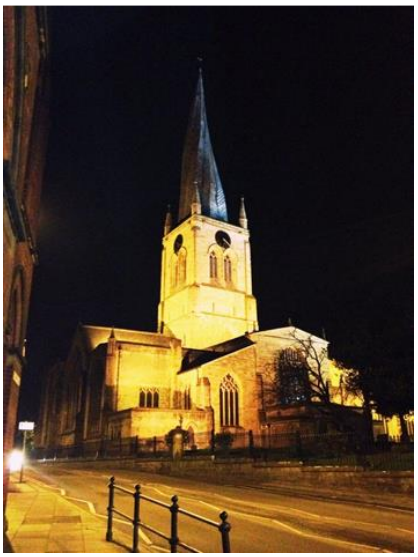
The Spire Sentinel



The Newsletter & Magazine of The Chesterfield Branch of The Western Front Association

ISSUE 67 – August 2021

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the Great War'.

Issue 67 – list of contents

August 2021 WFA Webinar (Planned Presentations)

WFA ZOOM MEETINGS For August but please keep an eye on the Website and Facebook pages as sometimes there are amendments during the month Follow these links for registering (please note dates and times)

02 AUG 2021 A fine feat of War: The taking of Mont St Quentin 1918 by JulianWhippy http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/events/online-a-fine-feat-of-war-the-taking-of-mont-st-quentin-1918-by-julian-whippy/

14 AUG 2021 HYBRID ONLINE/LIVE MEETING: The U Boat Campaign and Experiences 1914-18 by Graham Kemp http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/events/hybrid-onlinelive-meeting-the-u-boat-campaign-and-experiences-1914-18-by-graham-kemp/

16 AUG 2021 The Battle that Saved the BEF: Le Cateau, 26 August 1914 by Dr Spencer Jones http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/events/online-the-battle-that-saved-the-bef-le-cateau-26-august-1914-by-dr-spencer-jones/

30 AUG 2021 ONLINE: Secrets and Lies: Operation Llandovery Castle. Moving the Canadian Corps for Battle, August 1918 by Rob Thompson http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/events/online-secrets-and-lies-operation-llandovery-castle-moving-the-canadian-corps-for-battle-august-1918-by-rob-thompson/

Any opinions expressed in this Newsletter /Magazine are not necessarily those of the Western Front Association, Chesterfield Branch, in particular, or the Western Front Association in general

A Note from the chair

Well, we have at long last emerged from majority of Government restrictions which have controlled many aspects of our lives for the last eighteen months or so. Restrictions have given way to a call to our consciences for self-restraint and responsibility. It is against this background that we are able to resume our face-to-face meetings, this coming Tuesday. The Labour Club have put some conditions on our use of their room and elsewhere in this Newsletter they will be set out. There is nothing in these requirements that will come as a shock, I am sure. Your committee wants to welcome back as many members and friends as possible, we want everyone to be safe and to feel safe. If you feel more comfortable wearing a mask then please wear one, I am sure some will and some will not. We will try to have some seats that are distanced from others but obviously we are governed by the available space.

During the various lockdowns we have attempted to provide Chesterfield branch supporters with a programme of joint webinars and these will continue, at least until full service is returned. It may be that they remain a part of the facilities we can offer to those who for whatever reason choose not to attend in person.

Finally, a word to anyone who will be coming for the first time, you are of course very welcome please let us know and we will be more than happy to 'show you the ropes'. Many thanks too to our speaker Andy, who has agreed at fairly short notice to make Tuesday's presentation.

I hope to see as many of you as possible on Tuesday.

Tony

Tuesday`s speaker ANDY RAWSON has over forty books to his name, including eight Pen and Sword 'Battleground Europe' travel books and three History Press 'Handbook' reference books. He has edited the minutes of the Second World War conferences and the top-secret correspondence between George C. Marshall and Dwight D. Eisenhower. He books include covering Poland's struggle in the twentieth century, Auschwitz Extermination Camp and wartime Krakow. He has also written a ten-part series on the Western Front campaigns between 1914-18. He has a master's degree with Birmingham University's history department. Andy has been a regular visitor to Chesterfield WFA Branch meetings over the past few years and indeed but for `Covid` should have delivered a presentation just over a year ago. For our August meeting on Tuesday evening The title of Andy`s talk is `The Real Peaky Blinders'. The story of ex-soldiers running amok with gambling and gang warfare across Sheffield in the 1920s. Andy`s great grandad was a police officer at the time and his workmate's grandad was a gang enforcer in the same area. After years of looking at battles and battalions Andy is getting immersed in social history during and around the war. After all 1914-18 was only four years in people's long lives. If you have seen the TV series (I have to confess I haven`t), you would get the appeal. It has emotionally scarred ex-tunnellers establishing a gang in post war Birmingham. All rather glamourous, unlike the real story of squalor and hardship, that soldiers came back home to.

Secretary`s Scribbles

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the August issue of the Branch newsletter and magazine.

Well, the Great Restart is almost upon us, hard to believe that our last `in the flesh` Branch Meeting was March 2020.

Like so many Clubs and Societies across the nation, we have missed so much and it will be a relief to be back again at a monthly meeting at our venue, Chesterfield Labour Club.

Our Branch Treasurer, Jane Lovatt visited the club and below is the Club rules – none too onerous I have to say that we must adhere to. I hope as many as possible will take the opportunity to get out and about again and attend. My local Royal British Legion Branch (of which I am secretary) have held two meetings since restrictions were eased, with no problems at all.

1. Hand sanitizer is provided at the entrance and must be used. It will also be provided in the meeting room.

2. Masks must be worn while at the bar, otherwise discretionary.

3. No leaning on, or touching the bar.

4. Windows of the meeting room to be open to provide ventilation.

5. As far as practicable, seating to be distanced.

Our speaker is Andy Rawson, prolific author on a wide range of historical subjects and, until lockdown, a regular attendee at Branch meetings. I consider Andy to be somewhat unique….Academic…Author….and someone who puts hard working practical skills to good use on a daily basis ! Anyway, more about Andy elsewhere.

Thanks to Jane Ainsworth for her welcome contribution to this newsletter.
Looking forward to September WFA Member and former Chesterfield Borough Councillor, Steve Brunt, will be coming to give us a talk on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) from its inception under Fabian Ware during WW1 to the present day, The meeting will be held on Tuesday 7th September at 7.30 pm – usual venue Chesterfield Labour Club.

I would like to see as many of you as possible at the August meeting…let`s get back into the swing of things – it`s been too long!!! In addition to our `own` meetings there is a further programme of webinars arranged by the WFA. **The full list, including the links for joining each talk is shown on page 2 of this newsletter.**

Take care

Grant Cullen…….Branch Secretary…….07824628638

Garrison Library

The Journal of the Royal United Services Institution. Gold Medal (Military) Prize Essay for 1918 ***" How can moral qualities best be developed during the preparation of the officer and the man for the duties each will carry out in war`***

War in History. ***Sir John fisher and the Policy of Strategic Deterrent 1904-1908***

War in History. ***The Impact of War: Matching Expectation with Reality in the Royal Navy in the first Months of the Great War***

Journal of Strategic Studies. ***The Morale Maze: the German Army in Late 1918***

War in History. ***The Chemical Dimension of the Gallipoli Campaign: Introducing Chemical Warfare to the Middle East.***

NWC Review Summer 2007. ***Expectation, Adaption and Resignation…British Battlefleet Planning, August 1914-April 1916***

Air Power Review. ***Haig and Trenchard: Achieving Air Superiority on the Western Front***

WW1 Listserve ***Falsehood in Wartime: by Arthur Ponsonby MP (1929)***

Christopher Phillips ***Civilian Specialists at War: Britain's Transport Experts and the First World War***

Elizabeth Greenhalgh: ***Ferdinand Foch and the French Contribution to the Somme 1916***

William Stewart: ***When the Learning Curve Falls – the Ordeal of the 44th Battalion, Canadian 4th Division, 25 th October 1916***

Meleagh Hampton: ***Hubert Gough, the Anzacs on the Somme. A Descent into Pointlessness***

Brett Holman: ***Constructing the Enemy Within; Rumours of Secret Gun Platforms and Zepellin Bases in Britain, August to October 1914***

Gary Sheffield: ***A Once in a Lifetime Opportunity – Personal Reflections on the Centenary of World War One in 2014***

Jim Beach: ***Doctrine Writing at British GHQ 1917-1918***

Andrew Whitmarsh: ***British Strategic Bombing 1917-1918. The Independent Air Force and its Predecessors***

Christopher Philips: ***Civilian Specialists in War – Britain`s Transport Experts in WW1***

British Journal of Military Research ***Volume 1 – October 2014***

Micharl St. Maur Sheil ***Does the Performance of the RFC at Cambrai in 1917 illustrate demands for aerial observation lead to the development of air power.***

Jonathan Krause ***Early Trench Tactics of the French***

Paul Mulvey ***The Western Front and Gallipoli 1915***

Unattributed ***Gallipoli Landings from the Perspective of the Lancashire Fusiliers***

Unattributed ***Gallipoli – The Last Batle of the Victorian Era ?***

James Kitchen ***Going to War – Europe and the Wider World 1914-1915***

Institute of Historical Research, Andrekas Varnava ***Imperialism first – War second ?. The British deliberations on where to attack the Ottoman Empire Nov 14 to April 15***

International History Review: ***Sir Basil Zaharoff and Sir Vincent Caillard as Instruments of British Policy towards Greece and the Ottoman Empire during the Asquith and Lloyd George Administrations, 1915-8***

Scientia Militaria. Ian van der Waag. ***The politics of south Africa`s `Second Little Bit` and the War on the Western front 1914-18***

Peter Doyle, Peter Barton, and Johan Vandewalle. ***ARCHAEOLOGY OF A GREAT WAR DUGOUT: BEECHAM FARM, PASSCHENDAELE, BELGIUM***

RUSI Journal ; Jonathon Krause; ***Ferdinand Foch and the Scientific Battle***

Peter Doyle ***Geology and the war on the Western Front, 1914–1918***

Simon Birch ***The abortive British attack on the Gommecourt salient, in support of the IV Army assault on the Somme, 1 July 1916. An operational case study at divisional level.***

Dominiek Dendooven In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres, Belgium ***Indians in the Ypres Salient 1914-1918***

E Tufan ***The Late Ottomans' path to alliance with Germany in 1914, Revisited***

Dr Anne Samson, Independent Historian, co-ordinator of Great War in East Africa
With Lettow and Smuts through Africa: World War 1

Copies of any of the above papers can be obtained via e mail…..contact grantcullen@hotmail.com Let me know what ones you want and I will send them to you. Thanks

