

The Armistice, 1918

History

Lesson 4 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

Enquiry: Why did WWI end in November 1918?

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1918 - The Hundred Days

In August 1918 the Allied Forces began to push back the German troops. The Allies had the advantage because the British and French armies were now supported by fresh American soldiers and resources. The American resources combined with the British and French experience of fighting on the Western Front since 1914 meant the Allies could push back the German advances made during the Spring Offensive.

This combination of experience and fresh resources proved devastating. It appeared to only be a matter of time until the Germans were defeated.



1918 - The Push Back

By September 1918, the Allies had reached and broken the **Hindenburg Line**. This was a German defensive line 8 miles behind the front line protected by machine guns and concrete pillboxes. By October the German forces were in full retreat. The German navy refused to obey an order to fight the British one last time. They **mutinied**. News of this spread to the front line and morale amongst the German soldiers fell. The German government came under pressure from the leaders of the army and the navy to end the war.

German representatives were sent to France to negotiate an **armistice**.



The Armistice

German negotiators arrived in France on 9th November 1918 to speak to the Commander of the Allied Forces, General Foch. Terms were put to the German negotiators. They were under pressure to reach a deal - over 100,000 Germans had been killed during the Hundred Days offensive, and Germany seemed on the brink of collapse. The German leader, the Kaiser, then **abdicated** on the 10th November 1918. The German government agreed to the details of the terms in the early morning of 11th November 1918. General Foch sent the message to Allied Commanders on the Western Front: “**Hostilities** will cease on the whole front as from November 11 at 11 o’clock French time.” The war had come to an end.



Military Reasons for the end of WWI

Germany seemed to have the advantage in early 1918 thanks to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed in March 1918. The treaty gave Germany natural resources from Russian land as well as allowing Germany to move its forces from the Eastern Front to the Western Front. The Allies also lost a country with substantial armed forces: the Russians had approximately 6 million soldiers. This changed, however, with US entry into the war. With 4 million men drafted into the army, **armaments** for fighting and technologically advanced tanks and aircraft, the USA gave the Allies the advantage over the tired Central Powers. The US resources helped the Allied push back in the Hundred Days.



Political Reasons for the end of WWI

As WWI developed, civilians in the belligerent (involved countries) began to question their governments. Russians questioned whether the Tsar was the right person to lead the country given his bad military decisions. Revolution in Russia led to his **abdication** and a complete change of government - Russia was to become the first Communist country in the world. This decision led to the withdrawal of Russia from WWI, an important ally for the British and French. The Russian withdrawal seemed to give the advantage to the Central Powers.



Political Reasons for the end of WWI

By 1917 public opinion in the USA began to support the country's involvement in WWI. German military strategy had led to unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic. Furthermore, a telegram was sent from Germany to Mexico to ask for their involvement. The USA felt the Germans had directed their aggression against them unnecessarily. President Woodrow Wilson made the case for US involvement to "make the world safe for democracy," against the Central Powers.



Economic Reasons for the end of WWI

When war broke out in 1914 both the Central Powers and the Allied Forces tried to cut off vital resources to each other to force an early surrender. The Germans waged unrestricted submarine warfare in the Atlantic to sink merchant ships carrying goods. The British blockaded German ports to prevent German import of foodstuffs. All home fronts were negatively affected. Poor economic conditions in Russia helped contribute to the Russian Revolution and withdrawal from WWI. The blockade of German ports led to malnutrition and a lack of food for civilians and soldiers. This contributed to low morale and tired soldiers that couldn't fight back against the Allies.



Economic Reasons for the end of WWI

As well as the lack of resources, the countries involved in the war were finding out just how expensive war was. It is estimated that the total cost of WWI was \$208 billion. Equipping an army with all the resources needed to fight whilst also maintaining the homefront cost billions. The cost of the war for the British was approximately \$35 billion whilst for Germany it reached nearly \$38 billion. The USA's entry into the war on the side of the Allies was vitally important. The country lent the Allies money to keep fighting, whilst also providing equipment the Allies would otherwise not have been able to buy. The Central Powers were not so lucky.



Glossary

Abdicated - to choose to stop ruling the country you are in charge of.

Armaments - military weapons and equipment.

Armistice - an agreement between two countries to stop fighting.

Hindenburg Line - German defensive line 8 miles back from the front.

Hostilities - fighting in a war.

Mutinied - an occasion when a group of people, especially soldiers or sailors, refuses to obey orders.



Questions

1. When did the Allied push back (the Hundred Days) begin?
2. Why did the German government come under pressure from the military leaders to end the war?
3. Why did Germany look close to collapse by the 10th November 1918?
4. When was the armistice agreed and when did it begin?
5. According to the worksheet, what three factors can help explain the end of WWI?

