

---

# The Round Table

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

---

Thursday, 25 October 2018  
32:03      Volume 32   Number 03  
Published by WW II History Round Table  
Written by Drs. Connie Harris and Christopher Simer  
[www.mn-ww2roundtable.org](http://www.mn-ww2roundtable.org)

---

**Welcome to the second October session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speaker is Dr. Kim Munholland from the University of Minnesota, filling in for Geoffrey Wawro, who was unable to attend. Dr. Munholland will be discussing the strategic mistakes at the end of the Great War that lead to World War II.

At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, the guns fell silent on the Western Front. The suicidal European bloodbath had been ended by the entry of the United States and by the fighting prowess of the American "doughboys." Even though the Americans had been engaged for only a few months in serious fighting, it was their presence that made the difference. The fresh American troops were decisive in halting the German summer offensive of 1918, when Germany had nearly succeeded in breaking the Western Front. 1918 was one of the deadliest years in history even after the guns fell silent. Murderous Communist revolutions broke out inside Germany and threatened other European nations. In Russia, the Bolsheviks were fighting a ferocious civil war. Millions died in the fall and winter of 1918 when a terrible influenza epidemic swept the world.

American war goals, articulated by US President Woodrow Wilson, were to "make the world safe for democracy" and "end all war," however the diplomacy of peacemaking virtually ensured a second world war because of the harsh terms forced on the losers in the treaties. Wilson insisted that the Germans create a new democratic regime and remove the Kaiser from power before an armistice was even possible. This meant that the peace treaty was signed by a new German government that had nothing to do with the war. Thus, Germany's new democracy was crippled at its very inception, and its leaders were later blamed by Hitler and others as the "criminals of November" who "stabbed Germany in the back" by ending the war.

In January 1919, Allied leaders met at Versailles to set the final peace terms for the defeated Central Powers. With delegates from 27 countries, and 52 separate commissions studying specific issues, the key decisions were made by the "Big Four" – Georges Clemenceau of

France, David Lloyd George of Great Britain, Vittorio Orlando of Italy, and Woodrow Wilson of the United States.

Wilson supported a conciliatory peace with the Germans and actually believed his allies were sincere when they signed off on his idealistic 14 Points as the price of US intervention. However, Britain and France had lost too much to even consider an easy peace. Millions of dead and wounded soldiers and near national bankruptcy had made the British and French seek to punish Germany and make her pay. Further, the Italians had been bribed to enter the war by promises of major gains from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and thus were aligned with the British and French against Wilson. Prime Minister David Lloyd George intended to "squeeze Germany until the pips squeak," and France wanted to permanently limit German power. Wilson's vision of a new peaceful world order would be dashed against the ramparts of English and French bitterness.

The terms of the final treaty signed on June 28, 1919 were stunning. The Germans were stripped of all their pre-war colonies (which were divided up between the Allied powers). The treaty forbade the Germans to have any military aircraft, they lost their fleet, and had to severely limit their army, and ensuring a permanent loss of power and status. The most vindictive part of the treaty was Article 231, the "war guilt clause" which placed the full blame for the war on Germany, and the Germans were thereby held financially responsible for all costs of all countries that fought them. This huge sum of "reparation" payments effectively destroyed the German economy and triggered hyperinflation in Germany by 1923, adding to the general chaos inside the new Weimar Republic.

The Paris Peace Conference involved no negotiations with the losers: the Germans were not invited to attend any of its sessions. One of the British delegates, Harold Nicholson, asserted that the Allies "simply forgot about the Germans" during the six-month conference as they fought over the terms of the treaty. The German delegation was only summoned at the end of the conference and compelled to sign the treaty with no opportunity to negotiate any part of it. As the treaty was signed, Marshal Foch prophetically stated, "This is not a peace, it is an armistice for 20 years."

**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns** – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

Of immediate impact was the anger at the “Versailles Diktat” among the defeated Germans, and the unintentional weakening of the new Weimar Republic in Germany: for the next decade, disgruntled German veterans formed political groups intended to overturn both the treaty and the democrats that signed it. One such veteran, a decorated Western Front soldier, later wrote that when he learned of the armistice, he was suddenly given a clear and essential purpose in life—to enter politics and punish all those responsible for the surrender. His name was Adolf Hitler.

