



VIDÉO

WEB SERIES "THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES IN THE GREAT WAR" - ENGLISH VERSION OF THE SCRIPT

♦ [Voir la vidéo](#)

EPISODE 1 : AUGUST 1914 : A PALACE IN A STATE OF WAR.

Female voice

In the summer of nineteen fourteen (1914), the site was resplendent in its beauty
For a number of years, the gardeners had been lavishing extra care on its flower beds.
The view from the windows was a visual delight.

Masculine voice n°1

Memoirs of Pierre de Nolhac, Palace curator.

Masculine voice n°2

In the summer of nineteen fourteen (1914), one of the worst of the entire century, Pierre de Nolhac
and Benjamin Chaussemiche, the palace's architect, were preparing plans for the return
to the palace of the Coronelli globes, ordered by Louis the fourteenth (XIV) for Marly,
and their installation in one of the wings of the palace.

But these pieces from the national library were to stay in their boxes.

These were turbulent times.

On the 2nd of August 1914, general mobilisation was ordered.

War was declared.

The museum closed to the public immediately.

Versailles took on a new role.



Mobilised men flocked to the garrison town.

Masculine voice n°1

The architect Chaussemiche told his superiors:

« Versailles is a busy assembly point that, from the start of mobilisation, saw its avenues filled with horses and a large amount of combat equipment belonging to various troops. »

Masculine voice n°2

In the months that followed, regiments assembled in the Place d'Armes or the Palace's Court of Honour before heading to the front.

Military hospitals were soon set up, like the British field hospital in the Trianon Palace hotel on the edge of the estate, which played a major role in nineteen nineteen (1919).

At the end of August, German troops reached Meaux, 50 km from Paris.

The works of art needed to be protected urgently.

Pierre De Nolhac set to work.

Female voice

Having learned that the Louvre was sending its main works to the South by train,

I was able to put our precious pieces in a lorry to be transported with them.

But what about the treasures inside the house already occupied by the enemy?

There are good, large cellars under the Gabriel wing.

One of them, prepared in only hours, housed works by Houdon, Nattier, Vigée-Lebrun, tapestries, and bronzes.

Masculine voice n°2

The battle of the Marne averted the immediate danger but vigilance remained.

The Versailles estate, which was within the Parisian entrenched zone, was crossed by the capital city's defence line.

Trenches were dug, breaches made in the park walls.

The vast stretches of the estate's land were transformed into a source of food for the population.

The animals were evacuated in the winter following the spread of disease.

During the war, activity on the estate was reduced.

Guards and wardens, gardeners and fountain engineers were mobilised.

Only older staff stayed behind with the curator and architect.

Some who went to the front, never saw the palace again.

To be continued...

◆ **The Palace of Versailles in the Great War**



EPISODE 2 : VERSAILLES, 1915-17, THE WAR EFFORT

Masculine Voice n°1

Nineteen fifteen (1915): France's Eastern front is stabilised.
The conflict drags on and the war looks set to continue.
Behind the lines, life resumes and Pierre de Nolhac decides to re-open the museum.
The absence of staff, sent to the front, means that not all rooms can be opened.
In the park, people start to have fun on the canal once again.

However, the war is never far from people's minds or daily lives.
Medal ceremonies become increasingly frequent on the Place d'Armes.
On 27 November 1915, Emilienne Moreau, aged seventeen (17), is awarded the Military Cross.

Her heroic actions in the face of the enemy are held up as an example.
Soldiers on leave and refugees from occupied areas arrive in groups to visit the palace.

Female Voice

Letter to Pierre de Nolhac from an officer at the Place de Paris.

Masculine voice n°2

Sir, the barracks at Reuilly have been officially designated to host soldiers on leave from occupied countries, who, missing their families, come to Paris for some well-deserved distraction.
We would be eternally grateful if you could offer them hospitality at the Palace, and the chance of happy memories.

Masculine voice n°1

Concerts are put on for the wounded returning from the front.
The wonders of Versailles give them support and comfort.

In nineteen seventeen (1917), a visit by an African delegation is followed by a show in aid of Muslim soldiers injured fighting for France.
In the park and museum, the "Oeuvres de Guerre" collect funds to help French and Allied troops suffering hardship.

These gala charity balls reinforce alliances between nations and promote patriotism.
During the summer, the galas attract up to 50,000 people with fountain displays, 17th century French plays and military music concerts.

National anthems are played.

But the parties cannot hide the difficult living conditions, especially as the winters are extremely harsh.

In February nineteen seventeen (1917), the ponds in the park are covered by 30 cm of ice.
With each passing year, fuel becomes increasingly scarce and it is hard to heat the rooms in the museum.

The temperature falls to 5°C and the works of art deteriorate.

In times of war and scarcity, each plot of land has to be cultivated.
The garden department is assisted by discharged and wounded soldiers.
Women also work the land.



In spring nineteen seventeen (1917), Georges Truffaut, founder of the Truffaut garden centres, creates a nursery for plants and vegetables in various parts of the domain.

At the Trianon, the land is cultivated by 70 Indo-Chinese soldiers.

