

## 6.3 The war in the air

When war broke out, it had been just over ten years since the invention of the aeroplane in 1903. So, perhaps it is surprising to discover that aeroplanes played a part in the First World War. However, aeroplanes had developed rapidly since their invention and a military role had been found for them by 1914. What role did they play? How did aviation technology develop during the war?

### Objectives

- Examine the role played by aircraft in the war.
- Outline how aviation technology developed.

### The first aeroplanes in warfare

When the fighting began, aeroplanes were very slow, clumsy and unreliable. They were mainly used for **reconnaissance** (keeping an eye on what the enemy was doing and spotting artillery). In August 1914, for example, two British pilots spotted thousands of German soldiers preparing to surround British troops on the Western Front. The British Army leaders ordered their soldiers to withdraw from the area – a move that might have saved the lives of 100,000 British troops. In September, during the First Battle of the Marne, aeroplanes spotted a gap in the German lines. French and British troops attacked the gap and were able to split the German Army and drive it back.

### Fighter planes

Enemy pilots would fight each other in the air. At first, they fired pistols and even threw bricks at each other, but this wasn't very effective. Machine guns fitted to the front of aeroplanes would often shoot away the propellers so a special mechanism was developed that allowed machine guns to be fired between the blades of the propeller. Pilots would take part in '**dogfights**' in the skies above the trenches. Every time a pilot shot down another plane, he claimed a 'kill' and those with the most kills were known as 'aces'. Aces kept track of their kills and were great heroes with the public at home. News of their dogfights was recorded in newspapers and used to boost morale at home and among the troops.

▼ **SOURCE A** A recruitment poster from 1918 asking for volunteers to join the Royal Air Force; the image shows a 'dogfight' between German and British fighter planes



▼ **SOURCE B** Adapted from the diary of Manfred von Richthofen, the 'Red Baron', a German First World War fighter pilot, 1917

When we passed above Arras I saw planes approaching from the other side. We caught them up. I attacked the man to the rear. His comrades deserted him. My opponent did not make matters easy for me. He was a good shot but he discovered that I was not an easy target. So he plunged and disappeared in a cloud. He had nearly saved himself. I dived after him and at last I hit him. I noticed a ribbon of white benzene vapour. He had to land for his engine had stopped. He was a stubborn fellow. I dropped to 900 feet. However he fought until he landed. I flew over him at 30 feet in order to see whether I had killed him or not. What did the rascal do? He took his machine-gun and shot holes into my machine. Afterwards, my friend told me he would have shot the airman on the ground. I ought to have done so for he had not surrendered. He was one of the few fortunate fellows who escaped with their lives.



