

8-2011

# With Our Backs to the Wall' : Entente Grand Strategy in 1918

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‘WITH OUR BACKS TO THE WALL’:  
ENTENTE GRAND STRATEGY IN 1918

‘WITH OUR BACKS TO THE WALL’:  
ENTENTE GRAND STRATEGY IN 1918

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in History

By

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## Abstract

Facing a military defeat in the face of the 1918 German offensive on the Western Front, the armies of the Entente reorganized under a Supreme Commander. This shift to coordinated grand strategy in conjunction with Allied strategic disunity enabled the Entente to destroy the armies of the Quadruple Alliance on the battlefield and bring the Great War to a conclusion on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council

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## Dedication

To my family, Jerry Don, Suzy, Amanda, Ashley, and Gus for their love and support during the writing of this thesis.

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## Introduction

1917 was a disastrous year for the armies of the Entente Cordial: Britain, France, and Russia. The Allied or Central, Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire had thwarted all offensives launched against them. The greatest blow came in the East, where the Bolsheviks, now in nominal control of Russia, were in the process of withdrawing from the war. Even the most optimistic Entente generals and politicians conceded that the best hope to win the war would not come until either 1919 or 1920, when America could field a battle ready army. 1918 began with even worse results. The Entente was faced with the very real possibility of defeat when the German spring offensive steamrolled over Anglo-French positions, snatching territory held by its enemies since 1914. On the verge of defeat, the Entente engaged in a series of grand strategic machinations which stemmed the tide of defeat. At the same moment, the Allied Powers, personified by Imperial Germany, engaged in a series of remarkably ill advised diplomatic postures. These shifts by the Entente in grand strategy, as well as the serious political overreach of peacemaking diplomacy by the Kaiser's government changed the entire dynamic of the war. When the Entente threw their counterpunch their strategic success enabled battlefield victories. By the end of 1918 the war was over. Coming face-to-face with military disaster in 1918, the Entente was able to secure victory by taking the necessary strategic steps required in coalition warfare.

Neither the Entente's change in strategy nor the failures of the Allies in the realm of diplomacy existed in a vacuum. For the first three years of war, the Entente had fought to secure different strategic objectives. The French army, facing disaster, was prepared to

separate itself from the British Expeditionary Force to protect Paris. Likewise, if the British believed their position in Belgium to be threatened they were prepared to abandon the French army to protect the Channel ports and their life-line to Britain. A fissure large enough could allow the Germans to focus on pushing the British off the Continent in a Dunkirk style evacuation. Without the British army, the French army would be overwhelmed by superior German numbers and left to fruitlessly defend Paris.

This is where the reorganization of Entente strategy becomes essential. At the height of the German onslaught, both the French and British armies reached a crisis phase. They both allowed a fissure to grow between them as they retreated to protect Paris and the Channel Ports respectively. With the creation of a unified commander, the gap between the armies was sealed. When the Germans focused their attention on the British army, the French army struck and vice versa. This frustrated and slowed down the German army by the summer of 1918. This gave the Entente time to prepare a counteroffensive, but for the first time striking in unison. As soon as the French army tired, the British attacked, followed by the Americans. Constant pressure wore down and destroyed the German army.

Also, the importance of German diplomacy in 1918 is that it had a direct impact on German strategy. For Ludendorff to have all of the troops he needed for the 1918 spring offensive, German diplomats needed to conclude peace treaties with the vanquished Russians and Romanians. This is because without a successful conclusion to the peace talks, German troops were ordered to occupy the captured territories. In the first two months of 1918, if the Russians and Romanians had agreed to the German terms, or if the German territorial demands had not been as severe, then Germany would have been

able to dispatch even more troops to the Western Front in time for spring. With sheer numbers, the German army could have reached both the Channel Ports and Paris before the Entente had time to enact its reorganization.

Finally, the failure to secure peace with Russia and Romania had a dire effect on Germany's allies. Enver Pasha, the leader of the Ottoman Empire, had begun to implement a plan to unite all ethnic Turks. To achieve this, he had ordered the majority of the Turkish military into the city of Baku in the Russian held area that is modern day Azerbaijan. These troops should have been directed to the Middle Eastern Front to hold the line against British General Sir Edmund Allenby's Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF). Sir Edmund's forces were severely reduced to reinforce the Entente in the face of Ludendorff's Spring Offensive, thus a strengthened Ottoman army had the capability to withstand the reduced EEF's advance. Also, the Austro-Hungarians had troops in Russia as an occupying force. They would have been better served holding the line on the Italian Front. When the Spring Offensive was launched, Ludendorff decided to remove German forces from the Middle East and Italy, thus leaving these sectors with weakened defenses. The Middle Eastern and Italian Fronts would not have decided the outcome of the Great War, but holding these sectors would have enabled the Germans to operate on the Western Front without the collapse of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires in 1918.

## Historiography

The key factor in the historiography of the Great War's final year is determining why, after almost four years of stalemate, the Entente's army emerged victorious. The first major authority of the war was Captain Basil Liddell Hart. Hart was sharply critical of the Entente command in general and the British High Command in particular. In his 1930 book *The Real War*, Hart argues that the reason the Entente won was because it was able to starve the Germans out of the war through blockade.<sup>1</sup> However, as Niall Ferguson and Klaus Schwabe have argued, the food shortages in Germany due to the Entente blockade were not as severe as the Weimar Government claimed.<sup>2</sup> In the years following the Second World War a plethora of new research emerged. The most impactful of these post-war studies was Alan Clark's *The Donkeys*, published in 1961. The titular donkey is reference to an exchange involving General Erich von Ludendorff, General Quartermaster of the German Army and General Max Hoffmann, Chief of Staff for the German Eighth Army, in which the British army is likened to lions being led into battle by donkeys.<sup>3</sup> Clark's book focused only on the British army's roles in the battles of 1915,

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<sup>1</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *The Real War 1914-1918* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), 470—6.

<sup>2</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 276—81; Klaus Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Imperial Germany, and Peacemaking, 1918—1919* Trans, Roger and Rita Kimber. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 148.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Clarke, *The Donkeys* (New York: Award Books, 1965). vi.; Erich von Falkenhayn, *General Headquarters 1914-1916 and its Critical Decisions*, (Uckfield, East Sussex: The Naval & Military Press, 2004). Clark is referencing an exchange between Hoffmann and Ludendorff that was credited to the memoirs of Erich von Falkenhayn. No such exchange actually takes place in Falkenhayn's memoir.

but it quickly became a template to describe the entirety of the British High Command in the Great War.<sup>4</sup> Sir John French, Clark's main donkey, was quickly replaced after 1915 by Sir Douglas Haig, the man who replaced him as Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force. Alan Clark paralyzed British scholarship on the First World War. All subsequent British histories of the Great War attempted to address, either directly or indirectly, the competence of British command during the course of the Great War. Two broadly definable camps within British scholarship have thus emerged: the advocates of an incompetent British command who then must explain how the Entente was still able to win the war despite poor leadership and supporters of the High Command<sup>5</sup>, who, in their zeal, diminish the role of every other army, European and colonial, fighting on the Western Front.

Following Clark, and further establishing the incompetent High Command theory, was Paul Fussell's 1975 book *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Although Fussell's book is an examination of the literary trends present amongst the British soldiers serving on the Continent, he established the war poets as the voice of the Great War. His main poets were Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, and Wilfred Owen.

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<sup>4</sup> These include: Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Norman Stone *World War One: A Short History*. (New York: Basic Books, 2009); and John H. Morrow, Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The defenders of the High Command include: Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain's Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Timothy Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987); and Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, Kent, UK: Spellmount Ltd., 2006).

Notably absent from Fussell's choice of key poets was Rupert Brooke, despite the fact that he was the most popular of all of the war poets during the course of the war.<sup>6</sup> His poetry was hawkish, idealizing the Great War and the righteousness of the Entente's cause. His popularity diminished during the 1930s and was replaced by the more cynical poets the same ones on whom Fussell placed his focus. Fussell dismisses Brooke because his patriotic poetry was penned before he witnessed combat. Indeed, Brooke died of blood poisoning en route to Gallipoli. The most memorable poem by Brooke, "The Soldier," is widely remembered because it's opening sentence,

"If I should die, think only of this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England."<sup>7</sup>

greatly contrasts with Wilfred Owens concluding lines from "Dulce Et Decorum Est":

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori."<sup>8</sup>

The use of the disillusioned poets is rife with problems, as Janet S. K. Watson shows in her 2004 book *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War*.<sup>9</sup> Watson argues that the war writings of Blunden, Graves, and Sassoon, as well as Erich Marie Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, reflected the time and

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<sup>6</sup> Bond, 29; Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 185.

<sup>7</sup> Rupert Brooke, *1914 and Other Poems* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1915), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis (New York: New Directions, 1963), 55. The Latin means: "It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country."

<sup>9</sup> Watson, 219—262.

circumstances of their respective authors rather than an accurate portrayal of their experiences during the Great War. Watson focuses on available diaries and less remembered second editions available of the war memoirs. Robert Graves' *Good-bye to All That*, for example, was released in 1929, following a suicide attempt by Graves' mistress. He revised it in 1957 and reduced most of his anti-war rhetoric making it more of a reflection of his personal diary kept during the war, which drastically differs from the original 1929 version.<sup>10</sup> Notably, Graves' revision was released after World War II, when Great Britain's wars with Germany were reassessed. After his death in 1985, the 1929 version was rereleased. Siegfried Sassoon's war diaries differ drastically from his George Sherston trilogy of *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man* (1928), *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), and *Sherston's Progress* (1936), but they coincide with his less memorable memoirs *The Old Century and Seven More Years* (1938), *The Weald of Youth* (1942), and *Siegfried's Journey* (1946).<sup>11</sup> Watson also argues that Blunden's memoir was highly praised upon its release in 1928 by those who had not become disillusioned by the war. Blunden (successfully) and Graves (unsuccessfully), both tried to enlist in the British army during World War II. The war poets' memoirs are thus not an accurate representation of their views of the Great War, but rather they reflected the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (New York: Doubleday, 1957; New York: Anchor, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries 1915—1918*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber & Faber, 1983); *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1960); *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (New York: Coward, McCann, Inc., 1930).; *Sherston's Progress* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936); *The Old Century and Seven More Years* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986); *The Weald of Youth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986); *Siegfried's Journey* (London: Faber & Faber, 1946).

disillusionment of post-war Britain, which was facing one of the most severe economic downturns in history.

Niall Ferguson's 1998 *The Pity of War* employs a counterfactual methodology to place all of the blames imaginable at the feet of the British High Command. Ferguson argues that if Britain remained on the sidelines, then Germany would have won the war. The victorious Germans then would have formed a prototype version of the European Union. Economically, this German dominated proto-European Union was a danger to Britain's economic influence in Europe. Ferguson argues this was a short-sighted miscalculation on the part of Herbert Asquith's government. A victorious Germany would have nudged Britain out as the economic power house on the Continent, but the war would have left Britain's colonial acquisitions intact. In Ferguson's view, the only danger a German peace would have created was a France dominated by radical nationalists. With the World economy not reeling from the effects of war in the 1920s and 30s and a *Kaiserreich* Germany acting as a counterbalance on the Continent to a still Tsarist Russia, "Adolf Hitler could have eked out his life as a mediocre postcard painter and a fulfilled old soldier ... [a]nd Lenin could have carried on his splenetic scribbling in Zurich, forever waiting for capitalism to collapse – and forever disappointed."<sup>12</sup> Since Britain intervened the war was unnecessarily dragged on until 1918, when the United States presence in the conflict began to be felt. The intervention of the United States, according to Ferguson, was a disaster for the British. In their inability to conclude the war, Britain lost their financial and military prestige, which began the slow decline of the British Empire. Ferguson focuses on the statistic of German soldiers surrendering in mass

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<sup>12</sup> Ferguson, 460.



numbers, unseen in any year but 1918, as a sign that the German soldier had become so disillusioned by the sheer number of Americans that they abandoned hope.

A curious counterfactual left untouched by Ferguson is: “What would have happened in the Great War if America remained on the sidelines?” One statistic Ferguson overlooks is the number of soldiers that were deployed in 1918. The German army actually held a numerical *superiority* over the combined armies of the Entente. Also, Germany had divisions still waiting to be transferred from the Eastern Front, which collapsed in 1917. This numerical superiority, even when considering the number of Americans arriving in France each month, would have favored the Germans until the summer of 1919. Thus, in Ferguson’s argument, a numerically superior army, which had just made the greatest gains in the course of the war, was flushed with a rash of desertions to an opposing army that was numerically inferior. If the Germans were cognizant of the fact that they were indeed losing the war, this may explain their desertion rates. But Captain Ernst Jünger wrote in 1920 he was unaware Germany was losing the war until September, 1918.<sup>13</sup> For other German soldiers, most famously Corporal Adolf Hitler, they never acknowledged the fact that Germany was losing the war by the end of 1918.<sup>14</sup> Ferguson’s major contribution to the literature is his painstaking use of the battlefield statistics for 1918. Ferguson argued that the German army was decisively defeated on the battlefield, which was far more significant than unrest on the German home front causing the war to end, although he credits the thought of an ever increasing American military as

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<sup>13</sup> Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofman (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 255.

<sup>14</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 231; 275.

the cause of disillusionment, rather than serious military setback. Thus for Ferguson the “donkeys” extend beyond British High Command to White Hall. The British Command is still donkeys because their attacks proved ineffectual until 1918 when German soldiers were ready to surrender en masse.

Those who wrote grand narratives of the Great War, such as Sir Martin Gilbert’s 1994 *The First World War*, John Keegan’s 1998 *The First World War*, Hew Strachan’s 2003 *The First World War* and Norman Stone’s 2007 *World War One* agree, in varying degrees, on a set of circumstances, explored below, which secured victory to the Entente. Furthermore, although they vary on the competency of the British High Command and the overall High Command personified by Field Marshal Foch, each author credits extenuating circumstances, not conduct on the field or shifting strategy, to be the key to victory in 1918.

The first of the arguments that is included in all of the grand narratives was the technological and logistical edge the Entente possessed during the final year of the war. On the logistical side, the argument is that with the vast amount of production available to the Entente, the Germans could not produce enough equipment to keep pace with their foes. Furthermore, the German government was hesitant to allow women into the factories to replace men bound for the Front, thus at the critical juncture in the war Germany no longer had the men to supply the frontlines and the factories producing the tools of war. The problem with this argument, however, stems from the other side of logistics, namely the supply of goods in addition to their procurement. It is true that the Entente’s production capability far outstripped Imperial Germany’s, but a key problem began with transporting goods manufactured in America to the other members of the

Entente. As woefully prepared for the war as America was in 1917, the state of her merchant marine was even worse. With literally hundreds of thousands of American soldiers to transfer across the Atlantic, the American merchant marine could not keep pace. The American government attempted to ship both material and men across the ocean.<sup>15</sup> In trying to do both it did neither well. It was not until the height of the Ludendorff offensives in 1918 that an agreement was reached which facilitated the flow of American men and material. The German army was already in retreat by the time shipments from America became stabilized.<sup>16</sup>

The grand narratives also agree that in most areas of armaments the Entente possessed a technological edge over the Allies. This was most felt in the area of tank warfare. By war's end, the Entente had produced thousands of tanks in contrast to the slightly more than fifty produced by Imperial Germany. Germany used more captured British tanks than it ever produced for itself. Although the British and French tanks were excellent weapons, they were useless in the defense. In the case of a retreat they possessed a serious danger to the retreating army by clogging up already heavily congested road and rail heads. Thus, the role of tanks during the Ludendorff offensives

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<sup>15</sup> Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), 537; Robert H. Zieger, *Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Lanham: Bowman and Littlefield, 2001), 57—58. Although America produced the majority of Entente war material, Britain and France still remained strong producers. In transporting soldiers across the Atlantic, the United States could not equip its soldiers with American goods. Thus, the doughboy in France fought with an American rifle, a British uniform, a combination of British and French tanks, and French airplanes.

