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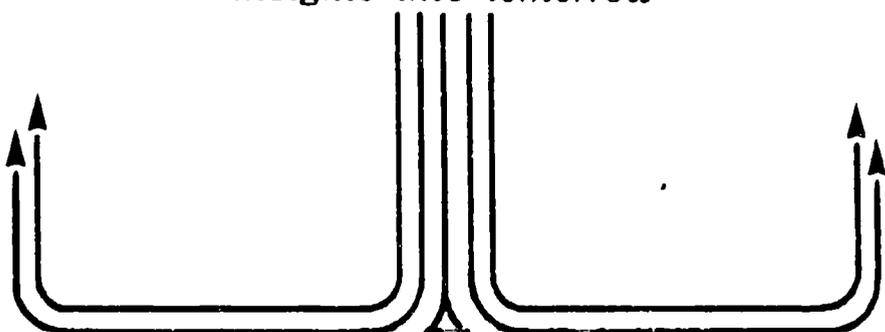
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STUDENT REPORT
DOUGLAS HAIG AND THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
MAJOR HAROLD M. JENSEN JR. 84-1375
"insights into tomorrow"

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AUTHOR(S) MAJOR HAROLD M. JENSEN JR., USAF

FACULTY ADVISOR DR DONALD CHIPMAN, SOS/CAE

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

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20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Reviews the background, strategy, and tactics of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, Commander of the British Expeditionary Force in World War I. The planning and action at the Battle of the Somme is highlighted and analyzed.		

PREFACE

This material is being submitted to the faculty of the University of Alabama in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Military History.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Harold M. Jensen Jr. received his commission in 1972 upon graduation from the United States Air Force Academy. His initial assignment was to Air Force Communications Command Headquarters as a manpower manager and was followed by a detachment level job in the Pacific. His next assignment, at Tactical Air Command Headquarters, involved determination of fighter aircraft manpower requirements using computer simulation. Prior to attending ACSC he was assigned to Air University. During that tour he served on the faculty of Squadron Officer School, then on the Headquarters Air University staff as Assistant Chief for Professional Military Education, and most recently as Executive Officer to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Education. Major Jensen holds a Master's Degree in Management (1976) from Central Michigan University.

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I. WHY?

A locomotive is moving. Someone asks: "What makes it move?" The peasant answers, "Tis the devil moves it." Another man says the locomotive moves because its wheels are going round. A third maintains that the cause of the motion lies in the smoke being carried away by the wind. .

. . .
The only conception capable of explaining the movement of the locomotive is that of a force commensurate with the movement observed. The only conception capable of explaining the movement of peoples is that of some force commensurate with the whole movement of the peoples.

Yet to supply this conception various historians assume forces of entirely different kinds, all of which are incommensurate with the movement observed. Some see it as a force directly inherent in heroes, as the peasant sees the devil in the steam-engine; others, as a force resulting from several other forces, like the movement of the wheels; others again, as an intellectual influence, like the smoke that is blown away.¹

Tolstoy's derogatory description of the three main schools of history is nonetheless fairly accurate. This project falls in the first category and proposes a study of a World War I "devil" or "hero," depending on your perspective, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Why study a World War I general whose military strategy seemed only to echo the single-minded French plan of "Attaquez, attaquez!" Why study military history at all in this present day world of radically different and rapidly changing technology?

Many of the great thinkers and great warriors in the profession of arms have noted the importance of history. In fact, as far back as 400

¹ L. N. Tolstoy, War and Peace, tr. R. Edmonds (New York: Penguin, 1957), pp. 1408-9.

B.C. we find a Chinese warrior, Sun Tzu, strongly endorsing the study of war. He said,

War is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly studied.²

Clausewitz, perhaps the greatest military thinker of all time, pointed out that, "Historical examples clarify everything and also provide the best kind of proof in the empirical sciences. This is particularly true of the art of war."³ General Douglas MacArthur, one of America's most revered commanders, was very specific about the importance of history.

More than most professions, the military is forced to depend on intelligent interpretation of the past for sign posts charting the future. Devoid of opportunity, in peace, for self-instruction through actual practice in his profession, the soldier makes maximum use of the historical record in assuring the readiness of himself and his command to function efficiently in emergency. The facts derived from historical analysis, he applies to conditions of the present and the proximate future, thus developing synthesis of appropriate method, organization, and doctrine.⁴

Perhaps the most eloquent and dramatic rationale for studying military history was presented by Mao Tse-tung. He said, "We should carefully study the lessons which were learned in past wars at the cost of blood and which have been bequeathed to us. . . ."⁵

Given that a study of military history has value, why select World War I, a conflict begun some seventy years ago? One reason is that this

² Sun Tzu, The Art of War, tr. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 63.

³ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and tr. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 170.

⁴ Courtney Whitney, MacArthur (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 503.

⁵ Mao Tse-tung, On the Protracted War (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1954), p. 186.

war marks a milestone in history that cut deep into the consciousness of modern man and reshaped the world's political order.⁶ Even today the First World War is called "The Great War." This was modern war on a grand scale when all the major world powers harnessed nationalism, imperialism, and the industrial revolution to destroy the enemy. Technology then, as now, shaped the war.

. . . By the end of 1914 the machinegun had established itself as the dominant weapon on the battlefield. In fact it determined the character of the war over the next four years. Against weapons spewing out hundreds of bullets a minute, "elan," "spirit," and "vigorous assaults" became meaningless.⁷

Even in the face of high casualties incurred against this new technology commanders clung to the methods and weapons of old.⁸

On 14 July [1916] some 20,000 men attacked at 3:25 a.m. after only 5 minutes bombardment. The Germans, who had thought their night's rest secure, were caught asleep. Five miles of their second line was overrun. Now came the great set piece of which all British generals dreamt: the cavalry were to go through. Three divisions were in readiness. They took a long time coming, held up in the mud and craters of the battlefield. At seven in the evening, the British infantry saw a sight unique on the Western Front; cavalry riding into action through the waving corn with

⁶ A story related to this author by a close friend, Dieter Barnes, provides an indication of the passions generated by World War I. Dieter was attending school in France and was touring the countryside. In his travels he found a cemetery that was odd in two respects: First, the graves were all World War I German soldiers and, second, trees were growing in the cemetery, an unusual feature in France. Seeing a man at the edge of the cemetery he asked about the trees. The man told him they were there so the French sun would never shine on a German soldier's grave. The feelings were strong even 50 years after the Great War.

⁷ Robert C. Ehrhart, Modern Warfare and Society (USAF Academy, CO: US Air Force Academy, 1980), p. 23.

⁸ "New" is a relative term. Rapid-fire weapons made their debut in the American Civil War, which ended in 1865.

bugles blowing and lances glittering. The glorious vision crumbled into slaughter as the German machine guns opened fire.⁹

Technology plays an important role in today's conflicts and some might even say a more important role than in World War I. One example of technology shaping a recent air war occurred in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In that war the Israelis encountered surface-to-air missiles (SAM) in unexpected quantities and of unexpected effectiveness. The Egyptians attacked at 1405 hours on 6 October and before dark the Israelis had lost more than 30 aircraft.¹⁰ They used chaff and other electronic countermeasures to achieve some small successes but were not able to regain air preeminence over the Suez Canal until Israeli tanks captured a number of Egyptian anti-aircraft missile batteries and created a gap in the network.¹¹ The bulk of the 102 Israeli aircraft shot down in this war¹² were hit by missiles and conventional anti-aircraft fire.¹³ Chaim Herzog, a leading Israeli military commentator, made this comment.¹⁴

⁹ A. J. P. Taylor, The First World War (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), pp. 139-40.

¹⁰ R. Ernest and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 1237.

¹¹ Ibid., 1238.

¹² The shooting portion of the war ended on 24 October 1973.

¹³ Chaim Herzog, The Arab-Israeli Wars (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 348.