BRANDED GOODS AVAILABILITY

New items are always being considered, so please check the Branded goods part of the shop for all items available.
Prices are inclusive of postage within UK (Branded Items Nos 1-11)
www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/wfa-branded-items/?p=2
or call Head Office (Sarah Gunn or Maya Shapland) on 020 7118 1914

And the (Branded Clothing, Nos 12- 18) note new prices (under) effective from 1st July.
Order direct from supplier (West Coast Workwear) **www.westernfrontassociation.com/shop/branded-clothing/**
or ring (0800 169 2228 or 01704 873301)

1	Fridge Magnet	(£5)	59mm dia, front metal plate, high strength neodymium magnetic backplate, and plastic mylar front cover
2	Anniv' Coaster	(£8.50)	4" in diameter hand crafted slate. Individually polished, screen printed by hand and backed by a baize
3	Mousemats	(£6)	196 x 235mm fabric surface and are of high quality. They have a rubberised base layer
4	Bookmarks	(£2)	(dims 55 x 175mm) rich UV High Gloss Coating provides protection against stains and damage
5	Baseball Caps	(£8)	Lightweight 5 Panel cotton cap, adjustable with velcro rip-strip, one size fits all
6	Ties	(£11)	Length 142cm, width 9cm (at widest part), 100% Polyester
7	Lapel Badges	(£2.50)	25mm Dia. Die struck + imitation hard enamel, Silver Nickel Plating, Butterfly clutch pin
8	Mug	(£10)	11oz ceramic mug (95mm high x 85mm diameter) features the bold official WFA logo design (two sides)
9	Messenger Bag	(£27)	37 x 29 x 11cm, 100% Cotton. Full cotton lining. Zippered organiser section, Capacity:13 litres
10	Despatch Bag	(£30)	40 x 30 x 12 cm, (10) Washed Canvas, dual rear pouch pockets. Multiple zippered pockets. Capacity: 14 litres
11	Shoulder Bag	(£25)	40 x 28 x 18 cm, (10) (11) Polyester. Internal valuables pocket. Zippered front pocket. Capacity: 14 litres
12	Oxford Shirt	(£27)	Kustom Kit Short Sleeve Corporate Oxford Shirt. Easy iron button down collar, 85% cotton, 15% polyester
13	Breathable Jacket	(£71)	Russell Hydro Plus 2000 Jacket. Nylon taslon with PU Coating
14	Rugby Shirt	(£25)	Front Row Classic Rugby Shirt, 100% Cotton
15	Fleece	(£24)	Regatta Thor 111 Fleece Jacket, 100% polyester anti pill
16	T-shirt	(£17)	Russell Classic Cotton T-Shirt. 100% ringspun cotton
17	Sweat Shirt	(£22.50)	Gents Russell Jerzees Raglan / Ladies Fruit Of The Loom Raglan
18	Polo Shirt	(£20.50)	Russell Cotton Pique Polo Shirt. 100% cotton

How Prime Minister Asquith Saved the life of David Lloyd George

Most of those who have an interest in The Great War are aware that Lord Kitchener Secretary of state for War sailed from Scrabster to Scapa Flow on 5 June 1916 aboard HMS *Oak* before transferring to the armoured cruiser HMS *Hampshire* for his diplomatic mission to Russia.

At the last minute, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe changed *Hampshire*'s route on the basis of a mis-reading of the weather forecast and ignoring (or not being aware of) recent intelligence and sightings of German U-boat activity in the vicinity of the amended route. Shortly before 19:30 hrs the same day, steaming for the Russian port of Arkhangelsk during a Force 9 gale, *Hampshire* struck a mine laid by the newly launched German U-boat *U-75* (commanded by Kurt Beitzen) and sank west of the Orkney Islands. Recent research has set the death toll of those aboard *Hampshire* at 737. Only twelve men survived.

Amongst the dead were all ten members of his entourage. Kitchener was seen standing on the quarterdeck during the approximately twenty minutes that it took the ship to sink. His body was never recovered.

How many are aware that David Lloyd George, then Minister of Munitions, and who became Prime Minister on December 5th 1916, should have been on HMS Hampshire accompanying Kitchener to Russia ? This is the story.

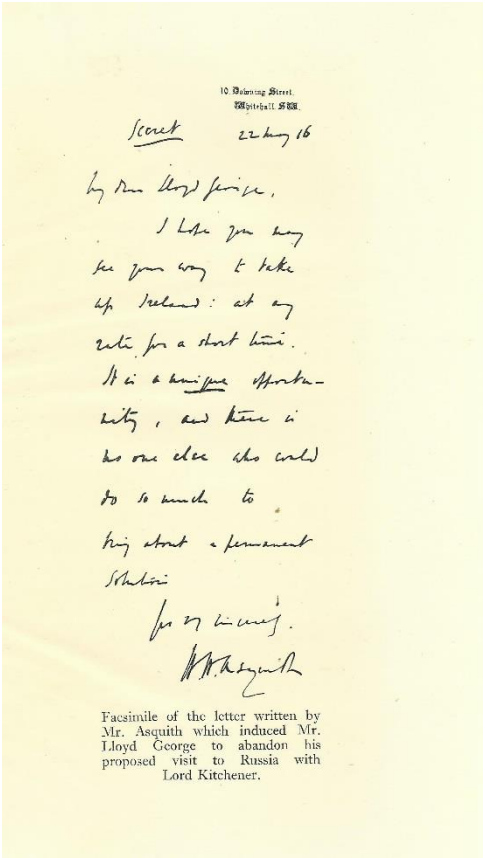
In April 1916, encouraged by Germany and many Irish Americans, the Sinn Fein leaders in Dublin decided that the time was right to come out in open rebellion against the British Government. A ship was to come from Germany to Ireland brining the Irish revolutionary leader Sir Roger Casement and the armed rebellion was timed to take effect on 23rd April, Easter Day 1916. Casement failed to turn up in Ireland on the 21st and the following day news appeared that the ship bringing him had been intercepted by the Royal Navy and that he had been taken into custody. Notices were quickly sent out by the Irish Volunteer headquarters to postpone the Sunday arrangements, but nevertheless an armed insurrection took place in Dublin and, on a minor scale, in other parts of the country.

Those provincial disturbances were small and easily suppressed. The Dublin outbreak was far more serious and for a time the Irish capital was held by the forces of insurrection. Troops were hastily summoned, martial law proclaimed, and in a couple of days the rising had been quelled, not without significant bloodshed on both sides, Several of the leaders of the rebellion were apprehended, tried by court martial and executed.

Obviously, matters could not be allowed to deteriorate further and after discussion with cabinet colleagues, Prime Minister Asquith travelled to Dublin to avail himself of the situation on the ground. Martial law was still in force and the three principal officers of the Crown, who were adjudged to have mishandled the situation. Lord Wimborne, Lord Lieutenant, Birrell, the Chief Secretary for Ireland and his Under Secretary Sir Matthew Nolan, all resigned their posts.

Upon his return, Asquith approached David Lloyd George, then Minister of Munitions and asked him if he would try and negotiate a settlement with the Irish revolutionary leaders as it was a well known fact that Lloyd George had certain sympathies with their cause, although his immersion in his task of equipping the BEF in the field, especially in view of the forthcoming Somme campaign had very much detached him from the Irish developments. For Lloyd George this request came at an awkward moment. For some time he had been urging on both the political and military leaders a measure of closer coordination with the Russian ally and he had at last got them to agree to a practical step in this direction. Lord Kitchener was to proceed to Russia via the northern port of Archangel to consult with the military authorities there about closer cooperation in the field and it had been arranged that Lloyd George go with him to find out the truth about the appalling shortage of equipment of which the UK government had heard and see in what way the Ministry of Munitions could best help to remedy this. Indeed these were matters in which Lloyd George was far more closely interested than the tragedy which had overtaken the government`s perceived lack of policy in Ireland.

Lloyd George`s plans were upset by Asquith`s proposal which came in a letter dated My 22nd 1916.



10, Downing Street,
Whitehall, S.W.

Secret 22 May 16

My dear Lloyd George,

I hope you may see your way to take up Ireland: at any rate for a short time. It is a unique opportunity, and there is no one else who could do so much to bring about a permanent Solution

Yrs very sincerely.

H.H. Asquith

Facsimile of the letter written by Mr. Asquith which induced Mr. Lloyd George to abandon his proposed visit to Russia with Lord Kitchener.

10 Downing Street
Whitehall
S.W.
22nd May 1916

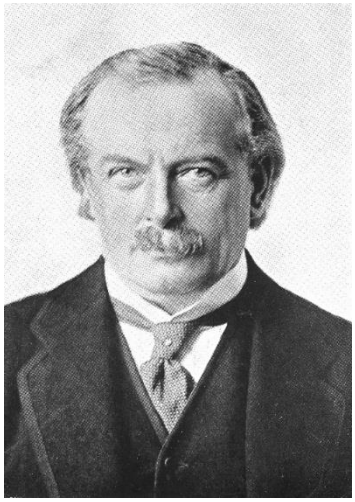
My dear Lloyd George

I hope you may see your way to take up Ireland, at any rate for a short time. It is a unique opportunity and there is no one else who could do so much to bring a permanent solution

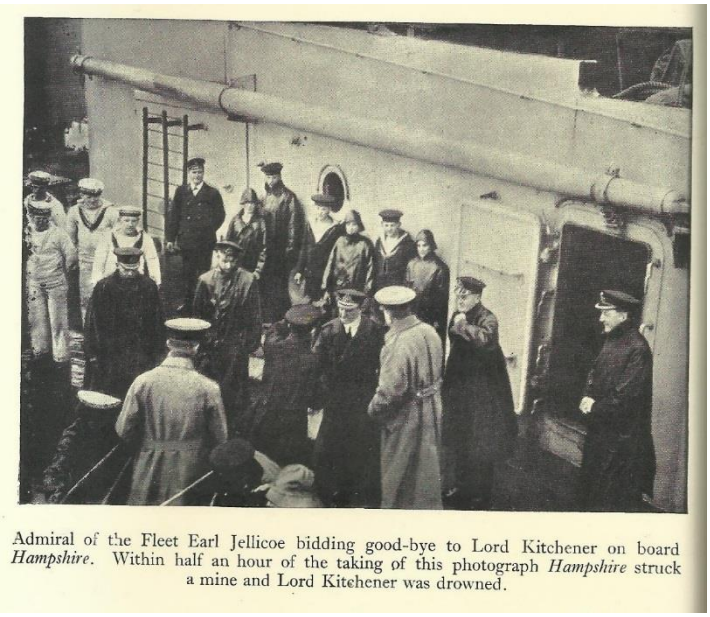
Yours very sincerely.

H.H. Asquith

Much against Lloyd George`s own inclination, he decided he could not refuse the Prime Minister`s request and informed Kitchener that he could not accompany him to Russia and asked him to use his best efforts to ascertain the munitions position in Russia and the way in which the British Munitions Ministry could render help in equipping the Russian armies.



As Asquith was penning his letter to Lloyd George an obscure German vessel was steaming across the North Sea bearing a sea mine which it loosed off the Scottish coast in the hope of sinking some ship of the Grand Fleet cruising around those Scottish islands. A fortnight later that mine struck HMS Hampshire with the renowned and almost legendary figure of the British Minister of War on board. But for Asquith`s letter David Lloyd George would have been with him and would have shared Kitchener`s fate and the course of history would have been changed.



Admiral of the Fleet Earl Jellicoe bidding good-bye to Lord Kitchener on board *Hampshire*. Within half an hour of the taking of this photograph *Hampshire* struck a mine and Lord Kitchener was drowned.

To leave it all behind…..

Before the Great War, and for a considerable number of years after, a high percentage of the population of the major cities and towns throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles lived in conditions of abject poverty. Tenement buildings, usually between four and five storeys high, provided low-rental accommodation for families regardless of number. Living side by side, next to, virtually on top of, and with other families; sharing the same basic amenities. Conditions were insanitary in the extreme, shared toilet facilities - little more than communal latrines - next to stand-pipes or pumps from which water for drinking, washing, cooking had to be drawn. Sewers - often open, overflowing and exposed - ran be-tween, beside or behind the buildings; infestations of rats and all manner of vermin were commonplace. All combined to ensure disease - typhus, cholera - and a multitude of other illnesses and ailments were rife and exacted a continual toll on the population regardless of their age.

Very little is known about Robert Bickley, but it is believed his parents lived in circumstances akin to those described above. His father, a general labourer died when he was thirty years old, leaving a wife with a one-year old baby to raise; she died four years later. Orphaned at five years of age Robert was too young to eke out an existence on the streets, an urchin scrounging and thieving to survive; he may have been 'taken in' only to be cruelly used and abused, dead within months. How he came to be placed in the custody of the local workhouse is unknown. Recorded 'pauper' he was put to work there doing whatever he was ordered that he might be rewarded with a roof over his head, share a 'cell' with others like him, a bed of straw similarly shared - changed once a month - to sleep on; his existence for the next six years was little better than that of a prison inmate.
Taken from the workhouse at age eleven and 'adopted' by a local colliery overseer, he was put to work deep underground mining coal. In the local mines where the dangerous conditions, accidents and illness, combined with the productivity the industry demanded, ensured the requirement of a numerically consistent workforce; it is highly likely the workhouse was a regular and frequently utilised source of labour replenishment.

At the end of each day's toil, covered in filth and grime, Robert would have walked to the communal accommodation - there being nine other persons of similar age and different names, male and female, registered at the address - of his 'adoptive parents' and their 'workforce' where he would have been provided with his daily fare, a barely substantive meal providing the minimum nutrients and calories for a basic dietary requirement. In grateful thanks for his 'adoption,' his removal from the workhouse and the life therein, for his gainful employ, for all his adoptive parents had provided, the charity afforded him, Robert would have been expected to hand over a substantial part of his meagre wage; effectively ensuring him a life of servitude, his 'adoptive parents' an added income.

It comes as no surprise on the outbreak of war, the call for volunteers - 'Your Country Needs You' - Robert and countless thousands of other men, young and old, sharing a common ex-istence of hardship and deprivation readily signed up. It also comes as no surprise to find, when reading their records, researching their stories, a considerable number, the majority of these men made exemplary soldiers. The hardships, the conditions they had endured in their civilian lives reflected in their ability to overcome, endure those they experienced, encountered in the squalid conditions of the trenches, on the field of battle, on the line of march, and in the camps behind

the lines. Sadly, for many their military careers were brief, abruptly curtailed. A better life after all the hardships they had endured, shared and overcome, denied.

Their reward a grave, Portland headstone, name on a memorial.
(II.D.20) Corpl. 4949, Robert Edward Bickley, 'C' Bty., 91st Bde., Royal Field Artillery: 2nd s. of the late William Bickley (d.1891), and his wife Alice Bickley, née Edwards (d.1895). Orphaned age five years, taken into Union Workhouse, Chester; adopted (pauper, age 11) s. of Alfred Edward Hayes, Colliery Deputy; of 35, Padeswood Road, Buckley, nr. Mold, Flints, and his wife Annie Hayes, née Wilcock: b. Warrington, Cheshire, 1889: Occ. - Coal Miner / Hewer: enlisted Wrexham: trained Lark Hill, Salisbury Plain: served in France from 21 July 1915: killed in action, 1 July 1916; counter-battery fire. Age 26. 'The Batteries carried out a pre-arranged bombardment of the enemy's communication trenches; otherwise very little firing was carried out. The enemy, with the exception of heavy fire in retaliation, was fairly quiet.' (Military records refer R. Bickley; taking into consideration the circumstances of his early years, it is highly probable he never knew he had a middle name)

Refers: Vlamertinghe Military Cemetery
'In Memory & In Mourning: Ypres Salient Cemeteries,' Vol.5, pg.122

Chivalry...Last Farwell[1]

Mission Tactics and the British & German Army's 1914-15

"To Army Headquarters and to G.H.Q. In some ways it was like the debate of a group of savages as to how to extract a screw from a piece of wood. Accustomed only to nails, they had made one effort to pull the screw by main force, and now that it had failed they were devising methods of applying more force still."

Introduction

26th August 1914 - General Smith-Dorrien was in an impossible position. Field Marshal French had made it clear that the retreat would continue but, but in the II Corps commander's view, such a retreat might well end in disaster. Visions of German artillery tearing holes through retreating infantry columns, with regiments of uhlans charging survivors, may well have raced through Smith-Dorrien mind.[2] He took comfort in the Field Service Regulations that not only permitted a subordinate commander to depart 'from the letter of his [superiors] order' in changed circumstances, but demanded that he do so.[3] Probably the closest the British Army came to applying its own doctrine with regards mission command in practice for hundred years. Smith-Dorrien hoped to force the German 1st Army to deploy for battle, deliver a blow harsh enough to give him the opportunity to retire his Corps under the cover of darkness. The decision to fight at Le Cateau has been a matter of fierce debate ever since. Even with the benefit of hindsight conclusive decision either way is just as elusive.

The British Way of War

What is clear that from that day onwards the carefully laid plans of the pre-war hierarchy would never again be relevant and a new way forward would have to be found. Once consequence of

[1] Junger, E (1929) Storm of Steel, Mottram, R, H, London, p 110
[2] Gilbert, A (2014) Challenge of Battle, Osprey, Oxford, p 114
[3] FSR (Pt 1, Sec 12, Para 13, sub-para. Iii)

Smith-Dorrien's last minute decision to halt the retreat and prepare for battle was to further confuse an already confused situation. How did the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) come to fight at Le Cateau at all? Having crossed the Channel in early August 1914, the BEF had moved north to Mons after a brief encounter along its frontage in line with their French allies a general withdrawal started which did not stop, less the action at Le Cateau, until well into September. The BEF introduction to war on mainland Europe was one of numerous hasty defence actions followed by retreat, this was repeated for nearly two months, by the end of which the British regular army was exhausted, decimated and shocked by what it had experienced. Its doctrine had been found to be at best lacking at worst irrelevant, its commander's hopelessly ill prepared for modern war. Smith-Dorrien like his counterparts, Haig and Field Marshal French (commander of the BEF) were products of British Imperial policing, the Boer War had led to some exposure to modern fighting techniques but by and large, defending Britain's Imperial interests throughout the globe had been poor preparation for the excesses of modern state on state conflict.

Meanwhile back at Le Cateau, the ground that the battle would be fought over was the rolling downland of northern France, similar in appearance to Salisbury Plain, a far cry from the mining villages and slag heaps of the BEF's most recent battle, Mons. The friendly forces situation saw three divisions (3rd, 4th, & 5th) of Smith-Dorrien's corps deployed in a slightly convex line through Belgium, with the towns of Esnes on his right and Le Cateau on the left, with his center based around Caudry. For the infantry in forward positions, the news that they would soon be in combat produced a last-minute round of digging to construct some sort of defensive line to face the Germans. When Smith-Dorrien had issued his stand-and-fight order he intended it as part of a delaying action, a means to gain time and distance his pursers, his ambiguous 'no-retirement' order had effectively been transformed into 'no retirement whatsoever' by the time it reach its tactical application.

Smith-Dorrien application of FSR did not spark a cascade of likewise innovate thinking with regards the deployment of ll Corps. By now all senior officers had been under enormous stress, since the outbreak of the campaign with no end in sight. This stress led them to fall back on old ways where courage was believed to count for more than tactical acumen. Quaint as it may seem now, many officers considered it to be ignoble to flinch from fire, however deadly, or seek safety behind cover.[4] Unsurprisingly there was a great deal of muddling through as battalions of various divisions moved into position.

The enemy was made up of the German 1st Army at its fore was the ll Cavalry Corps under Lieutenant-General von der Marwitz. ll Corps was evenly match to its German counterpart but the German Cavalry Corps had one advantage in the attachment of five 'over-sized' Jager light infantry battalions, each fielding a company of six machine guns. These Jager Bn's machine guns had direct effect on the 12 Brigade (Bde) in the 4th Division which held the left of the line around Esnes, which led to 12 Bde withdrawal. It was then 11 Bde turn (to the right of 12 Bde) to feel the heat of battle as the Jager switch their attack. In the center around Caudry held by the 3rd Div, 7 Bde comfortable held the line. It was on the right that the battle would be decided with the 5th Div at La Cateau itself.

More and more German troops, machine guns and batteries came into action along the Le Cateau-Cambrai road. The British Army losses especially in artillery and a shortage of ammunition led to their own rate of supporting fire slackening. The brunt of the initial attack at Le Cateau was borne by the 14th Bde, and most notably the 2nd Bn Suffolk Regiment. Understandably the Suffolk's began to waver. The 2nd Manchester and 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were rushed forward to reinforce the Suffolk's. The results were predictable, once forward of their hasty defensive positions with little artillery support they were easy meat for the German machine guns and batteries. Few if any reached the Suffolk's, this like so many actions throughout the battle showed how ill prepared the BEF was for modern war and was to be

[4] Gilbert, A (2014) Challenge of Battle, Osprey, Oxford, p 121

repeated far too often. The notion of élan could carry the day as if the BEF was engaged in a rerun of Waterloo persisted to long into the war.

Under constant pressure the line became undone and many unauthorized withdrawals took place. As officer and NCO casualties increased many soldiers took it upon themselves to avoid the maelstrom of modern warfare. The Suffolk's along with their counterparts the KOYLI succumbed to the inevitable and were overrun by the Germans, the battle was slowing slipping from Smith-Dorrien's hands. The casualties reflected the intense nature of modern battle, the Suffolk's in their valiant rearguard action lost over 700 men, the KOYLI over 600, the flower of the pre-war regular army was going the way of the Dodo. The BEF did not break and run but it was a damn *close-run-thing*, the withdraw came in fits and starts as the line crumbled under the German onslaught. The 10th Bde was allotted the pleasure of fighting the rear-guard, the withdraw became a retreat, the retreat, was translated to the ordinary *'Tommy', as 'get away as best you could'.* The Germans also had their own problems, the BEF had inflicted a terrible price on their opponents and the German follow up was weak an incoherent.

By the early hours of 27 August, the Germans had taken control of Le Cateau battlefield, but lacked the resources to follow up their victory during the hours of darkness. In a scenes of confusion the main bulk of the British force continued to march away during the night and next day. The prime cause of the British defeat at Le Cateau was poor leadership. These failings occurred at all levels, but were most significate at the top.[5]

As is the British way of war,[6] after action reports gave prominence to the description of isolated heroic acts by regiments, battalions and officers the irony was obviously lost that these acts were only required because of the failure of leadership. The great mass of British troops heading away from Le Cateau battlefield experienced all the wretched emotions of defeat. The stress and strain of marching, counter-marching retreat, casualties out of all pre-war experience and eventual stalemate had an effect on the BEF far beyond the expectation of the British Army. Senior officers and some staffs of brigades and division simply broke down. Some officers went mad with the exhaustion and had to be relived others sort comfort elsewhere as officer casualties increased NCO's felt the strain of command, ill-prepared for the weight of responsibility they to buckled under the strain, indicative of the pre-war army's failure to encourage NCO development. Casualties' weather due to combat or stress led to repeated turnover of senior officers, albeit often necessary, did nothing to maintain continuity and stability of command.[7]

The British Army officer corps was also trapped in a doctrine of command ethos which greatness virtue was to display the classical interpretation of leadership. The virtue of displaying Achilles like stoic attributes had limited utility in the combined arms battle, since once they had exposed themselves on the modern battlefield they encountered the full hurricane of shrapnel, machine-gun fire and high explosive. As the classical view of leadership in the British sense meant exposure yourself to fire the toll of officer casualties was excessive a more prudent, managerial style of leadership was now forced on the front-line officer. No longer exposing himself and set forward sword in hand displaying all the attributes of the stiff upper-lip, a change of stance was required to preserve what was left of the pre-war officer corps. The rifle was now in his hand, rank was subdued, and an attempt to blend in and not make one's self a target of the snipers, all these changes still resonates to this day.

The German Way of War

But what of the Germans, the much vaunted enemy. The German army of 1914 was probably better prepare for war than its earnest while distant cousin of 1939, well equipped, well trained and without doubt the most effective general staff in the whole world. Even the most effective

[5] Gilbert, A (2014) Challenge of Battle, Osprey, Oxford, p 133-53

[6] From Rorkes Drift, to Dunkirk & the Platoon House battles of Helmand

[7] Gilbert, A (2014) Challenge of Battle, Osprey, Oxford, p 240

army of the day was beginning to show the strain by late 1914. Casualties had been high, the need to fight a war on two fronts sapped at its ability to maneuver with style it had adopted on pre-war exercises, stretched to the limit. Time was already running out, what was to be done to make the brake through?

A solution of sorts lay on the large pool of serviceable manpower that had been left behind when the German Army first marched to war. Comparing of reservists, volunteers, and other non-front-line troops, six reserve corps were hastily assembled during August and four were ordered to Flanders. The gamble was to use the mass of these poorly prepared and equipped troops relying on enthusiasm and bravery to make up for any deficiencies in capability to break through the BEF. Some of the German units still wore the old blue uniforms, rifles only arrived late in their training, and drills were centered on the parade square rather than the field. Officers were of what the British would call the dug-out variety. Lacking in modern tactical acumen, and often unfit for the rigors of modern campaigning, this was a risk. Already with the plan behind schedule a certain drive of a decisive brake though gathered traction, an attitude of one more push and we will get through persisted.

On October 23rd the German reserve formations launched a mass infantry attack. Subtle it was not having more in common with Rossbach than 1914, the assault on Langemarck was to become the stuff of myth and legend, neither of which could hide the folly. The tactical ineptitude was on a par with the British Army 1st day of the Somme, the fact that the Germans had already showed the folly of such tactics eighteen months before does the British Army abilities to learn from others mistakes little credit. Over two days Haig's 1 Corps weathered repeated attacks by the enthusiastic amateurs of the reserve corps, the casualties were obscene. These casualties were later cynically manipulated as the *'Kindermond'* ('the Death of Innocents'), a German nationalist myth that envisioned idealistic students marching towards the Allied lines, singing martial songs with arms linked and flags unfurled. The *'Langemarck Myth'* was subsequently taken on by the Nazis to display the virtues of German militaristic spirt, but it could not conceal the shortcomings of the German Supreme Command in sending such poorly trained soldiers under such tactically barren leadership into battle. For an army that prided its self on its professional attributes and education of its leadership since 1806 on Mission Command it was probably its profession lowest ebb. The fact it came only three months into the war showed the much vaunted German Army had in fact a very shallow doctrinal understanding of modern war.

The Germans plough on but to no avail there would be no brake through in 1914. What was bad for the Germans was obviously good for the British, stalemate bought time for the BEF, time it needed to adapt and overcome the shortfalls in its doctrinal DNA. Haig the ultimate product of the Victorian regular army became the standard bearer for the new model army. Although no Wellington or Marlborough, Haig held his nerve, when many around him did not. Haig was the best British general in 1914-15 but that is not much to shout about considering the dearth of talent at the higher echelons of the British Army.

The German failure to brake the allied line in 1914 would be the nemesis that would haunt the German army for the whole war. Whatever anxiety that British senior officers experienced about the strength of their defenses was more than countered by the rising sense of frustration amongst their German counterpart. Each much vaunted next offensive brake through on either side provided illusory.

The British Army soon came to rely on its soldiers to maintain the line often in spite of their senior command. Fighting more often than not became a 'soldiers battle' with leadership, once battle was joined due to the lack of communications, devolved to the commanders of battalions, who in turn, were able to rely on a core of field officers, NCOs and privates who simply refused to give way.

The Reckoning

As always good leadership was the precursor to battlefield success.[8] The lack of grip shown by some brigade commanders was shocking, however whatever the shortcomings of the BEF they held the line. Their steely determination against the odds won the respect of friend and foe alike. The survivors of 1914 campaign who were still with their units at the end of the year felt a profound sense of loss. The officers, NCO and regular other ranks had developed a close *esprit de corps* in the years leading up to 1914 (this was mirrored in the Regular German units, such as the Prussian Guards), which in many units had been brutally and irrevocably destroyed.

After the Great War, the notion passed into history that the BEF was the best prepared army ever sent forth from these shores. The truth is a little different, it was as prepared for the coming war as any of its allies or for that matter its opponents. That is to say along with the rest of the European military elite, it was not prepared at all. The regular regiments of the BEF suffered the same fate as the French, German, Austrian and Russian pre-war regular infantry it was mostly wasted on poorly coordinated frontal attacks, and duly annihilated with the first twelve months of the war. It in turn was then replaced by a largely new armies that carried on the fight.

Whatever the facts of the Great War, they were rapidly submerged in the legends and myths of the national struggle to put meaning to the sacrifice and come up with a meaningful means of remembering such sacrifice. There is nothing particularity unusual in this, the British and German Army's both came to build their own legends and myths around their collective failure. As the brilliant, but sarcastic French writer observed, "While our soil was being littered with statues of dying soldiers in cheap stone, Gallic cocks of brass, and weeping angels cast in concreate, the war veterans were reducing their epic to the level of street corner gossip".[9]

The story of the development of infantry tactics post 1914 is really the story of what the Germans called the 'storm trooper'. He was to be a foot soldier of a new type, adapted for the conditions the modern battlefield and employing a range of new weapons to the full. He would be given more flexibility and independence than ever, and would fight in particularly small groups. In the attack he would skirmish forward cautiously and attempt to infiltrate through an enemy position, rather than tackle it heads-on. In defense he would act as an immediate counter-attack element in support of a dispersed 'web' of small strongpoints. The enemy would be enmeshed in the web and then struck with violent blows at the moment when he was least prepared to receive them.[10]

In 1914 the infantry had been armed with three different weapons-rifle and bayonet, pistol for officers, and perhaps the occasional machine gun. By the end of 1915 in contrast the infantry could draw on up to dozen different types of weapon system, these included, the light mortar, light machine gun, flamethrower, a host of grenades, mines and assorted explosive devices. It was the Great War that the grenade displaced the bayonet as the arm par excellence of the close quarter fighter. It was the principal weapon of the storm trooper. This change in tactics, tended to isolate the front line soldier and throw him back on his own resources, or at best, those of his NCOs.

Haig to Montgomery

If we look to 1915 the British Army fought a number of significant battles – Neuve Chapelle in March, Second Ypres in April and May, and Loos in September and October. At the time Loos was the largest battle in British military history. It was the first British use of chlorine gas, it was the first engagement by Kitchener's citizen army, and it was terribly expensive – with some 60,000 casualties in just three weeks. In terms of tactical development it was a remarkable year that saw the introduction of the wireless, the beginning of air-land integration and combined

[8] Gilbert, A (2014) Challenge of Battle, Osprey, Oxford, p 298
[9] Dutourd, J (1957) The Taxis of the Marne Simon & Schuster, New York, p 195
[10] Griffith, P (1990) Presidio, p96

arms artillery fire, early experimentation with tanks, advances in trench warfare and infiltration tactics.[11] As a result the British Army was forced to fight at a distinct disadvantage against its German foes. Indeed, the battlefield reality of 1915 was inexperienced ill-equipped and engaged against a foe of considerable fighting power in exceptionally difficult conditions. The result was in James Edmonds words, that 'the enemy undoubtedly had the best of the fighting' and that 'too many of our bravest and best perished, seeking to compensate by valor for the lack of experience and shortage of munitions'. British strategy and BEF operations were shaped by the realities outlined above. British lacked military resources to make a decisive contribution on the Western Front and its leaders were cognizant of the need for more time to train and equip her fledging forcers. Yet the country could not afford to stand by whist its alliance partners battled for national survival. Trapped by this strategic paradox, the BEF was forced to fight battles for which it was ill-prepared and which proved, in Edmonds' phase, '*tactically disappointing and strategically disastrous.'*[12]

It easy to forget that until the end of 1915 that the Great War would fulfill its creator's vision of a mobile campaign. There seemed to be no reason to doubt in the spring of 1915 the deadlock would be broken and the offensive would again be set in motion. If there was now a momentary 'siege' phase in operations, it was presumably the result of a temporary exhaustion of both logistic and moral assets. As soon as these had been made good the armies would surely be free to return to *'a good fight in the open'*, subsequent battles obviously discredited this assumption but all this lay in the future.

In that future effective performance on operations was to be based on sound planning and rehearsals that in turn is built on formations being trained for the job they have to do, but the bedrock on which this is based is built on a workable organization and administration that allows the structure to function and sustain itself… one has to look at the raising of the Confederate and Union forces in the American Civil War as the only comparable equivalent in raising mass armies as Britain did in 1914-1918. McClelland was the architect of the Army of the Potomac in the American Civil War, General Sir Douglas Haig, one of the architects of the BEF. McClelland was removed because in the end he would not fight the Army he forged, Haig is pilloried because he knew that the only way that Germany could be defeated was by fighting it with his armies and has been condemned for fighting too much. On assuming command in December 1915 Haig had a structure in embryo only. It had the appearance of a fighting force but was nothing of the sort. It was the junior partner faced with taking over an expanding front from the French.

Haig had a vision of how the German armies were to be defeated which he pursued with unrelenting zeal. He determined that the German armies would be broken in battle which would culminate in a breakthrough and pursuit. The Somme was the turning point in Haig's tactical thinking. He remained wedded to the concept of a breakthrough battle but he and his subordinate army commanders were learning how to achieve it with an infantry army…Evolving doctrine within an army must be based on a procedure that is able to recognize the best practice that is happening at the sharp end. Throughout the BEF commanders at all levels groped towards tactical solutions on how to cross the deadly ground and close with the enemy.

Haig's strengths and weaknesses encapsulated in his willingness to support an innovative plan, an insistence on training and rehearsals, countered by a determination to demand more than what was possible, and once committed, unwilling to give this up, resulting in an unnecessarily prolonged battle. There is a curious paradox about Haig's approach to command. On one hand he would detach himself from the tasks he delegated to his Army commanders and act almost in the role of Directing Staff in querying their plans, and yet, in every other respect, he was a constant presence who ensured that GHQ directives were put into practice across his armies... The evolution of Haig as Commander-in-Chief, and the evolving professionalism of his armies

[11] Address by CGS Gen Sir N Carter - Guards Chapel 9 Nov 15

[12] Jones, S (2015) Western Front Assoc. Buletin No 103, p 16

which he oversaw, is one of enormous achievement against the finest army in the world within a comparatively short timeframe of just over four years of warfare. Mistakes were many and costly but given the start point and the caliber of the opposition this was inevitable.[13]

The battles of 1914 – 15 threw up an overwhelming rhetoric of modernity and futurism, which led to some grave consequences when it came to preparing for the next war. As the baton pass from Haig, through a host of underachievers it was finally to come to rest with Montgomery. Montgomery would fashion the army not only of the later stages of the Second World War but to this day. For the British Army it was the characteristically 'infantry' style of warfare which emerged and it was to be Montgomery that most methodical infantrymen who would become its greatest captain.

Whatever else 1914-15 was for the BEF As a whole, it was surely a triumph of morale, training and cold steel over numerical superiority hardware and munitions. In 1990 Paddy Griffith wrote that the British Army was finally starting to shake free from some of the more debilitating rigidities of Haig and Montgomery. When viewing the performance of the British Army through the lens of Le Cateau, its best to remember the battle was a symptom not the disease. The British Army of 1914 is much like it is today, perhaps too much, small professional but ultimately linked to much to tradition than innovation, to inward looking than open to new ideas. It talks the talk of mission command but is much more comfortable with micromanagement, it still has a long way to brake free of the shackles of Haig and Montgomery.

Schlieffen to Seeckt

As for the German Army Langemarck vividly showed that the apostles of mission command could be as doctrinal bankrupt as the allies. The fact that the Germans suffered such a climatic failure of its own tactical ability eighteen months before the British Army's 'First Day of the Somme' does little to admonish the British tactical gurus from copying such ineptitude. Langemarck is the real signpost to the failure of the German Army to win the Great War. From October 1914 Germany was never going to win the war. It would seem come close on many occasions, but all the mission command and storm troopers, could not make up for the strategic vacuum at the heart of the German war machine.

Langemarck created not only the conditions for ultimate failure in one war, but also laid the conditions for failure in the next. The myth of the brightest and best linking arms singing martial songs as they marched under the colors of the ancient regime was exploited by the coming new order as a cause celeb. Of cause the storm troopers and mission command doctrine would flow like an expanding torrent in the years to come. But the Langemarck myth would always drag its creators back to noble but ultimately pointless communal sacrifice. The link between the Langemarck myth and the rebirth of the German soldier as the new industrial man, of the Junger 'Storm of Steel' portrayal of him, led ultimately only in one direction, failure. In failure the 'storm trooper' morphed into the Freikrops of the civil war, which in turn led to its logically conclusion under Ernst Rohm as the myth of the *'front-line-soldier'* and its national socialists fulcrum the SA-storm trooper. In time the SA storm trooper would become redundant to its master and was cast aside, showing as with all things, even myths have a shelf life of utility.[14]A thousand von Seeckts' with all the mission command in the world linked to the most progressive of military doctrines could not have saved the German Army in the final contest, since it had already mortgaged it soul to its greatest of military 'sins' its own vanity. *G Long 2015*

[13] Pugsley, C, Dr (2011) Haig and the Implementation of Tactical Doctrine on the Western Front, RMAS Occasional Papers, http://www.army.mod.uk/documents/general/rmas_occ_paper_08.pdf

[14] See Ben Scotts excellent The Origins of the Freikorps: A Reevaluation for full analysis of this development, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=1-scott-the-origins-of-the-freikorps&site=15

Closing Address

Prof. Dr. Luc de Vos (Belgium), Honorary President of the ICMH

The First World War and the Fundamental Problem of Breaking through the Front

The First World War is particularly associated with the bloody offensives on the Western front. Only a few months after its outbreak, the war got stuck in an unprecedented stalemate. The various armies tried to break through the front with new and heavier weaponry, but systematically, offensives ended in a failure with tens of thousands of casualties. This article considers the reasons for this by analysing the various ways by which attack and defence were organized.
We also look at how the Germans almost achieved a breakthrough in Spring 1918 and how it was finally to the Allies to win the war.1

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE EMERGENCE OF MASS ARMIES

The relationship between the Industrial Revolution and military technique is fairly clear. The possibilities from a whole series of inventions were used to bring a new dimension to the business of war. In addition, the Industrial Revolution was closely linked to the emergence of the nation-state and hence to another distinctive aspect of warfare in the 19th and 20th centuries: nationalism.

1 A smaller and popular version of this article already appeared in the catalogue of the national exhibition '14-18: It's our history!' (Brussels, Museum of Europe, 2014).
We thank our esteemed colleagues Prof. Dr. Michael Epkenhans (Germany), Prof. Dr. Massimo de Leonardis (Italy), Dr. Erwin Schmidl (Austria) and Dr. Dmitar Tasic (Serbia) for providing comparative elements to our own study work on the Western front and on the military operations in Belgium in particular.

The combination of industrial developments and nationalist aspirations brought mass armies onto the battlefield and changed the face of war radically.
The French in the age of Napoleon were the first to create a mass army. The use of military conscription meant that the army contained a significant proportion of non-professional soldiers. In response to their heavy defeat at Jena (in 1806), the Prussians introduced almost universal conscription in 1813. That same year, together with their Russian and Austrian allies, they defeated the French at Leipzig, in the first decisive encounter between two mass armies. In 1870-1871, there was a further confrontation between the two great powers, in which the French again tasted defeat. The loss of Alsace-Lorraine led to a strong current of revanchism against the newly formed German empire.
From the turn of the century, tensions in Europe grew, and both France and the German empire prepared for a war with mass armies. Alliances were forged, and by 1914 all that was needed for was the fuse to the powder keg to be lit.

This happened in the Balkans, where Austria-Hungary and Russia had been trying to win influence at one another's expense for half a century. To this came the role of the newly independent countries, which had emerged following the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, and which pursued their own nationalistic ambitions.
The war in 1914 started as the 'Third Balkan War', but this soon took on wider dimensions as Austria-Hungary had allied itself with Germany and Russia with France. Germany felt surrounded and a two-front war seemed inevitable.

The German Schlieffen-plan first aimed at delivering a decisive battle in the West, followed by attacking the Russians in the East. The Franco-German border was so heavily defended that the only possibility to attack France went through neutral Belgium.
The British had a different policy. Their military strength was based mainly on the Royal Navy, which controlled the world's seas, and an empire that on the eve of the First World War covered a quarter of the world, including subcontinents such as India, Australia and Canada. By the turn of the century, German political, industrial, maritime and colonial ambitions were increasingly driving the British into the arms of their former enemies, the French.5 Along with the other powers of the time (France, Russia, Austria and Prussia) Britain had in 1839 guaranteed the imposed armed neutrality of the newly independent buffer state of Belgium, and this gave it direct influence in European politics.

When Belgian neutrality was violated, the British had only a small intervention force of 100,000 highly trained professional soldiers to send in. They too now began to form a mass army. To this end, more than 600,000 volunteers joined up in 1914 and 1915, but in 1916 the British too found it necessary to introduce general military conscription in order to maintain the supply of military manpower.

In the aftermath of Waterloo, the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz set out the military ideas of his time in his work '*Vom Kriege*' ('*On War*'). He saw the total defeat of the enemy as the ultimate goal of war. If any concession was made to the loser, the victory became nothing more than a *Halbding* – an unfinished job. This notion dominated military thinking in 1914 and made the development towards total war inevitable. For states driven by nationalism and with mass armies at their disposal it became, as the German Kaiser and King of Prussia Wilhelm II put it in August 1914, a question of *Sein oder nicht sein* ('To be or not to be'). All civil and military achievements of the Industrial Revolution had to be deployed, and as a result, technology, science and industrial production attained new heights.

Ironically, the German Empire was unable to get its battleships – the very pinnacle of its industrial achievement – out of port, due to the rapid imposition of a blockade by the Royal Navy. Technically speaking, this was not a blockade, but an imposition of Contraband control.

