**Cambridge IGCSE Depth Study A: The First World War, 1914-18**

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**The Schlieffen Plan**

In 1905 Alfred von Schlieffen, the German Army Chief of Staff, devised a plan to cope with having to fight a war against both France and Russia. He anticipated it taking Russia six weeks to mobilise and organise its army for an attack on Germany. These six weeks would be used to defeat France. Schlieffen thought Britain would not have joined any conflict in this time and that Russia and Britain wouldn’t fight if France had been defeated.

Schlieffen planned to use 90% of Germany’s armed forces to attack France through Holland and Belgium and encircle Paris. The remaining 10% of the German army would be sent to the east to stop the expected Russian advance.

Schlieffen was replaced in 1906. His successor, Helmuth von Moltke, changed the plan, reducing the commitment of troops left to contain Russia. Moltke also changed the route of the proposed attack, avoiding Holland and taking a more direct route through Belgium.

The plan depended on speed. However, the Germans encountered unexpectedly fierce resistance from the Belgians.

**The Battle of Mons, August 1914**

The German invasion of Belgium also led to the British joining the war. The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was dispatched to France. This was Britain’s standing army of around 120,000, led by Sir John French. It was relatively small by the standards of the time and the Kaiser dismissed it as a ‘contemptible little army’.

The BEF first engaged the Germans at the Battle of Mons in Belgium where the number of German soldiers forced the British to retreat.

**The Battles of the Marne, September 1914**

At the Battle of the Marne the BEF and French 5th army combined and forced the German forces to split in two and eventually retreat.

**The First Battle of Ypres, October 1914**

In October 1914 the British withstood a massive attack by up to 250,000 at the Belgian city of Ypres. The first of four battles of Ypres helps explain why trench warfare developed. Ypres was important due to its location along the roads leading to the Channel ports. Following the German failure to break through at the Battle of the Marne both sides wanted to establish control of the sea.

The Allies arrived in Ypres first and manned a 35km front line. They aimed to push the Germans back, retaking Lille in France and Brussels in Belgium. The Germans were hoping to push through the Allies at Ypres and take the ports of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne.

Fierce fighting lasted for over a month. Each side had the advantage at different points, but weaponry such as cavalry and machine guns were unable to break the stalemate. Horrific losses were suffered on both sides. Up to half the BEF were killed or wounded.

Ypres marked the end of the BEF. Britain would now have to rely on volunteer recruits. It also marked the end of a mobile war. Neither side had shown itself to be stronger than the other, so two evenly matched armies resorted to defensive formations. Across the front troops now dug in to trenches.

**The Battle of Verdun, February-December 1916**

The longest battle of the war was fought at the French town of Verdun. Germany believed that if it was to win the war, they had to force the French to surrender, hoping that if they did so the British would also withdraw. They attacked at Verdun which was of historical importance. It was a heavily fortified town built to withstand Prussian attacks in the 1880s. It was a symbol of French military pride. The Germans hoped a victory here would deal a devastating blow to French morale.

The Germans subjected Verdun to an intense bombardment. As the French sent extra forces to defend the town the Germans attacked. Their aim was to break through and open up the French line for a devastating assault. The French were unprepared for such a large assault, and at one point an army of 200,000 French faced around a million German soldiers. Despite getting close on several occasions the Germans were still unable to make a significant breakthrough. The French suffered huge casualties, but their dogged determination kept the Germans at bay.

The Battle of Verdun led to the Battle of the Somme as the French persuaded the British to move to an offensive elsewhere to ensure the Germans would need to withdraw some of their troops from Verdun.

Verdun also showed how hard a breakthrough was to achieve. Despite vast numbers of men, as long as the defending side were willing to suffer large casualties there seemed little chance of a breakthrough with trench warfare.

