1918: DEFINING VICTORY

CONTRIBUTORS

EM Andrews is associate professor of history at the University of Newcastle.

John Bourne is senior lecturer in modern history at the University of Birmingham.

Ian M Brown is a financial analyst with HealthAmerica in Pittsburgh.

Peter Dennis is professor of history at University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

Jeffrey Grey is associate professor of history at University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

Lieutenant-General Frank J Hickling is Chief of Army.

Roger Lee is Head, Army History Unit, Canberra.

Albert Palazzo is a research associate in history at University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

Robin Prior is associate professor of history at University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

Bill Rawling is a senior historian in the Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence, Canberra.

GD Sheffield is a senior lecturer in war studies at Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.

Craig Wilcox is an independent historian residing in Sydney.

Trevor Wilson is emeritus professor of history at the University of Adelaide.

SF Wise is emeritus professor of history at Carleton University, Ottawa.
1918: DEFINING VICTORY

INTRODUCTION
Lieutenant-General Frank Hickling
Chief of Army

1998 marks the 80th anniversary of the last year of the First World War. It was called the Great War, the war to end all wars. Australia had been heavily involved, initially in 1914 in German New Guinea where the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force landed at Rabaul, and then in the Middle East and the costly Gallipoli campaign of 1915. In 1916 the Australian Imperial Force, less the bulk of the mounted troops who were to remain in the Middle East, were moved to the Western Front.

By July and August 1916 Australian troops were involved in the first Somme offensive at Pozieres and Mouquet Farm, and in October at Bapaume. The following year, 1917, they were again heavily engaged in May and June at Vimy Ridge, Bullecourt and Messines, and from August to December in the great battles of the Ypres offensive—Menin Road, Polygon Wood, Broodseinde and Passchendaele.

Battle casualties made it difficult keeping the Australian divisions up to strength and one of the divisions, the 4th, was made a depot division to the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Divisions. These were later formed into the Australian Corps, but it was not until May 1918 that the Corps was commanded by an Australian, Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash.

Early in 1918 the Australians were involved in preventing the capture of Amiens, Hazebrouck and Villers-Bretonneux during the major German offensive. During the final battles of the war they were engaged at Mont St Quentin, Peronne and the breaching of the Hindenburg Line. They were still advancing when the Armistice was signed.

The cost of the war in human terms was enormous. In Australia the total enlistments were in excess of 416,000, and this was without conscription. Of these, some 331,000 embarked for service overseas. The total Australian casualties, killed and wounded, came to 215,000. This very high proportion of casualties was probably due in part to the fact that most of the Australians were front line troops engaged throughout the war in heavy fighting.

The human cost was also felt very keenly at home. Families who lost their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons had in many instances lost their means of support. There was also the other cost—the crippled, maimed and damaged men who survived the war. Often whole districts were affected when a battalion raised from that area suffered extensive casualties.

Many of you at this conference, perhaps most of you, can claim a family connection to someone who served in the war. I am sure that most of us here saw some of the coverage of the commemorations which took place in France earlier this year when the memorials at Fromelles and Le Hamel were officially dedicated. You will also be aware of the generous gesture of the French Government in awarding those Australian veterans of the war the Legion of Honour. Survivors of the Great War are few and are fading away. The theme of this conference is, I believe, appropriate while the war is still in living memory.

The reason for this conference is not, however, commemorative. Everybody needs to use history. We need to look at what occurred in the past in order to analyse what happened, to avoid the errors which were made, and to adapt any innovations which might help us now. In this conference we are looking in particular at 1918 and addressing those factors which helped define victory after four long and costly years of war.
From the perspective of world history, the most significant collaboration in which Australia and Canada have ever engaged began at 4:20 in the morning of 8 August 1918. It was at that hour that the Australian and Canadian Corps moved off, side by side, from their taped start lines, plunged into a heavy mist, and achieved the largest single day advance made by the Allies during the whole of the First World War—eight miles for the Canadians, seven miles for the Australians. This spectacular offensive, which was to continue through 11 August, changed the course of history and ushered in the Allied victory campaign.

Until Amiens, 1918 had been a year of unrelenting German offensive action on the Western Front. With the elimination of Tsarist Russia from the war, Germany was at last free to transfer forces from the Eastern Front, swelling its armies to over 200 divisions. The Kaiserschlacht (the Kaiser's battle) was launched on 21 March with Operation 'Michael', when three German armies opened a dangerous gap between the French and British forces, and sent the British Fifth Army reeling back in ignominious retreat. For the next four months, until mid-July, offensive succeeded offensive, as General Erich Ludendorff sought the formula which would bring triumph for Germany. By June, the German tide had once more reached the River Marne, as it had in 1914, and in Flanders, the hard won British gains of 1917 disappeared as German armies thrust towards Ypres. Only in mid-July did the French give a check to the German advance, throwing back a bridgehead over the Marne and forcing a slight enemy withdrawal. At this stage, however, there was no real sign that the German offensive had ended. Allied leaders, politicians and soldiers alike, assumed that the war would continue into 1919, and looked to the Allied generalissimo, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, whose appointment was a direct result of German successes, to provide the strategy for the coming year.

The Allied high command certainly did not anticipate a near-breakthrough at Amiens. Since early April, Marshal Foch had hoped to free up the Paris-Amiens railway, because German guns threatened the vital lateral communications between the British and French armies. Field Marshal Haig wrote to Foch on 17 July, suggesting 'the advancing of the Allied front east and south-east of Amiens, so as to disengage this town and the railway line'. Foch agreed, but in fact this formal exchange simply ratified an agreement reached by the two as early as 23 May 1918, and by 17 July planning for an offensive was already well advanced. Nor did General Ludendorff anticipate an Allied offensive, though with great confidence he welcomed such a development should it occur. In an order of the day of 4 August, he told his troops that 'we occupy everywhere positions which have been very strongly fortified ... Henceforward, we can await every hostile attack with the greater confidence ... we should wish for nothing better than to see the enemy launch an offensive, which can but hasten the disintegration of his forces'.

Nor were the Allies prepared to exploit the success they had won. On 9 August, neither the Australians nor the Canadians resumed the offensive until late in the morning. One has the distinct impression that their commanders, Sir John Monash and Sir Arthur Currie, had been too busy exchanging congratulations with their divisional commanders, each other, and General Sir Henry Rawlinson, commander of Fourth Army. But when the Dominion troops resumed the attack, their offensive was almost as impressive as it had been on the previous day. Ludendorff was plunged from the confidence of 4 August into deep despondency. As he wrote in his war memoirs:
August 8th was the black day of the German Army in the history of the war. This was the worst experience I had to go through ... early on August 8th, in a dense fog that had been rendered still thicker by artificial means, the British, mainly with Australian and Canadian divisions, attacked between Albert and Moreuil with strong squadrons of Tanks, but for the rest with no great superiority. They broke between the Somme and the Luce deep into our front. The Divisions in line allowed themselves to be completely overwhelmed ... August 8th made things clear for both Army Commands, both for the German and for that of the enemy.4

When he disclosed the extent of the disaster to the Kaiser on 10 August, Wilhelm declared: ‘We have reached the limits of our capacity. The war must be terminated’.5

How did it come about that Australia and Canada were brought together on the plain of the Santerre, between the Somme and the Luce, to deal Germany this decisive blow? Had the two corps collaborated successfully on previous occasions? During the Somme battles of 1916, the Canadians had relieved the Australians in the vicinity of Pozières, but there was no real collaborative action. The only occasion on which the two corps had been intended to work closely together was not a happy one. At Passchendael, in October 1917, and admittedly under appalling conditions, the two corps had not cooperated effectively, the Australians charging that they had been given inadequate flank protection by one of the Canadian divisions. To cap an unhappy experience, the Australians were pulled out of the line, and the operation was left to the Canadians. General John Monash, then commanding the Third Australian Division, was deeply resentful, feeling that the Army commander, General Plumer, had not allowed the Australians sufficient time for preparation. The Canadians, he believed, would simply reap the benefit of the Australian efforts, ‘and the job which we were asked to do in one stage will be done in three separate stages, so that the augury is all in favour of the next attempt’.6 He wrote home bitterly that ‘Our men are being put into the hottest fighting and are being sacrificed in hare-brained ventures, like Bullecourt and Passchendael ... Australian interests are suffering badly, and Australia is not getting anything like the recognition it deserves’.7

Second Army had found the Australians difficult at Passchendael; General Harington, Plumer’s chief of staff, writing after the war, referred to them as ‘very fine fighters but not too easy to deal with’.

I think we were glad to have the Canadians for the final phase. Possibly having been BG GS of the Canadian Corps, I found it easier to make arrangements with them & old Currie [was] so nice to work with.8

That the Canadian Corps took Passchendael village and its ridge (at the cost of nearly 16,000 casualties) was attributed by Monash, and doubtless many of his fellow Australians, to the preparatory work of the Australian Corps.

If the British high command took any note of this unpropitious circumstance in the planning for Amiens, there is no sign of it. And once the German offensives began, the idea of employing the five Australian and four Canadian divisions together in a counter-stroke preoccupied Foch and Haig alike. As early as April 1918 Foch proposed using the Canadian Corps to launch a spoiling attack in Flanders on a ten-mile front between Festubert and Robecq, intended to disrupt Ludendorfs offensives, and found that Haig had been nursing such a notion since the winter.9 Known as ‘Delta’, and shrouded in the deepest secrecy, it was forestalled because Ludendorfs attacks provided no adequate opportunity, and the operation was suspended in early May and later cancelled. The intense preparations for it had, Currie observed, ‘a most vivifying influence on the training of the Canadian Corps’, and indeed in several specific ways the training for ‘Delta’ had direct application to the Amiens operation. It appears that either Foch or Haig suggested employing the Ausiralisans and Canadians together, if not in Operation ‘Delta’, then at the first feasible moment. When the German onslaught had been checked in mid-July, therefore, it was natural for Haig to propose once again that the Canadians be used, together with three or four other divisions; it was General Sir Henry Rawlinson of Fourth Army who suggested that the proposed combination with the Australians should be revived.10 As we shall see, however, this agreement was merely the formalisation of an understanding which had been reached among Foch, Haig and Rawlinson two months before.
Why, then, were the Australians and Canadians selected to spearhead an attack in which a very large British commitment in tanks, cavalry and aircraft was also being made? The conventional Australian and Canadian answer to this question is to say that, by this stage in the war, these two corps had emerged as elite forces, the shock troops *par excellence*, among all the formations within the British Expeditionary Force. No one was more assiduous in putting forward this view than the Australian official historian, CEW Bean, and his no-holds-barred debate with the British official historian, Brigadier-General JE Edmonds, on this specific question, though many years after the event, is of great significance historically. The argument was precipitated by Bean's draft text for Volume VI of the Australian official history, which Edmonds was vetting and making editorial suggestions upon, as had been their joint practice since each embarked on these national projects immediately after the war.

Bean's first chapter in Volume VI is entitled 'The Diggers, 1918', and it contains a statement of his fundamental beliefs about the Australian soldier, implicit since his first book, but now explicit. The natural individualism of the Australian, his rejection of the deference towards the officer class which characterised the English and European soldier, the promotion practices of the corps in which merit, not social standing, was the critical criterion, the essentially democratic outlook common to the Corps, from the greenest private to general officers like Gellibrand, the absence of a social gulf between officers and men in the ranks: Bean believed all these things to be true of the Corps, and believed too that these values made the Australian Corps the finest formation on the Allied side of the Western Front. In making these assertions, he also argued that the colonial experience had had the same effect upon Canadians, New Zealanders and South Africans, and that the mix of freedom, egalitarianism, the physical challenge of the environment of new lands, and better educational systems for the bulk of the population, produced better soldiers than did the industrial towns and impoverished rural areas of Great Britain. He therefore, throughout his text, did not hesitate to criticise British generalship and the qualities of British soldiers, British units, and British formations. Edmonds, a military intellectual, a former senior member of Haig's headquarters throughout the war, and in many ways the epitome of the old world society Bean was attacking, was remarkably restrained—for him—in his response. 'We all feel', he wrote, 'that the historian of the AIF could afford to be a little more generous in his allusions to British units and formations. You are now aware perhaps that the home troops regarded the Australians and Canadians as the spoiled children of GHQ, who were given most rest, the pick of the fighting pitches and most of the praise—not that it was grudged'.

Bean's views were not products of the postwar era; in July 1918 he had had precisely the same argument with Major-General Dawny of GHQ because of his unwillingness to write a pamphlet 'intended to show the high admiration which Australian and British troops have of each other'. 'It is useless', Bean told his diary, 'to attempt to cram into Australian troops that the English divisions beside them are as good as they ... because they know they are not'. Bean in fact was faithfully representing the feelings in the Australian Corps, and its members did not hesitate to express their views. The Canadian Corps had, in general, a similar outlook, priding itself on being an elite formation, and many of its members frequently expressed their disdain for the lack of fighting qualities they believed characterised a number of British divisions in 1917 and 1918. In 1917 General Currie complained to his Army Commander, General Horne, that British troops 'won't fight'; Horne confided to Haig that in his opinion Currie and his staff had become 'swollen headed', and suggested that 'the Canadian Corps is perhaps rather apt to take all the credit it can for every thing, and to consider that the BEF consists of the Canadian Corps and some other troops'. Currie's diary for 11 April 1918 carries the entry: 'many British troops are not fighting well. This is what I expected ... would be the case'. His expectation was based upon the British changeover to the nine battalion division, which he steadfastly opposed as a grievous tactical and organisational error; despite pressure from both the War Office and from certain ambitious members of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada HQ, he refused to alter the Canadian Corps in a similar fashion. After the Canadians captured Passchendaele, a young British staff captain named Bernard Law Montgomery wrote home that 'the Canadians are a queer crowd; they seem to think they are the best troops in France ... I was disappointed in them. At plain straightforward fighting they are magnificent, but they are narrow-minded and lack soldierly instincts'. (He meant, among other things, that they were slovenly about saluting.)
During the German offensives of 1918, to help stem the German tide, Field Marshal Haig broke up the Canadian Corps and despatched its four divisions to threatened sectors of the front, as if the corps were like any other British Army formation. It was not, of course; General Currie was responsible not only to GHQ but to the Canadian Government, and the result was that within 24 hours three of his four divisions were back under his command. Currie did permit a dismounted cavalry brigade to join Gough's beleaguered Fifth Army, sent the Canadian Cavalry Brigade (the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the Strathconas and the Fort Garry Horse) to work with the 3rd British Cavalry Brigade in the defence of Amiens, and despatched the First Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade to Villers-Bretonneux, where they fought as part of 'Carey's Force' until relieved by the Australians. Meanwhile, Currie was holding ten miles of front with two divisions. It was, Currie wrote, 'altogether too much, but owing to lack of men in the British Army, it cannot be helped. I am told we have 430,000 men in Mesopotamia. What a splendid place for a reserve!'17 But the Germans, though they attacked to either side of the Canadian Corps, never challenged their stronghold in the Lens-Vimy area. General ELM Burns, then a Canadian staff captain, wrote that 'a joke was current among the Canadians who continued to hold the only part of the British line that had not been attacked and pierced by the Germans. The tale went that the real German strategy was to isolate us by the offensives to the north and south of our sector, and then to make a separate peace with Canada'.18

Though the Canadians may have joked, the British were furious. Haig contrasted Currie's behaviour unfavourably with that of the Australians:

He wishes to fight only as a 'Canadian Corps' and gets his Canadian representative in London to write and urge me to arrange it! As a result the Canadians are together holding a wide front near Arras, but they have not yet been in the battle! The Australians on the other hand have been used by Divisions and are now spread out from Albert to Amiens and one is in front of Hazebrouck.19

When Sir Edward Kemp, the Canadian Overseas Minister, reaffirmed Currie's position when visiting Haig at his headquarters, the Field Marshal observed in his diary that 'I could not help feeling that some people in Canada regard themselves rather as "allies" than fellow citizens in the Empire.'20 To Haig, the Canadian Corps was simply the part of the British Expeditionary Force that happened to speak with flat North American accents; to Canadians, however, it was the country's national army. Haig would have done well to observe the advice of Lord Derby, Secretary of State for War, who told him that 'we must look upon [the Canadians and the Australians] in the light in which they wish to be looked upon rather than the light in which we would wish to do so.'21

If, unlike the Canadians, the Australians behaved as good Imperialists during the Ludendorff offensives, in a number of other respects they were a thorn in the side of the British high command. Not only were they even more undisciplined than the Canadians in terms of spit-and-polish soldiering, but they also had the highest desertion and crime rates of any of the Imperial formations. In 1918 8.5 Australians per 1000 members of the AIF were in military prisons, while the British rate was 1.0 per 1000, and the Canadians, New Zealanders and South Africans were all grouped at 2.0 per thousand. Antipodeans also topped the VD stakes: whereas members of the Canadian Corps had a hospital admission rate of 8.5 per 1000 per month, the New Zealand rate was 15.27 and the Australian 15.35.22 So firmly was the Australian reputation fixed that after the war, when Canadian troops rioted in Britain because of delays in shipping them home, with considerable property damage and several deaths, the British press immediately identified the rioters as Australian.

The sense of superiority projected by Dominion forces, particularly in the last year of the war, was deeply resented in the British Army, and was to be long-lasting, as the Edmonds-Bean exchange shows. This clash of feeling was to colour the historiography of that period in a marked and sometimes unexpected way. Not only was the assertion of the primacy of the Australian or the Canadian Corps taken up by popular historians in both countries in the postwar era, but among British historians of the war there was a kind of embittered acceptance of Dominion claims, and as a result, for more than a generation, a notable lack of
significant writing by British military historians on the period of the Hundred Days, a gap rooted in wartime memory, and encapsulated by the Amiens experience. A classic example of the anguish experienced by many Britons at the time of the Amiens victory was put with great eloquence and bitterness by CE Montague, a leader writer and an critic for the Manchester Guardian, who as a captain in the Press Section of GHQ Intelligence, had a ringside view of the battle. He and some of his colleagues climbed the high ground on the left flank of the battle in the 111 British Corps sector north of the Somme, on that August morning, and trained their binoculars to trace the advance of the British troops. Because of the fog, nothing could be seen for the first hours of the operation; they heard the sounds of it, but these gave no clue to the course of the action.

One kept a tight hand on hope. One had hoped too often since Loos. And then the mist lifted. It rolled right up to the sky in one piece, like a theatre curtain, and revealed the vision so much longed for during four years. Beyond the river a miracle—the miracle—had begun. It was going on fast. Remember that all previous advances had gained us little more than freedom to skulk up communication trenches a mile or two further eastward, if that. But now! Across the level Santerre ... two endless columns of British guns, wagons, and troops were marching steadily east, unshelled, over the ground that the Germans had held since dawn. Nothing like it had ever been seen in the war. Above, on our cliff, we turned and stared at each other ... like Cortes' men agape on their peak.

Then came the moment of bitter realisation: III Corps had been checked; those distant columns were the Australians and Canadians forging ahead; and once more British arms were paying the price of the Somme and Third Ypres. Now Britain was fielding understrength divisions, composed of conscript battalions of 'colourless, stunted, half-toothless lads from hot, humid Lancashire mills, battalions of slow, staring faces', in shocking contrast to 'Dominion battalions of men startlingly taller, stronger, handsomer, prouder, firmer in nerve, better schooled, bolder ... men who had learned already to look at our men with the half-curious, half-pitying look of a higher, happier caste at a lower'.

Then, while you saw the triumphant Australians throw back a protective flank from the left of their newly won front to the English right, far in the rear, you knew bitterly what the Australians were saying once more; 'They've let us down again! ... The Canadians were all right, of course, but the Tommies! Well, we might have known'.

Recently, the Sandhurst historian Richard Holmes asked himself, in the introduction to his excellent guide to European battlefields, why it was that so little had been written by British historians about the battle of Amiens, which 'attracts far less comment than the Somme or Passchendaele, though its results were arguably greater than those of any other British offensive during the war'. He puts this down to 'a quirk of the British character'; the British prefer 'pompent defeats or hard-won victories ... to well-deserved but cheaply bought success'. Certainly Holmes is correct in drawing attention to the relative scarcity of British analyses of 1918 battles, particularly of the Hundred Days, but it is doubtful that an explanation for this imbalance lies solely in a British character quirk. Liddell Hart, it is true, ignored almost completely the 1918 war-ending campaigns, arguing that more was to be learned from defeats than from victory. But with the notable exception of the indomitable John Terraine, most British military historians have accepted the adverse criticism of British generalship, especially that of Sir Douglas Haig, and have not felt drawn to the study of battles which appear to have been dominated by arrogant Canadians and Australians.

In recent years there had been a reaction against this situation, particularly among a group of British historians centred around Brian Bond at the University of London. In a paper presented at the Australian War Memorial conference in 1993, Peter Simkins of the Imperial War Museum pointed out that the denigration of the supposed incompetence of the leadership and the rank and file of the BEF simply would not stand up to historical investigation. He was able to show, for example, that the operational records of a good many British divisions in 1918 merit consideration alongside the purportedly superior Dominion formations. Curiously, much of the scholarship which is leading to the reconstruction of the reputation of the BEF is the product of Australian and Canadian historians.
The most strident voice connected with the British revival of interest is that of Paddy Griffith, whose *Battle tactics of the Western Front: the British Army's art of attack 1916-1918* throws down the gauntlet to everyone from Liddell Hart to the 'Teutophiles' for whom every German soldier was a tactical genius. Griffith targets, among others, the 'colonial' historians who claim for the Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders elite status, and who contrast their innovative tactics with the amateurishness of the British officer corps.

Griffith, while conceding the quality of the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand formations, contends that a considerable number of Regular and New Army divisions should be ranked with them, in terms of their actual performance. His book, though often quixotic, is a useful challenge to some conventional 'colonial' attitudes. It gains particular weight from the material Griffith draws from Charles Carrington's able personal memoir, *Soldier from the wars returning*, especially Carrington's evidence showing tactical innovation in the BEF even before the Somme. Curiously, however, he omits Carrington's high testimony to Dominion troops at Amiens and in the Hundred Days: at the moment of Amiens, Carrington wrote:

> the ten divisions from the Dominions ... assumed a place which cannot be denied them as the best fighting troops in any army. For the last few weeks of the war the achievement of these divisions was greater in relation to their strength than that of any other formations and they must be given credit for it. In the autumn of 1918 these ten divisions constituted about one-fifth of the fighting strength of the BEF and suffered about one-third of the casualties.

In part, Griffith is still fighting the old battle waged by Bean and Edmonds. His object, it would appear, is to diminish the significance of the formations he chooses to call 'colonial' by exaggeration, misstatement, and the substitution of assertion for analysis. To this end, for example, he terms the French Army's check to Ludendorff on 18 July a 'grandiose success', gives 13 lines to Amiens without mentioning either the AIF or the CEF, grossly underestimates (at six miles) the total ground gained over the four-day battle, and characterises Amiens as 'a splendid little battle', thus resuscitating the hoary British imperial practice of patronising condescension.

In part, Griffith is still fighting the old battle waged by Bean and Edmonds. His object, it would appear, is to diminish the significance of the formations he chooses to call 'colonial' by exaggeration, misstatement, and the substitution of assertion for analysis. To this end, for example, he terms the French Army's check to Ludendorff on 18 July a 'grandiose success', gives 13 lines to Amiens without mentioning either the AIF or the CEF, grossly underestimates (at six miles) the total ground gained over the four-day battle, and characterises Amiens as 'a splendid little battle', thus resuscitating the hoary British imperial practice of patronising condescension. Blaxland managed the remarkable feat of ignoring CEW Bean, as well as every subsequent Australian authority. Griffith provides no explanation for his description of Currie as 'eccentric'—to his staff, Currie's sole eccentricity seems to have been his phenomenal command of sulphurous language. Nor, so far as I can discover, was there anything remotely 'controversial' about Monash. Despite all this, Griffith does admit the quality of the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian contingents, and rates the 'eccentric' Currie and 'controversial' Monash highly as commanders, but his fundamental contention is that a considerable number of Regular and New Army divisions should be ranked with the 'colonials' in terms of actual performance. Assertion, however, is not a substitute for the kind of systematic evaluation being undertaken by Peter Simkins and his colleagues, and so the Griffith book lacks the persuasiveness that further research might have given it.

National priorities and preoccupations have obscured the fact that Amiens was a joint operation, directed broadly by General Rawlinson and his Fourth Army staff, but essentially dependent upon the Australian and Canadian Corps as the key actors. It is remarkable that this aspect of the battle has been given so little attention. The most succinct statement defining the nature of the battle of Amiens was made by Sir John Monash, with characteristic insight and economy. 'The Canadians', he wrote in *Australian victories in France*, 'were to operate on my right, and farther south again the First French Army was to supply a Corps to form a defensive flank for the Canadians. The Third British Corps was to carry out for me a similar function on my northern flank. Thus four corps in line were to operate, the two central
Corps carrying out the main advance, while the two outer flank Corps would be employed further to broaden the base of the great salient which the operation would create’.

What Monash was describing was a joint operation, in which the offensive power rested with the Australian and Canadian Corps, and support functions with III British Corps and XXXI French Corps. That was the essence of the operation, although many additional elements were superimposed upon it.

In fact, however, the battle has never been treated as a joint operation, not even by historians in Australia or Canada. The reason can be deduced from the maps used to illustrate it. Monash's own account has an excellent map, which shows in great detail that segment of the advance which was accomplished by the Australians, and leaves the Canadians and the British to the left and right margins. Bean supplied no battle map, but only tiny illustrations of tactical situations encountered by elements of the Australian Corps. The latest Australian account was published in 1995, in David Horner's history of Australian artillery; his map of Amiens is simply a segment of the totality of Australian operations until their withdrawal in the first week of October. The Canadian record is even more lamentable. No official history of the Canadian Corps to match those of Britain and Australia was ever published; Colonel J Fortescue Duguid published a single volume in 1938, after 18 years' labour, which carried the story to 1915 and Second Ypres. An entire generation of Canadians, not to speak of the surviving members of the CEF, was deprived of an official account of Canada's role on the Western Front. Not until 1962 was a one-volume official history published, by Colonel GWL Nicholson, and though a sound account, balanced and judicious, and bearing no relation to Paddy Griffith's blistering depiction of colonial exaggerations, only a chapter could be devoted to the Battle of Amiens. The excellent map depicting the battle, like that of Monash, is a segment, but in this case of the Canadian slice of the battle, with the Australians and the French huddled along its edges.

In both Nicholson and in Prior and Wilson, there are good outline maps showing the Allied deployment north and south of the Somme, and the distribution of German forces along the whole length of the front. But even these black and white maps, though giving some indication of the scale of the operation, do not come to grips with an essential element of the battle zone, which, despite all the factors working in favour of the Allies, played an important part in the course of operations over the several days of the battle: that is, the highly varied terrain of a very large battlefield. It may be that the differentiated terrain has defeated the resources of skilled cartographers, and that there is a case, if not for Bean's microsketches, at least for a more intensive mapping approach. But to walk or drive this ground is to understand more clearly the problems encountered by each of the forces involved in carrying out their divergent tasks.

Facing III British Corps on the north side of the Somme were the truly formidable features of the Chipilly and Etinghem spurs, descending sharply to villages on the river's edge, but with sharp and rugged gradients, some of which could only be described as cliffs. III Corps had the misfortune to be the recipients of what turned out to be a spoiling attack on the eve of the battle, an attack which disrupted the deployment of a formation which had suffered heavy casualties during the German offensives, had been inadequately reinforced by scarcely trained conscripts, was not well led, had inadequate tank resources, and in any event was required to fight over ground not suitable for tank operations. Small wonder that on 8 August this corps failed to take Chipilly Spur, which meant in turn that the Australian left came under accurate German artillery fire from the environs of Chipilly village. This check necessitated a change in corps boundaries, so that the Australians had first to refuse their left flank, and then to take over responsibility for part of the north bank of the Somme in order to get on.

Facing the Australian and Canadian Corps was the inviting prospect of the Plaine de Santerre, a fertile, prosperous farming area that was one of the gems of Picardy. Here grew vast fields of wheat, barley and oats, interspersed with orchards and brick-walled villages, many of them today in a state of rural decay and others having grown into one another, but all reflecting what was then a high degree of agricultural prosperity. This was ideal ground, if it could be gained, for tank and infantry collaboration, but to do so meant overcoming not only German resistance, chiefly from well-hidden and dispersed machine gun emplacements, but
also real natural obstacles. The Australians had to overcome a series of ridges running down to the Somme and its marshy banks, much gentler than those on the north side (and of course dominated by them) but significant military obstacles nevertheless. Without the help of the guns and the tanks, it would have been difficult for the Corps to surmount this rolling ground and gain the Santerre plateau. Perhaps most challenging of all was the open plain before the village of Lihons, faced by the Corps on 9 and 10 August, with less artillery and tank support than its units had enjoyed on the 8th. The plain rises gently to Lihons village—one of the less prepossessing communities in the region—and was swept by German fire from its crest. It reminded me of the gradient at Vimy, and even more, of the killing ground at Malvern Hill in the 1862 Peninsular campaign of the American Civil War, when Confederate infantry faced massed Union artillery.

The operations narrative of the Australian Corps is characteristically restrained in describing the action around Lihons, but the importance of the terrain and the relative weakness of supporting arms is clear. The 1st Australian Division on the 9th had the help of the 2nd, 8th and 15th Tank Battalions, 'but with very reduced numbers owing to casualties suffered on the 8th August'. The narrative continues:

Considerable opposition was met with from the LIHONS ridge both from close range field guns and from machine guns. Direct fire was responsible for considerable casualties among the Tanks supporting the 1st Australian Division.

On 10 August, some help was received by the advance of the 2nd Canadian Division on the Australian right, as the narrative notes:

The advance towards LIHONS was continued by the 1st Australian Division on the 10th instant in conjunction with the advance of the Canadian Corps south of the railway. Very considerable opposition was encountered, and heavy fighting took place in the old entrenched country on the western slopes of the LIHONS Ridge. The 1st Australian Infantry Brigade was counter-attacked very heavily and the battle swayed to and fro during the day. As the result of the day's operations our line was advanced to the western outskirts of the village of LIHONS. LIHONS is sited on a low hill which rises in a glacis slope for a considerable distance on all sides. The country is particularly open and is admirably adapted for defence. The capture of this strong position under conditions of open warfare was not an ordinary feat of arms.35

Like the Australians, the Canadian Corps' objective was the attainment of the Santerre plateau, but the barrier facing them was quite different. Their sector was set off from the Australian sector by the Amiens-Nesle railway, a still-existing line along which both corps operated in collaborative fashion. The southern boundary of the Canadian zone was the Amiens-Roye highroad, dividing them from the French First Army. The main feature which inhibited the initial advance was the Luce River, running diagonally across the Canadian front. The Luce is not an impressive stream, at least to those accustomed to rivers like the Murray, the Ottawa, the Mackenzie or the St Lawrence, and at several points along its meandering course I was able to leap across it, no difficult feat even for a person who will not see 70 again. But the Luce is a real obstacle, for all of that. As the narrative of 3rd Canadian Division notes:

The ground to be taken ... consisted mainly of a plateau intersected by some deep ravines which ran down to the LUCE river. The LUCE River protected the plateau, and was an unfordable obstacle, very marshy, the marsh being as much as 200 yards in places. We had only a small bridgehead on the enemy's side of the river at HOURGES, and this was completely dominated from the enemy trenches on the forward slopes of the plateau ... The difficulty was to assemble troops and tanks in this small bridgehead and to deploy them outwards from that cramped assembly position.36
The 3rd Division found the going after zero hour ‘very wet and marshy’, but the mist cut down casualties, the German artillery response ‘rather wild and not extraordinarily heavy’ (though Domart Bridge got attention), and its units were soon across the Luce and pushing bewildered German troops out of heavy woods. Emerging from them, 3rd Division units attacked towards Hangard on the Luce; its bridge ‘was found to have an 18-foot gap in it and could not be mended before 11.00 am. The Engineers, however, concentrated on this bridge, and by that time both HANGARD and DEMUIN bridges were passable for field artillery’. Coping with the Luce bedevilled the Corps’ operations on 8 August, and continued into the 9th, since its valley was bordered by ridges and dense woods which provided cover for German artillery and machine guns. The Luce and its valley were challenges the Canadian engineers met efficiently, though their road building and bridge mending under fire brought severe casualties.37

Beyond the Amiens-Roye highway was the zone of the French First Army, its left formation being XXXI Corps. Its sector was dominated by rolling grassy uplands and long ridges, topped by thick woods running down close to Moreuil. Though the French were initially slow off the mark, collaboration between them and the neighbouring Canadian troops was frequent and effective, particularly because of the patrolling of the Canadian Independent Force, a large body of armoured cars and trucks carrying heavy machine guns and trench mortars, and commanded by Brigadier-General Raymond Brutinel. An illustration of how well-trained infantry tackled the difficult ground along the zone between the French and Canadian forces, and of the close collaboration between these forces, can be found in the narrative of the 43rd Battalion (Cameron Highlanders of Winnipeg, a unit of the 9th Brigade of 3rd Canadian Division). Their objective was Dodo Wood, close to the boundary with the French. One company of the 43rd attacked frontally, another swung across the Amiens-Roye highway and launched a flank attack, and the other two companies swung farther to the right ‘up a pronounced draw on the flank of the hill’ and attacked due south, breaking in ‘on the enemy’s right flank of his main defences and proceed to roll them up together with the strong points on the high ground’. Since the French were also anxious about this feature,

an international platoon was formed composed of a platoon of the 94th Regiment of [French] Infantry and No 5 platoon of the 43rd Canadian Bn. This international platoon swept up the hill on the right carrying the small wood in front of DODO WOOD, the Southern end of DODO WOOD and HOLLAN WOOD ... The other three companies were hampered in their operations by the thick mist but continued to press on and ultimately got to the top of the hill where they were reorganized and proceeded to the objectives allotted to each company, incidentally capturing intact a battery of four 5.9’s and a 4.1 gun. Touch was maintained with the French on the Right.38

Like the Australians on their left, who were held up by the failure at Chipilly Spur, the only setback the Canadians had on 8 August was on the right, when the unexpected presence of German reinforcements at Le Quesnel, beyond the range of Canadian artillery, and a delay in the advance of XXXI French Corps, meant that their objective on the first day was not fully attained. Le Quesnel fell by 6:45 am on 9 August to an enterprising group consisting of elements of the Canadian Independent Force including motorcyclists, the 75th (Mississauga) Battalion CEF of the 4th Canadian Division, and on the right troops identified by the CEF narrative as ‘the French’.39 In all the cases cited in the Canadian zone for 8 August, terrain was a major factor; at Le Quesnel there was an intelligence failure as well.

Not only does the cartography of Amiens fail to bring out the importance of terrain, and additionally, the mutually supporting operations of forces in parallel, but the textual treatment of the battle has failed to contribute to an understanding of the nature of the battle.40 Despite Monash’s magisterial statement, his account scarcely mentions the Canadians, once the battle was launched. Bean has a few fleeting references to the parallel advances of the Canadian Corps; for example, he mentions in his narrative of the advance of 8 August the Canadian capture of Marcelcave on the Australian right, with the 19th Battalion CEF emerging from that village as if it were on parade—a touch I much appreciated, since the 19th (Central
Ontario Regiment) was my father's battalion. But his concentration, as befits the official historian, is upon his own national army, not someone else's, and the chief non-Australian elements have to do with the consequences of the failure of British, III Corps on the Australian left, and the doings of some scattered American units working with the Australian Corps. Edmonds, in the British official history, presents very fairly a summary of Australian and Canadian operations, but in separate segments, essentially an abandonment of the operational unity of the battle. Nicholson, in the Canadian official history, justly states the nature of the operation, but his treatment is as one-sided as those of Bean and Monash, while the operations of the French XXXI Corps on the Canadian right remain, in his account, a virtual mystery. The French official account is notable only for its superb indifference to such tribal distinctions as 'Canadian' and 'Australian'.

To state the obvious, the success of the operation depended upon two related considerations: first, the mutual support provided each other by the two attacking corps, and second, the effective prosecution of limited roles by the French and British corps to the right and left of the central operation. To what extent, then, was Amiens not only joint but collaborative? What was the role of Haig, and of Rawlinson, in ensuring, so far as such things can be ensured in war, that the two key players were appropriately synchronised? What steps did the two corps commanders take to bring the operations of their forces into harmony? The answers to most of these questions, and to others to which they give rise, are not, on the whole, to be found in the literature. Monash himself, for example, omits in his account any mention of pre-battle joint planning or collaboration; he merely says that 'At no time did any question of the security of my right flank furnish me with any cause for anxiety. The prowess of the Canadian Corps was well known to all Australians, and I knew that, to use his own expressive vernacular, it was General Currie's invariable habit to "deliver the goods". This tells us less than nothing. In fact, the answers to such questions can only be determined by research in the operational records of divisions, corps and armies, and my own research is by no means complete. My sense of the scenario, which follows, is in part conjectural.

The impressive thing about Amiens is how rapidly it was put together. The initiative lay with Foch and Haig, and they determined the composition of the forces to be employed. From the beginning, the decision to use the Canadians and to unite the Australian Corps by bringing the First Division down from Flanders dictated not only an enormous transport problem, but the imposition of the tightest security so that tactical and strategic surprise could be obtained. It is a testimony to the high competence of the formations and staffs concerned that these crucial operations were carried out with great efficiency. Amiens was in fact one of the most successful security operations carried out by the Allies during the whole of the war on the Western Front, and on a scale without precedent. Intelligence reports, and interrogation of German prisoners, indicate that the operation was a total surprise to the German army, whether at the command level or to front line troops. The measures of deception to hide the movement of the huge Canadian Corps from the Lens-Vimy front to Amiens, or the use of heavy bombers to drown the engine noise of 530 tanks moving into position, are well known. What is harder to establish is the degree to which German intelligence was taken in.

There are two pieces of evidence pointing to the complete success of the security operation, one amusing, and one perhaps decisive. The first is that the redoubtable Bean, a first-class sleuth in ferreting out prospective operations, was completely taken in. In his diary, he notes that on 28 July, outside Australian Corps headquarters, he was introduced to two Canadian general officers by Brigadier-General Thomas Blamey, Monash's chief of staff. He concluded, from a brief conversation, that one of them was Blamey's Canadian opposite number, namely, Brigadier General N (Jumbo) Webber, Currie's chief of staff. From further remarks, he gathered that the other general officer was the CRA of the Canadian Corps, in other words, Major-General EWB 'Dinky' Morrison. 'And if that is so, it looks very much as if they were down here to inspect the line before taking over'; that is, he had concluded that the Australians were about to be relieved by the Canadians, which in fact was one of the cover stories being assiduously circulated within Fourth Army. He therefore departed quite happily to visit the First Division AIF in Flanders, only to find them gone, and returned to the Amiens sector a few days later to discover that both the Canadians and the First Australian Division had preceded him.
The other piece of evidence is more conclusive: the situation map for the front of the German Army Group commanded by Crown Prince Rupprecht (Heeresgruppe Kronprinz Rupprecht) for 8 August at 8 am shows the four Canadian divisions clustered to the west of Arras in the Vimy-Lens area; that is, in the strong defensive position they had occupied since returning from Passchendaele in November 1917. This map, a copy of which is in the Bean Papers at the Australian War Memorial, would appear to indicate that the security operation had been successful in deceiving German intelligence. Total surprise was a major element in the Amiens victory.

The battle plan itself originated with the staff of Fourth Army, Rawlinson having been directed by Haig on 23 May to prepare for an offensive operation, in consultation with General Debeney, commander of French First Army. In a visit to Australian Headquarters in mid-May, Haig had already asked General Birdwood to prepare, in secret, plans for such an operation. Thus, as Rawlinson's diary makes clear, the initial planning was done by the Australian Corps, and specifically by General Brudenell White, General Birdwood's chief of staff. On 24 May Rawlinson recorded the following:

I visited the [Australian] Corps and discussed with Birdie and White the plans for the Somme offensive which Foch is very keen about. Birdie is not much good at making plans but White is excellent and I have told him to write a paper on the basis of employing 5 or 6 Divns ... I understand I am to have Currie and three Canadian Divns for the attack unless they are used up in the line somewhere before it comes off. With both the Canadians and Australians we ought to be able to make a good show of it.

The details were worked out in a series of conferences which involved Haig, Rawlinson and the relevant corps commanders in late July and the first couple of days of August. These officers included not only Monash and Currie, but the commanders of the British tank and cavalry corps and General Salmond of the Royal Air Force, plus members of their staffs.

From Fourth Army, therefore, came the decisions with respect to the frontage allotted to each of the formations involved, the distribution and handling of the tank forces, the timing of possible cavalry operations, the layout of tank and cavalry tracks, and the objectives for the first and ensuing days, the latter consideration dictating the mode of 'leapfrogging' divisions or brigades, so that the momentum of attack could be maintained with fresh troops. Once decisions on these questions had been made, and corps commanders were aware of their objectives, detailed tactical planning was left by Haig and Rawlinson to each corps to work out in conjunction with all their internal hierarchies. On the corps level, and down through divisions to brigades and battalions, this meant the development of the artillery fire plan, its relationship to established objectives, its coordination with the movement of the infantry and tanks, and cavalry as well, and the mode of communication between the RAF and ground forces. Since the plan assumed an advance which would run beyond the fire cover of the artillery, provision had to be made for the forward movement not only of field artillery but of the heavy artillery as well. Additionally, corps and divisional staffs had to prepare traffic priorities, rear area policing, provision of transport services, signals and communications planning, especially the burying of cable so that contact could be maintained with the moving edge of battle, provision for medical and sanitary services, the laying on of engineering services for road building and repair, bridging, the piping of potable water, and thousands of further details. The levels of planning and operational complexity at Amiens were far removed from the comparatively simple and unsophisticated methods of 1915-16; what is instructive, too, is the degree to which both Haig and Rawlinson could make assumptions about the procedures to be carried out at the corps, division, brigade and battalion level.

