

Special edition



'All bar the shouting'

How logistics
provided the
key to victory

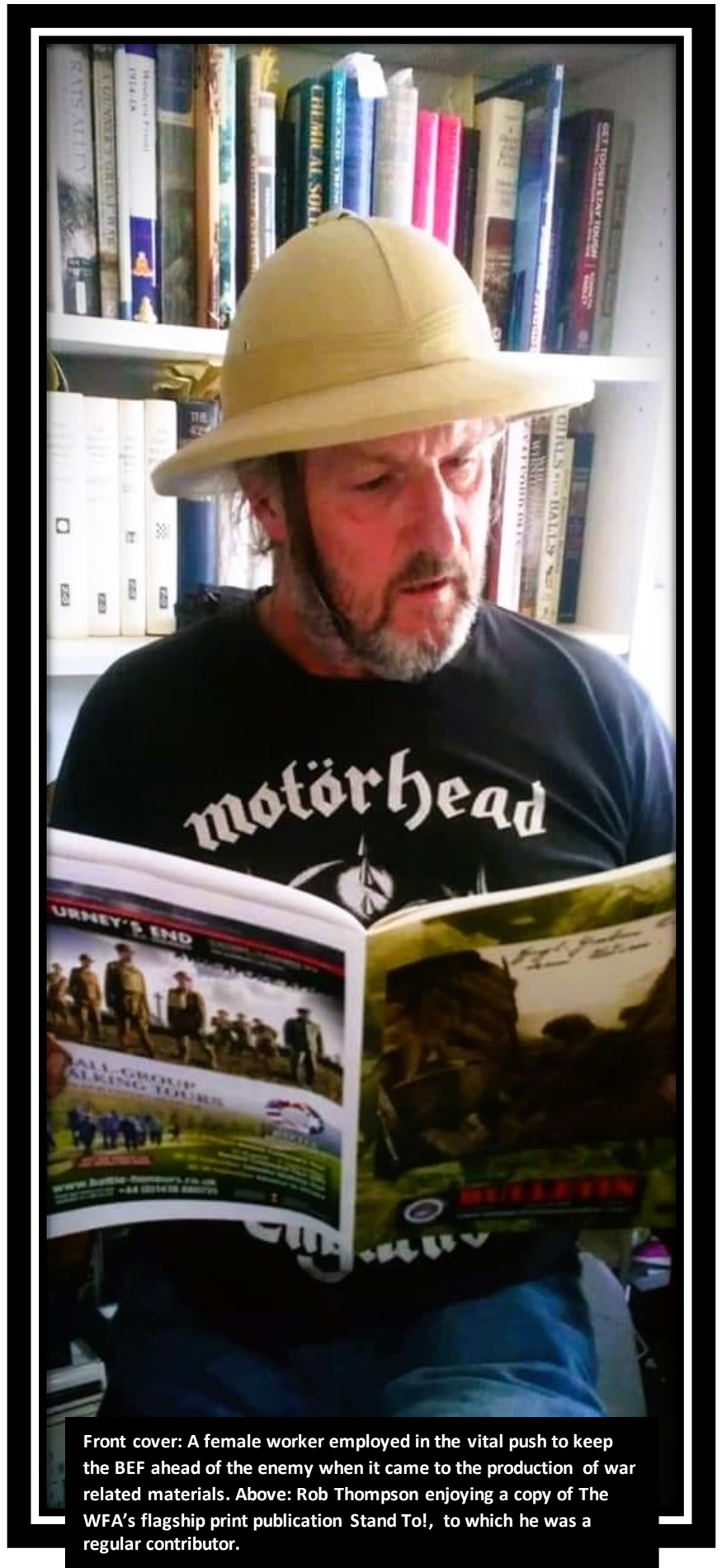


A tribute to the life and
work of Rob Thompson

INSIDE

- **1914:** Preparing the BEF for conflict and transportation overseas; and the role that the German naval attack at Scarborough played in pushing Britain down the road to readiness for 'total war'.
- **1915:** The different challenges faced by the planners on the Western Front and at Gallipoli. The chaos of delivery of men and stores and the need to improve rapidly.
- **1915-1916:** The ammunition shortage and the need to step-up the manufacturing base to prepare for the Battle of the Somme.
- **1917:** How to cope with the new challenge of logistics 'on the move' after the German retreat to the Hindenberg Line; and the Canadian approach to overcoming the crisis of supply at Passchendaele.
- **1918:** The logistical and tactical points that the Germans got wrong in relation to their spring offensive; and what the allies got right in their advance to victory – highlighted by the seemingly innocuous availability of lifejackets for infantry crossing a key point of the St Quentin canal at Riqueval.
- **TRIBUTES:** A number of tribute and reflection items related to Rob, that are dotted throughout the publication.

● Digital publication edited and designed by Dr Martin Purdy. (March 2024)



Front cover: A female worker employed in the vital push to keep the BEF ahead of the enemy when it came to the production of war related materials. Above: Rob Thompson enjoying a copy of The WFA's flagship print publication Stand To!, to which he was a regular contributor.

IN March 2021 Rob Thompson was the guest on Dr Tom Thorpe's WFA podcast

Mentioned in Dispatches.

Entitled 'Logistics during the Messines-Third Ypres Campaign', (a theme visited in one of the articles in this publication), it is the opening conversation that is of most interest for the purposes of this introduction – providing, as it does, some insight into the passion that drove Rob and made him into the historian and compelling, approachable and often self-effacing individual that so many in The Western Front Association respected and admired. It also underlines his wonderful ability as a storyteller: to make the complex world of logistics understandable and the "boring and dull" (to use his own words) fascinating. That is a rare talent, and one that many struggle with. But then, as the excerpt below shows, Rob was not cut from standard cloth...

Dr Tom Thorpe: How did you become interested in the Great War?

Rob Thompson: I went to university as a mature student. I had no interest in the Great War or any wars, but I did a politics and history degree - and I was really interested in the politics. My interest was actually Italian politics, post-World War II. Anyway, I went for the history element because it gave me a solid background. Various modules I was taking did not run in the second year, so I got my fifth-choice module, which was '20th Century Military History'. My initial reaction was, 'Oh God, not the boys with the toys'. I went to the first seminar with Professor Martin Alexander. Brilliant bloke... anyway, he asked for a volunteer to do the first presentation on the First World War the following week, and I saw a lot of 19, 20-year-olds staring at their shoes. I thought:

Introduction...

'Well, you'll get cut the most 'slack' if you do this first, so I'll do it.' It was going to be straight forward - lions, donkeys, all that kind of thing - and I started reading Professor John Bourne's book 'Britain in the Great War' and it started to challenge just about everything. I got sucked in.

Tom: So, we're going to talk about logistics today. Could you tell us what 'logistics' means?

Rob: Logistics is 'everything bar the shouting', which is all that is required to supply and maintain an army in the field... things like warehousing, ports, shipping; you know, what type of crane you've got, how good your roads are, what is the capacity of your railway? It's something much, much bigger than merely supply and transportation. It is everything required to move and maintain an army in the field - everything bar the shouting.

Tom: It is said that amateurs study tactics, war professionals study logistics. Is there any truth to this?

Rob: Swift answer to that, 'yes'. Professionals do talk logistics. Military history is littered with commanders who had no idea of what they were asking for in the 20th century - the era, if you like, of mass warfare and technology warfare. We see Hitler sweeping his hand across a map when looking at attacking Russia. I'm thinking, zero account of anything going on there: How do you move this? Where are the rail lines? What's the conditions in this part of the year or that part of the year? You may dream of bolting through to the Dardanelles, or driving up through Italy or defeating a

Montgomery in North Africa, but unless you've got the fuel and the trucks you're on a hiding to nothing. You can look at, for example, the German Spring Offensive. It is clear why this fails: because they simply took no notice of logistics whatsoever.

Tom: So why has there been so little academic study of this, especially during the First World War?

Rob: Because it's boring, it's very technical. When I look at a war diary from, say, a division of a brigade or a battalion of infantry, it's full of derring-do. If you look at the corresponding diary of the divisional assistant adjutant and quartermaster general, it's

talking about the fact that this part for a gun isn't particularly good, or it's talking about schedules of delivery. You know,

it's 'dull'. Does anybody think about how electricity arrives at their house when they flip the switch on? No. They want to watch the TV. They don't want to talk about or understand what goes on to produce those images.

Thank goodness for historians like Rob who have gone where most do not have the patience to go, and who are then capable of turning their findings into stimulating, thought-provoking discussion, presentation and prose. What follows is a collection of Rob's work that has appeared in the pages of The Western Front Association's publications – Bulletin and Stand To! - over the course of the past ten years. We could think of no finer tribute to the man than to let his own work speak for itself.

Dr Martin Purdy

Note: You can listen to this and more podcasts on the website [here](#)

MOBILIZATION OF THE BEF by Rob

AS the sun rose over the small village of Casteau, north of Mons, on the morning of Saturday, 22 August 1914 Corporal E. Thomas of No. 4 Troop, C Squadron, 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards levelled his rifle at a group of German cavalymen of the 4th Kurassiers, pulled the trigger and watched as one of the group dropped to the ground.⁽¹⁾ The sound of a bolt-action Short-Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) Mk III .303 rifle chambering and discharging a round is unique and carries far, but it was not one that the Germans had expected to hear. If they expected anything they expected the sharp report of a French 8mm Lebel or perhaps a Belgian 7.65 mm Mauser, but a British Lee-Enfield? It could not possibly be, because according to General Alexander von Kluck's First Army intelligence reports the British were still mobilizing their troops far from the battlefield.

The German shock at the surprise appearance of the British Expeditionary Force at Mons is testament to the superb implementation of the BEF mobilization plan, a plan so well-executed that it attracted the unstinting praise of no lesser person than Kitchener, a man not known for effusive plaudits.⁽²⁾ More importantly, the sudden and timely appearance of the BEF, played a significant part in delaying von Kluck's advance and the eventual German defeat at the September Battle of the Marne.⁽³⁾

Events after the Marne served to reveal Britain and the BEF's lack of preparedness for modern war in many different ways and the BEF spent 1915 and 1916 trying to make good its manifold deficiencies using the 'classic' British approach of 'muddling through', an approach described by historian Ian M. Brown as 'ad hocism'.⁽⁴⁾ The efficiency of Britain's mobilization stands in stark contrast to this: it was a triumph of foresight, co-operation and administrative excellence involving the army, the government and civilian commerce and deserves study in its own right. This article examines the development of the BEF mobilization plan and its practical implementation...

● 1st Cheshires march to embark in August 1914.



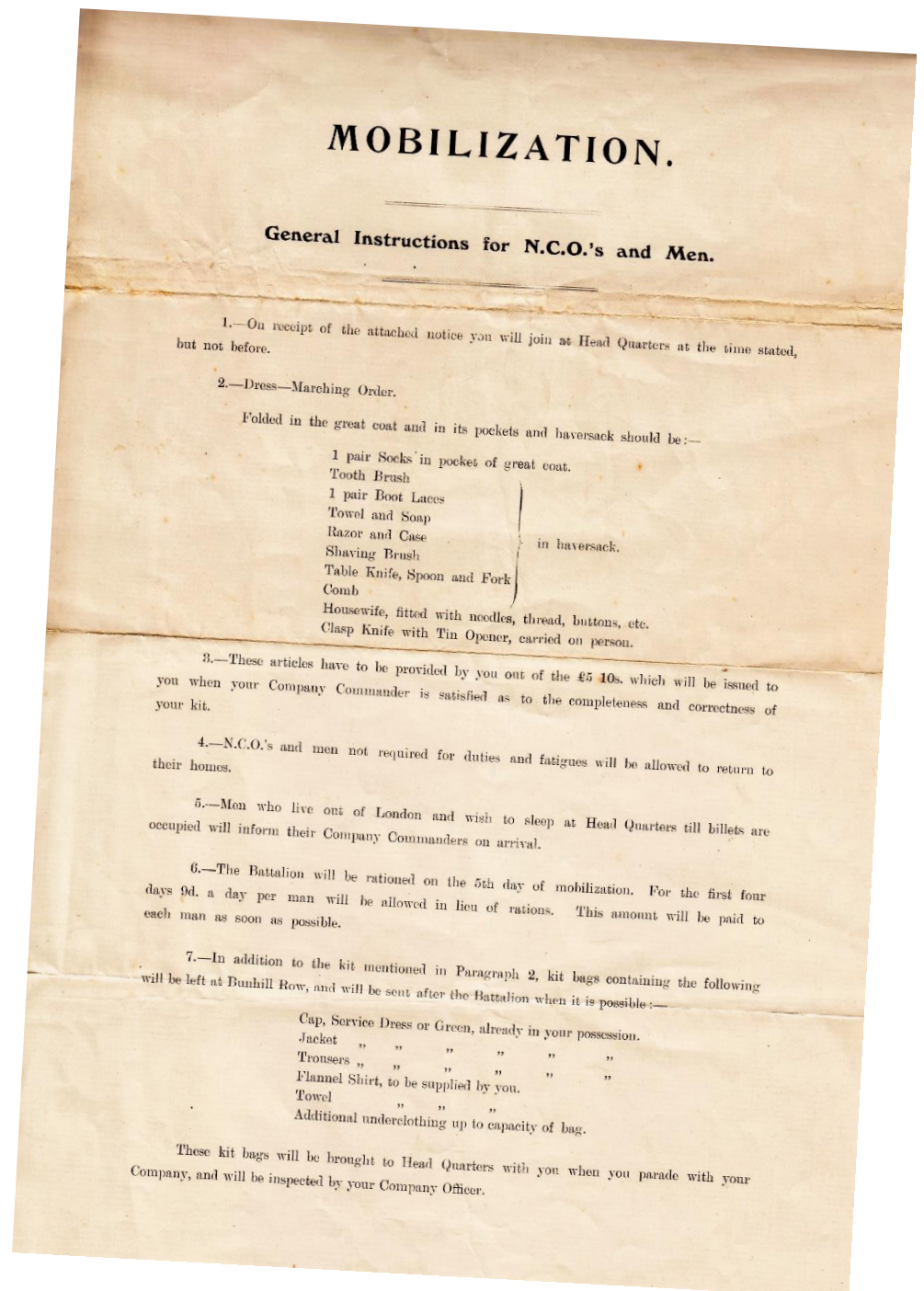
**An early
British triumph**

1914

DURING the first decade of the Twentieth Century there was a good deal of debate as to the potential nature of future warfare. Although military opinions within and between the major military powers ebbed and flowed the one element all agreed on was that he who attacked first and fastest would win the day. The success of this 'Cult of the Offensive' depended almost entirely upon the ability of nations to mobilize and get their troops into the field faster than the enemy, an ability made possible by the development of sophisticated, complex, mass-capacity railway systems during the late-Nineteenth Century.

Germany's mobilization system was developed after their successful use of railways during the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and rapid railway mobilization became an integral part of Germany's strategic attack scheme, the Schlieffen Plan. To enhance railway capability Germany effectively 'nationalised' its railways by imposing direct or indirect state control, creating a centralised administration, imposing 'standard operating procedures' and investing huge sums of money. Its development was dominated by a military that went so far as to require all German locomotives to have detachable tops so they could clear the low French bridges.⁽⁵⁾

France was equally aware of the military importance of its rail system and introduced a 'dual-control' arrangement whereby the railways remained in private hands and a shadow military organisation was formed. On the outbreak of war, the military took direct control of railways in



● **Detailed instructions as to what to take in relation to dress and general hygiene.**

the 'Army Zone', while the 'Interior Zone' remained in the hands of civilians. Like the Germans, the French invested heavily in 'military' track and infrastructure, nearly tripling the number of main lines running to the German frontier.

Even though Britain was equally aware of the importance of rapid mobilization, its position was

radically different to that of Germany and France. Britain's railway network was wholly privately-owned and its development driven solely by commercial considerations, the state and the military having no control or influence. While there was 'common practice' amongst the hundreds of fiercely independent railway companies this fell far short of the 'universal standard procedures' found on the Continent. British rolling stock, stations, platforms and loading bays, were developed exclusively to deal with commercial passengers and

freight, not soldiers and guns. In addition, although the 90,000-strong BEF was a much smaller force than the French and German 'million-man' conscript armies, its mobilization was a far more complex affair, requiring the use and coordination of more transport elements including the fragmented British rail system, sea transport from ports all around Britain, and French ports and railways to receive them and move them into the field.

These less than propitious circumstances suggest a BEF mobilization likely to descend into tragi-comic muddle and chaos but the reality was a masterpiece of smooth, rapid

The four basic elements of mobilization are *assembly* (of base depots, supplies, units, arms, equipment and reservists); *embarkation* (of troops onto trains and thence to the ports); *crossing* (assembling and organising ships) and *disembarkation* (at the French ports and concentration in the field) of which the first two will be dealt with.

The task of 'turn up, get on, cross over and get off' sounds simple enough but making this happen in practice was a phenomenally complex undertaking requiring forethought, excellent co-ordination, sound administration and obsessive attention to detail.

1912 consisting of representatives of the military, government and the ten major British railway companies created a forum that fully-incorporated the 'third leg' of Britain's mobilization system – the commercial railways.

More importantly it completed the means by which much closer practical understanding and co-operation could be achieved at the all-important technical level by bridging the gap between the military and private commercial worlds - the culmination of a process begun in 1896 with the formation of the War Railway Council [WRC].⁽⁹⁾



● ***The 5th Division staff who were faced with overcoming early logistical conundrums.***

efficiency that deposited the BEF in France extraordinarily quickly.⁽⁶⁾ This apparent miracle was not achieved through any inspired flash of genius or radical overhaul of the system but through the mundane application of thought, foresight, planning, sound administration and the close co-operation of all concerned. As British railway expert Edwin A. Pratt noted, this remarkable achievement '... was no more than the practical outcomes of those peace-time preparations... on which so great an amount of labour had been spent in bygone years'.⁽⁷⁾

The administrative foundations upon which mobilization was built were developed in the aftermath of the Second Boer War and consisted of the Committee for Imperial Defence [CID] and the General Staff [GS], created in 1902 and 1903 respectively. These provided the basic planning 'machinery' and meant that for the first time '... the actions of the government and the army were made the subject of detailed, coherent and specific planning'.⁽⁸⁾ The creation of the Railway Executive Committee [REC] in November

The functions of REC were to advise on railway matters; draw up and maintain a detailed scheme of movement based on War Office information; define the composition of trains based upon unit establishments; collate and transmit information to those requiring it and prepare regulations. To give effect to intent 'mobilization programmes' were required, and although the first timetables were drawn up as early as November 1904 it was not until 1909 that a level of trust and co-operation had been achieved sufficient for the

'The administrative foundations upon which mobilization was built were developed in the aftermath of the Second Boer War.'

companies to be satisfied that 'mobilization timetables proper' were achievable. The compilation task was the responsibility of the War Office and the REC. The War Office provided details as to exact unit composition; what start station they required; which day of mobilization and the desired time of arrival. The REC dealt with provision of rolling stock; times of passing stations and junctions enroute; compiling timetables; the making up and provision of complete trains and making sure these can run to schedule whenever needed.

To complicate matters even further, in 1911 district military commands were formed requiring a second tier of planning to fully co-ordinate the simultaneous mobilization required *within* command districts with that of the BEF passing *through* command districts. On top of this was the 'small' matter of mobilizing the entire navy whose needs had to be identified and interpolated into the programme.



The REC worked closely with numerous independent railway companies and a myriad of War Office and government departments and with so many fingers in the same pie the potential for confusion and chaos was enormous. The solution was the 'War Book'. The War Book was introduced in 1911 by Col. Maurice Hankey, Secretary of the CID, and represented the practical means by which the 'mobilization of the machinery of state was ordered and co-ordinated'.⁽¹⁰⁾ It consisted of a continuously-updated single text with individual chapters detailing the actions taken by each agency upon mobilization together with a description of the reciprocal and concurrent action taken by other agencies. This simple act produced many benefits in terms

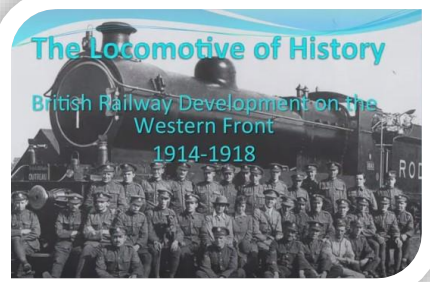


Railway Development in WW1 | Rob Thompson
The Western Front Association
9.4K views · 4 years ago

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FUNDAMENTAL to the success of war are the logistics of supply and movement, and in the Great War the '*prime lifters*' were railways. The Schlieffen Plan and Plan XVII were built around the railways as was Britain's mobilisation of the BEF. Railways also denied any quick and decisive victory by dint of the same virtues, leading to stalemate on the Western Front. 'Trenchlock' created the insatiable demand for the colossal amounts of "*more*" needed to both breakthrough and defend the lines and only railways could provide it. The static conditions created the stability and predictability needed for broad gauge and light railway systems on both sides to develop in size, complexity and importance thereby ensuring the maintenance of the siege for over three years. In early 1918 the railways allowed Germany to transfer troops from east to west for a series of powerful offensives that restored mobility to the battlefield, and during the spring and summer of 1918 railways allowed the Allies to strike back in a series of decisive operations designed to cut the enemy's railways in half and achieve victory.

● It is a fascinating topic, and one that you can find out a lot more about via a talk by Rob on The WFA YouTube channel. It's under 'playlists' and 'logistics' and you can access by clicking the link [here](#)



The Locomotive of History
British Railway Development on the Western Front
1914-1918

of achieving consistency of approach, reducing problems arising from 'compartmentalised' agencies and improving co-ordination - not least through a better understanding of how the actions of one agency related to another. On a very prosaic level it saved time as a single document required only a single authorising signature to set the wheels rolling rather than the normal procedure of multiple documents and multiple authorisations.

The mobilization programme also required two further elements: practical liaison between the army and the railway staff during

mobilization and an effective direct communication system. Practical railway-army co-operation was achieved through the forming of a military 'Railway Transport Service' with a definite chain of command that ended at the station with the Railway Transport Officer [RTO] who worked closely with his civilian counterpart, the Stationmaster. Although the RTO was of lowly rank his authority was supreme: all requests, commands and queries even when made by colonels and generals were dealt with through the RTO and his



● Unloading horses from the *Caledonia* at Le Havre for the 1st Battalion Cameronians was an ungainly affair (above, picture courtesy of Imperial War Museum) but did get marginally better as the conflict went on (below).



decision was always both absolute and final.⁽¹¹⁾

Effective mobilization ultimately depends upon the ability to directly communicate, and this too was attended to, albeit belatedly. Wireless telegraphy was considered and rejected as being unreliable and insecure, but the major deciding factor was that the railway companies used telephones exclusively, so this became the default means of communication. To achieve this and maintain security an entirely new 'private' system of lines was laid by the Post Office thereby providing phone coverage from top to bottom. The system was completed only one week before the declaration of war.

Officially the order for mobilization was signed at 4pm on Tuesday, 4 August 1914, the following day being classed as 'Day One' of mobilization. The delicate diplomatic situation and the political ramifications of declaring mobilization saw a more nuanced approach taken by a government that had to simultaneously prepare for war without those preparations precipitating the conflict they were trying to avoid.

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On 29 July the 'Precautionary Period', a period of necessary activity prior to full mobilization, was quietly entered. On the night of 2 August and throughout 3 August the Territorials, on their annual summer camp were recalled and trains successfully organised to collect them despite the fact this situation was not foreseen or planned for. On 'Day One' (5 August) the district military commands were mobilized, but not the BEF, whose mobilization was sanctioned on 6 August but delayed for a further three days due to the political

situation. On 7 August advanced parties of the BEF began to move to France and on 9 August the BEF mobilized.

The actual mobilization of the BEF began as planned on 9 August with concentration in France completed by 19 August. This timeframe does, however, create the false impression that 'mobilization' only took 10 days or so from start to finish. In fact there were two consecutive phases of mobilization: military commands, which dealt with horses and reservists in their area destined for the BEF, and the movement of the BEF 'proper', complete with its full complement of formed units.⁽¹²⁾ Planned to occur concurrently, the decision to delay BEF mobilization until August 9 created an unintended 'two-stage mobilization'. It is possible to argue this was a boon,

'Most of the horses needed by the BEF were in private hands and would have to be rapidly requisitioned upon mobilization, but no real provision was made for this.'

allowing extra time to collect the individual reservists and horses required or that it was a hindrance that disrupted the timetable. Interestingly the army had calculated that it required 15 days to get the BEF ready for action and that is how long it took from the declaration of August 4 to the concentration of the BEF in France, 19-20 August.⁽¹³⁾

The initial 1906 plan for mobilizing reservists was to inform their depot, which in turn would *post* the reservist their instruction to return to depot along with a rail travel warrant and a Post Office Order to cover their subsistence costs while en route, a process that would take weeks.⁽¹⁴⁾ This clearly unacceptable situation was solved by the simple but very

effective measure of permanently attaching a rail warrant and PO Order to the reservist's identity card and the use of pre-prepared telegrams to notify the reservist directly. The reservist then journeyed independently to their designated depot, whereupon special trains were used to move the reservists to the location of their regiment.

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Horses were another problem, and it was only thanks to pre-1914 reforms driven by the QMG, General Sir John Cowans, and implemented just in time, that the BEF managed to get the horses it needed - as the original organisation could not have provided more than 10 per cent of the required number. Most of the horses needed by the BEF were in private hands and would

have to be rapidly requisitioned upon mobilization, but no real provision was made for this. Between 1912 and April 1914 Cowans organised the legal framework and set up a system whereby Remount Officers could

monitor horses in their area in conjunction with an ongoing national census. Upon mobilization 'duly authorised persons' collected the required horses in their area and these were taken to designated entraining stations for movement by pre-prepared special trains.

On Monday, 10 August at 08:15 the first BEF train arrived 30 minutes early at Southampton Docks. This was the start of a nationwide tsunami of men, animals, guns, supplies and equipment all heading for France. It is often forgotten that the mobilization programme included reinforcements and further stores that were dispatched up until 31 August. During this period the total amount sent amounted to

118,454 personnel, 37,649 horses, 5,221 vehicles and 4,557 tons of baggage and stores. The peak traffic day at Southampton (21-22 August) saw nearly 17,000 troops and 4,583 horses processed. On the five greatest days of activity over 1,800 special trains were run with 13 ships per day leaving their berths. These are very impressive figures, even more impressive when one realises that these represent the movement of complete units that could move under their own power once in France rather than just component parts yet to be 'sorted'.



The primary consideration when moving the units was not capacity to send, but Southampton's capacity to receive. This meant that all schedules were worked out backwards from the dock gates requiring spectacularly efficient turnaround times at the docks to avoid congestion. On average a train arrived at the dock gates every twelve minutes and was directed to within 150 yards of the ship berth down special lines called 'Gullet Roads' and completely unloaded and turned around in only 40 minutes. Even as the empty train left another elaborate set of arrangements was initiated to make certain that 'empty mileage' was minimised.

Southampton was only one of five ports that were used for mobilization of which three were of vital importance for handling supplies and specialised equipment: Avonmouth (Motor Transport and petrol), Newhaven

(stores and supplies), and Liverpool (MT and frozen meat). Without the mobilization of supplies, no modern army can function and this added another complex layer of timetables and co-operation. It also highlights one of the less 'orthodox' elements of the mobilization, one that was most definitely not contained in the 'War Book'.

The man most directly responsible for the maintenance and movement of supplies was General Long of the Army Service Corps [ASC]. Long was a brilliant but irascible and independent man who was concerned that supplies of sugar might 'disappear' due to sharp practice by the sugar companies looking to increase profit as they did during the Boer War. Upon the outbreak of war the War Office Contracts Branch ascertained how much sugar could be supplied.

The answer was pitifully small unless excessive prices were paid. Long refused these prices and instead identified the location of all sugar stores in the country and sent troops to guard the gates, threatening to seize the sugar if necessary. The sugar 'barons' caved in. Of course Long's actions were entirely illegal but now that he had acted Parliament had no choice but to pass emergency legislation in less than 24 hours to retrospectively sanction his actions.

The last of the BEF unit trains arrived on Sunday, 17 August at 17:38, 22 minutes early. Five days later the first shots at Mons were fired by complete units of the BEF.

This astonishing achievement was completed without fuss, frenzy or chaos, despite the potential inherent in the British system. Nor was it achieved through any kind of enormous government effort or state-sanctioned centralisation as was the case with Germany and France. It was achieved through the simple but effective application of foresight, thought, planning, rehearsal and co-operation.

As such it proves the supreme importance in war of what the modern US and British military trainers and educators now call 'The 7 Ps' - 'Proper Planning and Preparation Prevent Piss-Poor Performance'.

Notes

- (1) Beadle, J & Harrison, I, 'Firsts, Lasts and Onlys: Military', (London, 2007), p. 93; The Long, Long Trail: The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918, 'The Battle of Mons', <http://www.1914-1918.net/bat1.htm> Accessed, 02/06/14.
- (2) Pratt, EA, 'British Railways and the Great War: Organisation, Efforts, Difficulties and Achievements' Vol. I, (London, 1921), p. 114.
- (3) That the BEF at Mons caused a delay so crucial that it ultimately 'saved France' is very doubtful. What it did do was interrupt First Army's advance thereby making a significant contribution to the cumulative delay plaguing von Kluck's First Army. In turn this forced von Kluck to abandon the encirclement of Paris, perhaps the most crucial element of the Schlieffen Plan, leading to the halting of the German advance at the Marne.
- (4) Brown IM, 'British Logistics on the Western Front, 1914-1919', (London, 1998), p. 233.
- (5) Wolmar, C, 'Engines of War: How Wars Were Won and Lost on the Railways', (London, 2010), p. 132-133.
- (6) 'Day One' of BEF mobilization was 5 August. The vast majority of the BEF were disembarked in France by 14 August and concentrated in the Le Cateau area by 20 August. Source: Bourne, J, 'Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918', (London, 1989), pp. 17-18.
- (7) Pratt, EA, 'British Railways and the Great War: Organisation, Efforts, Difficulties and Achievements' Vol. I, (London, 1921), p. 114.
- (8) Bourne, J, 'Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918', (London, 1989), p. 16.
- (9) The antecedent of the 1912 Railway Executive Committee was the Army Railway Council created in 1886 before becoming the 'War Railway Council' in 1903.
- (10) Bourne, J, 'Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918', (London, 1989), p. 16.
- (11) Pratt, EA, 'British Railways and the Great War: Organisation, Efforts, Difficulties and Achievements' Vol. I, (London, 1921), p. 27-29.
- (12) Territorials were mobilized not necessarily for inclusion in the BEF, but to take over some of the duties of regulars destined for the BEF and to guard mobilization routes and key depots. While maintaining home security was clearly important, the fighting ability of the BEF did not depend upon territorials, but it did depend upon having the requisite numbers of reservists and horses.
- (13) The period 4-19 August constitutes 15 days.
- (14) Chapman-Huston & Rutter, 'General Sir John Cowans: The Quartermaster-General of the Great War', Vol. I, (London, 1924), p. 267.

'On average a train arrived at the dock gates every twelve minutes and was directed to within 150 yards of the ship berth down special lines called 'Gullet Roads' and completely unloaded and turned around in only 40 minutes.'

THE TRANSITION TO TOTAL WAR by Rob

REMEMBER SCARBOROUGH!



ENLIST NOW

**MEN OF BRITAIN!
WILL YOU STAND THIS?**



No 2 Wykeham Street, SCARBOROUGH after the German bombardment on Decr 16th. It was the home of a Working Man. Four People were killed in this House including the Wife, aged 58, and Two Children, the youngest aged 5.

78 Women & Children were killed and 228 Women & Children were wounded by the German Raiders

ENLIST NOW

REMEMBER Scarbor'o' was a slogan coined at the beginning of the war – one that reflected public shock and outrage at the German naval bombardment of this peaceful seaside resort on 16 December, 1914.

It was a phrase that predated the shift in warfare (known in military circles as an RMA or 'Revolution in Military Affairs') that would occur between 1914 and 1918...

As a tactic of warfare, the East Coast raids reflected a nineteenth century concept of warfare that stressed and reflected factors such as élan; musketry skills; the 'shock' of the cavalry charge; la guerre à outrance; the 'cult of the offensive' and achieving 'the decision'. (The raids had been an attempt to draw out the Royal

Navy on terms favourable to the German Kaiserliche Marine - Imperial German Navy - and defeat them in a decisive naval engagement.)

Within less than a year, the slogans associated with the raids would be replaced by others such as 'Feed the Guns', which represented the move to address

1914

the mass, industrialised, production-orientated, statistically measured, technologically driven, firepower-centred attritional slog that the war had become.

Like the Old Contemptibles at the Marne and First Ypres, the Scarborough raid had been another 'Last Hurrah' of a fading Edwardian Summer – one that was to be rapidly replaced by U-boats, mines, torpedoes, blockades and convoy duty complementing and sustaining the attritional grind of trenches,



wire, routine and the ceaseless roar of the voracious guns. Taken together, the slogans 'Remember Scarborough' and 'Feed the Guns' represent the transition from the limited wars of the nineteenth-century to the Total Wars of the twentieth - and just as the failure to achieve a land decision in 1914 had profound but unforeseen consequences, so would the Scarborough raid.

What is Total War?

The phrase was coined by the ex-Commander-in-Chief of the German Army Erich Ludendorff in his 1935 book *Der totale Krieg*, though the idea dates back to the French Revolution - and he borrowed liberally from others too. When he wrote 'total war is not only aimed against the armed forces, but also directly against the people', he touched on the essence of Total War: the extension of warfare to include

● *SMS Derfflinger launches a salvo from its powerful guns. These, which were used at the attack on the East Coast, could fire a 550-893 lbs shell a distance of 25 miles at over three times the speed of sound.*

the people. Historian Hugh Bicheno provides a more succinct definition: 'Total War is one in which the whole population and all the resources of the combatants are committed to complete victory and thus become military targets'. The key elements contained within this broad definition are:

- *Typically national in character involving entire population*
- *Distinction between 'combatant' and 'non-combatant' blurred or removed entirely*
- *Science and industry mobilised by the state on national scale to maximise war material output*
- *Actions often militarily unrestrained*
- *Battles indecisive and outcome decided by attrition over time*

- *Suspension of social, political and legal 'norms'*
- *Mass armies of citizen-soldiers*
- *Strong ideological element to justify mass participation*
- *Demand for unconditional surrender*
- *'Capitulation' not an option*
- *The mobilisation of entire nation and resources for pursuit of victory*

Combatants, Non-Combatants, Ideology, Recruiting

The Scarborough attack and the introduction of unrestricted U-boat warfare were closely linked but also important in terms of defining combatant status and ideology, which are both key elements in Total War. Part of the rationale underpinning the path to unrestricted U-boat warfare was the Royal Navy's blockade of Germany instituted upon the outbreak of war, the severity increasing incrementally between August and November. Aimed initially at the seizure of

'Part of the rationale underpinning the path to unrestricted U-boat warfare was the Royal Navy's blockade of Germany.'

warlike materials destined for German ports, by December 1914 the legal definitions of 'blockade', 'contraband' and 'ultimate destination' had been stretched to breaking point. In practice the navy could stop any neutral ship wherever bound and seize material (including foodstuffs) if it suspected the ship or its cargo were ultimately destined for Germany, irrespective of the stated destination port. Apart from 'justifying' Germany's naval actions and decisions the blockade also antagonised neutral nations, most especially the USA whose financial, agricultural and industrial support were vital to the Allies if they were to win the war.

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The USA took the position that neutrals have a right to engage in free trade of civilian supplies without interference from belligerents. This was enshrined in the US-sponsored 1909 Declaration of London which was signed, but not ratified, by Britain. In the event this latter excuse was not relied on and Britain trod carefully, only increasing the scope of the blockade in response to German actions such as the laying of mines. This mollified the US Government (at least to a certain degree) but there was still an undercurrent of resentment. Furthermore, by December 1914 the British blockade was to all intents and purposes indiscriminate and hurt the non-combatant civilian population far worse than the military - giving at least some credence to Germany's claim that the blockade was not just illegal but immoral, thereby justifying their own policies. However, any resentment the Americans felt about the blockade paled into insignificance compared with the



● **No.2 Wykeham Street, Scarborough, became the focal point for much of the subsequent propaganda.**

increasing shock and outrage directed at Germany's actions, and the attack on Scarborough was an integral part of this.

