**37 Days: Countdown to World War I**

**June 28: Archduke assassinated**

Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was shot dead while on a state visit to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

His killer was the 19-year-old Gavrilo Princip, backed by Serbian terrorist organisation, ‘the Black Hand’, and joined by a group of other would-be assassins. One of them threw a bomb at the Archduke's motorcade in a first, unsuccessful, attempt on his life. But, when a fateful mistake meant Franz Ferdinand’s driver took the car directly to the street corner where Princip was standing, his two shots killed the Archduke and his wife, Sophie Chotek.

**June 29: Austria-Hungary wants revenge**

Although Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia for the assassination, the Serbian government tried to distance itself claiming it had tried to warn Austria of a plot. The Austrian chief of military staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, wanted war, but the foreign secretary was more cautious, fearing that Serbia’s long time ally Russia would be angered by any attack and be forced to step in. But perhaps Austria-Hungary’s powerful ally Germany would back them against Russia.

**July 5: Germany promises to back Austria-Hungary**

When he learnt of Austria-Hungary’s wish to attack Serbia, Kaiser Wilhelm pledged Germany's support, even if it meant war with Russia.

This became known as Germany’s ‘blank cheque’, which would guarantee any action they decided to take against Serbia. The Kaiser explained: “Should a war between Austria-Hungary and Russia be unavoidable, Austria-Hungary can rest assured that Germany, your old faithful ally, will stand at your side.” Perhaps he was unaware what the consequences could be for Europe.

**July 19: The ultimatum**

Austria-Hungary’s ministers gathered for a secret meeting in Vienna, where they made the final decision to issue an ultimatum to Serbia. If Serbia agreed to its terms, it would come under Austria-Hungary’s control. If it refused, there would be war.

The ultimatum blamed Serbian officials for Franz Ferdinand’s assassination and made a series of demands. Among them: Serbia must stop all anti-Austro-Hungarian propaganda and remove anyone deemed guilty of it from office; it must accept Austria-Hungary’s collaboration in suppressing subversive movements within Serbia, and it must allow Austria to direct judicial proceedings against accessories in the assassination plot. In short, Serbia was being asked to hand over sovereignty.

**July 25: Serbia concedes but . . .**

Serbia's deadline for responding to Austria-Hungary’s ultimatum was 18:00 central European time. After checking he had Russia’s support in the event of war, the Serbian Prime Minister delivered his reply to the Austrian embassy. Serbia conceded to all of the demands, apart from two. Key among them was the request that Austria-Hungary be allowed to direct judicial proceedings in Serbia - a violation of its constitution. Serbia had effectively rejected the ultimatum and, as planned in Vienna, war was now inevitable.

**July 28: Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia**

With all of their demands not met, Austria-Hungary moves to declare war on Serbia. The Austrian army was not ready to attack though, and would not be ready for another two weeks. Germany was frustrated with its ally; it had been a month since Franz Ferdinand’s assassination and with each day that passed, sympathy for Austria-Hungary’s cause among other European powers was ebbing away.

**July 30: Russia mobilizes for war**

Under immense pressure from his foreign minister, the Tsar of Russia ordered his armies to prepare for war and mobilize against Germany and Austria-Hungary. He was convinced that Russia must protect Serbia. His ministers advised that if he did not act boldly, the Russian dynasty would be at risk. Fully understanding the consequences, it was not a decision he took lightly.

**July 31: Another ultimatum**

Germany issued an ultimatum to Russia that unless it called off mobilization, war would be declared. Russia did not back down so Germany declared war on Russia at 17:00. The German army was then ordered to mobilize. In the west, France had already begun mobilizing its armies in anticipation of German attack. A European war was now inevitable.

**August 2: Germany tells Belgium to step aside**

On the pretext of preventing a French attack, Germany sent an ultimatum to Belgium asking for safe passage through its territory. If the Belgian government said no, Germany would consider them an enemy. Britain had promised to guarantee Belgium’s neutrality, and if the German demand was rejected, and soldiers crossed its border, Britain would be obliged to act. At 02:30 the following morning, Belgium did exactly that. The ultimatum was rejected. The British government now had to make a terrible decision.

**August 2: Germany declares war on France**

In Paris, the German ambassador delivered Germany’s declaration of war to the French foreign ministry. France had been careful to do nothing to provoke Germany - positioning its troops 10 km from the German border - but Germany’s military plans were inflexible. They had to defeat France before attacking Russia.

**August 4: Britain gives Germany an ultimatum**

As German troops advanced into Belgium, the British cabinet was agreed: it could not stand aside. An ultimatum was sent to Berlin. The deadline for Germany to reply was 23:00 (GMT). Just after 19:00 the British ambassador went to see the German ambassador with the ultimatum. The Kaiser and his government refused to stop the invasion of Belgium and at 23:00, Britain and Germany were at war.

The European powers were pitted against each other and Britain would drag its global empire into the conflict. An assassination in southern Europe, brought war not only to the wider continent, but to the populations of Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and North and South America. Many believed the war would be over within months, but the guns did not fall silent for another four years, and millions lost their lives.

Information from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/timelines/zgy334j#z3fvvcw>

When Britain declared war on Germany, Canada was also officially at war. At that time, Canada was still part of the British “Dominion” and we were controlled by the British Government.

Most Canadians were of British origin and were pleased to hear the news that Britain had declared war on Germany because it meant Canada was also at war. War was considered exciting for many! Canadians didn't know that the war would last four years; they believed it would be for a few months at the most.

The Canadian government did need to decide how much money and troops Canada and Canadians would contribute. The majority of Canadians felt that Canada must do whatever was necessary to support the Empire.

Canadians response at the beginning was overwhelming. Recruitment offices were overwhelmed with people trying to sign up to go fight for “King and Country.” During the first recruitment drive over 33,000 men had enlisted. This was far greater than the government had even hoped for.

For some men it was about adventure, travel, experience, and of course getting paid.