¹⁴ Herzog served with the British Army in Europe in World War II, was twice Director of Israeli military intelligence, served as Israeli Defense Attaché in Washington, held various command and staff posts in the Israeli Defense Forces, was the first Military Governor of the West Bank of the Jordan, Israeli ambassador to the UN, retired as a Major-General, and is a member of the Knesset.

Despite the manner in which the Israeli Air Force acquitted itself in the face of the missiles, there was no doubt that many of the accepted concepts about air war would have to be reevaluated. The role of aircraft in war had changed, and new strategies and uses of air power would have to be evolved To a degree, air power would not be as influential as it had been, and would affect the immediate battlefield less than hitherto.¹⁵

This example is not meant to infer that SAMs are the airman's equivalent of the machine gun but rather to show the impact of technology now as then. Pushing this example a step further, one can draw still further analogies.

The 1983 Israeli campaign in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley caused the Israeli Air Force to encounter SAM concentrations similar to that found in the Yom Kippur War. In large measure, they overcame the threat using unmanned drones. The United States Air Force has not yet developed plans to take similar action in a heavy SAM environment. Adhering to traditional tactics, some USAF "cavalry" generals may have to relearn the lessons of 1973.

Given that a study of military history and specifically World War I has value, why study a commander of the British Expeditionary Force, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig? John Keegan, in his book The Face of Battle, says the common factor in battle is human and leadership is one element of the human factor.¹⁶ In addition, we'll find Haig adopted a strategy designed to wear out the enemy by almost continuous frontal attack. Russell Weigley would call this a strategy of annihilation and

¹⁵ Herzog, The Arab-Israeli Wars, p. 348.

¹⁶ John Keegan, The Face of Battle (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 303.

has said this is characteristically the American way of war.¹⁷ The very fact that Haig is British allows Americans a more detached evaluation as opposed to the biases that might arise should we study Grant, Pershing, or Eisenhower.

An added bonus to this study is the disagreement among historians over Haig's performance. There is no disagreement that World War I ended on November 11, 1918 when Germany accepted defeat on the Western Front. History will forever record that Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig commanded the British Armies on the Western Front for the last 35 months. At the end his British Expeditionary Force numbered almost two million men; to this day the largest British force ever deployed in one theater of operations.¹⁸ The Allies (Britain, France, Italy, and the United States) won the war and Britain paid a large portion of the price of victory. These are generally accepted "facts" but men have interpreted these facts in different ways in judging the leadership and generalship of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. Richard Burdon Haldane, British Secretary of State for War, said, "Haig had a first-rate General Staff mind."¹⁹ David Lloyd George, British Secretary of State for War and also

¹⁷ Russell Weigley, The American Way of War (Bloomington, Indiana, Indiana University Press, 1973), p. xxii. It's interesting to note that in a 1918 letter to former War Secretary Haldane, Haig fondly remembers his tour at the War Office because, ". . . The organization of our Army for war dates from then. Until you arrived . . . no one knew for what purpose our Army existed!" Marshall-Cornwall, Haig, p. 77. This concern about purpose is echoed in the USAF of the 1980s through PROJECT WARRIOR, a program designed to get Air Force people thinking and studying war.

¹⁸ John Terraine, Douglas Haig (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1963), p. xxii.

¹⁹ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. xiii.

Prime Minister during the war, said, "Haig undoubtedly lacked those highest qualities which were essential in a great commander in the greatest war the world has ever seen . . . it was far beyond his mental equipment."²⁰ Some say no one man was fit to the task. Winston Churchill said, "The Great War owned no human master; no one was equal to its vast and novel issues; no human had controlled its hurricanes; no eye could pierce its whirlwind dust clouds."²¹

To glean some lessons from the experiences of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, it is appropriate to first review his life before taking command of the British Expeditionary Force; second, look closely at his military strategy and tactics; third, make an in-depth analysis of a critical battle, the First Somme; and, fourth, analyze this slice of history.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 18.

II. HAIG'S LIFE BEFORE COMMAND OF THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Douglas Haig was born on June 19, 1861 at Edinburgh, Scotland, the youngest son in a family of nine children. The early years of Haig's life present no remarkable pictures says one of his biographies.¹ His mother died when he was eighteen. He spent four years at Clifton College, visited America with an older brother, and upon his return entered Brasenose College at Oxford. He distinguished himself at polo, but nothing else. He was, says Charteris, reserved, discontented, and purposeless.² One biographer says Oxford gave him the desire to succeed at something.³ Another says his sister convinced him to try the army and Haig, being older and more widely experienced than his fellow students at the Sandhurst Military Academy, found himself a leader. He strove to maintain that position.⁴

Apparently, Haig was not a popular student at Sandhurst and one biographer notes that he had difficulty communicating, a problem that continued throughout his life.⁵ In spite of this, he graduated first in

¹ John Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 7.

³ Duff Cooper, Haig (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1936, p. 3.

⁴ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 8.

⁵ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 5.

order of merit and one of the Sandhurst instructors, asked which cadet showed the greatest promise for the future, replied, "A Scottish lad, Douglas Haig, is top in almost everything--books, drill, riding, and sports: he is to go into the cavalry, and, before he is finished, he will be top of the army."⁶

Haig's first assignment was with the 7th Hussars, a cavalry unit, and a year after he joined them they were sent to India. He became regiment adjutant within three years and was selected to act as Brigadier Major at a cavalry camp. In 1892 he was attached to the Headquarters Staff of the Bombay Army but realized he must attend the Staff College to be successful. He took the entrance exam and failed because of a low mark in arithmetic and color-blindness. He briefly returned to the 7th Hussars as second-in-command of a squadron but soon returned to England as aide-de-camp to the Inspector-General of the Cavalry. During this time he visited France and Germany and his report on the German Army made a strong impression on Sir Evelyn Wood, then Quartermaster General. Years later, when the war had broken out, Wood remembered the paper and wrote, "Haig knows more about the German Army than any officer in England."⁷ It was probably Wood who convinced the British Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, to grant Haig special dispensation to the 2 year tour at Staff College.

Upon graduation Captain Haig went to Egypt where he briefly commanded a squadron and was afterwards appointed staff officer to a British

⁶ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 9.

⁷ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 10.

commander of ten squadrons of Egyptian cavalry. On one occasion in the Sudan, Haig gave command orders on troop employment when his colonel went off to lead a cavalry charge. He frequently wrote tactical notes embodying the lessons of the fighting in which he had taken part and one entry criticized his colonel for leading those two squadrons in a charge because he thereby lost control of the whole brigade.

In 1899 Haig was appointed Brigade Major of the 1st Cavalry Brigade which shortly deployed to South Africa and the Boer War. He became Chief of Staff to General French, who would later command the British Expeditionary Force, and who he would replace. French spoke highly of Haig and Douglas was soon promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. By the end of 1900 he was promoted to Colonel and given command of troops engaged in hunting Boer partisans. He was given the additional command of a cavalry regiment, the 17th Lancers. He had performed well in Egypt and South Africa and earned "every clasp that the medals of the two campaigns could carry."⁸

In 1902 the 17th Lancers returned to England and Haig was given the additional duty of aide-de-camp to the King. In this position he became friends with Edward VII who in later years continued to ask Haig for military advice. "Two eminent soldiers were competing for his [Haig's] services: Sir John French, now Commander-in-Chief at Aldershot, wanted him to command the Cavalry Brigade there; Lord Kitchener, newly appointed Commander-in-Chief in India, wanted him as Inspector-General of Cavalry in that country."⁹

⁸ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 22.

⁹ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 31.

In 1903 Haig went to India with the task of modernizing the cavalry into an effective fighting force. His position called for a Major-General¹⁰ and he attained that permanent rank within a year, a meteoric rise for a man with only nineteen years' service. While in this job he introduced "staff rides," exercises designed to teach military lessons and evaluate functional capability. He also published Cavalry Studies, which became a standard text book, formed a cavalry school so all regiments could keep abreast of modern techniques, and developed the Indian Staff College.

