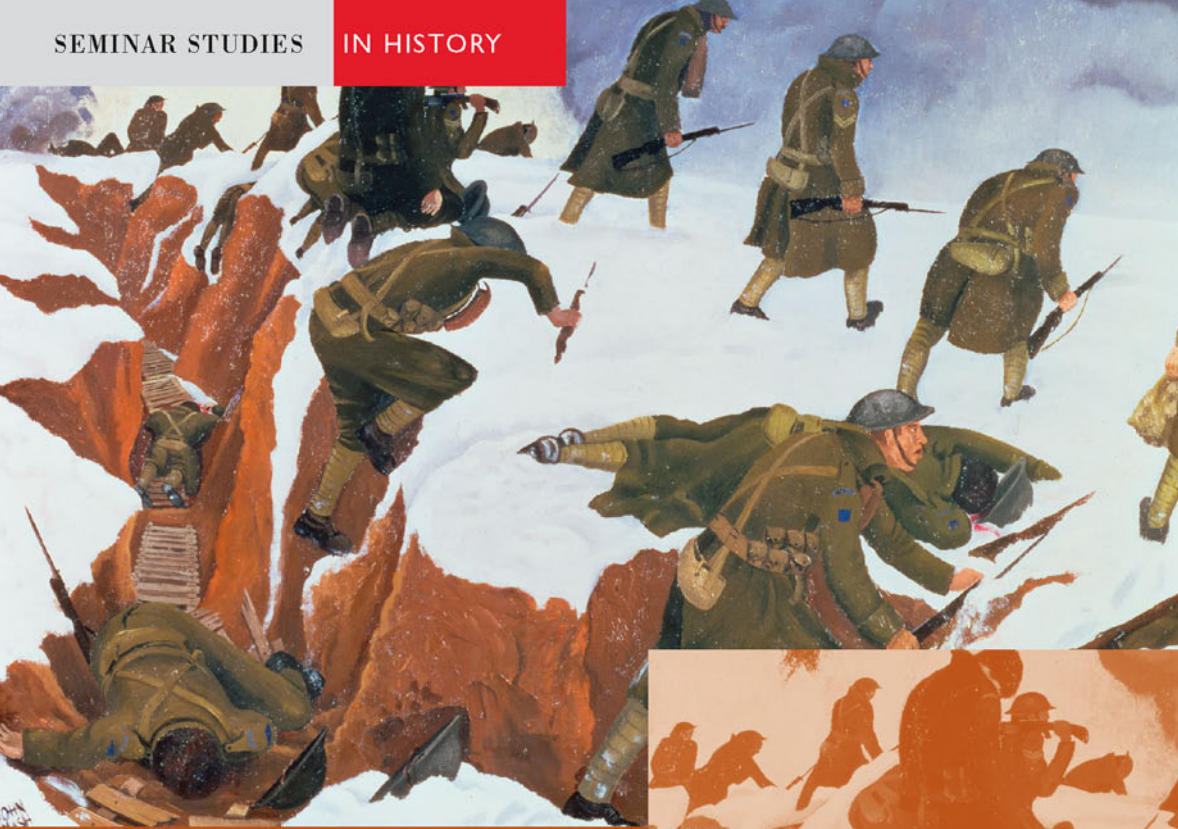


SEMINAR STUDIES

IN HISTORY



# The First World War

## Second Edition

Stuart Robson

ROUTLEDGE

## The First World War

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IN HISTORY

# **The First World War**

Second edition

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STUART ROBSON

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

History is a narrative constructed by historians from traces left by the past. Historical enquiry is often driven by contemporary issues and, in consequence, historical narratives are constantly revisited and reshaped. *Seminar Studies in History* was designed to bridge the gap between current research and the broad, popular general surveys that often date rapidly.

The volumes in the series are written by historians who are not only familiar with the latest research in, and current debates about, their topic, but also have contributed to that research and the debates. The books are intended to provide the reader with a clear introduction to a major topic in history. They give a narrative and analysis of events and highlight contemporary controversies. They include the kinds of tools generally omitted from specialist monographs – chronologies and a glossary – as well as that essential tool, an up-to-date bibliography. They conclude with a selection of documents – some traces of the past illustrative of events described, which also serve as the historian's raw materials.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHRONOLOGY

Unless indicated otherwise, a place-name signifies a battle

### 1914

- 29 July: Austrians bombard Belgrade
- 3 August: Germany declares war on France, invades Belgium
- 7 August: Russians invade East Prussia
- 12 August: Austrians invade Serbia
- 14–25 August: Battles of the Frontiers
- 16 August: Germans take Liège
- 18 August: Russians invade Galicia
- 23–24 August: Krasnik
- 23–24 August: Mons
- 26–27 August: Le Cateau
- 26–31 August: Tannenberg
- 5–10 September: the Marne
- 9–14 September: Masurian Lakes
- 14 September: Falkenhayn succeeds Moltke
- 15 September: the Aisne, first trenches appear
- 15–21 October: Warsaw
- 12 October–17 November: First Ypres
- 2 December: Austrians occupy Belgrade

