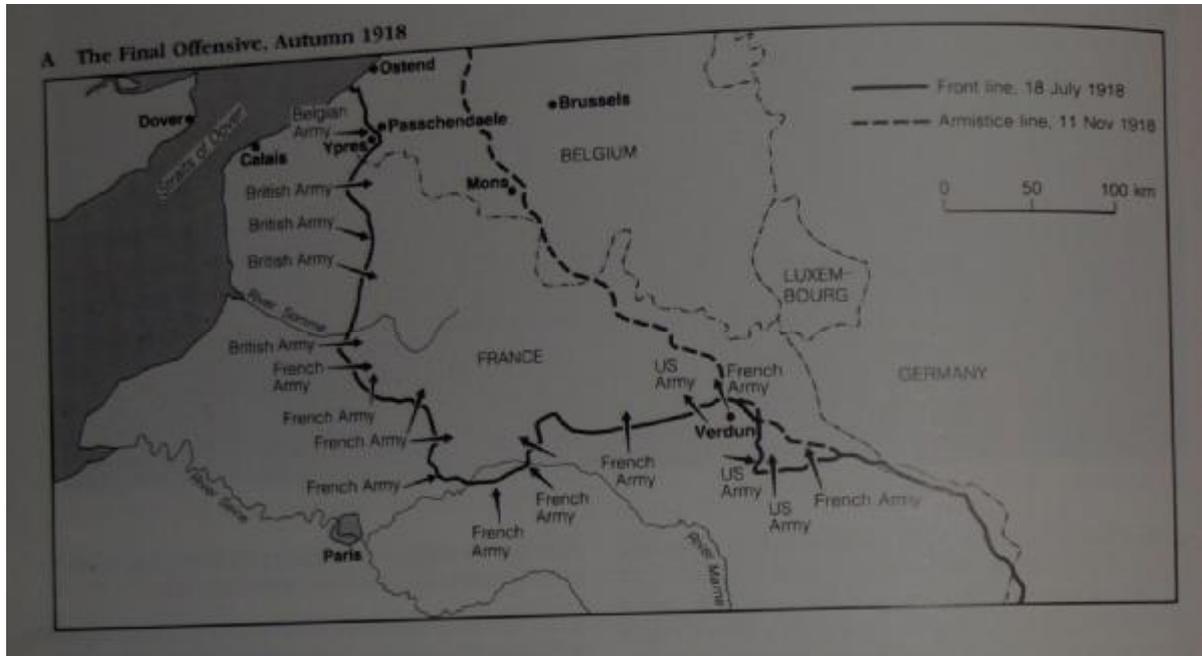


## Spring Offensives in 1918:

**Key words: Spring Offensive, The second Battle of Marne, Hundred Days of Offensive, The Battle of Amiens, Ferdinand Foch, 11.11.1918, casualties**



**Spring Offensive, 1918:** was a series of German attacks along the Western Front during World War I, which marked the deepest advances by either side since 1914. The Germans calculated that they had about 6 months before the USA would be in a position to send large numbers of men to Europe. They decided to launch a final, all-out offensive on the Western Front, using extra troops **now available as a result of the collapse of Russia (as a result of a ..... Treaty)**, to defeat the Allies.

German commander General Ludendorff explains the situation: *“The situation in Russia and Italy makes it possible to deliver a blow on the Western Front in the New Year. Our general situation requires that we should strike at the earliest possible moment before the Americans can throw strong forces in.”*

In March 1918 the German army struck. Within days they had punched a hole through the weakest part of the Allied line, and the German troops were once again marching towards Paris. By July 1918 the enemy had reached river **Marne** and, for the second time in the war, it seemed that Paris must fall.

**The Second Battle of the Marne: (July – August 1918):** was the last major German Spring Offensive on the Western Front during World War I. The British and French forces, together with fresh American soldiers who had been rushed to France, counter-attacked successfully. Under the **supreme command of one Allied leader, the French Marshal Foch**<sup>1</sup>, the tide of battle turned and it was the Germans who began to retreat. They were retreating but by no means defeated. From August 1918 onwards Ludendorff began to see that all was lost.