While on leave in England, he met his future wife, one of Queen Alexandra's Maids of Honor, and within a month he married her in the private chapel at Buckingham Palace--"The first time that the chapel had been used for any ceremony not immediately connected with a member of the royal family. The King and Queen gave the wedding breakfast to celebrate the occasion."¹¹

In 1906 a new administration took power in England and Mr. Richard Burdon Haldane became Secretary of State for War. Even in 1906 there was concern about the militaristic Germans and Haldane said:

. . . After surveying the whole Army, I took it upon myself to ask Lord Haig, who was then in India, to come over to this country and to think for us. From all I could discover even then, he seemed to be the most highly equipped thinker in the British Army.¹²

¹⁰ At the time, this was the next grade after Colonel.

¹¹ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 31.

¹² Ibid., p. 35. Haldane said this in a speech delivered after Haig's death.

Haig left India in August of that year for a position at the War Office. A note which Haig wrote reveals the basic guide for his work.

. . . Our object in my opinion should be to start a system . . . suited to the "supposed situation," i.e., a great war requiring the whole resources of the nation to bring it to a successful end. . . . The Germans seem to be going ahead in every direction with the utmost self-assurance and energy, so that the crisis is sure of coming before many years are over.¹³

His initial task at the War Office was establishing the size, composition, and organization of a British Expeditionary Force should war break out. Informal coordination was begun with the French General Staff concerning logistics and force employment. At one point Haig told a subordinate:

We may well be fighting Germany in the next few years In battle with troops as brave and as efficient as the Germans, we shall have to fight long and hard before we can hope for a decision. It will be dangerous to attempt a decisive blow until we have worn down the enemy's power of resistance.¹⁴

Anticipating a need for great numbers of soldiers, Haig proposed that the forces in British Dominions and Dependencies be organized and trained the same as British troops. He also recommended that the "British General Staff" become the "Imperial General Staff of the Forces of the Empire" to insure homogeneous doctrine and direction. Both of these reforms were instituted.

In 1909 Haig became Chief-of-Staff in India, a position normally held by a Lieutenant-General. In this position he established "staff tours," exercises designed to instruct the staff in the practical

¹³ Terraine, Douglas Haig, pp. 40-41.

¹⁴ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 40.

problems of war. Each staff tour was devoted to fighting against a European enemy.

In 1912 Haldane brought Lieutenant-General Haig back to England as Commander-in-Chief of the Aldershot Command, the choice active command that Britain had to offer. Two years later Haig would command one of the two army corps of the British Expeditionary Force under the overall command of General Sir John French.

On the 11th of August, 1914, the King and Queen arrived at Aldershot to visit the Haigs and review his troops. Haig wrote in his diary,

The King seemed delighted that Sir John French had been appointed to the Chief Command of the Expeditionary Force. He asked me my opinion. I told him at once, as I felt it my duty to do so, that from my experience with Sir John in the South African War, he was certain to do his utmost loyally to carry out any orders which the Government might give him. I had grave doubts, however, whether either his temper was sufficiently even or his military knowledge sufficiently thorough to enable him to discharge properly the very difficult duties which will devolve upon him during the coming operations with Allies on the Continent. In my own heart, I know that French is quite unfit for this great command at a time of crisis in our Nation's history.¹⁵

In 1915, General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, proposed a joint offensive with the British to help relieve the pressure on the Russians. The British Secretary of War agreed to support the plan, yet neither Sir John French nor Haig had much confidence it would succeed. Indeed, this battle, Loos, was a costly failure. The British suffered about 50,000 casualties and gained little ground. Some historians argue, as Haig did later, that it might have succeeded if Field-Marshal French had released the reserves to Haig earlier in the battle. Sir John's

¹⁵ Robert Blake (ed.), The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoodie, 1952), p. 70.

actions here were hard to fathom. He chose an advanced command post that had no telephone line to Haig, his attacking army commander. While French was now closer to the front, he left his staff at the old headquarters some thirty kilometers away. In addition, General French retained control of the reserves and placed those reserves eight to ten kilometers behind the front, too far back to be quickly engaged. Finally, he released the reserves to Haig too late to be effective; and then, in his report on the battle, incorrectly stated the time he released those reserves.¹⁶ After the battle, French told Haig that they (the Allies) "ought to take the first opportunity of concluding peace, otherwise England would be ruined!"¹⁷

The report misstatements came to Haig's attention when printed by The Times (of London). Haig provided Sir John with evidence that showed when the reserves were released and asked that the report be amended. French's Chief of Staff was directed to reply that, "the statements in question were substantially correct and called for no amendment."¹⁸ Relations between the two commanders became "quite impossible."¹⁹

The King visited France and invited Haig to dinner. In private, he asked Haig's opinion of Sir John French's leadership. Haig replied:

. . . French's handling of the reserves in the last battle, his obstinacy, and conceit, showed his incapacity, and it seemed . . . impossible . . . to prevent him doing

¹⁶ James Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1973), p. 159.

¹⁷ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, p. 104.

¹⁸ Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander, p. 167.

¹⁹ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, p. 104.

the same things again for the sake of the Empire,
French ought to be removed.²⁰

This reinforced what the King had heard about French from other British generals and apparently he later pressed the Prime Minister to appoint Haig Commander-in-Chief. The Prime Minister was getting the same recommendation from the Chief of the General Staff and the Secretary of War.²¹ At noon on December 19, 1915, General Douglas Haig took command of the British Expeditionary Force and French was relieved of duty. Haig's opponents have said he undermined Field-Marshal French through subtle political maneuvering with the king. They point out that the death toll at Loos will pale in comparison to later British battles under Haig, yet he will proclaim them victories and remain Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force. Haig's proponents argue that Field-Marshal French committed serious errors at Loos and no longer had the will to win. They maintain Haig never recommended he personally replace French, although he was the logical choice, and only gave his honest opinion in a serious matter affecting the lives of millions of people.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 109.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 114-115.

III. STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The first major battle of the BEF under its new commander was to be the Battle of the Somme, the bloodiest battle of World War I. Why did Haig attack on 1 July 1916? Some have argued that it was too soon; he should have waited for large numbers of tanks or more personnel, or attacked somewhere else. Others ask what led him to use the strategy exhibited at the Somme?

As early as 24 November 1914 Haig remarked to the King, "the surest way to prevent the enemy from attempting to invade Great Britain [is] to engage and press him hard on the Continent."¹ Nearly everyone encouraged Haig to do this. In July of 1915 a representative from General Joffre's headquarters told Haig the French people were tired of the war, the economy was practically at a standstill, and there was a general wish to end the war that autumn with a strong effort.² A month later the Secretary of War advised Haig that the British forces should do their best to support the French even if it meant suffering very heavy losses.³

As the newly installed BEF Commander, Haig sent for the French liaison officer and pointed out that while he was not under General Joffre's orders, his intentions were, "to carry out General Joffre's wishes on

¹ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919, p. 78.

² Ibid., p. 96.

³ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

strategical matters, as if they were orders."⁴ Three weeks earlier the Allies had decided on simultaneous offensives some time in the middle of 1916.

In January, 1916 General William Robertson, the Chief of the General Staff, wrote Haig a rather long letter concerning the political difficulties on the home front and remarked, "what we [those siding with the Western front advocates] really want is a real big success somewhere and we shall then be in a stronger position."⁵ On 21 February, the Germans pre-empted the Allied strategy with their own attempt to bleed the French white at Verdun.

While Haig was in England during April, 1916, he visited Prime Minister Asquith. Mr. Asquith told him a representative of the French government had asked Britain for a big loan and without it the French would have to admit defeat. Later that day Haig met with a banker friend who also spoke of the loan and said, "they [the French] were afraid to tax their people. It appears that the French people would rather make peace with the Germans than submit to a war tax!"⁶

By May, 1916 the situation at Verdun was serious. Haig noted in his diary that French losses would probably reach 200,000 by the end of the month and "if this went on, the French Army would be ruined."⁷ At a meeting of the British and French staffs Haig remarked that before fixing

⁴ Ibid., p. 122.

