

The Treaty of Versailles

At the conclusion of the war, German delegates came to Paris expecting to negotiate with the Allies the shape of the peace. Instead they discovered that there would be no discussion; the heads of states of the victors would unilaterally make up the treaty. Thus the Peace Conference ended with the Germans given a document, the Treaty of Versailles, to sign that required them to agree to all its many provisions (excerpted below).

The peace was dictated, not negotiated, and the Germans received it with great bitterness. In order to force the Germans into an agreement, The Allied naval blockade was not lifted until the Treaty was signed on 28 June 1919. This blockade caused untold hardship on German civilians, including starvation. It along with the Treaty would become yet another weapon in Adolph Hitler's arsenal of hate.

Article 42. Germany is forbidden to maintain or construct any fortifications either on the left bank of the Rhine or on the right bank to the west of a line drawn 50 kilometers to the east of the Rhine.

Article 45. As compensation for the destruction of the coal-mines in the north of France and as part payment towards the total reparation due from Germany for the damage resulting from the war, Germany cedes to France in full and absolute possession, with exclusive rights of exploitation, unencumbered and free from all debts and charges of any kind, the coal-mines situated in the Saar Basin.

Article 49. Germany renounces in favour of the League of Nations, in the capacity of trustee, the government of the territory defined above. At the end of fifteen years from the coming into force of the present Treaty the inhabitants of the said territory shall be called upon to indicate the sovereignty under which they desire to be placed.

Article 51. The territories, which were ceded to Germany in accordance with the Preliminaries of Peace signed at Versailles on February 26, 1871 and the Treaty of Frankfort of May 10, 1871, are restored to French sovereignty as from the date of the Armistice of November 11, 1918. The provisions of the Treaties establishing the delimitation of the frontiers before 1871 shall be restored....

Article 87. Germany, in conformity with the action already taken by the Allied and Associated Powers, recognizes the complete independence of Poland.

Article 159. The German military forces shall be demobilized and reduced as prescribed hereinafter.

Article 160. By a date, which must not be later than March 31, 1920, the German Army must not comprise more than seven divisions of infantry and three divisions of cavalry. After that date the total number of effectives in the Army of the States constituting Germany must not exceed one hundred thousand men, including officers and establishments of depot The Army shall be devoted exclusively to the maintenance of

order within the territory and to the control of the frontiers. The total effective strength of officers, including the personnel of staffs, whatever their composition, must not exceed four thousand.

The Great Germany General Staff and all similar organisations shall be dissolved and may not be reconstituted in any form.

Ironically, a national German Army did not exist prior to the Treaty of Versailles. Instead during the war, Germany had four armies from the Kingdoms of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, and Württemberg. Before the war, these were organized into 217 infantry regiments, of which 166 were Prussian, 24 Bavarian, 17 Saxon, and 10 Württemberger.

Article 231. The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her Allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

After reading this selection, answer the following questions.

1. What articles sought to keep Germany from ever making war again?
2. What was the maximum allowed size of the German Army? When was the German Army actually created?
3. Where is Germany forbidden to build fortifications?
4. Which article recognizes the independence of a new nation? What was that nation?
5. Which article returns territory (Alsace-Lorraine) to France?
6. Which article places guilt for the war on Germany?
7. What must Germany do in compensation for the destruction of the French coal mines?
8. Explain how much input was the German delegation to the peace conference allowed to give?
9. Do you think the demand for reparations was a fair request? Was it realistic to expect Germany to disarm permanently? **Explain.**