WORLD WAR ONE

EATON REMEMBERS

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Preface

As 2014 approached, Government, the Church and many other institutions, from the BBC to the Royal British Legion and the Royal Family were confronted with how to properly commemorate the centenary of World War 1. We saw the extraordinary poppy field at he Tower of London, more recently the *There but Not There* silhouettes and torches to mark the Armistice. Truly, as the period of commemoration comes to an end, although we must never forget, the process has been remarkable for its dignified good taste and emphasis on reconciliation. What it has not always done, as Professor Gary Sheffield wrote in The Times on 13 August this year, is present it as participants and contemporaries saw it. And without that, in we are in danger of channelling our current perceptions onto those events.

The Church of England encouraged congregations to undertake their own acts of remembrance, as appropriate, and this led to several, pre-planned events in Eaton. In 2013, a small committee was formed under the guidance of David Scott to prepare the Parish's plan for the centenary commemorations. From this emerged the cleaning and repair of the War Memorial on Newmarket Road, organised by Don Ray; a careful listing and researching of the backgrounds of all the known casualties in the War from the Parish by the Rev. Colin Way* and, as well as annual Remembrance Day ceremonies, special ceremonies were held at the War Memorial to mark the centenaries of the beginning of the War in August 2014 and the first day of the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 2016. An important feature of all of these has been involvement of local schools, to try to enhance awareness of these, now long-distant events, amongst today's children. Schools gave great support and many children laid wreaths. Most recently a *There but Not There* figure has been added to Christ Church.

This booklet is another product of that pre-planning. I was asked to give a talk on the war as part of the 2014 Summer Programme at St. Andrew's, Eaton and then to contribute occasional articles to the Parish magazine over the course of the next four years, highlighting key aspects and incidents in the war. This is a compilation of parts of that 2014 talk and my articles, edited to make a continuous narrative. It is a series of episodes and does not pretend to be, nor is it, a history. For those who want to read more, I have listed what I consider to be key reading for the general reader; mainly recent books that have added to my understanding of the subject.

The booklet is in two parts. The first is an overview, reflecting on

the War as a whole, which tries to provide a context for the events described in the second part. For those who simply want to remind themselves of specific incidents, such as Jutland, Gallipoli or the Somme, they can skip to the second part.

However, I hope readers will reflect on the first part because it is intended as a corrective to the popular view over the last 50 years, that the war was totally futile. More recently, historians have seen it as a catastrophe, a tragedy, but not as futile; for Britain and France there was a honourable purpose, however much the mud of Flanders obscures it to us. And, as Gary Sheffield said, the futility view does not reflect how those who fought and lost their lives, saw it. Most of them believed in what they were fighting for and they deserve more respect than to have their deaths dismissed as futile.

Finally, to emphasise the link between the war and every local community in the land I have, with Colin Way's help, provided some information about the men from Eaton who fought and those who did not come back. At Armistice Day 2018, when the formal centenary of remembrance comes to and end, we must both remember and respect those who were lost and what they died for, and not project our hindsight onto them. I hope this booklet contributes, in a small way, to that. In the famous words,

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Roger Humber
November 2018

*This list can be found on the Christ Church, Eaton web site; https://christchurch-eaton.org.uk/about-us/world-war-1/

PART ONE

Introduction

Just over one hundred and four years ago, on 15 August 1914, French Armies advanced in bright red and blue uniforms, some with gleaming breastplates, waving swords, with bands playing and firing outdated carbines on the German Armies in Alsace and Lorraine and the Ardennes. They were trying to defeat the invading Germans before their mobilisation was complete. Whatever the outcome, virtually everyone on both sides expected it to be 'all over by Christmas', as the popular saying went. Instead the French suffered total defeat on every front, as superior German arms, training and tactics pushed them back, with catastrophic losses.

This was not going to be over by Christmas. It was going to be over by the early September.

But as we all know, it wasn't. It ground on for more than four years. It finally ended in the West on 11 November 1918, following a French, British Empire and US defeat of the mighty German Army and a revolution in Germany following the Kaiser's abdication.

On the 100th Anniversary of the ending of the War, we are still puzzled and disturbed by questions such as;
- how and why did civilised Christian countries start it?
- why did it go on so long and so terribly?
- and what should we make of it today?

Taking the last question first, and starting with the view of the War that became popularised following the 50th anniversary in the 1960's. The sleeve blurb on Hew Strachan's famous history of the War says, 'The popular view of the First World War is dominated by cliche; young British soldiers, many of them budding poets, led to early and ghastly deaths in muddy wastes by incompetent Generals for reasons that were seemingly futile' but it goes on, 'for those liberal countries struggling to defend their freedoms, the war was far from futile'.

Futile or grim necessity?

And that is the point. The futility argument that has dominated much of the last 50 years is based on the kind of moral equivalence we used to hear in the Cold War - that the Soviets and the Americans/the West are

just as bad as each other. But just as there was a genuine difference between Western freedoms and the repression of Soviet Communism, so there was a genuine moral difference between Prussian absolutism and militarism and the liberal values espoused by Britain and France. That has been forgotten, particularly in Britain, because the intervening monster of Nazism has allowed us to forget Prussianism. But the continuity of Prussian and Hitlerian policy was seamless, with just Hitler's specific racial policies added to spawn Nazism.

The War was an appalling tragedy, but only cock-eyed hindsight justifies the futility view. The hopes for lasting peace that victory had brought certainly were lost, but that was not the fault of those who fought, from general to private, nor could they anticipate that failure. That lost peace can rightly be regarded an even greater tragedy than the War, because it resulted in a yet worse war.

Total deaths in the first War are thought to have been around 16m, around 10m military and 6m civilians. Around a million of those were British. 25% of French 18 -25 year olds were killed, while 62.5% of Serbian men aged between 15-55 died in the conflict.

But to put this into context, modern estimates of total casualties during World War Two are between 60m and 85m, including about 25m Soviets. Over the course of these two wars, European civilisation, which, in 1914, dominated the world intellectually, politically, financially and technologically, destroyed itself in barely 30 years. Seventy years of Soviet oppression followed in Eastern Europe, while Western Europe and some of its pre-1914 values survived, only courtesy of American money and military might.

The Great War concluded in the West as the 'War to end all Wars'; its result, though full of blood sacrifice, was regarded at the time as a just victory. But since the 1960's, the literature and the famous television series made to mark the 50th Anniversary of the War turned it into a source of confusion, grief and anger. That revisionism made the endless slaughter seem incomprehensible, futile; someone must have been to blame.

Douglas Haig and the other Generals were generally blamed. Alan Clark invented the image of *Lions led by Donkeys* and Joan Littlewood did the rest with *O What a Lovely War*, a piece of agitprop that some people still confuse with history. Idiotic, upper-class Generals mindlessly sending the working classes to slaughter for imperial ends - an image reinforced, as late as 1989, by the infamous last episode of *Blackadder*. On this reading, apparently, it was exclusively British Generals who were stupid. But who

highlighted the stupidity of German, Russian or the most stupid of all, the Italian General Cadorna who lost eleven battles in the same place and saw half his army killed in the process?