⁵ Ibid., p. 123.

⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

⁷ Ibid., p. 144.

the date for the Somme offensive he wanted to compare British Army readiness on the 1st and 15th of July and the 1st and 15th of August. He remembered, "The moment I mentioned August 15th, Joffre at once got very excited and shouted, 'The French Army would cease to exist if we did nothing til them.'"⁸ Haig agreed to 1 July.

Britain's other allies were not doing well either. In response to French appeals for help because of Verdun, the Russians initiated the Battle of Lake Naroch on 18 March, losing between 70,000 and 100,000 men as casualties plus about 10,000 prisoners. The Germans lost about 20,000 men. The Italians were having considerable difficulty with an Austrian offensive and by mid-June had lost more than 147,000 men, 300 guns, and large stores of supplies to Austrian losses of about 81,000 men.

The Italians had also appealed to Russia for help and in a 4 June response General Alexei Brusilov launched a surprise attack along a 300-mile front that very successfully slashed through the Austro-German Line until checked by a German counteroffensive on 16 June. It's difficult to quantify Russian losses at this point, but when the Brusilov offensive ended in September, the Russians had sustained about 1,000,000 casualties.⁹

The war had deeply hurt all the allies, except Britain. In England the war was still very popular and pacifists and conscientious-objectors were treated as outcasts. Britain believed she could save the French and win the war.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

⁹ Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History, pp. 961-962.

¹⁰ Martin Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), p. 254.

Thus, it is obvious the advice the BEF Commander-in-Chief valued most highly and the pressures he felt most strongly urged an attack on the Somme on 1 July 1916.

To fully appreciate Haig's actions on the Somme it is necessary to trace the development of his strategic and tactical ideas. In Haig's background there are keys to his thoughts on war and battlefield strategy, the future of horse cavalry, the employment of artillery, the importance of new technology like the machine gun and tank, and, finally, his attitude as a commander.

While Chief-of-Staff in India before the war Haig had identified Britain's primary threat.

He instituted a close study of the German Army. He compared the differences between the organization adopted by the Germans and that prevailing in Great Britain and in India. He sought to arrive at a definite decision between the alternative armies--between envelopment of the flank and penetration of the centre. Above all, he strove to teach that no stereotyped system of strategy could be accepted as invariably the best, or indeed the only solution of the ever-varying problems which would be presented in the course of modern warfare.¹¹

He taught on each one of his Staff Tours that a war would go through four phases: maneuver for position, first clash of battle, a wearing-out fight of varying duration, and the eventual decisive blow which would provide victory.

At a dinner on July 30, 1915, Haldane asked Haig how to win the war. Haig responded,

¹¹ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 53. Haig selected Brigadier General Charteris to be BEF Chief of Intelligence. Charteris was very close to Haig.

. . . By applying the old principles to the present conditions. Engage the enemy on a wide front, the wider the better, 100 miles or more, then after five or six days bring up a strong reserve of all arms, attack by surprise and break through where the enemy had shown that he was weak It must be our objective to engage the enemy all along his line so as to oblige him to use up his reserves.¹²

Shortly after Haig took command of the British Expeditionary Force he noted in his diary that British action should take the form of:

1. "Winter sports" or raids continued into the Spring, i.e. capturing lengths of enemy's trenches at favourable points.
2. Wearing out fight similar to 1 but on a larger scale along the whole front. Will last about three weeks to draw in the enemy's reserves.
3. Decisive attacks at several points, object to break through. The amount of ammunition for 2 and 3 will be very large indeed.¹³

Not all of Haig's prophecies were accurate. Having been part of the cavalry for so long, he may have been blinded to its future war potential.

He said:

The role of Cavalry on the battlefield will always go on increasing, because--

1. The extended nature of the modern battlefield means that there will be a greater choice of cover to favour the concealed approach of Cavalry.
2. The increased range and killing power of modern guns, and the greater length of time during which battles will last, will augment the moral exhaustion, will affect men's nerves more, and produce greater demoralisation amongst the troops. These factors contribute to provoke panic, and to render troops (short-service soldiers nowadays) ripe for attack by Cavalry.
3. The longer the range and killing power of modern arms, the more important will rapidity of movement become, because it lessens the relative time of exposure to danger in favour of the Cavalry.

¹² Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919, p. 100.

¹³ Ibid., p. 125.

4. The introduction of the small-bore rifle, the bullet from which has little stopping power against a horse.¹⁴

Even as late as 1916, Haig was a strong supporter of horse cavalry. The King, in a 7 June conversation with Haig, suggests a reduction in horse cavalry because of maintenance costs. Haig protests, saying, ". . . in order to shorten the war and reap the fruits of any success, we must make use of the mobility of the Cavalry."¹⁵ As noted earlier, the reality of World War I would show the utter futility of using horse cavalry.¹⁶

On 9 May 1915 Haig commanded the First Army as it attacked at Festubert. He noted that,

The defences in our front are so carefully and so strongly made, and mutual support with machine-guns is so complete, that in order to demolish them a long methodical bombardment will be necessary by heavy artillery (guns and howitzers) before Infantry are sent forward to attack.¹⁷

This comment tends to predict his use of artillery against strong German defenses on the Somme in 1916.

While he may have mis-read the importance of horse cavalry, it's interesting to note he recognized the value of machine guns very early. In fact, in 1898, Captain Haig commented that he "felt the want of machine guns" in an encounter in Egypt.¹⁸

¹⁴ Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander, p. 65.

¹⁵ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919, p. 147.

¹⁶ In 1903 Haig had told H. M. Jessel, a former Captain in the 17th Lancers who was then a member of Parliament that he didn't think it wise to abolish the cavalry lance; that half the cavalry should have swords and half lances. A month earlier an Army Order had been published directing the cavalry to carry rifles and swords. Marshall-Cornwall, Haig as Military Commander, pp. 58,60.

¹⁷ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919, p. 93.

¹⁸ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 16.

Some of Haig's critics address either his neglect, premature use, or mis-use, of the tank at the Somme. His diary notes state that on 14 April 1916 Haig asked about the tanks and was told 150 would be ready by 31 July. He said that was too late and wanted 50 by 1 June. The diary also noted he asked the project managers to have tanks and crews practice over obstacles and terrain similar to the Somme. Then he provided them a map of the trenches and highlighted the importance of their ". . . thinking over the system of leadership and control of a group of 'tanks' with a view to manoeuvring into a position of readiness and during an action."¹⁹

In August, after the Somme battle had begun, he received a letter saying the tanks would not be ready until 1 September. His diary notes he was disappointed as he was ". . . looking forward to obtaining decisive results from the use of these 'tanks' at an early date."²⁰ On September 15th, when the tanks finally entered the Somme battle, he was very pleased and credited them with enabling the attack ". . . to progress at a surprisingly fast pace."²¹ Haig even recommended that the Navy build special boats to land tanks on beaches, where they could break through the barbed wire and capture enemy defenses.²²

Another key to understanding Haig's Somme strategy was his desire to fight and his willingness to use his soldiers. Winston Churchill remembered a remark Haig made about a brigadier general during a 1912

¹⁹ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919, p. 138.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

²¹ Ibid., p. 167.

²² Ibid.

wargame. "This officer," Haig said, "did not show a sincere desire to engage the enemy." Churchill says this was the essence of Haig and the message he gave his army to the very end of the war.²³

Thus, the Somme location was strongly influenced by politics. The timing was probably sooner than Haig would have liked, but he submitted to French cries for relief. In broad terms his strategy envisioned attack on a wide front, break through weak points, and exploit the breakthrough with cavalry. He appreciated, perhaps not enough, the value of new technology like the machine gun and tank but remained blind to the vulnerability of his beloved horse cavalry.

