

formidable form of defence was a series of mutually supporting strong points in a chess-board design, as the Germans had used at Passchendaele in 1917. But by then the Hindenburg line had been built, and the Germans had not updated the design because their whole endeavour between January and July 1918 had been devoted to the offensive, which would leave the Hindenburg line far behind. Secondly, in August 1918 Australian troops had captured the plans of the layout of a large section of the Hindenburg line—trenches, dugouts, artillery points—the lot! Thirdly, Britain had such massive quantities of artillery available, which could now be used with accuracy, so that no defensive position could have withstood the bombardment.

As the line crumbled at the end of September, Ludendorff demanded an armistice. In order to get the best possible terms the first of a series of notes was sent to President Wilson of the USA at the beginning of October. On 2 October 1918 Major von dem Bussche, acting on behalf of the army high command, told the German *Reichstag* that victory in the war was no longer possible for the German army: 'We can carry on the war for a substantial further period, we can cause the enemy heavy loss, we can lay waste his country as we retreat, but we cannot win the war.'

On 26 October General Ludendorff resigned. In early November, with the Austrians signing an armistice and the threat of revolution growing in Germany, the Kaiser abdicated and fled to Holland. At 5 a.m. on 11 November 1918 the armistice was signed and came into operation six hours later, thus ending the war at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918.

The war was over, but the first seeds of the next war had already been sown. The resignations of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, as well as the fact that they allowed the democratic politicians to pick up the pieces of a shattered nation, allowed extremists to develop the myth that the army had not really lost the war at all, but rather had been betrayed. Clearly these rumours were false, because it was Ludendorff himself who declared to the Kaiser that the war was lost. Facts, however, often suffer when they contradict what people really want to believe.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 By 1918 lessons in military leadership had been learned on the Allied side. How do the battles of Hamel and Amiens illustrate this?
- 2 How had the technology of warfare changed on the Western Front from 1916 to 1918?
- 3 Why is 8 August 1918 regarded as a significant day on the Western Front?
- 4 How did manpower become a significant issue in the final months of the war?
- 5 What evidence is there of collapsing German troop morale from August 1918?
- 6 Why did the Hindenburg Line prove less of an obstacle to the Allies than the Germans would have hoped?

DOCUMENT STUDY: THE LEGACY OF WAR — DEATH AND MAIMING



Figure 8.60 Dust to dust—the decomposing remains of a soldier and a horse. In the intensive fighting many human and animal corpses had to be left unburied. Over 100 000 soldiers, Allied and German, remain without a proper burial on the Somme battlefields alone. (Imperial War Museum Negative Number E(AUS)2966)



Figure 8.62

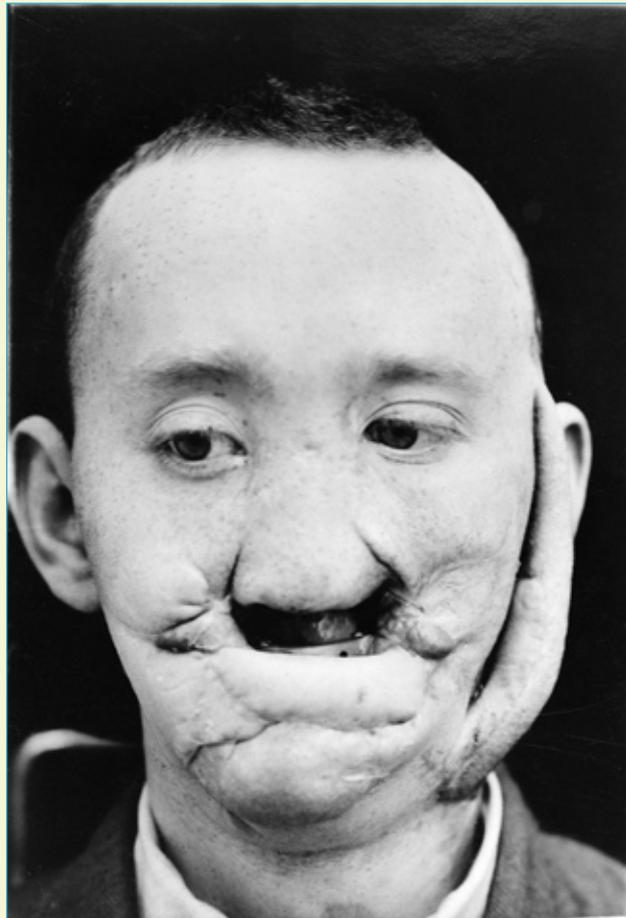


Figure 8.61 Plastic surgery was in its infancy. After the war soldiers like this would often refuse to leave home in daylight because of the reactions they would receive in the street.

DOCUMENT STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 What can a historian learn about the fighting on the Western Front from photographs such as these?
- 2 Photographs such as these were rarely if ever seen on the home front. Why?