<sup>16</sup>Ziegler, 114.

proved to be a moot point. Tanks played an insignificant role in checking the German advances in the spring of 1918.<sup>17</sup>

The other weapon of war of which the Entente possessed a numerical superiority was airplanes. Since their introduction in 1915, combat aircraft had become more essential to military planners. The first to seriously study the use of air power in warfare was Italian pilot and theorist Giulio Douhet.<sup>18</sup> Douhet argued that air warfare grew during the Great War, but was not at a stage to provide a decisive blow. Advances in aircraft design could possibly be more decisive role, but they had not reached that point by the time he revised his seminal work, *The Command of the Air*, in 1927. Also, as Tami Davis Biddle argues in *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* the role of tactical bombing specifically and air combat in general was too much in the experimental phase to change the tide of battle.<sup>19</sup> The bombers in the Great War carried a remarkably small payload and their bombs could only be dropped within a narrow radius from their home airfields. Air warfare existed as more of a potential in the minds of military planners rather than an effective weapon on the battlefield.

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The First World War* (New York: Owl Books, 1994), 407; Strachan, 316.

<sup>18</sup> Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (Washington: Office of Air Force History, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Tami Davis Biddle, *Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

The other circumstance which the grand narratives claim led to the defeat of Germany is the collapse of the German home front.<sup>20</sup> While the situation in Berlin deteriorated rapidly during 1918, political extremists from the political right and left took to the streets. However, as Berlin reached a state of chaos by November 1918, the only branch of the Imperial Germany military to crack was the Navy. The sailors of the German navy revolted in November, after the war was already decided, when they were ordered on a suicide run into the North Sea. Their rebellion did not spread to the army. Furthermore, as Dietrich Orlow argued the anti-war political groups were never well organized or very effective.<sup>21</sup> The German army was not betrayed from the home front, as fellow National Socialists Erich von Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler claimed, but were defeated on the battlefield and had ceased to be an effective fighting force.<sup>22</sup> As Roger Chickering argued, German morale on the home front and within the army persisted until the serious major defeats suffered by the German army occurred in September, which was when Jünger also believed that the war was over.<sup>23</sup>

The view that attempts to bridge the gap between the lions led by donkey approach and the apologists for Sir Douglas Haig is personified by Tim Travers and Andy Simpson. Tim Travers' *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front & the Emergence of Modern War 1900-1918*, examines the evolution of the British army

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<sup>20</sup> Gilbert 393—6; Stone 180—1.

<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Orlow, *A History of Modern Germany 1871 to Present*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 90—95.

<sup>22</sup> Hitler, 231.; Erich Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story, August 1914-November 1918*, vol. II. (Lexington: Bibliolife, 2001), 428—30.

<sup>23</sup> Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 182—187.

from the Victorian era. The British Expeditionary Force landed in Belgium in 1914 prepared to fight a grand battle that was akin to the Napoleonic wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Promotion within the British army relied more heavily upon birth rather than merit. However, after disastrous showings in the early years of the war, the British army reconstituted itself as a modern fighting force, with merit becoming essential to promotion, new tactics such as small attack forces suited to anti-trench warfare, and a reorganization of the British command structure as key. Travers does bridge the gap by arguing that when appointed head of the BEF Douglas Haig was disastrously prepared to fight a 19<sup>th</sup> century style war. However, once in command Haig adapted to the nuances of the Great War and by 1918 had abandoned his teachings in favor of 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare involving combined air, ground, and armor attacks. Andy Simpson's *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18* singles out the reorganization of the command structure, specifically at the Corps level, as being the key to British victory in 1918. The problem is that many of these reforms had already been carried out by both Britain's ally and enemy. France had used small bands of anti-trench units as early as 1916. German storm troopers were the essential tactic of the initial success of the Ludendorff offensives. Furthermore, both armies had undergone similar reorganizations of the corps level in 1917. The problem with Simpson's argument is that although the expansion of the Corps did have a great impact on the British army, the British were the last to enact these reforms, thus it is not unique to the British. In fact due to timing, the British adaptation of the Corps was a hindrance, not a help as Simpson argues, because Britain's enemies had already undergone these procedures and it would

take time to implement these changes, which was the exact timeframe that the Germans attacked.

On the other extreme view of the British command is Paddy Griffith's *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: the British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18*. Griffith argues that the British were solely responsible for the success of the Entente in the Great War. He argues that after the disastrous showing during the Somme offensive, the British army transformed itself into a modern army equipped with modern weapons, such as the airplane and tank, and using tactics such as small band anti-trench warfare. Winston Churchill shared this point of view, writing in 1931 that "It was galling to the British Headquarters ... to find the credit ascribed by their own Cabinet and public opinion to Marshal Foch."<sup>24</sup> Griffith further contends that Sir Douglas Haig, alone amongst Entente commanders, was able to enact the reforms necessary for victory. Once the reforms were completed, the German army was steamrolled by the British, which forced the Germans to capitulate. However, Griffith fails to mention that most of Sir Douglas Haig's reforms were the last to be performed by an army on the Western Front. Both French and German soldiers had adapted to the small anti-trench tactics. Tanks and airplanes were useless to the Entente for the majority of 1918 and much of the offensive action in 1918 stretched well beyond the British sector.

Griffith does argue that one problem with the historiography of the Great War is the highly nationalistic literature which attempts to describe the reason for victory. For example, the Canadian authors focus on their nations fight at Vimy Ridge proving to be the key battle that broke Germans resistance or Americans using the Meuse-Argonne as

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<sup>24</sup> Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (New York: Free Press), 819.

the key battle of the war. Although the focus for Griffith was on the former members of the British Empire taking credit for victory, he also directed his ire at the Americans for claiming that their army proved decisive in the outcome of the war. In this, Griffith is in fact correct. Robert H. Zieger argues in *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* that American capital and manpower entered the fray at a key juncture, enabling the Entente to achieve victory. Taking that argument a step further, Alan Axelrod in *Miracle at Belleau Wood: The Birth of the Modern U.S. Marine Corps* and Edward G. Lengel in *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse Argonne, 1918* argue that the actions of the United States Marine Corps and army respectively proved the decisive factor in ultimate victory.

The problem with highly nationalistic historiography, to use Griffith's term, is that it discounts the roles of the rest of the Entente in achieving final victory. In 1918, no one army could have stood against the German army. The American army was fresh, but it was largely untrained and unsupplied. The British and the French armies were experiencing a crisis in manpower levels. New soldiers could not fill the ranks of the dead fast enough. While Germany also faced a crisis in manpower, it held a vast reserve of seasoned soldiers on the Eastern Front.

The only way Germany could be defeated in 1918 was if the Entente fought as a united entity, which in the middle of 1918 is exactly what they finally did. After halting the initial German advance in 1914, the Entente fought as a loose coalition. An attack by one major power was launched with the other power attacking for the purpose of relieving pressure or to distract the Germany army from the real attack. In 1917 this system collapsed. The British attack on the city of Arras during the Battle of Chemin des



Dames threatened the main French assault. The pressure on the French was too severe and the army collapsed. This loose coalition broke at the worst moment. Its little successes had resulted because Germany fought a defensive war on the Western Front after Verdun. After winning the war on the Eastern Front, Germany returned to offensive action. For the Entente to survive in 1918, it had to abandon the loose coalition system that had been in place since 1914. The creation of a Supreme Commander was created out of necessity because it had become obvious to the British and French army commanders that their system was a failure. A Supreme Commander could coordinate the war strategy in a manner that produced results because he could use the Entente armies to the best of their abilities by fighting as a united Front. The Entente's system of attacking as subterfuge or as a means to relieve pressure was abandoned in favor of a unified army that attacked the overwhelming German army with the purpose of bleeding it white. Once the German advance was stopped, then the united Entente armies could bring their technological superiority to bare and defeat the German army.

German diplomacy in 1918 is important because of the dire consequences it had on German strategy. The inability to quickly end the peace talks for the Eastern Front prevented not only the Germans from adding more troops to their role, but also prevented the Austro-Hungarians and the Ottomans from relieving troops in the east and shoring up the Italian and Middle Eastern Fronts respectively. Once the Austro-Hungarians and the Ottomans folded, Germany could not remain in the war alone. Unlike the Entente which realized they were stronger fighting as one, the Triple Alliance never reconciled their strategies. The Entente learned the failures of loose coalition warfare in 1918. The Triple

Alliance fought the Great War in 1918 the way that the Entente had tried to fight in the previous three years of the war and it proved to be their undoing.

## The Disasters of 1917

On the Western Front at the start of 1917, General Robert Nivelle was promoted Commander in Chief of the French army. His tenacious fighting spirit at the Battle of Verdun in 1916 was deemed a key ingredient to restore the *élan* of the French army, which was still reeling from the massive number of casualties it had suffered at Verdun. As a Protestant, he was also a politically attractive candidate in the era of the Third French Republic where the French army and Catholicism were viewed as harboring anti-republican sentiment and posing as grave dangers to the Republic.<sup>25</sup> It was these politics which prevented Henri-Philippe Pétain and Ferdinand Foch from being named Commander in Chief.

Although dubbed the “Hero of Verdun,” Nivelle’s spotlight of glory was really a diversion from Henri-Philippe Pétain. Pétain was an advocate of defensive warfare which was anathema to the French General Staff. Since the disaster at Sedan during the Franco-Prussian War, the French General Staff held a near mythical regard for staying on the attack.<sup>26</sup> The obsession with attacking also placed greater emphasis on the role of *élan*

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Neiberg, *Foch* (Washington: Brassey’s Inc., 2003), 3--17.

<sup>26</sup> Ian Ousby, *The Road to Verdun* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003). Ousby chronicles the stunted growth which the French military experienced following the Franco-Prussian War. In the forty years following the defeat of the French army at Sedan, France’s military estimates assumed the French army could never match the Germans in material or manpower, but could counterbalance this deficiency with an overwhelming spirit. The French relied heavily upon the idea of *élan*, the spirit of attack, because in the warrior spirit of the attack “la[id]...the recovery from humiliation. Furthermore, as Michael Neiberg chronicles in his biography of Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the French military high command became distrustful of the loyalties of French soldiers from the annexed regions of Alsace and Lorraine. This included Alsatians such as wrongfully accused spy Alfred Dreyfus and Lorrainers, such as Foch.

and the bayonet charge rather than rifle proficiency and group tactics. In the General Staff's view, Pétain's successful defense of Verdun was due to Nivelle's offensive strikes against the German army, when the reality was the reverse. Pétain's stringent defense of Verdun wore down the opposing German army to the point where they could not resist Nivelle's attack.<sup>27</sup>

Another man well acquainted with the impact of politics impeding military advancement was General Ferdinand Foch. While Nivelle was a practicing Protestant, Foch was an ardent and strict Catholic. Always wary of domestic threats, the secular Third Republic held such strident Catholicism as an incubator of insurrection. Foch had kept his politics closely to his vest and avoided wading into political minefields in his early career, such as the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs<sup>28</sup>. However, although a well regarded instructor at France's premier military school, *École Supérieure de Guerre*, Foch's career moved along at a snail's pace. In 1907 a frustrated Foch met with then Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, who revealed to Foch that the French military had maintained a file on him and tagged him as a potential threat to the Republic and accused

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<sup>27</sup> Alistair Horne, *Price of Glory* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 320.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Sowerwine, *France Since 1870* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 60—2; 67—73. General Georges Boulanger was a popular General that was dispatched to the backwaters of France after he was suspected by the Republic of holding monarchist tendencies. Boulanger entered politics and became a rallying factor for monarchists. In 1889 he won election in Paris and his supporters anticipated a coup d'état. This failed to materialize when Boulanger lost his nerve. After his suicide two years later, Boulangism quickly faded from the French political scene. Captain Alfred Dreyfus was an Alsatian Jew accused of spying for Germany in 1894. Anti-Semitism was behind the original accusation, but the affair quickly became a battle between republicans and monarchists as republicans defended Dreyfus and the monarchists refusing to accuse the army of anything untoward, even as massive amounts of evidence cleared the Captain of all wrong doing. Although Dreyfus' conviction was upheld in 1899, the staggering amount of evidence forced the French government to grant him a third trial in 1906. He was cleared of all charges and promoted to major.

him of grade manipulation while teaching at the *École Supérieure de Guerre*.<sup>29</sup> It is unknown what Foch said to Clemenceau, but after the meeting promotions began to come his way, although he was still viewed in general with suspicion by his fellow officers. As a fighting general, Foch had the unbelievable deficiency of being deemed too aggressive in an army that obsessed over attack and *élan*. During the Battle of the Marne in 1914, while in command of the Ninth Army, Foch outran his support and his forces were almost surrounded and destroyed by German troops. In the heat of battle Foch sent the immortal dispatch, “My center is giving way, my right is in retreat. Situation excellent. I attack.”<sup>30</sup> After the battle, Foch was removed from field command because, even by the French warrior code of *élan*, the casualties sustained by the forces under his command during the First Battle of the Marne were deemed too severe. He was tasked by then Commander in Chief Joseph Joffre to serve as an intermediary between Joffre and his British counterpart Sir John French. A little more than a month into the war and French and Joffre were barely on speaking terms. In September 1914, with Foch operating as a strategic liaison, the British and French armies demonstrated at least a semblance of working together.<sup>31</sup> Foch’s diplomatic skills and belief in inter-strategic warfare proved invaluable. He was one of the first to realize the potential for a strong coalition striking in unison. For the first month of the Great War, the British Expeditionary Force and the French army operated independently with a total lack of Entente cooperation, but Foch’s actions were cementing his strategic beliefs that led to the salvation of his country four years later.

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<sup>29</sup> Neiberg, 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 17—29.

Once the position of Supreme Commander was created in 1918, Foch was the logical choice to fill it because he understood the potential of a strong coalition.