Does this mean that the Australian and Canadian Corps were as alike as peas in a pod? Far from it. As both Prior and Wilson, in Command on the Western Front, and Bill Rawling in Surviving Trench Warfare point out, there had been a steady improvement throughout the British Army both in the general effectiveness of its artillery and in the armament and tactics of its infantry since 1916. Recognition of the vital role of artillery in the infantry battle, the development of new techniques for locating and registering enemy batteries (flash spotting, sound ranging, aerial observation and photography), improvements in gun laying by adjusting
for atmospheric conditions, precise survey of battery locations and hostile targets, so that firing by the map became much more accurate—these and other innovations had spread throughout the BEF through a flow of pamphlets, instructions and intelligence information. 48

Standardisation of gunnery practice throughout the BEF had been, at least to a degree, paralleled by increasing sophistication of infantry tactics and infantry armament. In an important study, Bill Rawling traces this development in the Canadian Corps, but is at pains to emphasise the extent to which changes in Canadian weapons and tactics derived in part from information circulated by Haig's headquarters and by the instructional and research networks of the British Army. This finding meshes with those of British historians like Simkins and Griffith; at the same time, however, Rawling demonstrates convincingly how much of Canadian tactical evolution arose from the battle experience of the troops themselves, and the transmission of this hard-won knowledge throughout the Corps structure. As was the case with the Australian Corps, and indeed for most formations throughout the British Army, the key tactical unit evolved over time from the battalion to the company, then to the platoon, and finally to the section, as infantrymen acquired enhanced firepower and mobility through the acquisition of light machine guns, hand grenades, portable mortars to add to the basic rifle component, and learned not only to work effectively with artillery, but then with tanks and aircraft. The end result was that infantry recovered the power of manoeuvre, just as German infantry did during the great offensives of 1918, and just as important, re-established the traditional infantry role of seizing and holding ground and consolidating gains. 49

The best short account of the battle itself is the chapter by Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson in Command on the Western Front. For them, as for Bean, the Australian victory at Hamel on 4 July 1918 was a test run on a smaller scale for the Amiens operation, since both a large artillery component and more than 50 tanks were employed together with Australian infantry. 50 Amiens was Hamel writ large. It was the biggest tank operation of the war, more than 500 being employed, not only to spearhead the advancing infantry and dispose of the well-hidden and dispersed German machine-gun positions, but also to carry ammunition supplies, water, and even infantry. More than 2000 guns were assembled, including more than 600 pieces of heavy artillery. There was no preliminary bombardment, but after the first crashing salvo a creeping barrage provided a curtain of fire ahead of advancing tanks and infantry. Counter-battery fire was so extraordinarily effective that there was almost no German artillery response to the attack. In addition to the artillery, tanks and infantry were also supported by more than 2000 RAF and French aircraft, giving absolute air command to the Allies. Squadrons carried out tactical bombing, low level strafing of German troops, machine gun nests and anti-tank batteries, engaged in ammunition drops, and flew a large number of sorties to bomb bridges over the Somme in order to seal off the battle zone from German reinforcements. 51

Amiens, with its sophisticated weaponry and tactics, its successful combination of all available arms, its instant conversion to open and mobile warfare, and its relatively low casualties compared to those suffered in trench warfare, has a distinctly modern character, and was in fact much studied between the wars by German, French and British soldiers alike. Towards the conclusion of their analysis of the first day's action at Amiens, Prior and Wilson—whose findings I have to a great extent followed—make an important statement about the troops of the two corps carrying the burden of the attack:

this success was evidence of the quality of the infantry carrying out the attack. The Australian and Canadian divisions were relatively fresh and made up in the main of battle-hardened veterans. There was no lack of determination on their part to get to grips with the enemy. Yet too much should not be made of this aspect. At the battle of the Somme in 1916 the attacking infantry were not wanting in courage or enthusiasm. It availed them little as long as they lacked weapons and tactics appropriate to deal with their opponents. At Amiens in 1918 the weapons and a serviceable plan, were to hand. Certainly the Australians and Canadians employed both skilfully. But without these implements, and in the absence of the technical expertise of the artillerymen, progress, as in 1916, would have been meagre and would have been dearly bought. 52
This summation puts the battle, and the role of the infantry, into proper proportion, and at the same time offers some propitiation to those who would argue that a number of British divisions would have done quite as well. But is it quite the whole story? What cannot be emphasised too strongly, is that both the Australian and Canadian Corps were national armies, with histories of combat distinction and much pride in their accomplishments. Moreover, they were corps—formed bodies of divisions, units and staffs who had served together and knew each other well, the Canadians even more than the Australians. Each had developed its own character and approach to battle; each had, in other words, its own battle culture, and though they shared with many British formations the same arms and the same basic tactics, each was distinctive. The mark of the Australian Corps was tactical brilliance and high administrative efficiency; that of the Canadian Corps was a disciplined thoroughness, a reliance on mass and tactical drive, and overwhelming firepower. Though sharing a common colonial heritage, the histories of their countries were quite different, and each, therefore, was an authentic projection of its own society’s outlook and values.

There is one aspect of the Canadian Corps which virtually every commentator has missed, including, surprisingly enough, Prior and Wilson. It is the immense size of the organisation, and in a sense this is the ‘untold story’ of Amiens. Facing each other on the morning of 8 August, the Germans of Second and Eighteenth Army, and the forces of Fourth British Army, each comprised 11 divisions. There were in addition at least five French divisions on the Allied right. The Allies therefore enjoyed a substantial numerical superiority, which increases further when actual divisional strengths are examined. Prior and Wilson use figures which presumably represent rifle strength; that is, infantry per division, and estimate German divisions at no more than 4000 rifles, giving a total of about 37,000 German troops in the battle zone. Fourth Army divisions are calculated at 7000 (French divisions were certainly smaller, and likely comparable to the Germans), giving a total infantry strength of about 75,000. Underlying this figure must be the assumption that the infantry component of the four Canadian divisions was roughly at the same level as that calculated for the rest of Fourth Army, but that was emphatically not the case. Even if one accepts Bean's figure of 12,000 rifles to a Canadian division, that gives a total of 48,000 infantry for the Corps, and even that figure is an underestimate. On 3 August 1918 the effective strength of the Canadian Corps, by division, was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Other Ranks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>19,811</td>
<td>20,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>924</td>
<td>19,909</td>
<td>20,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>20,013</td>
<td>20,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>19,618</td>
<td>20,518</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same source provides the exact total of the infantry component of the Corps on 3 August, namely 2542 officers and 57,797 other ranks, or a total of 60,339. If it is calculated that two per cent of Canadian infantry were left out of battle on 8 August (practice in the BEF at the time was to leave out of battle a 'nucleus' of from ten to 20 percent of effectives) that would still give a minimum total of 48,000 committed to the attack. As Desmond Morton has remarked: 'Only the American Expeditionary Force had more abundant manpower by war-weary 1918'. An American division of this period averaged a total strength of just over 21,000, slightly larger than the Canadian average. Nor was this owing to conscription. Though the Military Service Act had passed the Canadian Parliament at the end of 1917, soldiers called up under its provisions were still in the training stream, and so far as I know, there were no Canadian conscripts at Amiens.

What factors account for the abundance of manpower in the Canadian Corps? Canadian casualties in 1917 had been heavy, at Vimy, Lens (Hill 70) and Passchendaele, but the Corps, unlike the Australians, had had what amounted to a long vacation from heavy fighting in 1918, while the Australians had been almost constantly in action from their first operations at Villers-Bretonneux at the beginning of the German offensives and then on through the
spring and summer. And 'peaceful penetration' was not a bloodless exercise. It is clear that the Australian Corps was facing a manpower problem in the summer of 1918, one that was to cause its withdrawal from operations during the Hundred Days. So far as the bulk of the BEF was concerned, the drain of Third Ypres had been very heavy, and even before the immense casualties British divisions experienced during the German offensives of 1918, the BEF had been forced to change from the 12-battalion division to a nine-battalion division. Thus III Corps, on the left at Amiens, had borne heavy casualties during 1918, and its divisions, especially the 18th and 12th Divisions, had been reinforced by incompletely trained conscripts.

The second factor explaining the strength of the Canadian Corps was its reorganisation by General Currie during the spring of 1918. The story is a complex one, but the basic facts are simple. Currie refused to have anything to do with a nine-battalion division, though urged by the War Office, the CIGS and Canadian Overseas Headquarters in London to do so. The scheme proposed was to bring over the Fifth Canadian Division, long held in Britain by political considerations, and to create a Sixth Division by the reduction to nine battalions. Currie, convinced that the 12-battalion division had far more offensive power than the smaller formation, and hostile to the creation of a second Corps Headquarters as a form of overhead the Canadians did not need, persuaded the Overseas Minister to support him. Instead, therefore, he broke up the Fifth Division, added one hundred trained infantrymen from it to each of the battalions of the four divisions of the Corps, established a strong reinforcement pool at the depot in France, and proceeded to create a new signals organization, a new (and armed) engineer organization which relieved Canadian infantry from field labour, and the already mentioned Canadian Independent Force. All these new formations were organised as corps troops, directly under his hand, which meant that on 3 August Canadian corps troops consisted of 1263 officers and 30,238 other ranks. All told, it is likely that total Canadian numbers at Amiens were close to 100,000.57

In any event, it was the Australian and Canadian Corps who fought the main battle, not the hypothetical divisions of Griffith or the undoubtedly competent British divisions identified by Peter Simkins and his colleagues. For a few days in August, 80 years ago, they shared the world stage. Robert Asprey, in an American assessment of their accomplishment, tempers his praise; the battle, he writes, had 'a satisfactory result, but it would not have rated more than a page or two in an official history of the war, except for one thing: the effect it exercised on the German high command'.58 Precisely. They had struck a crippling blow at the will of the enemy, surely the chief object of strategy.59
Endnotes


2. General JE Edmonds, *Military operations. France and Belgium 1918*. Vol IV (London: HMSO, 1947), 38 Ludendorff’s circular to his divisional commanders is also quoted in Robert B Asprey, *The German High Command at War: Hindenburg and Ludendorff and the First World War* (London: Warner Books, 1994), 445. Asprey includes the sentence ‘we should be pleased if the enemy does attack, since he will expend his strength all the quicker by doing so’.

3. At Fourth Army Headquarters, Rawlinson’s chief of staff observed, everyone was ‘so busy congratulating everyone else on their share of the victory that valuable time was lost’. General AA Montgomery, quoted in P A Pedersen, *Monash as military commander* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), 251.


5. Ibid, 684.


8. Bean Papers, 3DRL 7953 Series 4: Item 34, Harington to Edmonds, 15 December 1932, AWM.

9. Ibid.

10. The Haig correspondence of April-May 1918 in WO 158/28, PRO.

11. CEW Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive, 1918* (Vol VI of *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*) (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1942), 463-5.

12. It is remarkable how closely Bean’s contentions echo the arguments of nineteenth century American popular historians, who contrasted the superiority of the free, democratic, well-fed and well-schooled American citizen-soldier with the oppressed soldiery of Britain’s class society during the War of 1812. See ‘The War of 1812 in popular memory’, in SF Wise, *God’s peculiar peoples: essays in nineteen century Canadian political culture* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994).

13. Bean Papers, 3DRL 7953, Series 4 I, Edmonds to Bean, 2 September 1918; Bean to Edmonds, 11 October 1932; Edmonds to Bean, 14 November 1932, AWM.

14. 3DRL 606 Bean Papers, Diary 116, entries for 14 July, 19 July, pp 26-27, AWM.


19. Haig Diary, 18 April 1918, PRO.

20. Ibid, 5 May 1918.


22. Christopher Pugsley, *On the fringe of hell: New Zealanders and military discipline in the First World War* (London: Auckland and Sydney; Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 7, 65-6, 132. On the subject of Australian discipline, Pugsley quotes from Beans diary: ‘The British officer does not generally like us. The Australian does not salute him as a general rule, also he is jealous of the praise we get as soldiers: and he probably quite honestly fails to understand our discipline’ (p 65). Haig’s diary has a number of entries having to do with the indiscipline of Australians. For example, in the entry for 3 March 1918, he notes that 9 Australians per 1000 were jailed, as compared with 1.6 Canadians and New Zealanders and the Irish, ‘That is’, he wrote, ‘nearly one Australian in every hundred men is in prison. This is greatly due to the fact that Australia refuses to allow Capital punishment to be awarded to any Australian’; Haig Diary, XXVI: 7, PRO.


24. Ibid, 116, 128. Curiously, Montague, an Irishman, had a view of English society similar to that of CEW Bean. His biographer, a close friend, described him as ‘at heart something of a foreigner alien to our great caste system and to our public schools ... a gentleman, democratic by instinct, caring for the man in the street and the Tommy in the trenches and predisposed against any kind of mandarin, political, military or educational’. Perhaps he regarded criticism of the English as an Irish privilege not to be extended to colonials. Another Irishman, George Bernard Shaw, said of him that ‘He had something of the Tolstoyan bitterness and disillusion that war produces at close quarters, less by its horrors,
perhaps, than by its wastes and futilities'. See Oliver Alton, CE Montague: a memoir (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), 5-6, 164.


30. Griffith, Battle tactics of the Western Front, 8.

31. CE Carrington, Soldier from the war return ing (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 233. Carrington added the New Zealand Division to the five Australian and four Canadian divisions.


34. For the battle maps, see Monash, Australian victories, and David Horner, The gunners: a history of Australian artillery (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 172; Nicholson, CEF, map facing p 418.

35. 3DRL 2316, Report on Operations of Australian Corps, Phase "B", 9-15 August 1918, Australian Corps HQ, 26 October 1918, AWM.

36. RG 9, v 4148, 3rd Canadian Division Narrative of Operations 8-16 August 1918, NAC.

37. 3DRL 2316, Report on Operations of Australian Corps, Phase "B", 9-15 August 1918, Australian Corps HQ, 26 October 1918, AWM.

38. RG 9, v 4189, 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade Operation Reports, 8-17 August 1918, NAC.

39. Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front, 324; RG 9, v 3942, Canadian Independent Force. Summary of Operations, 8-10 August 1918, 5-6, NAC.

40. The exception is Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front, chapters 26-8, not because it treats the bank as a joint operation, but because its concentration upon weapons systems contributes to a unified overview.

41. See, for example, French First Army's report on the Amiens operation, entitled 'Bataille de Mondidier-Roye, 4 au 29 août', in AWM 26 476/1. In this summary, the Canadians with whom XXXI French Corps cooperated so effectively are identified merely as 'l'armée anglaise'.

42. Monash, Australian victories, 75.

43. Bean Papers, 3 DRL 606, Item 116 Diary 28 July 1918, 38, AWM; RG 9, v 3854. First Army to Canadian Corps, 25 July 1918, NAC, provides examples of other cover stories being circulated to explain the Canadian presence.

44. The situation map is to be found with the Herbertson material at the Australian War Memorial. Herbertson, a British officer, had served as an intelligence officer with the Australian Corps, where he and Bean became friends. While Herbertson was serving with the British Army of the Rhine after the war, he was hired by Bean to obtain from the Reichsarchiv in Potsdam materials bearing on Australian operations.

45. Bean, The Alf in France during the Allied Offensive 1918, 463-5.

46. Rawlinson Diary, 24 May 1918, Archives of Churchill College, Cambridge.

47. The planning correspondence is in PRO WO 95/436, and opens with Haig's direction to Rawlinson of 23 May to 'draw up a plan and make all the necessary preparations, in consultation with General Debeney, for a combined attack on the enemy south of the River SOMME'. Rawlinson's outline plan for operations.


49. Rawling, Surviving trench warfare, passim.

50. Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front, 296.

52. Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 323.

53. Cyril Falls, in *The Great War* (New York: Capricorn, 1961), 372-3, compared what I have termed the 'battle culture' of the two Dominion corps, terming the Canadians 'this magnificent body of troops', and the Australians 'equally good troops of a rather different pattern, perhaps even better tactically but at lower levels apt to be less careful of detail'. Both Desmond Morton, in 'The Canadian military experience in the First World War' in Adams (ed), *The Great War*, and Dean Oliver, *The Canadians at Passchendaele*, in Peter H Liddle (ed), *Passchendaele in perspective: the Third Battle of Ypres* (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), are valuable attempts to define the character of the Corps. At Amiens, the overwhelming firepower of the Corps derived in part from its deployment (in addition to the field and heavy artillery of each of its four divisions) of the heavy and field artillery of the Fifth Canadian Division, which had been left intact after the infantry units had been broken up.


55. RG 9, III C 3, v3757 (Canadian Record Office), Return of effective strength by branch of service, 3 August 1918, NAC.


57. The best outline of the Currie policy and is to be found in Hyatt, *Currie*, 88-103. Corps Troops statistics are in RG reorganisation 9, v3757, Return of Effective Strength 3 August 1918, NAC.

58. Asprey, *The German High Command at war*, 448.

59. Professor Prior, in his conference paper, remarked that Ludendorff's Black Day of the German Army was really only 'greyish', and that he overemphasised the defeat. What matters, however, is the moral effect of that defeat upon General Ludendorff, and his subsequent behaviour, not the diagnosis at 80 years remove of what he ought to have thought.
There has been a wide variety of explanations put forward to explain why the Western Allies defeated Imperial Germany in 1918. Some are in the realms of fantasy—for example the view propagated by the German Army and the Nazi Party that the soldiers were stabbed in the back by a combination of Jews and communists on the home front. Others are partial. The Royal Navy believed that it was the blockade which had brought Germany down. So did military thinkers such as Liddell Hart, whose main concern in the inter-war years was to prevent Britain from ever again committing a mass army to Europe. On the other hand the Americans considered that it was their arrival in 1917 which had turned the tables. Australians and Canadians have tended to point to the respective contributions of their Army Corps as the vital factor.\(^1\) Only New Zealand, it seems, has refrained from claiming that their infantry division won the war single-handed.

Many of these explanations are worthy of detailed investigation, but in this essay we wish to highlight two factors which have not received their due as war winners. The first is the obtuseness of the German High Command. The second is the innovative nature of British tactics on the Western Front in the latter half of 1918. To some, these factors might elicit some surprise. The general tendency in the literature has certainly been to portray the Germans as ruthlessly efficient militarists and the British as a byword for incompetence, but no great credence should be placed in these stereotypes.

First let us examine the actions of the German High Command in 1918. Two aspects of their performance are worthy of investigation—the offensives on the Western Front, and their various activities in the East.

Ludendorff's March offensive was launched on 21 March against the British on a 50-mile front between Arras and St Quentin. It was followed by a farther attack on the British in Flanders on 9 April and their offensives against the French in the Champagne and Chemin des Dames between May and June.\(^2\) Prodigious amounts of territory were gained—unprecedented in Western Front experience. Consequently Ludendorff's efforts have received a good press. But the crucial question seems to be: why, after achieving such startling initial gains, did all his offensives fail to achieve decisive success? To answer this question we must look in more detail at the methods employed by Ludendorff that have so impressed generations of military historians.

In short Ludendorff's tactics can be reduced to two elements—concentration of force and innovative infantry tactics. In all his offensives he used some troops brought back from the East to supplement his Western forces in order to achieve a superiority over the defenders of about 2 to 1. More importantly, by concentrating as much as three-quarters of all German heavy guns on the Western Front against an area of attack, he achieved an artillery superiority of 3, 4 or 5 to 1. Then to maximise the impact of his infantry, Ludendorff developed new small-group tactics.

To implement these tactics he divided his divisions into shock troops, attack troops, and follow-up formations. The most skilled were concentrated into spearhead units called stormtroops. They were not to advance in coherent linear formations as of old, but were to penetrate deep into the British defences wherever opportunity beckoned, by-passing centres of resistance without waiting for the protection of forces on their flanks. The areas thus by-passed would then be taken out by the follow-up units.\(^3\)

The huge number of guns available to Ludendorff allowed for a short bombardment of incredible ferocity, which it was hoped would also provide a degree of surprise to the battle. Rear areas, headquarters, and the enemy artillery would first be deluged with shells in an attempt to disrupt the command and communication system and to eliminate the main weapon of response. Then the guns would be turned on the zone defences of the defenders in an attempt to stun them just in advance of the main infantry assault.
Historians ever since have been mightily impressed with these tactics. In some respects they were certainly novel. If the main defences could be rapidly breached by this combination of overwhelming firepower and storm troopers, then the German infantry could reach open country and advance rapidly. There seems little doubt that a closer scrutiny reveals that Ludendorff’s methods were reckless and desperately old-fashioned. To achieve the distant objective Ludendorff was specifying that there could be no question of full artillery participation beyond the opening stage. After the big guns had facilitated the initial rupture, they would soon be left well in the rear. Certainly Ludendorff enjoined his battery commanders to move their guns forward as swiftly as was practicable. But all experience had confirmed that this would not be very swift. And anyway, once the guns did get forward they would need time to establish the whereabouts of their own forces and of the targets they were required to engage.

All this meant that in the aftermath of initial success, the stormtroopers would have to exploit success with their own resources. It might be thought that the day had long since departed when a commander on the Western Front would seek to achieve his purposes largely by the actions of his infantry. Yet that, after the opening penetration, was what Ludendorff was contemplating. Unless his opponents were so unhinged by initial reverses as to prove incapable of a coherent response, Ludendorff would soon be offering up his last great reserve of manpower to heavy slaughter.

This scenario is more or less what came to pass. On successive occasions Ludendorff’s artillery blasted a hole in the British or French line and employing the stormtrooper tactics broke out into open country, occasionally securing advances of 40 or 50 miles. All this confirmed the value of the stormtroop method in the opening phase of battle. But soon the crucial shortcomings in the method revealed themselves. The German attackers would quickly approach exhaustion. Casualties, especially in the elite stormtroop formations, had been heavy. The great mass of the artillery was still struggling to get forward. Increasingly, therefore, the infantry had only their light weapons to rely upon for fire support. On the other side of the line, the defenders would rush reserves and guns forward by rail. These came from the unattacked portion of the front—be it British or French or even in one instance from Britain itself.4

The inevitable consequence was that successive German on-rushes were successfully brought to a halt. There should be no surprise at this. Exhausted infantry supported only by the weapons they could carry had no chance of prevailing against fresh troops supported by an array of artillery and other weapons. The only surprise is that historians—determined, as they seem to be, to give the main role in modern mechanised conventional war to the infantry—have failed to notice the fatal flaw at the heart of Ludendorff’s method.

This brings us to the second colossal blunder made by the German High Command in 1918—their activities in the East. The German endeavours in the West between March and June 1918 might be taken as an indication that at least the German High Command was single-minded in devoting all its attention and resources to that theatre. Yet this was not the case. During 1918 about one million men (50 divisions) were stationed on the Eastern Front. And for much of this time they were not just holding the line against the Bolsheviks, they were actually undertaking offensive operations.

The need to keep so many troops in the east arose out of an aspect of the German High Command that has largely escaped attention. Ludendorff and his acolytes, it should be noted, were not just military functionaries. They were also determining the foreign policy of their country. That policy was one of aggressive expansionism. So when the Bolsheviks entered into negotiations with the German military, they found themselves confronted with draconian demands.

When the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was finally signed by the Bolsheviks on 3 March 1918 its main provisions included the severing of Finland, the Ukraine, Lithuania, Courland, Livonia and Poland from Russia and the placing of these new states under German tutelage. At a stroke Russia lost 90 per cent of its coal reserves, 50 per cent of its industry, and 30 per cent of its population.5
The military implications of all this needs to be emphasised. To enforce his programme of aggrandisement against Russia, Ludendorff had to station 50 divisions permanently on the Eastern Front in 1918. Thus one million men were tied to a region where their foes had been thoroughly defeated and from which no military threat now emanated. To enforce this force all 50 German divisions at present in the East would be retained there. And they were not to remain idle. Soon the collapse of puppet regimes in the various states set up under this Treaty saw the Germans advancing deep into the Ukraine and the Crimea. In July the objectives were extended to include the Baku oilfields in the Caucasus.

On 18 August (10 days after Ludendorff had stated that the German army had suffered its blackest day in the west) he ordered that the small British force which had subsequently occupied Baku be expelled. On 10 September, as the Allies were assembling for the assault on the Hindenburg Line, this proposed action at Baku was accomplished by German troops. In late September Ludendorff gathered a team of specialists to proceed to Baku to get the oil flowing. Two days later he announced to the Kaiser that the war was lost.

And this was at a time when the decisive battles of the war were being fought in the west. Had a less predatory eastern policy been adopted, it has been estimated that the Germans could have moved at least 500,000 troops from Russia to the Western Front. Yet, so implacable was Ludendorff's determination to achieve expansion in the east that he carried through his policy to the detriment of the war in the west. The folly of allowing the military to dominate all aspects of policy in Germany could not be better illustrated.

As it happened, just three weeks after Ludendorff's last great offensive ground to a halt in the west, the British Fourth Army spearheaded by Canadian and Australian troops dealt the Germans a savage blow at the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918. The Fourth Army advanced eight miles on a 15,000 yard front, captured 400 guns and inflicted 27,000 casualties. The losses were comparatively light.

Did the key to this success lie in the dash shown by the Colonial infantry? No it did not. On the Somme two years before Australian and Canadian soldiers had fought with considerable élan. In terms of major advances, they had achieved precisely nothing at a very high cost indeed. On that dismal battlefield, support in the form of accurate artillery protection had not been developed. By 1918 it had. By then the men who could ensure that infantry could live on the battlefield were far removed from the front line. They were to be found back at Corps or Army headquarters hunched over trigonometrical and meteorological tables. These were the men who could ensure that the new location devices developed to find the enemy guns—known as sound ranging—could pinpoint them before zero hour without prior attempts to find the range.

In that preliminary ranging had almost always given away the intention to attack, these developments in the employment of artillery helped to restore surprise to the battlefield. So when the bombardment came down on the morning of 8 August, most German guns were blanketed or destroyed. At one stroke, the main impediment to the infantry and to the progress of the tanks was eliminated.

The other great opponent of the infantry, the machine gun, was dealt with by further elements of the weapon-system. The creeping barrage of high explosive shells kept down the heads of the machine gunners and other defenders until they could be set upon by the troops advancing just behind the barrage. Those missed by the barrage were eliminated by outflanking movements of troops equipped with mortars, Lewis guns, and rifle-grenades. Finally, the tanks—400 of the more reliable Mark V variety—unimpeded by hostile artillery, helped keep casualties down by themselves dealing with pockets of resistance and by causing, in some instances, enemy troops to flee the battlefield.

It is important to note the wide-spread applicability of this weapons system. Once the British, by employing a combination of big guns, mortars, machine guns, tanks and aircraft, had devised a method of dominating German artillery and trench defences, they were in a position to get their troops forward at least as far as the distance a high explosive shell could travel.
Moreover, it was not important in these circumstances whether enemy morale was secure or waning. At Amiens, German troops of high morale were overrun just as thoroughly as those whose devotion to combat was less than robust.

But a major test of the new methods of conducting an offensive remained. After all, the German defences at Amiens—an area but recently overrun and to which their High Command had since paid little attention—were rudimentary. But well behind the front stood the altogether more formidable Hindenburg Line, which in the aftermath of the Battle of the Somme in 1916 the German command had developed into a sophisticated defensive system. Would the British Army's method of attack also prove capable of overcoming this kind of defence in depth?

The Hindenburg defences were certainly formidable. In places they were 6000 yards deep, with protecting wire and concrete machine gun posts. In some sections they were aligned to incorporate steep-banked canals. The key sector lay to the north of St Quentin in the area of the British Fourth Army. If this position could be broken, the entire line to the north would be turned. But it was here that the defences were at their strongest. The main element was the St Quentin Canal, which had 50 feet of steeply sloping banks, and water or mud to a depth of six feet. It was an insuperable barrier to tanks and a considerable obstacle for infantry. Just to the north, the canal ran through a tunnel which would make the going easier but which encompassed the greatest depth of defence.

Against these obstacles there was no question of employing surprise, as had been possible at Amiens. A long bombardment on Somme lines was essential to destroy a sufficiency of wire and of machine gun posts to allow the passage of the infantry. Also, in the contrast to Amiens, tanks could play only a minor role. They were useless against the canal and of dubious utility against the tangle of defences in the tunnel area.

Despite these problems, several factors were to the advantage of the British. First, the Australians had captured plans of a section of these defences revealing every machine gun post, artillery position, trench, and wire entanglement. Second, the British were able to employ to even greater effect the method of maximising artillery fire, which had been so successfully employed at Amiens. Third, British industry had supplied the artillery with high explosive shells in unprecedented numbers.

The actions of 29 September revealed the potency of these factors. The counter-batteries proved just as effective as on 8 August. As a result most German guns had been neutralised by zero and played little role in the ensuing battle.

Certainly not all aspects of the attack went well. In the northern sector where theoretically the tanks could be employed against the tunnel, the powerful defences held up the American and Australian attackers and thus deprived them of the supporting barrage. Thus the attack ground to a halt.

But events further south, where the canal defences happened to be at their strongest, redeemed this setback. In the aftermath of a devastating artillery bombardment, an obscure British division (46th North Midland) crossed the canal and pushed on to breach the Hindenburg defences on a front of 6000 yards. Thereby they outflanked the Germans holding up the Australians and Americans and enabled the attack to proceed along the whole front. The key to this success should be carefully noted. Because of the evident difficulties which would be met in attempting the crossing of a canal, the Fourth Army had concentrated most of its artillery in the Midlander's area. As noted, the counter-batteries early on eliminated the distant German guns. The remainder of Fourth Army's artillery, employing a huge volume of shells, overwhelmed the more immediate defences. Some statistics illustrate this proceeding. For each minute of the attack 126 shells from the field guns alone fell on every 500 yards of German trench. And this intensity was maintained for the entire eight hours of the attack. That is, in the advance from the near bank of the canal to their final objective, these infantrymen on any 500 yards of front were supported by 50,000 shells. No defences could withstand this onslaught. The defenders, irrespective of their morale, were killed, stunned, or too cowed to offer protracted resistance.
These events, with local variations, were repeated in the areas of the Third and First British Armies. By 5 October the Allies were through the entire Hindenburg system and into open country.

It was clear what these operations signified. The British had now developed methods of overwhelming the most powerful defensive system at relatively modest cost. There was of course a severe limitation: no advance could be pushed beyond the protection of the covering artillery. By the end of September even Haig, though at times reluctantly, had come to see the wisdom of this 'bite and hold' approach, at least as a prelude to the still-anticipated climactic battle for which the cavalry continued to be held in readiness.

So in essence from early October until 11 November, the Allies continued to make a series of steady, if unspectacular advances along their entire front, pausing to consolidate at times, and then advancing once more. By 17 October the Germans had lost the line of the River Selle, and in early November the Schelt and then the Sambre. Their increasingly disorganised armies could do little but accelerate their retreat.

Ludendorff, in a lucid moment on 28 September, had realised he had no answer to this onslaught. He recommended making peace. Then he changed his mind, but it was too late. The newly appointed civilian government in Germany disregarded his latest about-turn and sought to initiate armistice negotiations, thereby precipitating his resignation. In late October a German delegation crossed the French line to commence discussions. By early November, with widespread strikes at home, mutiny in the fleet, and revolution threatening in a number of regions, the delegation had little choice but to sign. So at 11 am on 11 November the war on the Western Front came to an end.

What can we conclude from the contrasting operations of the Germans and the British in 1918? The German Command seems to demonstrate a similar brand of hubris to that which led them to implement the Schlieffen Plan in 1914. It was a combination of overweening arrogance coupled with ruthless expansionism and the desire to dominate. That all of this had very little to do with developing a method which actually might win the war should be obvious from what has been said above. Indeed the vaulting ambition of the German command led them to will a victory rather than work out the means by which it might be obtained.

On the British side it was the very modesty of their ambitions which led them to success. At last the grandiose plans which brought them undone in 1916 at the Somme and in 1917 at Third Ypres had been replaced—rather against Haig's wishes—with a series of operations with limited goals. These limited attacks did not attempt to push the infantry beyond the limits of the technology which provided their protection. Thus it was the machines above all, in the form of guns, but also tanks, trench mortars, machine guns and so on, which directed the extent of each advance. By narrowing their horizons—which after all they could afford to do because they had no desire to sweep across great tracts of Europe for their own aggrandisement—the British hit on a formula for victory. That the Germans did not because they could never envisage narrow horizons is one of the nicer ironies of the war.
Endnotes

2. For a lively account of the attack on the British on 21 March 1918 see Martin Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle* (London: Allen Lane, 1974).
3. For a favourable view of these tactics see Bruce I Gudmussen, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).
10. 'Notes on the Siegfried [Hindenburg] Line—German Defensive Scheme', AWM 26/12/490/6, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
11. See ibid for details.
12. CEW Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied Offensive, 1918* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1942), 986-94.
1918: DEFINING VICTORY

A RESOURCE NOT TO BE SQUANDERED: THE CANADIAN CORPS ON THE 1918 BATTLEFIELD

Bill Rawling

To most, the First World War conjures up images created by poets, romanciers, and film directors. All Quiet on the Western Front, whether as a novel or a film, Paths of Glory, or recent efforts such as Legends of the Fall and Gallipoli, portray that conflict mainly in terms of hopelessness; participants could do little but try to accommodate themselves to their eventual fate, one over which they had no control. There is much truth to this scenario, the infantryman especially spending most of his time waiting for others to determine his destiny, but the soldier's experience of the 1914-1918 war was multi-dimensional, and incorporated elements which allowed him, to some extent, to contribute to his continuing well-being. Further, he could look to supporting elements (perhaps rather cynically, one must admit) to increase his chances of survival on the battlefield. Such is most evident as the conflict neared its end, and a study of the Canadian Corps in 1918 will reveal that, though war is mostly about killing, there is more to war than dying.

Preparing for Battle

The Canadian Corps, when it was still the Canadian Contingent, arrived in France in March 1915, expanding to four infantry divisions and supporting arms by the fall of the following year. The battles on the Somme having proved a brutal experience leading to the loss of over 24,000 Canadian soldiers, the formation looked to changing its procedures and adopting new technologies in the winter of 1916-17, before it again engaged in offensive operations in the spring. Then came the battles of Vimy Ridge in April, Hill 70 in August, and Passchendaele in October and November, all of which served to confirm, at least in the minds of commanders, the tactics that had been developed after the Somme. The latter relied on the platoon of about 30 men, grouped into four sections, as the basic unit of manoeuvre.1 Led by a junior officer, it was organised into two half-platoons, each under the command of a sergeant and formed of two sections, one of Lewis gunners and another combining riflemen and rifle grenadiers.2 Though lacking a water jacket to cool the barrel, so that it could only be fired in bursts rather than streams, the Lewis gun had the advantage of weighing less than 30 pounds (compared to 48 pounds for the Vickers' tripod alone), while rifle grenades, with their parabolic trajectory, could be fired into trenches from ranges of a hundred yards or more.

The experience of the Somme had taught commanders, staff officers, and instructors that the men who used these weapons could not be sent across no-man's-land in lines or bunched-up groups, but had to spread themselves out to minimise casualties from enemy artillery and machine gun fire, and somehow bring themselves together again whenever teamwork was needed to deal with an enemy position. 'Notes on Training' of November 1917 related that, at Passchendaele, 'A recent development in the method of attack has been the advance by Section rushes from cover to cover behind a slow-moving barrage (eg 8 minutes to 100 yards). This and also the advance by Section Columns over very broken ground should be thoroughly taught'.3 Though not self-sufficient for combat, sections would move separately to avoid heavy casualties from enemy fire, though bringing the different elements of a platoon together to attack a strong point would require first-rate leadership abilities on the part of platoon commanders.

In the course of an attack, these small units were expected to advance from one tactical point to the next, leap-frogging at pre-arranged boundaries, a tactic by which a given unit was only to advance so far before being relieved by another before exhaustion rendered it incapable of operating effectively. Critical was the need to follow closely on the heels of the artillery's creeping barrage (of which more below) to ensure enemy machine gunners were unable to emerge from their protective dugouts and prepare their weapons before the Canadians were upon them. Scouts would lead, followed by advance platoons, themselves followed by the
rest of the company, all under cover of rifle and Lewis-gun fire. In training, platoon commanders were encouraged to get ahead and reconnoitre, so they would know where they were in relation to their objectives; troops meanwhile practised rapid section deployment not only to avoid the effects of enemy fire but also to encircle strong points before the enemy could react. Once slowed by enemy counter-attacks or defences, they would dig in, the latter positions chosen to ensure front and flanks could be swept by their own machine guns; infantry would thus not fight counter-attacks by putting platoons in the enemy's path, but by keeping his routes of advance covered with automatic weapons. Fire control was of course crucial, otherwise small enemy groups could slip into one's hastily prepared defences. The emphasis on firepower in the defence was an open recognition of the effectiveness of German assault tactics, but the Canadians (and many of their allies) went even further, adopting and adapting those very same techniques. As each Canadian brigade left the line to go into reserve it trained as a formation for six weeks, the basic principle of operations being for each platoon to be allotted its objectives and areas where it was to fight the enemy. It would then proceed directly towards these, avoiding obstructions on the way, whether they be wire obstacles or strong points, taking advantage of local topography and advancing under cover of its weapons and those of nearby platoons. The Canadians would thus advance by infiltrating through enemy defences, much as the Germans had bypassed strong points in Operation Michael the previous March.

According to the doctrine of the time, the main support arm for these units was the artillery, which in the Canadian Corps had increased its ratio of guns to troops from 6.3 per 1000 infantrymen in 1915 to twice that. Also, after the Somme, artillery shells able to explode within barbed wire, microphone arrays able to determine the location of enemy batteries, and other such 'gadgets' aided gunners in increasing accuracy and effectiveness. In set-piece battles such as Vimy and Passchendaele artillery support proved reasonably effective, though casualties among attacking troops were still heavy. In attempting to reduce them, gunners played a four-fold supporting role: they attempted to destroy known strong points and barbed wire; they suppressed, harassed, or destroyed German artillery; they interdicted lines of communication and assembly areas; and they provided a creeping barrage designed to keep enemy troops in their dugouts and shelters until Canadian infantry could move up to attack. To prepare for such tasks, in the summer of 1918 batteries sent a section at a time for six weeks' instruction at the Canadian Corps Artillery School at Permes, then began training for what was called 'open warfare', gunners practising moving from position to position, often digging in their own sites before settling in to shoot. For increased accuracy, they also learned such arcana as the effects of atmospheric conditions on the flight of projectiles.

Fulfilling a similar role were the heavy Vickers machine guns of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps which, unlike the lighter Lewis guns the infantry carried into battle, acted more like artillery in supporting troops with long-range and even indirect fire. In training, these specialists were judged according to their ability to prepare their guns for action, rapidly select and occupy favourable positions, open fire according to previously issued orders, and maintain as high a rate of fire as long as necessary. The influence of Raymond Brutinel, a French proponent of using machine guns in an indirect support role who had chosen to serve with the Canadian Contingent when war broke out, was evident in the emphasis on firing at targets the machine gunner could not see. Brutinel believed that in upcoming offensives such techniques might well be the only support his branch could offer the infantry, though as we shall see he was being somewhat pessimistic.

Still, if they were to support advancing infantry the machine guns would have to move, heavy as they were, with each section officer accompanying the infantry battalion to which he was attached, the Vickers following by leap-frogging their way forward so some would be able to provide fire support for the infantry while others located new positions. Movement required much hard work, however, the gun weighing 28.5 pounds empty and 38.5 pounds with a full water jacket, while the tripod, as already mentioned, weighed 48; a box of 250 rounds of ammunition ready for use weighed 21 pounds. Bringing the three main elements of gun, tripod, and bullets together when needed required careful choreography, a process that required weeks to learn. First, the Number 1, or team leader, an NCO, indicated where he wanted the tripod; then the Number 2 put the gun on the tripod, after which Number 1 locked it into place; Number 3 brought up 250 rounds of ammunition, Number 2 loaded the web containing the bullets into the weapon, and Number 1 cocked it. It was then ready to fire.
Also in support, and gaining an ever-higher profile in doing so, were the Corps' field engineers, their role encapsulated by a few words in Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie's later report on the 1918 offensives: "I am of the opinion that much of the success of the Canadian Corps in the final 100 days was due to the fact that they had sufficient engineers to do the engineering work and that in those closing battles we did not employ the infantry in that kind of work. We trained the infantry for fighting and used them only for fighting," rather than for pick and shovel work. Or, as Brigadier William Lindsay put it, in more technical terms, "In any offensive the work of the engineers must be communications", burying cable so it would be resistant to artillery fire, building infantry and mule tracks with duckboards, as well as constructing tram lines and corduroy roads, to name just a few of their tasks. To ensure that engineers would have the resources necessary to complete such work, they were reorganised in the first week of May 1918. The three field companies per division were reformed and expanded into a single brigade of three battalions, with its own headquarters, pontoon bridging, and transport unit. Each battalion, like the infantry, was formed of about 1000 men, who were collected from the four disbanded pioneer battalions, the 1st and 2nd Tunnelling Companies, and the three field companies of the 5th Division, which was still training in Britain at the time. Thus, instead of dealing with infantry brigades, engineer companies had their own chain of command, with their own personnel and logistical support to keep them going in the field and on the job site. In fact, the Canadian Engineers Motor Transport Company, formed as part of the Canadian Army Service Corps in July, was the largest MT Column in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. An engineer company commander would therefore not have to go through an overworked and hence uncomprehending infantry battalion headquarters to get the stores he needed to support that very same infantry battalion.

Though reorganised, engineers had been familiar to the Canadian Contingent and its successor the Canadian Corps since mobilisation, but the same could not be said of the recently developed tank. In this regard the Canadians were less open to change than, say, the Australians, but in the spring of 1918 training nevertheless included work with the tracked, armoured vehicles. If the latter were to be useful on the battlefield liaison was of obvious importance, one British report insisting that "It must never be forgotten by Tank Commanders that their role during an advance is not only to get their Tanks to the strong point, but to get the infantry there with them." Of the four vehicles in a group, one was designated to force its way into the Germans' rear, two supported the infantry assault, and the fourth held itself ready to help mop up or replace casualties.

Ideally, infantry platoons would get into position to make a final rush on a position, waiting for the two accompanying tanks to create an opportune moment with their fire-power of 6-pounders and heavy machine guns, and, when the infantry rushed forward, the tanks would bring maximum fire to bear to support the advance; alternatively, armoured vehicles could attack from a flank while the infantry entered behind them, then both could mop up together. The tank was thus a system little different from the Lewis gun section or rifle grenadiers, though its proponents felt it would be more effective in dealing with strong points than vulnerable infantrymen. That still left the issue of coordinating the two infantry scouts riding in the vehicles serving as a communications link; flags, interestingly enough, seemed to work best, since the two arms had to remain within sight of each other anyway (the tank had been developed in part by the British Admiralty, after all).

Training was not, however, very methodical, though at least Canadian infantry learned not to get in the way of the mechanical monsters. It would be the Australian Corps that would put tank-infantry cooperation to the test in a limited attack at Hamel, on 4 July. The previous April Brigadier Hugh Elles, commanding the Tank Corps, had convinced the Australians his arm could give them effective support; armoured vehicles would capture ground while infantry helped overcome strong points, mopped up defences, and consolidated any gains. Training was vital if infantry and armour were to work well together, and Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash, commanding the Australian Corps, insisted his troops undergo extensive rehearsals. As for the attack itself, the tanks followed the creeping barrage as closely as possible, their armour nearly immune to the odd shrapnel shell that might explode short. One of many designed to slow the enemy's advance by threatening him on other sectors of the front (this was in the midst of the German summer offensives), the assault then followed a pattern that

3
would become familiar to colonial and British troops alike in the campaigns to come; tanks and infantry went straight to their objectives, leaving strong points to others, demonstrating not only the tank's potential but the possibilities offered by infiltration tactics. In his evaluation of the battle, Tim Travers places surprise first in order of importance to explain its success, but next suggests that 'the previous training of the Australian infantry with tanks and the impact of the new tanks on enemy machine gun resistance' was also part of the recipe for victory.

The Australian example in regards to armoured vehicles is important because it seems the Canadians did not follow suit; instead, after two years of extensive work making artillery more effective, in the summer of 1918 the Canadian Corps focussed on quick-movement drills for the guns. Such training increased in scale over time, batteries, brigades, and whole divisions rehearsing their technique, until in June 1918 the guns joined the infantry, tanks, and aircraft on large exercises. It was not easy for the gunners to adapt to intensive mobile training, however, John Swettenham noting that 'The first manoeuvres found batteries extremely awkward at the unaccustomed style of fighting. After long months and years of engaging the enemy from static sites, it was strange indeed to set out in the morning and take up three or four positions in succession, practising various methods of attack throughout a long, tiring day before returning to billets'.

Trying to keep everyone working towards the same goal, as determined by the Corps Commander, meant relying on communications technologies that had changed little in the course of the war. As we have seen, visual signalling proved useful in ensuring armour-infantry cooperation, wireless being too bulky and difficult to maintain to be useful outside of higher headquarters; the latter also relied heavily on telephones, which were portable, but required extensive wiring and cables, which were not. Platoons and companies thus had to use various visual means, such as flags and mirrors, as well as a technique known to the ancient Greeks, runners, to send back information or implore aid. In a sense, the tactics of 1918 reflected the difficulties soldiers faced trying to keep in touch with their commanders. Battalions had to move according to an artillery timetable, since there was no way to guarantee communications would remain open to allow schedule changes should disaster strike or opportunity arise; for the same reason platoons needed their own fire support of rifle grenades and Lewis guns, or tanks if they were available. Thus, perhaps ironically, the fire and movement tactics of 1918 combined rigidity at battalion level with initiative within the platoon to break into German defences and, some hoped, into the countryside beyond.

