

The Second Battle of the Marne

With Russia out of the war, the Germans planned a final offensive maneuver on the western front for March 1918. Their goal was to break the stalemate and reach Paris before more American troops arrived to help the Allies.

On March 21 the Germans launched a furious attack at the Somme. They advanced 12 miles and inflicted 800,000 British and French casualties. By May 31 they reached the banks of the Marne, where they had been stopped four years earlier. However, as in 1914, Allied resistance stalled the German offensive. Repeated attacks by German General Erich Ludendorff and his troops only added to the slaughter of his dwindling forces. Since the beginning of the attack in March, the Germans had lost more than half a million men. Ludendorff's determination to break into Paris had slowly destroyed the Germany army.

In April all Allied troops in France, including Americans, were brought under the overall command of French Marshal Ferdinand Foch. By July, with twenty-five American divisions at the front, Foch felt confident to launch an offensive of his own. In what was called the Second Battle of the Marne, the Allies attacked with superior force and drove the Germans back to their own border.

The war was drawing to an end. Bulgaria surrendered on September 30, followed by the Ottoman Empire one month later. Austria-Hungary left the fight on November 3, leaving Germany alone. Realizing that all hope was lost, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany fled to Holland on November 9. Two days later, on November 11, the Germans signed an armistice with the Allies. The long and terrible war had finally come to an end.

Decide if each of the following statements is a fact or an opinion. Write F or O in each blank.

1. _____ In April 1918 French Marshal Ferdinand Foch commanded all the Allied troops in France.
2. _____ American soldiers were more courageous than the British and French troops.
3. _____ Germany's final offensive was made possible by Russia's withdrawal from the war.
4. _____ The Germans hoped their last offensive would enable them to take Paris before American troops arrived in greater numbers.
5. _____ General Erich Ludendorff was unqualified to direct Germany's last offensive of the war.
6. Suppose the Germans had broken through at the Marne in 1918 and captured Paris. Do you think the war would have turned out differently? Why or why not?

