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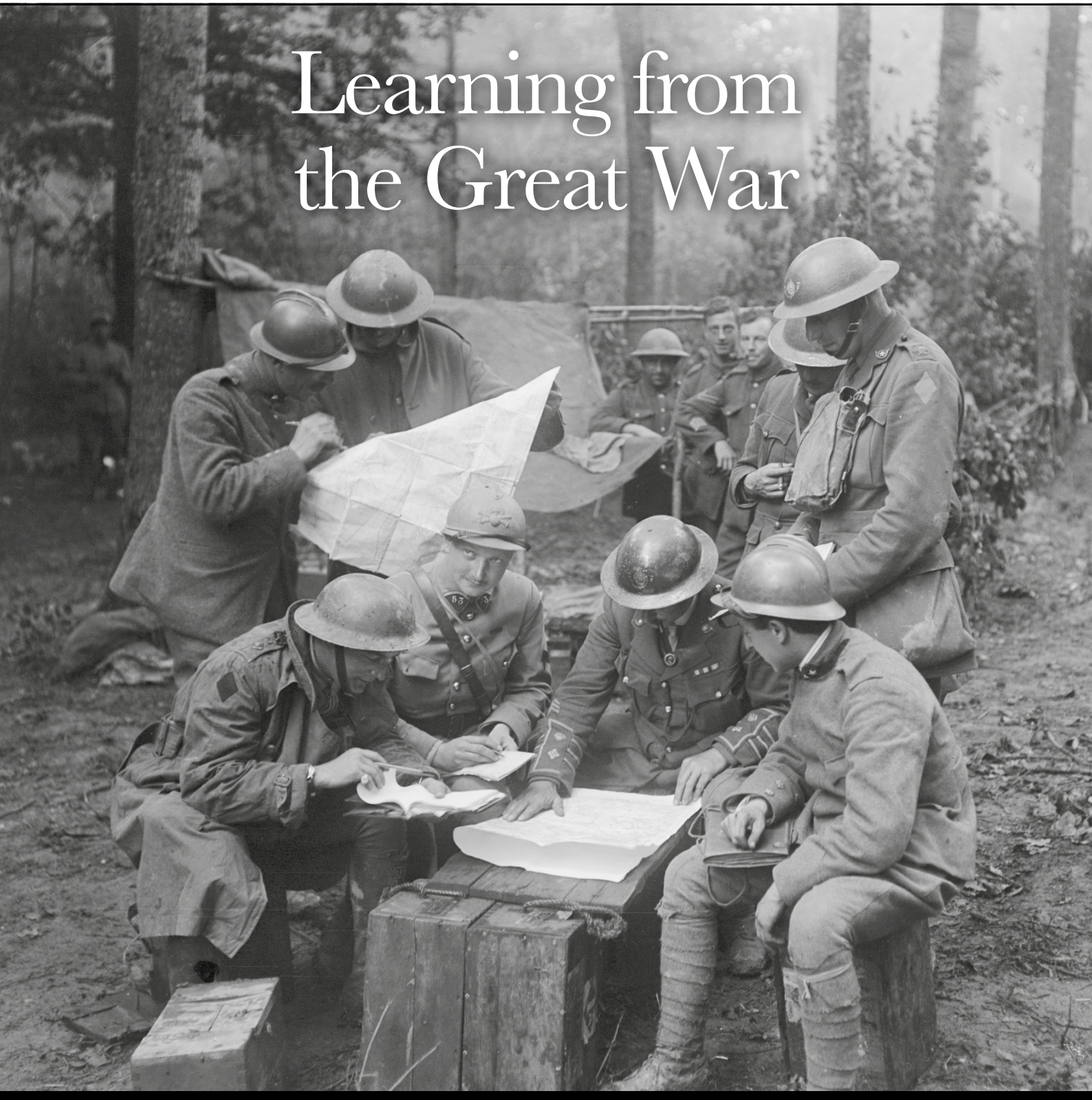

Learning from the Great War

13 THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF 1918

CHACR

CONTENTS

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FOREWORD

On 22nd March 2018, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst played host to an historical conference as part of *Operation REFLECT*, the British Army's on-going programme of events to mark the centenary of the First World War.

As the Chief of the General Staff made clear in his written introduction (reproduced on pages 4-5) and his concluding remarks, *Operation REFLECT* has been a learning journey reflecting the British Army's wider intent to derive wisdom from its past experiences.

Within that intent, the purpose of the conference was to set out the strategic situation in early 1918 as the war entered its final year in preparation for a series of learning events culminating in the Army Staff Ride in October 2018.

To achieve this objective, the conference brought together a rich array of international speakers, reflecting the global reach and significance of a war fought across several continents and numerous separate fronts. Each speaker brought deep expertise on the war as experienced from these different geographic and national perspectives, thereby broadening understanding of the strategic context well beyond the Western Front that has been the focus of British attention.

This edition of *Ares & Athena* brings together these excellent contributions in written form, reinforced by reflections from the expert chairs of the three panels to provide a written record of an important event that underlined the British Army's determination to learn lessons relevant to its own development from the experience of the armies of all combatant nations a century ago.

CONFERENCE INTRODUCTION

General Sir Nicholas Carter, KCB, CBE, DSO, ADC Gen
Chief of the General Staff

International insights: Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg reviews a German Army regiment during June 1918 (above left); and (above right) French troops move towards the front near Domart on 21 April 1918. **Credits: IWM (Q 52199)/IWM (Q 10951)**

Welcome to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for the first major event in the British Army's commemoration of the centenary of the final year of the First World War. Since 2014, we have been conducting a programme of professional study, titled *Operation REFLECT*, which has aimed to honour all those who served, remember all those who suffered and to learn from their experiences lessons that will enhance our own professional understanding.

The high points of this learning process have been two major Army 'staff rides' to France and Belgium, which have enabled us, alongside our modern allies, to learn more about how the character of warfare was transformed by the combined mass citizen armies, industrial production and new technologies.

Each of these exercises has been prefaced by preliminary study days, enabling those deploying and a wider professional audience to understand the strategic context in which these momentous events took place. Hence, today's conference has been convened to explore the strategic situation at the outset of 1918, ahead of the final *Operation REFLECT* staff ride that will take place in October of this year.

Building on significant multi-national involvement in 2014 and 2016, the 2018 staff ride will be very much international by design. Its unifying theme is 'four armies in four days', focusing attention in turn on the roles and experiences of the German, French, British Empire and United States forces on the Western Front in 1918. Reflecting this multi-national theme, we are fortunate to have secured participation by military personnel and historians from Germany, France, the United States and Britain as well as smaller contingents from other nations, among the 150 who will travel to France in October.

> While the focus of the staff ride will be on the Western Front, it is important that we understand that it was but one theatre of operations amongst many in what was a truly world war

While the focus of the staff ride will be on the Western Front, it is important that we understand that it was but one theatre of operations amongst many in what was a truly world war.

Hence, I am delighted that one of the United Kingdom's most eminent military historians, and a particular expert on the First World War, Professor Sir Hew Strachan, will open proceedings by setting out the global strategic context of 1918. This will illustrate how conflict was being waged across Western and Southern Europe, Russia, in the Levant and Middle East, in Africa; largely on land, but also at sea and increasingly in the air. Against this background, our expert panels will address the experience of 1918 through the three themes of: Total War; Coalition War; and Winning and Losing the War.

The first panel, chaired by Major General (retired) Mungo Melvin, who edited the Army's battlefield guide to the Western Front, will consider how the combatant nations sustained their war effort in a conflict that escalated steadily in intensity over four years. Professor Michael Epkenhans will describe how Germany assembled the human and materiel resources to launch a series of offensives against the British and French forces on the Western Front in the spring of 1918, which represented the culmination of the German effort in the West. Professor David Stevenson will then explore how the resources of the British Empire were harnessed and managed to ensure that the British Expeditionary Force (itself very much multi-national in

BIOGRAPHY

General Sir Nicholas Carter commissioned into The Royal Green Jackets in 1978. At Regimental Duty he has served in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Germany, Bosnia and Kosovo and commanded 2nd Battalion, The Royal Green Jackets. He attended Army Staff College, the Higher Command and Staff Course and the Royal College of Defence Studies. At staff he has been Military Assistant to the Assistant Chief of the General Staff, Colonel Army Personnel Strategy, spent a year at HQ Land Command writing the Collective Training Study, and was Director of Army Resources and Plans. He also served as Director of Plans within the US-led Combined Joint Task Force 180 in Afghanistan and spent three months in the Cross Government Iraq Planning Unit prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He commanded 20th Armoured Brigade in Iraq and 6th Division in Afghanistan. He was then the Director General Land Warfare before becoming the Army 2020 Team Leader. He served as DCOM ISAF from October 2012 to August 2013, became Commander Land Forces in November 2013 and was appointed Chief of the General Staff in September 2014.

> Our aim has been to expand our understanding of this decisive year of the First World War so that we may gain insights into the many military challenges that we may face today. Of these, I would highlight: meeting the demands of warfighting at scale against a peer opponent; managing multi-national coalitions as a fundamental component of any conflict; and understanding how and why wars end, and what can be learned from them

character) was able to absorb the impact of the German offensives and then take the offensive alongside its Allies with increasing success from August 1918 onwards.

Our second panel, chaired by Dr Paul Harris from the War Studies Department at Sandhurst, will examine how the dynamics of coalitions on both sides evolved during the decisive phase of the war. Professor Georges-Henri Soutou will consider how the Allies responded to military collapse of a major coalition partner in Russia, the threat of collapse on the Western Front and integrated the rapid expansion of the American Expeditionary Force in their drive to victory. The perspective of the Central Powers will be addressed by Professor Lothar Höbelt from Vienna University, who will consider whether the failure of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire to establish an effective coalition contributed to their ultimate defeat. Finally, Professor John Gooch will explore the perspective of Italy as a junior coalition partner fighting on a secondary front.

Our third panel, chaired by Major General (retired) David Zabecki PhD, late of the US Army, will evaluate the factors involved in the winning and losing of the war on the Western Front. Dr Jonathan Boff will assess the relative influence of increasing weight of men and materiel, growing sophistication in integrating all-arms tactics and closer unity of command in enabling Allied success in their offensives from June to November 1918. Dr Matthias Strohn will assess whether German exhaustion, military, economic and social, was more critical in forcing the German high command to the negotiating table than Allied successes on the battlefield. Both will consider the extent of the Allied victory in 1918, highlighting how differing perceptions of the peace provided the seeds of renewed war in 1939.

By air and sea: The pilot and observer of a Royal Aircraft Factory R.E.8 biplane of No. 59 Squadron receives instructions before taking off from Vert-Galland Aerodrome on 15 May 1918 (above). Surrendered German submarine crews (above right) wait on deck with their kits ahead of being transferred to the British Motor Launch ML 15 in November 1918.
Credits: IWM (Q 12168)/IWM (Q 20169)

Multinational effort: Men of the American 30th Infantry Division are pictured (above left) at rest with German prisoners following the capture of Bellicourt on 29th September 1918. In the background are British Mark V Tanks with 'cribs' of the 8th Battalion, Tank Corps, which were one of four battalions of the V Tank Brigade allotted to the 5th Australian Division and American Corps for the Battle of the St Quentin Canal (Saint-Quentin). Above right, men of the 6th Battalion, Black Watch (51st Division) prepare to encamp in woods near St. Imoges after the capture of the Bois de l'Aulnay on 25 July 1918.
Credits: IWM (Q 9365)/IWM (Q 11105)

Each of these panels will be followed by opportunities for questions and debate in which I hope you will all take an active part. Our aim has been to expand our understanding of this decisive year of the First World War so that we may gain insights into the many military challenges that we may face today.

Of these, I would highlight: meeting the demands of warfighting at scale against a peer opponent; managing multi-national coalitions as a fundamental component of any conflict; and understanding how and why wars end, and what can be learned from them. These are reflected in the themes of the three panels.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all our speakers for lending their expertise to inform our *Operation REFLECT* learning experience, and also to our many guests, including those from the British Commission for Military History and the Western Front Association, for joining us as we start our commemoration of the final year of what was then the greatest conflict in human experience.

THE GLOBAL VIEW 1918

Professor Sir Hew Strachan

In the new year of 1918 the allies' mood was pessimistic. Although the fighting on the western front in 1917 had not produced the results that had been promised, their much greater worry was socialism. In November the Bolshevik revolution had changed the debate on how the war might end. Lenin was determined to take Russia out of the war, not least in order to protect the revolution, and, if that happened, the Germans could concentrate their forces in France for the first time in the war. Even more damagingly, Lenin proposed a peace settlement without annexations or indemnities. For war weary people of all nations and every political stripe, that might be a deeply attractive solution. Why not stop fighting and go back to where they had been before this war had started?

The allies had known since April 1917 that they would win the war in the end. The entry of the United States to the war had secured their financial and economic superiority over the Central Powers. The US Navy had brought relief from submarines on the sea lanes bringing supplies to Europe, and by the summer of 1919 four million American soldiers would have arrived in France. The danger was short term: that the home front would collapse in revolution before the war could be won militarily.

In the event the Central Powers came to the allies' rescue by overplaying their hands in the annexationist peace treaties they imposed on Russia at Brest Litovsk in March and on Romania at Bucharest in May. Neither of Germany's major allies in eastern Europe had any direct interest in the war in the west. For both Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria, the war, although it had prostrated them, had also now

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On the western front Ferdinand Foch was appointed to coordinate allied responses to the German offensive of 21 March, and in the following weeks his powers were extended to the strategic direction of the war in France and Flanders

delivered. They had got what they wanted: the question was whether they would survive to enjoy it. The Ottoman empire was more directly engaged against France and Britain, but after the Arab revolt and the fall of Jerusalem in December 1917, it diverted its gaze from its southern territories to the north, responding to the opportunities created by Russia's implosion. Indeed by late summer 1918 its principal rival in the east was Germany itself. As a result the enemy coalition fell apart. Between 29 September and 13 November 1918 each of Germany's allies sought its own armistice independently of Berlin.