Whether capped with success or failure, there would be a price to pay, hence the need for medical practitioners to deal with the aftermath of combat. It should be noted, however, that whether they be stretcher-bearers, surgeons, or nursing sisters, they played a dual role: first; they tried to prevent disease through sanitation inspections, water and food testing, checking clothing and blankets, seeing to the provision of bath houses and delousing stations, vaccinating troops, and isolating those who came down with infectious diseases; second, they focused on corrective measures, such as surgery to remove bullet or shrapnel from soldiers' bodies, or convalescence to allow them to recover from infected wounds (almost inevitable in the manure-rich lands of north-west Europe). A new wrinkle in medical treatment as Canadians prepared to go on the offensive was the Rest Station, where medical practitioners sent 'Cases of minor disease, where unfitness would extend over but two or three weeks, especially those who could be up and about; cases of skin disease and scabies, cases requiring correction of vision', so they would not be sent to a Casualty Clearing Station or a General Hospital even further to the rear, where they could be lost to the Corps for some time. Keeping less serious sick and wounded closer to the front increased the chances they could be returned there soon. In combat the line of evacuation began with stretcher bearers picking up wounded on the battlefield, carrying them to a Regimental Aid Post, where they received basic treatment, before being taken by field ambulance or other conveyance, in succession, to an Advanced Dressing Station, Main Dressing Station, Casualty Clearing Station (where surgery was first performed, and the furthest forward nursing sisters could be posted), and General Hospital, though nodes in the system could be bypassed depending on circumstances and geography.
While organising and preparing for the offensives of 1918 the medical corps found itself in the midst of one of the greatest epidemics of human history—the influenza scourge of 1918-19. Killing millions, in absolute terms it compared with the plague of Justinian of the sixth century or the Black Death of the fourteenth, but though 30-50,000 Canadians would succumb to the disease, the very great majority of them were on the home front. (According to the official medical history, the Canadian Expeditionary Force suffered 395,084 casualties due to disease, 3825 of whom died—776 of influenza.) The Canadian Corps still had a problem on its hands, however, as the illness ‘flooded the rest station and camps with sick’ in the summer of 1918, and ‘while exhibiting the symptoms of influenza, it ran its course in a week or eight days. It spread rapidly and necessitated the promulgation of extensive and stringent precautionary orders to prevent its spread. All public places such as Unit Entertainments, YMCA Cinema Shows, Estaminets & etc were closed for a time. In the latter places it was permitted to serve drinks at tables outside the buildings.’ This first wave subsided, coincidentally in time for the summer offensives to begin, but serving as a reminder to medical practitioners that, while supporting a campaign against the Kaiser's Germany, they also had to fight an ongoing war against germs. As previous conflicts had demonstrated, failure to do so effectively could mean military defeat.

**Into Battle: Amiens**

Such was relegated to deep background when combat was engaged, however, the training the fighting arms had undergone in the summer being first put to the test in the Battle of Amiens, which opened on 8 August. German defences relied heavily on a vast number of machine guns hidden in great depth across the entire front; they were not to reveal their positions until attackers were within range, thus avoiding much deliberate shelling before the battle began. Canadian gunners, however, were under orders to dispense with such preparations in any case in hopes of attacking with the benefit of the element of surprise, their most important task being to suppress enemy artillery. With 646 guns of various calibres at their disposal, they left little to chance; to give just one example, to check their guns for wear gunners fired projectiles through two screens placed several feet apart; an electric circuit between them measured the shell's speed and allowed the gunners to calculate muzzle velocity and thus the gun's exact range. As for putting them to use, instructions to the artillery were that 'During the phase in which Infantry ... are advancing to their first objective it will necessary to subject all known and suspected hostile batteries to an intense neutralizing fire'. The gunners would maintain such bombardment until the assaulting battalions were almost under the field artillery barrage or had advanced to a point where they could machine gun enemy artillery. To make up for errors arising from the lack of preparation, guns from different batteries would fire at the same target, while guns from the same battery might fire at different targets; so if one battery was inaccurate, others might compensate.

The Australians, who had occupied the area the Canadians were now about to attack from, provided much detail about enemy positions, and to update counter-battery and other information Canadian gunners relied on the intelligence gathering system developed in late 1916 and early 1917; aerial photographs, aircraft patrols, listening-posts, observation posts, and sound-ranging batteries provided a picture of how German artillery was deployed, though because the Canadians were not allowed to give away their positions raids and patrols were out of the question.

Information gathered in such fashion was used not only for counter-battery operations but for the wider artillery plan as well. Field artillery, supplemented by heavy guns, would attempt to protect infantry battalions as they moved forward, as at Vimy and Passchendaele the previous year, with a moving barrage that periodically lifted in accordance with a prearranged schedule. Artillery was also to harass all approaches the Germans could use to ferry up reserves, ammunition, or supplies, and long-range guns were responsible for shelling detraining stations, rest billets, and similar facilities in the enemy’s rear to disrupt his defences in depth. In the battle to come the artillery's importance would be exemplified by the experiences of the 8th Battalion; those machine gun nests the gunners had shelled in the opening hours of the battle fell almost immediately, while those that had avoided shelling thanks to their concealed positions inflicted heavy casualties.
The task of actually capturing such defences of course fell to the infantry, and though the experience of battle at Amiens was not uniform from unit to unit, the progress of the centre division was sufficiently typical to serve as an example of the corps as a whole. (The Canadian Corps committed three divisions to the battle while the 31st French Corps attacked on the right and the Australian Corps assaulted on the left.) Infantry companies moved forward under cover of mist, smoke, and artillery barrage in the formations they had practised during the summer, advancing by infiltrating their way past strong points and machine-gun nests directly to their objectives. Units of the 3rd Brigade attacked four areas in depth simultaneously, some of them hundreds of yards behind German forward positions, advanced waves moving steadily on to their targets and leaving any trouble areas they found along the way to comrades coming up behind.39

Following each battalion’s attack and looking for positions from which to fire at German defences was a battery of eight machine guns of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps, and these proved useful in a battle where the enemy had hidden many of his support weapons. The 14th Battalion, for example, used L Battery to good effect, breaking up concealed machine gun posts as it skirted a wood. Though Raymond Brutinel had insisted that their main role was to fire over the heads of attacking platoons at targets beyond, at Amiens machine guns often became involved in skirmishes in the mist. Regardless of how they carried out their support function, they adopted formations similar to those of the infantry; picking their way across no-man’s land and captured ground as spread out as possible to reduce casualties to enemy artillery, keeping direction with compasses and air photographs. Like those of the infantry, their losses mounted, however.30

Similarly, trench mortars followed the infantry, two of them, for example, attempting to support the 14th Battalion’s advance, though theirs was no easy task as crews moved 6-inch mortars across rough terrain. Even though they could be broken down into three main parts, weight was still a factor, the base plate weighing 29 pounds, the mounting 35 pounds, and the barrel a back-breaking 49 pounds.31 Each was thus set up on a mobile platform, which also carried 20 bombs, pulled by two mules in tandem, and a wagon carrying 30 more rounds followed behind. The 14th Battalion, for one, was impressed with the potentials of the trench mortar, along with the machine gun, for destroying or capturing strong posts. When listing the lessons learned from the attack, battalion officers replied: ‘In assaulting Machine Gun nests our Heavy Machine Guns and TMs can, and should be used with the greatest boldness. Volume of fire is the essential factor to allow Infantry to get to assaulting distance, [for] over flat country, a well placed enemy Machine Gun, manned by determined gunners is a considerable obstacle, and can hold an advance up at a range of 500 yards, thereby putting our rifle grenadiers out of range.’32

An example of how the experiences of one battalion could differ from another was the 13th’s mention of trench mortars, which made little impact and appear only once in its narrative. Tanks were a different matter, however, the unit reporting that the surprise of seeing these mechanical beasts emerge from the smoke and mist, which may have masked the sound of their engines as well as their movements, was enough to make some garrisons surrender. Infantry sections usually preceded the tanks, which moved ahead of their charges only when needed; after completing a task, such as destroying a machine gun nest or clearing a section of trench, they returned to their positions behind the first wave of advancing infantry. The 13th Battalion found them most useful when, as it approached a wood, it came upon barbed wire, very rare at Amiens, and ordered a tank through it; on another occasion tanks encircled a small wood while an infantry company, with two more tanks, mopped up.33

Armoured vehicles, however, faced a well-trained enemy using a variety of anti-tank weapons, notably artillery pieces whose crews had been indoctrinated to just such a purpose. The 8th Battalion summarised the experience of the first days of the offensive in a short but revealing paragraph. ‘During the first phase of the attack on the 8th August, our tanks, both light and heavy, did very effective work, but on the second day, they were not so effective. On the latter day they were late in getting into position and did not appear to know the correct direction of advance, thus delaying what might have been a more rapid advance and a greater reduction in casualties.’34 In all fairness, by the second day the tanks were facing an
enemy no longer confused by surprise, still high in morale and fully equipped. On the entire British front, the number of tanks available fell from 342 on 8 August to 145 on the 9th, 85 on the 10th, 38 on the 11th, by which time the crews were completely exhausted, and only six on the 12th.\textsuperscript{35}

It was thus perhaps with good reason that the Canadian Corps continued to rely on artillery as its main supporting arm, though as we have seen the nature of communications systems limited the gunners' flexibility once battle was joined. Nevertheless, artillery officers accompanied the attack to ensure well-trained technicians could call for fire support, and these forward observation officers, usually battery commanders, had instructions to observe enemy activity and pick out targets of opportunity. The latter, however, had to be somewhat static, a pillbox being a good example, since observers had to communicate firing data through the infantry's signals network (to be described below), which may or may not have been set up when the target was first discovered. Forward observers were accompanied by small teams of signallers, who could use visual means such as lamps, flags, or mirrors as alternatives to patching into the perhaps incomplete telephone system, but such techniques obviously required clear weather to be successful.

As for the guns themselves, in open warfare they had to move forward to prepare to support the next phase of the offensive, so artillery patrols, as they looked for points from which to observe the battle, sought out future sites for their batteries and looked for captured enemy positions they could turn to their own use, though gun pits faced the wrong way. (If the guns were still in them and operational, however, the Canadians could use them to further disorganise the enemy.)\textsuperscript{36} At the same time, their comrades attempted to move up Canadian guns as soon as the advance had outranged them, a task no easier than getting 6-inch mortars across the battlefield. Artillerymen had to limber up their field pieces, load ammunition onto wagons and trucks, and load themselves up or prepare to walk; they then moved forward through areas that may not have been completely mopped up, located the positions laid out for them by artillery patrols, unlimbered the guns, and unloaded the ammunition; finally, they had to lay on and prepare to fire.\textsuperscript{37} The 10th Battalion, for one, praised the gunners 'for the rapid manner in which they moved forward, and for their speed in taking up positions and coming into action'.\textsuperscript{38}

Perhaps the ultimate expression of close artillery support were the composite batteries, whose operations were, somewhat ironically, more akin to those of Waterloo or Balaclava than the technically-oriented procedures of 1918. Such a battery was made up of several sections, each of two guns, the designation 'composite' relating to the fact that each pair came from a different unit. Their arrival on the scene of action could certainly be dramatic, 'with horses straining low against their breastcollars', according to one account, coming into action 'with lighting speed'. The section in question engaged at least two machine gun positions in succession, using shrapnel to destroy them or force them to retreat.\textsuperscript{39} Their effectiveness is impossible to determine, but that in itself is significant, commanders and staff officers applying firepower in such quantity and variety, including machine guns, trench mortars, and field artillery, that there was not then nor is there now any way of distinguishing one's impact from another.

Trying to keep these varied elements in touch with one another were a legion of signallers, operations to maintain communications evolving throughout the battle. Brigade headquarters personnel established an advanced report centre close to the front, using just about every technique possible, including runners, mounted orderlies, visual signalling, telephones, pigeons, and aircraft-signalling panels. Battalion headquarters had the same communications organization as the advanced report centre, and after the battle started signallers followed closely behind the infantry and tanks, turning houses along the line of advance into nodes in the system, which was used to keep in touch with a given unit's flanks as well as its parent formation. As the advance progressed, signallers formed subsequent advanced report centres and successive battalion headquarters, and when the infantry and tanks reached their final objectives, patrols laid down telephone wire to keep the battalions in touch with their forward companies. In the course of the battle itself runners, as before, kept the battalions informed of what was happening.\textsuperscript{40} Results were mixed. For example, the first day of the
offensive at Amiens the 5th Battalion reported that the signals section, closely following the advancing infantry, established its first station soon after the attack, then set up a second station when the advance continued 90 minutes later; on neither occasion, however, could it contact brigade headquarters with lamps. After another few hours the infantry’s success forced it to set up another station, but again it could not contact the brigade. A forward observer moving with the 14th Battalion had different luck; he saw the unit held up by machine guns in a wood and reported that ‘I had perfect communications and perfect observation, but was unable to use Artillery’ as the infantry was too close to the objective.

The copse was captured in a flanking assault.

While signallers attempted to maintain the flow of information, medical practitioners performed a more poignant task, the advance proving as costly as it was successful. Horsed ambulances followed the attacking infantry to collect the wounded, while stretcher bearers faced a new feature at Amiens; Regimental Aid Posts, normally the first stop in the system where casualties received treatment, had been dispensed with, stretcher cases instead being collected at protected points marked by strips of white bandage from which ambulances could remove them to the Advanced Dressing Station. The next stop, for those wounded able to survive the journey, was the Main Dressing Station, which thanks to favourable weather was able to use an open field for its work on the first day of the campaign. Such was fortunate, since it had to be mobile; a tent section moving up as the Corps made progress to turn the Advanced Dressing Station into an MDS, so the latter would always be within useful range of the fighting. The Main Dressing Station received 2622 wounded the first 24 hours, then 1334, 2544, and 1615 on subsequent days, casualties dropping to 702 on the fifth; 30 motor lorries were made available to carry casualties from the MDS to Casualty Clearing Stations further back.

According to the official history, which measures casualties in relative terms, such losses were light compared with the amount of ground captured, and, in fact, casualties were lighter than all the Corps’ previous battles. By the end of the first day 1036 Canadians were dead, 2803 were wounded, and 29 were prisoners of war. The total for 8 August, 3868, was lower than for Vimy Ridge, the Canadian Corps’ greatest success to that time, where 7707 men became casualties, of whom 2967 died, in the two days necessary to capture their main objectives. The second day at Amiens, casualties mounted by 2574, while the Corps advanced three miles (one-tenth the number of soldiers lost on the Somme while capturing the same amount of ground). Casualties for the entire battle, from 8 to 20 August, totalled 11,725, similar to the 10,602 of Vimy Ridge. Gains were thus expensive, but to commanders who had seen far worse, the figures were grounds to breathe a sigh of relief, though this author is willing to admit that their troops may have had a different perspective.

Into Battle: The Hundred Days

An important lesson of Amiens was thus that gaining ground cost lives regardless of the technology and tactics used; another, to be confirmed in the battles that followed, was that a weapon’s utility was in inverse ratio to its weight. The bayonet, the lightest fighting tool the infantry carried, saw little use in spite of much rigorous training emphasising such drill manoeuvres as thrust, parry, and slash; as the 78th Battalion’s commanding officer pointed out, ‘I doubt if much attention is paid to drill movements when the moment comes for the man to use it.’ At the other end of the scale the Vickers machine gun and the trench mortar, whose rate of fire and substantial bursting charge, respectively, made them excellent support weapons, were also difficult to move around a battlefield in the midst of an assault. As we have seen, they were much praised when they were available, but they were not available all the time. Somewhere in between bayonet and mortar/machine gun were the Lewis guns and rifle grenades the infantry carried with them.

Tanks were a different matter altogether, having proven their usefulness and mobility at Amiens, but having demonstrated a certain vulnerability to anti-tank weapons as well. Thus at the Battle of the Scarpe, which began near Arras on 26 August and included the breaching of the Drocourt-Quéant Line, the Canadian Corps continued to use tanks cautiously, they being ordered to remain behind the infantry except to take on specific strong points. The pattern
set at Amiens repeated itself, armoured vehicles being successful in the first hours of combat but running into more and more trouble as German defences hardened. According to the 1st Canadian Division, 'The Tanks worked well and assisted the Infantry very materially in capturing the Drocourt-Quéant Line, breaking paths through the wire and reducing the enemy’s resistance. Upon the cessation of the protective barrage, however, all the Tanks became casualties, and were unable to assist in the subsequent advance, where they would have been most useful'.

Thus the tanks, like everyone else, operated best when they could count on artillery fire, but at Arras, gunners, given less time to prepare, sometimes had trouble playing their supporting role effectively. Lieutenant-Colonel JL Hart of the 46th Battalion later related how 'the artillery were supposed to have cut the wire for us out here in front of Drury and they didn’t get it cut, because we were going so fast that the artillery couldn’t be brought up and keep in touch and they were not getting a chance to set their guns, just shooting, encountering a lot of shorts weren’t too pleasant, we had some casualties from our own shorts but that was part of war'.

The infantry had to place its trust in its own resources, one example being a lance-corporal who worked his way forward with his Lewis gun and opened fire at a machine gun nest from short range; another instance was a similar position falling to a barrage of rifle grenades.

An important reason why the infantry had to become even more self-reliant was the inability of communications technology to keep up with the pace of battle. Behind the front, telephone lines remained open for the most part, though after Drocourt-Quéant, battalion commanders stressed the importance of keeping copious amounts of cable on hand to repair breaks caused by friendly and enemy artillery. Some units used pigeons, with mixed results, while visual signalling with forward troops was often a problem on a battlefield where infiltration tactics temporarily left many strong points behind to act as snipers; lamps made excellent targets. All in all communications were patchy, and though battalion commanders and their superiors wanted to know what was happening at the front, as the campaigns of 1918 progressed it was becoming more evident that they had little input into the hour-by-hour management of battle.

Similarly, medical practitioners, having put plans into place to deal with the wounded, could then do little but wait for battle to be engaged and hope their preparations would be up to the task. At Arras, the first day of battle seemed to indicate that medical treatment would be carried out at peak efficiency; according to Number 10 Field Ambulance, 'The wounded began to arrive in steady numbers at about 6.30 am on the morning of the attack and from then onward both dressing stations were kept busy. Everything worked with smooth precision. At one end of the admission room records were kept and anti-tetanus serum administered. The wounded were then carried through a hall into the dressing room. Here 8 stretcher cases could be "dressed" simultaneously, after which they received hot drinks and then loaded into cars of the motor ambulance convoy and were swiftly conveyed to the casualty clearing stations', though only for the first few days. On 29 August, the unit had to report that:

The continued fire on the roads unfortunately had effect on the ambulances. A shell near the walking wounded post destroyed two cars, wounding some of the drivers of Nos 8 and 9 Field Ambulances, also Pte Phillips of this Unit. At night hostile bombing set an ambulance on fire just near the ADS at Bourlon. The car had a load of 4 stretcher cases and 2 sitting cases aboard. The bomb killed a wounded prisoner who was being conveyed in it, and two of the other stretcher cases died later. Sgt IME Markle and Pte JW McLean who were driving, were slightly wounded and burned, but the escape of any was miraculous as the car was blown completely over and the hood stripped from its framework. The work of rescuing the patients and extinguishing the fire was rendered more difficult owing to the overturned condition of the car and the congested nature of the road, the same bomb having killed 4 horses and wrecked a wagon, this completely blocking the roadway.

Like the plans of any other military institution, those of the medical corps could begin to unravel once combat was joined.
After Drocourt-Quéant the Canadian Corps had a few weeks to recover before engaging in the Battle of the Canal du Nord, which it entered on 27 September as part of the assault on the Hindenburg Line. Events generally followed the pattern outlined above, except in one important respect, the need for engineer bridging parties, their work vital if ammunition, artillery, tanks, and other combat necessities were to cross the waterway and keep up with the infantry. Where the canal was filled with water the troops themselves needed bridges to get over the obstacle; first, platoons that had crossed in dry areas swung around and captured a bridgehead, then the engineers put up foot bridges, made of cork slabs baled with wire netting, to allow units like the 42nd Battalion to make their way to their assembly areas on the other side of the canal. The engineers' second task would then be to prepare crossings for field guns and transport, using pontoon or prefabricated trestle bridges. Finally, they would assemble strong, but also prefabricated, Inglis bridges (named for the inventor) for the larger trucks and guns, while the tanks would be ramped across the dry portion of the canal.

When the creeping barrage began to move forward, sappers followed directly behind assaulting troops to repair roads and canal crossings, the 3rd Battalion being the busiest of the engineer units that day. Its A Company helped the 1st Divisional Artillery get its guns forward, with one subsection attached to each of the four forward batteries. For example, the 3rd Sub-Section, accompanying the 5th Battery, bridged a small stream, crossed the canal at a site prepared by other engineers, and cut a passage through barbed wire obstacles. B Company built two crossings for the guns to move forward, though one crew working on a pontoon bridge was hampered by machine gun fire. C Company was closest to the fighting, since it put four infantry foot bridges across the canal for the 15th Battalion; after the first was in place, sappers rushed across to capture a machine gun so the next three could be built. The company was also responsible for six light transport bridges made of prefabricated materials called Weldon Trestles; wagons brought materials forward, often under sporadic machine gun fire. D Company built a heavy bridge for the tanks, starting six hours after battle was engaged. The operation was thus a foreshadowing of the next war, when engineers in many theatres would be hard-pressed to keep tanks, artillery, and truck-borne infantry moving over rivers and across rough terrain.

Also worthy of note in discussing the Canal du Nord was how the artillery attempted to provide continuing support even though the infantry's advance was planned to outrange field guns. In the fighting from 27 September to 1 October Canadian gunners used 'relay' barrages; of ten brigades supporting the 4th Division, for example, only six fired the barrage up to the first objective, while the other four moved forward. Eight brigades fired the barrage to the second objective, four from their original locations plus the four that had just moved up. Meanwhile, two brigades joined the latter, and these six then fired the barrage to the third objective. Also, Amiens and Drocourt-Quéant had made it clear that artillery could be useful in an even closer support role, especially given anti-tank guns that made armoured operations particularly hazardous (the tanks' success at Canal du Nord was similar to that of previous engagements). Thus pairs of guns, each with 176 rounds of ammunition and the protection of Lewis gunners, moved off to support the infantry advance as best they could.

Such efforts, however, could not prevent the assault from often turning into small actions—stand-up battles between Canadian Lewis guns and rifles advancing from cover to cover and German infantry and machine gunners in defensive positions sometimes protected by barbed wire. It was only in the Corps' last set-piece battle of the war, at Valenciennes, that the system of combined arms came close to realising its full potential. Taking over from the British on 31 October, the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade assaulted into the outskirts of town the next day before entering Valenciennes itself. Meanwhile, the 38th and 72nd Battalions of the 12th Brigade attacked directly across a canal and into the town, though all units were understrength after the autumn's fighting and the usual depletions caused by illness and injury. The gunners' plan was a simple one, to saturate every known German artillery position, every possible approach for German troops, and every likely assembly area for German reserves.
As at Amiens, gunners did not preregister but relied on their maps, the science of calibration, and the skill of survey sections in gathering information and of battery officers in fixing gun positions, lines of fire, and targets. The Canadians had 104 heavy artillery pieces, and field artillery contributed 24 batteries for the 10th Brigade’s creeping barrage alone, which meant that 144 18-pounders and 48 4.5-inch howitzers would be firing; the 18-pounders alone delivered seven tons of explosives, per minute, on a front of less than a mile and a half. The infantry requested a slow rate of advance and the artillery complied; platoons were then able to manoeuvre around buildings, reasonably secure behind a dense wall of shrapnel, smoke, and dust. The smoke by itself was a complete success, blown by the wind into German positions, blinding them, and in the course of the advance the 3rd Brigade Canadian Field Artillery followed the infantry to supply closer support as soon as it had completed its barrage tasks.

Supply conditions were far better than they had been in previous campaigns; for senior Canadian gunners sensed that the war was nearing its end and did not baulk at expending vast quantities of ammunition. There was much talk of peace in the air, and the gunners knew it. It was therefore the proper time to neglect economy and to exert every possible effort by means of supporting mechanical weapons to break down the enemy’s resistance and thus, as far as possible, minimise the infantry casualties. Ammunition expenditures were phenomenal; 18-pounders and 4.5-inch howitzers combined fired 56,200 rounds, or 620 tons of shell, and heavy artillery fired 31,500 rounds, or 1520 tons, for a grand total of 87,700 rounds, or 2140 tons. McNaughton compared the bombardment with the 2800 tons of shell both sides fired in the Boer War and the 37 tons expended at Waterloo, exclaiming that ‘there had been nothing like it the whole history of war for intensity.’ (Though 27 years later the first atomic bomb would prove over eight times more powerful than all Canadian artillery ammunition expended at Valenciennes.)

Infantry went into the attack accompanied by machine guns and trench mortars, as in previous actions. Nine batteries, or 72 Vickers machine guns, thickened the artillery barrage in the early stages of the assault, many placing themselves on the Canal de L’Escaut, firing at German positions until Canadian troops moving across their front were almost upon them. A battery of eight guns accompanied each attacking battalion and took up defensive positions after the objectives fell, and a few 6-inch Newton mortars followed close behind; in one case two mortars fired 80 rounds in 20 minutes, destroying or silencing several machine gun posts. All in all, the 10th Brigade, which bore the brunt of the fighting, lost 60 men killed, 380 wounded, and 61 missing out of the approximately 1200 available for battle.

An armistice being declared a week later, the war ended for the fighting branches of the Canadian Corps. But not for its medical practitioners. Influenza flared up again, and though some cases were mild, exhibiting fever for four to six days before recovering, others caused pneumonia and death; the total number of ill soldiers eventually reached over 45,000, equalling battle losses. Poignantly, some men may have unwittingly condemned themselves in their understandable wish to get home after the war, No 3 General Hospital reporting that ‘Most of the patients gave a history of having felt poorly while in their forward areas but had not reported sick for fear of having their demobilisation delayed’. Interestingly, ‘The same attitude of concealment of illness was noticed amongst the Released Prisoners of War soon after the Armistice.’ There is no evidence, however, that early detection increased one’s chances of survival, and the flu epidemic of 1918-1919 added several hundred names to the CEF’s Book of Remembrance.

Le Bilan

Though the battles of the Hundred Days tend to be looked upon favourably by historians, that has been mainly because of the way they ended—in an Armistice still commemorated by many countries on every 11th of November. In terms of casualties, however, Amiens, Arras, and the Hindenburg Line differed only in degree from previous campaigns; the first offensive of 1918 to involve the Canadian Corps entailed losses of 11,700 men, compared with the 13,400 casualties of Vimy, or a rate of 13 per cent compared to 16. Crossing the Canal du Nord cost over 13,000 men, compared with the 16,000-plus of Passchendaele, but the
Canadians lost the same ratio of troops in both these battles, about one in five. In terms of casualties, then, the chronological dividing line between abysmal and simply heavy came earlier, after the lessons of the Somme had been absorbed in time for the assault on Vimy Ridge. Second Ypres, a defensive battle in the spring of 1915, where the Germans used poison gas on a large scale, cost the Canadian Contingent a third or more of its strength; the Somme demanded only a little less with over 30 per cent losses.

Still, it would be easy to exaggerate the differences between 1915 and 1918. If one measures infantry casualties as an average per division engaged in a given month, April 1915, the month of Second Ypres, still stands as the worst, with 5026 infantrymen of the 1st Division killed, taken prisoner, missing, or wounded severely enough to require evacuation. But the second-worst figure is for September 1918, when the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Divisions lost an average of 4914 riflemen, Lewis gunners, and rifle grenadiers. In September 1916, the only full month the Corps spent on the Somme, the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Divisions each suffered an average of 4407 infantry casualties, but August 1918 was only slightly better, each of the Corps’ four divisions losing an average of 4397 infantrymen. The main difference between the earlier and the latter battles was that troops were capturing more ground for the blood they had to shed.

Though at the risk of overtaxing the reader’s patience, further statistical analysis, a look at the worst months of the war for individual divisions, can also be instructive (see Tables below). The 1st Division at Mont Sorrel, though losing almost a brigade in a German attack in June 1916, then suffering further casualties in the counter-attacks it launched subsequently, experienced only the tenth worst month of the war, with losses of 4239. Worst of all was the same formation in September 1918 as it fought at Arras and the Canal du Nord, suffering 7352 casualties in the process. Next came the 2nd Division in August 1918, with its 6020 losses at Amiens. Second Ypres figures third, fighting on the Somme in September 1916 (within 2nd Division) fourth, and the 1st Division at Amiens fifth. The latter battle’s low casualty percentage, compared with earlier engagements, thus had much to do with the large number of supporting troops involved, the 2nd and 3rd Divisions suffering their worst months of the war in August 1918. The 1st Division, as mentioned above, suffered its worst month in September 1918, its second worst at Ypres in 1915, but its third worst in October 1918. Thus by any measure the Hundred Days were costly, most especially in infantry.

In any discussion of losses and gains, Valenciennes is of particular interest. In an operation heavily involving six battalions, or about 3600 troops, 380 became casualties, a rate identical with the 15.5 per cent loss taking the Drocourt-Quéant Line. As long as the enemy was willing to fight back, there was a limit to how low casualties could be, which for the Canadian Corps in the First World War seemed to hover around 12 or 13 per cent—a sobering thought which raises the issue of sustainability. In the period 8 to 22 August, which encompassed the Battle of Amiens, the corps lost 11,725 men and received reinforcements of 12,200; then it started to suffer heavier casualties than it could replace, the deficit amounting to 1580 from 26 August to 9 September (Arras and the Drocourt-Quéant Line) then to 3968 in the period 27 September, to 10 October (the Hindenburg Line). It was only in the last month of the war, with the German Army in general retreat, that the Canadian Corps managed to make up its losses, 5761 more troops arriving from reinforcement camps than were lost in battle, through sickness, or to accident.68 The figures, of course, give no indication as to the level of training new arrivals brought with them, and as we have seen indoctrinating experienced soldiers in the spring of summer of 1918 had been a complex task, so it is reasonable to speculate that the reinforcements of October 1918 were considerably less skilled than the casualties they were replacing. If one may be allowed to use modern terminology, the Canadian Corps that had proven so successful at Amiens was a non-renewable resource.

For that very reason, the engagement at Valenciennes is of further interest; knowing that the war was close to its end, the Corps’ commander and his staff were willing to pull out all the stops on ammunition expenditure; in effect, they attempted to reduce losses by increasing fire power. They failed, but clearly they did not consider heavy casualties to be a necessary price for victory. Perhaps then, one should not just look for lessons learned when studying the battles of 1918; it may also be useful to look for a moral as well. Sometime during the First
World War members of the Canadian Corps ceased to be men to be sacrificed in a gallant cause and became technicians working in teams to defeat an army in the field; they had gone from being a symbol to becoming a means to an end. In our current era, where 'personnel departments' have been replaced with 'human resources', there might be something to learn in such a process—that a soldier is a resource not to be squandered.

### Average Losses per Division

#### Sample Months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Average Losses/ Div</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 1915</td>
<td>5026</td>
<td>1st Div only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1918</td>
<td>4914</td>
<td>3 Divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1916</td>
<td>4407</td>
<td>3 Divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1918</td>
<td>4397</td>
<td>All 4 Divisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Ten Worst Months of the War

#### Canadian Divisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Losses</th>
<th>Operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1918</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>7352</td>
<td>Arras, DQ Line, Canal du Nord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1918</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>6020</td>
<td>Amiens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1915</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>5026</td>
<td>Second Ypres, Defensive Ops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1916</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>4843</td>
<td>Somme, Courcelotte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1918</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>4750</td>
<td>Cambrai, Bourlon Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1916</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>4748</td>
<td>Somme, Pozières, Thiepval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1918</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>4716</td>
<td>Amiens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1916</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>4580</td>
<td>Mont Sorrel, Defensive/ Offensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1917</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>4401</td>
<td>Vimy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1916</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>4239</td>
<td>Mont Sorrel, Defensive/ Offensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

1. The purist would note that battalions are units while platoons are sub-sub-units, but the author has chosen to use a simpler vocabulary.

2. RG 9, v 4162, folder 9, file 2, Organization of a Platoon, 18 May 1918, National Archives of Canada [NAC].

3. RG 9, v 4064, folder 15, file 6, Canadian Corps, Notes on Training—November 1917, NAC.

4. RG 9, v 4188, folder 5, file 6, 3rd Division, 22 April 1918; 58th Battalion to 9th Brigade, 4 May 18; 116th Battalion, 25 April 1918; MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 167, 11 CIB Training Instructions, NAC.

5. Ibid.

6. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 167, 11 CIB Training Instructions, 5 May 1918, NAC.


8. RG 9, v 4049, folder 14, file 4, Notes for the Information and Guidance of all Officers Regarding the Organization of Machine Gun Battalions and their Employment, 30 April 1918; v 4199, folder 6, file 12, Tactical Notes on Operations on the Somme, March and April 1918, Obtained from Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade, 1 May 1918, NAC.


10. RG 9, v 4049, folder 14, file 1, 2nd Army to GHQ, Machine Guns, NAC.


12. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 35, file 161, Canadian Corps CE 7/23, NAC.


14. AJL Kerry and WA McDill, The History of the Corps of Royal Canadian Engineers (Ottawa: Military Engineers' Association of Canada, 1962), II: 159-67; RG 9, v 4188, folder 5, file 6, 3rd Division, Engineer Sub-Section Organization, 5 June 1918, NAC.

15. RG 9, v 4239, folder 8, file 15, Notes on Experience Gained and Lessons Learned during the Recent Training with the French Infantry at Sautrecourt, Attack on a Strong Point, 7 June 1918, NAC.

16. Ibid.

17. RG 9, v 4201, folder 11, file 15, Canadian Corps, 24 July 1918, NAC.


21. AE Snell, The CAMC with the Canadian Corps during the Last Hundred Days of the Great War (Ottawa: Acland, 1924), 9.

22. RG 9, III, v 4715, 107-20, Passchendaele to Gouy-en-Artois, June 1918, NAC.


24. RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, Canadian Corps Artillery Instructions, 4 August 1918, NAC.

25. Ibid.

26. Swettenham, McNaughton, I: 139, 143.

27. RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, Canadian Corps Artillery Instructions, 4 August 1918, NAC.

28. RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, 8th Battalion, Narrative No 2 from 12.00 Midnight 8/9th August to 5.00 pm 10th August 1918, NAC.

29. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 167, 14th Battalion Report on Operations of August 9th 1918, NAC.


31. DHist, 87/191, Light Mortar Training, June 1918.

32. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 167, 14th Battalion Report on Operations of August 9th 1918, NAC.

33. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 167, 3rd CIB Report on Operations August 3rd to 20th 1918; 4th Tank Battalion, Report on Operations with 1st Canadian Division, Luce Valley, August 8th 1918, NAC.

34. RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, 8th Battalion, Narrative No 2 from 12.00 Midnight & 8/9th August to 5.00 pm 10th August 1918, NAC.

37. RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, Canadian Corps Artillery Instructions, 4 August 1918, NAC.
38. RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, Narrative of Phase A—Operations Taken Part in by the 10th Canadian Infantry Battalion from the Night of 7th/8th-8-1918 to 9-8-1918, NAC.
39. JA MacDonald, Gun-fire: An Historical Narrative of the 4th Bde CFA in the Great War (Toronto: Greenway Press, 1929), 137.
40. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 167, 14th Battalion Report on Operations of August 9th, 1918; RG 9, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, Headquarters 5th Battalion to Headquarters 2 CIB, 15 August 1918, NAC.
41. Headquarters 5th Canadian Battalion (Western Canada) to HQ 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, 15 August 1918, RG 9, III, v 4052, folder 22, file 4, NAC.
42. Royal Montreal Regiment, 14th Canadian Battalion, August 12th 1918, Report on Operations of August 8th, 1918, MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, folder 167, NAC.
43. RG 9, III, v 4551, 1-13, Medical Arrangements Canadian Corps during Second Battle of Amiens, August 8th to 20th, NAC.
45. RG 9, v 4239, folder 4, file 10, 78th Battalion, 22 August 1918, NAC.
46. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 168, 1st Division, Report on Arras Operations, Drocourt-Quéant Line, August 28th-September 4th, 1918, NAC.
47. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 168, 1st Division, Report on Arras Operations, NAC.
48. RG 41, v 13, 46th Battalion, JL Hart, NAC.
49. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 168, 10th CIB Narrative of Operations, Battle of Arras, Appendix H; Appendix I, 3rd CIB Report on Drocourt-Quéant Operations—September 2nd 1918, NAC.
50. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 37, file 168, 10th CIB Narrative of Operations, Battle of Arras, Appendix H; Appendix I, file 167, 3rd CIB Report on Drocourt-Quéant Operations—September 2nd 1918, NAC.
51. RG 9, III, v 4715, 107-20, The Battle of Arras, August 1918, NAC.
52. Ibid.
53. RG 9, v 4158, folder 2, file 6, 42nd Battalion Narrative of Operations 25th-30th September 1918, NAC.
55. RG 9, v 3873, folder 120, file 10, Interim Report on the Operations of the Canadian Corps during the Year 1918, v 4995, War Diary, 3rd Battalion CE, Appendix, Narrative of Bourlon Wood Operations, September 27th-28th-29th, 1918, NAC.
56. RG 9, v 3912, folder 42, file 10, Artillery Notes on Operations of the Canadian Corps, September 27-October 1, 1918, NAC.
57. RG 9, v 3912, folder 42, file 9, Notes on Recent Fighting No 21, NAC.
58. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 38, file 169, Artillery Report on Mount Houy (Valenciennes) Operation by Canadian Corps, 1918, NAC.
59. Swettenham, McNaughton, I: 163.
60. Ibid.
61. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 38, file 169, Artillery Report on Mount Houy, 1918, NAC.
62. Ibid.
63. Swettenham, McNaughton, I: 165.
64. MG 30, E100, Arthur Currie Papers, v 38, file 169, Artillery Report on Mount Houy, 1918, NAC; DHist, 709 (D1), AGL McNaughton, The Development of Artillery in the Great War.
65. RG 9, III, v 5035, War Diary, No 3 Cdn Gen Hosp McGill, Appx, November 1918, NAC; Andrew MacPhail, The Medical Services (Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War) (Ottawa: Acland, 1925), 271.
68. RG 24, v 1883, file 27, Statistics-Cas, NAC.
On 11 November 1918 Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig noted in his diary: 'The Armistice came into force at 11am'. 1 Haig's characteristic lack of emotion, which was not shared by all British senior commanders, belied the fact of a remarkable military victory over a formidable enemy, the Imperial German army. 2 This victory was won by a coalition, in which the forces of the British Empire played the leading role. 3 Yet in Great Britain, the very fact of a military victory in 1918 has largely been forgotten. This summer, Professor Sir Michael Howard published a letter in The Times reminding people of the fact that we were approaching the 80th anniversary of the Hundred Days. Sir Michael suggested that the commemoration of this, the greatest series of victories in British military history, should match those for the 80th anniversary of the disastrous first day of the Somme. 4 Needless to say, 8 August 1998 did not see a repetition of the wall-to-wall media coverage that occurred on 1 July 1996. 5 Moreover, those who have remembered the Hundred Days have tended to downplay the role of 'British' as opposed to 'Dominion' troops. Of the 60 active divisions in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) under the command of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig in November 1918, all but ten were British. Yet while the achievements of the Canadian and Australian Corps have been, rightly, celebrated, with a couple of exceptions the no less remarkable activities of many British troops have received scant attention. Rather, the alleged disgraceful defeat at the hands of German Kaiserschlacht has been highlighted by popular authors. One, the journalist William Moore, used the catchpenny title See How They Ran for his book. 6 Martin Middlebrook's book on 21 March 1918, while well researched and objective, may give the unwary an unbalanced view by concentrating on one day of apparent defeat to the exclusion of later developments. 7

Besides the volumes of British official history, 8 there are some other books on 1918 that give a balanced account of the activities of British forces. In this category I would include Major-General H Essame's The Battle for Europe 1918 (1972), Gregory Blaxland's Amiens 1918 (1968) and John Terraine's To Win a War: 1918, The Year of Victory (1978). 9 These books are still worth reading but they were largely based on published sources, and belong to an older historiographical tradition. Three more recent books have reinvigorated the debate on 1918. Tim Travers' How the War Was Won (1992) is a very well researched analysis of 1918, but his views on the British army troops have proved somewhat controversial in revisionist historical circles in the United Kingdom. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson's Command on the Western Front, also published in 1992, and Paddy Griffith's Battle Tactics of the Western Front are among the most important books ever published on the Western Front. 10 Both give a rather more positive view of the activities of British forces in 1918 than has been customary.

Unfortunately, books are still being published that contain unwarranted sideswipes at the performance of British troops in 1918, usually by means of unfavourable comparisons with Dominion troops. 11 This tendency has led to the revisionist school of British historians of the Western Front that is based around Sandhurst, the Imperial War Museum and the British Commission for Military History, to refer ironically to Dominion troops as 'colonial supermen'. Of course, this is quite unfair. Recently, historians from the Dominions have placed 'Colonial' military excellence into a proper perspective. 12 However, we still lack a fully-fledged comparative study of British and Dominion troops; although along with my British co-authors Peter Simkins and John Lee, I am writing a book—Haig's Army—which will have a strong comparative element. 13 This essay can do no more than review the main issues, but hopefully it will provide a starting point for future research.
The British Army of January 1918 had little in common with its tiny, professional predecessor of August 1914. Equally, it was a very different creature from the mass volunteer army that made its debut on the Somme in July 1916 and it was to undergo further changes in character by the time of the armistice in November 1918. Just over half (50.3 per cent) of all enlistments into the wartime British army occurred after the introduction of conscription. By January 1918, although many wartime volunteers and even a few prewar Regulars and Territorials remained with the colours, the British army was a largely conscript force. It was an army that contained a disproportionately large number of men taken from white collar occupations. There were a number of reasons why this should be so. One was the simple fact that given the manpower problems being faced by a state fighting a total war, clerks could be more easily spared for the army than industrial workers. Nevertheless, as John Bourne has reminded us, wartime British casualties—and hence British soldiers—were overwhelmingly working class.

In January 1918 the BEF contained a mixture of experienced and inexperienced soldiers. The heavy losses at Passchendaele (some 250,000) were replaced to some extent by recruits, and the tactical experience and wisdom passed on by the hard core of survivors of Third Ypres compensated to some extent for the casualties—at least in a military sense. The manpower crisis at the beginning of 1918 led to the drastic step of reducing the number of battalions in British brigades from four to three, thus reducing 12 battalion divisions to nine battalions. Battalions were disbanded, amalgamated and shuffled from division to division: thus 31st Division, a Kitchener division of pals battalions, unkindly known to some historians as the 'Thirty-Worst', received three battalions of Foot Guards. This was a traumatic process. It involved the destruction of communities, of soldiers’ emotional 'homes', and led in some cases to bitterness and depressed morale. It also meant that some tactical practices, based on the four battalion brigade, had to be rethought. This was far from the end of the trauma. At the end of the German offensives, some divisions underwent further radical restructuring; thus the infantry of the 34th being reduced to cadre before being reconstituted. Moreover, most of the replacements that arrived at the front during the latter part of 1918 were extremely youthful and lacking in military experience.

The case of 19th (Western) Division, a Kitchener formation, illustrates this point. Making its debut on the Somme in 1916, it earned a reputation as a good fighting division. Committed to battle on the afternoon of 21 March 1918, it incurred 3800 casualties by the 26th. A large number of 'boys' arrived as replacements but there was no time to 'absorb' them properly into the Division before it was sent north to Messines. There on 10 April 19th Division was thrown into the battle of the Lys, suffering 4346 casualties. By May, the division 'was now composed almost entirely of new drafts, many of whom were not fully trained'. Sent to the south, 19th Division became involved in the latter stages of IX Corps' defensive battle on the Aisne. Between 21 March and 19 June, the Division suffered 13,000 casualties 'or about 90 per cent of the strength of the Division'.

In July 1918 the Division received more drafts, but still the 'majority of the men were young soldiers with no experience' and only partially trained. However, 'Good progress was made and ... [by 7 August when 19th Division returned to the front line] the men had been through a course of short but fairly intensive training'. 19th Division then experienced a spell of active trench warfare, including a successful divisional-sized operation in the Neuve Chapelle area on 3 September. Its next major offensive action came during the successful battle of the Selle in October. The losses incurred during these actions were replaced by 'considerable number of young soldiers with no previous experience of the war and very little time in which to train them'. The Division's final action was an attack on 6th November 1918. In the last week of the war it advanced 18 miles. 19th Division's total casualties since 21 March 1918 amounted to about 16,000. Its record of achievement, in its 12 opposed assaults during the Hundred Days, was an impressive 100 per cent.

The net result of the organisational changes and heavy casualties of 1918 were that for many if not most British divisions, the continuity of command and personnel of their constituent units was severely disrupted. Moreover, compared to the Canadian Corps and the New Zealand Division (the latter was the strongest division in the BEF), British divisions were weak.
Indeed, as Shane Schreiber has recently pointed out, in terms of manpower and firepower a Canadian division 'resembled a British Corps'. As has often been noted, the Australian and Canadian Corps had the great advantage over British corps of being permanent organisations, with all that implies for common doctrine, with staffs and commanders of various constituent parts becoming used to working together. Compare this with the complaint of a British divisional staff officer on hearing his division was about to come under the command of a different corps: each corps has its own methods 'and one has to get into new ways'. The wonder is, given these problems, that so many British formations performed as well as they did.