²³ Winston S. Churchill, Great Contemporaries (New York: C. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937), p. 194.

IV. THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

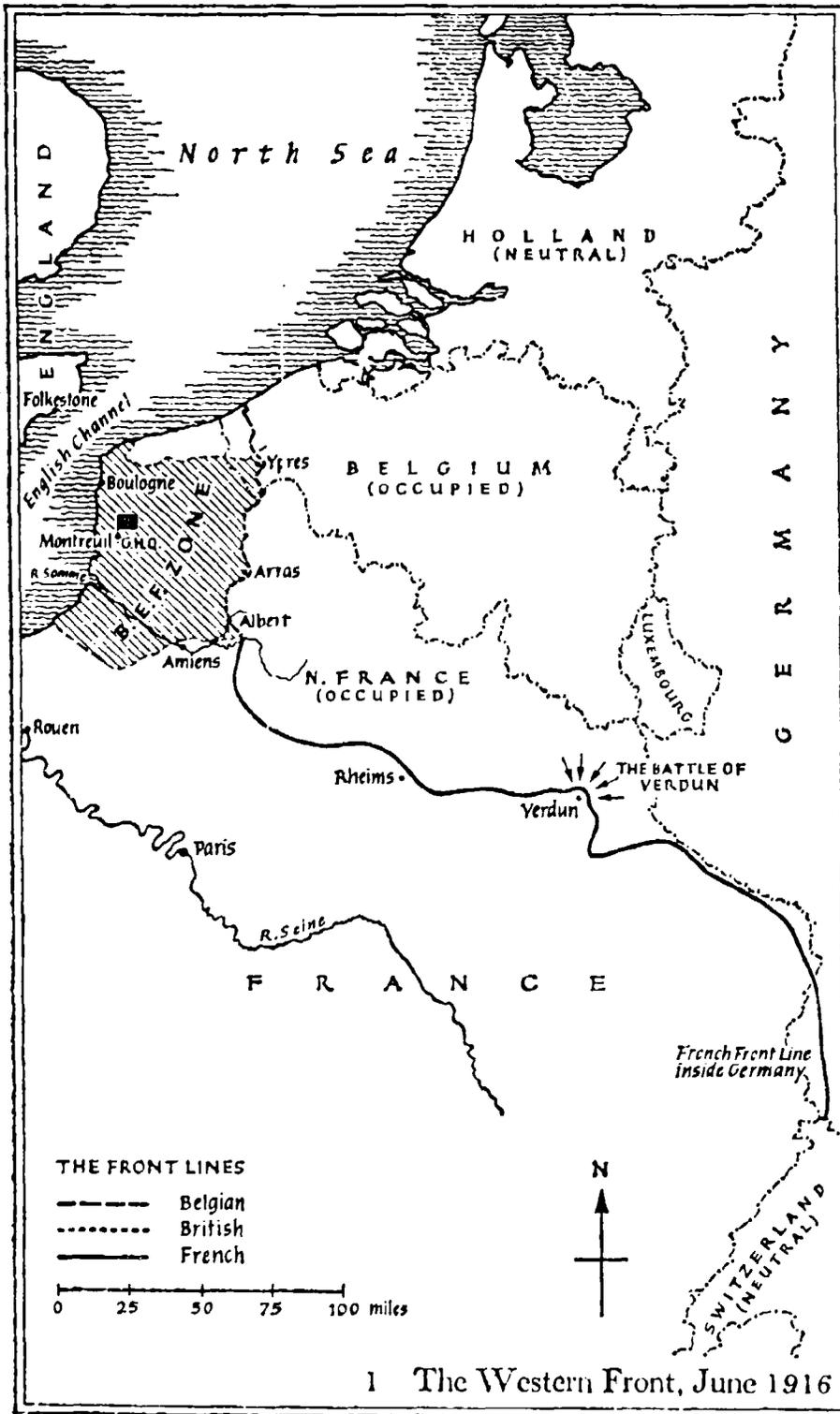
The battleground of the Somme appears to have been chosen for political rather than strategic reasons. Haig would have preferred a different area but felt the French had to be involved. At the Somme they would form the right flank. On 4 March 1916 Haig directed his 4th Army commander, Rawlinson, to develop a detailed plan for the Somme offensive. Haig's guidance called for an infantry attack along about a 16-mile front. If the infantry broke through German lines, the cavalry would charge through the gap and achieve the war of movement Haig desired. Some historians argue that a clear objective was not articulated at this point so Rawlinson, who did not believe a breakthrough possible, developed a plan to merely capture the high ground.¹ It was not until 16 June 1916 that Haig defined the objective in writing.

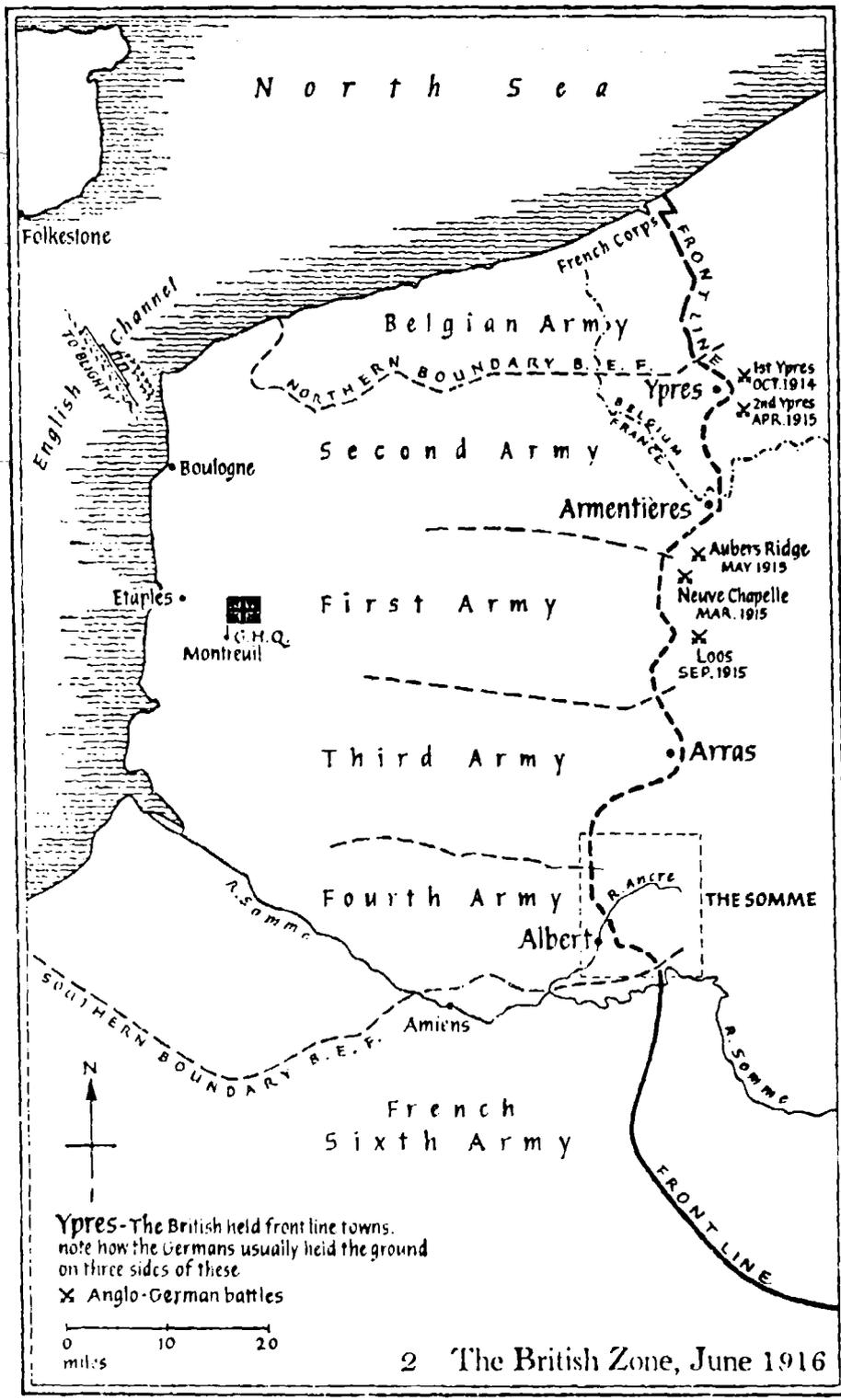
The Third and Fourth Armies will undertake offensive operations on the front Maricourt-Gommecourt, in conjunction with the French Sixth Army astride the Somme, with the object of relieving the pressure on the French at Verdun and inflicting loss on the enemy.²

