

1917-18

WESTERN FRONT

1917 - A new French General - Nivelle started another offensive. The Germans knew of his plans and retreated to new stronger positions (the Hindenburg Line). General Nivelle refused to change his plans so the casualties were huge! Several units from the French army mutinied... General Pétain was called in. He solved the crisis by ruthlessly punish the leaders of the mutiny and at the same time improving the conditions for the ordinary soldiers. The British and Canadians had some successes - like the Canadian capture of VIMY Ridge in April 1917. This was the same month USA joined the war!

WHY?

- Since 1914 bad feelings had grown between Germany and the USA. The US was officially neutral but supplied loans and equipment to the Allies.
- The German policy of *unrestricted submarine warfare* was resumed (the German submarine warfare had been stopped after the strong American reactions 1915 (when a German submarine on the 7th of May torpedoed *LUSITANIA* - a British transatlantic cruiser - with the cost of 128 US lives). Now a new German military government tried a desperate measure with the aim to try to starve the British to submission.
- In January 1917 the British intercepted and decoded a message from the German Foreign Office to the German minister in Mexico City - Alfred Zimmerman. This message, called the *Zimmerman note*, suggested an alliance with Mexico if war broke out between Germany and USA. The reward to Mexico would be the territories lost to the US in the war of 1848. For the Americans this was the straw that broke the camels back - On April 1st 1917 the US declared war against Germany!

When the Americans joined the war in April 1917 the Allies thought that "*the tide was turning*", but late 1917 the situation was not any different than before...

WHY?

- The Americans had not arrived in force
- The French armies were still reeling from the mutinies of early 1917
- The Russians had decided to make peace with Germany (Russian Revolution!) so several 100.000 German troops were transferred to the western front.

1918 - It was not until 1918 that the stalemate was broken...

WHY?

- The Allies blockade of German ports had starved the German economy of raw materials and the population of food (including the soldiers!).
- USA now moved about 50.000 new troops into France every month.
- The German army, do to the casualties, was not the quality fighting machine it had been.

In March 1918 the German Commander Ludendorff launched a desperate attack in an attempt to win the war. The Germans advanced and broke through the Allied Lines in many places. The Allies retreated in order and forced the German troops to stretch themselves. More American troops arrived every week and now the French called in reserve troops. In making this breakthrough Germany lost 400.000 men and they had no reserves to call in! The German soldiers lacked food and supplies which made them stop the advance at times to loot food and supplies from captured trenches or villages. Between May and August the Germans made no further progress. Now it was only a matter of time before the Allies would defeat Germany!

WHY?

- The Allied army was large in numbers and they were well fed and well equipped.
- The Allied troops were also supported by tanks, aircraft and improved artillery

On August 8 1918 the Allies started a counter-attack along much of the western front. By late September they had reached the Hindenburg Line. By October the Germans were in full retreat and at 11.00 am the 11/11 1918 the armistice (cease-fire) came into effect - The First World War was over!

EASTERN FRONT

Russian casualties and economic hardship leads to revolution; The enormous losses in human life's as well as the strained Russian economy brought Russia into a collapse in February 1917. What first looked like a normal strike turned into a revolution and within a few weeks the Tsar abdicated. The Romanov dynasty came to an end after over 300 years of rule! The new Provisional Government continued the war. The period between February and October 1917 saw several Russian defeats. The most serious one hit the country in June 1917 (Galician offensive). In October 1917 Lenin and the Bolsheviks made a second revolution. They had promised to end the war. Germany granted Russia an armistice but after waiting nearly two months for some kind of agreements Germany continued the war. Russia gave up after just a few weeks and another armistice was granted.

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk – March 1918! In March 1918 a Peace Treaty was signed in Brest-Litovsk. Russia lost an enormous amount of land as well as both good agrarian areas as industrial regions. Germany could now also send 100 000's of men to the Western front...

ITALIAN FRONT

Battle of the Piave River; The main assault, fought 15-22 June 1918, was a response to German demands upon their ally to launch an offensive across the Piave River. The Austro-Hungarian army of June 1918 was quite different from the one that had triumphed at Caporetto eight months earlier. It was demoralized, equipment and other supplies were perilously low, and even if Austria-Hungary had as many divisions (or even a few more) they were weak. The attack failed and the Austro-Hungarian Army had to go back into their old positions after losing over 190 000 men...

Battle of Vittorio Veneto; As part of an all Entente offensive in September 1918 the Entente Command tried to talk General Diaz to launch an attack over the Piave River. He had after the success of the Battle of the Piave River preferred smaller local operations. Now the Entente leaders tried to convince him to launch a bigger advance. After the continuous success of the Entente on the Western front and the fact that it seems like the war was close to an end it was important for Italy to gain as much as possible before the Peace Treaties would be discussed. The attack opened on 23 October 1918 with an Italian advance in the mountains. After some initial problems the Italian army managed with the help of British and French forces to advance. A week later Vittorio Veneto fell. This split the defending Austro-Hungarian Army. With the Allies' succeeding in advancing 24km along a 56km front a truce was finally agreed on 2 November with the capture of Tagliamento; an armistice came into effect the following day, signed at Padua. Hostilities were formally concluded on 4 November 1918. The Italians lost some 38,000 casualties, a figure dwarfed by the 300,000 prisoners suffered by the Austro-Hungarians. Simultaneous political turmoil completed the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The war was over for the Dual Monarchy!