**Haig and the Battle of the Somme, July-November 1916**

On 1st July 1916 the British tried to break through with an all-out attack on the German trenches near the river Somme. The attack was also designed to relieve pressure on the French at Verdun by making the Germans withdraw some of their troops from there. There was a widespread belief that a major victory on the Western Front could result in a decisive breakthrough in the war – it would weaken the German army, reduce their morale and force their army to be stretched further.

The Commander-in-Chief of the British army, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig believed in the ‘Big Push’. He was convinced the enemy could be overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers.

The plan involved three steps:

Step One: Heavy shelling for 7 days before 1st July to remove German defences, inflict heavy casualties and clear barbed wire. Also 5 large mines were planted beneath German trenches to inflict maximum damage.

Step Two: Coordinated infantry advance at 7.30am on 1st July. Soldiers told to walk slowly to clear remaining Germans from front line trenches

Step Three: Second wave of attack including cavalry would sweep through the seized trenches and onwards, attacking the fleeing Germans

Initial newspaper reports showed the battle to be a British success. However, the reality was very different. 1st July 1916 was the worst day in the History of the British army. German soldiers survived the shelling before the attacks as they were dug into an elaborate trench system deep underground with all the food and supplies they needed and were therefore largely undamaged by the bombardment. Once the shelling stopped the Germans knew an attack was coming. 20,000 British troops were killed and 40,000 wounded. The British shelling had been largely ineffective. It had failed to clear the barbed wire or damage the German machine guns. Very little ground was gained; few German trenches were taken and held.

The Battle of the Somme continued from July until November 1916. Far from being a rapid breakthrough for the British it turned into a battle of attrition that claimed over a million lives in total. The British had advanced just over seven miles.

The battle was also significant because:

* It made the Allies realise how long the war might be
* The soldiers were heavily demoralised
* New technology, designed to be decisive had been limited by the poor conditions. Tanks struggled in the mud, with over half breaking down before they even reached the front line.

Some see Haig as responsible for having sacrificed mainly newly recruited volunteer soldiers in an unwinnable battle, calling the soldiers ‘Lions led by Donkeys’. Haig had given the order to walk rather than charge believing ‘not even a rat would be alive’. Others argue that Haig was doing the best he could with limited resources and that in the long run the battle contributed to the Allied victory.

**The nature and problems of trench warfare**

Following the German retreat after the Battle of the Marne both sides had tried to outflank each other to gain control of the war. Three months of mobile conflict had followed as the two sides had fought without either seizing the advantage. This was known as the ‘race to the sea’ as the Germans attempted to get there first to cut off supplies coming from Britain. Despite several battles (most notably at Ypres) neither side could maintain control and outflank the other. In the end two lines emerged, with troops dug in along a line of trench systems that stretched from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier with France. This line remained essentially unchanged for most of the war.

By December 1914 the race to the sea was over. What had started as a war of rapid movement was now a war of attrition. Trench warfare developed as German and Allied forces dug trenches both as shelter and as positions from which to attack the other side.

Soldiers did not spend all their time fighting in the trenches. A general pattern was 4-4-4, meaning four days on the front line, four in the reserve trench and four days resting, usually slightly back from the front line in a local village where the army was billeted. However, this pattern was theoretical and altered dependent upon attacks, the availability of reserves and other factors.

The trenches themselves varied in conditions. The trenches in northern France and Belgium were built in chalky ground and crumbled easily. In Ypres the ground was more boggy. Trenches were built as far away as Palestine where they were built in rock.

