

Armistice
Centenary Special
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HISTORY TODAY



First World War:
from the History
Today Archive

Foreword by
Gary Sheffield

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Introduction

A personal selection of rich and diverse articles from the History Today Archive. Expert analysis of the First World War from its beginning to its end. *Gary Sheffield*

Over the decades, many articles about the First World War have appeared in *History Today*. The magazine has prided itself on publishing the work of some of the most important historians of the conflict, who have written from a variety of perspectives. This ebook, published to mark the centenary of the Armistice of 11 November 1918, brings together a personal selection. In choosing the chapters, I had to omit many fascinating pieces and topics: my original 'long list' ran to more than 20 items. Nonetheless, from its origins to its aftermath via battles, politics, home fronts and empires, this is a rich and diverse collection, which showcases the range of scholarship on the First World War.

We start with that perennially contentious topic, the origins of the war. As Vernon Bogdanor notes in 'August 1914: The Shadows Lengthen': "The nations slithered over the brink ..." declared Lloyd George in his war memoirs, a view endorsed by the historian Christopher Clark.' Bogdanor's article provides an understated but powerful counterargument to Clark's influential 'sleepwalkers' thesis, by showing that there was a possibility of negotiating a way out of the July Crisis that followed the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, but neither Vienna nor Berlin were interested in doing so. In Bogdanor's view, German and Austrian 'rejection of [British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward] Grey's proposal [for negotiations] seems conclusive in the debate on responsibility for the war'.

Too often the First World War is, in spite of its name, viewed primarily in terms of the Western Front. In reality it was a global conflict, and the second and third chapters in this book present different facets of this struggle. David Motadel's 'Germany's Jihad' looks at attempts by Germany and its Ottoman allies to foment unrest among the millions of Muslims in the British, French and Russian empires. The campaign failed, not least because 'the influence of pan-Islam was overestimated'. Nonetheless, this attempt to stimulate holy war caused considerable unease in the Entente states and prompted counter-campaigns to shore up support in Muslim areas. The Indian army was an immensely important strategic asset of the British Empire. A number of Indian soldiers wounded in France and Flanders were sent to Brighton. Here was the Empire coming to England's doorstep and, as Suzanne Bardgett argues in 'Indians in Brighton', many of these soldiers forged good relations with the locals. The British authorities took a dim view of this fraternisation and in 1915 steps were taken to isolate the Indian convalescents from the denizens of the Sussex coast. Fear of upsetting social norms, not least by facilitating interracial sexual relations, prevailed over simple humanity.

Returning to the Western Front, historians disagree fundamentally about German General Erich von Falkenhayn's aim in launching the notorious battle of Verdun in 1916. In 'Verdun: the Killing Field', Robert T. Foley argues persuasively that the battle was Falkenhayn's 'sophisticated, if grisly, response to the stalemate of the trenches ... the war's first deliberate battle of attrition'. It failed to break the French

army but came to symbolise, for the both the French and the Germans, all that was dreadful about the First World War. A different method of trying to break the deadlock of the trenches was to introduce new technology. Brian Holden Reid's chapter begins with the first mass use of tanks, by the British army at Cambrai, in November 1917. Initially, the tanks achieved extraordinary success, which could not be sustained. The real importance of Cambrai was offering, in Holden Reid's words, 'Visions of Future War', which he explores through the ideas of thinkers such as J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart. They were reacting against grim attritional battles typified by Third Ypres (1917). In a short piece, I consider the historical and cultural significance of the name by which this battle has come to be known: Passchendaele.

A month before Cambrai, German and Austro-Hungarian troops broke the deadlock on the Italian Front. As Vanda Wilcox explains in 'The Catastrophe at Caporetto', the Central Powers inflicted a shattering defeat on the Italian army. She demonstrates that common accusations that Italian soldiers in the front line simply failed to put up much of a fight are untrue. Nonetheless, Caporetto was more than just a military defeat. It came to symbolise all that was wrong with Italy's First World War and the remarkable Italian and Allied victory of Vittorio Veneto, which began exactly a year later on 24 October 1918, did not erase the memory. By that stage, the fighting on the Western Front had once again become mobile. In 'The 'Battle of Amiens'', a classic article from 1958, John Terraine made the case that the Allied victory of 8 August 1918 was decisive in ending the war. Terraine was the single most important historian of the 1960s and 1970s arguing for the rehabilitation of First World War British generalship (especially that of Haig) and the achievements of the British Expeditionary Force. Nick Lloyd reconsidered Terraine's contribution in a recent short article, also included here. Lloyd argues that for the most part, Terraine's insights have stood the test of time, although his underplaying of the importance of the Canadians has been rectified by more recent historians. Terraine remains an immensely significant figure in the development of the historiography of the First World War.

This ebook begins with an in-depth examination of the month before the war broke out and it is appropriate to end with a discussion of the immediate aftermath. Alan Sharp's chapter, 'Dreamland of the Armistice', looks at the machinations that took place before the Paris Peace conference convened on 18 January 1919. The 'dreamland' in his title refers to the German belief that the new republic would be treated as the successor of the discredited imperial regime and thus relatively leniently on the basis of US President Woodrow Wilson's liberal and idealistic 'Fourteen Points'. Germany was to be sorely disappointed. Wilson's plans were regarded with contempt by some of the key players in Britain and France, who had their own agendas, and the scars of the war were just too raw. The scene was set for the Versailles Treaty of June 1919, which was by no means as harsh as some believe, but was very different from the sort of settlement for which Germans hoped.

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The Concert of Europe, the diplomatic model championed by Britain in the century before the First World War, was doomed by the actions of competing nationalisms. Britain's entry into the conflict became inevitable, despite its lack of preparation.
Vernon Bogdanor

The Shadows Lengthen

1914



The spark: Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, five minutes before their assassination, 28 June 1914.
Wikimedia/Creative Commons

The First World War was, so the US diplomat George Kennan declared, ‘the great seminal catastrophe of the 20th century’. It had two basic causes. The first was the clash in the Balkans between Slav nationalism and the decaying Austro-Hungarian Empire. The second, perhaps more fundamental, cause was the rise of German power and the difficulty of containing it by peaceful means.

German reunification came in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The significance of that conflict had been noticed by Benjamin Disraeli, who as Leader of the Opposition told the House of Commons in February 1871:

This war represents the German revolution, a greater political event than the French Revolution of last century... The balance of power has been entirely destroyed, and the country which suffers most, and feels the effects of this great change most, is England.

Germany had been unified by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. The great conservative statesman tamed German nationalism and kept it within bounds. Bismarck was a master of restraint and gave Europe a generation of peace, which, by 1914, had come to be taken for granted. It is often said that if Bismarck

had been chancellor in 1914 there would not have been a war, but perhaps an international system that depends for its success upon one genius is not, in the last resort, a very stable one. Bismarck’s unscrupulous, authoritarian methods were later to be adopted by those who lacked his genius or indeed his restraint.

The growth of German power posed a challenge to an international system based on the Concert of Europe, developed at the Congress of Vienna following the defeat of Napoleon. Its members could call a conference to resolve diplomatic issues, a system that Britain, and particularly the Liberals in government in 1914, were committed to defend. Edward Grey had been foreign secretary since 1905, a position he retained until 1916; the longest continuous tenure in modern times. He was a right-leaning Liberal who found himself subject to more criticism from his own backbenchers than from Conservative opponents. In his handling of foreign policy his critics alleged that Grey had abandoned the idea of the Concert of Europe and was worshipping what John Bright had called ‘the foul idol’ of the balance of power. They suggested that he was making Britain part of an alliance system, the Triple Entente, with France and Russia, and that he was concealing his policies from Parliament, the public and even from Cabinet colleagues. By helping to divide



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Europe into two armed camps he was increasing the likelihood of war.

On his appointment in December 1905, Grey had indeed maintained the loose Anglo-French entente of 1904, which the Conservatives of the previous government had negotiated. He extended that policy by negotiating an entente with France's ally, Russia, in 1907. In 1905 France was embroiled in a conflict with Germany over rival claims in Morocco. The French had essentially said to Lord Lansdowne, Grey's Conservative predecessor: suppose this conflict leads to war – if you are to support us, let us consult together on naval matters to consider how your support can be made effective.

The Conservatives had responded that, while they would discuss contingency plans, they could not make any commitments.

Grey continued the naval conversations and extended them to include military dialogue. He informed the then prime minister, Henry Campbell Bannerman, and two senior ministers of these talks, but not the rest of the Cabinet. Nevertheless, Britain could not be committed to military action without the approval of both Cabinet and Parliament. In November 1912, at the insistence of the Cabinet, there was an exchange of letters between Grey and the French ambassador, Paul Cambon, making it explicit that Britain was under no commitment, except to consult, were France to be threatened. In 1914, furthermore, the French never suggested that Britain was under any sort of obligation to support them, only that it would be the honourable course of action.

The Moroccan conflict was settled peacefully at the conference of Algeciras in 1906. A further crisis over Morocco broke out in 1911, which seemed, for a time, as if it might lead to war. But this was not, in the words of A.J.P. Taylor: 'the first stage to world war but rather a last episode in an age of European rivalries in Africa, which had been running for the previous 40 years'.

Conflict and containment

Imperial conflicts could be, and were, contained by the great powers. The world war was caused by conflicts, not in Africa or Asia, but in Europe and specifically in the Balkans. The cause lay not in rival imperialisms, but rival nationalisms. In the Balkans, the Slavs were seeking what Germany, Italy and Hungary had recently achieved, the realisation of their national aspirations. In their way stood the Ottoman Empire and the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire. The latter was dominated by the Germans and Hungarians. The Slavs living within it were subordinate

and the empire stood in the way of their national aspirations, in particular the aspirations of the southern Slavs.

In 1908 a dress rehearsal for the Sarajevo crisis took place, when Austria-Hungary converted its occupation of the Slav provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which it had administered since the Treaty of Berlin in 1878) into an annexation. It had been agreed at Berlin that the occupation would be temporary and that the provinces would be returned to the Ottoman Empire once order and prosperity had been restored. The annexation, therefore, was a breach of the treaty and of international law. It would have significant consequences. The first was that it made non-Slav rule in Bosnia appear permanent, since the Austro-Hungarian Empire appeared more durable than the Ottoman Empire. The annexation was a particular blow to the independent south Slav state of Serbia, which objected. Second, the annexation made the southern Slav issue an international problem, since it involved Serbia's ally, Russia, which saw itself as the protector of the Slavs. In March 1909 Austria demanded, under threat of war, that Serbia accept the annexation, while Germany told Russia that, in case of war, it would take Austria's side.

Rival nationalisms

Britain helped persuade Serbia and Russia to back down. The great powers accepted the annexation. The kaiser, unwisely perhaps, boasted in Vienna in 1910 that he had come to Austria's side as a 'knight in shining armour'.

The annexation of Bosnia pitted two rival nationalisms against each other in south-eastern Europe: Slav nationalism, seeking to unite all the southern Slavs in a Greater Serbia or a Yugoslavia; and German nationalism, seeking to expand eastwards. It was the tension between the two that was to lead to a world war.

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, Europe, as in 1908, appeared to be divided into two camps. But in 1914, by contrast with 1908-9, Russia refused to back down, largely because it considered the existence of Serbia as an independent state to be at risk. As a result, Russia has been blamed by some historians as primarily responsible for the war. But, of course, conflict can always be avoided if the potential victim always backs down.

The crisis of 1914 came at a time when it seemed as if Europe was settling down. After the First Balkan War of 1912, which almost ended Turkish rule in Europe, Grey sponsored a Conference of Ambassadors in London to secure a negotiated peace between the great powers. It has not been sufficiently

Grey was a true believer in the concept of the Concert of Europe and was to prove an ardent supporter of the League of Nations

noted that, strikingly, on most contentious issues, Grey took the side of Austro-Hungary – and therefore of Germany. He helped to ensure that the borders of a new non-Slav state, Albania, made a buffer between Austria and the Slavs, denying Serbia access to the Adriatic. When in 1913 Serbia's ally, the tiny state of Montenegro, captured and sought to annex the strategic city of Scutari (now Shkënder), allocated to Albania at the conference, Grey refused to oppose Austrian action to remove the Montenegrins. Instead, he joined the powers in a naval demonstration, compelling Montenegro to withdraw.

Taking sides

Grey defended this policy in the House of Commons by arguing that the Albanian population of Scutari was mainly Catholic and Muslim, rather than Slav, and that its people had the same right of self-determination as the Slavs. But he had other reasons for supporting Austria, which he did not express publicly. The first was that concessions by Serbia and Montenegro were necessary to keep the peace and the need for peace outweighed the wishes of the ententes. The second was to show Germany that its fears of encirclement by hostile powers were baseless. The ententes, Grey believed, did not commit Britain to supporting Russia or its allies in the Balkans. Britain would take the side of Austria-Hungary and of Germany, if that was required.

Despite the allegations of his Liberal critics, Grey was a true believer in the Gladstonian concept of the Concert of Europe and after 1918 was to prove an ardent supporter of the League of Nations. He had hoped that the settlement at the London Conference might prove the prelude both to détente with Germany and also to a true and permanent Concert, based on the conference approach to diplomacy. Reporting the outcome of the London Conference on 10 May 1913, the radical journal the *Nation* stated: 'The credit belongs in equal parts to the statesmen of Germany and Sir Edward Grey. They have found at last a consciousness of their common duties. There might evolve from this temporary association some permanent machinery of legislation' – some sort of proto-League of Nations, perhaps. Grey certainly hoped so. On 15 December 1913 he told the Commons: 'Nothing more than a memory is left of the old Anglo-German antagonism.'

Yet the London Conference proved to be not the beginning of a new Concert of Europe, but its end. It was not to be renewed until after the fall of communism in 1989. For Grey's conception was hardly representative. In Austria-Hungary, different voices were to

be heard, voices worried by threatened encroachments on the empire. The Balkan wars had increased Serbia's territory and also its population, from 3 to 4.5 million. Austria regarded Serbia as an irredentist threat to the Slavs in the empire. In November 1913 the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister, Leopold Count Berchtold, told a colleague:

The solution of the South Slav issue ... in face of the tenacity and confidence with which Serbia is pursuing the idea of a Greater Serbia, can only be by force. It will either almost completely destroy the present state of Serbia or shake Austria-Hungary to its foundations.

In fact, it would do both.

Pulling the trigger

The trigger was the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. Killed by a Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, he and his fellow conspirators had obtained their weapons from Serbia and had been aided by renegade members of the Serb armed forces, seeking to embarrass their own government, which they saw as insufficiently militant. The Serb government was almost certainly not involved.

For a month after the assassination nothing seemed to happen, though on 5 July Germany had given Austria-Hungary *carte blanche* to do with Serbia as it wished. Austria-Hungary would not need German support to crush a small state such as Serbia, but its assurances were needed in case Russia should intervene. There was already fear that a war with Serbia could not be localised. Indeed, on 7 July the German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, told his secretary that 'an action against Serbia can lead to a world war'.

On 23 July Austria presented its terms to Serbia, with a 48-hour time limit demanding unconditional acceptance; it was, in effect, an ultimatum. Grey told the Austrian ambassador in London, Albert Count von Mensdorff-Pouilly-Dietrichstein, that the note was 'the most formidable document that was ever addressed from one state to another'. The demands were framed so as to ensure rejection and provide a pretext for military action; although Serbia sent a conciliatory reply, Austria-Hungary broke off diplomatic relations. It was clear that war was threatened in the Balkans and that it might spread. It was at this point that the European crisis came before the British Cabinet, at the end of a long discussion about Ulster. The atmosphere was described graphically by Winston Churchill, who at the time was First Lord of the Admiralty:

It is difficult to see what Austria-Hungary and Germany could have lost by agreeing to a conference, or by arbitration

The discussion had reached its inconclusive end, and the Cabinet was about to separate, when the quiet grave tones of Sir Edward Grey's voice were heard reading a document which had just been brought to him from the Foreign Office. It was the Austrian note to Serbia. He had been reading or speaking for several minutes before I could disengage my mind from the tedious and bewildering debate which had just closed. We were all very tired, but gradually as the phrases and sentences followed one another, impressions of a wholly different character began to form in my mind. This note was clearly an ultimatum, but it was an ultimatum such as had never been penned in modern times. As the reading proceeded it seemed absolutely impossible that any State in the world could accept it, or that any acceptance, however abject, would satisfy the aggressor. The parishes of Fermanagh and Tyrone faded back into the mists and squalls of Ireland, and a strange light began immediately but by perceptible gradations, to fall and grow upon the map of Europe.

Nevertheless, even if the war spread, it did not seem that Britain needed to be involved in this obscure squabble. On the evening of 24 July the prime minister, Herbert Asquith, told his girlfriend, Venetia Stanley, that: 'Happily there seems to be no reason why we should be anything more than spectators [in any European conflict].' Just five days before Britain entered the war the *Manchester Guardian* declared on 30 July 1914: 'We care as little for Belgrade as Belgrade does for Manchester.'

Grey followed the same conciliatory policy he had pursued after the First Balkan War and sought to recreate the Conference of Ambassadors. Russia responded that it would prefer direct talks with Austria-Hungary, but, if that were not possible, it would attend a conference. The Austrians rejected both direct talks and the conference, as did Germany, on the grounds that it would amount to a court of arbitration against Austria, which was entitled to settle its dispute with Serbia in its own way. Germany argued that in such a conference it would be Austria's only defender.

Grey might well have taken the Austrian side at such a conference as he had done in 1912-13. He would have been aiming to exert his influence to achieve a peaceful solution – and that would require Serbian concessions. He produced a formula to the effect that the powers would 'examine how Serbia can fully satisfy Austria without impairing Serbia's sovereign rights or independence'. Russian support for Serbia would have been limited, since it could hardly have condoned regicide, especially as

Tsar Nicholas II's grandfather had himself been assassinated in 1881 by terrorists.

Rejection of Grey's proposal seems conclusive in the debate on responsibility for the war. For it took from his hands a lever with which he could have persuaded Russia not to mobilise. 'Had such a conference taken place', Churchill wrote, 'there would have been no war. Mere acceptance of the principle of a conference of the Central Powers would have instantly relieved the tension.' Grey declared that he would accept any proposal for peaceful mediation offered by Germany or Austria-Hungary. He repeatedly invited Germany to make proposals of its own, but there was no response.

