Worksheet 2 – Why were the soldiers there?

PROLOGUE*

Tensions between some European countries over territory and political influence had been simmering since the mid 19th century. By 1914 these countries fell roughly into two opposing groups. The Central Powers, led by Germany, and the Allies, led by Britain and France.

Tempers grew, threats were exchanged and weapons collected. All it needed was an excuse for war, and that came in June 1914 when Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by a Serbian. Austria promptly declared war on Serbia. The Central Powers sided with Austria, the Allies supported Serbia … and World War I began.

The Central Powers were Turkey, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Germany.

The Allies were Britain and her Empire, France, Belgium, Russia, Serbia, Italy, Romania, Portugal and Greece.

- Compare European maps of 1914 and 1919. How do they differ?
- What was the Versailles treaty?
- What was the British Empire?

Many people thought that the war would be over by Christmas, but Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, considered that it would be a long and bitter war. As casualty lists continue to grow alarmingly Kitchener set about organising the largest volunteer army that had ever been seen

Posters, like this one of Lord Kitchener, were displayed throughout the country urging young men to join the army for the duration of the war

- What was the significance of the white feathers given, by some citizens, to some young men in civilian clothes?.

Thousands of young men from all parts of the country and empire voluntarily left their civilian jobs and families to defend this country in time of war. Although men flocked to join up even more men were needed. The voluntary element was then scrapped and men were drafted into the army. Conscription came into force in June 1916. This decreed that all healthy single British men between the ages of 18 - 41 (later extended to married men) were forced to join Kitchener's New Army.

There was a large military staff at Fovant Camp to look after the men's health and welfare, but most of the men who passed through Fovant Camp were there to be trained to become an efficient fighting force.

* use a dictionary

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