And, as Peter Simkins' research demonstrates, British divisions did fight well. Simkins analysed British and Dominion divisions' offensive operations and concluded that while Dominion formations indeed performed well, the success rate of many British divisions was equally impressive. His statistical evidence, which he places into context by discussing factors such as divisional freshness and numbers of days in battle, offers compelling evidence that 'the British divisions in the "Hundred Days", in spite of the crises they had experienced earlier in the year ... made a very weighty contribution to the Allied victory'. He identifies the Guards, 9th, 16th, 18th, 19th, 24th, 25th, 34th, 38th, and 66th as statistically the ten most successful British divisions. From these figures 'one could infer ... that, in general, ten British divisions performed at least as well as—and in a few cases possibly better than—the leading six or seven Dominion divisions'.

This is not to claim that all British divisions fought brilliantly on all occasions. Clearly, some divisions did not perform well during the German offensives of March to July 1918. On 8 August 1918 a British gunner officer complained that III Corps 'made a hopeless mess of their part' in the battle of Amiens, although we should note that they attacked under peculiarly difficult circumstances not of their own making. However, successful operations by British units greatly outnumbered failures, a fact that attests to the high level of competence to be found throughout the BEF. The example of 46th (North Midland) Division, a Territorial formation that performed spectacularly badly at Gommecourt on 1 July 1916 but carried out one of the outstanding feats of the war in storming Riqueval bridge and thus breaking the Hindenburg Line on 29 September 1918, is relevant here. Simon Peaple, who is working on this division, argues that by autumn 1918 the level of competence in the BEF was such that even an unexceptional formation like the 46th could display considerable competence, both in gunnery and infantry fighting.

'Peaceful Penetration' was not solely an Anzac activity. 19th Division, which called it 'nibbling', was not committed to a major action from July to mid-October 1918. During this time the division carried out a programme of bombardments, patrols, raids, and small attacks (up to and including brigade and divisional strength) that took ground from the enemy and wore down his strength and morale. Simkins has referred to the importance of the "relentless pressure" brought to bear on the Germans during the Hundred Days. The effect of this pressure on the Germans was intensified because Foch and Haig began to put into practice the rudiments of what we would today call 'operational art': treating the entire Western Front as a single battlefield, and switching the point of main effort from one sector to another, to keep the enemy 'on the back foot'. The closing down of the Amiens offensive on 11 August and switching the main attack north to Third Army's front sector is an obvious example. Constant attrition, as well the more obviously spectacular advances, played a major part in bringing about the Allied victory in 1918.

There are some other aspects of British military performance in 1918 that were vital to the Allied cause. First is the performance of British troops during the German offensives. As Simkins has demonstrated, the harsh criticism levied by Monash and others of British efforts during Villers-Bretonneux in April was undeserved. More generally, British troops deserve credit for their dogged performance during the spring offensives. German 'stormtroop' tactics did not come as a complete surprise to the British high command and in the first three months of the year divisions undertook considerable training in defensive measures, albeit under less than perfect conditions. In spite of the tactical reverse suffered on 21 March, the German offensives in Picardy in March and on the Lys in April ended as British strategic victories, albeit defensive ones, that prevented the Germans from reaching their operational goals and eroded German manpower and morale.
Second, we should not forget the vast number of British troops who were not organised into divisions. The British army had to spread its resources quite thinly. It could not concentrate its resources in 'teeth arm' units, nor could it focus on one main theatre of operations. Britain had to provide a full range of troops, all over the globe, from infantrymen and field gunners to the man who was described in his confidential report for 1918 as 'A good hardworking officer very well up in his special subject—boots.' On 1 August 1918, for instance, some 548,780 men were serving in the Royal Artillery. On the Western Front the gunners had 19 Royal Horse Artillery, 415 Royal Field Artillery, 148 anti-aircraft, 77 Trench Mortar, 58 Royal Garrison Artillery Heavy and 331 Siege batteries. A British RGA siege battery might just as well be used to support a Dominion as an English or Scottish division. The artillery support for the Australian Corps at Amiens on 8 August 1918 consisted of divisional batteries of the five Australian divisions: III (Aus), VI (Aus), XII (Aus), XIV, XXIII, 189, 298 Brigades RFA, XVI (Army) Brigade RHA; and no less than nine RGA brigades. Thus the majority of the artillery that played such a crucial role in the Australian success was British: the credit for the Australian victory belongs to the British gunners as well as Antipodean infantry. The same basic point applies to British logistic and combat support units. 216 Army Troops Company Royal Engineers, a specialist bridging unit raised in the English midland town of Nuneaton, served for some time in 1918 in support of the Australian Corps.

Let us now turn to look at various aspects of the performance of British troops in 1918. I will confine my comments to the following areas: morale; logistics; tactics and training; and leadership, command and control. I have recently written elsewhere on the subject of morale, so here I will limit myself to a few general points. British military morale—in the sense of soldiers' willingness to fight—remained sound throughout the First World War. It certainly was in a trough in spring 1918, but had the morale of Gough's Fifth Army really collapsed, as some have claimed, the Germans would have won the First World War. Surrenders of British soldiers and losses of guns notwithstanding, vastly more soldiers remained with their units and fought on than capitulated. Many of those who did surrender only did so after they had resisted for some time and the situation was clearly hopeless. Such a soldier was Pte OG Billingham of 2/6 Manchester (66th Division). He endured four and a half days of fighting, suffering a 'most awful time', resisting until the enemy had almost encircled his small party before he surrendered. Official reports, based on the censorship of soldiers' letters, confirm that British morale remained basically sound during the spring offensives.

Military victory brought with it higher morale. Apparently in response to a 'gloomy' letter from his father, in early June 1918 an officer of 9/East Surreys (12th Division) reported that soldiers at the front were rather more optimistic. When the Allies finally seized the initiative, and the Germans were being pushed back, soldiers of all ranks began to sense that victory was near:

These are great days for all of us and I pity anyone who isn't on the spot, and who has been through all the labour and heat of the day only to miss the reward at the end. Everyone is in fine form and confident to a degree not known hitherto.

A number of soldiers are credited with the aphorism 'amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics'. Effective logistics is certainly the hallmark of a professional army. In its handling of supply and administration, as in so many other things, by January 1918 the BEF had come a long way from July 1916, let alone August 1914. This is clear from Ian Brown's 1998 monograph on the subject. The ad hoc approach of the early war years was replaced by a much larger and more soundly based system by the time of the March Retreat. The Army Service Corps (ASC) grew from 498 officers and 5933 other ranks in August 1914 to 10,477 officers and 314,693 men four years later. Turning from transport to ordnance, by late 1917 the Armourers' Shop at the major base at Calais could repair 1000 rifles per day, and the Bootmakers' Shop, claimed to be the biggest in the world, employed 500 soldiers and 100 French civilians who could repair 30,000 pairs a week. The preparations for the Somme offensive included putting the supply of water to the front line on a firm footing, and planning to get water forward quickly if a rapid advance should ensue. Light tramways were constructed in forward areas to ease transportation problems.
But in the spring of 1918 to some individuals it must have seemed as if the logistic system that had served the needs of trench warfare so well had broken down. A member of the Frolics concert party wrote that on 23 March:

we had to make a hasty retreat with all our worldly possessions—every road out of the village was crowded with rushing traffic—lorries, limbers, GS waggons, great caterpillar-tractors with immense guns behind them, all were dashing along in an uninterrupted stream—and men, half-running, with portions of their kit dropping from them as they ran—for it was said that the enemy cavalry were through and were nearly in the village ... 'I never thought in the days when we looked with disdain on "bully" and biscuits I should ever long for them and cherish a bit of hard, dry biscuit as a hungry tramp cherishes a crust of bread.  

46

Seen in a wider perspective, the British logistic system proved remarkably resilient under the enormous strain of the German offensives. British logisticians certainly made mistakes. The history of the Army Ordnance Services, published in 1929, candidly admits that in the build up to the German offensive more should have been done to 'reduce or render more mobile' the various logistic workshops, dumps and the like. In the event, among other logistic catastrophes, 'A great part' of Fifth Army's 'central workshop was ... lost'.47 However, the triumphs of the British logisticians far outweighed the disasters. Between 20 March and 30 April 1918 the British lost 816 18-pdrs and 280 4.5 inch howitzers. Yet during the period 26 March-9 May, Fifth Army's artillery park alone, despite the need to move location several times as the enemy advanced, issued 585 guns and 2941 machine guns.48 A combination of the effectiveness of the BEF's logistics, and the inability of the Germans to advance further than they did to cut the British lines of communication (which was in part a product of German logistic problems), gave the fighting troops of the BEF a firm based upon which to fall back, regroup, and prepare to take the offensive.

Unfortunately, neither Ian Brown's new monograph nor the volume of the British Official History that deals with transportation goes into very much detail about the logistics of the Hundred Days.49 The evidence suggests that the logistic system came under severe strain but was as flexible in the advance as it had been resilient in the retreat. The demands on combat support and logistic units were very different from those of trench warfare. Assault river crossings, in which bridge building engineers played a vital role, were a feature of operations such as the battle of the Selle and the crossing of the River Lys (both in October 1918). For instance, the Royal Engineers between the beginning of the war and August 1918 had constructed 180 steel bridges; in the three months after 8 August 1918, they built 330.50 Success brought its own problems. Most fundamental of all, the logisticians had to struggle to keep advancing troops in supply. One of the most perceptive historians of the war, Cyril Falls, who served with 36th (Ulster) Division, discussed the logistic problems faced II Corps when it broke out of the Ypres Salient at the end of September:

Batteries in an advance go forward only. The limbers which feed them, the lorries which feed the limbers from the train, must go forward and backward. Therein lay the real trouble. The roads were choked.

The next phase of the offensive, on 14 October, was delayed until sufficient artillery was amassed for the assault. The attack was successful: Courtrai fell, and 36th Division continued to advance. By this stage, Falls judged, the chief obstacle to final victory was not the Germans but logistic problems. Wagons and lorries had to make their way across 'the terrible roads of the devastated area'. By 'good organisation and industry' and, not least, sheer hard work and dedication, the Army Service Corps 'scored a triumph'51 as did the rest of the support services, including the provost branch who wrestled with the problems of traffic control. The Ulster Division's experiences were far from untypical.52 By improvisation and strenuous exertion the BEF's logisticians kept the advance going, but it was a near run thing. One can scarcely fault the performance of these British troops.
Nowhere was the British army's learning curve more apparent than in the field of tactics. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the implementation of tactical 'good practice' in the BEF between mid-1916 and the end of 1917. Suffice it to say that the BEF took advantage of new technology as it became available—Lewis Guns, gas, trench mortars, the 106 fuse, tanks, wireless, aircraft and the like—and by trial and error developed effective tactics to harness it. The British battalion of August 1918 had far fewer men than its counterpart of two years earlier: about 500, compared to 1000. However, its firepower was much more formidable. The four Lewis Guns per battalion of 1916 had grown to 30, plus eight light trench mortars and 16 rifle-bombers. As early as the spring of 1917, the lessons of the Somme had been absorbed, resulting in the platoon organisation being changed from four rifle sections to one rifle section plus a section each of Lewis Gunners, bombers, and rifle grenadiers. Moreover, the division now included a Machine Gun battalion as a tactical unit, with the battalion commander in a position 'analogous' to that of the 'C[ommander] R[oyal] A[rtillery] of a division concerning the artillery'. Although Tim Travers has argued for the essential conservatism of officers who relied on infantry and artillery centred methods (as opposed to tanks), by 1918 the BEF was at the forefront of military technology. Put in simple terms, the 106 artillery fuse probably made a greater contribution to the Allied victory than the tank.

Tactical good practice could only be implemented by successful training. As we have seen, during 1918 time for training was at a premium, to be fined in when operations permitted. Yet the comments of the historian of the Welsh Guards were as applicable to 1918 as to earlier years: 'Training never ceased during the war. The hardened veteran, out of the line for a rest, joined the young recruit, who had just arrived in France for the first time, and trained'.

The learning process continued while operations were in progress in 1918. As early as 5 April during the first phase of the German offensive, GHQ issued the first of a long series of Notes on Recent Fighting in which an analysis of the lessons 21-22 March were 'issued down to brigades'. Notes No 7, issued two weeks after the opening of the battles of the Lys, stressed the importance of holding the flanks of an enemy breakthrough and thus enfilading the enemy and helping to contain his advance, a lesson drawn from the dogged actions of 55th and 40th Divisions on the flanks of the German breakthrough on 9 April. When the Allies seized the initiative from the Germans, official publications disseminated the lessons of offensive war. Other higher formations issued their own documents. In late August, Horne's First Army issued a document that recognised that some divisions had greater expertise at fire and movement tactics in open warfare than others. It stressed the need for better training of troops acting as advance guards when not actually in contact with the enemy, who had a tendency to move 'in general lines' rather than concentrate in small bodies. Such 'high level' tactical advice was in addition to the numerous studies produced by divisions or even lower level formations for use by units under their command. An important step was the appointment of Ivor Maxse, by reputation one of the finest trainers in the British Army, as Inspector General of Training in 1918. His inspectorate produced a large number of 'Training Leaflets' which covered topics such as 'Sample of a Day's Training for a Company' and 'Attack Formation for Small Units' in a straightforward, accessible fashion. These leaflets were issued in vast numbers. Of the two mentioned above, by February 1919 39,426 were issued of the first, and 41,496 of the second.

There is still much work to be done on this topic; the role of role of Maxse would repay further investigation, for instance. But clearly in 1918 as in previous years, the British high command was making strenuous efforts to analyse and disseminate tactical lessons of recent actions, and as a result commanders were receiving a great deal of useful tactical advice and information, which was integrated into training.

The reality of the tactical learning curve was made explicit in an account of the attack on Beaulencourt carried out by 21st Division on 1 September 1918. This account was written in 1919 by Captain DV Kelly of 6/Licesters. Kelly was a Somme veteran, and it is worth quoting his account at some length:
[This attack] gave a striking proof of the enormous advance made by the new British Army in the technique of warfare, for it was a small masterpiece achieved with one tenth of the casualties it would assuredly have cost us in 1916. The long western-front of the village, which appeared the main line of approach, was defended by numerous well-concealed pits for riflemen and machine guns, and had we been attacking in the 1916 method the course of events would probably have been as follows. A tremendous artillery bombardment, perhaps for two days, would have annihilated the village and churned up the ground, and at zero hour our troops would have advanced in waves across the belt of land commanded by the various posts, who, as our barrage passed on behind them, would have opened a murderous direct fire on them and taken an enormous toll of casualties. Very possibly we should never have reached the village, but consolidated a line of shellholes a few hundred yards beyond the starting-point, from which a fresh attack would have been delivered perhaps several days later. By September, 1918, however we had acquired an improved technique. The Western side of the village was left severely alone, and the attack was arranged for the northern end of the village, a procedure which involved in itself a movement and assembly by night that would have been difficult for inexperienced officers. The artillery fired numerous periodic ‘crashes’, and their support at zero was arranged to appear merely a repetition of one of these and did not specially indicate the time or direction of the attack. Under cover of complete darkness the village was rushed and the defences taken in the rear, the whole affair being a complete surprise ... It is very important to remember that the artillery had improved their technique just as had the staffs and the infantry: in 1916 one could hardly have relied on the accuracy and exact synchronization, which one had now learned to expect, required for such an operation.

About 130 Germans were captured, in addition to a number of weapons. The two assaulting battalions, 1/Wiltshires and 6/Leicesters, suffered only five killed and 50 wounded.

Among the reasons for success mentioned by Kelly are sophisticated artillery techniques and good co-ordination between the gunners and the infantry, good staff work, and good regimental leadership: these factors made it possible to achieve surprise. While his description of the ‘1916 methods’ was perhaps a little harsh, in broad terms it was correct. Kelly’s description of the tactics of 1918 was applicable to many other formations: 21st Division was a very competent division but it was far from unique. The tactical expertise of 1918 was, I would suggest, the product of hard won experience gained on the Somme in 1916, at Arras and Third Battle of Ypres in 1917; and good training.

British junior leadership in 1918 has had a bad press. The roots of the belief that that British regimental officers behaved poorly in 1918 can perhaps be traced back to Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds’ comments in the British official history. However, it was also held during the war by some British Regular officers, and it seemed to be an article of faith with many Australians. I take issue with these views in my forthcoming monograph and here it will suffice to say that by 1918 the selection process for British officers was very similar to that for Australians. By the last year of the war the British officer corps was a broadly meritocratic body in which leadership ability counted for vastly more and social status for much less than before the war. Most officers were by 1918 commissioned from the ranks, and something like 40 per cent of officers demobilised at the end of the war came from lower middle-class and working-class backgrounds.

There is much to be said that for the view that by the summer of 1917 ‘war was becoming more than ever a platoon commanders’ war, for it would be on their initiative and determination that success would depend’. The Hundred Days was probably the finest hour of these meritocratic temporary officers. The quality of their leadership was a vital component of British military success in 1918. On 30 March 1918, on the sixth day of 20th (Light) Division’s retreat, Major RS Cockburn came across some exhausted stragglers, lacking training and discipline, who seemed to have given up all thought of soldiering. However their officers, who were themselves inexperienced, showed good leadership in halting the retreat.
by explaining to them why no further retreat was possible. Leaders did not have to be officers. The minor counterattack by Lewis gunners of 24/Royal Fusiliers (2nd Division) led by CSM ‘Rosy’ Read and Sgt Roland Whipp during the March Retreat are typical of the countless number of similar operations instigated by NCOs.

Good junior leadership was just as vital during the advance; low level initiative and improvisation became increasingly important as the Allies pushed forward. Long periods for the preparation of assaults were not always available or even necessary. This new tactical situation demanded excellence from staff officers and junior commanders. A gunner subaltern noted in his diary that orders for an assault to be made at 0130 on 23 October only arrived 'soon after 9 pm. Meant an unholy rush and consequently no sleep during the night'. However, the attack was a great success. This can profitably be compared both to the rushed and frequently unsuccessful attacks on the Somme in 1916, and also to the 'minute preparations' and extensive practice carried out before many 1917 operations. According to the commander of British 5th Division's artillery, the 'outstanding feature' of operations in the Hundred Days:

was the way in which batteries pushed on and took advantage of the tactical situations as they developed. On many occasions batteries were commanded by quite junior subalterns with remarkable success, in spite of the fact that they were entirely new to open warfare conditions.

In late September, the high command stressed that, while the barrage remained vital, it was also important to use 18-pdrs as 'weapons of opportunity' in direct support of the 'leading infantry', which required the closest liaison between the infantry and the guns. Guns were also to be used to engage enemy guns holding up the advance of tanks. Not just field artillery, but guns as big as 60-pdrs, were to be 'push[ed] up ... boldly'.

While the importance of the creeping barrage and counterbattery work has been well covered in recent years, the role of the infantry has perhaps received less attention than it deserves. The advice issued by Brigadier-General James Jack to 'All Ranks 28th Infantry Brigade' of 9th (Scottish) Division on 27 September 1918 concisely encapsulates much of the tactical wisdom of the Hundred Days, which was based on the experience of 1916 and 1917:

Brigadier has heard of your gallantry, has seen your smartness, and prays you use your wits.

Keep as close as you can to 18pdrs (pipsqueak) barrage. Its their, [sic] so don't go into it. Never mind your dressing.

Reply at once to any enemy small arm [sic] fire. Fire at once at any enemy you see in range—slowly and accurately from the quickest position, lying, standing, or kneeling.

Don't crowd, the loose order will save you casualties if you use your wits.

Watch your flanks and draw them back if necessary.

If held up reply steadily to the fire whilst your comrades get round.

If necessary help your comrades on flank by cross fire.

Surround pill-boxes and Machine Guns. They can only fire one or two ways.

Don't have more than about 100x [yards] between sections. Don't scatter from your sections, file is best for advancing, a few paces interval for firing.

Push steadily forward in your little groups, using slow covering fire where necessary, and stick roughly to your own line of ADVANCE.

Good luck.
Such tactics were simple enough to be taught quickly and effectively to the vast numbers of inexperienced 18-year-olds arriving as reinforcements for the BEF in 1918. Combined with effective support from the guns and sometimes tanks and aircraft, such tactics were good enough to inflict defeat after defeat on the Germans.

In the last few weeks of the war, as the fighting moved into untouched countryside and into intact villages, towns and cities, on some occasions the importance of the artillery diminished: on 5 November, a gunner officer noted that the enemy were retreating 'at such a rate as to render the H[eavy] A[rtillery] useless'. Under such conditions the fighting abilities of the infantry made the difference between success and failure, victory and defeat.

The open warfare conditions of 1918 called for the learning of new skills. As an officer of 20th Division commented, with a slight degree of exaggeration, the British citizen army had trained for offensive action, but not how to withdraw under attack. In fact, British divisions learned how to conduct a fighting retreat remarkably quickly and effectively. When the tide turned in favour of the Allies, they developed yet another approach to warfare. Pace those who believe that cavalry was completely redundant on the Western Front, the mobility of mounted troops, which had been a useful asset in the days of trench warfare, now became a priceless one. During the Hundred Days, there was a shortage of horsemen, and, tactically, 'the absence of mounted troops was severely felt'. In September, 19th Division formed a 'Divisional Mounted Detachment' that in October had a skirmish with German cavalry. In early October, the infantry divisions of I Corps were reorganised to facilitate rapid pursuit of the enemy. Infantry brigades were divided into an advanced guard and a main body. Each brigade commander was allotted an all arms mobile body (one section of cavalry, one section RE, one 18-pdr battery, one section each of 4.5in howitzers and Medium Trench Mortars, one company of machine gunners, part of a Field Ambulance, and an 'Investigation Party' of men from a Tunnelling Company). This reorganisation 'proved very suitable to the circumstances'.

The command and control (C2) of the BEF has been something of a blind spot for historians. Two of the most influential studies, by Martin Samuels and Martin van Creveld, concentrate on the beginning of the Somme campaign and do not analyse the situation in 1918, giving a one-sided view. Samuels compares the situation at Thiepval on 1 July 1916 with German C2 on 21 March 1918, a case of comparing apples with bananas rather than apples with apples if there ever was one. Tim Travers in two very influential books painted a bleak picture of the BEF's C2 system. John Bourne has summarised Travers's view of it as:

rigid, hierarchical and inflexible ... reactionary, hostile to technology, preferring a costly 'human solution' to the problems of the battlefield and fatuously determined to overcome the of chaos war by highly detailed and structured planning from above ... The most that can be said in favour of the British system is that it broke down under the impact of the German offensives and the semi-open warfare which followed, to be replaced by 'useful anarchy'.

Bourne takes issue with Travers' views, as do I. The German offensives of March to July 1918 certainly placed the BEF's command and control system under severe strain. The points made about logistics above are also applicable to command and control: the British C2 system proved resilient and flexible enough to absorb and cope with the limited damage inflicted by the German advance. The sudden reemergence of open warfare left the BEF no choice but to shake off some of their trench-bound habits. Overblown divisional headquarters had to be slimmed down to cope with the new circumstances, the ideal being 'to work as far as possible with a message book only'. Some commanders of divisions 'establish[ed] advanced HQ motor cars', linked by telephone line to the divisional signal office. This is not to underestimate the real C2 problems experienced during the German offensives. Nevertheless, the BEF's C2 system survived, battered but sufficiently intact to allow the BEF to pass onto the offensive. One reason for this was that command at various levels was much less rigid and hidebound than the traditional version would have us believe. The Somme, Arras, Passchendaele and Cambrai battles bred a group of commanders at battalion, brigade and divisional level—perhaps even at corps and army level—able to cope with the changing
demands of the battlefield. At even lower levels, subalterns, NCOs and even privates became increasingly accustomed to taking initiative and responsibility. In Bourne's words, 'The SHLM Project on British divisional performance during the war suggests that "useful anarchy" began much before 1918'.

As noted above, the increase in the tempo of offensive operations in the autumn of 1918 placed considerable strain on staff officers. However, in general, operations and logistic staffs coped well with the mobile warfare of the Hundred Days. To take just one example from many, the historian of 5/Leicesters (46th Division) recorded his appreciation of the staff work (and the 'skill and pluck' of the ASC) that enabled the infantry to attack on 29 September carrying only one day's rations. The 1919 Braithwaite Report on Staff Organisation believed that the open warfare phase vindicated 'the soundness of the general principles on which the Staff is organized and was trained before the war'. Although apparently smacking of self-congratulation and even complacency, the historian can accept this conclusion, with reservations, as sound.

The performance of British troops was, then, a vital factor in the Allied victory of 1918. It was not a 'British' victory or even a British Empire victory. British and Dominion forces fought as part of a multinational coalition, and to think in such terms would be to do a disservice to the considerable French, United States and Belgian contributions. But it was undoubtedly a triumph for the forces of the British Empire. It does not diminish the achievements of the Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and South African forces in any way to recognise that the performance of troops from the British Isles was an indispensable factor in the final victory.
Endnotes

I would like to thank the usual suspects, especially Chris McCarthy, Peter Simkins, John Lee and Niall Barr, for their advice on this topic. I am grateful to Dr Peter H Liddle for permission to quote from material in the Liddle Collection, University of Leeds; Mrs Pam Bendall for granting me access to material in the library of Staff College, Camberley; and the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum for granting me access to their collections. Crown copyright material in the Public Record Office appears by permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

2. See Sir Henry Horne to wife, 11 November 1918, Horne papers, Imperial War Museum.
8. See, among other works, Bill Rawling, Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps. 1914-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 87-123.
9. In addition to Prior and Wilson, Command, see, among other works, Bill Rawling, Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps. 1914-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 87-123.
16. Material on 19th Division is drawn from Everard Wyrall, The History of the 19th Division 1914-1918 (London: Edward Arnold, nd); 'Report on Operations undertaken by IX Corps between 27th and 30th May 1918', in WO 95/837, Public Record Office, and Anon, A Short History of the 19th (Western) Division 1914-1918 (London: John Murray, 1919). Quotations are from the latter source, 61, 78, 90.
17. Ibid, 100.
22. Diary, Lt CR Benstead, 8 August 1918, Liddle Collection, University of Leeds.
24. Wyrall, 19th Division, 211-14.

29. 'German Methods in the Attack, and Indications of an Offensive', annex to Tank Corps Summary of Information, 27 February 1918, WO 95/93, PRO.


31. *General Aspects: Officers, items 6, LC.

32. SME, 163.

33. BOH 1918, IV: 62.


37. Diary, 21-25 March 1918, OG Billingham papers, LC.

38. The British Armies in France as gathered from Censorship', Appendix to July 1918, Haig Papers, WO 256/33, PRO; Middlebrook, *Kaiser's Battle*, 105, 300-18, 341.

39. RB Marshall to father, 4 June 1918, Marshall Papers, LC.

40. CD Sheffield and GIS Inglis (eds), *From Vimy Ridge to the Rhine: The Great War Letters of Christopher Stone DSO MC* (Ramsbury: Crowood, 1989), 136 (Stone to wife, 3 October 1918).


42. SME, 181.

43. 'Notes on Calais Base', November 1917, E436A S[taff] C[ollege] L[ibrary], Camberley.

44. 'Notes from a Lecture on Water Supplies in the Field', nd (c spring 1917), E435, SCL.

45. 'Forward Tramlines in Trench War', E in C Field Work notes No 22, nd, E435, SCL.

46. Signaller CL Leeson to 'Will', 29 March 1918, Leeson Papers, LC. For details of the soldier's diet in more normal times, see 'Appendix 1, The British Ration in the Field', WO 107/28, PRO.


52. Operations of the 17th Division from 21st August 1918 to 11 November 1918, 112-13, Conf 3355, SCL, *Short History of 19th Division*, 104.


54. Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 311.

55. In *Breakthrough*, 224, Hubert C Johnson misdates this restructuring by 12 months, placing it in 1918.


57. Travers, *How the War was Won*, 7-9, 175-8.


59. For the BEF's training regime, see SS 152 *Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France January, 1918*.


61. Notes on Recent Fighting No 1, 5 April 1918.

62. Notes on Recent Fighting No 7, 24 April 1918.

63. For example, SS 218, Operations By the Australian Corps Against Hamel, Bois de Hamel and Bois de Vaire, 4th of July, 1918.

64. 'First Army no 1888 (G), lessons of recent fighting ...', 30 August 1918, SCL.


67. British tactical pamphlets were also used as source material by the US Army. See *The Attack of the British 9th Corps at Messines Ridge* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917) and Jas A Moss,
Trench Warfare (Menasha, Wisconsin: Geo Banta, 1917). The former was effectively a straight reprint of a British pamphlet; the latter was based on the 'latest private and official British publications'.

68. DV Kelly, 39 Months with the "Tigers", 1915-1918 (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), 137-8.


70. Griffith, Battle Tactics, 22.

71. Home, Diary, 163, 166 (1 and 10 April 1918).

72. Diary, 3 October 1916, JT Hutton, State Library of New South Wales, ML MSS 1138; Lectures (?) on 'Stopping the German Offensive, 1918' and 'Leadership and Discipline', CH Brand Papers, 3 DRL 2750, Australian War Memorial; W D Joynt, Saving the Channel Ports 1918 (North Blackburn: Wren Publishing, 1975) 2-5.

73. GD Sheffield, Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War (London: Macmillan, 1999).

74. AM McGilchrist, The Liverpool Scottish 1900-1919 (Liverpool: Young, 1930), 131.

75. Unpublished account (written 1918), 45, RS Cockburn papers, P 258. IWM.

76. Author's interview with Roland Whipp.

77. See Short History of the 19th Division, 93.

78. Diary, 22, 23 October 1918, CR Benstead Papers, LC.

79. For one such attack in 1917, by the Guards Division on 31 July 1917, see Dudley Ward, Welsh Guards, 149.

80. Brigadier-General AH Hussey, Narrative of the 5th Divisional Artillery (Woolwich: RA Institution, 1919), 36. For examples, see ibid, 34-5.

81. Notes on Recent Fighting No 21, 25 September 1918, SCL.

82. 'First Army no 1888 (G), lessons of recent fighting' 30 August 1918, SCL.


84. Appendix G to September 1918, WO 95/1775, PRO.

85. For the BEF's training regime, see SS 152 Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France January, 1918.

86. Diary, 5 November 1918, Lt CR Benstead, LC. See also Hussey, Fifth Divisional Artillery, 45.

87. Unpublished account, 23, RS Cockburn papers, P 258, IWM.

88. For example, Bernard Brodie, War and Politics (London: Cassell, 1973), 456.

89. BOH 1918 V: 536.

90. Short History of 19th Division, 95.


95. Notes on Recent Fighting No 4, 13 April 1918.

96. See the chapters by Chris McCarthy and John Lee in GD Sheffield and Stephen Badsey (eds), Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Experience 1914-1918 (forthcoming).


99. 'Report of the Committee on Staff Organization', 6 March 1919, WO 32/3753, PRO.
Seniority and Society were the dominant factors in Army promotion.

---

The war at least had made the Army for the moment a career open to the talents with only one standard: courage and the capacity to command in battle ...

No other army in Europe at this time was drawing its officers from more varied levels of society than did the British, or from so many careers in which individuality, resource and leadership were qualities which were essential to success.

---

On 29 September 1918 almost the whole British Expeditionary Force was involved in major offensives against the German Army in France and Belgium. It was the biggest British Army that anyone had ever and would ever command: 1.8 million men, comprising 60 infantry divisions, five of them Australian. During the previous 24 hours, the BEF fired the highest daily expenditure of ammunition during the course of the war, 945,052 rounds. On the Fourth Army front the 46th (North Midland) Division, supported by the heaviest divisional artillery bombardment of the war, broke the Hindenburg Line at Bellenglise. The Allied Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Foch, described this as 'the blow from which there could be no [German] recovery'. The day represents the apogee of the BEF in the Great War. It also provides a timely opportunity to examine the kind of men who had come into positions of command at this culminating moment in the history of the British Army.

Few groups in British history have been the subject of such vilification as the Western Front generals of the Great War. Their popular reputation remains thoroughly evil, unredeemed by 30 years of revisionist scholarship. Their professional competence is ridiculed, their courage impugned, their lack of humanity decried. British academic historians prepared to leave their comfortable campus chateaux for the front line of the village hall and provincial library soon discover, sometimes to their discomfiture, the enduring emotive power of the Great War in British popular culture. Attempts to defend the military high command are often met with incomprehension, sometimes with rage, and even with tears. The Great War still touches a raw nerve.

What exposed this nerve was, of course, the unprecedented and unique level of British casualties. It is difficult to reconcile these with the rest of British history. They mock the Whig tradition. Surely someone was at fault? Popular opinion quickly indicted British generalship. Although individuals, especially Haig, are singled out for special blame, the denunciation is essentially a blanket one. Few have escaped. Plumer is certainly one. He is everyone's favourite First World War general, even AJP Taylor's. His methodical planning, the limited nature of his objectives, his concern for the welfare of his troops are contrasted with the casual amateurism, strategic grandiosity and flint-like indifference to ordinary soldiers' suffering of his peers. Plumer's reputation is shared, perhaps, only by the Dominion generals, though in practice only two names are widely known in Britain, the Canadian, Currie, and—more especially—the Australian, Monash, on whose brow rest still the laurels placed there by Lloyd George in his War Memoirs—the war's one authentic 'British' military genius whose merits were deliberately obscured by a Army establishment appalled by the success of a man who was 'a civilian' when the war began and also a Jew.

The function of the Australian Imperial Force in a certain strain of British popular writing on the war, notably that of Denis Winter, is to be held up as a mirror in which the British Army's inadequacies are revealed. Australian superiority is everywhere apparent. As 'amateurs', Australian commanders approached the war's operational problems unburdened by irrelevant
dogma. Pragmatism made it easier for them to understand and accept modern technology and to learn from their mistakes. They were 'task-oriented', uninhibited by pointless attention to the minutiae of military etiquette and appearances, imaginative, adaptable and flexible. They led from the front and shared the sufferings of their men. In this they had little choice because their men were all independent-minded volunteers who could not be driven like sheep. Australian commanders could not expect automatic obedience. They had to prove themselves. In doing so they achieved moral authority. Their intimacy with front-line conditions taught them what was and was not tactically possible. Their aggression was duly tempered with calculation and prudence.

The explanation of Australian superiority, following Bean, is essentially sociological. Australian commanders were superior because Australia was superior: a democratic society free from the enervating inequalities of what Courtney Love recently described as Britain's 'serf culture'; a frontier society requiring initiative, resourcefulness, independent judgement and moral and physical courage; a rural society with plenty of good food and fresh air in which people could grow strong and straight.7

This essay offers a different perspective. It stresses the similarities, rather than the differences, between British and Australian commanders. To find these similarities Australian commanders need to be put in context. The first context is that of the British Expeditionary Force, of which they were part, whose 'learning curve' they followed and with whose British commanders, by the final year of the war at least, they shared many characteristics. The second context is that of Australian military experience before the war, the context of Australian commanders not as Australians but as Australian soldiers.

In the commonplace popular denunciation of British generals during the Great War (that they were 'all cavalrymen', that they were 'all stupid', and that they 'all stayed out of harm's way in comfortable chateaux miles from the front line') the most intriguing word is the word 'all'. 'All' is actually a considerable number. More than 1200 men held the rank of Brigadier-General or above during the Great War on the Western Front alone.8 Little interest has been shown in their collective biography. This is an important gap. Much recent work on the operational history of the British Army, notably Prior and Wilson's study of Rawlinson, the researches of the SHLM project and, in its perverse way, Travers' How the War Was Won confirm that the BEF's evolution was the work of many hands.9 It mattered then and it matters now who was in command of brigades and divisions and corps, who their staff officers were, who commanded the artillery and engineers and who administered the logistics of an immense and complicated institution.

On 29 September 1918 there were more than 450 generals serving in the BEF.10 These included five army commanders, 17 corps commanders, 63 divisional commanders, 189 brigade commanders, 100 artillery commanders, 45 staff officers and 23 engineers. Twenty-seven were Australian.11 What kind of men were they? The empirical evidence is clear. They were overwhelmingly British Regular officers on the active service list at the outbreak of war. Into this category fall 74.8 per cent of formation commanders, 82 per cent of artillery commanders and 82.2 per cent of staff officers. This situation was not confined to general officer ranks. The post of GSO1, chief of staff of a division, was a virtual Regular monopoly: 94 per cent of the 53 British divisions had Regular GSO1s. Even at the junior (though important) staff officer level of brigade major, nearly a third were Regulars, many of them extremely young, often mere 2nd Lieutenants when the war began.12 The preponderance of Regulars in these key posts is too great to be explained by chance: it suggests policy.

The Army's ability to maintain this Regular dominance is, in some ways perhaps, surprising. There were fewer than 13,000 Regular officers on the eve of war.13 Only 10,827 officers belonged to the cavalry and infantry, from which the BEF's formation commanders and most of its staff officers would be principally recruited.14 These already small numbers were speedily reduced by the high officer casualty rates of 1914-15. Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire shows 2807 Regular officers killed or died during the first year of the war in France and Belgium, with another 1103 missing or prisoners of war, a total of 3910, a loss of 30.7 percent on the August 1914 figure.15
There were only four sources of trained officers readily to hand. The first was provided by the Indian Army, which had 3364 officers in August 1914; the second by the British Army's own Reserve of Officers (3202); the third by the Special Reserve (2557); and the fourth by the Territorial Force (9563). None of these provided significant numbers of generals for the BEF in September 1918 or indeed throughout the war.

Only nine Indian Army officers held general officer rank by 29 September 1918, a 'success rate' of 0.28 per cent. The most prominent was Sir William Birdwood (GOC Fifth Army). One of the BEF's best corps commanders, Sir Claud Jacob (GOC II Corps), was also an Indian Army officer. But there were no divisional commanders from the Indian Army by September 1918 and only two brigade commanders, HE Ap Rhys Price (GOC 113th Brigade) and EA Fagan (GOC 12th Brigade). The staff picture was equally blank. Only five officers from the Indian Army had posts: Major-General HC Holman (DA & QMG Fourth Army); Brigadier-General CN Macmullen (BGGS XIX Corps); Major-General AW Peck (DA & QMG First Army); Major-General LR Vaughan (MGGS Third Army). The fifth, Brigadier-General RA Carruthers, was DA & QMG Australian Corps, a position he held throughout the war, having being recalled from retirement as Secretary of the Bombay Yacht Club in 1914 by his old friend, Birdwood.

The British Army's Reserve and Special Reserve officers fared little better. There were only 17 general officers from this source on the Western Front on 29 September 1918, a 'success rate' of 0.3 per cent. Twelve were commanding formations, the most senior of whom was Sir Herbert Watts (GOC XIX Corps). There was also one staff general, though admittedly an important one, Sir Herbert Lawrence (CGS).

The failure of Territorial officers to reach general officer rank was a major source of grievance in the Force. By 29 September 1918 there were only 11 Territorials holding general officer rank, none above Brigadier-General, six infantry brigade commanders (3.2 per cent of the total) and five BGRAs (5 per cent). These represent a 'success rate' of 0.12 per cent. In contrast, the 349 Regulars who held general officer rank on 29 September 1918 represent a 'success rate' of 2.74 percent. British Territorials were left to fume about a Regular 'closed shop' and to look wistfully at the success of their militia cousins in the Australian and Canadian Corps.

In the face of the British Army's apparent determination to place trained Regular officers in all key posts, it is perhaps surprising that so many Dominion officers were able to reach general officer rank. This had not been the case in the Boer War. Only one 'colonial', the New Zealander RH Davies, received an independent command. The change owed much to the increasing perception of the Dominion contingents as 'national' armies, whose governments had both the will and the power to insist on the appointment of their own officers to positions of command, political backing which British Territorials lacked.

But the greater success of Dominion officers can also be misleading. The Australian Corps and its predecessor formations were never enclaves hermetically sealed from British Regular contamination. I Anzac and II Anzac Corps were both commanded for most of the war by British Regulars, Birdwood and Sir AJ Godley. Before its 'Australisation' in the summer of 1918, the Australian Corps had also been well served by other British Regulars, notably Sir HB Walker (GOC 1st Australian Division) and NM Smyth VC (GOC 2nd Australian Division). Even by 29 September 1918 the Australian Corps was far from being an 'amateur' organisation. Four of the Corps' key personnel, Blamey (chief of staff), Coxen (field artillery commander), Fraser (heavy artillery commander) and Carruthers (chief logistics officer), were Australian or British Regulars. An Australian Regular, Brudenell White, virtually ran the Corps during Birdwood's indulgent command. As chief of staff also of the Australian Imperial Force, he continued to exercise a powerful influence on appointments and promotions even after his own elevation to chief of staff, Fifth Army. The tensions between Regulars and militiamen, so apparent in the British Army, were also present in the Australian Corps. 'Pompey' Elliott, in particular, believed that White favoured Regulars, especially those with British Army connections. He never forgave White for promoting Gellibrand, an ex-British Regular and staff college graduate, "over his head" to the command of 3rd Division, a disappointment from which he never really recovered.
It is also, perhaps, a little misleading to compare Australian ‘amateurs’ only with British Regulars. If they are compared with British ‘amateurs’ a rather similar picture emerges. Tremendous popular misconceptions persist in Britain about the social origins of the AIF in general and its commanders in particular. The AIF is still generally perceived as a rural, frontier force. Australian generals were, of course, principally members of a well-educated, urban, professional colonial elite. They were, admittedly, often the first generation to achieve this status, many having parents from quite humble social origins and occupations. Only Gellibrand, Glasgow and Heane were engaged in agricultural pursuits. Bennett was an accountant, Cannan worked in insurance, Robertson and Tivey were stockbrokers. Cam Stewart worked in a bank, the belligerent and formidable ‘Pompey’ Elliott was a solicitor, Monash was a civil engineer and barrister, Hobbs and Rosenthal were architects, Grimwade was a pharmacist, Bessell-Browne, Goddard and Leane were businessmen, Herring was an estate agent, McNicholl was a headmaster and Mackay a physicist. These are exactly the same backgrounds from which the BEF’s Territorial and ‘Kitchener’ generals came. The success of these men demonstrates the importance in modern war of the ‘transferable skills’ of the trained professional mind rather than the field craft of the frontiersman.

The BEF’s generals on 29 September 1918 were also predominantly infantrymen. The belief that ‘all’ British First World War generals were cavalrymen is astonishingly tenacious. It is given support by the fact that both Commanders-in-Chief came from that arm as did five (out of 11) army commanders, two of whom (Byng and Birdwood) were in post on 29 September 1918. At lower levels of command, however, the situation appears less sinister. By September 1918 only one corps commander (5.9 per cent). Sir Beauvoir de Lisle, was a cavalryman (and he spent the first ten years of his army career in the Durham Light Infantry). Eleven divisional commanders were cavalrymen (17.5 per cent), but three of these were commanding (and had only commanded) cavalry divisions and two were Dominion officers. Of the 50 British infantry divisions on 29 September 1918 only six were commanded by cavalrymen (12 per cent). There is a similar picture at infantry brigade level: 155 brigade commanders were infantrymen (86.1 per cent) and only 17 cavalrymen (9.4 per cent). These figures are broadly in line with the proportion of cavalry to infantry officers in the prewar Regular Army. Cavalrymen generally fared better in the promotion stakes under Sir John French than under Sir Douglas Haig. Haig certainly favoured Gough’s rapid ascent to Army command, but he showed little preference for other cavalrymen at corps or divisional level. Nor did he surround himself with close advisers who were cavalrymen.

Where cavalrymen are mentioned in a First World War context, of course, the sound of gathering stereotypes is deafening. Not only are cavalrymen irredeemably stupid, but they are also ignorant of technology (a charge constantly asserted and almost never proven) and imbued with something called the ‘cavalry spirit’, which supposedly made them as reckless with other men’s lives as they were with their own. The career of one of the longest-serving cavalryman commanders of an infantry division is, perhaps, instructive.

On 29 September 1918 Major-General Nevill Smyth was commanding a second-line British Territorial division, the 59th (2nd North Midland). Smyth was the son of a distinguished scientist. In a prewar career packed with incident he commanded not only cavalry but also infantry and machine guns. He suppressed the Khalifa Sherif’s rising on the Blue Nile, surveyed the Sudan and charted the Nile cataracts. In 1913 he obtained his Aviator’s certificate. His flying ability came in useful when, as GOC 2nd Australian Division, he achieved a certain degree of notoriety for ‘borrowing’ aircraft to do his own trench spotting. Far from being an unreflecting thruster, his command was marked by thoroughness, professionalism and attention to detail.

