Operations in 1918

Global Strategy

The Allied situation at the beginning of 1918 was grim. The major Allied offensives of 1917 had failed. Russia had collapsed, and Italy was on the verge of collapse. The German U-boat campaign still threatened the maritime supply route from the United States. Many months would pass before American soldiers could bolster depleted Allied manpower. Both Britain and France were on the defensive.

Nor had the Central Powers been successful. They were being strangled by the Allied naval blockade. Austria was at the end of its resources; Turkey and Bulgaria were wobbling; the burden of the war fell more and more heavily on Germany. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had established a virtual military dictatorship in Germany. Moreover, they exercised almost as much authority over the subservient governments of Austria, Bulgaria, and Turkey.

The American Buildup

The United States was unprepared for war. It now faced the task of organizing, equipping, training, transporting, and supplying an overseas military force. From a strength of 200,000 men and 9,000 officers, the army swelled to more than 4 million men, including 200,000 officers; about half reached Europe before the war ended. Of these, more than half were in combat units—42 divisions of about 28,000 men each; the remainder, in supporting roles. Training emphasis was on mobile warfare in offensive combat, with stress on individual marksmanship. Pershing hoped to break out of the constraints of trench warfare.

Pershing and Allied leaders agreed on the Lorraine area east of Verdun as the American combat zone. Supplies from the United States went to ports in southwest France, and movement overland conflicted little with the Allied efforts farther north. Overseas transportation, the province of the U.S. Navy, was in part provided by German merchant vessels seized in American ports, plus an improvised fleet of the American merchant marine. The combined fleet carried more than a million American soldiers to France without loss of a single vessel—on eastbound voyages. (The remaining million sent overseas were transported on Allied ships.)
The 800,000-man U.S. Navy was involved primarily in convoy and other antisubmarine activities. It laid 56,000 of the 70,000 mines constituting the North Sea mine belt from Scotland to Norway. Also, a division of five battleships joined the British Grand Fleet, and three other battleships operated in Irish waters against surface raiders.

The United States was not technically one of the Allies. As a result, Pershing was directed that his expeditionary force be "a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must preserved." The Allies, short of manpower and unsure of the inexperienced Americans' military ability, wanted the AEF turned over in toto as a replacement reservoir for the French and British armies. War Secretary Newton D. Baker and President Wilson upheld Pershing, however, despite pleas from French premier Georges Clemenceau and Lloyd George.

In an address to Congress on Jan. 8, 1918, President Wilson laid down his famous Fourteen Points for peace. These called—among other things—for open diplomacy, armament reduction, national self-determination, and the formation of a league of nations. These idealistic war aims appeared to give moral weight to the Allied cause.

Operations on the Western Front

Ludendorff realized that Germany's only hope of winning the war lay in a decisive victory in the west before American manpower could exercise a significant effect. With Russia out of the war, he was able to shift most German forces from the east to prepare for a major offensive. His intention was to smash the Allied armies in a series of powerful thrusts. He recognized the divergent interests of the French (concerned with protection of Paris) and the British (interested in their lines of communications with the Channel ports). He intended to drive a wedge between their armies and then destroy the British in subsequent assaults.

The Germans began their drive, the Second Battle of the Somme, at dawn on March 21 in heavy fog. They struck at the right flank of the British sector on a 100-km (60-mi) front between Arras and La Fere. Following a surprise 5-hour bombardment, specially trained German shock elements rolled through the fog, each division pressing as far and as fast as possible. The stunned British fell back, allowing the German Eighteenth Army to reach and pass the Somme. As British reserves raced to stop the German advance, Haig appealed for French reinforcements, but Pétain was more concerned with protecting Paris. The British pressed for a supreme commander, and on April 3 the Allied Supreme War Council, meeting at Beauvais, appointed Ferdinand Foch as the Allied commander in chief. Immediately he began to send reserves to aid the British.

The German drive, after gaining 64 km (40 mi), had lost momentum. Foch's shifting of reserves checked the German assault after it reached Montdidier, and Ludendorff brought it to a halt. Allied losses amounted to about 240,000 casualties (163,000 British, 77,000 French); German casualties were almost as high. The most serious consequence of the offensive, from the German point of view, had been the institution of an Allied unified command.

