

Slide 1

Germany's Great War Legacies

How the Great War Ended

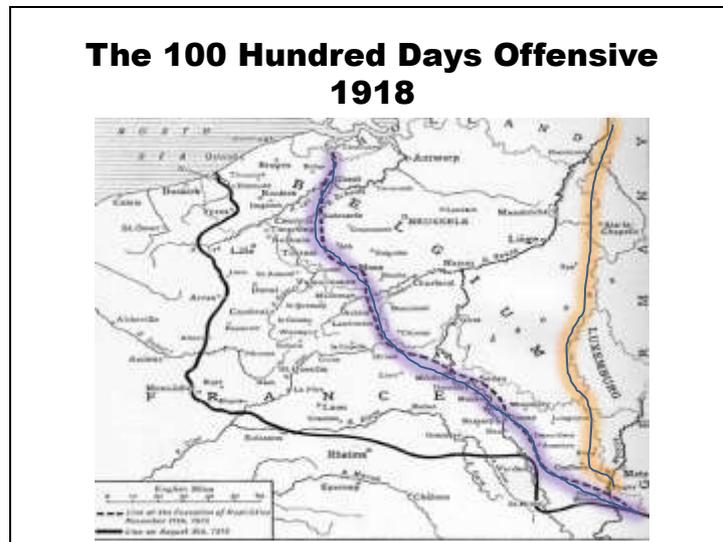
Slide 2

**Two Versions of how the
Great War Ended**

Slide 3

**The Allies Version of the
Great War's Conclusion**

Slide 4



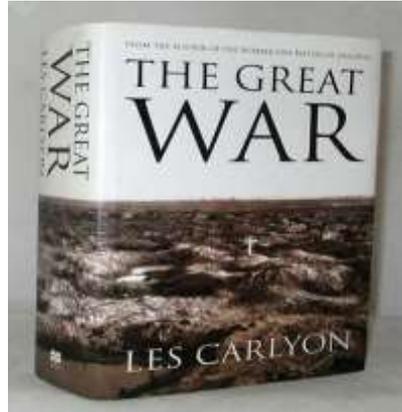
Notes

The Spring Offensive of the German Army on the Western Front had begun on 21 March 1918 with Operation Michael and had petered out by July.

At that point the recently appointed Allied supreme commander Ferdinand Foch, with joint command for the first time over all of the Allied armies, ordered a series of simultaneous counter offensives involving the British, Belgian, French and American armies, along most sections of the Western Front.

The Hundred Days Offensive was a series of major battles that took place in the final phase of the Great War on the Western Front between August and November 1918. Following the Allied counter-attack at the Second Battle of the Marne (15 July – 6 August 1918), and the even more significant Battle of Amiens on 8th August. As a result the German army was driven back to their Hindenburg defensive line and following Allied breakthroughs there, the German government was finally forced to seek peace.

The Australian Contribution to the 100 Day Offensive



Les Carlyon in his epic work 'The Great War' with respect to the Australian contribution states:

In the Allies 100 Day Offensive "The Australians had incurred another 24,162 casualties in the offensive that had begun in front of Villers Bretonneux on August 8th. This was a heavy enough toll, but covered nearly two months' fighting. By the standards of the Great War it was reasonable, especially since the Australian's had taken their front forward nearly thirty miles (50 kilometres).

In the advance that ended at Montbrechain they liberated more than 100 villages and took more than 29,000 German prisoners. They had fought thirty-nine German divisions and all but wiped out several of them. They had become an elite force, although no-one at Haig's headquarters was going to concede this outside private conversations.

Australians ever since have been prone to overstate their country's contribution to the victories of 1918, partly, one suspects, as a counter to Britain's tendency to understate them.

The truth is that the Canadians and the New Zealanders had also become elite forces and that Canadian commander Arthur Currie, in his different way, was as good a leader as Monash.

It is more sensible to say that Haig's force owed more to dominion troops than most of its chroniclers have ever acknowledged."

Slide 6



Notes

Carlyon goes on to conclude:

“Hamel, Amiens, Mont St Quentin and Bellicourt – these were victories against the main enemy in the main theatre. There is nothing to match them in Australia’s military history, yet they were little celebrated in Australia at the time and have been all but forgotten since.

The Somme and Passchendaele, both heavy with futility, are better remembered. Gallipoli is remembered best of all. Gallipoli has become a faith, and faith is hostile to analysis. Gallipoli is said to embody a spirit, and it does, although there are many interpretations of the nature of that spirit.

The journey from Villers Bretonneux to Montbrehain was the stuff of greatness, and it embodied a spirit too; but places along that road, if they are remembered at all, are just names.

Churchill wrote in the 1920’s that the victories of British and dominion troops in 1918 ‘will excite the wonder of future generations’. They didn’t. Haig and his army are better remembered for their failures.

Slide 7

Our Version of How the Great War Came to a Conclusion



Photo of German prisoners of war following the Battle of Amiens on 8th August 1918.