REASONS FOR THE ALLIED VICTORY AND GERMAN COLLAPSE



Figure 8.63 The reasons for victory and defeat

THE BRITISH NAVAL BLOCKADE OF GERMANY

Naval leaders on both sides knew that the key to success in a long war lay in the control of the sea lanes around northern Europe. A country deprived of food and raw materials from abroad would not be able to continue the fight over the longer period. Germany, with the largest maritime trade of all the countries on the continent and a merchant fleet second in size only to that of Britain, was particularly vulnerable because of its limited access to the world's oceans. When the ships of the Royal Navy took up their war stations on the night of 29 July 1914, they effectively cut off Germany from the rest of the world (see Figure 8.64).

Germany's only access to vital raw materials was Swedish iron ore, which could be shipped across the Baltic, the only sea that Germany controlled. Even these imports became subject to British submarine attack by 1915.

The only way for the Germans to break the blockade would have been to defeat the British fleet in combat, but the indecisive battle of Jutland in 1916 was the only time when the British naval stranglehold was challenged, and the return of the German High Seas Fleet to port ensured that the blockade noose continued to tighten around Germany.

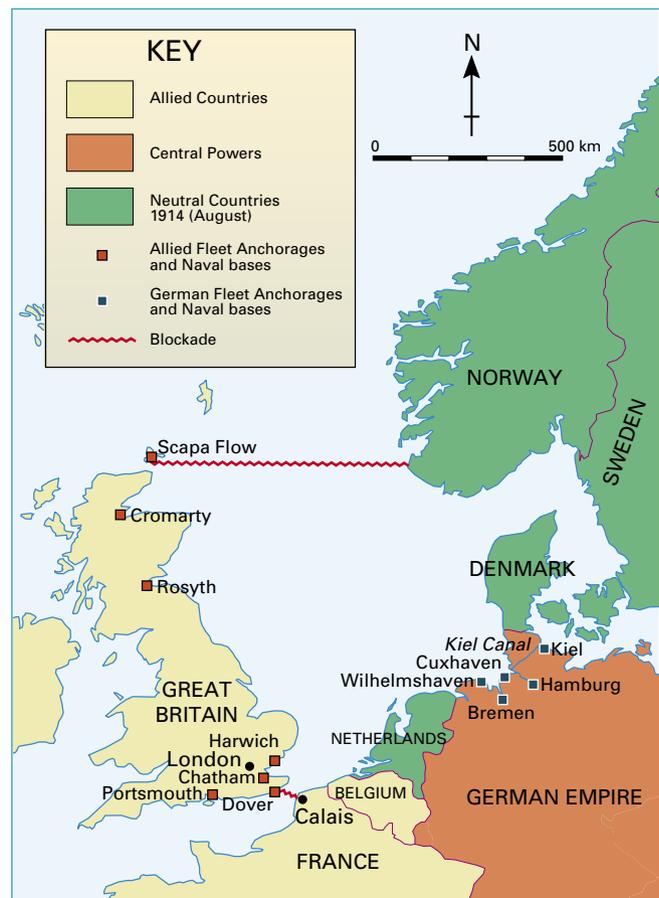


Figure 8.64 The British blockade in the Dover Strait, and from the Orkneys to Norway, strangled Germany's maritime trade.

Throughout the war the British policy of stopping, searching and sometimes confiscating the cargoes of ships under neutral flags caused irritation to these non-combatants. Attempts were made to avoid diplomatic protests by schemes involving the purchase of cargoes bound for Germany and special deals made with particular countries. Thus in 1916 Britain agreed to supplement Dutch grain supplies only if the Dutch agreed to reduce their exports of pork to Germany, since British fodder had been fattening Dutch pigs for German dinner tables!

At the time of the armistice it was agreed that the blockade would continue until Germany signed a formal peace treaty. It was thought necessary to have a continuing hold over Germany to ensure that the armistice was adhered to. One result was increasing starvation in parts of Germany during 1919. By March 1919 food relief from the Allies was reaching Germany, but the blockade was not officially ended until 12 July 1919. As to the overall effectiveness of the blockade, Marshall Foch stated that the final victory was due 50 per cent to the military and 50 per cent to the blockade.

FIREPOWER AND MANPOWER

The British home front had shown itself capable of not only replacing the enormous number of guns lost during the March retreat, but also of adding to that number. By July, the British had more artillery at their disposal than had been available before 21 March. At the same time British factories were delivering large quantities of tanks (of a better model), machine-guns, Lewis guns, trench mortars and shells. The 500 men in a British battalion in 1918 packed a considerably heavier punch than did the 1000 strong battalion of 1916. A battalion in 1916, apart from its rifles, which were well-nigh useless in trench warfare, might have at its disposal four Lewis guns and one or two light trench mortars.



Figure 8.65 Younger and younger German boys in uniform were being captured towards the end of the war, as the faces of some of these prisoners suggest.

In 1918, each battalion included thirty Lewis guns, eight light trench mortars, and at least sixteen rifle grenadiers. In addition, a battalion in the vanguard of the advance would enjoy the support of at least six tanks.