Meanwhile, on March 23, a remarkable long-range German cannon began a sporadic
bombardment of Paris from a position 105 km (65 mi) away. This amazing weapon seriously damaged Parisian morale and eventually inflicted 876 casualties. It did not, however, significantly affect the war.

On April 9, in the Battle of Lys, the Germans struck the British sector again. This time they moved in Flanders on a narrower front, threatening the important rail junction of Hazebrouck and the Channel ports. German troops quickly cut through unprepared British divisions and a Portuguese division. On April 12, after announcing, "Our backs are to the wall," Haig forbade further retreat and galvanized British resistance. The German drive was halted on April 17 after gaining 16 km (10 mi), which included the recapture of Messines Ridge. Again, and for the same reasons as before, Ludendorff had achieved tactical success but strategical failure. There was no breakthrough, and the Channel ports were safe.

Ludendorff struck again—the Third Battle of Aisne—on May 27, this time on a 40-km (25-mi) front along the Chemin des Dames. This action was a diversion against the French, preparatory to a decisive blow planned against the British in Flanders. German troops, preceded by tanks, routed 12 French divisions (3 of them British), and by noon the Germans were crossing the Aisne; by evening they had crossed the Vesle, west of Fismes, and on May 30 reached the Marne.

On May 28, as Pershing was rushing reinforcements to the French on the Marne, the first American offensive of the war took place at Cantigny, 80 km (50 mi) northwest. Although only a local operation, its success—against veteran troops of Hutier's Eighteenth Army—boosted Allied morale.

At the same time, the U.S. Second and Third Divisions were flung against the nose of the German offensive along the Marne, moving into position on May 30. The Third Division held the bridges at Château-Thierry, then counterattacked; with assistance from rallying French troops, they drove the Germans back across the Marne. The Second Division checked German attacks west of Château-Thierry.

Ludendorff called off his offensive on June 4. The Second Division then counterattacked, spearheaded by its marine brigade. Between June 6 and July 1 the Germans were uprooted from positions at Bouresches, Belleau Wood, and Vaux. A German advance on Compiègne, begun on June 9, was halted by French and American troops on June 12.

Ludendorff was still planning a climactic drive against the British in Flanders. He attempted one more preliminary offensive in Champagne to lure French troops away from the British front. The Second Battle of the Marne began on July 15 when the Allies, warned of the blow by deserters, aerial reconnaissance, and prisoners, battered the advancing Germans with artillery. East of Reims the attack was halted within a few hours by the French. West of Reims approximately 14 divisions of the German Seventh Army crossed the Marne, but American forces snubbed the attack there. Then Allied aircraft and artillery destroyed the German
bridges, disrupting supply and forcing the attack to halt on July 17. In the space of 5 months the Germans had suffered half a million casualties. Allied losses had been somewhat greater, but American troops were now arriving at a rate of 300,000 a month.

As Ludendorff prepared to pull back, the Allied counteroffensive began on July 18. The French armies, using light tanks and aided by U.S. and British divisions, assaulted the Marne salient from left to right; they reached the Vesle River and recaptured Soissons. Ludendorff now called off his proposed Flanders drive and concentrated on stabilizing the situation along the Vesle. The Marne salient no longer existed. Strategically, the Second Battle of the Marne turned the tide. The initiative had been wrested from the Germans. Ludendorff's gamble had failed.

On August 8, near Amiens, Haig threw his Fourth Army and the attached French First Army against the German Eighteenth and Second armies. The Germans, caught off guard by a well-mounted assault, began a panicky withdrawal. Ludendorff bitterly declared that August 8 was the "Black Day of the German Army." He later added: "The war must be ended!"

The Germans managed to reestablish a position 15 km (10 mi) behind the former nose of the salient. On August 10, however, French troops forced the evacuation of Montdidier.

On August 21 the British and French armies renewed the assault in the second phase of the Battle of the Amiens. Ludendorff ordered a general withdrawal from the Lys and Amiens areas, but his plans were disrupted when ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troops penetrated across the Somme on August 30–31. The entire German situation deteriorated, necessitating retreat to the final position—the Hindenburg line. By this time Haig had expended his reserves and could not further exploit his victory. German casualties were more than 100,000, including about 30,000 prisoners. Allied losses were 22,000 British and 20,000 French. Tactically and strategically, the Allies had gained another major victory. German morale plummeted.