The unfairness and one-sidedness of the Versailles Treaty was quickly realized as the emotions of the war began to recede. John Maynard Keynes (a British delegate at Versailles) wrote “The Economic Consequences of the Peace” in late 1919 and began the process of changing British attitudes towards the Versailles Treaty. By the 1930s, most elite opinion in the United Kingdom felt that Germany had been mistreated, and there was a strong sentiment to make sincere efforts to reach better diplomatic understanding with the Germans. This defined the intellectual climate that favored appeasement policies towards the new Nazi government, a government led by a man dedicated, above all things, to overturning Versailles and taking revenge for the harm done Germany in 1918-1919.

Reappraisal of the deleterious effects of the punitive Versailles peace treaties informed the post-1945 American resolution to establish new, strong democracies in the countries we occupied, and not repeat the errors of 1919. Such thinking was also behind the Marshall Plan to help even former enemies rebuild, rather than generate the kind of poisonous resentment which led to the rise of the National Socialists.

#### FURTHER READINGS:

Patricia O’Toole, *The Moralist: Woodrow Wilson and the World He Made* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018)  
 Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2002)  
 Joseph E. Perisco, *Eleventh Month, Eleventh Day, Eleventh Hour: Armistice Day 1918 World War I and Its Violent Climax* (New York: Random House, 2005)  
 Sally Marks, *The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918–1933* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2003)  
 Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

#### Announcements:

See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>

**Vietnam War Roundtable** - 19 Nov. 2018 - *Veterans Voices Awards* - [mnvietnam.org](http://mnvietnam.org) - [rldietrich@mmilitarymuseum.org](mailto:rldietrich@mmilitarymuseum.org)  
 Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 20 Nov. 2018 – *The Last Siege: Mobile Campaign* - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 26 Nov. 2018 – *Lincoln & Thanksgiving* - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)  
 Civil War Symposium - 6 Apr. 2019 - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)  
 Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
 Minnesota Air Guard Museum - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523  
 Friends of Ft. Snelling, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)  
 World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>  
 Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 20 June 2020. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.  
 Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie - 13-14 July 2019 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org) 952-746-6100  
 Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - 28 Nov. 2018 - Allison, *Destined for War: Can America ...Escape Thucydides's Trap?* - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)  
 Winston Churchill Book Club: Info: [lin.hopkins@hotmail.com](mailto:lin.hopkins@hotmail.com)  
 Alliance Francaise, [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org), 612-332-0436  
 Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjer-ry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717  
 CAF - Commemorative Air Force - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) 651-455-6942

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

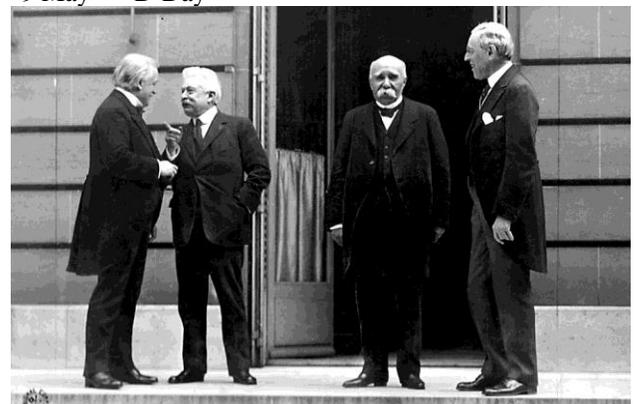
#### Round Table Schedule 2018-2019

##### 2018

8 Nov. Conspiracies v. Hitler  
 13 Dec. Pearl Harbor

##### 2019

10 Jan. Inside Hitler’s Headquarters  
 14 Feb. Economics of War  
 14 Mar. Aerial Reconnaissance of the Reich  
 28 Mar. WASPs  
 11 Apr. General with Six Stars: J. H. C. Lee  
 9 May D-Day



David Lloyd George, Vittorio Emanuele Orlando, Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson, Paris Peace Conference, Versailles, 27 May 1919. USArmy Signal Corps Photo.