

Why did the Allies win WWI?



US intervention: fresh troops (4 fresh million), economic potential and help



Intervention of Britain, navy and colonial might - 22% of world, crack ANZACS and Canadian troops



Failure of Schlieffen Plan, failed to prevent a two front war



Belgium and France put up stiffer resistance than expected



Russian 'steamroller' (army) tied down held half the German army. Did well against Turks and Austrian



Germany was starting to collapse internally. Kiel Mutiny - peace protests



German unrestricted warfare brought US into war and failed to starve the British (convoys)



Allied enjoyed some military advantages: Tank by 1918, from Cambrai, surface fleet



Overall Allies had more men and materials than Germans/Central Powers



Blockade of Germany caused great hardships, 'Turnip Winter' 1917 - 18, over 250,000 died

Why did Germany and her Allies lose World War One?

1. Military

The most obvious reason why the Central Powers were defeated is the failure of their high-risk military strategies. They had gambled everything on a short, sharp war based around the **Schlieffen Plan**: the idea of invading France through neutral Belgium, knocking her out in a couple of months and then concentrating the entire German war machine against Russia. However, the Schlieffen Plan had been adjusted in the years immediately prior to the war so that less divisions were concentrated against France. This weakness in the plan made it easier for the Allies to slow down the German advance in the Battle of Marne, with trench warfare being the end result. Thereafter, the Germans threw everything they could into high-risk strategies to end the war: The **Zimmerman Telegram**, the use of **unrestricted submarine warfare**, the use of **gas weapons at Loos and flamethrowers at Verdun**. The ultimate expression of military desperation was the **Spring Offensive** of 1918, when – aware that the economic might of the United States would soon make defeat inevitable – Germany threw all of her available armies into a gigantic assault on the Western Front. Although her stormtroops made spectacular initial gains in terms of territory, they quickly outran their supply lines due to the parlous state of economic production in Germany by this stage. The advance ground to a halt as half-starved German soldiers fell ravenously upon French and British supply depots rather than advance further into enemy territory. As the Germans were driven back to the river Marne – where the BEF had originally held them back in 1918 – 30,000 German troops surrendered in the space of just two days. Other examples of German military weakness include Ludendorff's nervous breakdown in 1918, when he declared the war lost, then demanded that armistice negotiations be broken off, then resigned and fled into exile in Sweden.

In contrast, it is one of the ironies of the war that Liberal England managed to respond to the demands of total war more effectively than authoritarian Germany. Other examples of military flexibility include the fact that Haig and Petain agreed to give overall **allied control to Foch** in 1918 at the height of the Spring Offensive, thus preventing the Allied armies from being divided by the Germans; another example is that by 1918 Haig had perfected the **creeping barrage** and had successfully co-ordinated the efforts of artillery, infantry and tanks in effective counter-attacks against the Germans. And of course we should not overlook the fact that from 1917 the United States joined on the allied side, with the result that by January 1918 a further 50,000 fresh troops were arriving under the leadership of the talented **General "Blackjack" Pershing**.

1. Economic Factors

However, although military factors provide the most obvious reason why the Central Powers lost the war, it was underlying economic factors that drove them towards such desperate military strategies in the first place: in particular, they were without the resources of Empire and so resorted to desperate and unsuccessful military strategies to break the **Western Front**. It is true that Germany introduced the **KRA** under the leadership of **Walter Rathenau** to co-ordinate war production, which was described by Chickering as "The most successful economic organisation created...during the war". However, the essential fact is that Germany had gambled everything on a short war of movement dictated by the Schlieffen Plan – well aware that she did not have the economic resources of Empire which would enable her to win a long war of attrition against Britain and her allies. As a result, Germany imposed no ceiling on war profits made by the bosses; neither did she even tax these profits before 1916, when a national income tax system was finally introduced. As a result, the government could only cover 16% of its costs through taxes, when Britain was able to cover about a third. They therefore printed paper money and sold bonds on the assumption that they would recover their costs in reparations after the war; this created inflation as well as massive debt. In terms of foodstuffs too, the picture for Germany was bleak. With such a small coastline, the British Navy found it a relatively easy task to blockade her. The resulting food shortages in Germany pushed many civilians to starvation. By 1915 Germans were eating "Kriegsbrot" (War Bread) made of potatoes, and by the **"Turnip Winter" of 1917**, the supply of potatoes had run out and the only real alternative was turnips – which were traditionally used as fodder for livestock., 750,000 Germans ultimately died in the influenza pandemic which swept across Europe that year. Six times as many civilians died in Germany as in France – an occupied country! In the words of Offer, "Like an invisible net, the problems of food supply entangled German society and its leadership until the war effort became difficult, then impossible, to sustain".

