

Worksheet 7 – The beginning of the end.

In March 1918 the German army launched a successful offensive against the Allies. Rapid German advance brought them close to Paris. By July their progress slowed as the Allies stopped retreating and dug in. In mid October an Allied counter attack not only halted further German advance but caused it's army to retreat.....all the way back to Germany. On November 9th Kaiser Wilhelm was deposed and Germany was declared a republic. In the face of complete collapse the Central Powers requested an armistice. All fighting stopped. Arrangements were made for delegations from each side to meet and negotiate peace.



The Allied delegation.

At 11 a.m. on the 11th November 1918 in a railway coach in the forest of Compiègne, ten miles outside Paris, representatives of each side signed the document which signalled the ending of hostilities.

It was not until 28th June 1919 that the war officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles - but that's another story.



Inside the railway coach where the armistice was signed.

DEMOBILISATION

The news of the signing of the armistice was obviously greeted with delight and relief throughout the world. However after the initial rejoicing subsided thoughts of demobilisation swiftly followed. Having signed on for the duration of the war, which was now over, as far as the men who had either volunteered, or had been conscripted, were concerned it was time to go home.

Problem – How to process so many men in the shortest possible time.

Solution – Set up demobilisation camps back in Britain. Seventeen such camps were set up – Fovant Military Camp was one of them.



Harry Patch 1898 - 2009

'Demobilisation long in coming saw him eventually returned first to 'the Isle of Wight, then to Gosport and finally to *Fovant*.

"From Gosport we went to Fovant on Salisbury Plain, and that's where I got my demob papers. We were sent to the quartermaster's store, given our civilian clothes, all the same and ill-fitting, or rather, it would be more accurate to say they fitted where they touched. We were then handed a travel warrant and set free. There was a light railway from Fovant to Salisbury from where we took a main line to wherever we were going. I headed for Bath and Home."

From 'The Last Fighting Tommy' by Richard Van Emden



'This card illustrates the frustration felt by many soldiers longing to return to civilian life in 1919. Fovant Camp was not so much a 'barrier' as a gateway, (*for once there*) demobilisation took less than a day and provided a gratuity and railway warrant.

From 'Wiltshire and the Great War'. By Terry Crawford

Unrest was widespread at the delays, particularly amongst overseas troops who had to wait for shipping to become available. Eventually demobilisation at Fovant was completed, the camp was demolished and cleared away. Everything went. Compensation was paid to the farmer who restored his farm to it's former purpose. Peace and tranquility returned.

It's not quite true that everything went. Something was left. What was it ?