Both sides were running out of men, An important factor, therefore, was the growth in numbers with the arrival of the Americans. In June 1917 the first contingent of US troops, 14 000 in all, arrived in France, though they had no immediate effect on the battlefield as they had to be properly trained and equipped. With the British and French high commands urging the Americans to enter the fighting, the first sustained US offensive took place at the end of May 1918. The growing numbers of fresh US troops was to provide a source of manpower that the Germans could not match.

THE MORALE AND CONDITION OF THE GERMAN TROOPS

As the initial successes of Operation Michael waned, German morale crumbled. Many divisions were simply exhausted after advancing 65 kilometres in seven days. Their very success posed a problem: divisions waited kilometres ahead of their supply trains, whose wagons, pulled by skinny underfed horses, lumbered with difficulty over the pockmarked wasteland. In recrossing the old Somme battlefields of 1916 the Germans had to contend with the networks of old trenches, shell craters and barbed wire. Though the effort at the Somme had not won the battle for the Allies in 1916, it certainly played a part in defeating the 1918 German offensive.

Disciplinary problems also existed within the German army: hungry and tired soldiers, thoroughly sick of war, fell like scavenging hordes on villages, towns and enemy supply depots that stood in their way. The troops soon discovered that their British opposites, far from starving as German propaganda had told them, were well clothed and well fed. Desertion rates rose alarmingly.

The *Sturmtruppen* tactics of the Ludendorff offensive were initially effective but also expensive, costing the lives of highly trained and motivated men who could not be replaced. In many units boys were commanding boys. Replacements lacked quantity and quality: young recruits, ill-clothed and hungry, without the patriotic feelings of their predecessors, most of whom had become casualties; older men from other fronts; or repatriated prisoners who had experienced enough of war. The spring offensives had cost half a million German casualties. Replacements from the Eastern Front were a mixed blessing. Too many of them had heard the message of Bolshevism, were spreading socialism in the ranks and were talking of an immediate peace without annexations or reparations.

The uniforms of many German soldiers were in tatters and their boots leaked, they lacked blankets, and they were hungry and undernourished. For months the German doctors had had to use crêpe-paper bandages, like toilet rolls, to cover wounds. Instead of cotton wool they used a kind of cellulose paper, which in no time got soaked with pus and blood and just dissolved into a wet and stinking mess.

TACTICS AND STRATEGY

The Ludendorff offensive has been criticised for being tactically strong but strategically weak. By this it is meant that while Ludendorff planned the preparation and instigation of the battle well, the whole operation lacked a major strategic goal. It was not enough to simply break the Allied line. Having broken through, then what? It was the failure of Ludendorff to answer this question of wider strategy that helped to unhinge the whole offensive. When the Ludendorff offensive ground to a halt it left the German armies in precarious forward positions, in lightly fortified trenches where they could only be supplied with difficulty over war-torn terrain.

Historians Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson have argued that Ludendorff made a further mistake in leaving at least half a million men on the Eastern Front after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Russia.

These were not, as is commonly thought, left to stand on the defensive against the Bolsheviks, but were used in a totally unnecessary advance deep into the Ukraine and the Crimea as part of an aggressive policy in the east. Arguably, those half a million men would have been much more useful for Germany on the Western Front.

By contrast, Allied tactics improved. Under Foch's direction, attacks on the Germans came in different directions from the French, the British and the Americans in a never-ending series of jabs that wore down enemy resistance. For his part, Haig pursued a series of carefully planned, closely defined engagements that spared his troops and made maximum use of his now considerable backing of guns, tanks and aircraft. The British did not push beyond the protection offered by their artillery in a series of 'bite and hold' tactics, which saw them consolidate gains before moving on.

DID YOU KNOW?

If a British soldier died as a result of war injuries by 31 August 1921, he was officially counted as a war casualty, with implications for benefits for his family. If he died after 1 September, he was not a war casualty and his family suffered financially.

THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC

Influenza broke out in Europe in the spring of 1918 and affected all countries, but found easy victims among the undernourished population of Germany, where over 400 000 died of the disease in 1918.

A STAB—BUT IN WHICH DIRECTION?

It did not take long for the German high command to manufacture the legend of the '*Dolchstoss*'—the 'stab in the back' (from a mixture of Jews, socialists and communists) to explain the ending of the war, thus preserving the reputation of the 'undefeated' army.

Roger Chickering in *Imperial Germany and the Great War 1914–18* describes this myth as a 'shameless exercise in evasion' and suggests that it was a series of arrogant miscalculations by the German high command—which he labels the 'Frontstoss' or 'stab from the front'—which helped to bring about Germany's loss.

- *The high command miscalculated in 1918, when the Ludendorff offensive failed.*
- *They miscalculated in 1917, when the submarine offensive failed.*
- *They miscalculated in 1916, when the Verdun offensive failed.*
- *They miscalculated in 1914, when the failure of the Schlieffen Plan dashed hopes for the only kind of war that the Germans could expect to win.*

By a prompt and efficient campaign of propaganda, the army high command put socialist politicians into the spotlight of defeat, allowing themselves to slink behind the curtain and disappear from the stage, only to reappear with untarnished reputations at a later stage of German history.