Apart from military attacks, some of the main dangers and hardships of trench life included:

* Rats and lice. They thrived in the poor conditions of mud, discarded food and other waste
* Disease. The lifestyle of living in a trench, not washing for days or weeks with limited toilet facilities and little chance of fresh water meant disease was rife
* Weather: harsh winters brought freezing temperatures; heavy rain brought flooding. In Flanders flooded trenches were waist high in water. Trench foot crippled soldiers as the flesh on their feet wasted due to being continually wet
* Psychological problems: ‘Shellshock’ became a term used for mental breakdowns due to the constant shelling and other effects of trench warfare
* Boredom: there was often a long wait between major battles. Trench life was usually tedious and very hard work – rebuilding trenches, fortifying defences and battling the elements

**New weapons 1: Machine guns**

Both sides used machine guns as an effective weapon. Capable of firing 400-600 rounds of small calibre ammunition per minute, each one had the fire power of about 100 rifles. Larger machine required a crew of three to six men and were positioned on a tripod. For added protection German machine guns were often housed in concrete blockhouses. Smaller machine guns were manned by one or two soldiers and were deployed effectively along the Western Front, particularly by the Germans.

**New weapons 2: Gas**

Poison gas accounted for about 4% of war deaths. 1,976 British soldiers were killed by chlorine gas, with 164,457 wounded. Mustard gas killed 4,086 and injured 16,526. These terrifying weapons caused panic and fear. Small amounts of mustard gas were added to high explosive shells and then released. Once in the soil mustard gas remained active for several weeks.

**New weapons 3: Tanks**

Tanks were first used on September 15th 1916 in the Battle of the Somme, despite fears among the British leadership that they were not suitable to the harsh conditions. When first deployed of 59 tanks in France only 49 were considered to be of good working order. Of these, 17 broke down before they had even had a chance to engage the enemy. Nevertheless, at first their impact was successful as they created panic and loss of morale amongst the Germans.

The head of the Tank Corps, Colonel John Fuller was convinced the tank was vital to winning the war. He persuaded Haig to supply him with another 1000 tanks. They were more successful at Cambrai in November 1917 and at Amiens in August 1918 General Henry Rawlinson used over 400 tanks supported by soldiers and aircraft to break through the German front line.

**New Weapons 4: Planes**

The main role of aircraft was for reconnaissance, allowing battlefield positions and troop movements to be observed from the air. The usefulness of aircraft was limited by poor communication – with no radios it took a long time for messages to be passed on to ground troops. There were also some attempts at bombing raids and opposing aircraft engaged with each other in ‘dog fights’, with ‘aces’ on both sides becoming heroes for the number of planes they shot down.

**The war at sea**

In the years leading up to the war each of the major powers had devoted a huge amount of resources to developing large and powerful navies. The German decision to build a powerful navy led to an arms race with Britain. However, there were surprisingly few major naval engagements during the war. Those that did take place did not provide a decisive outcome. Even so, the ability of Britain to gain and maintain control of the English Channel and North Sea played a significant part in her eventual victory.

At the start of the war the British priority had been to preserve the supply lines between Britain and her major trading partners and between Britain and northern France. A further aim had been to choke Germany into submission by blockading Germany’s narrow coastline.

Germany’s main aim had been more limited. She intended to use her large navy as a deterrent and to carry out small attacks to reduce the size of Britain’s Royal Navy, in the hope that it would be a useful negotiating tool in future peace negotiations. The German navy also laid minefields in the North Sea and used its developing submarine (U-Boat) fleet.

Early events in the war at sea included:

* 28th August 1914 Battle of Heligoland Bight: A large British force targeted German shipping at its naval base in Heligoland, resulting in the deaths of 712 German sailors and the loss of six German ships at a cost of 35 British sailors killed and no ships sunk.
* 1st November 1914 Battle of Coronel: A small German fleet of modern cruisers commanded by Admiral von Spee sank two British cruisers with the loss of 1600 British lives off the coast of Chile
* 8th December 1914 Battle of the Falkland Islands: a new British fleet assembled to hunt down von Spee gained revenge, sinking four German ships and inflicting 1871 fatalities for the loss of 10 men and no ships on the British side
* 16th December 1914 the German High Seas Fleet shelled Scarborough, Whitby and Hartlepool, killing 137 civilians
* 24th January 1915 Battle of Dogger Bank: after intercepting German radio messages the British knew the German High Seas Fleet was heading for Dogger Bank. At Dogger Bank the Royal Navy cut off the German forces and sank an armoured cruiser, inflicting 954 fatalities.