Rawlinson's plan called for a long preliminary bombardment even though Haig was known to favor a short bombardment that provided surprise. Rawlinson believed a long preliminary was necessary to cut the concertina

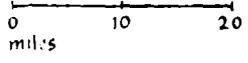
¹ A. H. Farrar-Hockley, The Somme (Philadelphia: Dufour Editions, 1964) and Martin Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972) seem to share this opinion.

² British Official History of the War, Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916, Vol. I, Appendix 13, G.H.Q. O.A.D. 12, of 16 June 1916.

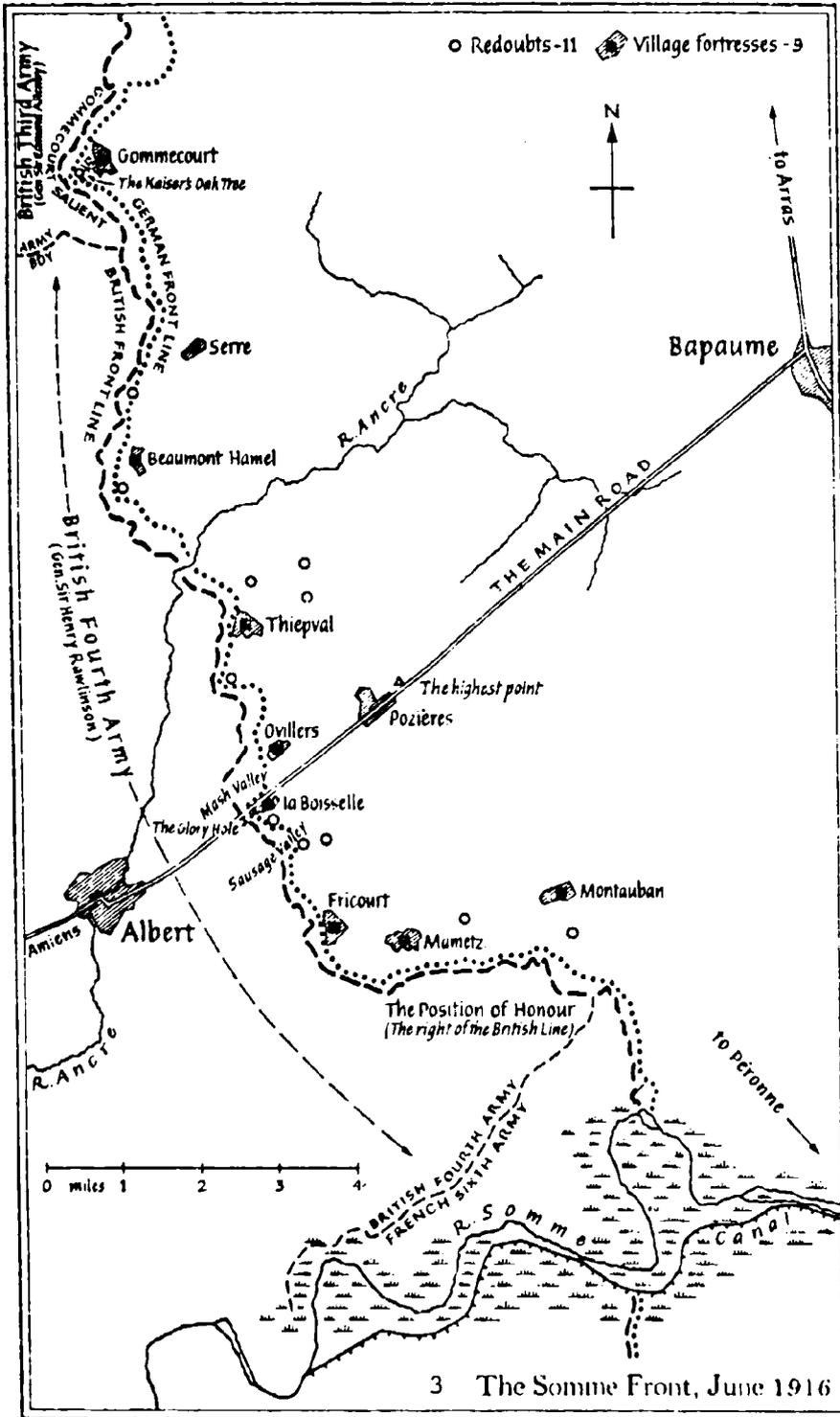




Ypres - The British held front line towns. note how the Germans usually held the ground on three sides of these.
 X Anglo-German battles



2 The British Zone, June 1916



wire and soften the enemy. To achieve surprise he proposed the infantry form up in darkness for a dawn attack. Haig capitulated. The plan estimated a 5-day bombardment but when reconnaissance indicated it had not yet achieved its objective, it continued for another two days.

Rawlinson believed this long bombardment would completely destroy the German front-line trenches and his infantry would merely mop up what little resistance remained. He hoped the Germans would then counter-attack and his infantry could exact a heavy toll from their new, more favorable positions. His artillery would move on to the second line until it too was ready for capture. He programmed the artillery to shift to the German second line when the attack began and allowed no changes without corps headquarters approval. The average corps headquarters was five miles behind the trenches.

Rawlinson was confident of the power of his artillery and had little confidence in an infantry composed largely of the new men of "Kitchener's Army." Haig advised rushing the German trenches as soon as the barrage lifted but Rawlinson argued for slow, walking waves across No-Man's Land because the standard assault tactics might cause his inexperienced battalions to become disorganized.

It was assumed the men would enter the first German trench and have to repel a German counter-attack. To meet this threat each man carried supplies; some say too many.

All men were in "fighting order," that is belt with bayonet, waterbottle, ammunition pouches, shoulder braces, and, on the back, ground sheet and haversack--the latter filled with the mess-tin, a tinned and an iron ration plus "the unexpired portion of the day's ration," toilet gear, "housewife" of sewing kit, spare socks and bootlaces. All men had two gas helmets and goggles against tear gas, plus

a field dressing and iodine. Some had wirecutters; half, at least, of each company had digging tools, shovels being in the proportion of five to one of picks. These were an additional load to the entrenching tool generally carried. All riflemen had 220 rounds of .303 cartridges, half of which were stowed in the pouches, the balance in a cotton bandolier. Everyone was directed to carry two sandbags and, in many units, either two Mills grenades or a Stokes mortar bomb. The Lewis gun teams were certainly no less laden. With his rifle charged with ammunition, weighing about 10 lb., no man carried less than 65 lb. Often additional grenades, bombs, small arms ammunition or perhaps a prepared charge against obstacles, stretchers or telephone cable increased the load to 85 or 90 lb.³

A dawn attack would have occurred at about 0430 hours. The French requested a later hour when the early morning mists would clear and better artillery observation would be possible. Attack time was therefore fixed at 0730. The infantry would cross No-Man's Land in broad daylight.

The Germans who faced these British on the Somme were in a formidable position. The German trenches took advantage of contours of the earth and held the high ground in every situation. Because they were on the high ground they enjoyed better drainage. This allowed them to dig deeper trenches and, more importantly, deep dug-outs 20 to 40 feet below ground.