As the alliance of the Central Powers splintered, the Entente partners – now without Russia – pulled together. The collapse of Tsarism and the entry of America made it easier to present the war as one for liberalism and democracy. The United States' entry also crystallised allied cooperation in the ordering and shipment of goods and resources. On the western front Ferdinand Foch was appointed to coordinate allied responses to the German offensive of 21 March, and in the following weeks his powers were extended to the strategic direction of the war in France and Flanders. Three days after the fifth and last German offensive on the Marne on 15 July, he ordered a counter-attack – the so-called second battle of the Marne – which gave the allied armies the momentum for the next 'hundred days', a series of successes which culminated with the German armistice of 11 November. All the allies – American, Belgian, British and French – played their part in a coordinated offensive along the whole length of the western front, which combined tanks, aircraft, artillery and infantry in what would now be called combined arms warfare.

Walking wounded: A group of injured French soldiers is escorted from the fighting by a British soldier (pictured centre) during the Second Battle of the Marne in the summer of 1918. **Credit: John Warwick Brooke, IWM (Q 6864)**

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Sir Hew Strachan is Professor of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews, having previously held the post of Chichele Professor of the History of War at the University of Oxford. He is Emeritus Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford and a Life Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He is a member of the Chief of the Defence Staff's Strategic Advisory Panel, the Defence Academy Advisory Board, and the Council of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. A trustee of the Imperial War Museum and a Commonwealth War Graves Commissioner, he also serves on the advisory panels of the UK and Scotland for the centenary of the First World War. Recent publications include *The First World War. Volume 1: To Arms* (2001); *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (2003); and *The Direction of War* (2013). He is the editor of *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (revised edition 2014), and of various books arising from his directorship of the Oxford Changing Character of War Programme from 2004 to 2015. He was knighted in the 2013 New Year Honours for services to the Ministry of Defence. In July 2017, Strachan was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, the United Kingdom's national academy for the humanities and social sciences.

Debates about whether the principal allied effort should be in the west or elsewhere were irrelevant in 1918. The shortest and most direct route from western Europe and Britain to the rest of the world lay across the Atlantic, the US entry to the war both confirmed that and helped secure its lines of communication. Convoys could now assemble in US harbours, rather than having do so outside territorial waters, and the United States Navy destroyers added to the numbers of escorts available to secure them against German submarines. By early 1918 the allies had won the 'battle of the Atlantic'.

Like the British, the Americans, having raised a mass army in short order, could only deliver and sustain it at the closest point to their home bases. They were also clear that their quarrel was with Germany: they only declared war against Austria-Hungary in December 1917, and never did so against Bulgaria or the Ottomans. That suited France, still fighting to clear its homeland, and it reflected the Germans' main effort in 1918.

The allies' Supreme War Council, which mutated into Foch's long-term strategic staff after May 1918, had planned on victory after June 1919, but after the second battle of the Marne Foch began to realise that he might achieve victory sooner than that. However, the general's political masters had learned to be wary of excessive optimism in reports from the field. The five German offensives in the west between March and July 1918 served as reminders of the enemy's capacity for regeneration. They were therefore taken by surprise on 1 October 1918 when Germany, at the insistence of its supreme military command, sued for an armistice. Over the next five weeks terms were thrashed out which stripped the German army and navy of their capacity to resume fighting. Thus a temporary pause, achieved without a climactic and decisive battle, was converted into a victory sufficient to set the course for peace.

After the war the German generals would claim that they were not defeated in the field, but had been betrayed by revolution at home, itself stoked by the allied maritime blockade. It was a false distinction. The First World War had become a total war, fought by citizen armies, and sustained by the production of civilians. Each component was dependent on the other, and the strains on one reverberated across the national war effort. More significant, as Foch himself realised, was that the war ended a year earlier than the politicians expected, leaving the latter insufficiently prepared to convert victory into peace.

Above, Dangerous waters: The crew of a German UC-1 class submarine on deck. Introduced in 1915, such craft were employed mainly on mine-laying duties and contributed to the sinking of 1,845,000 tonnes of Allied and neutral shipping between February and April 1917. **Credit: IWM (Q 20220)**

Below, Counter attack: A US Navy recruitment poster referencing the sinking of civilian ships by German U-boats.

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MARCH 1918: IMPERIAL GERMANY'S LAST ATTEMPT TO WIN THE WAR

Professor Dr Michael Epkenhans

After war had broken out in August 1914, the Prussian Minister of War, General Erich von Falkenhayn, wrote to a friend: "Even if we lose this war, it will have been wonderful to have taken part in it!" Roughly four years later, probably no-one would have shared this view. Rather, the wife of a mason living in the Rhineland jotted down in her diary on 11 November 1918: "The ceasefire has been signed at 11 o'clock this morning. Thanks God. It is better to make a painful break than draw out the agony!"

How could this happen? If we first look at the beginning of the war, Germany seemed – at least at first sight – well prepared for war and, moreover, victory over its enemies. After the order of mobilisation had been issued, all troops were put on trains and sent to the fronts, especially in the West. More than 20,000 trains crossed the important Rhine Bridge in Cologne to invade Belgium and France – as almost meticulously planned by the general staff under Field Marshall Alfred Count Schlieffen and his successor, Colonel General Helmuth von Moltke, in the years before – and to crush France within the weeks to follow. Only a small part of the army, the 8th army, was left in the East to protect Germany's Eastern provinces against a Russian onslaught. Before the Russian steamroller was supposed to get really moving, the war would hopefully be over.

> The numbers the Germans had mobilised were indeed impressive: 2.4 million soldiers were part of the first wave, which, if all went right, was to win the war

The numbers the Germans had mobilised were indeed impressive: 2.4 million soldiers were part of the first wave, which, if all went right, was to win the war. Most importantly, though the degree of public support is a matter of dispute, there can be no doubt that – by and large – all political parties, apart from a few dissenters, and the majority of the population supported Germany's entry into the war. Some were, indeed, real war-enthusiasts, but most of them were convinced that the German Empire had to defend itself against aggression, most importantly against Russian despotism. The war-machine itself – namely industry – had also started to run more or less smoothly after it had become clear that the war would last longer than expected. Eventually thousands of smaller or bigger firms were producing for the army and the navy. Last but not least, the question of war-finance had been solved: war-bonds were signed by millions of Germans who hoped that the enemy would eventually pay for them.

In 1916, however, the situation had begun to change fundamentally. Both sides had tried to break the deadlock through major offensives both at Verdun and at the Somme in the West and in the East – with little success as we all know. Italy's and Romania's entries into the war in May 1915 and August 1916 respectively had increased the number of Germany's enemies, but, so far, it had not helped the Allies to win the war. Similarly, Turkey's entry on the side of the Central Powers had also only enlarged the theatre of war, but not made German victory more likely.

In 1917 Britain had renewed its offensives in Flanders, again with little success despite heavy losses. Though the Germans had withstood all attacks, they had also suffered enormously. However, contrary to the Allies, the Germans had at least achieved victory against one important enemy at the end of 1917. After three years of fighting and increasing hardships at home, the Czarist Empire had collapsed in the course of two revolutions and military setbacks during the Kerensky offensive delivering peace. Germany's nightmare of fighting a two-front war had thus disappeared.

Whether this victory would give Germany a reasonable chance of also winning the war in the West was, though, an open question. Of course, throughout 1917 the Germans had fought a successful defensive war in the West. There was, however, one new aspect, they could not neglect in the short- or long-term. After three years of avoiding more or less everything to keep the United States out of the war, Germany had carelessly thrown the gauntlet into the face of President Wilson. On 1 February 1917 they had begun a new submarine offensive. By sinking all shipping without prior warning, the Admiralty staff had promised to force Britain upon its knees within six months and thus win the war. The outcome was, as we all know, completely different. Neither was Britain upon its knees at the end of the year nor had the navy been able to prevent US soldiers and, moreover, US weapons and war materials of all kinds from crossing the Atlantic.

As a result the window of opportunity which Germany's victory over Russia had opened would close as soon as the Allies had recovered from their losses in 1917 and renewed their offensives in the West with even greater vigour in 1918.

As in 1914, in late 1917 the Germans again opted for a single blow to decide the war. Ludendorff's planning for this last battle very much resembled Schlieffen's and Moltke's ideas in this respect. How well were the Germans prepared for this scenario? Let us first look at the organisation of the war. One of the main characteristics of Germany's war effort was the multitude of organisations which were involved in the political, military, and economic decision-making process: the government, the Supreme Army Command, the navy, the war ministry, to some extent even parliament despite its restricted rights and eventually above all of them, at least in theory, the Emperor himself as the supreme warlord who was supposed to take the final decision or to mediate between different interests. During the course of the war, this system, which even before the war had been called 'polycratic' or, to put it less nicely, 'chaotic' the balance had slowly shifted in favour of an increasingly stronger position of the supreme army command. Whether this did indeed transform into a silent dictatorship is a matter of dispute: that it was the most important organisation can, however, not be doubted, though, in theory, it was only responsible for planning and conducting all operations.

Eventually, after long discussions in the fall and winter of 1917/18, it was the Supreme Army Command which decided to start a new offensive although some members of the government as well as important members of society had been in favour of trying to find out whether a compromise peace was possible. However, which 'assets' did it have at its disposal? Let's look at the army first. Compared to 1914, Germany's military strength had doubled since the beginning of the war. In March 1918 the whole field army consisted of 176,713 officers, 4,443,243 men and 992,557 horses. The great majority of this army was deployed on the Western front. However, roughly one million men were still serving on the Eastern front where Germany had started to occupy huge parts of former Russia both in order to force Bolshevik Russia to sign a harsh peace treaty in February 1918 and to enlarge its spheres of influence from the Ukraine to Georgia. Nevertheless, in March 1918 the German army with its 194 divisions had a superiority of 18 divisions in the West.

However, some caveats have to be made. Most divisions were worn-out and tired and the old officer corps had suffered huge losses in the past three years. The same applied to the traditionally very important non-commissioned officer corps. Those who had succeeded their positions did not have the experience of their predecessors. The situation among the rank-and-file was hardly better. Many were either too old or still too young for front-line service. In 1917 all men born in 1898 had been drafted and trained and sent to the front. In 1918, those born in 1899 were, indeed, the last reserve amounting to 250,000 men. Though those born in 1900 were also called-up in 1918 for military training, most of them did not see front-line service. Though, taken altogether, these figures seemed to make up a formidable striking force, at a closer look the situation was bleak. The war ministry had figured out that the army was only short of 330,000 men in 1918, if losses amounted to, as expected, 150,000 men every month. Monthly losses of more than 400,000 men after the offensive had started made clear how optimistic these estimates had been.

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The army was, however, not only short of men – hardly less important was the shortage of horses. Contrary to the Allies, the German army still heavily depended upon horse-power in a literal sense. For the offensive itself the number of horses seemed sufficient, since all resources had been fully mobilised. It was, however, only a question of time, when the army would be unable to move. Mechanising the army at a greater pace was no option, because of lacking raw materials like rubber and petrol as well as problems of producing lorries in greater numbers. Arms – light and heavy artillery, ammunitions and rifles as well as even fighter aircraft for tactical support on the ground – seemed, however, available in sufficient numbers. The only exception was tanks. The army had neglected this new type of weapon convinced that it was of no real use in the war. The only question was, however, how long these weapons and provisions would last.

And what about the German navy, the Emperor's most favourite weapon? Contrary to all hopes and promises, the navy had proved unable to fulfil them. On the eve of war, the analysis of Royal Navy manoeuvres had left no doubt that the latter would not offer battle under the guns of Heligoland as the navy's leadership had expected during all the years of Germany's costly build-up of a powerful navy. Rather, the Grand Fleet established a distant blockade in the Northern North Sea. This blockade not only kept the High Seas fleet at arm's length, but it also allowed the British to cut off all German lines of communication. For an industrial power like Germany this decision soon proved disastrous because it depended on imports and exports both to keep the war-machine running and for its population to survive. After

Early onslaught: German infantry on the battlefield in August 1914. **Credit: US War Dept**

BIOGRAPHY

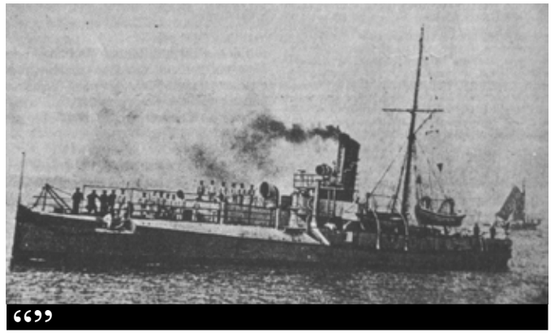
Professor Dr Michael Epkenhans is the Director of Historical Research at the Centre for Military History and Social Sciences of the German Armed Forces (ZMSBw) at Potsdam. He is an expert in German and European History of the 19th and 20th centuries with a special emphasis on military history. His main field of research is German military history before, during and after the First World War. In addition to his role at the ZMSBw he is Professor at Potsdam University and editor of Germany's leading journal on military history, the *Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift*. Professor Epkenhans holds a commission in the German Navy with the rank of Commander (Naval Reserve).

successful surprise attacks in 1914 and 1915, the High Seas Fleet had avoided any encounter with the Grand Fleet. In 1916, however, it had, more or less by accident, clashed with the Grand Fleet in the Battle of Jutland as a result of a sortie which had had completely different aims. This knocking at the door of the cage in which it was kept prisoner did, however, not change anything. Despite some tactical successes during the battle, the strategic situation remained the same as before.

The North Sea and the waters around Great Britain were still the most important theatres of the war at sea at the beginning of the last year of the war. For the Grand Fleet 1917 had been a year of great disappointments. Though the Grand Fleet had like her enemy decided to avoid bigger actions, for the possible risks did not match with the likely gains, it had nevertheless tried to inflict losses upon the enemy's surface ships. Like below the surface, it was the German High Sea Fleet with its energetic commander-in-chief, Admiral Reinhard Scheer, which had tried to strike again in the North Sea in late 1917. After the Emperor had forbidden a major attack planned by Scheer into the Hoofden in early 1917, two sorties by light cruisers against Allied convoys in the North Sea proved very successful. In mid-October two German light cruisers, SMS *Brummer* and SMS *Bremse* attacked a westbound Scandinavian convoy 70 miles east of Lerwick, and in mid-December the Germans struck again. Two torpedo-boat flotillas accompanied by the light cruiser SMS *Emden* attacked Allied convoys in the war channel along the east coast and on the Bergen-Lerwick route. Each time they did not only sink many of the merchant vessels, but also most of the convoy escorts.