**The Battle of Jutland, 31st May-1st June 1916**

German Vice Admiral Scheer planned to lure the British Grand Fleet from its base at Rosyth by way of decoy attacks on merchant shipping in the North Sea and then use the remainder of his fleet to destroy British Admiral Jellicoe’s forces. In doing so he hoped to reduce the British fleet to closer to the size of the German fleet. Jellicoe was aware of his plan and had sailed out of port much earlier than Scheer had expected. He was lying in wait.

While Jellicoe’s fleet outnumbered that of Scheer, the decision to provide more speed and better guns at the expense of stronger armour would prove costly. In the first hour of the German gunfire sank HMS Indefatigable and HMS Queen Mary, costing 2,868 lives. Jellicoe planned to lure Scheer into a trap. By early evening both main fleets faced each other in a fog of heavy smoke and with poor communications within each fleet. The ensuing battle lasted only a few minutes but the damage inflicted by the huge British guns and the realisation that he was sailing into a trap forced Scheer to sail for home. Using his submarines for cover Scheer was able to prevent Jellicoe mounting an effective pursuit and he managed to reach port the following morning

Results of the battle:

* Germany: lost 11 ships including a battle cruiser; 3058 dead or wounded; able to use 10 large ships immediately after the battle; never risked a major sea battle again
* Britain: lost 14 ships including 3 battle cruisers; 6784 dead, wounded or captured; able to use 24 large ships immediately after the battle; maintained control of the North Sea; able to sustain blockade of the north German coast

**The British Blockade of Germany**

Jellicoe’s decision to mount a blockade of Germany’s ports had greater impact on the outcome of the war than events at Jutland. Soon after the outbreak of war the North Sea had been declared to be a British military area, and all neutral merchant ships were intercepted and searched for any materials which could be used to help the German war effort.

The blockade had a dramatic impact on Germany’s ability to feed her population and service her armaments industry. Imports fell by 60% during the war, creating a stranglehold on the German economy. In February 1917 daily rations dropped from an average of 2,240 to 1,000 calories per person. There were food riots across Germany and Austria-Hungary. The shortage of potatoes created what became known as the ‘turnip winter’ when turnips, previously seen as only fit to feed animals replaced the potato as a staple in the German diet.

**U-boats and convoys**

Britain was also vulnerable to the threat of blockade with 60% of all food consumed in Britain in 1914 having to be imported. In 1915 Germany launched a campaign of **unrestricted submarine warfare** to target military and merchant ships leaving or heading towards Britain. International outrage peaked when a German U-boat sank the passenger liner Lusitania on 7th May 1915, with the loss of 1,198 lives. Pressure from the USA increased when a US liner, the Arabic, was sunk in August 1915. US threats to join the war led to Germany temporarily abandoning unrestricted submarine warfare.

However, by the start of 1917 Germany’s failure to achieve victory on the Western Front and the likely impact of US soldiers in Europe persuaded the German Chancellor Bethman-Hollweg to resume unrestricted submarine warfare.

During the spring and summer of 1917 Britain and her allies lost 1505 merchant sailors and 2,225,406 tons of shipping. This led to the introduction of rationing in Britain as efforts to persuade people to use less food were not enough.

Britain introduced a range of strategies to combat this threat:

* Q ships: heavily armed ships disguised as merchant vessels were used to lure U-boats to the surface where they could be attacked. Guns were hidden under fake lifeboats and funnels. However, in 1917 23 Q-boats were sunk compared to only 6 U-boats sunk by them
* Mines: thousands of mines were laid across the North Sea, with the 180-mile stretch between Norway and the Orkneys and Heligoland Bight proving particularly dangerous for the U-boats
* Convoy system: from summer 1916 merchant ships crossed the Atlantic in large numbers, escorted by battleships and sometimes aircraft. This made it harder for U-boats to pick them off and made it dangerous to attack in daylight. Battleships and planes could drop depth charges where they believed U-boats to be present. This was very effective in reducing the number of merchant ships sunk by the Germans.

