Why did Germany finally lose in 1918?

L/0 – To identify and evaluate the reasons for the German defeat
Events in 1918 - Timeline

March
The Treaty of Brest Litovsk: Germany imposes a harsh peace treaty on Russia.
Collapse of Romania.

1918
The situation at the end of 1917

- At the end of 1917, there was **stalemate** on the Western Front. However the Allies were in deep trouble:
  1. Russia **withdrew from the war** in 1917 and signed a peace treaty with Germany in March 1918.
  2. Unrestricted U-boat warfare was **seriously affecting** allied supplies.
  3. The French army was still recovering from a **mutiny** in the summer.
  4. The USA had **declared war** on 6\textsuperscript{th} April 1917 but troops had still not arrived in Europe.
Ludendorff’s Offensives

- In March 1918, the German commander General Ludendorff, decided to take advantage of allied problems and gamble on one major offensive.

- He wanted to win the war quickly before the arrival of the Americans.

- But why did he decided to risk everything on this gamble?
Why did Ludendorff gamble on an offensive?

1.) **American Entry** – He knew Germany couldn’t hold out against American industry and manpower.

2.) **The British Naval Blockade** – Was working by 1918, Sweden & Denmark had agreed to limit exports, USA no longer traded.

3.) **Failure of the U-boat Campaign of 1917** – Failed due to convoy system and brought the USA into the war.

4.) **Russian Withdrawal** – Meant he could transfer one million troops from the Eastern to the Western Front.

5.) **German Allies** – Austria was in stalemate in Italy and was running out of resources, Turkey was being pushed back in the Middle East.
The German Attacks: March-May

• The offensive started on 21st March 1918 and focused on the British at Amiens.

• It started with huge bombardments and gas attacks which were followed by smaller bands of specially trained and lightly equipped ‘storm troops’.

• They struck during heavy fog across the entire front line.
“As the fog cleared a little, we saw the Germans for the first time, advancing in thousands. The whole area was darkened by their figures, a moving mass of grey... the ground favoured their advance; it was a maze of shell holes and they crawled from one to the other... All our Lewis guns, damaged earlier by shell fire, were out of action, and by now German bullets were whistling at us from all directions... it was only then that we realised that we were completely surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered. The first breakthrough had apparently come on our right when the enemy had captured our Company Headquarters.”

G Wright, a soldier in the North Staffordshire Regiment, remembers the German attack in the Ludendorff Offensive.
The German Attacks: March-May

• They were trained to attack at speed and along the whole of the front line so the Allies couldn’t mass their defence in a single place.

• It broke through the line in many places and was very effective.

• The Germans advanced up to 64 km in some places and Paris was now in range of heavy gunfire.

“3 weeks ago the enemy began terrific attacks against us. Victory will belong to the side that holds out the longest. Every position must be held to the last man. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end.”

Haig’s orders during the Ludendorff Offensive
Failure of the Offensive

- The offensive had gone very well but by **August**, had run out of **time and resources**.

- The Germans had ended trench warfare but the Allies now had the benefit of large numbers of **well-fed and well-equipped** troops.

- Allied troops were backed up by the **latest tanks, aircraft and artillery** which were now ready to counter-attack. They even appointed an overall commander of the entire front – **French General Foch**.
Why did they fail to breakthrough?

1. German army had **lost 400,000** in making the breakthrough and had **no more reserves**.

2. German troops were **exhausted** and had **poor morale and discipline** compared to well-fed allied soldiers.

3. Germans now had a **much greater area to defend** with only makeshift trenches.

4. First Americans went into action in May and Germans were rapidly **losing their superiority of numbers**.
The Allied drive to victory

• On 8th August the Allies hit back along the whole front. Canadians, Australians, Americans, Belgians, French and British troops all burst through the German defences and forced the Germans back.

• By late September they had reached the Hindenburg Line. By October the Germans were in full retreat. 400,000 Germans were taken prisoner.
The Allied drive to victory

- By late October, the **coast of Belgium had been liberated**. In a single day the Allies advanced 13km from Ypres.

- In Germany, there was a **revolution** and the **Kaiser forced to abdicate**. On the 9th November the new German government asked the Allies for an **armistice**.

- This came into effect on the **11th November 1918**. The Great War was over.
Should Germany have signed the armistice?

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