When Lord Moran described the prewar British Regular Army as a ‘small family affair’ he was not speaking metaphorically. British Army officers came principally from military families. Nearly a third of the BEF’s formation commanders, more than a third of the artillery commanders and a quarter of staff officers on 29 September 1918 had fathers in the British or Indian Armies. A public school education was common but few attended a university. Most had undergone preliminary training, either at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, or the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich. Formal training of this kind was comparatively unusual in
contemporary British society. The British Army was certainly more 'professional' than much British business and industry.31 A third of the BEF's generals on 29 September 1918 had also successfully completed a course of higher training at the staff colleges at Camberley or Quetta. Trained staff officers were a precious asset.32 They were used principally in the posts for which they were trained: only 33.6 per cent of the BEF's formation commanders on 29 September 1918 had passed staff college, but all the BGGGs had, as well as 95.5 per cent of the DA&QMGs. Some staff officers felt that they were being 'ghetto-ised' and their careers held back by being prevented from taking field commands, where the opportunities of rapid promotion were seen to be greater.33

There are clear differences here between British and Australian commanders. Hardly any Australian generals on 29 September 1918 came from military families. Their fathers were more commonly farmers and graziers, businessmen, shopkeepers, artisans, schoolmasters and clergymen. Far fewer had attended public school, though many of the schools they did attend were elite institutions within the Australian context, and most had some form of secondary education.34 Elliott, Mackay, McNicholl and Monash were university graduates.35 Only one Australian general, John Gellibrand, had attended the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Few Australians had passed staff college, though both White and Blamey, like many of their British counterparts, were used during the war exclusively in staff positions.36

Not only had the majority of the BEF's generals on 29 September 1918 been professionally trained, but they had also seen active service before the war, either in South Africa or the Sudan or in the small colonial 'bush-fire' wars of the North-West Frontier or West Africa or occasionally in all of them. This is often regarded as a source of institutional weakness. It produced an army which fought in 'penny packets', lacked operational doctrine, was weak in staff work and undergunned in heavy artillery. But the wars of empire also produced an officer corps with vast combat and active service experience. The intensity and range of professional opportunity offered by the prewar British Army was enormous. It is difficult to reconcile the fit, adaptable, energetic, resourceful, pragmatic men who emerge from the prewar Army's multi-biography with the somnolent, dogma-ridden, unprofessional, unreflecting institution depicted by Tim Travers and Martin Samuels.37

Nor was the Regular officer's experience of combat confined to the prewar period. The BEF's generals on 29 September 1918 also had wide exposure to front line conditions during the war, in which a high proportion had been wounded at least once.38 During the war as a whole one corps commander (Sir Walter Congreve, GOC XIII Corps) was wounded, seven divisional commanders were killed in action and three died of wounds (including one Australian, William Holmes), nine divisional commanders were wounded (including another Australian, Charles Rosenthal, one of five wounds he received in all), 30 infantry brigade commanders were killed in action and eight died of wounds (including one British Regular serving with the Australians, Duncan Glasfurd), 72 infantry brigade commanders were wounded (including four Australians, Brand, Gellibrand, Paton and Tivey).39 Some châteaux were clearly built far too close to the front line.

It is in some ways misleading to portray Australian commanders as 'civilians'. They had considerable military experience. This was principally of two kinds: actual combat; and pre-war peacetime service. The pre-war combat experience of Australian generals was less extensive than that of their British counterparts, but it was nevertheless impressive, involving service in a large-scale and demanding conflict, the South African War. Bessell-Browne, Brand, Elliott, Goddard and Tivey all served there, as had (the then British Regular) Gellibrand. The Australians' pre-Western Front combat experience was equally large-scale and demanding. Many of the Australian units which arrived in France in 1916 had received their baptism of fire on Gallipoli. This provided a brutal crash course in the realities of modern war. (It is significant, perhaps, that two British divisions which served on Gallipoli, the 11th (Northern) Division and the 29th Division, also achieved elite status on the Western Front.) Australian generals could measure their experience in wound stripes. An extraordinary 50 per cent of Australian formation commanders were wounded at least once sometime during the war. Their reputation for being aware of front-line realities is well merited, but it was hardly unique.
The pre-war peacetime experience of Australian commanders has attracted less attention and tends to be underestimated. Soldiering for most of them was not a career, but a leisure activity, a hobby. This is not to trivialise it. After all, many pursue their hobbies with fanatical dedication. Intelligent, educated men were unlikely to be content with a constant diet of drill. Instead, they often chose to read. Both Elliott and Monash were formidably well read in the history of war, a trait they shared with a British Territorial general, Henry Page-Croft. They could also choose to take instructional courses. These were rarely confined to one branch of the service. This promoted an awareness of the problems of other arms and of the importance of inter-arm co-operation, an understanding often lacking in the British Army. Keen officers could also volunteer for unusual assignments. These often involved staff work of some kind: writing manuals; surveying and map making; intelligence gathering and assessment; unit administration. It was possible to derive much relevant experience from service in the pre-war Australian militia: an awareness of the importance of training, of careful reconnaissance, of topography, of meticulous operational and administrative staff work; of co-operation; of logistics. One man, at least, did so. His name was John Monash.

Experience in the BEF was reinforced by youth. The general officers of the Hundred Days were young and getting younger. The average age of divisional commanders on first appointment dropped by a decade during the course of the war, from 55.2 in 1914 to 45.9 in 1918. The average age of the BEF’s formation commanders on 29 September 1918 was 44.3. Sixteen divisional commanders (25.4 percent) were under 45 (two of them Australians), the youngest being the 35-year-old Keppel Bethell (GOC 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division). One hundred and twenty brigade commanders (63.5 per cent) were under 45, 49 (25.9 per cent) under 40, the youngest being the 28-year-old Bernard Freyberg VC (GOC 88th Brigade). Twenty-eight infantry brigade commanders under the age of 35 were appointed during the war. Five were Australian (17.9 per cent).

Bean believed that the youthfulness of Australian commanders was exceptional. He was wrong. The differences are marginal. The average age of British corps commanders on 29 September 1918 was 52.6: Monash was 53. The average age of British divisional commanders was 47.5, that of Australian 46; the average age of British brigade commanders was 42.2, that of Australian 40.8. The BEF and the Australian Corps were dancing to the same tune. The war demanded younger, finer, more experienced commanders. By September 1918 both the BEF and the Australian Corps had them.

"Looking round the faces opposite me," Field-Marshal Haig confided to his diary on 20 July 1917, "I felt what a fine hard-looking determined set of men the war had brought to the front." This was even more true by 29 September 1918. The process by which this evolution came about, however, is badly documented and poorly understood. The role of the Military Secretary's office in identifying men for promotion has never been studied. How the Military Secretary's staff operated and what qualities they looked for can only be inferred. The statistical evidence suggests that promotion had little to do with 'cap badge' patronage or the operation of regimental mafias. What is clear is that the bulk of British generals on 29 September 1918, especially its formation commanders, were rapidly promoted young officers, most of whom were ‘acting up’ (on temporary rank) at least two—and commonly three—levels above their substantive rank. Only one divisional commander on 29 September, 1918, George Gorringe (GOC 47th (2nd London) Division), was a Major-General when the war began. ‘Major’ was the rank most commonly held at the outbreak of war by divisional commanders (34.9 per cent), artillery commanders (68 per cent) and staff officers (66.7 per cent); for brigade commanders it was captain (45.5 per cent).

This had important consequences for the command and leadership perceptions of British generals. What they brought to command positions were the training, experience and instincts of regimental officers. These emphasised personal courage, a high sense of duty, concern for the welfare of their men and professional attention to detail, not least in unit administration. This did not make for a great deal of military genius, but tactical innovation and original thought were not essential for competent brigade, division or even corps commanders. What was absolutely necessary was careful (preferably personal) reconnaissance, thorough preparation and an awareness of the ‘friction of war’. Anything less invited disaster at the hands of a formidable enemy.
Did Australian generals offer anything different? In part, at least, the answer must be 'yes'. Charles Bean believed that Australian officers were closer to their men.\textsuperscript{46} He was probably right. British Regular officers were often sphinx-like and imperturbable: they kept their distance as a matter of principle. They were aware that the urban, working-men who flocked into the New Armies were different from the prewar rankers they were used to, but few seemed capable of making the leap of imagination which command of them appeared to require.\textsuperscript{47} Although British unit histories often speak of a particular general being 'loved and respected by all ranks', it is doubtful how many really achieved a degree of personal loyalty from the ordinary soldier. Few received the respect and devotion accorded to 'Pompey' Elliott by his men or to John Gellibrand by his officers. Fewer still displayed Charles Rosenthal's flair for self-publicity. But it is easy to exaggerate the differences. Bean himself described Bill Glasgow, perhaps the most impressive of the Australian divisional commanders on 29 September 1918, as 'an Australian counterpart of the best type of English country gentleman'.\textsuperscript{48} The longest-serving—and largely forgotten—Australian brigade commander, Edwin Tivey, is also often noted for his 'English' characteristics. Monash, himself, was hardly a stereotypical Australian commander. He was not close to or beloved by the ordinary soldier. He was a strict disciplinarian who never sought popularity, characteristics which endeared him to Haig, who had little time for the shameless vulgarity of Monash's predecessor, Birdwood. He rarely, if ever, visited the front line. His was the managerial style of command. He was a calculating man. He measured his resources against his task. And he rarely bit off more than he could chew. These, in the end, were the characteristics that mattered in the First World War: the capacity to take infinite care with planning and preparation; to respond effectively to battlefield emergencies; and to maintain the initiative by constant harassing of the enemy. These military virtues were well represented in the Australian Corps, but were not unique to it. On 29 September 1918 they were widespread at battalion, brigade and divisional command levels throughout the BEF and were increasingly to be found at corps level. By September 1918 'neither seniority nor Society counted' for much. The British Army, temporarily at least, was a 'career open to the talents with only one standard: courage and the capacity to command in battle'.

\begin{flushright}
Endnotes
\end{flushright}

3. The 4th Australian Division, together with the three British cavalry divisions, was actually in GHQ Reserve on 29 September 1918.
8. The latest count shows 1223 names, but there are probably still some more to come out of the woodwork.
10. The data base, from which many of the statistics in this paper are taken, actually contains the records of 447 general officers. These include all men holding general officer rank at army level and below except for medical officers and signalmen. The C-in-C and his senior lieutenants at GHQ are also included but general officers of the Royal Air Force, less senior staff officers at GHQ, general officers on the Lines of Communication and others involved in supply, transport, allied liaison and salvage are not.
11. HG Bennett (GOC 3rd Australian Brigade); AJ Bessell Browne (BGRA 5th Australian Division); TA Blamey (BGGS Australian Corps); CH Brand (GOC 4th Australian Brigade); JH Cannan (GOC 11th Australian Brigade); WA Coxen (BGRA Australian Corps); HE Elliott (GOC 15th Australian Brigade); CH Foott (Chief Engineer Australian Corps); J Gellibrand (GOC 3rd Australian Division); TW Glasgow (GOC
1. The figure is inflated by the inclusion of 253-5. The figure is inflated by the inclusion of Indian Army officers among the casualties.

2. "Success rate" = number of generals on 29 September 1918 as a proportion of the total number of Indian Army officers at the outbreak of war.


4. Another Reserve officer, the Earl of Cavan, also commanded a corps on the Western Front. He was C-in-C British Forces Italy in September 1918.


6. Arthur Birtwistle (BGRA 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division); Sir Smith Child Bt (BGRA 46th (North Midland) Division); GD Goodman (GOC 21st Brigade); Viscount Hampden (GOC 185th Brigade); JF Laycock (BGRA 59th (2nd North Midland) Division); Arthur Maxwell (GOC 174th Brigade); WF Mildren (GOC 141st Brigade); JB Polllok-McCall (GOC 25th Brigade); RE Sugden (GOC 191st Brigade); TE Topping (BGRA 38th (Wessex) Division); and EN Whitley (BGRA 47th (2nd London) Division). A small number of 'exotics' also managed to breach the Regular monopoly, some of whom had military experience before the war, but all of whom were civilians when the war broke out: CA Blacklock (GOC 63rd (Royal Naval) Division); Bernard Freyberg VC (GOC 88th Brigade); GH Gater (GOC 62nd Brigade); George Rollo (GOC 150th Brigade); SVP Weston (GOC 122nd Brigade); and EA Wood (GOC 55th Brigade).

7. This figure rises to 3.95 per cent if the casualties of the first year of the war are discounted.

8. Davies' post-Boer War career was spectacular. He was sent to England for special training, passed staff college and so impressed that he was given command of an infantry brigade, the 6th, which he took to war in 1914. During the BEF's deployment, he insisted on marching to the front with his men, a decision which left him exhausted. He was relieved of command in September 1914 and sent home to raise and train the 20th (Light) Division, the first New Zealander to command a division. After a few weeks in France as GOC 20th Division, he was sent home again and spent most of the war as GOC Reserve Centre, Cannock Chase. In May 1918 he committed suicide by slashing his throat in a London clinic specialising in the treatment of army officers with mental disorders.

9. The GOC 4th Australian Division on 29 September 1918 (Major-General EG Sinclair-Maclagan) was also a British Regular. A British-bom New Zealand Regular, WHL Burgess, commanded the division's artillery. By this date, however, there was only one British battalion commander left in the Australian Corps. Lieutenant-Colonel CS Davies (CO 32nd Battalion). All three had been on attachment to Australian forces in 1914.

10. Birtwistle was a cotton manufacturer. Hubback (GOC 2nd Brigade) an architect, Husey (GOC 25th Brigade) an accountant, Lewis (GOC 142nd Brigade) and Whitley solicitors. Page-Croft (GOC 68th Brigade) a maitster, Maxwell a banker, Mildren a company director, Rollo an engineer, and Weston a Member of the Stock Exchange.

11. TW Glasgow (GOC 1st Australian Division) and AC Macdonnell (GOC 1st Canadian Division). The ineffable Keppel Bethell (GOC 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division), ever a man to defy precise categorisation, began his career in the Royal Field Artillery before transferring to the Indian Army and then the British Army cavalry. He had also commanded an infantry battalion on the Western Front.

12. Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire show 876 cavalry officers in August 1914 and 9951 infantry officers: 1 cavalry officer for every 11 infantry officers (9.1 per cent). The July 1914 Army List shows 894 cavalry officers and 6173 infantry officers: 1 cavalry officer for every 7 infantry officers (14.3 per cent).

13. Kiggell (CGS) was an infantryman, as was Kiggell's deputy. Butler. Davidson (DM) was also an infantryman. Charteris (DMI) was a sapper. Fowke (AG) was a sapper. Maxwell (QMG) was yet another sapper and his successor, Travers Clarke, an infantryman. Kiggell's successor, Lawrence, was a
cavalryman, but he and Haig were hardly close and it is not entirely clear what role Haig played in his appointment. The most important cavalryman in Haig's circle was probably Noel Birch, his chief artillery adviser, a Royal Horse Artilleryman.

30. Only 14 British Regular formation commanders had attended university and not all of them took their degrees.
31. Attendance at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, was virtually total among British artillery and sapper generals. Four British generals on 29 September 1918 had also been promoted from the ranks: GF Boyd (GOC 46th (North Midland) Division), CB Norton (GOC 95th Brigade), Sir WE Peyton (GOC 40th Division); and GA Stevens (GOC 90th Brigade). None of these men was working-class.
33. There were 908 men on the British Army Active List who had passed staff college at the outbreak of war. Of these 134 were killed on active service during the war, 56 of them in 1914 and 34 in 1915. See John Hussey, ‘The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers in the Great War: “A Generation Missing”’, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 75 (1997): 246-59.
34. This was a constant refrain of staff officers in their correspondence with Sir Lancelot Kiggell (CGS), Kiggell Papers (Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives), V, passim.
35. Raymond Leane (GOC 12th Australian Brigade) left school at 12.
36. This pattern of higher university attendance is also apparent among British 'non- Regular' generals and Canadians. Five out of the 11 British Territorial generals on 29 September 1918 had attended university. In a seniority service like the British Army, delayed entry (inevitable in the case of university attendance) was not an attractive proposition.
38. Twenty-nine point nine per cent of formation commanders were wounded at least once sometime during the war. These included one corps commander (5.9 per cent), 24 divisional commanders (38.1 per cent) and 58 brigade commanders (30.7 per cent).
41. Bennett (GOC 3rd Australian Brigade), Drake-Brockman (GOC 12th Australian Brigade), Jess (GOC 10th Australian Brigade) and Stewart (GOC 14th Australian Brigade). Bennett was the youngest general in the British Army at the time of his promotion. The youngest general of all was the 25-year old RB Bradford VC (GOC 186th Brigade), killed at Cambrai in November 1917.
42. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France During the Allied Offensive, 1918*, 1081.
Among the all the famous technological improvements, tactical advances and enhanced training methods referred to in the context of achieving victory in 1918, there is one vital element that rarely rates a mention—the staff.

In his memoirs dealing with the great victories on the Western Front in 1918, Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash wrote, 'there must be a word of recognition of the work of the devoted and able Staffs. It was upon them, after all, that the principal burden of the campaign rested'.

This claim is at odds with the popular view of the Staff, first invented by the front line troops during the War and constantly embellished in subsequent passage through the generations. Siegfried Sassoon described the staff as 'those scarlet majors at the base, fierce and bald and short of breath, who stand compared but poorly with the glum heroes of the line, sacrificed to their inept commands'. The contemporary image is no more positive. Who can forget the theatre of 'Oh What a Lovely War' or the portrayals of staff officers in that very entertaining television series 'Blackadder'? The 'incompetence' of the staff and the size of the 'butcher's bill' are two contemporary images of that conflict that are inextricably linked in the public mind.

The widely held perception that the Imperial authorities deliberately used Dominion troops in high risk operations, in preference to risking British lives, may well have added to Australians' already well developed anti-staff views. The adverse image of the staff officer is further exacerbated by the presence, especially in the early years of the AIF, of British Officers in key staff appointments. Monash himself claimed that the 'Australianisation' of the Staff was a factor in improving the overall performance of the AIF and that during the formation of the Australian Corps in 1918 there was a major effort made to appoint qualified Australians to staff and command positions. However, the analysis necessary to support Monash's assertion that the replacement of the British Officer by an Australian improved the AIF's fighting efficiency has yet to be done.

Of these two views of the Staff, Sassoon's or Monash's, one must be wrong. The question is which one? The only way to answer this question with any certainty would be to undertake a detailed analysis of the performance of each individual staff officer, examining the decisions he made, based on the information and resources he possessed, against the eventual outcome. This has not yet been done. Even general comment on the staff is limited. One reputable bibliography lists more than 6000 books on the First World War, not including the countless articles, specialist magazines, unpublished papers and theses that address the topic. With remarkably few exceptions, the role of the staff officer rates little mention, other than in passing, negative asides. Nor has the existence of several excellent biographies of several prominent staff officers improved the overall staff officer profile.

This essay is intended to provide an overview of the staff structure that guided the AIF through the last year of the war. For many Australian readers with a professional military background, there will be little that is new because the staff arrangement and organisation that emerged finely honed from 1918 served as the model for the Australian Army's staff structure until recently.

What of the image of the staff officer that has sustained the popular antipathy towards him? In practically all portrayals of the 'red tabbed Staff Officer', one common charge levelled at him is ignorance: ignorance of the conditions under which the front line soldiers were operating and ignorance of the consequences of orders issued by him in the comfort and security of a headquarters based far from the fighting. There is sufficient data on the staff of 1918 to test the validity of this perception.
Any analysis of the staff strikes an immediate problem. What is a staff officer? This deceptively simple question is in fact very complex and there is no satisfactory answer. As we will see shortly, staff were employed in many roles at several different levels of headquarters and held widely different ranks. They could hold the formal staff qualification of ‘Passed Staff College’ (psc), obviously gained by completing an approved course of study at a Staff College. Many who worked in staff positions in 1918, as indeed still occurs today, did not have that qualification.

Before the Great War, the term 'staff officer' had two distinct applications. In its precise application it referred to an officer serving on the newly formed 'General Staff or, more pedantically, 'Imperial General Staff', from where the shorthand reference 'G' staff came. Until the war, the term tended to be used for officers serving at the politico/strategic level in organisations such as the War Office. It had another, broader application as well when it was used to describe any officer attached to or on a staff. The Brigade Administrative Officer was a staff officer under this definition.

In Australia, the term 'Staff Officer' has been in use since the beginning of the Army. In his first Annual Report to Parliament in May 1903, Sir Edward Hutton complained of the lack of 'assistance of experienced and qualified Staff Officers of the Imperial Army'. It would appear, from the context, that he meant administrative and organisational staff as well as operational planners and strategic thinkers.

There are other difficulties. In commenting on the staff of 1915-18, most authors fail to distinguish between the staff and the command function. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's reputation for indifference and incompetence as a commander seems to have rubbed off onto any officer unfortunate enough to have served as staff on a headquarters somewhere on the Western Front. Yet some staff officers also exercised command functions and perhaps therefore warrant some of this reflected criticism.

The staffs reputation has not been helped by the difficulty many commentators on the war have had with the wide range of ranks and roles that are caught up in the description 'Staff'. The numbers of officers who could be classified as staff was not large. In 1918, the AIF included some 9411 officers (including those with honorary rank). Of this number, slightly fewer than 500 could be defined as having some staff responsibilities in connection with operations involving Australian troops on the Western Front. That number needs to be treated with considerable caution as it is entirely dependent on how a staff officer is defined. While the broadest possible interpretation has been used it does not include the Middle East contingent or AIF troops in Australia. It does include depot staffs in the United Kingdom and individuals who commanded formations of brigade size and above. It still represents a small proportion, about six per cent, of the total officer corps.

If the narrower definition of officers who planned and directed operations is used, the number shrinks even further. One paper that does examine the Australian Staff, Peter Stanley's work on the ‘G’ staff, identified around 150 officers, not including trainees, who served in this capacity between 1916 and 1918.

If the definition of a staff officer defies generalisation, what of the duties they carried out? All purely 'staff' functions fall into three categories, known until recently in the Australian Army by the letters 'G', 'A' and 'Q'. The first of these, the 'G' staff, had the 'glamour' role of operational planning, the 'A' or administrative staff dealt with the personnel function and 'Q', or Quartermaster, was concerned with all matters of supply. Although intelligence was always the province of the ‘G’ staff, this was formalised during the war by the establishment of a specific ‘G’ officer position for intelligence. The ‘A' and ‘Q' functions were often considered complementary areas of responsibilities and at some command levels were discharged by the same individual. There was also a host of specialist appointments that evolved during the War that had no pre-war equivalents and that did not fit neatly into any of these three categories.
The staff structure of 1918 was complex but had a clear logic to its construction. It is impossible to evaluate the contribution of the staff officer in isolation from an understanding of the organisation in which he worked. As the AIF was never formed into a national Army, despite considerable efforts by some to achieve such a distinction, the staff structure of an Army level command will not be considered. At the highest level of command of Empire forces in France, Sir Douglas Haig's GHQ, no Australian staff officers featured, so the structure of this Headquarters is also not addressed. Nor, despite their being included in the numbers mentioned earlier, are the staff employed at Headquarters in the United Kingdom considered further.

In the structure of a 1918 British pattern army, the Brigade was the smallest formation with a formal staff structure. Lower level formations such as Battalions did have officers, for example Adjutants, whose duties had many of the appearances of staff duties. For routine minor operations, particularly small trench raids, responsibility was often delegated even further, to the commanders of the Company or Platoon conducting the mission. However, on this limited, uncomplicated scale, planning and coordination were accepted as a normal part of the commander's responsibilities.

The Brigade was arguably the smallest distinguishable combat element engaged on the Western Front. The Brigade structure in the AIF underwent a profound change in 1918, when the number of its Infantry Battalions was reduced from four to three. Before 1918, a Brigade would have fielded about 4200 men including, in addition to the infantry battalions, its organic Light Trench Mortar Company (of about 50 personnel) and, until grouped together at Divisional level, its Machine Gun Company. After the reorganisation, the authorised Brigade strength was reduced by 1000, but declining reinforcements usually meant a much lower actual strength.

To plan the activities of this force, the Brigade Commander, usually a Brigadier or senior Colonel, was assisted by two officers, one Major, who was known as the Brigade Major or BM, and a Staff Captain. In addition, Brigade Headquarters often had attached officers learning the basics of staff work.
**Headquarters, Australian Army Corps**  
*(October 1918)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appointment</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commander</td>
<td>Maj-Gen (temp Lt-Gen) Sir J Monash, KCB, VD, AIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADC to Commander</td>
<td>Capt AM Moss, AIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADC to Commander</td>
<td>Capt PW Simonson, AIF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GS Branch**

- BGGS: Col (temp Brig-Gen) TA Blamey, CMG, DSO, AIF, psc
- GSO2: Lt-Col SL Milligan, CMG, DSO, MC, AIF
- GSO2: Major RG Casey, DSO, MC, AIF
- GSO2: Capt (temp Major) SA Hunn, MC, AIF
- GSO3: Capt JD Rogers, MC, AIF

**A & Q Branch**

- DA & QMG: Col (temp Brig-Gen) RA Carruthers, CB, CMG, Ind Army
- AQMG: Lt-Col GC Sommerville, CMG, DSO, AIF
- DAAG: Major FK Officer, MC, AIF
- DAQMG: Major, EO Milne, DSO, AIF
- Staff Capt: Capt RCA Anderson, AIF

**Admin Secs and Depts**

- AD Signals: Lt-Col TR Williams, DSO, AIF
- DAD Roads: Lt (temp Major) G Davy, MC, RE (TF)
- Lab Comdt: Lt-Col (temp Col) AD Acland, TF Res
- Asst to Lab Comdt: Temp Capt F Harrison, Gen List
- DDMS: Col GW Barber, CMG, DSO, AAMC, AIF
- DADMS: Major AJ Collins, DSO, MC, AAMC, AIF
- ADOS: Lt-Col ET Leane, AIF
- ADVS: Lt-Col T Matson, DSO, AAVC, AIF
- DADAPS: Lt (temp Capt) CJ Fletcher, AIF

**Spec Appointment**

- APM Camp Commdt: Major WW Berry, AIF
- MG Officer: Major EA Wilton, DSO, AIF

**HQ Artillery of the Corps**

- Commander: Col (temp Brig-Gen) WA Coxen, CMG, DSO, AIF
- GSO2: Lt-Col HDK Macartney, DSO AIF
- Staff Capt: Capt EJ Chenery, MC, AIF
- SO for Reconnaissance: Capt HB Sewell, MC, AIF
- Lt-Col RA attached for Counter Battery Work: Major (temp Lt-Col) EJ Cummins, DSO, RGA

**HQ Divini Engineers**

- Commander: Lt-Col WA Henderson, DSO, AIF
- Adjt: Capt BS Dowling, MC, AIF
The BM’s role was to plan the Brigade’s operations, usually within a larger operation involving Divisional and often Corps troops. The Brigade Major’s principal task was to interpret the commands from higher headquarters and transform them into precise instructions and specific actions for each of the Brigade’s combat elements. He also advised the Brigade Commander on all matters relating to the fighting efficiency of the Brigade. It was at this level that the minor tactical planning for the battle was undertaken. Within the limits set by the overall plan, it was the BM who advised his Brigadier on the local objectives that should be achieved and who coordinated the unit actions and tactics necessary to secure them. He coordinated any artillery and/or trench mortar support that was made available and usually provided the liaison with adjoining formations.

The ability of the Brigade Major was a key factor in a Brigade’s combat effectiveness. Ideally, he would have been a senior major of much battle experience. In October 1918, in a reflection of the intensity of the fighting in which the AIF had been involved, only eight of the 15 Infantry Brigade BMs in the Australian Corps were majors, and all except one of these had been a major for 12 months or less. The remainder were captains. While they were all also very young, with only two of the captains and none of the majors older than 30, and seven were 25 or younger, they had all had recent combat experience with battalions. Only four did not hold the Military Cross and of these George Vasey of 11 Brigade had the DSO instead. Although holding key planning responsibilities, none held the psc qualification.

The other key member of the Brigade staff was the Staff Captain. If the BM fulfilled the ‘G’ function for the Brigade, the Staff Captain had both the ‘A’ and the ‘Q’ role. It was his responsibility to ensure the Brigade was adequately equipped and supplied, up to the required strength in manpower and generally well administered. In operational planning, he was responsible for controlling and coordinating arrangements with the support services within the Brigade area. Medical evacuation routes, POW and straggler collection and resupply are examples of the matters for which he was directly responsible.

Much of the cartoon humour directed against staff officers uses the theme of rear echelon ‘Q’ staff, safe in their luxurious chateaux, asking ridiculous questions about requests for stores and equipment. Clearly, this does not apply to the Staff Captain of the Brigade staff. Unlike their BMs, only two of the Staff Captains in October 1918 did not hold the MC, and these two were newly arrived and had had no combat experience. While most Staff Captains tended to be older than their BM superiors (one was nearly 40), they appear to have been Captains for, on average, one and a half to two years. All had service in battalions and some were promoted from the ranks. It is clearly unlikely that, apart from the two new arrivals, this group would have been unaware of the conditions under which their troops were operating.

There was usually a third officer on the Headquarters strength, known as the Orderly Officer who was, in effect, the staff trainee. The brigade also had a veterinary officer permanently attached while towards the end of the War a Brigade Intelligence Officer starts to appear in the War Diaries, with 12 Officers identified as Brigade Intelligence officers in the Gradation Lists of October 1918. The Divisional Artillery Brigade also had a specialist officer, known as the Staff Officer for Reconnaissance, who was the Brigade’s specialist Intelligence Officer.

Missing from this list are the several specialist officers taken on the Brigade staff to advise the Commander on specific subjects. These could include, by the end of the War, the Brigade Bombing Officer, Gas Officer, Musketry Officer and the Trench Mortar Officer, who also commanded the Light Trench Mortar Company. They also had responsibilities for training in their particular specialities. While all brigades employed officers in these roles, they were never an official part of the Brigade Headquarters and usually accepted these responsibilities in addition to other duties. In 1918, over 30 officers appear on Brigade staff strengths, mainly as musketry and bombing officers.

Three Infantry Brigades, together of course with divisional troops such as the engineer element, the Artillery Brigade and the medical and service elements, combined to make up a Division. At the beginning of the war, it would have had a strength of around 20,000 men but for some divisions in 1918, this number had shrunk to around 12,000. While the Division was the primary combat organisation of all armies on the Western Front, combat strength varied considerably between Divisions.
To plan and manage such a large force required a larger staff. Traditionally, Great War Divisions had 19 approved staff positions, as the diagram of the 1st Division shows. In practice, there were invariably several additional officers on the strength, either supernumerary or as 'staff learners'.

The three staff of the General Staff Branch were the divisional equivalent of the Brigade Major, having major responsibility for planning and managing the Division in action. The senior 'G' staff officer, known as the GSO1 was a Lieutenant Colonel. His was the responsibility for all planning relating to the combat employment of the Division. He was the main point of contact between higher and lower level Headquarters and with Headquarters of other formations. Unlike the Brigade Major, the GSO1 was not solely responsible for coordinating the supporting arms such as artillery or the engineers.

The GSO2, usually a Major, was responsible for the actual drafting and distribution of orders, monitoring the battle efficiency of the Division and preparing all correspondence relating to the Division's operations. The third G Staff Officer, the GSOII, was usually a Captain. By 1918, the GSO3 had formally become the Divisional Intelligence Officer. Given the crushing burden of responsibilities this small team bore, it was quite common to have an additional Captain appointed to assist the GSO2.

The Divisional 'G' staff of 1918 was significantly different in character from the Brigade Staff serving under its orders. Of the five GSO1s, all had spent more of the war in staff positions than in command of troops and all five were regular officers. Those two points were not coincidental, but reflective of the critical shortage of trained officers available to fill senior staff positions. Although all were regulars, only JD Lavarack was psc. All of them had battle experience, mostly on Gallipoli, and all had won bravery awards. In contrast to the battle-caused rapid promotion through the ranks that was common in the rest of the army, three of these five had been in their staff position for more than 18 months.

Of the five GSO2s, three had been in their position since February 1917. Like their immediate superiors, all except one had combat experience and been decorated for bravery. Major EF Harrison of the Third Division, who was the one without battle experience, was the only one with the psc qualification. He had come from an instructor's position in Australia. His arrival also raised the average age of the group, as he was ten years older than the others.

It is illustrative of the functioning of a modern army that while operational planning was the responsibility of four officers, eight staff positions were necessary to administer and supply the Division. The ‘A’ and ‘Q’ function still came under the oversight of one individual, the Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General (AA&QMG). A Lieutenant-Colonel, the AA&QMG was responsible for all personnel and ordnance matters, including administrative responsibility for the medical services. The daily demands of a combat division were so extensive that he required two senior staff in support, one for each area of responsibility. The Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG) had particular responsibility for discipline, POWS, personnel administrative matters such as leave, casualties, reinforcements, working parties and fatigues, cookery and (with the Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal) police matters and traffic control. His equivalent on the supply side of the staff was the Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General (DAQMG) whose principal responsibility was the provision of supplies of all kinds. He was responsible also for the provision of maps, supervision of all movements and transport and had oversight of the veterinary care of the significant number of animals required by an Infantry Division.

Separate from these staff officers but working closely with them were the heads of specialist services or Departments. Each of them was considered to be part of the staff as they all had major input to the Divisional planning process. The most prominent was the Assistant Director of Medical Services (ADMS). Frequently senior in rank to all the other members of the staff, the ADMS had a role beyond caring for the sick and wounded. He worked closely with the AA&QMG to protect the physical and mental well-being of all the troops in the Division. Matters of sanitation were his responsibility. The Deputy Assistant Director Veterinary Services had similar responsibilities for the Division's animals.
While DAQMG was the Division's supply staff officer, he worked closely with several other departments and specialists. Chief among these was an organisation known as the Divisional Train. This was a large unit, usually commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel, and was responsible for the movement of supplies and stores between major distribution points to the Division. While Divisional Train was a Divisional Unit, its Commanding Officer is not included on the Divisional Staff. Advice on supply was channelled from the Train into the planning process via DAQMG. One key supply officer who was shown on the Divisional staff strength was the Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Services (DADOS). This officer was responsible for the supply, maintenance and replacement of all equipment in use in the Division. While most of the Division's clothing and rifle requirements were sourced from Australia, the British supplied everything else, DADOS had therefore to develop a good understanding of, and maintain close links with, the British Army 'Q' system.

The interesting observation to be drawn about this class of staff officer is, once again, the large number with prior combat experience. If gallantry awards serve any analytical purpose, it is as a pointer to the recipient's exposure to the front line. In the five Divisional A&Q Branches, eight officers held DSOs and five held MCs, demonstrating that 13 out of a possible 15 had some experience of combat at some stage in their careers. For many of the more senior specialist A&Q staff, this experience was most likely gained on Gallipoli.

All five AA&QMG were regular officers, members of the prewar Administrative and Instructional Staff. All were considerably older than their 'G' staff equivalents. The youngest, RE Jackson, AA&QMG for the Third Division was born in 1886 while the oldest, RDowse of the Fourth Division, was born in 1866. The age and experience of this group, in obvious contrast with their staff colleagues, probably contributed to the trench humour depiction of the staff as both overage and overly concerned with paperwork.

The GOC of the Division had two Aides-de-Camp. Contrary to some front line opinions, they occupied positions of some responsibility. The senior ADC was the 'Camp Commandant' for the Headquarters staff while the other was the private secretary and personal assistant for the GOC. The progression of former ADCs through the ranks is most spectacularly illustrated by the illustrious career of one RG Casey, who started out in 1914 as an Honorary Lieutenant in the Automobile Corps moved to be ADC to the GOC 1 Div and up through the 'G' staff structure before retiring, many years later, as Governor-General of Australia.

There were two other officers on the staff of the Division whose positions were unlike the others. The Commander of the Divisional Artillery, known as Commander Royal Artillery or CRA, was the senior gunner of the formation. Usually a Brigadier, CRA was responsible for all aspects of the employment and development of the Division's organic artillery. He prepared the fire plan with which the guns would support the infantry in attack and defence. He coordinated the artillery of other formations assisting the Division and liaised with other formations when his guns were supporting them and he was responsible for the training and professional development of the gunners. He frequently commanded the Division in the absence of the GOC. Consequently, the CRA exercised both a staff and a command function.

The Commander Royal Engineers, or CRE, was usually a Lieutenant-Colonel and was responsible both for commanding the specialist engineer troops attached to the Division and for providing specialist engineering advice to the Divisional Commander. CRE also provided the Division's communications through the Divisional Signals Unit, which was an engineer unit in 1918. As with the CRA, CRF worked closely with the 'G' staff in operational planning.

Both these groups of specialists had front line experience similar to their staff colleagues. The CRAS and CREs of all five divisions had had prior combat experience. All had commanded a combat unit and most had DSOs. The Military Cross was a common decoration among their subordinates.

Like the Brigade, the Division had a large number of specialist officers who provided advice on a range of specific topics. They were not regarded as part of the Headquarters staff but did carry considerable responsibilities. At the Divisional level, more of these specialists were
concerned with support and rear area activities than with the Brigades. They ranged from specialist Traffic Control Officers, through the Divisional Claims Officer and Salvage Officer to the Divisional Courts-Martial Officer. The Gas Officer at Divisional level was sometimes called the Divisional Chemical Adviser. There were also the usual weapons experts such as the Medium and Heavy Trench Mortar Officers and the Machine-Gun Officer.

### 1st Australian Infantry Brigade (October 1918)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appointment</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commander</td>
<td>Lt-Col (temp Brig-Gen) IG Mackay, DSO, AIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bde-Major</td>
<td>Capt RR Agnew, AIF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Capt</td>
<td>Capt R Hall, MC AIF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While many Australian staff were employed in Headquarters in the rear areas and in the UK, the highest level Australian Headquarters controlling combat troops was the Australian Corps. A Corps was a flexible formation of two or more Divisions plus Corps troops. Corps were the main combat elements of the Western Front. As such, the planning task was significantly more demanding than at divisional level. This was reflected in the staff structure of the Corps Headquarters.

The principal Corps planner and chief of staff of the Corps Headquarters was the Brigadier General General Staff, or BGGS. His duties were broadly the same as those of the Divisional GSO1, just far more complex. He was assisted by a somewhat larger team of ‘G’ staff officers. Of increased importance was the intelligence function, while responsibility for training and skill standards was lessened with the increased distance from the troops. While the planning responsibility became more complex and demanding, there was no increase in the number of psc qualified staff on the Australian Corps Headquarters. Only the BGGS, TA Blamey, was a staff college graduate. However, most of the staff, on both the ‘G’ and the ‘A&Q’ sides, had had prior staff experience. Despite the distance between the Corps Headquarters and the fighting units, there is no diminution in the indicators of combat experience with the staff. All three junior GSOs (including RG Casey) had Military Crosses.

The 'A' and 'Q' staff also shared duties broadly similar to their Divisional counterparts but on a more extensive and complex level. Interestingly, it is on the ‘A&Q’ side that the first non-AIF (or honorary AIF) officer is encountered—in marked contrast to two years earlier. RA Carruthers, DA&QMG of the Australian Corps, was an Indian Army Officer who came to the AIF with Birdwood in 1915. At this level, a British Officer would have been an advantage, for it was here that the Australian supply system interfaced with the British network.

The Corps had one other group of staff who were a key element in operational planning. As understanding and appreciation of the power of modern massed artillery increased, heavier calibres of artillery tended to be grouped together at Corps level. Specialist artillery officers, including some of the remaining few non-Australians on the staff, appeared on Corps headquarters strengths to plan and control the application of this operationally critical force multiplier.

The only other non-Australians left in the Corps were some specialist engineers at Corps headquarters. The process of ‘Australianisation’ of the staff throughout the Corps was virtually complete, even if it did mean employing staff with limited experience.
Conclusion

The staff in 1918 operated in a simple yet effective and flexible structure. It was a structure that enabled and encouraged the essential interaction between planners and specialists so necessary to ensure operational success. It also shows that the staff of the Australian Corps in 1918, with a few exceptions, possessed the backgrounds and experience needed by planners in the changing tactical and technological environment of the Western Front. Whether their efforts were effective because of this experience or, indeed, whether they were any more efficient at the individual level in 1918 than were their colleagues of two years earlier, is a question that lies beyond the scope of this essay.

Before these conclusions can be drawn with any confidence, there are a number of key factors that had a profound influence on the staff that need analysis. The impact of the expansion of the AIF had a profound impact on the nature and character of the staff. The influx of Indian Army officers with Birdwood, absolutely necessary due to the lack of suitable staff within the AIF at the time, led to an imbalance in the development of AIF officers. AIF Headquarters favoured Australians in the administrative staff because, as Major-General Gordon Legge noted when taking command of the newly formed Second Division, 'Australian experience was more needed on the AA&QMG side because it dealt with personnel administration, a matter of keen concern to both the troops and the Australian Government'.

This desire to ensure only Australians administered Australians left the 'G' function a heavily British officered organisation until 1917. There is as yet no evidence to prove whether this was or was not to the detriment of the AIF.

What can be said, however, is that by 1918, sufficient evidence exists of the diversity of experience of the staff at all levels of the command structure of the Australian Corps to render unconvincing the popular stereotype of the 'staff as universally ignorant and unconcerned for their colleagues in the front line.

Endnotes

In the early morning hours of 21 March 1918 three German armies attacked Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army and part of Sir Julian Byng's Third Army. Fifth Army, badly under strength for the length of front they held, buckled and rapidly broke in the face of superior numbers and, in most locations, highly effective German tactics. Fifth Army, however, continued to fight and, in spite of reports that led the German high command to believe otherwise, managed to slow the German onslaught. Nonetheless, Fifth Army lost a comparatively vast tract of French countryside in the ensuing days and the German success has been celebrated by historians ever since. This is unfortunate because it obscures both the logistic lessons of 1918 and the BEF's outstanding record in that field.

Despite Fifth Army's defeat, and in spite of later German offensives that also occupied large tracts of land, the offensives did not end the war. Indeed, only seven months later, the allies had turned the tables on the German Army, reoccupied all of the land lost in the spring and more, and in the process driven the German high command to the realisation that an armistice had become necessary. In spite of their becoming a costly failure, the German spring offensives have exerted a strong impact on the historiography of the Great War, particularly in the last quartercentury. While both the internal school that evolved from Liddell Hart's writings (and also called the 'mud-and-blood' school) and Edmonds' external school have vocal and effective adherents, today's historiography is changing the face of the debate over the Great War. Two modern schools are increasingly shaping the historiography. The first is the Germanophile school that is largely prevalent in the United States, and the second might best be termed the 'Commonwealth' school because it originated in the works of authors who largely hail from the former British Empire.

The Germanophile school has a distinguished lineage, tracing its roots to GC Wynne's *If Germany Attacks: The Battle in Depth in the West* (1940). A number of distinguished authors, such as Trevor N Dupuy, Timothy Lupfer and William Lind helped this school to evolve and its most recent contributor is Martin Samuels. This school is attractive to many readers, particularly in the United States, because it extols the virtues of manoeuvre warfare while condemning attritional warfare. Unfortunately, the school's boundaries define attrition warfare as, in essence, that which is not manoeuvre-oriented. As a result, the German Army of 1918 is lauded in works such as Timothy Lupfer's *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War* (1981) because they attempted a manoeuvre warfare solution to the trenches. This loses sight of the question of whether or not this approach proved wise; it simply praises them for trying. This leaves the Germanophile school in the opposite corner to the Commonwealth school because the latter attempts to get beyond the glamour of manoeuvre to assess the relative merits of what happened based on the military situation of the time.

The Commonwealth school presents a balanced view of the BEF (and to a lesser degree the German Army) because it endeavours to synthesize the best of both of the older schools. Until recently, this school has been driven by the scholarship of authors based in Britain, Canada and Australia—Shelford Bidwell, Dominick Graham, Tim Travers, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, in particular. Taken collectively, this school's works argue that the British high command made some colossal errors during the Great War—Tim Travers's *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (1987), for example, provides a scathing indictment of Haig's style of command.
However, this school is also able to illustrate that the BEF made tremendous strides during the war in the fields of tactical and operational methods that resulted in an offensive force that, in the summer of 1918, proved unstoppable. The BEF's remarkably tight integration of a highly effective operational system based on the suppressive power of artillery and sound small unit, combined arms tactics proved less glamorous, but ultimately more effective, than the German solution in the conditions of the time.

