

## Why did the First World War come to an end in 1918?

The United States joined the Allies in April 1917. But in November, there was a revolution in Russia and the new leaders pulled Russia out of the war. Fighting ended on the Eastern Front which meant Germany now could concentrate all their troops in the west. However, time was running out for Germany. The German generals knew they could not win the war once the Americans arrived. So, during the winter of 1917-18, they planned a last great offensive break the Allied lines before significant American involvement got off the ground.

At first it worked, by April, German troops were just 50 miles from Paris. German troops had found open ground beyond the trench network; at last, the armies were on the move again. But it was the last gasp of an exhausted army. Supplies of food and ammunition simply could not keep up with the troops. German soldiers stopped to loot Allied food and drink – and the attack slowed down. They could see that German propaganda about poor Allied supplies was not true.

Meanwhile, the Allies had put their armies under the leadership of one man – General Foch. He counter-attacked, and by early August, the German forces were retreating. On 8 August, the German army was pushed back 7 miles during the Battle of Amiens. General Ludendorff called it 'the blackest day of the German army'.

These were black days for the German people too. There were serious food shortages. Butcher's shops sold crows and a doctor's prescription was needed to get eggs! A typical day's food for an adult provided just 100 calories.

On 26th September, Allied troops broke through the Hindenburg Line – the last line of German defences. Just a week later, the German chancellor asked the United States to arrange a ceasefire. Now that they were winning, the Allies were in no hurry to agree peace terms. They carried on talking while Germany's allies collapsed. Bulgaria had made peace in September, in October Turkey gave up. That same month, there was mutiny in German navy.

Early in November it was all over. Riots broke out in Munich against the war on 7th November and by 9th November people were protesting in the streets of Berlin. Germany surrendered, and General Ludendorff, a German commander, wrote "Germany collapsed like a house of cards. All that we lived for, all that we had bled four long years to keep was gone. We no longer had a native land of which we might be proud. Order vanished. All authority disappeared. Chaos." The same day the Kaiser abdicated (gave up the throne) and later fled to Holland.

The end came on 11 November 1918. At about 5am an armistice (temporary peace) was signed. Fighting would end at 11am Paris time.