Account of the First World War

In the summer of 1914, a very long time ago, a terrible war broke out between many of the countries of Europe, including Britain and Germany. The war came to be known as the Great War, later it was called the First World War.

This war broke out in the time of your great-great-grandparents. In those days, most people thought that war was a glorious thing. They wanted to fight to save their country. People on both sides felt the same. They did not know about the bad things that happened in war, because in those days there was no television and there were no photographs of wars for ordinary people to see.

Many young men rushed to join the army. They thought that they would quickly win. They thought the war would be over very soon. They were wrong because the war did not end for another four years. These young men also expected to have a good time and thought that it would be an exciting adventure. They soon found that this was wrong too. They were sent to France to face the enemy.

The soldiers had to live in trenches, where they could shelter from the gunfire. The trenches were deep and muddy. Many rats lived down in there too. The young men were often crouched in the mud, cold, wet and hungry, listening to the roaring guns of the enemy. Some young men became very ill, deafened or shocked by the terrible noise of bombs exploding nearby.

Often the order came that they must go 'over the top'. They called this 'OTT'. This meant that they had to run out over the top of their trenches to attack the enemy with their hand weapons. They had to fight with their pistols and bayonets. Of course, as soon as they came up out of their trenches many were killed by the gunfire.

After the war, people began to realise how many young men had died. They felt very sad and angry. They wanted to remember them and so they built, in every town and village, a special war memorial. They made statues or large crosses and put under them the names of all the soldiers, sailors and airmen from their town that had been killed.

Poppy Day began at the end of the war. The poem 'In Flanders Fields', written by a soldier in the war, told of poppies growing in the fields. It became so well known that the poppy became the symbol of remembrance. Poppy Day was first held on the 11th of November, 1921. The poppies were first made and sold in France in places that had been destroyed during the war.