So what was portrayed in the 1960s was not an accurate account of the War, rather it was a suborning of it in pursuit of then current political objectives. It became part of the violent, anti-establishment, CND, class war, Vietnam-influenced mood of the 60's when, along with the satire movement, everything established or traditional was mocked and belittled.

Moreover, as events and problems described in this booklet attempt to show, it was not the unique stupidity and incompetence of the British Generals. The problem was that the questions posed for all sides by this new kind of industrialised, mechanised, war were virtually insoluble. The trenches have been the *leitmotif* of the War for subsequent generations, but they were the intractable problem faced at the time by the British and French Generals. They had to get the Germans out of the trenches to get them out of France and Belgium. They tried many times and in different ways, but failed. But when the Germans tried to attack at the first two battles of Ypres and at Verdun, they failed just as comprehensively.

In *The Long Shadow* published in 2013, David Reynolds examines the changing attitudes to the War in Britain, through the generations and in other combatant nations. He argues that in the 1950's and 60's, Britain was a nation that had recently taken part in a second, even more terrible War, but the 'right' side had won against the indisputable evil of Nazism and, bluntly, the majority of casualties were Russian and German and even more distantly, Asian, so Britain did not see a repeat of the earlier War's casualty lists. The mood was heroic, at least until the late 50's. Few had doubts about the necessity of the War, particularly as the full horrors of the Holocaust came to light. In contrast, during the 1960s, the narrative in Britain, although not in many other countries, about World War One became wholly negative. One war was just and necessary, the other stupid and pointless.

The 100th Anniversary has provided a welcome opportunity to consider the changing perceptions of the War since 1918 and particularly how it came to be seen in the 60's. A wide range of new publications over the last five years or so has allowed a far more balanced and nuanced view to emerge. This booklet re-visits the War in the context of those revised perceptions, because on this anniversary of its conclusion, properly remembering and honouring the War's participants, both dead and survivors, requires us understand it as contemporaries saw it as well as how history has treated it subsequently.

Following the majority of recent histories, this selective account - as explained below, it does not pretend to be full history - rejects the futility thesis and argues that the war was catastrophic but unavoidable for Britain and France - the latter having been invaded, what could it do but fight? It could, however, have been avoided if the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary had wanted to. But they and Russia wanted war. Unfortunately, none of them got the war they expected.

Next, although it was a World War, being fought not just in France and Belgium, but also in Eastern Europe, Russia, the Balkans, Mesopotamia and the Middle East, in East Africa and in the Far East, the usual conventions are followed here, by concentrating on the War in Western Europe. There are two reasons for this. First, it is because that is what we think of as 'the War' and second, because regardless of all these other theatres, everyone at the time acknowledged that it would be decided in the West.

But its legacy still rumbles on in Syria and the Middle East today, in Israel and Palestine, in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, as Yugoslavia broke up and on Russia's frontiers with its neighbours, not least Ukraine.

Third, this is not a detailed account of almost 52 months of fighting. It comprises of memory jogging accounts of some of the key events that many, particularly older people, know by name, but will have forgotten the detail and of which many younger people may never have heard. But to make sense of these episodes, some pattern needs to be imposed on the kaleidoscopic and bewildering range of battles and actions that took place. Thinking of the War as unfolding in three parts helps to clarify this.

A Drama in Three Parts

The first part lasted from August until the first battle of Ypres in October and November 1914. This period ended with the full entrenchment of the German Army, creating the stalemate on what we know as the Western Front.

But, in its first few weeks, the War was a violent, bloody and brutal series of pitched battles - and one that is almost entirely forgotten in the popular view of the War, being overshadowed by its second stage in the trenches, with its unsuccessful 'big pushes'.

Yet nothing, apart from the big pushes, until the open warfare of 1918,

matched the casualties of 1914. Understanding 1914 explains so much else that still mystifies us, including the question, why did it go on so long? That first period determined what the War became.

We need to remember that soldiers were not lined up in trenches to start a grinding war. They ended up in the trenches as early as September 1914 because the War was a catastrophic failure, which did not pan out as the leaders and nations all expected, particularly the aggressors. In particular, the trenches were the result of the failure of the Germans' war plan and of them not having a Plan B for either winning or calling a halt. Their plan, after their initial failure, was to avoid losing and hope something would turn up. That meant that initiatives to win the War mainly had to be taken by the French and British, with results that were usually catastrophic.

The second phase, or long middle, of the War, resulting from that failure, runs roughly from late 1914 to early 1918. This is the period of stalemate on the Western Front, including the mass offensives and the carnage that we think of as the War. Arras, Loos, the Somme, Verdun, the Nivelle offensive, the Second and Third battles of Ypres (Passchendaele) and many famous, smaller actions.

That period also sees the 1917 German U-Boat offensive attempting to offset the effects of the British naval blockage and mutual attempts to starve each other into submission. As the British Director General of food economy said in 1917, "the British loaf is going to beat the German loaf". So the War was not just about fighting; it was about armament production and feeding civilian populations.

It saw Churchill's unsuccessful attempt to circumvent trench war, via the Gallipoli landings in 1915. It also saw the Russian Revolution of October 1917 that, along with American entry into the War, triggered the final period.

The third and final stage is the equally forgotten and little understood period, when the war of movement and offensive resumed in spring 1918. The Germans came out of the trenches and began massive offensives in March, which gradually weakened until June, without making significant strategic gains, while also suffering irreplaceable troop losses, in the process. From there on until November they were in wholesale retreat.

That period saw some of the British Army's greatest feats of arms. The most significant of these was the Battle of Amiens, 8th to 11th August 1918, which should be remembered alongside Crecy, Agincourt,

Blenheim, Waterloo and Alamein. Until the hasty staging of a memorial service in August 2018,it was usually ignored or forgotten. As historian Nick Lloyd has written, the battle was planned and executed so brilliantly as an 'All Arms' battle, using the latest technology and tactics, that it totally destroyed German moral. But 'Amiens' he writes, 'was not just a forgotten battle; it was an inconvenient one too', given the favoured narrative of incompetence and stupidity, not least with Lloyd George, who constantly criticised the Army's performance and hated Haig in particular.

But the despised Haig, a man with many faults and by no means an unblemished record in the War, did play a major part, with Foch and some brilliant Commonwealth generals, in winning the war. He was regarded as a national hero - although not without critics - for many years afterwards, until Joan Littlewood and AJP Taylor, who knew better, and many others, destroyed his reputation.

PART TWO

The Prelude to Armageddon

So how did the July crisis of 1914, following the assassination of the Austrian Grand Duke at Sarajevo result in the outbreak of war in August? It has to be said immediately that the origins, causes and who bore responsibility for the Great War continues to reinterpreted and disputed by professional historians a century later.

The Versailles Treaty was widely believed to have placed the blame on German military aggression, while Germany's invasion of Belgium to create a passage into France gave the Franco-British alliance a moral justification for war that sustained them through the horrors that followed.

In the decade before 1914, an arms race between Britain and Germany to build massive warships – Dreadnoughts - created tensions, as Britain sought to maintain its global naval superiority. This was critical to British foreign policy because, as it drew its wealth and strength from being a global trading nation, naval pre-eminence was seen as essential to protect its trade routes. Various imperial crises between the powers, triggered by Germany's desire to emulate Britain and France and gain an overseas Empire, added to the tensions. Yet these crises were all successfully defused by traditional diplomacy.

A kaleidoscope of shifting alliances between France, Russia and Britain (the Triple Entente) and Germany, Austria and, intermittently and opportunistically, Italy (the Triple Alliance) resulted in muddled understandings of the exact nature of individual national aims and their treaty obligations; how far did they required one party to support the other and in exactly what circumstances? The diplomatic confusion was so intense that, often, neither allies or potential foes could properly interpret the other's words and actions.

That was compounded by what we would now regard as the chaotic conduct of Government in all the major powers. Austria/Hungary, like Russia, was still an autocracy but, in both, politicians and the military constantly schemed with or against their emperors, for or against war. Germany was 'led' by an hysterical Kaiser but he and the conflicting military and civilian politicians were blindly trying to control a political system created, but only apparently workable by, Bismarck. But Wilhelm II had dismissed him in 1890 and Bismarck's subtle balancing of competing forces in Germany was never replicated.

1913 - European leaders try to calm tension in the Balkans

In Britain, the King kept out of politics to a greater extent than other emperors, but the long serving Foreign Secretary, Sir Henry Grey, ran a devious and often conflicting foreign policy. He made secret alliances with France without informing his Liberal Cabinet colleagues, still less Parliament or the people. Meanwhile, the British army's Chief of Staff, Sir Henry Wilson, despised civilian control of the military and conspired with his French opposite number, behind Grey's back, to create a joint Anglo-French war plan in the event of a German invasion of France that, in reality, Britain's tiny army could not deliver.

French Republican institutions, both political and military, remained weak and confused in the wake of the Dreyfus affair and democratic oversight was weak.

And what was the point of these alliances? The Germans extraordinarily, with hindsight, believed they had to defeat Russia by 1916, before it completed a massive re-armament exercise and swamped them militarily and industrially. But the Russians and French were allied, partly in support of Russia's pan-Slavist interests in the Balkans, where France was also a major investor, partly to keep the Ottomans at bay and partly to encircle and contain an over-mighty Germany. So the Germans' Schlieffen war plan, drawn up in 1905, was based on a rapid defeat of France in the West, followed by a more leisurely destruction of Russia.

France was insouciant about war with Germany, believing its Russian ally's vast armies would tie down the Germans in the East, while they recaptured Alsace and Lorraine, lost to Prussia in 1871. Russia saw Austria as the new "sick man" of Europe and intended to dismember it, despite German support of Austria. Its quarrels with Austria were exacerbated by the latter's annexation of Bosnia and by the behaviour of Serbia in two, long-forgotten, Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913. Today we

would undoubtedly call Serbia a rogue state, but as fellow Slavs, Russia offered it protection against punitive action by Austria.

All the key protagonists thought they could win something from a war and some actively looked forward to it.

The July Crisis, 1914

The assassination of the Austrian Grand Duke Franz Ferdinand and his wife by a group of teenage Bosnian terrorists on 28 June 1914 did not necessarily cause the Great War. But it provided the spark that ignited a tinderbox of those states that saw war as an opportunity.

The July crisis saw all the key actors in the subsequent conflict manoeuvring; seeking to justify their aims, threatening and counter-threatening, but virtually no-one, except the Kaiser - extraordinarily, given his previous tragi-comic belligerence - sought to avoid war. And even he acquiesced to the inevitable in the end.

The Serbian Government always denied arming and encouraging Gavrillo Princip's gang of assassins. This may have been technically true but their links with the head of its military intelligence, which sponsored terror, are well established.

Understandably, the Austrians were outraged and issued a ten point list of demands to Serbia, most of which the by-now thoroughly frightened Serbian government accepted. However, they refused the Austrians' demand to be allowed to occupy Belgrade for a period and to supervise its inquiry into the assassination.

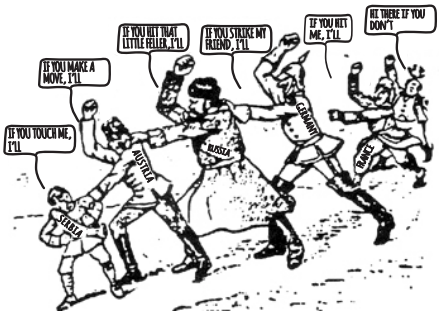
The Russians could not stomach their fellow Slavs' sovereignty being prejudiced by these demands and were themselves gung-ho for a war with Austria. Their attitude to the assassination was a very modern shrug and sneer of "get over it" to the Austrians.

History has placed the heaviest responsibility on Germany for the outcome of the crisis. Given its preparedness since 1905 to attack France and its wish to strike pre-emptively against Russia, it encouraged Austria to press ahead with an attack on Serbia and Russia by giving it the infamous 'blank cheque', implying Germany would come to its aid, whatever she did.

The French regarded themselves as treaty-bound to assist Russia in the event of war but many historians subsequently asked whether their

treaty obligations required a response in all circumstances or only those in which French interests were directly involved. Irrespective, as noted before, the French were more than happy to fight to recover Alsace and Lorraine from the Germans but, in any event, Germany invaded France.

Britain had fewer reasons for involvement in a conflict that many, even some of the German High Command, hoped could be localised in the Balkans. Many Britons had reservations about being allied with the barbarous Czarist regime and others about being involved in war to protect the disreputable Serbs. Indeed, so little notice was taken in Britain of the growing crisis that it was not even discussed in Cabinet until 24th July. Of far greater concern to it were disturbances in Ireland, where Civil War was pending, the on-going and increasingly terroristic behaviour of the Suffragettes and violent labour disputes. The idyllic peace of pre-war England was pure myth, as even were the glorious Edwardian summers. The weather was so atrocious for several summers that Australian and South African cricket teams refused to tour!



As accurate an explanation of the causes of the War as many long histories give.

Events forced the British hand. The Germans, after a month of hesitation and dissimulation about how wide a war they wanted, opted for a strike at France, and asked the Belgian government if they would step aside and allow German armies unopposed passage through Belgium. Bravely but tragically the Belgians refused and, as a guarantor of Belgian neutrality, Britain declared war when Germany invaded.

However, in the complex web of pre-war, semi-secret understandings and agreements, the French had moved their fleet to the Mediterranean, leaving the British Fleet to defend its Atlantic coast. Even if it had ignored the Belgian invasion, Britain had to prevent Channel and Atlantic ports falling to the Germans. Its involvement in the land war, for which its small professional army, used to fighting minor colonial wars, was wholly unprepared, followed.

Deep in the Russian railway system, mobilisation had begun on 24 July. Austria attacked Serbia on 28 July. Germany declared war on Russia on 1 August and invaded Belgium on 3rd, fighting its way into France on 14th August. Britain entered the War on 4 August 1914.

Even then, was Armageddon inevitable? Could it have been prevented? Of course it could - but virtually no one wanted to, or in the case of Britain, had left it too late to seek diplomatic settlements. Britain apart, most participants had objectives they expected to achieve and few foresaw the consequences or the kind of war they were unleashing. As Christopher Clark wrote in 2012, in his widely praised account of how Europe went to war, during July 1914 all the players sleepwalked into what turned out to be a catastrophe.

All Over By Christmas

No one could foresee what the war would actually become. It was expected to be short, as exemplified in the phrase, 'All over by Christmas' - how we scoff at their foolishness, but that was the widely held view. But it was almost over by early-September 1914. The tragedy was that, after six weeks of fighting, the two major participants in the West, both Germany and France, were too exhausted to administer the *coup de grace.*

Technically, Austria/Hungary started the war with its attack on Serbia, following the assassination of the Archduke in Sarajevo. But, by trying to provide support in Galicia to its principal backer, Germany, Austria fatally weakened its army and suffered shattering defeats at the hands of the Serbs as early as 20 August.

The Germans' exaggeration of the dangers posed by Russia was also quickly exposed. Ludendorff's army, which was supposed to be in a merely defensive position in East Prussia, almost casually annihilated two massive Russian armies at Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes on 27 August and 9 September, respectively. This was an opportunistic enterprise by Ludendorff that made his reputation, but the lessons he learned from these victories would fatally flaw his judgement in the last crucial stages of the War.

But the war would be decided in the West, not Galicia, East Prussia or the Balkans. On 4 August von Moltke, the German Commander in Chief, implemented his version of the Schlieffen plan, designed to envelop the French, knock them quickly out of the war, before turning on Russia.

Joffre, his French opposite number, activated his Plan XVII but, in reality, he had just one tactic - attack, attack, attack. He ignored warnings of heavy blows aimed at Belgium and Northern France and sent large armies to Alsace Lorraine, where the Germans were well defended in positions on the Vosges Mountains.


Von Moltke

There, in the Ardennes and on the Belgian border, Joffre's Battles of the Frontiers saw the attacking French suffer terrible casualties. The German advance was irresistible and on 22 August, across the three fronts, France lost 27,000 dead, the most on any single day in the War.

Between 20-29 August Joffre's hubristic plan brought France to the brink of defeat and the Germans, not unjustifiably, thought they had won the War, despite their own huge losses and the logistical strains of advancing at such pace. Unexpectedly, the Germans abandoned their plan of enveloping Paris and, instead, thought they only needed to mop up the French. Kluck, the commander in the field, turned his army across Paris, leaving its flank exposed.

Joffre, having almost orchestrated French defeat in the previous three weeks, then contrived his moment of greatness. He saw the opportunity, sacked his failed Generals and appointed new ones and, with a new army including troops transferred from Alsace, he commenced the counter-attack on the Marne on 6 September. Even then, in much of the next few days' fighting, German arms were probably winning although, by then, logistics, communications and lack of shells were becoming as great a problem as the exhaustion of their troops. By 8 and 9 September the German generals, Kluck, von Bulow, and Haussen, had lost communication with each other and with Moltke, who remained based in Luxembourg.

They either misread the situation or realised they were over-stretched, while Moltke appears to have suffered a breakdown, becoming convinced the while the war could not be won, it must not be lost. He ordered his confused generals, some of who thought they were on the brink of victory, to retreat. On 10 September a new French advance found the Germans had disappeared into the night.

The French were too surprised and exhausted to follow them; the Germans retreated in good order and began to dig-in on the River Aisne. By mid-September the pattern of entrenched defenders in strong

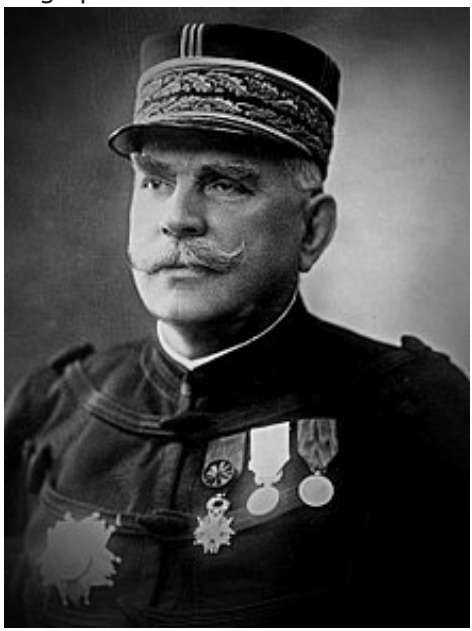
positions, which characterised the next three and a half years, began to take shape. It was completed in November, after defeat at Ypres ended the last German attempt, until 1918, to win the War outright.

The Germans might well have won if they had continued their plan of envelopment at the end of August, or even if they had fought another three or four days on the Marne - although it can equally be argued that, by then, they were too over-stretched to fight any longer and might have been defeated. The French might have won if they had pursued and outflanked the Germans after 10 September.

Either outcome would have avoided the slaughter that resulted, but whether a German victory would have been an acceptable price to pay for avoiding it is still hotly debated by historians today.

The trenches create stalemate

Following their failure to finish the war on the Marne, in September, German, French and British forces joined in what came to be called 'the race the sea'. The German objective was to launch an offensive aimed at dividing the Allied armies and capturing Ypres and other channel ports, thus controlling the outlets to the North Sea. That would almost certainly have knocked Britain out of the War, had it succeeded, unless a Dunkirk-type evacuation had been possible. Each army attempted to outflank the other on their way northwards, hastily constructing trenches as they went. The race ended in mid-October at Ypres, the ancient Flemish city with its fortifications guarding the ports of the English Channel and access to the North Sea beyond. The Germans captured the Belgian city of Antwerp and the BEF and remaining Belgian forces withdrew to Ypres.



Joffre, the saviour of France in 1914. But the failure of either him or von Moltke to win the war in 1914 resulted in four years of carnage.

On October 19, the Germans opened their Flanders offensive and the Allies steadfastly resisted, while seeking their own chances to go on the attack wherever possible.

Fighting continued, with heavy losses on both sides, until November 22, when the winter weather forced a halt to the battle. The area between the positions became known as the Ypres Salient, a region that would continue to see some of the war's most brutal struggles.

At Ypres, in November 1914, the Germans found they could not quite defeat even poorly dug-in armies, while the British Expeditionary Force sacrificed itself demonstrating the *leitmotif* of trench war - that even weak defenders would have the upper hand and attacking forces could only rarely overcome defences. When they did, they could not hold their gains for very long. And with the BEF, its professional army virtually destroyed, Britain had to rebuild its fighting capacity with Kitchener's new, volunteer army. Douglas Haig, then a Lieutenant- General, drew a lesson from this battle that stayed with him throughout the rest of the War. He believed the Germans would have won if they had persisted for even a few more days. He resolved never to make the mistake of stopping a battle too soon.

1914 ended in stalemate on the Western Front. The Central Powers' intention to knock France quickly out of the War had totally failed. The static reality of the trenches replaced the frenzied battles of August and September 1914. The Germans had failed to force the War to a conclusion and this failure had been matched by the inability of the French and the Belgians - with minimal British support at this stage - to eject them from Belgium and Northern France, still less from Alsace Lorraine.

The impasse that characterised the long middle of the War was reached long before Christmas 1914 and its largely irrelevant "truce". The trenches ran from the North Sea through Belgium and France to the Swiss Border. A word on the trenches; they became a necessary lifesaver against early 20th century firepower. Although soldiers lived in often appalling conditions, the trenches being flooded and spreading lice, disease and trench foot, they gave protection that fighting in the open did not. However, they made a 'result' in the War virtually impossible. Equally, it is forgotten that men rotated in and out of the trenches on schedules of about 10 days, doing training, repairs or other works behind the lines or enjoying R & R; Mademoiselle from Armentiers was real and very popular!

In November 1914, Falkenhayn, the German commander at Ypres, reached the only feasible conclusion. The War could not be won, and peace must be negotiated. However, neither von Bethmann-Hollweg, the Chancellor, nor von Hindenburg, the Army Chief of Staff, contemplate it - indeed, to have admitted failure after such heavy losses would, they

rightly feared, imperil the very survival of the Hohenzollern Empire.

But was peace remotely possible - how much territory would France and Belgium need to cede to propitiate the Germans? And what effect would any peace have on Britain's control of the seas, if it involved permanent German access to Atlantic and North Sea ports? Moreover, peace in the West could have left Russia facing Germany alone, contrary to the French, Russian and British agreements of September 1914 that they would not make any separate peace treaties.

So the French and British generals simply had to get on with it and try to get the Germans out of France and Belgium, despite the problems of overcoming the trenches. Meanwhile the Germans had to win or avoid defeat. Nothing less would justify their initial aggression, about which many were feeling distinctly uneasy.

Understandably the French and the Belgians wanted the Germans off their soil and sufficiently punished to stop any further aggression for a very long time. They certainly could not be left in a position to agree a Carthaginian peace and resume war at a time of their own choosing. The German high command knew their history and particularly that of the Punic wars between Rome and Carthage. Rome made peace with Carthage twice, with the explicit purpose of starting the war again from a stronger position and eventually obliterated Carthage. The Germans debated this possibility after the Marne and the French well knew this. They could not allow a peace that would allow the Germans to recover and strike at them again.

Some historians ask whether it would have mattered if Germany had won quickly in 1914 and Britain stayed out? Niall Fergusson claims that a German victory over France, which he argues would have happened in 1915 if Britain had stayed out, could, after a period of some unpleasantness for France and the rest of Europe, have seen the evolution of a kind of benign, liberal European Union and avoided creating the preconditions for the second war.

Historical 'what if 's?' are difficult, but there is enough evidence of German intentions to de-industrialise France after defeat and to deport large numbers of French to the East as slave labour, as they did in the second war, to suggest there were no benign intentions. We also have the evidence of how badly they actually treated countries like Belgium and Romania, after their defeat, to suggest that German victory was an unacceptable outcome. Moreover, Britain could not have tolerated a German dominated Europe, from the French coast to the Urals, the Balkans and Greece.

Sadly, therefore, the war could not be resolved in 1915 by anything but victory and that was an impossible aspiration, at that stage. The fighting had to go on.

The Formative Experience: 1915

With all plans for a swift victory in tatters, 1915 saw the beginning the war's 'long middle', the generals and the politicians were conducting the war by the seat of their pants. Strategy was ad hoc. As David Stevenson (author of a widely acclaimed history of the war) wrote, 'From now on, the drama would unfold without a script.'

1915 was what another leading historian of the war, Hew Strachan, calls 'the formative experience' of this long, middle phase, characterised by immobility. There was equilibrium of frustration and impotence, shared by equally matched sides, particularly on the Western Front. But as Stevenson writes, 'that equilibrium was not static but dynamic...as either side tried to pre-empt or thwart each other's gambits.' Strachan reinforces the point, 'Although the front was static, the thinking of the armies was not… (it) was an intensely competitive environment…'

As already emphasised, the overwhelming reason for equilibrium was the inability of attackers to defeat even relatively weak, entrenched defensive positions – although most German positions were well prepared and equipped. This impotence became the predominant characteristic of the War from 1915 to early 1918.

At the second battle of Ypres in April and May, in an innovative, though cruel, attempt to negate the problem posed for attackers by the trenches, the Germans used poison gas for the first time. It was allowed to drift over French and British positions, causing havoc before the Germans attacked successfully and gained significant ground. They compressed the Ypres Salient, but still lost some of their gains and despite destroying Ypres with artillery fire, could not take it or overcome the defenders, who included inexperienced Canadian troops.

French initiatives in Champagne and Artois, starting in January 1915, with limited British support at Neuve Chappelle, were also costly failures. Neuve Chapelle in March 1915 was the British Army's first significant solo effort in support these French offensives. The military wanted to shell a broad front to allow an army to fan out into enemy territory and move up large reinforcements supporting the first army. But it was limited to a narrow front because of a lack of shells and equipment, while inadequate

communications meant that reinforcements did not arrive in time.

The attack petered out after the initial breakthrough and all the ground gained was lost; an outcome that came to typify the next four years. Time and again a perfectly sound plan may have been prepared but limitations of communications with such large armies and their increasingly difficult logistical problems, plus the sheer difficulty of moving reinforcements quickly enough, meant the plans could not be implemented effectively.

The British offensive at Loos, where they, too, used gas, was the largest British battle to date. It was launched to support a second French offensive at Artois in the summer of 1915, and further highlighted the problem of attacking heavily defended trenches - the Germans had reserve trenches up to 8 km behind the line, while reinforcements to capitalise on early successes arrived too late. British wounded and dead were almost 50,000.

All the 'big heaves', in which so much faith was invested in the war's middle period, failed. Typically, these offensives saw an early breakthrough after the initial assault was launched but reinforcements failed to flood into the breach and widen it, allowing defenders to reinforce the front from the rear and enfilade the flanks to regain any ground lost. That pattern was set in 1915.

Each failure to make the breakthrough came to be explained by the alternative doctrine of 'attrition'. 'We shall kill more of the enemy than he can kill of us', said Marshall Joffre, after one such failure. This confusion between breakthrough and attrition led one French general, quoted by Hew Strachan, to complain about 'a battle without a purpose', in that strategic gains, rather than just killings, were never attainable in many actions. The inability to resolve this conflict saw the massive casualties of 1915 dwarfed in 1916 and 1917.

The ad hockery of 1915 produced the fundamental conundrum of the War's middle period. 'The idea that a war can be won by standing on the defensive and waiting for the enemy to attack is a dangerous fallacy', declared Field Marshall Douglas Haig. By late 1914/early 1915 the belief grew that trenches could be overcome by days of heavy shelling, followed by infantry advances. This theory would waste millions of shells and men's lives over the next four years. Haig and the French Generals, who were still senior partners in the alliance, believed that a big enough thrust, led by artillery bombardment across at least a 20 km front, with full reserve armies behind the first infantry wave, could win the war.

But every time they tried it failed, because they could never deliver all the key components of the plan. Communications available to handle the vastly greater volumes of men and equipment were little better than the Duke of Wellington's at Waterloo and it proved impossible to bring up the second wave before defenders regrouped and attacked the flanks. Shells were often in short supply, too, and that provoked a political crisis.

Social and political effects

The style of fighting that developed; heavy bombardments and 'big heaves'; placed unprecedented reliance on the industrial production of artillery and shells. In Britain, Germany and France, this became a potent political issue in 1915. In May 1915 shell shortages contributed to the disappearance of the last Liberal government in Britain, as the more belligerent Unionists joined a Coalition government, although still one led by Asquith. But Lloyd George's appointment to become an outstandingly successful Munitions Minister propelled his rise. In 1916 he replaced Asquith as Prime Minister, becoming the most powerful individual

The ruins of Ypres, scene of three of the bloodiest engagements of the War.

politician ever seen in modern Britain.

In 1915 the war became an industrialised struggle and led to even greater reliance on women in armaments production and other industries to meet the shortfall in workers following the enlistment by volunteers and, later, of conscripted men. Nationally, 23% of women were employed in 1914 - the majority in domestic service or industries such as cotton and woollen - but by 1918 this had risen to 45% and many would have left domestic service, never to return.

As a result, the war began to re-shape British society and domestic politics. It revolutionised the scale of the State, creating modern Britain and reinforced the importance of industrial production in modern warfare. It also meant that women's suffrage could no longer be resisted, at the end of the War.

Meanwhile, in December Douglas Haig replaced Sir John French as commander of the BEF while a major Anglo-French conference agreed a big push for June 1916; this was to become the Somme offensive. Haig's appointment, the issue of armaments production and the changes in the Government during 1915 all had momentous consequences for the conduct of the rest of the war.

Although stalemated in the West, 1915 saw Central Powers' successes. Falkenhayn, the German Chief of General Staff, deliberately weakened his forces in the West to mount a massive and successful advance in Lithuania and Poland against Russia - this was the biggest operation of 1915 on any front.

After initial successes against Austria in 1914, the Serbian army was over-run by German, Bulgarian and Austro-Hungarian forces in October 1915 and its remnants were eventually evacuated to Corfu and Salonika by a British fleet.

Gallipoli, 1915; tragedy in the Dardanelles

Viewing the disasters suffered by all sides in their attempts to win the War, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith plaintively asked, was there no alternative to "sending our Armies to chew barbed wire in Flanders?"

To sidestep this growing waste of men and resources on the Western Front, an attack on the Ottoman Empire, seen as the Central Powers' weakest point, became a gleam in several eyes, not just Churchill's. Thus, Gallipoli was conceived.

Gallipoli became a byword for military arrogance and incompetence. Generally seen as tragic and pointless waste of life, it almost destroyed Winston Churchill's career in mid-term. But was the campaign a foolhardy adventure from the outset or an inspired alternative to the slaughter on the Western Front that was badly bungled by the military?

In October 1914 Turkey belatedly declared itself for the German-led Alliance, having received extensive military training and re-arming by the Germans since 1913. Russia saw this as a real threat and begged for help to keep access to the Dardanelles Straits free and prevent an attack on its southern borders. Landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula was seen as helping Russia defend the Black Sea, while striking a blow at the enemy's soft underbelly; potentially a daring game-changer in a stalemated War.

Just as Asquith desperately wanted an alternative to the killing in the trenches, Churchill saw opening up another Front as a way of weakening Germany in Flanders and the Austrians on the Russian Front. Admiral of the Fleet, 'Jackie' Fisher, disagreed with Churchill, thinking the proposal insane and resigned.

The Norfolk Regiment embarks for Gallipoli. Their optimism would be short lived.

In February 1915 a joint British and French naval action to capture the Straits and destroy the defences began well, but in March the main naval action ended in failure and confusion when the combined fleet struck a minefield, imagined the whole strait was impassable, panicked and withdrew. Churchill was furious, insisting the naval assault continue, but Admiral de Robeck refused until the Army came to help. It arrived in April but the lengthy delays had allowed the Germans to make the Straits virtually impregnable, by reinforcing the Turks and installing heavy artillery.

The landings were a disaster, with troops marooned on beaches and in landing craft providing a shooting gallery for the Turks. Beachheads were finally established and a series of both large and small actions (Suvla Bay and Anzac Cove being the best remembered), took place over the summer of 1915. These were as bloody and attritional as those on the Western Front. Huge Allied (including Anzac) casualties and even higher Turkish losses resulted. Heat, flies and dysentery replaced rain, mud and trench-foot.

In September the Cabinet finally sent General Monroe to review the calamity and he recommended immediate withdrawal. Evacuation eventually took place in December 1915 and early January 1916. It was the best-planned and most successful part of the campaign, completed under the noses of the Turks with scarcely any casualties.

Gallipoli failed because it was poorly planned and led and under-resourced. To succeed would have required an operation on a D-Day scale, maintaining total secrecy and surprise. Its stuttering start and slow execution telegraphed Allied intentions to the enemy and gave the German-advised Turks time to put strong reinforcements in place.

Churchill complained bitterly that barely half the number of troops that were needed for success was sent, but this reflected a fundamental strategic dilemma that remained unresolved either before or during the campaign. Was this a sideshow or a serious attempt to win the War? Whatever the views of politicians, the Generals refused to release enough men from the Western Front, probably reflecting their scepticism and refusal, at that point in the War, to accept civilian leadership in military affairs.

Not only was it a failure but, over the war as a whole, it resulted in the diversion of up to one million troops from the Western Front to the Middle East. Of course, they might simply have been more cannon fodder fed into the Western Front but, equally, they could have been the critical

mass that changed things when reinforcements failed to materialise. But involvement in Gallipoli led directly to Britain's subsequent, complex involvement in the Middle East, in further and often disastrous actions against the Ottomans, before their eventual collapse.

The report of an Inquiry in 1917 censured General Hamilton, whose poor planning and execution of battles in the summer had thrown away any chances of success, but found that 'the army and navy co-operated well.' That was completely untrue.

Its overall conclusion was that, '...success in the Dardanelles, if possible, was only possible upon condition that the Government concentrated their efforts upon the enterprise and limited their expenditure of men and materials in the Western theatre of war. This condition was never fulfilled.' That conclusion still stands scrutiny.

Gallipoli left long term legacies. It was the first time in over a century that non-Europeans successfully resisted Western power, still less defeated the British Navy, albeit a badly led fleet of mainly obsolete vessels. Kemal Attaturk attained heroic status as one of the successful Turkish commanders, and founded modern, secular, Turkey in 1923.