### 1915

- 19 February: Allies bombard the Dardanelles
- 10–13 March: Neuve Chapelle
- 18 March: Allied naval attack in Dardanelles
- 22 April–25 May: Second Ypres
- 25 April: Allied landings at Helles and Anzac Cove
- 7 May: Germans sink *Lusitania*
- 16 May–30 June: Second Artois (or Vimy)
- 23 May: Italy declares war on Austria
- 23 June–7 July: First Isonzo
- 12–13 July: British attack at Helles
- 18 July–3 August: Second Isonzo
- 6 August: British landing at Suvla

- 
- 6–9 August: Anzac attack at Lone Pine
  - 19 August: Germans sink *Arabic*
  - 18 October–4 November: Third Isonzo
  - 25 September–6 October: Second Champagne
  - 25 September–8 October: Loos
  - 10 November–2 December: Fourth Isonzo
  - 19–20 December: Allies evacuate Suvla and Anzac
  - 1916**
  - 8–9 January: Allies evacuate Helles
  - 21 February–18 December: Verdun, including
  - 21 February: first German offensive
  - 26 February: fall of Fort Douamont
  - 6 March: second German offensive
  - 9 April: third German offensive
  - 7 June: fall of Fort Vaux
  - 24 October: French retake Douamont
  - 2 November: French retake Vaux
  - 11–29 March: Fifth Isonzo
  - 22 March: Russians take Przemyśl
  - 24–29 April: Easter Rising in Dublin
  - 25 April: Germans bombard Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth
  - 2–4 May: Central Powers' Gorlice–Tarnow offensive
  - 31 May–1 June: Jutland
  - 3 June: Austrians retake Przemyśl
  - 4 June–20 September: Brusilov Offensive
  - 5 June: Lord Kitchener drowned in sinking of HMS *Hampshire*
  - 6 June: Start of Arab Revolt in Hejaz
  - 10 June: Arabs capture Mecca
  - 22 June: Austrians take Lemberg
  - 1 July–18 November: The Somme, including
  - 1–13 July: Albert
  - 23 July–3 September: Pozières
  - 15–22 September: Flers-Courcelette
  - 26–28 September: Thiepval
  - 5 August: Germans enter Warsaw
  - 6–17 August: Sixth Isonzo
  - 25 August: Central Powers take Brest-Litovsk
  - 14–26 September: Seventh Isonzo
  - 10–12 October: Eighth Isonzo
  - 1–14 November: Ninth Isonzo
  - 7 November: British take Gaza
  - 7 November: Woodrow Wilson re-elected President of United States of America
  - 6 December: Central Powers capture Bucharest

7 December: Lloyd George replaces Asquith as Prime Minister

**1917**

31 January: Germans declare unrestricted submarine warfare

15 March: Tsar Nicholas II abdicates: Prince Lvov forms provisional government

6 April: USA declares war on Germany

9 April–15 May: Arras

9–14 April: Vimy

16–20 April: Nivelle Offensive

12 May–8 June: Tenth Isonzo

7–14 June: Messines

1 July: Start of Russian offensive

31 July–10 November: Third Ypres, including

31 July–2 August: Pilckem

16–18 August: Langemarck

20–25 September: Menin Road

26 September–3 October: Polygon Wood

4 October: Broodseinde

9 October: Poelcapelle

12 October: First Passchendaele

26 October–10 November: Second Passchendaele

18 August–15 September: Eleventh Isonzo

3 September: Germans take Riga

24 October–12 November: Caporetto (Twelfth Isonzo)

7 November: Bolsheviks seize power

16 November: Clemenceau becomes Prime Minister of France

20 November–7 December: Cambrai

9 December: British take Jerusalem

**1918**

8 January: Wilson issues 14 Points, four more than Moses (Clemenceau's joke)

21 March–5 April: German 'Michael' Offensive, including

21–23 March: St. Quentin

24–25 March: First Bapaume

28 March: Second Arras

9–29 April: German 'Georgette' Offensive

27 May–17 June: German 'Blücher–Yorck' Offensive

9–13 June: German 'Gneisenau' Offensive

18 July–5 August: Allied Aisne–Marne Counter-Offensive

8–11 August: Amiens

12 August–12 October: Assault on Hindenburg Line, including

26–30 August: Scarpe

2–3 September: Drocourt–Quéant Switch

- 27 September–1 October: Canal du Nord
- 29 September–2 October: St. Quentin Canal
- 8–9 October: Second Cambrai
- 12–16 September: St. Mihiel
- 26 September–11 November: Franco-American Meuse–Argonne Offensive
- 30 September: Anglo-Arab occupation of Damascus
- 24 October–4 November: Vittorio Veneto
- 29 October: German sailors mutiny
- 11 November: Armistice signed, taking effect on 11th hour of 11th day of 11th month