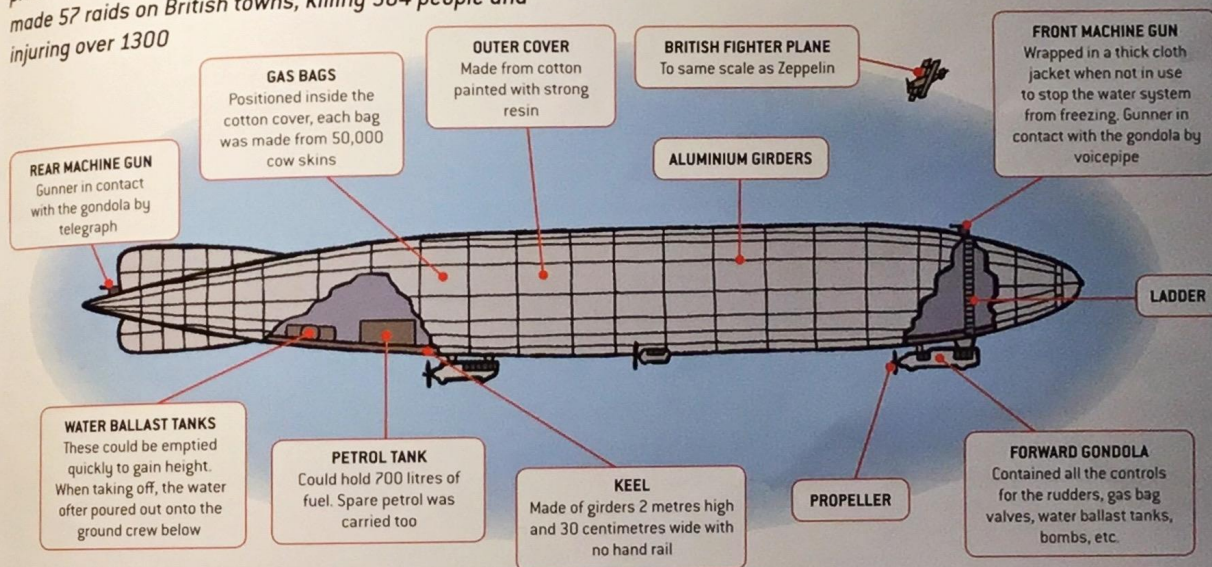
## Bomber planes

Both sides used aircraft to drop bombs on enemy positions. But these 'bomber planes' could only carry small bombs that the pilots dropped over the sides, so military engineers worked tirelessly to develop aeroplanes that could fly for a long period of time and bomb enemy cities. By 1917, the Germans had developed the Gotha bomber and began bombing British towns and cities. In one raid, in June 1917, a 20-bomber raid on London killed 162 people, including 18 children at a primary school in Chelsea. The British hit back with their own long-range bomber (the Handley Page) and by the end of the war these planes had flown more than 200 bombing raids over Germany.

## Airships

The war in the air was not just fought by aeroplanes. Airships were used for both reconnaissance and

**GC** Zeppelins were about 200 metres long (two football pitches) and could carry 27 tons of bombs; in total, they made 57 raids on British towns, killing 564 people and injuring over 1300



## Key Words

reconnaissance      dogfight      Zeppelin

bombings. The Germans made the most use of airships and developed one known as a **Zeppelin**. Zeppelins bombed French, Belgian and British cities. In 1915, in Britain, there were 20 raids, resulting in 188 deaths. However, as aeroplanes improved it became easier to shoot down Zeppelins and the use of them declined.

## Extension

Prepare fact files on some of the famous fighter pilots of the war. Manfred von Richthofen was the best known (see Source B), but you might want to look up Edward Mannock (British), Billy Bishop (Canada), René Fonck (French), and Eddie Rickenbacker (American).

## Work

- Explain the following terms.
 

a Reconnaissance	d Fighter aces
b Dogfights	e Zeppelins
c Gotha bombers	
- Look at **Source A**. How does the poster try to persuade people to join the RAF?
- Read **Source B**. How did the British pilot try to escape?
  - What attitude to his enemy does the Red Baron show?

## Practice Question

Study **Sources A** and **B**. How useful are **Sources A** and **B** to a historian studying air warfare of the time?

Explain your answer using **Sources A** and **B** and your contextual knowledge.

**12 marks**

## Study Tip

Consider the purpose of each source in your answer.



## 6.4

# The war in the wider world

When war broke out in August 1914, Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia, the Germans launched the Schlieffen Plan in the west, and the Russians attacked in the east. But the First World War was not just confined to Europe. Many of the countries involved ruled colonies beyond Europe. The war quickly spread around the world as fighting took place in some of these colonies, and many soldiers from these places fought in Europe.

### Objectives

- Recall areas and regions of the world outside Europe where fighting took place.
- Justify why the war is commonly called a 'world war'.

Bulgaria joined in the war on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary in October 1915, after promises of land after the war. Soon, Serbia was under attack from these three countries. Britain, France, Italy and Russia sent troops to help Serbia. They landed in Salonika in Greece but were immediately halted by Bulgarian troops, with German support. Another front developed – the Salonika Front – and a stalemate soon developed like that on the Western Front.

Italy stayed out of the war to begin with, but joined on the side of Britain, France and Russia in 1915. They hoped they would gain land from Austria-Hungary and a share of German colonies at the end of the war. The Italians attempted to attack Austria-Hungary through the difficult Julian Alps mountain range around the Isonzo river. Eleven fierce and bloody battles were fought between 1915 and 1917 but the Italians never advanced more than 10 miles. In November 1917, the Germans scored a major victory over the Italians at the Battle of Caporetto. The Italians were pushed back and nearly knocked out of the war, but help from Britain and France prevented this from happening.

The German colony of Togoland was captured by the British and French forces in the first month of the war.

German-controlled Cameroon was attacked in August 1914 and German forces put up strong resistance. The colony was eventually captured in February 1916.

South Africans, fighting for the British Empire, conquered German South West Africa (now Namibia).