On August 30, Pershing, having won his fight for a separate and distinct U.S. army operating on its own assigned front, moved toward the Saint-Mihiel salient, which the Germans had occupied since 1914. Supported by an Allied air force of about 1,400 planes—American, French, Italian, and Portuguese—under U.S. colonel Billy Mitchell, the U.S. First Army attacked both faces of the salient on September 12. The assault was completely successful; the salient was entirely cleared by September 16, and Pershing at once turned to the tremendous job of shifting his entire army to another front. More than 1 million men, with tanks and guns, had to be moved 100 km (60 mi)—entirely at night—to the area of the Argonne Forest, west of the Meuse River. There they were made ready to start another major offensive.

Foch planned two major assaults. One was to be a Franco-American drive from the Verdun area toward Mézières, a vital German supply center and railroad junction. The other was a British offensive between Peronne and Lens, with the railroad junction of Aulnoye as its objective. If successful, this double penetration would jeopardize the entire German logistical situation on the western front. After the Americans swept through Vauquois and Montfaucon
on September 26–27, their drive slowed as the Germans rushed in reinforcements. Replacing a number of his assault divisions with rested troops from the Saint-Mihiel operation, Pershing renewed the offensive on October 4. No room for maneuver existed. The First Army battered its way slowly forward in a series of costly frontal attacks. Nevertheless, the Argonne Forest was cleared, facilitating the advance of the French Fourth Army, on the left, to the Aisne River.

Prime Minister Clemenceau of France, exasperated by the slow progress of the Americans, attempted unsuccessfully to have Pershing relieved. Foch, aware that the American offensive was drawing all available German reserves from the rest of the western front, declined to support Clemenceau. As October ended, the First Army had punched through most of the third and final German line.

With rested divisions replacing tired ones, the First Army advanced again on November 1, smashing through the last German positions northeast and west of Buzancy. This enabled the French Fourth Army to cross the Aisne. In the open now, American spearheads raced up the Meuse Valley, reaching the Meuse before Sedan on November 6. They severed by artillery fire the Mézières-Montmédy rail line, a vital supply artery for the entire German front. On September 27, a day after the beginning of the American offensive, Haig's army group flung itself against the Hindenburg line; his drive soon slowed down, however, in the face of skillful German defense.

Because of American pressure in the Meuse-Argonne, a German retreat all along the line became necessary. In a renewed assault, the British broke through German defenses on the Selle River on October 17. At the same time, the Belgians and British under the Belgian king Albert began to move again in Flanders. The German army began to crack.

On October 6, as the front lines started to crumble, the new German chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, sent a message to President Wilson, requesting an armistice on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points. An exchange of messages was concluded on October 23 with Wilson's insistence that the United States and the Allies not negotiate an armistice with the existing military dictatorship of Germany. Immediately before formal dismissal, Ludendorff resigned on October 26 to permit the desperate German government to comply with Wilson's demand. Hindenburg, however, retained his post as German field commander. Gen. Wilhelm Groener replaced Ludendorff as quartermaster general, or chief of staff.

Revolution and Armistice

Inspired by the Communists and sparked by a mutiny of the High Seas Fleet, which erupted on October 29, revolts flared inside Germany. A new socialist government took power and proclaimed a republic on November 9. The emperor fled to the Netherlands the next day.

Meanwhile, a German delegation, headed by civilian Matthias Erzberger, negotiated an armistice with Foch in his railway-coach headquarters on a siding at Compiègne. Agreement was finally reached at 5:00 A.M. on Nov. 11, 1918. The terms specified that the German army must immediately evacuate all occupied territory and Alsace-Lorraine; immediately surrender great quantities of war matériel; surrender all submarines; and intern all surface warships as
directed by the Allies. In addition the Germans were to evacuate German territory west of the Rhine, and three bridgeheads over the Rhine were to be occupied by the Allies. The armistice became effective immediately; hostilities ceased at 11:00 A.M. on November 11.

Although the AEF was a vital factor in the final Allied victory, the American role was primarily to add a final increment of numbers and fresh initiative. This permitted the much larger and more experienced Allied armies to achieve equally spectacular successes in the final weeks of the war.

