

Armistice - The End of World War I

The final Allied push towards the German border began on October 17, 1918. As the British, French and American armies advanced, the alliance between the Central Powers began to collapse. Turkey signed an armistice at the end of October, Austria-Hungary followed on November 3.

Germany began to crumble from within. Faced with the prospect of returning to sea, the sailors of

the High Seas Fleet stationed at Kiel mutinied on October 29. Within a few days, the entire city was in their control and the revolution spread throughout the country. On November 9 the Kaiser abdicated; slipping across the border into the Netherlands and exile. A German Republic was declared and peace feelers extended to the Allies. At 5 AM on the morning of November 11 an armistice was signed in a railroad car parked in a French forest near the front lines.



American troops at the front celebrate the end of the fighting, Nov 11, 1918

The terms of the agreement called for the cessation of fighting along the entire Western Front to begin at precisely 11 AM that morning. After over four years of bloody conflict, the Great War was at an end.

"...at the front there was no celebration."

Colonel Thomas Gowenlock served as an intelligence officer in the American 1st Division. He was on the front line that November morning and wrote of his experience a few years later:

"On the morning of November 11 I sat in my dugout talking to our Chief of Staff, Colonel John Greely, and Lieutenant Colonel Paul Peabody. A signal corps officer entered and handed us the following message:

Official Radio from Paris - 6:01 A.M., Nov. 11, 1918. Marshal Foch to the Commander-in-Chief.

1. Hostilities will be stopped on the entire front beginning at 11 o'clock, November 11th (French hour).
2. The Allied troops will not go beyond the line reached at that hour on that date until further orders.

[signed]
MARSHAL FOCH
5:45 A.M.

'Well - *fini la guerre!*' said Colonel Greely. 'It sure looks like it,' I agreed.

The colonel said later 'My watch said nine o'clock. With only two hours to go, I drove over to the bank of the Meuse River to see the finish. The shelling was heavy and, as I walked down the road, it grew steadily worse. It seemed to me that every battery in the world was trying to burn up its guns. At last eleven o'clock came - but the firing continued. The men on both sides had decided to give each other all they had-their farewell to arms. It was a very natural impulse after their years of war, but unfortunately many died after eleven o'clock that day'.

'All over the world on November 11, 1918, people were celebrating, dancing in the streets, drinking champagne, hailing the armistice that meant the end of the war but at the front there was no celebration'.



Celebration in Paris
Nov 11, 1918

'Many soldiers believed the armistice only a temporary measure and that the war would soon go on. As night came, the quietness, unearthly in its penetration, began to eat into their souls. The men sat around log fires, the first they had ever had at the front. They were trying to reassure themselves that there were no enemy batteries spying on them from the next hill and no German bombing planes approaching to blast them out of existence. They talked in low tones. They were nervous'.

'After the long months of intense strain, of keying themselves up to the daily mortal danger, of thinking always in terms of war and the enemy, the abrupt release from it all was physical and psychological agony. Some suffered a total nervous collapse. Some, of a steadier temperament, began to hope they would someday return to home and the embrace of loved ones. Some could think only of the crude little crosses that marked the graves of their comrades. Some fell into an exhausted sleep. All were bewildered by the sudden meaninglessness of their existence as soldiers'.

TASK- Read the history of the soldiers at the end of the war.

- 1). Why do you think the war ended?
- 2). Where was the Armistice signed?
- 3). How did Colonel Thomas Gowenlock find out about ending of the war?
- 4). What did the Colonel see in the last few hours of the war?
- 5). Why would the men not celebrate the end of the war?
- 6). How would you like to show your respect to Armistice day at Ark Helenswood in 2016?