



Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I

Alexander Watson

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For Germany and Austria-Hungary the First World War started with high hopes for a rapid, decisive outcome. Convinced that right was on their side and fearful of the enemies that encircled them, they threw themselves resolutely into battle. Yet, despite the initial halting of a brutal Russian invasion, the Central Powers' war plans soon unravelled. Germany's attack on France failed. Austria-Hungary's armies suffered catastrophic losses at Russian and Serbian hands. Hopes of a quick victory lay in ruins.

For the Central Powers the war now became a siege on a monstrous scale. Britain's ruthless intervention cut sea routes to central Europe and mobilised the world against them. Germany and Austria-Hungary were to be strangled of war supplies and food, their soldiers overwhelmed by better armed enemies, and their civilians brought to the brink of starvation. Conquest and plunder, land offensives, and submarine warfare all proved powerless to counter or break the blockade. The Central Powers were trapped in the Allies' ever-tightening ring of steel.

Alexander Watson's compelling new history retells the war from the perspectives of its instigators and losers, the Germans and Austro-Hungarians. This is the story not just of their leaders in Berlin and Vienna, but above all of the people. Only through their unprecedented mobilisation could the conflict last so long and be so bitterly fought, and only with the waning of their commitment did it end. The war shattered their societies, destroyed their states and bequeathed to east-central Europe a poisonous legacy of unredeemed sacrifice, suffering, race hatred and violence. A major re-evaluation of the First World War, *Ring of Steel* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the last century of European history.

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