The weakness of all of the schools of thought on the Great War has been in the areas of administration and logistics. While most modern authors are cognizant of its importance, logistics generally receives short shrift. The two classic logistic studies, Martin van Creveld's seminal *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (1977) and Julian Thompson's *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict* (1991) cover the Great War only in passing. Further information can be gleaned from the biographies of various senior officers, particularly administrative ones such as William Robertson or John Cowans; and AM Heniker's *Transportation on the Western Front* (1937) is a treasure-trove. There is little else. An understanding of logistic issues is, however, vital for a sound understanding of the War's final year. Logistics and staff-work, for example, go a long way towards explaining the German failures in 1918. They also provide the primary explanation for the BEF's opening of the 'hundred days' in the Amiens vicinity.

Six main ports supplied the bulk of the BEF's needs in 1918: Rouen (the largest), Dunkirk, Boulogne, Le Havre, Calais and Dieppe (the smallest). Other, smaller ports, such as Le Tréport, supplemented the six main ports, and a cross-Channel barge service linked directly with the BEF's Inland Water Transport (IWT) canal services. This all fed two lines of communication, northern and southern, which ran supplies to depots and on up through to the railheads, where tactical supply services (primarily light railway systems and horse-drawn wagons) took over. Of the two lines of communication, the southern line had more port capacity, so the BEF had to ensure the security of south-north railway communication.

The BEF had arrived at this system through a long, onerous period of trial and error. By the late spring of 1917, however, the above system had been set up and its control had devolved onto a single officer who reported directly to Haig—the Director-General of Transportation. This new system worked exceptionally well under static warfare conditions, as the 1917 offensives had shown. Whatever one's opinion on the wisdom or handling of the Passchendaele offensive, the BEF had launched four enormous offensives in 1917, none of which suffered from supply problems at the operational level; tactically, the BEF suffered serious resupply problems at Passchendaele, but operationally, the supplies had been available and had reached the railheads. Compared to the Somme, the 1917 offensives proved logistically anticlimactic. Unfortunately, none of the 1917 offensives had shown what to expect of the logistic support that the BEF might expect in mobile or semi-mobile warfare. As a result, the BEF focussed its attention on the northern Channel ports due to their proximity to the front lines.

GHQ fixated on Channel Ports to the point that they did not study the rest of their rear areas enough. This led them to an inadequate appreciation of the importance of their southern line of communications to the overall well-being of the BEF. The table below indicates the expected weekly shipments that the BEF had planned for in 1917, broken down by the port's location on the northern or southern line of communication.
TABLE 1
Southern Line of Communications Receipts as a Percentage of Total Receipts
(tons per week)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Northern LOC</th>
<th>Southern LOC</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Southern Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RE Stores</td>
<td>24,250</td>
<td>16,450</td>
<td>40,700</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fuel</td>
<td>4630</td>
<td>4150</td>
<td>8780</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Forage</td>
<td>15,200</td>
<td>20,770</td>
<td>35,970</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- General</td>
<td>10,270</td>
<td>13,250</td>
<td>23,520</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- POL</td>
<td>1560</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>3060</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway Stores</td>
<td>11,250</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,250</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordnance Stores</td>
<td>4070</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>8070</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFC</td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>3450</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MT Vehicles</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1160</td>
<td>1160</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parcels</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mails</td>
<td>1130</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammunition</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total          | 104,785      | 100,405      | 205,190 | 49                  |

Source: WO 95/32, Quartermaster-General Branch, War Diary, Nov-Dec 1916, 'Estimated Weekly Tonnage to be Discharged at Ports in France', Public Record Office, Kew.

Clearly, the BEF had done a generally solid job of diversifying the arrival of shipments such that roughly half of everything came in via the southern ports. However, significantly more than half of the BEF held positions north of the Somme (very roughly, the dividing point for a north-south determination), therefore, any serious threat to the limited crossings over the Somme would be magnified. Furthermore, none of the railway stores came into southern ports, which would have left the BEF reliant on a one-sided construction programme should the crossings be threatened.

GHQ's fixation on the Channel Ports led them to defend inadequately the most vital part of their lines of communication, the Amiens-Abancourt-Abbeville area. For supplies landing at Dieppe, Le Havre or Rouen, the BEF only had three double-tracked rail routes northward over the Somme River. The first route ran through Serqueux-Abancourt-Eu and then north over the Somme at Abbeville. The second ran Serqueux-Abancourt-Amiens and north, while the third ran Serqueux-Beauvais (via Paris)-St Omer-Amiens and north (see Figure 1: Rail Schematic, March 1918). The BEF also had a single track running Dieppe-Eu capable of handling only eight trains per day, with the possibility of more with considerable effort on the part of switching staffs, and a Longroy-Longpré spur that could handle a dozen trains per day. Clearly, the loss of Amiens would have been very painful, reducing the BEF to one primary route northwards with the secondary one through Longroy-Longpré. If they managed to lose the Abancourt area also, the result would almost certainly have been catastrophic—indeed, this area, as a single area, had more strategic value even than Amiens (though Amiens would feel the threat first). Should the BEF lose control of Abancourt, the single coastal track would have been completely incapable of meeting the BEF's demands. Retrospectively, Gough offered another, more threatening though far more difficult for the Germans, possibility:

If he [the Germans] would have pushed his advance through Amiens to Abbeyville [sic], and held off the French in the direction of Compiègne with his left hand, so to speak,—threatening Paris, the British Army would have been in a most dangerous situation, with their backs to the sea,—the small ports of Calais and Boulogne insufficient to supply them, isolated and cut from the French, and exposed to a general assault by superior numbers.$^5$
Either scenario would have been a nightmare one for the planners at GHQ, but these scenarios only arose after the Germans began their offensives because GHQ had looked too much to the northern Channel ports. Some of the fixation on the northern Channel ports is understandable—all the northern line of communications fed through them, they were close to the front lines, and if they fell into German hands, the extensive rail lines that served them would not be much use for anything but evacuations. In light of the success of the German counterattacks at Cambrai, however, which gave some indication that the Germans might be able to spring a more open style of warfare on them, GHQ ought to have given more consideration to the Amiens-Abancourt area.

**FIGURE 1**
Railway Schematic, March 1918

The 'Michael' offensive drove Fifth Army backward toward Amiens and, by 26 March, the QMG recognised the threat for what it was—a blow that had the potential to drive the BEF from France. Moreover, QMG Branch understood the dire nature of that threat, and began to make contingency plans. The first, the so-called Scheme X, dealt with stores, personnel and animals in the Amiens-Abbeville-Blargies-Dieppe area. The second, Scheme Y, added evacuation plans for Calais, Dunkirk and the Abbeville-Abancourt-Dieppe areas. The serious nature of the threat, that the Germans might seize Amiens and drive a wedge between the BEF and the French, is underscored by the QMG's willingness practically to give up his three northern base ports. Once GHQ had been informed that the BEF would maintain, at all costs, a continuous front with the French, the QMG again modified the plan. Scheme Z, or the Z Plan, became the final contingency plan to be adopted only in the gravest circumstances. It called for the evacuation of all troops north of the Somme River in order to maintain a continuous front. This would certainly sacrifice the northern base ports, as well as the
enormous investment on infrastructure that had been required in prior years to develop the
northern line of communication. The BEF had spent the better part of three years building this
line of communication, along with its attendant infrastructure—rail improvements, depots,
bases, port improvements, road improvements, light railways, ammunition depots. All would
have to be moved or destroyed should the Z Plan be needed.

Luckily for the BEF, the German Army advanced too fast, their poor decisions at the
operational and strategic level leading the forward troops to the position where they outran
their support services. As a result, they had to pause long enough for the Allies to manage to
fill in the holes. After the 'Michael' offensive had petered out, Rawlinson wrote to Henry
Wilson:

There can be no doubt that his first attack on the Cambrai-St Quentin front was
directed on Amiens primarily with a view to separating the British and French Armies,
but with the secondary object, if he failed in the first, of reaching a position from which
he would be within striking distance of the vitally important railway centres of Amiens
and Abancourt, for the severance of the railways at these two places would cut off the
Armies in the North from railway communication with the rest of France.

In this, Rawlinson differed from Gough. While neither proved correct in terms of German
intentions, both had come up with plausible guesses as to those intentions. Both based their
guesses on what they knew would hurt the BEF—any severing of its logistic infrastructure.
Neither counted, however, on the lack of strategic planning inherent in Ludendorff's gamble,
nor with the apparent ignorance on the German side of the importance of logistics to an army
whose lifeline led overseas.

When the 'Michael' offensive struck Fifth Army it took some time for the BEF to understand
the magnitude of their problem and to react. Once they understood what they faced, GHQ
rushed troops south to shore up Fifth Army and, incidentally, to cover Amiens. Foch's
appointment to supreme command also came out of the ensuing crisis. On the administrative
front, the QMG and his fellow officers adopted a number of policies and expedients designed
to get vital infrastructure and the like out of the way while simultaneously maintaining a high
level of resupply to the troops. Only so much could be evacuated, however. In spite of GHQ's
efforts, practically all of Fifth Army's light railway infrastructure fell into German hands along
with a number of broad gauge locomotives and wagons. These losses would prove more
difficult to replace than the more typical military losses of artillery, machine guns and the like.
Indeed, the losses in artillery could be made up from stocks that the BEF held in reserve
before the battle began. The railway losses could not. What could not be evacuated, GHQ
attempted to issue to troops or destroy. Herculean effort on the part of Haig's logisticians
mitigated the worst of the problems and it would appear that 'In spite of the difficulties,
everyone seems to get his rations every day'.

As of the middle of April, the Allies had 86 divisions (six of them cavalry) north of the Somme
River. These had, in part, to be supplied from south of that river with the main double line
from Beauvais to Amiens under fire. If we allow British scales to the allied divisions (20
infantry and three cavalry divisions) then the lines of communication had to move 43 trains
per day to simply keep these them supplied at a basic level—to say nothing of the
requirements should they need to fight. Furthermore, numerous trains had to be allowed for to
move supplies to depots and dumps both north and south of the Somme. As a result, the BEF
instituted a massive program of railway construction on the Somme crossings designed to
ease congestion in Amiens area caused by German encroachment. The results may be seen
when Figure II: Schematic of Somme Crossings, August 1918, is examined. The BEF had
completely reconfigured the crossings in the Abbeville area, allowing far more trains to cross
without having to go near Amiens. A number of lines had been twinned, particularly the
Abancourt-Martainneville-Longpré line which re-routed 36 extra trains per day west of
Amiens, and the Dieppe-Eu line had seen a quadrupling of capacity. While the Abancourt
area remained a critical one, the Germans could no longer threaten it and, unlike in March,
the difficulty in the Amiens area had become little more than an irritant. While the BEF could
have happily used the extra capacity allowed by a fully utilised Amiens, they no longer
required it for their own security.
The BEF learned some hard logistic lessons during the 'Michael' offensive. The first dealt with internal communication. It appears that the various branches at GHQ did not frequently communicate on formal face-to-face occasions, relying instead on copying each other with message traffic. Major-General GP Dawnay (Deputy CGS), for example, first mentioned Q Branch in his letters to his wife only on 13 April, when he wrote: Conference with QMG and Director-General of Transportation at 10 AM; he did, however, originate, send and read substantial quantities of message traffic that had been copied to other branches of the staff. In spite of the apparent lack of intimate contact, Dawnay evidently got on well with Travers Clarke (the QMC), which is indicative that information likely made its way back and forth informally.

The second dealt with railheads—they had often been placed too close to the front lines leaving them vulnerable to capture. This forced Fifth Army to abandon ammunition and supplies and to site their railheads further behind the front. As a temporary expedient, Fifth Army simply tried to dump ammunition on the roadsides for the guns, but they found that they had better success moving the ammunition right up to the guns by lorry. As far as the troops went, Fifth Army's formations discovered that if they fed and resupplied the infantry by area, rather than trying to find all of one's own troops—to have done otherwise would have created even more confusion in the rear areas. In spite of all of the problems created by the chaos of
the retreat, Fifth Army managed to hold itself together. On 4 and 5 April, the Germans launched their final effort in the Amiens area—a limited push that seized ground up to Villers Bretonneux, just on the outskirts of Amiens. This seems to indicate that the Germans had belatedly realized the Amiens held some importance to the BEF. However, Fifth Army retained the teeth to mount a small but effective local counter attack that recaptured Villers-Bretonneux and stopped the Germans for good in the Amiens area.\(^{13}\)

The BEF clearly realised the importance of the Amiens-Abancourt area to their continued existence. In April, Rawlinson had predicted (incorrectly) that this area would be the logical one for the next German attack. He used this to justify keeping a large force in the Amiens area.\(^{14}\) By May Rawlinson stated: 'There can be no question but that the Amiens area is the only one in which the enemy can hope to gain such a success as to force the Allies to discuss terms of peace.' He went on, though, to say: 'The Allies have fully realized that the Amiens area is the decisive one, and, since the appointment of Foch as Generalissimo, large forces have been collected and preparations made to meet a hostile offensive in this region'. He noted that the region contained, as of 4 May, 22 British divisions, 16 French divisions, plus a reserve of four to six French divisions.\(^{15}\) The question, then, is why did the Germans not push this area harder earlier and, given its importance, how did they miss it? The answer appears to be that the German high command did not look for such vulnerability, choosing, instead, to believe that hammer-blows driven by tactics would succeed in defeating the Anglo-French armies.

On 4 July the BEF launched its first significant counter-attack when 4th Australian Division supported by battalions of 2nd and 3rd Australian Divisions, four companies of 33rd US Division, and five companies of tanks attacked German positions in front of Hamel. In selecting the Australians, General Rawlinson picked the best troops he had available, which is indicative of his wish for a successful attack; and given his appreciation in April, this should have been no surprise. The planners arranged for this force to be supported by over 600 guns (300 of them heavy artillery) and, though this only allowed one field piece per 25 yards of front, the lack of formidable defences and the significant discrepancy in morale between the Australians and Germans resulted in success. The operational method mirrored what the BEF would use later in the summer—limited objectives, under the range of the field and heavy artillery and careful consolidation on the final phase fines. Moreover, in spite of the tanks, 4 Australian Division made no effort to push beyond these limits. The commander evidently realised the futility of attempting a break out given the limitations of foot-power. The Battle of Hamel is a fascinating but relatively minor action that the BEF fought in very large measure to add ‘depth to our defences on the Hill 104—Villers Bretonneux plateau, the safety of which was vital to the defence of Amiens’.\(^{16}\) Hamel certainly bought a little more breathing space for Amiens. It could, however, have been launched elsewhere. The BEF faced no shortage of areas where the Germans held positions that could not be termed much more than rudimentary. Hamel, however, presented an opportunity to use tanks with some of the most aggressive infantry in the BEF and, simultaneously, a locale that had great logistic significance, so they took it.

During June and July, Rawlinson developed a plan to relieve the danger that the Germans still posed to Amiens. Haig approved his plan and consented to sending the Canadian Corps to bolster the Australian Corps, thus providing Rawlinson with nine of the very best divisions in the BEF for his spearhead. Other than his decision to approve Rawlinson’s plan, Haig’s decision to commit both Dominion corps speaks volumes of the importance of Amiens, as did other issues. First, Haig and Rawlinson chose to plan the attack in the utmost secrecy. Currie did not first hear word of the plan until 20 July and, at a conference two days later at Fourth Army headquarters, he agreed to conceal the actual plan from his own immediate subordinates. As a result, Canadian divisional commanders proceeded under the assumption that they would be moved to Second Army for an attack on Orange Hill. GHQ even went so far as to issue false orders for the Canadian Corps to move to Second Army on 29 July. In fact, only a token force went to Second Army. Currie did not reveal the true nature of the plan to his divisional commanders until 29 July. At that point, GHQ had less than ten days to coordinate the move with the Canadians.\(^{17}\) It should be remembered that the Canadian Corps had not lost one battalion per brigade in 1917 and, in fact, had increased the size of each of their battalions at the time such that each Canadian division had the rough manpower of two
British divisions. As a result, the Canadian move entailed planning more suitable to moving eight divisions, or nearly three corps—it would have been far easier to move the Australians north. These examples speak volumes of Haig's grasp of the importance of the Amiens area.

Fourth Army's attack into the German defences near Amiens (far weaker than in other sectors, it must be noted) proved a tremendous success. By nightfall the two Dominion corps had driven the Germans back some eight miles, capturing numerous prisoners and guns in the most successful British attack of the war to that point. In the immediate aftermath of the opening day, GP Davvnay wrote: 'Prisoners into five figures and guns into three—and a great step taken towards the disengagement of Amiens'. Over ensuing days, the attack lost momentum, as did all attacks in that war, but, unlike in previous years, Haig heeded requests from his field commanders to break the offensive off and renew it elsewhere. Having bought breathing space in front of Amiens (roughly 20 miles), Haig clearly felt able to accede to the requests British staffs and commanders at many levels understood just what freeing Amiens meant to the BEF. Had they not done so, the attack might not have been launched.

By focussing their efforts almost solely on attempting to create a break-out (as opposed to a break-in and break-through), the German Army either forgot Clausewitz's centre of gravity, or chose the wrong one—choosing to believe that the loss of territory might drive the Allies out of the war, without asking of what value the lost territory had to those same Allies. Had the German high command asked 'how can we cut the British lines of communication?' they would likely have launched far more effective offensives, possibly crippling the BEF beyond repair, even if they did not inflict massive casualties on that force. The German tactics in 1918 became an end to themselves rather than a means to an end. Even then, the German infantry tactics did not mesh particularly well with the artillery, the most devastating weapon on a Great War battlefield. The BEF learned during the offensives that the German "barrage described is not a true creeping barrage, the smallest "lift" being 200 yards. It is obvious, therefore, ... that the enemy attaches less importance than ourselves to the close following of the barrage by the attacking infantry". Indeed, the barrages used to help crack British lines bear a remarkable similarity to those used by the BEF on 1 July 1916—for which Haig and his fellow officers have been roundly criticised ever since. The BEF provides a marked contrast to the German system.

The German style of offensive warfare in 1918 emphasised the initiative and self-reliance of the infantry above all else. It relied little on artillery except as the tool for helping to break open the defenders' front lines. The German Army used a tremendous weight of shell in short and intensive bombardments before they changed to a form of creeping barrage. Once the bombardment changed over to the lifting barrage, the infantry attacked and pushed as far and as hard as they could, continuing even after they had advanced past the range of their artillery support. This system did work. It caused tremendous dislocation in British defences, led to the capture of large numbers of artillery pieces and defending, troops, and allowed the German Army to capture vast tracts of territory in amounts not seen since 1914. However, it had some serious flaws. First, by limiting the artillery to the role of a tool used to crack the defence open, the German system left its infantry extremely vulnerable to British artillery as the attack progressed. Since the infantry could move ahead far more swiftly than the artillery could possibly follow, the infantry effectively lost its artillery within hours of the attack opening. In contrast, the defenders could fall back on their artillery, and on replacement guns being rushed up to make good losses. This ultimately led to high casualties amongst the German spearhead units. Second, the German system left little provision for rest or recuperation. The attacking infantry had to keep moving forward as rapidly as possible. This led to exhaustion and further increased casualties as British defences stiffened and tired German troops had to put in unsupported attacks on the improving positions. Third, by stressing speed at all costs, the Germans made inadequate provision for resupplying their spearhead troops. Finally, the German offensives lacked a strategic vision beyond a vain hope that they might somehow win the war. The German Army did not target locales whose capture might hurt the BEF—such as Amiens, Abancourt or Abbeville—they simply looked to grab territory. All in all, this made for an offensive system that could seize large tracts of territory, but at a substantial cost in lives and morale.
In contrast, the BEF succeeded admirably at the strategic level. They had fixated too much on the Channel ports in the late winter and early spring, but they did recognise the threat that the first German offensive posed to their lines of communication and reacted appropriately, strengthening the Amiens area throughout that first offensive. Indeed, by early April, the Germans could do little against the defences in that area. Luckily for the BEF, though, no later offensives targeted the Amiens area, for it seems likely that the forces brought to bear in the later offensives (such as 'Georgette') could have seized Amiens and threatened areas further west. The improved strategic vision at GHQ is also evidenced by the fact that the BEF's first limited counter-attack came at Hamel in the immediate Amiens vicinity and their first large-scale counter-offensive had as its primary goal the freeing up of Amiens. Finally the immense railway reconstruction and extension efforts behind Amiens point to a sound grasp of logistics in the BEF. Clearly, GHQ understood logistics. This is also evident in the British style of attack in 1918.

The British style of offensive warfare in 1918 lacked the glamour of the German stormtroopers, but it did prove effective. This style may be simply described as a limited-objective, set-piece attack. It featured very sound infantry tactics and all-arms cooperation under the cover of an artillery umbrella. As such, it relied on sound logistics and the understanding that infantry supported by artillery had far more power than those who lacked it. The BEF's logistic excellence had allowed them to develop this style of attack and, throughout the summer and autumn of 1918, the German Army seldom checked the BEF's advance. Indeed, the ultimate reign on the BEF's advance had little to do with the German Army. By October the BEF found itself too far in advance of its railheads to press the German withdrawal. This inability to move the supplies forward fast enough, left the BEF unable to come to grips with their retreating opponents and proved far more effective at slowing the BEF than had any German defence during 1918.

An understanding of logistics is vital to understanding the course of the final year of the Great War. The German Army had the opportunity, in March and early April, to deal a crippling blow to the BEF. Their inability to focus on what made the BEF vulnerable—a line of communication stretching out of France to Britain, North America and beyond—meant that they squandered their one real chance to improve the terms of an armistice. The BEF's understanding of their own vulnerability, belated though it was in the case of the Amiens area, allowed them both to defend successfully and to lay the logistic groundwork for the summer counter-offensives. By August the area behind Amiens had seen tremendous railway reconstruction that, in part, would later allow the BEF to support four armies in simultaneous offensive operations. That these operations featured an artillery-intensive andlogistically demanding style of warfare simply reemphasises the excellence of the BEF's logistic infrastructure—both mental and material. For the BEF, logistics truly helped define the victory.
Endnotes

2. Cf also William Lind's Maneuver Warfare Handbook (1985) and Martin Samuels' Command or Control? German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War (1992) which is very good for the German side of the equation, but much less reliable for the British.
5. Gough to Shaw-Sparrow, 18 August 1918, W Shaw-Sparrow Papers, 48203, vol 1, British Library.
6. Burnett-Stuart mss, 82, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3/6/6, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.
8. GP Dawnay to Mrs GP Dawnay, 27 March 1918, Major-General GP Dawnay Papers, 69/21/3, IWM.
9. Rawlinson to Wilson, 'An Appreciation', 18 April 1918, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson Papers, HHW 2/13, IWM.
10. GP Dawnay to Mrs GP Dawnay, 13 April 1918, Major-General GP Dawnay Papers, 69/21/3, IWM. Dawnay's papers also contain a great many operations priority signals from GHQ to Fifth Army, especially on 22 March, which GHQ internally copied to the AG, QMG, DGT, Engineer-in-Chief and Director of Signals.
11. Cf Dawnay's comments on Travers Clarke in GP Dawnay to Mrs GP Dawnay, 9 June 1918, Major-General GP Dawnay Papers, 69/21/3, IWM.
12. The A and Q Work in the 12th Division', ts, EHE Collen Papers, vol III, IWM.
14. Rawlinson to Wilson, 'An Appreciation', 18 April 1918, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson Papers, HHW 2/13, IWM.
15. Rawlinson to Wilson, 'An Appreciation', 4 May 1918, ibid.
16. SS 218, Operations by the Australian Corps Against Hamel, Bois de Hamel, and Bon de Vaire, 4th of July, 1918 (France: Army Printing and Stationery Services, July 1918). See p 3 for participants; p 5 for the artillery, p 2 for the state of German defences, morale, the limitation of the depth of attack, and the purpose of the attack.
17. N Webber to R Brutinel, 15 February 1919, 'Amiens Narrative, RG9 III D2, v 4802, file 135, National Archives of Canada; Arthur W Currie, Canadian Corps Operations During the Year 1918—Interim Report (Ottawa: Queens Printer, 1919), 27-29, 32; D Watson, Diary, 29 July and 1 August (misdated as 1 July) 1918, Major-General Sir D Watson Papers, MG30 E69, NAC.
18. GP Dawnay to Mrs GP Dawnay, 9 August 1918, Major-General GP. Dawnay Papers, 69/21/3, IWM.
19. Ivor Maxse felt that the German intention had been to drive a wedge between the French and British Armies, then to turn and destroy the British Army in France. Cf 'Narrative of the German Attack on XVIII Corps From from 21st March-27th March 1918‘, 1, General Sir Ivor Maxse Papers, 69/53/9-45, IWM. This opinion had been garnered from captured prisoners and, interestingly enough, it indicates that the Germans did not understand the BEF's logistic vulnerability. Had they seized Amiens, they could, with little pressure, have simply watched the BEF melt away as the Royal Navy, presumably, evacuated it from the Continent. Having seized Amiens, they could have turned on the French instead.
20. 'Notes on the Recent Fighting-No 10', 6 May 1918, Major-General GP Dawnsy Papers, 69/21/2, IWM.
Books on war retain a wide popular appeal. This is not surprising: battles and campaigns can be fascinating; the personalities and the experiences of service men and women are often emotionally moving; and the follies of high command illustrate the gross misjudgments which can be made by those in power. But there is a temptation to skim over passages dealing with defence administration. In comparison with other matters, it seems such a dull subject. Yet in all wars the administrative machine is vital, and weaknesses in it can be fatal. There are many lessons to be learnt for those who have eyes to see, and Australia's experience in the First World War is no exception.

When war broke out in 1914, the Defence Department was tiny. It had been created in 1901 as one of the original departments at federation, when its central civilian administration had only 13 members (compared with 19,000 civilians in June 1997). The Secretary for Defence ran the Department, supervised the civilian and industrial branches, co-ordinated the civil and military sides, and dealt with other Departments and the general public. Under him were a Chief Accountant, a Chief Clerk, six Clerks, one Senior Messenger, two Messengers and a Caretaker. The total cost for the year was £3600.

They were all housed in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne: it was cramped, but pretty informal. The acting Chief Clerk shared an office with another person, next to the record room where three clerks worked. Security was incredibly lax. Reporters could gain access through three possible entry ways—two through the departments of Customs and Home Affairs. They were never allowed into Central Registry, but they did seem to have gained access on most days to the Minister, the Secretary or—when he was absent—the Chief Clerk.

The department administered a force of merely 28,500 men, either permanent, militia or volunteers. In addition there were 29,000 members of Rifle Clubs, 2600 military reserves and 9000 school cadets. The staff in the Department's 'Central Administration' slowly grew, but by 1914 still only numbered about 29 people—mainly in Melbourne, but with small sub-branches in each State. It was in fact seriously understaffed, even for the times, and was put under great pressure when compulsory training was introduced in 1911.

The department was therefore inevitably overwhelmed by the outbreak of war, when public recruiting drives led to an expeditionary force of nearly 330,000 men and women, sent to different theatres of war. The sheer burden of administering this, and providing the logistic and other support services, such as pay and transport, was unprecedented. At the same time, the public appeal of the recruiting drives made it difficult to get extra staff for the department itself. The government quickly restricted enlistment by Defence organisation personnel themselves, but that did not solve the problem: many of the most suitable civilians outside had already enlisted: and since the Public Service in general had been almost entirely recruited from 15-year-old school leavers seeking a secure but undemanding job, there was no pool of talent in the organisation itself to draw on. To make matters worse, with the shortage of capable first division officers, the government used defence personnel elsewhere. The Secretary, Samuel Pethebridge, went to Rabaul as Colonel to administer Germany's Pacific Islands, and Thomas Trumble became Acting Secretary.

Yet the Australian government reserved the right to administer the AIF itself. Its first commander, Sir William Bridges, established the Australian Intermediate Base in Cairo as a section of the British base under Sir John Maxwell, but in 1916 Maxwell created a separate HQ AIF which went to Horseferry Road in London under Bridges' successor, General Sir William Birdwood. He had the right to communicate directly with the Australian Minister for
Defence, Senator Pearce, and was helped by a large staff in London. He was also in an area with good communications—unlike Chauvel who had been left administratively on a limb in the Middle East. Technically, therefore, AIF administration was divided between Melbourne and London: but as Birdwood was both controller of AIF headquarters and commander in France, his attention was divided between the two posts, so where the Canadian and New Zealand administrations in London became large and effective and gained initiative, AIF headquarters remained weak—a purely administrative body, with all policy decisions referred back to Australia. Everything therefore depended on the efficiency of 'Defence Central' back in far off Melbourne.

By that time, however, the range of its duties had exploded. The 'Expeditionary Force Branch', set up in the Adjutant-General's Department to deal with all correspondence concerning the AIF, had become the 'Base Records Office'. Beginning with one officer and two clerks in three rooms, by June 1917 it occupied three buildings with a staff of 328 who worked from 9 am to 8.30 pm daily. It liaised with AIF HQ in London, through which went all communications with the British War Office. Each mail from abroad brought orders from 147 Infantry Units, 22 Light Horse Units, 47 Artillery Units, 260 Army Service, Medical and Miscellaneous Units. It also kept a personal history card for each member of the AIF.

Meanwhile, the Military Board, via the Quartermaster General's branch, was heavily involved in the development of ordnance and clothing factories. There was a Contract and Supply Board, a 'Chemical Advisor's Branch', and by mid 1916 an Arsenal Branch. There followed a major empire-building scheme—or 'rationalisation', depending on one's point of view—by JK Jensen, who headed the Factories Branch. This involved Senator Pearce and 'Defence Central' as well.

In financial matters, the Army pay organisation, which had been tiny in 1914 since most pay was organised through unit commanders, had vastly expanded, while the Accounts Branch had the horrendous—and near impossible—task of calculating for Treasury the expenses of the war, not counting the ordinary expenditure of the Defence Department. This was needed because the British government had agreed to meet accommodation and travel expenses overseas of the AIF. Some extremely complicated accounting followed.

The Defence organisation also built and maintained 44 hospitals, both general and specialised; ran internment camps; and was involved in censorship and recruiting.

There was therefore a massive expansion of military administration, both in staff numbers and their duties. The combined military and civilian staff at HQ Melbourne increased from 267 in 1914 to 1483 in 1918. Victoria Barracks became overcrowded, and a 'temporary' wooden building was set up on the parade ground for 'Central Administration'. Then in September 1916 a new Branch of the Military Board, under the Military Secretary, was created to deal with the expected 'Yes' Vote in the referendum and the decision to call up all eligible males for service within Australia in the meantime. Perhaps it was as well the referendum was lost: the administrative chaos that would have resulted otherwise would have been horrendous. As it was, constant changes in the structure of the department and the names of its sections led to difficulties in liaison and communication, while there was overlapping between the military and civilian organisation, so administrative functions were carried out by whatever personnel seemed best. This caused some complexity: though the head of the Finance Branch was listed as being 'Lt Col TJ Thomas', in fact he was a civilian public servant with an honorary rank. Similarly, George Macandie was fleet paymaster of the RAN but held the honorary rank of Commander.

The coherence of the whole system depended on 'Central Registry' in the Secretary's Branch, through which all correspondence passed. Staff in Registry classified it and then distributed it to the relevant officers, who would handle routine matters themselves, but reserve more important or difficult ones for the Secretary—if necessary for subsequent submission to the Minister. The telephone directory had similar divisions in it, so that—in theory—members of the public with questions could speak directly to officers in that section.
The work load was horrendous. A report issued by the department in 1917 claimed the average number of papers dealt with per day had risen from 750 to 4000; letters despatched from 27,504 to 116,916; London mail from 600 to 1242 items; and telegrams from 3752 to 19,904. The 1917-18 Royal Commission noted that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Contract and Supply Board were also Acting Assistant Secretary in the Defence Department and Director of Equipment and Ordnance Services respectively, and even before they got those jobs, ‘their ordinary departmental duties compelled them to work seven days a week, and until a late hour each night’. Needless to say, they gained no relief for their additional duties.

Extra help obviously had to be hired, but the government was desperate to keep costs down. They had risen from 1.1 per cent of GDP and 18.8 per cent of Commonwealth outlays in the year 1913-14 to 12.5 per cent of GDP and 62.1 per cent of Commonwealth Outlays by 1917-18. Not that this was surprising: a major war was under way and expenditure was bound to rise. Government reluctance to face this fact, however, meant that the enlargement of the Department was painfully slow. The number of permanent staff in Central Administration under the Public Service Act only rose to 50 by mid 1915. By 1916 there were 62, but the department had enormous difficulties in recruiting trained and or experienced people, and had to appoint at the lowest levels. Most were temporary. It resorted to the then unprecedented action of employing female clerks and typists (who were however forbidden to work after 6 pm, due to the lack of lighting along St Kilda Road). Jensen later boasted that he employed the first female clerk ever in the Public Service, and this allowed it to ban the employment of men who were eligible to enlist.

The situation was made worse when large numbers of ex-servicemen returned and claimed precedence—which the government had offered them to encourage recruiting. The first wounded soldiers returned to Australia in July 1915 and they were duly given precedence. Further concessions to returned soldiers by amendments to the Commonwealth Public Service Act in 1915 allowing full leave of absence during the war to public servants who joined the AIF, and granting preference to returned servicemen with a satisfactory record, led to even fewer qualified applicants. Able and ambitious people were unwilling to accept temporary work for the duration of the war, only to be replaced by a demobilised soldier once peace came. Moreover, many returned servicemen had been traumatised by the war, or at the very least grown used to an open-air life, and did not make good clerks.

As a result, some highly unsuitable people were employed, and mistakes and muddles followed, such as the reluctance to authorise hospital ships and the chaos in medical arrangements during the Gallipoli campaign.

Back in Australia, there was a report of a navvy who took up clerical work, as well as a groom and ‘a member of an illegal organisation’ who was later taken away by plain-clothes police. Central Registry grimly pointed out that it required intelligence to work in the branch, and an ability to classify correspondence, précis material, and master the technical terminology in use. Mistakes in classification of papers and indexing led to the loss of files and confusion, and the Finance Member complained about untrained temporary clerks and the lengthening hours of work.

Under great pressure, the Defence Department seemed accident prone. The newspapers, being censored in most matters during the war, found relief in ‘patriotically’ hunting down what they termed ‘maladministration, corruption and ineptitude’. These were easily found in the supply system used by the Department. It had been bad enough in 1914, but once war came the government tried to meet the unprecedented demands by what today would be called ‘outsourcing’ or ‘privatisation’. When this was combined with slackness in contracting and accounting, the result was disastrous.

In 1914 Arthur Kidman, a merchant, sold inferior food at inflated prices to the AIF and the Tropical force sent to New Guinea. Major AG O’Donnell, the Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General who was in charge of purchasing supplies in NSW, was in league with him and received kick-backs. (When he was tried in 1915 O’Donnell claimed that he had won all the cash he was putting into his bank account at the races—but he was unable to remember the names of the horses or his bookmakers.)
In September 1916 a personable young man, FR Sanderson, who claimed to have invented an 'electric gun', conned a State Governor, prominent businessmen in Sydney and Adelaide, and a future Justice of the High Court of Australia, into forming a syndicate to support him, and Pearce to grant him access to a section of Cockatoo Island to produce it. The scam was spotted by Jensen. So it is hardly surprising that when in January 1918 a picnic was arranged for Defence Department personnel at the bayside town of Mornington in Port Phillip Bay, the press got word of it, and maliciously highlighted a speech on the 'they only serve who also sit and wait' theme. No further picnics were held.

Acquisition problems led to other embarrassments. Before the war no permanent officers had any interest in the military uses of motor vehicles, but a group of militia officers had formed the 'Australian Volunteer Automobile Corps'. The first CO of the unit was—naturally—the owner of one of the largest car companies in Australia, H Tarrant. When war came and the government desperately wanted transport (the War Office had asked it to supply some) it naturally asked Tarrant and F Bracey, Manager of the motoring division of Dalgety and Co, to form an Advisory Board to help the Department buy motor vehicles. No one seems to have considered Tarrant's vested interests. He acquired 27 German lorries (of the 135 the Department needed—one wonders where he thought the spare parts would come from!). The resultant press campaign led to questions in federal parliament and bitter complaints by his rivals in the motor industry.

To quieten the scandal, the government appointed a businessman and ex-Treasurer and Town Clerk of Sydney, R McC Anderson, to report on the financial and business operations of the Department. He dismissed the accusations against Tarrant, arguing that he had provided a service to the country (and when trade rivals complained again in 1916—this time accusing Tarrant of gaining an unjust amount of the repairs to defence vehicles—two other reports verified this, but nevertheless tried to justify the practice). 29

Anderson however also visited and inspected all major defence establishments, and wrote a blunt and forceful report. He was highly critical of the Navy for laxity and dual control under both the Public Service and Defence Acts. He regarded the Finance Member as simply a Chief Accountant who had exceeded his authority, with nit-picking criticisms that led to friction and ill-will. The Ordnance Department—its staff again working under various awards—was 'a synonym for ineptitude', 30 while the Public Service Commissioners seemed to have had no responsibility for seeing that the men they appointed were actually efficient. 31 The Minister was harassed; and the Defence organisation 'a series of fragments working in disunion'. He suggested dividing Defence clearly into three separate groups—Civil, Naval and Military. The Secretary's Department should control the organisation generally, and the secretary take the chair of the Council of Defence. The First Assistant Secretary should cover the general administration of the department and coordinate naval and military matters. The Second Assistant Secretary should be the civil member of both the naval and military Boards, and report to the Minister.

As for the senior staff in Defence, he thought the First Naval Member, Commander Creswell, ‘has only the foggiest idea of modern management ... [He is an] exceedingly pleasant old gentleman, but an expensive luxury in his present position’. On the other hand the Chief Accountant, Colonel Laing, ‘had not a good word to say of anybody, and in poetic justice not one witness I examined had a good word to say of him’. 32

Anderson's acerbic comments were not politically acceptable, but Pearce was determined to rid himself of a complete section of the administrative work, so in July 1915 he accepted Anderson's idea and hived off the Navy under its own Minister. 33 Anderson meanwhile had gone on to Egypt as DQMG, with the rank of Colonel, to 'reorganise and coordinate' administration there. This was needed, after the fiasco of the medical arrangements on Gallipoli, but Anderson was not the man to send. His range of duties were wide and not clearly explained, either to him or the CO AIF—nor had HQ AIF in Egypt been informed of his arrival. His bluntness and intolerance immediately resurfaced. He sent a five-page letter to Trumble that was so abusive and sarcastic that Pearce refused to receive it and Trumble returned it and sent a copy to HQ AIF in Cairo.
The official historian later delicately remarked: ‘Certain irregularities, never fully explored, occurred at this early stage in Egypt.’ At the time Anderson simply wrote that the Pay department in Egypt was ‘rotten’, and carried many ‘passengers, some of whom were making a profit in currency speculation’. Thomas had been sent out to audit, but ‘he failed to grasp the essential features of failure’, such as the fact that not a single unit ledger had been balanced. This greatly upset defence mandarins: Trumble decided to keep a record of all Anderson’s communications, and channelled them through Defence Central. As staff numbers were inadequate, that in turn led to long delays and failures to reply. Anderson complained, but did not help his case by remarks like ‘the evidence before me as to your methods of conducting the business of a great department is such as to make me feel solemn’.

The immediate result of Anderson’s Report was the formation of the Contract and Supply Board in November 1915 and the amalgamation of all supply functions under the influence of Jensen and his Arsenal Branch, but despite this, it is clear that the Department’s acquisition, storage and account-keeping methods remained unsatisfactory, with wide scope for fraud, as well as a very high incidence of items being simply lost. The department indeed admitted that the stocktaking results of February 1916 were unreliable.

Anderson meanwhile went on to irritating bigger and better targets. Hughes personally appointed him in April 1916 as Brigadier-General to be Commandant of AIF headquarters in London and the official Australian government representative at the War Office on financial and administrative matters, as well as Birdwood’s link with AIF training and holding depots in England. He was soon thoroughly disliked by both British and Australian officers, and on extremely bad terms with the War Office—but Birdwood did not replace him, presumably because a really effective man would have been a threat to Birdwood’s own position.

Back in Australia, the need to improve defence administration remained. The biggest weakness lay in the Paymaster’s Branch, which, for all his criticisms of other parts of the organisation, Anderson had not investigated properly. The Auditor General’s Report in 1915 had blamed delays in Treasury statements on late returns from ‘the Military section of the Department of Defence’. In particular, accounts of the District Paymaster in NSW were ‘in a most unsatisfactory position’: an incomplete cash book, with some pages totalled in pencil and others not at all; cheques drawn without authority; Paying Officers’ accounts not reconciled; and cheques and cash for unpaid salary and allotments left in the office safe. Pearce had put it all under Thomas, but there was difficulty in finding skilled staffs. The Melbourne and Sydney sections had received over 2000 extra people, but many were untrained and unsuitable, and it was not until 1916 that a number of public accountants were taken in as officers.

By then it was too late: the long simmering crisis was about to come to a head. Lt DCW Howell-Price was on the administrative and instructional staff at Victoria Barracks, Sydney, in 1914. As Adjutant of the 9th Light Horse, he had begun by forging forage contracts, then in 1915 went on to paysheets for the unit’s non-existent time in camp, cashing the resultant cheques himself. In the end he defrauded the department of £67,374—his salary at the time being £275 a year. Only his laziness led to his discovery: he neglected to forge acquittance slips, and a new Pay Officer became suspicious. Yet after all this, he was merely charged on two counts of forgery and sentenced in March 1917 to four years’ imprisonment. Further possible charges were abandoned the following May, despite the Board of Inquiry strongly urging they be pursued. With good conduct and armistice remissions he was released in 1919 and only £19,756 was ever recovered.

By this time now the press was openly sniping the Defence Department. Jensen tried to play off the morning and evening papers against one another, but by 1917 there were too many stories of corruption and incompetence, and too much press and parliamentary criticism. In January the Argus declared there was ‘something radically wrong’ with the management of the whole Defence Department, and talked of waste and theft; the Australasian attacked extravagance, and the Bulletin, which had been running a campaign for years, claimed the government had raided its offices and used wartime press censorship to prevent criticism, for which it blamed Pearce, accusing him of incompetence and hypocrisy.
Spurred by these attacks and the mounting pay scandal in NSW, Pearce first in February set up a 'Committee to Examine the Pay Office'. This did not satisfy Treasury, which had been demanding that it be given control over departmental pay officers for some time. Nor did it silence the press, especially the Bulletin, which described Pearce as a 'dull, commonplace bluffer whose administration of a great State Department [made] a story of inept, ignorant, wasteful bungling without parallel in Australian history'. Some day, when the people realise the enormous importance of administration, the fact that a man can make more or less eloquent speeches will be regarded as a matter of grave suspicion.

Pearce finally bowed to the pressure and on 2 July 1917 offered a 'Royal Commission into Defence Administration'. Three commissioners were appointed, all businessmen: WG McBeath (a Melbourne merchant); J Chalmers (manager of Farmer & Co, Sydney); and FA Verco (an Adelaide miller). None was a specialist accountant, and there was no Treasury representative—although two advisory accountants and a secretary were provided for the commissioners. The Secretary to the Treasury, JR Collins, was indignant: he had already argued there was no higher authority in matters of Government accounting than the Treasury itself.

The Commissioners, however, had a much wider mandate than just accounting. The Board of Inquiry into the Pay Office was disbanded, and the commissioners proceeded to investigate all contracts, supplies, and accounting and payment systems; and to visit the department's industrial establishments. They produced a series of 'Progress Reports', a procedure which provoked continuing debate, stimulated by the delay of nearly three months in the publication of the first report. Public and press suspicion that the government was hiding something increased.

As all the Commissioners were businessmen, they brought the typical prejudices of businessmen with them. In the First Progress Report (13 November 1917) they commented sarcastically on the poor qualifications of ordnance personnel in the Contract and Supply Board—'the dumping ground of the misfits, the inefficients, or the men unqualified by lack of business training'. Like Anderson, they were unhappy that personnel working in the Defence organisation were under different sets of regulations. They talked of 'the business of war' and the fact that 'the Defence Department has been conducting by far the largest commercial undertaking in the Commonwealth'. They criticised the accumulation of stores in 1915: only one AIF division had been sent overseas instead of three, so the Department was grossly overstocked. The problem they thought was an absence of businessmen in charge of spending. They suggested a central 'Business Board of Administration', with a District Business Board in each Military District, 'to take, subject only to the Minister, full control of the Business sections of the Defence Department'. It should be equal to the Military Board of Administration, directly responsible to the Minister, and be permanent with executive powers. They also recommended the appointment of an administrative Inspector-General, improved accounting and ordnance stores, and the formation of an Army Ordnance Corps. (It is amazing that one had not been formed by then.)