Foch's previous role as an instructor at the *École Supérieure de Guerre* served him well as a liaison. He spent his career analyzing the failures of the French offensives of the Franco-Prussian war. Although a proponent of the attack, he disagreed with the widespread belief in the offensive at all costs. He believed an attack was dependent on a successful coordination of all available resources, unlike the infantry centered belief in *élan*. This contrasted sharply with Robert Nivelle. Thrust into the spotlight in March of 1917, Nivelle wasted little time making the cocktail and reception circuits. At these gatherings, he was more than willing to boast about his designs for an upcoming French offensive. These stories quickly made their way to the German lines. German troops began preparing defense in depth for an impending French attack. Nivelle's plan called for a British diversionary attack on the city of Arras. This attack, in Nivelle's mind, should pull enough German troops northward to stop the British attack allowing the French army to tear through the then depleted German defenders in the French sector, advancing some six miles on the first day. According to Nivelle's plan, if the attack was overwhelming enough, then French troops should have an open path to Berlin.<sup>32</sup>

British General Douglas Haig had barely survived with his command intact at the end of 1916. Although he was popular with the British press and Cabinet, he was intensely disliked by the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. Haig had proposed a British summer offensive in the British held Belgium sector of Ypres. He recognized that the British army needed time to recover from the Somme offensive of 1916 and the army

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<sup>32</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 322—4; Strachan, 242—8; Gilbert, 323.

was not ready for a full assault. Furthermore, Haig had a growing fascination with a British invented super weapon that possessed the real possibility of winning the war on the Western Front: the tank. However, the tank was still in the early stages of production and would not be available in large quantities to be deployed on the Western Front until late summer 1917, at the earliest. Lloyd George promptly vetoed Haig's plan. He even went two steps further in undermining Haig's command. First, he urged Haig to subordinate his army to Nivelle's command. Second, he placed political capital on the success of Nivelle's offensive by publicly expressing confidence that the French were on the verge of winning the war with minimal support from the British forces on the Western Front. Consequently, Lloyd George believed the best role for Britain in ultimate victory was to support offensives away from France and Belgium. He therefore urged Haig to relinquish units to be sent to the Middle East and Italy.<sup>33</sup> Haig, and by extension the British army, was trapped in a no-win situation of political machinations and inter-Entente rivalries. Lloyd George's dislike for Haig came from the Prime Minister's utter lack of faith in him as a military commander because of the amount of casualties incurred in all of Haig's battles. For Douglas Haig, the dislike of David Lloyd George was personal. Haig was personally loyal to the former British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and believed Lloyd George to be an unnecessary micromanager.<sup>34</sup> These factors only metastasized once the Nivelle offensive began.

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<sup>33</sup> Lyn Macdonald, *They Called It Passchendaele* (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 178—179.

<sup>34</sup> David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936), 339—340; Douglas Haig, *War Diaries and Letters*, eds. Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), 259—261.

With German defenders waiting for an impending attack in the French sector, the British diversionary attack was the perfect surprise attack. The diversion quickly became a rout. On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1917, the British overran Arras and captured the strategic vantage point of Vimy ridge. On his own initiative, Haig fell victim to “mission creep” and convinced himself that the limited diversionary attack had evolved into a breakthrough attack which had punched a hole in the German lines. Without consulting Nivelle, Haig began to divert the British army to plow through the gap created at Arras. He ordered the cavalry, still the offensive weapon of choice for mobile warfare, to move to the front lines and await their chance to exploit the evolving military success. Haig’s initiative infuriated Nivelle. By moving the cavalry up from the rear, the British army was clogging roads deemed by Nivelle to be vital to French logistics.<sup>35</sup> Nivelle was so angry he refused to speak to Haig and halted all inter-Entente coordination.<sup>36</sup> Nivelle’s plan had always been questionable. Overwhelming force as the basis for a breakthrough had failed every time it had been tried. When Nivelle’s temper turned the French attack into an insular proposition, he signed the death warrant for his career.

An ardent follower of the cult of his own greatness, Nivelle had spent the weeks preceding his offensive boasting about the predicted gains the French army could make

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<sup>35</sup> As Paddy Griffith argues in *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, the First World War saw the British army transform from a force centered around tactics popular in the Napoleonic War to a modern fighting force. The one area where this transformation failed was in the overestimation of the abilities of the cavalry. Until 1918, all battle plans designed by the British envisioned a break out which would allow the cavalry to take over the attack from the infantry. The nature of trench warfare rendered the cavalry useless. Indeed, in an ironic twist, the only successful cavalry charge on the Western Front came in late 1917 at the Battle of Cambrai, in which British tanks, not the infantry, cleared the path for mounted units.

<sup>36</sup> Gilbert, 121; Strachan, 244—5; Keegan, 325—6.



on a day by day basis. Once he perceived his plan to have been undermined by Haig, Nivelle launched the French attack with an eye firmly placed on restoring his own glory. Immediately, the plan was an utter disaster for France. The Germans had been waiting since the start of 1917 for a French offensive and were well prepared for the attack. Nivelle's audacious claims of six mile gains each day crashed against the reality of miniscule gains coupled with a grave number of French casualties. His subordinate generals began to suggest to Nivelle that his plan had failed. Nivelle dismissed their advice and ordered a greater number of French troops to join the fray. It is spectacular how poorly Nivelle interpreted the situation. Even his most conservative estimates for daily gains were substantially higher than the reality on the ground. Worse, the number of casualties the French army was already racking up was depleting its manpower at an alarming rate. The offensive should have been called off, but Nivelle was overwhelmed and his deficiencies as a commander had been laid bare.<sup>37</sup> He resolved to keep fighting at the Battle of Chemin des Dames with another overwhelming assault and in doing so he created the best possibility to win the war on the Western Front in 1917 – for the Germans.<sup>38</sup> The French army was locked in a stalemate and over the course of the Nivelle offensive sustained more than half a million casualties, compared to German casualties of slightly over a hundred and sixty thousand.

The morale amongst the rank and file French troops, the *poilu*, had been shattered. They had pinned their hopes on Nivelle's boisterous claims and they perceived the

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<sup>37</sup> Hunt Tooley, *The Western Front* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 177—187.

<sup>38</sup> As a final insult to Nivelle, the Battle of Chemin des Dames is always referred to as the Nivelle Offensive as a reminder of who was the architect for the disasters the French army would suffer in 1917.

massive failure of the offensive from the onset. Nivelle's continued pursuit of the offensive convinced many French troops their lives were worthless to their commander. Something had to give and in the presence of continued demands to renew the offensive it did; the French army mutinied in May. French soldiers sat in their trenches and refused all commands to attack. After years of suffering poor conditions with only the rarest opportunity to enjoy leave, the French army was now placed under the command of a man they increasingly viewed as disconnected from the reality they faced. Men simply laid down their rifles and refused to keep fighting until their demands of more leave time, less offensive fighting, and better pay were met. The French mutiny was the greatest secret of the war. The Germans never learned the size and extent of the revolt. Haig was aware of the mutiny, but the French failed to inform him of the extent of the collapse of the French army with half of the French army participating in the mutiny. The Germans were content to reinforce their defensive positions.<sup>39</sup> If they had attacked the French sector at this point, they would have faced a disorganized and leaderless collection of soldiers, not a functioning army.

This crisis forced a change in the French government and General Staff's thought processes. *Élan* had finally been discredited. Nivelle was quickly sacked and replaced by General Philippe Pétain. Pétain ordered an end to the Nivelle offensive and promised his troops that they would not take any offensive action for the rest of 1917. He reorganized the army's handling of leave, greatly increasing the availability and duration of trips away from the front. He also reduced the suggested execution numbers of the mutineers against the wishes of many French generals who demanded a large scale purge of the

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<sup>39</sup> Stone, 140.

French army of elements they deemed subversive.<sup>40</sup> Pétain kept the French army on the field, but as a fighting force they were spent. He was content to let the British continue attacking the Germans while the French remained on the defensive and waited for their new ally, the United States, to enter the war.

Nivelle's failure was due in no small part to the lack of strategic unity between the British and French armies. Once the battle began, Haig and Nivelle pursued their own objectives. This was standard operating procedure as an Entente attack was the responsibility of one nation with an Entente power attacking at the same time at an area that was advantageous for them. Although the attacks coincided, they were not coordinated, meaning that one attack had the real possibility to provide little or no aid to the main offensive. This led to continual stalemate across the Western Front for the Entente.

Although the Germans remained in the dark over the extent of the French mutiny, Douglas Haig was well aware that he had to act quickly to divert the Germans' attention.<sup>41</sup> He had been granted a political reprieve after Lloyd George's open support for Nivelle had proved calamitous. Haig raced to implement his original design to attack German positions in the Ypres sector. By advancing his timeline as far forward as he could, Haig denied himself the use of adequate air and tank support, which earlier had been so precious to him.<sup>42</sup> However, the greatest unforeseen circumstance which doomed

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<sup>40</sup> Strachan, 246—8.

<sup>41</sup> Since Haig was never informed of the extent of the French mutiny, his plans for the Battle of Third Ypres relied upon French involvement. He assumed the mutiny was an isolated incident, and not as widespread as it was in reality.

<sup>42</sup> Macdonald, 142; 178—9.

Haig's operation was a brief collaboration between the Imperial German army and the weather.

Almost as soon as the Third Battle of Ypres began, unseasonable rains turned the battlefield into a quagmire. Artillery became worthless as the guns became stuck in the mud, shells sank in the mud without exploding, and ammunition resupply became dependent on pack animals. As concern began to mount within the British ranks over the success of the operation, Haig began to drastically scale back the attack's objectives. He focused on the strategically worthless village of Passchendaele, which gave the Third Battle of Ypres its popular name.<sup>43</sup> As the campaign wore down, Haig unleashed his tank corps at Cambrai. The early attacks by the tanks yielded significant gains, but Haig was not fast enough to consolidate the tank corps' gains. German counterattacks destroyed or disabled a significant portion of Britain's tanks. Passchendaele was successful in the fact that it relieved enormous pressure from the French. Although the tank had proven only moderately successful at Cambrai, its actions convinced Haig that the tank was a weapon that could significantly alter the way the war was fought on the ground. Yet, Passchendaele had cost the British army far too many casualties. At nearly a half of a million, casualty numbers mirrored the failed Somme offensive. The possibility of a manpower shortage in the British army was now a reality.

Further compounding Haig's position was that the failure at Passchendaele had enabled Lloyd George to regain enough political capital to reassert his doubts about Haig's ability. Lloyd George was able to convince the war cabinet to divert troops from

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<sup>43</sup> Passchendaele lacked strategic rail lines and was situated on flat ground which made it difficult to defend. The village was quickly overwhelmed by the Germans in 1918.

Haig's command to other Fronts. The unintended consequence of the depletion of troops was that it forced the army to restructure its units, which other armies had done as early as 1915.<sup>44</sup> The most important of these reorganizations was the formation of a corps command that separated the General Staff from the divisional level. The corps began to assume the minutia of command, such as establishing communications and coordinating grand strategy into specific maneuvers for the divisions. This reorganization also streamlined British divisions, enabling them to become more flexible as they did not have to deal with the duties that the corps was assuming. Britain's reorganization briefly proved to be a disaster in 1918 when the gutted British Fifth Army, used to resupply the First through Fourth armies, was holding the exact position the Germans attacked in 1918, but the process proved invaluable by the end of 1918. For now Haig, like Pétain, had to wait on the Americans.

The British and French offensives of 1917 brought the war no closer to a conclusion. At the heart of their failure was the lack of strategic coordination. The Nivelle Offensive began to collapse when British interests diverged from the French battle plan. Without coordinating with Nivelle, Haig transformed his limited diversionary attack into an attempt to break the German lines. His mission creep is one of the gravest sins of coalition warfare: he failed to inform his ally of his intention. Instead of coordinating with Haig on the new realities on the ground, Nivelle attempted to attack the Germans according to the original plan, which was impossible because the British had radically transformed the dynamic of the battle. The lack of a Supreme Command was

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<sup>44</sup> Simpson, *Directing Operations*.

most critical at this juncture because the Entente armies had no one to step in and mediate the crisis. Instead, Haig and Nivelle's egos conspired to doom the offensive.

The British attack at Third Ypres was nothing more than a reaction to the failure of the Nivelle Offensive. In planning for Third Ypres, Haig, never knowing the extent of the French mutiny, assumed he would have the support of the French army for the attack. For their part, the French were vague in their promises to Haig. Again, this was a grave crisis which a Supreme Commander could have remedied. Haig ordered the British army to attack the Germans at Ypres in what he assumed was a coalition attack, but Haig's most important ally, the French, were misleading him on the shape of their army. With this fact in mind, it was impossible for the Third Battle of Ypres to be anything but a disaster. The lack of grand strategic planning between the Entente generals was creating a killing ground for their men.

## America Goes To War

Germany's worst political mistake for the totality of the war up to 1917 had been the way it had handled the relationship with the United States, the largest non-combatant in the world. Americans were hesitant to enter a European affair and large numbers of Irish and German immigrants even favored supporting the Allied Powers. The American government of President Woodrow Wilson was content to keep America on the sidelines and pursue a "business as usual" approach to Europe. Wilson believed that the war was simply a European affair and that the United States had little to gain from intervention. This reflected American public opinion. However, Germany began to draw America's ire when it leaned on its submarine fleet of *unterseeboots*, or U-boats, to break the ever tightening British blockade. When German u-boats sank a collection of passenger liners, most particularly the Cunard liner *Lusitania* off the Irish coast in May 1915, taking the lives of one hundred twenty-eight Americans, America successfully applied enough diplomatic pressure to force the Imperial German government to quit its U-boat campaign.<sup>45</sup> Yet, a few days after the sinking of RMS *Lusitania*, Woodrow Wilson reaffirmed America's commitment to neutrality. Speaking in Philadelphia on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, President Wilson said: "There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight; there is such a thing as a nation being so right that it does not need to convince others by force that it is right."<sup>46</sup> Germany continued to antagonize, however, spending 1916

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<sup>45</sup> John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 288—302; Robert Ziegler, 27—57.

<sup>46</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Too Proud to Fight" (lecture, Convention Hall, Philadelphia, PA, May 10, 1915).

sanctioning terrorist raids and sabotage in America.<sup>47</sup> The most successful strike was against a munitions factory in New York City. The raids increased American distrust and hostility toward Germany, even as the American public was turning out in large numbers to re-elect President Wilson, whose most effective campaign slogan had been “He kept us out of war.” Germany also monitored a festering situation on the American-Mexican border. After the Mexican bandit Poncho Villa led a successful attack in New Mexico, an American expeditionary force led by General John J. Pershing pursued him across the Mexican border. This quickly became a disaster. Pershing’s invasion galvanized Mexican opinion against America and Villa became a hero. The government in Mexico City denounced Pershing’s invasion as a threat to their sovereignty and supported Villa’s attack on the American troops.<sup>48</sup> This situation was rapidly devolving into an embarrassment to the American government and the Germans perceived an opportunity.

In early 1917, German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann developed a plan to keep America out of the war in Europe. He composed a message to the Mexican government asking them to join the Allied Powers and declare war on the United States. In return, the Germans offered to support the Mexican annexation of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. The problem for Zimmermann and his eponymous telegram was that before it was ever received by a Mexican official it was intercepted and decoded by both the British and American governments. Wilson had the telegram turned over to the

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Koenig’s *The Fourth Horseman* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006) chronicles the story of the homegrown terrorist Anton Dilger, a microbiologist and German spy that attempted to unleash an anthrax attack on Washington DC. Dilger sought and was denied sanction by the German government. They preferred to use their own agents as saboteurs against military installations in the United States.

<sup>48</sup> Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 101—4.



American press, where it was obviously front page news. Zimmermann, in a remarkably bad political move, took credit for writing the telegram without a hint of regret. In response, the American government cut diplomatic ties with Imperial Germany.<sup>49</sup> The battle for the seas and the Zimmermann telegram were pushing America toward war, but it was unable to bring any relief to the German economy.