In the end Germany’s use of unrestricted submarine warfare had failed to defeat Britain and brought America into the war.

**Gallipoli**

Turkey had joined the Central Powers in November 1915. The Gallipoli Campaign was thought up by Winston Churchill to defeat the badly-rated Turkish army, gain control of the Dardanelles Straits, improve supplies to her ally Russia and weaken Germany by creating another front in the war.

Early attempts to knock out the guns on the Gallipoli shoreline in March 1915 had been frustrated by a combination of bad weather, mines in the Dardanelles Straits and the organisation of the Turkish defenders by German general Liman von Sanders.

On 25th April 1915 British, French, Australian and New Zealand troops launched an invasion of Turkey under the command of Sir Ian Hamilton. He had been advised by Greek military leaders that he would need 150,000 men to take Gallipoli, but Lord Kitchener, who opposed the plan approved use of only 70,000. Also, the naval raids in March had removed any element of surprise and 70,000 new Turkish troops had arrived to defend the peninsula.

British troops landing at Cape Helles suffered 20,000 killed or wounded. Many of the casualties were suffered on Beach V where an old trawler was used to land the troops and Turkish machine gunners had direct lines of fire at them. Hamilton was commanding the invasion from miles offshore on the Queen Elizabeth and was unable to grasp the scale of the crisis or make the necessary changes.

Australian and New Zealand forces were landing further north at Kabatepe – which became known as ANZAC Cove. Here the troops were dropped off 1500 metres from the planned drop-off point and they were faced with steep cliffs which prevented them making any progress inland. There were over 2000 Australian casualties on the first day of the landing.

The intense summer heat made conditions particularly bad. Shortage of fresh water, fly-ridden food and difficulties of burying corpses meant sickness and disease spread quickly among malnourished men. Winter then brought torrential floods which threw men out to sea and snow then brought the danger of frost-bite.

Unable to move troops off the beach in either the north or south of the peninsula, Hamilton decided to launch a second invasion further north at Suvla Bay. On 6th August 1915 ANZAC forces mounted a diversionary attack at ANZAC Cove whilst a further 2000 British troops commanded by General Stopford came ashore at Suvla Bay, facing little opposition. However, Stopford’s reluctance to push inland and the arrival of more Turkish defenders meant this invasion led to the same stalemate which had afflicted the previous landings.

In October 1915 Hamilton was replaced by General Sir Charles Munro. Face with little prospect of success and after enduring terrible weather conditions, he took the decision to withdraw the Allies in November 1915. Helles was the last beach to be evacuated in January 1916.

In total over one million men had been involved in the Gallipoli campaign. Over one third became casualties. The invaders lost over 44,000 men in one of the biggest blunders of the war.

The expedition’s failure led to Winston Churchill resigning from the government in November 1915 and to Asquith being replaced as Prime Minister by David Lloyd George in December 1916.

**The impact of war on civilian populations**

The outbreak of war brought many new restrictions on people’s way of life. In August 1914 the British Government brought in the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) which gave the government wide-ranging powers to secure ‘public safety’. These powers included the introduction of press censorship, imprisonment without trial, reduced licensing hours and the introduction of British Summer Time (BST).

In the USA the Espionage Act after their entry into the war in 1917 made it illegal to interfere with the recruitment of troops or to pass on classified information and made conscientious objection an offence. In 1918 the Sedition Act made it illegal to use abusive language about the US Constitution, the armed forces or the government. Mail could be denied to anyone thought to be in breach of the terms of this act.

The need to recruit volunteers had a particularly big impact in Britain which was the only major combatant nation without a large army in 1914. All countries introduced conscription. The British Parliament repeatedly voted against doing so until 1916 – having recruited over three million volunteers. However, the cumulative effects of campaigns such as Mons, Ypres and Gallipoli meant conscription was introduced for single men aged 18-41 in January 1916. This was extended to married men in May 1916.