In contrast, Germany's enemies were comparatively strong in an economic sense. As an island nation it was practically impossible for the Central Powers to blockade Britain effectively; when the Germans unleashed unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, a convoy system was quickly established to protect food supplies and a voluntary rationing scheme was introduced in Britain later that year, along with a vigorous propaganda drive encouraging people to produce their own food and waste as little as possible ("The Kitchen is the Key to Victory!", "Join the Women's Land Army!"). The scheme was made compulsory in 1918 and in his memoirs, Lloyd George stated that as a result "we were never faced with famine or actual privation". In terms of capital goods, The 1914 **Defence of the Realm Act ("DORA")** enabled the government to control the coal and armaments and encourage almost a million women into the workforce. The policy towards women in the workforce is an excellent example of the flexibility of Britain's economic flexibility. The authorities initially used women merely in a token role: for example, to encourage men to fight at the front through the "White Feather" movement, the poster "Women of Britain: Say GO!". However, following the **"Munitions Crisis" of 1915** the government encouraged thousands of women to work in armaments factories. By 1917, 80% of all shells were being produced by the "Munitionettes", and many found this a "genuinely liberating experience" (Gail Braybon). In this way economic strengths led to direct military benefits.

3. Political

The military performance of the combatants had direct political results. On the one hand, and somewhat perversely, the military victories of Germany weakened her politically. In particular, the initiative for decision-making quickly passed from the Kaiser to his generals very early on, with the result that Wilhelm was marginalised and became a token figure. More importantly, the defeat of Russia in 1917 actually undermined the German war effort: firstly, because the final Treaty of Brest Litovsk was so harsh that it steeled the determination of the Allies to fight on until Germany's complete defeat; secondly, because the new Soviet government (which had been sponsored by the Germans to destabilise the Russian autocracy) deliberately hampered negotiations with the result that the German armed forces were not liberated to fight on the Western Front as quickly as they should have been; finally, because the communist ideology which was now the official position of Soviet Russia quickly spread into Germany itself and undermined its government. By 1918 Bavaria had declared itself an independent communist republic under the leadership of Kurt Eisner, creating further political tensions and distractions which undermined the German war effort.

On the other hand, but equally perversely, the military weaknesses of Britain strengthened her politically. In particular, Britain's reliance upon a volunteer army compelled the government to become flexible and pragmatic in its approach. The Liberal government under Asquith was desperate to avoid centralisation of economic control and the introduction of conscription, but Lloyd George challenged this position and thereby forced a shift of political opinion – firstly by becoming Minister of Munitions in 1915 and secondly by forcing Asquith's resignation, becoming Prime Minister himself and introducing compulsory military service. Lloyd George, the ultimate political pragmatist, also stirred up political discord among his enemies much more effectively than even the Germans (who of course sponsored the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916 and the Communist Revolution in Russia in 1917). Whereas German attempts were abortive or actually undermined their own position, the British attempts were more successful. For example, Lawrence of Arabia was sent over to the Middle East to offer British support for the Arab independence campaigns. Largely as a result of Arab support, the war ended with the Ottoman Empire in pieces that the British occupying the territory that was to become Iraq, Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

4. Cultural

The military conduct of the campaigns was also directly responsible for the socio-cultural conditions in each of the combatant nations in terms of morale. The British in particular generated vast amounts of propaganda designed initially to steel the British people in the belief that Germany was evil and that the war against her was therefore just. Posters such as "Remember Belgium!" and cinema shorts depicting Germany as a monstrous gorilla bent on world domination all helped to augment the "Your country needs you!" recruitment drive which in turn meant that by Christmas 1914 Britain had overcome the lack of conscript army by raising a force of 1 million enthusiastic soldiers. Moreover, the British were flexible with their propaganda. From 1916, when conscription had removed the need to persuade men to join up and the Battle of the Somme had made it impossible to hide the carnage of the trenches, propaganda focused instead on encouraging civilians to empathise with the terrible conditions being faced by men at the front (Geoff Malins' "Battle of the Somme" film) and to conserve food supplies in the face of U-Boat attacks ("The Kitchen is the Key to Victory!").

In contrast, Germany and her allies were always at a disadvantage in the propaganda war because nothing could disguise the fact that – whatever the long term provocations – Germany had invaded neutral Belgium and declared war on both Russia and France before any of her enemies had issued any declaration of war. As a result she sacrificed the moral high ground and found it very difficult to produce simple, effective propaganda to motivate civilians and soldiers. Military strategies such as the use of Zeppelin attacks ("babykillers") on Scarborough, the use of gas at the Battle of Loos and the use of flamethrowers at Verdun all increased the difficulties of Germany in cultural terms. Hitler himself in *Mein Kampf* referred disparagingly to the "the total failure of the whole German system of information" during World War One compared to the "psychologically efficient" propaganda of Britain and her allies. In particular, he criticised the tendency of German and Austria comics to depict the French and British soldiers as being weak and cowardly, since this merely bred complacency outside of battle and then a sense of betrayal within it once it became clear that this message was utterly untrue. In this sense German propaganda, in Hitler's view, was not merely inefficient but positively damaging to morale ("In England propaganda was regarded as a weapon of the first order, whereas with us it represented the last hope of a livelihood for our unemployed politicians and a snug job for shirkers of the modest hero type. Taken all in all, its results were negative").