Court of Arbitration

In his 2012 book, *The Sleepwalkers*, Christopher Clark argues that the Austrians could not have defended their interests in 'the absence of any international legal bodies capable of arbitrating in such cases, and the impossibility in the current international climate of enforcing the future compliance of Belgrade'. But there was in fact such a body: the Court of Arbitration at The Hague, established in 1899. The tsar proposed that the dispute be put to The Hague, but Austria refused. Had it accepted, Britain would have put its weight behind enforcement and it would have been difficult for the Russians to resist such pressure against a state accused of being involved in regicide.

It is difficult to see what Austria-Hungary and Germany could have lost by agreeing to a conference, or by arbitration. Had agreement not been reached, they would have been in a strong position to use force against Serbia. A war against Serbia, under such circumstances, might well have been localised. In rejecting the conference proposal, Germany and Austria-Hungary consciously accepted the risk of a Continental war in order to reduce Serbia to a vassal state, if not to annex its territory, or to allow other states to do so.

On 29 July Bethmann-Hollweg strove to secure British neutrality, offering to guarantee the territorial integrity both of France and Belgium, but not the French colonies, nor, more importantly, the neutrality of Belgium.

Asquith told the Commons on 6 August that for Britain to have accepted neutrality on such a basis would have been contemptible. It was being asked to agree to the disposal of the colonies of an ally and to bargain away Belgian neutrality, thus becoming, in effect, an accomplice to a German invasion. If, as proved to be the case, Belgium was to ask for British support to protect its neutrality, the reply would be

Had Belgium not been invaded, the Liberals could not have led Britain into war

that it had already been bargained away. In return for betraying Belgium, Britain would secure a promise from Germany to respect British neutrality and independence, a guarantee given at the very same time as Germany was proposing to violate the neutrality and independence of another power that it had promised to respect.

Nevertheless, the Liberal Cabinet was deeply divided over the threat of war. Grey, Asquith and some senior colleagues, including Churchill, the Lord Chancellor, Haldane and the India Secretary, Lord Crewe, believed that Britain was bound in honour to support France. The majority of the Cabinet did not. Nor did most Liberal backbenchers. However, the invasion of Belgium was to transform Liberal opinion. At around this time, Grey recalls in his memoirs:

A very active Liberal member came up to me in the lobby and told me that he wished me to understand that under no circumstances whatever ought this country to take part in the war, if it came. I answered pretty roughly to the effect that I hoped we should not be involved in war, but that it was nonsense to say that there were no circumstances conceivable in which we ought to go to war. 'Under no circumstances whatever' was the retort. 'Suppose Germany violates the neutrality of Belgium?' For a moment he paused, like one who, running at speed, finds himself suddenly confronted with an obstacle, unexpected and unforeseen. Then he said with emphasis, 'She won't do it.' 'I don't say she will, but supposing she does?' 'She won't do it', he repeated, confidently, and with that assurance he left me.

Had Belgium not been invaded, the Liberals could not have led Britain into war. They had 261 seats in the Commons out of 670, some distance from an overall majority, but they were supported by the Irish Parliamentary Party, which had 84 seats, and Labour with 37. The Conservative opposition had 288 seats and there were three vacancies. Neither the Irish nor Labour would have supported a war before the invasion of Belgium. Nor would most Liberal MPs. On 2 August, two days before Britain declared war, Asquith noted: 'A good three-quarters of our own party in the House of Commons for absolute non-interference at any price.' There would almost certainly have been a split in the Liberal Party, with the majority opposed to intervention. But, as Asquith wrote to Venetia Stanley when he learned of the ultimatum to Belgium, this 'simplifies matters so we sent the Germans an ultimatum to expire at midnight'.

The guarantee of Belgium, recognising Belgian independence, was a collective one signed by the powers in 1831. Every signatory had the legal right to enforce it, but there was no legal obligation on any single guarantor to act. As the Cabinet recognised, the matter was one of policy not of obligation. But, in practice, no British government could conceivably have accepted the invasion of Belgium.

The 20th century saw numerous atrocities and they have perhaps dulled our sensibilities, so it is difficult to appreciate the sense of moral outrage caused by the invasion, which, apart from the breach of a treaty, was an act of unprovoked aggression against a small power. There was a general feeling that, if a great power could simply ignore the neutral status of a small country to which it had pledged its word, Europe would not be safe. In 1914, no government that had failed to help Belgium could have survived in the House of Commons.

Belgium invaded

Opinion was almost unanimous. The Left had argued that Germany was not as bad as it had been painted by Conservatives and that Britain should make more effort to secure détente. Grey had come to agree with them. But the invasion of Belgium seemed to show that Germany was far worse than anyone had thought.

On 3 August, after Grey addressed the Commons, the leader of the Conservative opposition spoke to support the war. He was followed by the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, John Redmond, who to everyone's surprise spoke in favour of the war because of the need to defend small nationalities. Redmond said that: 'There never was – that he believed was the universal sentiment of Ireland – a juster war, or one in which higher and nobler principles and issues were at stake.' Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party, and Keir Hardie then spoke against the war, but they were repudiated by their parliamentary colleagues. Only four of the 37 Labour MPs refused to support the war and MacDonald resigned his leadership. George V – who as Asquith once said was rather like 'the man in the tube' – summed up the general opinion when he told the American Ambassador, 'My God, Mr Page, what else could we do?'

Grey has been attacked by historians for two contradictory reasons. First, that he allowed France and Russia to believe that he would support them, so preventing conciliation. Yet France and Russia made their dispositions while still quite uncertain as to what Britain would do; in any case, France made no provision for the appearance

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of a British Expeditionary Force on the Continent. Second, that he did not warn Germany in advance that Britain would go to war if Belgium were invaded. In fact he did tell the German ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky, that Britain could not let France disappear as a great power. The trouble was that no one in Berlin listened to the ambassador. Even so, no one with the slightest familiarity with Britain could have any doubt on this matter. In 1912 a German correspondent in Britain asked J.A. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, whether Britain would join in a war if France were threatened. Spender replied:

My dear Sir, you have lived in England for ten years and you know the English people. Can you really see them sitting still while the German army wiped out the French and planted itself on the French coast?

Britain's decision to go to war was based not simply on morality, in terms of upholding Belgian neutrality, but also on self-interest. Most British politicians and, one suspects, the British people, felt that to allow Germany to conquer France and Belgium would compromise British independence so that it would become a vassal state of Germany. The same judgment would have been made had the ententes not existed, had there been no military or naval conversations and regardless of who was foreign secretary. The achievement of Asquith and Grey was to bring a united country into the war. A Conservative government facing opposition from the Left would have found it more difficult.


No interest in the quarrel

Grey, alone among the diplomats of 1914, sought peace in the sense of making concrete proposals that might have prevented war. He could do this precisely because Britain had no interest in the quarrel between Austria-Hungary and Serbia and no territorial demands upon any other power.

There was, however, a disconnection between British foreign policy and defence policy under the Liberals. If, in practice, Britain could not allow France to be defeated, then she might have done better to draw the conclusion that the entente should, in fact, become a formal alliance. In his book, *The Pity of War* (1999), Niall Ferguson criticises Grey for turning a Continental war into a global one, implying that Britain was not part of the Continent. But, if it could not afford to allow France to be defeated, then Britain was a Continental power. Its security depended not only on mastery of the seas but on what happened in Europe. If Britain wanted influence on the Continent, it needed

not just a strong navy but a strong army. Instead, it had what Lord Kitchener called a 'town clerk's army'. A strong army would have meant conscription and that was politically impossible in the years before 1914. It was, as Grey declared in 1914, 'unnatural'. Only a strong Continental commitment would have deterred Germany in 1914, yet the Liberals had followed a policy of limited liability, since they did not believe that Germany was fundamentally an aggressive power.

'The nations slithered over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war without any trace of apprehension or dismay', declared Lloyd George in his war memoirs, a view endorsed by Christopher Clark. In reality, the war came about as a result of the actions of politicians and diplomats, in particular the leaders of Austria-Hungary and Germany, who made decisions that they knew might involve more than a localised war.

Britain went to war not because it was opposed to German domination of Europe, but because it was so ill-prepared to resist that domination – it discovered that, ultimately, it could be resisted only by war. Indeed, the threat of German domination could only be ended by two world wars. That resistance finally triumphed in April 1945 when two extra-European powers – the US and the Soviet Union – joined hands at Torgau, cutting Hitler's Reich in two. This ended the final German bid for power in Europe. It also ended the era of European supremacy in world affairs. We are still living with the consequences. 

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In the early days of the First World War a plan was hatched in Berlin to spread revolt among the Muslim populations of the empires of Britain, France and Russia. It failed.
David Motadel

Germany's Jihad

1914



Holy warriors: the Shaykh al-Islam reads the fatwa in front of the Fatih mosque, Istanbul, 14 November 1914.

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On Wednesday 11 November 1914, as the Ottoman generals mobilised their troops to fight on the side of the Central Powers, Shaykh al-Islam Ürgüplü Hayri, the highest religious authority of the caliphate in Constantinople, issued five fatwas, calling Muslims across the world for jihad against the Entente and promising them the status of martyr if they fell in battle. Three days later, in the name of Sultan-Caliph Mehmed V, the 'Commander of the Faithful', the decree was read out to a large crowd outside Constantinople's Fatih Mosque. Afterwards, in an officially organised rally, crowds with flags and banners moved through the streets of the Ottoman capital, calling for holy war. Across the Ottoman Empire, imams carried the message of jihad to believers in their Friday sermons. Addressing not only Ottoman subjects, but also the millions of Muslims living in the Entente empires, the proclamation was translated into Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Tatar and spread around the world. In the Allies capitals of London, Paris and St Petersburg, where officials had been haunted for decades by fears of Islamic insurgency in the Muslim-populated parts of their empires, the jihad proclamation sparked anxiety.

The fatwas drew on an unusual concept of

jihad. The meaning of the word has always been fluid, ranging from intellectual reflection to military struggle against infidels. Compared with earlier proclamations of armed jihad, the decree was theologically unorthodox, though not unprecedented, as it called for a selective jihad against the British, French, Montenegrins, Serbs and Russians and not against the caliph's Christian allies, Germany and Austria-Hungary. The holy war was thus not a religious conflict in the classic sense, waged between 'believers' and 'infidels'. As only Britain, France, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro had turned hostile to the caliphate, only they could be considered enemies of Islam.

Pan-Islamic promotion

Although the declaration was part of Ottoman efforts to promote pan-Islamism, a strategy which the Sublime Porte had pursued since the 19th century to sustain unity within its heterogeneous empire and to win support abroad, a major role in this episode was played by officials in Berlin; it was the Germans who had pushed for the jihad proclamation. Strategists in the German capital had discussed the scheme for some time. At the height of the July Crisis, Kaiser Wilhelm II declared that 'the whole Mohammedan world' had to be provoked



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into 'wild revolt' against the British, Russian and French empires. Shortly afterwards, his Chief of the General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, had ordered his subordinates to 'awaken the fanaticism of Islam'. Various plans were worked out, the most detailed of which was written by Max von Oppenheim, an official in the foreign office and a leading expert on contemporary Islamic affairs. His 136-page *Memorandum on the Revolutionising of the Islamic Territories of our Enemies*, drawn up in October, a month before the Ottomans entered the war, outlined a campaign to incite religious violence in Muslim-populated areas in the Entente's colonies and imperial peripheries.

Call for holy war

Describing 'Islam' as 'one of our most important weapons', one that could be 'decisive for the success of the war', he made a number of concrete suggestions, including a 'call for holy war'. In the following months Oppenheim established the Intelligence Office for the Orient, which became the centre of Germany's policies and propaganda in the lands of Islam.

Across the Muslim world, German and Ottoman emissaries circulated pan-Islamic propaganda, drawing on the language of holy war and martyrdom. Berlin also organised missions to incite rebellions in the Muslim hinterlands of the Entente empires. In the first months of the war a number of German expeditions were sent to the Arabian peninsula to win the support of the Bedouins and to disseminate propaganda among pilgrims. There were also attempts to spread propaganda against Anglo-Egyptian rule in Sudan and to organise insurrection in British Egypt. In Cyrenaica, German emissaries tried to convince the leaders of the Islamic Sanusi order to attack Egypt. The Sanusi had organised resistance against imperial intrusion in the previous decade, calling for jihad against French troops in the southern Sahara and fighting the Italians following the invasion of Tripolitania in 1911.

After lengthy negotiations and considerable payments, the Sanusi finally took up arms, attacking the western frontier of Egypt, but were soon stopped by the British. Attempts to arm and incite Muslim resistance movements in French North Africa and British and French West Africa had some success, but posed no serious overall threat. In early 1915 a German mission set out for southern Iraq to meet the influential Shi'a mujtahids of the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala, global centres of Shi'a Islam. Although the leading Shi'a scholars had already issued decrees in support of the Ottoman fatwas in late 1914, the Germans convinced some more mullahs, with

significant bribes, to write up another proclamation of holy war. Some Shi'a dignitaries in Iran followed; scholars at the Iranian National Archives have recently edited a book of fatwas that were issued by the Persian 'ulama during the war, giving insights into the complex theological and political debates sparked by the sultan's call for jihad. Iran was considered to be of crucial strategic importance, which is why German military agents operated there. The most important of all the German missions, however, was aimed at spreading revolt from Afghanistan into the Muslim borderlands of British India – the North-west Frontier – led by the Bavarian artillery officer Oskar Ritter von Niedermayer and his rival, the diplomat Werner Otto von Hentig. Although, after an odyssey through Arabia and Iran, Niedermayer and Hentig reached Afghanistan in 1915, they failed to convince local Muslim leaders to join the jihad.

Overall, German-Ottoman attempts to employ Islam for their war effort failed. In the capitals of the Entente the call for holy war caused much anxiety among officials, who maintained military reserves in their Muslim-populated colonies, troops that could have otherwise fought in the trenches of Europe. Yet Berlin and Constantinople did not succeed in inciting larger uprisings. The idea that Islam could be used to provoke an organised revolt was a misconception. The influence of pan-Islam was overestimated. The Muslim world was far too heterogeneous. More importantly, the campaign lacked credibility. It was too obvious that Muslims were being employed for the strategic purposes of the Central Powers, not for a truly religious cause. The sultan lacked religious legitimacy and was less universally accepted as caliph than strategists in Berlin had hoped.

Allied responses


Finally, the Entente powers confronted the jihad. From the beginning, the French circulated decrees of loyal Islamic dignitaries denying that the Ottoman sultan had the authority to issue a call for holy war and declaring support of the Triple Alliance a divine duty. Religious leaders were actively involved in recruiting Muslims of the French Empire to fight on the battlefields of Europe. The British responded to Constantinople's call for jihad with their own religious propaganda: Islamic dignitaries across the empire exhorted the faithful to support the Entente, condemning the jihad as an unscrupulous and self-seeking venture and accusing the sultan of apostasy.

Tsarist officials, too, employed religious figures to denounce the German-Ottoman jihad. Shortly after the proclamation of the

The most important of the German missions was aimed at spreading revolt from Afghanistan into the Muslim borderlands of British India

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five fatwas, one of the highest Islamic authorities of the Romanov Empire, the Mufti of Orenburg, called the faithful to arms against their empire's enemies. In the end many Muslims proved loyal to the French, British and Russian governments. Hundreds of thousands fought in their colonial armies. With the Arab revolt, London, in contrast to the Central Powers, even succeeded in spreading rebellion in the volatile imperial hinterlands of its adversaries. When the Sharif of Mecca, Husayn ibn Ali, and his sons Faisal and Abdullah switched sides in 1916, overrunning garrisons and port cities, it became clear that the German-Ottoman jihad had failed.

Sharifian propaganda justified the revolt against Constantinople in religious terms, accusing the Ottomans of corrupting the purity of Islam and betraying the community of believers. The rulers on the Bosphorus were perceived by the rebels as 'godless transgressors of their creed and their human duty' and 'traitors to the spirit of the time, and to the highest interests of Islam', as T.E. Lawrence put it in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Islamic propaganda, it became clear, could also be used against the Central Powers. More than a century after the Ottoman declaration of holy war, we look back at a century of attempts to exploit the concept of jihad, to politicise the sacred for profane political aims – a story that is far from over. 

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The people of Brighton offered a warm welcome to the Indian soldiers sent to convalesce at the Sussex resort during the First World War. But the military authorities found much to be nervous about.

Suzanne Bardgett

Indians in Brighton

1915

Imperial greetings:
cigarettes are handed out
to wounded Indian officers
at the Kitchener Hospital,
Brighton, 1915.
Alamy



Six months after the outbreak of war the *Brighton Herald* of 16 January 1915 reported an encounter between a small group of Indian soldiers and the people of the town. It took place outside York Place secondary school, which had been converted into a hospital for wounded Indians, newly arrived from the First Battle of Ypres. The *Herald's* reporter was covering a visit by two members of the royal family: Princess Beatrice, who had lost a son in the battle just months before, and her sister, Princess Louise, who had recently lost her husband, the former Governor-General of Canada, John Campbell, 9th Duke of Argyll. The recently bereaved pair, daughters of Queen Victoria and thus a direct link to the first Empress of India, would have been thought highly suitable ambassadors to the Indian troops. But it was an impromptu incident that day which caught the reporter's attention:

On the outskirts of the crowd were three Indians, one of whom, possibly in honour of the Royal visit, had adorned his khaki turban with a spray of ivy. To the small children, as well as to the elders, the Indians were a centre of the keenest interest. And the Indians were as much interested in the children as the children were in them. At length the inspiration seized a small boy to hand a baby brother up to one of the Indians to be held in his arms. The Indian took the child with eagerness. That set the fashion. The next minute girls and mothers, too, were handing up their small children freely, either to shake hands with the Indians or to be taken in their arms ... [One soldier patted a baby's] woollen covered toes with a joy that would have done credit to a proud young father handling his first-born. What stories there will be to tell these babies when they grow up – how they had been fondled by wounded Indian soldiers who had come over to fight for Britain in the Great European War.



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In late February 1915 the authorities took the unpopular step of locking the soldiers into the hospitals

There seems no doubt of the mutual captivation that existed between the Indian soldiers sent to Brighton to convalesce from their war injuries and the people of that town. The encounters would be short-lived, however. In late February 1915 the military authorities took the highly unpopular step of locking the soldiers into the hospitals and guarding them with military police. What had gone on and why did the military react in this way?