Approximately 16,000 conscientious objectors refused to be conscripted. About half accepted non-combatant roles. Those who did not were imprisoned or forced to join a military unit in France.

Most combatant nations experienced food shortages because of blockades, inadequate railway networks or conscription of farm workers.

Measures taken to tackle food shortages included, in Britain:

* Increased areas of farmland
* Increased imports from the US
* Campaigns to encourage people to consume less
* Rationing from January 1918 – starting with sugar and meat, then extended to other foods

In Germany:

* Limited rationing was introduced in 1914
* Development of ersatz (substitute) goods such as acorns and beechnuts as a coffee substitute
* Clocks moved forward one hour to give workers the opportunity to work for longer in their gardens after work
* Millions of pigs were slaughtered to save grain
* After disastrous potato harvests in 1916 turnips were used as a replacement

In Russia the poor rail network and lack of incentive for peasants to produce more as the war dragged on caused particular food shortages in cities and a sharp increase in inflation – e.g.1914-16 the cost of meat rose 232%.

USA and France did not suffer food shortages.

The war also proved a turning point for employment of women. In Russia women made up 43% of the workforce and there was a female battalion. The proportion of women in the British workforce increased from 24% to 37%. In France approximately one-third of those working in armaments were women. Across Europe women moved from low-paid, usually domestic work to better paid jobs in munitions factories or public transport.

The need to increase food production also affected women’s work. In Britain the Women’s Land Army was formed in 1915 to create a skilled female farming workforce. In France women benefited from the general increase in farm income and allowances paid to soldiers’ wives. In Germany, however, the effects of food shortages and influenza led to a sharp increase in the death rate for women in 1917-18.

After the war most women were forced back into their pre-war occupations but women were rewarded by being granted the vote in Britain, Canada, Austria, Germany and the USA.

There also significant deaths on the home front. On top of an estimated ten million casualties on the battlefield approximately 940,000 civilians lost their lives due to military action and a further 5.9 million from disease, malnutrition and accidents. Spanish flu arrived at the end of the war and went on to kill approximately 250,000 in Britain, 400,000 in France and an estimated 50-100 million around the world). Whilst it can be argued that wartime conditions made the spread of the disease more likely, these figures cannot be counted as war dead).

**Events on the Eastern Front and the defeat of Russia**

Russia entered the war in August 1914 with the largest land army of any of the combatants. The speed of her mobilisation caught Germany and Austria-Hungary by surprise. However, by the summer of 1917 Russia was all but finished as a major partner in the war effort.

At the start of the war most of Russia’s population rallied behind Tsar Nicholas II’s call to arms and the army enjoyed early successes against Germany in the north and Austria-Hungary in the south. However, at the Battles of Tannenburg in August 1914 and Masurian Lakes in September 1914 Russian armies suffered heavy defeats against Hindenburg’s German forces. Russia lost around 250,000 men. The Russian commander Samsanov shot himself. Russia suffered further defeats before managing to hold off the German advance into their Polish territories at the end of 1914.

While the Russian army was able to prevent a significant loss of land on the Austrian Front, 1915 brought further retreats as the Germans advanced. Warsaw fell on 4th August 1915 and only the huge number of men at their disposal and the extremities of winter weather prevented total Russian capitulation. Commanders complained of shell shortages and the new Russian Minister of War, Polivanov, became exasperated at the lack of coordination between generals along the front line and between the General Headquarters and the Ministry of War.

The chaos in the command structure and his growing sympathy for political reform in Russia led Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich to resign as Commander-in-Chief in August 1915. Tsar Nicholas II decided to assume the role himself.