Notes

Many Britains and Australians today still believe that our forces made the significant breakthroughs against the German armies that subsequently caused the German government to sue for an end to the War.

However such a contention is simplistic, and the actual circumstances that brought about a conclusion to the Great War were far more complex.

Slide 8



Notes

While it is true that in late 1918 that the German armies on the Western Front Empire were being pushed back, the million plus soldiers positioned there were still *entirely on Belgian and French territory*, and they were still a cohesive and intact military force.

Part of the reason for that was because as they fell back, they did so on 'interior' supply lines that utilized the German rail system, untouched by war, which became shorter and therefore relatively more effective.

We should also be mindful of the casualty statistics that indicate the German army lost fewer soldiers fighting on ALL fronts than the Allies did fighting on the Western Front, where the ratio was at least two to one and probably higher.

In 1918 for example, the only year when the Allies made significant territorial gains on the Western Front, the Allied forces suffered a total of 467,000 killed compared to German dead of just 206,000.

Furthermore, with more than a million German troops still occupying conquered territory in Eastern Europe towards the end of 1918 – (armies that had never experienced defeat) that could potentially have been re-deployed to the West, the German army was by no means a beaten force at the end of that eventful year.

Moreover, if they had been forced to fight within German home territory in 1919, it could reasonably have been expected that their resistance would further stiffened, as it did towards the end of WWII when the nation was invaded by the Russians, Americans and the British.

In considering the concluding stages of the Great War these latter aspects need to be kept in mind.

Slide 9



Notes

The factor that contributed most to ending the Great War was arguably the involvement of the United States armies. With more than a million soldiers on the ground in Europe by mid-1918, and with the potential for a further million to arrive, this new entrant to the conflict fought in a war that had a duration of just five months.

In that brief period the US armies fought battles in the St Mihiel and Argonnes regions and in the process suffered some 85,000 killed (compared to approximately 63,000 Australians killed in all theatres in four years of the Great War) – however in so doing the Americans displayed to the Germans their keenness to fight, supported by an abundance of men and war materiel.

Slide 10



Notes

It was the recognition of the enormous potential of the Americans that led the German High Command to conclude that Germany could no longer win the War, and to recommend to the *newly instituted civilian government* that steps should be taken with the Allies to end the conflict.

The resultant note from the German government to President Wilson on 4 October requested an armistice based on his Fourteen Points, and further communications were exchanged between the two parties over the next three weeks.

Two events of significance occurred during this critical period.

First, the negotiations coincided with the *transfer of military power from the German General Staff to the civilian leaders* of the newly announced government.

We shall see later when we study the Weimar Government how this aspect would severely hamper the new German democratic government in the post war period.

Slide 11

The French & British Perspective



Notes

The second aspect was that in mid-October 1918, the French and British governments at that point were determined that the War, which they were now winning, would continue on in 1919 with a further push into German territory, to completely crush the German military.

Slide 12



Notes

While the armies of the United States had enjoyed some military successes on the Western Front in late 1918, their victories came at the cost of heavy casualty rates (85,000 killed).

Part of the reason for those losses was the fact that the American General Pershing and his command insisted on adopting infantry tactics that the French and eventually the British had abandoned by 1917 – the notion of the dominance of the infantryman armed with a rifle, a bayonet and an aggressive spirit.

As a consequence of the high casualty rates they had suffered, by October 1918 the America's military leaders in France were keen to reduce future casualties by bringing the war to a conclusion.

Therefore, to counter the aggressive line of thinking of the French & British for a continuation of the war, on 29th October 1918 the American's put it directly to their French and British allies that if the Germans accepted President Wilson's 14 point peace proposal, then the US would be prepared to negotiate a separate peace directly with the German government, effectively leaving those two nations to stand alone in their continued fight against the Germans.

Quickly realizing that without enormous US support they did not have the manpower, financial or materiel resources to sustain the war on their own, the French and British governments capitulated to President Wilson, and subsequently it was agreed by all parties that an Armistice would occur at 11.00 am on the 11th November 1918.

Slide 13



**What the German Government
Agreed To**



**President Wilson's
Fourteen Points**

1. Open diplomacy
2. Freedom of the Seas
3. Removal of economic barriers
4. Reduction of armaments
5. Adjustment of colonial claims
6. Conquered territories in Russia
7. Preservation of Belgian sovereignty
8. Restoration of French territory
9. Redrawing of Italian frontiers
10. Division of Austria-Hungary
11. Redrawing of Balkan boundaries
12. Limitations on Turkey
13. Establishment of an independent Poland
14. Creation of an Association of Nations

Notes

When the newly installed German government asked U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to arrange a general armistice in October 1918, it did so on the basis that it accepted the Fourteen Points he had formulated as the basis for a just peace.

As it later turned out, these were nothing like the terms the Allies later applied to the German nation in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

Kaiser Wilhelm's Exile



Notes

By 4th November 1918 both Turkey and Austria Hungary had signed armistices with the Allies, and Germany now stood alone.