Many were large enough to hold a platoon of men. The officers' dug-outs were panelled in wood or had cloth hangings to cover the rough chalk walls, and were furnished with tables, chairs and even pianos taken from nearby villages. Their men lived in miniature underground barrack rooms with rows of bunk beds and special alcoves or cupboards for each man's equipment. The whole system was lit by electricity, had forced air ventilation and was often supplied with piped water.⁴

The German trenches connected a defense line of 9 village fortresses, 11 redoubts, and approximately 1,000 machine gun posts. The Germans

³ Farrar-Hockley, The Somme, p. 88.

⁴ Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme, p. 42.

placed great faith in machine guns. "A well-trained machine-gunner could hit targets up to a mile away"⁵ so they protected them with the best means available, sometimes behind concrete or steel plating.

The Germans were in good positions but they were not impervious. During the day they sat in their dug-outs and when the barrage stopped they ran up to the trenches expecting enemy assault. If they were not being fired on at night, they would man the trenches at reduced strength against raiding parties while the remaining men repaired trench lines or closed gaps in the wire. It was difficult to evacuate wounded or bring in ammunition and food. Rations began to run out on June 27th.⁶ Finally, there was the shelling and the constant tension as they waited for the attack.

Reports from the Allied night raiding parties and photo reconnaissance concerning results of the bombardment were both good and bad. They were generally good on the right flank where the French heavy guns were causing considerable damage to wire, trenches, and even some dug-outs. On the left and in the center there were smaller numbers of British heavy artillery.⁷ Their effect was further reduced when one-third of the shells failed to explode. In addition, the smaller British guns, tasked with destroying the wire, primarily used a shrapnel charge. It was difficult to cut the wire with this kind of charge and the infantry would find great stretches of wire still intact on 1 July.⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Farrar-Hockley, The Somme, p. 77.

⁷ The French had nearly four times as many heavy guns for each mile of front as did the British. The British had 467 heavies for 16 miles of front; the French had 900 for 8 miles. Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme, p. 258.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 258-259.

At 0730 hours on 1 July 1916 the heavily laden men of the British Expeditionary Force climbed out of their trenches and walked out into No-Man's Land. They moved forward in human waves. The German reaction was swift and deadly. Their machine-gunners had a field day. Their artillery centered on No-Man's Land. The Germans at most points in the line were very confident. Private L. Ramage of the Glasgow Boys' Brigade Battalion said,

As I approached the German trenches, I could see a wall of German soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder right along the parapet of their front-line trench, waving to us to come on.⁹

The British suffered heavy casualties; few reached the German trenches. Private A. Fretwell of the Sheffield City Battalion said,

When I got near the German trenches I could see some of them coming out with their hands up but, when they saw how many of us had been hit, they changed their minds and ran back again.¹⁰

By the end of the day the British had suffered nearly 60,000 casualties, more than 19,000 of them dead--the greatest one day loss in the history of the British Army.

The 1st Hampshires had suffered so severely that no one could be found at the end of the day to describe, reliably, what had happened. Its War Diary entry for 1 July reads, "Our casualties in officers amounted to 100% and was also heavy in other ranks."¹¹

Almost half the men who attacked had become casualties. Seventy-five percent of the officers were casualties.

⁹ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 244.

The battle continued. Falkenhayn, the German Commander, ordered counterattacks to retake every yard of trench that was lost. He also began shifting reinforcements from the Verdun front. As mentioned earlier, 13 July saw the last large scale use of horse cavalry on the Western Front. September 15 saw the first use of tanks. About 47 tanks were brought forward but most historians say less than a dozen got into the battle. The British gained ground, sometimes because of the tank and sometimes without it. No breakthrough was achieved.

It began to rain in earnest in September and since there were virtually no trees or even grasses left for miles, mud became a serious problem. It got worse in October and November. Clay in the soil caused the mud to ball on the soles of boots to the size of a football. Wounded often drowned. Rifles and Lewis guns became clogged with mud and most of the fighting was hand-to-hand. Trench foot was rampant. Men in one unit were in mud up to their armpits. Those who found them could not get them out. Horses and mules got so bogged down they had to be shot. The attacks stopped in mid-November. In four and one half months they had advanced about eight miles.

Total casualties in this campaign were large. The British had about 420,000 casualties; the French 195,000; and the Germans between 450,000 and 650,000 depending on whose data and rationale is used. Even using the smallest estimate of German casualties, the figures total more than one million, a staggering number.¹²

While the Battle of the Somme dragged on the Germans began constructing a new defensive system several miles behind the front lines. Work

¹² Just the British and French casualties in this single campaign are three times the U.S. casualties for the entire Vietnam War.

continued all through the winter and in February 1917 the Germans withdrew to this new line. By doing this they gave up "nearly 1,000 square miles of territory, ten times more than the Allies had captured in 1916. When the British and French troops reached this new line they found a defensive system as strong as the one they had so painfully forced the previous year."¹³

¹³ Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme, p. 278.

V. ANALYSIS

I will deal first with the relatively broad area of military strategy. In particular I'll review how well Haig achieved his objectives on the Somme, identify strategic weaknesses, and consider a question that people asked in 1916 and are still asking today: Why did Haig continue fighting when so many men were killed for so little gain? I'll then turn to the tactical arena and address artillery, infantry, and a new weapon in 1916--the tank. Finally, I'll briefly present some evaluations of Douglas Haig as a commander and as a man.

Some historians argue that Haig's plan was a strategic success. If we evaluate the Battle of the Somme against the written objectives that Haig established then it should be considered a victory. The Germans pulled troops away from Verdun thereby easing the pressure on the French, the Allied trench positions were better than they had been at the start of battle, and the Germans had sustained heavy casualties. General Ludendorff remarked in his memoirs that, ". . . The endurance of the [German] troops had been weakened by long spells of defence under the powerful enemy artillery fire and their own losses. We were completely exhausted on the Western Front."¹

¹ Farrar-Hockley, The Somme, p. 211, quotes General E. von Ludendorff, My War Memoirs, 1914-1918 (Hutchinson), Vol. 1, p. 292.

A German author's evaluation based on experience with their 3rd Guard Division stated, "The Somme was the muddy grave of the German field army."²

Even Haig's admirers would agree his plan contained some strategic weaknesses. It has already been pointed out that he directed the development of battle plans before he had clearly defined his objective. In addition, the location of the battle was chosen for political rather than strategic value. Finally, blessed with historical hindsight we know this "exhausted" German Army with one foot in the "grave" was to hold out remarkably well. This Somme "victory" argued some people then, and now, was achieved at high cost in human life, perhaps too high.

The human cost of the Somme was high right from the start and since the gain was relatively small, why did Haig continue to press the offensive? The British intelligence staff told Haig the Germans were having a hard time maintaining an adequate defense.³ These reports encouraged him to maintain the attack with the hope that some portion of the German line would collapse and a breakthrough could be made. In addition, Joffre constantly pressured Haig to maintain the offensive. The Frenchman constantly wanted to wear down the enemy. He argued that if the offensive were halted the Germans would have time to build defense works as strong as first encountered in July. In 1917, he inferred, the Allies would have to start

² Ibid., p. 211, quotes Hentig, Psychologische Strategie des Grossen Krieges.

