

<p>The Final Battles At the same time, American soldiers arrived. Even training had not prepared them for the realities of war. The troops lived on dried beef, hard biscuits, and canned emergency rations. The men shared the trenches with rats, lice, and sometimes the bodies of dead soldiers. A soldiers' song of the time described the situation:</p> <p>“Sing me to sleep where bullets fall, Let me forget the war and all; Damp is my dug-out [trench], cold my feet, Nothing but bully [canned meat] and biscuits to eat.” —<i>Quoted in Great Push: An Episode of the Great War, by Patrick MacGill</i></p> <p>On March 21, 1918, the Germans began blasting more than 6,000 heavy guns at Allied troops along the Somme River in northern France. German forces drove 40 miles into Allied lines before the advance stalled. Some 250,000 Germans had been killed or wounded. British and French casualties totaled 133,000.</p>	
<p>The Germans then attacked farther south, advancing to the Marne River and pushing the French line back toward Paris. At this critical moment, General Pershing promised Allied commander Ferdinand Foch: “Infantry, artillery, aviation—all that we have ... The American people would be proud to be engaged in the greatest battle of history.” Two divisions of the AEF joined French forces.</p> <p>The Germans were unprepared for the fresh energy and fighting skills of the Americans. The U.S. soldiers succeeded in stopping the German advance less than 50 miles from Paris. Then, at Belleau Wood, the Allies attacked and gradually drove the Germans back.</p> <p>German generals became desperate. In July 1918 they launched their final offensive— one last attempt to cross the Marne River. Terrible losses on the German side stopped the German offensive and protected Paris from invasion. Although they suffered about 12,000 casualties, American troops had helped force a major turning point in the war.</p>	
<p>Driving the Germans Back. Now the Allies drove toward victory. There were more than 1 million U.S. troops in France, and they played a key role in the later battles of the war. In September 1918 Allied forces attacked and defeated the Germans at the town of Saint-Mihiel on the border of France and Germany. Along the Meuse River and in the Argonne Forest, near the French-Belgian</p>	

border, American and Allied troops again attacked German forces.

Among the many heroes of these battles was a young man from Tennessee named Alvin York. In October 1918 York killed 25 German gunners and captured 132 prisoners. His heroism earned him fame and many awards, including the Congressional Medal of Honor. His life story even became the basis for a popular movie in 1941.

Also among the brave American troops were the African American soldiers of the 369th Infantry. Known as the Harlem Hellfighters, the 369th spent more time in combat than any other American unit. Its members were the first to reach the Rhine River on the German border. France awarded them the prized Croix de Guerre (Cross of War) medal for their bravery.

The Allies were also winning the war at sea. Allied war planners used a new strategy called the convoy system to protect their ships. This meant that destroyers capable of sinking U-boats escorted and protected groups of Allied merchant ships.

By November 1918, American soldiers were making rapid advances toward Germany. “For the first time the enemy lines were completely broken through,” reported General Pershing.

Armistice. At home and on the battlefield, Germans were tired of war. Food was so scarce in Germany that more than 800 German civilians were dying of starvation every day. In Germany and other nations of the Central Powers, food riots and strikes occurred. Germany was also running out of soldiers. In addition to those killed or wounded in 1918, one quarter of Germany’s fighting men had been captured by the Allies.

Germany’s allies were also eager to end the war. Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire quit the war in the fall of 1918.

Austria-Hungary reached a peace agreement with the Allies on November 3. Seeing that his country was beaten, the German leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II, gave up his throne and fled to the Netherlands.

The Germans then agreed to a ceasefire. The Allies demanded that Germany pull back from all its conquered territory. They insisted that Germany destroy its aircraft, tanks, and big guns, and surrender its U-boats. The Germans had no choice but to accept these demands to disarm. The **armistice, or truce, went into effect on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918.** “At eleven o’clock everything got so quiet that the silence was nearly unbearable,” remembered an American soldier. Then the silence was broken with shouts like “I’ve lived through the war!”

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