In Admiral Tirpitz's plans, the German battleships were intended as a (political) tool of dissuasion. By putting the dagger-at-the throat of Britain, Germany hoped to force the British to make concessions in the distribution of the remaining parts of the world. But prior to the war, this policy wasn't very successful and it also failed in 1914. As the British refused to give battle near the German coast, the German navy was limited to submarine warfare.9
The German mass army of 3,800,000 men (6% of the population) seemed initially as if it would be able to repeat the success of 1870. The French had created an almost equally large army, representing 9% of the population, but it was far less well equipped and also lacked an extensive rail network to move troops and equipment quickly into position. The invasion through Belgium also enabled the Germans to use the extensive Belgian railway network. The Belgian forts were quickly put out of action, among other means through the use of revolutionary 42 cm and 30,5 cm artillery, and the road to Paris seemed to be open. But the Belgian army (200,000 men after mobilisation) offered far more resistance than expected.
After the Battle of the Marne and the race to the sea the Belgians, British and French were finally able to bring the German advance to a halt.

DEADLOCK ON THE WESTERN FRONT

The military operations of the First World War can be evaluated on three levels: strategic (policy, large-scale planning), operational (manoeuvres involving army units, especially at divisional level) and tactical (the actual combat). On the political and strategic level, it is astonishing that such an enormous war started actually without any significant war aims. Real war aims and increasingly greedy ones, only emerged gradually, paradoxically at times when the military chances for their implementation became more and more unreal. At the same time, in the development towards total war in which countries' entire governmental systems came to be almost wholly given over to the pursuit of the conflict, strategy was often reduced in scope to operational strategy, a term which had previously been used by Napoleon. Meanwhile, faulty tactics led to an accumulation of operational failures, causing a bloody stalemate on the Western front.

Although in the last decades before the war a profound revolution had occurred in the field of armaments, during the opening months of the war most armies still used early 19th-century tactics. Close order formations were maintained with a predominantly linear arrangement that gave the officers control over the troops. The emphasis was on *feu* ('fire power') and *choc* ('mass assault'), with the bayonet charge regarded as the final word in warfare. Thus in October 1914, not only did the inexperienced German 'student volunteers' of Langemarck perish, but on 11 November 1914 the elite Prussian Guard also failed to force a breakthrough at Ypres.

The British regular army was the exception to the rule. Some of its soldiers and many senior officers were veterans of the Boer War in South Africa, and had learned not just about 'fire', but also about the importance of movement and taking cover. With his Lee Enfield rifle, a trained professional soldier could shoot up to fifteen well-aimed rounds per minute (the so called 'mad minute'), and through the use of a spread-out formation in woods, hedges and ditches many German assaults were mown down. However the British paid a heavy price themselves: between August and November 1914 the elite British Expeditionary Force lost more than half its strength, including quite a few officers of noble descent. With the arrival of volunteers, the British Army too rapidly turned into a mass army, which together with the French numbered about as many men as the Germans and fought with similar weapons and logistics.

So in the course of 1915, the **fundamental problem of breaking through the front** emerged: the front had ceased to move, and neither side was able to make any significant advance.

Similar developments occurred in Serbia, where the Serbs managed to push back three Austro-Hungarian offensives in 1914, and on the Eastern front , where hundreds of thousands perished in the bloody Carpathian battles of thewinter 1914-15, without achieving a breakthrough in either direction. In 1915-17,this experience repeated itself on the Italian Isonzo (Soca) valley, where the Italians for more than two years were unable to reach Trieste- a distance one can easily cover in half an hour by car today. In this period the Italians lost about 300.000 soldiers and the Austrians about the same number.

Initially, attempts were made to break the deadlock with more firepower and new technology. From 1916, the Germans in particular gave much thought to tactical solutions, but it was not until 1918 that these were implemented everywhere at the front. It was this combination of 19th-century tactics and 20thcentury technology (weapons) that led to the wholesale slaughter for which the First World War remains etched in the collective memory.

THE DEFENSIVE DEPLOYMENT

The defensive deployment developed in the same way as the offensive.
In the first months of the war it was linear in character, with an emphasis on firepower and control.18 By the end of 1914, the war on the Yser front had come to a halt due to the flooding. The Belgians were on the defensive from the start, and hence had already begun to construct several lines in the early stages of the war. Behind the frontline trenches a second line was added a few hundred meters behind the Nieuport-Dixmude railway line in December 1914, followed soon after by a third line on the canal of Loo.
On the Ypres front the two sides long persisted in the belief that a decisive breakthrough was possible. As a result, the structure of the front was initially limited to a few hundred metres on either side of no man's land, which in some places was less than 100 metres wide. In the course of 1915, the Germans began work on a second line of defence. The following year one of the most important changes of mentality of the war occurred when the Germans were the first to become aware that on the Western front a long war of attrition was likely, and that it was therefore better to put everything into defence.

In the meanwhile, they would try to achieve a decisive victory against the Russians on the Eastern front. The French and the British, by contrast, continued to believe with each new offensive that they could force a breakthrough in the West, even though they tried 'indirect approaches' with the Gallipoli landing and by bringing Italy in the war in 1915 .
As they developed their defence in depth, the Germans quickly realised that a less visible network of strategic heights, ruins and other defensive outposts was much harder to put out of action than dense continuous trenches. Eventually, in the Ypres Salient, they built six lines located one behind the other, with the *Flandern I-Stellung* largely being constructed with concrete bunkers. When the British artillery stopped firing and the infantry launched an attack, the German defenders would crawl out of these bunkers and set up their machine guns so that they could accurately cover one another, with dire consequences for the attackers.22 Reinforced concrete was another product of the Industrial Revolution that was especially highly developed in Germany. Although the Belgian forts of 1914 contained a lot of concrete, they had hardly any reinforcement, making the forts quite easy for heavy artillery to destroy.
In the new defensive system of 1916-17, the Germans also created a rotation system between front line troops and reserves, in which certain divisions were referred to as *Eingreifdivisionen* ('intervention divisions'). These had to keep out of range of the British field artillery in order to be in position within a few hours to carry out a counter-attack. The *Eingreifdivisionen* operated increasingly on the principle of stormtrooping, described later on.24
During the Battle of Passchendaele, in 1917, the British were only able to advance with the greatest difficulty. For an eventual toll of 245,000 British and 215,000 German dead, wounded and missing, they gained just eight kilometres over a final stretch of front of three kilometres around the village of Passchendaele. The British breakthrough attempt was prevented by machine gun fire from well-positioned concrete bunkers on the slopes of the Passchendaele ridge. In addition to the defence of the Ypres Salient the Germans also worked on a defensive system with concrete bunkers on the Belgian coast, and subsequently even along the Belgian-Dutch border. The German coastal defences were so successful that during World War II they became the model for the construction of the Atlantic Wall.After the confrontation with the German *Abwehrschlacht* or 'defensive

battle' in 1917, the British themselves finally began, in the winter of 1917-18, to work on a solid defence in depth. Although the British lines never became truly operational and their strength could not match that of the Germans, the new approach did help to stop the German Spring Offensive of 1918.27 By the
summer of 1918, the Germans were exhausted, and retreated to what remained of their old positions of 1917. Despite the Allies' numerical superiority during the Final Offensive, the Belgians, British and French also suffered heavy losses in September and October 1918 against these lines and no real breakthrough could be achieved. The German Army retreated, but didn't collapse before 11 November 1918.

A slightly different situation existed in the East, where larger operations occasionally occurred- such as the German and Austro-Hungarian breakthrough at Gorlice and Tarnów in spring 1915, or the Brusilov offensive in 1916 and in the Middle East and other more exotic, but not less important, theatres of war. In the mountains along the Austrian-Italian border, in contrast, a special form of trench or siege warfare developed, with troops fighting for mountain peaks, and surviving in harsh Alpine winter conditions.

FIREPOWER AND THE PROBLEM OF BREAKING THROUGH THE FRONT

In 1815, Napoleon's 'Grande Batterie' used around 24,000 artillery shells at Waterloo. During the Battle of Sedan in 1870, the Prussian army fired 33,000 shells. Between 12 and 31 July 1917, the British artillery, in preparation for the Battle of Passchendaele, fired 4,200,000 shells.31 The First World War was thus characterised by a massive increase in firepower, in terms of both quantities of ammunition fired and steadily increasing calibres. One major problem with the artillery pieces was that they recoiled after each shot and so had to be repositioned. Around the turn of the century, new guns appeared in which the barrel moved along the gun carriage on which it was mounted by means of a recoil mechanism. Reference now began to be made to 'old' and 'modern' guns. In 1914, the French artillery had 4,000 modern 75mm guns and 7,500 old pieces of the *De Bange* type. The German artillery mostly had modern guns.Large numbers of artillery did not automatically make the enemy easy to dislodge. The accuracy of fire was poor and - in the early years - such was also the quality of ammunition. Barbed wire and bunkers also proved to be difficult obstacles to deal with. The more than 33 million shells fired by the British into the German positions during the Battle of Passchendaele did not in the end destroy the German defence, but utterly churned up the terrain over which the attack then had to be made. In the well-watered region of the Passchendaele ridge all drainage facilities were so shot to pieces that men, animals and machines became bogged down. The terrain was so badly affected that one in three shells penetrated the ground without its percussion fuse being activated by the impact.
This is why in the Yser-Ypres area an average of 200 tonnes of unexploded munitions is still being found every year and dealt with by the Belgian bomb disposal. Thus the artillery did not bring the hoped-for breakthrough, but on the contrary contributed to further deadlock at the front. Two-thirds of all casualties were caused by artillery fire.34
The most important weapon of trench warfare was probably the machine gun, which was effective at a distance of 2,000 to 3,000 metres. In 1914 the Germans possessed 12,000 machine guns of the MG 08 type, and by 1918 they had nearly 100,000. Like the MG 08, the British Vickers gun was based on a design by the American Maxim. Due to their weight water-cooled heavy machine guns were essentially defensive weapons. They played a crucial role during the battles of the Somme and Passchendaele.