Mutual fascination

Bachetar Singh, a soldier recovering in Brighton, wrote to a friend in India on 15 March 1915: 'How can I describe this war? It is like a furnace in which everything becomes ashes on both sides.' For Singh and hundreds of other recovering soldiers, contact with civilians in Brighton had been relaxed for the first two months of 1915 and it had been a source of fascination and pleasure. We know this from the letters the Indians wrote home, which were read and translated by the British censor. 'These people love us from the bottom of their heart', reported one. According to another: 'The people of this place pay us great honour & attention & keep on saying "How do you do?" & treat us with great respect.'

Three large buildings in Brighton had been converted into hospitals for the Indian wounded: the York Place School, the Royal Pavilion and the Brighton Workhouse, which became the largest of the hospitals and was known as the Kitchener Hospital. The Royal Pavilion was thought to provide a particularly appropriate setting for the convalescing soldiers. Its exotic interior – filled with hospital beds and recovering soldiers – was to become the subject of several paintings. Local newspaper reports showed compassion and empathy for the Indians. When a train bearing a large contingent of wounded Indian soldiers arrived at Brighton railway station from a hospital ship in Southampton, the *Herald's* reporter was there to describe the scene:

It is a moving sight to see stretcher after stretcher shifted from the train to the ambulance vans, each stretcher with its motionless figure, some with their faces covered, others looking out upon their unaccustomed surroundings with expressions of patient endurance and with that aspect of mystery and melancholy which lurks in the eyes and feature of so many Indians ... in some cases where both legs were wounded the Indians were carried by their English comrades.

Language could be a barrier, but not always, for there were some Brightonians who had

lived in India. A Sikh soldier was able to converse with a Hindi-speaking reporter on the *Herald*, telling him, for example, about the recent fighting, with its constant machine-gun fire and exploding hand grenades. A Brighton policeman, who had spent several years in India, 'was immediately the centre of a group who recounted their experiences'.

The seafront presented a host of entertainments. These included now-forgotten diversions, such as rides in carriages drawn by goats. The two piers had booths with gaming machines, including recently installed ones that allowed the public to fire rifles at German soldiers. There were the trappings of commerce: a monster soda bottle on the roof of a house to advertise the drink was another singular sight that we know the Indian soldiers found amusing. The Indians noticed straightaway the warmth of the Brighton people. In a letter from February 1915, a Mahratta medical subordinate wrote:

The people are so very good & kind that they make no difference between black & white. Everyone seeks every opportunity of becoming fast friends with us & of serving us in any way in their power. In the evening we always go for a walk. The people treat us very well indeed. Men and women alike greet us with smiling faces and take great pleasure in talking with us.

One thing that struck the Indians was that the English they were meeting behaved altogether better than those they had met back in India. Sub-Assistant Surgeon J.N. Godbole wrote to his friend in Poona:

We do not hear the words 'damn' and 'bloody' at all frequently as in India. But this only applies to those who have not seen India. Those who have gnash their teeth at us, some laugh and some make fun, but there are not many who do this. The people here are charming. It is impossible to ask why they become so bad on reaching India.

From the pages of the *Herald* we learn of a spontaneous act by a young Brightonian. The Indian soldiers were out on parade and quite a few small boys had joined in:

One boy rather older than the rest marched all the way by the side of a good-looking young Indian in the rear. They could not speak a word to each other, but the boy marched along with all the mingled pride and solicitude of the 'big brother'. He had clearly taken the Indian under his care. And the last thing one saw before the great gates of the Pavilion closed upon the party was the boy and the

Indian shaking hands in farewell. India and Britain will be closer than ever before.

Here we have a moment of connection: one young man singling out another and showing his brotherly concern. Brighton was full of families who each weekend greeted thousands of visitors: publicans, shop-keepers, hotel and café-owners and a host of other individuals who made their living through providing entertainments or selling ice-creams on the seafront. In short, people were used to welcoming strangers. Some families had Indian troops staying in their homes. One Parsee medical subordinate wrote to his friend in Bombay on 26 January 1915:

Tomorrow we proceed to Bournemouth to take our HQ there. We are very sorry to leave Brighton & especially our billeting place and such comfort and motherly & fatherly feelings as we received from Mr and Mrs _____ who so proudly sheltered us for 14 days.

Brightonians learned to say 'salaam' on meeting the Indians. This was easy enough, but a feature in the *Herald* in March 1915 introduced readers to Hinduism and its rituals, explaining how the morning bath was a daily baptism and quoting from the *Rig veda*. Efforts at cultural understanding would grow as the hospitals became better established.

Brief encounters

That January, snow had fallen on Brighton and the *Herald* published a photo of the Indians making a snowball on the Pavilion lawn. The report described how the Indians 'looked out upon the captivating scene spread before them with wonderment and delight'. The tone may seem condescending today. In 1915 it would not have. Another report that same January caught a moment of real sympathy for a group of Indians being taken on a drive on an especially cold day:

They came with bandaged hands, with arm in a sling, or with hurts to feet and legs that had left them unable to walk save with the support of the Red Cross soldiers. Careful handling indeed was needed to get these maimed warriors into the seats of the covered-in car. To the keen interest of the group of onlookers the delicate task was at length accomplished. As the car moved away up the London road, the crowd, unable quite to muster up the cheer that they felt in their hearts, waved their hands in token of good wishes. Smilingly the Indians, who ever manifest the most friendly disposition, acknowledged the salutation.

These soldiers were evidently too badly wounded for such a journey, which must have jolted them for a full three hours. The crowd of onlookers seems to have sensed this and felt it was too much.

Inevitably, it was encounters with the women of the town which produced the most complex set of responses: 'The women here have no hesitation in walking with us. They do so hand in hand. The men so far from objecting, encourage them. The fact is that this is the custom here', wrote Sub-Assistant Surgeon M.M. Pandit to a friend in Sholapur. One Sikh wrote to his father of afternoon encounters with English women, who gave them fruit and of one woman who said to him:

We have never seen such men. Only have we heard of them that they are the Sikhs of India who once fought against England. Now do we see them with our own eyes as we see our son.

'Who once fought against England' is presumably a reference to the Anglo-Sikh wars of the 1840s. Here is an unknown Englishwoman, seemingly wanting to push aside past prejudice. But the easy relations of early 1915 came to an abrupt end. Writing home in the spring of 1915, Dhunjibhoy Chinoy reported that new restrictions were in place:

We are not allowed to go anywhere and are hard pressed and we do not like it ... At first the 'salas' allowed us more freedom and we acted according to our pleasure and stayed out sometimes all night. We were even placed outside in billets; but some men abused the privilege and it was entirely stopped.

In late February 1915, Sir Bruce Seton, commanding officer of the Kitchener hospital, took the decision to clamp down on the Indian soldiers' freedoms by locking them into his hospital. He went to the very top and wrote to Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India, voicing his concerns about 'the too frequent intercourse with Indian attendants and patients'. Sir Walter Lawrence, the Commissioner in Charge of the Welfare of Indian Troops, thought it was unfair, although his objections were not particularly strenuous: 'The Indians are behaving like gentlemen and it is rather a pity that Bruce Seton should have alarmed Lord Hardinge needlessly.' There was some discussion of the Coronation in 1911, when around 700 Indian soldiers had been billeted at Hampton Court. That had not been a town however: it was the urban environment that gave the military concern. Barbed wire was put on top of the walls surrounding the hospital and a band of military police formed from among the

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patients to enforce the new rules. Seton later defended his action:

It was evident, from the very first, that drink and that the sex problem were factors which would have to be reckoned with. A large proportion of the followers, the sweepings of Bombay city, were found to be habitual drunkards; and the ill-advised conduct of the women of the town, although partly innocent in intention, was bound to result in the gravest of scandals.

Alcohol may have been partly to blame: there was a court case against a contractor who had brought strong liquor into the hospital. But the prospect of liaisons with local Brighton women was the main reason. In February 1915 the Brighton Women's Co-Operative Guild asked that something be done 'to prevent the nuisance in connection with the Indians in Pelham Street' and asked that the garden in nearby Trafalgar Street be 'immediately boarded up'. The gardens were close to the entrance to the York Place hospital and it seems that Brighton women – with whatever motive – were congregating there to meet the Indians.

The military knew a lot more about the Indian troops' relations with civilians than they were letting on and what they read gave them much to worry about. Marseilles in particular, where the Indian troops had disembarked, was mentioned a good deal by the censor:

It would appear from the tenor of certain letters passing between the Base Camp at Marseilles, where the scum of the Army has naturally tended to collect, and the front, that the Indian soldiers in camp at Marseilles have been able in some cases to obtain access to the women of the neighbourhood and that a certain amount of illicit intercourse with them is going on.

Letters to the Indians intercepted from Marseilles offered tantalising evidence of liaisons, but the precise nature of them was rarely clear. The prospect of a similar situation developing in Brighton was alarming. There were just too many opportunities for sexual adventure.

Class concerns

There was very likely a class aspect to this concern. In his 1909 history of Brighton, Lewis Melville bemoaned the social decline of the town. The arrival of the railway had changed things for the worse. Brighton had become 'the Cockney's paradise, the Mecca of the stock-broker and the chorus girl'. Unlike nearby Brockenhurst and Barton-on-Sea, also the sites of hospitals, Brighton was

associated with pleasure-seeking Londoners and, for the British Indian Army officers, would have seemed to harbour all kinds of low-life. The idea of the Indians consorting with barmaids and other lower-class women touched a particular nerve. The issue of European prostitutes and barmaids operating in India had produced a major scandal in the 1880s and, like all scandals, it cast a long shadow in the military mind.

There was also irritation at the apparent affection that white women felt towards the Indians. A Liverpool journalist, reporting from Paris in 1914, observed:

The Cult of the Asiatic, always strong in France, is now, thanks to the added sentiment for the brave ally, almost an obsession. A young princeling in my hotel is embarrassed by many kind smiles and glances. A motor-car will drive up and disgorge a bevy of heavily-furred ladies in the lounge where he is sitting. All through dejeuner their eyes will wander to him. The interest of course is half military and patriotic, and half due to the romance that dwells in everything remote.

English women were also criticised for their behaviour when encountering Indians. A British Indian Army medical official wrote to his wife that Brighton was 'covered with girls who make a lot of the natives. They are seen to go arm in arm with ward servants and are very fond of coloured people'. I have been able to find just one example of a letter from an English woman to an Indian soldier in the censored correspondence at the British Library. It was sent by a Londoner to a 'Muslim clerk' in France. It starts 'Dear Gummie' and thanks him for sending her money. A few lines later the writer says that there are not many soldiers in London now. One wonders whether this is a woman who had come to rely on payment for sex from soldiers on leave in London, but it is impossible to know. Perhaps 'Gummie' had sent the money on behalf of his superior. The letter ended 'love and kisses for the Captain and yourself'. We can imagine how the censor's office must have reacted. Here was proof to the censors that some kind of relationship had developed and it can only have fuelled their concerns. There was evidence in the Indian soldiers' letters, too. Writing home to a fellow-soldier in January 1915, a Muslim sub-assistant surgeon reported 'I have been to the theatre. Enough, don't you ask me anything. I am not tied up [by scruples] as you are. I go about to enjoy myself'.

With whom was this enjoyment being had? For the military a host of possible scenarios presented themselves. The war was

The idea of the Indians consorting with barmaids and other lower-class women touched a particular nerve

The main reason for devoting so much effort to nursing the Indians back to health was to return them to the fighting fronts

starting to give more freedom to women and this posed all kinds of risks. So-called 'khaki-fever' and war babies were discussed in the press around this time and women police patrols were formed across the country to curb 'unruly behaviour'. The prospect of mixed-race babies being born was disturbing but, more than that, the notion of sexual relations between Indians and British women challenged the very foundations of the British imperial edifice. Behind Seton's concerns – and those of other senior military officers – was the fact that, by this time the Indian presence in the UK had become a highly polished project.

The tone of much of what was written in the newspaper reports was both possessive (references to 'our Indian troops') and condescending (phrases such as 'gallant warriors'). The newspapers of the day helped reinforce a notion of the Indians that placed them firmly in the imperial hierarchy. They made much of the colour of Indian skins and far less of the terrible fighting they had been part of just weeks before. As reporters wrestled with describing the mass of men with whom they could not converse, they drew on appearance to speculate on the Indians' characters and the physical attributes of the different racial groups. Not infrequently this gave rise to comparisons with children: 'Filled with a child-like faith in their own religion, they seem as innocent as children, but in reality they have the hearts of lions for bravery.' Every opportunity was taken to promote the notion of the Indians' loyalty and dependability. Conducted visits to London – a regular activity for the convalescing soldiers – took them to Madame Tussauds and to West End stores. But they were also made to give formal salutes to the statue of Queen Victoria outside Buckingham Palace and were photographed doing so.

There was a degree of self-satisfaction at Britain's largesse in treating the Indians so well and an expectation of gratitude. In *A Short History in English, Gurmukhi & Urdu of the Royal Pavilion Brighton* (1915) there is a description of it as a hospital for Indian soldiers. The author imagined the Indians recalling their time there after the war: 'Their faces will then glow with pride as they tell of that day when they were lying wounded in a Royal Palace and the king and queen came to their bedsides and spoke to them words of tender sympathy and cheer.' Willcocks later remembered how obsessed the senior military and political elite were with the Indians. If we look at the records of the Indian Soldiers Fund, set up in October 1914, we get some sense of this enthusiasm. The Fund's organising committee comprised a long list of aristocratic men and women.

Infinite care was poured into the scheme, with large quantities of tobacco, spices, chutney, pagri covers, balaclavas, coconut oil and sweets purchased to be sent to the front. The effort was well meant, but the rush to support and the determination to be listed on committees and lists of donors spoke of an almost fanatical interest. This ambitious campaign, now inextricably linked to the influential and highly inter-connected British elite, had to be guarded against any scandal or taint.

Great expectations

Being a cause célèbre was not easy for the recovering soldiers and produced its own pressures. With so much adulation and fussing, the Indians had to be circumspect about anything that might provoke criticism from the locals. Gambling had helped pass the time in the hospitals, but it was officially forbidden. A Hindu soldier reported to his friend in India: 'We only have a game on the sly now and then, so that the Officers may not know. You see we are held in great respect here. But if they were to know what we do, what would become of the respect?'

There was an incident in which a 15-year-old local errand boy stole money from a Sikh soldier. At the court hearing that followed, the soldier – despite needing the money – was at pains not to make a fuss. The relationship between Indians and their hosts had become strained. The Indians were under intense pressure to conform to expectations. The British were anxious that the Indian soldiers' presence was packaged and presented to the best effect.

It became apparent that the main reason for devoting so much effort to nursing the Indians back to health was to return them to the fighting fronts. The letters home began to show resentment that Indian soldiers were being seen as cannon fodder. Ragbir Singh of the 59th Rifles wrote:

I have been wounded twice, and now this is the third time that I am being sent to the trenches. The English say it is all right. How can it be all right?

For the Indians to have been locked in, after a period of freedom in Brighton and in contrast to conditions in France, seemed undeserved. Soon the soldiers were writing with real bitterness of the frustration they felt. Writing home in June, Pirzada, a sepoy, warned:

Our people are very angry. They do not allow us out to the bazaars etc. They do not let the French or the English talk to us nor do they let us talk to them. The English have now become very bad. They have become dogs. Our Indian

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soldiers are very much oppressed, but they can do nothing.


In the following month an unnamed Indian soldier wrote home to Ahmedabad:

Brighton is a large city but I am ignorant of its contents.

To have curbed relations in the way the British military had was not surprising, but it was heartless. The French authorities tended to be much more lenient. There were even some marriages between Indians and French women. We know from the letters written about encounters with French families, moreover, just how much these interactions were generally appreciated. We know also from the thousands of letters and diaries in the Imperial War Museum archives how much soldiers – throughout the 20th century – took comfort from chance meetings with civilians in wartime. It was mothers, sisters and grandmothers who were missed, not just wives. Many of the Indian soldiers in any case had their own taboos about sexual liaisons with women not of their caste. The opportunity to get to know the people of Brighton – with all the healing benefits it would have brought – was lost.

Fraternalisation threatened the very cornerstone on which the Empire was built: a presumption of the supremacy of the British over the Indian. Within this construct stood an ideal of British womanhood. In his memoir Willcocks recalled the example of Lady Minto, the wife of an earlier viceroy, who had crossed the Malakand Pass into tribal districts, rarely visited by white women:

She spoke to all the Indian officers and men of the wild transborder chiefs, and years afterwards the memory of her visit was still a theme of conversation amongst the Maliks beyond Chakdara and en route to distant Chitral. You can do much in the East by personal example, you can do little without it.

This was the preferred image of British womanhood: brave, aloof, untouchable. The encounters in Brighton's Pelham Street gardens presented a very different scenario – one best avoided. 

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The epic German offensive to take the strategically crucial fortress in north-east France reached its bloody end in September 1916. How and why did Erich von Falkenhayn, Chief of the German General Staff, attempt to break the deadlock on the Western Front?

Robert T. Foley

Verdun: The Killing Field

1916

Political general: Erich von Falkenhayn, 1916.

Alamy



In the early hours of 21 February 1916, the defenders of the hitherto quiet sector around the French fortress of Verdun found themselves facing the greatest concentration of German guns and mortars that anyone on the Western Front had faced to date. The German Fifth Army, commanded by Crown Prince Wilhelm with his chief of staff, Konstantin Schmidt von Knobelsdorf, had assembled more than 1,400 artillery pieces and mortars, along with several million rounds to fire in the offensive's first few days. Their plan was to use this overwhelming artillery to stun its defenders and allow a relatively easy capture of the eastern bank of the River Meuse. From these dominating heights, the German Chief of the General Staff, Erich von Falkenhayn, expected the Fifth Army to be able to inflict huge casualties on any French counter-offensives.

He hoped to use the tactical success gained by the Fifth Army to have a debilitating effect on the French army and people.

The Battle of Verdun was an enormous expenditure of resources – both lives and material – in a tiny section of the Western Front. Between February and September 1916, German soldiers fought and died to take the heights overlooking the French citadel, only to lose almost all their gains by Christmas to French counter-offensives. Along this 20-kilometre section, the German Fifth Army and the French Second Army are estimated to have fired more than 30 million artillery shells. To make matters worse, the German Landser upon whom fell the grim task of continual attacks and counterattacks had no idea that the strategic goal of Falkenhayn was to 'bleed white' the French people via the attrition of its youthful army.