REVIEW TASKS

- 1 List the reasons for victory and defeat mentioned in the text, ranking them in order of importance. Justify your ranking.
- 2 'Germany was not defeated on the battlefield—it collapsed from within.' Draw evidence from the text to argue for and against this proposition.

THE ROLES AND GOALS OF THE PEACEMAKERS AND THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

WILSON'S FOURTEEN POINTS

In late 1917 President Wilson (USA) had hoped to induce the Allies to issue a joint statement of liberal war aims. When this was refused he issued his own plan on 8 January 1918. At the heart of the program was his proposal for the creation of a League of Nations to bring countries together for the preservation of future peace. At no time did Britain and France accept the Fourteen Points as the basis for a common program for peace. Germany at first rejected the Fourteen Points, but in October 1918, with defeat inevitable, Wilson was approached for an armistice and peace settlement on the basis of the program. While Wilson was prepared to consider this, Britain and France were not. They felt that the terms were far too vague and Wilson was strongly advised by his allies that the terms of the armistice must be left for the military leaders to decide. He relented and communicated this to the Germans on 14 October.

The Fourteen Points proposed by President Wilson were as follows:

- 1 *There should be no secret treaties.*
- 2 *There should be freedom of the seas in peacetime or wartime.*
- 3 *There should be free trade between countries.*
- 4 *There should be international disarmament.*
- 5 *Colonies should have a say in their own future.*
- 6 *German troops should leave Russia.*
- 7 *There should be independence for Belgium.*
- 8 *France should regain Alsace–Lorraine.*
- 9 *The frontier between Austria and Italy to be adjusted.*
- 10 *There should be self-determination for the peoples of eastern Europe.*
- 11 *Serbia should have access to the sea.*
- 12 *There should be self-determination for the peoples of the Turkish Empire.*
- 13 *Poland should become an independent state with access to the sea.*
- 14 *A League of Nations should be established.*

VOTES AND EXPECTATIONS

In the closing weeks of 1918 voting took place in all three major Allied countries. In the USA, President Wilson's Democratic party suffered defeat in the congressional elections and the rival Republicans took control. In France there was a public vote of confidence in the government of Clemenceau.

In Britain, an election was called for on 14 December. For a variety of reasons, not least because of the virulent influenza epidemic that was at its height at the time of the campaign, the public seemed apathetic towards broader party policies, and even Lloyd George's promise to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in aroused little interest.

It was the nature of the peace that captured the public's attention, and the public message was clear—it was to be harsh! The leaders of Germany should be tried as war criminals, Germany should pay Britain's war costs and German nationals, interned during the war, should be expelled from Britain permanently.

DOCUMENT STUDY: THE ARMISTICE

The following points are extracts from the terms of the armistice. Germany was to do the following:

- 1 *Immediately evacuate Belgium, Luxembourg, France and Alsace–Lorraine.*
- 2 *Surrender 2500 heavy guns, 2500 field guns, 25 000 machine-guns, and 1700 planes.*
- 3 *Evacuate the left bank of the Rhine; this area would be occupied by the Allies.*
- 4 *Hand over 5000 locomotives, 150 000 railway wagons and 5000 trucks.*