## Work

- 1 Briefly explain why there was fighting:
  - a on the Isonzo Front
  - b in Africa
  - c in Greece
  - d in the Middle East
  - e in the Far East and Pacific region.
- 2
  - a Who was Lawrence of Arabia?
  - b Why do you think Lawrence's tactics were so successful against the Turks?
- 3 Based on all the work you have done so far in your studies on the topic, do you think that it is correct to call it a world war? Give reasons for your answer.

## Extension



The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest award for bravery for members of the British armed forces. It recognises acts of extreme bravery carried out under direct enemy fire. Find out how many soldiers were awarded a VC in the First World War. What nations of the empire were they from? Research the soldier who was awarded it twice.

British and Indian troops fought the Turks in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq, Kuwait, parts of Syria and southeast Turkey). After a Turkish victory at the Siege of Kut (December 1915 to April 1916), a new British-Indian force was joined by ANZAC troops and began to drive the Turks back out of Mesopotamia and towards Turkey. The Turks also faced opposition from Arabs in the region, who wanted independence from Turkish control. Helped by a British army officer named T E Lawrence (known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'), the Arabs waged a 'hit and run' war against the Turks. They attacked Turkish positions and blew up railway lines used by the Turks. At the same time, British and ANZAC troops pushed the Turkish Army further back and defeated the Turks at the battles of Beersheba and Megiddo.

In the Pacific region, troops from Australia and New Zealand (ANZACs) captured German colonies Western Samoa (now Samoa) and New Guinea within a few weeks of the outbreak of war.

In German East Africa (now Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania) German forces, under the leadership of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, amounted to 12,000 men (3000 German and 9000 African), but they managed to keep around 200,000 Allied troops occupied until the end of the war.

Japan and Britain had been allies since 1902. In August 1914, Japan declared war on Germany and captured German colonies in the Pacific Ocean (the Mariana, Caroline and Marshall Islands) and German-controlled territory in eastern China (Kiaochow).



## 7.1

# Russia leaves the war

In November 1917, a new government in Russia announced that they would make peace with Russia's enemies. In early December, a peace conference began between Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary and, on 15 December, the fighting stopped on the Eastern Front. Why was there a new government in Russia? How did Russia's withdrawal from the war affect Germany's strategy?

### Objectives

- **Examine** why Russia withdrew from the war.
- **Explore** the effect of Russia's withdrawal on Germany's strategy.

### The early stages of the war

To begin with, the Russians won some important battles against both Germany and Austria-Hungary. But a shortage of decent military equipment and poor leadership meant they suffered two major defeats in the battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes [see pages 44 and 45].

### The effects of war on Russia

Russia's Tsar made things worse by going to the front to lead the Army – he was a poor leader, and was personally blamed for the Army's defeats. With the Tsar away from Petrograd (the Russian capital's name was changed from St Petersburg during the war), the government was now in the hands of his German wife (the Tsarina) and her divisive and unpopular adviser, a monk called Rasputin.

Ordinary Russians were soon suffering. Over 15 million men had joined the Army and left fields, mines and factories without workers. This led to shortages of food and fuel. Russia's railway system also couldn't cope with the extra demands of war, and fuel could not get to the cities, leading to power failures. Neither the Tsar, his wife, her adviser, or the government seemed to have any solutions to these problems. By 1916, over a million Russians had been killed in the fighting, and both soldiers and civilians had completely lost their enthusiasm for the war.

### Revolution

By the beginning of 1917, discontent had turned to open opposition. Riots and strikes broke out all over Russia. When the Tsarina ordered soldiers to fire at the rioters, they refused and joined the protests. Soldiers on the front-lines were also refusing to follow orders, and many **deserted**. In the capital city, workers and soldiers set up their own council – the Petrograd Soviet – to coordinate what was now a revolution. In March, the Tsar returned from the front and saw the chaos in Petrograd, but it was too late for him to do anything about it.

No soldiers were loyal to him and he **abdicated** on 15 March. Immediately, the Tsar and his family were seized and imprisoned.

▼ **SOURCE A** *Adapted from the diary entry of an English nurse, Florence Farmborough, who worked at the Russian Front during the war; she describes events taking place during the revolution in Russia*

23 Jan 1917: Sabotage – railroads destroyed, workshops looted. Mobs shouting, 'Peace and bread'. They are aware that the war is at the root of their hardships. The Tsar wishes to please everybody and pleases no one. We are amazed at newspapers criticising the government. A few months ago the writers would have been arrested. Things cannot continue as they are.