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Perhaps the most immediate shock of the East Coast raid was the number of non-combatants, especially women and children, killed or injured. In the case of Hartlepool, the Germans could claim what we would call today 'collateral' casualties, suffered because of their proximity to legitimate military targets. At Hartlepool the German guns represented the latest in

sophisticated, accurate firepower, but the limits of this meant that although the gasworks, harbour, steelworks and railways (arguably legitimate targets) were hit so were churches and houses. The non-combatant civilian casualty toll far outweighed that of combatants. Technology had provided the ability to engage in 'stand-off' military engagements directly against an enemy nation rather than just its military. The sophisticated industrial production systems required to sustain peace were now also that



which sustained war: the local gas and steel works were as capable of producing ploughshares as they were swords. These two factors alone inevitably blurred the distinction between combatant and non-combatant. At Scarborough, a popular seaside resort containing no legitimate military targets (despite Germany's risible claims to the contrary) there were no such mitigating circumstances. The civilian population, an inviolate target protected by international laws that all parties were bound by, was attacked directly. This foreshadowed what was to come: when the entire nation is at war the entire nation acquires combatant status.

Even though the process had begun the entire nation was not at war when the German guns opened fire on Scarborough and its non-military status meant there was no issue of collateral casualties to debate: this was a straightforward atrocity and was perceived as such by a British public appalled at such barbarity.

Today the Great War is often seen in terms of self-serving Great-Power-politics but it did have a powerful ideological component: civilised liberalism and freedom versus barbarous German militarism and 'kultur'. This perspective gained increasing credibility through

'Scarborough became one of the 'strong ideological' elements justifying mass participation in the conflict.'

Germany's declaration of war; its violation of Belgian neutrality; the burning of the Louvain library and the execution of Belgian civilians suspected of being, harbouring or aiding 'Francs Tireurs' amongst many other real and imagined atrocities. The Scarborough raid did not happen 'over there', an abstract event viewed from the distant comfort of the British Isles: it was a shockingly real and immediate example of German 'frightfulness', and it could just as easily happen to you. If there

was any lingering doubt of the 'rightness' of Britain's cause the merciless brutality of the Scarborough raid dispelled it.

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Scarborough became one of the 'strong ideological' elements justifying mass participation in the conflict, and in the face of such barbarity capitulation was not an option.

The most immediate effect was on voluntary recruiting. The Parliamentary Recruiting Committee moved quickly and produced a series of posters of which perhaps the most powerful and direct was a poster showing a motherless child with a baby in her arms outside of a destroyed No. 2 Wykeham Street; the number of women and children killed and injured there and the defiantly challenging slogan *Men of Britain! Will You Stand This?* (In a tragically ironic twist the 'hero' of No. 2 Wykeham Street, Christopher Bennett, who saw his family massacred himself became a victim of the coming 'Total War' when he joined the Royal Artillery and was killed in France

● *The naval attack on Scarborough generated headlines around the world (facing page), and two of the most famous slogans of the war in tandem (right) as part of a Munitions War Bond drive in Scarborough in 1918 (picture courtesy of Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre).*



on 21 January, 1917.) Other posters began to use the words *Remember Scarborough*, a rallying cry which stuck. Although there is much anecdotal evidence of a significant increase in voluntary recruiting both locally and nationally Government figures suggest this was minimal and transitory. Its longer-term effect should be understood more in terms of 'recruitment to the cause' rather than the 'colours'. This arguably helped frame discussion about compulsory military service in 1915 (anathematic to liberal Britain but crucial for the prosecution of Total War) and ease the introduction of the Military Service Act in early-1916.

World opinion

Although difficult to quantify it is probable that the greater effect was on world opinion, especially that of the USA as evidenced by the width and depth of newspaper coverage - aided in no small measure by Britain's extensive control of newspapers press agencies and media technology. Nevertheless, the

coverage in the USA from the major national to the smallest local paper was nothing short of astonishing, as was the speed of coverage, the majority of US papers running it as a front-page headline in the evening editions of 16 December. The 'acid test' of the importance of a press story is not just the width of coverage but the depth: if they are reading it in the 'Bible Belt' as well as the Eastern Seaboard then the story has 'penetration'.

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Furthermore, the raid was continually discussed and referenced after the event. In the United States this story, in concert with previous German 'atrocities' stories was a significant factor in furthering the impression of a 'barbaric' Germany and allowed journalists to argue the case for US support of 'freedom-loving, liberal Britain'. And outrage was not confined to English-speaking America. In Italy, national editions such as *La Stampa* and *Corriere della Sera* both described the Germans as 'baby-killers'. Italian liberals and socialists

pressed harder for Italy to enter the fray on the side of the Allies.

Scarborough was not the direct cause of America's change of position or its eventual entry into the war, nor was it Italy's 'final straw', but by stirring emotions, generating debate, defining moral and ethical positions, directing opinion, deflecting criticism and hardening attitudes its effect was indirect but profound. Above all it introduced the appalling reality of this war and what it would rapidly become. The need to 'Feed the guns' and the impact that would have on all walks of life, particularly women, cannot be understated.

Note: When this article was first supplied to *The WFA* some years ago it included 32 references which were excluded due to space limitations, and which have sadly been lost to posterity.



Watch a Rob talk on the move to total war [here](#)