As 1917 progressed, the British blockade was beginning to hurt the German economy. The German fleet had been trapped in Wilhelmshaven since the inconclusive Battle of Jutland in 1915. The battle was inconclusive in the sense that it brought a Western Front style stalemate to the naval war. Although the Germans were confined to Wilhelmshaven for the duration of the war, Jutland was long perceived by the British to be a loss. As the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on the Seventh of June, 1915 that the death of then British War Minister Horatio Herbert Kitchener was “the second shock the country has sustained within a week. The other was when the newspapers appeared ...with the first intelligence of the naval battle in the North sea in the form of a list of the ships lost, with virtually no intimation that there was any compensation in the way of enemy losses.”<sup>50</sup> The British did incur more losses at the Battle of Jutland. Even though the German fleet was trapped in Wilhelmshaven, the British never again tried to destroy the German fleet. Winston Churchill attributed this to a predisposition of over cautiousness on the part of the Admiralty.<sup>51</sup> The British navy could not leave the North

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<sup>49</sup> Strachan, 227; Gilbert, 308.

<sup>50</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1915.

<sup>51</sup> Churchill, 651.

Atlantic because Jutland had failed to destroy the German navy, thus the Royal Navy was unable to sail to another theater to assist in operations around the World.

The German General Staff decided to gamble on the end of the war. It was apparent to them that Germany was on the verge of total victory in the East. They also realized that possible American intervention in the war could take up to two years to be fully implemented. If Germany could act fast enough, then their U-boat fleet could cripple Britain in a counter-blockade, relieving the pressure of the British blockade, and defeat Russia and overwhelm the Western Front with recently relieved troops from the East before American troops ever set foot in Europe. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1917, Germany therefore announced the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare. The United States Congress issued a declaration of War against Germany.<sup>52</sup> While this action heartened the Allies, Germany's estimation of America's military capacity was fairly accurate. America had one of the smallest armies of any major nation and to train and supply an ever expanding American army was going to take years. While Haig and Pétain were content to wait on the Americans, Germany realized the war was turning in their favor. However, the debacle with America created the first in a series of diplomatic miscues for Germany which, taken together, seriously hurt their increasing strategic power. The German plan to win the war before America entered by using unrestricted submarine warfare was a failure, but it was only one of many the German government committed before the war was over. The problem for the German military was that although the war was turning in their favor, their diplomatic corps under Arthur Zimmermann had just created a grave error. Over confident of the situation in France, Zimmermann is directly responsible for

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<sup>52</sup> Rodney Carlisle, *Sovereignty at Sea: U.S. Merchant Ships and American Entry into World War I* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009), 141—60.

bringing America into the war. Sharing this direct blame is Ludendorff and Hindenburg, who by this time had assumed more control of the German government from the Kaiser. Under their direction, the German navy resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, believing that by the time America entered the war it would be too late to save the Entente. The antagonism of America into war was the first in a pattern of poor German diplomacy, which was a deterrent to all the Allied Powers.

### The Ancillary Fronts in 1917

Germany's key ally, Austria-Hungary, was militarily ending 1917 in the best possible position. Its war with Serbia, which had spread to World War, was over. Serbia had been utterly crushed. As Russia collapsed in the East, Austrian troops advanced into Romania. The Italian army had been decimated at Caporetto and like the French army, was going into revolt. Since Austria-Hungary had no quarrel with Britain or France and had exceeded all of its war goals, and was ready to end the war. Kaiser Karl's government approached the German government with such a proposal. The German government balked. The only peace it viewed as successful was a German peace. Austria-Hungary was rapidly becoming disillusioned with their role in the Allied Powers.<sup>53</sup> The war had pushed the Empire to the breaking point, but in its estimation it had succeeded in all of its goals. Behind Germany's back, Karl sent peace feelers out to Britain and France. Germany's disregard for its ally was tearing apart the Allied Powers. German leaders, such as Ludendorff, realized the Austro-Hungarian Empire was reaching a breaking point.<sup>54</sup>

On the surface, Germany's other major ally the Ottoman Empire was also in dire straits. British troops had entered Jerusalem and Baghdad. Perceiving the British army to be on the side of history, and handsomely rewarded with British gold, the Arab tribesman had formed an alliance with Great Britain. However, Enver Pasha, military domo of the Ottoman Empire, was willing to cede the Arab held lands of the Ottoman Empire. He

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<sup>53</sup> Stone, 115—150.

<sup>54</sup> Ludendorff, 161.

looked east, to the historically Turkish lands dominated by Russia. As the British and Arab forces moved through the Holy Land, Turkish troops seized control of large swaths of Russian territory in the hopes of creating a massive Turkish empire. Ottoman Turkey also received an unlikely diplomatic triumph when after seizing power in November of 1917 the Bolsheviks in Russia revealed the Western Powers goals in the Middle East to be far from the noble enterprise they claimed. The gravest diplomatic wound to the Entente was the revelation of Franco-British designs for the Middle East. While promising their Arab allies a homeland, the British and the French were anxious to supplant Ottoman Rule in the Middle East with their own.<sup>55</sup> The Turks were far from defeated by the start of 1918.

Russia was the most massive disaster for the Entente in 1917. Ignoring the stream of diplomatic pressure from Britain and France, Tsar Nikolai II appointed himself the head of the Russian army. The British and the French were rightly worried that with Nikolai at the head of the Russian army, he had personalized the military in the context that any setback in the Russian military's fortune would be laid at the feet of the Tsar. With another round of defeats suffered by the Russian army, the legitimacy of the Tsar was the biggest casualty. Four hundred years of Romanov rule was coming to an end. With the abdication of Nikolai in March 1917, the Russian parliament, the Duma, was now in control of Russia, led by Aleksandr Kerensky. Kerensky doomed this March revolution by deciding to keep Russia in the war. When the subsequent Russian offensive collapsed, discontent in Russia grew to a breaking point. The army appeared to have gone rogue and turned toward Petrograd to suppress discontent. Kerensky needed an armed

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<sup>55</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Owl Books, 1989), 305—15.

force to protect the citizens of Petrograd from their own army. The only political force in Russia with enough armed members was the Bolsheviks. Kerensky had to appeal to the group that was most vocal in their opposition to a democratic Russia to save Petrograd. Kerensky appealed to the highest ranking Bolshevik in Russia, Leon Trotsky, to release the armed Bolsheviks, the Red Guard, to preserve the Revolution. The infant democracy in Russia had just asked armed Communists to save their government.<sup>56</sup>

While Kerensky was in effect placing himself at the mercy of the Bolsheviks, the Germans put in place a plan to knock Russia from the war. They brokered a deal with the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin to move him from exile in Switzerland home to Russia. Lenin and the Germans both understood that the Russian people desired peace more than anything. Once back in Russia, Lenin worked to undermine the few strands of legitimacy left with Kerensky's government. In November 1917, the Bolsheviks toppled the Kerensky's government and seized power.

As 1917 closed, victory appeared farther than ever from the Entente. The French army had ceased to be an effective fighting force. Britain's attack at Ypres had proven to be a disastrous waste of men and material. Manpower reserves in both Britain and France were running low, as conscription drained men to the front. Italy's army was in shambles. Britain was losing hundreds of thousands of tons of shipping each month to German U-boats. Worst of all, Russia was knocked out of the war and forty-four new divisions of Germany's Eastern army were scheduled to arrive on the Western Front in time for the German Spring Offensive, which was going to greatly shift the balance of power on the Western Front. Ludendorff wrote that the spring of 1918 appeared to be the perfect

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<sup>56</sup> Strachan, 238—42.

opportunity to strike because “[n]umerically we had never been so strong in comparison with our enemies.”<sup>57</sup> The only problem Germany could create was if the peace treaty with Russia took too long to finalize, thus delaying the troops from arriving by the scheduled March start date. The Entente knew that America was on its way, but they quickly began to realize that an American army was more of an idea than a reality. In any case, American intervention was possibly going to arrive too late to matter. Finally, the Entente’s diplomatic secrets had been revealed to be far from noble, disheartening their own troops and briefly encouraging the soldiers of the Allied Powers. 1918 was going to begin with a remarkably inauspicious start.

The German government had the chance to cripple the Entente at the end of 1917. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had conquered the Balkans, the Entente’s role in the Middle East was revealed to be little more than an imperialist design, and Russia had been knocked out of the war. Yet, Germany misread the situation. They refused to consider Austria-Hungary’s peace plan and forced them to stay in the war. Germany took a paternalistic approach to the Ottoman Empire and was willing to use their ally whenever it suited German aims. For the Ottomans, this was a very thin line from outright imperialism. With Russia, Germany only had to secure a favorable peace and then it could remove its occupation force in time to attack the Entente before America reached Europe. The actions on the Eastern Front were to have an essential role to play in the outcome of the war on the Western Front.

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<sup>57</sup> Ludendorff, 158.

## German Diplomacy in 1918

At the beginning of 1918, Germany realized it had its best opportunity to win the war. The British army was licking its wounds in Belgium, the French sector was unusually quiet, and the U-boat campaign was more successful than the planners had predicted. Russia and Romania were sitting down at the peace table. America was probably not going to make a difference until 1919. Finally, Austria-Hungary had secured the Balkans and they were preventing the Italians from crossing the Alps. With a massive number of troops soon to be repositioned from Russia to France, Germany's military dynamic duo, Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, were ready to strike the final blow. Ludendorff readied the German army for a spring offensive, codenamed *Michael* in honor of Germany's patron Saint. Before the first shot was ever fired, Germany's diplomatic corps, failing to learn from its mistakes in handling America, was going to cripple Ludendorff's offensive. Their remarkably amateurish approach to foreign policy bought the Entente valuable time.

In 1917, the German Reichstag published its list of war aims. This list was meant to reinforce Germany's claim that it had been fighting a defensive war. The key claim in its war aims was that it sought no annexations or change to the antebellum status quo. This claim was sharply contrasted by the Bolsheviks' publishing of the Entente's war aims that blatantly sought colonial expansion and a restructuring of Europe. German politicians had two chances in 1918 to enact the 1917 Reichstag resolution and they failed to secure enough votes. This attempt by the German government to win the propaganda campaign was doomed because Germany was constructing peace treaties



which firmly put to bed the claim that they were fighting a defensive war. Germany's true war aims were revealed to be an establishment of a new world order with the creation of German dominated Europe. German victory over Romania and Russia was in fact a demand for territory and treasure meant to enrich the *Kaiserreich*.

Germany needed to conclude a peace with Russia as soon as possible to release troops from the Eastern Front if they were to be used in Ludendorff's spring offensive. Germany's actions at the negotiating table at Brest-Litovsk proved to be a serious hindrance to its military operations.<sup>58</sup> Germany planned to strip Russia of large swaths of its natural resources, territory, and population. Upon being presented with the terms, the head of the Russian delegation, Leon Trotsky, walked out. Trotsky wrote: "[W]e cannot fight at present, but we have enough of revolutionary courage to tell you that we will never of our own free will sign the terms which you are writing with your sword across the bodies of the living peoples."<sup>59</sup> Germany responded by resuming the war. As German troops marched deeper into Russia, the nations of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Courland, and Ukraine broke from Russia. Trotsky argued that "The only real serious obstacle in the path of the German advance was the huge distances."<sup>60</sup> Each of their governments was pro-German. As German troops neared Petrograd, Lenin ordered Trotsky to sign the treaty. He wrote: "The absolute necessity of signing, at the given moment, an annexationist and unbelievably harsh peace treaty with Germany is due

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<sup>58</sup> Ludendorff, 167.

<sup>59</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution to Brest-Litovsk* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1919), 141—2.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

primarily to the fact that we have no army and cannot defend ourselves.”<sup>61</sup> He reasoned that German gains would be short-lived once the world revolution began. Even though Russia was a defeated enemy, Germany’s heavy-handed attitude toward them backfired. Trotsky’s initial refusal to sign the treaty meant that Germany could not pull its Eastern troops to fight on the Western Front. The delay between Trotsky’s abandonment of the peace talks and Lenin’s decision to accept the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk bought the Entente time. Also, Lenin’s overriding of Trotsky at Brest-Litovsk signaled to the Germans that the Russians were so desperate for peace that they would have accepted any treaty. The German delegation misread the Bolshevik response as a bluff, not the desperate act that it really was. Germany had to leave troops on the Eastern Front to ensure Russian compliance and the establishment of satellite nations carved out of Russia that would become German allies.<sup>62</sup> Germany’s informal empire in the east masked the fact that it was a grave diplomatic miscalculation which helped doom the offenses already underway on the Western Front. This narrow-sighted approach carried over to Romania. This had a direct impact on German strategy on the Western Front because the Ludendorff offensive had to be launched while a substantial number of German troops remained to secure the Eastern Front.

With the collapse of Romania, Germany revealed its peace plan. Romania was to become a rump state with territory being distributed to Bulgaria and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This was essentially worthless, since Germany intended to dominate its allies after the war. Germany laid bare its intention to economically dominate Europe.

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<sup>61</sup> Vladimir Lenin, *The Revolutionary Phrase* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), 48.

<sup>62</sup> Gilbert, 385—91.

Germany assumed the rights to Romanian oil until at least 2017, appropriated the Danube as a German waterway, and split Romanian agricultural yields between itself and Austria-Hungary. The economies of the Allied Powers were tied together with a German customs union.<sup>63</sup> The façade of a negotiated peace without annexation and a return to the pre-war economic status quo was torn away. Germany was going to use the weapon of economics to control the Continent.

The political blunderings at Brest-Litovsk and Romania had another unintended consequence for Germany: it provided a timely morale boost for the Entente. The lofty idealism that greeted the outbreak of war, such as Britain's claim that it was fighting to defend the existence of "Poor Little Belgium," had lost its entire luster by 1918. As the war entered its fourth year, the rhetoric of 1914 was a distant memory. An implication of the 1917 French mutiny was that France was fighting to defend itself and nothing more. Italy entered the war on the side of the Allies to expand its holdings in the Tyrol, but by 1918 it was reduced to fighting a war of survival. Amongst soldiers on the Western Front it was suspected, and confirmed by the Bolsheviks after seizing power, that the war in other theaters was an attempt by the Entente to expand their influence across the globe. The American army, yet to enter combat, still displayed the optimism that had vanished from the Western Front. America brought to France liberal ideas of a "world safe for democracy," national self-determination and liberation, all articulated by President Wilson.<sup>64</sup> Once Germany violated these liberal principles, Entente troops adopted the

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<sup>63</sup> Strachan, 269—71.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 303.

American ideals that they were fighting for a better world. Although never fully restored, the optimism of 1914 had a renaissance in 1918.

## The 1918 Spring Offensives

In March of 1918, the British 5<sup>th</sup> Army, led by Hubert Gough, was ordered to relieve French troops holding the old Somme battlefield. At Third Ypres Gough had proved to be a remarkable poor and indecisive general. His career had received a brief reprieve from General Haig, a close friend of Gough's. Yet Gough found himself as a general in charge of a rapidly dwindling army. After Third Ypres, the British army launched a reorganizing procedure to address structural deficiencies in its organization. The French and Germans had taken similar steps in 1916. Troops were being pulled from Gough's command to fill these gaps. The fighting capability of 5<sup>th</sup> Army was rapidly deteriorating. The defense positions of the Somme battlefield had fallen into grave disrepair while in the French army's care. Haig ordered Gough to restore the defenses, but Gough decided to dither and wait for the end of troop reorganization. No one within the British command had realized that a massive abscess was forming on the Western Front. The Somme battlefield was becoming the most poorly defended section of the Western Front. If the Germans attacked this one point on the line the Entente was faced with the potential for a disaster like none seen since 1914.<sup>65</sup> On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, 1918, the Germans did just that.