And what did the German navy plan for and do in 1918? Scheer was fully aware of his weaknesses. Since U-boat-warfare had become his priority, the sweeping of minefields in the German Bight kept the fleet occupied to a steadily increasing degree. Without the support of big ships minesweepers had no chance of fulfilling this dangerous and difficult task. Moreover, German operations in the Baltic against Finland in spring 1918 required further support from the fleet. As a result all ideas to support the army's great offensive in the West in March 1918 by attacking Allied transports in the Channel were put aside. Economic pressure exerted by submarines remained the only contribution of the High Seas Fleet in these months. The risks of an operation against the French coast as far as Calais seemed too high compared with the gains such an attack would bring about. Nevertheless, this did not mean that the High Seas Fleet wanted to remain idle. In late April the fleet left port again though not for the French coast but Scandinavian waters to attack allied convoys, which it did not find this time. Instead, one of its valuable battle-cruisers was torpedoed by a British submarine.

Assessing the strength of the army or the contribution of the navy, however, is only one aspect. What about the domestic situation? Until 1915, perhaps even until 1916, all was 'quiet' on the domestic front. Of course, the number of dissenters on the political left, the number of strikes and even demonstrations against the war had increased. Even in parliament the opposition against the government had become stronger. The bloody battles in 1916, and, moreover, the increasing lack of food and daily commodities had eventually turned the tide. The Turnip Winter of 1917 and the long cold, which went hand-in-hand with the increasing



In mid-October [1917] two German light cruisers, SMS *Brummer* (pictured) and SMS *Bremse* attacked a westbound Scandinavian convoy 70 miles east of Lerwick, and in mid-December the Germans struck again. Two torpedo-boat flotillas accompanied by the light cruiser SMS *Emden* attacked Allied convoys in the war channel along the east coast and on the Bergen-Lerwick route. Each time they did not only sink many of the merchant vessels, but also most of the convoy escorts

demands of the army to work more and harder for the common war-effort, had simply been too much. In March 1917, thousands of workers downed tools at the Imperial Yard in Kiel to demand higher wages, better food rations and – for the first time – more political rights and, most importantly, peace.

These strikes were eventually crushed, but this did not mean that there was no discontent any more. Rather, the number of strikes and demonstrations steadily increased. War-weariness and hunger were two of the main reasons for this movement. We have to remember that daily rations had gone down to 1,200 calories instead of 2,400 calories for ordinary citizens; even workers in the heavy industries received only two thirds of what was necessary. As a result people were not only starving but dying. Even if we leave out the great flu of 1918, it is estimated that 400,000 Germans died of hunger or other illness which proved fatal because of their physical weakness. In January 1918, while the army was preparing its final offensive, new strikes which now spread all over the empire and which affected many arms factories made again clear that people wanted peace, more bread, and political reforms.

And what about the war-economy? In 1914 industry had, due to the wide-spread short-war illusion, taken almost no precautions for a long, protracted war. This had slowly changed with the help of leading industrialists. The battles of 1916 had, however, made clear that the army needed more than industry could produce. In the event, the so-called Hindenburg programme was supposed to mobilise all resources for the war-effort. This programme was accompanied by the so-called 'auxiliary service law'. All men between 16 and 60 were obliged to work. Attempts to extend the law to women, however, failed. Nevertheless, the number

of women working in the arms and other related industries was considerable. After many problems, the Hindenburg programme seemed to improve the situation on the fronts. However, the price for this 'success' was high and somehow detrimental to the war-effort. First, in order to increase production, industry needed greater numbers of skilled workers who, accordingly, could not serve in the trenches. As a result, the war-ministry and leading industrialists almost continuously clashed over this question. Second, producing war materials was one aspect, transporting the raw materials to the factories and the finished products to the front lines were a completely different matter. The better the Hindenburg programme eventually worked, the greater was the so-called transport crisis which had become visible as early as spring 1917, but which reached its climax during the 1918 offensives. Third, the more arms and ammunitions were produced, the greater was the strain of those who had to work in the factories under circumstances which became more and more difficult every day. It was an open question how long people would be willing to stand the strain, if the war continued into 1919 and even 1920, instead of coming to an end in 1918.

It was against this background that German troops got out of their trenches on 21 March 1918 to strike the famous 'hole' into the British lines and thus pave the way for final victory. In the first days of the offensives many soldiers and people on the home front had the impression that this carefully prepared onslaught would be successful. However, after initial success, German troops were finally stopped, perhaps at the very last minute. On 5 April, General Hermann von Kuhl, a Bavarian general and one the planners of the offensive, admitted in his diary: "The attack itself was a great success, but the ensuing operations were conducted very badly." It was, however, not only the ill-conduct of operations which made victory increasingly unlikely. A sober assessment of the reality at the front would have made clear that all further attempts to achieve a breakthrough would be in vain. Losses amounted to roughly 450,000 men every month. More importantly, though the majority of soldiers had stormed enemy trenches with sometimes astonishing enthusiasm, the lack of success had an enormous impact upon their morale as many commanders reported to the Supreme Army Command. War weariness increased steadily, not the least because German soldiers were also starving. Their rations were even lower than those of the

Telling blow: A section of Hindu soldiers are pictured in the forest of Villers-Cotterets, where Foch had massed French, English and American troops. On July 18, 1918, he ordered an attack of the 7th German Army from three sides.

It was only after the Allied successes at Villers-Cotterets and at Amiens, the famous 'black day' of the German army, that Germany's leadership began to realise that victory might not be achieved. It took, however, another six weeks to admit it openly and ask for a truce which eventually ended the war

Italians, who also received smaller rations than their French or British comrades. Nevertheless, despite these sufferings the Germans achieved several impressive successes in their ensuing offensives in May, June, and even in July 1918. These successes, however, were only of a tactical nature. Strategically they only increased the structural problems the Germans were already facing, if we only look at the extension of the supply-lines through devastated areas. As in the years before, these successes nurtured the illusion that Germany might still win the war.

Ideas to look for a compromise peace before it was too late were still bluntly rejected by the Supreme Army Command. It was only after the Allied successes at Villers-Cotterets and at Amiens, the famous 'black day' of the German army, that Germany's leadership began to realise that victory might not be achieved. It took, however, another six weeks to admit it openly and ask for a truce which eventually ended the war. In the meantime, though the front-lines still held, thousands of soldiers had decided to end the war for themselves by either surrendering to Allied troops or simply disappearing in the hinterland.

For the home front the admission that the war was lost was one of the reasons for the outbreak of a revolution several weeks later. The final trigger was the attempt by the navy to fight a final battle against the Grand Fleet with no obvious strategic purpose but to save the honour of the imperial naval officer corps. The rank-and-file of the navy were, however, unwilling to die for officers who had treated them badly in the years before.

To sum up, in March 1918 Germany's political and military leaders decided to throw their last dice; it took them another six months to realise that they had lost the gamble. The results were military defeat and a revolution, which overthrew the old political and social order.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF 1918: BRITISH EMPIRE

Professor David Stevenson

In 1918 the United Kingdom and its empire formed in some ways an alliance within an alliance. The empire's contribution to the overall British war effort was indispensable, although its role should not obscure the strain on the home islands. In November 1918, of 87 British Empire infantry divisions (Regular and Territorial), six were Indian, five Australian, four Canadian, and one from New Zealand. As of March the British Empire armed forces totalled 5.6 million, of whom 3.8 million (22.5 per cent of the relevant male age cohorts) came from the UK. Similarly, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the British Isles (population 46 million) was comparable to that of the rest of the empire (population 380 million) combined, and the UK accounted for almost 90 per cent of total British Empire war expenditure.

In good measure precisely because of the empire, Britain's commitments were worldwide. Of the 87 British Empire infantry divisions in November 1918, 61 were serving on the Western Front, but a total of 19 were in Italy, Macedonia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt-Palestine, while four territorial divisions were in the UK and three in Egypt. 51 UK infantry divisions were on the Western Front, three in Italy, four in Macedonia, one in Palestine, and one in Mesopotamia. Some three quarters of the British Empire's manpower and four fifths of the UK divisions were in France and Flanders, but almost a quarter were not; and additionally the UK was sustaining the Allies' largest navy and mercantile marine. Although Britain drew in manpower and resources from all over the world, it was fighting to destroy the German colonial empire and to conquer Palestine and Mesopotamia, as well – from summer 1918 – as intervening in Russia. Prime Minister David Lloyd George's War Cabinet well understood both the value of the empire's contribution and the global nature of the British war effort, which assisted and yet also impeded a concentration in Western Europe.

To repel Germany's 1918 offensives the British needed manpower and matériel. Their access to them depended on logistics, both land and maritime. Most European railway systems were running down, for lack of personnel, spare parts, fuel, and maintenance, but the UK network held up better than in most belligerents. In contrast, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had suffered serious supply difficulties on the Somme in 1916, but since then the British had invested heavily in dock and track infrastructure, and taken over much of France's northern railway company network. Although choke-points such as Amiens and Hazebrouck bulked large in the 1918 campaigning, on the whole the system worked well. During Germany's March 1918 'Michael' offensive the British moved 18 divisions into the battle zone and withdrew another 19. Perhaps more surprisingly, maritime supply was also maintained, despite the depredations of unrestricted submarine warfare (torpedoing without warning). By 1918 Allied shipping losses were down approximately to the levels before the unrestricted U-Boat campaign had begun in February 1917; this reduction being largely due to the introduction of convoying across the Atlantic and in coastal waters. Yet sinkings still exceeded new construction, and a second key development was better organisation – faster turnaround times in Liverpool and New York, and concentrating available shipping on the North Atlantic run. More goods were landed monthly in British ports in the first half of 1918 than the first half of 1917. Of the American troops shipped to Europe 45 per cent sailed in British vessels, and almost all escaped the U-Boats. Command of the sea was vital for alleviating coal and grain shortages in France and Italy as well as meat shortages in Britain (which provoked huge queues in London's East End). It was also crucial for the fuel needed by the Royal Navy and for delivering steel and machinery to make munitions.

During Germany's March 1918 'Michael' offensive the British moved 18 divisions into the battle zone and withdrew another 19

If the British could transport most of what they needed, they also had enough money. Between 1914 and 1918 British GDP expanded by some 13 per cent. Britain spent more on the war than did any other belligerent, and in 1918 government spending reached 37.7 per cent of GDP. Taxes rose on incomes, luxury imports, and war profits, but most expenditure was covered by borrowing: from the public and from abroad. After America entered the war, the US Treasury did not provide free loans but did charge below the market interest rate, and from July 1917 it supported the sterling/dollar exchange rate. In these circumstances Winston Churchill (Munitions Minister in 1917-18) advised that "finance is not a limiting factor". By now the 'shell scandal' that earlier beset the BEF had been overcome. The army was obtaining all the basic weapons – shells, machine guns, rifles, 18-pounder field guns – that it needed, and production had entered a more sophisticated phase, including poison gas, tanks, and aircraft. In 1918, 32,000 aeroplanes were completed, double the 1917 figure. The field and machine guns lost in the 'Michael' fighting were replaced within weeks; and by 8 April the BEF had more aircraft than on 21 March. In the week before the BEF breached the Hindenburg Line in September, its artillery fired 3.383 million rounds. All this while in May 1918 Britain had 848 anti-submarine vessels under construction. For a country that had passed its industrial heyday, its manufacturing achievements were remarkable.

The key constraint was not matériel but personnel – and 'manpower' is a First World War coinage. Since introducing conscription the government had been preoccupied with balancing home front requirements against the armed forces. Britain was relatively successful in recruiting women for war production: some 0.75 million out of a Munitions Ministry workforce of 2.75 million were female, whereas the German Army in 1917-18 released hundreds of thousands of soldiers to the armaments plants. But the BEF reached its peak size during 1917, and after suffering 790,000 casualties during that year it had great difficulty in maintaining its strength. Dominion recruiting was also reaching its limits – conscription was twice defeated in referenda in Australia, and when Canada introduced it riots broke out in Quebec. Where the empire made the biggest difference was India, whose army doubled in 1916-18, so that Indians formed the bulk of the British Empire infantry not only in Mesopotamia but also in Palestine and increasingly in Macedonia. Nonetheless, in two other respects the British authorities were gravely constrained: (i) although they took legislative powers in 1918 to introduce conscription in Ireland, just the possibility caused uproar in the southern and western counties and the British garrison had to be reinforced, the net effect being to reduce the military manpower available; (ii) when the government decided to call up 75,000 miners, Britain suffered a dangerous fall in coal output. In general the Cabinet was reluctant to jeopardise industrial production and feared confrontation with the trade unions, especially after a 1917 engineering strike had interrupted artillery deliveries and cost 1.5 million working days. In late 1917 the Cabinet decided to prepare for a long haul, looking to victory with American aid in 1919 or even 1920: the priorities were therefore shipbuilding, agriculture, and the air defence of London, rather than the BEF. It grew ever harder to square the manpower circle, and the obstacles were not just technical but also painfully political.

Against this backdrop we can consider the preparations for the 1918 campaign, considering first relations with Britain's allies and then GHQ's own measures.

The USA. The prospect of American troops arriving en masse

Women at work: Rows of 6" howitzer shells line a warehouse at the National Filling Factory in Chilwell **Credit: IWM (Q 30042)**

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BIOGRAPHY

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was a key reason why Hindenburg and Ludendorff opted for a spring 1918 win-the-war offensive. Yet they overestimated the intended speed of the American build-up, and the offensive actually caused the Americans to accelerate their shipments. To an extent the Germans committed suicide for fear of death. In March 1918, almost a year since entering the war, the US had a quarter of a million military personnel in France and two divisions in the line. The burden of resistance fell mainly on the European Allies. The reasons were partly technical: the American regular army in April 1917 numbered only 100,000, and much of it was needed to help with instruction. By 1918 the administration had Congressional funding to conscript two million men, but training and shipping them still took time. In addition, however, the American commander, John J. Pershing, insisted on a balanced build-up with logistical, engineering, and medical contingents, not just infantry, so that eventually his force could operate independently. He resisted pressure for his troops to be brigaded in French and British units ('amalgamation') – partly because he and Woodrow Wilson's administration wanted a separate army to gain political leverage.