To Mariel  
for putting the pieces together

## PART ONE

## BACKGROUND



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## CHAPTER ONE

# WAR KNOWN AND WAR IMAGINED

### THE CIVILIAN VIEW OF WAR

The First World War began on 3 August 1914 when Germany declared war on France and invaded Belgium. Germany and Austria–Hungary\* (the Central Powers) fought against Russia, France and the British Empire (the Triple Entente\*). After the Pact of London of September 1914 which bound the latter three not to make a separate peace, they became known as the Allies. They were joined by Italy in 1915 and then by America in 1917, as an associated but not allied power. The war grew out of the diplomatic crisis that began when Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb, assassinated Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife. The archduke was the heir to the throne of Austria–Hungary. Austria–Hungary sought to punish Serbia for sponsoring such terrorism. Russia defended Serbia, a fellow Slavic state. Germany insisted that the rest of Europe keep out of the business that her ally Austria–Hungary had with Serbia. France was bound by treaty to assist Russia. Britain did not have formal treaty commitments to France or Russia, but informal military and naval arrangements seemed to the government to amount to a moral commitment to help France. People in the towns and cities of the belligerent nations welcomed the outbreak of war almost universally and assumed the conflict would be over by Christmas. It did not end until 11 November 1918. Historians estimate that the war led to approximately 9.5 million military deaths.

After the First World War, survivors across all of Europe looked back to the world before 1914 with profound nostalgia. They contrasted the bleakness of the war and its aftermath to the radiant light of a golden age the war seemed to have destroyed, an age of peace, prosperity and tranquility [*Doc. 10*]. This homesickness for a time rather than a place showed up more in personal memoirs or fiction than in academic history, which was instead obsessed with finding the diplomatic causes of the war.

Of all the myths about the age before 1914, that of the Long Peace is the most enduring, echoed as it has been in both high and popular culture. It is also the least realistic. After all, British people in their sixties in 1914 would

have lived through at least twenty-four wars. Myths, however, usually rest on facts and for that reason should not be taken lightly. What matters in history is not only what happens but also what people think happens – or has happened. People living in 1914 thought peace was normal because the wars since 1850 had been brief and peripheral to their lives. War for most people had become war imagined. At the same time, without reality as a check, war had become idealized as a test not just of state power but also of the moral strength of individuals and nations. Social changes encouraged this perception.

Modernization arrived in force after 1870, in an era that Norman Stone has called ‘the great transformation’ (Norman, 1983). People were on the move – literally, with 30 million Europeans migrating outside Europe and 60 million more moving into the cities of Europe. They were also trying to move socially, climbing the new ladder of urban society. Movement brought contact with strangers, which in turn raised new questions such as ‘who am I?’ and ‘who are we?’ – questions that had not seemed important in the isolated, unchanging life of rural society. Together with self-consciousness about one’s identity came a yearning for certainty in a world in which, as Karl Marx observed, everything solid melts into air. Historians are now paying close attention to the changing experience of women in this era. But change had an impact on masculinity too. When the role of women was starting to change and activities that had traditionally defined masculinity were mutating, what did it mean to be a man? Kipling wrote a sentimental poem outlining a modern version of Aristotelian gentility that avoided extremes of behaviour, although its title, ‘If’, suggests the limits of a stiff upper lip as a code of conduct. Being a gentleman meant juggling a lot of ‘thou shalls’ and ‘thou shall nots’. Yet the ideal of chivalry that he evoked had an important revival in the Victorian era. Middle-class men found emotional satisfaction in imagining themselves to be knights in shining armour. It was not just a matter of a taste for literature set in the Middle Ages but a way of expressing the ideal of the gentleman. A gentleman devoted his life to fair play and to helping others. In this deliberately old-fashioned view of life, war served as the ultimate test of character. The gentleman-warrior, schooled on the playing fields of the public schools, put his life on the line for the sake of honour. Cowards and bullies thought only of themselves and their narrow, selfish interests. They broke the rules, violated the spirit of the game and so of course they lost, whatever the final score. Yet it was not just against cads that the gentleman-knight defined himself. What he did could not be done by women. Men made war and war made men. It was the surest way to define masculinity and test character. The cult of the gentleman rationalized the violence and terror of war by treating death as the ultimate challenge. The gentleman should aspire to die a good death, facing it as Peter Pan did, as a ‘great adventure’.

War was imagined to be a purgative as well as a test. It was assumed to be the opposite of peace and therefore free of the sins peace had acquired: