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Coalition For Total War:
Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig
and Entente Military Cooperation, 1916-1918

by

William Richard Griffiths

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Abstract

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William Richard Griffiths, William Marsh Rice University

Of the military and historical lessons presented by the Great War, the necessity for military cooperation between sovereign allies is paramount. Because of the universal distaste for this war and the suffering which it brought, historians have been slow in perceiving the true character of the cooperative military operations conducted by the Entente Powers in the period 1914-1918.

Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the commander of the British Armies in France, served with or under all four of France's high commanders during the war. Despite his understandable sensitivity to excessive French domination, he was more than cooperative with all of these men and, in many instances, submerged his personal desires in order to maintain a semblance of unity in joint military action on the Western Front.

The immense influence—both positive and negative—which Haig exercised over the schemes for cooperative action has been largely overlooked or unappreciated by intervening analysts. There can be little doubt that Field-Marsh
was the single most important commander in the Allied coalition during the final two years of the war. His armies prevented the Germans from destroying the French at Verdun and distracted the German High Command from the utter helplessness of the French during the Army mutinies of 1917. In the final months of the war, while the fledgling American Army was being brought into the line, the British blunted the German last gamble offensives. Following this, Haig led his force to decisively defeat the principal enemy in the only theater of operations where final victory could be achieved, the Western Front.

During his period of command, Haig accepted a subordinate role to Joffre and Nivelle. During Fétain's tenure as Commander-in-Chief, he worked as an honest partner to relieve pressure from the hard-pressed French. Haig successfully thwarted the attempts of the Allied political leaders to impose direction by a committee upon the military commanders. When imminent disaster confronted the alliance, Haig finally accepted formal subordination under the Generalissimo, Foch.

Although the results of Haig's cooperative efforts were appreciated by the Allies during the Second World War, the techniques used to achieve this goal were never fully understood.
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Preface

The impact of the First World War -- called in its time the Great War -- upon the history of mankind was cataclysmic in nature. The dominant societies of the earth were rent by forces which caused immense human suffering and grinding economic loss. The war also stimulated radical changes in the political and social frameworks of the Western Democracies. Due to the bitterness and fear aroused by this period of madness, the peoples who had greeted war with patriotic enthusiasm tried to forget it upon its conclusion. Before the last guns were silenced by the armistice, a wave of anti-war sentiment swept over all levels of western society. People made a nearly psychotic attempt to blot out the bloody memories of the conflict and thus assure that such devastation would never happen again. The Anglo-American community, especially, refused to accept this war as an historically relevant event and as a result were forced to continue the struggle less than a quarter of a century later.

Historical military lessons of the Great War have also been clouded by the stupendous catalog of miscalculations, false premises, and irresolute action compiled by
the military forces of all participants. It is difficult to look for universal truths in operations which were, on the whole, miserable failures. But these lessons must be sought after, even amidst the rubble of Ypres and Gallipoli, if we are to understand the evolution of total warfare and to place the Great War in its proper historical setting.

In searching for lessons of the greatest military significance, two stand out prominently. The first was the realization by military men that technological advances wrought during the nineteenth century were dominant factors on the field of battle and could no longer be ignored by their inward-looking caste. A second lesson was that the control of political-military coalitions in modern war is a delicate task but one which, if ignored, can nullify successes in all other fields. The generation which followed the one decimated in the Great War learned both of these lessons well, even if it drew the wrong conclusions. The Western Allies misinterpreted the dominance of mechanical devices and prepared for future war in a defensive posture. The defeated Germans correctly assessed the possibilities for using machines in a decisive strategy and rebuilt their forces around a mobile employment of machines on offense. This initiative restored the war of movement and the
superiority of the offensive over the defensive in the
Second World War.

Western military leaders reviewed the period of
repeated failure on the battlefield from the outset of the
war until a unified supreme command was achieved under
General Ferdinand Foch in March 1918. From these post-war
studies, the democracies derived the correct moral that unity
of effort was the bedrock upon which all other projects must
be based in coalition warfare. As a direct result, they
established such unity of command in the Second World War
under General Eisenhower. But while the democracies drew
the proper lesson in this instance, events indicate that the
supreme direction of the Great War was never an effective
tool and that victory was attained by the plodding,
unimaginative approach which so revolted the sensibilities
of the inter-war leaders. Despite the fact that success
followed the establishment of the Supreme Command, historic¬
ally it is necessary to reexamine the military relationships
of the Entente Powers and clarify the personal influences
which contributed to victory.

The key, of course, to the Allied military effort
of 1914-18 on the Western Front was the cooperation of the
British Armies in France and Flanders with the Army of
France. Although the United States provided immense moral and material support in the concluding rounds of the war, it fit its military efforts into patterns pre-determined by the British and French and as a result never exerted a unique influence.

An ideal vehicle for studying the Franco-British military effort is the period in which Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig commanded the British forces—December 19, 1915 until the conclusion of hostilities. Although Haig was a subordinate for the first seventeen months of the war, he did serve with or under every French Commander-in-Chief. His period of command witnessed four distinct methods of achieving Allied military cooperation and his personal desires were, in the final analysis, those which determined the form of the Supreme Command and provided the bounds within which the Generalissimo could function.

This method of investigating the true character of the Supreme Command is accompanied by many difficulties. Several of these are apparent—the partisan national interpretations of the relative military influence of the partners of the Entente, the fixed positions of the various analysts of the military operations who have long since awarded their laurels and thorns and have collected a
following which will not easily be swayed to an objective discussion; there is even the imponderable problem of defining what a successful campaign was under the conditions existing on the Western Front. But perhaps the greatest potential drawback in this proposed method of analysis is that the central figure, Haig, may prove enigmatic and a barrier to true understanding. This diffident and inarticulate leader of millions has been dismissed by the intervening generations as a military cipher and an insular protector of divisiveness. It is reasonable, however, to assume that he possessed some clear talents for military command or he would never have attained his exalted position. The fact that Haig rarely commented publicly upon his decisions or ever deigned to rebut the many charges which were leveled at him by critics does not aid the project. However, recent acquisitions of the original diaries and private papers of the Field-Marshar will be most beneficial in trying to determine the influence his philosophy of command had upon the entire problem of military coordination amongst the Allies.

These carefully guarded private papers reveal the man to have been a complex and thinking soldier who diligently studied warfare and based his military actions upon his
interpretations of history's lessons. He continued to persevere in his beliefs and seems to have twisted the outcome of his decisions to conform to his view of reality. When faced with an obvious failure, he could never be honest with himself and admit error. Clearly then, to get at the truth of the events leading to the creation of the Supreme Command and its effectiveness, Douglas Haig's influence and thought must first be put into proper perspective.

This then will be the purpose of this work; to examine the development of the Allied military command system and the success of various attempts to coordinate the military efforts of the national forces. The influence of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig upon these activities will be discussed and highlighted as being relatively unknown and virtually ignored.
Notes for Preface


2 The two principal exceptions to the general historical apathy were the extensive investigation of the causes of the war and the apologia of the military and political leaders, usually in biographical form, which attempted to justify their actions in the tragedy.


4 For a particularly biased version of the impact of the appointment of General Foch to the Supreme Command see Peter Wright, At The Supreme War Council (New York, 1921), 147-48.

5 Prior to General Dwight D. Eisenhower's appointment as the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe in December 1943, the British showed that they had learned the lesson of military cooperation well. From the first movement of the British Expeditionary Force to the Continent in early October 1939, its commander, Lord Gort, was subordinated to the French Commander-in-Chief, General Maurice Gamelin. A Supreme War Council was formed and continued to function until France was defeated. The fact that these actions could not avert disaster did not deter the Allies of the Second World War from seeking inspiration and models of technique from the final command structure of the Great War. J.R.M.

The Royal Institute of International Affairs commissioned Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice to prepare a study of the lessons learned during the First World War. This work was published early in the second war as *Lessons of Allied Co-operation: Military, Naval and Air* (London, 1942). This work not only stressed the need for cooperative efforts during coalition warfare but also in the peace which would follow.

6

The creation of the Supreme Allied War Council in November 1917 was a significant event. Despite the author's view that it had little actual effect upon the military conduct of the war, it was a symbolic admission of the need for a formal tool to coordinate both military and political plans. It set the tone and much of the precedent for the Versailles Peace Conference and even the structure and philosophy of the League of Nations. The historical investigation of the evolution of the Supreme War Council and the position of the Generalissimo is remarkably limited. All general works on the war, of course, mention the situation and refer superficially to the measures taken. The only definitive work extant is Thomas D. Shumate Jr., "The Allied Supreme War Council, 1917—1918" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 1952). Other works of varying quality and areas of specialization are: Tasker H. Bliss, "The Evolution of the Unified Command", *Foreign Affairs*, 1 (1922): 1-30; T. M. Hunter, "Foch and Eisenhower: A Study in Allied Supreme Command", *Army Quarterly*, 87 (1963): 33-52; L. Loucheur, "Le Commandement Unique", *L'Illustration*, 4438 (1928): 272-77; Maurice, *Lessons of Allied Co-operation*; and David F. Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council* (Middleton, Conn., 1961).
Chapter One

The Very Model of a Modern Major-General

I am the very model of a modern Major-General
I've information vegetable, animal and mineral
I know the Kings of England and I quote the
fights historical,
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical....

When I can tell at sight a chassepôt rifle from
a javelin,
When such affairs as sorties and surprises I'm
more wary at
And when I know precisely what is meant by
"commissariat",
When I have learnt what progress has been made
in modern gunnery,
When I know more of tactics than a novice in a
nunnery:
In short, when I've a smattering of elemental
strategy,
You'll say a better Major-General has never sat
a gee--

Major-General Stanley
from The Pirates of Penzance
or The Slave of Duty by
William S. Gilbert and
Arthur Sullivan
Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, commander of all British and Empire forces engaged on the Western Front, has been characterized as a man overwhelmed by the enormity of the command and administrative problems which he faced in the First World War. He has been accused of a lack of imagination and his repeated use of methods which, in retrospect, appear prodigal are cited as proof of his failure as the British Empire's leading military figure. Yet if the doctrine of attrition on the battlefield and disunity of allied military command are now condemned as sure avenues to disaster, why was this man, the proponent of such methods, in such a position of importance and power? An inquiry into Haig's philosophy of command and his policies both within his own army and with his allies is warranted before his real impact upon allied success or failure can be assessed.

How did Haig come to power? What were his credentials and training for leading Great Britain's largest army into battle?

As the Field-Marshal reflected upon his mission of defeating the main German field army in concert with French, Belgian and Italian leaders, he drew upon the best, or what was at the time accepted as the best, preparation for high command. Although he failed to receive a degree at Oxford
University after three year's study, his move to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst provided him with the first indication of his future military prominence. Being more mature and definitely more serious than his fellow officer candidates, Haig studied assiduously and strictly programmed his daily activities. His serious approach to his school work placed him first in the general order of merit upon graduation in 1884. He was also awarded the Anson Memorial Sword as the Senior Under Officer.

Success at the military school appears to have cast Haig's career upon a quest for further achievement and strongly influenced his self-satisfied approach to problems. His dour but immaculate appearance, coupled with a lack of interest in matters not directly connected with his vocation marked him early in his service as a potential leader of Queen Victoria's Army. He also had the further attribute of independent wealth, social connections and ability as a polo player—all of which were helpful in the pre-World War army.

Haig's adroit maneuvering within the socially conscious structure of the Queen's Army began shortly after his assignment to the 7th Hussars in February, 1885. While on leave from his cavalry troop in India, he visited several German Army installations and observed the German training
and organizational techniques. A detailed study of his findings was prepared and he ventured to forward a copy of it to the British Quartermaster General, Sir Evelyn Wood. This seemingly impertinent move was apparently done at the urging of Douglas' influential sister, Henrietta Jameson. The favorable reception of his report and the subtle pressures of his elder sister at court assured Haig of sympathetic support in the upper reaches of the Victorian military-social hierarchy.

As a slightly above-aged captain, Douglas Haig took the qualifying examination for the Camberly Staff College in June, 1893. He failed to qualify in the mathematical portion of the test as well as being adjudged color blind. This seeming check to his professional ambitions was remedied through the application of political and social suasion. He was granted a direct appointment to the Staff College in 1896 by the Duke of Cambridge, the Army's Commander-in-Chief.

During his two-year course of instruction at Camberly, Haig was observed by Colonel G. F. R. Henderson, then the Chief instructor. Henderson was highly regarded as an excellent judge of command ability and was a proponent of progressive military thought. During their association,
Henderson predicted that Haig would some day be appointed Commander-in-Chief. James Edmonds, who was Haig's classmate at Camberly and who would become the official historian of the British Armies in the Great War, attested to this prediction and strove to protect Haig in his later writings.

Following Camberly, Brevet Major Haig served in the Egyptian Army under the Sirdar Horatio Kitchener as a cavalry squadron commander and staff officer during the year 1898. He participated in the Battles of Atbara and Omdurman and continued his critical correspondence with Sir Evelyn Wood.

The C.[ommanding] O.[fficers] of Battalions do not delegate any power at all to their British Officers, but run the whole show themselves. ...

I quite understand the reasons why the Sirdar wishes the Cavalry here always to be in strength, viz. to raise its "moral" but one can't both eat one's cake and have it! This bivouac is v.[ery] dusty (no method in its arrangement at all).

Although these comments sound unseemly coming from a junior cavalryman to a prominent general officer, there was no hesitancy in Haig's appraisal of the shortcomings of his immediate superiors.
Following the suppression of the Mahdist uprising in the Soudan, Haig reverted to his permanent rank of captain and returned to England. He now made another fortunate association at Aldershot when he was assigned as John D. P. French's Chief of Staff. French was later the Chief of the General Staff and was the commander of the British Expeditionary Force in 1914.

In September, 1899 Haig and his Brigade Commander, French, were dispatched to South Africa. Participating in the initial stages of the British mobilization for the Boer War, Haig sensed the complete lack of preparedness and disorganization which existed in the army. He felt that "some modified form of conscription [would] be necessary after this war." He was also particularly aware that his chosen branch, Cavalry, was far from ready for combat.

The one thing required here is "Cavalry"! I think the Country ought to be alive now to the fact (which we have always pointed out) that we don't keep enough of the arm in peacetime!

Haig acted as Chief Staff Officer to the now Major-General French in the Cavalry Division. French led this force to the first British victory in the Battle of Elandsslaagte and in the successful Colesberg Campaign.
At a time of general British failure and military ineptitude, these two actions made French and Haig conspicuous as winners.

Lord Roberts replaced Sir Redvers Buller as the commander of the South African Expeditionary Force in late 1899. Lord Kitchener acted as Roberts' Chief of Staff. In February, 1900, the new command began its counteroffensive. On 15 February Major-General French led his cavalry in a forced march and relieved the besieged town of Kimberly. Haig had been appointed Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade by this time. By mid-March, Bloemfontein fell and Pretoria was secured in June. During his service with the Cavalry Division, Haig had fulfilled his responsibilities capably. He was granted the opportunity for independent command at the end of the year as the war degenerated into guerrilla action.

Haig commanded a column of troops in defensive operations in the Cape Colony. In pursuing the illusive Boer General Jan C. Smuts, Haig proved as unsuccessful as others who had tried. The regular methods of Camberly and the General Staff proved of little value in the bush. An ideal column commander would have shown flexibility and initiative to a maximum degree and these were not qualities which marked Haig's performance of duty
in any capacity.

Coincidentally, Haig's patron, Sir Evelyn Wood, had secured a regimental command for him. The command of the 17th Lancers profoundly affected his career and gave him a home regiment for the remainder of his life. The famous symbol of the unit, a pirate's skull and crossbones, was to be his and the unit would form his guard of honor in later years. In the British Army, it was unusual for an officer to change regiments as Haig from the 7th Hussars to the 17th Lancers. He was initially resented in the unit because of the obvious use of influence in his selection.

Command of a battalion (regiment in the British Cavalry) can be a period of metamorphosis for a professional officer. Haig's attachment to his new unit was genuine and he now realized the importance of a unit's connection with and dependence upon its commander. His concern and pride in unit are reflected in lines written shortly after one of his squadrons had been defeated by the Boers:

Out of 130 men, 29 were killed and 41 wounded. The other men were still fighting when the next squadron came up to their support and the enemy made off. All the officers were either killed or wounded,... It made one feel very miserable to see what has taken place. The wounds were terrible. The brutes used explosive
bullets.... I at once galloped to the scene of the action but was too late to come up with the enemy.... I stayed the night at Eland's River Bridge and we have been pursuing these ruffians hard till yesterday. 12

These are hardly the sentiments of a man who was callous toward the sacrifice of human life in combat. It is therefore instructive to compare these early lines with the indictment made by more recent detractors that he was a butcher and insensitive to the suffering which his orders produced during the Great War.

In September, 1902, Douglas returned to England and shared in the accolades which a grateful nation showered on its Cavalry leaders. Sir John French became the prominent hero of the nation. Haig, now a brevet colonel, was awarded the position of a Companion of the Bath and was appointed an aide-de-camp to King Edward. In addition to the many medals he received and the prominence accorded to him in the dispatches, Haig was now recognized as a promising young officer who would be needed in the army's reorganization and revitalization—now obvious requirements after its poor performance against the Boers.

Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, requested Douglas Haig by name to act as the Indian Inspector
General of Cavalry. This request indicated Kitchener's high regard for the colonel's ability and was the first promotion he received on his own merit rather than through political leverage. After a year's interlude in Edinburgh with his regiment, Haig departed for service in India.

During his tour under Kitchener, Haig observed the combined reforming zeal of his commander and the Viceroy, Lord Curzon. The two worked to counteract the "absurd and uncontrolled expenditure, lack of method and system and the slackness and jobbery" which existed in the civil and military organization of the British Raj. When Curzon and Kitchener later became political enemies, the army leader continued to work for military efficiency and a unified command structure.

Obviously Haig, as a colonel, was not in a position of influence in these reforms. However he did energetically modernize the training of the Cavalry. He also became a leading partisan of the arme blanche method of cavalry employment as opposed to those who sought to replace the cold steel and elan of the cavalry with mounted infantrymen. A letter from his earlier period represents his unalterable position in this military feud. Note, however, Haig's consideration for the sensitivities of his friends in high
This Mounted Infantry craze is now I trust exploded. So far, they have proved useless and are not likely to be of use until they learn to ride! You had better not give these views to Sir Evelyn [Wood], for both he and Wolseley are the parents of the Mounted Infantry. Personally I think our regiments of Cavalry should be armed in equal proportions viz. half the Cavalry should have swords; the other lances—but I believe a good hog spear would be better than the existing long lance... but I don't think it is wise to abolish the lance....

I consider Cavalry (properly trained) should fulfill the requirements of mounted troops, and that Mounted Infantry should be abolished. 14

Haig observed the rudimentary problem of a dual military command structure which existed in India. The military member of the Viceroy's council was autonomous from the Commander-in-Chief and had many purely military functions which were not coordinated with the army's leaders:

The C-in-C in India really has very little power. All Supply, Transport and Finance are under an individual called "Military Member of Council". That is to say that Lord K.[itchener] may order men to Thibet[sic] but he does not know whether they will starve or not because he has nothing to do with the supply arrangement. Such a system is obviously ridiculous. It is like a pair of horses in double harness without a coachman. The latter ought to be the Viceroy but he has too many things to attend to already, even if he were capable of discharging such duties which the majority of Viceroy's are not. 15
In addition to command problems, Haig was vitally concerned with the training of all Indian cavalry units. One effective tool used by him in supervising and evaluating the Cavalry was the Staff Ride. These exercises were designed to simulate actual combat conditions for unit staffs and commanders. Officers performed their duties without the actual participation of troops. The work done by Haig in this program was recognized in his branch and throughout the army as a distinct success. The reports of five of the staff tours were collected and published in a modified form in 1907 under the title Cavalry Studies, Strategical and Tactical. Despite the book's technical language and method, it is admirable in expressing Haig's belief in the importance of precise staff work, and the training of both commissioned officers and troop units. He used the lessons of military history to illustrate his method to cavalry leaders. Yet he never lost sight of the army's requirement to look forward and prepare for the next war.

In a single formula we may sum up its [the Cavalry's] role and its future. The war of masses necessitates mass tactics.... But as already emphasised, in Cavalry work it is grasping a situation, of being able quickly to come to a decision and at once issue clear and easily executed orders, that, more than the possession of any other faculty brings success to a commander in the field.
The development of this faculty ought to be the main objective of the training of combatant officers in peace, and close attention should be paid to all exercises which tend to develop a power of decision and skill in quickly drafting orders.

Certainly a knowledge of Military History is all-important for an officer. In studying it we see the "great masters" at work: we learn from their experience,... 16

In the third study presented in his book, Haig dealt with a general situation similar to the one he would face in 1916—the conduct of coalition warfare. Although the staff problem situation dealt with an Indian "Buffer State" as the allied nation, he realized the delicate nature of allied military coordination and gave the following precautions:

Military history teaches us that the whole question of cooperation with an ally is fraught with difficulties and danger. When the theatre of operation lies in the country of the ally, and when the organization of the latter's forces is imperfect, these difficulties increase, for war can rarely benefit the inhabitants on the spot, and ill-feeling is certain to arise....

On the whole, it is probably wise to openly recognise the danger and to risk hurting feelings rather than to misplace confidence. The so-called "political considerations" have often spelt disaster. 17

Here we have the first glimmering of Douglas Haig's sensitivity to the military difficulties in joint military ventures. Yet the final thought, indicative of the hardening
antagonism between the "frocks and brasshats", shows an equal obliviousness to the ultimate considerations for which war is waged.

Accompanying the sound advice in technique and philosophy, Cavalry Studies contains Haig's fatal attraction to the obsolete methods of horse cavalry units. It must be remembered, now that such military theory has been proven to be hopelessly out of place on the modern battlefield, that in his day Haig was voicing the dominant sentiment in his branch; one which claimed for the unprotected horseman a key role on the field of modern battle. The overwhelming success of cavalry leaders in achieving the positions of leadership in the world's military organizations prior to the Great War attests to the fact that Haig was in respectable company when he insisted that:

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

1. The extended nature of the modern battlefield means that there will be a greater choice of cover to favour the concealed approach of Cavalry....

3. The longer the range and killing power of modern arms, the more important will be rapidity of movement become, because it lessens the relative time of exposure to danger in favour of the Cavalry.

4. The introduction of the small-bore rifle bullet...which has little stopping power against a horse.
These factors, with different results, were to prove the utter uselessness of the \textit{arme blanche} on the fields of the next war. However Haig would insist on the maintenance of this arm at full strength and in unmanageable formations throughout his life.

In April, 1906, Secretary of State for War Richard B. Haldane summoned Douglas Haig from India to assist the War Office in implementing full reforms of the British Army. These programs, which were to shape the British Expeditionary Force of 1914, were long overdue and brought the British military organization into the modern world.

Serving as the Director of Military Training, Haig established an easy rapport with the brilliant legal and political leader, Haldane. This relationship is interesting since it is in sharp contrast to a later one between Haig and David Lloyd George. Lloyd George, who was similar in outlook and training to Haldane, developed an antipathy toward Haig which was reciprocated and had a most unfortunate effect upon their crucial work together. The direction of British military policy during Lloyd George's tenure as Prime Minister was weak and indecisive because of the distrust and animosity which existed between the politician and the military commander.
Haig, now a major-general, and the dynamic Haldane worked very closely in formulating plans to implement the needed reforms. The principal plan was for an effective expeditionary force of 160,000 men of the regular army to back up Britain's commitment to the Entente Cordiale. The Haldane Reforms also called for a revitalization of the Territorial Army as the main base for the expansion of the army in time of general war. These two major projects were put into effect despite a general decrease in the military expenditures.

The detailed organization of the fourteen divisions of the Territorial Army (Haig had recommended twenty-eight), to include all arms, was prepared under Haig's supervision. This work and the planned tables of organization for the regular units were published as Field Service Regulations, part II. The total plan of organization for the army was accepted wholeheartedly by all active military leaders and was to remain in effect with only minor changes until that fateful August day in 1914 when the plans were implemented.

Haig was opposed to Lord Roberts' scheme for Universal Service for Home Defence as a diversion of resources which would injure the overall military posture of the Empire. He
realistically appraised the total amount of money the Liberal Government could be expected to place into military preparedness and preferred a highly trained professional force backed by a second line of part-time soldiers to a large mass army of imperfectly trained and equipped conscripts. The fear of invasion of the British Isles, which was to hamper military operations and deployment until the final year of the Great War, was the only reason for advancing a proposal for conscription and this Haig dismissed as implausible.

The now influential and respected Major-General Haig was fatalistic about the coming war with Germany as early as 1906. In discussing the military situation with a subordinate at the War Office, he reasoned:

We may well be fighting Germany in the next few years.... If we do, the right place for us to fight is where we can use our naval and our military power together with the greatest effect. In battle with troops as brave and efficient as the Germans, we shall have to fight long and hard before we can hope for a decision. It will be dangerous to attempt a decisive blow until we have worn down the enemy's power of resistance. We must tell the army that. 22

Such a sentiment for exercising Great Britain's strategic advantages combined with a realistic view of the length of the probable operations belie those who credit Haig with little insight. It must also be remembered that few
other military figures expected the war to last more than a few months.

In October, 1909, after three years of diligent work in the War Office, Haig gladly accepted an offer from Sir O'Moore Creagh, who had succeeded Kitchener in India, to assume the position of Chief of Staff of the Indian Army. Though his work under Haldane had been rewarding, his health had suffered from the constant strain of office work and the debilitating social rounds in London.

As Chief of Staff, Haig vigorously attacked the problems in the command structure in the Indian Army. Although Kitchener had managed to combine the troublesome position of the Military Member of the Viceroy's Council with his own duties, the basic problem of a dual staff system still existed. The Commander-in-Chief now had the dual capacities of a civil minister and a military commander with corresponding staffs for both positions. This "canonization of duality" as Haig described it perpetuated disunity at the lower staff and command levels. This system often produced the ludicrous situation of the military leader in sharp disagreement with himself as civilian cabinet member over matters of policy. Haig pinpointed the source of the problem and advanced an administrative reform to provide unity to the staff procedures. He also enforced a
strict policy of simplifying all staff reports and communications between departments.

In line with his conviction that a general European conflict was inevitable, Haig instituted a series of staff exercises to provide the Indian Army with training for such an occurrence. The various situations upon which the exercises were based brought the Indian force into contact with the realities of the German and French military organizations, the Continental military situation, and the highly probable deployment of some Indian troops to support the mother country. His conception of the stages through which such a mammoth world-wide struggle would pass remained unchanged throughout his military career: maneuver for position by the opposing forces, the initial border clashes, "the wearing-out" stage of varying duration to deplete the enemy's reserves and finally the placement of the decisive blow to secure the victory. These phases of conflict were emphasized throughout the staff exercises.

These Staff Tours provide further insight into Haig's theory of military command. While giving little attention to the proliferation of modern armaments, he stressed the importance of morale. He borrowed the motto of his public school to instill this lesson—"The Spirit Quicketh". Again
this perspective is more understandable when it is recalled that in France the offensive à l'outrance theory of Ardant du Picq, Colonel Foch, and Colonel Grandmaison were in vogue. Even after the Western military leaders gained a proper respect for the devastating impact of automatic weapons and heavy artillery, they did not recant their insistence on the psychological unity and elan of their combat units. This obsession with the morale of the troops has been sharply criticized because of the heavy casualty lists in the battles of the Great War. This same element—morale, esprit de corps or motivation—has, however, been the necessary ingredient for military victory since the dawn of time and is still emphasized in the training of troops. No, it was not Douglas Haig's constant measures to assure high morale which were at fault, but his reluctance to adapt obsolete tactical methods in order to provide an avenue for this stirring spirit to triumph.

Haig also stressed the importance of rapid and flexible decision-making processes in all military commanders. Yet it is obvious from his later policies that he expected complete loyalty to his decisions and would brook no critical discussion within his command. The explanation for this apparent dichotomy was that he placed a greater value upon the execution of a decision than on the decision itself. Flexibility and rapid decisions were secondary to the
cardinal principle that "any decision—even a bad one—is better than indecision." The Scot's obstinacy, combined with the English trait of "muddling through" were to cause much misery in the next war when Haig attempted to retrieve victories from obviously hopeless tactical situations.

In his Staff Tour of 1911, due no doubt to the recent Agadir crisis, the specific problem posed by the German military machine was dealt with. The crux of that year's exercise was the transfer of a contingent of the Indian Army to Europe for employment with British forces on the Continent. Using the data derived from this exercise, Haig and a small staff prepared detailed plans for exactly such a move in case of actual war. Through clandestine channels these plans were coordinated with the Imperial General Staff and modified to meet British requirements. This plan, given the code name "Nathi" from the Hindustani word for imp (imperial) was later discovered by the Secretary of State for India and ordered destroyed. Copies of the plan did survive and became the basis upon which the deployment of Indian divisions was accomplished in the early months of the 24 was.

Haig returned to England in February, 1912 to assume the command of Aldershot, the Empire's most prestigious
peacetime troop assignment. Now in his twenty-seventh year of service, he was selected over many distinguished officers who were his senior. Aldershot, consisting of two regular infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade, was viewed as a choice assignment, reserved for those officers who were expected to continue to the pinnacle of the military system.

Adding to the feeling of accomplishment and security experienced by Haig was the fact that two old friends and confidants held positions as his immediate superiors. Richard Haldane still held control as the Secretary of State for War and Field-Marshal French had assumed the duties of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Another most important consideration of this assignment was that in the event of general war mobilization, Haig would receive a high command in the British Expeditionary Force.

Haig busied himself with the training of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions and seems to have returned more to tactical rather than political or strategical problems. He had not held an active command for ten years and was received with some skepticism by the British military establishment which maintained a competitive attitude toward those from the Indian Army.

The work performed at Aldershot by its new commander
was apparently routine and little material from this period remains. Haig relaxed in his uncomplicated job and devoted more time to his family life and recreation than had been possible in his previous assignments. Aside from the conduct of an annual Staff Tour, inspecting unit training and performing ceremonial chores, this interval before the war was a relatively carefree one for Haig. During this period are found his first references to business interests in the John Haig distillery and other financial dealings. He also now found time to meditate over household problems and his two daughters—subjects which had rarely concerned him earlier.

Being close to the center of the Empire, Haig was kept informed of the flickering political and military problems on the Continent and especially in the Balkans. He dispatched his personal staff officer, John Charteris, to observe the war between Bulgaria and the dual alliance of Serbia and Greece. He attended discussions by the Committee of Imperial Defence on the problems of war between either England and Germany or between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente. But as the "powderkeg" of Europe appeared to return to stability in 1913, Great Britain and her army relaxed any thought of active participation.

During the early months of 1914, the Incident at the
Curragh threatened to disrupt the army and ruin its effectiveness. The problem arose over the theoretical coercion of the Ulster section of Ireland to accept the Home Rule Bill. This incident seriously demoralized many conservative army officers and frightened the political leaders of the country who viewed it as an invasion of their domain by the military. Haig, however, was never personally involved and appears to have worried more about the incident's effect upon national military preparedness than any constitutional issues. His Chief of Staff, John Gough, brother of the leader of the Curragh coterie, Hubert Gough, offered to resign but Haig dissuaded him. He firmly rejected the right of any officer to serve the colors only upon his own conditions and rigidly eschewed any hint of the military mixing in or attempting to influence national policies. Following the incident, the tranquil routine at Aldershot resumed and its commander continued to train the ill-starred regular troops who, within six months, would be thrust between two mammoth military organizations in a gallant but futile effort to tip the scales of a continental war.

The future leader of the First Corps of the miniscule British Expeditionary Force had prepared himself for the coming test as well as his society allowed such preparation.
He had achieved prominence under generally peaceful conditions. His brief encounters with active campaigning had given him little in the way of useful preparation; fighting Dervishes and Dutch farmers provided little insight into the mass devastation of the Great War.

Haig's ability at playing and training teams for polo matches, his detailed but uncritical study of military history, and his immaculate personal appearance were his principal military attributes. His real source of strength lay in his social connections with the Royal Family and certain high ranking officers and in his considerable personal wealth. His sharply critical correspondence with his social patrons which continued throughout his life may be viewed today as a breach not only of etiquette but also of military discipline. This practice, however, was apparently not uncommon and never seems to have bothered Haig. In any event, he always voiced a sharp opposition to any hint of military connivance in political matters. Later, during the war, when he was urged to use his vast influence to pressure politicians on their own terms he refused.

As a personality, Haig at this time, leaves an ambiguous impression. His very coldness and unapproachability cause speculation about a hidden and vastly more interesting
character. The General's complete lack of facility with the spoken language and his reluctance to show any public emotion hamper a detailed character analysis. His devotion to God and Country are, however, predominant forces in his life.

His religious views are a strange admixture of the conventional and the unusual. Raised in the Church of Scotland, he apparently was not strongly influenced by its Calvinistic doctrines until late in life. His references to and analyses of sermons from church services are scanty and superficial in his early diaries but become much more detailed and self-serving during his period of great responsibility. His absolute assurance of his predestined mission from God to destroy the German Army is inextricably linked to his late-blooming Calvinism and the total immersion of the British society in destroying an implacable and wholly despicable foe.

Periodically Haig dabbled in the occult. Henrietta Jameson, his older sister who exerted a very great influence on Douglas' thought, was devoted to mysterious and supernatural communication with the spirit world. Haig attended seances on several occasions and was moved to describe them in his diaries. He discussed his military work freely with the mediums and received such recommendations as: "She
thought a 'company basis' better than a 'battalion basis' for expansion of the Territorial Army."

The seances also amplified his opinion that his position in the army and his mission were predestined.

...she [the medium] said she felt I wanted magnetism and had been unwell but was getting better. It seemed as if I would go abroad after a time for some special object of a wide and important nature—much would depend on me....she said that I was influenced by several spirits—notably a small man named Napoleon, who aided me.

Such beliefs could only strengthen an obstinate nature and serve to justify setbacks as inconsequential to the overall success of an operation.

Haig's devotion to the British Empire gave a larger focus for his attention than purely national military problems. The problems of coordinating and controlling international military forces were real to him but his appreciation seemed to stop somehow at the limits of the Dominions and Colonies. He suffered from the peculiar Anglo-American myopia which refuses to admit the value of "foreign" institutions. In a letter to his nephew, Oliver, during his South African campaigns, Haig epitomized the preoccupation of the Edwardian society with its Imperial
It would be absurd for a lad of your years and without really any experience of the Empire and its inhabitants, to settle down into a turnip grower in Fife. Leave these pursuits until you get into doddering age! Meantime do your best to become a worthy citizen of the Empire.... The gist of the whole thing is that I am anxious not only that you shd. realize your duty to your family, your country and to Scotland, but to the Empire—"Aim high" as the Book says, "perchance ye may attain". Aim at being worthy of the British Empire.... Don't let the lives of mediocrities about you deflect you from your determination to belong to the few who can command or guide or benefit our Great Empire. Believe me, the reservoir of such men is not boundless.... It is not ambition! this is duty. 32

Basil H. Liddell Hart has styled Sir Douglas as "the essence of Britain" and, certainly at the outbreak of hostilities, Haig had all the credentials for success in the King's Army. His personal shortcomings--inability to express himself, lack of flexibility and limited imagination--were not serious drawbacks in the peacetime army. The pre-war army valued the traditional virtues of orthodoxy, conformity and social position above all else. It is therefore understandable that the model major-general would eventually achieve high command. Even his most caustic critic, David Lloyd George, grudgingly granted that British society could neither produce
nor recognize a more able leader.

I was conscious of these defects in him [Haig] as a leader.... Unfortunately the British Army did not bring into prominence any Commander who, taking him all round, was more conspicuously fitted for this post [Commander-in-Chief]. 34

Major-General Stanley's sentiments from Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *The Pirates of Penzance* which preface this chapter were not literally true for the actual model, Haig. Douglas Haig had a detailed knowledge of military science and history and little interest or understanding in other fields, in direct contrast to the buffoon of the stage; yet he was just as unprepared to fight a total war. His duties for the four years of the Great War called for a reassessment of old ways and completely new tactical methods; these Haig could never quite grasp.

In a society which did not send its most talented young men into the profession of arms, Douglas Haig was, perhaps, as well prepared for World War I as any other high ranking officer. The coming ordeal would soon expose the military unpreparedness of the British Army and the unrealistic attitude of the British people and their governments toward their international commitments.
Notes for Chapter One

1

Those derogatory works which attempt to deal with Haig's early career are weak in explaining his early development and use inaccurate or misleading glimpses into his past to reinforce preconceived models of incompetence. According to the standards of the Victorian Army, Haig had ample training and experience to assume the duties of the Empire's foremost soldier in 1915. On the contrary, it would have been surprising if another officer had been chosen in his stead. Haig's devotion to duty, lack of outside interests and his social position made his elevation to the rank of Field-Marshall the culmination of a logical progression of events rather than an aberration. For a broad view of contrary analysis see: Winston S. Churchill, Great Contemporaries (New York, 1937), 191-200; Alan Clark, The Donkeys (New York, 1961); B. H. Liddell Hart, Through the Fog of War (New York, 1938); David Lloyd George, War Memoirs of David Lloyd George, 6 vols. (Boston, 1933-37); Frank E. Vandiver, "Haig, Nivelle and Third Ypres" (unpublished paper, 1965); Leon Wolff, In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign (New York, 1958).

2

In preparing this specialized study of Douglas Haig's military development and philosophy of command, the author has drawn upon the existing biographies. While several of these are blatently protective, they are most instructive in those areas about which they are most sensitive. The latest work, John Terraine's, is the most balanced but still persists in fighting the old battles by evaluating the success or failure of each of Haig's military operations. The First World War cannot be viewed with the normal criteria of military success. Victories were primarily negative actions which prevented the enemy from gaining an objective. Biographical sources consulted: George C. Arthur, Lord Haig (London, 1928); John Charteris, Field-Marshall Earl Haig (New York, 1929); Haig (New York, 1933); [Alfred] Duff Cooper, Haig, 2 vols. (London, 1935); The Countess [Dorothy Maud] Haig, The Man I Knew (Edinburgh, 1936); John Terraine, Ordeal of Victory (New York, 1963).

3

husband's letters and personal diaries from the period 1861 to 1914. The proof edition was set in type and was in the process of correction as the first of a complete series. Alfred Duff Cooper's official biography was ready for publication at this time (1934) however, and he convinced the countess to discontinue her project which would have diverted public interest from the biography. She did prepare a mundane and rambling narrative of her life with the Field-Marshal entitled The Man I Knew in 1936. It is assumed that the Haig family took no further action to publish the papers until Robert Blake's highly selective version of them was published in 1952.


5 An excellent perspective on Colonel Henderson's prestige and influence upon military thought in the pre-war British Army is found in Jay Luvaas, The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940 (Chicago, 1964).


7 Douglas Haig to Evelyn Wood, March 3, 1898 and March 26, 1898, Haig ed., Haig: His Letters and Diaries, 79-83 and 84-88. For Haig's detailed account of these engagements see: Douglas Haig to Henrietta Jameson, April 12, 1898 and Haig's diary entries August 30-September 4, 1898, ibid., 91-95 and 111-24.

8 Douglas Haig to Hugo Haig, November 16, 1899, ibid., 185.

9 Douglas Haig to Henrietta Jameson, November 26, 1899, ibid., 185.
10 Douglas Haig to Henrietta Jameson, February 22, 1900, ibid., 201. For Haig's description of the relief of Kimberly see Douglas Haig to Lonsdale Hale, March 2, 1900, ibid., 203-06.

11 Herbert Lawrence, the officer who expected the appointment, retired in protest because of Haig's selection. He later served under Haig as his Chief of Staff of the British Armies in France and Flanders in 1918.


13 Lord Curzon to Field-Marshal Kitchener, undated, quoted in Terraine, Ordeal of Victory, 32.


15 Douglas Haig to Henrietta Jameson, November 4, 1901 [sic 1904], ibid., 311-12. A letter from his third tour in India as Chief of Staff of the Indian Army indicates that this problem persisted. See Douglas Haig to General Gerald Ellison, June 8, 1910, ibid., 413.

16 Douglas Haig, Cavalry Studies, Strategical and Tactical (London, 1907), 19.

17 Ibid., 151-52.

18 Ibid., 8-9.

19 This close relationship and the importance of Haig's contribution to the reform program are attested to
by Lord Haldane in Before the War (London, 1920), 32-33 and 166-68.

20 The inclusion of organic artillery units in the Territorial Army organization was a significant victory for Haig's program. See Douglas Haig to Richard B. Haldane, March 18, 1908, quoted in Duff Cooper, Haig, I, 111-12.


22 Conversation with Major Frederick Maurice quoted in Charteris, Haig, 40. See also the personal diary entry on February 18, 1908, Haig ed., Haig: His Letters and Diaries, 395.

23 Charteris, Haig, 49.

24 Ibid., 56-57.


26 Diary entries February 20 through 24, 1912, ibid., 449.

27 This practice was apparently common among army leaders. Field-Marshal Kitchener's inappropriate correspondence with Lady Cranborne and Field-Marshal French's discussions with newspaperman Colonel Charles a Court Repington being only two of the more famous indiscretions. Haig was encouraged to criticize his superiors by Evelyn Wood, Edward VII, George V, Lord Esher and Lord Derby. Diary entry October 4, 1903, ibid., 302-03; Robert Blake ed., The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914-1919 (London, 1952), 19-20; Duff Cooper, Haig, 88-89.
Diary entries on May 1 and September 11, 1892 are early examples of this practice which became standard during the Great War. Haig ed., *Haig: Letters and Diaries*, 35 and 37.


Ibid.

Douglas Haig to Oliver Haig, May 10, 1902, *ibid.*, 272-74.


David Lloyd George, *Memoirs* (London, 1937) VI, 356. The former Prime Minister continued that he felt Lieutenant General John Monash would have risen to the duties if he had been given an opportunity. Of course, Lloyd George ignores the facts that Monash was an Australian, was a pre-war businessman and was a Jew. Any of these disabilities would have precluded his assumption of Supreme Command.
Chapter Two

Cooperation and Subordination

"Bloody war and quick promotion"
British Army toast.

When Great Britain's leaders allowed her to become
enmeshed in Continental political and military affairs, it
was only a matter of time for this dramatic shift in foreign
policy to require implementation. When Sir Edward Grey, the
British foreign secretary, effectively ended England's
"splendid isolation" from continental quarrels, few of her
leaders realized that a sizable military force, patterned
after the huge conscript armies of France and Imperial
Germany would ever be needed. Most British military planners
worked on the assumption—as did their Continental counterparts
—that a modern war in 1914 could last only a few months and
that victory or defeat would be determined long before
England's military effectiveness could be built up and
applied. Thus, trusting in her isolated geographical
position, a preeminent navy, and a pitifully small expedition-
ary force of 160,000 regular troops, England went to war on
August 5, 1914.
If the premise of a short violent land conflict proved correct, no need really existed for detailed plans for the employment of the combined armies of the Entente. The British Expeditionary Force—a miniscule junior partner—would just attach itself to the left coat sleeve of the mighty French Army as a gesture of solidarity and the enemy would be quickly defeated.

Field-Marshal John French, the initial commander of the BEF quickly fell into a subordinate position to General Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief. He was instructed to ensure that his military plans conformed to those of Joffre and to cooperate with all requests presented by France's unflappable premier soldier.

The orders issued to French by the Secretary of State for War Kitchener in August 1914, set out specific objectives and limitations for the BEF. The only reason given for the dispatch of the force was the violation of Belgian territory by German troops. "The special motive of the Force under [French's] control [was] to support and co-operate with the French Army against our common enemy." Due to the small size of his force, French was instructed to conserve it and exercise the greatest care in minimizing "losses and wastage". The order ended with the strongest possible emphasis that his
was an independent command:

Therefore, while every effort must be made to coincide most sympathetically with the plans and wishes of our Ally, the gravest considerations will devolve upon you as to participation in forward movements where large bodies of French troops are not engaged and where your Force may be unduly exposed to attack.... In this connection I wish you distinctly to understand that your command is an entirely independent one, and that you will in no case come in any sense under orders of any Allied General.

Unfortunately, France's presumed superiority in military science was quickly disproved when Plan XVII shattered against the German defenses at Morhange and Sarrebourg. The Kaiser's legions' swarming through the Belgian lowlands during that hot August similarly disproved the ability of the French military leaders to foresee the correct military dispositions or even to estimate the strength of the opposing forces. Thus, disillusioned by the French generals' display of ineptitude, John French withdrew into a protective attitude which would, he hoped, ensure no more surprises like the 8 Battles of Mons and Le Cateau. A corollary to this decision was that it also doomed any further effective cooperation between the principal allied military headquarters until Field-Marshal French was replaced.
When Douglas Haig acceded to the command of the British Armies in France and Flanders on December 19, 1915, his options for selecting a command policy were limited by those of his predecessor, the changing desires of his government, and the relative strengths of the allied armies. The British General Commanding-in-Chief was still expected to play a subordinate role and cooperate with the French who had borne the brunt of the German onslaught. The British government, distracted with numerous other projects, saw fit to continue the tenuous command relationship which had existed between Field-Marshal French and General Joffre. This decision was made despite the fact that Kitchener's "New Armies" had swollen the British contribution to the Western Theater of operations from four divisions in 1914 to an organization of four armies composed of thirty-eight infantry and five cavalry divisions in January, 1916.

Haig's instructions from the Secretary of State for War, Field-Marshal Horatio Kitchener, managed to separate responsibility and authority—a cardinal error in any leadership situation. Haig was ordered to cooperate with General Joffre's instructions and plans but was not relieved of the responsibility for the safety of the British forces in the field. Despite this serious weakness, initial relations
between the British General Headquarters (GHQ) and the French Grand Quartier Général (GQG) improved with Haig's appointment. The close cooperation between the French and British commanders in the field, necessary for an Allied victory, had seemingly been assured by Haig's promotion.

Haig's orders from Kitchener on December 28, 1915 maintained the aloof character of British military cooperation present in those of his predecessor. However, more specific instructions regarding strategic movements were presented which bound the BEF more surely to the French forces.

...the mission of the British Expeditionary Force... is to support and cooperate with the French and Belgian Armies against our common enemies.... but I wish you distinctly to understand that your command is an independent one, and that you will in no case come under the orders of any Allied General further than the necessary co-operation with our Allies above referred to.

4. If unforeseen circumstances should arise such as to compel our Expeditionary Force to retire, such a retirement should never be contemplated as an independent move to secure the defence of the ports facing the Straits of Dover, although their security is a matter of great importance.... The safety of the Channel will be decided by the overthrow of the German Armies rather than by some defensive positions with our backs to the sea.
These explicit instructions were adhered to by Field-Marshall Haig until they were amended on July 21, 1918 by Alfred Lord Milner. He was never relieved of the ultimate responsibility for the safety of all British troops on the Western Front, although he was often denied the ultimate authority over strategic employment of these troops.

Haig had shown a keen appreciation of the importance of cooperation with the French during the Battles of the Frontiers. During the Retreat from Mons, he commanded the I Corps of the BEF and was not favorably impressed with the performance of the French commanders. He attempted to cooperate with General Lanrezac's plan to thwart the German advance at the Battle of Guise but was overruled by Field-Marshall French. In another instance of his cooperative attitude at this time, he aided the French XVIII Corps which was suffering from a breakdown of its logistical support. Haig gave 10,000 tins of Bully Beef to the French Corps out of his own supplies. General de Maud'huy, the grateful recipient, replied that this gift to his half-starved troops would be one which he would always remember.

Haig has been characterized by some detractors as being vehemently anti-French and wholly unresponsive to the cause of Allied unity. However, in this regard it is
apparent that his views are being classed as one with those of the Francophile General William Robertson. In light of the attitudes shown by Haig at his accession to the high command and his subsequent cooperation with French commanders, the fable of the British Field-Marshall's prejudice is shown to be wholly inaccurate or at least grossly exaggerated.

In contrast to Field-Marshall French, Haig realized that the cornerstone of British military strategy was the Western Front and that the Empire's interests there were thus dependent upon cooperation with the French. In order to facilitate the requisite cooperation, Haig undertook the study of the French language and spent two hours each day for four months improving his ability to communicate in his ally's tongue. Later in the war when asked by French President Poincaré how he and General Pétain were progressing together, Haig replied: "Nous ne parlons ensemble ni français ni anglais, nous parlons militaire, et nous nous entendons." These are hardly the sentiments of an inarticulate Francophile.

On December 21, 1915, Haig issued a memorandum to his Chief of Staff Launcelot Kiggell which outlined his policy toward Franco-British cooperation:
In the past there has certainly existed on the part of the French a feeling that we were not always willing to take our fair share. No doubt that feeling has existed on our side also. There must be give and take. The present moment is opportune for creating a good impression and paving the way for smooth negotiations with the French, especially as important matters in regard to combined operations are pending. 20

Even Basil H. Liddell Hart, an outspoken critic of Haig and his policies, allows that:

He [Douglas Haig] maintained this spirit of helpfulness when in supreme command, and none had a better grasp of the vital importance of cooperation between the Allies. If General Headquarters was sometimes as notorious for its criticism against the French as was the Grand Quartier Général against the British such tendencies were due not to Haig but to his subordinates. 21

By the time Douglas Haig assumed command of the British Armies in France and Flanders, the French Armies had suffered more than one million dead and missing. The all volunteer Kitchener Armies of England had just begun to come onto the battlefield and it was evident that the British would soon be the dominant Allied force. Yet, despite the narrowing gap between the relative army strengths, the French were still predominant in early 1916. The battles in
the principal theater of operations were being fought on French soil and the primary national interest in the coalition had to be that of the Third Republic. In these circumstances, the British high command continued to surrender its initiative to their ally and supported with growing fervor the insistence that a maximum effort be expended in the West.

**Papa Joffre**

Italy joined the Allied cause in April, 1915 under the secret provisions of the London Conference. Amidst the complex territorial "deals" provided as inducements for Italian cooperation was sandwiched the first concrete proposal for joint military planning. The resolution called for a "Military Convention" to be concluded between all Allied General Staffs in order to determine the appropriate plans against Austria-Hungary. The only other military consideration in the treaty was that the military leaders should prepare joint positions on "questions bearing upon an armistice in so far as these...come within the scope of the Army Command." With such a limited mandate, the French began joint military planning within three months.

On July 7th, the first Inter-Allied Military Conference of the war was convened at General Joseph Joffre's
headquarters at Chantilly. After the first in a series of failures on the Isonzo Front by the Italians, the disaster at Suvla Bay by a joint Allied task force and the impending destruction of the Russian Army, the assembled leaders of the Entente now realized the necessity for at least coordinating their independent activities in point of view of time. The first conference, however, did not produce any specific measures "except a general agreement that each national army should be active in its own way." A second conference was planned to discuss further specific actions.

Prior to the convening of the second Inter-Allied Military Conference, General Joffre presented a detailed memorandum on Allied war policies. In broad terms, the French proposal called upon the Allies to deliver "simultaneous attacks with their maximum forces on their respective fronts as soon as they [were] ready." In the meantime, the "Austro-German forces [were to] be worn down by vigorous action." In typically French manner, the Allies were ambivalently asked to "allot to the secondary theatres only the minimum forces required". However, minimum forces included all of the units then in Salonika, Albania, Roumania, and the Middle East. Again, in the fashion of the French, the economic aspects of the war were virtually ignored. The naval blockade was given
The representatives of the Allied armies unanimously agreed to the principle: "the decision of the war can only be obtained in the principal theatres,... (Russian front, Franco-British front, Italian front). The decision should be obtained by co-ordinated offensives on these fronts." While falling far short of a "Western" strategy, this endorsement did downgrade Salonika, Mesopotamia and Palestine as important fronts. The conferees also called for simultaneous "general action" to be launched as soon as possible (later this was specified as the end of March, 1916). This plan of action also countenanced the war of attrition: "The wearing down ('usure') of the enemy" was to be pursued intensively by the "Powers which still have abundant reserves of men."

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, upon his return to England, presented the first military position paper of the Imperial General Staff to the Government. On December 16th, after revising his paper in some respects to conform with the decisions of the Inter-Allied Military Conference, he presented a wide ranging examination of the available courses of action open to Great Britain, acting as a part of the Entente. Murray carefully weighed the military options of landing troops on the Belgian coast, behind the
the Isonzo Front, and in Asia Minor. He realistically indicated the impossibility of any major new force being raised within the next six to eight months. Fully conceding Germany's inherent advantage of interior lines, the author concluded that "the General Staff recommend, unhesitatingly, a vigorous prosecution of the offensive on the existing East, West, and Italian fronts as the wisest course to pursue". Just as Robertson and Haig would do later in the war, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff dismissed "the idea of an easier way round" as apparently "based more on impatience than on a careful examination of evidence." Since British forces were not envisioned as participating in actions on the Russian or Italian fronts, this policy paper was essentially an exposition of the "Western" strategy for the British.

Shortly after the submission of this policy recommendation, General Murray was replaced as CIGS by Sir William Robertson. At the same time General Douglas Haig assumed the command of the British Armies in France and Flanders. Robertson agreed fully with the examination of the situation and the conclusions drawn by his predecessor in the paper and immediately requested a decision from the Government. Consequently on the 28th of December, the War Committee approved the following resolutions:
1. From the point of view of the British Empire, France and Flanders will remain the main theatre of operations.
2. Every effort is to be made for carrying out the offensive operations next spring in the main theatre of war in close co-operation with the Allies and in the greatest possible strength. The actual plan of attack is left to the discretion of the commanders in the field.

The Committee further relegated operations in the secondary theaters except Salonika, which was not mentioned, to a defensive posture. British military and political leaders were in agreement upon the futility of maintaining the Allied expedition in Salonika and would have withdrawn from that theater immediately. French and Russian desires regarding the Salonikan front however, blocked such a move and the British maintained a substantial force there during the remainder of the war.

Thus, when Douglas Haig was called upon to lead the rapidly expanding British Army, many precedents had been set and rather firm courses of action had been agreed upon by the political and military leaders of the Entente. First, it had been agreed that the French military commander, General Joffre, was the de facto leader of Allied policy making. The second point was that some degree of Allied military cooperation was vital if victory was to be achieved;
this cooperation was based upon voluntary contributions, however. Finally, the Allies had committed themselves to concentrating their forces in the principal theaters of war. As far as the British Empire was concerned, this meant sending all available forces to France and reverting to defensive operations on all other fronts.

Haig's plan for the coming spring operation was to make the main British effort on the Ypres-Messines front. The plan called for an end-run amphibious landing on the Belgian coast in combination with a thrust on land against the relatively weak German defenses around the Ypres salient. Joffre, however, planned a combined Anglo-French offensive on either side of the Somme River. Joffre requested the British to relieve the French Tenth Army in the line. This move would make the British front continuous from the Ypres area to the Somme River. Haig clung to the hope of implementing the northern operations but instructed his staff and the concerned army commanders to begin planning for both this and Joffre's Somme battle.

After a period of discussion and realizing his subordinate position in the coalition, Haig acquiesced and agreed to conform to Joffre's plan. The relief of the French Tenth Army was also agreed to in principle, without fixing
a date for the transfer. The British munitions shortage, particularly in an adequate supply of heavy artillery shells, was being remedied but would not allow a large scale attack to begin before the summer. Accordingly, the Somme offensive 33 was provisionally scheduled for the late summer.

While the Allies planned, the German Army acted. General Falkenhayn, now the military leader of the Central Powers, initiated the great battle for Verdun. The unannounced objective of this operation was to bleed the French Army of its remaining strength and thus knock France out of the war. Six days after the intense battle of attrition began, it became obvious that the French were being pressed to the limits of their endurance. On that day, Haig informed General Joffre that the British Army would commence the relief of the French Tenth Army immediately. The next day, Haig went to GQG to personally assure his beleaguered ally of his complete support.

On January 13th, the British War Committee had modified 35 its commitment to a full scale spring offensive. It added the qualification: "although it must not be assumed that such offensive operations are finally decided on" to their original agreement to participate in the spring offensive.

Joffre realized the difficult situation presented by the British Government's tampering with the original plan.
He, therefore, called a third Inter-Allied Military Conference to be held on March 12th. In addition, he influenced the French Premier, Aristide Briand, to convene an Allied Conference in Paris on March 27th. The latter conference was attended by both political and military leaders and was the largest such gathering held in the war up until that time.

The previous military meeting had concluded that "the Coalition [should] undertake its combined offensives with the least possible delay. The exact date will be fixed by the Commanders-in-Chief." This statement was communicated to the Allied Conference which accepted this and several other proposals without debate. The representatives then proceeded to consider the technical details of transportation, ammunition supply, and the labor available on the home front. These were the first definite steps taken toward joint action. The time for optimistic rhetoric had passed, action was now needed.

While the German mincing machine at Verdun was consuming French troops, there was a great public outcry in France over the apparent inactivity of the British troops. Although Haig was following Joffre's desires exactly, it was evident to the British Government that any hesitation on their part in agreeing to the Allied military plans might
might prove fatal to the cause of the Entente. Therefore, on April 7th, the British Government formally approved the commitment of British troops to the large Franco-British offensive.

As French losses mounted and French units were rotated through the hell of the Verdun battlefield, it became evident to both Joffre and Haig that the French contribution to the Somme offensive would have to be reduced. As a result, the French decided that "it is possible and it may even be unavoidable that the English Army will have to undertake alone the offensive which has been prepared."

Following this, Haig, on May 29th, notified General Sir Henry Rawlinson that his Fourth Army might have to carry the main burden of the attack alone. That same day the new CIGS, General Robertson, informed the War Committee of the grave military situation and counseled against expecting a breakthrough of the German lines.

The prolonged first Battle of the Somme commenced on July 1, 1916. It proceeded with extremely heavy losses being suffered without any compensating gains in terrain. The various component offensives continued until November, when bad weather halted active campaigning. The Somme Battles had the immediate effect of diverting enough German attention
and troop strength from Verdun to allow the French to check and eventually to throw back Falkenhayn's offensive. Before the end of 1916, General Nivelle conducted two brilliantly successful attacks which recovered nearly all German gains. The oppressive losses suffered by the Germans in the Somme Battles and in their own offensive were not evident as the year ended. The losses suffered by the British and French were, however, only too evident.

The enemy had been diverted and finally checked in his offensive operations but the prospect of victory in the west by overcoming the German Army appeared very distant, if not unattainable. To add to the apparent futility of the Allied military situation, Roumania had been overwhelmed by the Central Powers after joining the Allied cause and the Italian Army had been checked in all actions on the Isonzo River. Despite a marked numerical superiority, the Allies had been unable to move toward victory and had succeeded only in negating the enemy's action on the Western Front. The situation on the field of battle was quickly reflected in political and military changes in the Allied command structure.
"No More Sommes"

The unremitting casualty rolls from the Somme and Verdun battlefields added to a growing sense of war weariness in France. The British nation, experiencing its first massive losses, endured the sorrow but questioned the effectiveness of the political and military leadership which allowed such Pyrrhic victories. Premier Briand elevated Joffre to the rank of Marshal of France and effectively relieved him of any authority in military matters. The new leader of the French Armies was General Robert Nivelle, a recent hero of Verdun. At the same time, General Ferdinand Foch, Joffre's chief executive, was removed from his command. In England, the military structure, although discredited, survived intact. Mr. Asquith's coalition Government resigned, however, and was replaced by that of Mr. David Lloyd George. With these adjustments, a new phase of Allied cooperation began.

In what had now become the accepted method of coordinating military activity, Joffre had convened an Inter-Allied Military Conference at the GQG on November 15th and 16th. The purpose of the conference had been to review the military situation and to prepare joint plans for the coming year. The military leaders unrealistically felt that the results of 1916's campaign had been satisfactory. They sensed the great
losses inflicted upon the German armies and prided themselves in having checked the Verdun offensive and causing Falkenhayn to be removed and replaced by the team of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff. With a completely different outlook from that of their civilian superiors, the military leaders called for a continuation of the slogging war of attrition.

a) During the winter of 1916-1917 the offensive operations now in course will be continued....
b) ... the Armies of the Coalition will be ready to undertake general offensives ...with all the means at their disposal....
d) ...the general offensives, in the maximum strength that each Army can put in the field, will be launched on all fronts at the earliest moment at which they can be synchronized.. 43

The growing desire for more political control of military operations caused Lloyd George to insist upon a conference of allied statesmen without military interference. This conference was held simultaneously with Joffre's Chantilly conference. On November 16th, Generals Joffre, Haig, Robertson and the Italian Chief of Staff, General Porro, joined the civilian meeting and presented their joint proposals. In the existing mood of the civil leaders, the conference received these proposals unenthusiastically. The politicians, feeling that their powers and constitutional responsibilities had been usurped, refused to endorse any
specific military policy for the coming year.

As the new year of 1917 opened, the alliance between France and Great Britain showed signs of weakness which could only add to the already confused state of military cooperation. The initial enthusiasm with which the peoples had supported the war had long since been drowned in a sea of trench mud and had been dulled by the incessant casualty rolls.

The inexact methods of democracy were shown to be inefficient in executing total war. As the British liaison officer at GQG noted: "The old coat of democracy, never intended for wear at Armageddon, was showing white at the seams". Especially in England, which had not felt the burdensome losses which the French nation had endured, the government and the people moved into action lethargically, despite their united spirit. Lacking a sense of urgency, the English went about their tasks in a businesslike manner which the volatile French were incapable of understanding.

David Lloyd George, who succeeded Asquith in December, 1916, was pledged to the effective prosecution of the war. He had been a brilliant solicitor and had shown his pragmatic decisiveness in organizing efficient production policies in the Ministry of Munitions. His was a fertile mind which would search for new approaches to all problems of the war.
The son of an itinerant Welsh teacher, he was little concerned with the niceties of British social and military procedure. His common sense approach to all problems might have been useful had he not faced one great problem. Although he knew what he wanted—a quick, inexpensive victory—he was dependent upon a tenuous coalition for his continuation in office. The great split in the Liberal Party had made permanent enemies of more than half of his former allies in Parliament. The Unionists, led by Andrew Bonar Law, were wedded to the support of the military powers in office—Haig and Robertson—and Lloyd George could not retain power without Unionist support.

Throughout his tenure of office, the Prime Minister had to balance his political and military policies with exact precision. If he precipitated a public revolt among his high military advisors, his position would be forfeit. Yet his unschooled evaluation of the war and the way it was being fought, convinced him that his generals did not know how to win the war efficiently. Their only solution was to continue the bloody encounters of attrition. The Western Front was the answer for Haig and Robertson. Only there could the principal enemy be defeated. Military Science emphasized meeting the main enemy force on the decisive front. Who but an unknowledgeable "frock" would dispute such pristine logic?
Lloyd George was determined to allow "no more Sommes". His impatient mind fled from the thought of attrition. There must be other ways. "Blood and mud" were not exactly bright slogans for a wartime political leader to use in rallying a nation. He searched for a new strategy which would bypass the 400 mile trench wall through Europe. His leading soldiers came up with no new strategy and, until the final months of the war, sought to block the solutions he presented.

The lack of unity between Lloyd George and his military commanders is peripheral to this study. However the fact that the military and civil leaders of Great Britain failed to present a united front in Allied councils goes far in explaining her lack of effect in those councils. This situation existed until the final stages of the war, when her military and naval forces predominated in the alliance. In general, Britain's voice was weak and uncertain in comparison to the consolidated action of the French leaders. As a result, French desires often overruled those of the British when there was a disagreement.

The general plan of Allied military cooperation had been agreed upon at the Inter-Allied Military Conference at GQG on the 16th of November 1916. General Joffre, by force of his prestige and the valiant sacrifices of the French
nation, was acknowledged as the principal war leader. Douglas Haig and William Robertson acquiesced in Joffre's preeminent position and readily subordinated themselves to the plan for offensives on all fronts during the first half of February 1917. It had become an article of faith among all French and British military leaders that their front in France and Belgium was the main theater for Allied operations. With an eye on their respective political superiors, the generals had been assured that the men and material for this front would not be diverted to other areas. "These should, in our opinion, be the paramount premises on which every plan of operation for the Coalition should be based." 

Haig and Robertson had also accepted the responsibility for the main role in the coming campaign season. Joffre was wary of over-taxing the French Army. The flower of French military strength had been sacrificed on the Marne, the Yser and at Verdun. More than 1,200,000 French poilus were now dead or in enemy confinement. The continued focus of battle on the French Army would eventually burn it through and leave the British Armies without an effective ally. The British generals knew that the great sacrifices made by the French limited their future participation. They did not have to be told that the main burden of the war now fell to their
Joffre's specific plan for the Western front was to broaden the frontage of the Somme battleground of the previous year. The French would attack between the rivers Oise and Somme while the British simultaneously assaulted between Baupaume and Vimy. The eight mile gap between these two salients was to be held defensively. This logical decision was made because the area here was comprised of some of the most devastated territory of the 1916 Somme battles.

Joffre indicated to Haig that following the spring offensive of 1917, the main effort in the fighting would pass to the British Armies. Continuing with the planned northern operations, which had been shelved a year ago in deference to Joffre's instructions, Haig fixed upon the combined amphibious-land attack in Belgium. The British Admiralty had spurred the implementation of this particular plan because it would drive the enemy from Zeebrugge and Ostend, which were being used as bases for submarine attacks on British shipping in the English Channel.

The enemy alliance was now led by the fabled combination of Hindenburg-Ludendorff. After the serious Austrian defeats in the Brusilov Offensive in June 1916, the Germans had been forced to close down Falkenhayen's costly operations
at Verdun and had consolidated their power. This series of events assured the Central Powers of unity of effort. The Germans led the way and Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey followed without question. Hindenburg-Ludendorff scraped together the necessary German troops to stiffen the motley forces of their partners and had ended the year with the brilliant defeat of the unfortunate Roumanian state.

On the Western Front, the Germans began a stout system of defensive works in September 1916 in case their forces were withdrawn on the Somme front. The "Siegried Stellung", called by the British the Hindenburg Line, stretched behind the salients which were the objectives of Joffre's plan from Arras to St. Quentin.

Certainly the premise of those who believed in the "Western Strategy" is open to question and will be debated as long as the Great War is a subject of interest. Even the most ardent Westerner will grant the military value of the objectives sought in the Dardanelles and Gallipoli campaigns of 1915— the securing of communications with the great eastern ally and depriving the Central Powers access to the Mediterranean Sea. The Easterners looked at these campaigns as attempting to knock out the Turkish "prop" but this was not the real objective. When these poorly planned and dread-
fully executed misadventures failed, there seems to have been little military reason for demanding that the Salonikan, Mesopotamian and Italian fronts receive resources which would have assured success in the French-Belgium theater. Even if sufficient force could have been gained to knock Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Turkey out of the war, the German enemy would still have been a viable one. Yet if Germany were forced from the field, the minor partners would have been helpless.

In addition to this purely strategic analysis, there remained in 1917 the fact that French territory and almost all of Belgium remained under German control. The emotional and political consequences of ignoring the Western front would have been disastrous for the alliance. The French could not view the conflict with the dispassionate eye of an historian or military analyst. Since the British had surrendered the political and military initiative of the Entente to the Army of the Third Republic from the outset and could not unite their own political-military representation, they forfeited any hope of shifting the effective weight of the fighting to any other theater.
La Bataille d'Usure

Although tactics are not within the purview of this work, it is necessary at this point to emphasize that the Franco-British military leaders had resolved by the summer of 1917 to fight the coming battles as battles of attrition. This technique has acquired an evil connotation in the ensuing years as a wasteful and senseless tactic which cannot achieve decisive results. The unpalatable features of attrition were just as evident in General Grant's wearing down of the Army of Northern Virginia as in Haig's decision to wear down the German Armies in France and Flanders. No doubt, a mobile war is less costly, more productive of innovation and certainly more interesting. But when this mobile war is impossible, there can be no other solution. Faced with the situation in 1916-18 on the Western Front, there could be no other choice.

The technology of the age had granted the overwhelming advantage to the defensive over the offensive form of warfare. The railroad lines which laced the tactical portions of the trench system together were defensive tools. Reserves could be shifted rapidly to blunt a threatened breakthrough but could never steam troops forward in an exploitation. The machine gun and massed heavy artillery multiplied the power of each defensive soldier over the unprotected, advancing
infantryman. Any local superiority obtained—artillery barrages, gas clouds, tanks or massed aeroplanes—would eventually be outrun or their potency reduced through technical limitations as the assault progressed. The momentum of any offensive was quickly spent and the gains made were immediately vulnerable to the inevitable counter-attack. The breakthrough was an illusory dream in 1917; it lived in the minds of cavalry generals until the cruel lessons of trench warfare were learned. Then the only answer was "the wearing-out fight;" the depletion of the enemy's reserves of manpower and material until he was too weak to resist. Only then was it possible to conduct the decisive stage of the battle—the drive for victory.

Douglas Haig dreamed of a breakthrough in the battles of Neuve Chapelle, Loos and the First Battle of the Somme in 1916. But, by mid-1917 he had learned his lessons in these bloody failures and was prepared to limit his offensives to achieve small, but cumulatively decisive, gains. It was proven at Neuve Chappie in 1915 and on the Somme in 1916 that any trench system could be breached at a relatively equal cost in losses, if the attacking force amassed an overwhelming superiority in artillery fire, advanced to the limit of their artillery support, and no farther, reached their limited objective in an organized formation and prepared for the
inevitable counterstroke.

This was attrition, devoid of its inflammatory and dramatic descriptive phrases. It was the slow, cautious and inexorable defeat of a weaker enemy by a power which knew its advantage but was unable to exercise this in mobile tactics.

Lloyd George Moves

An Allied conference was held in Rome in January, 1917. The ostensible purpose of the meeting was to discuss the campaign in Macedonia. The new British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, accompanied by Alfred Lord Milner and their military advisors, met with the Premiers of France and Italy. After agreeing upon a course of action for the Macedonian Front, Lloyd George unveiled a new military plan which had not been shown to any military personnel.

The premise of this new plan was that since Austria-Hungary was much weaker than Germany, the Allies should press for a victory against her and force her to accept a separate peace. This proposal would, argued its author, be much less costly than continuing on the offensive on the Western Front. Lloyd George offered to lend 250 to 300 heavy artillery pieces to Italy as an inducement to accept the mission and urged France to contribute according to her resources. The Italian
Commander-in-Chief, General Luigi Cadorna, was just as surprised as his British counterparts and insisted upon time to consider the proposal. Neither the French nor the Italian political leaders were prepared to accept such plans without expert advice. Ironically, the only tangible results of Lloyd George's clumsy maneuver were to improve the railway lines connecting Italy and France and to expose to Great Britain's allies the amount of distrust and the lack of coordination which now reigned in her political-military relations.

During Lloyd George's return trip through France he met and was strangely influenced by the new French Commander-in-Chief, General Robert Nivelle.

The Breakthrough: Once More With Feeling!

General Robert Georges Nivelle was a charming and forceful speaker. He spoke English fluently and without accent. Perhaps because Lloyd George was unused to such a clear military briefing, he responded to Nivelle's plan and leadership without reservation.

Nivelle's proposal was to mass the French Army for one final breakthrough of the German line. Basically he planned to apply the methods which had proven tactically successful at Verdun on a grand strategic scale. He foresaw a decisive
battle on the Western Front which would destroy the enemy's main army and achieve the illusive breakthrough, which other military leaders had failed to achieve. He planned to pin down the major portion of the enemy line with British assistance and then shatter the front on the Chemins des Dames ridge with a mass attack, reminiscent of the plans and doctrine of August, 1914. The attack, as he envisioned it, would go through within twenty-four hours. He promised that if the attack did not succeed within forty-eight hours, it would be halted. This plan was a drastic change from that agreed upon in November by the military leaders. It required an extension of the British line by more than twenty miles. It also placed the principal burden of battle squarely back upon the French Army.

Haig offered to begin his relief of the French line on February 1st and indicated that after the first increment of eight miles, the rate of this relief would depend upon the rate at which he received reinforcements. In addition, Haig asked Nivelle to agree that, if his breakthrough failed, the French would relieve some of the British line to allow the northern operations to continue in the summer. Affronted by the imagined lethargy of British support for his program and even more insulted by the suggestion that it might fail, Nivelle appealed to his government to press the British for
more complete conformity to his desires.

At a Franco-British conference in December, Lloyd George emphasized his support of the Nivelle plan but told Haig that no British reinforcements from Salonika could be expected. Before the next conference was held on Nivelle's plan, the British Prime Minister met with the author and was converted to its complete support. Lloyd George welcomed the vision of a decisive end to the war, especially if it imposed no heavy requirements upon his nation. His desire to win "on the cheap" blinded him to the fact that the plan was merely a rerun of policies which had failed miserably in the past two years.

At the second London conference on the proposed plan, Lloyd George agreed to send Haig two divisions from the home island defense force, in addition to four others. With this reinforcement, it was agreed that the British could relieve the full twenty miles of trenches requested by Nivelle by April 1st. The strength of the British Army would now be increased to sixty-two divisions in France. With this expansion, however, another serious problem presented itself.

The growth of the British forces in northern France had placed a heavy strain upon the rail network which supplied their needs. Haig, in line with his policy of utilizing civilian expertise whenever advantageous, had appointed Eric
Geddes as the Director-General of Transportation for his armies. Geddes implemented an extensive program of coordinating facilities in the British sector. The technical details of the logistical network were being dealt with and additional rolling stock was being sent from England. However, for the immediate needs of the expanding British front, much dependence was placed upon French facilities. On January 24th, Haig explained to Nivelle that his current capacity of 150,000 tons of supplies per week would have to be increased to 250,000 tons for effective implementation of the spring plan. The French viewed these requirements merely as excuses for postponing the attack. Nivelle proposed to aid the British supply system and improve the northern transportation network so that it could carry 200,000 tons each week. Haig agreed to compromise on this supply plan. At a later conference between the two commanders, the French general extended his assurance of assistance to the promise that the offensive would not begin until all British requirements had been met. This completely satisfied Haig and there appeared to be no further technical problems in the way of the planned offensive.

There was, however, one military exception which the British commander made to Nivelle's plan. He insisted that Vimy Ridge be included in the British objectives. He knew that
the British could not operate successfully east of Arras without first securing this dominant terrain feature to his left rear. The French refused to believe that the British could secure Vimy Ridge because General Foch had attempted this twice and had been repulsed. Despite the skeptical French attitude, Sir Douglas continued his demands and finally received permission to modify his plans. With all evident problems disposed of, there now appeared no reason for further high level discussion but, surprisingly, a full scale Franco-British conference was scheduled by Lloyd George to be held at Calais on February 26th. The reasons given for holding this meeting were to conduct additional talks on the British supply facilities and the continuing problems in the Macedonian theater.

"The Apple of Discord"

The Calais Conference met on February 26, 1917 and its results were to color the internal political and military coordination of the British Empire for the remainder of the war. The British Prime Minister, from the outset, allowed his revulsion with the policies of his own commanders to so warp his appreciation of the military situation, that he seriously compromised what unity of effort there had been up until that
time. An even more critical result of David Lloyd George's decisions in this conference was that he bound the main Allied Armies to a foolhardy military plan which would nearly lose the war within three months.

The purported reason for the conference—the transportation problems behind the British lines—was quickly brushed aside and the technical matters referred to a committee of experts. Lloyd George then turned to his real reason for calling the conference. He asked Nivelle and Haig to speak frankly of any disagreements they had over the coming operations. Haig naively spoke of the disagreement over including Vimy Ridge in the British objectives. Lloyd George then indicated that he was not interested in technical military points and gave the French the opening they had been awaiting. He asked General Nivelle to place in writing a guide to the military command structure which he felt should be instituted on the Western Front. At last, the conflict between the British political and military hierarchies was exposed; the French could now permanently subjugate their ally.

David Lloyd George had informed the French government and GQG, through the French liaison officer at the War Office, that he was willing to allow the British forces to be placed under General Nivelle's command. He expressed complete
confidence in Nivelle's plan and the feeling that Nivelle had to command all Allied troops in the coming operations for success. He stated that these sentiments could not be expressed publicly because Field-Marshal Haig's reputation among the British people and in his army was too great. However, he intimated that secret orders to the British Commander-in-Chief, making him subordinate to Nivelle, would be possible. Accordingly, the French had prepared a detailed command formula and now presented it when the conference reconvened.

This command formula exploited all of the weaknesses that Lloyd George had exposed. The memorandum called for ensuring "unity of command on the Western Front from 1st March 1917" by granting the French General-in-Chief "authority over the British forces operating on this front, in all that concerns the conduct of operations and especially: the planning and execution of offensive and defensive action; the dispositions of the forces... the boundaries between... formations...[and] the allotment of material." The British commander would carry out "the directives and instructions of the French Commander-in-Chief" and otherwise would only handle "questions of personnel and general discipline in the British Armies." The French commander would control the
British forces through a chief of staff at GHQ who would directly control the British General Staff and Quartermaster General, bypassing the British commander. The ultimate humiliation was that this arrangement was to be permanent, even if Nivelle was replaced, and could only be modified by a new joint directive.

The British military were shocked by this proposal. They had not been told of the pre-conference maneuvering or even informed of the general topics of discussion. In fact, they had purposely been kept unaware of Lloyd George's plans. Such a situation left Haig and Robertson bitter at their Prime Minister and distrustful of the ally with whom they had always loyally cooperated.

General William Robertson vowed that he would resign his position as Chief of the Imperial General Staff rather than allow the British Armies to be placed in such a subordinate role. Sir Douglas Haig, while smarting under this blow of ingratitude, publicly held that the higher command system was a political and not a military concern and was, therefore, not within the realm of his power. The French proposal was even too drastic and specific for Lloyd George. As a result, a second command proposal was drafted which approved the 1917 war plans of General Nivelle, gave the
general direction of the campaign to the French Commander-in-Chief but gave the British commander the option of appealing to his government if his forces were endangered. This hastily prepared compromise was approved, but its imprecise nature soon became a source of friction.

The day after the Calais Conference, Haig received from Nivelle a peremptory order for all instructions issued by GHQ to the army commanders to be sent to the French headquarters first. This obvious attempt to meddle in the internal operations of the British command may have been caused by Nivelle's desire to embarass Haig and force him to resign or it may have resulted from the French officer's imperfect understanding of the final limitations of the Calais agreement. In any event, Sir Douglas protested to his government that he was being treated unfairly and that the relationship with Nivelle had better be further defined. At this point, the relationship between the French and British High Commands became spiteful and sank to the lowest point in the war.

The result of Haig's protest was a second conference, held in London on March 13th, to define more precisely the command relationships between the two generals. The resulting agreement reaffirmed the British commander as a coequal and instructed "the French Commander-in-Chief [to] only
communicate with the Authorities of the British Army through the British Commander-in-Chief." It further specified that "all British troops stationed in France [would] remain in all circumstances under the orders of their own chiefs and of the British Commander-in-Chief." The final agreement did, however, authorize the "French Commander-in-Chief [to receive] from the British Commander-in-Chief information as to his operation orders as well as all information respecting their execution."

When asked to approve this agreement, Sir Douglas Haig refused to give a blanket endorsement:

I agree with the above on the understanding that while I am fully determined to carry out the Calais Agreement in spirit and letter, the British Army and its Commander-in-Chief will be regarded by General Nivelle as Allies and not as subordinates, except during the particular operations which he explained at the Calais Conference.

Further, while I also accept the Agreement respecting the functions of the British Mission at French Headquarters, it should be understood that these functions may be subject to modifications as experience shows to be necessary.

This endorsement is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, Haig's principal objection to any modification in the command arrangement which had existed between General Joffre and himself was apparently more one of form than reality. He insisted that he be recognized as an ally and not as a
subordinate, when he had, in practice, readily subordinated himself and his forces to the wishes of the former French commander. Another key to Haig's attitude is seen in his pragmatic approach to the liaison system between GHQ and GQG. Haig wanted to ensure that he retained control of his General Staff sections and the Quartermaster General's activities. But the most obvious exception which Haig took to the previous negotiations was that he viewed any direct subordination of British forces to French command as a temporary expedient and that he agreed to conform to General Nivelle's wishes only for the forthcoming spring offensive.

This exchange of proposals and counterproposals did nothing but exacerbate the latent distrust between the French and British High Commands. In fact, the command structure soon became unimportant in comparison to the disastrous course of events on the battlefield. In any event, the British headquarters did conform to Nivelle's plan, with the inclusion of Vimy Ridge as an objective, and loyally carried out all instructions of the French Commander-in-Chief.

**The End of the French Army**

Throughout the period of recrimination and confusion over Franco-British military coordination, the enemy had been
preparing to nullify the effectiveness of Nivelle's planned offensive. The German fortifications behind the Noyen salient, a part of the Hindenburg Line, had long been suspected by British intelligence of portending a voluntary withdrawal. During the very Calais Conference, which had committed the Allies to Nivelle's attack, Douglas Haig had received reports from his Fifth Army that enemy contact had been lost in some areas and that the Germans had begun a general withdrawal. These reports served to confirm Haig's lack of confidence in the Nivelle plan. This move by the enemy had been one of the reasons for the inclusion of Vimy Ridge in the British portion of the operation. The German withdrawal shortened their line, greatly increased their defensive power and would free units for possible offensive action.

After the London meetings, the German withdrawal was moving rapidly. The two planned holding attacks were seriously affected by the withdrawal, but the main attack in the south was not. Nivelle, after promising an end to the war in one offensive, was now trapped by his own publicity campaign. He refused to modify his plans to conform to the changed conditions and maintained an air of optimism. However, the firm support he had enjoyed, especially from his own government, was rapidly being eroded. The Briand Government fell on
March 17, 1917 and the new ministry, headed by M. Alexandre Ribot, had as its War Minister Paul Painlevé, a skeptic about the soundness of Nivelle's plans. Painleve inquired among the Army Group commanders about the plan and found that the subordinates who would have to carry out the orders also had serious misgivings about them.

To add to Nivelle's problems, it became apparent that there would be no cooperative efforts from the other theaters of war to divert the enemy's reserves. The tottering Russian Army would make no offensive efforts until the end of June and a weak Allied offensive in Macedonia had ended after only twelve days on March 23rd. The British had sent the Italian Army ten batteries of six-inch howitzers in hopes of spurring and offensive on that front. However, General Cadorna, fearing an Austro-German attack after the fall of Roumania and the Russian Revolution, did not begin his offensive until after Nivelle's had failed. There appeared to be no chance of the simultaneous cooperation which had been in effect under Joffre's suzerainty. To climax the chain of bad omens for the success of the spring offensive, the Germans captured a set of operational plans for the main attack on April 4th. General Nivelle, faced with these mounting obstacles, persisted with his plans without any substantial change.
On April 9th, General Rawlinson's Fourth British Army began the much publicized campaign. The assault on Vimy Ridge was a complete success and the British attack, designed merely as a holding action, gained from two to five miles along a twenty-five mile front. The Arras offensive, with no real strategic objective, was maintained after these initial gains only to prevent the enemy from massing reserves against the French in the south.

Nivelle's grand assault commenced on the following day. Instead of the expected breakthrough, the thirty division attack penetrated only to the second defensive positions in a few areas. Following this meager advance, the offensive was checked all along the line. The poor showing of the French Army, after Nivelle's vaunted promises, caused a disastrous let down in morale. The French nation had nurtured unrealistic hopes that the operation would end the war; when it did not, the reaction was understandably sharp.

The discredited Ribot Government replaced Nivelle with the circumspect General Henri Pétain. Pétain favored a military course of "limited liability" and would await the arrival of the great American Army without further debilitating activity. The French Army turned inward to heal its mutiny-riddled spirit and passed the initiative for the remainder
of the year to the British. Without an active ally, Douglas Haig moved without external restraint upon his command until the following November.

Cooperative Allied efforts under General Joffre for the first two years of the war had proven frustrating and had greatly weakened the Entente military position. The politicians had retrieved their rightful control over the conduct of the war and instituted their kind of unified command—subordination of the British Army to French generals. In a very short time this solution had failed miserably. This failure effectively suspended military cooperation until final defeat confronted the alliance.
Notes for Chapter Two

1


2

The Continental mania for large standing armies, backed by a responsive reserve system, stemmed largely from the Franco-Prussian military rivalry. The British in their isolated military situation and with an historical distrust of standing armies did modernize their system to a large extent after the South African embrolio and the reports of the Esher Committee. The Haldane Reforms, instituted during Douglas Haig's tour of duty in the War Office as Director of Staff Duties, envisioned the small regular army being rapidly supplemented by the Territorial Army which would serve as the basis for all new troop units. When the need for a large army actually came, Lord Kitchener decided to form a completely new organization, the New Armies, from the rush of volunteers. Thus, the British used three distinct types of troop schedules with different standards of training and experience: the Regular Army, the Territorial Army and the New Armies.

3

A notable exception to this general military myopia was Lieutenant-General Douglas Haig. He foresaw a long war, requiring Great Britain to field a mass army. On August 4, 1914, he prevailed upon the newly appointed Secretary of State for War, Field-Marshal Kitchener, to accept this view. The only man to publicly declare a belief in a large scale war of attrition was a Polish banker and economist, Ivan S. Bloch, The Future of War... Is War Now Impossible?, (New York, 1899). This detailed study, which concluded that a modern war in 1900 would be indecisive and prohibitively expensive, was generally ignored by soldiers bent on conducting a short offensive war. See Hanson W. Baldwin, World War I, An Outline History (New York, 1962), 2.

4

France's attitude toward British involvement in a Continental land war was epitomized by the future Generalissimo of the Allied Armies, Ferdinand Foch, during a visit to England in 1898. When asked what support France expected from England in such a war he replied: "Send one man, I will take care that he is killed and then I will know we shall have the English nation in arms." George C. Arthur, Not Worth Reading (London, 1938), 177; Guinn, British Strategy and Politics, 14.

The British Governments repeatedly surrendered their initiative in military strategy to the French, who, in turn, had surrendered their initiative to their generals. France had granted England the right to predominance in naval coordination but the English never took advantage of this abrogation of authority. As England's military role increased, her proportionate influence in Allied councils should have become predominant.


See letter, Field-Marshal John French to Field-Marshal Earl Kitchener, August 31, 1914. Contained in George C. Arthur, Life of Lord Kitchener (New York, 1920), III, 48. This letter expresses French's complete distrust of the French High Command and his intention to withdraw his forces from the line of battle.

French's withdrawal into an unrealistic defensive posture required the Secretary of State for War to personally intervene and order French to move back into line and fight with the French Army.


12 Aside from dissatisfaction with Field-Marshal French's attitude, the French leaders welcomed Haig as a competent military commander. Following the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in 1915, General Joffre sent a translation of Haig's orders to all French staffs as an example of how field instructions should be imparted to subordinates. General Huguet, Britain and the War (London, 1928), 158 and 179.


14 See supra, 161-163.


16 John Terraine, Ordeal of Victory (New York, 1963), 97.

17 Victor Bonham-Carter, The Strategy of Victory, 1914-1918 (New York, 1963), 170-71; David Lloyd George, Memoirs, 6 vols. (London, 1937), III, 401-02; V, 208; A relatively impartial observer, Neville Lytton, the chief of the press representatives at GHQ, observed: "I must say that the Chief [Douglas Haig] was always full of respect for my admiration for the French, though his staff scowled. This anti-French atmosphere was fostered and kept active by the attitude of the Prime Minister [Lloyd George] who admired French military genius at the expense of our own soldiers...." Neville Lytton, The Press and the General Staff (London, 1920), 138-39.


22. *Les Armées Française dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 1925), III, 588-602. The total French killed and missing as of December 31, 1915 was 1,001,271.


24. Shortly thereafter, a bilateral Franco-British agreement was consumated as a result of Joffre's appeal to his Government on July 30, 1915. The command formula agreed upon in this instance provided: "During the period in which the operations of the British army take place in French territory...the initiative in combined actions of the French and British forces devolves on the French Commander-in-Chief." The only restriction placed on Joffre's position was that: "The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces will of course fully retain the choice of means of execution." Lord Kitchener agreed to these conditions for the British Government but he insisted upon keeping the details of the agreement from the Dardanelles Committee (which shortly became the War Cabinet). Although this was an excellent command structure for coordinated activity, it never really took effect. It was indeed unfortunate that these terms were never made public, for they might have served as a precedent for further cooperative endeavors. Edmonds, *BOH*, 1915, II, 123-26; Maurice, *Lessons*, 16-19.

25. Edmonds, *BOH*, 1915, II, 87-89. In the interim between the two Chantilly conferences, General Joffre was elevated from C-in-C of the Armies of the Northeast to C-in-C of the
French Armies. This move was obviously taken to strengthen Joffre's position in the second Inter-Allied Conference.

26

The conference was held on December 6th-8th 1915. Great Britain was represented by Field-Marshal French, Lieutenant-General Archibald Murray (CIGS), Lieutenant-General Henry Wilson (chief liaison officer to the French Army), and Lieutenant-General William Robertson (CofS, BEF). Thus, by coincidence, all three men who would serve the British Empire as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff during the Great War participated in this first declaration of Allied military policy. France, Russia, Italy, and Serbia were the other participants.

27

28

29

30
Edmonds, BOH, 1916, I, 10.

31
The German defenses around Ypres were less formidable than those astride the Somme River where the British eventually attacked.

32

33
Although Haig acquiesced on the overall principle of conducting a joint campaign on the Somme, he did stand up to Joffre on several important side issues. He insisted upon
"the main French and British attacks [being] 'jointives' that is side by side" for maximum effect. Furthermore he firmly declined to initiate spoiling attacks to draw enemy reserves in April for the July main attack. The new commander complemented himself for achieving "quite a victory" and realized that he "had to be firm without being rude in order to gain [his] points" with the venerable Joffre. Diary entry, February 14, 1916, Blake ed., Private Papers, 129.

34
This scene was quite similar to the one in which General John J. Pershing gave his assurance of full support to General Foch following the reverses of the spring of 1918. In this first instance, however, the promise was effectively fulfilled. Duff Cooper, Haig, I, 305-06; Diary entry, February 25, 1916, Blake ed., Private Papers, 132-33.

35
See infra, 55; Edmonds, BOH, 1916, I, 12; Field-Marshall William Robertson, Soldiers and Statesmen (New York, 1926), I, 257.

36

37
This frank discussion among the Allied representatives concerning technical cooperation highlighted the complex character the war had assumed. The offers of mutual assistance made at this conference indicate a deep awareness amongst all Allies of their interdependence in technical matters. France actually proposed to manufacture and supply Italy and Russia with heavy artillery if they, in turn, would only provided her with laborers. Ibid., 35-39.

38

39
Memorandum, French Government (information copy to Douglas Haig), Edmonds, BOH, 1916, I, 44.

40
Maurice, Lessons, 27.

There has been a great deal of controversy over the relative losses in personnel during the Somme Battles of 1916 and at Verdun. The British Official Historian of the Great War concludes that the Germans suffered proportionally higher casualties:

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<tr>
<td><strong>British losses, Somme</strong></td>
<td>419,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>French losses, Somme</strong></td>
<td>204,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>French losses, Verdun</strong></td>
<td>362,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>985,000</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>German losses, Somme</strong></td>
<td>680,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>German losses, Verdun</strong></td>
<td>336,000</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,016,000</strong></td>
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These figures have been attacked as being doctored to protect the reputations of the Allied military commanders. The principal problem in comparing casualty figures in the Great War lies in the widely varying definition of what a casualty was in the German Army. The British counted all wounds as casualties and often one man with multiple wounds would be counted several times. The Germans did not consider a man wounded if he could return to action within 30 days or if he was allowed to recuperate in the zone of battle. See: M. J. Williams, "Thirty Per Cent: A Study in Casualty Statistics," *Journal Royal United Services Insitution*, 109 (1964) 51-55.


The British public accepted many voluntary restraints upon their activities. The government established restrictive measures in a slow and evolutionary manner. The pressures to maintain "business as usual" gave way only slowly and France
viewed this as a betrayal of her great sacrifices. See: Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Boston, 1965), 39-44 and 130-48. One excellent example of this slow realization of the demands of total war was noted in Haig's diary. While on a steamer, returning to France, he noted that the boat was very crowded because military leave had been suspended due to the expected heavy railway traffic in England during the Easter holiday. Grimly he asked: "I wonder what the historian will write about Great Britain, whose inhabitants in a period of crisis, insist that these holiday makers should be given preference in travelling to soldiers from the seat of war." Blake, *Private Papers*, 140.

46

"At one of his first high-level conferences with the French, Haig was said by an eye-witness to have been treated exactly as if he were an Army Group Commander and to have been cross-examined by French politicians about his dispositions and reserves." General Wilson, a leading Francophile, viewed this as being too compliant. Basil Collier, *Brasshat: A Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson* (London, 1961), 229-30.

47


48

For details of the proposed plans of the military leaders see: Edmonds, *BOH, 1917*, I, *passim*.

49

It might be well to point out that these plans for the northern operations did not originate with Haig. On January 8, 1915, the British War Committee vetoed Sir John French's proposal for a British advance on Zeebrugge. The reason for this action was not dissatisfaction with the idea but a lack of adequate forces. F. M. French was "thereby not prevented from co-operating—to the utmost extent compatible with [his] present resources—with any offensive movement contemplated by General Joffre." Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, 50.

50


Another possible explanation of Nivelle's ungentlemanly behavior stems from the attitude of his principal assistant the consumptive Colonel D'Alenson. As Nivelle's chef de cabinet he "sought... by a series of dictatorial instructions...[to] produce a crisis and Haig's resignation. In this object D'Alenson failed, and even the temporary harm he did to Allied relations was minimized by Haig's own balance of mind, for if strong to complain he was not strong to retaliate; and it is one of the highest tributes to him [Haig] that although sorely tried he never let his sense of injury obscure his sense of the need for cooperation between the Allies." Basil H. Liddell Hart, Reputations: Ten Years After (New York, 1928), 129.


Ibid., 68.
Chapter Three

War By Committee or The Supreme W. C.

The realization by the Western political leaders that the prosecution of the war was ineffective and wasteful led them to develop various schemes to achieve unity of military direction. These schemes reflected the national outlook of each leader and were subject to limitations imposed by the mandates held from their peoples. The French wished to have a thorough-going joint military command structure controlled by a French Generalissimo. The newly-joined American nation also emphasized the need for unified military control and was willing to submit its forces to the command of a foreign general. The Italian nation was a minor contributor to the military effort on the Western Front and their principal interest lay in obtaining technical and material assistance from France and Great Britain. Italy would accept the principle of a French Generalissimo on the Franco-British front so long as their voice dominated the actions in the Italian theater. The miniscule Belgian Army, under its constitutional Commander-in-Chief King Albert, could not formally accept foreign control. However, its actions were integrated under effective French control by the appointment of a French general officer as the Chief of Staff of the Belgian Army. The British Empire,
represented by the government of Great Britain, could not accept the control of a French Generalissimo until disaster faced the alliance. The principal reasons for the British intransigence in this matter were the public sentiment in favor of maintaining a separate force under a British leader and the fact that France no longer contributed the major share of the military power of the Alliance but would insist upon the right of naming the Generalissimo.

As has been outlined previously, the inability of the major allies to subordinate their selfish national interests to a common goal had restricted the scope of any plans for unity of command in military planning and execution from the outset of the war. As is characteristic in democratic societies, it took a traumatic shock of near-defeat to change this pattern of limited cooperation. The rout of General Luigi Cadorna's armies on the Isonzo Front on October 24, 1917, during the Battle of Caporetto, provided the impetus for the beginning moves in a series of command experiments which would culminate in the selection of an over-all commander for the Allied armies.

At a meeting between David Lloyd George, Paul Panlevé, and Vittorio Orlando at the Italian resort of Rapallo on November 7th, the Allies agreed to establish a Supreme War Council. The purpose of this council was to provide political and military coordination for the Allied military effort. and
specifically to avert any future fiascos such as Caporetto, which had cost a quarter of a million prisoners and required the rapid redeployment of eleven French and British divisions to the Italian theater.

Each nation was to be represented on the council either by its premier or his deputy and one other civilian representative. A leading military officer from each army was to act as the government's technical advisor on a board of Permanent Military Representatives which would provide the War Council with appropriate plans and recommendations for their approval. As a compromise gesture to M. Panlevé's acceptance of the British plan to limit the powers of the Council, the political leaders directed that the Board of Permanent Military Advisors would meet at least once each month in the Paris suburb of Versailles.

The French proposed that the Permanent Military Representatives should be the Chiefs of Staff or the Commanders-in-Chief of the participating nations. This requirement was unacceptable to Lloyd George since his ultimate desire was to bypass his leading military officers and direct the war effort himself through a uniformed spokesman. Another defect in the French proposal was that the use of officers already committed to national goals would require dual allegiance—to their own armies and to the board. It was therefore decided that the
that the military representatives would be disassociated from national assignments.

General Ferdinand Foch, General Henry Wilson, General Luigi Cadorna and General Tasker Bliss were appointed as the initial Permanent Military Representatives. From this selection, it is obvious that only Great Britain abided by the agreement to separate national and coalition loyalties. Foch had resigned as the French Chief of Staff to assume his new post, Bliss was the former American Chief of Staff, and Luigi Cadorna had recently been replaced as the Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Armies. Henry Wilson, in contrast, had been unemployed since his relief from duties as the British liaison officer to the Grand Quartier Général. He had been elevated to the rank of full General for his new assignment and his military outlook was closer to that of the Prime Minister than to those of the leaders of the British Army.

In fact, Great Britain's Prime Minister hobbled the effectiveness of the Supreme War Council by nominating Wilson to sit as the British emissary. Wilson was distrusted by Field-Marshal Haig and General Robertson. Neither Haig nor Robertson agreed with the idea of the council or the military proclivities of Lloyd George. The fiery Welshman reciprocated the feelings of the military leaders and felt that their
concepts of warfare were barren and could never produce a victorious conclusion to the war. The atmosphere of distrust which surrounded British military planning and direction could only spawn misunderstanding in the War Council and among the military leaders of the principal forces on the Western Front. Unfortunately, Lloyd George never felt secure enough to risk the morally correct but politically inexpedient course of replacing Field-Marshal Haig.

Wilson and the disgraced Field-Marshal Sir John French had been consulted by the Prime Minister earlier, on the 11th and 20th of October, in an attempt to determine the proper course for British Empire military strategy. In an interesting and strongly biased report, the two former supporters of the "Western Strategy" and central figures in past disputes with the French High Command determined that a supreme council for the direction of joint military operations was now required. This unprecedented procedure for obtaining military advice and its result gained Lloyd George's warm acceptance. The ad hoc military advisors had merely told the Prime Minister what he wished to hear and their questionable prestige was added to his campaign to nullify the influence of Haig and Robertson. This was the Prime Minister's goal in consulting French and Wilson and in proposing a Supreme War Council, although it
must be noted that in his mind these objectives were a vital first step toward winning the war.

It soon became apparent that the Supreme Allied War Council would be an ornamental structure erected as a sign of prompt political reaction to the fruitless military strategy of the preceding years. As a political sop to the public, it was an effective tool for the war leaders of the Entente powers. It also presented a semblence of military efficiency to the newly associated power—the United States of America. American President Wilson and his advisors were keenly aware of the need for concerted direction of the coalition war effort, although they were equally determined not to become entangled in the political and diplomatic intrigues of Europe. Thus, the newest member of the coalition was the most insistent upon a strong Board of Military Representatives while their interest in the political coordination of the Supreme War Council was negligible. Events would prove that the reverse emphasis was built into the structure of the council. The Military Representatives could provide a limited amount of technical advice but this was useless without the executive power to implement their plans.

An even more debilitating feature of the Supreme War Council's procedure was the requirement for unanimity upon all
Military plans and reports were submitted by the Board of Military Representatives to the War Council members in the form of Joint Military Notes. "No joint note was submitted to the Council for consideration unless it had been unanimously accepted by the military representatives." General Tasker Bliss in describing this unfortunate system to the American Secretary of War Newton Baker related:

Every military plan made here is necessarily a compromise. If one of the [Military Representatives] knows that his Government will not approve he refuses to give his assent.... each of us surrenders such of his objections as are not radical in order to reach agreement .... Otherwise any action here would be impossible. 17

Even when the military presented a united front to the Council members, a second barrier existed--projects could not be implemented until each of the nations of the Entente had given its assent. Closed negotiating sessions between political representatives assured agreement on an issue before it was allowed to be discussed in open session. Thus, the open meetings merely formalized previously decided courses of action and were devoid of meaningful debate.

If these obstacles of compromise were sucessfully surmounted, the program was then implemented by coordination
between the Allied governments through their own General Staffs or Commanders-in-Chief. With such a complex process for adopting a course of action it is no wonder that Douglas Haig was unconcerned about the Supreme War Council's effect upon his command. His realistic contempt for the political machinations of the Council is evident from his diary entry on the day he was first informed of the decision to create the body.

Sunday, November 4, [1917]... I told him [Lloyd George] that the proposal [for an Inter-Allied Supreme War Council and Staff] had been considered for three years and each time had been rejected as unworkable. I gave several reasons why I thought it could not work, and that it would add to our difficulties having such a body. The P. M. then said that the two Governments had decided to form it; so I said, there is no need saying any more then!... L. G. is feeling that his position as P. M. is shaky and means to try and vindicate his conduct of the war in the eyes of the public and try and put the people against the soldiers.... I should think [he is] most unreliable. 19

At the second meeting of the Supreme War Council, the newly installed Premier of France, Georges Clemenceau, moved that the first business of the Council should be to examine and prepare plans for the military operations to be undertaken in 1918. M. Clemenceau asked that the Military Representatives be instructed to examine the possible courses of action and answer these questions:
First, it should be assumed that Russia would not be in a position to give the Allies any effective support. How many effective enemy divisions would be freed by this situation?

Secondly, now that the Italian Front had been stabilized and the Franco-British Front weakened, should an offensive in Italy be considered?

Third, what strength could the American forces provide during 1918? The answer to this question depended largely on shipping available through diverting it from supply missions.

Finally, since the war had become one of exhaustion, should the Allies consider the destruction of Germany's allies prior to the final assault upon the principal enemy? This course was the "Easterner's" strategy of knocking the props out from under Germany.

These very same questions had been dealt with by the Commanders-in-Chief and the Chiefs of Staff at their July 25th meeting in Paris. In view of the expected increase in German forces opposing the Franco-British line in France due to the collapse of the Russian Front, the military leaders recommended that the secondary theaters be held defensively and that all available strength be transferred to the Western Front. The generals also recommended the "unification of action on the Western Front by the help of a permanent Inter-Allied military
organization which should study and make preparations for the rapid movement of troops from one theater to another."

General Wilson took the lead in organizing the work of the Military Representatives. His competent staff organization, while separated from the Imperial General Staff, was a model upon which the other nations fashioned their own organizations. Wilson also became the leader of the representatives in preparing their joint notes. Twelve notes were prepared between the second and third meetings of the Supreme War Council.

Note number one, in response to M. Clemenceau's queries, recommended the adoption of a defensive policy from the North Sea to the Adriatic. This conclusion was reached following reasoning which was quite similar to that used by the national army commanders in their July meeting. This note specifically called for, in addition, the systematic defense and gradual retirement from the Macedonian Front. The entire defensive policy was considered a necessary preparation for a strong coordinated offensive in 1918 in any theater where it was considered an opportune strategy. This offensive would have to await more detailed information on the political situation in Russia and the military requirements of the Italian front.

Notes two through eleven dealt with technical military matters such as army reorganization, logistical problems,
effectiveness of aircraft and tanks and the extension of the British Army's front in northern France by approximately sixty miles. In note number twelve a general survey of the military sphere of the war was presented. The "Western" philosophy of strategy was expounded and the security of the Franco-British front was stressed as vital to the hope of eventual victory. The estimate of enemy offensive power which might be thrown against this front was given as up to ninety-six divisions. To face such a large enemy attack the entire Western Front must be considered as extending south to the Adriatic Sea. In addition, the required reinforcement of the front by at least two American divisions each month would be necessary to assure the repulse of any enemy initiative. The Military Representatives called for attention to be paid to all phases of defensive tactics, including increased weapon density and the ability to rapidly transfer reinforcements from one sector of the expanded front to another. The technical advisors to the political leaders of the Allied powers could foresee no chance of obtaining a final or even decisive victory on the Western Front in 1918. They planned on achieving victory only after the arrival of a massive American Army and an offensive move begun in the summer of 1919 or even 1920. Thus, the Military Representatives looked forward to a continuance of a war of
attrition in the west.

The Military Representatives saw no opportunity for a decisive victory in Mesopotamia either. However, they felt that the elimination of Turkey from the war would have far-reaching effects upon the entire military situation. If this collapse could be achieved immediately, the Allies might be able to retrieve their losses in Southern Russia and Roumania. Thus, the final call for the offensive in the Middle East conflicted with the general theme of the note which stressed the assumption of a completely defensive posture. The only concession to the overall plan of defensive strategy was that the Turkish offensive could not be contemplated unless the current troop strength on the Western Front was maintained.

When the Supreme War Council met for its third session on January 30, 1918, its first order of business was consideration of Joint Note number twelve. The coordinated defensive posture of the Western Front, to include the Italian theater was accepted. In addition, the principle of a counter-offensive to be delivered when circumstances warranted such action was also agreed upon. However, the condition that British and French troop strength be maintained at current levels for the security of the Western Front was a point of intense disagreement.
General Pétain and Field-Marshal Haig stated and, when pressed for proof, illustrated with statistics, that the proposed dearth of replacements would require the breaking up of thirty British and twenty-five French divisions in 1918. This revelation immediately forced M. Clemenceau to side with the generals in demanding the ancillary campaign in Turkey be cancelled. The military's proposal was in line with the stated conditions of Joint Note twelve that the effective combat strength of the British and French armies be maintained before any side actions be undertaken.

Lloyd George, the man responsible for withholding troops from the British Armies in France, refused to accept the postponement of his Turkish plans. He pointed out that the German Army had held its front successfully with a defensive inferiority of four to seven. During this period, Serbia and Roumania had been destroyed and Russia nearly knocked out of the war when the German generals realized that decisive results could not be achieved on the Western Front. The British Prime Minister had no faith in his military leaders' ability to push the Germans back to the Rhine River and felt his only alternative was to defend in the west and and force one of Germany's allies from the war. M. Clemenceau was understandably much more concerned and sensitive to the Entente's defensive
capabilities in the west and insisted that the security and strength of the Allied positions here overrode all other considerations. The basic point of contention between the French and British ministers was how effective the current force levels would be without reinforcement and adequate replacement of wastage. Lloyd George maintained that the declining troop strength would be adequate while Clemenceau agreed with the military commanders and the Permanent Military Representatives who insisted that strength be maintained in the west before operations in any other theater could be planned.

In a private meeting during the evening recess, Mr. Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau compromised their differences and the shrewd Celt's maneuvering achieved a tactical success. The joint resolution which was issued the next morning allowed the British to continue with their planned Turkish offensive plans. This resolution accepted "...Joint Note No. 12 of the Military Representatives on the Plan of Campaign for 1918," the British Government agreed to using "in the most effective fashion the forces already at its disposal in the Eastern theatre" and assured their allies that they had "no intention of diverting forces from the Western Front" to the other theaters. Of course the British were free to send all their
trained replacements to the Turkish theater and send "scraps" to the British Armies serving under Haig. Since there had never been a proposal to divert troops from France to the east, the compromise resolution was a complete victory for Lloyd George but one which would cause his armies to suffer grievously within the coming months.

Defense Compared with Offense

With the acceptance of the obvious military disadvantages the Allies would face in the spring of 1918, the entire complexion of the problems of military cooperation had changed. With the rapid transferral of German strength to the Western Front the Allies would, for the first time since August, 1914, be faced with a superior enemy.

Coordination of disparate military units, like that of chance acquaintances, is relatively simple and characterized by unselfishness in good times. Although maximum efficiency, unity of purpose, and timely scheduling are not always achieved by voluntary cooperation under easy circumstances, they do have a patina of effectiveness. In difficult periods, when defeat and destruction are imminent to one or each of the cooperating members, this system fails completely and shows that national self-interest and preservation are, after all,
the primary motivating factors in coalition warfare.

During periods of defensive operations, coalition members are loath to transfer reserves to a neighbor's threatened sector for fear of weakening their own capabilities for survival. A military commander, by the very nature of his calling, must prepare for the worst possible situations. In periods of joint military operations this worst possible situation is the unleashing of all of the common enemy's destructive force on the front of one partner. All the instincts of the military commander and his staff lead to a pessimistic evaluation of the enemy's capabilities and options. The moral advantage inherent in an offensive posture is therefore multiplied when opposing a defense prepared by a coalition of sovereign states.

For these rather basic reasons, a joint defensive operation demands firmer control and stricter obedience by the leaders of the national military components than do joint offensive maneuvers. The fact that system "D" had sufficed in 1914 and the French Army's overwhelming contribution to the Allied cause in the early stages of the war served to dull the impact of this lesson upon western military leaders.

The Permanent Military Representatives, from their detached vantage point, could discern the need for more precise
commitments for military assistance and control. The members were also influenced by the extraordinary example of the small German General Reserve of six divisions. This reserve had successfully influenced the outcome of events in the Roumanian, Russian and Italian theaters. The lesson drawn from the successes of this unit was that the Allies also needed a General Reserve in their organization to counter the expected German thrusts in the spring. The Board of Military Representatives proposed the formation of a thirty division reserve composed of ten British, thirteen French and seven Italian divisions. The control of this force was to be vested in a Military Executive War Board (EWB) which was, interestingly enough, the Permanent Military Representatives with a new name and expanded powers. The Executive War Board would decide where the General Reserve was to be stationed, to which area of the front it would be committed and when to withdraw the forces. During the actual employment of the Reserve in combat it would be under the control of the national Commander-in-Chief.

At the third plenary session of the Supreme War Council, the national political leaders instructed the Permanent Military Representatives to investigate the usefulness of forming an Inter-Allied General Reserve to counter the growing enemy
strength on the Western Front. In Joint Notes number fourteen and fifteen, the Military Representatives outlined the details of their General Reserve plan. These notes were approved by the War Council in January, 1918. A Military Executive Board was established to direct the Reserve and General Ferdinand Foch was called upon to assume the presidency of the board.

A formal request for divisions to form the General Reserve was issued by the Board to all national army commanders. Italy agreed to provide six divisions with the proviso that the French and British divisions then in Italy would not be withdrawn. Field-Marshall Haig and General Petain replied to the request negatively and worked in concert to destroy the General Reserve plan. Both Haig and Petain looked upon this idea as one which would deprive them of ultimate control in their areas of responsibility in addition to weakening the entire Allied defensive posture.

The reasons behind this deliberate move to circumvent the express desires of their nations' political leaders by two leading field commanders are diverse and difficult to define fully. Obviously, there must have been some professional jealousy pervading the entire episode. Pétain, the cautious, pessimistic saviour of the French Armies following the mutinies of 1917, wished to retain his dominance over the resurgent
Foch. Haig realized that his armies were now the dominant Allied military force and would remain so until the eventual arrival of the fledgling American Armies. Thus, both national military leaders were reluctant to surrender control over sizable portions of their armies to the Executive War Board or to General Foch's command.

Technical military considerations were also a factor in their reluctance to supply troops to the Reserve. A heterogeneous military force would be difficult to maintain and transport. The lack of uniform equipment, training and organization of the Allied forces made exact substitution impossible and might prove more inefficient than the retention of the Reserve at the national level. The technique of attack in one sector of the line to relieve enemy pressure from another, had also proved an effective countermeasure in operations such as the Verdun-Somme Battles and was put forth as a suitable substitute.

Haig's best reason, however, for refusing to provide the British share of the Reserve was his acute shortage of troops. He was negotiating with Petain to extend his portion of the front; the British divisions in Italy under General Herbert Plumer were unavailable to him and the great losses of the Third Ypres Campaign had not been replaced by the
Government. These factors made it clearly impossible for Haig to detach any more divisions and still maintain a margin of safety in his defensive posture.

Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig officially received the request of the Executive War Board for British divisions to be placed in the General Reserve in EWB note number 1, dated February 27, 1918. Three days later he replied:

...that I foresee a wider employment, etc., of Allied Reserves than that foreshadowed in the Joint Note.... this force could not be earmarked or located in any particular areas prior to the delivery of the German offensive or the development of the enemy's intentions,... I have arranged as a preliminary measure with the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies for all preparations to be made for the rapid despatch of a force from six to eight British divisions with a proportionate amount of artillery and subsidiary services to his assistance.

General Pétain has made similar arrangements for relief or intervention of French troops in the British front...To meet this attack I have already disposed of all the troops at present under my command,... I therefore regret that I am unable to comply with the suggestion conveyed in the Joint Note. 34

Haig took this strong position out of deep conviction that it was militarily correct and, at least at that date, politically acceptable to the French leaders. His diary entry three days before he received the request for reserve troops indicates that Georges Clemenceau had personally intimated his
backing of Petain in his rivalry with Foch. He thus gave his blessing to the principle of cooperation rather than control by a Generalissimo. On the day that Haig sent his reply to the Joint Note, he was apprised by a liaison officer that M. Poincaré, the President of the Republic, had flatly disallowed General Foch the authority to control an inter-allied reserve and that, in effect, the Executive War Board was now powerless. In more precise military fashion, Haig further outlined his opposition to the plan in a secret dispatch:

It is essential, however, that unity and homogeneity should be preserved in the formation of a reserve, and that such a reserve should be appointed and handled by a responsible commander.

To weaken Armies in order to place a general reserve wanting in homogeneity in the hands of a Committee composed of members of different nationalities is a complete misunderstanding of the role of a reserve in a great modern battle.... which is a prolonged struggle lasting for weeks and perhaps for months... which in its preliminary stages is simply a 'bataille d'usure'--a wearing down of the enemy's forces.

He pointed out that the reserves of the lower units are the first to be drawn into battle followed by those of the supreme commander. But the reserves were no longer used only to influence the battle and meet unforeseen events but also to secure a rotation of exhausted divisions from the line.
Thus the reserves must be at the disposal of the responsible commander who alone is in charge of the operation and has sufficient knowledge of the local situation. Haig did not, however, completely rule out the possible utility of a supreme unity of effort:

In the case of a divergency of opinion between the Commanders-in-Chief such authority may be necessary, but to vest in a Committee the power to handle troops, even if such were available, which is not now the case, would be to create in fact, a Generalissimo in the form of a Committee. History affords numerous examples of the failures of such forms of authority. 38

Haig and Pétain deliberately by-passed the authority of the Executive War Board and prepared bilateral plans to control the defense of the Western Front. Without consulting their respective political superiors, the Field-Marshal and the General also struck a bargain to compromise on the extension of the British line only as far south as Barisis. This small rail center was just south of the River Oise and constituted an extension of only twenty-five miles of additional frontage rather than the sixty miles demanded by the French Government and approved by the Permanent Military Representatives in their Joint Note number ten.
The planned cooperative response to any German offensive was based upon the promise of each national military leader to assist the other and was not really subject to specific provisions concerning the number of divisions or the conditions for implementation. Regardless of the eventual effect of these preparations, the close cooperation between Pétain and Haig had ended any hope of forming the Inter-Allied General Reserve under the control of the Executive War Board.

When Italy discovered that the British and French quotas for the General Reserve would not be filled, she withdrew her offer to provide troops. On March 14th, the Allied ministers meeting at Versailles were informed of the current impasse in the situation and accepted the explanations rendered by the military commanders. The Executive War Board had, in effect, superseded the Permanent Military Representatives and now that the General Reserve could not be formed its raison d'être was gone. In this complex and intrigue-laden series of events, the desires of the political leaders of the Entente had been thwarted by their field commanders.

Georges Clemenceau should have realized the strength of Haig's opposition to the appointment of a command superior to his own on the Western Front. During a meeting between the two in January, 1918 at the British General Headquarters, Clemenceau
described Sir Douglas' violent reaction to such a proposal.

There was a long way to go. We had had too many wars with the British for them readily to fall in with the idea of placing their soldiers under the command of a Frenchman. The day I first broached the subject to General [sic] Sir Douglas Haig, as I was breakfasting at his headquarters, the soldier jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, and, with both hands shot up to heaven, exclaimed: "Monsieur Clemenceau, I have only one chief, and I can have no other. My King." 40

Although one may suspect a touch of Gallic exaggeration in this description since it is the most emotional reaction Haig has ever been accused of, the same fervent opposition to the Supreme Command ruled his military judgement. As long as Haig opposed the idea of a Generalissimo it seems that it could never be employed.

The vaunted unity of military effort, desired in some degree by all of the allies, could not be achieved until final disaster faced the coalition. The military commanders had outmaneuvered the politicians and used their influence to retain their vested interest in military strategy. Until Douglas Haig could be convinced that his personal interests and those of his armies required a unified command, the goal was unattainable.
Notes for Chapter Three

1  Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, *Lessons of Allied Co-operation: Military, Naval and Air* (London, 1942), 80 and 173-74. Maurice feels that the politicians misread the public's opinion on this matter and cites the subordination of British forces in the Mediterranean and at Salonika without public protest in substantiation. The influence of Lord Kitchener in developing an independent British force which, in time, would be the predominant Allied Army must also be considered in this regard.

2  The disaster on the Italian Front followed by less than a month the death gasp of the Russian Army at Riga. Thus, two severe setbacks must be considered the immediate causes of the Allied action. Unity of command on the Western Front had been the topic of serious discussion at least since the Rome conference in January, 1917 when Lloyd George and Panleve exchanged views on the matter.

3  The United States of America, which had declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, was not a charter member of the Council. Shortly after the Rapallo Agreement the U. S. Military Representative, former Army Chief of Staff, Brevet General Tasker H. Bliss, was appointed to represent his government on the military advisory board. However, in line with President Woodrow Wilson's desire to remain aloof from the political entanglements of the Entente, Colonel Edward M. House acted only as an official observer at the second and eighth meetings of the Supreme Allied War Council. President Wilson attempted to influence the Council to deemphasize the political aspects of the Council and transform it into an instrument of joint military direction. These goals were in direct conflict with those of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the primary force behind the original plan. Thus, the Allied and Associated Powers were forced to compromise their desires and this, in turn, contributed to the uncertain and weak role the Council was to play. Cf. David F. Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council* (Middletown, Conn., 1961), 20-37.


Paul Panlevé's government fell on a vote of minor importance in the Chamber of Deputies. However, his inability to establish the rule of a French Generalissimo had a decided weakening effect on his power. Georges Clemenceau, an aging but vibrant supporter of the war effort, succeeded Panleve. It was Clemenceau who acceded to Lloyd George's desires on the appointment of a lesser military official to the Board of Military Representatives. The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, ed., Charles Seymour, 4 vols. (Boston, 1926-28), III, 262-63.

General Maxime Weygand, Foch's senior staff officer, became the French Military Representative when Lloyd George refused to endorse the eventual evolution of the War Council into a Supreme Command. General Sir Henry Rawlinson replaced General Wilson when he was installed as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on February 16, 1918. Rawlinson was chosen upon the recommendation of Douglas Haig. Haig was given this privilege because of his acceptance of Lloyd George's action in replacing General Robertson. Rawlinson was in complete accord with Haig's policies and priorities and his appointment marked the end of any chance for the Board of Military Representatives to become an effective tool for coordinating military policies. When the Fifth British Army was reconstituted Major-General Sackville-West, a loyal subordinate of General Wilson, replaced Rawlinson and the British representative was finally an officer responsive to the desires of the General Staff.

9 Terraine, Ordeal of Victory, 80; Blake ed., Private Papers, 79.


11 James E. Edmonds, Official History of the War, Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1917, 3 vols. (London, 1948), II, ix; David Lloyd George, War Memoirs, 6 vols. (Boston, 1934), IV, 531-45. During the period of Lloyd George's consultations, F. M. French was the commander of the Home Forces in the United Kingdom. Lieutenant-General Wilson was unemployed after being relieved of his duties as chief liaison officer to GQG as persona non grata at General Petain's request.


13 Although Lloyd George tried to find a precedent for bypassing his normal military advisors by citing the War Cabinet meeting of August 5, 1914; his attempt fails. The consultation of Lord Roberts and lower ranking military officer by the Asquith ministry was done in a time of national peril. Another difference between the two incidents was that the August 5th meeting included the Commander of the BEF and the CIGS while this meeting specifically excluded them. Lloyd George, ibid., IV, 531-32; For Lloyd George's appraisal of his leading military subordinates see: ibid., IV, 504-11.

14 Because of a great public outcry in Great Britain following the announcement of the creation of the Supreme War Council and Lloyd George's Paris speech defending the action he was forced to publicly recant some of the stronger implications of the Rapallo Agreement. In the House of Commons, the Prime Minister rebutted an attack on the usefulness of the newly created Council by Mr. Asquith by saying that it was never intended to evolve into a Supreme Command under a Generalissimo.
Trask, U. S. In the Supreme War Council, 46-52.

Ibid., 39.


For a grander view of the Supreme War Council's mission and utility cf. Trask, ibid. and Thomas D. Shumate Jr., "The Allied Supreme War Council, 1917-1918," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Univ. of Virginia, 1952). In practice the Council became a formalized structure for the conduct of political discussions similar to those which had taken place prior to its inception. Political conferences continued to be held outside of the Council's charter (e.g. the Doullens Conference of March 26, 1918 at which General Foch was authorized to direct all Allied military forces on the Western Front). The military value of the Council stemmed from its logistical and administrative subcommittees rather than from the indecisive work of the Permanent Military Representatives. See: Report of the Military Board of Allied Supply, 2 vols. (Washington, 1924).

Douglas Haig, Diaries and Papers, H. 119. November 4, 1917. Only a brief mention of the creation of the Supreme War Council is found in Haig's papers. See also exchange of letters between General William Robertson and Haig, ibid., November 22 and 25, 1917.

Edmonds, BOH, 1918, I, 33-34.

Maurice, Lessons, 111; Edmonds, ibid., 4. The proposals of the allied generals were contingent upon Russia's defeat and were never adopted by the political leaders.
For an excellent view of the institutional characteristics of the Council and the development of the powers of the Board of Permanent Military Representatives see: Trask, U. S., *In the Supreme War Council*, 38-46.

For a complete listing of the titles of the Joint Notes adopted by the Military Representatives see: Shumate, "Supreme War Council," appendix A. This listing is contained in Appendix A of this work.

Ibid.


The British Armies in France and Flanders had requested 615,000 men for the year of 1918. The Government, motivated by a desire to restrict Haig's offensive capabilities along with a consideration of Great Britain's ability to support the war on the home front, largely ignored these requests. It is evident that sufficient manpower existed in the British Isles for the strength of the armies to be maintained at full establishment prior to the March 21st German offensive. A particularly odious move on the part of the Government to cover up its lack of manpower support was its arbitrary decision in January, 1918 to reduce the table of divisional organization from twelve infantry battalions to nine. This move was made without consulting the military leaders and directly against the wishes of the Army Council. Edmonds, *BOH*, 1918, I, 50-54 and 1918 Appendix, 30-34. Frederick Maurice, *Intirques of the War*, (London, 1922), passim.

Edmonds, *BOH*, 1918, I, 75.

Se débrouiller--The French counterpart of the British
habit of "muddling through".


31 "Resolutions adopted by the Supreme War Council on February 2, 1918 (fifth meeting)." *BOH*, 1918, I, 77-78.

32 Haig's reasonable opposition to the General Reserve plan was set forth in O. A. D. 776 excerpts of which are given below at pages


36 Diary entry March 2, 1918, *ibid.*, 291. The officer who relayed this information was General Clive

37 O. A. D. 776, March 12, 1918, *Diaries and Papers*, H. 124


Chapter Four

The Regime of the Generalissimo

With the equivocal stance assumed by the Supreme War Council at their March 14th meeting, the chances for establishing an inter-allied General Reserve and eventually a supra-national military command appeared ended at last. Douglas Haig, perhaps feeling more secure in his position, now explained his entire defensive plan. He also offered his first detailed thoughts about the value of the Executive War Board and by implication the entire Supreme War Council.

There was now little doubt that a massive German attack--to be christened the Friedensturm--on the Western Front was imminent. Field-Marshal Haig's intelligence services calculated that by April 1st the enemy would have 195 divisions available for employment in the west after transferring units from the now inactive Eastern Front (actually they massed 194). 200 divisions would face the Entente by May 1st. Haig's headquarters predicted that the assault would fall between Arras and St. Quentin anytime after March 1st. The predicted objective would be to split the British and French Armies which now made junction at Barisis. From this prescient analysis of the enemy's intentions it is obvious that Haig was in no way
surprised by the German onslaught of the 21st of March.
Although the actual offensive fell farther south, the English
dispositions were made with a knowledge of the enemy's options
and intentions rarely possessed by a military commander.

In his discussion of the situation, Haig noted that of
the 58 British and 2 Portuguese divisions on the 125 mile front,
only 10 were held as Army Reserve and 8 were at his disposal.
Opposing the recently extended British line, were 40 German
divisions in the line and 47 in reserve. In addition, 30 other
German divisions could be transferred to this sector without
drawing away from vital duties opposite the French.

The peculiar situation of the British was that their
northern and central lines were only an average of forty-five
miles from the Channel coast. This lack of adequate maneuver
room dictated that these sectors be held in greater strength.
Noting the disproportionate weakness of the Fifth Army in
the south, Haig realistically pointed out:

The last reserve of 8 divisions held at the
disposal of the F. M. C.-in-C. to meet the
situation which will certainly arise on the
British front, is far too small for the purpose,
and is the minimum necessary to start a
roulement of the divisions attacked.... the
front of [the Fifth Army] is already dangerously
extended towards its junction with the French.
The Fifth Army holds a front of 70,000 yards with
10 divisions and 1 in Army reserve. In this Army
the III Corps of only 3 divisions is operating on
a front of 29,000 yards.

Our divisions on the whole front are holding on a average 5,500 yards which compares badly with the 3,000 yards usually allotted to a German division in a defensive battle.

It is estimated that the enemy has sufficient resources to attack in force on a front of some 50 miles, say from the LA BASSE Canal to ST. QUENTIN, without having to withdraw any troops from the French front...

Therefore, Haig expecting the assault, had to man his most threatened lines lightly and had to assume new portions of the line at a most inopportune time. This additional twenty-five miles of the line was the scene of the horrible devastation of the great Somme Battles of 1916 and the methodical despoliation of Ludendorff's planned withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in April 1917. General Hubert Gough's Fifth Army had been attempting to organize a coherent defensive system in this area from the neglected and half-finished French positions.

By early March, a civilian labor force of more than forty-eight thousand men was allotted to the Fifth Army to supplement the efforts of the fighting men in preparing defenses. Transportation of every essential of life, as well as the vast quantities of fortification materials required was nearly impossible. The barren and flattened terrain of the area was bereft of roadways and cover. Every house or tree in the area
had been destroyed and most movement had to be done at night. To economize on the available labor, the local commanders decided to form a series of independent, but mutually supporting redoubts. Although this "blob system" would require less defensive work, it was calculated that nearly three hundred miles of new trenches, covered by barbed wire, would be required for an adequate defense. Such a task was virtually impossible within the short time remaining to the British before the 5 Friedensturm.

Sir Douglas Haig was adopting the defensive lessons learned by his German enemies. Using the doctrine set forth in a German field manual of August, 1917, he issued memoranda outlining the new system; the organization of a lightly held outpost zone, a main battle zone of 2,000-3,000 meters and a rear defensive area at least four miles behind the principal defensive position. This flexible system would gradually slow the momentum of an attacking force at the least cost to the defenders. The only serious drawback to this method was that conditions of reduced visibility would limit its effectiveness, since friendly artillery and infantry weapons had to see the attackers in order to provide mutual support. This manner of defense was contrary to the British tradition of defending in a continuous line with a great portion of troops in the
forward positions. Perhaps Haig had finally realized that his most precious resource—the high-spirited and loyal young volunteer soldier—was not an inexhaustable one. Although the Government's refusal to resupply Haig with sufficient troop replacements was to cause near-disaster within a short time, it may also have awakened him to the fact that his prodigal tactical methods of the past were hurting the British Empire almost as much as the enemy.

On January 7, 1918, Haig was summoned to London to explain what he expected to happen in the near future. Haig explained that he would not attack if he were in the position of the German military leaders because they would fail in their offensive and then be open to final defeat during the Allied counter-offensive. Haig was never a good speaker and his inarticulateness apparently gave his listeners the impression that he did not expect a German attack. The next day in an apparently contradictory written statement, the Field-Marshal clearly showed his evaluation of the critical defensive situation on the Western Front for the next six months. The Germans might well attempt to force a decision by attacking in the spring. This would be in the nature of a gamble with a determination to risk everything in order to gain a quick victory. The Allied armies must prepare to meet this assault and to replace the losses which would certainly be incurred.
Knowing the expected limitations he would face in manpower, he warned the Cabinet that the troops available were inadequate. If a rate of 100,000 replacements per month could be maintained during the German offensive a gradually improving situation and ultimately a satisfactory peace settlement would be achieved.

At a later conference, only seven days before the German offensive began, Lloyd George met with Haig and again the wily solicitor attempted to trick the tongue-tied Haig into committing himself against the possibility of a major German offensive.

They[Lloyd George and Bonar Law] did their best to get me to say that the Germans would not attack! The P. M. remarked that I had "given my opinion [on January 7th?] that the Germans would only attack against small portions of our front." I said that "I had never said that. The question put to me was if I were a German General and confronted by the present situation would I attack!"...... I now said that the German Army and its leaders seem drunk with their success in Russia and the middle East, so that it is impossible to foretell what they may not attempt. In any case we must be prepared to meet a very strong attack indeed on a 50 mile front, and for this, drafts are urgently required.

General Erich Ludendorff called a conference to prepare the plans for the German "last gamble" offensive on November 11, 1917 at Mons. The Chiefs of Staff of the groups of armies commanded by the Crown Prince and Prince Rupprecht were consulted without the presence of either commander, the Kaiser or even the nominal Chief of the General Staff, Paul von
Hindenburg. This meeting emphasized the complete control and unity of command which would be henceforth exercised by Ludendorff over the entire military effort of the Central Powers. It also indicated the complete lack of civil restraint imposed upon the German High Command by political authorities during the last year of the war.

With the inevitable arrival of a growing American Army, the German leaders realized that their only chance of winning the war lay in an early all-out offensive. The foolhardy decision to reinstitute unrestricted submarine warfare had by this time proved unable to defeat Great Britain. The final toss of the dice had to be made in a land offensive.

Although the Germans regarded the British Armies as more obstinate and difficult to dislodge from defensive positions than the French, they knew that defeat of the British in France and Flanders was their only chance of decisive victory. A defeated French Army might always choose to retreat into the south of France and skillfully delay until the Americans came to their assistance. The British, however, were in a tenuous defensive position and if forced to retreat back on their Channel supply bases, might be separated from the French line and defeated in detail.

Preparing a series of alternate plans for attack at
several points in the line, Ludendorff determined to begin the great offensive by mid-March. He intended to strike violently at the rigid British defenses south of Arras and, once the British reserves had been shifted south, to strike further north. A third attack in Flanders would be made if needed, but Ludendorff felt that this operation would be superfluous.

Using the latest assault methods developed by General von Hutier in the operations at Riga, the Germans planned on a short violent artillery and gas preparation followed by rapid infantry assaults which would by-pass and isolate enemy strong points. Fortunately for the British defenders, the German commanders had been unimpressed by the offensive value of the tank. This weapons system, which is ideally suited to this type of mobile offensive, was therefore not employed extensively in this campaign. It was not until after the "Black Day" of the German Army on August 8th that Ludendorff realized the decisive character of the tank and placed it on the list of urgently required war material.

The German leaders were also careful to maintain secrecy and achieve surprise and disunion on the Allied defensive front. Activity on the French Champagne sector was intentionally increased and this move succeeded in misleading the timid General Pétain into expecting the main offensive
against his forces. This key diversion was to spell disaster for the cooperative defensive plans prepared by Field-Marshal Haig and General Pétain.

Haig was also deceived, for a time, into believing the initial assault would come in the extreme north and this was a factor in his decision to man this section strongly. However, he also expected that the French would more readily reinforce his southern line than that in the north and his sensitivity to losing his supply bases, as mentioned earlier, were his primary reasons for holding the south more lightly. By February 1st the indications of a German assault between the Scarpe and Oise rivers were obvious enough to be accepted by the local British commanders but Haig remained dubious of the assault reaching as far south as the Fifth Army's sector. On March 2nd, he announced to his Army commanders:

...the necessity for being ready as soon as possible to meet a big offensive of prolonged duration. I also told the Army Commanders that I was very pleased at all I had seen on the fronts of the three Armies which I had recently visited. Plans were sound and thorough and much work had already been done. I was only afraid that the enemy would find our front so very strong that he will hesitate to commit his Army to the attack with the almost certainty of losing very heavily.

The German offensive began at 4:40 P.M. on the 21st of March, the exact date predicted by General Gough, the Fifth
Army commander. The violent bombardment caught about one-third of the defending troops in the forward defensive zone and inflicted heavy casualties. The infantry assault began five hours later and was aided by a thick, low-lying fog which hampered the observation of the mutually supporting redoubts. The German fire support was not seriously affected by the fog since it was registered on the fixed defensive positions and they could fire their missions from map coordinates. By nightfall, the Germans had penetrated the forward zone and in several places had succeeded in piercing the battle zone as well. The rear zone—the final protection, far removed to the rear—existed only in theory and was little more than a series of chalk lines on the ground. The next day, again aided by poor visibility, the attack succeeded in reaching open country north and west of St. Quentin. At 1:00 P.M. on March 22nd, Gough ordered a retirement behind the Somme River and by the next day the enemy were advancing north of Péronne and threatened to separate the British Third and Fifth Armies.

Haig was still wary that the offensive in the south was a diversion (which it was supposed to be) and was slow to send reserves to relieve the Fifth Army. The rapid success of the German forces convinced Ludendorff that the entire British defensive system had collapsed; that he could now move
upon the vital rail junction at Amiens, fending off the French to the south. Thus, Ludendorff made the fatal error of following the tactically opportune course of pressing the second Somme Battle rather than initiating the main offensive further north after the British had shifted their reserves. The greatest danger to the British position, however, lay in the reaction of the French Army and its commander.

At 4:00 P.M. on the 23rd, General Pétain arrived at GHQ to discuss the implementation of the joint defensive plans previously arranged. He stated that two armies, under General Fayolle, "would operate in the Somme and keep [the British and French] Armies in touch with one another." To Haig, Pétain appeared most anxious to do all he could to support his British allies and at this date still agreed in principle to holding the line together. However, when asked by Haig "to concentrate a large force (20 divisions) about Amiens, P.[étain] said he was most anxious to do all he could to support... but he expected that the enemy was about to attack him in Champagne."

Haig realized that if contact between the two armies were lost "the British [would] be rounded up and driven into the sea! This must be prevented even at the cost of drawing back the North flank on the sea coast."

The next day, after attempting to remedy the precipitate
withdrawal of Gough's Army, Haig returned to his chateau headquarters at Dury at 11:00 P.M. There he found General Pétain "most anxious, unbalanced and much upset." Haig calmly explained his intention of concentrating the Third Army to attack southward if the Germans threatened Amiens; he asked "[Pétain] to concentrate as large a force as possible about Amiens astride the Somme to cooperate on the [British] right."

Still worried about the threatened Champagne front, which Ludendorff's diversionary efforts still kept alive, Pétain hedged his expected losses. He replied that Fayolle's force was concentrating about Montdidier but that in the event the Germans advanced any further the order had been given "to fall back South Westwards towards Beauvais in order to cover Paris."

Haig immediately grasped what this irresolute order meant; the separation of the French and British Armies and the penetration of the German armies to the coast. His first question to his ally was "do you intend to abandon my right flank?" Pétain weakly nodded assent and Haig presumed that this was the result of political treachery and the order of the French Government to "cover Paris at all costs." Haig's instructions from Lord Kitchener and his personal conviction were "our armies' existence in France depends on keeping the French and British Armies united." He therefore hurried to report the serious
change in the French strategy to the Chief of the Imperial
General Staff and the Secretary of State for War. He further
requested that these two authorities come to France immediately
in an attempt to stem this false move.

In Haig's diary entry on the 25th, he reiterated his
horror at the implications in Pétain's announcement of the
previous evening. Yet he states that "Lawrence [Haig's Chief
of Staff] at once left me to telegraph to Wilson (C. I. G. S.,
London) requesting him and Lord Milner to come to France at
once." In fact, Milner was a minister without portfolio
at the time and Lord Derby was the Secretary of State for War.
Milner later became the Secretary of State for War in May.

In further expanding his thoughts on this matter, Haig
instructed his government:

...that General Foch or some other determined
General who would fight, should be given
supreme control of the operations in France.

Reflecting on his experience and responsibilities, Haig "knew
Foch's strategic ideas were in conformity with the orders
given [to him] by Lord Kitchener when [he] became C. in C., and
that he was a man of great courage and decision as shown during
the fighting in October and November 1914."

When General Henry Wilson arrived at 11:00 A.M., Haig
gave him a review of the situation and stressed the need for gaining French support "at once with 20 divisions of good quality, North of the Somme." Haig now hoped to gain time until the French could be brought into action. The Third British Army was now holding the shoulders of the German breakthrough but Haig was correct in stating that the British "were now confronting the weight of the German Army single handed."

On the 26th, after a confused attempt by all of the principals to meet on the previous day, the representatives of the British and French military and political hierarchies met in the town hall at Doullens. After separate meetings with three of his army commanders and with Lord Milner to coordinate the British opinion on the crisis, Field-Marshal Haig met with President Poincaré, Premier Clemenceau, Lord Milner, and Generals Foch, Pétain, and Wilson. This assemblage, called in the heat of the greatest crisis for the Western Allies in the War, was to make the momentous decision to unify the command of the Franco-British forces—up to that moment an unattainable goal.

Field-Marshal Haig opened the conference by emphasizing the critical requirement for the French to hurry large reinforcements to the beleagured British Fifth Army. General Pétain
rather piously claimed that the Fifth Army no longer existed as a fighting force and that nine French divisions were now engaged south of the German penetration. Haig insisted and the conference unanimously agreed that "AMIENS must be covered at all costs."

During the discussion on how best to relieve General Gough's tired troops in front of Amiens, Haig stated that the British would hold from Arras to the Somme at all costs. Pétain remained equivocal. Lord Milner then interjected the obvious fact that fresh troops had to be put in at once. The French Commander-in-Chief adamantly claimed that he was moving as quickly as possible with as large a relief force to aid the British but could not endanger his own positions. At this point, General Foch, the Chief of Staff of the French Army and his government's principal military advisor, emphasized the necessity of instant action and of impressing on all troops the necessity of holding all ground regardless of the costs. General Wilson agreed with this stand. Perhaps Foch could now gloat over his prediction of the need for an Inter-Allied General Reserve to meet just such a situation, but now was the time for resolute action and not spiteful recrimination.

Lord Milner and Field-Marshall Haig then adjourned to a private discussion and after this the British delegation agreed
to allow the French to appoint a military coordinator in the threatened area. M. Clemenceau then drew up a resolution proposing "that General Foch be appointed to coordinate the operations of the Allied Armies about AMIENS to cover that place."

After this proposal was read, Douglas Haig pointed out the difficulty of anyone performing this mission at the juncture of the French and British lines without the authority to draw forces from throughout the theater. He therefore proposed that the statement be modified so that General Foch's authority would be extended to coordinate all Allied operations on the Western Front. With this self-effacing and realistic proposal, Haig accepted Foch as his superior and unified the Allied command structure. The grateful political leaders quickly accepted the Field-Marshall's recommendation and the meeting unanimously voted its adoption.

General Foch, upon assuming his new powers, immediately set the tone of defiance and moral certitude which would mark his regime. His first instructions, on March 26th, in untechnical language merely ordered the troops in the area of battle to insure that all positions were held at all costs. He also emphasized that the British and French forces, remaining in close touch, must cover Amiens.

The disorganization and apparently heavy losses of
the British Fifth Army caused many persons behind the lines to fear that a breakthrough had occurred in the friendly line. In fact, the line was still generally intact. The remnants of the British III Corps and two Cavalry divisions which had been on Gough's far right, now joined with the French Third Army in continuing the southern end of the German pocket. For the sake of unity of command on the local level, Haig transferred the remaining elements of the Fifth Army, south of the Somme River, to the command of General Fayolle in the Group of Armies of Reserve.

The British troops, untrained in the techniques of open warfare, greatly reduced in number, and weary after six days and nights of constant action, still managed to retire effectively. In addition to the twelve French Infantry and five Cavalry divisions now actively engaged, Foch's change of orders had five more Infantry divisions enroute to the battlefield. Most of these reinforcements were used to strengthen the French line however, and not to relieve the fatigued British units.

In many instances, the French units arriving in the field did so without adequate services of support. Some units came into action carrying only the individual issue of fifty rounds of small arms ammunition; with no artillery, transport,
or even provisions for messing. These units quickly folded and joined the flood of civilians to the rear.

With the shocking battle news returning from the front, the British War Cabinet met in a series of meetings from the 23rd to the 30th of March. The enemy had forced the issue; reinforcements had to be sent to Haig's command or the war would be lost. Miraculously these men who had been unable to even make the normal replacements a short time earlier, now determined that there were trained troops available. 27,000 drafts were immediately available along with 50,000 trained boys between the ages of 18½ and 19 years; previously trained soldiers working in agriculture and the munitions industries of 45,000 and 16,000 respectively were found; and 88,000 troops on leave were returned to the front. Plans were also discussed to send Marines, raise the age limit for conscription to 45 years and even to extend conscription to Ireland. Lloyd George further agreed to recall two Infantry divisions and five brigades of field artillery from Italy, two divisions from General Allenby's forces in Palestine and twelve battalions from Salonika. As previously mentioned, only "scraps" had reached the British Armies in France prior to the March 21st attack but after realizing the gravity of the situation facing the Allies the War Cabinet sent more than 540,000 replacements.
It must be remembered that Douglas Haig had not sought unity of command as an abstract principle. At the Doullens Conference he had moved for Foch's appointment on the pragmatic grounds of stopping Pétain's defeatism and revitalizing the Allied military effort. The ancillary motive of gaining active French support to save his weary Fifth Army from defeat was another consideration. However, once the unpalatable decision had been made, he stuck to his commitment. An apocryphal story pictures Sir Douglas as accepting the new command structure with the comment "I can work with a man but not a committee."

Three days after Foch's appointment, the two military leaders met at Abbeville and Haig noted in his diary:

He [Foch] tells me that he is doing all he can to expedite the arrival of French Divisions, and until they come we can only do our best to hold on to our present positions. It is most important to prevent the enemy from placing guns near enough to shell the great railway depot and troop sidings near Amiens (Longeau) on the east of the town. By April 2nd I gather that the French should have sufficient troops concentrated to admit of them starting an offensive. But will they?

I think Foch has brought great energy to bear on the present situation, and has, instead of permitting French troops to retire S.W. from Amiens, insisted on some of them relieving our tired troops and on covering Amiens at all costs. He and I are quite in agreement as to the general plan of operations.
The next day, M. Clemenceau shared Haig's usual luncheon out of his picnic basket at Dury. Clemenceau expressed his confidence that Haig would loyally support and cooperate with Foch. "It was Pétain and Foch who he feared would squabble." Commenting on his recent performance in the face of danger, he stated "Pétain is a very nervous man and sometimes may not carry out all he has promised." Haig reiterated his excellent relations with the French C.-in-C. in the past but "in the present operations he has been slow to decide and slower still in acting. At times his nerve seems to have gone and he imagines that he is to be attacked in force. Hence the troubled position of affairs about Amiens."

On April 3rd, another Franco-British conference was held in the Beauvais townhall. General Foch, after considering his position, had appealed to Premier Clemenceau for a more definite and logical sphere of authority. The French proposed that coordination of the Allied efforts previously entrusted to Foch be expanded to "authority over all strategical direction of military operations on the Western Front." The British, represented by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Haig and General Wilson, readily agreed to the modification which would grant Foch the power to plan for future operations rather than reacting to existing situations. A safety clause,
reminiscent of the War Office's instructions to Haig, was included in the Beauvais Agreement that provided:

The C.-in-C. of the British, French and American Armies will have full control of the tactical action of their respective Armies. Each C.-in-C. will have the right of appeal to his Government if, in his opinion, his Army is endangered by reason of any order from General Foch. 25

In his diary that evening, Haig expressed his complete support of the course taken. Furthermore, he felt that this in no real sense altered his cooperative efforts with the French:

I was in full agreement [with the Beauvais Accord] and explained that this new arrangement did not in any way alter my attitude towards Foch, or C.-in-C. French Army. I had always in accordance with Lord Kitchener's orders to me regarded the latter as being responsible for indicating the general strategical policy, and as far as possible, I tried to fall in with his strategical plan of operations. 26

Despite this air of equanimity, Haig continued this diary entry with some bitter comments on the support he was receiving from others:

...Foch and Pétain both stated their determination to start attacking "as soon as possible." But will they ever attack? I doubt whether the French Army, as a whole, is now fit for an offensive.

General Bliss and Pershing were also at the Conference. 120,000 American Infantry are to arrive monthly for four months—480,000. I
hope the Yankees will not disappoint us in this. They have seldom done anything yet which they have promised.

The P. M. [David Lloyd George] looked as if he had been thoroughly frightened, and he seemed still in a funk.... He talks and argues so! And he appears to me to be a thorough imposter.... He is looking out for a scapegoat for the retreat of the Fifth Army. I pointed out that "fewer men, extended front and increased hostile forces," were the main causes to which the retreat may be attributed.... L. G. seems a "cur" and when I am with him I cannot resist a feeling of distrust of him and his intentions. 27

On the field of battle the power of the defensive reasserted itself over the tremendous German drive to split the Allied line. The difficult nature of the terrain on the Somme battlefield, combined with increasing German losses, slowed and gradually halted the offensive only ten miles short of Amiens. The British Third Army firmly repulsed a German attempt to turn its flank between Amiens and Arras. The Germans apparently lacked the final drive to exploit their successes in the Fifth Army area and the French, after the 28th, began arriving in adequate numbers and with proper support in the south.

On the 28th, Ludendorff ordered the execution of supporting attacks north and south of Arras. The British were well-prepared in this sector and turned the Germans back with heavy losses. The Hutier tactics had now used up many of the
elite storm troops and the remaining infantrymen reverted to the linear attack formation of former days. Six ranks deep and shoulder to shoulder to shoulder, the attackers were now being cut down by accurate machine gun and artillery fire.

Fighting continued until April 5th when Ludendorff realized that he must end the battle or settle into a battle of attrition. The Germans could spare neither the time nor the resources for such wasteful operations. The offensives, which were code named St. Michael 1, 2, and 3, had succeeded in capturing 70,000 prisoners, 1100 guns and immense quantities of stores. The British Army had faltered and fallen back but it had not been decisively defeated. The strategic victory had eluded Ludendorff. The German Army would fight again with bravery and determination in four more attempts to end the war but would never display the same confidence or power displayed during the opening offensive. There are strong parallels between the March 21st offensive of 1918 and a later last-ditch attempt to secure victory by the Germans in the Second World War during the Battle of the Bulge.
Foch in Command

Through an exchange of letters and telegraph messages, General Foch's formal title was agreed upon on April 14th. Known as the General in Chief of the Allied Armies in France, his actual powers were somewhat more limited than his title implied. His position was never analogous to that of General Dwight D. Eisenhower in the second war. He did not control a large inter-allied staff nor did he exercise a pervasive effect upon the subordinate units under his command. The complex and, in some respects, efficient machinery of the Board of Permanent Military Representatives at Versailles could have formed the nucleus of such an organization, but this was not done. The Military Representatives and their organizations were allowed to founder and produced little of value for the rest of the war.

Against the entire trend of modern warfare toward complexity and more rigid control, Foch reverted to a personal and political approach to command. His small personal staff of about twenty officers relied on information supplied from the British and French General Staffs and the field armies.

Because the Great War was brought to a successful conclusion on the Western Front only eight months after the elevation of Foch to the Supreme Command, many have confused this decision as being the turning point of the war and the
chief reason for victory. In fact, the man and the system which
he adopted possessed no particular ingredient which brought
about victory. The strategic abilities of Haig and Pétain
reasserted themselves in the coming months and provided the
effectiveness to defeat the enemy. The moral ascendancy
provided by Foch to the Allied cause cannot be ignored but
this gift was unadorned by an adequate military insight.

The General was the same Foch who, as Commandant of
the War College, had inspired the "Young Turks" with the
importance of morale and the offensive in battle; the same
Foch who was disgraced after the tremendous losses his armies
suffered during the Somme Battles of 1916. Foch in March, 1918
was a vibrant leader, dedicated to the offensive and the
expulsion of the Boche from the soil of "la patrie". He was
however, imprecise in judgement and planned on a grand plane.
He issued enigmatic orders with all the spirit of a Napoleon,
but seemed to ignore the increased complexity of operations
and the need for detailed staff work and coordination of arms.
Yet he was courageous and steadfast--it was for these qualities
that he had been given his appointment.

Sir James Edmonds, the official historian of the
British Army in the Great War, in commenting on the problems
which Foch's method of command created in the Franco-British
military structure notes:

Certain new difficulties at once arose when Foch took charge, as he was not accustomed to command British troops; nor were British generals accustomed to receive the kind of directives and orders which he issued. There should have been British staff officers on his staff to "interpret" him.... French generals... felt themselves entitled by custom to use discretion in executing orders given by superior officers not in close touch with local conditions.... A close study of the methods of possible Allies is in the highest degree necessary for intelligent and smooth co-operation. 31

Foch chose to plan by inspiration and issue directives far removed from the grim realities of the trenches. This method soon irritated Haig as well as his subordinates. He even went so far as to recommend that Foch replace Pétain as French Commander-in-Chief in addition to his new duties just so that he would be served by a proper staff and a complement of liaison personnel. This proposal, of course, would have resulted in exactly the same command structure forced upon Haig by Lloyd George and General Nivelle in 1917.

The German Tide Breaks and Ebbs

The northern German attack, the Battle of Lys, opened on the morning of April 9th. Once again initial successes spurred Ludendorff's optimism. Fortunately for the attacking forces, their selected point of attack was manned along five
miles by unreliable Portugese troops, which were in the process of being relieved of their front line duties. One Portugese division broke ranks and fled to the rear, carrying their artillery with them. Within three hours of the initial assault, the Germans had breached the last defensive system and reached open country. This gap was closed only with great difficulty by British reserve units.

North of the Lys river, the Germans retook the Messines Ridge and by April 12th had moved dangerously close to another key railroad center, Hazebrouck. The Germans were held up only by the superhuman efforts of reserve units and by local commanders organizing administrative and rear-echelon personnel into defensive teams. These setbacks were not quickly remedied by the new Generalissimo, as Haig had expected. During the second German offensive, his old fear of French flaccidity was reinforced. In this battle, Foch was slow to transfer troops north and when they did arrive they took little active part in the fight.

On April 11th, Haig again pointed out the critical situation in his northern sector and appealed for assistance. Foch replied that the British had to stand fast and to expect no further French reinforcement. Foch was faced with the problem of continuing to refit and retrain the French Armies,
but he was, at this early date, planning a grand counter-stroke which would win the war.

That night, Haig penned his historic and characteristic message to his soldiers:

Many amongst us are now tired. To those I would say that Victory will belong to the side which holds out the longest.... There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man; there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each man must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the Freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment. 33

Haig continued to press Foch to support the British northern sector with French reinforcements without success. On April 14th, the Field-Marshal felt compelled to "place on record [his] opinion that the arrangements made [by Foch were] insufficient to meet the present situation." The Generalissimo, perhaps recalling the tenacity of the British soldier in the first two battles of Ypres, ignored these requests. His actions for the remainder of the war would be based upon two unshakeable tenets:

1) No large unit should be relieved while engaged or a battle is in progress.

2) The only chance for either tactical or strategical victory lay in counter-attacks.
While these rules were the epitome of military determination and bravery, their inflexible application brought great suffering to the weary Tommy and poilu in the trenches.

On the day following Haig's protest, Foch grandly announced: "La bataille de Hazebrouck est finie." Certainly the troops then engaged in stemming the German onslaught would have been utterly amazed at such a pronouncement. In fact, the battle was not yet over and the proof of this was the loss of Kemmel Hill by one of the few French units in the northern line ten days after Foch made his statement. But, in the final analysis, Foch was correct. Despite his poor grasp of the situation in the north and his inflexible policies, the British did slow and finally stop the Germans on April 30th. Ludendorff had attracted more than half of the Allied reserves to the British front and now decided to shift his offensive resources southward to General Pétain's Champagne sector. The Germans now had a dangerous salient to defend in Flanders and would require a month to mount the attack upon the French line.

German headquarters prepared for their assault upon the Chemin des Dames Ridge with a practiced and meticulous attitude. The artillery coordinator, Colonel Bruchmuller, who had developed the system of violent preparation from the Riga operations, now performed his duties flawlessly. The German
commanders and General Staff sections, after the experience of the past weeks performed smoothly and skillfully for Operation Blucher. Their preparations were too good as it turned out; this southern thrust was to be just another diversion.

The military and technical competence displayed by Ludendorff's staff and that of the Crown Prince assured complete surprise on the French front. On May 27th, despite sharp warnings from the American Expeditionary Force's intelligence section, the French were caught completely by surprise. Again luck was initially with the First Quartermaster General. As in his first two offensives, his assault struck a particularly vulnerable point. After Pétain's fears of a Champagne offensive had proved false, he had allowed his command to assume that the enemy would not assault the strong Chemin des Dames positions. The French defenses were thus weakly held and General Duchesne, violating instructions and the lessons of defense recently learned by all other commanders, continued to man his front heavily. Another cruel twist lay in the fact that four weak British divisions were in the line after being rotated by Foch to the "quiet" Champagne sector for recuperation.

The cumulative result of Gallic incompetence and Teutonic persistence was foreordained. On the first day of the assault, the storm of Bruchmuller's 3,719 guns began
promptly at 1:00 A.M. All front line units virtually disappeared in a holocaust equalled only by the British mine and artillery preparation on the Messines-Wytschaete Ridge in the previous year. At 3:40 A.M., the German Storm Troops quickly moved forward across the Aisne River. By evening, the German spearhead had advanced twelve miles, a feat undreamed of on the Western Front for the last three years. Two days later, the attackers had secured Soissons and reached the Marne River on the 31st.

Ludendorff was as surprised as the bewildered French at the phenomenal success of the German diversionary operation. Not learning from the ultimate frustration of their past opportunism, the German commanders pressed the attack home and followed tactical success. Blucher now became the main offensive effort rather than a diversion.

Yet, with the glorious successes achieved by German arms there were unmistakable omens of the resurgence of the defensive; all the advances had been triangular, with a steep apex, and General Pétain, the practical and methodical defender, was directing effective holding actions on the flanks of the attack. Another dangerous salient was forming. The lengthening supply lines, served by only one main railroad, began to impede progress. Gradually, Allied reserves arrived on the
on the scene to hold the shoulders of the attack. On June 9th, Ludendorff attempted his final offensive thrust, but was successfully repulsed by a counter-attack mounted by General Mangin. In this action, the American Expeditionary Force participated for the first time in active combat operations during the Battle of Belleau Wood. This debut provided further proof that the balance had finally shifted against the Central Powers.

While this great battle was raging in the south, Haig had three definite factors to consider in his planning. First, the principal German reserve, under Crown Prince Rupprecht—thirty-nine divisions of fresh troops on May 29th, thirty-two on June 3rd—was a potent force opposing him despite its declining numbers. Secondly, he had to prepare to assist the French in the south upon Foch's order. Finally, the British commander had to prepare for the decisive counterstrokes against the Germans to be launched once they had failed.

Foch, apparently more concerned with the German thrust towards Paris than he had been over the imminent destruction of the British Army in Flanders, anxiously set up plans for shifting reserves to stem the latest offensive. At the meeting of the Supreme Allied War Council on the 1st of June, the French Government asked Lloyd George to transfer all American troops serving in the British sector to support Pétain. The
intention was for the untrained Americans to relieve French units in quiet sectors. Haig opposed this proposal:

> I said that it would be very wrong to employ these new troops in the way proposed by the French, because, being on so wide a front, the companies would never get a chance of getting together and training. I hoped to quicken up the training of the Americans, and to render four Divisions fit for the line by the middle of June. 37

On the 4th of June, Foch increased his demands upon the British. He now asked for three British divisions to support the Somme area before Amiens immediately and for plans to be drawn for the shipping of all British reserves south on call. Haig's reaction was to comply with the order but to also make a "formal protest against any troops leaving [his] command until the bulk of the Reserves of Prince Rupprecht's Armies had become involved in the Battle." He forwarded a copy of this protest to the War Office in London. These actions were strictly in accordance with the Beauvais Agreement and fortunately this was the last public disagreement between Foch and Haig.

Lord Milner, now officially the Secretary of State for War, travelled to Paris in response to Haig's protest. At the French War Ministry, an inter-allied meeting was held to resolve this issue of Foch's preparations to strip the British Armies of all their reserve units. Milner expressed the
the British Government's concern with the strategical plans and complete support for Haig's position. The British Field-Marshall then explained his compliance with Foch's orders and general agreement with the necessity of preparing plans for all eventualities. However, he resented Foch's arbitrary acts of withdrawing units and artillery support from the British sector without reference to British GHQ or in some cases to the Army headquarters concerned.

Milner and Clemenceau fully agreed with Haig's position on this matter and instructed Foch to use the chain of command more effectively. This was yet another result of the inadequate staff and liaison procedures used by Foch.

The Generalissimo then insisted upon the right, in principle, to order troops of any nationality wherever he thought fit and at the shortest notice. This power was recognised so long as adequate liaison between the Supreme Command and British headquarters was maintained. This power, the logical result of the Doullens and Beauvais Agreements, was finally realized by the British Government and its rather naive view of the problems involved in placing its soldiers under a foreign commander was dispelled. Haig accordingly requested a modification of his orders from the War Office.

Lord Milner issued Haig's new instructions on the 21st of June. The letter reaffirmed all but one paragraph of
of the original instructions given by Field-Marshal Kitchener in 1915. In place of the assurance that Haig's command was an independent one and that [he was] in no case [to] come under the orders of any Allied General" a new command formula was given.

In pursuit of those objectives [defeat of the Germans] you will carry out loyally any instructions issued to you by the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces. At the same time, if any order given by him appears to you to imperil the British Army, it is agreed between the Allied Governments that you should be at liberty to appeal to the British Government before executing such order. 42

In addition to this rather awkward military arrangement, the growing fear of the War Cabinet that the French were attempting to dominate the British forces administratively was included. This fear was similar to that of General John J. Pershing who guarded against a loss of national identity in an amalgamation of his troops into other armies.

It is the desire of His Majesty's Government to keep the British Forces under your command as far as possible together. If at any time the Allied Commander-in-Chief finds it necessary to transfer any portion of the British troops for the purposes of roulement it should be distinctly understood that this is only a temporary arrangement and that as soon as practicable the troops thus detached should be reunited to the main body of the British Forces.

Again, this was a rather impossible requirement from the military standpoint. Either a military commander has the
authority commensurate with his responsibility or his position is hopelessly compromised. On the one hand Lloyd George had given Foch supreme power while offering Douglas Haig the opportunity, at the first crisis to undercut this authority. This first crisis was not long in coming and quickly undid the sophistry of the politicians.

While awaiting the final spasms of the German last gamble offensives, Foch, on July 13th, ordered four British divisions and a Corps headquarters to move into the Champagne sector under General Pétain's command. Haig was in London on leave at the time this order was received and his Chief of Staff, Major-General Lawrence, only partially followed the instructions. British intelligence had discounted Foch's fears of another German offensive and Lawrence assumed the responsibility of tempering the order until the Field-Marshal returned. He dispatched one division east into Champagne with one other to follow in time.

When Haig returned on the 14th, he approved of Lawrence's decision but now found that Foch demanded an additional four divisions—a total of eight. Haig and Foch met the next day to discuss the situation but by this time the Germans had struck a final blow in Champagne, contrary to British intelligence estimates.
The British War Cabinet again intervened through the medium of General Henry Wilson. Wilson called Haig prior to his conference with Foch and informed him of the Government's anxiety over shifting any British troops while Crown Prince Rupprecht's heavy reserve opposite the British line remained intact. He further hinted: "that if you consider the British Army is endangered or if you think that General Foch is not acting solely on military considerations they (the War Cabinet) rely on the exercise of your judgement, under the Beauvais agreement, as to the security of the British front..."

Here was a perfect opening. If Haig wished now to destroy the Supreme Command, he need only appeal to his government a second time. He would have been supported and the tempestual Foch would have, in all likelihood, relinquished his authority entirely. But Haig was too responsible for such a shallow motive to influence his decision. He now realized the need for the eight British divisions behind the French line and assumed the responsibility for weakening his front for the common good of the Coalition.

That evening Haig, in the privacy of his study, noted the full irony of the situation in his diary.

...I was directed to obey all his [Foch's] orders at once and notify War Cabinet if I took exception to any of them. On the other hand, Milner's instructions to me dated
22nd June 1918 [sic], lay down 'You will carry out loyally any instructions issued to you by the C.in C. Allied Forces. At the same time, if any order given by him appears to you to imperil the British Army, you should appeal to the British Government before executing such order.' This is a case of 'heads you win and tails I lose.' If things go well, the Government take credit to themselves and the Generalissimo; if badly, the Field-Marshal will be blamed. 45

Fortunately, three days after this decision was taken, General Mangin struck the first in the series of Allied counter-strokes and doomed Ludendorff's planned second Lys offensive. But for this, Haig would indeed have been another military scapegoat added to Lloyd George's collection. Here, perhaps more clearly than at any other time in his career, Haig's moral supremacy is exposed and his right to credit for maintaining what little Allied unity there was in the Great War is clearly seen.

Advance to Victory

The time for reducing the German bulges had finally come. Ludendorff postponed yet again his offensive in Flanders. As he received the news of the Franco-American counterattack on the western flank of the Marné salient in Rupprecht's headquarters, he ordered an end to immediate preparations and nervously returned south. His task was now to extricate his
his forces from the sack into which he had allowed them to become trapped. In this endeavor he was aided now by the fiery offensive spirit of Foch. The Generalissimo ordered assaults on all fronts of the bulge and continuous pressure on the retreating Germans. This philosophy directly contradicted Pétain's instructions to withdraw slowly in the south and east while attacking across the chord of the salient from the west to entrap all forces inside. There is some doubt that Pétain's planned maneuver would have been completely successful due to the general lack of mobility of the infantry and the unreliability of the new tank weapon, but it appears that even a partial success would have been more rewarding at far less cost than Foch's unremitting frontal assaults.

But retreat under pressure—even when that pressure is improperly applied—is a most difficult maneuver at best. The total losses of the Germans in this Second Battle of the Marne were 100,000, including 35,000 prisoners and 650 guns. This was not a great loss compared to other bloody encounters of the war, but it did signal the beginning of the great allied push to victory. It was furthermore the first concrete victory for General Foch during an unbroken string of holding actions. Foch's "great military orchestra," as he was wont to describe the Allied armies on the Western Front, could now commence the offensive.
It is interesting to note that at this point in the war no military leader, let alone political spokesman, foresaw an end to the war in 1918 with the exception of Field-Marshal Haig. Despite his successes in retaking some lost ground, Foch looked forward to a series of isolated and limited attacks to secure the railway systems in 1918. Foch dared not expect victory until the summer of 1919. Ludendorff felt that he could continue the war and planned to strike another offensive in Flanders. But perhaps the most glaring example of an unrealistic evaluation of the war situation in the waning summer months came from Lloyd George's personally selected military advisor, General Henry Wilson. In only one of a long series of military miscalculations, Wilson presented a thirty-one page paper to the War Cabinet on July 21st entitled "British Military Policy, 1918-1919." In this position statement, Wilson viewed the remainder of 1918 and much of 1919 as only a "period of preparation." He even asked the question: "... will it be possible to accomplish it [victory] in 1919 or must we wait until 1920?" He counselled the husbanding of resources until at least the 1st of July and the incorporation of "every mechanical auxillery" into the army. Although Wilson was the most ardent of Westerners at the outbreak of the war, his new master, Lloyd George, influenced him to reverse his field:
(ii) During this period a British reserve of 3 or 4 divisions should be stationed in Italy.
(iv) ...[improve] our position in Palestine by gaining possession of the Hejaz railway about Amman.
(v) The most urgent task in the meantime is the establishment of British control of the Caspian and a secure Lines[ sic] of Communication to it from Baghdad.
(vi) ... after the war it is imperative for the future security of Egypt and India that a wide no man's land should be maintained between our present railheads ... and those of the enemy.
(vii) The re-constitution of Russia in some form as an armed and independent state, strong enough to withstand German infiltration and aggression is a vital British interest.

No polemic by a defender of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig could so thoroughly damn the ineptitude and lack of vision of the Imperial General Staff and the Government. Haig, in a letter appended to this document in 1927, claims to have largely ignored the entire paper at the time he was preparing for the Amiens Battle. He characterizes the statements made by Wilson as "priceless absurdities" and concludes: "thank God that the G. S. in London in 1918 had no influence over our military decision at G.H.Q. in France."

To further emphasize the muddled reasoning of the British leaders at home and their lack of contact with the field command, another paper entitled "Munitions Policy, 1919 or 1920" dated September 5, 1918 by the Minister of Munitions, Winston S. Churchill, is of interest.
In the introductory paragraph, Churchill lauds "the extremely important paper written by the Chief of Staff [Wilson]" which affirms that the German Armies in the West could be defeated in the summer of 1919. The author calls for a refusal of large commitments of artillery or equipment in order to "ease up the strain on our own population, civil industries, shipping, &c" in order to hold out until 1920. The man stigmatized for the great disaster at the Dardanelles, now called for "an increasing proportion of our war effort [to] be devoted to the East, to ensure the defence of India, ...to rebuild the Russian fighting front, and to [prosecute] our attacks upon the Turkish Empire." Churchill advised that the British "should be content to play a very subordinate role in France."

Criticizing this paper, Haig wrote cryptic notes in utter disbelief—"What rubbish" and "I saw the S of S for War ... in hopes of getting him to send all possible reinforcements to France so as to win this autumn or early next year! D.H."

Fortunately for the Allied nations, Douglas Haig now had a clear conception that victory was obtainable before the end of the year. As early as May 17th, he had visited General Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army headquarters and instructed him "to begin studying, in conjunction with
General Debeney, the question of an attack eastwards from Villers Bretonneux in combination with an attack from the French front S. of Roye. [Haig] gave him details of the scheme."

This was the genesis of the Battle of Amiens, the real turning point of the war.

On August 8th at 4:30 A.M., the first large-scale British attack began. Spearheaded by Australian and Canadian units, which had not been weakened by organizational shifts or the defensive battles of the past months, Rawlinson's army advanced rapidly. Supported by a strong tank force and 2000 guns, the assault completely surprised the Germans. At the end of the day, British units had advanced seven miles and had captured 15,000 prisoners and 350 guns. But the attack was not pressed after the second day. In the face of the enthusiasm of the subordinate commanders, the British high command was wary of accepting grievous losses against prepared and alerted defense systems.

To the promising, but not spectacular results of this first attack must be added the great moral depression which now engulfed the German high command. Ludendorff plummeted into despair and spoke of the "black day" of his army. The successful employment of integrated tank-infantry attacks by the British had cruelly depressed the field commanders and soldiers.
Haig, after a personal reconnaissance of his front on August 12th, was convinced that a continued assault on the heavily fortified and naturally strong enemy positions, even if successful, would be too costly. Accordingly, he prepared to initiate attacks with his armies to the north with the objective of outflanking the defenders and dislodging the general defensive line. Finally the lessons learned at fearful cost at Loos, the Somme and 3rd Ypres were being applied—Haig was to reinforce success but break off operations where the enemy was too strong. An acceptance of the law of diminishing returns was the keynote of Haig's conversion to a more sensible tactical and strategic method of attack. Unfortunately, Foch was not moved by this change of policy.

Haig now assumed an adamant position and would follow the orders of Foch in the conduct of operations only if he concurred with them. The main factor in the impetus of the Allied advance was now the British Armies and there was little Foch could do to discipline his theoretical subordinate. Foch insisted that the British success east of Amiens be continued and the method of frontal attack be pressed home. This Haig refused to do and in the end Foch was forced to give in; Haig had his way.
In a fit of temper, Foch then ordered General Mangin's Tenth French Army to attack north of Soissons on August 18th. This assault achieved little except more French casualties. However, on the 20th, Mangin drove his armies forward another two miles and captured 8,000 prisoners and 200 guns.

The August battles, in retrospect, appear as a perfectly planned and mutually supporting series of attacks. Each one was broken off almost as soon as its initial momentum was slowed by enemy defenses. New attacks profited by close proximity from those which preceded and it appears that a master plan for these strokes was in operation. In fact, though each action was instituted under Foch's ridiculous doctrine—"Tout le monde à la bataille"—steamroller tactics all along the front. These same attacks were halted largely against Foch's desires—the French through logistical breakdowns, the British through the strong-willed insistence of their commander.

General Julian Byng's Third Army commenced its operations on August 21st, just north of Rawlinson's victory. Two hundred tanks provided the shock action for the assault. The lack of a heavy artillery preparation and thick fog assured the enemy's complete surprise. The infantry advanced rapidly until it reached the main defensive line and halted awaiting the displacement forward of its artillery. The Germans attempted an aggressive counter-attack and were roundly repulsed.
The Fourth Army pushed its lines forward on the 22nd and formed a continuous front with the Third Army. On the next day, a combined attack by both armies pushed the Germans back another three miles and Ludendorff viewed this as another "black day" for his army. German units were disappearing in combat with no hope of replacement. The Allies were now outflanking all positions rather than battering their men against skillfully prepared German defensive works. The British, following the lead of their commander, were converts to a new creed of efficient advances and practiced it with fervor. Significantly, a large number of German soldiers, outflanked by the new tactics, now preferred to surrender rather than fight on to the end.

On the 26th, the British line advanced to the Siegfried Position. This fortified barrier was more than fifty miles long and joined into other defensive works on either end. It now appeared that a frontal assault against this strong position was inevitable. Haig realized that the enemy must be kept unbalanced and that he must violate his newly found instinct to preserve his forces to do this.

As Sir Douglas contemplated the Hindenburg Line—7,000 to 10,000 yards in depth, and fitted with every defensive device that German ingenuity could provide—a new annoyance
entered his life from London. A personal telegram from General Wilson was brought to Haig's headquarters by his operations officer. Once again, the War Cabinet and the Imperial Staff were hedging their bets and disclaimed any responsibility for possible disaster:

Just a word of caution in regard to incurring heavy losses in attacks on Hindenburg Line as opposed to losses when driving the enemy back to that line. I do not mean to say that you have incurred such losses, but I know the War Cabinet would become anxious if we received heavy punishment in attacking the Hindenburg Line, without success.

Signed
Wilson  52

Surely no military leader could be placed in a more difficult position by his government. If the British continued their advance and incurred heavy losses the Field-Marshall would be relieved; if he carried out the necessary attacks he could remain only if the cost was light. But if he acted indecisively and refrained from action, he could still keep his command although he would not be fulfilling his mission or his great responsibility to the millions of men who served under him. Haig again acted resolutely and assumed the correct military attitude regardless of the personal consequences. Realizing that he "could hope for no mercy" he rebuked Wilson and the "frock coats":
My dear Henry,

With reference to your wire re casualties in attacking the Hindenburg Line—what a wretched lot! and how well they mean to support me! What confidence! Please call their attention to my action two weeks ago when the French pressed me to attack the strong line of defence east of Roye-Chaules front. I wrote you at the time and instead of attacking south of the Somme I started Byng's attack. I assure you I watch the drafts most carefully. 53

The assaults were ordered and they were bloody. On the evening of August 30th, the 2nd Australian Division began its advance across the Somme River in the direction of Peronne and the hills of Mont St. Quentin. The German defenders--five divisions--had orders that they were to hold at all costs. The attack commenced on the morning of the 31st and by 7:00 A.M., owing to complete surprise, the attackers secured the village of Mont St. Quentin. The Germans counterattacked furiously and killed the majority of the leading Australian troops. The survivors were pushed down the hill into an enemy trench network on the river bank. The vicious fighting continued for the rest of the day but determination and bravery alone still proved insufficient in a frontal attack upon prepared positions.

While the Germans were focusing their attention upon Mont St. Quentin, other Australians easily secured Péronne during the night. This movement distracted the German commander and, being uncertain as to which position to hold, he weakened the defensive force at Mont St. Quentin. The result was that the
Australian's next attack up the hill succeeded in dislodging the enemy. This time German counterattacks failed.

The next morning, south of Peronne, another brigade of the Australian Corps crossed the Somme and advanced westward. This move outflanked the German defensive system in the area and the entire line was forced to withdraw. The Dominion troops had acquitted themselves with an unselfishness and dash reminiscent of the battles of 1915.

While these actions were in progress, General Byng's Third Army advanced in the north beyond Bapaume and outflanked the enemy in the north as well.

On the 2nd of September, the Canadian Corps, under General Henry Horne's First Army, broke through the German's Wotan Position (known by the British as the Drocourt–Queant switch line). These actions precipitated the German High Command's order to retire from the entire Marne salient.

General Pershing, following the fixed objective of forming a cohesive American sector, had withdrawn five of his divisions operating under Haig's direction on the 12th of August. This move, taken just before Haig's great offensive began, upset him and caused some recrimination. That evening Haig mused: "What will History say regarding this action of the Americans leaving the British zone when the decisive
battle of the war is at its height, and the decision is still in doubt." Although disappointed, the Field-Marshal was nevertheless cooperative with the American commander and Pershing respected his straightforwardness.

Pershing formed the American Expeditionary Force around the St. Mihiel salient, east of Verdun. The reduction of the salient was a correct military objective but following this, Pershing intended to continue the attack toward Metz into the virtually impregnable defensive system built by the Germans in the past three years. Such a continuation of the American attack, aside from being costly, would have diverged from the principal Allied offensives to the north. Haig, therefore, wrote to Foch suggesting that the Americans be halted after the St. Mihiel salient was reduced and their forces shifted into a concentric attack from the south toward Cambrai. Haig realized that Pershing might object to a directed objective and suggested that Foch choose Mézières, north of the Argonne Forest, for the American assault. Haig further suggested that final victory in 1918 would be possible if this strategic direction were adopted. Foch enthusiastically accepted Haig's proposal. Later, he was surprised to find that even the coolly logical General Petain accepted this proposal. On August 30th, Foch visited
Pershing's headquarters and skillfully substituted Mézières for Metz as the ultimate strategic direction for the AEF. Although Pershing later chose to fight east of the Argonne Forest, Haig's strategic appreciation shaped the final vast offensive ordered by Marshal Foch.

The Grand Assault was planned to commence on September 26th with the Americans and the French Fourth Army attacking north towards Mézières. One day later, the British First, Third, and Fourth Armies were to proceed southward into the Hindenburg Line. General Plumer's Second Army, with Belgian and French support, was to again break out of the Ypres salient and drive along the Belgian coast on the 28th. The next day, Rawlinson's Fourth Army and the French First Army under Debeney, would reduce the German defensive line frontally. These bold plans would have been foolhardy a few months earlier, but the German military forces were now suffering extreme physical hardship and their morale was ebbing quickly. The British naval blockade's inexorable pressure upon Germany's economy was finally having a telling effect upon civilian and military determination to fight on. The recent failure of the Friedensturm and the growing Allied superiority served to remind the German soldier that defeat was certain and prolonging its coming would make it only more terrible.
Foch's final offensive was not wholly successful, but was the catalyst that finally ended the war with military victory. After an initial advance, the French and Americans in the south were bogged down with logistical problems and by extremely heavy losses caused by overcrowding of troops in restrictive terrain. The Belgian and British thrust in the north advanced eight miles only to be stopped again by Flanders mud. But on the 29th, the British were successful in smashing through the southern section of the Hindenburg Line and finally reached open country behind the rearmost German defensive zone. Although the British were too weak to exploit their victory, the shattering of the Hindenburg Line caused Ludendorff to lose his nerve. He insisted that the Imperial Government of Germany request an immediate armistice.

The events on the battlefield now became secondary to political and diplomatic maneuvering for an end to the fighting. A new German Government was installed on October 3rd under Prince Max of Baden. The new political leaders requested an armistice in line with President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. After an extended exchange of diplomatic notes, the Chancellor of Germany reorganized the German constitutional form of government to provide full control to the elected Reichstag. Ludendorff was removed as the effective head of the
military forces; he was replaced by General Groener. As Imperial Germany failed and began to collapse, her partners in the Central Powers lost heart and submitted to the eventual victory of the Entente Powers.

As peace through victory became an increasingly certain goal, the British Government chose to ignore their leading military commander. Sir Douglas Haig had proved unerringly correct in the final year of the war. His warnings as well as his optimistic predictions had been borne out. The great moral certitude which he provided to the Allied cause had pulled it through its darkest hours and impelled it on to certain victory on the battlefield. With peace in sight, David Lloyd George chose not only to disregard, but also to bypass Haig on military matters. It is apparent that the principal reason for this attitude was the Prime Minister's personal dislike for the stiff and inarticulate soldier.

Although Haig's optimism had proved unjustified in the past; he now tempered it with realism. Lloyd George did not speak with Haig about the military conditions for an armistice until October 19th. At this time, perhaps recalling his over-zealousness in the past, the Field-Marshal counselled a moderate settlement which could be enforced. He stated that Germany was not yet completely defeated and that her armies
could delay effectively back into their own territory.

A very large part of the German Army has been badly beaten, but the whole Field Army has not yet been broken up.... general disorganization... is not yet apparent.... The French Army seems greatly worn out.... [The] American Army is disorganized, ill-equipped and ill-trained...it must take at least a year before it becomes a serious fighting force.... The British Army has fought hard. It is a veteran force, very confident in itself but its infantry is already 50,000 under strength.... [It] is not sufficiently fresh or strong to force a decision by itself...

A careful consideration of the military situation on the Western Front, and keeping British interests in view, forces me to the conclusion that an armistice with Germany should be concluded on the following basis:-

1. Complete and immediate evacuation of Belgium and occupied French territories. Alsace and Lorraine must also be evacuated and Metz and Strasbourg handed forthwith to the Allies.
2. Rolling stock of French and Belgian railways or equivalent to be returned, inhabitants repatriated etc.

Haig was not vindictive and he saw no reason to expend further resources if Britain's war aims could be satisfied without this. Of course, the conditions which caused this assessment rapidly changed and a more severe and uncompromising armistice agreement became possible. Yet Haig, unlike so many of his comrades in arms, realized that the purpose of the war just concluded was to secure a lasting peace. On November 27th, he noted the repressive attitude of the French toward the beaten enemy:
The French are anxious to be very strict, e.g., to forbid the German postal system to function... This, of course, is out of the question. We must not forget that it is to our interest to return to peace methods at once, to have Germany a prosperous, not an impoverished country. Furthermore, we ought not to make Germany our enemy for many years to come.

The Supreme Allied War Council accepted the recommendations of Marshal Poch and General Pershing and imposed harsh armistice terms on the German nation. Such action was taken against Germany despite the fact that her armies were never completely defeated and the Allies were still on their own territory when the guns were silenced. The peace treaty which followed the halt in fighting was even more repressive and humiliating to the defeated powers.

Douglas Haig was bypassed by the British Government and the Prime Minister in postwar deliberations almost immediately upon the conclusion of the armistice. Lloyd George now accepted the sacrifices and steadfastness of the army and its leader without gratitude and clamored for the position of honor in the postwar mafficking.
Notes for Chapter Four


2. For a detailed discussion of the British defensive preparations see Barrie Pitt, 1918, The Last Act (New York, 1963), 52-74. The British troops were improperly trained for conducting defensive operations, especially those conducted in a mobile situation. Haig was well aware of this training problem but his shortages of personnel precluded pulling men from the line for adequate retraining.


4. Ibid.

5. It was perhaps, unfortunate that General Hubert Gough was placed in command of the defensive battles. He was a cavalryman and was noted for his dash and aggressive spirit and not tenacity and concentration on details which are the qualities most needed by a defensive commander. For a discussion of the many problems confronting Gough see his The Fifth Army (London, 1931), 221-59.

6. In 1935, Colonel C. Allanson, the GSO I at the War Office in 1918, confirmed that 120,000 troops were withheld from the British forces in France. The reasons given for such a move such as concealment from enemy observation, saving foreign exchange and bolstering public morale are shallow when compared to the suffering this decision caused the troops defending the line. B. H. Liddell Hart, Memoirs, I, 365-69. Despite Gough's thorough assessment of the problems and Haig's numerous warnings, the Government did little to prepare. Only one division was returned from Italy and no substantial reinforcements were sent to the Western Front. The War Cabinet, especially Lloyd George, were responsible for the policy of keeping a large number of troops in subsidiary theaters of war at a critical time. Sir Llewellyn Woodward, Great Britain and


8 Diary entry, March 14, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 124.

9 See: Pitt, The Last Act, passim. for details of the German offensive preparations.

10 Diary entry, March 2, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 124.

11 Diary entry, March 23, 1918, ibid., H. 124.

12 "Procès-verbal of Conference at Dury" and diary entry, March 24, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 124.

13 Ibid.

14 John A. Fairlie, British War Administration (New York, 1919), 53. Lord Milner may have been designated as Lord Derby's successor earlier and was considered by Haig to be the de facto Secretary of State for War.

15 Diary entry, March 25, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 124.

16 Ibid.

17 "Procès-verbal of Third Conference at Doullens, March 26, 1918," Diaries and Papers, H. 124.

18 At an earlier meeting, General Wilson broached the subject of command authority and recommended that Premier Clemenceau be directed to coordinate these defenses. This
ludicrous suggestion was dismissed by Foch as only adding to the difficulties of the situation, since Clemenceau would seek professional advice from both Pétain and himself. Since it was obvious that the two French military leaders disagreed on the methods to be used in counteracting the problem, Clemenceau could not effectively control or coordinate the defense.

19 James E. Edmonds, *Official History of the War: Military Operations in France and Belgium, 1918*, II, 2-7. These orders were communicated verbally to General Pétain at the Doullens Conference. Foch sent General Barthelemy to General Gough's headquarters.

20 Diary entry, March 27, 1918, *Diaries and Papers*, H. 124.

21 Edmonds, *BOH*, 1918, II, 10-11. This was the total from March 21 through August 31, 1918. By the end of March, all material losses were replenished from stocks within the theater.


23 Diary entry, March 29, 1918, *Diaries and Papers*, H. 124. For an example of the complete support which Haig accorded to the new Generalissimo see: O.A.D. 797, GHQ to Army commanders, *ibid*.


26 Diary entry, April 3, 1918, *ibid.*, H. 125.
Ibid.

The oft-repeated claim that the German soldiers' discovery of the plentiful supplies behind the British lines caused the advance to be slowed down appears to be false. Although there must have been a loss of credibility of German propaganda about the submarine campaign, there was no large-scale plundering and lack of discipline. These elements did affect the progress of the April offensive in Flanders, however. Woodward, Great Britain in the War, 389 fn.

David Trask, The United States in the Supreme War Council (Middleton, Conn., 1961), 65; Shumate, "The Allied Supreme War Council, 1917-1918," (doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 1952), 841-43 and 857-70. Frederick Maurice indicated that this situation occurred because it was not desired to make Foch too powerful. This was just another example of the half-measures adopted by the Allied political leaders in military direction.


Edmonds, BOH, 1918, II, 486-87.

John Terraine, Ordeal of Victory (New York, 1963), 426-27.

"Special Order of the Day, April 11, 1918," Diaries and Papers, H. 125. The literary quality of this appeal may be open to question and certainly does not substantiate Brigadier General Charteris' claim that Haig was as facile with his pen as he was clumsy with the spoken word. However, this message was of inestimable importance to the morale of the British defenders. Although the French reinforcements promised were, in fact, not rushing to the aid of the British, the words did inspire the weary man in the trench to display gallant determin-
ation. An example of this inspiration at the lowest level are the special orders issued by an unknown subaltern in the 1st Australian Division:

"1) This position will be held, and the section will remain here until relieved.
2) The enemy cannot be allowed to interfere with this programme.
3) If the section cannot remain here alive it will remain here dead, but in any case it will remain here....
5) Should all guns be blown out, the section will use Mills grenades and other novelties."

Quoted in Edmonds, BOH, 1918, II, 249 fn.

34 O.A.D. 818, letter Douglas Haig to Ferdinand Foch, April 15, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 125.


36 Bruchmuller's technique was so successful that he was nicknamed Durchbruchmuller, literally "Through-break Muller". Pitt, Last Act, 138. A greater compliment to Col. Bruchmuller's ability was shown to him by the Allies who copied his techniques and made the unexpected, violent artillery preparation standard for the remainder of the war.

37 Diary entry, June 1, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 128.

38 Diary entry, June 4, 1918, ibid.; See also telegram, Foch to Haig and O.A.D. 861, Haig to Foch, ibid.


40 Letter, Lord Milner to Douglas Haig, June 21, 1918, ibid., H. 128.
183

41
Cf. supra 47-48.

42
121/France/2357, Lord Milner to Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, British Armies in France [Douglas Haig], June 21, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 128.

43
Lloyd George, in his memoirs, denies any knowledge of this last minute meddling in military matters. Yet it seems, from Wilson's embarrassed apologies in his next communication, that he would never have forwarded such advice without firm instructions from the War Cabinet.

44
Diary entry, July 15, 1918, Diaries and Papers, H. 129.

45
Ibid.

46
A further insight into the magnitude of Haig's action is that almost contemporaneously with his support of Foch, his opposite number General Pétain, was appealing to his government for relief from Foch's imperious orders. Clemenceau, who by this time was weary of Pétain's pessimism, rescinded Pétain's right of appeal under the Beauvais Agreement and placed him specifically under the orders of Foch.

47
Foch, Memoirs, 375-79.

48

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52
Diary entry, August 29, 1918, Blake ed., *Private Papers*, 325. This portion of the diary entry is not included in the typed version of *Diaries and Papers*, H. 130. The telegram is not included in the attached papers either. This is the only observed instance in which Blake's edition contains more material than the National Library of Scotland's collection. However, this message is quoted verbatim in Duff Cooper, *Haig*, II, 360. Lloyd George denies that the War Cabinet was consulted on this matter. He also claims that the Cabinet would not have concurred in the general tone of caution. Lloyd George, *Memoirs*, VI, 376-77. The Prime Minister, in his self-serving reminiscences, attributes Wilson's action to a "streak of mischief--not to say malice--in his nature." LTC Maurice P.A. Hankey, the secretary of the War Cabinet, does not specifically mention the message but verifies that Lloyd George was highly critical of Douglas Haig's performance at this time and feared that he might accept heavy losses for little or no gain. The Prime Minister was seriously considering replacing Haig. Hankey, *Supreme Command*, II, 829.

53
Letter, Douglas Haig to Henry Wilson, September 1, 1918, quoted in Terraine, *Ordeal of Victory*, 463.

54
Diary entry, August 25, 1918, *Diaries and Papers*, H. 130; see also diary entry August 27, 1918, *ibid*.

55
Pershing told Haig: "At any rate I always know when I am dealing with you what your opinion is on the question at issue. This is not always the case with the French." Diary entry, August 12, 1918, *Diaries and Papers*, H. 130.

56
Diary entry, August 27, 1918, *ibid*.

57
The planned concentric advance by the British and Americans would leave the main French force, in the center, only the mission of holding their front. Petain was chary of expending any more French troops and this plan fit in well with his desires.
Foch was installed as a Marshal of France on August 14, 1918.

Groener was chosen primarily because of his expert knowledge of the internal railway network; he had been the Chief of Field Railways. In addition, he was the son of a noncommissioned officer and did not have the odium of being from the Prussian military caste. Woodward, *Great Britain and the War*, 419 fn.


Diary entry, November 27, 1918, ibid., H. 133.
Conclusion

With the end of the Great War and the negotiations for the Versailles Treaty in progress, Douglas Haig returned to England and, shortly thereafter, to private life. After a brief flurry of awards and celebrations, he was relegated to a position as a retired officer and the laird of his family estate at Bemersyde. As Winston Churchill has observed:

He did not join in the counsels of the nation; he was not invited to reorganize its army; he was not consulted upon the Treaties; no sphere of public activity was open to him.... he was not wanted anymore.

The only satisfactory explanation for this "strange state of affairs" lies in the Prime Minister's personal animosity towards Haig and everything for which he stood. Lloyd George mounted his vendetta against Haig in print and gave rise to a genre of war literature which fit nicely into the post-war revulsion against the stupid and unimaginative policies of the military leaders. Other generals rose to their own defense, but Haig maintained a dignified silence until his death in 1928. He never publicly offered explanation for any of his military decisions. Stoically, he awaited the judgement of history.

The writings of historians and military analysts in the intervening years have not yet placed Douglas Haig's
influence in the Great War in proper perspective. Overly defensive works by his staff associate, John Charteris, and his official biographer, Alfred Duff Cooper, have merely fanned the flames of controversy and have not justified his position as a key figure in military victory. David Lloyd George has been joined by a host of latter day detractors such as his literary-military advisor, Captain Basil H. Liddell Hart, Alan Clark and Leon Wolff to further defame Haig's reputation and minimize his influence upon high-level decisions.

It has not been the purpose of this work to resurrect Haig as a Great Captain. Within the narrow limits of the subject of Allied military cooperation, its purpose has been to clarify the immense influence Haig had upon the various methods of achieving that end. An evaluation of Haig's command methods and his tactical and strategical doctrines must await a more lengthy study.

In attempting to place a value upon Haig's contribution to Allied unity of command, one might be tempted to pass off the praise of Marshal Foch as a mere post-war accolade, rendered as a matter of course. Yet the praise is quite specific:

Never at any time in history has the British Army achieved greater results in attack than in this unbroken offensive lasting 116 days,... The victory gained was indeed complete....
thanks above all to the unselfishness of the wise, loyal and energetic policy of their Commander-in-Chief, who made easy a great combination, and sanctioned a prolonged and gigantic effort. Was it not the insight of an experienced and enlightened Commander which led him to intervene as he did, with his own Government on the 24th of March, 1918, and with the Allied Governments assembled at Doullens on the 26th, to the end that the French and British Armies might at once be placed under a single command, even though his personal position should thereby suffer? In the events that followed, did he not prove that he was above all anxious to ... move in perfect harmony with the general Allied plan...?

This statement, while overestimating Haig's acquiescence in the final stages of victory, adequately acknowledges his pivotal role in Allied cooperation.

The German enemy is no less specific in pointing to Haig's part in the final decision. Although the official monograph on the Great War, issued by the Deutschen Gesellschaft für Wehrpolitik und Wehrwissenschaften, refuses to admit German defeat on the battlefield, it firmly fixes upon Field-Marshall Haig the major credit for preventing a German victory.

The circumstances that Haig never could act really independently, but always had to make his decisions subject to conditions imposed on him, is no reason to deny him the position of a commander-in-chief. Dependence on others was often the fate of great commanders. What is more important is whether his actions were conducted with strategic ability, firm will, strength of character, acceptance of responsibility and political insight. Haig possessed all these
qualities and used them in 'harmonious combination' as Clausewitz requires of a great commander. By means of these powers he saved France in 1916 and 1917, and pre-eminently on that historic day, the 26th March 1918 [date of the Doullens Conference]. Finally: if the ultimate victory over the Central Powers was not accomplished on the battlefield, but was gained on quite another plane, yet in the last three years of the war Haig contributed the most to prevent a German victory. Thus he really remained 'master of the field'.

The words Passchendaele and the Somme have been coated with the venom of the post-war era. These battles, often grossly misrepresented, are used to damn Haig to oblivion without further discussion or even verification of the supposed facts. In truth, there was great suffering and sacrifice on the stagnant battlefields of 1915-1917, but the British armies did impose their will upon the enemy. During the grinding battles of attrition, they inflicted greater casualties upon the German forces than they sustained themselves. Alone among all the armies on the Western Front, the British units maintained their morale and confidence in spite of the most appalling conditions.

Haig is frequently characterized as an unfeeling and unimaginative individual. He is indicted for isolating himself in palatial headquarters, far from the trench lines, and moving pins on his large map board which doomed thousands of
helpless youths to destruction. The Field-Marshál was a dour
and proper Scotsman and was not given to emotional displays.
Yet his concern for the welfare of his men and their suffering
in the trenches pervades his nocturnal summaries in his diary.
He was baffled, as were all the Allied and German high com-
manders, by the problem of breaking the stalemate of the
trench lines. His instant appreciation of the new tank weapon
and his understanding of the practical problems of Allied
military cooperation show that he was not devoid of imagina-
tion. His biting and vitriolic commentaries, preserved in his
diaries, are ample proof of very real feelings. Far from
being cold, he was, if anything, overly sensitive and
jealous of his personal image.

Douglas Haig's daily routine was rigidly enforced. A
full night's sleep and the writing of a complete diary entry
were almost ritualistically performed, even during periods
of the greatest crisis. Haig made many trips to the lower
echelons of command. Far from remaining in an "ivory tower",
he made a point of visiting those under his command. It is
foolish for later historians to condemn the Commander-in-Chief
for not visiting the trenches, for his proper sphere of control
extended only to the five army commanders. He often visited
and questioned units down to brigade level but he strictly
adhered to his policy of not interfering, except in the most flagrant situations, with the prerogatives of subordinates. Perhaps he was too willing to allow his subordinates freedom of action, but this rule is a cardinal precept in modern leadership techniques.

A patrician model of a professional soldier was a vulnerable target for derision in the frenetic and irreverent decades between the world wars. Modern analysts find it more profitable to denounce incompetence than to attempt to understand the mood of the Great War and the restrictive medium in which it was fought. There were no great high commanders in that war; each had fatal flaws which deny them entry into the pantheon of Great Captains. But Haig's performance in the final stage of the war--his acceptance of a supreme commander, his tactical innovations, and his perceptive analysis of the war aims of the British Empire--places him above his contemporaries.

The release of Haig's personal diaries now provides a unique opportunity for the historian to impartially access his actions during the war. Although these documents often reveal their author as a prejudiced and unreasonable observer, they are consistent in thrust and have not been doctored to eliminate obvious errors or misjudgements.
There is little doubt that Field-Marshal Haig was the single most important commander in the Allied coalition during the final two years of the war. His armies prevented the Germans from completing the destruction of the French at Verdun and distracted Ludendorff from the utter helplessness of the French Army during the 1917 mutinies. In the final months of the war, it was the British and not the French or the Americans who blunted the German last gambles for victory and then turned to defeat the principal enemy decisively in the only theater of operations where final victory could be achieved.

The French sacrificed an entire generation of young men in the first two years of the war in order to stave off defeat. The American presence in the final year of the war provided an immeasurable stimulus to the flagging Allied morale. Perhaps the most ignored factor in the final victory on land was the cumulative effect of the complete naval blockade which weakened the entire German nation. All of these factors contributed to victory and it has not been the purpose of this work to denigrate them; rather it is merely suggested that the vital importance of Douglas Haig and his armies should also be understood.

Haig served with or under all four of France's military high commanders. Despite his understandable sensitivity to
excessive French domination, he was more than cooperative with all of these men and, in many instances, submerged his personal desires in order to maintain a semblance of unity in joint action. Due to insincerity and a lack of clear policy on the part of British political leaders, the political-military coordination of British policy was faulty, especially in the final two years of the war. Perhaps the most tragic aspect of this phase was that the British Army was represented in the high councils of war by two inarticulate and outwardly uninspiring leaders—Haig and Robertson. David Lloyd George was a demagogue of the new politics and could never adequately convey his often valid objections to the army. Distrust between the frock coats and the brasshats, nurtured during the Liberal reign before the war, cast a pall of ineffectiveness over military-political understanding throughout the war.

Yet Haig frequently reaffirmed his detachment from political considerations. He clearly communicated his willingness to resign his command if asked by the Government. When Lloyd George finally saw his way clear to remove General Robertson as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Haig refrained from doing anything to interfere with the civilian control of the military and, in effect, saved the Lloyd George ministry.
The disunity of the civil-military leadership at home made the voice of Great Britain in the Allied councils much weaker than her growing military presence warranted. The French governments, always the master of the diplomatic situation, never allowed her position to be compromised by internal conflict.

A larger exploration of Field-Marshal Haig's policies and effectiveness in the entire war is needed. The purpose of this work is narrow and the above points on other topics only serve to recreate the atmosphere in which Haig's great contributions to allied military cooperation were made.

Haig's most prominent personality trait was persistence—stubbornness to his critics. There is no doubt that he was overly sanguine in his estimates of the success which his plans would achieve. He maintained an optimistic view of the outcome of each battle and of the war. It was not until he was forced to face the reality of the great losses his plans were causing, that he learned to conserve his fighting power. It may be argued that his acceptance of this reality was slow in coming but at least he learned it; this cannot be said of Foch or Ludendorff.

Air Vice-Marshall E. J. Kingston McCloughry, in his study of the political direction and high command in war, restates an immutable rule:
whatever the nature of war, or the weapons employed, human agencies in one form or another, despite their inherent limitations, are always of prime importance. Indeed, although the nature, scope and degree, of the influence of individuals have changed with the evolution of war, this factor has always been an overriding one. 14

Douglas Haig's conversion to efficient and flexible tactical methods in the last stage of the war and the resultant end of the war within four months must rank as the greatest vindication of this axiom. As C.R.M.F. Crutwell, a leading chronicler of the Great War has observed:

In the last hundred days of the war he [Douglas Haig] showed a vision and a calculated resolution in taking chances worthy of a great captain. His career in the war is a curious example of how exactly the same qualities in dissimilar circumstances make both a bad and a good general. 15

If future commanders are to learn from their predecessors, it is the moral and not the technical lessons which should be stressed. The sense of responsibility for other lives—often the lifeblood of the nation—requires a moral certitude incomparably greater in a military commander than in any other leader. Great Britain's belated preparations for a modern global war was insufficient to meet the crisis of 1914-1918. The selection and training of military leaders in pre-war England was woefully inadequate. That a workmanlike,
professional soldier with narrow horizons was able to
eventually rise to meet the great responsibilities of the war,
not the bloody and wasteful experiments which preceded the
final victory, is the lesson of Haig's period in command.
Notes for Conclusion

1
Haig did, of course, accept the leadership of the British Legion and worked diligently in behalf of disabled war veterans for the remainder of his life. His activities in this regard were, however, as a private citizen.

2

3
Haig told Churchill in later years: "Let us get the facts right and then the people will be able to judge for themselves." Ibid., 199.

4

5

6

7
This term is used to denote the Third Battle of Ypres by those wishing to deprecate the value of the actions in the northern sector over a period of four months. Actually, Passchendaele was only the final stage of the protracted battle.

The Field-Marshal also identified personally with his former men after the war. He refused to accept any personal honors, titles, or grants until adequate compensation or "batta" had been granted to the veterans, widows and orphans of the army. His dedication to the British Legion and his work in uniting the various splinter veteran groups throughout the Empire show a real concern beyond any superficial expression of concern.

Although Haig's initial use of the tank in the Battle of the Somme was inconsequential, it does not appear, as has been charged by several armor theoreticians, that he ruined the effectiveness of the weapons system. In all probability the German intelligence network would have discerned the secret weapon within a few months of the Somme Battles. The Battle of Cambrai in November, 1917, showed that the tank's shock effect and mobility were just as effective as if its debut had been postponed until that date. In the final campaign of the war—after the Battle of Amiens—Haig's tank corps, in combination with the French and American armored units, played a decisive tactical role. Ludendorff did not perceive the value of the tank until it was too late. Throughout Haig's supposed misuse of the tank, the Royal Tank Regiment continuously improved its vehicles, tactics, and technical methods of supply and repair. If the weapon had been saved, it would have been even more unreliable and vulnerable; it exhibited these qualities to a great degree in any event.

An example of the simplification of the difficult problems of command and misrepresentation of Haig's command policies is given in the New Cambridge Modern History, ed. C.L. Mowat (London, 1968), XII, The Shifting Balance of World Forces, 191. "His [Haig's] gravest defects stemmed from his physical remoteness from the front..."
The most striking example of Haig's misconceptions of reality was his diary entry on July 1, 1916 in which he observed that his armies had begun the Somme Battle well and had suffered only moderate losses. In fact, his forces had made little gain that day and with the greatest single day's casualties in the history of the British Army. It is exactly because of such mistakes and the fact that they were not amended or excised, that these diaries have such great historical value.

In view of the totality of the war, this was a rather naive attitude. However, it was a completely understandable position within the framework of British constitutional experience and the limited philosophical preparation afforded the pre-war British soldier.


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# List of Joint Notes Adopted by the Board of Permanent Military Representatives

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INTER-ALLIED WAR ORGANISATION, NOVEMBER 1918.

Supreme War Council

- **Economic Side**
  - Commission Intermittent de Ravitaillement (for coordinating purchases in United Kingdom)
  - Allied Maritime Transport Council (Ministerial)
  - Programme Committees
  - Allied Maritime Transport Executive

- **Allied Propaganda Committee**
  - Allied Food Council (Ministerial)
  - Committee of Representatives

- **Allied Blockade Council**
  - Allied Naval Council (London)
  - Allied Transport Council (Versailles)

- **Naval and Military Side**
  - Aircraft Committee
  - Tanks Committee
  - Allied Munitions Council (Ministerial)

**Leather Wool Cotton Jute Flax and Hides**
**Timber Paper Coal and Coke**

**NOTE.**—The organisation shown here is approximate only. It was in a state of continuous development. There were many links between the various executives which cannot be shown in diagrammatic form.