France. In the absence of a large US contribution, Anglo-French co-ordination was vital, but this issue too was fraught. Lloyd George had placed his Western Front commander, Sir Douglas Haig, under French orders during the disastrous spring 1917 offensive. By the end of 1917, in the absence of a supreme Allied commander, the French C-in-C Philippe Pétain planned to attack in 1918 in Alsace, and Haig to attack in Flanders: at opposite ends of the front. In November the Allied leaders had established the Supreme War Council as a co-ordinating agency: it comprised monthly summit meetings between heads of government and an advisory staff, the Permanent Military Representatives (PMR). Early in 1918 the Allies agreed that in view of the likelihood of German and Austrian offensives they should concentrate on fighting defensively in France and Italy, attacking elsewhere (such as in Palestine) only if resources could be spared. The Cabinet overruled Haig by insisting on the extension of the BEF-held line from 93 to 125 miles, a relief that allowed Pétain to enlarge his reserve but meant the British Fifth Army sector in the south was held thinly. However, an attempt by the French and British Governments to assign Western Front units to a general reserve under an Executive Board (the PMR chaired by the French General Ferdinand Foch) collapsed. Haig and Pétain opposed it, and Lloyd George acquiesced in return for Haig acquiescing in the replacement as Chief of the Imperial General Staff of Sir William Robertson (whom the Premier loathed) by Sir Henry Wilson (with whom Lloyd George could get on). Instead Haig and Pétain made bilateral arrangements to assist each other if attacked. In the March 1918 crisis Pétain actually sent troops to assist the BEF as fast as the available transport would permit, even though he feared (mistakenly) that the Germans would attack him elsewhere. When Foch was appointed on 26 March to co-ordinate the Allies' Western Front armies the tide of battle was already turning, but the timing of Foch's appointment enabled him to take a good deal of the credit.

Haig underestimated the breadth of the attack, the effectiveness of the bombardment, and the speed of the infantry advance, and he allowed 88,000 men on 'special leave' to remain at home

Haig and his General Headquarters (GHQ): (i) Manpower. In the 'Maurice debate' in the Commons in May 1918, Lloyd George rebuffed insinuations that he had weakened the BEF by needlessly withholding men. In fact the BEF's overall size had increased between January 1917 and January 1918, but the number of combatants had fallen (from 1.07 million to 969,000) – though this partly reflected a growth in support services. Once the German attack began, however, more than 200,000 men were rushed across the Channel in two weeks. The government had withheld them partly because of exaggerated fears of an invasion of England, but also because it feared that GHQ would squander the troops in fruitless new offensives.

(ii) Intelligence. During the winter, GHQ realised that troop transfers from Russia would enable a German spring offensive, and accurately predicted the timing. Nonetheless, Haig underestimated the breadth of the attack, the effectiveness of the bombardment, and the speed of the infantry advance, and he allowed 88,000 men on 'special leave' to remain at home.

(iii) Morale. GHQ knew that BEF morale was at a low ebb after the Passchendaele fighting, and it was further unsettled by the transition in early 1918 from 12- to nine-battalion infantry divisions, as another adaptation to the manpower shortage. That the Germans now came out into the open and that more mobile warfare resumed probably did as much as anything to improve the troops' mood.

(iv) Tactics. Haig had too little labour. He concentrated much of what he had on improving his lateral and narrow-gauge railways. But GHQ also introduced a new defensive system (modelled on German practice). It replaced continuous trenches by a Forward Zone of supposedly mutually supporting outposts, then larger redoubts in a Battle Zone further out of artillery range, and finally a Rear Zone where counter-attack units would concentrate. Many infantrymen felt isolated and unhappy with these arrangements, too many defenders were stationed forward, and the new defences were unfinished, especially in the recently occupied southern sector. The collapse of this system under the shock of the enemy bombardment and of 'stormtroop' infantry tactics was perhaps the biggest single reason for the speed and scale of the British withdrawal once Germany attacked.

Haig did not get everything wrong, and he suffered in part from factors outside his control, but the opening stages of the Michael battle were always likely to be nerve-racking. This presentation has tried to identify the slack in the system (French, British, and American reserve forces in France and across the Channel and Atlantic; British financial, manufacturing, and logistical assets) that helped the Allies contain the onslaught and roll with the blow. It has also highlighted the strength in depth of the British Empire's war effort, and the mainsprings of its extraordinary resilience.

COALITION WAR: THE ALLIED AND ASSOCIATED POWERS

Professor Georges-Henri Soutou

"Since I have seen a coalition at work, I much less admire Napoléon" – Marshal Foch

What was the state of allied coordination and command at the time of the first big German offensive in the West on March 21st? Since 1915, there had been yearly meetings of the commanders in chief of allied armies, including the Russians, in order to coordinate more or less the timetable of their main offensives during the following year. There had been more coordination in the West among British, French and Belgian commands, but only the Somme offensive in July 1916 saw a real coordinated effort on the same battlefield.

Some progress appeared to be in reach after the disaster at Caporetto and after the Rapallo and Paris Allied Conferences in November. An inter-allied Supreme War Council was set up, formed of members of the different governments, with military advisers; and those were to form in January 1918 an Executive Council, chaired by General Foch. But the whole system was not effective: "A worse state of chaos than I have ever known in all my wide experience," quipped Hankey, the chief of the Cabinet office. For instance, they failed to build up a central reserve, able to come to assistance to all Allies at any place along the front, although it was seen as a most necessary measure in order to be able to meet a German offensive, the location of which would be very difficult to foresee. We shall see how successful they were in transforming a mere coalition into a real alliance, concentrating on the lessons of lasting value.

The consensus at the Supreme War Council in December 1917 was that after a difficult 1917, and before the Americans could arrive in any number, 1918 would be very difficult

BIOGRAPHY

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The dire situation of the Allies at the beginning of March 1917

In December 1917 Lenin had started to negotiate with the Germans. This led to the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty of March 3 1918, which gave the Central powers control of the Baltic countries, Poland and Ukraine (and which did not prevent the German army from advancing further East). The Allies intervened, from Archangelsk to Odessa and Vladivostok, but were unable to restore an Eastern front against Germany (one of the main reasons being that they acted piecemeal and did not coordinate enough, mainly because there were actually pursuing different aims). Another problem was the Italian front following the severe defeat at Caporetto (October-November 1917). The Germans had used the new penetration tactics developed at Riga in September 1917, which they were to use again with dramatic effect in March in France. The Italians had re-established their front on the Piave, but they clung to the last hills before the Po Valley and Northern Italy.

Meanwhile the Salonika Front remained at a standstill. "Germany's soft underbelly", to quote Winston Churchill, certainly was in the Balkans, but it was guarded by rather muscular Bulgarian troops. It was also beset by problems between Allies (particularly France and Italy) and by the problems of Greece, where the pro-Entente Venizelos had deposed King Constantine. On top of that, both British and French High Commands did not believe in the indirect approach. To be fair, they had to take into account the demonstrated ability of the Germans to react very fast, as had been the case when Rumania entered the War in 1916. Only in September 1918 did the Salonika Front start to move – but then with a vengeance!

The allied consensus was to wait, to see, to try to suffocate Germany. But they had no actual operations plan for 1918. The consensus at the Supreme War Council in December 1917 was that after a difficult 1917 and Brest-Litovsk, and before the Americans could arrive in any number, 1918 would be very difficult. Victory could not come before 1919. To prepare for another year of war, all they could do was to try to suffocate the German economy, get intelligence on German preparations and plans, prepare themselves according to the evolving tactics of the war and exploit their material superiority. On all those points they were able to coordinate moderately-to-highly successfully (NB: all that did not involve actual fighting).

Blockade and economic warfare: pooling and sharing. The most efficient coordination effort

Inter-allied economic cooperation was much developed through the 'Allied Executives' for shipping and essential raw materials. The Allied Maritime Transport Council was a great success: the British representative, James Arthur Salter,

related his experience (shared by Jean Monnet for France) in his book *Allied Shipping Control. An Experiment in International Administration* (1921), which is still useful in the context of *Operation REFLECT*.

The blockade of Germany was perfected: the Germans lacked oil and lubricants (ungreased train axles caught fire) and copper and foodstuffs. This certainly hampered their war effort and sapped their morale. And the Germans were to understand that 'economic warfare' against their trade and industry would continue even after the war: this was probably the most effective threat, when they decided in September 2018 to ask for an armistice.

How effective were the Allies in getting intelligence and how far did they share it?

The French 2nd Bureau of the General Staff had properly understood the new German methods, tried first at Riga, then at Caporetto with devastating effect: elite troops with high firepower penetrating through enemy lines, infiltrating themselves between enemy strong-points[1]. That information, very up-to date and well organised, was disseminated to the different French commands.

[1] *Unpublished PhD Olivier LAHAIE, "Evolution et adaptation de la Section de Renseignement et de la Section de Centralisation du Renseignement (2e Bureau/EMA) pendant la guerre de 1914-1918" Paris-Sorbonne, 1006.*

Mechanical manoeuvres: More than 400 British tanks prepared for the Battle of Cambrai at the Tank Driving School in Wailly, France. **Credit: IWM (Q 6299)**

On the British side, the Tank Corps had received before February 1918 a very perceptive report about the new German methods since Riga[2]. It would be interesting to know how much the Allies did exchange on that, or whether they reached those conclusions independently. Regardless there was very little effect whatsoever: the Allies were in 1918 rather complacent about the use of those methods in the West and eventually were taken by surprise all the same.

Strategic intelligence (particularly how many troops the Germans would keep in the East or send to the West) was very poor. The Allies did not realize that Ludendorff would retain one million men in the East, contrary to the principle of concentration of forces. Field intelligence was not bad, but not decisive; a fair amount of prisoners and deserters allowed the Allies to understand that a big offensive was afoot, but the huge German preparations all along the Western Front left the allied staffs undecided whether the main thrust would be in Champaign or in Picardy.

Pooling and sharing new tactics?

The Allies did not really take the new German tactics into account: they retained a linear defensive system protected by static artillery, hence the many German penetrations. But they introduced mechanical warfare, with tanks, trucks and airplanes, starting with the British tank attack at Cambrai on November 20 1917. Big progress was achieved in 1918: the new tactic was fully applied in the July 1918 counter-offensive, with massed tanks pushing far beyond the first enemy lines and aircraft attacking German reinforcements.

[2] *For this information I thank Colonel (retired) Geoffrey Vesey Holt*

The British Royal Tank Corps was preparing a 1940-style offensive for 1919, along the 'Plan 19' devised by the chief of Staff, RTC, JCC Fuller. An Inter-allied Tanks Committee (with Fuller) was instituted to coordinate tanks development. Tanks of one army could fight with the infantry of another army. A "Centre interallié de l'Artillerie d'assaut" was created to develop common tactics and concepts. But there was no operational coordination before March 1918.

Meanwhile, defensive was the order of the day, but with no common views about how to support each other. There was no common operative concept and even no proper operative outlook, just a vague commitment to support each other. But they had no clear idea about possible German offensives. Would it come in Flanders? In Champagne? Or even through Switzerland? The Germans were able to hide to a large extent troop transports from the East and transports along the Western Front: on March 21st the head of the 2ème Bureau had to tell Pétain 24 German divisions were unaccounted for. Including units in transit from the East, the location of about 40 divisions was unknown. Ludendorff achieved surprise.

On March 11th the Germans introduced a new code for their wireless transmissions. But it was complex, and some units were at first unable to use it; thus, on March 14th, they were repeated under the former code, which had been broken. Thus the French were able to break the new code, but apparently it did not allow them to draw real operative, useful conclusions: the next German offensives surprised them all the same.

Only the last offensive, in July, was detected timely enough to allow for actual reaction, mainly from aerial observations, prisoners and agents. It was painstaking work, not a great intelligence coup.

The German attack and the Allied disarray

The Germans attacked on March 21st at the junction between the British and French lines, along the Oise River, and opened a gap of about 50 miles. Gal. Haig wanted to cover his communications and retreated westwards. Gal. Pétain, C-in-C of the French Army, contrary to frequent accusations, did not systematically retreat south to cover Paris, but French troops were pushed back. But he was slow in sending reinforcements, because he feared a second German attack in the Champagne region. Foch, at the time only chairman of the military committee of the Allied War Council, stressed that everything should be concentrated to close the gap. He convinced Clemenceau and Lloyd George. The question had been slowly maturing since 1917, but nobody was ready to accept loss of full control over one's own forces. The new Chief of the Imperial Staff, General Wilson, suggested Foch (he had known him for years and had actually devised with him the informal Franco-British military agreements before 1914). Unity of command was achieved at Doullens on March 26: Marshal Foch thus became 'the first SACEUR'.

> [Foch] understood that the main thing was to hold Amiens and its railways of strategic importance at all cost: neither Pétain nor Ludendorff grasped that

How did Foch understand his role?

He was acceptable to all, and the only one to rise to the challenge of a coordinated allied strategy. Actually (even if his title was later upgraded to C- in-C) he was only in charge of coordination, the Allied C-in-C retaining the right to appeal to their governments. Hence his method: he made suggestions, he did not give outright orders. But well-founded suggestions were in his view more effective than orders which might not be obeyed. After an inconclusive discussion, he would not insist, but leave a note... Foch believed that role was more important than the formal decision reached at Doullens. He did not start with a great strategic concept. His first task was to plug the breach between the French and British Armies by "patching up" (Foch's expression) the front, piecemeal, with reinforcements released by Pétain. Then the most urgent thing was to prevent the collapse of the front and of the Alliance.

The two main reasons for Foch's success were the application of the operative concept and the concentration on Amiens. The operative concept, intermediary between the strategic and the tactical levels, was first evolved by the Russians after their war with Japan in 1904-1905 (notion of a 'theatre of operations'). The Germans followed suit after 1914, first in the East. Joffre did it for the French 'North-East'. Foch enlarged the operative concept from the French 'North-East' to all the Western fronts down to the Piave, and, beyond his actual brief, to the overall direction of the war. Thus he had a strategic grasp of the whole situation. The second reason of his success was that he understood that the main thing was to hold Amiens and its railways of strategic importance at all cost: neither Pétain nor Ludendorff grasped that.

March to July: On the defensive, with Foch prodding and coaxing

From April 4th to July 13th four major German offensives took place. Pétain was pessimistic and all for a defensive strategy: "I'm waiting for the tanks and the Americans." He prescribed an elastic defence with a first position as a trip-wire and a principal position way back, out of range of German

British priority: The Surrender of the German High Seas Fleet, November 1918 (pictured is the German Battle Cruiser SMS Hindenburg). **Credit: IWM (Q 19300)**

artillery. But the commanders of the different French armies did not really obey, hence a series of near disasters.

Foch had other views: not conceding one inch of ground; maintaining the link with the British; building up reserves (which he did with American divisions coming on line and with an Italian corps); and then going on the offensive. He was to be ultimately vindicated.

On July 15-17 the Germans launched their last offensive, South of Reims. On July 18 the French counter-offensive on their flank began. It was decided by Foch against Pétain's advice. From then on, it was non-stop. But Foch had to defend Pershing and the Italians against Clemenceau (who did not want the US to build up their own command, and the Italians to nurse their forces and wait for their Vittorio Veneto victorious counter-offensive, but wanted to use their troops immediately as reinforcements).

But Foch had to reconcile different strategies and different war aims. Keeping everyone on board was Foch's first preoccupation. But diverging war aims and strategic directions opposed the Allies; Foch had to urge, prod and compromise. They all agreed on diminishing German geopolitical and economic power, seen as a quasi-hegemony over Europe. But they diverged for the rest: Great Britain's priorities were to eliminate the German Fleet; to secure the Low Countries against an eventually resurgent Germany; to control the Middle East. Pétain's was to secure the return of Alsace-Lorraine come what may, even a negotiated peace, through a dedicated offensive in Lorraine. He followed a national strategy, as did the British.

Foch's objective was to achieve a complete victory (with the control of the Rhine), through a series of offensives keeping the Germans off balance, while taking into account anyone's agenda, and keeping the Allies together in order to guarantee France's security after the war. It meant keeping all the Allies (including the US) happy, even at the cost of strategic concentration of forces and expediency: it was a grand strategy taking politics into account. And an inter-allied strategy, even if less than optimal.

Grand strategy and war termination: The Foch-Pétain controversy

Ludendorff realised that after the Bulgarian armistice on September 30th, Germany had decisively lost the war. He led Berlin to ask for an armistice before the enemy had entered German territory. Thus he probably saved the Reich.

Pétain had planned an offensive in Lorraine for November 13th, to get Alsace-Lorraine firmly in French hands before the peace treaty. But Foch, with Clemenceau's support, felt it was impossible to go on one more day. Because of his soldiers, and also because of the Allies. There were many controversies later. But their position was sound: it was the only way to nurture the prospects of what French governmental circles already called 'the Atlantic alliance'.

Conclusions

Doullens saved the Allies. But beyond the obvious, everyone agreed on the importance of the new operative level and the need for an operative outlook by Higher Command. The operative level was finally seen as the real competence level of military high command, just under the Grand Strategy they had to share with their political masters. Foch and his British counterparts understood that; Ludendorff not so much.

The Allies also cooperated on tactics and concepts more than usually realised. Adding the importance of the defensive and offensive aspects of Total War (trade, blockade, finance, propaganda and so on) and of allied cooperation, beyond coalition warfare to a real alliance, those were the enduring lessons of 1918.

COALITION WARFARE IN 1918: THE CASE OF THE CENTRAL POWERS

Professor Lothar Höbelt

The Central Powers were a far more asymmetrical alliance than the Entente. All three of Germany's allies taken together represented less than half of the German fighting power. In 1918, Germany put some 240 divisions into the field, Austria-Hungary roughly 70. On paper, the Ottoman Army consisted of 49 divisions, the Bulgarian one of 16; but then Bulgarian divisions were over-sized (comparable to US ones) and Turkish skeleton units of between 2,000 and 4,000 men. The imbalance was even worse in terms of material (machine-guns or steel-production). Thus, even with the best of intentions, the results of cooperation could not be all that rewarding for Germany.

The ups and downs of coalition warfare followed a pattern of challenge and response. Crisis acted as a catalyst for cooperation. Not surprisingly, cooperation between the armies of the Central Powers reached its high-water mark in the summer of 1916, after the Russian Brusilov Offensive and the Rumanian entry into the war, when a Supreme War Leadership ("Oberste Kriegsleitung") was established because German leadership was the only way Bulgaria and Turkey could be persuaded to join forces against Rumania. The Eastern Front was the only theatre of war where all four partners were able to cooperate. In early 1918, however, there was no longer much of an Eastern Front – and there was no immediate crisis that made cooperation unavoidable.

The reverse side of the coin was success breeds rivalry. One German minute reads: "Our allies are getting more impudent after every success." The allies doubtless felt that Germans were becoming even more arrogant, too. As a result, as the Russian collapse opened a window of opportunity for the Central Powers, political feuds multiplied, fuelled by disputes over the sharing of the spoils. Bulgaria quarrelled with the rest of her allies about the fate of the Dobrudja, the right-hand shore of the Danube; Germans and Turks engaged in a tug-of-war over Baku, with Germans openly supporting their illicit new partners, the Soviet Russians; in the summer of 1918, there was even an armed clash between the two of them. (However, minds concentrated wonderfully once

In terms of shortening the war, the Salonika front (above) proved to be a boon for the Entente. However, in terms of surviving the challenge of the spring of 1918, it was a drag

'Dunsterforce' appeared on the shores of the Caspian Sea in September 1918.)

As a result, for most of 1918, the Central Powers went their separate ways. Let's start with the more outlying regions. Politics, propaganda and war aims figured prominently in the dispute between the Germans and Ottomans. German experts lamented the 'cultural turn', the importance attached to symbolic sites bar of strategic value like Medina or Baghdad. Even more so, they faulted the Turks for pouring troops into Transcaucasia. For all that, these disputes had a slightly schizophrenic character. After all, the man who as their chief-of-staff drafted most of the Ottoman memoranda was none other than Hans von Seeckt (who went on to command the Reichswehr in the inter-war period). The commander of the army group facing Allenby in Palestine was a German too.

With hindsight, the Ottomans should have given priority to the Palestine front. Yet, for all their massive rates of desertion, the limiting factor in the Middle East was not soldiers, but coal supplies. Some argued that if the coal used for shipping in the Black Sea had been used on the Baghdad railway, things might have improved. However, Seeckt was probably right that even then a lack of locomotives would have created bottle-necks. Even worse, the key to war in Syria or Mesopotamia was the gap – or rather the several gaps – in the famous Berlin to Baghdad rail link. The Austrian ambassador in Constantinople was a far from unbiased observer, but there was a kernel of truth in his observation that every reinforcement for the Turks in the Arab South was not only pointless but positively harmful for logistical reasons.

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Lothar Höbelt was born in Vienna in 1956 and graduated with honours from the University of Vienna in 1982. He was assistant visiting professor at the University of Chicago in 1992, associate professor of Modern History at the University of Vienna since 1997, and lecturer at the Military Academy Wiener Neustadt since 2001. The main focus of his research is the history of Austria(-Hungary) in the 19th and 20th centuries. His publications include *Franz Joseph I: Der Kaiser und sein Reich: Eine politische Geschichte* (2009), and *Die Habsburger: Aufstieg und Glanz einer europäischen Dynastie* (2009). His latest work is *'Stehen oder Fallen?' Österreichische Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (2015).

Moreover, most of the disagreements between Germans and Ottomans surfaced in the summer of 1918 after the German push in the West had already come to a halt. For climatic reasons, too, fighting usually came to a halt during the summer months. There was very little the Turks could have done to help the Germans by drawing off more Entente troops. As it was, the Ottomans kept more than one million Brits busy in the Middle East, anyway (a number roughly comparable to the Germans left behind to police the marches of the East in 1918). That was no mean achievement. In a way, the Turks were thus more effective allies than the Austrians who did not manage to immobilise a similar number of Western troops.

In Macedonia, Bulgarians and the Armee de l'Orient continued their stand-off, as they had done for practically all of 1917. Debates about whether to evacuate Salonika or not had a lot to do with Entente war aims, Greek politics and French military in-fighting, but little with enemy action. The major cause of losses on both sides was not enemy action but malaria. For the Central Powers, the situation came close to the best of all possible worlds. In the end, in terms of shortening the war, the Salonika front proved to be a boon for the Entente. However, in terms of surviving the challenge of the spring of 1918, it was a drag. Actually, if the Bulgarians had succeeded in forcing the Entente to evacuate Salonika, it would have spelt a terrible loss of prestige, but Robertson would have been the first to note that in terms of resources they might have done the Entente a service. In terms of possible reinforcements for the Western front, Britain and France would have a dozen extra divisions; whereas the Bulgarians would certainly not have transferred any of their forces to Flanders Fields.

Emperor Charles I never had liked the idea of mixing Austrian troops with German ones. When he had served as an army commander in 1916, he himself had suffered from having to kowtow to a Prussian COS

In many ways, coalition warfare for the Central Powers thus boiled down to relations between Germany and Austria-Hungary – the Austrians might send reinforcements to the Western Front. If not as a cutting edge of the offensive (except for their famous but few 12" mortars) then at least by freeing German troops in quiet sectors of the front for the main offensive. Or they could try and stage a repeat performance of Caporetto that might force the Western powers to send reinforcements to Italy. This was very much a second-best option: Britain and France would always prefer to defend Amiens or Calais, rather than Venice. Besides, even if the Austrians had been successful in crossing the Piave, the Italians could always have rallied behind the Adige or the Mincio.

Why was there no determined effort to use the Austrian forces freed by the Russian collapse and the Italian near-collapse to help the big German push in the West, one way or another? In fact, already a few days after the battle of Caporetto had started in October 1917, Ludendorff did suggest that the Austrians might reciprocate by sending some of their reserves his way in the spring. Both Baron Arthur Arz von Straussenburg, Austria-Hungary's Transylvanian COS, and his deputy Colonel Waldstätten seemed to agree. Yet, these agreements were not followed up. One of the reasons probably reads: They got bogged down in the mire of Austrian command arrangement. Arz was acting more as a mediator than as a commander. Mediating between Germany and his own Kaiser, and between powerful Army group commanders like his predecessor Conrad or Boroevic.

Emperor Charles I never had liked the idea of mixing Austrian troops with German ones. When he had served as an army commander in 1916, he himself had suffered from having to kowtow to a Prussian COS (once again, a certain Seeckt). In 1917, he had originally wanted to fight Caporetto with his own troops exclusively. In 1918, he did not want to join the German advance into the Ukraine. Yet, on each of these occasions, Arz subtly managed to circumvent his monarch's objections. On the matter of reinforcements to the West, however, Charles' objections were not overruled until it was too late. Ludendorff was not given to shyness. If he had really wanted Austrian troops, he would have said so – and not simply allow the matter to be forgotten in the early weeks of 1918.

The most plausible explanation probably is that Ludendorff simply did not want to ask the Austrians for anything while he was at daggers drawn with all of them over the peace negotiations in the East, and even more so about Austrian claims to Poland. After all, those early weeks of 1918 were the crucial period when Operation Michael went through the planning stage. To put things in perspective, the Austrians could maybe have sent something like a dozen divisions. Now, if all of them had been dropped on Arras all of a sudden, they might indeed have made all the difference. If compared with the almost 200 German divisions in the West, their contribution sounds much smaller. Still, it probably was a mistake not to send them – a mistake, caused not by different views on strategic necessities but by political rivalries unconnected with the military issues.

On 15 March – two weeks after the peace of Brest-Litowsk and one week before Michael – the Germans formally asked the Austrians to opt for the second best solution by attacking the Italians. Arz promised to do so, but it was mid-June before the attack actually started. That was fairly late in the year when the Germans had already shot their bolt. This so-called Battle of the Solstice was a flawed operation from the beginning and ended in a tactical defeat. Torrential rainfall washed away the pontoons across the river and provided the Austrians with a ready-made excuse. Only after that option had been exhausted did Ludendorff deign to ask for reinforcements for the Western Front. On 24 June the Austrians consented – in return for Germany supplying food to starving Vienna. Six divisions were earmarked for the Western Front; only two Transylvanian ones actually saw service – against another sort of newcomers to the Western Front, the US.

ITALY IN 1918

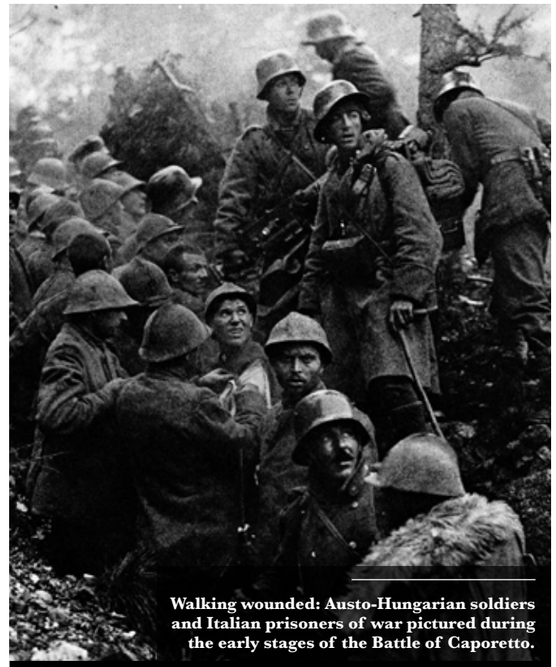
Professor John Gooch

Between April 1915, when she signed the Treaty of London and then entered the war, and March 1918, Italy was regarded by the western Allies as a junior partner fighting on a secondary front. This was so as far as the British and French high commands were concerned, and it was also the case as far as the statesmen guiding British and French international policy and shaping their countries' respective war aims were concerned. Military strategy and war aims ran on different rails, but distance in the former and growing divergence in the latter combined to shape attitudes towards Italy that were at best agnostic and at their worst (influenced partly by innate cultural prejudice) dismissive.