A thick, low laying fog covered the Somme battlefield that morning. British troops were unprepared when German artillery batteries opened fire. On the heels of the barrage, small bands of German storm troopers raced across No Man's Land and bypassed British defense strongholds. Their attacks behind British lines led to the spread

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew Wiest, *The Western Front 1917—1918* (London: Amber Books, 2008), 127—145.

of mass confusion amongst the 5<sup>th</sup> Army. They were woefully unprepared when the bulk of the German army facing them launched their attack. Gough panicked and ordered full retreat. As soon as Gough lost his nerve, control over the 5<sup>th</sup> Army was lost. Without an effective commander, the depleted 5<sup>th</sup> Army inadvertently turned their retreat into an all out rout. Haig quickly stepped in and sacked Gough. He could also clearly see that the Germans were forming a wedge between the French and British armies. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, Haig wrote: "I at once asked Pétain if he meant to abandon my right flank. He nodded assent...In my opinion, our Army's existence in France depends on keeping the British and French armies united."<sup>66</sup> He was invited by Foch, now Chief of the General Staff, to attend a meeting at Doullens on the 26th with Pétain.<sup>67</sup> This meeting drastically changed the course of the war. In one swift move, the Entente armies became the most efficient fighting force in the war. The desperation created by the German attacks forced the French and British generals to check their egos and serve under a unified command. Foch had become increasingly convinced of the necessity of a unified command. In London on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, before the German attack, he stressed that "the [Entente's] battle might be seriously compromised, under existing conditions, because unity of view and of action would be lacking."<sup>68</sup> Desperation forced a total strategic overhaul of the Entente.

In addition to Foch, Haig, and Pétain other attendees at Doullens included the French President and Premier, Raymond Poincaré and Georges Clemenceau, and the

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<sup>66</sup> Haig, 392.

<sup>67</sup> Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch*, trans. Bentley Mott (New York: Doubleday, 1931), 256.

<sup>68</sup> Foch, 252.

British Chief of Staff, Henry Wilson. After a fair share of bickering between Haig and Pétain, the true purpose of the meeting was unveiled. The Entente leaders had reached a decision that General Foch had displayed the best grasp of the situation in Europe. It was proposed that he be named Supreme Commander, in charge of both the British and French armies. For years, Haig had refused to entertain the notion of subjugating British troops to French command. With the situation on the ground being desperate, however he finally acquiesced. George Dewar argued that the selection was the perfect selection for Haig, because he had worked well with Foch in the early phases of the war, when Foch was liaison between the French and British armies.<sup>69</sup> Foch immediately ordered Pétain to dispatch French troops to aid the British.<sup>70</sup> For the first time, the Entente armies were fighting as a unified force. David Lloyd George wrote: “I have always felt that we are losing value and efficiency in the [Entente] Armies through lack of coordination and concentration.”<sup>71</sup> As Supreme Commander, Foch could focus on grand strategy, a process which had been sorely lacking since 1914. The move immediately began to bear fruit.

With the French army now actively harassing German gains, Ludendorff ordered his armies to stop pressing a gap between the British and French armies and try to recapture Arras and Vimy ridge. From their strategic location on Vimy ridge, British troops were able to repulse the German advance. A similar German attack on the strategic rail center at Amiens was repulsed by British and Australian troops. The Offensive had

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<sup>69</sup> George A.B. Dewar and Lt. Col. J.H. Boraston, *Sir Douglas Haig's Command, December 19, 1915 to November 11, 1918*, vol. II (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 133—45.

<sup>70</sup> Keegan, 402—03.

<sup>71</sup> Charles Francis Horne, ed. *Source Records of the Great War*, vol. VI (USA: National Alumni, 1923), 102—3.

lost its steam and Ludendorff canceled further action on April 5<sup>th</sup>. Two days earlier, the Americans endorsed Foch's appointment to Supreme Commander at a conference in Beauvais, France.<sup>72</sup> General Pershing was intrigued by the possibility of the formation of a Supreme Commander. During the Beauvais conference he fully endorsed the elevation of General Foch with a speech that stated,

The principle of unity of command is undoubtedly the correct one for the [Entente] to follow. I do not believe that its possible to have unity of action without a supreme commander ... Each commander-in-chief is interested in his own army, and cannot get the other commander's point of view or a grasp of the problem as a whole. I am in favor of a supreme commander and believe that the success of the [Entente's] cause depends upon it ... I am in favor of conferring the supreme command upon General Foch.<sup>73</sup>

General Pershing was confident enough in Foch that he allowed the American army, which at that point had refused all suggestions to subordinate American command to a foreign general, to serve within French command. Foch recalled General Bliss, the American liaison in France saying: "We have come over here to get ourselves killed; if you want to use us, what are you waiting for?"<sup>74</sup>

Although the Allies were granted a breather, the results of Operation *Michael* were daunting. The German army had overrun forty miles of territory. At the time, it was the largest single gain of land since 1914.<sup>75</sup> The British and French armies had come precariously close to being separated. Yet, the number of German casualties, around two hundred and forty thousand, was mounting and key among them were the number of elite

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<sup>72</sup> Foch, 260.

<sup>73</sup> John J. Pershing, *My Experience in the World War* vol.2 (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: TAB, 1989), 363.

<sup>74</sup> Foch, 270.

<sup>75</sup> Wiest, 145—52.



German storm troopers being lost. Entente cooperation had allowed the British and French armies to apply emergency tourniquets to areas where the Germans were creating breakthroughs. Working together bought them needed time to regroup. At this point in the war, time was the most valuable asset.

In surveying the results of Operation *Michael*, Ludendorff realized the British had made a grave tactical error in the defense of Amiens. In defending the vital rail head, Britain pulled troops from the defense of the Channel ports. The area was held by the Portuguese army, who was overdue to be recalled from the front lines. They were exhausted and running low on supplies. Ludendorff prepared to attack this sector. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, Operation *Georgette* was launched. The Germans first hit the Portuguese army, which was easily routed. German troops raced toward the Channel ports in the hope of cutting the British army off from resupply. As Foch gathered troops for a counterattack, the British were pushed back to a defensive position fifteen miles from the ports. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, Haig issued a special order of the day to all ranks of the British army. The message famously concluded:

There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment.<sup>76</sup>

Haig's "backs to the wall" message worked beautifully. The British army tenaciously fought to defend the Channel ports. This enabled Foch time to launch a counterattack with British, French, and American troops. Ludendorff called off *Georgette* on the 29<sup>th</sup> of

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<sup>76</sup> Haig, 402.

April.<sup>77</sup> Again, the German offensive had broken down once the combined Entente armies had attacked, but manpower shortages were becoming critical on both sides.

The last obstacle to total inter-Entente unity was the American army. Before General Pershing left for France, President Wilson urged him to maintain the American army as a separate fighting force. Upon his arrival in France in 1917, Pershing was continuously pressured by British and French representatives to subordinate the American army to their command. Pershing spent a year in France defending the sovereignty of the American army. He was well too aware that the American army was not battle ready. To ensure the maximum number of American troops arriving in France each month, the troops arrived bereft of equipment. American “doughboys” were hastily equipped with a combination of British and French weapons, uniforms, tanks, and airplanes. Pershing’s only compromise was to allow black combat troops to be transferred to French command. As a former commander of the black cavalry unit named the Buffalo Soldiers, Pershing was well aware that American combat regulations prevented black and white soldiers from engaging in combat together. The Beauvais conference was the first step in reconciling the American and other Entente views on the role of American troops. Haig and Pétain wanted the American troops to serve as replacements to the British and French armies. Pershing wanted a separate American army that would serve under Foch like their British and French counterparts. With manpower levels reaching a crisis, Foch called for an Entente conference on the first of May at Abbeville France. The Entente finally accepted American claims of an independent Army. In return, Pershing promised the Allies that the American army would

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<sup>77</sup> Wiest, 152—6.

engage with every battle ready unit whenever the Germans launched their next offensive.<sup>78</sup> Also present at the meeting was Italian Premier Vittorio Orlando.<sup>79</sup> He too endorsed Foch as Supreme Commander and placed the Italian army at his disposal.<sup>80</sup> The combined Entente armies were now wholly unified. Germany and her allies now faced a unified coalition that stretched from Belgium to the Italian Alps. The door to victory was slamming shut on Ludendorff.

Ludendorff decided to shift objectives again. His plan for his new offensive, *Blücher-Yorck*, sought to once again drive a wedge between the British and French armies. He hoped the offensive would knock either out of the war before the American Army was ready to fight, but unbeknownst to him, the Americans had been ready for three weeks. Ludendorff still possessed the ability to auger the weakest point of the Entente line to direct his attack. This is exactly where *Blücher-Yorck* struck on May 27<sup>th</sup>. The line between Soissons and Rheims was held by a handful of British divisions pulled from the front lines after suffering massive casualties in the previous offensives. To support the British, the French Sixth Army was on their flank. The Sixth Army, under the command of the remarkably inept General Denis Duchêne, fell victim to their commander's panic. He needed to move his army, but Duchene could not decide where to order his troops, giving the Germans time to fix their artillery. German artillery tore the

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<sup>78</sup> Ziegler, 92—7.

<sup>79</sup> Although part of the Central Powers at the outbreak of the war, Italy remained a neutral until 1915. Public opinion was sharply against an alliance with Austria-Hungary because the Austro-Hungarians had been Italy's largest military rival since unification. Italy had laid claim to the Tyrol, controlled by Austria-Hungary, since unification. The Entente lured Italy into the war with a guarantee of control over Tyrol after the war.

<sup>80</sup> Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front 1915—1919* (New York: Basic Books), 331.

massed Sixth Army to pieces. The Germans opened a hole on the Soissons-Rheims Front, which allowed them to march virtually unhindered to the River Marne. Germany had advanced to the area of its furthest extent in 1914. The massive German artillery piece dubbed the “Paris Gun” was brought forward. It could literally lob shells into the upper stratosphere before falling on the city of Paris.<sup>81</sup> With Paris under bombardment, citizens began to flee the city and the French government contemplated taking the same action. *Blucher-Yorck* was finally halted after the United States Army, aided by French colonial troops, launched a counterattack at Château-Thierry. The first major action taken by American troops in the Great War was a success. Château-Thierry silenced doubts being whispered about the effectiveness of the American soldiers. Foch was impressed enough by the actions of the American Army that he ordered the United States Marine Corps to reinforce faltering French troops near Belleau Wood.<sup>82</sup> Foch’s faith in the Corps was well rewarded.

Ludendorff made a grave tactical mistake at Belleau Wood. He determined that the French retreat signaled the Entente abandonment of the sector. Unprepared for an attack, German positions were quickly overrun by the Marines. Thousands of German prisoners of war were taken. Marine action at Belleau Wood prevented the reinforcement of the advance on the Marne and essentially ended *Blücher-Yorck*.<sup>83</sup> The Battle of Belleau Wood significantly emphasized the success of the role of a Supreme Commander. In the previous years of war, Ludendorff’s initial estimation of the battle

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<sup>81</sup> Wiest, 156.

<sup>82</sup> Foch, 325.

<sup>83</sup> Alan Axelrod, *Miracle at Belleau Wood: The Birth of the Modern U.S. Marine Corps* (Guilford, CT: Lyon, 2007), 156—162.

would have been correct. The retreating French forces did signify the abandonment of that area of the front. However, with the leadership of the Supreme Commander, French or other Entente troops reaching their breaking point could quickly be pulled from the front and replaced by a fresh contingent from another nation. Ludendorff's failure to grasp this concept was creating a disaster for the German army.

While the Marines were still clearing out German positions in Belleau Wood, Ludendorff again shifted tactics. He planned another assault, codenamed *Gneisenau*, to weaken defenses near the Channel ports and secure the railhead at Amiens. German troops, beginning to sense a coming disaster, began to surrender themselves to the Allies in increasing numbers. Some prisoners of war revealed the details of *Gneisenau* to their captors. Ludendorff's luck in attacking the weakest points in the Entente lines had run out. When the German army attacked across the Matz River near Compiègne stiff resistance broke the German attack. *Gneisenau* was a total failure. The German army was spent. Its best troops had been depleted throughout the Spring Offensives.<sup>84</sup> The Entente armies had bent, but they never broke. Foch quipped: "A great orchestra always takes a certain time to put its instruments in tune; and when it is composed of diverse elements, a tuning fork sometimes has to be employed to bring them into unison."<sup>85</sup> The unified fighting force of the Allies had proven successful on the defensive, but now Foch was ready to test their strength on the offensive.

With a Supreme Commander in place to coordinate grand strategy, the German Spring Offensives were launched against a completely different enemy. In 1916, the

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 215—225.

<sup>85</sup> Keegan, 409—12.

British aided the French at Verdun by launching a counter-offensive at the Somme, almost six months later. In 1917, in order to support the French army after the failed Nivelle Offensive, the British launched the Third Ypres Offensive, over three months later. Now Foch could pull Entente units of all nationalities from anywhere in Europe to respond to German attacks. Ludendorff lacked such an advantage. The war on the Western Front was solely the responsibility of the German army. Kaiser Karl was in the process of negotiating a peace with the British and the French and he knew that committing any troops against them was going to undo his peace feelers. Further, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was not at war with the United States.<sup>86</sup> They were content to wait out the war, but they were shackled to Germany and it was with Germany that their fate was going to be decided.

With the German offensives exhausted, Ludendorff's subordinates began to petition for a strategic withdrawal to more defensible positions. Ludendorff dismissed the pleas out of hand. His inability to settle on a single strategy during the Spring Offensives meant that the German gains were a collection of unconsolidated gains down the length of the Western Front. In numerous places these gains formed an enfilade in which an attacking Entente force could rain fire on the Germans from three directions.

Ludendorff's continued pursuit of the offensive also wasted his best troops, leaving the lines to be guarded by reserve forces. His continued insistence on the attack also allowed the Allies time to stockpile offensive weapons which were ineffective in defense, such as tanks and airplanes<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Stone, 144—51.

<sup>87</sup> Strachan, 310—15.

### The Entente Counterattack

By the summer of 1918, the Entente stockpile of non-infantry weapons dwarfed German supplies. The British and French combined to produce 5800 heavy tanks in comparison to the twenty produced by Germany. Entente supremacy in shipping and manufacturing also allowed a well equipped American army to take the field by the summer of 1918. “Best case scenario” German estimates had predicted an American army of the size available in France would be impossible until 1919.<sup>88</sup> In this estimate, they were not alone. As Foch prepared to counterattack German positions in the summer of 1918, Entente governments were confident final victory was on hand, but not until 1919. This enraged Haig. On the cover of the British Military Policy 1918-1919, which described the war stretching into 1919, Haig scribbled “Words! Words! Words! Lots of words! And little else.”<sup>89</sup> The success of the Entente offensive was going to take almost everyone by surprise.