The Italian Front

During the spring, Germany transferred its troops in Italy to the western front. It insisted that the Austrians crush Italy single-handedly because Russia was out of the war. Following a diversionary attack in the west at the Tonale Pass, which was repulsed on June 13, Austrian drives toward Verona and Padua were similarly checked. Diaz, marking time until certain of Allied success on other fronts, finally prepared a double offensive. (By this time the Austro-Hungarian government was requesting an armistice.) The Italians attacked on October 24 in the Battle of Vittorio Veneto but were quickly halted on the Piave River line. French troops, however, clawed a footing on the left, and British troops gained a large bridgehead on the right, splitting the front by October 28. The penetration reached Sacile on October 30. The next day, as Italian reinforcements exploited the ever widening gap, Austrian resistance collapsed. Belluno was reached on November 1 and the Tagliamento on the next day, while in the western zone British and French troops drove through to Trent on November 3. That same day Trieste was seized by an Allied naval expedition in the Gulf of Venice, and a few hours later an armistice was signed. Hostilities ended on November 4.

The Balkan Front

At Salonika the brilliant French general Franchet d'Esperey succeeded Guillaumat in July. Grudgingly the Supreme War Council agreed to allow him to mount a major offensive. He nominally commanded nearly 600,000 men—Serb, Czech, Italian, French, and British—but only about 350,000 were available for duty. Opposing him were about 400,000 Bulgarians. Practically all German troops had been withdrawn except for command and staff.

Covered by heavy artillery support, Serbian troops attacked the center of the front on September 15, flanked by French and Greek forces. The penetration was successful, as was a British diversionary attack on the right on September 18.

Gaining momentum, the assault reached the Vardar on September 25, splitting the Bulgarian front. The British drive reached Strumitsa the next day, and French cavalry, passing through the main effort, took Skopje on September 29. Allied air forces created panic among the fleeing Bulgarians.

On September 29, Bulgaria asked for and received an armistice, but Franchet d'Esperey kept his troops moving north. On November 1 they crossed the Danube at Belgrade and were prepared to march on Budapest and Dresden when Germany's armistice halted hostilities.
The Turkish Fronts: Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia

During the early part of the year, Allenby at Jerusalem was restricted to minor operations because of drafts on his force to the western front. To the south and east, however, Arabia was in flames. T. E. Lawrence, with a small group of British officers, reaped a harvest from the Arab rebellion against Turkish rule. Lawrence’s guerrilla forces regularly raided the Hejaz Railway, running approximately 970 km (600 mi) from Amman, Palestine, to Medina in Arabia, the southernmost Turkish garrison. In all, Lawrence’s activities kept more than 25,000 Turkish troops pinned down to blockhouses and posts along this line.

By September, Lawrence, with Emir Faisal, son of Husayn ibn Ali, self-styled "King of the Hejaz," had isolated Medina by destroying the railway line and was moving north to operate on Allenby’s right flank.

Meanwhile, Allenby had been reinforced during the late summer. He prepared meticulously for what was to be the decisive blow. The Turkish defensive line, skillfully fortified, lay from the Mediterranean north of Jaffa to the Jordan Valley. Allenby’s plan was to mass his main effort on the seashore, burst open a gap, and then let his cavalry corps through; at the same time, the entire British line would swing north and east like a gate, pivoting on the Jordan Valley. Utmost secrecy was kept. At 4:30 A.M. on September 19 the offensive began. An infantry attack tore a wide gap along the seacoast, through which poured the Desert Mounted Corps. At the same time, the Royal Air Force bombed rail junctions and all Turkish army headquarters, completely paralyzing communications. By dawn on September 20 the Turkish Eighth Army had ceased to exist, and the Seventh was falling back eastward in disorder toward the Jordan. The British cavalry then swept through Nazareth and turned east to reach the Jordan just south of the Sea of Galilee on September 21. On the desert flank to the east Lawrence and Faisal cut the railway line at Déraa on September 27, while Allenby pressed to take Damascus on October 1 and Beirut the next day. The Desert Mounted Corps continued to spearhead the advance, reaching Homs on October 16 and Aleppo on October 25. Within 5 days Turkey had signed an armistice at Mudros, ending the war in the Middle East.

Allenby’s victory at Megiddo was one of the most brilliant operations in the history of the British army. In 38 days Allenby’s troops advanced 580 km (360 mi), taking 76,000 prisoners (4,000 of them Germans and Austrians).