Italy's place in Allied military strategy was determined by the primacy of the Western Front, which condemned her armies to what was seen by almost all the leading British and French generals of the day as a subaltern role in their war. Attempts were made in 1917 to reconsider the established strategic paradigm and explore the value of attacking the Central Powers by knocking the weaker partner, Austria-Hungary, out of the war, but they foundered on the rock of the Nivelle offensive and on the generals' determination to fight Germany in France and Flanders 'where we are stronger'.

On the diplomatic front, early collaboration was soon replaced by conflict over potential Balkan allies (in August 1915 Britain proposed offering neutral Bulgaria territory already promised to Italy) and over the carving up of the Middle East, where Britain and France negotiated behind Italy's back before finally reneging on an agreement with her about the division of the region in October 1918. Division, and indeed mistrust, were sharpened by Italy's failure to declare war on Germany until August 1916 (her primary enemy was Austria-Hungary), and by her refusal to send troops to take part in the ill-fated Dardanelles expedition.

On 24 October 1917, German and Austro-Hungarian forces began the battle of Caporetto. By the time that the Italian Army came to rest on the Piave some two weeks later it had lost roughly a quarter of its artillery and 600,000 men – one-third of the front-line army – were out of the game either permanently as prisoners of war or temporarily as the disorganised remnants of general Capello's II Army, which had borne the brunt of the attack.



Walking wounded: Austo-Hungarian soldiers and Italian prisoners of war pictured during the early stages of the Battle of Caporetto.

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Caporetto came as a shock to the British high command, whose chief military representative in Italy had declared only three days before the battle that "the Austrian forces... are certain to lose very heavily", and a surprise to the French, whose military representative had thought that at least the Italians would hold. Neither Sir William Robertson nor Sir Douglas Haig were minded to assist their ally. Robertson only offered forces to Italy after being persuaded by Foch of the need to abandon his conviction that the western front alone really mattered and after being ordered to do so by the prime minister, David Lloyd George. When Haig learned of the decision, he went behind Robertson's back and tried to persuade Lloyd George to reverse it.

The huge task of putting the Italian army back together again fell to General Armando Diaz, who replaced the

BIOGRAPHY

Professor John Gooch is Emeritus Professor at the University of Leeds where he was Head of the School of History between 2006 and 2009. He has devoted his academic career to the study of the history of modern Italy including the Italian Army, fascism and Mussolini. His publications include *The Italian Army and the First World War* (2014); *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922–1940* (2007); and *Army, State and Society in Italy, 1870-1915* (1989). In honour of his life-long research into Italian history, Professor John Gooch was knighted by the Italian president in 2011 and awarded the title *Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella della Soldiarieta*.

discredited general Cadorna in November 1917. Diaz's remarkable achievements, which were still on-going when the German attack in the West came on 21 March 1918, certainly rank alongside those of Marshal Pétain who held the French Army together in the aftermath of the 'mutinies' of April-May 1917.

For military Italy, the immediate consequences of the German attack in the West on 21 March 1918 were negative. Three of the Allied divisions that had been moved to Italy in the aftermath of the battle of Caporetto, and some of the artillery that had accompanied them, were switched back to France. With them went General Sir Herbert Plumer, who had taken over command of the enlarged British contingent in Italy in November 1917. Plumer's departure was much regretted by the Italians, with whom he had enjoyed a friendly and strain-free relationship. The unexpected withdrawal of Allied divisions, which was in Italian eyes poorly handled, led their representative at Versailles, General Giardino, to resign.

In the immediate aftermath of the German attack Foch was made Allied generalissimo and given powers of command on the Franco-Belgian front. Those powers did not extend to the Italian front. That left Diaz in a more independent position than either Haig or Pétain, something of which he made full use – as indeed he had to, for not only had the army to be re-equipped and its morale restored but civilian society, fractured by social and political divisions, had for the first time to be properly mobilised for a war in which many had not believed, industrial production had to be expanded, and greater effort given to propaganda in order to explain to the people and the army what they were now fighting for. That cause, in a word, was 'Italy'.

The first test of the new Italian Army came with the defensive battle of the Piave (15-22 June 1918), in which it showed that it could indeed fight and win. In the months that followed Diaz came under mounting Allied pressure to attack. Unwilling to launch what he called a 'premature' offensive until he was sure that his army was ready, Diaz stone-walled. As one of his supporters in the government put it, Diaz's army was 'Italy's last card' and she had to play it wisely.

> [General Armando] Diaz's army was 'Italy's last card' and she had to play it wisely. Planning for Vittorio Veneto started in September and the battle itself – the only outright victory won by the Allied armies in Europe in 1918 – began on 24 October

Planning for Vittorio Veneto started in September and the battle itself – the only outright victory won by the Allied armies in Europe in 1918 – began on 24 October. As it was being fought, the war-time alliance was dissolving into acrimony as Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson abandoned the undertakings made in the Treaty of London for the 'new diplomacy' based on national self-determination. Thus Italy ended the war a military victor and – in her own eyes – a diplomatic loser.

Military master: A statue of Armando Diaz, who was given the task of putting the Italian army back together following the battle of Caporetto, stands on the seafront of Via Caracciolo in Naples, Italy.

OPERATION REFLECT: WINNING AND LOSING THE WAR

Major General David T. Zabecki

Operational history, the study of how wars are fought and the forces that fight them, matters. This is especially true for the First World War, which 100 years on remains one of the most misunderstood wars in history. Perhaps Vietnam is the only modern war that comes the closest in terms of myths, bogus legends, and emotionally-warped stereotypes.

The study of the Great War is especially relevant for the modern soldier of today. We are currently in an era of never-ending technological advances that bring about large changes in weapons systems, which in turn drives changes in tactics, techniques, and procedures. But it was the First World War that was the first truly modern war of future shock, and its impacts are still with us today. If an infantry battalion commander of 1914 were picked up and set down in a battalion command post of late 1918 he would be bewildered by what was going on around him. The battalion staff would be doing and coordinating things he could never have conceived in his wildest imagination. But if a battalion commander of late-1918 made a similar fast-forward trip to late-1944, he would recognise much. Most of the weapons and technologies he had known in 1918 would have improved vastly, and a few new things would have appeared; but the basic structure of managing a battalion battle would still be understandable.

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BIOGRAPHY

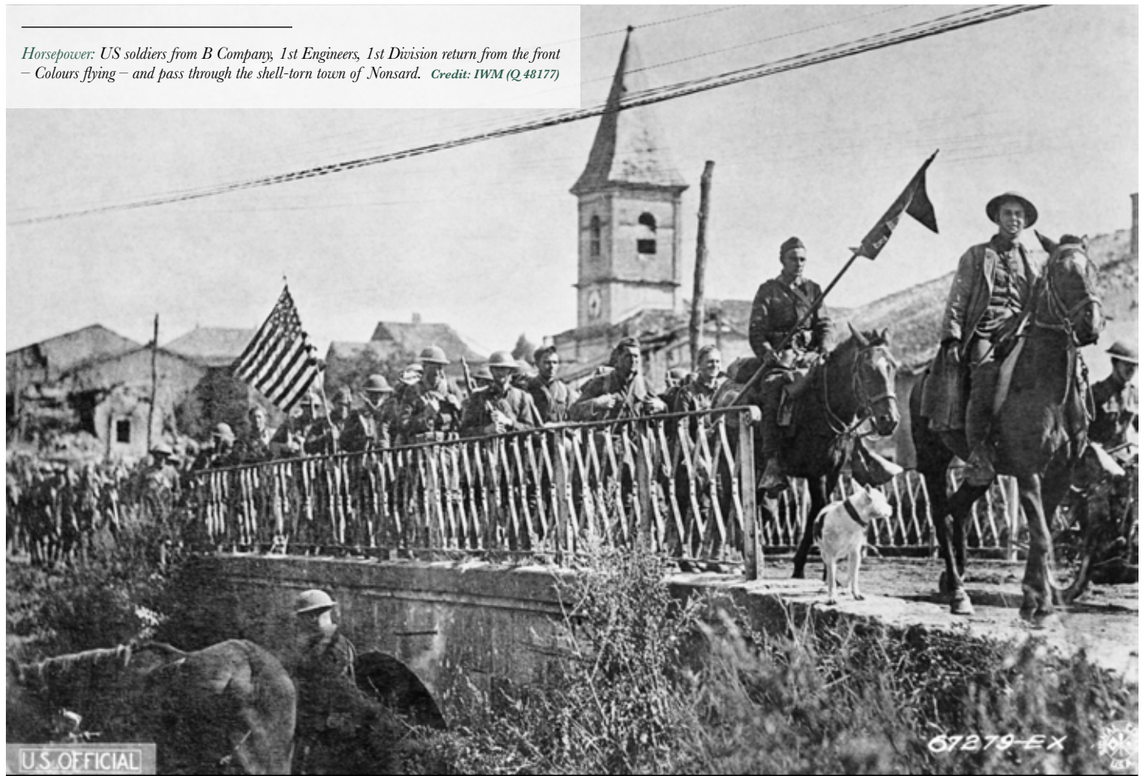
Major General David T. Zabecki retired from the US Army in 2007. He started his military career as an infantry rifleman in Vietnam in 1967 and 1968. In 2003, he was attached to the US State Department as the Senior Security Advisor on the US Coordinating and Monitoring Mission (Roadmap to Peace in the Middle East), where he negotiated between the Israeli Defense Force and the multiple Palestinian security organisations. In 2004, he was the commander of US forces supporting the 60th anniversary commemorations of the D-Day Landings, Operation Market-Garden, and the Battle of the Bulge. In 2005–06 he was the senior US Army commander in Europe south of the Alps, based in Vicenza, Italy. He holds a PhD in Military History from the Royal Military College of Science, Cranfield University, where his supervisor was the late Professor Richard Holmes. In 2012 he served as the Dr Leo A. Shifirn Distinguished Professor of Military History at the US Naval Academy, Annapolis. He is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the War Studies Programme at the University of Birmingham (UK) and the author or editor of numerous military history books. In 2016 his encyclopaedia, *Germany at War: 400 Years of Military History*, won a Society for Military History Distinguished Book Award.

The Great War was a 20th Century war fought by 19th Century soldiers, and the period 1914-1918 saw three of the largest paradigm shifts in the history of warfighting. Drawing on the work of Thomas Kuhn, historian Tim Travers applied the concept of the paradigm shift to the study of the Great War[3]. The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines a paradigm shift as "a time when the usual and accepted way of doing or thinking about something changes completely". Paradigm shifts do not happen often, but the soldiers of 1914-1918 experienced and had to cope with three simultaneous and interconnected radical departures from long-standing war-fighting thought and practice.

The first was the advent of three-dimensional warfare, both above the battlefield in the air, and beneath the surface of the ocean. The second was the rise of depth. It now became possible to fight and win a battle other than along the line of contact. And depth, both in time and space, is one of the key elements that defines the operational level of war. The third and most significant paradigm shift was mechanisation, the replacement of human and animal muscle power with machine power. But that transition did not occur evenly. At the start of the war in 1914 firepower mechanisation had leapt far ahead of manoeuvre and mobility mechanisation, and the deadlock between the two largely contributed to trench warfare. But during the years between the World Wars, mobility mechanization finally caught up and restored much of the balance between fire and manoeuvre.

The vast scope of First World War military operations was something no military commander of 1914 had any experience with. For the previous 40 years, the armies of Germany, France, Britain, and the United States had engaged primarily in colonial police actions and frontier skirmishes. Relatively few regular officers and troops participated in Germany's colonial wars in Africa between 1887-1908. Both France and Britain fought a number of campaigns in their far-flung empires of the period. Britain's biggest war immediately prior to World War I was the Second Boer War of 1899-1902, which largely was fought either on horseback or on foot. Some 347,000 British troops fought in that struggle, a mere nine percent of the number that would serve in the Great War. The U.S. Army's primary field experiences in the years following the American Civil War were limited to the far-flung Indian Campaigns on the western frontier, the brief fighting in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and the small Mexican Punitive Expedition of 1916-17. The U.S. Army, which totalled some four million troops in 1918 (roughly half of them in Europe), had only 120,000 regular soldiers in April 1917.

[3] *Travers, Tim. The Killing Ground: The British Army on the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare. Allen and Unwin, London: 1987. xix, 250, 253.*



Horsepower: US soldiers from B Company, 1st Engineers, 1st Division return from the front – Colours flying – and pass through the shell-torn town of Nonsard. **Credit: IWM (Q 48177)**

> The most significant paradigm shift was mechanisation, the replacement of human and animal muscle power with machine power. But that transition did not occur evenly. At the start of the war in 1914 firepower mechanisation had leapt far ahead of manoeuvre and mobility mechanisation, and the deadlock between the two largely contributed to trench warfare. But during the years between the World Wars, mobility mechanisation finally caught up and restored much of the balance between fire and manoeuvre

As Richard Holmes has written, for the first time in their respective histories both Britain and America sent the main force of their armies overseas in a major war to confront the main strength of a first-rate opponent in the war's principal theatre[4]. And in the case of the United States, neither that country nor any other in all history had tried to deploy a two-million-man force 3,000 miles from its own borders.

Thus, the neat stereotypes of butchers and bunglers, lions and donkeys are far too simplistic and fail to hold up under close scrutiny. Every soldier of the Great War, from private to field marshal, was forced to climb a very steep learning curve. Nor was it a stationary curve: it continued advancing at a rapid pace, right through to the end of the war. By late 1917 and into 1918 an entirely new way of thinking emerged on how wars had to be fought. As Major General Jonathan Bailey has written: "The new thinking of 1917-18 formed the seedbed for the new techniques of fire and manoeuvre practiced in the Second World War.[5]"

The national armies that fought the Great War all climbed the learning curve by their own distinct paths and rates of advance. As Sir Michael Howard has written, it is almost impossible for armies to get things right at the outset of any war. This was especially true for the First World War, where the vast technological changes created complexities that soldiers and commanders never before had to face. Thus, it was far more important between 1914 and 1918 to adapt and change to the new battlefield realities – and that is still very much the case today. As Sir Michael also noted: "In these circumstances when everybody starts wrong, the advantage goes to the side which can most quickly adjust itself to the new and unfamiliar environment and learn from its mistakes.[6]"

Adaptability, self-assessment, and the management of change within an army are the primary responsibility of that army's senior leaders. By closely studying the generals and the command systems of 1918, senior leaders of today can come to a better understanding of how the leaders and organizations of 100 years ago learned, adapted, and ultimately managed change – successfully or not.