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<sup>1</sup> **Ferdinand Foch** (pronounced "Fosh") Shortly after the start of the Spring Offensive, Germany's final attempt to win the war, Foch was chosen as supreme commander of the Allied armies, a position that he held until 11 November 1918, when he accepted the German request for an armistice.

Boat-loads or freshly-trained American troops were arriving in France every day and, with his beaten and exhausted army, he could not hope to hold them back. The German gamble has failed.

A German soldier remembers: “*The physical exhaustion of the most men was so great that they could not fire their rifles. They let themselves be wiped out almost without caring or moving ... We are glad if the ration carts can get up to us at night – then the men and horses feed for the next twenty-four hours at one sitting. All the water we can get comes from the icy shell holes. There was looting. I see men carrying hens under their arms, men wearing top hats, men carrying wine bottles, men who could hardly walk.*”

*Reasons for the Allied success:* The Allies owed their success on the Western Front in 1918 to many things. The idea of having **one Supreme Commander** instead of three separate leaders of the British, French and American forces was one fact which certainly helped, and so too did the **much greater use of tanks**. Probably the most important single reason for success, however, was the **arrival of the Americans**. The young, enthusiastic soldiers who came over from the USA thirsting for action put new heart into the war-weary British and French troops. Without the Americans the war would have dragged on for a lot longer.

**Hundred Days of Offensive (August 1918 to November 1918):** was the final period of the First World War, during which the Allies launched a series of offensives against the Central Powers on the Western Front from August 1918 to November 1918. The Hundred Days Offensive does not refer to a specific battle or unified strategy, but rather the rapid sequences of Allied victories starting with the Battle of Amiens. The offensive forced the German armies to retreat beyond the Hindenburg Line<sup>2</sup> and was followed by an armistice.

**The Battle of Amiens (August 1918):** Allied forces advanced over seven miles on the first day, one of the greatest advances of the war. The battle is also notable for its effects on both sides' morale and the large number of surrendering German forces. This led Erich Ludendorff to describe the first day of the battle as "*the black day of the German Army.*" Amiens was one of the first major battles involving armoured warfare and marked the end of trench warfare on the Western Front; fighting becoming mobile once again until the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918.

**Trench warfare: from October 1914 – after the battle of ..... to August 1918 – after the battle of .....**

**The war is over:** Ludendorff and the other generals feared a Communist take-over in Germany more than they feared the Allies and early in November they persuaded the Kaiser to give up his throne so that a president representing the people could be elected. As soon as this was done, they **asked the Allies for peace** and the fighting came to an end at **11 o'clock a.m. on 11.11. 1918. This was the Armistice Day. The war was over.**



<sup>2</sup> The **Hindenburg Line** was a vast system of defences in northeastern France during World War I. It was constructed by the Germans (using Russian PoWs as labour) during the winter of 1916–17. The line stretched from Lens to beyond Verdun. A portion of the line was known as the Siegfried Line, not to be confused with the better known Siegfried Line of the Second World War.

### The story of signing the armistice:

The German delegation headed by Matthias Erzberger crossed the front line in five cars and was escorted for ten hours across the devastated war zone of Northern France. They were then entrained and taken to the secret destination, **aboard Foch's private train parked in a railway siding in the forest of Compiègne.**

Foch appeared only twice in the three days of negotiations: on the first day, to ask the German delegation what they wanted, and on the last day, to see to the signatures. ... There was no question of negotiation. The Germans were able to correct a few impossible demands (for example, the decommissioning of more submarines than their fleet possessed), and registered their formal protest at the harshness of Allied terms. But they were in no position to refuse to sign. On Sunday 10 November, they were shown newspapers from Paris, to inform them that Kaiser Wilhelm II had abdicated.