### A new leadership

A provisional (or temporary) government replaced the Tsar. The new leaders promised to hold elections and divide the land among the peasants. But they did not promise to end the war. In fact, they ordered a new attack on Germany in July 1917, which ended in a heavy defeat for the Russians. After this, whole sections of the Russian Army deserted.

### Another revolution

Meanwhile, the Germans were quietly smuggling a man named Vladimir Lenin back *into* Russia. He had been exiled by the Tsar for many years because of his revolutionary ideas. The Germans thought that getting him back into Russia might destabilise the weak provisional government and start another revolution. They were right.

In November 1917 Lenin and his supporters (the **Bolsheviks**) staged a second revolution, overthrew the provisional government, and set up a new government. Lenin declared that Russia was going to make peace with its enemies.



## The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

In March 1918, the Russians signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and its allies. The treaty was harsh on Russia, which lost some of its best farmland and natural resources. The British and French were angry that the Russians had broken the alliances made before war broke out. And the treaty gave the Germans a sudden advantage.

### Advantages to Germany

Russia's withdrawal from the war meant that the Germans could pull their troops away from the Eastern Front and move them to the Western Front. Germany no longer had to fight a war on two fronts. They could concentrate all their military power into beating the British and French. Also, the Germans had gained valuable farmland and raw materials in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, so this would help ease the shortages in Germany that had been caused by the British blockade.

**SOURCE B** From British magazine Punch, 12 June 1918; the title was, 'A German "Peace" (For the instruction of our pacifists)'; it comments on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; German troops were stationed in the territory Russia had to give up



### Practice Question

Study **Source B**. This source supports the continued fighting by British and French armies on the Western Front. How do you know? Explain your answer using **Source B** and your contextual knowledge.

4 marks

### Key Words

desert      abdicate      Bolshevik

**C** The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; Russia lost some of its richest areas, totalling 26% of its population, 27% of its farmland, 26% of its railways, and 74% of its coal and iron ore



### Work

- Describe the impact of the war on:
  - ordinary Russians
  - the Tsar.
- Why were there two revolutions in Russia in 1917?
- Read **Source A**. How does this source help you understand:
  - the effects of the war
  - a method the Tsar used to control Russia before the revolution?
- Look at Map C. What land had Russia lost?
  - What impact do you think these losses would have had on Russia?
  - What advantages would they give to Germany?

### Study Tip

After four years of fighting, many people in Britain wanted, like the Russians, to end the war. How does this cartoon warn against that?



## 7.2

# The USA enters the war

Russia's exit from the war was a major blow to Britain and France. It meant that German troops would no longer be needed to fight the Russians, so they could be sent to strengthen the German Army on the Western Front. However, the loss of Russia was balanced when the USA entered the war on the side of Britain and France. What were the reasons for America's entry into the war? Why had America avoided the conflict up to this point? What was the impact of America's entry?

### Objectives

- **Outline** the reasons for the USA's entry into the war.
- **Assess** the impact of the USA's entry into the war.

### American neutrality

When war broke out in 1914, the USA refused to take sides or support any particular alliance. This is known as **neutrality**. The British felt that the Americans should join in on their side; after all, they spoke the same language and had strong cultural, religious and historical links. However, the Americans had never been involved as an ally in a major European war before, and felt that this was a distant European conflict. Also, many Americans were of German descent and approved of the policy of neutrality.

### The business of war

American neutrality did not mean that the USA remained totally unconnected to the war. American companies sold food, weapons and other goods to Britain and its allies. This created many jobs in America and made lots of business people very rich. American banks also lent money to Britain and its allies (around two billion dollars), which was used to buy weapons and food, mainly from the USA. So, in the first three years of the war, the USA was financially involved in the war.

### Submarine attacks

Ships transporting American weapons, foods and other goods to Europe were a target for German submarines (U-boats). In America, anti-German feeling grew as increasing numbers of ships were sunk by German U-boats. In May 1915, the Germans sank the passenger liner *Lusitania*, sailing from New York to Liverpool, killing over a 1000 passengers, including 128 Americans. There was a huge outcry over the sinking, and tension between the US and German governments increased. Many Americans

demanded that the USA declare war on Germany, but President Woodrow Wilson refused to get drawn into the war. In fact, the Germans decided to cut back their U-boat attacks for a while after this.