Over the course of the war, lighter machine guns were also developed, such as the German MG 08/15, the British Lewis gun and the French Chauchat (which was also used by the Belgians). These were more offensive weapons, and their deployment played a key role in the development of new assault tactics. Towards the end of the war, the Germans also introduced the revolutionary *Maschinenpistole 18* (Bergmann), the first fully automatic weapon that could actually be used by one man alone. Although the distribution of these weapons was limited, they were nevertheless a defining attribute of the German storm troops in the final year of the war.
Mortars are an ancient form of ballistic trajectory weapon which launch a projectile high into the air, for it to fall back to the ground a few hundred metres away. They were typical of past siege warfare, and by 1914 were virtuallyobsolete. Only the Germans had modern mortars (*Minenwerfer*). However, the Western Front soon acquired the character of a gigantic medieval siege operation, and this made mortars an absolute necessity, since the enemy was so close to one's own trenches that they could not be fired upon by field artillery without causing casualties on one's own side.
In the winter of 1914-15, while waiting for new mortars to arrive, the French reintroduced the *M 1839 Louis Philippe* mortar, which was literally takenout of forgotten arsenals and museums. After this, all the combatant countries developed mortars, with the Belgian 70 mm Van Deuren mortar being worthy of special mention. The big advantage of trench artillery was that it could be set up among the infantry. Light mortar pieces could also easily be brought forward during an attack.
Another weapon scarcely being produced in 1914 was the hand grenade.
In 1914 the British had just one type of hand grenade. A year later, they had about ten types, and during the war as a whole they produced about 105 million units, of which nearly 70 million were *Mills bombs*. These were particularly effective in the almost daily trench raids, especially for putting enemy positions out of action. In order to increase the range, a whole series of rifle grenades was also introduced, which were usually fired with a rod in the barrel of the rifle. In 1918 these had a range of up to 400 metres.39 The *Stielhandgranate* was the most typical German explosive device of the First World War, and a variant of it was used in the Second World War

TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF BREAKING THROUGH THE FRONT

In the trench warfare of 1915-1917, attempts were made to break the deadlock at the front in Flanders through the use of technical innovations, including mines, gas, flamethrowers and tanks. Military aviation also progressed at great speed. In early 1915, the Germans started detonating underground explosive charges on the Western front. Mine warfare marked a new phase in the conduct of the war, in which the two parties tried to undermine each other's positions. However, the technique was not in itself entirely new, as sapping had already been used as a siege technique during the Middle Ages. The underground war rapidly became a game of cat-and-mouse, with mines and countermines. After a mine explosion there was usually fierce fighting around the resulting crater,leading to the front shifting a few dozen metres, after which a fresh start was made on tunnelling. On 1 July 1916, the Battle of the Somme opened with the explosion of 17 deep mines. Mine warfare was also not limited to the Western front. In the Alpine warfare between the Habsburg and Savoy monarchies, 24 enemy

positions were mined by both sides, including the famous blowing up of the 'Col di Sangue' (Bloody Mountain') by Italian sappers on 17 April 1916.
In Flanders, towards the end of 1915 British, Australian and Canadian Tunnelling Companies started work on a *magnum opus*, aiming to undermine at great depth the most strategic points in the salient to the south of Ypres, around Messines and Wytschaete. From Zillebeke to Ploegsteert, a total of twenty-four charges were placed from deep shafts and tunnels which could be several hundred metres long. However, the Germans got wind of what was going on and tried to intercept the British from a series of countermine shafts up to 50 metres deep. On 7 June 1917, 19 of the 24 charges were finally detonated simultaneously, representing a total of 500,000 kilograms of explosive, which together caused the largest manmade earthquake to date, the force of which was not surpassed until the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945. The German defenders were totally shattered and abandoned not only the front line, but also their second line through the villages of Wytschaete and Messines, and subsequently fell back to the third line. This prologue to the Battle of Passchendaele was one of the best prepared operations of the entire war, and demonstrated like no other the power of surprise.Poison gas was the second new weapon, first introduced on 22 April 1915. On the initiative of the German chemist and future Nobel Prize winner, Fritz Haber, 6,000 cylinders of chlorine gas were released from Steenstraete to Langemarck. The attack was so successful that the road to Ypres lay open, but the Germans had regarded the attack as more of an experiment, and lacked sufficient troops to take advantage. A few days later, all parties already had primitive gas protection, so the gas weapon was no longer able to create a breakthrough.
Nonetheless, gas continued to be used and new types of gas were developed. Its use was also not limited to the Western Front. For example, gas played a major role in the breakthrough of Austrian-Hungarian and Germantroops at Caporetto (Kobarid), in the 12th Isonzo (Soca) battle, in October 1917.
Contrary to what is sometimes thought, by the end of the war the Allies, including the Belgians, used as much gas as the Germans. The only difference was that they did not focus on research into new products, but on the development of new weapons for dispersing gas, such as the British Livens projectors, by means of which a dense gas cloud could be created easily and efficiently.On 12 July 1917, an innovative type of defensive ‘gas’ was introduced on the Ypres front: ‘mustard gas’, in many countries still called ‘Yperite’.
This was in fact not a gas at all, but an oily liquid which was dispersed with artillery shells and caused severe burns and subsequent disfigurement. Little protection was available against it. However, the product sometimes remained active for several days, making it unsuitable for offensive operations. As the war progressed, still other and more deadly types of combat gas were deployed, but these developments were always – except for mustard gas – followed by improvements in gas protection. Ultimately, therefore, only 1% of the total number of deaths in the First World War were caused through the use of gas.The third new weapon that the Germans tried out was the flamethrower.
For the third time in a row, the first major attack happened on the Ypres front, at Hooge on 30 July 1915. The flamethrower troops of the Garde-Pionier-Regiment carried out 653 attacks in the course of the war, but never achieved a real breakthrough. Towards the end of 1917, a portable device was introduced, the *Wex*, which played an important role in the Spring Offensive of 1918, as the first flamethrower that could be carried and used by a single soldier.46 The French also set up flamethrower units. The British likewise experimented with flamethrowers, but finally rejected them due to doubts about their effectiveness.

Not surprisingly, soldiers considered flamethrowers 'unfair' weapons-and flamethrower operators rarely survived capture in battle.
The fourth and last new weapon was a Franco-British innovation: the tank. This came at a time when the Germans no longer believed in a technical breakthrough and were already focussing on tactical innovation. As a result, the Germans hardly developed any tanks of their own, although they did try to keep this weapon under control by developing anti-tank guns. The first French tanks were ready in September 1916, as was the British Mark I, which was immediately sent out to take part in the Battle of the Somme. The best known First World War tank is undoubtedly the British Mark IV, more than 1,000 of which were delivered to the front from the summer of 1917 onwards.48
In response to the demand for a lighter tank, the French Renault FT 17, first used in 1917 (3,700 units), was among the tanks developed. It was also deployed during the Final Offensive in Flanders, and many countries were still using it at the outbreak of the Second World War. The Belgian army did not use tanks at any point during the First World War.
In November 1917, the Battle of Cambrai demonstrated the possibilities of the tank. Previously, tanks had been ineffectively used in the Battle of Passchendaele, as they need solid ground and do not work well in swampy terrain. One point of debate was whether the tank should support the infantry or whether the infantry should follow the tank. Few people realised that here – provided suitable tactics were used – was the weapon of the future.50 Apart from tanks, armoured cars also played a role in various theatres of war. So did armoured trains, a development of colonial operations before 1914. But both armoured cars and trains were not suitable for the war on the Western front.
In addition to the development of new weapons, military aviation also underwent spectacular development. In 1903, the American Wright brothers succeeded in making the first heavier-than-air, machine-powered flight. By 1914, most armies had only a few dozen operational aircraft in service. From then on,aircraft construction underwent very rapid qualitative and quantitative development. Initially the focus was exclusively on two-seaters used for observation and directing artillery. Later, the observer also operated a machine gun for firing at other aircraft. Once Roland Garros, Anthony Fokker and Constantinescu had perfected the principle of firing through the propeller, singleseat fighter aircraft were built.
The importance of air superiority was depicted over Verdun in 1916, where both sides concentrated a few hundreds of planes. On the eve of the Battle of Passchendaele, the Allies in Flanders had almost 1,100 aircraft, roughly twice as many as the Germans. This led to an almost endless series of heroic aerial duels or ‘dogfights’. Pilots who had brought down more than five aircraft became ‘aces’, with famous names such as the Frenchman Georges Guynemer and the German Manfred von Richthofen, who were killed in 1917 and 1918 respectively.
As well as observation and aerial combat planes, there were also bombers. German Gothas bombarded England and gradually replaced the much larger Zeppelins, which were proving increasingly vulnerable to fighter aircraft.
From France, cities in Germany were also bombarded. Behind the front in Flanders too, supply routes and railway junctions were bombed, causing many civilian casualties. A final innovation in military aviation was the provision of fire support from the air to advancing infantry, a technique applied in particular by the Germans with great success in the Spring Offensive of 1918. Alongside the tank, the aircraft was also a weapon of the future.

THE SEARCH FOR A TACTICAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF BREAKING THROUGH THE FRONT

The quest for a tactical solution to the problem of achieving a breakthrough did not come from the military leadership, but from below. In 1915, the German officer Willy Rohr formed *Sturm-* or *Stosstruppen* ('stormtroops') which no longer attacked in close order, but in smaller mobile formations with light weapons. Strength, speed and surprise were of key importance. Instead of officers pushing the men forward, NCOs and junior officers now had to lead their men with great autonomy and flexibility in the execution of their mission. Rohr achieved some remarkable results, prompting the German senior commander Ludendorff to set up a *Sturmbataillon* ('storm battalion') in every army.54 Young officers such as Heinz Guderian and Erwin Rommel gained experience which was to prove very useful later on.

At a later stage, training focused on infiltration techniques, in which stormtroops penetrated enemy lines as deeply as possible, bypassed the enemy's strong points and attacked them from behind. Elite soldiers thus began to be developed. By 1918, Ludendorff had trained a quarter of his divisions – the best ones, naturally – as *Angriffsdivisionen* ('assault divisions'), while also within the *Stellungsdivisionen* storm troops were formed at all levels.

The German Spring Offensives of 1918 became the ultimate operation for dissolving the stalemate as Ludendorff wanted to force a decision on the Western Front before the Americans arrived. The new tactics proved highly effective, and in several places a breakthrough was achieved. However, the innovation came too late as by then, German logistics were already broken by the long war of attrition. The operations failed due to a lack of ammunition and supplies.France was the first other country to go along with the tactical

developments, and platoons rather than regiments became the linchpin of combat. The use of new weapons, especially light machine guns like the *Chauchat*, also created a revolution, with independently operating *Groupes de Combat* ('combat units').59 In 1917, the platoon also became in the British army a fully-fledged tactical unit with four specialised sections: one with grenadiers, a second with Lewis guns, a third with riflemen and a fourth with rifle grenades or trench mortars. Specialisation was an important feature of the new breakthrough tactics, although it never came to the creation of true elite troops on the German model.60

The Germans also came up with new insights into the use of artillery.

Instead of destroying the enemy, the artillery had to neutralise the enemy artillery (counter-battery) and pin down the infantry.61 A key figure in this development was Georg Bruchmüller ('Durchbruchmüller'), one of the creators of the *Feuerwalz* or creeping barrage, an advancing line of rolling fire which moved according to a strict timetable, and behind which the infantry followed

Although the British and the French also used creeping barrages and even optimised their use, a number of commanders continued to cling stubbornly to the use of large-scale preparatory artillery bombardments, which lacked the element of surprise and often churned up the terrain of attack.63

A more operational element was the choice of the type of attack: major offensives versus operations with a limited objective. During the Battle of Passchendaele, the British Commander-in-chief Douglas Haig first relied on General Hubert Gough for a major attack on a broad front, but when this foundered he entrusted the offensive to General Herbert Plumer, who was able to resume progress through step-by-step, bite-and-hold tactics. These used several waves of assault, in which the battalions were deployed behind one another on a brigade front, with successive lines of objectives. Throughout the attack, the infantry

was preceded and supported by the artillery and further advance was only possible after the moving forwards of guns and logistics. A common mistake in connection with offensive action was that of failing to consolidate successes, but instead consolidating failures (by continually sending in reinforcements), after which the offensive was continued and degenerated into a series of local battles with no outcome.5 The contrast between major offensives and operations with limited objectives was only overcome by the Germans in 1918 by combining the best of both worlds: launching major offensives while breaking through enemy positions with small combat groups in **particular places**.
The failure of countless offensives brings us to another aspect of operational command: the war of attrition, bleeding the opponent to death. The Germans tried this against the French at Verdun, and after the war, Haig too claimed that this was his aim at Passchendaele. The Battle of Passchendaele did indeed have a decisive influence on the course of the war as a *Materialschlacht* ('battle of material'): German logistics broke down at Passchendaele, whereas the Allies remained able to resupply. However, it is clear that Haig was aiming for an operational-strategic breakthrough, and only presented the outcome in this perspective afterwards

In any case, the question arises of how a war with equal numbers of men and quantities of material, in which any form of diplomacy had long since failed, could end up as anything other than a war of attrition. In March 1918 the Germans broke though the British lines on the Somme. But in vain, French and newly arrived American troops solved the problem. Despite their new and superior tactics, the Germans still lost the war in 1918 due to logistical exhaustion and revolutionary unrest in their country.

FROM 1918 TO THE *BLITZKRIEG* OF 1940

The question of who won the war in 1918 is not easy to answer. On a human level, there were only losers. Germany lost 2 million soldiers out of a population of 65 million. France (and colonies) lost 1.4 million out of a population of 39 million. Regional recruitment and the high death toll caused the population in certain areas to be decimated. During the First World War, nearly 70 million soldiers were deployed, of whom 8,5-10 million eventually lost their lives and 21 million were injured. Belgium came through relatively unscathed, with approximately 41,000 military and 23,000 civilian deaths as a result of the war. In material terms, a large part of Belgium and France lay in ruins.
The price of war in Eastern and Southeastern Europe was even higher. In the Russian Empire, it is estimated that by late 1915, there were already 3,3 million civilian refugees and displaced persons and more than six million in 1917(over 5 per cent of the total population). In addition to the soldiers killed, disabled and traumatized for the rest of their lives, millions had become prisoners of war. Some of them, especially from Russia, only returned home in 1921-1922, if at all. The 'totalization' of war ensured that in most European countries, the whole population had been affected and suffered enormously. Besides its casualties, Belgium lost some 18% of its national wealth in terms of infrastructure, land, machinery and money.
The peace treaties of 1919-1920 were all dictates by victors. This was very much in the spirit of Clausewitz, in which the settlement was intended to destroy the enemy's potential as far as possible. Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine and had impossible reparations imposed on her, resulting in the later occupation of the industrialised Ruhr area. The Germans and their allies were so badly humiliated that the seeds of a new war were planted.

In the East, three large multinational empires did not survive the war: first, the Russian Empire fell in 1917, followed by Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in 1918. Although unliked and even hated by many of their subjects, these empires had nevertheless also provided a degree of stability. In its place appeared new quarrels, rivalries and territorial conflicts. The big guns may have fallen silent in 1918, but the fighting continued in many places well into the 1920s, with huge human suffering and loss of life. The Russian civil war is the best known, but not the only one of these conflicts. Some contemporary conflicts, such as in Ukraine (itself created only in 1917-18 as a result of the war) and in the Middle East, can be traced back to the First World War and its aftermath.But the biggest loser of the war was perhaps Great Britain. To achieve victory it had been obliged to throw its entire empire into battle. But by proving their skills on the battlefield, many of Britain's dominions quickly evolved into independent nations. Even in their own backyard, the British had to tolerate most of Ireland becoming independent. What remained of the British Empire was finished off after the Second World War. Britain's leading world role was gradually taken over by the Americans, who in 1918 had contributed significantly to the Allied victory with 1.8 million men, without being worn down by the fighting.

The war had also created a revolution militarily. The fundamental problem of breaking through the front was solved in 1918 by a profound change of tactics. The importance of classic infantry decreased: in 1914, the French army was still 70% infantry, but this had fallen to 50% by 1918. Cavalry went already obsolete during the first months of the war, but in its place came motorised reconnaissance vehicles and light tanks.

Although technical solutions had proved unable to achieve the breakthrough, several new weapons combined with appropriate tactics had nonetheless demonstrated great potential for the future. Foremost among these were tanks and air support for ground troops, but new small arms were also important, such as the Bergmann semi-automatic pistol that formed the basis for the MP 40 of the Second World War. The first industrialized war in history also underlined the importance of logistics: mass armies needed mass supplies and massive automotive transport to bring them up to the front.

The Germans would take the lessons of the First World War to heart. Most of the commanders in May 1940 were veterans of the previous war, including Adolf Hitler himself. The key to the success of the new *Blitzkrieg* lay in a combination of mobile and well-equipped elite units trained in infiltration techniques and rapid tracked vehicles, plus an effective air force, supported by a mass army advancing in the rear. The French had understood the lessons of World War I less well and hid away behind their Maginot Line, the ultimate version of trenches, cast in concrete and steel. The war on the Western Front was therefore decided within a few weeks. Other factors, however, ensured that once again, the conflict did not go the Germans' way...

The legacy of the First World War determined military thinking until far into the 20th century. Numerical strength gradually became less important, being supplanted firstly by technology and secondly by guerrilla warfare, in which fighters mix up with the civilian population, challenging the military tacticians once again to come up with a response to avoid a new deadlock.

THE BARNSLEY PALS COLOURS ARE HOME AGAIN!

The King's Colours awarded to the 13th (First Barnsley) and 14th (Second Barnsley) Battalions of the York and Lancaster Regiment were laid up together in the War Memorial Chapel in St Mary's Church in Barnsley Town Centre nearly 100 years ago. They have now been framed and returned to the Chapel, where they will be on public display for the first time during the Heritage Open Days in September 2021.

When I first saw the Colours hidden away in a cupboard in the tower of St Mary's in 2013, I could never have anticipated how they would take over my life for so many years. However, I'm thrilled that, after being forgotten about for 30 years, these sacred memorials to thousands of brave Barnsley men, whose lives were changed or sacrificed by fighting for their King and Country, have been shown the respect they deserve and will continue to be honoured by future generations until they eventually 'return to dust'.

The Colours were framed by accredited Textile Conservators from the People's History Museum in Manchester just before the first Lockdown of the Covid-19 Pandemic in March 2020. St Mary's magnificent War Memorial Pillar was cleaned and conserved then by Hirst Conservation. With the ongoing closure of St Mary's for most of the last 18 months, we have been unable to celebrate this work or invite people to view the results until now.

Friends of Barnsley St Mary are participating in the national Heritage Open Days 2021.
We have organised various activities and details will be publicised soon.
Please join us on Tuesday 14th or Saturday 18th between 11am and 3pm.
Everyone is very welcome.

We want visitors to feel comfortable coming into what we hope will be a busy space and, therefore, we request that people wear a mask indoors, sanitise hands and observe distancing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Inevitably, framing the Colours, commissioning replicas, holding special events and conserving the War Memorial Pillar have been expensive to do properly. Rev Canon Stephen Race and I are extremely grateful to individuals who made generous donations and bought copies of my book, groups - such as the York and Lancaster Regimental Association, RAFA, Freemasons Lodges, BWMP, NUM - and grants from DVLP, SYCF, WMT and Ward Alliances.

We also appreciate greatly the support of the following:
Sir Nicholas Hewitt, grandson of the first Lieutenant-Colonel of the First Barnsley Pals - for his enthusiasm, sharing his family archives and making resources available to promote the project.
Andrew Greenwood (Retired Major), responsible for Colours etc at the Ministry of Defence - for helping me to understand and explain the military significance of Colours and granting permission to frame 'ours' rather than leave them to return to dust in an inappropriate cupboard.

FUTURE WORK
We decided last year that the framed Colours should be displayed on bespoke wooden stands and I have just received a grant for this from SYCF. (The idea was inspired by the Colour stands in Chesterfield's Parish Church, which I visited before the last meeting of the WFA Chesterfield Branch I attended. I was so impressed I photographed them to recommend to Father Stephen and the PCC; they agreed). Each stand, to be made by Barnsley College, will have a clear topped box underneath; one will be used for the poles and various documents while we intend to work with some local schoolchildren to create a time capsule for the other.

Jane Ainsworth August 2021

Jane also asked if we could mention this…….

https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/yorkshiretrench

YORKSHIRE NEEDS YOU The Yorkshire Trench is one of the very few World War One front line trenches, that still exist in their original positions earning its name The Yorkshire Trench as the 49th West Riding of Yorkshire Division manned and improved this section of the trench, the network for communications tunnels which once connected the front-line trenches names after Strensall Road, Leeds Road and Huddersfield Road.

Until recently the trench was accessible to the public. The recent wet weather in Flanders has taken its toll, much as it did in the Great War. It is now seriously damaged by the wind, and rain. We urgently need YOUR HELP to re-instate this important site. This is part of our Yorkshire heritage, it is on this small piece of Belgian land just outside the town of Ypres. Where so many British soldiers many from Yorkshire fell in battle. It is in remembrance of them and the French, German and Belgian soldiers who died in the vicinity during the period from 1915 to early 1917, that we must repair, and preserve this historic trench. And in that remembrance show both visitor, and student the true reality of war.

Your donation will be wisely used, and greatly appreciated.

Why the Yorkshire Trench? Who Owns it?

The trench is owned by the city of Ieper. The museum provides the historical context and integrates the site in educational tours and packages. This site is of really great importance for the city and the museum as it is the only original (but restored) British trench open to the public in the salient.

Why £100,000?

We can not currently give an estimation of the total costs for a complete restoration. But will do so as soon as possible. The initial amount is an estimation based on an initial estimation in 2014 of 150,000 EURO (£135,000).

Unfortunately, we are aware that the cost is big and that it will be recurrent.

Every donation is greatly appreciated and also to note The City of Ieper will also be contributing to this project.

Who will the Money go to?

The City of Ieper, represented by the Deputy Major Dimitry Soenen and the Museum Represented by the director Piet Chielens who will also share the budget for this restoration campaign.

100% of Money raised will be used for the Yorkshire Trench Restoration.