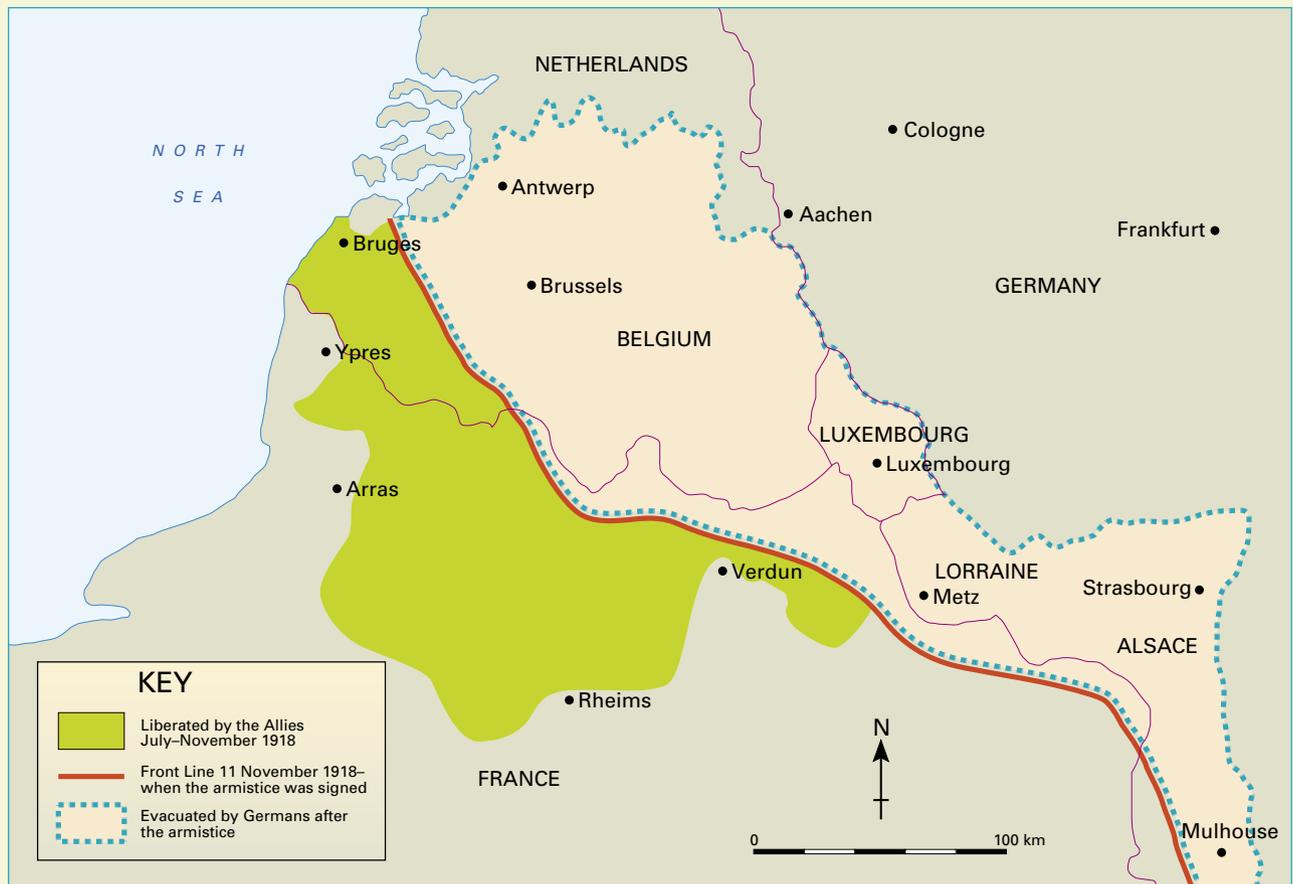


Figure 8.66 The zones of occupation

DOCUMENT STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 Look at Figure 8.66. What important point may be made about the location of the German army at the time of the armistice?
- 2 The Germans argued for more lenient terms. Which parts of the armistice would have been hardest for them to accept?
- 3 Suggest reasons why points 2, 3 and 4 of the armistice were demanded by the Allies.

The anger towards Germany was inflamed by two further examples of German 'frightfulness' in late 1918. On 10 October the mail boat *Leinster* was torpedoed in the Irish Sea with the loss of 451 civilian lives. Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour spoke for most Britons when he declared 'Brutes they were when they began the war, and ... brutes they remain'. Then about 60 000 British prisoners of war had been made to perform hard labour behind the German lines. When the war ended they were freed—undernourished, ill-clothed, and with no transportation. 'Skeletons drag their way into France. Many dying on the road', reported the *Daily Mail*.

On 29 November, George Barnes, a parliamentary candidate, coined the most famous slogan of the campaign: 'Hang the Kaiser'. Sir Eric Geddes, from the Admiralty, later added, 'the Germans ... are going to pay every penny; they are going to be squeezed as a lemon is squeezed—until the pips squeak!'

Lloyd George had begun the campaign moderately, calling for a peace of reconciliation and speaking of social reconstruction. However, he belatedly caught the public mood and was soon promising that he would demand the entire cost of the war from Germany. The government was returned with a large majority.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 Why would Germany favour a peace based upon the Fourteen Points? Why wouldn't the British and French favour this?
- 2 Contrast the Fourteen Points with the armistice terms. Is the approach different? Why?
- 3 What was the attitude of the British public towards peacemaking?
- 4 How was Lloyd George affected by the public mood?

THE VERSAILLES CONFERENCE JANUARY–JUNE 1919

The conference began with almost a hundred delegates from countries as diverse as Brazil, Portugal and Japan, though all the main decisions were taken by the 'Big Three': Wilson (USA), Lloyd George (Britain) and Clemenceau (France). Each had their different goals and the six months of discussions saw several clashes of personality and policy.

Georges Clemenceau At the age of seventy-seven, he had seen Germans invade his country twice, first in 1870 and then in 1914, and was determined it would never happen again. The peace had to be punitive—he was not interested in the sort of idealism spoken by Wilson. For Clemenceau the main issues were territorial. French security had to be guaranteed and this could best be done by weakening Germany, by reducing her size: territory in the east should go to Poland and in the west, as well as regaining Alsace–Lorraine, the Rhineland (that is the part of Germany lying west of the Rhine) should be detached and given to France. Clemenceau also strongly supported large reparations.

Woodrow Wilson Wilson was seen, and saw himself, as an idealist, seeking a peace that was fair and just. The centrepiece of his program was the establishment of a League of Nations to guarantee future world peace. He also favoured self-determination, the right of peoples to rule themselves; opposed the annexation of Germany's colonies by the victorious powers; disapproved of French attempts to 'dismember' Germany; and wanted to limit any effort to impose reparations.

