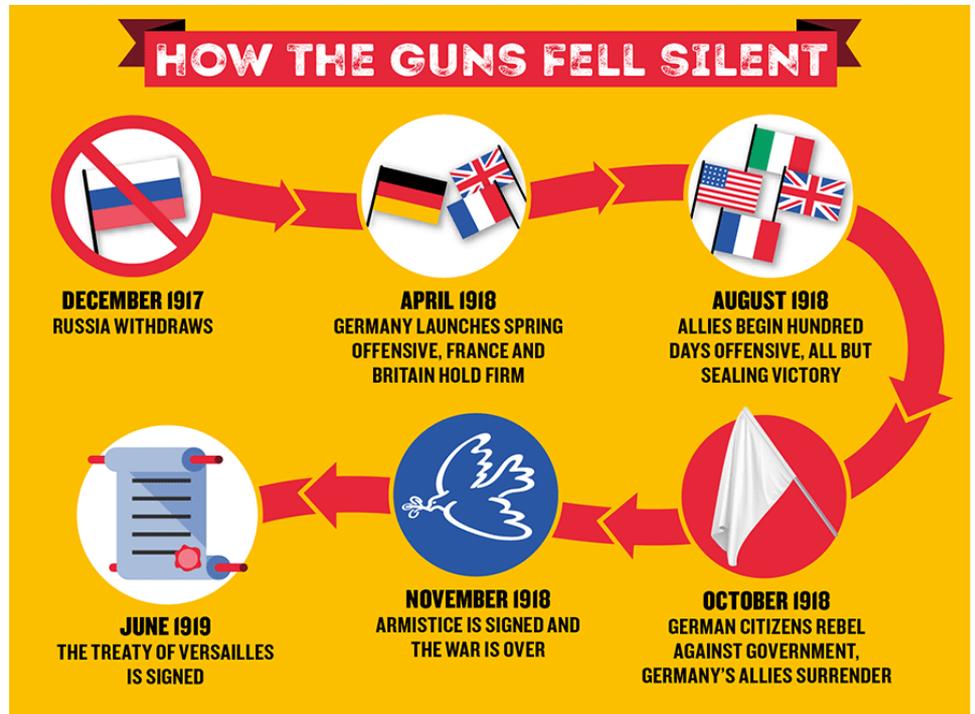


BRIEFING

The end of World War One

We know that the war began with a single pistol shot. It then degenerated into slaughter and stalemate. But how did history's second deadliest conflict end? And was it ever truly resolved?



And then it was over: The armistice was signed in French Marshal Foch's private train car.

Q: What was happening one year before the war ended?

A: In November 1917, the war had been going for three and a half years. The war in the west had reached a deadlock, while Germany and the other Central Powers were also fighting Russia in the east. And it was a coup in Russia one month earlier that triggered the events that would lead to the conflict's end.

Q: What was that?

A: The **October Revolution** in Russia, when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Russian government. The revolution prompted Russia's withdrawal from the conflict in December 1917.

This allowed huge numbers of German troops to march on the Western Front. For a few months, it looked as though the Allies would lose.

But in April 1917, two years after the **sinking of the RMS Lusitania** by German forces, American President Woodrow Wilson bowed to public pressure and declared war on Germany.

Q: What did this mean?

A: Time was not on Germany's side. Although they were initially boosted by a new burst of reinforcements in the west, American troops were also pouring into Europe. They needed to push for a final, quick offensive to secure victory before the Americans became too heavily involved.

Thus the Spring Offensive began. The Germans tried to push through Allied lines in northern France and Belgium in a series of attacks codenamed Georgette, Gneisenau, Blücher-Yorck and Michael.

Operation Michael was the most important of these. It drove the Allies back across the trench-ridden wasteland left by the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

Q: How did the Allies respond?

A: The next stage for the Germans was to push the Allies back to the English Channel, but they had sustained heavy losses. The Allies awaited US reinforcements, and on August 8, 1918, the Hundred Days Offensive started.

This series of counter-offensives pushed the Germans back into central Europe and defeated them once and for all. The names of these battles — Amiens, the **Hindenburg Line** — are largely forgotten now, but they are some of Britain's most glorious military victories in modern history.

Q: How did Germany react?

A: By autumn, the Central Powers were exhausted, and their citizens were hungry and in the mood to revolt. They were resigned to defeat.

Nonetheless, in October, the German Navy was ordered to go into battle against the British. The thought of being sent to a pointless defeat caused a mutiny among the German

ranks. Rioting started in the town of Kiel and then spread to all of Germany's northern ports.

By this time, Germany's allies were already starting to give up. Bulgaria had surrendered on September 30, Turkey on October 30, and Austria-Hungary on November 3.

With its citizens and armed forces in a revolutionary mood, the Germans accepted the inevitable. The government approached the United States asking for an armistice, which was signed on November 11. The war was over.

Q: Was that the Treaty of Versailles?

A: No. That was signed on June 28, 1919, **just outside Paris**, by the US, the UK, France, Italy and Japan — who would become known as the **League of Nations** — along with Germany.

The treaty forced huge concessions on the defeated Germans. They were forced to cede territory. But most controversially, the document required "Germany [to] accept the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage" during the war.

Germany had to pay reparations to the tune of tens of billions in today's money. Its economy would later collapse under the weight of these payments.

And it was this mixture of economic turmoil and resentment mixed with a desire for revenge that provided the perfect environment for the rise of Adolf Hitler.

YOU DECIDE

What is more important: how wars start or how they end?

ACTIVITY

"The Second World War could never have happened without the First World War." Write 500 words discussing this point.

WORD WATCH

October Revolution – The Russian Revolution is often seen as a single event, but there were, in fact, two revolutions. The first, in February 1917, was when the tsar abdicated and the Russian Empire collapsed, while the October Revolution saw Lenin's Bolsheviks seize power.

Sinking of the RMS Lusitania – Of the 1,959

people aboard, 1,198 were killed when the commercial ship was sunk off the coast of Ireland.

Hindenburg Line – A heavily fortified zone running several miles behind the active front between the north coast of France and the town of Verdun, near the border of France and Belgium.

Just outside Paris – Versailles Palace was the summer residence of France's monarchs

before the French Revolution.

League of Nations – An international organisation created to provide a forum for resolving international disputes. It was thought up by President Wilson. America, however, never joined, and so the League did not have the power it needed to enforce any of the rules that made it up.

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 Notes