The sacrifice of Australian and New Zealanders (ANZACs) also helped to forge national identities; no longer Imperial appendages they became nations, increasingly independent of Britain. In 1914 Britain declared war on their behalf, without consultation. In 1939 they made their own decision to offer assistance to the Mother Country.

Although not blamed by the official Inquiry, Churchill's reputation suffered lasting damage. Both the Tories, who hated him after he joined the Liberals in1904, and other opponents, threw 'the Dardanelles' at him throughout the '20's and '30's. It strengthened his image as a reckless adventurer and many still feared the consequences of him becoming Prime Minister in 1940.

Jutland 1916

Surely the navy of Nelson and Drake would deliver some relief from the eternal gloom. It didn't. The massive build up of warships, the Dreadnought race, which was one of the pre-War sources of tension between Britain and Germany turned out to be a vast waste of resources, particularly on the part of Germany. The increased size of its navy enabled Britain to continue to command the seas, globally, but having called and end to the race in 1910, the Kaiser made his one known joke.

Dreadnoughts, he said, don't have wheels. In other words, European wars were land wars and the Germans had realised that warships would contribute little to them; so German military expenditure was redirected from the navy to the army.

Of course Britain had, since the Napoleonic Wars, used its navy differently from other powers. In war, it was used to secure the coasts from invasion and to blockade enemy ports and prevent food and other supplies getting in. This War was no different and that strategy was executed successfully, even being extended to the defeat of the U-boats. In peace, it kept the international trade routes open for all nations and, for much of the 19th Century, suppressed the slave trade. As such, the decision in 1898 by von Tirpitz to build a German navy to rival it was almost a declaration of war, from Britain's point of view.

The outcome of the Battle of Jutland was a massive disappointment for the British public – but a strategic victory for Britain.

But the great decisive naval engagements envisaged by both sides in the Dreadnought race never materialised, with the exception of the Battle of Jutland, which in many respects was a baffling and indeterminate encounter, which the Germans subsequently claimed to have won. Equally, much of the British press and public felt cheated of the great naval victory for which their fleet had been built, at such great cost.

The facts of the encounter are complicated and messy but, essentially, part of the British Fleet encountered a large part of the German navy off the coast of Jutland, before the main fleet of heavy battle ships could

travel from Scapa Flow. In a battle lasting from 31 May to overnight on 1 June, the Germans were able to sink several battle cruisers and other heavy ships, surprising the British with the skill of their gunnery and prompting Admiral Beatty's comment, as another ship blew up, 'there's something wrong with our bloody ships today'. But when the main battle fleet was able to engage, the heavier long-range guns of the British fleet started to inflict serious damage on the German fleet. Admiral Jellicoe was trying to manoeuvre his heavy battleships ahead of the German fleet, to cut off their retreat, but when night fell on 1 June and they did escape under cover of darkness.

On a simple head count the Germans would certainly be declared the victors. The British suffered 6,784 casualties, lost 3 battle cruisers and 11 other ships. The Germans incurred 3,039 casualties, lost 1 battle cruiser and 10 other ships. However after the initial shock in Britain, it became clear that the Germans had failed in their main objective of luring parts of the British navy into battles with their main fleet that would gradually reduce its numerical superiority. Superior intelligence and the ability of the main fleet to quickly reinforce any other part of the fleet showed this aim to be unachievable. Moreover, the German fleet had not been able to force its way into the North Sea to challenge Britain's control or weaken its blockade.

Assessing the outcome, Admiral Scheer concluded that more encounters with the British navy would weaken his fleet more than the British. As a result, the main German Fleet remained in port for the rest of the War, with Scheer advocating submarine warfare as a more effective way of counteracting the British blockade. So, however poorly the Fleet performed on the day, and it was heavily criticised in the press, Parliament and in an Admiralty report, the strategic outcome greatly favoured Britain. And it is worth remembering that even if Britain had won a famous naval encounter to match Trafalgar, it would have made no difference whatsoever to the progress of the War.

But the appearance of defeat in the one theatre that Britain expected overwhelming victory added to the growing gloom about the progress of the War; gloom the deepened further as 1916 progressed and the casualty lists grew after the Somme.

Verdun and the Somme - 1916

In Britain, the battle of the Somme (1 July to 13 November 1916, although the exact end date is disputed) has become a metaphor for the futility of the Great War and its conduct. The first day - the first hour

even - characterised by men calmly walking half a mile over open ground into machine guns - seems to epitomise every criticism levelled at the generals over the past century.

But while the Somme is central to our perception of the War, it was also part of a larger action fought solely between the Germans and the French; one which the French still regard as the battle for the soul of France and which invoked Christ-like images of suffering to describe its horrors at the time. Verdun is scarcely remembered on this side of the Channel but one French historian called it a 'war within a war' (lasting from February to December 1916) and it has been likened to Stalingrad in intensity and importance.

France and Britain had agreed in December 1915 that a large joint offensive would begin around July 1916 on the River Somme. However, the original plan was overtaken by an unexpectedly large-scale German offensive at Verdun in February 1916. The German chief of staff, Falkenhayn, targeted Verdun (one of a series of forts in Eastern France) that he believed the French would defend to the last man.

His plan, he subsequently claimed, was to attack with overwhelming force and to hold the ground taken, resulting not just in defeat of the front line armies, but by forcing the French to pull reserves away from

Tommies in the trenches on the Somme, 1916.

the Western Front to this vital battle, destroying them, too. This, he believed, would so badly damage the French that they would be forced to make a separate peace.

A terrible artillery bombardment continued for weeks; several forts, but not Verdun, did fall and the French were badly mauled. But, just as Joffre saved them at the Marne in September 1914, so an already elderly general, one Petain, found himself in charge of the sector. He took the exact opposite approach to Joffre's 'attack, attack, attack' and adopted a strictly defensive strategy, skilfully exploiting artillery and giving the Germans a taste of what the French and British had to suffer whenever they tried to take ground from them.

At the height of the battle in June, when the pressure on the French was greatest, they invoked the mutual assistance agreement between the allies and requested that the planned Somme offensive be activated, aimed at creating a dilemma for the Germans and splitting their forces. Although the British had done some detailed planning, the overall strategy and objectives had not been comprehensively thrashed out with the French, while the scale of their participation had to be reduced because of the magnitude of the demands of Verdun. The French reduced their intended manpower and artillery at the Somme by at least 50% and attacked on a narrower, 15 kilometres front, not the original 40 kilometres.

As a result, what was originally conceived as a breakthrough offensive had insufficient weight to achieve its purpose, even assuming all the other difficulties it would face could be overcome. British and French planning suffered from the same dilemma that faced the Germans when they launched Verdun. Was its eventual purpose what the French and Germans called 'nibbling', better understood today as attrition, weakening the enemy by killing them in large numbers, or was it to be a breakthrough battle?