The Russians did better in the spring of 1916. General Brusilov then planned a large offensive against the Austrians at Galicia, with the aim of relieving Verdun and tying the Germans down prior to the planned Anglo-French Somme offensive in July. Brusilov implemented large scale reconnaissance and intelligence gathering in preparation for the attack. The attack began on 4th June 1916 and was initially a great success as the Austrians lost up to half their army and were pushed back.

However, the reluctance of other officers to follow up the initial offensives and the arrival of German reinforcements meant the Russians were pushed back to almost where they started from, at a cost of 1.5 million casualties. The battle did weaken Austria-Hungary and relieve pressure on Verdun but most Russians were dismayed at the army’s failure to deliver a clear victory.

As well as military failures, the war had other serious effects in Russia:

* The loss of land created a huge refugee problem as people fled from the invading German forces
* A shortage of food in urban areas and the government’s decision to print money to pay for the war caused chronic inflation. Prices in Moscow doubled in the first year of the war and trebled again by the start of 1917
* Tsar Nicholas II sacked ministers who supported a group wanting liberal reforms once the war was over. When he became Commander-in-Chief his wife Alexandra and Rasputin were left in charge. They replaced any ministers who were not 100% loyal and replaced them with incompetent ones. The regime’s inability to tackle food shortages eventually led to its downfall in 1917

In February 1917 Nicholas II was forced to abdicate. A Provisional Government was formed to rule Russia before a new Constituent Assembly could be formed. The Provisional Government had to share power with a council of workers and soldiers called the Petrograd Soviet. They decided to continue with the war and became more unpopular after an unsuccessful attempt to make a breakthrough on the Austrian front in June 1917.

A communist revolution led by Lenin’s Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government in October 1917. They then called on all nations to stop fighting. They agreed an armistice with the Central Powers in December 1917 and Trotsky led negotiations on the terms of the peace. He hoped to delay negotiations for long enough such that there would also be communist revolutions in Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, these did not arise and Germany ended the armistice in February 1918 and forced Russia to accept the harsh Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918.

Russia lost:

* More than 290,000 square miles of land, including Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus and Ukraine
* A quarter of her population
* A quarter of her industry
* 90% of her coal mines
* All Turkish lands gained in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. These were to be returned to the Ottoman Empire

**US entry into the war**

The USA had maintained a policy of isolation throughout the 19th Century, but in 1914 it agreed to a British request to stop selling arms to Germany. However, she did not agree to formally join the war on the Allies’ side until April 1917. There a number of reasons for this:

* The US didn’t want to see any single dominant power en=merge from the war
* Unrestricted submarine warfare appeared to highlight the aggressive nature of the Central Powers, and President Wilson was furious when 100 Americans died in the May 1915 sinking of the Lusitania
* Wilson’s attempts to broker peace between the two sides were unsuccessful
* Unrestricted submarine warfare was resumed in February 1917
* The British intercepted a telegram from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman to the German Ambassador in Mexico offering US territory to Mexico in return for joining the German side in the war. This led directly to Wilson declaring war on Germany on 6th April 1917

At first US assistance was limited to sending destroyers and merchant ships and assisting with mining operations in the North Sea to counter the effects of U-boats. US forces started to arrive in small numbers, but by March 1918 there were 300,000 US soldiers in France. They helped to plug the gaps created by Ludendorff’s offensive launched on 21st March 1918. 800,000 more US soldiers arrived between May and July 1918. This allowed the Allies to transfer more experienced soldiers from quieter areas of the Western Front to combat the follow-up German offensives in June and July 1918.

US forces never gained the key victory their commander General Pershing wanted, but their arrival provided a huge psychological boost. As the German army lost 1.75 million men between March and November 1918, the US managed to recruit nearly 5 million men.

**The failure of the Ludendorff Offensive/Operation Michael**

In January 1918 faced with continuing commitment to a war on two fronts, all remaining reserves having already been recruited, the failure of the U-boats to achieve victory and the expected arrival of large numbers of US troops, General Ludendorff decided their last chance would be a great push on the Western Front – Operation Michael.