Lloyd George Britain's priorities lay with the fate of the German colonies and reparations. While Lloyd George wanted to see Germany punished—he was conscious that the British electorate had recently re-elected him to ensure this—he also wanted to moderate the anti-German demands. Britain, by

tradition, had never favoured a powerful France dominating the European continent.

The clash of personalities

Prior to the conference, Clemenceau had objected to President Wilson representing the USA. As the only head of state, Clemenceau feared that Wilson would dominate the proceedings. However, having met Wilson in December 1918 during Wilson's trip to Europe, Clemenceau withdrew his objection—he felt he had nothing to fear. Clemenceau and Lloyd George were at times irritated by Wilson's assumed air of moral superiority. Their countries had, after all, borne the brunt of the fighting and suffering.

Six months of discussion meant that alliances changed between the 'Big Three'. Some examples of this were the alliance between Lloyd George and Clemenceau against Wilson over reparations. Wilson lost. Lloyd George and Wilson were allied against Clemenceau over the detachment of the Rhineland. Clemenceau lost. Clemenceau and Wilson were allied against Lloyd George over revisions to the terms before final submission. A compromise was made.



Figure 8.67 The Big Four of the Allies gather for the Treaty of Versailles. They are, left to right, David Lloyd George of Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, Georges Clemenceau of France, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States of America.

The Fontainebleau memorandum, 25 March 1919

Lloyd George became increasingly uneasy about the course of the peacemaking. He feared that if the final treaty was too severe, Germany would turn to Bolshevism and seek retribution against the Allies. At the palace of Fontainebleau he set out his thoughts on the future directions of the negotiations.

- *Germany should pay an annual sum in reparation for a fixed period that would disappear with the generation that made the war. The Allies could not both cripple Germany and expect her to pay.*
- *The settlement should contain no provocation for future wars.*
- *As far as possible, nationalities should be allocated to their motherlands. The proposal to place two million Germans under Polish rule alarmed him.*
- *Germany should be admitted to the League of Nations.*

Clemenceau later gave a cool reception to this call for moderation. Arguing that no one in Germany drew any distinction between the just and the unjust demands of the Allies, he said, 'The Germans, a servile people, must have force to sustain an argument'.

Spotlight on a key issue: reparations

Pre-conference utterances indicated a moderate and limited reparations settlement. The pre-armistice agreement required Germany to compensate for all damage done by the aggression of Germany by land, sea and air to the civilian populations of the Allies and their property. This could not be interpreted to include the war costs of the Allies. However, British attitudes stiffened after the December 1918 election campaign, and Lloyd George found himself having to adopt a tougher stance on the issue.

The USA firmly opposed the idea that Germany should pay war costs, and secured from the other Allies an undertaking that they would not pursue such a claim.

The question of a fixed sum

The central objective of USA policy was to secure the inclusion in the peace treaty of a reasonable fixed sum of reparations. Two approaches were tried: the first to fix the sum by determining the amount of damages claimed, the second by determining Germany's capacity to pay. Both methods failed, partly due to the intransigence of the British and French delegations. Having successfully eliminated war costs, the USA failed to translate that victory into a limited and defined reparations obligation.

War pensions

The British wished to define a category of reparations that would provide for the financial losses of Britain as against the property losses suffered by France and Belgium. The category chosen to serve this end was military pensions. France supported this move, probably because it welcomed any measure that added to the bill, and after a little persuasion Wilson agreed. This was condemned in some American circles as an unwarranted surrender of principles on the reparations question.

The war guilt clause

Lloyd George insisted that the treaty contain some indication of Germany's incapacity to pay all they owed, in order to enable him and Clemenceau to justify their renunciation of war costs before public opinion. They also insisted that the necessary clause should contain a statement of German acceptance of war guilt. The USA questioned the compatibility with the pre-armistice agreements of an explicit German acceptance of responsibility, but they yielded. The result was Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, which was designed as a compromise between the determination of the USA to comply with the pre-armistice agreements, and the desire of Lloyd George and Clemenceau to appease public opinion by a declaration of at least theoretical German responsibility for the reparations.

The question of a time limit

The defeat of American efforts to specify a fixed sum made it all the more important, from their point of view, to limit Germany's obligation by a time limit on payments. The British position was that Germany should complete all payments within thirty years, but that if they had not done so, the reparations commission should have the power to extend the time. Davis, the US representative, said that when Wilson agreed to pensions he had counted on a thirty-year time limit so that the pensions would affect only the distribution of the reparations, and not the amount of money Germany would have to pay. Colonel House, the leader of the US delegation in the absence of Wilson, who was ill, suggested that the British idea be adopted. House, who seems not to have understood the significance of this concession, thus surrendered a major principle of US policy, namely that some form of limitation should be put on the Allied demands for reparations.

Having established the principles, actual amounts were to be worked out by a reparations commission after the signing of the peace treaty. In April 1921 the amount was fixed at £6 600 000 000, plus interest!

In May the treaty was presented to the Germans for their comments, though there was to be no renegotiation. Despite their objections Germany had little choice but to sign the treaty on 28 June 1919.