Conclusion

In conclusion, the question "Why did Germany and her Allies lose World War One?" is inherently misleading on two levels. Firstly, Germany and her allies did not lose so much as the Allies won; in other words, the strengths, flexibility and successes of the Allies were at least equally important factors as any direct weaknesses, rigidity and failures of the Germans and their allies. Secondly, the question assumes that the Germans actually lost. Of course in a military sense it is a statement of fact rather than opinion that the Germans lost the war by signing the Armistice and then the Treaty of Versailles. However, on a broader level it could realistically be argued that Germany did not actually lose: culturally, the harsh Treaty of Versailles meant that Germany could reclaim the moral high ground and produce propaganda which depicted herself as the victim rather than the aggressor; economically, the burden of reparations ultimately led to the Dawes Plan – a loan of 800 million Gold Marks from the United States in 1924. And politically, the entry of Germany into the League of Nations and Stresemann being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1926 was an interesting and ironic contrast to the political strife of Britain during the General Strike of the same year.

(should the question really be "Why did it take the allies so LONG to defeat Germany?")

Central Power Weaknesses

Bulgaria – Achieved her war aims against Balkan neighbours early on – so this undermined **political** support for the war - Pulled out **Sep 1918 – Dobro Pole** – encircled and crushed by **Greeks / Serbs(???)** = Military / Cultural (nationalistic); food riots in Bulgaria (**economic**). The same day that Bulgaria pulled out, Ludendorff told Kaiser that the war was lost.

Austria – Battle of Piave with Italy; Battle of Vittorio Veneto against Italy. **Military** defeat. Surrendered Nov 4th, 1918. May 12 1918 – mutiny in the army – Slovenians – when crushed, Serbs, Ruthenians and Czechs rose up in rebellion too. = **Cultural**

Ottoman Empire – Lawrence of Arabia etc (**cultural / political**). General Allenby (military).

Italy – Was in the Triple Alliance with Austria, Germany – but refused to fight 1914, instead joined Allies in 1915. Central powers now face war on THREE fronts (**military**).

Allied Strengths

France – Mobilised a larger percentage of their male population than Germany or Russia; 25% of women into workforce. – **political**. She was allies with Russia, meant war on two fronts for Germany. France guarded the mediterranean front navally.

Russia – Provisional Government continued the war from Feb-Oct 1917 – crucial few extra months. – **military**

USA – **economic** contribution – bankrolled the war effort; **cultural** – used propaganda well.

Serbia – occupied till 1918

Why did Germany lose the First World War in 1918?
2. Long term factors: Internal weaknesses in Germany

Introduction

- In the last lesson you considered how the short term events of 1918 led to the collapse of the German army.
- Your task now will be to consider how long term weaknesses in Germany (political, economic and military) contributed to her defeat.

Main Task

1. Use this information to produce a mindmap on one side of A4. The main branches should be the headings highlighted here in blue; how you wish to divide other branches is up to you.
2. Provide a written answer to this question:
What was the most damaging area of weakness for Germany during World War One: military, political or economic factors?
Explain your answer carefully.

Extension Task

Complete the worksheet "The economic impact of the Allied blockade on Germany" at www.activehistory.co.uk > GCSE > World War One

Problem 1 (Military): The war lasts longer than expected



drawn-out 'total' war turned out to be surprisingly difficult.

- Germany entered the Great War under Kaiser Wilhelm (left) better prepared than any other nation. Yet they did not believe the war would last very long: military plans had all been based on the assumption of a short war: one in which decisive victory would be won or lost in a matter of months, in a single battle or two. And at first it did seem as though victory would be quick, and would go to Germany and its allies, but very quickly the front line settled down into a fixed line of trenches.
- As the war settled into stalemate, generals called for greater and greater commitments of resources to the front: if battles could not be won by strategy, perhaps they could be won by the sheer weight of men, metal, and explosives committed to the front. However, mobilizing economic resources for a

Problem 2 (Political): The German government is unable to respond effectively

- At the outset of the war, there was a complete political truce (*Burgfriede*) symbolised by Wilhelm's statement that "I no longer recognise parties; I only recognise Germans". Even the SPD (the Socialist party) voted unanimously for war credits, and there was no public criticism of the government until the Peace Resolution from the Reichstag in July 1917.
- However, the Kaiser was quickly sidelined by his generals, who ran the war without any reference to the civilian politicians in the Reichstag (parliament).
- Their attempts to run a war economy therefore failed...