Since its inception, both soldiers and



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German intelligence identified manpower shortages as a critical vulnerability of France

historians have struggled to understand Falkenhayn's strategic goal of attrition. Yet, far from a ridiculous objective, Falkenhayn's plans in 1916 were a sophisticated, if grisly, response to the stalemate of the trenches. His plans drew on his experiences of the war to date and the failures of both the Central Powers and the Entente to achieve victory through traditional means. Verdun represents the war's first deliberate battle of attrition. Indeed, one observer, the future Chief of the General Staff and German War Minister, Wilhelm Groener, later wrote that he could find 'no analogue' in military history with which to compare Falkenhayn's approach at Verdun.

Unlikely choice

Falkenhayn was an unlikely choice to succeed Helmuth von Moltke as chief of the General Staff in the wake of the German defeat at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914. Falkenhayn had spent much of his career as a military advisor and instructor to the Chinese, far from the sometimes feverish centre of the army, the General Staff in Berlin. Many put Falkenhayn's rise to prominence, first as Prussian Minister of War in 1913 and then as Chief of the General Staff, down to his political ties and acumen rather than his abilities as a strategist or military thinker. This image of a 'political general' would dog him throughout the war. Yet, far from a mindless sycophant, Falkenhayn's pre-war career allowed him to see more clearly than most that the war had challenged the assumptions on which strategy had been based and allowed him to develop a unique response, which would be used at Verdun.

In the wake of the failure of his offensive in Flanders in 1914, Falkenhayn pressed the German Chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, to use diplomacy to detach one of Germany's enemies from the coalition: 'So long as Russia, France, and England stay together ... we run the risk of slowly exhausting ourselves.' Falkenhayn used the offensive on the Eastern Front in 1915 to attempt to detach Russia from its allies, hoping to use the conquest of Russian Poland as a bargaining chip with the tsarist government. That this failed, despite the vast amount of territory conquered by Austro-Hungarian and German forces in 1915, did not shake Falkenhayn from his belief that there was no simple military solution to Germany's strategic dilemma. Rather, the experience of 1915 convinced Falkenhayn that the German Foreign Office could not be relied upon to take sufficient advantage of the opportunities presented by battlefield success. He concluded he would have to find another way of detaching one of Germany's enemies from the Entente.

In 1916, Falkenhayn returned to the concept of striking at the enemy's political weakness in order to have strategic effect. In this case, the German strategist focused on manpower. Although France was undoubtedly still a 'Great Power' in 1916, her long-term future as such was not assured, in large part because of her ageing and ultimately declining population. Thanks to a low birth rate, by 1914 France had to conscript nearly 85 per cent of her eligible manpower to maintain the size of her army at a par with that of Germany. By contrast, the population of Imperial Germany was growing by leaps and bounds, meaning that it conscripted less than 50 per cent of its eligible manpower. In 1913, the introduction of a three-year service law designed to increase the trained manpower available to the French army at any one time was met with howls of protest from the French population, worried about the impact of extended service on its youth. In the wake of this, the French army was forced to improve living conditions in barracks and make other concessions. These factors did not pass unnoticed by German intelligence. They had identified manpower shortages as a critical vulnerability of France and concluded that it could not sustain prolonged losses without political consequences. By 1916, the French army, and its population, had suffered enormous losses, further weakening the army and its resolve in the eyes of Falkenhayn and his intelligence officers.

By 1916, Falkenhayn was convinced that the French army was in long-term decline, thanks to the high casualties it had suffered in 1914 and 1915. In August 1915, German intelligence completed a report on France:

France's victims in this war are so many that the government can bear the responsibility for them neither before the people of France nor someday before history. Soon [the French government] will be faced with the question of whether, despite all outside help, the ending of resistance is a more fitting path for the future of the nation than the continuation of this hopeless war.

The experience of the German offensives in Flanders in 1914 and of the Franco-British offensives in 1915 also convinced Falkenhayn of the futility of attempting a large-scale breakthrough of the modern defensive positions that dominated the Western Front. Indeed, the success of the German Army of the Western Front (the Westheer) in resisting the superior Franco-British forces in September and October 1915 demonstrated the power of defence when backed by sufficient artillery.

The war to date had shown clearly, and not

At first glance, Verdun seems like an odd choice of location for a major German offensive

just to Falkenhayn, the importance of firepower in both offensive and defensive operations. Here, the German army was better off than its opponents. It had invested in mobile heavily artillery, particularly howitzers, while the French and Russian armies had focused on field artillery. The plunging fire and the heavy shells thrown by howitzers made them ideal weapons for trench warfare. Their high angle of fire meant they could hit targets hidden by obstacles and could penetrate earthworks and other cover that the flat trajectory field guns could not hit.

Several offensives had demonstrated to the German army how this superiority could be best put to use. First, in late 1914 and early 1915, units of the German First Army carried out two successful limited offensives near Soissons. Later in the year, Austro-Hungarian and German forces launched a series of large offensives against Russia, which all but destroyed the tsar's army with the loss of all of Russian Poland. One of the factors in the success of these offensives was the use of artillery. Possessing large numbers of howitzers, the Germans could be more targeted in their use of artillery: in repeated attacks through the spring and summer of 1915, heavy shells fired at high trajectory laid waste to Russian defensive positions. Lacking howitzers, by contrast, the allies still had to rely on an overwhelming mass of artillery in their offensives and were unable to destroy their targets. Moreover, these German offensives demonstrated the importance of the psychological effect of artillery, in addition to its destructive effects. German artillery by early 1916 aimed not only to destroy key components of the enemy defence, but also to stun the defenders through short, sharp bombardments, which would enable German infantry to manoeuvre.

Choosing Verdun

At first glance, Verdun seems like an odd choice of location for a major German offensive. It had been a quiet sector of the front since 1914. So quiet, in fact, that the French High Command had stripped the fortress of much of its heavy artillery and transferred it to the field army. Yet the fortress itself remained inherently strong. Its distributed forts were far enough from each other that they could not all be taken in one go, but were close enough to provide mutual fire support. Moreover, most of the forts were well protected from all but the heaviest of artillery fire.

Despite all this, Verdun offered the Germans some advantages. First, the fortress was at the centre of a large salient within the German lines. This meant that German

artillery could fire into the French position from three sides, rather than simply from the front. Second, the Germans possessed good lines of communications – heavy and light railways as well as roads – that would enable the rapid supply of men and munitions. This contrasted sharply with the situation for the French: only one road and one rail line ran into the salient, which was vulnerable to long-range German artillery fire. Finally, the geography of the battlefield offered significant advantages to the Germans. The fortress of Verdun was bisected by the River Meuse, making coherent defence more challenging. Additionally, the land that was on the right bank, where the German offensive would first strike, was significantly higher than that of the left. If this could be taken, the Germans would be in a position to dominate the lower terrain with well-directed artillery fire.

French vulnerability

These factors came together in Falkenhayn's plan for the offensive at Verdun and were the basis of his hope for strategic success in 1916. The offensive was designed by Falkenhayn to hit French manpower, which was judged to be France's main vulnerability. Heavy losses on top of those suffered elsewhere would compel the French public to put pressure on its politicians to bring the war to a conclusion. This, in turn, would meet Falkenhayn's long-held strategic goal of breaking the Entente.

The experience of the war to date also offered Falkenhayn ideas of how this attrition was to be carried out at a low enough cost for German attackers. The experiences of 1914 and 1915 demonstrated that offensives could achieve limited terrain goals, if properly supported by artillery and if properly executed. The German First Army had done this near Soissons in January and the French and British had done this in Champagne and around Loos in September and October. The terrain around Verdun was central to Falkenhayn's plans. He believed that the units of the Fifth Army would be able to seize the dominating heights around Verdun in one rapid jump. Once in possession of these heights, they would be in solid defensive positions, would be in a position to overlook any preparations for counterattack and would be able to withstand them with comparatively light losses.

From the start, he recognised that the French and their British allies might attack elsewhere on the Western Front. Indeed, he hoped the British Expeditionary Force would be compelled to attack to assist their French allies. Given the relative ease with which a much weaker Westheer had been able to withstand the Franco-British offensives of

Most of the French army experienced the 'hell of Verdun' at least once

1915, Falkenhayn believed a Westheer, reinforced by units from the Eastern Front, would be able to hold its ground in 1916.

Given all this, Falkenhayn sought to limit some of the Fifth Army's more ambitious plans for the Verdun offensive. Although the Fifth Army was clear about the goal of 'bleeding white' the French army, it was less certain about how this was to be accomplished. The early plans focused on the rapid capture of the fortress and an offensive on both banks of the Meuse. Wanting to limit potential German casualties, as well as wanting to maintain a reserve to meet potential counter-offensives elsewhere on the Western Front, Falkenhayn restricted his army's offensive to the right bank. He assumed that once the heights on this bank were captured, then heavy German artillery would be able to suppress any French artillery fire coming from the lower heights of the left bank. However, these conflicting views of the offensive would ultimately cause problems in the detailed planning for the operation and its conduct.

Opening fire

The German offensive at Verdun began with intensive fire from more than 1,400 guns, howitzer and mortars. As Falkenhayn had directed, the Fifth Army's plan relied on the effect of artillery to support the advance of its six attack divisions along a 14-kilometre front. Unlike the French and the British in 1915 or later at the Somme in 1916, the Fifth Army's preparatory artillery bombardment was designed to precisely target key enemy defensive positions and lines of approach and destroy them rapidly. The Fifth Army trusted that the psychological effects of an intense bombardment would paralyse the French defenders long enough for the German infantry to close upon their lines. Thus, the initial bombardment lasted for 10 hours, but fired close to a million shells. A further 1.5 million rounds were stockpiled to support the advance over the next couple of days.

Though the element of surprise had been lost by a delay caused by poor weather, the Fifth Army's attack met its initial goals. On the first day, all three attacking corps had taken the French first lines and some units had penetrated the second lines. By 24 February, the Fifth Army was poised to break the French resistance at Verdun and capture the heights overlooking the Meuse. The entire French second defensive position was in German hands and the French defending units were all but annihilated. However, the German attackers had suffered heavily, too, and, thanks to Falkenhayn's desire to limit the offensive, the Fifth Army did not have fresh units with which to maintain the attack's momentum and to

break French resistance once and for all. The Fifth Army's commander, Crown Prince Wilhelm, later wrote:

On the evening of 24 February, the resistance of the enemy was actually broken; the path to Verdun was open! ... We were so close to a complete victory! However, I lacked the reserves for an immediate and ruthless exploitation of the success we had achieved. The troops, who had been engaged in unbroken, heavy combat for four days, were no longer in the condition to do so. Thus, the psychological moment passed unused.

To make matters worse for the Fifth Army, the French government and army had finally decided that Verdun was to be held at all costs. On 29 February, Philippe Pétain, whose motto had long been 'le feu tue', or 'firepower kills', was given command of the defence of the fortress. The new French commander rationalised the French line and created a coherent defensive fire plan. He massed artillery on the west bank of the Meuse, where it could fire into the flank of the attacking German troops on the east bank. He also stiffened the morale of the defenders. His General Order Number One read: 'The mission of the Second Army is to stop at any price the enemy effort on the Verdun front. Every time the enemy wrests a parcel of terrain from us, an immediate counter-attack will take place.'

Pétain also set in place a unit rotation policy, which allowed the French army to endure the massive casualties of the battle without breaking. He insisted that units be replaced before they were completely worn out, which allowed each unit to preserve a cadre of trained and experienced manpower around which a new unit could form. This ensured that most of the French army experienced the 'hell of Verdun' at least once. It also meant that the French contribution to the planned Franco-British offensive on the Somme had to be continually reduced.

Pounding away

Failing to achieve the heights along the east bank of the Meuse in a rapid advance, the Fifth Army now had to fight its way through tangled terrain against a motivated and well dug-in defender. The German Fifth Army continued to pound away at the French defences on the east bank with limited gains. In early March, the Fifth Army finally convinced Falkenhayn that an offensive also needed to be launched to seize the high ground on the west bank, from which the French defenders were pouring artillery fire into the flank of those German units attacking on the east bank. This, too, failed, resulting in heavy casualties. Stung by the

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increasing losses, at the end of March Falkenhayn questioned whether or not the offensive should be ended. The Fifth Army argued that the offensive should be continued, as it was achieving the goal of wearing down the French army.

Indeed, from the German perspective, it appeared as if their attritional goal was being achieved, though poor intelligence meant that they had a far from accurate picture of the damage being inflicted upon Verdun's defenders. Falkenhayn believed that the French suffered five casualties for every two Germans. In early March, he assumed that the French had suffered more than 100,000 casualties. The reality was different. By 15 March, the French had taken nearly 70,000 casualties defending Verdun, but this had cost the German attackers more than 52,000 of their own.

With the Fifth Army committed to continuing the battle, Falkenhayn found it difficult to bring it to an end. It did not help that the kaiser stated on 1 April that: 'The decision of the war of 1870 took place in Paris. This war will end at Verdun.' Indeed, too many important reputations were linked to the offensive. It was clear that a loss at Verdun would pave the way for Falkenhayn's rivals, Paul von Hindenburg or Erich Ludendorff, to take his place as Chief of the General Staff. But the prestige of the Fifth Army was also heavily invested in the offensive. Part of the rationale for attacking Verdun was for the German Crown Prince to be seen to be leading the German army to victory against the French. Failure there would taint the reputation of the future German emperor. While not the only reason for continuing the attritional battle, the importance of reputations was clearly significant in the decision to continue the battle, despite rising costs and limited gains.

In the end, failure to produce the collapse of the French will to fight combined with the pressures of a largely British relief offensive on the Somme, the spectacular successes of an enemy thought destroyed on the Eastern Front and the entry of Romania into the war on the side of the Entente brought Falkenhayn's time as Chief of the General Staff to a close. With this came the end of the German offensive at Verdun. This was not, however, the end of the battle. French counter-offensives retook most of the terrain seized by the Fifth Army by the end of 1916.


The battle had led to the anticipated attrition of the French army, but it did not have the expected result of destroying the French will to fight. Thanks to Pétain's system of unit rotation, 74 of the 98 divisions available to the French army in 1916 passed through Verdun. Nearly 380,000 Frenchmen were casualties of the battle, including

62,000 dead. Despite its 'victory' in the battle, the French army never really recovered from it. By September 1916, when the German offensive ended, the strength of the French infantry was 150,000 below its establishment strength and the lack of manpower meant that the French army would never again reach the size it had been at the start of 1916.

The German army also suffered heavily, though only 39 divisions took part in the battle, the equivalent of 30 per cent of the German army's strength. These units suffered about 337,000 casualties between 21 February and the end of 1916. The German army, though, was able to make good its losses and even those suffered during the other defensive battles of the year, on the Somme and on the Eastern Front. Thanks to a deeper pool of manpower, the German army did not reach the peak of its strength until June 1917.

Falkenhayn dismissed

The broader impact of the battle is difficult, though, to quantify. The failure of the offensive resulted in Falkenhayn's dismissal. With his departure, Germany lost its most imaginative strategist. His replacements, Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff, failed to recognise that the rise of mass armies and trench warfare necessitated new approaches. In 1918 they attempted to follow the same old strategic script that had failed in 1914 with predictable results. The French 'victory' also lost some of its lustre. Pétain's unit rotation system may have enabled the French army to endure the battle in the short term, but it also ensured that three quarters of the army experienced the 'hell of Verdun.' This contributed to longer-term problems of morale that surfaced in the mutinies of 1917.

The large-scale participation in the battle, its relentless attritional nature and the lack of any clear conclusion also helped establish Verdun as the symbolic battle of the war for both the French and German peoples. While the Battle of the Somme has come to symbolise the First World War in the eyes of Britain and its former Empire, Verdun holds a similar place for Germany and France today. Indeed, over time, the shared experience of the Battle of Verdun came to play an important role in Franco-German relations. It was at the great Douaumont Ossuary, in which the bones of 130,000 unknown French and German dead are co-mingled, that the French President François Mitterand and the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl joined hands in a poignant gesture of reconciliation between the two former belligerents during a memorial service in 1984 to the fallen of the Battle of Verdun. 

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The massed tank battle of Cambrai transformed the mythology, imagery and practice of conventional land warfare.
Brian Holden Reid

The Tank: A Vision of War to Come

1917



Knocked out: German soldiers prepare to recover an abandoned British tank, Cambrai, November 1917.
Bundesarchiv/Wikimedia/
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On the dull and misty morning of 20 November 1917, 378 tanks along with 1,003 guns and howitzers had been assembled to break through the German army's immensely strong Hindenburg Line, seize Bourslon Wood, cross the St Quentin Canal and capture the town of Cambrai in the Picardy region of north-east France. A feature of this operation was surprise. As the Allied troops gathered on 19 November, an eyewitness recalled that: 'The night was pitch black, and smoking was absolutely forbidden. Officers had instructions to shoot any man caught smoking.' The men 'suffered like drug addicts'.

Though the assembly was interrupted by German artillery fire, this turned out to be nothing more than the venting of early morning spleen. At zero hour – 06.30 – the artillery opened fire. 'The synchronisation was excellent', recalled a battery commander, 'and it was a most impressive sight to see the hillside burst into a perfect sheet of flame.' Surprise was complete. The tanks lumbered forward and smashed down the thick entanglements of barbed wire. German defensive fire was weak; the enemy stunned. The enemy's first line fell; by 11.00 hours the Hindenburg Line had been pierced as far as the Cambrai-Bapaume Road and Forward Observation Officers (FOOs) had established

themselves. An advance of eight miles on a frontage of 13,000 yards had been achieved; 8,000 German prisoners and 100 guns had been captured. The speed and excitement of the advance was matched by a certain glamour so lacking in earlier battles. The commander of the Tank Corps, Brigadier General Hugh Elles, led the attack personally in his tank, 'Hilda', flying, like an admiral on his flagship, a brown, red and green tricolour, symbolising 'Through the Mud and Blood to the Green Fields Beyond'. On reaching the first objective, Elles had assured his staff that he would return to headquarters. He jumped down from 'Hilda' somewhat testily, started walking back and before long he was importuned by crowds of German soldiers offering to surrender.