DOCUMENT STUDY: THE TERMS OF THE TREATY

Source 8.32

The treaty terms imposed on Germany, not mentioned elsewhere:

- army limited to 100 000 men
- no air force; navy limited to six battleships
- conscription banned
- no colonies
- Allied occupation of the Rhineland for fifteen years
- banned from membership of the League of Nations.

Source 8.33

The historian, with every justification, will come to the conclusion that we were very stupid men ... We arrived determined that a Peace of justice and wisdom should be negotiated; we left the conference conscious that the treaties imposed upon our enemies were neither just nor wise.

Harold Nicolson, member of the British delegation at Versailles, cited in B. Walsh, *Modern World History*, 1996.

Source 8.34

Severe as the Treaty seemed to many Germans, it should be remembered that Germany might easily have fared much worse. If Clemenceau had had his way ... the Rhineland would have become an independent state, the Saar would have been annexed to France and Danzig would have become part of Poland.

W. Carr, cited in *A History of Germany*, 1972.



Figure 8.68 A German cartoon published in 1919. The German mother is saying to her starving child: 'When we have paid one hundred billion marks then I can give you something to eat.'



Figure 8.69 Territorial changes as a result of the Treaty of Versailles

DOCUMENT STUDY: CONTINUED

DOCUMENT STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 Which clauses of the treaty would appear most unfair to the Germans?
- 2 What changes would you have made to the treaty if you wanted to: (a) establish a more just peace, or (b) punish Germany severely?
- 3 To what aspect of the treaty is Figure 8.68 referring? Was that provision reasonable?
- 4 Who has the most appropriate view of the treaty: Nicolson in Source 8.33 or Carr in Source 8.34?

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 What were the different approaches of the 'Big Three' to the peace settlement?
- 2 Using the sources, figures and text make a list of the final provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.
- 3 Do you believe that one person triumphed over the others, when reading the final settlement?
- 4 What was the purpose of the Fontainebleau memorandum?
- 5 In what ways was the reparations settlement a defeat for US policy?

The historiography of Versailles

Ruth Henig points out that the historiography of the Versailles Peace Settlement falls into two phases—before and after 1950 (Henig, 1995). Until the 1950s the almost unanimous view was that the settlement was a harsh one. Historians after 1950 conclude that the settlement was probably the best that could be achieved in the circumstances. Its weaknesses, so modern historians conclude, lay not so much in its terms as in its lack of mechanisms to enforce those terms on a resentful Germany.

In the *New Cambridge Modern History* (1964), Rohan Butler argued that on Germany's eastern frontier a 'creditably fair compromise' was reached, and the Germans, to divert attention away from their own 'greedy and vindictive war aims', launched an instant, and very effective, propaganda campaign against the treaty, and in particular against the 'war guilt' clause. Butler points out that this clause had been inserted into the treaty as part of the financial reparations provisions, but had been plucked out of its financial context and unfairly denounced by the Germans as placing moral war guilt upon their nation. Butler saw the main problems as arising not so much from the treaty itself but from Germany's failure to accept that it had suffered defeat, that the war had left a dangerous power vacuum in eastern Europe, and that the struggle to restore stability was undermined by the USA's withdrawal from the implementation of the settlement.

Howard Elcock, in *Portrait of a Decision: The Council of Four and the Treaty of Versailles* (1972), shared the view that US withdrawal and the effects of the Depression destroyed any chance that the Versailles settlement might work. Elcock argued that the failure of the settlement did not lie so much in its provisions as in what happened after 1919.

In *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918–1933* (mid-1970s), Sally Marks argued that the problem was not that the treaty was exceptionally unfair, but that the Germans thought it was. The peace left Germany both powerful and resentful and with a string of weak neighbours to its east.

Negotiating the treaty was only the first step. The more important task was to enforce it, and it was here that the peacemakers failed.

In *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961), A. J. P. Taylor argued that 'the treaty was designed to provide security against a new German aggression, yet it could work only with the cooperation of the German government'. As Taylor noted, Germany remained 'by far the greatest power on the continent of Europe; with the disappearance of Russia, more so than before. She was the greatest in population ... her preponderance was greater still in the economic resources of coal and steel'. Once Germany recovered from the effects of the war they would constitute a major threat to the other continental European powers, and the settlement contained nothing that would guard against that eventuality.

In *Guilt at Versailles* (1984), Anthony Lentin observed Machiavelli's precept that the victor should either 'conciliate his enemy or destroy him', and the Treaty of Versailles did neither. The main problem was that the powerful and unrepentant Germany had come out of the war in better shape than her neighbours and late enemies. Lentin argues that, because the peace settlement was seen on all sides as such an unsatisfactory compromise, there was 'little will to enforce Versailles on the American and British side, little confidence in its effectiveness on the French side, and on the part of Germany, every inducement to undermine it'.

In *The Versailles Settlement: Peacemaking in Paris 1919* (1991), Alan Sharp emphasised the nature of the compromises that had to be made to meet the varying needs of security, stability and nationalism.