Operation Michael began at 4am on 21st March 1918. The German army amassed troops south of Arras. They advanced 35 miles in the first three weeks and by July were within 5 miles of Paris before being stopped by a Franco-American counter-offensive. The British lost 178,000 casualties and the French 77,000. However, the Germans lost over 1 million. In fact the early advances had made the gains unsustainable as transforming the war of attrition into a war of movement played into the hands of an enemy with more men, tanks and aircraft. The Germans were unable to occupy and defend the ground they had gained, so Hindenburg retreated to shorten his defensive lines.

A successful counter-attack by the French at the Marne in July 1918 led to Ludendorff calling off the offensive. The Allies had used new tactics – surprise attacks and creeping barrages supporting infantry advances, reinforced by overwhelming superiority of shells and tanks.

Germany were further hit by half a million cases of Spanish influenza in the army. By August 1918 only two of Germany’s 13 divisions were fit for action and a further 5 only good for defence.

German morale was damaged. Alcohol abuse, shirking and desertion became common in what had been a highly disciplined army.

Also in August 1918 a combined Allied infantry, artillery, tank and air offensive, coupled with precise intelligence of the location of German artillery resulted in the Allies advancing 8 miles at the Battle of Amiens. When the Allies broke through the German defensive Hindenburg Line at the end of September 1918, their victory became inevitable.

**The Kiel Mutiny and German Revolution**

War weariness was also having an impact on the situation within Germany. The Reichstag had called for peace in July 1917. By the end of September 1918 Ludendorff, who with Hindenburg had become increasingly involved in domestic affairs, was willing to consider ‘revolution from above’ to prevent widespread mutiny and a possible full-scale revolution.

In October 1918 Prince Max von Baden, a liberal monarchist was appointed Chancellor. He formed a government of liberal and socialist Reichstag members. He asked President Wilson for an armistice. Wilson insisted that any peace negotiations must take place without the German generals or Kaiser. On 26th October the Kaiser made reforms transferring power to the Reichstag.

On 30th October there were mutinies of German sailors at the naval bases of Kiel and Wilhelmshaven in reaction to Scheer’s plan for a large naval assault on Britain’s High Seas Fleet. Tired and hungry sailors refused to return from leave or set sail. Soldiers’ Councils were set up, including industrial workers from Kiel.

**The abdication of the Kaiser**

In early November 1918 riots broke out across Germany. A Bavarian Democratic and Social Republic was created in Munich on 8th November 1918. Fearing imminent civil war, a delay to the end of the war and a more radical socialist revolution, Prince Max von Baden announced Kaiser Wilhelm II’s abdication on 9th November 1918. Friedrich Ebert was appointed Chancellor and the Kaiser fled to Holland.

**The armistice**

German forces were in a state of permanent retreat, morale had all but collapsed and failure to surrender would have been likely to lead to the complete destruction of the German army and the invasion of Germany. Bulgaria had surrendered in September 1918, Turkey on 30th October and Austria on 3rd November. Germany agreed an armistice on 11th November 1918.

**Some of the most important reasons for German defeat were:**

* Having to fight a war on two fronts
* Huge losses – eg.at the Somme 1916 (600,000), Passchendaele 1917 (400,000) and 1,75 million casualties in 1918
* By March 1918 the Allies had far superior numbers of guns, planes and tanks
* The failure of Operation Michael used up German reserves ad created open warfare
* In 1918 the Allies successfully used new tactics of the creeping barrage and combined arms warfare
* The Allied blockade led to shortages in Germany and declining support for the war and mutinies by the end of 1918
* Weaker allies – Germany had to reinforce Austria whereas it is arguable the entry of the USA was a decisive turning point for the Allies

**useful websites**

**Collection of accessible BBC articles on the war**

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/

**Trenches on the web**

http://worldwar1.com/trenchesontheweb.htm

**firstworldwar.com: a multimedia history of the war**

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**Spartacus Educational pages on the war**

http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWW.htm

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