Although tanks had been used before, notably at the battles of the Somme and Passchendaele, it was without conspicuous success. Cambrai was the first battle in which tanks had revealed their true potential. It did not lose its lustre, despite the fact that the crucial objectives of Bourslon Wood and Cambrai were not taken and that in front of Bourslon Wood tanks were picked off piecemeal by German artillery fire, which rallied after the initial shock; nor that a German counter-attack beginning on 30 November had, within a week, regained all the lost ground. The Battle of Cambrai is a



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landmark in the history of war. It was hailed as opening a new epoch by the school of tank enthusiasts, which grew up in the Tank Corps led by the original author of the Cambrai plan, Colonel J.F.C. Fuller, the Tank Corps chief staff officer (GSO1).

Chariot of the future

The idea underlying the tank was not in itself very new. The tank is fundamentally a weapon carrier rather than a weapon. It is a self-propelled fighting vehicle, which is capable of moving across country without being restricted to roads. The tank's armour protects its weapons and enables weapon-power to be maximised at the enemy's weakest point.

The tank is a direct descendant of the war chariots of the Ancient Egyptians, Assyrians and Britons, and the war elephants of Porus and Hannibal. Its basic elements – like those of most new inventions – had been in existence for a number of years. The most important feature, the caterpillar track, had first demonstrated its potential to the British army in 1910. This was the Hornsby chain track, consisting of chains mounted on wooden blocks of paving-stone size fixed to powerful springs. An observer, Major General William Robertson, thought that such a device would have 'a great future as a tractor for dragging heavy guns and vehicles across broken ground'. But he pitied the crew, who looked seasick. An advance on this machine was the Holt caterpillar tractor, weighing 15 tons with a speed of 15 mph, though reduced to 2 mph when hauling a gun. Indeed, L.E. Mole had submitted a design of a tank to the War Office in 1910, which was shelved.

The tank had also made an early mark on the public consciousness in popular literature. The most notable contribution was made by H.G. Wells in his essay, 'The Land Ironclads' in a 1903 edition of the *Strand Magazine*. Wells' ironclads resembled ships at sea, steam-powered land vessels up to 100 feet long and 10 feet high with portholes. Their prime function was the transport of firepower, the traversing of battle zones and trenches and assaulting artillery emplacements – the enemy's gun line. Wells' ideas did not embrace the notion that the tank would become the main mobile weapon, thrusting into the enemy's rear independently. This would be developed fully by a later and greater school of military thinkers, led by Fuller. Indeed Wells' vision of the development of the land ironclad emphasised size and destructiveness rather than mobility.

Another important feature of Wells' writings refers to the kind of men who would fight in tanks. In his *Anticipation of the*

Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress Upon Human Life and Thought (1901), Wells had argued that the mechanisation of modern life would usher in the 'ideal war', waged by a new kind of soldier, the 'engineering man'. Wells loathed the amateur ideal that prevailed in Britain before 1914 and saw an urgent need for rational professionalism to cope with the complexities of the technological age. 'Every new weapon, every new complication of the art of war ... darkens the outlook of a nation of amateurs', he wrote. He preached the virtues of an 'inexorable tendency' that would transform a soldier into a 'skilled and educated man and link him ... with the engineer and the doctor'. The key to victory, therefore, was scientific education and training. In 'The Land Ironclads', Wells contrasted the cool rationality and clinical efficiency of the tank crews with the emotional and hysterical enemy and condemned 'the almost brutish want of imagination their methods of fighting displayed'. Wells disliked conscript armies because he claimed that smaller armies were more efficient than large ones. Conscript armies were 'made up, not of masses of military muscle, but of a large proportion of military fat'. In these striking and prescient writings, Wells foreshadowed most – though not all – of the arguments used to justify the introduction of the tank to the world's armies.

Dreams confirmed

The appearance of the tank on the battlefield of Cambrai and its later success at the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918 – the 'black day' in the history of the German army, in the opinion of General Ludendorff – confirmed the dreams of some far-sighted officers, especially Fuller, that the tank could not only effect a fundamental change in the means of fighting battles, but transform the very nature of war itself.

Before 1914 a number of perceptive but gloomy prognostications had come from the pen of a Polish banker, I.S. Bloch. He had claimed that the increased industrialisation of war would result in the mobilisation of entire populations; warfare could only degenerate into a great siege, with massive trench systems, battles of attrition, famine and revolution. Bloch's ideas were ignored by the military, but after 1918 Fuller argued with increasing confidence that Bloch's reasoning, though valid, could now be modified and perhaps ultimately overturned. He believed that the Industrial Revolution was entering a new phase in which the internal combustion engine would dominate and thus restore mobility to the battlefield. The utility of the decisive battle in war would be restored.

The tank is a direct descendant of the war chariots of the Ancient Egyptians, Assyrians and Britons

A visionary rather than a technocrat, Fuller was the most complete intellect produced by the British army

This development would also require a change in the relationship between firepower and mobility. It was the immobility of the First World War that had contributed so signally to its lack of decisiveness. Commanders had relied excessively on firepower, which was so immense that it destroyed communications over the territories through which armies intended to move. At Passchendaele alone, 4,283,550 shells were fired in the preliminary bombardment.

In a remarkable document written in the spring and early summer of 1918, known as 'Plan 1919', Fuller laid down the fundamental axioms of armoured warfare as it developed between the World Wars. He was to develop these views in a brilliant series of books and articles published in the early 1920s and, though some were discarded, they remained, as they still remain, a basic point of departure. 'Plan 1919' was based on the expectation of the deployment of a new kind of tank, the Medium D, which, with a speed of 20 mph, was a considerable advance on earlier models fielded at Cambrai and Amiens, the Marks IV and V, whose average speed was 2-5 mph. Its main thrust was that the tank accentuated mobility. This meant that armies could achieve more in a shorter period of time. As the Allies could move whereas the enemy could not, the enemy's strength could be avoided in battle and his weaknesses could be exploited. The most vulnerable point of any army was its rear; here lay its command centres. By striking at these vitals, swift moving armoured forces could destroy the command functions of the German army and reduce it to a demoralised panic-stricken mob. An attack on the military organisation of the enemy rather than his main body now became a feasible proposition and could be achieved by technological means. As Socrates once observed, 'a disorderly mob is no more an army than a heap of building material is a house'.

The grand sweep of 'Plan 1919', its prophetic insight and skilful presentation of a patchy case (after all, the Medium D had yet to be built), confirmed Fuller as the leading exponent of the tank. He was to receive a number of awards and decorations from foreign armies in the years ahead. Fuller was an unusual figure, rather unprepossessing in appearance: bald, short but with penetrating eyes. He always remained calm and never shouted; what men feared was not his wrath but a savage wit, which was usually directed toward his superiors. He was a compulsive writer and always scribbling something, whether it be tactical manuals, an article for publication, or some mystic reflections on the meaning of life. A visionary rather than

a technocrat, a romantic idealist rather than an architect of neat blueprints, Fuller was the most complete intellect produced by the British army. Though personally aloof and solitary, he was a towering intellectual who stimulated a school of thought. Liddell Hart did not exaggerate when he claimed that Fuller 'was the first who ever made the heads of Continental armies look to England for professional guidance'.

In the 1920s Fuller and his followers were forced to rely on the performance of the tank between 1917 and 1918 for evidence of its potential. This was a shaky foundation upon which to rest ambitious theories. In Fuller's opinion, the Battle of Amiens was strategically the Waterloo of the Great War, 'the rest was minor tactics'. Victory in 1918 was, he argued in *Tanks in the Great War* (1920), mainly due to the tank. Such a claim is to some extent justified, but it downplays the contribution of other arms. The failure of the massive bombardments before the Somme and Third Ypres aroused the scorn not only of Fuller but another convert to the tank's cause, Captain B.H. Liddell Hart.

Artillery and the tank

Both of these military writers downplayed the importance of artillery in future war. The bombardment before Passchendaele had cost £22 million; Cambrai, Fuller remarked sarcastically, had been achieved at the expense of 'a few gallons of petrol'. But they overlooked the contribution made by the artillery bombardment to the victory at Cambrai. Moreover, armoured vehicles in 1918 lacked the endurance to win the victory by themselves. At the Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918, for instance, 414 tanks moved into action. The following day only 145 were available and that number had fallen to 85 by 10 August. The following day, only 38 were operational and of those, wrote C. and A. Williams-Ellis in *The Tank Corps* (1919), 'there was not one that did not badly need overhauling. The crews were completely exhausted'.

Yet despite the weaknesses of the early tanks, Fuller and his followers – who soon included not only Liddell Hart but Major Frederick 'Tim' Pile, Captain Giffard Martel and Major Percy Hobart, among others – all progressed to the senior ranks of the army. These soldiers sought to determine 'the shape of things to come' in war by gauging the impact of new weapons technology on the battlefield. They sought above all to establish methods for the future and were confident that accurate prediction about future war was possible. Despite some gloomy asides, the prophets of mechanisation were optimistic, at least initially. They refused to be persuaded by the

pessimistic climate of opinion that prevailed after 1918. As I.F. Clarke comments:

The slaughter of the trenches, the fall of ancient monarchies, the establishment of a powerful communist state, the March on Rome, the Slump, the rise of the Nazis – these were changes of such magnitude and raised such serious questions about coming things that they shattered the pre-war expectation of an uncomplicated passage from present to future.

The increased technological sophistication of weapons, with its promise of even greater death and destruction brought by aircraft and gas, lent weight to the view that mankind was heading towards a cataclysm. Christopher Isherwood's 1946 novella, *Prater Violet*, captures this sense of foreboding. Set in 1933, it dwells on violent and sudden attacks on Europe's great cities 'by thousands of planes, dropping bombs filled with deadly bacilli'. Isherwood shuddered at the thought of war's outbreak, which 'like the moment of death, crossed my perspective of the future like a wall: it marked the instant total end of my imagined world'.

It was precisely a reaction against this fatalistic dread of inevitable cycles of slaughter and destruction – and especially that of 1914-18 – that inspired the armoured enthusiasts to proselytise their ideas. Fuller in *The Reformation of War* (1923) and Liddell Hart in *Paris, or the Future of War* (1925), argued that opportunities were now present to reduce the destructive scope of war. This could be achieved by exploiting technological change rather than by resisting it. It is a striking feature of criticisms of the arms race that technological improvement is represented as an immensely destructive tool which threatens to unleash forces beyond man's control. Thus, mankind will eventually destroy itself. Such predictions were commonplace in the 20th century, in works such as Edward Shanks' *People of Ruin* (1920). The soldier-prophets of future armoured warfare considered this a gross over-simplification that pandered to sensationalism. In *On Future Warfare* (1928), Fuller contended that the tank offered a chance to reverse this destructive spiral:

It will not abolish war, but it will refine its grossness. It will once again make the offensive stronger than the defensive, it will reinstate war as an art ... If wars are to continue, seeing what the last war has to teach us, surely it is wiser to fight behind armour than in woollen jackets.

Another striking feature of predictive war

literature, is that it tended to ignore ground operations and concentrated instead on the aerial and chemical threat. This pattern had been set by H.G. Wells in his series of novels, *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899) and *The War in the Air* (1908). Wells focused on the global scope of aerial power. It was a device that could influence the density of the entire world. Tanks were less glamorous, merely tactical devices. In the 1920s, Fuller and Liddell Hart tried to reverse this view and argued that the potential of the tank was so great that it would do nothing less than revolutionise the art of war.

New age of warfare

The tank would inaugurate a new age of machine warfare. 'The whole evolution of machine tools', wrote Fuller, 'is that of the elimination of the workman and the replacement of muscular energy by steam, electricity, or some other form of power.' And so it would be in war. As weapon-power would be concentrated increasingly on capital intensive, mobile and protected platforms, so fighting power would be invested in machines rather than masses of men. Large conscript armies would become a liability because of their immobile bulk, slow communications and long supply lines.

Unprotected infantry would disappear and be replaced by a lighter, more mobile kind of foot soldier. The tank pioneers differed over the degree of change affecting the infantry: Martel thought it might survive; Fuller that it would ultimately be abolished; Liddell Hart's views were somewhere in-between. Nevertheless they all agreed that the introduction of the tank would result in a drastic reduction in the size of armies.

If armies became smaller they would become easier to command. The art of generalship would again come into its own. Increasingly, the armoured pioneers poured scorn on the generalship of the First World War. This process of increasing disillusion can be traced in Liddell Hart's two books, *Reputations* (1930) and *Through the Fog of War* (1938). Fuller described the armies of the Great War as 'pot bellied and pea brained' and Douglas Haig as a 'Stone Age general', judgments hardly likely to make friends in high places. The past inspiration for their vision of future generalship sprang from antiquity and the knights of medieval times. (Fuller dedicated *Tanks in the Great War* to the 'modern knights in armour'.) The ideal of the warrior king, Alexander the Great, was immensely attractive. Both Percy Hobart and Heinz Guderian, the German pioneer of mechanisation, believed that armoured warfare would usher in the epoch of a 'new Alexander', while Fuller had studied his

In the future, fighting power would be invested in machines rather than masses of men

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campaigns intensively since 1917. Personal command would be revived. 'In mechanised warfare', agreed General Wavell, who was otherwise sceptical about many of the claims made for the tank, 'we may again see the general leading his troops almost in the front of the fighting, or possibly reconnoitring and commanding from the air.' Here, Cambrai furnished an unimpeachable model.

The revival in the art of command was the product of a restoration of mobility. The most revolutionary aspect of the tank was that it could cross country. It was a mobile fortress that defied the machine gun, 'in every respect the "lands ship" it was first called', averred Fuller. Thus, equipped with caterpillar tracks, tanks could move over country and strike at objectives in a far shorter period of time than was possible with road-bound forces. 'In the mechanical wars of the future', wrote Fuller, who developed this theme more fully than other writers, 'we must ... recognise the fact that the earth is a solid sea as easily traversible in all directions by a tractor as a sheet of ice is by a skater; the battle in these wars will more and more approximate to naval actions'. Like ships at sea, armoured 'fleets' would carry their supplies with them and reduce dependence on lines of communication. Battles would revolve around areas and not long entrenched lines, as in the First World War.

Fleets of tanks

The analogy between armoured warfare and naval actions was perhaps the most controversial aspect of these predictions. Nonetheless, it was central to their vision of war. The armoured pioneers envisaged the 'fleet' moving forward under the eye of the commanding general. Battles would become more decisive, perhaps lasting no longer than a day. The idea that tank warfare approximated to naval warfare originated with Martel, who first used it in a paper called 'A Tank Army' in 1916. It was extended by Fuller and Liddell Hart and became a central factor in their thesis that technological change could guarantee such an advance to one side that its enemy could be annihilated without the loss of a single casualty. The Battle of Coronel in 1914, fought off the coast of Chile, which saw the German Imperial Navy defeat the Royal Navy, served as a striking example.

This was a radical vision of the future and excited a great deal of criticism. Though the battles in North Africa and some of the actions on the rolling steppes of Soviet Russia in 1941, confirmed the view that armoured warfare could take the form of naval engagements, the hopes entertained for the naval analogy have not been completely realised. This was due to the

simple fact that, as some conservative critics perceived, mechanisation did not reduce the size of armies. Fuller and Liddell Hart claimed that the massive expense of mechanisation would prevent the development of mechanised armies on a great scale. This underestimated the industrial capacity of the world's powers. It also ignored the important point that technology is a function of numbers, not of quality. Therefore their argument that future wars would exalt quality and not quantity and that they would be shorter and more decisive was based on a fallacy. This error undercut another feature of their writing that had been anticipated by H.G. Wells. Fuller and Liddell Hart believed that future armies would consist of highly trained and proficient engineers, professional soldiers who could think for themselves. A professional spirit between 'fellow soldiers' would develop in war that would stimulate a return of chivalry and a rational desire to limit destruction.

But mechanisation demanded numbers on a scale even greater than in 1914-18: conscription returned and so did hordes of amateur soldiers. The hopes placed in the transformation of the ethical spirit of war, though true in parts, was generally ill-founded. A return to the 'limited wars' of the 18th century – unfortunately for the world – turned out to be a pipe dream.

The writings about the tank that appeared after the end of the First World War represent one of those bursts of activity inspired by the trauma of a great conflict. The armoured pioneers can be compared with that group of reformers, including Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Clausewitz, which came to the fore after Napoleon's humiliation of Prussia at Jena in 1806. The armoured enthusiasts probably built their ideas too hurriedly and optimistically on the technology available in the 1920s. The transformation of war following the introduction of the tank has been much less drastic than they expected. Still, they made a striking and original contribution to military thought. The highest compliment that can be paid to them is that the full implications of their ideas have yet to be fully worked out. **HT**

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How did an evocatively named village in Flanders become shorthand for a whole series of battles around the Belgian city of Ypres?

Gary Sheffield

Passchendaele: What's in a Name?

1917



Calvary of conflict: Australian soldiers pass through Chateau Wood in the Ypres salient, 29 October 1917.
Wikimedia/Creative Commons

Around the time of its centenary, there was some discussion on social media about the correct way to describe the First World War battle which began on 31 July 1917. The government, the BBC and, as far as I can tell, the rest of the media in the UK has opted for ‘Passchendaele’. There is a school of thought that says it should be ‘The Third Battle of Ypres’. Which is correct? Does it matter?

In the aftermath of the First World War, the report of the Battle Nomenclature Committee used the term ‘The Battles [plural] of Ypres, 1917: 31 July to 10 November’. It divided the fighting into eight phases, of which only the last two mention Passchendaele. This is not surprising, as the small village of that name and the ridge upon which it sits only featured in the last stages of

the offensive, in October and November 1917. Actually, there were at least five distinct major bouts of fighting in the Ypres area during the First World War, which quickly became known as ‘battles’. The First Battle of Ypres, or ‘First Ypres’ was fought in October–November 1914, while Second Ypres raged from April to May 1915. What amounted to Fourth Ypres is known as the Battle of the Lys (9–29 April 1918) and Fifth Ypres is officially ‘The Final Advance in Flanders’ (28 September–19 October 1918). Like Third Ypres, all are sub-divided; thus the second act of First Ypres was called ‘The Battle of Gheluvelt’.