[4] *Holmes, Richard. The Western Front. BBC Books, London: 1999, 214.*

[5] *Bailey, Jonathan. The First World War and the Modern Style of Warfare. The Occasional, Number 22, The Strategic and Combat Studies Institute: Camberley (1996). 3.*

[6] *Howard, Michael. "Military Science in an Age of Peace." RUSI Journal, March 1974, 6-7.*

WHY THE ALLIED ARMIES WON THE WAR IN 1918

Doctor Jonathan Boff

1918 was the most successful year in the history of the British Army. Never before or since has it punched with such weight on the global stage, making a vital contribution to Allied victory in the first truly world war. While Tommies projected British power from Archangel to Zanzibar, however, their finest achievement was, together with their Allies, to defeat Germany's main army in the principal theatre of war: the Western Front. This article briefly lists the factors which contributed to the British Expeditionary Force's victory in 1918 before suggesting that many of these factors were underpinned by a single, extremely idiosyncratic, culture of innovation which helped the British Army learn and adapt to the challenges of modern war better than its enemy. Allied victory on the Western Front was constructed on nine foundations, in three groups of three: strategic; technical; and human:

A) Strategy

1) Survival. To win the long war, the Allies needed to make sure they didn't lose the short war first. This required resilience and resource mobilisation on an unprecedented scale.

2) Insight. A clear understanding of the present and a coherent vision of the future. By 1918 no-one was in any doubt that this was an unlimited war against an implacable enemy which could only be resolved by the destruction of the enemy's will to resist by defeating his army. This would not be easy: it meant throwing away the rapier of Napoleonic manoeuvre and taking up the cudgel, to bludgeon Germany pitilessly into submission. Importantly, the civil-military leadership were (finally) united in this view.

3) Coalition. Britain had to manage fighting as part of not one, but two, coalitions: one international, the other the Empire. The decision to appoint Marshal Ferdinand Foch as supreme commander of the international coalition was a master-stroke. Much like Eisenhower in a later war, with a mix of flattery, cajoling, persuasion and occasionally blackmail, but never direct orders, he managed to get the national contingent commanders to overcome their petty

BIOGRAPHY

Doctor Jonathan Boff **FRHistS is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Birmingham, where he teaches courses relating to war from Homer to Helmand. He specialises in particular in the First World War. His publications include *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *Haig's Enemy: Crown Prince Rupprecht and Germany's War on the Western Front* (Oxford University Press, 2018). He has undertaken consultancy projects for the British Army and the BBC and serves on the Councils of the National Army Museum and the Army Records Society.**

Combined arsenal: A 60-pounder battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery in position near Albert, France on 28 March 1918. **Credit: IWM (Q 8645)**

> In the early years of the war, when kit was in short supply, and troops were trying to solve an awful lot of problems at once, combined arms had often broken down. It took time to re-learn its importance and how to do it. Inevitably, even in the last months of the war, they didn't always get it right. Artillery fire fell short, or was poorly timed. Tanks got lost and turned up late, or never turned up at all. Communications broke down, orders were misunderstood. There were plenty of bloody disasters

jealousies and pull together. Haig had to deploy similar diplomacy and regard for public opinion in how he used his excellent Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African troops, all of whom fought alongside their British cousins in the name of the King, but none of whom could be taken for granted.

B) Technical

4) Operations. The biggest problem facing the attacker in 1914-18 was not how to get across no man's land: that was a relatively easy technical problem to solve. Instead, it was how to maintain the momentum of an advance by feeding in men and matériel across shattered landscape faster than the defender, operating with the benefit of intact road and rail networks, could reinforce and seal off any attack. Battles such as the Somme and Third Ypres had shown that it was impossible to exploit in depth: the culminating point was reached too quickly. Although improved engineering capacity, more of everything, and better staff work helped, in summer 1918 the decision was taken henceforth to broaden, rather than deepen, attacks. When the attack in one sector slowed, the allies switched their effort north, south or both, in a process known as lateral exploitation. This chewed up German defenders, kept the enemy off balance, depressed his morale with a continual

stream of defeats, and wore his reserves down and out.

5) Tactics. Although getting into the enemy's trenches was in a sense the easy bit, this was only relative. It still required advanced warfighting skills, including greater articulation with small-unit dispersed manoeuvre. Where in 1914 the basic manoeuvre block was the company, by 1918 it had become the platoon or even the section. Along with articulation went combined arms at every level from sub-unit up to corps and army, where heavy artillery, chemical weapons, aircraft and tanks were all fed into the mix. In the early years of the war, when kit was in short supply, and troops were trying to solve an awful lot of problems at once, combined arms had often broken down. It took time to re-learn its importance and how to do it. Inevitably, even in the last months of the war, they didn't always get it right. Artillery fire fell short, or was poorly timed. Tanks got lost and turned up late, or never turned up at all. Communications broke down, orders were misunderstood. There were plenty of bloody disasters. Even when it worked, the exact mix of combined arms which was deployed varied wildly.

6) Learning went on in a variety of formal and non-formal ways. Doctrine pamphlets were published and distributed by GHQ in France. When out of the line, units underwent training in the latest techniques, and GHQ tried to standardise this training as much as it could. A huge raft of schools and courses were set up to teach both technical skills and broader topics such as staff work, or how to command a battalion. Lessons learnt were disseminated in a range of informal ways too, via personal connections and social spaces such as officers' clubs. Overall, the British and French won the innovation war, still coming up with new tactics and approaches to which, by September-October 1918, the Germans had no answer. We shall return to this point below.

8) Morale. Even in the face of the initial German advances in spring 1918, Allied morale was remarkably resilient. Although large numbers of British soldiers were captured – more in the first two weeks of the offensive than in the whole war so far – the Germans were shocked by the sense they all shared that it would be the Allies who won this war. Good leadership, adequate training, sufficient food and kit: all played a role in maintaining morale. As 1918 went on, the feeling seems to have grown that commanders knew what they were doing, that victory was getting closer, and that the quickest way back home lay through the German lines.

9) Weaker opposition. The German Army had run out of men, matériel, morale and ideas. Other articles in this issue will discuss the Germans in more detail.

These nine proximate factors in Allied success are linked by a number of underlying causes, including resilience, co-operation, correct analysis, as well as the one we'll explore in more detail here: the culture of innovation. By 1918 the British, French and their allies had learnt new ways of warfare. Some historians talk about a British 'learning curve' but it wasn't exclusively British and it wasn't much of a curve. It's more useful to think of learning and adaptation as a separate front in the war, where the scientists and military intellectuals of both sides competed to develop measures and counter-measures. How the British fought on that front was framed by their approach to innovation and adaptation. The way they learnt can often look ramshackle and inconsistent, especially when held up to the highly thorough standards of, say, modern American TRADOC. Even when the British Army was at its largest, greenest and needed to learn most, learning and adaptation remained highly personalised and variable. In training, immense leeway was left to individual unit COs. Unit performance was consequently just as varied. Attempts at standardisation were often regarded with scepticism.

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By 1918 the British, French and their allies had learnt new ways of warfare. Some historians talk about a British 'learning curve' but it wasn't exclusively British and it wasn't much of a curve

C) Human factors

7) Leadership: improved at every level and there was more delegation of initiative to 'the man on the spot'. By 1918 those who were unsuited or unfit for wartime command had been weeded out and replaced by a breed of younger, harder and experienced men. Greater articulation demanded better leadership from junior officers and NCOs. Another stimulus towards greater delegation was the poor state of communications and a shift in the style of fighting in 1918. The set-piece, highly-choreographed battles of 1916 and 1917, characterised by long lead times and pages of plans, largely gave way in 1918 to more improvised action, with flash-to-bang times measured in hours rather than weeks. This placed a premium on speed of decision-making but with no corresponding improvement in communications, the only way to get timely decisions made was to trust the 'man on the spot' to make them for himself. All First World War armies paid lip service to the importance of initiative and mission command but most of them found it hard to operate on those lines in any systematic way. Nevertheless, where mutual trust was high, subordinates were sometimes left to their own devices, with improved flexibility in Allied actions and reactions.

And yet... overall, it worked. The British out-thought the Germans as much as they outfought them, and did so for three reasons. Firstly, in the huge variety of situations encountered in war, one-size-fits-all solutions proved less useful than mental flexibility and a willingness to improvise. Secondly, where the Germans became increasingly predictable as they operated by rote, the British retained a capacity to surprise. Thirdly, the British Army was working with, not across, the cultural grain of the institution. It was culturally attuned to a pragmatic, laissez-faire approach where officers could in general be trusted to 'do the right thing' without being told. Had GHQ attempted to impose more programmatic methods, as the French, Germans and Americans did, it might have provoked more opposition to change and created more problems than it could ever have solved. Sacrificing uniformity, ironically, enhanced effectiveness.

Pragmatism is neither pretty nor neat, but it proved the right answer for the British Army during the First World War. It brought results on a scale never achieved before or since. The British Army understood its own culture and how best to drive change within it. Can we say the same today?

1918: THE LONG SHADOW OF THE DEFEAT OF GERMANY

Doctor Matthias Strohn

On 23 March 1918, two days after the beginning of the Michael offensive in the west, the German Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, made the joyful statement that "the battle is won, the English have been utterly defeated"[7]. And yet, on 11 November 1918, the Germans surrendered to the Allies. How did the pendulum of victory swing so quickly from one coalition to the other and leave the Central Powers, seemingly expecting to end the war victorious, with the bitter aftertaste of defeat?

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to say that the Central Powers' impressive victory in the east against Russia in 1917 was levelled by the USA's entry into the war on 6 April 1917. Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, the chief of the Prussian and Great General Staff between 1857 and 1888, had allegedly described the US Civil War as "two armed-mobs running around the countryside and beating each other up, from which very little of military utility could be learned". This view of an unprofessional, ill-equipped US Army might have persisted in 1917, but the entry of the US into the war arguably changed the outcome of the First World War and thus shaped the history of Europe and the world.

Connected to this was the problem that morale was low among the German troops: the soldiers had expected a victorious outcome of the war at the end of their offensives in the west, but after these had failed to deliver strategic victory over the Allies, the war dragged on with no sign of victory. Before the start of the Michael offensive, morale had generally been very high because of the expectation that the offensive would result in peace. In the summer of 1918, shirking became a wide-spread occurrence, and it has been argued that a 'disguised military strike' took place and that up to approximately one million soldiers (a figure probably too high) were 'getting lost on train stations' or found that 'their trains to the front-line had been delayed'. In this context, it is interesting to note that the German Army as an organisation did not collapse until late October/early November 1918 and that many soldiers still continued to fight – a fact that explains the Allies' casualties in the summer and autumn of 1918.

On the march: German soldiers advance through the Somme during the Spring Offensive.

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Even though the German Army as an organisation still put up fierce resistance, it was obvious that it was exhausted. In six months, the strength of the German Army had fallen from approximately 5.1 million men to 4.2 million. The offensives in March and April alone had cost the German army 316,000 men and the overall casualty figures for these two months were set between 424,000 and 475,000 soldiers. April was the month with the highest monthly casualties of the entire war. Between March and September 1918, the German Army lost 536,000 killed and missing and 808,300 wounded. Not only did this weaken the Army numerically, but it also resulted in an increasing reduction of the troops' quality, because many of the experienced soldiers had become casualties of war. The influenza epidemic and the British blockade of the sea lanes further weakened the German troops. As a consequence, Major Ludwig Beck, later the Chief of the General staff, wrote in his diary that "the front is held a by mere spider-web of fighters".

On top of this, the Germans were no longer in well-prepared defensive positions. With their offensives, the Germans had

[7] *Quoted in Georg Alexander von Müller, The Kaiser and his Court (London: Macdonald, 1961), p. 344.*

BIOGRAPHY

Doctor Matthias Strohn was educated at the universities of Münster and Oxford. Since 2006 he has been a lecturer in the Department of War Studies at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. He is also a Reader in Modern War Studies at the University of Buckingham and, since 2017, he has been a visiting fellow at the Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR) at Camberley. He also holds a commission in the German Army as a Lieutenant Colonel. He has published widely on 20th Century German and European military history, including the *German Army and the Defence of the Reich* (2010). He edited *The Battle of the Somme* (2016), which was the companion for the Army Staff Ride in 2016, and *1918: Winning the War, Losing the War* (2018), which is the companion for the Army Staff Ride in 2018.

TREATY SIGNED; WAR OVER

The Evening World. FINAL EDITION

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PRICE TWO CENTS. NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JUNE 28, 1919. 14 PAGES PRICE TWO CENTS.

WILSON LEAVES PARIS; SAILS SUNDAY

GERMANS PLEDGED TO ACT IN GOOD FAITH

CITY'S BELLS RING TIDINGS AS PEACE TREATY IS SIGNED; FLEET JOINS IN CELEBRATION

Flagship Pennsylvania in Hudson Fires Salute of 21 Guns as Men "Dress Ship."

JOY IN WALL STREET.

Star-Spangled Banner Floats From Fleet in North River to Bands Play.

BEST DAY IN HISTORY SINCE BETHLEHEM, SAYS SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

Daniels Orders Every Ship and Shore Station to Fire Salute of 21 Guns for Peace.

TREATY SEVERE ON GERMANY, SAYS WILSON, BUT IMPOSES NOTHING SHE CANNOT DO

President in an Address to the American Public Says It Furnishes a Charter for a New Order and Ends Rule of Selfish Groups

GUNS BOOM, PLANES FILL AIR; FRENCH CROWDS CHEER PEACE

GERMANS PLEDGED TO ENFORCE TREATY; NO RESERVATION

Delegates in Statement Say Nation Will Earn Right to Place in League.

WILSON, STARTING FOR HOME, BIDS FRANCE GODSPEED

Expresses Sympathy for People, With Belief in Her Future Confirmed.