### The end of neutrality

By 1917, the Germans were in a desperate situation and felt that one of their best chances of victory was to starve Britain and France into surrender. To do this, they needed to attack ships of any country that were sailing in British waters. Within a few months, German U-boats had sunk eight American ships, and the demands in America to declare war on Germany grew louder once again.

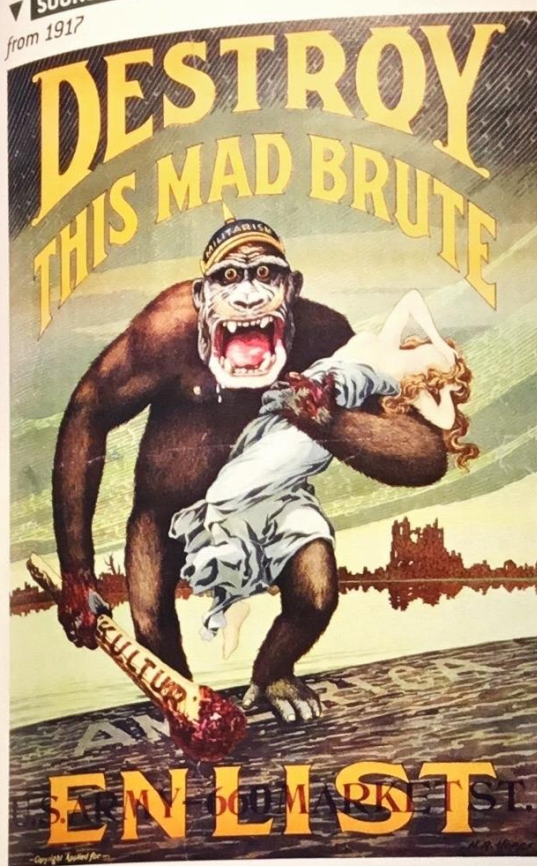
Then, in March 1917, the Americans discovered that the Germans were trying to forge a secret alliance with Mexico. The plan was that Germany would provide money and weapons to the Mexicans, so they could attack the USA. Mexico would then claim the US states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. This was the final straw and America declared war in April 1917.

▼ **SOURCE A** Adapted from President Woodrow Wilson's declaration of war, 2 April 1917

Germany has committed repeated acts of war against the people of the USA; therefore, we declare that a state of war exists between the United States and the Germany. This war has been thrust upon the United States. The President is authorised and directed to use the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against Germany



**SOURCE B** An American army recruiting poster from 1917



### Impact of the entry of the USA

The entry of America was a great boost for Britain and France. They were one of the richest countries in the world with huge supplies of coal, oil, iron, cotton and wheat. And even though it would take a few months for the American soldiers to arrive, the news came at a time when Russia's commitment to the war was in doubt. There had been a revolution, the Tsar had abdicated, and Russian soldiers were deserting. The arrival of US troops would help to balance the loss of the Russians.

For the Germans, Russia's withdrawal from the war would be good news, but America's entry was a devastating blow. Although Germany would no longer be fighting a war on two fronts, it was racing against time to mount a concentrated attack on the Western Front against Britain and France before the American troops arrived.

#### Fact

By the end of the war, America had sent nearly 90,000 tonnes of meat and 600,000 horses to Europe.

### Key Words

neutrality

### Work

- 1 **a** Define 'neutrality'.
- b** Do you think America was really a neutral country in the first three years of the war?
- 2 Read **Source A**. What do you think Wilson was referring to when he said, 'Germany has committed repeated acts of war against the people of the USA'?
- 3 Look at **Source B**. What impression of Germany does the artist give?
- 4 What happened in 1917 that made the USA abandon its neutrality?
- 5 What benefits did the USA bring to its new allies after April 1917?

### Extension



The President who took America into war was named Woodrow Wilson. Prepare a fact file on him. Summarise the President's reasons for entering the war on the Allied side. What were his ideas for the post-war world? What role did he play in the peace conferences after the war? Interestingly, when Wilson was elected in 1916, he campaigned with the slogan 'He Kept Us Out of War'.

### Practice Question

Study **Sources A** and **B**. How useful are these sources to a historian studying why Americans fought in the First World War?

Explain your answer using **Sources A** and **B** and your contextual knowledge.

**12 marks**

### Study Tip

Make sure you use both sources in your answer. Try to think about the impact of these sources on American citizens.