The Armistice was agreed at 5 a.m. on 11 November, to come into effect at 11 a.m. Paris time, for which reason the occasion is sometimes referred to as "**the eleventh (hour) of the eleventh (day) of the eleventh (month)**". It was the result of a hurried and desperate process.

| <u>Country:</u> | <u>The country asked for peace in:</u> |
|-----------------|--|
| Bulgaria        | September 1918                         |
| Ottoman Empire  | September 1918                         |
| Austria-Hungary | November 1918                          |
| Germany         | 11 November 1918. End of the war       |

## **The End of WWI: 11 November 1918**

### **WWI: 28 July 1914 – 11 November 1918**



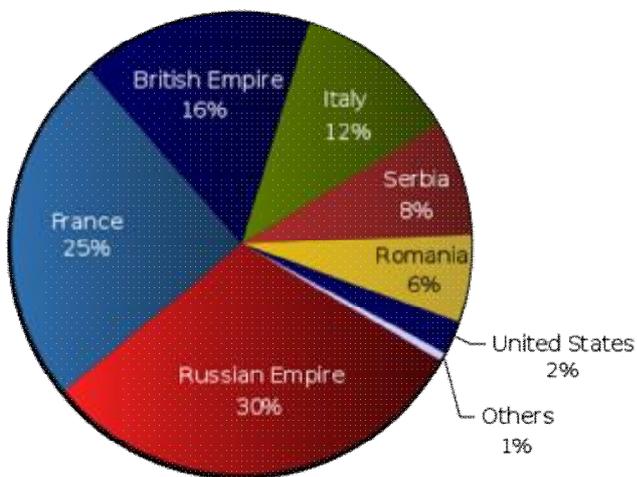
Painting depicting the signature of the armistice in the railway carriage. Behind the table, from right to left, general Weygand, Marshal Foch (standing) and British admiral Roslyn Wemyss. In the foreground, Matthias Erzberger, general major Detlof von Winterfeldt (with helmet), Alfred von Oberndorff and Ernst Vanselow.

### World War I casualties:

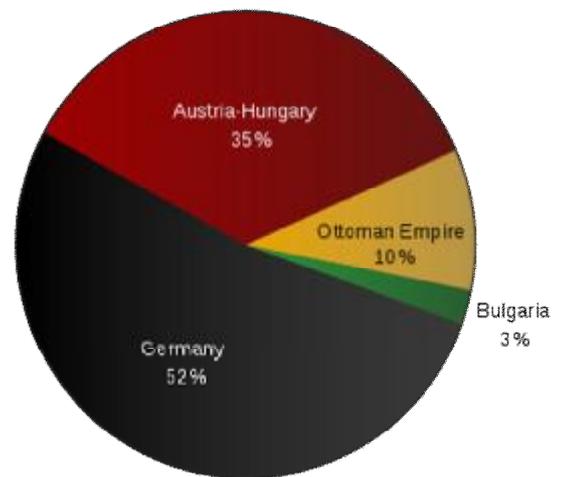
The total number of *casualties in World War I, both military and civilian, was about 37 million: 16 million deaths and 21 million wounded*. The total number of deaths includes 9.7 million military personnel and about 6.8 million civilians. The Entente Powers (also known as the Allies) lost about 5.7 million soldiers while the Central Powers lost about 4 million.

Unlike most (if not all) conflicts that took place in the 19th century and before, the majority of military deaths in World War I were caused by combat as opposed to **disease**. Improvements in medicine as well as the increased lethality of military weaponry were both factors in this development. Nevertheless, disease (including the **Spanish flu**) still caused a significant proportion of military deaths for all belligerents.

#### World War I Military Deaths (Entente Powers)



#### World War I Military Deaths (Central Powers)



The **Douaumont ossuary** is a memorial containing the remains of soldiers who died on the battlefield during the Battle of Verdun in World War I. It is located in Douaumont, France, within the Verdun battlefield.