Although useful for constructing a narrative, the official, unwieldy names did not catch on. Today, only military historians use them. Pithier terms, like ‘Second Ypres’, continued to be used but, in the case of the 1917 fighting, in a classic example of



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synecdoche, a part came to stand for the whole. Passchendaele became synonymous with the Third Battle of Ypres. In part this is probably because the last phase of the offensive became notorious because of the appalling conditions, but also because the way the village was pronounced in English – ‘Passion Dale’ – had Christian undertones, with connotations of sacrifice. This fitted in neatly with what has been described as the ‘secular religion’ of remembrance that emerged at the end of the war. It is but a short step from Passion Dale to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey; the Cenotaph, which literally means an empty tomb; and the reverence that accompanied the annual ritual of the two-minutes silence on Armistice Day, held every 11 November.

Thus the use of ‘Passchendaele’ to describe the fighting that took place near Ypres in the second half of 1917 has venerable pedigree. Why, then, query its use for the current commemorations? In general, there are no problems with Passchendaele being used as shorthand for the entire Third Battle of Ypres. Indeed, I have used the name in this sense in my own writings. As we have seen, the ‘Third Battle of Ypres’ is not actually the official name for the fighting, any more than Passchendaele is; but it is more accurate, as it covers a much broader swathe of actions. Perhaps this is a minority

view, but it is important that official commemorations should be characterised by accuracy, given that the subject is encrusted with myths, half-truths and outright falsifications.

Passchendaele is loaded with emotional and historical baggage, but soldiers who went into action on 31 July 1917 had conceivably never heard of the place and died without being any the wiser. Moreover, the three battles in the middle of the offensive – Menin Road (20-25 September), Polygon Wood (26 September-3 October) and Broodseinde (4 October) – were all highly successful, if bloody, for the Allies and were fought in conditions that were very different from the muddy ‘Passchendaele’ of folk memory. And the sonorous word ‘Passchendaele’ hides a lively debate among historians as to the origins, conduct and consequences of the battle that shows no sign of diminishing. The mass media has had little or no coverage of this debate.

The lasting legacy of the centenary commemorations should be about education. The use of a different term for a familiar battle, if only in parentheses – ‘Passchendaele (Third Ypres)’ – would have opened up opportunities for learning, but sadly, that chance was missed. Dare we hope that, as we commemorate the end of the First World War, the opportunity for education will be taken? 

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On 24 October 1917, the Central Powers launched a massive offensive at Italy's north-eastern border. The resulting battle – popularly known as Caporetto – is the greatest defeat in Italian military history.
Vanda Wilcox

The Catastrophe at Caporetto

1917



A nation vanquished: Italian troops huddle together on the Italian-Austrian border, Autumn 1917.
 Österreichische
 Nationalbibliothek

When Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary on 23 May 1915, it did so fuelled by optimistic visions of territorial conquest.

It hoped to seize the largely Italian-speaking regions around Trento and Trieste at the country's north-east border. Nationalist rhetoric held that acquisition of these areas – along with parts of Dalmatia – would complete the process of unification which had taken place in the second half of the 19th century. 'Italians want a greater Italy, by conquest not by purchase, not shamefully but through blood and glory', proclaimed the firebrand poet Gabriele D'Annunzio.

By late 1917, however, fatigue had set in even among the war's supporters. Little apparent progress had been made on any front, casualties were high and the country's economy was suffering badly. Soldiers in the Italian army hoped that the winter of 1917 would offer some respite. It did not. As rumours of an imminent Austro-Hungarian attack circulated, the Italian army sought to reinforce the mountainous north-eastern battle lines around the town of Caporetto (now Kobarid in Slovenia). The town was positioned on the western side of the River Isonzo, which had formed part of the boundary between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the war.

By October 1917, the frontlines ran some six or seven miles east of the river, along the heights of mounts Ursig, Nero and Rosso. Caporetto had been selected by the Central Powers as the target for a major offensive because of the weakness of the Italian defence there.

When the expected offensive was launched on 24 October, the resulting battle lasted over a month and was a disaster tantamount to a national trauma. We can witness its opening stage through the eyes of Colonel Francesco Pisani who, as acting general of the Foggia Brigade, found himself and his division part of the Italian drive for reinforcement when he was ordered to Caporetto on 23 October 1917. His brigade had been involved in heavy fighting during the summer, in the successful conquest of the Bainsizza plateau, and was now in a state of disarray. He hoped Caporetto would be a quiet posting. The units under his command were struggling with large numbers of green, poorly trained soldiers. Pisani led his men towards divisional headquarters at Caporetto overnight through torrential rain and thick fog. They had barely reached the front line in the early hours of 24 October when an intense enemy bombardment began along the entire north-eastern line. At dawn, though Pisani and his men did not know it, nine Austro-Hungarian and six German



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divisions under Otto von Below had launched a major offensive. Germany had agreed to support its ally in what was hoped would be a decisive attack on Italy before winter made campaigning impossible. Domestic tensions in Austria-Hungary, caused by the growing desire for autonomy among the empire's many nationalities, made it imperative to seek victory as quickly as possible. The Central Powers' plan was to smash through the Italian lines, advancing through the valleys to isolate and encircle the Italian defenders who were holding the high ground, before pushing on westward towards the rivers and plains of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia. The Foggia Brigade were advancing directly towards the focal point of this attack.

Road of retreat

As the morning wore on, orders arrived from divisional headquarters redirecting most of the Foggia Brigade's battalions to other nearby destinations where they would reinforce other units struggling under the Central Powers' assault. As the remaining members of the brigade moved towards Caporetto, they began to encounter large numbers of troops retreating down the same narrow mountain road that they were ascending, bringing with them terrible stories about the fighting ahead. After reaching divisional HQ at Caporetto, Pisani and his men were sent to defend the vital Eiffel Bridge. This was one of the few crossings over the fast-flowing Isonzo, which lay in a deep gorge. If the bridge were lost, several Italian divisions on the east bank of the river and on the mountain slopes above it would be entirely cut off. As German units infiltrated the area, encircling the high peaks of Mount Nero and Rosso up ahead, large numbers of Italian troops were seeking to retreat to the relative safety of the west bank and of Caporetto itself. Without the Eiffel Bridge, this evacuation would be impossible.

The divisional commander had ordered a general retreat and abandoned control of the town to the Foggia Brigade. Pisani later described his task in his official post-battle debriefing:

There was total confusion, the road was almost entirely blocked by a mass of troops, carts, horses, trucks, artillery pieces, mules, and supplies. Officers' cars were unable to make any headway, and it was very hard to execute or even transmit any orders. At this point, the various components of the Brigade became separated, in the chaos, the freezing fog and the rain. We also tried to organise transport for the wounded, many of who had been abandoned in the road. We could hear them groaning through the fog, and it was imperative to move them since their presence was demoralising the defenders of the bridge.

By mid-afternoon, Italian army headquarters in Udine, 25 miles away, was still in complete ignorance of the scale of events. Not until 10pm would Chief of General Staff Luigi Cadorna learn the true dimensions of what the Italian troops were suffering at the country's north-eastern boundary. The situation was a catalogue of woe: indecisive senior commanders, munitions shortages, information blackouts, missing officers and communication breakdowns all worked against a few desperately stretched individuals doing their best to contain the German assault under driving rain and freezing fog.

At around 3pm on 24 October, Italian engineers blew up the Eiffel Bridge that the Foggia Brigade was supposed to be defending. At least two Italian divisions were trapped on the eastern side of the river, their retreat cut off. Pisani described the scene:

There was no immediate command in the town of Caporetto itself. The order to destroy the bridge must have been given by a senior officer – but when? Perhaps it had been issued in an uncertain and unclear fashion. I concluded that the decision must have been based on the supposition that the enemy was still on the east bank of the Isonzo – but this was not at all the case, and given that the Germans had already crossed the river [further to the south], the destruction of the bridge served no useful purpose.

I was ordering the rearrangement of our remaining machine gun posts for a better defence of the position, at about 17.00, and my few staff and I were making our way from one post to another when we suddenly found ourselves confronted by a large group of German soldiers. We had no idea the enemy had approached so close. Concealing themselves in one of the half-ruined buildings along the road, they were able to ambush and encircle us easily. Threatening us with rifles and bayonets, the enemy disarmed us so quickly that there was barely time to even think.

This was the end of Pisani's war; captured with his staff, he was despatched to a prisoner of war camp at Karlsruhe in Germany. Leaderless and isolated, the Foggia Brigade stood little chance. Most of the patrols that Pisani had sent out in search of information had already been surrounded in the fog. By the end of the day 3,577 of its men had been taken prisoner, while the Central Powers had advanced around 14 miles, seizing bridges, and were established on the west bank of the Isonzo. Around 20,000 Italians were captured that day and, by the time the battle ended a month later, more than 280,000 had been taken by the enemy, almost half

By the time the battle ended, more than 280,000 Italians had been captured by the enemy

More than six million tons of fish and meat were among the Italian supplies captured by the Central Powers

of all those captured during the war.

The opening phase of the battle, from 24 October to 3 November, was the most damaging to Italy. The chaotic scenes and mass captures that Pisani witnessed were repeated up and down the peaks and valleys of the north-eastern front. As enormous numbers of troops began to retreat, often without munitions and officers, panic set in and a disorderly mass flight began. By 27 October, the Supreme Command was no longer confident that even the 'extreme' line of defence, nearly 45 miles away on the River Tagliamento, would be able to hold. This was where Italy's last prepared defensive positions were located, but Chief of General Staff Cadorna began to contemplate a further withdrawal to the River Piave. The next day, he and his staff abandoned their headquarters at Udine and joined the retreat. The first enemy troops reached Udine at around 3pm; it would soon become the new Austro-Hungarian HQ. The retreating Italians reached the Tagliamento on 31 October. By 3 November the enemy, too, had reached this river, as Italian troops fell back towards the Piave, around 100 miles behind the original front.

In the first five days of the battle, huge numbers of Italians were captured but as the retreat continued losses were increasingly caused by desertion. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers fled back into Italy from the positions they had conquered in the first two and a half years of the war. Luigi Albertini, editor of the daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, visited the front on 30 October 1917. 'For the most part, the troops did not fight. When sent forward they discarded their weapons and returned unarmed', he reported. Many men claimed that they had been told that the war was over, so it was not only permissible but sensible to head home. In total 300,000 men were 'scattered' during the battle. It was impossible to say whether they had voluntarily absconded or simply got lost in the chaos of the retreat.

The speed and extent of the Austro-German offensive had taken the Italian forces by surprise, but it was equally unexpected to the attackers themselves. As a result, they struggled to capitalise on their advance. Bringing up fresh troops and keeping their artillery moving forward proved difficult owing to fleeing civilians, broken bridges and disordered roads, which had also delayed the Italian retreat. This gave the Italians time to regroup. In the second phase of the battle, beginning once the Italians had reached the Tagliamento on 3 November, they began to recover their fighting capacity as the demoralised forces were replaced by more solid and resilient troops drawn from the reserves and from the

Alpine front in the north, which had been untouched by the Central Powers' attack. The retreat was controlled and disciplined. Gradually the line stabilised, taking up a new defensive position on the Piave on 9 November. The new front, which was maintained until October 1918, was hundreds of kilometres shorter than the original and thus more easily manned. The terrain, too, was more hospitable, allowing for more effective lines of communication.

The third and final phase of the battle started on 12 November and lasted for six days. The Austro-German offensive was renewed, with a final push to break through Italian lines towards Venice. British intelligence reported that 'Germany and Austria count on the collapse of Italy during the coming winter'. But the push was unsuccessful: the Piave line held, with support from French and British forces, who took over their own sections on 21 November. The battle finally ended on 26 November as the new front stabilised. The front line would remain in this position until the final weeks of the war.

Death, sickness, deprivation

By the battle's conclusion more than 5,000 square miles of Italian territory was in enemy hands. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of prisoners and dispersed soldiers, the Italian army also lost 40,000 soldiers who were either killed or wounded during the battle. German and Austro-Hungarian casualties numbered 50,000. Over one million civilian refugees had been forced to flee from the advancing Austro-German troops; many more remained trapped in occupied territory, suffering death, sickness and deprivation under Habsburg military rule.

Italy's losses were not limited to land and people. The young Lieutenant Erwin Rommel, fighting south of Caporetto with the Württemberg Mountain battalion, recollected with pleasure the 'chocolate, eggs, preserves, grapes and white bread' which his troops seized and which made their morale 'wonderful!' Over 10 million ration sets and more than six million tins of fish or meat were among the Italian supplies captured by the advancing forces of the Central Powers, along with 1,309 tonnes of dried pasta, 645 tonnes of cheese and 253 tonnes of coffee. Of even more interest to Rommel's men, perhaps, was their share of the captured wine (five million litres) and cognac (1,600 litres). The Italians also lost significant stores of clothing and bedding: 966,000 coats and waterproofs, 69,000 hats, 320,000 pairs of boots and 1.5 million pairs of pants and socks along with 295,000 sheets and blankets.

Engineers lost more than 17,000 tonnes of

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essential material, while thousands of trucks and tens of thousands of horses and mules – with their fodder – were abandoned to the enemy. Some 3,000 artillery pieces and a similar number of machine guns were lost, which Italy could ill afford given its shortages of these essential weapons. Several field hospitals with all their beds, iodine and medicines were taken. The loss of significant amounts of coal meant that Italy became dependent on imports from its allies. The consequences of the defeat were dramatic and a great deal of national soul-searching followed with immediate changes at the highest levels. The prime minister, Paolo Boselli, was replaced by the experienced liberal lawyer Vittorio Orlando. Cadorna was forced out. His high-handed, inflexible leadership was unpopular with civilian politicians and his military abilities had been questioned even before the catastrophic events of Caporetto. Orlando did not want to work with him and nor did the Allies, whose representatives arrived in Italy at the end of October. The allies met at Rapallo, near Genoa, on 5 November, with the battle still raging. They agreed to support Italy and created the Supreme War Council (SWC), a kind of allied general staff. This offered an ideal way to remove Cadorna, who was shifted ‘upwards’ into the SWC, and replaced as Chief of the General Staff by Armando Diaz, a younger, more dynamic and tactful general. Diaz would transform the army’s training, formation-level tactics, morale, command structures, leave policies and more. Where Cadorna had stifled initiative and confidence – sacking and demoting commanders at the drop of a hat – Diaz was more open to suggestions and to delegation.

Allocating blame


Cadorna’s dismissal suggested that he was responsible for the defeat, but allocation of blame caused a political row, beginning within 48 hours of the initial attack. Concerns about disaffection and defeatism among the troops had been growing. The authorities feared that ‘subversive’ socialist propaganda was destroying the army’s fighting spirit. Cadorna was quick to advance this interpretation. On 28 October he had declared that ‘the inadequate resistance of units of the Second Army, cowardly retreating without fighting or ignominiously surrendering to the enemy, has permitted the Austro-German forces to break our left wing on the Julian front’. This was damaging to the Italian army’s image, both nationally and internationally. The Italian ambassador to London recalled that even George V made disparaging comments about the Italian troops’ performance. Attributing blame for defeat on the soldiers was oddly endorsed by

elements of both the right – who saw it as proof of socialist-inspired cowardice and pacifism – and the left, who interpreted it as a ‘military strike’, which demonstrated that the masses had turned against the war.

In truth, it is unfair to claim that the frontline units who faced the Austro-German assault on 24 October or the days after failed to fight. The Foggia Brigade’s experience of conflicting orders, inadequate supplies and unsuitable defensive positioning was representative of the whole. Many reports suggest that the men fought bravely with determination for as long as they had officers and munitions. Once these two essentials were lost it was hard to keep a positive outlook, as a battalion commander from the 224th infantry regiment recalled:

On the night of 23 October my men were in good spirits but by the end of the next day they were less confident. By the end of 25 October, the unit had become mixed with others, the men had not slept for 24 hours and had no more munitions. At this stage they became ‘morally prisoners’ and in a state of depression began to accept the prospect of capture and imprisonment.

Under these circumstances large groups of men could be captured by small enemy detachments. The Italian army’s defence strategy was also responsible for the defeat. Cadorna had decided to hold the mountainous peaks at all costs while neglecting the valleys below; the Germans simply advanced with speed through these valleys, encircling the defenders on the peaks. Caporetto was a devastating military defeat, but it was one with clearly identifiable strategic, operational and tactical causes.

The battle almost immediately assumed the name of the town where the decisive breakthrough had been made and soon became an emblem of Italian military failure. For decades it was associated with anti-war sentiment, desertion and cowardice. The novelist Carlo Emilio Gadda, who was trapped and captured after the premature destruction of the Eiffel Bridge, described his experience as one of ‘spiritual horrors’. In a sense, the whole country reacted this way. Pisani wrote that ‘the sacrifice of blood made by the regiments could not hope to dam up the invading tide’; that tide swept away two and a half years worth of gains, made at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives. Italy’s victory in the First World War came in the battle of Vittorio Veneto, symbolically (if coincidentally) launched on 24 October 1918. Yet the scars left by Caporetto were hard to heal. The shadows of those foggy, chaotic days in the mountains loomed large into the postwar years. 

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A resounding British victory in 1918
convinced Germany's military commanders
that they had lost the First World War.
John Terraine

The Battle of Amiens

1918



Path to victory: allied soldiers pass through the village of Hourges during the Battle of Amiens, August 1918.
Alamy

At one side of the half-finished, pale grey, concrete railway station at Amiens, a wide and seedy road runs past the barracks, past rows of shabby houses and cafes, a Renaissance church, petrol pumps and poky shops, to the outskirts of the town, where the cobbles end, the road forks, and a sign reads 'St. Quentin'. From this point the Roman Road springs 70 kilometres in a straight line across country to that town.

In 1918 the axis of the British advance that persuaded Germany's warlords they had lost the First World War lay along this road. You can draw it with a ruler on a map. At first it runs parallel to the marshy, tree-lined valley of the River Somme about a mile away; then the Somme begins its looping north-eastern course, while the road continues due east, past the dense, bright-green saplings of the Bois l'Abbé to Villers Bretonneux.

'Abbé Wood' and Villers Bretonneux were the furthest points reached in the central German offensive which began on 21 March 1918. The object of this massive attack was to split the British and French armies apart at their junction in front of Amiens, forcing the British to fall back northward to cover the Channel ports and the French to wheel southward to cover Paris.