The government accepted the recommendations. A Business Board of Administration in defence was duly set up, and its Chairman made a member of the Military Board in place of the Finance Member. Nevertheless, like most businessmen, they went too far. Pearce produced a two-page memorandum which pointed out that the Commissioners had ignored the fact that the Department of Defence was not a business organisation, concerned only with profit and loss, but a government department which had a war to run. The Quartermaster-General supported him, pointing to the weaknesses in businessmen's attitudes. Armies need reserve supplies of material, and are forced to stockpile—a point Pearce took up.

If the government thought that it could tame the commission by criticising it, or declining to replace one commissioner who retired due to ill health, it was mistaken. The Second Progress Report on 14 February 1918 was political dynamite! After noting the demands of the war and the reaction to Anderson's report, it heavily criticised the Finance section for the slipshod methods which had led to the Howell-Price affair. The Commissioners slammed the incompetence of the Pay Office of the 2nd Military District in Sydney, and were highly
suspicious of some officers who had incurred gambling debts—during office hours—with Howell-Price. They were 'deeply disturbed' by the decision not to take further action against him, which prevented the investigation of other offenders. The Department was incredibly benign in this matter: listening to representations from Howell-Price's father. The Military Board even found it necessary to minute that they did not think Howell-Price should be paid any compensation on his retirement!\(^{53}\)

The report then turned to the Ordnance Stores with their uncollected fines, chaos, and accounts in 'hopeless confusion'. They pointed out that there were both massive surpluses and deficiencies in the ledgers. They were scathing about the Auditor-General and urged the appointment of a Director-General of Military Accounts. They suggested a conference with the Treasury, the centralisation of the Pay Offices, new stocktaking and accounting measures, and improvement in personnel, so that 'while preference is given to returned soldiers, the greatest care be exercised to insure [sic!] that they are fitted temperamentally and by experience for the vacant positions'.

The Advisory Accountants were even more caustic, writing of 'serious improprieties and corruption'. The creation of an Army Pay Corps had led to improvements, but the system still needed tightening up. As for the Ordnance section, the 'regulations regarding the checking of stock on hand were in most cases absolutely ignored'. The 2nd Military District in Sydney was particularly bad: £300 of cloth had disappeared, and the loss or destruction of the issue vouchers precluded them from establishing how it had happened—an event which they dryly remarked 'was probably fortuitous'. Their greatest sarcasm, however, was directed against the NSW Pay Offices, discussing the Howell-Price case in great detail, and arguing that the Department should pay salaries sufficient to attract men capable of the work.

Once again the government rejected the criticisms. Pearce defended the Department, and showed the commissioners' criticism of them to the Quartermaster-General and Finance Member, who naturally protested vigorously. Pearce then asked the Commissioners to reconsider their report. The Chairman objected, and both the Commissioners and the Advisory Accountants refused to alter their reports. The confrontation was published in the Argus and Pearce had to stall in federal parliament. It was all humiliating.\(^{54}\)

The Third and Fourth Progress Reports were short and to the point. In the Third, on 20 February 1918, the Commissioners recommended that all defence personnel should be placed under Section 63 of the Defence Act until a year after the war had ended. They produced a draft Bill which became the basis of the Defence (Civil Employment) Act, No 17 of 1918. They also wanted the Business Board of Administration to be given powers to remove unsuitable temporary employees, and a Staff Committee to be set up: of the Public Commissioner, the Adjutant-General, and a representative of the Business Board of Administration.\(^{55}\) The Fourth Progress Report (13 March 1918) dealt with the government factories and motor transport, and wanted a different system of accounting used.

The Commission thus ended its series of reports in a conciliatory fashion, noting the 'unprecedented nature and magnitude of the task, and the replacement of unsuitable personnel'.\(^{56}\) Despite this, they provoked a series of bitter complaints and 'storm of criticism of the department's methods', especially in the press, which attacked the delay in publication and Pearce's performance as Minister. Federal parliamentarians thought he had been in the Department too long and saw everything through 'military spectacles'.\(^{57}\) His political career was threatened, not for the first time.\(^{58}\) Hughes had kept Pearce as Minister for Defence, but the latter had blundered in refusing to accept advice that two officers of the Department be seconded to the Commission to cross-examine witnesses and reveal the practical problems the department faced.\(^{59}\) Pearce had only himself to blame, and produced a short—and rather lame—defence of the department on 18 March 1919, and Hughes had support him with a more forthright statement welcoming the work of the Commission, but stressing the enormous scale of the department's operations during the war. He must have been very unimpressed with Pearce, however, and it has been suggested that from then on the relations between the two men became 'rather cooler'. Pearce 'was sent to London' to organise the demobilisation and repatriation of the AIF.\(^{60}\)
The Auditor-General and the CGS, Brigadier General Hubert Foster, produced strong defences, but the gross incompetence and corruption in the pay and supply sections was undeniable, and the government was forced to react. On 15 March 1918 Cabinet approved the appointment of a Director-General of Accounts, a conference to simplify accounting procedures, changed titles in the Pay organisation, and checks on railway warrants and freight charges. It also took measures to improve the calibre of personnel in charge of accounting records and to ensure more care in placing returned soldiers in such posts. The Auditor-General's position was reconsidered. All personnel—including Clerks in the Secretary's office—were to come under the Defence Act for the duration of the war and one year afterwards.

The final two reports, on Naval administration, appeared on 4 October 1918 and after the war had ended on 13 February 1919. They suggested a reconstructed Board, and a Secretary who was permanent head of the Navy department. They criticised the purchase of a Wireless factory in Sydney at an inflated price. The Minister for the Navy, JA Jensen, had acted on his own initiative on this and other acquisition matters—sometimes against the wishes of the Naval Board—and in addition, a portion of the purchase price had been paid to Senator JJ Long of Tasmania. Long protested his innocence vehemently, but was ignored, and Jensen was dismissed from the Ministry, even though by that time he held another portfolio.

The government was embarrassed by these additional revelations and did not like the suggestion to strengthen the Naval Board, arguing that it ignored the basis of the Westminster system—ministerial responsibility. A Cabinet sub-committee suggested instead a four-man Board, reporting to the Minister. The matter was deferred until the return of Senator Cook (then Minister for the Navy) from Britain. The Commissioners complained that they had been misunderstood: the Minister 'should be held responsible for the policy and finance of the administration', but he 'should not, unless under very exceptional circumstances, interfere with details of the administration. These should be intrusted [sic!] to the Naval Board and the expert officers of the Department'. It was an interesting argument, and the opposite of Pearce's habits. By that time the war had ended, however.

After the war, the Commissioners' battle with the government was hidden in the official history. Scott argued that the findings of the commission were 'rounds for congratulation' in that 'no major or even minor scandal was revealed'. This was nonsense: the misappropriation of £67,374 had lo be a major scandal. According to Reserve Bank figures, the sum is equivalent to $3,825,495 in today's currency. Scott however was probably pressured into writing so blandly: there are hints that he deeply disagreed, and would have preferred to resign, but Bean followed his usual practice in the official history series of sidestepping criticism. Shedden followed a similar line in his manuscript in the late fifties, arguing that the Commissioners' refusal to discuss matters, their rebuff to the government, and their direct appeal to the press, 'largely discounted the value of [their] report'. This suggests that the Commissioners' reports still rankled some 40 years later. One can only agree with a BA Honours thesis produced in ADFA, that—despite the comments of both Bean and Shedden—as a result of the massive demands of the war, 'the Department of Defence came under immense administrative pressure' and that 'its small and inexperienced staff was completely overwhelmed by events'.

Not that the Defence Department was alone in its troubles. GE Caiden argues that the Public Service as a whole was in 'a state of disarray until 1916', and Royal Commissions into the Wheat Boards in South Australia and New South Wales revealed corruption by Ministers which led to their resignations. Nevertheless, the problems the Defence Department faced during the war were unprecedented: the raising of the AIF and expansion of the navy; the shortage of trained officers; failings in the political leadership; political in-fighting with the elections and the referenda; the split in the ALP; press criticism and public emotionalism; and the lack of an adequately large and trained public service, both in the lower and senior grades. The war put enormous strains on the system, as it did on the armies of the day, which had become too large to administer or command effectively, with notorious results on the battlefields. Nor was Pearce a far-sighted and efficient administrator—whatever his defenders say. It was hardly surprising that some parts and personnel in defence failed.
Meanwhile, Central Administration continued its links with all sections of the defence organisation, except for the time being the Navy. Its role as a centre of communications and in the administration of the defence factories, continued, so when the 'Business Board of Defence' was established in April 1918, JT Grose, Finance Secretary of the Department of Defence, was a member, as well as being Civil Member of the Military Board. Senior departmental officers, however, had little impact on wider policy issues, partly because they were overwhelmed by the detail of administration, but mainly because of the politics—both international and national—of the day.

In Britain, Lloyd George created a small War Cabinet and developed a number of new Ministries, coordinated by a system of Committees, based on the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), and using the CID secretariat. By 1918 he crowned the system with the Imperial War Cabinet.

Australia had none of this. Decision-making was personalised, and autocratic. The Governor-General, Munro Ferguson, regarded himself as the servant of the British monarch and government; while the Prime Minister, WM Hughes, was more akin to a President than a Prime Minister. Not surprisingly, the Council of Defence did not meet between 1915 and 1918, and in so far as Hughes employed the Australian bureaucracy, it was his own 'Prime Minister's Department', which on one occasion 'altered the number of destroyers being transferred from the Singapore station to Aden without informing the Minister for the Navy'.

Nor was the secretariat helped by its political leader. Pearce was a cypher, complaining to the Senate in October 1914 that he had inherited 'a legacy of an almost vicious character from State administrations', whose defence ministers had so little to do that they could consider 'the minutest details of administration', in which he now found himself swamped. He did not say why that precluded him from delegating more himself, or why, as an experienced Minister for Defence (1908-9, 1910-13, and 1914 onwards) he had not changed the system long before then. As Heydon puts it, 'It took three years, and a Royal Commission ... to bring proper business methods into what was a vast business undertaking'.

The basic reason may well have been the poor quality of the average Public Servant (discussed above), and the lack of educated and trained higher staff, so that decisions had to be made by the leadership, but Pearce's temperamental inability to delegate also played a large part. He has been credited with 'marked administrative ability'. He certainly worked long hours himself and insisted that others did so too, but research suggests that working long hours beyond a certain point reduces the quality and output of work, and increases health and accident problems. It also led to tension. Pearce:

established a ... rather formal ... partnership with his senior officers, whether administrative or professional. He was always the Minister, they were always the officers ... Pearce's mastery of detail did mean that he did rather too much himself.

Numerous instances can be cited; one of Pearce's decisions as Minister at the Navy Office on 1 October 1914 was to challenge the award of a tender for the supply of marmalade, while in November at Victoria Barracks he dealt with Balaclava helmets for Range Finder Operators to the value of £13!

The effects of this habit were made insupportable by his political burden at the time. During the war he was leader of the Senate; Hughes' de facto second in command (and Acting Prime Minister while Hughes was in England in 1916); planner with Hughes of the two conscription campaigns; deeply involved in the Labor Party split and the organisation of a National Party Senate majority in 1917; and oversaw censorship. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that 'he did too much work himself as Minister' and 'suffered a breakdown'.

Moreover, he was prevented by the political crises in Australia from attending the Imperial War Cabinet in 1917. Hughes went to London in 1918, and dictated policy to his colleagues left behind in Melbourne, far from the sources of information and decision making. The
imperial system meant that ‘it was the Prime Ministers who were being equated with their
countries’, and it is significant that Hughes did not take a member of Defence Central—let
alone its secretary—with him when he went to London, but his political ally and Minister for
the Navy, Joseph Cook, and his adviser Commander JG Latham (later to be Minister for
External Affairs in the United Australia Party), as well as his wife, personal secretary, and
doctor. Pearce at the time was in Britain—but had been given repatriation and shipping as his
charge. Pearce may have been Minister for Defence, but it was an area that Hughes
regarded as his own domain.

In such a situation, the Defence Department had no hope of being listened to. It was simply a
functional department, and had no input into policy. The future would be different, for while
the chaos of the war continued, a minor clerk was working his way up in the defence
administration. Frederick Shedden had joined the Department in 1910—typically enough on
leaving school at the age of 16, and at the lowest level as a junior clerk. Hard working and
ambitious, he studied part-time, first for the Senior Public Examination of Melbourne
University in 1914, to enable him to take university studies. At university, however, he failed
two law subjects in 1915, and turned to accountancy instead, since he had been transferred
to the Finance Branch of the Department early in 1915. He became a Licentiate of the
Incorporated Institute of Accountants of Victoria in December 1916. He was unusual in the
department of his day, since he ‘recognised the value of educational qualifications as a
means to promotion’. In January 1916 he answered the recruiting questionnaire that he was
prepared to enlist, but the Finance Branch by that time (with growing criticism formalised in
the Anderson Report of April 1915) was not in the mood to let competent staff go. The Howell-
Price scandal then broke, with the result that in March 1917 ‘Shedden was appointed
Lieutenant in the AIF Pay Corps and sent to liaise with the AIF in Europe on accounting
procedures’. It was a timely move, for as a result of the Royal Commission’s report the
Secretary of Defence was given responsibility for scrutiny and accountability of the
expeditionary force expenditures. In addition, Pearce thought that juniors should be given
wide experience, so that if any war broke out in future, there would be someone in the
department with experience of the initial wartime measures and administration needed.
Shedden therefore went to London, and then for two months to France: the first at AIF HQ,
and the second as paymaster with 4th Division. He was to return to Australia in December
1919. He then studied at the Imperial Defence College in Britain in 1928, and finally became
Permanent Secretary of Defence in November 1937. Despite the decimation of the defence
organisation in the inter-war years, Shedden as Secretary of Defence—if not his
department—was to have a much larger role to play in the decision-making process during
the Second World War.
Endnotes

1. As at 30 June, including ADI (Australian Defence Industries), *Australian Year Book*, 1998, 128.
2. Jensen ms, 1, MP598/30, item 4, AA.
5. By 1916 Clerks, Class V, were being forbidden to enlist, 19/1/16 B539 AIF150/1/234 and 12/2/1916, B539 AIF150/1/109, AA. See also Jensen's comments, MP598/30, item 4, 10-11, AA.
6. There was a Records Office attached to GHQ EEF, but the Light Horse in Palestine had no direct access to the Australian government.
10. See Treasury request July 1915, MP472/1/0 3/15/5494, AA.
12. Ibid,231.
13. Department of Defence, 'Report upon the Department of Defence: From the First of July 1914, until the Thirtieth of June, 1917. Pt 1: Compiled in the office of the Secretary, Department of Defence (in fact by Jensen), from information furnished by the Heads of Branches and Commandants of Military Districts, Melbourne, 1917', 223 (AWM).
15. 'Report Upon the Department of Defence ... 1917', 415-16 (continuing to 551 with the detail), cf Jensen ms, 1-3, MP598/30, item 4, AA.
16. 'Report upon the Department of Defence ... 1917', 429-30.
19. The proportion of good candidates for the public service had been declining before 1914: Caiden, *Career Service*, 25.
20. Jensen ms, 11-12, MP598/30, item 4, AA.
21. 'Report upon the Department of Defence ... 1917', 420-23; Scott, *Australia during the War*, 296, 828.
22. Caiden, *Career Service*, 115, 123-4; Jensen ms, 13, MP598/30, item 4, AA.
25. 'Report upon the Department of Defence ... 1917', 365, 428-9.
27. The Auditor-General had complained about accounting for the Small Arms Factory in 1914, and the slowness of any response to his queries Accounts were over a year in arrears. 'Fourteenth Annual Report of the Auditor-General ... Being upon the Public Accounts for the Year ended 30 June, 1915', CPP, 1914-1917, Ill: 1479-1525.
28. Special Report of the Auditor-General ... being comments upon those portions of the Second Progress Report of the Royal Commission on Navy and defence Administration which relate to the Audit Office', CPP, 1917-1919, IV 259, 265; A1831/1 17/372A Pt 1, AA; Sydney Morning Herald, 23-5 June 1919; Wells, 'Senator Pearce', 16-17.
30. Shedden ms, A5954/1 785/3, 500, AA.
32. MP 153/8, AA.
33. Shedden ms, A5954 785/3, 507, AA.
34. Scott, *Australia during the War*, 277.
35. The correspondence can be found in PR83/20, AWM.
38. Scott, *Australia during the War*, 278.
41. Scott, *Australia during the War*, 277, 280.
42. C Meeking, ‘How a Lieutenant Swindled the Army’, *The Australian Accountant*, September 1979, 564-5, from which this account is taken.
43. For the Board of Inquiry, see MP367/1 609/2-1710 & A226/3/450, AA.
44. For using the War Precautions Act to prevent public disclosure, see Wells, ‘Senator Pearce’, 24; *Bulletin*, 25 January, 15 & 29 March, 5 & 12 April, 31 May, 14 & 28 June, 9 August, 20 October; 6 December 1917; *Argus*, 31 January 1917; Jensen ms, 48-52, MP598/30, item 4, AA.
45. Pearce to Hughes, 27 February 1917, 3DRL 2222, bundle 7, 72-75, AWM.
49. Special Report of the Auditor-General, Appendix E, CPP, 1917-1919, IV: 271 & 274 (Trumble had in fact suggested an Australian Ordnance Corps, which was gazetted on 19 July 1917).
51. Defence—Navy and Defence Administration—Royal Commission, First Progress Report together with an announcement by the Prime Minister and memorandum by the Minister for Defence, 13 November 1917, CPP, 1917-1919, IV: 175-190; Quartermaster-General, MP367/1 612/1/483, AA.
52. For example, $10,000 cash found in the NSW Pay Office, missing pay sheets, and overpayment of allowances.
54. Wells, ‘Senator Pearce’, 58-62; Memorandum for Cabinet, 13 March 1918, A3832/1 RC17, item 9, AA; Shedden ms, A5954/1 785/3, 515, AA, reflects the ill-feeling against the commissioners at the time. Advisory Accountants Memorandum to the Royal Commission, 22 March 1918, A3832/1 RC17, item 5, AA; Defence—Navy and Defence Administration—Royal Commission, Second Progress Report together with Report by the Finance Member the Quartermaster-General; Solicitor-General ... Prime Minister 14 February 1918, CPP, 1917-1919, IV: 199-250, Memorandum for Cabinet, 13 March 1918, A3832/1 RC17, item 9, AA.
55. MP367/1 559/25/11, AA; Defence—Navy and Defence Administration—Royal Commission; Third Progress Report, 20 February 1918, CPP, 1917-1919, IV, 277-82.
58. PR Heydon, Sir George Pearce as Administrator’, *Public Administration* (Sydney) 27: 4 (December 1963), 314. When the Nationalist Party was formed in 1917, he had been heavily criticised by members of the Liberal Party, who had even demanded his removal from office as the price of amalgamation with Hughes' breakaway ex-Labor men.
59. Jensen and Trumble, Jensen ms, 28-30, MP598/30, item 4, AA.
62. Defence—Navy and Defence Administration—Royal Commission; Decisions Arrived at by the Cabinet, 15th March 1918, on the Second, Third and Fourth Progress Reports, CPP, 1917-1919, IV: 299-300; An Act Relating to Civil Employment in the Department of Defence, AWM27 301/5; Director-General of Accounts, A3832 RC17, item 7, AA.
63. Scott, Australia during the War, 282-5; 'Navy and Defence Administration—Royal Commission: Report on Navy Administration', CPP, 1917-1919, IV: 305-32; Long, A3832/1 RC17, item 4, AA; Jensen, ibid, item 3.
64. Shedden ms, A5954 785/3, 520-21, AA; 'Navy and Defence Administration—Royal Commission
66. Shedden ms, A5954 785/3, 507-16, AA.
67. I am indebted for this information to Joseph Kearns of the Economic Policy section of the Reserve Bank. According to their figures, one pound (£1) Australian in 1917 is equivalent to $56.78 in 1996.
70. Caiden, Career Service, 119-20, cited in Wells, 'Senator Pearce', 15; Scott, Australia during the War, 598-604.
71. Heydon, Quiet Decision, 60; Caiden, Career Service, 120.
72. Military Order No 209, 15 April 1918, in Memo to CEW Bean (undated), AWM27 301/6.
75. CPD 75: 105 (14 October 1914), quoted in Perry, 'Pearce', 46-7.
76. Heydon, 'Pearce as Administrator', 327.
77. OCAMH, 461-2; Heydon, Pearce as Administrator', 316.
78. Heydon, Quiet Decision, 148, 155.
79. Ibid, 151; 'Pearce as Administrator', 316, 324; MP472/1 1/16/3459, AA.
81. Heydon, 'Pearce as Administrator', 320: 'officers of the present Department of Defence would shudder if they read many of the papers of the First World War in which Pearce minuted documents with instructions direct to the Adjutant-General or the QMG or similar officers'.
82. Edwards, Prime Ministers and Diplomats, 32, 35-8, 43, 45.
83. D170/2/139, AA.
84. Alan Thompson, 'Role of the Secretary and CDF', paper presented to the JCF ADTs defence subcommittee inquiry into the higher management of defence, 1986-7, vol II, Submissions and Incorporated Documents.
It's a long way from Villers-Bretonneux to Victoria Barracks. There were no battles on Australian soil during the Great War, no raids on our coast, not even a memorable act of sabotage. Still, hundreds of women and thousands of men defended Australian territory throughout the war. Police and private citizens monitored supposed disloyalty. Censors suppressed information deemed to be demoralising. A small expeditionary force conquered and garrisoned German New Guinea, securing the only land approach to Australian territory. Recruits for the Australian Imperial Force filled camps with armed and uniformed men who might be called on if some local military emergency arose. AIF recruits rejected for overseas service assumed the job of guarding defence installations and the camps in which so-called aliens had been interned. Naval reservists examined ships for contraband cargo. Women who wanted to take up arms began to drill and shoot unofficially.

In addition to this impromptu collective of defenders, an army existed to defend Australia from invasion and, more remotely, to train men for future service in the AIF. The army predated the war, and its mobilisation was our first military contribution to the war effort. Invasion never came, and the army was wound down after Gallipoli. But individual units performed garrison duty throughout the next three years, and there was a frantic effort to revive the army when German victories early in 1918 raised the prospect of war coming to Australia after all. This other Australian army is the subject of this chapter. Properly called the Australian Military Forces, I will call it in this essay by one of its vernacular and more evocative names: the citizen army.

The Army and Its Purpose

The citizen army was not an army as we understand one today. It had only a small cadre of professional soldiers, little military discipline, no obligation to serve outside Australia, indeed no real existence outside the few hours each week that its mostly part-time members changed into uniform after a day's work and assembled in drill halls around the country to practise drill and musketry. Australia's only military force when the war began, the citizen army was a product of a conscious determination to assert Australian home rule within the British empire, and of a less conscious inheritance of Britain's long citizen soldier tradition. Australians accepted the duty of contributing to imperial defence, but their contribution had to be voluntary. It must not compromise the authority of the Australian government, or a citizen's right to ignore the king's wars. Defence of hearth and home took strong precedence over imperial defence in Australia's prewar military system.

Before the war the Australian government sanctioned vague plans to raise an expeditionary force to serve with the British army if war began. It would be formed of Australia's best men, of course, but they would be voluntarily recruited and amount to just one infantry division and one light horse brigade. At the same time, fear of Japanese attack on Australian soil yielded active preparation, not just vague plans. Millions of pounds were devoted to disbanding the old voluntarily-recruited citizen forces and to beginning to raise a vast compulsory militia from annual intakes of fit 18-year-old men. The militia would be complete only in 1920. Until then, rifle club members, who shot for military as well as sporting reasons, would bring it up to war strength in a crisis. Detailed defence schemes laid down when and where the militia, the rifle club reservists and the so-called permanent force, the citizen army's cadre of professional artillery and engineers, would concentrate if war began. First they would secure the capital cities, Newcastle and Thursday Island from attack. Then they would form a field army to repel an invasion by an 'Eastern power', a polite euphemism for Japan. Military enthusiasts sometimes talked of the German challenge before the war. The citizen army had a different enemy in its sights, and militia officers reminded their young soldiers they were training to beat back a coming Japanese invasion.
1914: The Army Mobilises and Demobilises

When the imperial government signalled to the empire on 30 July 1914 that war with Germany threatened, senior officers in Australia pulled the defence schemes from their safes and began to mobilise the citizen army. Preliminary mobilisation began on 2 August. The artillerymen and engineers who constituted the bulk of the permanent force, the citizen army’s small professional cadre, stood by the fixed guns at the capital cities, Newcastle and Thursday Island. About a thousand militiamen and rifle club reservists were called out. Some joined the permanent soldiers at the guns, or began guarding arms and ammunition factories, wireless stations and bridges, or where undersea telegraph cables came ashore. Most, though, assembled for a dramatic task. The government feared an attack on Thursday Island, key to the Torres Strait and a good base for a German admiral seeking to sink Australian shipping or a Japanese general assembling an invasion force. Accordingly Townsville’s garrison artillerymen and the Kennedy Regiment, an infantry battalion recruited across northern Queensland, assembled for brief but intense training in preparation for sailing to the island to reinforce permanent force gunners and the local rifle club. The British empire was not yet at war, and some citizen soldiers proved slow to mobilise. Two rifle club reservists in Darwin refused to leave their beds when ordered to guard a cable landing place. Suspecting a hoax, they had to be hauled to their posts by the police. But men who put on uniform were hailed as heroes, and a Melbourne battalion was besieged by a rapt crowd when it held a ceremony on the night of 4 August to induct its third intake of recruits.

On 5 August war came. Vigilant gunners at Queenscliff fired a warning shot over the German steamer *Pfalz* to prevent it from leaving Port Phillip. It was the first of many shots fired over the next four years near unidentified ships which failed to follow strict military navigation and identification procedures, and it was later proudly claimed as the first British shot of the war. Now came the first stage of full mobilisation, which aimed to protect the coastal cities with garrisons of all arms. Ten thousand militiamen received telegrams in red envelopes summoning them to drill halls around the country. After assembling and training for a day these men bedded down for a night on hard straw and marched off next morning. Geelong’s militiamen were hailed by their local newspaper as heroes ‘off to the front’. The Kennedy Regiment and the Townsville garrison artillery steamed for Thursday Island on 8 August 1914, a day which one journalist proclaimed would ‘be remembered in the history of Australia as that on which the first contingent of her new citizen forces was sent forth on active service conditions’.

The day almost did become memorable. On reaching Thursday Island the citizen artillerymen dutifully joined their permanent counterparts at the guns, but the Kennedy Regiment’s ardent young infantry officers called for volunteers to return to their ship and sail on to real war. Nearly half the battalion answered the call. They landed at Port Moresby, found nothing to do, but encountered William Holmes’ small expeditionary force on its way to seize German New Guinea. The Kennedy men asked to join the force. William Holmes declared them unfit for active service. The hasty mobilisation of an incomplete militia had not yielded a formidable army. There had been no proper medical inspections, no turning away of the youngest recruits. There were too few officers, not enough ammunition, only one set of clothes for each man, no tents or mosquito nets. Some men were without boots. The Kennedy men were not easily deterred by Holmes’s declaration. When his force sailed for Rabaul they tried to follow it. But their ship fell behind when its crew refused to sail outside home waters, and the men were ordered home.

The return of the Kennedy Regiment to Australian territory ended any chance of Australia’s citizen army seeing real war. German power in the Pacific was now collapsing, greatly reducing the chance of a raid on Australia. Japan was entering the war on the allied side, greatly reducing the chance of an invasion. Officers of militia units not called up for the first stage of full mobilisation were ordered to prepare for the second stage, during which many units would combine into an infantry division and light horse division that would operate against the invader. John Monash, commanding the citizen army’s 13th Infantry Brigade, did his best to prepare his men for war, and reminded himself to prepare the clothing, kit items and food he would need, arrange a horse and saddle and obtain a map of the site where his
The reminder had proved unnecessary. With vast armies beginning to clash in Europe, detailed planning had at last begun for raising what would be called the Australian Imperial Force. At the close of August the government had decreed that only a small number of militia infantry battalions and light horse regiments need remain on duty at any one time, though for the moment the garrison artillery and engineers of the permanent force and militia were to stay put. The best officers and men of the citizen army began to join the AIF. John Monash swapped his brigade command in the militia for a brigade command in the AIF.

A reorientation of Australia’s military system from home defence to expeditionary war was beginning. Not that the reorientation was immediately effected. By December 1914 the AIF had grown to twice its intended size—nearly 40,000 soldiers—but the citizen army remained far larger: over 100,000 soldiers, including 56,000 militiamen and 51,000 rifle reservists. Yet in terms of warlike activity the shift was already clear. Nearly 11,000 permanent and citizen soldiers had been mobilised for full-time duty since the war began, while twice as many men had already sailed overseas with the AIF. At the close of the year most of the militia’s garrison artillerymen were dismissed from full-time duty. The appearance of a home-grown enemy would have halted the citizen army’s demobilisation, but none occurred. An anticipated rising by Germans in Sydney over Christmas 1914 failed to eventuate, and the special trams which waited to bring soldiers into the city returned empty to their depots. Twenty non-uniformed members of the 82nd Infantry Battalion proved sufficient to help police kill the butcher and the ice cream vendor who, under a Turkish flag, fired shots into a passing train at Broken Hill on New Year’s Day 1915. Australia’s defence was being secured by soldiers in Europe and the Middle East, by sailors on distant fleets, by censors working with pens and typewriters, by William Holmes’ force in Rabaul. The chance of conflict with Japan was being defused by silk-hatted diplomats in London and Tokyo. The citizen army, demobilised and without even saboteurs to suppress, was eclipsed by the AIF.

1915-1917: Garrison Duty and Decline

Demobilisation did not lead to disbandment. Raids by German cruisers and submarines were still feared. Australian governments still worried that Japan would take advantage of some allied reverse in Europe to conquer the South Pacific. Permanent artillerymen came to be drawn into the AIF’s siege artillery brigade, but militia infantry and artillery units and, in remote areas, rifle clubs remained on call. They were summoned for periods of days, weeks or months throughout the war to guard seaward approaches to the large cities or patrol exposed stretches of coastline and isolated telegraph cable landing places. Usually three to four thousand soldiers were on full-time duty at any moment.

A typical stint of garrison service was performed by the New South Wales Mounted Rifles in 1915. Recruited across central New South Wales, this light horse regiment’s three squadrons were mobilised one after another during March and April 1915 to guard Sydney’s water supply from sabotage and to watch for raids on the city’s northern coastline. A temporary headquarters was established at St Ives, an upper north shore suburb midway between the regiment’s places of duty. But with the commanding officer away in Egypt with the AIF and with no real expectation of attack, no headquarters staff were present apart from the adjutant. Each squadron went on duty for just two weeks, which included a break of three or four days. Seventy or so horsemen performed long, lonely mounted patrols along sandy beaches each day. Another 20, or fewer, guarded pipelines and dams. Then came demobilisation, payment, a return to civilian life—punctuated by drill.

Garrison duty could be more rigorous at times and places of heightened vigilance. Townsville’s garrison artillery unit remained on duty at Thursday Island throughout the war, its members subject, so one later complained, to ‘as rigid military discipline as obtained anywhere in the British Empire’. Two partial mobilisations occurred in February-March 1916 and April-May 1918, both in response to the presence of German raiders. Though not many more than the usual number of soldiers were called up in response, full-time service proved hard work. During the first partial mobilisation Sydney’s garrison gunners performed 24-hour shifts, all the time exposed to sun, wind and rain. Their time off was more enjoyable, being
marked, so one officer recalled, by ‘comfortable quarters, a bath, well-cooked meals, a bed-stretcher on a wide verandah ... a swim, a game of cricket or a few hours’ fishing, and occasionally a half-day’s leave’.23

In mid 1915 the citizen army expanded according to prewar plans. New units were raised and 17,000 recruits were inducted. Recruits were told they had an important job to do. There might be no glory in their service, said one battalion commander, but there was ‘the supreme merit of usefulness’. Local communities continued to support their citizen soldiers as they had done before the war, buying them musical instruments and presenting them with embroidered flags.24 But if the citizen army was useful, the AIF was vital. During 1915 the AIF grew to include six divisions and 200,000 soldiers, and Australians found themselves maintaining two armies where they could barely afford to maintain one. Inevitably the citizen army began to yield to the AIF its camp facilities, its instructors, its weapons, its equipment, its uniforms, and most of its mature soldiers. By July 1915 one in six militiamen and one in four permanent soldiers had enlisted for overseas service. By the end of the year the militia had lost nearly all its adjutants and instructors to the AIF and somewhere between a quarter and a third of its officers. By the end of the war 50,000 militiamen had gone overseas.25 Militia training was disrupted as early as August 1915, when officers began to be used as AIF instructors and annual camps were cancelled. Few militia units beyond the garrison artillery and engineers assembled for any training from October 1915 to July 1916. Some training camps were held in the second half of 1916 but there were no guns for the artillery, no horses for the light horse, sometimes no rifles for the infantry.26 ‘I do not think that anything very effective is now being done’, worried James Catts, a State director of AIF recruitment who wanted a strong militia as a deterrent to Japanese attack.27

Further annual intakes of militia recruits were signed onto militia muster rolls in 1916 and 1917. On paper the militia's numbers rose according to prewar plans: 70,000 men in mid 1916, over 100,000 after mid 1917.28 But the drill halls were empty. Few recruits faced any heavier obligation than filling in forms and being examined by a doctor. Exemptions from training were granted any man who lived more than five miles from a drill hall, or whose family might experience 'hardship' if he wore uniform.29 Quality declined as well as quantity. First-rate officers like Gordon Bennett and Iven Mackay went overseas. Second-rate ones like Robert Menzies of the Melbourne University Rifles and Arthur Calwell of the Yarra Borderers remained behind.30 The most spectacular example of this disparity was seen in the Howell-Price family. While John, Frederick, Owen, Philip and Richmond Howell-Price were winning fame overseas in the AIF and the navy, their eldest brother, David, was winning notoriety in the citizen army by defrauding the government of £70,000.31 The quality of the men in the ranks also declined. Not only did the most experienced and mature men join the AIF, leaving the young recruits behind; in 1915 the government began to reorient senior cadet training, a vital preparation for militia service, from martial to gymnastic activities. Recruits no longer understood the basics of drill or even the need for discipline.32

Both law and custom permitted the replenishment of the militia by conscription, a move which James Carts among others urged as a method of nudging more men toward joining the AIF and warning Japan that Australia was strongly defended.33 But conscription into the militia seemed an impossibly antiquated measure beside the more pressing question of whether to follow New Zealand and Britain, cast aside the British citizen soldier tradition and its ancient resistance to foreign wars, and conscript men into what would become a single Australian army, able to fight anywhere on the globe. At plebiscites in October 1916 and December 1917 most Australians chose to keep their traditions intact, but as part of an official effort to prepare for a 'yes' vote at the first plebiscite, or even to prompt it, a limited conscription into the militia was held. It lasted just long enough to create administrative confusion and subject 37,000 men to a short training camp. More men obeyed the call-up than expected.34 One who did not was John Curtin, a Labor journalist who had opposed compulsory military training before the war and was now working to oppose conscription into the AIF. Curtin was sentenced to three months' imprisonment but gaol for just three days.35
Though conscription was rejected and Australians maintained two armies throughout the war, the government strove to unite the militia and AIF in a limited way. Two attempts failed to raise and reinforce each AIF unit in the same district as a militia unit, thus linking the two armies at the community level. But after Gallipoli it was decreed that every militia unit would eventually be renumbered after an AIF unit from its State and share its battle honours and colour patches. The decree may also have been a way of easing amalgamation of the two armies if conscription were introduced. A second and more tangible link was to accompany the renumbering. A new reserve force would replace the rifle clubs after the war, to be formed of war veterans as well as from men who had passed through their eight years' militia service. The authorities hoped it would bring 200,000 AIF veterans into the citizen army. Drilling alongside the militia, these men would inspire youthful militiamen to emulate the heroes of Anzac. The first recruit entered the new reserve in March 1917. But few would be able to follow him until the war ended. In the meantime the militia languished.36

The militia's decline was masked for a year or more by the rise of the rifle clubs. Raising a compulsory militia had brought some unwilling men into uniform, but it had also kept out willing men who were too old, too unfit or lived too far from the drill halls. The coming of war roused these outsiders to act. In Britain their counterparts formed a new volunteer force.37 In Australia this was impossible. Too much prewar effort had gone into making citizen soldiering scientific to permit a return to old ways. The authorities told men unable join the AIF, the permanent force or the militia to join the rifle clubs.38 The result was an explosion of rifle club membership and activity. By the close of 1915 there were 103,000 club members. Most were professional men, clerks, public servants, or skilled workers in large shops and warehouses. Most lived in New South Wales, where Ambrose Carmichael, a Labor education minister, saw them as a future force of sharpshooters for the AIF. The rifle club movement resembled a nineteenth-century volunteer movement in its origin and activities. New clubs were based as much on workplaces and shared interest as on localities: there was a Government Printing Office club, a David Jones' employees club, an 'Athletic Sports' club, even a few trade union-based clubs. Meetings to form clubs were organised by local notables and spilled out of the town halls booked to hold them. Patriotic fervour and a fusion of hierarchy and democracy, obedience and egalitarianism, were the guiding spirit at the simple drills which clubs held once or twice a week.39 In November 1915 Carmichael and a thousand other club members joined the AIF as its 36th Battalion, the so-called 'riflemen's thousand'. Otherwise nothing came of Carmichael's vision, and members stayed at home or joined the AIF individually—a course taken by nearly 26,000 by late 1917.40 The rifle clubs continued to look impressive on paper for the rest of the war. Loss of members and facilities to the AIF and a dearth of ammunition and official support were the reality. By 1918 the clubs' rifle ranges were almost as quiet as the militia's drill halls.41

1918: Attempted Revival

The citizen army had virtually collapsed by the time the German offensive of March-July 1918 revived fears of Japanese attack on Australia. The prime minister wanted a new Monroe doctrine declared, warning Japan not to enter the South Pacific. But how would his threat be enforced? Some rifle club captains hoped their clubs would be revived and allowed to form a new citizen army.42 The government and its military advisers had other ideas. They enacted 'practical temporary measures to rebuild the militia: amalgamation of units, annual training camps, new uniforms, new equipment. Voluntary recruiting would be encouraged for the first time since 1912.Rejected volunteers for the AIF were 'earnestly urged' to join the militia, and 'carefully directed' to the nearest drill hall. Recruiting advertisements promised men they would 'never regret the experience gained' or 'the comradeships made' in the militia.43

Militia training revived and garrison duties intensified, at least for some units.44 It proved harder to fill the ranks than to train those already in them. Fewer than 500 men joined voluntarily.45 After nearly fours years of war, what man wanted to wear a uniform who had not already enlisted in the AIF or belonged to a rifle club? Why would he give up a day's pay to receive a half or a third the amount performing tedious drill? There was opposition to the militia revival as well as indifference. Employers and employees objected that camp training would disrupt war production. Rifle clubs were offended that the government had not
summoned them to save the day, and would not allow their oldest members to enlist in the militia. Australians who were weary of war suspected the government of using the militia revival to introduce conscription by stealth, or of forcing militiamen to guard German prisoners. In any case, how was the part-time training of an army of infantry and cavalry really useful in a war being won by tanks, aeroplanes and heavy artillery? William Bolton, a politician and militia officer who had fought briefly at Gallipoli, echoed a growing opinion when he said that militia training was so unlike real war it was ‘harmful to the military spirit’. In July 1918 the defence department conceded that the attempt to revive the militia had failed.

The scheme for a reserve of veterans also stalled. It was clear from the brittle mood of men returning from the front that the reserve would attract veterans only if it offered an almost nominal training regime, granted officers seniority over their counterparts in the militia, and conferred complete exemption from compulsory militia service. When drumming up recruits, reserve organiser Kenneth Mackay promised that members would do no more than four days’ drill a year. But such concessions threatened a permanent weakening of the citizen army by continuing to deprive it after the war of the best officers and the fittest, most experienced soldiers, and by subordinating it to an almost untrained force whose members might not accept being slotted into the militia’s ranks in wartime. While Mackay and the authorities bickered over the merits of the reserve, militia units were renumbered after AIF units and 17,000 veterans joined the new reserve but did no training. Australia ended the war, as it had begun it, with two armies, only now the militia was almost as much a paper force as the AIF had been in July 1914. Australia’s citizen army not only played no part in the great allied victory over Germany, it was not even able to cheer for the winning team from the sidelines or supply useful reinforcements.

After The War

In the home front volume of the official history of Australia in the Great War, Ernest Scott wrote that the Great War had ‘burst in upon’ Australia’s prewar military system ‘like a vast flood smashing through a dam’. The war did more than disrupt the system: it discredited it. War had not come to Australian shores, and the citizen army had not been used. Instead an expeditionary force had to be raised from scratch. But if war had come to Australia, the citizen army had seemed—when compared against the AIF—too youthful and amateurish to defend the country.

But what lesson would be drawn from this? After the war Harry Chauvel and other generals advised the government to train the militia harder, to place it under military discipline, to oblige it to serve overseas, and to dispense with scratch-built expeditionary forces. Ordinary Australians disagreed. The AIF had fought well, they said. Didn’t this prove that peacetime training was pointless? And after four years of war drill seemed distasteful, something only militarists might enjoy. The generals wanted to prepare for the next war. The people wanted a rest from the last one. The people’s view prevailed for nearly two decades. So in 1939 Australia went into a second world war with the same military system and with the same citizen army it had maintained in 1914.

Should some members of the citizen army have been granted the status of returned soldiers? The garrison artillery argued they should, and petitioned the government and the repatriation department. Had they not been ‘a vital link in the military chain’? Had they not been ‘conscripted’ on mobilisation and placed under military discipline? Had they not fired the first shot of the war? The military authorities were unmoved. The war had not come to Australia, they pointed out, and the garrison gunners could not have been sent out of Australia to fight in it. Men who did not and indeed could not have gone away could not be said to have returned. Returned soldiers agreed. Their main lobby group, today known as the Returned and Services League, refused to share the privileged identity of returned soldier with militiamen. A local RSL branch even protested that it was ‘an insult to “diggers” to allow coldfooters [in the militia] to wear the colour patches so highly treasured by the men who had made the history attached to them’. The defence minister put out a press release praising the gunners for doing their duty. And with that piece of paper the members of Australia’s other army of the Great War would have to be satisfied.
Endnotes


4. Richard Crouch, 'First steps in battalion training', Commonwealth Military Journal, July 1913, 398-9; 'Coast defence exercise 11th April 1914', series B197, item 1856/4/297, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA); 'Report on an inspection of the military forces of the Commonwealth of Australia by General Sir Ian Hamilton', 24 April 1914, Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, 1914, vol 2, no 14; 'General scheme of defence Commonwealth of Australia', July 1914, item MP826/1/3 NAA; 'Melbourne (Port Phillip) defence scheme revised to 1st July 1914', item MP826/1/4e, NAA, 'Officers' list of the Australian Military Forces 1st August 1914 (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1914); Wilcox, For hearths and homes, 62-73.

5. Note by Sellheim, 2 August 1914, item 3, series MP826/1, NAA.

6. Circulars received by 13th Infantry Brigade, 4 August 1914, folder 1178, Monash Papers, National Library of Australia MS1884; [JK Jensen], Report upon the Department of Defence from the first of July 1914 until the thirtieth of June 1917 (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1917 [hereafter Jensen report]), 26-7; Sydney Morning Herald, 4 August 1914, 10; Argus, 3 August 1914, 16, 4 August 1914, 10; Geelong Advertiser, 4 August 1914, 3, 5; North Queensland Register, 10 August 1914, 77, 88; David Horner, The gunners: a history of Australian artillery (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 72-3.

