

## **Remembering the First World War – 1915 in Context**

A year ago we were commemorating the centenary of the start of the First World War. In three years time in 1918, we will be commemorating its end with the centenary of the signing of the armistice in Versailles on 11 November 1918 that officially ended that dreadful four year war.

This year, 2015, we will be remembering key events in 1915 in the prosecution of the war which had quickly developed into a conflict between the Triple Entente of the United Kingdom, France and Russia and the central powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy.



### **The Military Alliances at the Start of WW1 – August 1914**

Of course, things were not as clear cut as that. At the global level, Japan was an important ally of the Triple Entente throughout the war. Meanwhile in Europe, Italy changed sides in April 1915 and in June 1915 unsuccessfully attacked Austro-Hungary. By the end of August 1915, Russia had been forced out of most of Poland. After varying military successes during 1916, Russia was hit by political upheaval. In 1917 the February Revolution occurred, after which the Tsar Nicholas II abdicated. This was followed by the October Revolution when the Bolsheviks took power and signed an armistice with Germany in December 1917.

Militarily, 1915 was a year of dig-in, fight, rebuff and start again. Inconclusive battles were fought at Ypres in Belgium in the Artois Region in northern France (Neuve-Chapelle, Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Vimy Ridge) and in the Champagne region near Rheims. The allied forces landed at Gallipoli in April and then started to withdraw by the end of the year. The deadlocked western front at the start of 1915 is shown below:



### The Western Front at the Start of 1915

On 16 December 1914, the Germans unexpectedly shelled Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby causing 137 fatalities and 592 casualties, many of whom were civilian. On 19-20 January 1915 this was followed up by the first Zeppelin raid. This was directed against Humberside but strong winds blew the two Zeppelins off course and the bombs were dropped on Great Yarmouth, Sheringham, King’s Lynn and the surrounding villages. This resulted in 4 killed and 16 injured. However, it wasn’t until September 1915 that the Germans managed to successfully bomb targets in London. Although these raids had no significant military impact, the psychological effect was considerable. They marked the transition from confrontation on battle fields to total war and stiffened the resolve of the British people.

In February Germany declared a submarine blockade of Great Britain and in May precipitated a diplomatic crisis with the USA by sinking the Lusitania off the coast of southern island with a loss of 1,198 lives, including 128 Americans. This undoubtedly led to a change of mood in the USA for by 1917 the Americans were funding the Allies after British money ran out in 1916. The USA declared war on Germany on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1917.

**Graham Tyack**  
30 October 2015