Although it achieved the destruction of

the British Fifth Army as a by-product, the German army never succeeded in this objective. Its best opportunity came during the first few days of its furious 40-mile advance, when the British and French commanders-in-chief were each struggling with their separate and abundant problems. It was Field-Marshal Haig who saw the paramount danger first; it was on his initiative that General Foch was appointed to the Allied Supreme Command on 26 March. From that moment it was certain that German strategy would be countered, but there remained the possibility that tactical advantages would give them the victory they sought.

In the fluid conditions of the Somme front, with the Allies intermixed and the British units dangerously weak and tired, German chances were still good. They made their attempt on 24 April; the capture of Villers Bretonneux broke through the last defences of Amiens and, as the Germans poured over the ridge that gave them a view into the city and swarmed into the covered approaches provided by the Bois l'Abbé, it seemed that at last this vital hinge would break.

But two relatively fresh Australian brigades arrived in the nick of time and counter-attacked with ferocity. The third anniversary of Anzac Day, 25 April, saw the Australians back in possession of the wood



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It was always a question whether British Provost Marshals or the enemy disliked the Australians most

and Villers Bretonneux. For a short time, an uneasy, unstable quiet descended on this sector.

Hindsight is a dangerous thing. At a distance the events of 1918 have an evident rhythm, a logical sequence that was by no means perceptible at the time to the men whose duty was to shape them. It is easy for us to say: 'The Germans attacked; they failed. The Allies attacked; they won.' But within those bald statements lay a maze of contradictory signs. The two months that followed the securing of Amiens resemble a change in the weather at sea. On the surface the waves remained violent and dangerous, but the swell of the deeps was finding its equilibrium.

Flight from Paris

During this May and June the Germans swung their forces south against the French and once more reached the Marne. For a year the moral condition of the French army had been the most disturbing feature of the Allied position in the West. Once again the spectre was raised of a French collapse; once again there was a flight from Paris; government securities and archives were removed. But Clemenceau and his Government stayed, breathing defiance.

A second German attack made less headway than the first, yet there were still reserves enough for further blows, either against the French or against the British in Flanders. The Germans nowhere relinquished their posture of attack; contrary to their practice ever since 1914, they did not heavily fortify the ground they won. In front of Amiens they dug in lightly as though about to spring again. Even the most ardent optimists among the Allies were planning the campaigns of 1919; the Americans were talking of having 100 divisions in the field in that year. Meanwhile, the initiative was still firmly in German hands.

It was an interview pregnant beyond their knowledge that took place on 17 May between Field Marshal Haig and General Sir Henry Rawlinson, commander of the British Fourth Army in the Amiens sector, at the latter's headquarters. 'I told Rawlinson', Haig recorded in his diary, 'to begin studying in conjunction with General Debeney [commander of the French First Army] the question of an attack eastwards from Villers Bretonneux in combination with an attack from the French front South of Roye. I gave him details of the scheme.'

Almost three months were to elapse before this seemingly sanguine plan could be put into operation. They were three turbulent months during which the omens of the future became more clear. Already, before the last great German attack was delivered,

an essential preliminary to the plan concocted between Haig and Rawlinson was carried out. This was the Battle of Hamel, which serves as a convenient occasion for considering some individuals and a formation of singularly individual character.

First, let us consider General Rawlinson. This tall, jocular, genial, quick-witted man, whose private pleasure was to dabble – with more success than the word implies – in watercolours, belonged to a small group of regular officers who, in the happy days of parties, polo and peaceful distraction before the Boer War, had chosen to take their profession seriously. He had become a pupil and protégé both of Lord Roberts and of Kitchener. He was a close friend of Henry Wilson, who was the main architect of the military Entente, and responsible for the British War Plan of 1914. 'Rawly is a fox', said his contemporaries who had learnt to respect him at manoeuvres.

A 'humbug', Haig once unkindly called him, distrusting his association with Wilson, the most plausible talker that the British army has known. But Rawlinson, whatever else he may have been, was a man who learned from experience, and without doubt the worst experience that he had ever passed through was the murderous First Battle of the Somme in 1916, with its 415,000 British casualties. Rawlinson was prepared to go to great lengths not to have another Somme.

Australian advance

Into Rawlinson's orbit, in April 1918, had come the newly formed Australian Army Corps. Australia had five divisions in the field, as well as the Light Horse Division in Palestine, compared with Canada's four. But it was not until November 1917 that they were formed into a single Corps, like the troops of their sister-Dominion, and not until 8 August 1918, that they all fought together. The Australian Corps was a phenomenon. Gloomily, Haig recorded, in February 1918, before the great battles of the year began:

We have had to separate the Australians into Convalescent Camps of their own, because they were giving so much trouble when along with our men and put such revolutionary ideas into their heads.

A few days later, with even deeper disapprobation, he noted that there were nine per 1,000 Australians in the prisons of the British Expeditionary Force, as compared with 1.6 per 1,000 of other Commonwealth troops and one per 1,000 of those of the United Kingdom. It was always a question whether British Provost Marshals or the enemy disliked the Australians most. But their own commander, Sir John Monash,

If ever a battle was won before it began, it was the Battle of Amiens

looking back on an astounding sequence of Australian victories in 1918, observed:

Very much and very stupid comment has been made upon the discipline of the Australian soldier.

That was because the very conception and purpose of discipline have been misunderstood. It is, after all, only a means to an end – and that end is the power to secure coordinated action among a large number of individuals for the achievement of a definite purpose. It does not mean lip-service, nor obsequious homage to superiors, nor servile observance of forms and customs, nor a suppression of individuality. The Australian army is a proof that individualism is the best and not the worst foundation upon which to build up collective discipline. Rawlinson, at any rate, was delighted with the Australians and proud to have them in his army.

An enigma

There remains the man who commanded this boisterous, competent, successful force. If his Corps was a phenomenon, Sir John Monash was an enigma. An engineer in civil life, a Jew, a 'Saturday-afternoon soldier', he had little in common with even the most intelligent and flexible British generals. Nor had he the qualities that might be supposed essential for commanding the tough Australians: human warmth and a flair for leadership. These attributes belonged far more to his predecessor, Sir William Birdwood, who, although an Englishman, captured the affections of the Anzacs. Yet after the war it was said that, had it continued only a little longer, Monash might have been Commander-in-Chief of the whole B.E.F. What was his secret? Brainpower.

He was the most thoughtful, the most careful, the most scientific of all the British commanders in that war; indeed, it is hard to think of any foreign general who surpassed him in these qualities. It was a war in which the infantry of all armies became martyrs as much as soldiers; the symbol of the war is the suffering infantryman. Monash's views of the role of the infantry contain probably the fullest reason for his success and for the total confidence that his men placed in him:

I had formed the theory that the true role of the infantry was not to expend itself upon heroic physical effort, nor to wither away under merciless machine-gun fire, nor to impale itself on hostile bayonets, nor to tear itself to pieces in hostile entanglements ... but on the contrary to advance under the maximum possible protection of the maximum possible array of mechanical

resources, in the form of guns, machine-guns, tanks, mortars and aeroplanes; to advance with as little impediment as possible; to be relieved as far as possible of the obligation to fight their way forward; to march resolutely, regardless of the din and tumult of battle, to the appointed goal, and there to hold and defend the territory gained; and to gather in the form of prisoners, guns and stores, the fruits of victory.

This doctrine expresses the exact opposite of the common experience of the First World War. But Monash translated it into reality on 4 July 1918, with his attack at Hamel, which bit off an essential slice of the German salient between Villers Bretonneux and the Somme, giving the British elbow-room for future advances. The prisoners alone taken by the Australians were double their own number of casualties. Tanks and infantry for the first time co-operated absolutely and with absolute success. In 93 minutes of fighting, it became obvious that the Germans in front of Amiens were ripe for a crushing blow and that this was the manner in which it should be delivered.

British G.H.Q. were impressed enough to circulate the Australian battle plan as a staff brochure. It became the blueprint of the later 'great push'; it would still have repaid study in 1940. It was the enemy, however, who delivered the next attack – Ludendorff's final throw. It fell once again on the French at Rheims, but this time the German advance was small and firmly held.

Four days later, on 18 July, the French counter-attacked and the enemy had to give up his awkward salient at Soissons. Ludendorff could still speak of launching further offensives and mentioned Amiens as their objective. But the British Fourth Army was now well advanced with its preparations and Ludendorff was never able to give effect to these intentions, nor, indeed, to harbour them again.

If ever a battle was won before it began, it was this Battle of Amiens, on 8 August 1918. In the minds of Rawlinson, his staff and his corps commanders, one thing was quite clear: there must be a complete surprise of the enemy. For months before the First Battle of the Somme in 1916 the preparations for it had been entirely visible; roads, light railways, encampments, horse lines, dumps, battery positions were fully exposed to the enemy's view. The bombardment, lasting ten days, gave final warning.

The result was a massacre of the attackers: 60,000 British soldiers fell on the first day alone. There was to be no repetition of this. But in the rolling empty uplands of the Somme plateaux, almost devoid of cover, it was difficult to effect concealment.

The scene as the sun burst through was unmistakably one of victory

Yet it was done. Only the strictest and most essential minimum of officers were let into the secret of the battle. The troops were exhorted by every means to say nothing, even to each other, of anything they might see.

'Keep Your Mouth Shut' was the most frequent legend on signposts throughout the sector. No movement whatever was permitted in the daytime, nor any unusual activity. Some units were detailed to allow themselves to be seen marching away from the front. Aircraft patrolled incessantly to make sure that nothing untoward was being revealed.

Under the enemy's noses

By these means Rawlinson was able to assemble over 2,000 pieces of artillery, over 900 aircraft and 534 tanks, of which 414 were fighting vehicles, in the space of one month, under the enemy's noses, to support his infantry. He was able to bring in and conceal a cavalry corps of three divisions; the most glaring giveaway of all, if it had been observed. But his tour-de-force was the introduction, on his right flank, of an entirely fresh army corps—the Canadians.

It was a well-established fact that when either the Australians or the Canadians appeared in a sector trouble was brewing. This was particularly true of the Canadians because of their government's rigid insistence that their divisions should never be separated. It was, therefore, necessary not only to hide completely the presence of this corps, 100,000 strong, which would have to be in the frontline at zero hour, but also to hide the fact that it was no longer in the sector, far to the north, where the Germans would already have identified it.

A whole complex of deceptions, including the passing of a stream of bogus wireless signals suggesting an attack in that area and the deliberate display of a small Canadian rearguard, ensured that the enemy was taken completely by surprise. It is a shallow notion that the generals of the First World War were incompetent blunderers without imagination. In the Fourth Army, imagination worked overtime. Yet, without two devices that had been brought to an increasing pitch of efficiency during the previous 18 months this type of battle could scarcely have been fought. These were the calibration of guns, which made it possible for artillery to fire by mathematics, without having to expose itself by registering, and the tanks, which made long bombardments unnecessary.

The Fourth Army aligned itself for battle: the Canadians on the right between Villers Bretonneux and the Noyon road, next to the French First Army, which was to move forward 45 minutes after the launching of the

British attack; the Australians in the centre, between Villers Bretonneux and the Somme; the British III Corps between the Somme and the Ancre. The early morning mist, which had favoured the Germans on 21 March, switched sides with a vengeance.

On 8 August it was so dense in some parts of the front, particularly beside the marshes of the Somme, that visibility was down to ten yards. The British barrage was abrupt, stunning and exact. Close behind it, through the smoke and fog, rolled the tanks and the extended infantry; and, for once, after all the breakdowns, all the disappointments, all the Aisnes, Verduns, Sommes, Passchendaeles, there is little more to add. In just over six hours the Canadian Corps had advanced nearly eight miles and taken all its objectives except on the extreme right where the French were not abreast of them.

Objectives gained

The Australians had been successful everywhere except at the extremities of their flanks, where the Canadians and British fell behind. Only the British III Corps, much weaker than the other two and hampered in its preparations by an enemy spoiling attack two days earlier, had failed to gain its objectives. The French advance was leisurely but deep.

There were setbacks, certainly. When the mists cleared, dogged German gunners picked off tanks at close range on the bare skylines; machine-gunners fought with their usual obstinacy; the Chipilly spur, thrusting its steep, rugged promontory across the course of the Somme into the Australian left, became a serious menace when the British 58th Division failed to take it. But over the great part of these wide, rolling downs, the scene as the sun burst through was unmistakably one of victory.

Cavalry advanced in brigades; field artillery limbered up and dashed forward; mounted staff officers raced to and fro; prisoners streamed back; supports swarmed up; there was practically no German gunfire. Along the Roman Road, where the kilometres flick past the motorist today, armoured cars sped along, penetrating deep into the German positions, shooting up transport, capturing a corps staff at their midday meal. The cavalry captured a train.

By noon the Canadians had taken more than 5,000 prisoners and 161 guns at a cost of 3,500 to themselves; the Australians had taken nearly 8,000 prisoners and 173 guns and their losses were less than 3,000. The total German losses for the day, on their own estimate, were between 26,000 and 27,000. Their official account says:

John Terraine was lead screenwriter for the landmark 1960s BBC TV documentary *The Great War*.

As the sun set on the 8th August on the battlefield the greatest defeat which the German Army had suffered since the beginning of the war was an accomplished fact.

The Battle of Amiens continued for three more days. Every day the Allies advanced further, more prisoners were taken, more German divisions were ruined, but the rate of advance was never the same again. The spectacular triumph could not be repeated. Hindsight tells us that more might have been accomplished had the relatively unscathed assaulting forces pressed further on the first day, before the German supports arrived. Monash has recorded that he wished to go on and his Australians were certainly well able to do so.

Too cautious


Rawlinson, lacking the advantage of hindsight and knowing the capacity of the Germans for counter-attacks, such as that which had turned the victory of Cambrai into disaster, insisted on consolidating after every advance. For once, caution was wrong. But who, in the context of that war in which unfounded optimism killed so many men, can altogether blame him? When his army reached the hideous obstacle of the old Somme battle-zone, with its wasteland of old trenches and wire and shell-holes, Rawlinson insisted that the battle should be called off, in spite of the urgent representations of Foch. He even went so far as to ask Haig: 'Who commands the British army, you, or Foch?' Haig accepted Rawlinson's view and switched his next effort north to the Third Army Front, beginning his deliberate enlargement of the attack until every British Army was involved, while the French extended it southward, so that nowhere did the enemy have a chance to recover until the Armistice.

The day of destiny was 8 August. It was, wrote Ludendorff, 'the black day of the German army in the history of the war. This was the worst experience I had to go through.' For his soldiers, it was even worse. The moral collapse of the German army became evident. One reserve unit, going up, was greeted by shouts of 'What do you war-prolongers want? If the enemy were only on the Rhine – the war would then be over.'

Another was told: 'We thought that we had set the thing going, now you asses are corking up the hole again.' There would still be obstinate resistance from machine-gunners, artillery and corps d'elite, but the old fighting spirit of the German infantry, which had achieved so much and borne so much, was broken. On 9 August the kaiser attended a meeting of the higher army

leaders. Ludendorff offered to resign, but the offer was not accepted.

The kaiser, however, was moved to say: 'I see that we must strike a balance. We have nearly reached the limit of our powers of resistance. The war must be ended.' 'Thus', comments the British Official Historian, 'the collapse of Germany began not in the Navy, not in the Homeland, not in any of the sideshows, but on the Western Front in consequence of defeat in the field.'

The battle of 8 August was a triumph of the planning and method perfected by Monash and the Australian Corps; of the co-ordination and cunning of Rawlinson; of the valour and efficiency of the British artillery and tanks; and of the courage, initiative and dash of the infantry of the two Dominions, revelling in the war of movement that had come at last. 

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Considering John Terraine's article on the Allied victory at Amiens, one asks: why is this remarkable military achievement not as well known as the first day of the Somme?

Nick Lloyd

The Imperial Triumph of Amiens

1918



In advance: men of B Company of the British 29th Battalion rest before attempting to take Harbonnières.

Australian War Memorial/
Wikimedia/Creative Commons

For the historian John Terraine, who fought a long and lonely battle to rescue the reputation of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig – commonly caricatured as a ‘butcher and bungler’ – the Battle of Amiens was his vindication. In his classic article for *History Today*, written in 1958, Terraine revisited the scene of the infamous ‘black day’ of the German army on 8 August 1918. As Terraine reminds us, this battle was a far cry from the barren, bloody results of the first day on the Somme, 1 July 1916, when the British army suffered its worst day. According to Terraine, Amiens was a triumph of ‘planning and method ... of co-ordination and cunning; of the valour and efficiency of the British artillery and tanks; and of the courage, initiative and dash of the infantry’.

Much of what Terraine wrote still stands. Amiens was a decisive moment, kicking off Marshal Ferdinand Foch’s ‘series of movements’, which would end with the German government appealing for peace negotiations on 3 October (an essential prelude to the Armistice on 11 November). Amiens was a perfect demonstration of not only how effective British and Commonwealth forces had become by 1918 – developing an embryonic blitzkrieg – but also how the German army had no answer to a combined, all-arms approach to warfare.

Purists will be offended by Terraine’s failure to explain the role of the French army at Amiens (which extended the attack to the south), but more intriguing is the sidelining of Sir Arthur Currie’s Canadian Corps. Indeed, Terraine’s focus on generals Rawlinson and Monash (although not incorrect in itself) seems to miss how important the Canadians were to the battle; it would be true to say that they made the Battle of Amiens. Their four divisions in line, deployed in the centre along the Amiens–Roye Road, formed the spearhead of the assault. At the end of the day they had driven eight miles into the position of the German Second Army.

The learning curve

Notwithstanding these quibbles, Terraine’s article, with its focus on training and planning and the coordination of firepower and manoeuvre, prefigures much of the debates that would take place in the 1990s and beyond about the nature of change and development in the British Expeditionary Force (the ‘learning curve’). While the military effort of the ‘white dominions’ – Australia, New Zealand and Canada – has been widely praised (with Canadians being justifiably proud of their tag as the ‘shock army of the British Empire’), the humble British Tommy has often been



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left behind. Since Terraine wrote his article, however, much work has been done to rectify this imbalance.

In contrast to Terraine, who relied mainly on published, secondary sources, a generation of historians have mined the archival record and written detailed studies of many aspects of this story: anything from corps command to individual battles; the development of artillery tactics to logistics, as well as forensic examinations of individual formations, from battalions to divisions. This corpus of knowledge has helped to bring out the complexity of the 'learning curve', while helping historians to understand the variety of responses to the Western Front from across the army. It has also helped to move the focus away from Haig (and other senior commanders) onto how the army as a whole adapted to the series of challenges it faced between 1914 and 1918.