Mueller Signs for Germans at 3.12, Bell a Minute Later—Wilson's Name Comes Next, Followed by Lloyd George and Clemenceau.

Soldiers Break Ranks and Join in the Demonstrations of Joy—Chinese Refuse to Attend Ceremony and Gen. Smuts Signs Under Protest.

VERSAILLES, June 28 (Associated Press).—The World War was formally ended to-day by the signing of the Peace Treaty with Germany.

The epochal meeting in the Hall of Mirrors began at 3.10 o'clock. The treaty was signed by Dr. Hermann Mueller at 3.12 o'clock (9.12 New York time) and by Johannes Bell at 3.13 P. M. They were followed by the American delegates, headed by President Wilson, and then by the plenipotentiaries of Great Britain, France, Italy and

left these behind, such as the Hindenburg-line (which the Germans called the Siegfriedstellung after the hero of the German national saga, the Nibelungenlied). The troops were now in the open and in hastily-prepared defensive positions. On 4 September 1918 Ludendorff ordered the field army in the West to abandon the sophisticated defence in depth for a more traditional and linear way of fighting. Moral, manpower and training were no longer available to the necessary degree in order to fight the defence in depth. On 30 September the OHL told the army group commander that it would no longer be able to provide any reserves and that the units and formations had to make do with what they had. It only took a few more days to realise that all last battle-worthy reserves had been thrown into the fight and had been consumed. As a consequence, Generalfeldmarschall Paul von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff agreed that Germany had to ask the Allies for an armistice.

On 4 October 1918, the German Chancellor, Prinz Max von Baden, sent a message to that effect to President Wilson, whom the German saw as the most honest broker. Five days earlier, on 29 September, the German ally Bulgaria had signed an armistice. The Ottoman Empire surrendered on 31 October, followed by Austria-Hungary on 3 November. The Central Powers had lost the war. As a consequence, German sailors mutinied in Kiel harbour in early November – they were not willing to sacrifice themselves in a glorious but deadly final assault on the Royal Navy. The German naval command had planned this in order to preserve the honour of the German navy, which would make it possible to re-build a great fleet in the future. By 6 November all of north-western Germany was under the control of the so-called workers and soldiers councils. On 8 November, the revolution reached Saxony, Hesse, Franconia and Württemberg in central and southern Germany. Faced with increasing pressure, the Reichskanzler, Prinz Max von Baden, unilaterally declared the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II on 9 November and on 11 Germany officially surrendered.

The experience of this war and its end, together with the Versailles Treaty that Germany signed in June 1919 and which was seen as a "Diktat" – a peace based on dictated terms, not a negotiation – embittered German society. Hand in glove with this went a radicalisation of the political process, not least driven by the experience of violence of wide parts of society during the war years which made people accept violence as an everyday occurrence. Maybe Ernst Jünger, arguably the most famous German writer of the First World War, was right when he claimed: "It is the war that shaped people and their time... The war, father of all things, is also our father; it has hammered, chiselled and hardened us to what we are... It has brought us up to fight and fighters we shall remain as long as we exist[8]."

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see the long shadow of the First World War in Jünger's words and it is this shadow which made 1918 one of the important, perhaps the most important, year of the 20th century, not only for Germany, but for Europe and the world. A different outcome of the First World War would probably have prevented the rise of Hitler and the Second World War. It was not to be.

[8] *Ernst Jünger, Der Krieg als inneres Erlebnis, ed. by Helmuth Kiesel (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2016), pp. 35-36.*

CONCLUSION: OVERCOMING THE LESSONS CHALLENGE

Major General (retired) Mungo Melvin

Long before I became involved in *Operation REFLECT*, the Army's programme of commemoration of, and learning from, the First World War, I had become concerned about the challenges in making lessons 'stick'. It appears to be a debilitating phenomenon in military organisations, and one equally prevalent in war and peace. In several appointments, such as Director Land Warfare and Director Operational Capability, I had witnessed lessons programmes stalling – with many issues readily identified on operations, training and experimentation that never became really learned – in so far as substantial corrections or improvements were made. So-called exploitation conferences or lessons symposia often became excuses for individuals or institutions to either defend or build their own particular empires. Or the dead hand of 'insufficient priority or resource' would blot out much needed innovation. Cries such as 'capability development' and 'adaptability' became oxymorons while the fighting power of the force steadily reduced. Although urgent operational requirements provided temporary respite, glaring deficiencies in the core programme took years to address, if at all. The lack of any integral ground-based area air defence today is but one example. So what can be done to improve matters?

The first step, I suggest, is to understand the enduring nature of the diverse obstacles to military learning. In her recent study of the British Army's learning during the First World War, Aimée Fox cites Major-General Arthur McNamara, one of the co-authors of the Kirke Committee on the Lessons of the Great War. While the soldier had gone on the record in 1932 by stating "we were slow to adapt our methods", the modern academic counters: "McNamara's criticism of the army's slowness to adapt underestimates the inherent difficulty of organisational learning, particularly in a time of crisis.[9]" Without attempting to summarise Fox's impressive work, which challenges many lazy assumptions about an army of "Blimps" supposedly ill-equipped to learn, it is necessary to appreciate the abrasions and the lubricants to such learning. McNamara, however, understood the realities of war only too well: hence his critique deserves to be taken seriously.

Any wise soldier, regardless of rank or cap-badge, understands one basic truth: poor decisions and tactical errors do not only happen, but will continue to do so, reflecting Clausewitz's unforgiving friction of war. Shamefully late in life I read Vera Brittain's famous *Testament of Youth* (first published in 1933) that tells not only of her experiences as a nurse during the Great War, but also of the fates of the menfolk she loved. Her brother Edward, an infantry officer serving on the Western Front, wrote in early July 1917 about a failed night attack: *"The whole thing was a complete fiasco; first of all the guide who was to lead us to our position went wrong and lost the way completely. I must tell you that the battalion had never been in the sector before and nobody knew the way at all... The organisation... was shocking as of course the position ought to have been reconnoitred before and it is obviously impossible for anyone who has not seen the ground before to attack in the dark.[10]"*

Of this incident, Brittain noted caustically, "how wastefully courageous lives were placed in jeopardy, and often thrown away, as the result of the crudest and most elementary failures of intelligence"[11]. Her bitterness, shared by so many of her generation, should not surprise us for she had lost her brother, her fiancé and two other close male friends during the conflict.

An army must be able to learn from the mistakes of individuals if it is to develop institutionally. Such education and training must go well beyond repeating banal truisms such as 'time spent on reconnaissance is seldom wasted' (although in Edward Brittain's case, it would have reduced the risk of failure), and be reflected in revised tactics, techniques and procedures, which remain tested, if not tempered, by recent experience. Making solid progress along this path depends on promoting an appropriate learning culture, one that permeates all levels, such as that expertise and initiative are rewarded. The directing and guiding role of senior leaders cannot be over-emphasised in encouraging the habit of learning and in supporting its structure and system, whether matters of doctrine or training. Unfortunately, however, talented individuals chasing promotion tend not to stay in their posts for long, and with that inevitable churn comes 'reinvented wheels' or misplaced 'change for change's sake', when none is actually required. 'Oiling the wheels' of learning, however, is hugely beneficial. A modern example is the Army's Knowledge Exchange. Furthermore, in many circumstances, continuity – once a needed change is made – represents a blessing as it takes time for developments to sink in both individually and collectively.

Military learning has perhaps as much to do with the character of people as the nature of war. While warfare continues to evolve with new technologies and tactics being

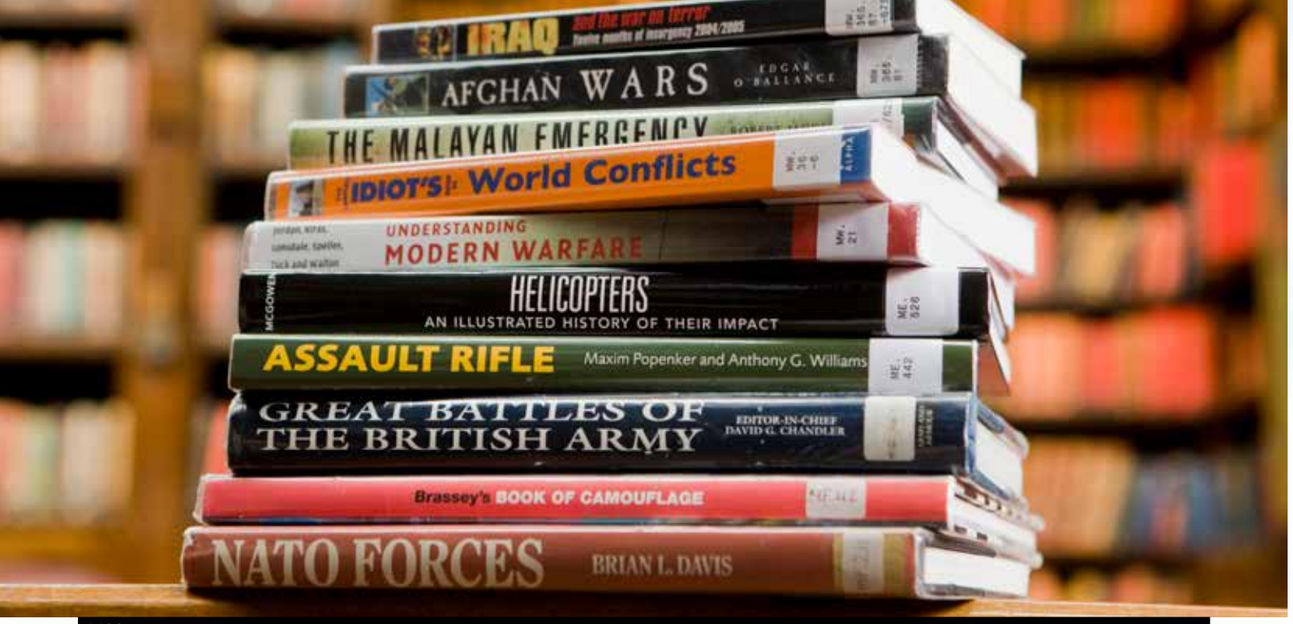
[9] *Aimée Fox, Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 51.*

[10] *Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925 (London: Virago, 1978), p. 331.*

[11] *Ibid.*

BIOGRAPHY

Major General (retired) Mungo Melvin CB OBE retired from the British Army in 2011, having served in the Royal Engineers and on the General Staff. He is a senior visiting research fellow of the War Studies Department of King's College London and is a senior associate fellow at RUSI. Emeritus President of the British Commission for Military History (2012-18), he is now the Chairman of the Royal Engineers Historical Society and a Vice-President of the Western Front Association. He authored *Manstein: Hitler's Greatest General* (2010) and edited the *Army's Battlefield Guide to the Western Front* (2015). His latest work, *Sevastapol's Wars: Crimea from Potemkin to Putin* was published in April 2017. He lectures widely on military history and high command.



> Investing in people who have proved themselves able to learn, adapt and innovate may prove a force-multiplier – they should be recognised and rewarded in career terms

introduced within a rapidly changing political, economic and societal context, we should understand the psychological if not 'social' obstacles to learning. A fear of failure or criticism may lead to conscious or unconscious attempts to avoid taking risk before an action, or to an inability to acknowledge mistakes when one thinks – perhaps mistakenly – that all's gone well. The real curse of learning, moreover, is not over-optimism, but rather hubris, a dangerous combination of exaggerating one's own capabilities and powers of leadership while denigrating those of the opponent (and in under-estimating the difficulties of terrain and weather). Military history is replete with examples of leaders over-reaching themselves in this manner: Napoleon and Hitler immediately spring to mind. Military learning needs to acknowledge that failures and successes happen: the aim is to promote the latter at the expense of the former without denying their cause and effect.

In hindsight, while it may prove relatively easy to identify the impediments to learning, recognising how to overcome them is much more problematic. Revisionist historians of the First World War stress the importance of a 'learning ethos' and associated 'learning curve' that spurred the British Army's development, particularly, but not exclusively, on the Western Front. Yet that approach masks the reality that all armies – for good or ill – set out to learn by their experiences, and do so simultaneously and competitively. Hence any battlefield learning can only be relative and remains largely incremental. Revolutions in military affairs occur only occasionally – one did happen towards the end of the First World War in terms of advances in artillery and in the integration of combined arms. Learning is not an absolute, one-sided science.

For learning to stick, however, it must also take place in the political and strategic spheres, which means that priorities and resources do matter, and fundamentally so. When a proposed beneficial 'push', based on a lesson identified, comes to 'shove', it needs to be backed appropriately from 'above' and 'below' if it is to have a decent chance of success, and hence be learned. Thus learning cannot be left to chance: it needs both purpose and proponency. When looking for inspiration from the First World War, one is spoilt for examples of both good and bad practice. But readers are well advised to keep an honest foot on the ground in the process and not be dulled into thinking that learning in contact – the much-lauded adaptation and innovation – provides cheap or easy panaceas to inherent problems in an army's organisation, equipment, doctrine and training. They do not: while representing very necessary conditions for improvement, neither adaptation nor innovation are sufficient. Many years of prudent professional military education and foresight may mitigate the impact of an unexpected situation arising, but in the end it all depends on the quality of the people involved (leaders at all levels) to make pragmatic decisions in combat, and to learn from their resultant successes and failures. Hence adaptation, for example, is but a means or a way to an end, and not an end in itself. Investing in people who have proved themselves able to learn, adapt and innovate may prove a force-multiplier – they should be recognised and rewarded in career terms.

Yet as Aimée Fox sagely reminds us, in the British Army of the First World War, there was a mixed scorecard of learning: *"While a culture of innovation was promoted, it was not perfect. The army did much to provide ways of capturing and disseminating learning, benefiting from new technologies and ways of thinking, but some units and their commanders focused on learning in the best way they could. Decisions were often irrational, contributing to significant casualties on the battlefield. Arrogance, intolerance, and Blimpish pockets were inevitable.*[12]"

In today's Army we need to promote learning fully cognisant of the challenges faced – whether individual or institutional, or typically, a complex combination of both. But it is surely a battle to be fought and won, however long drawn out. Otherwise the Blimps will have it.

[12] *Fox, p. 246.*

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