The vegetables, which will brighten up the soldiers' usual meals, are packed up in the Orangerie and dispatched to the front.

To be continued...

➤ **The Palace of Versailles in the Great War**



EPISODE 3 : VERSAILLES, 1918, NEARING VICTORY

Masculine voice n°1

In nineteen eighteen (1918), the war was coming to an end.
The enemy was now attacking Paris from the air.
Pierre de Nolhac, the curator at Versailles, described the situation in his memoirs:

Female Voice

«Paris was bombed every night, and Versailles was on alert.
Military bells rang out to warn of the danger, and the lights immediately went out.»

Masculine voice n°1

Once again, special measures were taken at Versailles.
Underground shelters were created for the population in the North and South wings.
In the park, Benjamin Chaussemiche, the domain's architect, designed a system to protect
the statues from the bombings.

Masculine voice n°2

The protective measures taken at Versailles were designed to shelter a large number of the most
precious objects made of marble, lead or bronze.
They were surrounded vertically by thick walls of bags filled with earth held in place by logs.
These walls were coupled with a solid floor to resist the blasts from exploding projectiles.

Masculine voice n°1

The Grand Canal, arranged in a cross, was an easy target for enemy airplanes.
In September, the army camouflaged it with pontoons and branches, which, seen from the sky,
transformed the historic landmark into a simple stream.

But victory was already looking likely.

The Americans, who had entered the war in April nineteen seventeen (1917), came to visit
Versailles.

On 4th July, America's national holiday, France honoured its new ally.
Versailles was bedecked with flags.

Versailles became the centre for coordinating the joint military effort.
The newly established Supreme War Council met regularly at the Trianon Palace hotel,
which previously housed an English hospital at the start of the war.

Heads of government and generals defined the strategy that would lead to victory.

On 10 November 1918, they studied the text that was set to end hostilities.

On 11th November, the armistice was signed in Rethondes. The war was over.

The country was jubilant and Versailles suffered no damage.

The staff who had been enlisted gradually returned.

On 12th November, Pierre de Nolhac requested that Versailles be given artillery taken from
the enemy.

They were symbolically displayed beneath the statue of Louis XIV, who had conquered Alsace
and part of Lorraine.

To thank America, a room celebrating the American Independence was created in the North wing.

It was inaugurated in September 1919.

Groups of relieved, happy soldiers from Allied countries visited Versailles.

Peace was arriving.



Versailles was preparing to make history once again.

To be continued...

◆ **The Palace of Versailles in the Great War**



EPISODE 4 : VERSAILLES, 28 JUNE 1919, THE SIGNING OF THE PEACE TREATY

Masculine voice n°1

During the war, the idea of signing the future peace treaty in the Hall of Mirrors of the palace of Versailles was already a possibility, to erase the affront of the French defeat in eighteen seventy (1870) and the declaration of the German empire in this very place. After the armistice was signed, the peace conference was held in Paris at the Quai d'Orsay from January nineteen nineteen (1919).

But Versailles was to host the signing of the completed peace treaty.

Beginning in April, the architect Benjamin Chaussemiche started preparing the palace for this historic event.

Access to the Hôtel des Réservoirs was made secure.

This building, located just beyond the palace, would house the German delegation.

On 7th of May, the Germans, based at the Trianon Palace hotel, were informed of the clauses of the treaty.

Negotiations would last several weeks.

The time had come to prepare the Hall of Mirrors.

The national furnishings department laid Savonnerie carpets dating from the reign of Louis XIV. The room was arranged according to protocol, for a ceremony that would be simple and low-key.

Benches were provided for journalists and guests.

Delegates from the countries represented would sit around the U-shaped table.

In the centre was a Louis XV desk on which the treaty would be placed.

On 24th June, accompanied by curator Pierre de Nolhac, Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson, the US President, and British and Italian ministers came to inspect the preparations.

The day was growing near.

28 June 1919.

In the morning of this historic day, soldiers from the Versailles garrison crowded into the place d'Armes in a show of patriotism.

From 2 o'clock, amid assembled infantrymen and mounted soldiers, the delegations started to arrive.

They entered the palace via the marble court and Queen's staircase.

The German delegation, ministers Müller and Bell, entered via the park.

Pierre de Nolhac led them to the museum.

Peace was arriving.

Female voice

At one of the French windows beneath the war room, the German delegates appeared.

We were required to lead them through the beautiful rooms lined with portraits from our history.

For a few moments more, they were the enemy, the defeated.

And I saw well up in the eyes of Herman Müller tears that he could not hide.

Masculine voice n°1

They were the last to enter the Hall of Mirrors, to a penetrating silence.

At 3 o'clock, the ceremony began, with the plenipotentiaries approaching in turn, after the defeated party, to sign the treaty.

The four great powers were represented by Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson, the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando.

The session ended 45 minutes later.



The Germans were the first to leave.
In the park, through which the Allied delegations left, the crowd broke through the barriers and surrounded the heads of government and delegates, to enthusiastic cheers. The fountains played to celebrate the end of what was believed at the time to be the war to end all wars.

➤ **The Palace of Versailles in the Great War**