Nevertheless, Terraine's mission to move the conventional wisdom of the war on from 1 July 1916 is yet to be fulfilled. The explosion of interest in the centenary offers an opportunity to revisit this, but whether Amiens will ever become as widely recognised as the Somme remains to be seen. 

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What factors shaped national policies in the weeks preceding the Paris Peace Conference, when the failure of the victorious allies to agree on its aims resulted in a 'tragedy of disappointment'?

Alan Sharp

Dreamland of the Armistice

1918



Peacemakers: left to right, George Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George leaving the Palace of Versailles after signing the Peace Treaty, 28 June 1919.

Alamy

On the morning of 11 November 1918, Harold Nicolson, a young British diplomat, chanced to look from the Foreign Office towards Downing Street:

It was 10.55 am. Suddenly the front door opened. Mr Lloyd George, his white hair fluttering on the wind, appeared upon the front doorstep. He waved his arms outwards. I opened the window hurriedly. He was shouting the same sentence over and over again. I caught his words. 'At eleven o'clock this morning the war will be over.'

The end of the war had come suddenly and unexpectedly early. In March 1918 German forces on the Western Front, reinforced by men released by the defeat of Russia, nearly split the British and French armies. As late as June, the French government contemplated evacuating Paris, but when the tide turned it was inexorable and the Central Powers collapsed, accepting the Allies' terms – first Bulgaria on 29 September, then Turkey on 30 October and Austria-Hungary on 3 November. On 4 October Germany sent a telegram via Switzerland requesting that the US president, Woodrow Wilson, negotiate a settlement based on the 'Fourteen Points' speech that he had delivered to Congress on 8 January 1918.

The two months between the Armistice on 11 November and the official opening of the Paris Peace Conference on 18 January 1919, were characterised by Ernst Troeltsch, the German theologian, historian and sociologist, as the 'dreamland of the armistice period'. The expectation that republican Germany would immediately be forgiven the sins of Kaiser Wilhelm II was soon exposed as unrealistic, though the Germans still continued to hope that Wilson's policies would prevail over those of the vengeful European Allies.

It was, for the Germans, a time of fulfilment, expectation and hope, but also exhaustion, anxiety and despair. The leaders of the new German government of November 1918 under Karl Ebert found themselves torn between the desire to distance themselves from the militarism of the imperial era and the need to retain the conditions negotiated for the Armistice by the kaiser's last government. These, theoretically at least, provided some assurance that the eventual treaty would conform to Wilson's precepts. Reluctantly they opted for continuity, thus finding themselves the unwilling apologists for the previous régime; although it is unlikely that the victors would ever have cast them in a different role. Later, their belief in Wilson turned to despair; by June 1919, German cartoonists showed Wilson's



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‘genuine American paint’ running to transform the Fourteen Points into ‘Scorn’ and ‘Hate’.

French triumph

The visit to Lorraine and Alsace on 8 and 9 December 1918 by the French prime minister Georges Clemenceau and his bitter rival President Raymond Poincaré – the two in harmony for once – represented the triumphant fulfilment of the French policy of *revanche* for the loss of the two provinces in 1871. Unique among all the territorial revisions of the Treaty of Versailles, the official date for the return of Alsace-Lorraine was 11 November 1918, not 10 January 1920, the day on which the treaty was ratified and became operative. Whether Clemenceau could deliver the more ambitious French schemes – eagerly advanced by Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the supreme Allied commander, and Poincaré – to detach the Rhineland from Germany or to annex the Saarland was less certain.

For Lloyd George, victory represented an opportunity to turn his popular support into political capital. He was the leader of a coalition consisting of the Conservatives and his supporters in a Liberal party divided between them and those who preferred the former prime minister, Herbert Asquith. There was a compelling constitutional case for the General Election that Lloyd George and the Conservative leader, Andrew Bonar Law, immediately called; the current Parliament had been sitting since the election of December 1910. However, for both leaders there was also, crucially, the hope of electoral reward.

Early reports from the electoral agents encouraged Lloyd George to change his original manifesto, focused on domestic issues, to enthuse a much-expanded electorate angry and tired of war. The reforms in the Representation of the People Act of 1918 had added to the electoral register: women over 30, many men previously excluded for lack of property and, for this one election, servicemen aged between 18 and the normal qualifying age of 21. Of the 21 million voters, 13 million were new and their intentions were not easily predictable. David Lindsay, the Earl of Crawford and the first commissioner of works, summarised what happened in his diary for 28 December 1918:

The electoral process has been significant. Lloyd George's original campaign fell rather flat. He pulled himself together on realizing he was being left high and dry on the shore. He revised his programme, or rather enlarged it by adding items about indemnities, aliens, punishment of the kaiser, and pledges to end

conscription. Then he got on to the wave again, and with an advancing tide has been borne to victory.

The popular perception of the election was thus that the government undertook to extract the Allies' war costs by squeezing Germany 'as a lemon is squeezed, until the pips squeak' and to hang the kaiser. Lloyd George promised neither (despite his private belief that Wilhelm should be shot) but he did not repudiate Eric Geddes or George Barnes, the two ministers who respectively made the suggestions.

Resounding victory

Coalition candidates, endorsed in a joint letter from Bonar Law and Lloyd George, which was scathingly dismissed by Asquith as a 'coupon', achieved a resounding victory – but for whom? Bonar Law declared: 'He can be Prime Minister for life if he likes' but, by March 1919, Conservatives such as Walter Long took a different line: 'George thinks he won the election. Well, he didn't. It was the Tories that won the election, and he will soon begin to find that out.'

The following month more than 200 MPs sent a telegram to Paris demanding that Lloyd George fulfil his electoral pledges, present the full bill for war costs to Germany and extract payment. On that occasion, Lloyd George routed his critics, but it was a clear reminder that his hands were not free and that the British election would have important implications for the peace in crucial areas such as reparations.

For Wilson, the results of the mid-term Congressional elections in November 1918 were much less ambiguous and were ultimately calamitous for the settlement. His disastrous partisan appeal for the country to elect Democrats, rather than candidates of either party who supported his policies, backfired. He found himself with a Republican Congress, where his authority was further undermined by his failure to select a prominent Republican to be one of the five American peace plenipotentiaries in Paris. Subsequently, a year later, he could not persuade the Senate to ratify the treaty and endorse the League of Nations.

Some contemporaries and later historians believed that the peace conference should have immediately followed the signature of the Armistice, but this did not happen. Wilson wanted to give his annual 'State of the Union' address to Congress on 2 December before he departed for Europe, where he was determined to be America's main negotiator. Lloyd George was fighting an election and Clemenceau was inclined to await the outcome of the revolutionary developments in Germany that followed Wilhelm's

It was, for the Germans, a time of fulfilment, expectation and hope, but also exhaustion, anxiety and despair

abdication on 9 November. Then Christmas and the New Year intervened. Although each leader knew that their victory in war now needed to be translated into a satisfactory peace, it was difficult to readjust immediately to a new task after such an exhausting and draining conflict. In the inevitable relaxation of tension that followed, some key decision-makers fell ill during the virulent influenza epidemic. Many more people, the young in particular, died in this worldwide epidemic than the eight to ten million soldiers killed in the war.

Regime change

In response to the German approach to broker a peace deal based on his Fourteen Points, Wilson demanded the additional inclusion of the programme he had outlined in three further speeches – the ‘Four Principles’ (11 February 1918), the ‘Four Ends’ (4 July 1918) and the ‘Five Particulars’ (27 September 1918). He also insisted on regime change in Germany, where he would negotiate only with a democratic government. He waited until 8 October to tell his European friends about the German communication, but they already knew of it: their cryptographers had broken the Swiss codes. They were understandably angry. ‘Have you ever been asked by President Wilson whether you accept the Fourteen Points? I have never been asked,’ exploded Clemenceau. ‘I have not been asked either,’ replied Lloyd George. Their tempers cannot have been helped by their perception that they had little choice but to accept.

These exchanges established three key premises. First, by agreeing to make the treaty conform to Wilson’s ideas (many of which Lloyd George shared) the peacemakers set themselves both higher moral standards than any previous postwar gathering and the delicate task of reconciling the real world to the aspirations of a political statement that was a brilliant clarion call to liberal values but lacked the precision of a diplomatic document. For example, Wilson’s 13th point promised secure access to the Baltic for an independent Poland, made up of indisputably Polish populations. The definition of ‘indisputably Polish populations’ already offered massive scope for disagreement, but Wilson’s promises were contradictory – on the one hand, secure access to the Baltic and, on the other, national self-determination. Danzig, the obvious port, was equally obviously German; Poles were in a minority in the lands that would be needed to make a ‘corridor’ to Danzig. The extent to which the peacemakers could overcome such contradictions would be a crucial benchmark for their efforts, but the probability was that they had set

themselves an impossible task. The Germans may well have seen this as a good two-way bet – either Wilson would deliver or they could cry foul. Others, too, hoped to exploit the vagueness of the programme and to use Wilson’s obsession with establishing the League of Nations to their own advantage.

Intellectual inspiration

Second, they confirmed that Wilson enjoyed huge prestige, not only as the spokesman for the masses of ordinary people in every combatant country who needed to believe that a better world would emerge from the carnage, but also as the inspiration for intellectuals such as Harold Nicolson or John Maynard Keynes, the British economist, who believed that the leader of the US had both the vision and the means to deliver that outcome. As he crossed the Atlantic to Europe, where he would receive a messianic welcome, Wilson himself experienced grave doubts, fearing that the result of the conference would be a ‘tragedy of disappointment’. Later Nicolson, and especially Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), a devastating attack on the peace conference and all its works, turned the full fury of their scorn against the president for his shortcomings.

Third, despite the fears of Clemenceau and Lloyd George that the Germans would dupe Wilson, the military terms of the armistice were crippling, amounting to a German surrender. When the disappointed German delegates returned with the draft treaty in June 1919 they found that their country had been deprived of any realistic hope of resuming hostilities and had no option but to sign the treaty.

On 25 October Lloyd George urged his Cabinet to voice its objections to Wilson’s agenda; otherwise:

... the Germans would have a perfect right to assume that the Fourteen Points were the worst conditions that could be imposed upon them.

He had two particular issues: ‘Freedom of the Seas’ and reparations. A potentially disastrous Anglo-American dispute over what constituted legitimate interference with neutral shipping in wartime was averted when he compromised to the extent that he agreed the matter might be discussed at the conference (in fact it never was). More significant were Wilson’s intentions about potential demands on Germany for compensation. Wilson believed that Belgium was entitled to its war costs, in addition to any restoration payments, because the German invasion was illegal. Speaking of the

Many more people died in the worldwide influenza epidemic than the eight to ten million soldiers killed in the war

The general notion, expressed by a committee member, was that since the cost of the war would ruin either Germany or the Allies, 'on the whole I think we had better ruin them'

other invaded Allied territories, he stipulated only that they be 'evacuated' and 'restored'.

Edward House, sent by Wilson to deal with any Allied concerns arising from his 'program for the peace of the world', agreed a definition of 'restoration':

By it they understand that compensation will be made by Germany for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allies and their property by the aggression of Germany by land, by sea, and from the air.

The phrasing owed much to Lloyd George, who drafted and redrafted it until he was satisfied, finally substituting 'aggression' for 'invasion' to safeguard British claims for compensation. This was incorporated into the note from the US secretary of state, Robert Lansing, sent to Germany on 5 November 1918. It formally agreed to the German request for an armistice and clarified some of the definitions upon which that assent depended.

Lansing's note thus apparently settled the issue of what were, in a simplified form, alternatives. Either Germany should pay the Allies for all their wartime expenditure (an indemnity) or it should repair only the damage done to civilians and their property (reparations). The note's definition endorsed Lloyd George's repudiation of an indemnity in his war aims speech to the Trades Union Congress on 5 January 1918, echoed by Wilson's 'Four Principles'. It stated: 'There shall be ... no contributions, no punitive indemnities.' This seemed a clear decision for reparations.

Yet both in December and when the conference opened, Lloyd George advanced a claim for an indemnity, even though he recognised the strength of US objections. He claimed later that his actions were at odds with his own moderate instincts, but were driven by the large amounts demanded by a powerful body of imperial and domestic opinion personified by three men: William Hughes, prime minister of Australia, and the 'Heavenly Twins' (so called because they were always in each other's company and suggested astronomical sums) – Lord Cunliffe, an ex-governor of the Bank of England, and Lord Sumner, a law lord. When Hughes complained bitterly in November 1918 that an undamaged Australia would receive no compensation, despite losing more men and spending more money than Belgium, Lloyd George insisted that he chair a committee to investigate what Germany could pay. Without offering any evidence, it recommended that Germany could afford £24,000 million in annual instalments of £1,200 million, including five per cent interest. The general notion, expressed by

a committee member, was that since the cost of the war would ruin either Germany or the Allies, 'on the whole I think we had better ruin them'.

Trapped by expectation

A recent alternative explanation to Lloyd George's claim that he was trapped by the electorate's expectation that he could deliver the 'wild and fantastic chimera' of the Twins' figures is that, for him, the Lansing note was a deception, a promise given only for the moment. He used the Twins as a front, so that he could appear moderate, sheltering behind their extremism while they were articulating his real wishes. They refused, on his orders, to compromise, because his true and consistent aim was as large and punitive a German payment to Britain as possible.

The clash between the Anglo-French demand for and Wilson's resolute refusal of an indemnity set up one of the most contentious debates of the conference, leading to a classic compromise that was rich in unintended consequences. To protect Lloyd George and Clemenceau from the wrath of the overinflated expectations of their electorates, the conference sought to separate Germany's moral responsibility to pay an indemnity, established in Article 231 (the 'War Guilt' clause), from the Allied intention to demand only that Germany pay reparations for those categories specified in Article 232. The waters were further muddled by Wilson's later controversial acceptance of the argument, advanced on Lloyd George's behalf by Jan Christian Smuts of South Africa, that since soldiers were only civilians in uniform, the cost of pensions and allowances paid to Allied soldiers and their dependants could legitimately be added to the list of what might more conventionally be termed reparations. Some of the parameters of the controversies surrounding reparations were thus established before the conference opened and continue to generate historical debate.

The location of the conference was itself controversial. Lloyd George and Wilson originally favoured Geneva or Lausanne, but Wilson then decided that Switzerland was 'saturated with every kind of poisonous element and open to every hostile element in Europe'. When House agreed to Clemenceau's strong plea for Paris, Lloyd George was left isolated. He acquiesced with bad grace:

I never wanted to hold the Conference in his bloody capital ... but the old man wept and protested so much that we gave way.

Only somewhere the size of Paris could accommodate the thousands of delegates

Clemenceau lost little opportunity to remind the world that the boot was now on the other foot

who would soon flood in, but the atmosphere in a city so recently menaced by German armies, raided by planes and bombarded by the terrifying 'Big Bertha' shells – one of which, hurtling through the roof of Nôtre Dame, killed many of those at prayer – was hardly likely to be conducive to moderation or generosity.

The road not taken

There is a strong case that the most important decision to face the conference was one that was not taken. Many assumed that peacemaking in 1919 would follow the pattern established in 1814-15. Then, the immediate issues relating to France and its former enemies were settled by the Treaty of Paris (May 1814). France only joined the other great powers, some of the smaller states and former neutrals at the Congress of Vienna (November 1814 to June 1815) to consider the wider aspects of the settlement. This model was the basis of the French proposals for the organisation and protocol of the conference circulated on 29 November 1918. These assumed that the Allies would establish their terms and dictate them, without negotiation, to Germany. Then former enemies and neutrals would meet with the victors to settle broader questions, significantly including the League, placed last on the proposed agenda; a move hardly likely to endear the suggestion to Wilson, especially when the French stated that the Fourteen Points were 'not sufficiently defined in their character to be taken as a basis for a concrete settlement of the war'. The plan was disregarded and not replaced.

Thus, when the peace conference opened, it had a number of parallel structures, some allowing the Allies to establish their peace terms for Germany, some considering wider aspects of the shaping of the new Europe and yet others studying broader questions, such as the League. The lack of a clear decision as to the process of peacemaking helped to create the profound sense of confusion apparent in many of the contemporary letters and diaries of participants. Paul Cambon, the veteran French ambassador to London, summed it up:

No matter how hard you try, you cannot imagine the shambles, the chaos, the incoherence, the ignorance here.

Following the opening ceremony, his brother, Jules, predicted that the result would be 'une improvisation'.

This was certainly true of the early work of many of the commissions to establish the Allies' terms. Assuming that, in the absence of a firm alternative directive, there would be negotiations with the Germans, the Allied

representatives set out their maximum demands in order to allow room for later manoeuvre and concession. It soon became clear that it was only with great difficulty that the Allies could agree among themselves on a number of the questions. It also became obvious that, with only a modicum of the skill and finesse with which Talleyrand had set France's enemies at each others' throats in 1815, any competent German negotiators could create havoc with Allied unity. Gradually, and tacitly, the presumption of no negotiation evolved but the lack of a firm decision helped to create what has been criticised as the mathematical absurdity of the treaty, a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Nicolson later reflected:

Had it been known from the outset that no negotiations would ever take place with the enemy, it is certain that many of the less reasonable clauses of the Treaty would never have been inserted.

The Paris Peace Conference opened formally on 18 January 1919. A Saturday was an unusual choice, but one made for a definite and rather ominous reason. On 18 January 1871, in the Hall of Mirrors in Louis XIV's palace at Versailles, the Prussian chancellor Otto von Bismarck had proclaimed the formation of the German Empire, following Prussia's victory in the Franco-Prussian War. The formidable Clemenceau had already provided the railway carriage used by the defeated Napoleon III as the location for the signature of the Armistice at Compiègne in northern France. Although he saved Versailles for the signature of the treaty itself, he lost little opportunity to remind the world that the boot was now on the other foot. The British diplomat Esmé Howard recorded the following scene:

I hear that when the delegates were putting on their hats to leave, Wilson, who saw Clemenceau putting on an old soft felt, said 'I was told I must wear a tall hat for this occasion.' 'So was I', retorted C. cramming his soft hat over his eyes.

It did not bode well.

Wilson's Fourteen Points

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest cooperation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted, in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development.

XI. Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike. HT