In Mesopotamia a British force under Lt. Gen. A. S. Cobbe was hurriedly pushed north from Baghdad on October 23 to secure the Mosul oil fields before the expected Turkish collapse. After a sharp fight at Sharqat on October 29, Cobbe hurried his cavalry to the outskirts of Mosul on November 1. Despite the provisions of the October 30 armistice, Cobbe was ordered to take the place. After some squabbling, the Turkish garrison of Halil Pasha agreed to march out and the British remained.

The entire checkered Mesopotamian campaign had hinged on possession and protection of the oil fields. The war’s end found them in Britain’s hands, at a total cost of 80,007 casualties. On November 12 the Allied fleet steamed through the Dardanelles. It arrived off
Constantinople (Istanbul) the next day, dramatizing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The War at Sea

By early 1918, German submarine warfare had been contained by the Allied convoy system. It was, nevertheless, still a menace. U-boats operated from bases at Zeebrugge, Ostend, and Bruges.

British rear admiral R. J. B. Keyes, commanding the Dover Patrol, organized a raid against the bases. On April 22–23 the light cruiser *Vindictive* dashed into Zeebrugge, with destroyer and submarine escort. At the same time, a British submarine loaded with high explosives was blown up against the lock gates and two blockships were also sunk. The *Vindictive* escaped after inflicting some damage, but the base was not entirely sealed. A simultaneous raid against Ostend failed, but a later sortie (May 9–10) to block Ostend was partially successful.

The German battle cruiser *Goeben* and light cruiser *Breslau* sailed into the Aegean Sea on January 20, but the voyage ended in disaster; the *Goeben* was badly damaged by British mines, and the *Breslau* was sunk. The *Goeben*, however, was saved despite British aerial bombing.

As Germany approached collapse, German commanders planned a desperate sortie to provoke a final battle with the British Grand Fleet. The crews mutinied and seized control of the warships, however, on October 29, ending the war at sea.

Operations in East Africa

Despite intensive efforts the British were unable to overcome the elusive Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck during four years of continuous search and pursuit. They drove him into Portuguese East Africa in 1917. There he continued an active and aggressive guerrilla campaign, capturing Portuguese military posts and maintaining his small command by captured supplies. He then reentered German East Africa and, although he had only 3,000 men and was opposed by forces totaling 130,000, he succeeded in capturing several small posts before marching into British Northern Rhodesia. Finally, after the British were able to inform him of the armistice, he ended hostilities on November 14. He surrendered his command on November 23.

Postarmistice

On November 17, under the terms of the armistice, Allied troops began to reoccupy those portions of France and Belgium which had been held by the Germans since 1914. Allied and U.S. troops followed the withdrawing Germans into Germany. On December 9, Allied troops crossed the Rhine into the bridgeheads agreed to in the armistice. The British were at Cologne, the Americans at Coblenz, and the French at Mainz. Meanwhile, on November 21 the German High Seas Fleet sailed into the Firth of Forth, between the lines of the British Grand Fleet. It later was shifted to Scapa Flow.

Cost of the War
The cost of the war in human lives and resources is shown in the table accompanying this article.

The Peace Treaties

The First Debate at Versailles

The Paris Peace Conference opened officially on Jan. 18, 1919, at Versailles. In attendance were 70 delegates, representing 27 victorious Allied powers. Neither Germany nor the new Russian Soviet republic was represented. The principal participants in the conference were the leaders of the four great powers: Woodrow Wilson of the United States, Georges Clemenceau of France, David Lloyd George of Britain, and Vittorio Orlando of Italy. It soon became apparent that they had widely divergent motives and interests.

Wilson was, at least at the outset, determined on implementing his Fourteen Points, which had been the basis for the armistice negotiations. He was most intent on the establishment of a league of nations, which would provide a basis for orderly international relations and the preservation of peace.

Clemenceau was a tough, determined, and skillful politician. He was also a vengeful old man, having seen much of France ruined and the flower of French manhood consumed in the horrendous war; he could also personally remember the harsh peace terms that Germany had imposed on his country after the Franco-Prussian War. He was determined not only that Germany should suffer but that the peace terms should make it impossible for Germany to wage war ever again.