The first concern of the Entente armies was to relieve pressure placed upon Paris. As the German offensive was grinding to a halt near the River Marne, Pétain suggested a full offensive against them. Foch was planning for a later broad offensive and he vetoed Pétain’s plan. He suggested a limited counterattack conducted by the French and American armies. Pétain devised a bold plan in response to Foch’s idea. He abandoned the forward trench near the river. The Germans incorrectly perceived this move not as an abandonment of the defensive position, but rather a collapse in French resolve. They

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Haig, 434.

hastily launched an attack on the French line, bombarding the empty trenches. The subsequent waves of German soldiers charged into a trap. Once they reached the abandoned line of trenches, the French and Americans counterattacked. The surprise essentially routed the Germans and they began to pull back from the River Marne. Dubbed the Second Battle of the Marne, Pétain's strategy won a reprieve for the City of Paris. Once Paris was out of danger, Foch ordered Pétain to halt. Foch planned on using maneuvers such as the one Pétain engaged in to reverse all of the German gains.<sup>90</sup> Entente and German commanders had spent the war trying to force a large set piece battle to end the war. In this way, their military strategy was a throwback to the Napoleonic war.<sup>91</sup> In the modern setting of the Great War, this tactic failed time and again as the mobility of the war allowed defending armies to reinforce their lines and launch successful counterattacks, which nullified tactical gains. Foch's approach radically changed the dynamic. Limited offensives were quickly called off after a series of rapid gains. This gave the attackers the advantages as they were granted time to consolidate their gains. The Allies had learned the successful strategy for modern war. By fighting on a united battle strategy, establishing realistic military goals for each battle, and fortifying secure territory at the expense of a continuous advance the Entente was achieving victory.

Foch presented his new strategy to his Entente commanders on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July. Above all, he urged them to focus on very simple objectives in the upcoming Entente offensive. In addition to trying to force the opposing armies into a grand set-piece battle,

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<sup>90</sup> Wiest, 163—7.

<sup>91</sup> Travers, 86.



generals in the Great War tied their offensives into ambitious goals which were simply impossible for their armies to achieve. Overreach was consistently the most formidable foe for any general up to that point. Foch revealed that his plan also called for continuous pressure across the entire front. Once one Entente army had achieved its objective it was ordered to immediately stop and consolidate its gains. Their objectives were to be no further than the extent of their artillery support. While the Germans were recovering from the attack, another Entente army was ordered to hit the line with their attack. It was believed, correctly, that the Germans were prepared to defend their front everywhere, which would leave them unprepared and uncertain which attack was “the real one.” Ludendorff failed to comprehend until it was too late that they were all part of the real attack. This plan was essentially the death of the German army through a thousand cuts.<sup>92</sup> Foch found himself immediately surrounded by converts.

In a bold stroke, Foch discarded the military tactics which the Entente had used since 1914. Victory was never going to come on the heels of a grand battle. Foch changed the focus of the offensive into a series of small battles, which were far more damaging to the Allied Powers than the previous grand battles of the war. Haig and Pétain realized their armies were under tremendous strain and, with manpower levels falling in Britain and France; they could not risk another massive attack until at least 1919. For Pershing, Foch’s proposal was welcomed because it gave him more time to build the American military’s strength. Pershing was worried that he was overextending his forces after the rapid succession of Château Thierry, Belleau Wood, and the Second Battle of the Marne. A limited attack granted the Americans the perfect opportunity to blend its new combat

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<sup>92</sup> Foch, 331—43.

veterans with untested units. For all four men, the new strategy was a novelty. In a single move they were throwing off the military doctrine, which had remained unchanged since Napoleon. This was most dramatic for Foch, whose career at the *École Supérieure de Guerre* featured him as the most vocal proponent of the sustained attack.<sup>93</sup> Foch's greatest asset as Supreme Commander was his ability to adapt and learn from battle. He was not the same man at the Second Battle of the Marne as he had been in 1914 at the First. This keen ability contrasted with Ludendorff, whom in the midst of disaster, could not adapt to new strategies.

With inter-Entente agreement on the new conduct of the war in place, they were ready to take the fight to the Germans. The British were selected to be the first army to strike in the Entente offensives slated to begin in early August. Haig presented a plan to Foch to attack the new German lines near Amiens and secure the vital railhead. Since the *Gneisenau* Operation had focused on the Franco-American lines, the British army had gone the longest without fighting. This allowed Haig time to amass the airplanes and tanks denied him the previous year at Ypres. Foch gave the plan the green light, with the tentative start date of August 8<sup>th</sup>. The attack at Amiens was the first of the fatal cuts suffered by Germany. Haig's overwhelming superiority in non-infantry units crushed German resistance. Almost half of the German defenders surrendered to the British. Ludendorff realized he had doomed the German army. He dubbed the 8<sup>th</sup> of August as the "black day of the German army."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Neiberg, 77—82.

<sup>94</sup> Ludendorff, 326.

Privately, Ludendorff shielded German leaders, including Hindenburg, from the extent of the disaster facing Germany. On the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of August German leaders and representatives from the Austro-Hungarian Empire met in Spa, Belgium. Ludendorff went out his way to reassure the assembled leaders that the situation on the Western Front remained positive. The lone voice of reason came from Kaiser Wilhelm, now essentially a figurehead, who urged Germany's government to seek peace. The German foreign minister, Paul von Hintze, placed his faith in Ludendorff's public façade over his Kaiser. Von Hintze informed the Kaiser he was only willing to negotiate with the Allies after the next German success. He wanted to negotiate from a position of strength, because he concluded the only successful end to the war for Germany was to reassert its control over Alsace-Lorraine and add Belgium to the Fatherland. Without Ludendorff's real data on the extent of disaster facing the German army, von Hintze assured the Reichstag that total victory was at hand. Germany's real problem in prosecuting the war was coming to the surface. Ludendorff had become supreme warlord over the German government. His power now eclipsed the Kaiser and the Reichstag.<sup>95</sup> As a warlord, he was a poor choice. Unlike Foch, he lacked the ability to forgo his failed strategy and adapt to conditions on the ground. Foch's role as Supreme Commander allowed him to serve as a liaison between government and the military. Ludendorff was the head of the military and in essence the government also. His obstinacy was ruining the German army and furthermore was creating a political disaster for Germany and her allies.

At Spa, Kaiser Karl heartily endorsed Wilhelm's peace proposal. This was unsurprising since Karl had tried to establish peace feelers with the Entente for over a

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<sup>95</sup> Strachan, 315—20; Keegan, 412.

year. The coalition of nationalities which made up the Austro-Hungarian Empire was coming apart at the seams. As the Entente armies became a unified military front, they also became united in their political goals. With their war aims firmly set, they decided victory on the Western Front meant the Austro-Hungarian Empire was to be dismantled. Entente political leaders endorsed the creation of an independent Poland and Czechoslovakia. They directed their propaganda efforts to sew disunity from within the Empire. In an attempt to divert pressure from within the Empire, the Austro-Hungarian military launched another attack against the Italians, but were checked on the River Piave. Karl pleaded with von Hintze to negotiate, but von Hintze only assured him that total victory was at hand. Karl had had enough. He ordered his government to stop trying to establish secret negotiations with the Allies and begin open negotiations.<sup>96</sup> Germany's alliance with Austria-Hungary was finished. As the Entente came together, the Allied Powers were breaking apart. The Entente could focus on destroying each nation in turn without the threat of a unified front. At the moment when it was most essential for the Allied Powers to work together they moved toward divorce.

As the Allied Powers bickered, the Entente kept up the pressure. A brief moment of crisis swept the Entente command, however. Although Haig was surprised by the rapid success of Amiens, he ordered his troops to halt once they reached their extent of artillery support. Foch lost his head. He pushed Haig to continue the assault and attempt to force a breakthrough. Haig adhered to Foch's earlier plan for attack and was forced to talk Foch out of his new reckless plan. Once cooler heads prevailed, Foch turned to the Americans to launch their attack. The Americans were sent in to pinch close a salient bulging into

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<sup>96</sup> Gilbert, 451.

Entente lines near St. Mihiel. The Americans launched their attack on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September. Their timing could not have been better. The German military had decided that the salient at St. Mihiel was one of the most difficult areas to defend. The decision had been reached that the salient was to be abandoned. While the German defenders were preparing to move, the Americans launched their attack. Panic and confusion spread amongst the defenders. Their escape routes and defensive weapons were clogging the roads away from St. Mihiel. They were quickly overwhelmed by the American troops. In what was becoming a dangerous pattern for Germany, many of its soldiers surrendered *en masse*. The Entente armies were capturing more and more German soldiers willing to surrender. As 1918 progressed, this number increased exponentially.<sup>97</sup> The significance of the number of troops willing to lay down their arms and quit fighting is that it demonstrated the extent to which German morale was collapsing

With the St. Mihiel salient sealed, Foch moved the American army next to the French army near the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest. He was expanding the Entente attacks from pin prick attacks into more substantive gains. He planned for a pincer movement which would squeeze as much of the German army in France as possible. The Americans and the French were ordered to attack into the Argonne Forest by following the Meuse Valley. As Franco-American forces moved north in the Meuse Argonne offensive, the British were ordered to attack the German positions in the

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<sup>97</sup> Edward G Lengel, *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 50—3. As Niall Ferguson argues in *The Pity of War*, the key sign Germany was on the verge of defeat was the number of troops surrendering. Wounded soldiers could recover to the battlefield and, according to Ferguson, dead troops were not as demoralizing as troops willing to surrender. This is because the nature of trench warfare made it difficult for soldiers willing to take the risk in crossing No Man's Land to surrender. Thus, the number of surrenders corresponds to an increasing willingness on the part of the Germans to take that risk and surrender.

North.<sup>98</sup> The pincer pushed the German armies back to the Siegfried Line, the area from which they launched their attacks half a year earlier. In six months, the Entente had retaken all of their lost territory and the Germans were still in retreat.<sup>99</sup> The German army simply had no response to facing the entire coalition of the Entente's armies across the whole front. On September 29<sup>th</sup>, the Entente penetrated the Siegfried line.

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<sup>98</sup> Foch, 403—21.

<sup>99</sup> Strachan, 321—22.

## The Splintering of the Allied Powers

With the German army in retreat on the Western Front, Entente leaders agreed to apply pressure to Germany's allies in an attempt to isolate Germany. A multinational force comprising units from Britain, France, Serbia, Italy, and Greece had held a foothold in Salonika since 1916. The theater became irrelevant once the war on the Western Front was consumed by the battles of 1916. With the war now in their favor, the Entente jointly agreed to reopen the Salonika Front. Facing the Entente was the most ill-treated member of the Allied Powers: the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians had hoped to win concessions from Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, but the Germans refused to invite them to the peace negotiations. With the fall of Romania, Bulgaria was hopeful it could secure the area of Dobrudja, but Germany gave it to Austro-Hungary. As Bulgaria and its army starved, Germany appropriated Bulgarian food supplies for its army on the Western Front. For Bulgaria, the war should have been over by 1916. Its main war aim, removing the threat posed to it by Serbia and Romania, had been achieved by then. Now the Bulgarians were forced to fight for German objectives. When the multinational force launched their attack on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, their Bulgarian counterparts were, thanks to the Germans, ill supplied and demoralized. Entente troops raced into Serbia and Bulgaria in a mobile war not seen on the Western Front. The Bulgarian government in vain pleaded for assistance from Germany. With Germany's refusal to aid Bulgaria their fate was sealed. Two weeks to the day after the Entente launched their attack from Salonika Bulgaria capitulated. Bulgaria's role to Germany was less of an ally and more of a territory to be dominated. After Germany had taken what it needed from Bulgaria, its usefulness steadily declined.

When Bulgaria faced its gravest crisis, Germany watched from the sidelines. This sent a clear signal that Germany's allies were disposable if they conflicted with German self-preservation. Suspicion grew amongst the Allied Powers as the fortune of war abandoned them.<sup>100</sup>

Leaders in Germany by now had slowly realized that they were on the irreversible path to defeat. Hoping to gain favor with the Entente in future negotiations, von Hintze revealed a plan to reform the German government. As domestic unrest gripped the country, von Hintze believed the people could be co-opted by moving Germany toward a constitutional monarchy, with true power being yielded by the Reichstag. He also proposed a liberalization of the franchise laws. In his military headquarters, Ludendorff, the real power in Germany, was in no position to weigh in. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, Ludendorff suffered a nervous breakdown. He fell to the floor in a series of convulsions and foaming at the mouth. Once he regained his senses he announced the truth to everyone for the first time: Germany had lost the war. The next day, as Entente troops crossed the Siegfried line, he urged an assembled war council to accept peace with the Entente on the basis of Wilson's Fourteen Points. The urgency of the meeting was coupled with the announcement that Bulgaria had quit the Allied Powers and surrendered to the Entente. Germany's allies fought the Great War in isolation. The military strategists of the Allied Powers viewed each front, with the exception of the Western and Eastern Fronts, as a separate military sector possessing no impact on another front. The Entente viewed the separate fronts as a means to isolate Germany before crushing her from all sides. Germany's inability to unite her allies created a hazard it did not

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<sup>100</sup> Strachan, 317—8.



appreciate until the fall of Bulgaria. Bulgaria's capitulation was the end of the Allied Powers. Diplomatic relations between Vienna and Berlin were at a nadir as Austro-Hungary latched onto self-preservation, even at the expense of Germany.<sup>101</sup> Germany had tried to dominate her allies, not cooperate with them. As the tide of war turned, Germany found itself standing alone.

With the collapse of Bulgaria, the Entente broke out from the Salonika Front. British and French troops diverged. The French marched toward Vienna and the British approached Constantinople. Germany's final partner in the Allied Powers, the Ottoman Empire, was under threat of invasion. In the closing years of the war, the Ottoman Empire led by Enver Pasha had engaged in a bold gamble to reinvigorate the empire. Pasha decided to forge a new Ottoman Empire in the Turkish regions once under Russian dominance. The Turks had been granted an unexpected reprieve by Germany's Spring Offensives. Although the British Egyptian Expeditionary Force under the command of General Edmund Allenby had captured Jerusalem in the waning days of 1917, progress in the Holy Land was blunted as troops were transferred from Allenby's command to shore up units in France. As T. E. Lawrence argued, the situation became dire as "the Turks from Amman might now have leisure to sweep ...back to Akaba."<sup>102</sup> Allenby reorganized the EEF with a collection of Indian, Australian, New Zealander, Ghurkas, the British Territorial Army, and Arab units under the command of Prince Faisal bin Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi. Allenby was a veteran of the Western Front and he sought to forge

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<sup>101</sup> David R. Woodward, *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 158—63.

<sup>102</sup> T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 526.

inter-allied cooperation between the British and the Arabs similar to the situation in France and Belgium between the British, French, and Americans. In another similarity to the Western Front, a non-unified force from the Allied Powers opposed Entente forces.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Strachan, 99—100.

