How it began

The explosive that was World War One had been long in the stockpiling; the spark was the ________________ of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. The ________________, a Serbian nationalist secret society, the Austro-Hungarians opted to take the opportunity to stamp its authority upon the Serbians, crushing the nationalist movement there and cementing Austria-Hungary’s influence in the Balkans.

It did so by issuing an ultimatum to Serbia which, in the extent of its demand that the assassins be brought to justice effectively nullified Serbia's sovereignty. Austria-Hungary's expectation was that Serbia would reject the remarkably severe terms of the ultimatum, thereby giving her a pretext for launching a ________________ against Serbia.

However, Serbia had long had Slavic ties with Russia, an altogether different proposition for Austria-Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian government sought assurances from her ally, ________________, that she would come to her aid should the unthinkable happen and Russia declared war on Austria-Hungary.

One Thing Led to Another

So then, we have the following remarkable sequence of events that led inexorably to the 'Great War' - a name that had been touted even before the coming of the conflict.

- **Austria-Hungary**, unsatisfied with Serbia's response to her ultimatum (which in the event was almost entirely placatory: however her jibbing over a couple of minor clauses gave Austria-Hungary her sought-after cue) declared war on Serbia on ________________.
- **Russia**, bound by treaty to Serbia, announced mobilization of its vast army in her defense, a slow process that would take around ____ weeks to complete.
- **Germany**, allied to Austria-Hungary by treaty, viewed the Russian mobilization as an act of war against Austria-Hungary, and after scant warning declared war on Russia on ________________.
- **France**, bound by treaty to Russia, found itself at war against Germany and, by extension, on Austria-Hungary following a German declaration on 3 August. Germany was swift in invading neutral ________________ so as to reach Paris by the shortest possible route.
- **Britain**, allied to France by a more loosely worded treaty which placed a "moral obligation" upon her to defend France, declared war against Germany on 4 August. Her reason for entering the conflict lay in another direction: she was obligated to defend neutral Belgium by the terms of a _____ year old treaty. With Germany’s invasion of Belgium on 4 August, and the Belgian King's appeal to Britain for assistance, Britain committed herself to Belgium's defense later that day. Like France, she was by extension also at war with Austria-Hungary.
• With Britain's entry into the war, her colonies and dominions abroad variously offered military and financial assistance, and included **Australia, ____________, India, New Zealand** and the **Union of South Africa**.

• **United States** President Woodrow Wilson declared a U.S. policy of absolute neutrality, an official stance that would last until 1917 when Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare - which seriously threatened America's commercial shipping (which was in any event almost entirely directed towards the Allies led by Britain and France) - forced the U.S. to finally enter the war on ________________.

• __________, honoring a military agreement with Britain, declared war on Germany on 23 August 1914. Two days later Austria-Hungary responded by declaring war on Japan.

• **Italy**, although allied to both Germany and Austria-Hungary, was able to avoid entering the fray by citing a clause enabling it to evade its obligations to both. In short, Italy was committed to defend Germany and Austria-Hungary only in the event of a 'defensive' war; arguing that their actions were 'offensive' she declared instead a policy of neutrality. The following year, in May 1915, she finally joined the conflict by siding with the __________ against her two former allies.

• It's clear from the summary above that the ________________ was as much at fault as anything in bringing about the scale of the conflict.

**A little history...**

Bismarck, first Prime Minister of Prussia and then Chancellor of the German Empire (once he had assembled it), set about the construction of Germany through high politics judiciously assisted by war against Austria and France.

The consequences of the war were numerous. Aside from the usual territorial gains - France ceded both ________________ to Prussia and was forced to pay staggering reparations (equivalent to around $1 billion today) - the southern German states agreed to an alliance with their northern counterparts, resulting in the creation of Bismarck's cherished German Empire.

For, having achieved his life's aim, Bismarck's expansionary plans were at an end. He had secured what he wanted, and his chief desire now was to maintain its stability. He therefore set about building European alliances aimed at protecting Germany from potentially threatening quarters.

Bismarck did not initially fear an alliance between France and Britain, for the latter was at that time in the midst of a self-declared 1870s policy of "_______________", choosing to stay above continental European politics.
Meanwhile, Britain was awaking to the emergence of Germany as a great European power - and a colonial power at that. Kaiser Wilhelm's successor, Wilhelm II, proved far more ambitious in establishing "____________________________" for Germany. With the effective dismissal of Bismarck the new Kaiser was determined to establish Germany as a great colonial power in the pacific and, most notably, in Africa.

**In the Pacific**

Among other set-pieces, the Japanese astonished the western powers by destroying the entire Russian fleet at the Battle of ________________ (27-28 May 1905) for the loss of two torpedo boats - a humiliating Russian defeat.

The Austro-Hungarian empire was directly impacted by troubles in the Balkans and, under the ageing Emperor Franz Josef, was patently struggling to maintain coherence of the various diametrically opposed ethnic groups which fell under the Austro-Hungarian umbrella.

Russia, ally of the Slavs - and therefore of Serbia - had been struggling to hold back full-scale revolution ever since the Japanese military disaster of 1905. In 1914, while the Tsar himself was reluctant, his government saw war with Austria-Hungary as an opportunity to restore social order - which indeed it did, at least until the continuation of repeated Russian military setbacks, Rasputin's intrigue at court and food shortages combined to bring about the long-threatened total revolution (which, encouraged by Germany, brought about Russia's withdrawal from the war in ________).

Then there is France. Almost immediately following her defeat by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, together with the humiliating annexation by the newly unified Germany of the coal-rich territories of Alsace and Lorraine, the French government and military alike were united in thirsting for revenge.

**Back in Germany**

However the German government and its military commanders assuredly did anticipate what was to come. A plan to take on both Russia and France, a war on two fronts, had long been expected and taken into account.

The so-called __________________, devised by former Army Chief of Staff Alfred von Schlieffen, had been carefully crafted to deal with a two-front war scenario. The plan, which very nearly succeeded, outlined a plan to conquer France, to knock her out of the war, on a 'Western Front', within five weeks - before, the Germans calculated, Russia could effectively mobilize for war on the 'Eastern Front' (which they estimated would take six weeks).

The British Government, and its Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey, attempted to mediate throughout July, reserving at all times its right to remain aloof from the dispute. It was only as the war began that the British position solidified into support for, ostensibly, Belgium.
This article has not by any means encompassed all of the suggested contributory factors that led inexorably to world war.

It has however attempted to pull together the main strands: ________________ determination to impose its will upon the Balkans; a ________________ desire for greater power and international influence, which sparked a naval arms race with Britain, who responded by building new and greater warships, the *Dreadnought*; a _____________ desire for revenge against Germany following disastrous defeat in 1871; _________________ anxiety to restore some semblance of national prestige after almost a decade of civil strife and a battering at the hands of the Japanese military in 1905.

“_______________” was a term used by British soldiers to refer to the front-line trench.