Lloyd George was also a skilled politician. Although generally inclined to make a practical, moderate peace, he had been elected on the basis of promises that Germany and its war leaders would be punished. He distrusted Wilson's idealism and was determined that none of the Fourteen Points should be allowed to interfere with Britain, its traditional policies, or its commitments to others.

Orlando, the least important of the so-called Big Four, was determined that Italy receive the huge territorial rewards that had been promised in 1915 to lure Italy into the war on the Allied side.

On January 25 the conference unanimously adopted a resolution to establish the League of Nations. Then, after a committee was appointed to draft the Covenant of the League, the peace terms were hammered out by the Supreme Council. This consisted of the heads of government and foreign ministers of the five principal Allied powers: the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan.

Three and a half months of slow, painful argument followed. Yet the Allied leaders eventually reached compromise solutions on all of the issues and secured the agreement of the smaller powers in matters in which they were concerned. By May 6 the Treaty of Versailles was finally ready to present to Germany.
The Treaty of Versailles

The Covenant of the League of Nations was made an integral part of the treaty. Every nation signing the treaty had to accept the world organization. The League was intended to provide a mechanism for the peaceful settlement of disputes, for the promotion of world disarmament, and for the general betterment of humankind.

Except for the return of Alsace-Lorraine to France, which was agreed to unanimously, all of the important treaty provisions regarding German territory were compromises. Allied occupation of the Rhineland was to continue for at least 15 years, and possibly longer. In addition, the region was to remain perpetually demilitarized, as was a belt of territory 50 km (30 mi) deep along the right bank of the Rhine. Three smaller frontier regions near Eupen and Malmédy were to be ceded to Belgium. Parts of the German provinces of Posen and West Prussia were to be given to Poland to provide that revived nation with access to the Baltic Sea; the Baltic seaport of Gdańsk (Danzig) was to become a free state but linked economically to Poland. This Polish Corridor to the Baltic left East Prussia completely separated from the rest of Germany.

All of Germany's overseas possessions were to be occupied by the Allies; however, they were to be organized as "mandates," subject to the supervision and control of the League of Nations. Britain and France divided most of Germany's African colonies, and Japan took over the extensive island possessions in the South Pacific. The treaty also confirmed Japanese rights over the former German leasehold in Shandong (Shantung). This provision sparked the May Fourth Movement in China and led to that country's ultimate refusal to endorse the treaty.

The treaty required Germany to accept sole responsibility and guilt for causing the war. The former emperor and other unspecified German war leaders were to be tried as war criminals. (This provision was never enforced.)

A number of other military and economic provisions were designed not only to punish Germany for its war guilt but also to insure France and the rest of the world against the possibility of future German aggression. The German army was limited to 100,000 soldiers and was not to possess any heavy artillery, the general staff was abolished, and the navy was to be reduced. No air force would be permitted, and the production of military planes was forbidden.

Germany was to pay for all civilian damages caused during the war. In addition, it was required to pay reparations to the Allies of great quantities of industrial goods, merchant shipping, and raw materials. These provisions were expected to prevent Germany from being able to finance any major military effort even if it were inclined to evade the military limitations.

The Second Debate at Versailles

On April 29 a German delegation headed by Graf Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, the German foreign minister, arrived at Versailles. On May 7 the members of the delegation were summoned to the Trianon Palace at Versailles to learn the treaty terms. After carefully reading
the treaty, Brockdorff-Rantzau denounced it. He reminded the Allied leaders that the Fourteen Points had provided the basis for the armistice negotiations and thus were as binding on the Allies as on Germany. He insisted that the economic provisions of the treaty were impossible to fulfill.

Although refusing to sign the treaty, the German delegation took it back to Berlin for the consideration of the government. Chancellor Philipp Scheidemann also denounced the treaty. The Allies had maintained their naval blockade of Germany, however, and after long and bitter debates in Berlin, it became obvious that Germany had no choice but to sign the treaty. Scheidemann and Brockdorff-Rantzau resigned on June 21. That same day, at Scapa Flow, the German High Seas Fleet staged a dramatic protest. Despite every conceivable British precaution, the German sailors scuttled each of their 50 warships in the harbor.

On June 28 the new German chancellor, Gustav Bauer, sent another delegation to Versailles. After informing the Allies that Germany was accepting the treaty only because of the need to alleviate the hardships on its people caused by the "inhuman" blockade, the Germans signed.