In early November German sailors at Kiel refused to man their warships in order to go out and attack the much superior British Navy, and that mutiny subsequently spread to other bases.

On the Western Front the German army was in virtual retreat while at home hungry civilians were causing increased civil unrest as socialist sentiments were growing.

Germany was not strong enough to continue fighting, especially as the USA had joined the war and hundreds of thousands of fresh American soldiers were arriving in France. This added greater military strength to the Triple Entente forces.

It was within this context that the Kaiser Wilhelm was forced into exile in Holland on 9th November, where he subsequently abdicated from the throne, thereby creating the first German Republic and the interim German government approached the Allies and sued for peace.

The Armistice of Compiègne



Slide 17

The Armistice

11.00 am 11th November 1918

Notes

The **Armistice** came into force at 11 a.m. Paris time on 11 November 1918 ("the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month") and marked a conditional victory for the Allies and a partial defeat for Germany, who did not formally 'surrender'.

Slide 18



Notes

Two days later, Germany signed the armistice and the guns fell silent. People in Britain, France and all of the countries that supported them, celebrated the end of war.

The Great War in Europe had lasted some four years and three months, against initial expectations of the belligerents that their soldiers would be home for Christmas 1914.

- **Reactions to the Armistice Varied**

Slide 20

London



London

Paris



USA



Slide 23



Notes

On 2nd October 1918 the German High Command informed the just commissioned civilian government and the Reichstag Deputies of the Army's deteriorating military situation, and the next day requested that the new government seek an immediate armistice with the Allies.

This news 'from the blue' astonished Berlin's political leaders, and came as a complete shock to the rest of the country.

Four years of battlefield victories and continued glowing newspaper coverage of the vast amounts of enemy territory that had been conquered had suddenly somehow resulted in military defeat – literally overnight.

Astounded, people asked how this could have happened, considering that their armies occupied much of Russia's territory and possessed a number of satellite states including the Baltic States, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Belgium.

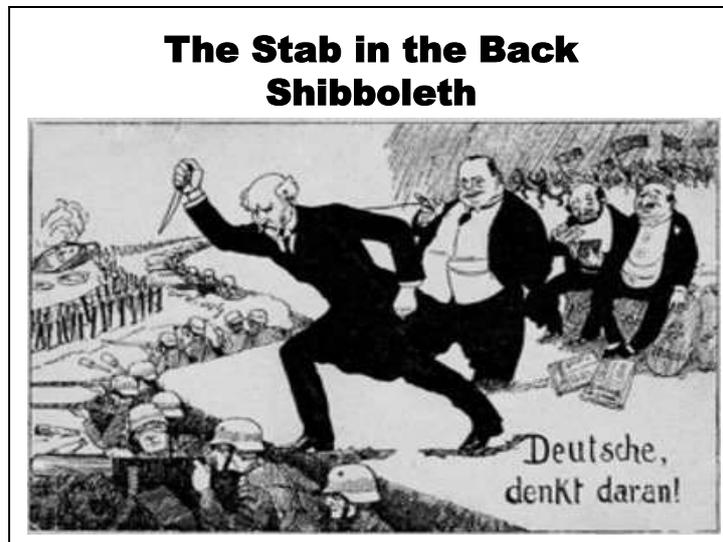
Shock, dismay and anger gripped the German people as they were suddenly confronted with the fact that the war was lost.

An analysis of the governance of the Great War would show that Germany's Kaiser and military leaders who had been clearly responsible for all decisions made in respect of preparing for, then declaring war in 1914 and for subsequently conducting four years of war, initiated a drastic change at 'one minute to midnight' in October 1918.

Basically, the military leadership 'hand passed' responsibility for terminating the conflict to a democratic civilian government that had no prior involvement in making any of the key decisions with respect to the War over the previous four years!

This legacy would haunt the German people for a further three decades!

Slide 24



Notes

Perhaps the most tragic myth of the First World War, and certainly the one with most dire consequences for the future, came *after* the Armistice.

Many German veterans maintained that the empire could have fought on (and perhaps even won the war) were it not for defeatists and revolutionaries on the home front that forced a surrender.

Nationalists quickly branded such 'quitters' the November Criminals. Such assertions have since been roundly refuted by historians; by the fall of 1918, Germany had utterly collapsed militarily and lacked the resources to continue the fight any longer.

Yet this belief in the "stab-in-the-back" had a number of prominent and vocal proponents including German general Erich Ludendorff and one war-veteran turned politician by the name of Adolf Hitler.

In fact the denunciation of the November Criminals, the punitive Treaty of Versailles and the very concept of German culpability for the war all became central planks in National Socialism movement and helped propel the Nazis to power.

An Armistice Post Script



Notes

The French surrender to Germany on 22nd June 1940 was signed in the same railway carriage in which the Armistice was signed.

After parading the carriage through Berlin, Hitler had the carriage blown up.