The great majority of British, German, French and American historians now generally agree that the treaty was 'relatively lenient'. Hilgruber (German) wrote that it was 'too weak to be a Carthaginian peace'. Soutou (French) wrote: 'it would not have been easy to do much better'. Of the leading personalities, Lloyd George and Clemenceau are now viewed as having emerged from the peacemaking process with some credit, fighting both to safeguard the interests of their countries and to construct a durable and rational peace. It is Wilson who has increasingly been seen as having failed to negotiate effectively, both in terms of his inability to deal with domestic opposition and in terms of his intransigence at vital points of discussion in Paris.

On reparations, Keynes's critique was challenged by Étienne Mantoux in *The Carthaginian Peace* (1945). Mantoux argued that Germany's economic and military revival in the 1930s demonstrated the underlying strength of the German economy, and the great recovery it had already made by 1929 showed that the treaty was neither punitive nor vindictive. He points out that the catastrophic depreciation of the mark in the early 1920s was the result not of the 'reparations burden' but of runaway inflation resulting from the financing of the war itself and the handling of the accrued debt. Sally Marks believes that 'the scholarly consensus now suggests that paying what was actually asked of her was within Germany's capacity'. Germany could, had it wished, in the 1920s have raised its low rates of tax, raised domestic loans to pay off the reparations and, as a consequence, secured the removal of the Allied occupation of the Rhineland. This is how France had reacted after 1871—Germany chose not to, treating the reparations battle as part of the ongoing political battle with its enemies. All combatants, and in particular, France and Belgium, faced huge reconstruction costs. France's ten richest provinces had been devastated by war and deliberate German sabotage as they retreated. If Germany evaded the payment of substantial sums in reparations, while France has to restore her war-damaged areas, this would be a considerable step towards the recovery of the German position in Europe.

France is now seen by historians as having been badly treated by its allies after 1919, left to restore its wartorn provinces and weakened economy as best it could, and forced to battle with Germany alone for the reparations due to it. France's invasion of the Ruhr is now seen by historians as evidence of France's growing weakness and isolation, a desperate act to seize the reparations due to it, and to try and strangle the inexorable German political and economic recovery.

Most historians now take the view that, in economic terms, the treaty was not unduly harsh on Germany, and that the intention was to give Germany substantial help towards paying its bills, and to meet many of the German objections by amendments to the way the reparations schedule was in practice carried out. In terms of war damage, Germany was one of the luckier belligerents, in that it was spared 'invasion, denudation and devastation'. It was indeed this German strength, rather than weakness, that brought about such a strong German reaction to the Treaty. Germany did not feel itself to be a defeated nation.

As historians now acknowledge, the real criticism of the peace settlement lies in its lack of means of enforcement. Peacemakers naively assumed that Germany would accept the Versailles medicine handed to it, just as France had complied with the terms of 1871. Instead, the Germans took every opportunity to denounce the settlement, declaring it morally invalid because it contravened the Fourteen Points, and sought to subvert or substantially revise it. In this strategy it soon acquired considerable support from the British government.

A recent, highly acclaimed study of the Versailles conference by Margaret Macmillan concludes:

Later it became commonplace to blame everything that went wrong in the 1920s and 1930s on the peacemakers and the settlements they made in Paris in 1919 ... That is to ignore the actions of everyone—political leaders, diplomats, soldiers, ordinary voters—for twenty years between 1919 and 1939. Hitler did not wage war because of the Treaty of Versailles, although he found its existence a godsend for his propaganda. Even if Germany had been left with its old borders, even if it had been allowed whatever military force it wanted, even if it had been permitted to join with Austria, he would still have wanted more: the destruction of Poland, control of Czechoslovakia, above all the conquest of the Soviet Union. He would have demanded room for the German people to expand and the destruction of their enemies, whether Jews or Bolsheviks. There was nothing in the Treaty of Versailles about that ... the peacemakers of 1919 made mistakes, of course ... If they could have done better, they certainly could have done much worse. They tried, even cynical old Clemenceau, to build a better order. They could not foresee the future and they certainly could not control it. That was up to their successors. When war came in 1939, it was the result of twenty years of decisions taken or not taken, not of the arrangements made in 1919. (Macmillan, 2001, pp. 499–500.)

Support for the peacemakers also comes from Richard Evans, who writes:

The reparations bills that Germany actually did have to pay from 1919 onwards were not beyond the country's resources to meet and not unreasonable given the wanton destruction visited upon Belgium and France by the occupying German armies. In many ways, the peace settlement of 1918–19 was a brave attempt at marrying principle and pragmatism in a dramatically altered world. In other circumstances it might have stood a chance of success. But not in the circumstances of 1919, when almost any peace terms would have been condemned by German nationalists who felt they had been unjustly cheated of victory. (Evans, 2004, p. 66.)

REVIEW QUESTION

After you have reviewed all the evidence, evaluate the view that the Versailles Treaty was a 'Carthaginian' (that is, harsh) peace.

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