Synthetic rubber was developed as were a number of other products using science to replace items Germany was unable to grow or mine.

Food

Germany had imported a third of her food in 1913. As early as the the winter of 1914, the German people began eating K-Bread (Kriegsbrot - war bread). This type of bread replaced wheat with potatoes as the main ingredient. As the war dragged on, Germany turned to science to produce foodstuffs for the people. Several food items in use today were developed during the war. One of the biggest was the production of margarine (an edible oil product) to replace butter. Artificial honey, coffee, gravy, puddings and many other items were developed to replace items sent to the front.

Food shortages thereafter rapidly pushed many civilians to the brink of starvation – especially as farmers were short of labourers to bring in the harvest. By 1918, Germany was producing only 50% of the milk it had done before the war. By the winter of 1917, the supply of potatoes had run out and the only real alternative was turnips. This is why the winter of 1916 to 1917 is known as the "**Turnip Winter**". Turnips were used as animal fodder and the thought of eating them repelled many.

Disease

Improper diet lowered resistance to or caused such diseases as tuberculosis, rickets, influenza, dysentery and scurvy. The influenza-epidemic of 1918 had, therefore, a far greater effect on German mortality, which was 250 percent greater in that year, than in England. It is thought that nearly 750,000 died of a combination of flu and starvation - this figure included mainly civilians but it also included soldiers who had survived the horror of war, returned to Germany and died of the disease. A 'flu ward is shown to the right.



Men

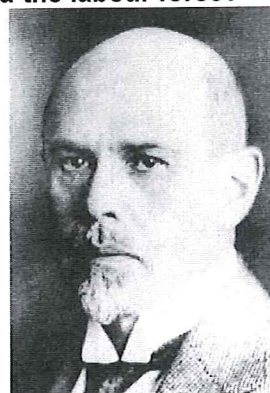
Also Germany had lost 2 million men in the war. These were the core of Germany's work force and Germany's industrial base could not function or recover without them. Therefore, it seemed that in December 1918, Germany was condemned to economic weakness.

Political effects

"One cannot intellectually dismiss the important possibility that blockade-induced starvation was a significant factor in the formation of the Nazi character... The ominous amalgamation of twisted emotion and physical degeneration, which was to presage considerable misery for Germany and the world, might have been prevented had it not been for the postwar policy of the Allies. The immediate centerpiece of this policy was the blockade" (Vincent)

• **How did the government seek to control the economy and the labour force?**

- War Materials Office (KRA) was set up in 1914 by Rathenau (right). This employed certain companies to act of behalf of the government in buying, storing and manufacturing materials.
- War Ministry directed the labour force and decided which jobs exempted men from military service
- War Boards were set up to arbitrate disputes between bosses and workers



• **What flaws existed with this system?**

- Industrial workers gained a great deal from the war boards and this created social tensions.
- The Federal Constitution had never specified a national income tax, which limited revenue.
- No ceiling was imposed on war profits by business, nor were these profits even taxed before 1916
- Therefore, the government could only cover 16% of its costs through taxes, when Britain was able to cover about a third.
- They therefore printed paper money and sold bonds on the assumption that they would recover their costs in reparations after the war; created inflation as well as massive debt.

Problem 3 (economic): The Allies exacerbate the situation by imposing a crippling blockade

- From 1915, the British imposed a blockade on Germany's northern ports, which was an easy task given her coastline.

- The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) gave Germany access to the grain resources of the Ukraine, but its harshness on Russia merely steeled allied determination to punish Germany after the war.



- In 1917, with German morale nearing the point of collapse, the Kaiser decided on the now infamous policy of unrestricted submarine warfare to destroy the blockade and to cut Britain's supply lines. In so doing, he gambled that Britain and her allies would collapse before the entry of the USA into the war could make a difference. He lost the gamble.

- In March 1918 the capitulation of Romania cut German oil supplies off and it was clear that the prospects of victory were rapidly fading. Following the collapse of Ludendorff's (left) Spring Offensive the government pressed for a ceasefire.

- Even following the Armistice, however, in which the allies stated that they "contemplated relieving the famine", the blockade was maintained until Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles 6 months later.

Effects:

Raw Materials

Coal and iron ore to make steel were plentiful, but resources like magnesium, oil, rubber and cotton (all essential for the production of ammunition) could not be obtained within Germany. Artificial silk, clothes and army sandbags were manufactured from wood pulp.