The Other Treaties

On September 10, representatives of the now tiny republic of Austria signed the Treaty of Saint-Germain, just outside Paris. The once great Habsburg empire had completely disintegrated in October and November 1918. The treaty, therefore, merely legalized the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Austria recognized the independence of Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Hungary; it also recognized the award of Galicia to Poland, and of the Trentino, South Tyrol, Trieste, and Istria to Italy. The Austrian army was limited to 30,000 men, and Austria agreed to pay economic reparations to Allied nations that had been victims of Austro-Hungarian aggression. Austria was forbidden to unite with Germany, a union that many people of both countries had envisioned.

On November 27, Bulgaria signed a treaty with the Allies at Neuilly, another suburb of Paris. Bulgaria recognized the independence of Yugoslavia and agreed to cede territory to Yugoslavia, Romania, and Greece. Bulgaria's army was restricted, and the country was forced to pay reparations to its Allied neighbors.

Hungary signed the Treaty of Trianon at Versailles on June 4, 1920. The treaty reduced the country in area from 283,000 km² (109,000 mi²) to less than 93,000 km² (36,000 mi²). The Hungarian army was limited to 35,000 troops, and reparations were demanded, although the amount was unspecified.

Because of a number of complications, the peace settlement with Turkey was long delayed. When finally signed—at Sèvres, another suburb of Paris, on Aug. 10, 1920—it was somewhat meaningless. The Turkish strongman Mustafa Kemal Pasha was leading a nationalist movement and establishing a powerful and proud government. He reconquered Turkish Armenia, which had become independent, and ejected a Greek army from Turkey in a brilliant campaign. Then he reoccupied Thrace, or European Turkey, which had been given to Greece by the Treaty of Sèvres. At that point Mustafa Kemal informed the Allies that he was willing to
accept most of the other provisions of the original peace settlement, consistent with the Fourteen Points. The Allies, having no desire for a new war, and accepting the reasonableness of the Turkish position, agreed.

By the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on July 24, 1923, Turkey recognized the independence of the Arab Kingdom of Hejaz, the French mandate over Syria, and the British mandates over Palestine and Mesopotamia. Turkey also recognized Greek and Italian occupation of most of its former Aegean islands and agreed to demilitarize the straits, retaining the right to close them in time of war. Turkey was to pay no reparations. It was a fair and responsible treaty that left Turkey better off than it had been before the war. All of the territories lost were really non-Turkish and had been perpetual military and economic problems for the old empire.

In the United States, despite President Wilson's efforts, the Senate failed to ratify the Versailles peace agreement. As a result the United States arranged separate treaties with Germany, Austria, and Hungary.

Technology Goes to War

More major military technological innovations occurred during World War I than in any other war in history. With the single important exception of the atomic bomb, all of the important means of warfare of World War II were merely improvements or modifications of weapons in use in 1918.

Aircraft and Air Warfare

Balloons had been used in earlier wars, such as the U.S. Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War. Yet serious directed and controlled flight above the ground was less than a decade and a half old when World War I broke out. At first, two varieties of aircraft were used: the rigid, lighter-than-air dirigible balloon, or airship; and the heavier-than-air airplane. The best-known and most successful type of dirigible airship was the German zeppelin. The airplanes were greatly improved versions of the crude prototype first flown (1903) in the United States by the Wright brothers.

The Germans initially used their zeppelins in a number of high-altitude raids on Paris and London. Long before the end of the war, however, they abandoned mass zeppelin raids because the airships were vulnerable to rapidly improving Allied airplanes. The latter were able to climb to the same altitude as zeppelins and, by firing tracer machine-gun bullets into the hydrogen-filled gas bags of the dirigibles, turn them into aerial holocausts. Zeppelins were used for long-distance transportation. One memorable nonstop flight from Bulgaria took much-needed supplies to the tiny isolated German army of General von Lettow-Vorbeck in East Africa. By the end of the war, however, the airship had been eclipsed by the combat airplane.

The air war, for all its color, romance, and glory, had little influence on the outcome of World War I. For the most part, aerial warfare consisted of a number of individual combats, bearing little relation to the course of the great ground battles. Bombing did not seriously damage any
war industry, and communications and supply lines on the ground were never disrupted to any important extent. Basically, the air war of 1914–18 was a forerunner of things to come and a proving ground for tactical and technical theory.