7. Geelong Advertiser, 5 August 1914, 3; Argus, 5 August 1914, 9-10.

8. Jose, Royal Australian Navy, 45, 375-8, 547; Scott, Australia during the war, 35-7; Horner, Gunners, 73-9.


10. Geelong Advertiser, 8 August 1914, 4; North Queensland Register, 17 August 1914, 83-4.

11. Entries for 5 & 6 September 1914, Australian Naval & Military Expeditionary Force war diaries, & Howse to Holmes, 6 September 1914, Holmes Papers, Mitchell Library MSS15; Jose, Royal Australian Navy; 75-8; Mackenzie, Australians at Rabaul, 31-2; Geoffrey Bolton, A thousand miles away: a history of North Queensland to 1920 (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1963), 320.

12. Circulars received by 13th Infantry Brigade and other brigade correspondence, 5-14 August 1914, folder 1178, Monash Papers.

13. Jensen report, 27; Sadler, evidence given to Howell-Price inquiry, 1 March 1917, file 474/8/218, series MP367/1, NAA.


15. CPD 75: 1298, 3 December 1914, Pearce.

16. 'Fonsac', Garrison gunners, 90-1, 94.

17. Kelly to Legge, 26 December 1914, file 2021/1/64, series B197, NAA; Verney, 'Army high command and Australian defence policy', 201.

18. Barrier Daily Truth, 2 January 1915, 3, 4 January 1915, 3-4; Barrier Miner, 1 January 1915, 2, & 2 January 1915, 5, 'Special edition', Scott, Australia during the war, 111-12.


52. File AA535/2/126, series MP367/1, NAA.
53. *Commonwealth Law Reports* 29: 49-54, 10-11 November 1920; *Argus*, 24 January 1921, 6 (Garth Pratten of the Australian War Memorial directed me to this source); JB Hirst, 'Australian defence and conscription: a re-assessment', part 1, *Australian Historical Studies* 25: 101 (October 1993), 609.
54. 'For the press', c 10 May 1920, file AA535/2/126, series MP367/1, NAA.
As the First World War drew to a close Australia possessed one of the best fighting forces that any army had produced during the conflict. In the war's final battles, Hamel, Amiens, Mont St Quentin and the breaching of the Hindenburg Line, the Australians repeatedly exhibited the balance, planning, drive and finesse of a highly experienced and capable military force. Their skill at arms overwhelmed the Germans and relentlessly drove the enemy back towards Germany. Unfortunately, the experience of the Second World War would demonstrate that the military skill of the Australians was neither native nor permanent. As war again approached, the Australian Army was a mere shadow of its former greatness. By 1939 the effectiveness of its formations had declined to such an extent that the Army had no offensive capability and, even more alarming, the nation was virtually defenceless. Despite success against the Italians in North Africa, the campaigns in Greece, Crete, Syria and Malaya painfully revealed the difference between the memory of the Great War and the reality of the Second World War. This essay will attempt to explain why the Army, during the years after the First World War, was unable to find the way forward that would allow it to build on its experience and to forge an even more efficient and effective fighting force with which to wage the Second World War.

The post First World War years were without a doubt extraordinarily difficult ones for the leaders of the Australian Army. After the war's conclusion, its senior officers had sought to implement an ambitious program for the interwar Army. At their 1920 conference they set the force's requirements as an organisation of seven divisions, as well as a training program consisting of 13 weeks of camps of continuous instruction. Despite the government assenting to this, the ministries of Hughes, Bruce, Scullin and Lyons would all follow policies of extreme fiscal frugality which would ensure that the Army remained a hollow shell and guaranteed that it would not achieve its organisational, establishment, equipment and training objectives. This phenomenon was not limited to Australia but was widespread throughout the Empire as policy makers emphasised disarmament at almost any cost and voters demanded peace at nearly any price. Instead of a force of seven combat capable Divisions the military would focus its efforts on the preparation of leaders—officers and NCOs—in order to facilitate the army's expansion to its planned size upon mobilisation.

The resources allocated to armed forces during peacetime are invariably less than the level desired by military leaders. In a non-war environment, the measure by which the effectiveness of an army's leadership should be assessed is not the agenda which it seeks to implement, as this is always likely to exceed the forbearance of the Treasury, but rather what it is able to accomplish with the level of support actually received. Therefore, in a period of fiscal stringency, the formulation of ambitious plans becomes meaningless, as their realisation is so unlikely. Moreover, such plans can be dangerous if they distract attention from the attainment of policy and prevent the achievement of the potential that is possible with the level of resources provided. The gulf between what the senior officers wanted for the Australian Army's organisation, establishment and readiness and what the nation's political leaders were willing to provide was vast, and remained so almost until the outbreak of war. By this criteria, the leaders of the interwar Australian Army must be found wanting, for they set priorities which failed to maximise the strength of their forces given the monies allocated, while at the same time stubbornly advocating an agenda which was manifestly contrary to government policy.

Despite the hostile political and social environment, the interwar period was not without opportunity. The Army contained a pool of combat veterans who were acknowledged leaders in the art of war and their experiences should have provided the Army with a sound foundation upon which to build. Instead of focusing on this talent, the Army's leaders obsessively pursued other objectives and were unable to conceive policy options which might
have instilled a greater level of effectiveness in the forces under their command. As a consequence the Army would lose the institutional skill and knowledge built up so painfully during the Great War, thereby forcing it to relearn the hard lessons of war on the battlefield after the commencement of the Second World War.

Although the postwar legacy of the Australian Army is the singular concern of this essay, it is not possible, or sensible, to restrict its analysis so narrowly. The Australian military experience during the interwar period is inseparable from that of the British Army and is closely bound to the wider debate on Imperial security. It is not surprising that Australian dependency upon Britain, which existed before the Great War and which both parties nurtured during the conflict, would continue to exert significant influence throughout the ensuing peace. Between the wars the Australian Army would rely on Britain for the testing, design and provision of its major weapon systems, for the higher-level training of its officers, and for the study of advancements in the military art. Furthermore, the ethos of the Australian Army was closely intertwined with that of the British. An editorial in the *Journal of the Royal Military College of Australia*, published shortly after the war's conclusion, suggested the strength of the fealty between the two forces. It emphatically opined that Australian officers were 'Britons overseas and our Army is a British Army. Our object should be to make it more so in every respect'.¹ Under such circumstances, this essay's reference to developments within the British Army is unavoidable.

This essay will also shape its arguments by comparing the interwar development of the Australian Army with that of the *Reichswehr*, the name given to the army of the Weimar Republic. In contrast to the British and Australian forces, the German Imperial Army ended the First World War as a broken force. However, *Reichswehr* leaders would rebuild their army into an extremely capable fighting machine which had a considerably better understanding of the complexities and opportunities of modern war, at least at the tactical level, than its future opponents. Moreover, they succeeded in an economic, political and social arena which was arguably even more daunting than that which Australia's military leaders faced. Interwar Germany suffered acute economic and political problems not experienced in Australia, including hyper-inflation, a civil war, and the imposition of a new form of government. German military leaders also laboured under the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty. These set the army's size at 100,000 men, including no more than 4000 officers, arranged into seven Infantry and three Cavalry Divisions with only two corps headquarters, a force not much larger than that established as the objective for Australia by its senior officers. As well, the peace treaty denied Germany modern weapons including tanks, heavy artillery, submarines, military aircraft and gas.² These weapon systems were also effectively unavailable to Australian military planners for most of the interwar, although for different reasons. While the *Reichswehr* did violate some clauses of the Versailles agreement, this alone is not enough to explain its leadership's success in laying a sound foundation for a modern Army, an accomplishment that proved beyond the capability of Australian military leaders.³

**What of Lessons?**

One of the critical differences between the British and Australian Armies and the German Army during the interwar period was their attitude towards intellectual pursuits. After more than four years of carnage, the conclusion of most British officers was that nothing of real note had occurred during the war, certainly nothing of sufficient consequence that would require them to modify their understanding of war. For these officers, the war's end was perceived not as a way forward to anything significant but rather as an opportunity to return the army to its pre-war conditions and restore the regiments to their proper role as imperial garrisons. The Germans, however, drew the opposite conclusion. They believed that the conduct of the campaigns in 1918 suggested that a fundamental change in the nature of modern war had occurred, and consequently significant innovation in the conception of warfare was possible. After the Armistice, key German military decision-makers would see the interwar years not as an opportunity to restore the pre-war status quo but rather as a chance to reshape the parameters of war.
Because of these attitudes, the decision-makers of both organisations would take dramatically different approaches to the issue of learning the lessons of the Great War. The British, in fact, were simply not interested in learning any lessons at all, and instead placed their intellectual effort into maintaining the same perception of war that had existed before the beginning of the First World War. As Brian Bond and Williamson Murray have suggested, the British Army would have done considerably better in 1939 if it had ruthlessly prepared for war as it existed in 1918. Unfortunately, 'British military institutions ... made every effort to escape the realities of the last war and to forget the hard lessons of that conflict'.

The British Army would not make any effort to study the Great War until 1932, 14 years after its conclusion and sufficient time to allow most lessons to recede from the institution's memory. In that year the CIGS, General Sir George Milne, appointed Lieutenant-General Sir Walter Kirke to chair a high-level Committee on Certain Lessons of the Great War. Milne charged the committee with the responsibility of deducing the lessons of the war and determining if the Army was correctly applying them in its manuals and training programmes. Kirke submitted a critical report later in the year but his findings were ultimately suppressed. Milne had intended a wide distribution for the report but his successor, General Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, limited its circulation to the senior ranks. He then instructed the preparation of a sanitised version for the rest of the officer corps. Montgomery-Massingberd had parts omitted and changed the significance of that which remained in areas concerning future doctrine, equipment and organisation. For example, Kirke's report as distributed contained an analysis of artillery fire which was completely contrary to the experience of the Western Front. During the war, British gunners had been highly innovative, imaginative officers who had thoroughly mastered scientific methods of fire. The report, however, stated that survey and indirect fire were not necessarily the primary methods of directing firepower. Throughout the interwar period, gunnery officers demonstrated a widely held preference for direct fire and in a future war they intended to rely upon observed fire and adjust shot by the eye. In effect, Montgomery-Massingberd had distorted the committee's findings so that they would conform to his Napoleonic-based interpretation of warfare.

Unfortunately, Montgomery-Massingberd's subterfuge was not an isolated incident but a reflection of an officer corps' determination to maintain a perceived reality in the face of overwhelming evidence of fundamental change. In 1920, when the content of BH Liddell-Hart's revision of the *Infantry Manual* annoyed his superiors, they simply replaced the objectionable parts with sections, including an entire chapter, from the manual's 1911 edition. Liddell Hart had seen the rewrite as an opportunity to draw upon the Army's experiences during the war, precisely the opposite of what the senior officers had intended.

The British Army's inability to advance their understanding of war is a symptom of what can be termed an intellectual preference for 'revealed doctrine'. Instead of showing a willingness to explore new ideas the British Army defended the existing interpretation of the nature of war as a fixed article of faith and forced any advances in the military art into the current structure, without making any modifications in the structure itself. The best example of this tendency is in the institution's reaction to mechanisation. Tanks played an important role in Britain's success in the First World War, and during the interwar period British armour theoreticians helped shape the debate regarding their future employment. However, the writings of advocates such as Liddell Hart and JFC Fuller had little effect on their own Army and Britain would lose its lead in armoured warfare. The British were unable to conceive the possibilities which mobile warfare offered and instead insisted that armour had to conform to a style of fighting in which the central focus of battle remained on the infantry. Armoured units had to subsume their capabilities to the requirements of the infantry, and institutional preference, unlike in Germany, would not allow them an independent role in battle.

Germany took a more enlightened approach to the study of the lessons of the First World War. During the interwar period the *Reichswehr* was not a powerful force and it was unable to defend Germany. When France occupied the Ruhr in 1923 the German Army could only stand by and watch. However, the officer charged with its postwar reconstruction, General Hans von Seeckt, sought to build up the army into the world's best, from a qualitative perspective. This would then serve as a solid basis for expansion when the opportunity
permitted. In this ambition he would largely succeed. Late in the interwar period an American military observer in Berlin would note that 'the Reichswehr was, in the opinion of all competent foreign observers, the most highly trained, efficient, forward looking officer corps in the world'.

In late 1919 Seeckt initiated a comprehensive program to collect and study the experiences of the First World War. In contrast to the lackadaisical attitude displayed by the British, Seeckt believed that, 'It is absolutely necessary to put the experience of war in a broad light and collect this experience while the impressions won on the battlefield are still fresh and a major proportion of the experienced officers are still in leading positions'. His goal was to provide the Reichswehr with a new doctrine, soundly based upon the advances in military affairs that had occurred during the war. This programme would involve 57 committees and subcommittees of officers, from all levels, to study all aspects of the war. Committees would consider topics such as troop morale, river crossings, military weather observation, tank and mountain warfare and leadership. He would authorise additional committees as needed, and over 400 officers would participate in the process. By 1921 the Reichswehr had begun to issue new manuals and regulations which incorporated the findings of the committees, and these would gradually lay the basis for a uniform doctrine at every level of training and provide for a common approach to tactical situations.

Seeckt created an environment that placed a high value on intellectual activities and which was designed to encourage innovation. He deliberately set out to change the German Army's interpretation of war in order to establish a system which would build upon the experiences of the First World War. Innovative Reichswehr officers operated in a climate which saw opportunity in change. British thinkers, however, were individuals attempting to move a system which did not value innovative pursuits. What Fuller and Liddell Hart required was a climate that would promote innovation. Instead, their efforts would lead to their marginalisation and removal from the service. Even senior officers such as Milne, who as CIGS did attempt to explore new options, could not move the institution's determination not to change. After Milne's retirement, his successors made sure to undermine his efforts at reform.

While the Germans produced manuals that looked forward, the British revised theirs so that they looked backwards. The postwar revision of the Field Service Regulations (FSR) provides a case in point. The FSR was the Army's critical operational manual whose ideas underlay the preparation of the force's other manuals and which guided the service's preparation for war. It fulfilled the same function for Australia. The 1924 edition is so similar to the original 1909 edition that it is almost as if the First World War had not occurred, or at least had failed to provide the authors with anything new to say. Critical parts are identical in language or intent. For example, both versions state that 'Success in war depends more on moral than on physical qualities'. The revised version does contain a section on tanks, but makes it clear that their only purpose is to help the advance of the infantry. In other areas the updated FSR ignored the lessons of the Western Front. The 1909 edition had limited the role of cavalry to that of mounted infantry who would rely upon firepower. The 1924 version not only saw an ongoing need for cavalry but restored to the horsemen their lance and sabre, in addition to their rifles.

Fuller summed up the problem with the standard of British manuals. Suggesting the inadequacy of the FSR, he argued that good tactical training demanded two books, one which dealt with present day warfare and another which dealt with future warfare. He believed that military affairs after the First World War were in a period of transition and that armies needed to prepare for future possibilities rather than simply present actualities. He presciently warned that if armies did not take this precaution they would be indifferently prepared to wage future war, but he was too generous in crediting the postwar FSR with providing for the current needs of the army. In 1932 Fuller published his own work, entitled Lectures on FSR III, which he hoped would provide for the army's future requirements. The reception of the continent to Lectures on FSR III was enthusiastic. In Britain, however, its release barely caused a ripple.
The British aversion to the serious study of war and the Commonwealth's reliance upon the 'mother country' for guidance in military affairs thus had serious ramifications for the Australian Army. The leaders of the Australian Army harboured similar attitudes which imbued their institutional ethos with its own version of intellectual apathy. The educational priorities of the Commandants of the Royal Military College of Australia (RMC) illustrate this point. The RMC's Commandant in 1920, Major-General JG Legge, began a trend which would continue throughout the interwar years. He proudly observed in his annual report that 'little change had been made in the curriculum since the time of the first Commandant, except to organize arrangements and include subjects, which were part of his plan'. The war had intervened since Major-General William T Bridges had established the military college in 1911 but Legge, who served at Gallipoli and the Western Front during the war, saw no reason to tinker with the founder's plan. Later in the period little regarding the institution's academic qualifications had changed. Brett Lodge in his biography of Lieutenant-General John Lavarack, who would head RMC during 1933-34, rightly notes that the Commandant was more interested in the prowess of the officer cadets on the sports field than in the classroom. Although Lavarack was considered one of the Army's best minds, his report for 1933 allowed only a brief sentence for the college's academics but waxed for two paragraphs on its sporting accomplishments.

When RMC did make changes to the curriculum they were unfortunately a by-product of the Army's policy of basing its intellectual focus upon materials provided by Britain. In his 1934 report, Lavarack noted that the process of revising the syllabus for military history, in order to utilise the FSR as the primary interpretative mechanism, was now complete. A manual which presented an idealised interpretation of war more suited to the age of Napoleon rather than one which addressed the realities of war so painfully learned on the Western Front was now the basis of instruction for one of the RMC's most important classes. The 1929 RMC report observed that the officer cadets had made constant reference to the FSR during their study of military history. Furthermore, the class had placed emphasis upon the principles of war it advanced with the 'object of showing how adherence to these principles has produced success and how reverse has spelt failure'. Of course, this objective would have been even more soundly met if the text used had itself been based upon a modern and honest interpretation of war.

The Australian Army adopted British publications as training manuals as the basis of the force's training and doctrinal direction for the entire interwar period. The Military Board made this clear in 1921 when it incorporated the FSR into its annual training instructions. This policy would prove detrimental to the development of the Australian Army as it would encourage the spreading of poorly thought out ideas and intellectual laziness throughout the institution and it would prevent the development of sound, forward-looking tactical ideas and preparations by the Army in general. Further reinforcing these tendencies was the policy of exchanging officers between the two forces or of sending an Australian staff officer to Britain for further study or experience. When these officers returned they brought with them an intensive exposure to outmoded ideas or to concepts that were more suited to the British environment.

A few examples of the effect of these policies must suffice. In 1927 a British officer visited Australia to give a series of lectures to officers. He impressed upon the officers of the 11th Mixed Brigade the fullness and completeness of the FSR and he stressed to his audience the need to understand these 'rules of the game'. The Australians were not meant to test the correctness of the FSR but rather to accept their principles without question. The ideas found in the FSR made their way into Australian training exercises. In 1930 a promotional tactical exercise without troops did not include any tanks or armoured cars and only employed aviation for reconnaissance. It did, however, feature cavalry in a shock role including clashes between sabre wielding horsemen.

Interwar advances in mechanisation policy offer a prime example to further illustrate the differences in the institutional approaches of the British and Australian Armies with that of the German Army. Von Seeckt displayed an early interest in mechanisation and the intellectual environment he created encouraged experimentation without risk to one's career. A number of officers emerged, such as Ernst Volckhein, Wilhelm Brandt and Heinz Guderian, who
would become advocates of the tank and who would participate in a vibrant interwar debate on the future of armoured warfare. By 1927 the Reichswehr's training section had concluded that in a future war the tank would probably be the decisive weapon, unlike the British who continued to insist on the supremacy of the infantry. There was opposition to mechanisation within the German Army, and the traditional cavalry mentality was not without influence, but bright officers were also given the opportunity to develop their ideas and, unlike in the British Army, they knew that these would receive a fair evaluation.21

The Reichswehr would hold its first exercise employing motorised infantry in 1921. Additional exercises followed in 1923, and the use of motorised vehicles in training programmes became routine. In 1924 the German Army issued a recommended reading list on motorised and mechanised topics, and articles on these subjects were featured in military periodicals.22 The Germans would also incorporate large numbers of dummy tanks into annual exercises. While these vehicles were nothing more than a wooden and canvas frame fitted around an automobile body or even a bicycle frame, they did allow the Germans to test the weapon's potential and also to participate in combined arms activities. The Germans did not need a real tank because their principal interest was not the vehicle itself but rather its place within an emerging system of waging war. Their first requirement was that of testing a theory, while at the same time identifying the weapon capabilities that would be required in order for it to fulfil its assigned role.

While their methods were perhaps crude, the Germans would succeed in laying the basis for the armoured doctrine which they would use to such effect in the next war. The Germans had also brought the tank into the broader context of Army operations, rather than letting its development occur in isolation in the hands of enthusiasts. This openness meant that the entire army was familiar with the potential of armoured warfare, rather than just a single regiment. Furthermore, when real tanks did enter production under the Nazis, they did so within a structure which had already begun to think about their use and which had already solved many of their operational problems.

The contrast with the priorities in the British and Australian Armies could not have been greater. Britain ended the First World War as a leader in armour developments, and its officer corps would produce some of the leading, forward thinking minds of the interwar period. Despite these advantages, the British army would concede its lead and by the onset of Second World War it would be well behind the Germans in both the theory of tank warfare and in weapon development. Furthermore, institutional preference would constrain innovative officers from successfully advancing novel ideas. For example, at the 1927 manoeuvres the directing staff reprimanded Sir Frederick Pile, a future general, for 'undertaking a dangerous act and for doing something which certainly was not war'. Pile had been in command of the Brigade's armoured cars. Instead of holding back with the infantry he dashed off and caught the opposing side in the midst of its deployment. Pile's armoured cars delivered their opponent a nasty surprise, upset their manoeuvre and placed them at a disadvantage for the rest of the exercise. The German Army would have rewarded such initiative whereas, to the British, Pile had violated a stereotype of war which they were determined to maintain.23

Instead of intellectual development, the British made the quest for a perfectly designed armoured fighting vehicle the priority of their interwar mechanisation programme. This emphasis was in part the result of an attempt to reduce the cost of equipment purchases by getting the machines right the first time, but it was also a reflection of a determination to fit weapon systems into an existing structure, and once so incorporated not allow them to evolve further. The British, therefore, intended to deny adaptation any role in their interpretation of warfare. As a consequence no one in either Britain or Australia appears to have been responsible for developing armoured doctrine, and the debate which existed immediately after the war between First World War tank enthusiasts did not cross over to a wider audience in the other regiments. Furthermore, the focus upon design perfection also meant that the Army lacked sufficient stocks of vehicles for trials. As a result the Army forced itself into the position where design would determine use rather than, more appropriately, the other way around. The British considered such an exploration unnecessary because the FSR already provided the required rules for incorporating armoured fighting vehicles into the army's method of waging war. That the FSR did this without any reference to changes in the nature of war as a result of the First World War did not appear to concern anyone.24


Australian military leaders did foresee an important role for tanks in their force structure. The Army's order of battle made provision for four battalions of tanks, although it deferred their raising pending the acquisition of equipment. In addition, increased mobility was an important issue as senior officers recognised the potential of motorisation or mechanisation to concentrate scattered forces more quickly at threatened points. However, like the British, the Australians saw no need to study the intended employment of mechanised forces or debate the potential for armoured forces to change the nature of warfare. Instead they, too, saw the process of mechanisation in design terms, particularly the need to develop an optimum weapon platform before undertaking the acquisition of a large number of vehicles. This policy would remain in place throughout the interwar period, even after rearmament had begun on the eve of war. In a major policy statement issued in December 1938 the Army continued to define the issue of mechanisation from the perspective of organisation and equipment design. The only mention of how the Army planned to employ tanks was an indirect reference to British manuals.25

The Australian Army did not have an internal body dedicated to mechanisation development until 1931 when the Military Board announced the formation of the Mechanical Warfare Committee, whose duties included the provision of advice on matters concerning mechanisation and motorisation. The driving force behind its establishment, however, was not the desire to study the implications that advances in tanks held for modern war but rather the belief that the Army should identify the types of vehicles in the Commonwealth which might be suitable for military use. The Military Board concluded that:

Mechanized and armoured vehicles are taking an increasingly prominent part in war preparations and a great deal of experimental work must be undertaken in connection with the adaptation of locally available mechanical vehicles, tractors, etc, to meet Army requirements on mobilization.26

In 1934 Major-General Julius H Bruche, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), raised the status of the Mechanical Warfare Committee to that of a directorate within Army Headquarters. Redesignating it as the Directorate of Mechanization, Bruche also provided its members with an expanded outline of the Army's most urgent requirements for their investigations. In order of priority they were:

a) A light armoured car.
b) The selection of a tractor for use with Medium Artillery.
c) The investigation of Field Artillery traction both for Cavalry and Infantry work.
d) An improved armoured machine gun carrier for use with the Infantry.
e) Selection of commercial vehicles for use in ... war.
f) Design, test and preparation for manufacture of special bodies required in war.27

Bruche maintained the Army's emphasis on equipment design and acquisition and made no effort to divert resources to doctrinal development. It is perhaps not surprising that the Director of Mechanisation served on the staff of the Quarter-Master General rather than that of the CGS.28

In March 1931 the tank wing of the Small Arms school began testing a wooden 'mock-up' of an armoured car, the only example of the Army's use of a dummy vehicle. Although problems existed, the experiments were successful enough to warrant the construction of a light steel version which in turn was followed by the building of an armoured car protected by bullet proof plate. In 1935 the Army considered the fate of the vehicle after a major trial conducted by the 1st Armoured Car Regiment. The unit's commander was not impressed. He concluded that the vehicle as designed was unable to fulfil its primary role of reconnaissance, and was at the same time inadequate to serve in a delaying action. As a consequence the Army
authorised no further testing on this version but began the process of design from scratch. However, by 1937 all work had halted and the Army abandoned its armoured car project. The other area of significant investigation by the committee consisted of testing the suitability of various tractors for use as prime movers for the artillery. This task, also, was simply an exercise in determining equipment suitability, and no effort was made to incorporate the increased mobility which tractors provided into an improved method of waging war. 29

Reinforcing the suggestion that the Army was only interested in the identification of the perfect weapon system, rather than the place of tanks in modern war, is the degree to which the Army committed its personnel to mechanised training. By 1937 only a single Australian officer had undergone training in England. Captain EW Lamperd had done a course in 1927 but he had subsequently died in a road accident. The next officer given the opportunity to train with the Royal Tank Corps was RNL Hopkins, who went to England in 1937 accompanied by a single warrant officer. The motivation behind his secondment was the imminent arrival of ten light tanks and the need to provide them with a commander who had some understanding of mechanical warfare. Hopkins was not expected back until April 1939, much too late as events unfolded to effect the Army's mechanical development before the onset of war. Pending his return, the Australian Army had to bring out a British officer to undertake the initial organisation and training of the light tank unit. However, this officer was subsequently found unsuitable for the task and left his position early without having had any significant effect on armour developments in Australia. 30

The greatest failure of the British and, by default, the Australian Armies during the interwar period was their leadership's unwillingness to take seriously the intellectual preparation for war, in contrast to their German rivals. During a period of transition in the art of war, British and Australian military leaders failed both to promote an environment in which bright officers could develop and test their ideas, and to foster an institutional ethos which encouraged innovation. Fuller warned of the consequences of this practice. In his Lectures on FSR III he observed:

The only way to prevent ... ossification of [the] mind is to accept nothing as fixed, to realize that circumstances of war are ever-changing, and that, consequently, organization, administration, strategy and tactics must change also; and if during peace time we cannot change them in fact, we nevertheless change them in theory, and so be mentally prepared when circumstances require that changes should be made. 31

Fuller was right. By 1939 the Australian Army had lost the vision of war that it had possessed in 1918.

An Organisational Obsession

Soon after the conclusion of the First World War the senior officers of the Commonwealth met in Melbourne in order to determine the future organisation of the Army. 32 They would decide that the nation's defence required a force of four Infantry Divisions, three Mixed Brigades (which could form a fifth division) and two Cavalry Divisions plus appropriate corps, army and L of C troops. In addition, this establishment would also provide troops for the garrisons for the coastal defence as well as the staff of the Permanent Military Forces. The organisation would require 130,000 at its peacetime establishment, expanding to more than 180,000 upon mobilisation for war. The vast majority of the necessary personnel would serve in the Citizen Military Forces (the Militia). Although the plan received the government's assent, the economic and political policies of a series of interwar ministries would make its effective attainment an impossibility. However, the Army's leaders never forsook their original concept and they would maintain, throughout the interwar period, that it was the minimum force structure required by the nation. In fact, so determined were the military leaders, and so obsessively focused on achieving the recommendations of the Conference of Senior Officers, that they would ignore or undermine government directives which they believed threatened the achievement of the Army's organisation. In addition, they would make policy choices aimed at sustaining the organisational structure, even at the expense of creating a force capable of waging a modern war. 33
The units that the Army raised after the war provided for a force which was composed almost exclusively of the traditional Infantry, Cavalry and Field Artillery arms. As part of the disposal of surplus equipment, the British Army gave Australia sufficient equipment for the raising of the recommended five Infantry Divisions and two Cavalry Divisions. However, the Australian Army did not receive any nondivisional armaments such as heavy or medium guns, tanks, or mechanical transport. The Conference of Senior Officers did recommend that the government purchase stocks of these items but the government refused to allocate funds, except for a handful of devices. Jeffrey Grey has noted that it was in precisely the areas of heavy artillery, armour and motorised vehicles that the most significant advances in the military art occurred. However, the army's leaders would consistently make the maintenance of their cavalry and infantry dependent divisions their priority.

Despite Prime Minister William Hughes's agreement to the senior officers' programme, cutbacks to the military vote following the signing of the Washington Naval Treaties in 1922 and the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 ensured that the Army's leaders would not have the resources to achieve their goal. Instead of a force of 130,000 the Army's establishment would quickly decline to under 30,000 and it would not recover until just before the beginning of the Second World War. Even though the defence estimate throughout the interwar period was insufficient to support the organisation established in 1920 the Army would insist on retaining all seven Divisions. The Army's leaders refused to reduce the organisation even though this meant that Infantry Battalions, Light Horse Regiments and Artillery Batteries would all exist at establishments which were far too small to result in effective units. For example, in 1936 the Army had only a single Battalion with an establishment of more than 400 (412 in the linked 30th/51st Battalion) while the 5th Battalion, with a membership of just 240, was much more typical. The Council of Defence did propose the Army's reorganisation in 1935 but the CGS successfully opposed the review, even though he admitted that the present organisation was tenuous and that the units were little more than skeleton formations. Instead, he insisted that the formations, no matter how small, still served as a basis for expansion.

Leaders, such as the Inspector General Lieutenant-General HG Chauvel, justified these steps by redefining the purpose of the Army. Instead of existing to provide for the immediate defence of the nation, the Army would maintain itself in a nucleus state with the primary objective becoming that of providing a framework for rapid expansion in case of mobilisation. The institution would retain its organisation, and its subunits, because they would serve as training establishments for the leaders the army would require for expansion. After the start of the depression, when the Army's personnel level declined farther, it would retain as many units as possible, even with absurdly low establishments. Unwittingly, the senior officers' reaction to the threat that the budget cut-backs posed to the organisation would actually increase the similarity between the Australian Army and the Weimar Reichswehr. Both forces now operated under nearly identical rationales. The German Army also was a shell, which was also unable to defend the state, and whose primary mission was to prepare for expansion. However, the Germans would manage the task in a much more coherent and focused manner, and as a result, their forces were in a much better position to mobilise as an effective military instrument when rearmament began.

The Army also resisted the government's strategic policy as it also threatened the goal of a seven division organisation. The Senior Officers had selected this figure because they believed it provided the minimum strength necessary to defend the continent from Japanese invasion. The interwar political leaders, however, maintained that invasion was an impossibility because of the protection afforded by the Royal Navy and the naval base at Singapore. Instead of anti-invasion the government wanted military leaders to make anti-raid the focus of their preparations. The Army's leaders remained defiant, and senior officers, such as the Lavarack would wage a campaign of obstruction, even after receiving the direct instructions of the government. In the end, the officers would only barely fulfil the letter of the government's policy. They would eventually concede and create the First Line Component, the force which would have the responsibility of repelling raids. Notionally, the Army would maintain the elements of the First Line Component at a higher level of readiness and establishment than the rest of the force, in order that they could quickly respond to small scale enemy incursions. In reality this did not occur, and units of the First Line Component
differed little from those of the supposed second echelon. In addition, the Army delayed the process for as long as possible by taking more than four years to decide which units would form the First Line Component. Finally, once it had been formed, the Army leaders would make a mockery of the concept, and its purpose, by assigning to it nearly the entire force structure.  

Senior officers also confronted the government directly on issues of strategic policy when this threatened the Army’s organisation. The most dramatic example was the response of Bruche to Sir Maurice Hankey’s report on the Commonwealth’s defence requirements and its place within the imperial system. Bruche’s tone verged on insubordination and he included unqualified statements that the government’s belief in the Singapore Strategy was wrong and improper for the nation’s defence. Lavarack, Bruche’s successor as CGS, was only slightly less belligerent and his persistent efforts to have the government reconsider its strategic policy earned him a rebuke from the Minister of Defence in 1936.

Although it is necessary to recognise the financial imperatives of the period, the Army leadership’s insistence on maintaining an organisation that they could not adequately support meant that other areas of defence preparation had to suffer. As a result of the Army’s policies, the standard of militia training and officer education were particularly grave. In 1947 a Member of Parliament, HBS Gullett, could state without exaggeration that ‘the standard of the militia in prewar days was so low that on the eve of the war the militia forces could not have undertaken the simplest military operation against a trained force with the least chance of success’. With the limited resources available, maintaining an organisation of seven division required the diversion of limited PMF personnel to the support of an oversized CMF in positions such as Area Officers or as unit adjutants. It might have been more profitable if the Army could have used some of these officers to study developments in the art of war, but such a diversion held little interest for the Army’s leaders. Moreover, the Army would put little effort into training, even of the instructors who would be responsible for the teaching of the militia. It opened the Central Training Depot in 1921 for the purpose of training such instructors. The Army closed it the following year and it would not conduct another instructional class until 1935.

Chauvel’s Inspector-General Reports throughout the 1920s contain numerous comments on the poor state of training in the Army. Little would change over the following decade. After a 3rd Division camp for leaders’ training in 1932 the instructors prepared a damning report which noted the lack of even elementary knowledge by the participating officers. They complained that the standard of regimental training in basic areas such as drill, small arms training and minor tactics was, at best, poor. Standards became so low that the Military Board was compelled to remind commanding officers that only competent officers and NCOS should oversee training. As the end of the interwar neared Lavarack would admit that it ‘has been apparent for many years that the standard of training in tactics and staff duties ... should be raised; and that a uniform standard and system of instruction is required’. Not until 1938 would the Army would establish a Command and Staff School to conduct courses of instruction for officers in tactics and staff duties.

Compounding the Army’s poor training practices was the policy of allowing unit commanders to set the training objectives for their camps of continuous instruction. Army Headquarters did issue annual training instructions but they did not deal with specifics nor did they provide a coherent doctrinal vision for the army. While limited financial resources meant that the unit camps were all too brief, the level of instruction provided necessarily tended to be basic and repetitious. For example, the syllabus prepared by the 36th Battalion for its camp in 1938 is nearly identical to that provided for the previous year. The Military Board also did not perceive the training cycle as an opportunity to test new ideas on the nature of war. Instead it used the exercises to reinforce existing notions or underwrite its policies. During the late 1930s the Military Board suggested that units conduct their training in coastal areas in order to gain anti-invasion experience. Tactical Exercises Without Troops also frequently followed an anti-invasion theme using a thinly disguised Japan as an opponent.
Unlike the *Reichswehr*, the Australian Army did not have an office which was responsible for establishing uniform training guidelines and objectives. The Army did possess a Directorate of Military Training but its primary purpose was to reissue British training publications and to conduct promotional examinations. During the reorganisation of the Weimar Army, Seeckt made sure to establish, within the *Truppenamt* (the postwar equivalent of the General Staff), sections dedicated to the standardisation of doctrine and training programs. This arrangement also provided the Germans with the means to incorporate the lessons of the war into their doctrine and to evaluate the results of annual training exercises in order to test new theories and incorporate positive results into manuals and future training cycles. The British and Australian Armies lacked an equivalent to the *Truppenamt* and, therefore, they had no device by which to evolve doctrine and training or to seek out advantages in the changing nature of modern war.48

The Army's unwillingness to reduce its organisation also meant that it could not be selective in the officers it accepted and it was therefore difficult to attract a better calibre of candidate. Instead, the interwar army was continually handicapped by inferior officer material. The examiner comments accompanying the results of the 1919 entrance exams to RMC suggest a bleak prospect for the Army's future. They noted consistently poor or disappointing results in a variety of subjects. In the exam on general knowledge the marker caustically noted that 'in some cases the ignorance of some matters of every-day knowledge was almost incredible'.49 The following year the examiners observed that very few candidates had attained an educational standard that could favourably compare to that of the better kind of student who passed the Victorian school leaving examination.50 During his tenure in 1934, Lavarack also complain of the inadequacy of the incoming cadets which the Army had to accept.51

Conclusion

The Australian Army's decline over the course of the interwar period was quite dramatic. In 1918 it was a force which could bend the enemy to its will. In the ensuing years it not only lost that capability but its effectiveness would decline so precipitously that by 1939 the Army was almost completely unprepared for war. On paper the Army contained a large array of formations but they were little more than hollow shells, bereft of manpower, indifferently trained and armed with obsolete weapons. Certainly, the Army's neglect by a series of governments who were unconcerned with military matters was a major contributor to this state of affairs. However, as this paper has shown, the Army's leaders also made decisions which added to the institution's decline and which assured that its forces would be unprepared for modern war. By shifting the focus of the creation of military effectiveness during the interwar from government policy to that of the paths taken by the nation's military leaders, this essay has explored a number of themes which help to explain why the Australian Army was unable to find the way forward.

In contrast to the priority which the *Reichswehr* assigned to the study of war and the intellectual development of its members, the British and Australian officer corps displayed virtually no interest in examining the lessons of the past nor in refining their conception of the nature of modern war. The Australians were neither able to conceive of new ideas for themselves nor to implement innovations suggested by others. Instead they turned to Britain for guidance. Unfortunately the British Army was even more apathetic towards intellectual pursuits than the Australian. This decision to look to Britain was most unfortunate for, as one interwar commentator has noted, the British Army between the wars was like an ostrich that was blinded to the advances in military armament and conception.52 This action assured that Australia would organise its forces on the basis of obsolete principles whose relevance for modern war remained, deliberately, untested.

It is also puzzling to note that the same Army's leaders, who so strenuously opposed any strategic policy which originated in London, could be so uncritically accepting of tactical and operational concepts originated from the same source. Leaders such as Bruche, Chauvel and Lavarack consistently objected to Australia's national security policy because it was based upon British, not Australian, assumptions regarding imperial strategy. This sense of
nationalism, however, was absent when they considered other areas of military affairs. Australian military leaders willingly employed British manuals as the basis of the Army's preparations and they routinely sent officers to Britain and India and sought advice from the War Office. This practice suggests that the senior officers were not evaluating strategic and tactical/operational policies equally but rather allowed other interests to impede their judgement. The historical record is unclear on the reasons for this, but it is obvious that a larger organisation, one based upon seven divisions, would provide greater opportunity for senior level appointment.

While the accusation that the Army's policies contributed to the impotence of the nation's military forces is serious enough, the role that senior officers played in the misdirection of government policy is even more disturbing. Furthermore, the actions of senior officers have important implications for the definition of military professionalism. The Army's leaders knowingly set priorities and implemented programmes that were in opposition to the desires of the nation's civilian leaders. When given direct instructions on issues to which they objected, senior officers resorted to subterfuge, delay and obstruction in order to make the government reconsider its decision or to minimise the effect of these decisions upon the Army's organisation. Claims that the officers understood the strategic situation more clearly than the politicians are, at best, an inadequate rationale for improper actions. The Army's efforts at undermining the government's preference for a military organised to defend against raids, as opposed to the officers' preference for an anti-invasion function, is an example of patently unacceptable behaviour by an officer corps in a democratic society.

Compounding the error is the fact that the officers' efforts did not succeed in the objective they had set for themselves. The nucleus army was a failure and did not provide the nation with the core of well trained leaders which would facilitate the expansion of the Army. Organisation was a simplistic mantra of leaders who had failed to determine the true lessons of the Great War and who were uninterested in seizing or unable to grasp the opportunity that advances in weaponry offered to reshape the parameters of war. The interwar army failed to realise that organisation is a means to an end and not the objective in itself. The true goal of the Conference of Senior Officers was to provide the nation with an Army that was adequate for its defence. Organisation should have been only one component of the Army's effort to achieve that goal. Von Seeckt, and the leaders of the Reichswehr Army, had a much better appreciation of what was required by an officer corps charged with the responsibility of reestablishing an army and laying the foundation for its expansion in time of war.

Institutional memory is an organisation's most precious asset. Throughout the interwar period the Australian Army allowed the experiences and knowledge that it had so painfully acquired during the Great War to dissipate. Exacerbating that tragedy was the leadership's lack of interest in matters which affected the preparation for future war and their obsessional struggle to maintain an organisation at the expense of all other possibilities. The result was an Army which had lost its way and which was incapable of operating at the same level of effectiveness in the Second World War which it had achieved in the First World War. The lesson that must be learned is simple—an army ignores its intellectual preparation at its peril.
Endnotes

3. The Reichswehr did violate some of the terms of Versailles Treaty, such as Germany's arrangement with the Soviet Union regarding armour development. However, these violations were relatively minor and do not explain the great advances the Reichswehr made in redeveloping German military strength. See David N Spires, Image and Reality: The Making of the German Officer, 1921-1933 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 121-3.
10. Ibid, 43; and Spires, Image and Reality, 126.
17. It is clear that even after the outbreak of war the Australian Army continued to rely upon War Office publications. See 'Southern Command Memorandum No 5—Policy Regarding Minor Tactical Training', 1 March 1940, MP70/5, 146/1/2002, Australian Archives, Victoria (hereafter AA Vic).
19. An example is the report of an Australian officer in England who was exposed to the British Army's latest thoughts on defensive warfare. See 'Notes on Defence', May 1939, AWMM, 147.
20. 'Lecture Notes for Officer Training, 11th mixed Brigade' (1921), AWMM, 9/15; and 'Tactical Exercise Without Troops—Course for Promotion to Lieut-Col', 19-24 May 1930, AWMM, 17/11A.
21. For the interwar Reichswehr debate on armoured warfare see Corum, The Roots of Blitzkrieg, 122-43.
22. Lewis, Forgotten Legions, 18.
25. 'General Staff Memorandum: Mechanisation Policy', December 1938, MP729/6, 37/401/124, AA Vic.
26. 'Mechanical Warfare Committee', 20 August 1931, MP392/10, MSB437/501/76, AA Vic.
28. 'Military Board Agenda No 42/1933—Appointment of a Director of Mechanization', 3 May 1933, B1535, 859/14/525, AA Vic.
29. 'Mechanical Warfare Committee—Minutes of the First Meeting', 10 September 1931, AWMM, 89; and 'Mechanical Warfare Committee—Minutes of the Third and Fourth Meetings', 6 October 1932 and 20 April 1933, AWMM, 83. See also, Appendix A to Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Australian Mechanical Board—Australian Pattern Experimental Armoured Car’, in CGS Periodic Letter No 2/1936, A6828/1, 2/1936, Australian Archives, Canberra [hereafter AA Canberra]; 'CGS Periodic Letter No 3/1936', A6828/1, 3/1936, ibid, and 'CGS Periodic Letter No 4/1937', A6828/1, 4/1937, ibid.
30. 'Minute Re: Provision of Personnel in Connection with the Formation of Light Tank Units', 2 February 1937, B1535, 849/20/290, AA Vic.
31. Fuller, Lectures on FSR III: (Operations Between Mechanized Forces), ix-x.
32. The Conference of Senior Officers met in February 1920. Its members were Lieutenant-General CBB White, Lieutenant-General Sir J Monash, Major-General JW McCay, Major-General JG Legge and Major-General JHT Hobbs.

33. For the interwar organisational plan of the Army see, 'Report on the Military Defence of Australia by a Conference of Senior Military Officers of the Australian Military Forces', vols I & II (1920), AWM1, 20/7.


38. 'CGS Periodic Letter No 1/1936', A6828/1, 1/1936, Australian Archives, Canberra.


40. CPD 193 (1947), 273.


42. '3rd Division Artillery & Infantry Course—Portsea: 3rd Division Headquarters Comments', 11 April 1932; and 'Report on Artillery and Infantry Course—Portsea', 16 March 1932, AWM49, 99.

43. Neumann, 'Australia's Citizen Soldiers', 218.

44. 'CGS Periodic Letter No 2/1938', A6828/1, 2/1938, AA Canberra.

45. Ibid.

46. For an example of an annual training instruction see 'Military Board Instruction', 1 July 1935 in CGS Periodic Letter No 3/1935, A6828/1, 3/1935, AA Canberra.