## The Ottoman Empire Collapses

The Ottoman Empire had thrown their lot with the Allied Powers in November of 1914. The Germans had hoped that the Ottomans could divert British attention away from the Western Front to protect India. The Ottoman plan to cripple the British in India was to declare *jihad*. Sultan Mehmed V, a figurehead placed on the throne by the Young Turks in 1909, publically issued the call to *jihad* on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 1914.<sup>104</sup> The plan was a dismal failure. Muslim sepoys in the Indian army remained loyal to the British. Worse for the Ottoman Empire was the fact that the British were able to find a man willing to place a counterclaim on the Turkish call for Holy War: Hussein bin Ali, the Sharif of Mecca. Arabs loyal to the Sharif fought in conjunction with the British under the command of his son, Prince Feisal. Although the British dispatched the flamboyant and self-publishing T.E. Lawrence to serve as an advisor to the Arabs, the Germans placed little faith in their Muslim allies. They assumed direct control over the Ottoman forces. The German generals in charge displayed a propensity to disregard Ottoman lives and an overall disregard for the fighting effectiveness. This created a tenuous distrust between the troops in the field and their German overlords. Erich von Falkenhayn, onetime German Chief of Staff whose career had gone into a tailspin after the German disaster at Verdun, was placed in charge of the Ottoman army defending Palestine. He promptly failed to defend the city and as the Ottoman army retreated north through the Golan Heights he was sacked in favor of Otto Liman von Sanders, who ordered the Ottomans to construct defensive positions north of Palestine. Ludendorff was

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<sup>104</sup> Fromkin, 315—329.

attracted to Liman because he had successfully repulsed the failed Entente landings at Gallipoli. However, in his pre-war career Liman was tasked with reforming the Ottoman army along Western lines. He was convinced this task was virtually impossible and viewed the Ottoman leadership and army as inferior to Western forces. Liman refused to attack the Egyptian Expeditionary Force at the moment it was being stripped of its fighting effectiveness. He believed the Ottomans were only capable of fighting defensive maneuvers, so he ordered his troops to take defensive positions and wait for the attack.<sup>105</sup> His distrust for his ally wasted the best opportunity that the Allied Powers had in crippling Entente efforts in the Middle East. The Ottomans were realizing that their collective future was irrelevant to Germany's military leaders.

As the Entente threatened to invade Anatolia from the West, through Syria, and from Mesopotamia, the Ottoman army in the east turned from securing Turkish lands to capturing the oil-rich city of Baku, in modern day Azerbaijan. Aside from the Ottomans, the British and the Germans were also trying to secure Baku. At this point it was not the British army, but the Germans that threatened the Ottoman advance on Baku. In late June, Ottoman military command in the Caucasus, in the person of Halil Pasha, advised Enver Pasha to declare war on Germany if they secured the city first. Enver dismissed the advice and contacted his German and Austro-Hungarian allies with a plan to reorganize the Allied Powers into a unified fighting force; the exact step that the Entente Powers had devised in April. Whilst the Entente had picked the most able military leader to be Commander in Chief, the Allied Powers elected Kaiser Wilhelm to coordinate military operations, a tall order for a figurehead. Austria-Hungary and the Ottomans were

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<sup>105</sup> Strachan, 299.

excluded from the supreme war council advisory panel.<sup>106</sup> The Germans were totally in charge. Enver's bid to unify the Allied Powers in fact revealed the disunity of them. This did not reinvigorate the Allied Powers; rather it reinforced the decision amongst the Ottomans and Austria-Hungary to quit the war before they were overrun for no other reason than keeping Germany alive. As Otto Liman von Sanders sat on the defensive, Allenby finished his reorganization of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. On his right flank, Faisal's Arabs began clandestine raids on Ottoman supply lines and probing raids on Turkish defensive positions. The Ottoman defensive sector was further weakened by desertions from Arabs serving in the Ottoman army. With his right flank secured and the Ottomans defending against Faisal's skirmishes, Allenby launched a feint attack along the Jordan River valley. Liman took the bait and extended his defensive perimeter to stop both Faisal and the phantom attack. This left large swaths of his front ill-defended. Allenby used those weaknesses to maneuver the Ottomans into battle at Megiddo. Allenby's multinational force was supported by ANZAC cavalry and air units, with Faisal's Bedouin raiders flanking the Ottoman defenders. The Battle of Megiddo was a rout. The Ottoman army collapsed, opening the road to both Damascus and an invasion corridor into Anatolia. Allenby had placed his faith in Faisal's Arab force to preoccupy the Ottomans in his hour of need. The EEF had to rebuild after the crisis on the Western Front depleted his army of critical manpower. The Arabs bought him the time that he desperately wanted.<sup>107</sup> Opposing Allenby and Faisal was Otto Liman von Sanders, whose view of his Ottoman army was a self-fulfilling prophecy: he expected little of them, thus

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<sup>106</sup> Woodward, 190—200.

<sup>107</sup> James Barr, *Setting the Desert on Fire* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 287—97.

he limited their combat role; their failure only reinforced his insular view.<sup>108</sup> As on the Western Front, the Entente's ability to work together in a time of crisis was creating a series of victories, whilst the Germans lack of faith in their allies was engineering a series of defeats.

The collapse of Otto Liman von Sanders' army was the final nail in the coffin for Enver Pasha's pan-Turkish strategy. As the bulk of his army was engaged in securing Turkish territory from Russia, which had quit the war a year earlier and was not technically at war with the Ottomans, Enver left the defense of Constantinople to the Bulgarian army. With Bulgaria's capitulation, Constantinople was open to invasion from the British army breaking out from Salonika. The collapse of his army in the Middle East opened Constantinople up to attack from the east, as no army was left to oppose Allenby's EEF from invading Anatolia and turning westward. Left with nothing more to fight for than self-preservation, the Ottoman Empire sued for peace. Germany had just lost one of its two major allies, but in the view of German military strategy, the Ottomans had served their purpose. The Ottoman Empire's worth to Germany as an ally lay in their ability to distract the Tsar's army and prevent the Russians from reinforcing their defenses against German and Austro-Hungarian attacks. Constantinople's strategic position closed the Dardanelles to Entente shipping, preventing them from reinforcing Russia in the Black Sea. It also bottled up the Russian Black Sea fleet and prevented it from linking up with Entente naval forces. The final possible contribution from the Ottomans was their ability to harass Allenby's EEF to the point where they could not

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<sup>108</sup> Woodward, 172—75.

reinforce the Western Front.<sup>109</sup> It was Germany's own commander, Otto Liman von Sanders, who failed at this task. His lack of faith in his Ottoman allies convinced him to wait on the defensive and allowed the initiative to slip from his grasp. Even on the defensive, Liman was a disaster because his lack of trust in his Ottoman ally prevented a proper defensive posture. His army was overrun by a British force that was aware it was fighting a disorganized ally. This had a direct impact on the Western Front because the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was stripped to the minimum manpower level possible. With the Ottomans putting up almost no resistance in the Holy Land, British troops could be shifted from the Middle East to the Western Front. When the Ottoman Empire capitulated to the Allies, its value as an ally to Germany had run its course. While nominally part of an Allied Powers unified command, Enver Pasha had used his army to pursue his own ends. As the Great War drew to a close and the Allies consolidated their objectives, the Allied Powers' failure to unite and place self-interest as their paramount war aim was damning the Allied Powers' fighting effectiveness. As their fortunes in war continued to deteriorate, Germany's other significant ally, Austria-Hungary, also looked for an exit.

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<sup>109</sup> Thompson, 294—323.

## The Destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire

The Austro-Hungarian Empire is a microcosm for the failures of the Allied Powers. Tensions and long held grievances undermined the unity of the Empire. When the Empire was faced with setbacks it was unable to unify and instead sought to protect its various self-interests, even if those self-interests undermined the conduct of the war. In the early years of the war, Germans likened the alliance with Austria-Hungary to being shackled to a corpse. This was the exact view held by the German general staff. The German military's low estimation of its Austro-Hungarian counterpart led to a string of insults. To the then Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff, Conrad von Hötzendorf, Germany's military "assistance" appeared to be nothing more than a veiled attempt to secure territory for Germany at the expense of Austria-Hungary's expansionist goals. Conrad was so dismayed he privately referred to the Germans as Austria-Hungary's 'secret enemy.'<sup>110</sup> By 1918, the wounds had not healed; they had become infected.

As the British army turned east in the Salonika breakout, the French forces turned west to begin a march on Vienna. With the Austro-Hungarian army moving to defend their territory from the French invasion, the Italians prepared to launch their first offensive in almost a year. Foch considered the Italian Front vital to the success of the war. He described the object of the Italian Front as: "To shatter the resistance of the Austrians, or, in any case, to draw to their side a portion of the German forces which were then engaged on the French front."<sup>111</sup> After the disastrous Battle of Caporetto to

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<sup>110</sup> Keegan, 413—17.

<sup>111</sup> Foch, 348.



conclude 1917, the Italian army experienced a series of strikes and mutinies similar to the French army that same year. Also like the French experience, the Italians decided to halt all future offensive operations. Italy's version of Robert Nivelle, Luigi Cardona, was quickly sacked and replaced by the most able of all Italian commanders: Armando Diaz. Diaz mimicked Pétain's reorganizational tactics, vastly improving the lot of the average Italian soldier. His actions quickly restored morale and ended mutinies within the Italian army. His decision to end offensive actions by the Italian army for the time being meant that his soldiers could focus on neglected defensive positions. Diaz focused most of his defensive construction on the River Piave. This sector was a key failure for the Italians during the Battle of Caporetto.<sup>112</sup> This is precisely where the Austro-Hungarian army attacked in June of 1918.

The Battle of the Piave is a microcosm of the failure of the Austro-Hungarian army. The Empire's forces were led by the new Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff, Arthur Arz von Straußenburg. The army in the field was led by two army commanders that personified the personal and racial divisions that hampered the Austro-Hungarians throughout the war. One army group was led by Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, the one-time Austro-Hungarian Chief of Staff that had lobbied then Emperor Franz Josef more than anyone for war against Serbia. While Chief of Staff, he placed little faith in the commander of the Austro-Hungarian's Fifth Army commander, Svetozar Boroević, who was now his fellow army group commander. An ethnic Croat, Boroević had showed promise in early fighting on the Eastern Front. Once the Italians joined the Allies in 1915, he was given command of the Fifth Army, which was dispatched to check possible Italian

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<sup>112</sup> Thompson, 294—323.

advances. Fearing an Italian advance through Slovenia which could possibly threaten the Austro-Hungarian heartland, Conrad ordered Borojević to abandon Slovenia and reinforce the approaches to Vienna. Conrad trusted neither the Croat Borojević, nor the Fifth Army's, which possessed a large contingent of ethnic Slovenes to halt the Italians. Conrad's view was based on the ethnic rivalries in the Hapsburg Empire. He could not believe a Croat could stop the Italians. He also did not believe the Slovenes manning the 5<sup>th</sup> Army possessed loyalty to any cause other than Slovenia. Borojević bypassed Conrad and appealed directly to Emperor Franz Josef, who gave Borojević his consent to operate freely. This began a personal rivalry between Conrad and Borojević. Franz Josef's faith was well placed. Borojević defeated the Italians in all eleven Battles of Isonzo. With the defeat of the Italians at Caporetto and fresh reinforcements arriving daily from the Eastern Front, Chief of Staff Straußenburg turned to Borojević and Conrad to devise a plan to knock the Italians out of the war. Neither man could work together, thus they proposed conflicting plans to Straußenburg, which diminished the role of the other. Unable to decide between the two plans, Straußenburg decided to implement both. On the Italian Front, the failure of inter-Entente cooperation was replaced with the failure of intra-Entente cooperation. By splitting his forces, Straußenburg presented the Italians with their best chance for victory.<sup>113</sup> Unlike the Austro-Hungarians, the Italians were no longer fighting alone.

The Italians were aided by key reinforcements from their allies, including the Americans although they were technically not at war with Austria-Hungary. Diaz, now under Foch's command, ordered his army to stop and consolidate its gains, which

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<sup>113</sup> Thompson, 342—47.

mirrored the strategy proving successful on the Western Front. Diaz's multinational force was able to defeat Borojević and Conrad's splintered armies in turn. The inability of the Austro-Hungarian commanders to subordinate their egos and positions to a unified command doomed the Italian Front. While Haig, Pétain, Pershing, and Diaz were able to fight together under Foch's command, Borojević and Conrad's personal enmity was allowed to fester by Karl.<sup>114</sup>

The Italian army was in desperate need for a morale boost, which was exactly what the Battle of the Piave provided. The Austro-Hungarian defeat allowed Diaz to finish reorganizing the Italian army. With fresh troops arriving from Britain, France, and America the Italian army was ready to shift from the defensive to the offensive. Diaz waited until an opportunity to present itself to launch the attack and the increase in ethnic tensions within the Austro-Hungarian Empire provided him with the perfect plan to attack.<sup>115</sup>

The House of Hapsburg was collapsing. The international liberalism prevalent in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points was filtering into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The most resounding message to the minorities present in Austro-Hungarian Empire was Wilson's emphasis on national self-determination for all people. The first group to seize this rhetoric and attempt to put it into action were the Czechoslovaks.<sup>116</sup> Discontented Czechoslovaks armed themselves and marched south into Italy. There, they linked up

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<sup>114</sup> Edward Crankshaw, *The Fall of the House of Hapsburg* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 412.

<sup>115</sup> Strachan, 299; 318.

<sup>116</sup> Crankshaw, 418. When the Czechoslovaks realized their long held desire for a homeland would be provided to them by the Entente, many stopped fighting for Austria-Hungary and fled to join the Entente's forces.

with Diaz's army on the Piave and allied themselves with his army for the coming battle. Kaiser Karl attempted to blunt Wilson's Fourteen Points by instigated sweeping reforms in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, the Empire announced it was adopting a Federal structure. The key exclusion by Karl was that of Hungary, which as King of Hungary, was an attempt by him to attain some control over the dominated Slavs from establishing their own state. The Empire was not dying; it was dead. Wilson rejected Karl's proposal as Czechoslovakia announced their independence and the Slavs announced the formation of their Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, more famously known as Yugoslavia. Even the two dominant groups, the Austrians and the Hungarians, were at their breaking point. People lived on the brink of starvation. The German army continued to appropriate grain from the conquered territories to feed itself with total disregard for the growing crisis. The army acted. Food distribution had been the frustratingly difficult task assigned to General Ottokar Landwehr von Pragenau, but after a year in office he was well too aware that Austro-Hungarian food supplies were about to dip below the starvation line. German grain shipments had become too tempting of a target to rectify the situation and he dispatched the army to the Danube. They attacked grain shipments sailing the Danube from the Ukraine in transit to Germany. Ludendorff was furious. He drew up plans and a declaration of war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although Ludendorff was talked down from making any rash decisions, the final nail had been driven into the coffin of the Allied Powers. Austro-Hungary was a shadow force unable to either maintain order at home or secure its borders.<sup>117</sup> Diaz and his

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<sup>117</sup> Crankshaw, 419; Gilbert, 376.

Entente army had waited for Austria-Hungary to commit suicide before acting. The 23<sup>rd</sup> of October was a day of action.