The Submarine

The first efforts toward submarine warfare were pioneered by Americans in the Revolutionary and Civil wars. Truly effective military submersibles, however, made their appearance in World War I.

Before 1914 a few German naval thinkers had seen the potential of the submarine. They saw it as a means of offsetting Britain's worldwide dominance of the sea by harassed and attempting to block Great Britain's vulnerable overseas lines of communications.

It almost worked. The submarine campaign of 1917 very nearly forced Britain out of the war. However, the convoy system saved Britain, and ultimately the submarines were no longer a serious threat.

The Tank

The tank was as dramatic and important a new weapon as the airplane and the submarine. It also demonstrated a potential that would come to be fully realized only in subsequent warfare. By the end of World War I the tank was becoming a major force in ground battles. It was slow, cumbersome, and vulnerable to hostile artillery, but it could provide mobility and firepower to the attacker.

Poison Gas

Poison gas was, largely because of its stealth and its asphyxiating fumes, the most terror-inspiring of all weapons of the war. Countermeasures soon reduced poison gas to little more than a means of harassment. However, its deadly potential led to an international agreement, the Geneva Protocol of 1925, banning poison gas as a means of warfare. (See Chemical Warfare.)

The Machine Gun

Like the airplane and the submarine, the machine gun was an American invention that was improved in Europe. Early in World War I its value as a defensive weapon was demonstrated. In combination with trenches, barbed wire, and high-explosive artillery shells, the machine gun dominated the long stalemate of the trenches between late 1914 and early 1918.

The Germans ultimately recognized the offensive potential of the machine gun and pioneered the development of light machine guns to provide mobile firepower within every squad.

Artillery and High Explosives

Smoothbore cannon had dominated the battlefields of Europe in Napoleonic times. That dominance had suddenly and dramatically disappeared in the U.S. Civil War, as the rifled
musket became the most lethal weapon on the battlefield. Three new developments, however, immediately before World War I restored artillery to its place as the arbiter of battles. Two of these were improvements in guns and ammunition: the accurate, quick-firing field gun with sophisticated recoil mechanism and fast-locking breachblock; and high-explosive shells, which could sweep large areas with destructive blasts and jagged splinters of steel. Perhaps most important, however, was the new means of rapid communication by telephone. This permitted guns to be placed behind ridge lines and forests and fired over these masks at targets the gunners could not see, by following telephoned directions from easily concealed observers at the front lines.

Tube artillery weapons also approached their full potential of lethality during World War I. The French 75mm field gun, developed in 1897—the most effective artillery piece of the war—remained a useful weapon when World War II broke out in 1939. The German long-range gun that shelled Paris in early 1918 had one of the longest firing ranges of any ballistic cannon.

Electronic Communications

Field telephones not only revitalized artillery, but they also provided instantaneous communication between commanders and subordinate units. Although the wires were vulnerable to hostile artillery fire and could be cut by daring night patrols, efficient repair crews could keep the telephones operating under almost any conditions.

A new means of electronic communication also appeared during World War I, barely ten years after its invention—the radio. Its invisible signals could not be cut by artillery fire or wire cutters, although means of jamming transmission were soon found—and just as soon evaded. Radio permitted much more rapid installation of communications, at far longer ranges, than was possible with field telephones. Few improvements have been made in field telephones since World War I; improvements in radio transmission, however, have been continuous, with the future potential of electronics in warfare still unlimited.

Aftermath

The increased technology of World War I had greatly expanded humankind's potential for killing, but it was also hoped that this "war to end all wars" had served as a lesson to nations and that future bloodshed could be avoided. The League of Nations was established to settle international disputes peaceably, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928) sought to outlaw war completely. Many aspects of the peace settlement at Versailles, however, sowed the seeds of future conflict. The harsh penalties levied against Germany created economic and political instability and thus assisted the rise of Adolf Hitler. As the outbreak of World War II 20 years later would prove, humanity had not yet found the means to peace.

Reviewed by

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Further Reading:
General


Military


Diplomatic and Political

Diplomatic and Military Documents


With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918 (2011)

Tuchman, Barbara W. The Zimmermann Telegram (1966; repr. 1985)


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