MESOPOTAMIAN FRONT

End of the War; The British resumed their offensive in late February 1918 capturing Kifri and Hit (previously called Khanaqin). In October the British went on the offensive for the last time and fought a battle at the Battle of Sharqat, routing the Turkish army. General Marshall accepted the surrender of Khalil Pasha and the Turkish 6th Army on October 30 1918. British troops marched unopposed into Mosul on the 14 November 1918. The British lost 92,000 soldiers in the Mesopotamian campaign. Turkish losses are unknown but the British captured a total of 45,000

prisoners of war. The vast majority of the British empire forces in this campaign were recruited from India.

PALESTINIAN FRONT

The **Arab revolt** was a success, aided immensely by **General Allenby's conquest of Palestine** in 1917. Late in 1917, Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force had smashed the Ottoman defences, captured Gaza and then captured Jerusalem. This victory was widely promoted in the Allied press. The British capture Jerusalem and the surrounding area was strategically of minimal importance, this event was later the key in the creation of Israel as a separate nation in 1948.

1918: The **Battle of Megiddo** of September 19 - 21, 1918, and its subsequent exploitation, was the culminating victory in British General Edmund Allenby's **Palestine Campaign** during WWI.

The Turks were taken by surprise when the British attacked Megiddo in a sudden storm. The Turkish troops started a full scale retreat, the British bombed the fleeing columns of men from the air and within a week, the Turkish army had ceased to exist as a military force.

Australian Lighthorse troops marched unopposed into Damascus on September 30, 1918. T.E. Lawrence and his Arab troops entered Damascus the next day to receive an "Official" surrender. The war in Palestine was over. The Turkish government signed an armistice on October 28, 1918 and outright surrendered two days later. 600 years of Ottoman rule over the Middle East had come to an end.

BALKAN FRONT

Breaking the stalemate in Greece 1918; Only at the very end of the war were the Entente powers able to make a breakthrough, which was after most of the German and Austro-Hungarian troops had been removed, leaving the Front held by the Bulgarians alone. The Bulgarians suffered their only defeat in the war in the battle of Dobro Pole (present day Macedonia – at this time part of Bulgaria) but days after this they decisively defeated the English and the Greeks in the battle of Doiran, which saved the country from enemy occupation. The defeat in Dobro Pole and threats of Entente reinforcements led to Bulgaria's signing an armistice on September 29, 1918. Bulgaria was now out of WWI!

Offensive through Serbia; The French General Franchet d'Esperey led a combined French, Serbian, Greek and British army out of Greece. After the battles against the Bulgarian Army he attacked north and defeated the German and Austrian forces that tried to halt his offensive. By October 1918 his army had recaptured all of Serbia and was preparing to invade Hungary proper. The offensive halted only because the Hungarian leadership offered to surrender in November 1918.



President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, January 1918

1. There should be no secret diplomacy between states. All international treaties should be openly negotiated, and all their terms should be published.
2. The use of the high seas should be freely available to all nations without restriction.
3. Economic barriers to international trade should be removed.
4. All states should agree to a reduction in armaments.
5. All states should work towards the dissolution of their colonial empires, and the independence of the territories that they had colonized.
6. German troops should evacuate all occupied Russian territory.
7. German troops should evacuate all occupied Belgian territory.
8. Alsace and Lorraine should be returned to France.
9. The frontiers of Italy should be readjusted in such a manner as takes account of the nationality of the inhabitants.
10. The nationalities governed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire should be allowed to determine their independent political futures.
11. German troops should evacuate all occupied territory in Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and the independence of those states should be guaranteed.
12. The nationalities governed by the Ottoman Empire should be allowed to determine their independent political futures, and the Dardanelles should be opened permanently to international shipping.
13. An independent state of Poland should be created with access to the sea.
14. An international association of nations should be formed to safeguard peace and to guarantee the independence of all states, great and small.

10 November, 1918 The Armistice Demands

1. Effective six hours after signing.
2. Immediate clearing of Belgium, France, Alsace-Lorraine, to be concluded within 14 days. Any troops remaining in these areas to be interned or taken as prisoners of war.
3. Surrender 5000 cannon (chiefly heavy), 30,000 machine guns, 3000 trench mortars, 2000 planes.
4. Evacuation of the left bank of the Rhine, Mayence, Coblenz, Cologne, occupied by the enemy to a radius of 30 kilometers deep.
5. On the right bank of the Rhine a neutral zone from 30 to 40 kilometers deep, evacuations within 11 days.
6. Nothing to be removed from the territory on the left bank of the Rhine, all factories, railroads, etc. to be left intact.
7. Surrender of 5000 locomotives, 150,000 railway coaches, 10,000 trucks.
8. Maintenance of enemy occupation troops through Germany.
9. In the East all troops to withdraw behind the boundaries of August 1, 1914, fixed time not given.
10. Renunciation of the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk and Bucharest.
11. Unconditional surrender of East Africa.
12. Return of the property of the Belgian Bank, Russian and Rumanian gold.
13. Return of prisoners of war without reciprocity.
14. Surrender of 160 U-boats, 8 light cruisers, 6 Dreadnoughts; the rest of the fleet to be disarmed and controlled by the Allies in neutral or Allied harbors.
15. Assurance of free trade through the Cattegat Sound; clearance of mine fields and occupation of all forts and batteries, through which transit could be hindered.
16. The blockade remains in effect. All German ships to be captured.
17. All limitations by Germany on neutral shipping to be removed.
18. Armistice lasts 30 days.