³ Farrar-Hockley, The Somme, p. 206, says that this position is stated in Fourth and Reserve Army intelligence summaries including interrogation reports for September 1916, and is confirmed by Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918, Vol. XI, pp. 9-79.

all over again. Eventually, the reason for sustaining operations became a desire to hold a tactical advantage, the high ground.⁴

Considerable evidence of tactical errors can be found at the Battle of the Somme. As mentioned, the British artillery was unable to carry out its tasks of destroying the wire and damaging German dug-outs. The cause rests with the insufficient numbers of heavy artillery; use of shrapnel, an inappropriate munition for cutting barbed wire; and approximately one-third of the heavy shells being duds. In addition, the artillery was tied to a rigid schedule that could be changed only with approval by corps headquarters. This policy made the artillery inflexible and unresponsive to changes in the tactical situation. This may seem a harsh and unjustified criticism, but in World War I it was a slow and difficult process to communicate with other army elements. Consider the account of Colonel Dickens, of Queen Victoria's Rifles, some 1,000 yards behind the front line of the Somme. "For two hours after zero, no news whatsoever was received from the front, all communications visual and telephonic having failed."⁵ He learned nothing until after 0900 when, "two plucky runners . . . returned to our line through the barrage."⁶ Even if a message were transmitted to corps headquarters in a reasonable time, it would still be necessary to convince the staff that the artillery should move to a new target. This is not an easy job when such a change negates the army commander's tasking order.

⁴ Farrar-Hockley, The Somme, p. 203.

⁵ Keegan, The Face of Battle, p. 264.

⁶ Ibid.

Perhaps as grievous an error was the use of non-standard infantry tactics. Normally, a party of men armed with grenades and light weapons and carrying a minimum of equipment would crawl into No-Man's Land and lie as close to the friendly artillery barrage as possible. When the barrage lifted, they would charge the enemy trench and attempt to keep them down until the more heavily armed infantry arrived to take the position. As noted earlier, General Rawlinson instituted human wave attacks based on his confidence in the preliminary artillery barrage and his lack of confidence in the infantry of "Kitchener's Army." Adding to the infantryman's problem was the 65 to 90 pounds of equipment that he carried. It is significant that two of the three divisions of the Fourth Army that were successful in their initial assault did not follow Rawlinson's attack procedures. One, in their eagerness to engage the enemy, entered No-Man's Land before the barrage lifted. The other simply used standard infantry tactics. The third successful division enjoyed the benefit of the more effective French artillery.⁷

Other subordinate commanders erred as well. In some cases narrow paths through the British wire were made several days before the attack. Alert German machine-gunners directed their fire on these critical points. In one case, a single gap contained the bodies of 66 dead Newfoundlanders.⁸

One of Haig's most controversial actions was his use of tanks at the Somme, the very first use of tanks in battle. Winston Churchill wrote:

⁷ Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme, pp. 259-260. This argument concerning infantry tactics is based on Middlebrook's excellent work.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

This priceless conception containing if used in its integrity and in a sufficient scale, the certainty of a great and brilliant victory, was revealed to the Germans for the mere petty purpose of taking a few ruined villages.⁹

Ernest Swinton, considered with Churchill a father of the tank, wrote:

The employment of a small number of tanks during the Somme Battle was against the advice of those who had given most thought to the potentialities of the New Arm.¹⁰

Prime Minister Lloyd George wrote:

So the great secret was sold for the battered ruin of a little hamlet on the Somme, which was not worth capturing.¹¹

B. H. Liddell Hart, author of a history of the Royal Tank Corps, wrote:

The premature use of a handful of tanks gave away the jealously guarded secret of this newly forged key to the French deadlock, sacrificing its birthright of decisive strategic surprise for the mess of pottage of a local success.¹²

The official History concluded:

To divulge our new methods whilst attacking with insufficient means was to squander possibilities of surprise just as much as the first effect of gas was wasted by the Germans at "Second Ypres," and the first effect of tanks was thrown away at the Somme in September 1916.¹³

A great many critics also point out that Haig concurred on a paper Swinton wrote on tank tactics. It said.

The chance of success of the new arm lies in its ability to effect a complete surprise, and therefore the machines should not be used in driblets; the fact of their existence should be kept secret until the whole are ready to be launched together.¹⁴

⁹ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 219.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² B. H. Liddell Hart, "Haig of Bemersyde," Atlantic, Vol. 140, No. 6 (December 1927), p. 789.

¹³ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 220.

¹⁴ Brian Gardner, The Big Push (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963), p. 126.

In considering this controversy it is worthwhile to review the situation. Lord Kitchener has told Haig that, ". . . unless we can impose a peace by force of arms this year [1916] we shall run a terrible risk of an unsatisfactory stalemate peace which will certainly necessitate hostilities again in about five years when we shall have few Allies and be unprepared."¹⁵ He also wrote, ". . . If we have to go through another winter I doubt whether France will stick it out or be able to do so."¹⁶ In addition, Haig was concerned about "amateur strategists" who felt "the war could be won in distant theatres" ¹⁷ He believed the Western Front was the key and wanted to demonstrate German vulnerability. Three days before the Battle of the Somme Haig learned of secret German peace feelers to France and captured German letters that depicted low morale in their army. Conversely, British morale, both at home and in the trenches, was very high.

I noted earlier that Haig wanted tanks for the Somme offensive and a table of resources drawn up in his headquarters on 24 May noted that by 1 August there would be "150 tanks of which only some may have been delivered in France, and only half the crews trained."¹⁸ While there is evidence that he personally told his army commanders to use the tanks "boldly" and "to go as far as possible," it is not clear if he directed them to use or study Swinton's tactics that called for concentrated tank

¹⁵ Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919, p. 365.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Terraine, Douglas Haig, p. 222.

formations. In fact, they did not. The tanks were spread out thinly along the fronts of their assaulting divisions. In spite of their limited success on the Somme, Haig was very pleased with their performance and asked the War Office for 1,000 more.¹⁹

Thus, we can review the situation from at least two viewpoints. From Haig's perspective the political and military situation justified the use of even this limited number of tanks. It is also possible that he did not consider the 49 tanks in France (less than a dozen actually got into battle) a "dribble." From his critics' point of view, Haig committed a serious error by revealing the tank before a serious blow could be dealt. This argument would benefit from additional research addressing what action the German Army took after seeing tanks on the Somme. It might determine if they developed any special anti-tank munitions, identified existing weapons that were effective against tanks, or added any training on anti-tank warfare. If these actions were taken, were they in evidence at Cambrai in November 1917? Specific anti-tank preparation by the Germans would tend to support Haig's critics.

The leadership of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig has been praised and decried. Brigadier-General John Charteris, Haig's Chief of Intelligence in France, said,

. . . When the final record is written, the final judgment given, Haig will stand out alone and without rival as the greatest of the great soldiers who led the armies of their country to battle in the gigantic conflict waged in France and Belgium.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 224.

²⁰ Charteris, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, p. 397.

General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, who served as a junior staff officer at Haig's headquarters in 1916 and 1917, said,

Douglas Haig and Ulysses Grant may perhaps share the honours as "four star generals" in the galaxy of the Great Captains.²¹

B. H. Liddell Hart was somewhat more tempered in his judgment of Haig.

He said,

As an executive commander there has never been a finer defensive general. In contrast, as an offensive general there has perhaps never been a worse one among those who have earned fame . . . where he failed was the instinct of surprise. And without the instinct of surprise [he cannot] take rank among the Great Captains. But as a great gentleman, also in the widest sense, and as a pattern of noble character, Haig will stand out in the roll of history . . . he was the very embodiment of the national character and the army tradition.²²

Winston Churchill's remarks are roughly comparable to Liddell Hart's:

He might be, he surely was, unequal to the prodigious scale of events; but no one else was discerned as his equal or his better . . . If there are some who would question Haig's right to rank with Wellington in British military annals, there are none who will deny that his character and conduct as soldier and subject will long serve as an example to all.²³

Private P. Smith went "over the top" on 1 July 1916 and had a different view:

Douglas Haig should have been hung, drawn and quartered for what he did on the Somme. The cream of British manhood was shattered in less than six hours.²⁴

David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister for much of the war, would have agreed with Private Smith.

²¹ Marshall-Cornwell, Haig, p. 295.

²² Liddell Hart, "Haig of Bemersyde," p. 798.

²³ Churchill, Great Contemporaries, pp. 197, 200.

²⁴ Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme, p. 297.

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