With Austria-Hungary now abandoned by its German ally and nationalities within the Empire fleeing from Hapsburg control, Diaz ordered his army into battle against the decimated Austro-Hungarian army. They tried to hold the Piave River for a few days at Vittorio-Veneto, but they could not withstand the combined Entente assault. The Austro-Hungarian army essentially collapsed. The soldiers were so demoralized that they fled Italy entirely and simply returned home. The Empire had lost the legitimacy of its rule. The route to Vienna was open to Diaz on the Italian Front and French General Louis Franchet d'Esperey breaking out from Salonika. Germany was neither unwilling nor unable to save its former ally.<sup>118</sup> As with the Ottoman Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire's perceived usefulness to the Germans had run its course. They too could be disposed. In reality, Germany's failure was to recognize the role that Austria-Hungary had played. By holding the Italian led coalition at bay in Italy, conquering the Balkans, and harassing the Russians on the Eastern Front, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had enabled the German army to possess flexibility in fighting the Great War. For three years, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had protected Germany's southern flank, but when Austria-Hungary faced invasion the German government simply washed its hands of its ally. Germany's contempt for its ally allowed the idea to grow among government officials that Germany was better off severing the alliance. In doing so, Germany was opening a fissure that could have allowed the Italian armies to cross the Alps and link up

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<sup>118</sup> Strachan, 323—34.

with the rest of the Entente on the Western Front. Germany would soon be standing alone.

On October 28<sup>th</sup> in Prague and the 29<sup>th</sup> in Zagreb republics were officially declared in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia respectively. Quite cognizant that the war was over, Austrians and Hungarians in Vienna and Budapest rioted for an immediate ceasefire on Halloween. The alliance between Austria and Hungary was at its conclusion as in the midst of these riots the Hungarian government in control at Budapest informed Karl their intention to leave the alliance. In a bid to retain power, Karl signaled he was willing to remain Kaiser of Austria solely. Further demonstrating this split was the inability of the former allies to quit the war together. Since assuming the throne in 1916 after the death of his great uncle Franz Josef, Karl, advised by his French bride, had tried to extricate Austria from the war. Behind the German government's back, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had sent out peace feelers. The Entente governments refused to listen because they viewed the alliance between Austria-Hungary and Germany as indivisible. Thus, they assumed the peace proposal to be a ploy from the Allied Powers to buy time. By November, with the war being essentially over on the Italian Front and the split between Austria-Hungary and Germany out in the open, the Allies decided to deal with the Empire. Austria quit the war on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, but Hungarian did not do so until the 13<sup>th</sup>, which was actually two days later than the Germans. Austria wanted to stop the bleeding of its territory into Italy as soon as possible.<sup>119</sup> They were willing to quit if they could maintain a claim of legitimacy in the Tyrol. For the Hungarians, Austria was acting after much of its territory, namely the Magyar dominated areas of Yugoslavia and

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<sup>119</sup> Strachan, 159—60.

Czechoslovakia had left the Empire. Tensions rose once Karl, unwilling to see the victorious Entente sink his navy, gave the Austrian navy to Yugoslavia. Tensions were muted once Italy, unaware of the exchange, sank the Austrian navy, now in the possession of their ally. As an Empire, Austria-Hungary was always a tenuous coalition between diverse ethnic groups. The Great War did not create ethnic strife within the Empire, but it did exacerbate it enough to where it became uncontrollable by the Dual Monarchy. As the territories held by the Austro-Hungarian Empire broke free, Germany began an aggressive stance towards its erstwhile ally. The Austro-Hungarian government had realized their alliance with Germany was essentially a path for German dominance. Twenty years later an Austrian completed the German domination of Austria with the *Anschluss Österreichs* in 1938. Germany was more of a threat to Austria-Hungary than the Entente.

## **The Decline and Fall of the House of Hohenzollern**

With defeats racking up on the field for Germany and their commander writhing on the floor and foaming at the mouth, the German government began to collapse. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, a day after his episode, Ludendorff informed the Kaiser it was imperative that the German government negotiate an armistice with the United States on the basis of President Wilson's Fourteen Points. This forced German Chancellor Georg von Hertling to resign. He was succeeded by Max von Baden, who urged Ludendorff to buy him more time to end the war. Although Baden was handpicked by Kaiser Wilhelm, he was also a liberal reformer. Baden and Ludendorff tried to devise a plan to end the war with the best possible outcome for Germany. Baden rammed through legislation in the Reichstag that exponentially enhanced the power of parliamentary democracy at the expense of the Kaiser. Ludendorff tried to break up the Entente. Ludendorff authorized cables to be sent to President Wilson inquiring about a negotiated peace along the lines established in his Fourteen Points. Ludendorff was forming a plan to split the Entente and prevent the American army from reinforcing the Anglo-French armies. If America could be taken out of the war, the German army could face the British and French alone, strengthening Germany's position at the negotiating table. Wilson failed to take the bait. In consultation with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and French President Georges Clemenceau, he rejected the German peace feeler. Although Baden was transforming Germany in essence into a Constitutional Monarchy, these steps were not enough for Wilson. If the Kaiser retained a modicum of power it was still too much to satisfy the Entente. Wilson informed the German government that the only way the



Entente would deal with Germany was without the Kaiser. In the midst of the discussions between Berlin and Washington, Ludendorff had ordered the German army into a virtual ceasefire. On October 23<sup>rd</sup> Wilson signaled he was no longer willing to negotiate without his allies. Ludendorff ordered his army back into battle.<sup>120</sup>

The German soldier on the ground realized what the temporary ceasefire had meant: the war was ending and Germany was exploring ways to quit fighting. The German army had not been on the offensive in months, supplies and materials were running low, and the ceasefire forced the realization upon most German soldiers that it was a beaten army. Ludendorff resigned his command three days later.<sup>121</sup> Ludendorff's plan to split the Entente was quite similar to the plan in place for the Entente to split the Allied Powers. The difference for Ludendorff, and hence his failure, was the structure of the Entente versus the Allied Powers. The Entente fought as a force of equals under a unified command of the most able general, in this case Ferdinand Foch. The Allied Powers fought as a German dominated force under a figure head commander in chief, Kaiser Wilhelm. Foch could place his faith in any member nation of his allies to attack weak points on the Allied Powers' line. The Germans placed so little faith in the fighting capabilities of their allies that they never trusted them enough to sustain the initiative in fighting. Germany tried to fight the Great War everywhere and in turn left themselves weak in areas that their allies could have reinforced their positions. Foch never hesitated to place his faith in his allies, including the untested American army or the oft defeated

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<sup>120</sup> Ludendorff, 365—9; Schwabe, 67—72.

<sup>121</sup> Stone, 179—81.

Italian army, to stand firm in the face of the Allied Powers' aggression. Once Germany was perceived to be weak, her allies abandoned her as soon as possible.

The Prussian dominated military structure of Imperial Germany was trapped in a war they could not exit. Generations of strict military training prevented them from designing an adequate exit strategy. A negotiated peace was rejected by the Prussians because their view of war held out for either total victory or total defeat. Two ideas were available, in their minds at least, and they both involved the Empire going down in a blaze of glory. The first idea was presented to the Kaiser at his headquarters in Spa, Belgium. General Wilhelm Groener, Ludendorff's replacement, discussed with the Kaiser and General Hindenburg a plan for the Kaiser to reestablish order within the German Empire. He advised the Kaiser to visit the frontlines and in the course of his visit allow himself to be killed by enemy gunfire or at the very least be gravely wounded. The Kaiser and Hindenburg immediately vetoed the idea. The Kaiser claimed it would lead to the deaths of too many good men and suicide "was made impossible by my firm Christian beliefs."<sup>122</sup>

The second plan involved Germany's largest untapped fighting force. With the German army engaged in a delaying action holding the Western Front to the best of their ability and preparing to fall back to defensive positions on the Rhine the only available fighting force to them was the *Kaiserliche Marine*, the Imperial Navy. The High Seas Fleet of the *Kaiserliche Marine* had been anchored in port at Wilhelmshaven since 1915. In 1918 Chief of Naval Staff Reinhard Scheer and commander of the High Seas Fleet Franz von Hipper devised a final play for glory to improve Germany's bargaining

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<sup>122</sup> Wilhelm Hohenzollern, *The Kaiser's Memoirs, Wilhelm II, Emperor of Germany, 1888-1918* (LaVergne TN: General Books, 2009.), 153

position in any future post-war settlement. The High Seas fleet was ordered to put to sea and raid the Belgian coast and the Thames before meeting the Grand Fleet in a final act of glory; a suicide run to inflict as much damage and humiliation on the Royal Navy as possible. Scheer and Hipper knew they were damning the sailors of the *Kaiserliche Marine* to a watery grave, so they refused to inform Chancellor Max von Baden. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, as the boilers of the *Kaiserliche Marine* were being stoked in Wilhelmshaven, the German sailors realized they were being ordered on a suicide mission. To preserve their lives they mutinied. The naval mutiny spread between the port at Wilhelmshaven and the port at Kiel. At Kiel, the sailors allied themselves with the socialist and communist anti-war demonstrations. The sailors' lists of demands included the end of the war and the abdication of the Royal family. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, troops being transferred from the Eastern to the Western Front also mutinied. They refused to go into battle and aligned themselves with the sailors and leftist protestors demanding the end of the war.<sup>123</sup>

Remarkably, the deteriorating situation went unrecognized by the Entente military leaders. As the German troops from the Eastern Front were mutinying, the Western powers were meeting to draw up war plans for 1919. They unanimously agreed to an invasion led by General Armando Diaz of Bavaria slated for spring of 1919. Two days later, German sailors were joined by twenty thousand German soldiers on a planned march to Berlin. That same day, the Entente finalized plans to invade Lorraine on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November. Baden realized the desperate situation in Germany. The loudest voices for revolution in Germany were coming from the radical left. Germany was close to falling

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<sup>123</sup> Gilbert, 485—7

into the hands of the Bolsheviks. The war had to be ended as quickly as possible with a socialist government in power to blunt the calls for radical revolution. On November 7<sup>th</sup> he dispatched a peace delegation, led by the leader of Germany's Center Party Matthias Erzberger, to meet with General Foch at his headquarters near Compiègne. Foch received them but refused to listen to their message until there was a change in the German government and the Kaiser had officially abdicated. This had been part of Baden's plan, but the Kaiser refused to accept his advice. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November the Kaiser ordered Hindenburg and Groener to turn the army back to Germany and quash the growing rebellion. Groener informed the Kaiser that the army no longer supported the Hohenzollern dynasty and they would rebel if ordered to attack German citizens. Reality was finally brought home to Wilhelm. He was informed that "the army could fight no longer and wished rest above all else, and that, therefore, any sort of armistice must be unconditionally accepted...as soon as possible, since the army had supplies for only six to eight days more."<sup>124</sup> He abdicated the next day and fled into exile in the Netherlands. Baden resigned the Chancellorship in favor of the socialist Fritz Ebert. With Germany now a republic, Foch opened negotiations with Erzberger. They agreed for a ceasefire to go into effect on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. The war on the Western Front was over.

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<sup>124</sup> Hohenzollern, 153.

## Conclusion

Seven months to the day after General Haig issued his special order of the day which described the British army as having its “back to the wall,” the Entente powers had defeated Germany, the last standing member of the Allied Powers. The collapse of Germany was an utter surprise. Before the Spring Offensives in 1918, the most optimistic Entente leaders believed they could successfully win the war in 1919 at the earliest. In May of 1918 Paris was closer to falling into German hands than at any point of the war since 1914. Even when the Ottoman Empire had exited the war and Austro-Hungary was negotiating their exit from the war, the Entente still felt it necessary to plan for an invasion of Germany in 1919. Although German soldiers from Ludendorff to Corporal Adolf Hitler blamed the defeat of Germany on the collapse of the home front, the German home front only began to collapse after the army in the field had been defeated. A military crisis precipitated a political reordering of the Entente chain of command. Germany’s successes in the Great War were always due to its ability to isolate its enemies in a particular attack. Once the Entente reformed and fielded a united front against the Germans, the initiative rapidly shifted away from the German army. Outside of the Western Front, Germany cynically viewed its allies as little more than cannon fodder whose most important task was to buy Germany time on the Western Front. Although this strategy worked reasonably well whenever Germany maintained the initiative, once the war turned against the Allied Powers that unity evaporated. The German government’s failures at inter-allied strategy were echoed by the diplomatic blunders in the arena of foreign policy. This is in sharp contrast to the Entente, which

when faced with its most desperate moment of the war in 1918 forged a unified command structure that made the Entente unbeatable. The Entente learned when the Germans did not.

For years, Germany allowed a cold war to simmer between Berlin and Washington. The antagonism toward America culminated in 1917 with the Zimmermann telegram and the decision to return to unrestricted submarine warfare. These poor decisions coincided with the German army's triumphal defeat of Tsarist Russia. As Kerensky's Russia was teetering on the verge of collapse, the United States was entering the war. Germany's unnecessary antagonism of the United States created a new enemy combatant at the exact moment it had shifted the balance of military power in Europe decisively in its favor. After three years of war had exhausted most of the manpower in Europe, Germany found itself at war with a nation able to place millions of fresh troops into the field.

Germany's peace treaties with Russia and Romania finally put to be the lie that Germany was fighting a defensive war. The German government's heavy handed treatment of the new Bolshevik government was so harsh that Lenin ordered Trotsky to refuse to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. This prolonged the war in the East long enough for American troops to begin to deploy on the Western Front, granted Britain time to start reorganizing after the 1917 Third Ypres Offensive, and bought time for the French army to recover from the mutinies following the Nivelle Offensive. On the Italian Front, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk also prevented the Austro-Hungarian Empire from deploying enough troops to exploit their victory at Caporetto. By the time troops from Austria-Hungary were dispatched to Italy, the Italian led coalition of Italian, British,

French, American, and Czechoslovak troops were able to first repulse and then defeat the Austro-Hungarian army across the River Piave.

Furthermore, those treaties revealed Germany's plan to reform Europe into a series of German dominated satellites. As these treaties were being unveiled for public consumption, the Entente could publicly wrap itself in President Woodrow Wilson's liberal idealism. The propaganda benefits from Wilson's idealism sharply contrasted Germany's territorial acquisitions in the East. Wilson's emphasis on national self-determination resonated within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia parlayed their visions of their own homelands into active support for the Entente enabling them to harass their Austro-Hungarian overlords on the Salonika and Italian Fronts.

Finally, unified command of the Ententes' armies granted Foch the luxury of elasticity that eluded Ludendorff. The Spring Offensives of 1918 succeeded at first because the offensive blunted the Entente's superiority in non-infantry units. The plan failed because Ludendorff had not learned the evolving nature of the Great War. The Spring Offensives lacked any form of strategy other than territory gained. With Foch in total control of the Entente's coalition forces could coordinate their defenses. Once the momentum of initiative swung away from the Germans, Foch was able to implement a new strategy to win the war. For the first time during the Great War the Entente fought as one. Grand schemes to seize as much ground as possible were discarded in favor of limited attacks to wear the German army down. This contrasted sharply with the stratagems of 1914-1917 when the Entente carried out separate campaigns with their allies, only becoming involved when pressure was needed to relieve their exhausted

soldiers. With pressure being applied to the German army everywhere on the Western Front it could no longer properly defend in depth. The scale of the Entente's counteroffensive left the Germany army in a precariously weak position.

The German government's policy of veiled condescension towards its allies weakened the Allied Powers throughout the war. Once the war shifted against Germany, those festering wounds crippled the Central Powers ability to fight the Great War. The Allied Powers' inability to unite proved fatal when the Entente fought in lockstep. The united forces of the Entente, finally fighting as a unified coalition, overwhelmed the German army in 1918. In the midst of their darkest hour, the Entente realized that unity was the only path to defeat the German war machine.



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