First World War Further Subject Notes

What were the origins of the First World War?

The *sonderwag* argument is one for continuity. Frederick the Great enlarged Germany, as did Kaiser Wilhelm and this ultimately led to Hitler. This argument came about *because* of the Nazis; it is a retrospective argument.

The Treaty of Versailles’ ‘war guilt clause’ made clear German blame for causing the war but is this really the case?

The July Crisis was very short; at most, it lasted a month. The significance of Franz Ferdinand’s assassination is that it promoted the Kaiser to issue Austria with a ‘blank cheque.’

An attempt by the British at diplomacy to resolve the issue is rejected by Austria Hungary, which lost out in 1815 due to attempts at diplomacy.

Russia then mobilises in support for Serbia and this kick starts a chain of mobilisation followed by an ultimatum and the outbreak of war. The July Crisis spans from 23 July to 4 August. For correspondence that is carried out through non-real time messages, this is incredibly fast.

The Germans are normally blamed for the outbreak of war as:

1. They issued the blank cheque and knew it would lead to war
2. They used Russia’s mobilisation to shift the blame for outbreak from them to Russia
3. German mobilisation and planning *actually* caused the war as Russian mobilisation was too slow to guarantee war

Most significantly, by the time Germany mobilises, Austria-Hungary and Serbia are fighting so why is Germany blamed for the outbreak of the war?

Unification of Germany in 1871 unbalances Europe as Europe cannot cope with a big and powerful Germany. Europe is also subject to a series of long term strains, like the decline of Empires that leads to independent Balkan states after the 1912 Balkan War. Another underlying issue was Russia, which was economically growing, but politically backwards.

The Anglo-German naval conflict that emerged from 1905 has no real role in causing the war. Tensions such as these did, however, mean that a system of alliances began to replace a general European concert. The alliance system of three powers pitched against three powers helps to preserve peace through the status quo. It must be recognised that at the time it was not expected that crises would ultimately escalate into war. The Bosnian Crisis of 1909, for example, ran on for several months but never led to war. Balkan wars do not mean that general European war will result. They can be contained.

Fischer argues for German responsibility for the war by arguing that German unified through war, the Prussian monarchy and Protestantism. This does not unify Germany but actually provokes tension between the east and west of Germany. This is heightened by divisions between Western industrialisation and Eastern agrarianism. Foreign policy, i.e. war, becomes an outlet for these tensions.

Germany is also subject to domestic tension. Bismarck, as the founder of a unified Germany, gave control of customs but *not* tax to imperial Germany meaning that the power to levy direct taxes remained a state privilege. By 1911, German expansion of the military was harder to fund, causing tension as a result.
role of women as exclusively home-front based but invasion, occupation and air force broke down the traditional barrier between home and fighting fronts.

War presented everyone with challenges but some were unique to women. Economic history focuses on the mobilisation of female labour but this overlooks the sheer amount of non-wage labour done by women. The war does not only have an economic on women as workers but overwhelmingly as consumers. The dependents of soldiers were supported by the state but it was unclear who was entitled to this. Even where it was clear who was owed separation allowances suffered from the inefficiency of allocation in the first two years of the war. This meant that working class women were often hugely deprived. This can often be best seen by focusing on women in the locality.

Focusing on the liberation of women as a result of war is just a slice of the experience and skews the narrative to be unduly positive.

The Ottoman Empire used women to deliver food and this meant if food became a weapon of war; the home too was a battleground. Occupation, invasion and propaganda all further undermined the traditional home and fighting front division.

Although air raids were few relative to the experience on the front, they are significant by virtue of who is affected. Clearly, men were not the only legitimate participants of war.

There is a women’s suffrage alliance meeting in Budapest in 1913. War actually means a greater interest in pacifism than votes and equity. The women’s peace conference at The Hague argued that women needed a voice.

How did Germany try and win the war?

There is an assumption that stalemate exists and there is no quick end to the war as a result. This stalemate arose because of equivalency – that is, the two are were equal. This meant that diplomacy was important and, as a result, so were victories in the short term in order to persuade other nations to join one’s side.

Although Britain has a vast empire, empire-based resources are further away meaning that it requires more shipping than resources from the US and Canada. It is therefore important that Britain retains its access to the US and especially wall street. The amount of debt that Britain takes on means that it is remarkable that the pound sterling remains stable against the dollar but equally it is very good for Britain as it is this that allows it to buy US goods. As a result, to Germany, the US was a quasi-ally of the Entente which presents Germany with the problem of how to launch an integrated attack on fighting and economic fronts. Falkenhayn seeks to do so by creating an Eastern Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia and thus seeks negotiated peace with Russia to this end. The failure of the Eastern Front to open up the opportunity for negotiation leads Falkenhayn then to focus on the Western Front and France.

Another way to target economic strength is to do so directly rather than attacking the French. This is achieved through U-Boat campaigns. Previously, major German land offensives are not coordinated with naval assaults.

The British answer to this is to mount a blockade but this presents problems of its own. An effective and legal blockade must be undertaken close to the shore but to do so would be to put it at danger from mines. The German hope was that this would weaken the British fleet and allow the Germans to engage the British on a more equal footing. This does not happen for a number of reasons:

1. Britain produces ships faster than Germany
2. Britain does not mount a close blockade but instead the whole North Sea
3. Germany had insufficient cruisers and submarines to take on British blockade
4. German naval command was very confused