So on the fateful morning of 1 July, and although the still the junior partner in the alliance, the British Army found itself 'taking on the principal burden of the major Entente offensive in the West in 1916', according to Hew Strachan. They had still not developed tactics to fit the circumstances and their six-day artillery barrage before the offensive only served to warn the Germans of an impending attack. Even more importantly, the guns were insufficiently heavy and did not do the predicted damage to the German defences, while the advance was on too wide a front.

When the whistles blew at 7.30 a.m. to go over the top, the infantry

walked into undamaged wire and other defensive obstacles and intact German machine gun nests. The British army suffered 57,470 dead and wounded that day. However, on the other bank of the river, the French inflicted a heavy defeat on the Germans, made possible by their superior and intensely focussed heavy artillery, at a cost of barely 2,000 men.

Instead of achieving a breakthrough, the Somme Offensive became a sterile battle of attrition, descending into a series of indecisive actions that should have been stopped in September, by which point the French had gained the upper hand at Verdun. But Haig applied the lesson he learned from Ypres, not to give up too soon.

It fizzled out during November, leaving over a million British Empire, French and German casualties. The British and French captured a few miles of strategically insignificant ground and inflicted greater attrition than the Germans. Nor was the offensive's intended diversionary objective of relieving the French at Verdun achieved. This was, surprisingly, provided by the Russians who inflicted heavy defeats on the Austrians during August, triggering the downfall of Falkenhayn and the assumption of total control of the war by Hindenburg and Ludendorff.

The French, led by now by General Nivelle - a name that became notorious in 1917 - pushed the Germans back at Verdun and, by December 1916, had regained every bit of ground they lost previously. The experience of the Somme and Verdun taught the Entente some lessons, but they would not be fully absorbed before many of the same mistakes were repeated in 1917.

However Hindenburg drew one great conclusion. Falkenhayn's alleged 'bite and hold' strategy had actually committed so many men forward that the German army eventually lost as many men as the French. The German army, said Hindenburg, could not withstand another Somme or Verdun. To avoid this he constructed the near-impregnable Hindenburg line, the deepest line of defences in the whole War.

Calling the Somme part of the learning process through which the British Army's High Command was passing, Hew Strachan concludes that the tragedy of the Somme was one of many lessons 'that although it paid dividends in 1918...its route there need not have been so sanguinary.'

Men and animals drowned in the mud at Passchendaele.

1917 - War Without End

Because the Somme was such a tragedy for Britain, it is often forgotten that the terrible battles of 1916, particularly Verdun and the Somme, had severely damaged the German army. As a result, Ludendorff's strategy for 1917 was highly defensive, avoiding heroic offensives. It should have been the decisive year of Allied victory, or at least of major progress towards it. But it was a year of setbacks and, with few signs of a decisive outcome either way, the prospect seemed to be a 'war without end'. As a consequence, 1917 saw the development of high-profile peace movements in both Britain and Germany to end the war. It was not just the casualties; in France and Britain there was growing concern that a war to protect liberal values was increasingly being fought in ways that flouted those values. But so much had been staked and lost by then that no one could find a basis for a negotiated peace, while few leaders even wanted one.

The outcomes of major Entente initiatives in 1917 were largely disastrous. After his apparent success in pressing home victory at Verdun, General Nivelle was appointed Commander in Chief of the French army. He was a throwback to the spirit of 1914 - attack, attack, attack. The Nivelle offensive of July 1917 was intended as the war winning strategic breakthrough but, yet again, it was a catastrophic frontal assault, this time on the Chemin des Dames ridge, a well-defended German position on the River Aisne. The French troops were so disillusioned with the task that they advanced up the hill making baa-ing noises, to let the commanders know they were lambs to the slaughter.

This offensive almost destroyed the French army, resulting in a month-long mutiny that was finally put down with executions and repression - but with a promise to the troops of no more frontal attacks. Nivelle was sacked and replaced by the cautious Petain; the real victor at Verdun. Like Hindenburg, he too adopted a less aggressive approach and intended to wait until American reinforcements arrived, before any more offensives were undertaken.

Lenin adresses crowds in St Petersberg.

By July, it was only the British and Italians who still harboured hopes that a major strategic breakthrough could be made. The Third Battle of Ypres - known forever after the nearby village of Passchendaele – was the nightmare result of that dream for the British. The concept was valid; a breakout from the vital salient to the ports of Zeebrugge and Ostend, from where the German U-boat offensive was being launched, and severing a principal German rail artery. But after some initial successes, appalling summer weather set in as early as August and by October men and animals were drowning in the mud. Haig had started this offensive despite opposition from the French and Lloyd George and he was heavily criticised for failing to abandon it sooner, when it had clearly failed. Far more than the Somme, this did severe and probably deserved damage to his reputation.

The Italians added to Entente woes when German and Austrian armies heavily defeated their offensive at Caporetto, on the Isonzo River, now the border area between Slovenia and Italy. This opened up the risk of a Central Powers' strike from the south and forces had to be rushed from Passchendaele to attempt to shore up the breach.

Russian participation in the war in the East weakened and eventually ceased. Agitation from Liberals as well as Socialists and Bolsheviks, much of it about food supplies, resulted in the abdication of the Tsar in March 1917 and the formation of Kerensky's Menshevik Government. This government initially intended to fight on and, in June launched a major offensive against German positions in Galicia. Once again, it was botched and the Russians were heavily defeated.

By then Bolshevik agitation in the Navy and Army meant that local soviets, not commanders, were deciding what military action would be

taken. Lenin's return to St Petersburg in October triggered both the Bolshevik Revolution and Russia's effective exit from the War, eventually allowing up to a million German troops to be released for action on the Western Front in 1918.

Some British successes were achieved at Cambrai, where tanks surprised the Germans, before losing the initial gains and at Messines Ridge in Belgium where, early in the Ypres offensive, British engineers undermined a lengthy defensive position and, in the biggest pre-atomic explosion, blew it up causing at least 10,000 German casualties. At Arras, as part of the third battle of Ypres, a tactical experiment successfully combined infantry and artillery while, again, sustaining massive losses. This validated techniques that were used effectively later in the War but in the context of the stalemate in the West, like the highly acclaimed Canadian capture of Vimy Ridge, nothing lasting was achieved.

Another set-back, but one which had a silver lining, was the resumption in February 1917 of unrestricted German U-boat attacks on all shipping, intended as a retaliatory measure to starve Britain, whose naval blockade was starving Germany. The campaign was initially a great success, nearly 500,000 tons of shipping being sunk in both February and March, and 860,000 tons in April, when Britain's supplies of wheat shrank to six weeks' worth. In May losses exceeded 600,000 tons, and in June 700,000. Britain was on the verge of defeat.

Lloyd George's adoption of the convoy system thwarted the U-boats but their attacks on all shipping heading for Britain, together with the Germans' offer, in the Zimmerman telegram, to return Texas and California to Mexico if it declared war on the US, tipped the previously neutral Congress into declaring war on Germany. This was finally a light at the end of the tunnel for the Allies. General Pershing was dispatched to the Western Front and, on inspecting the position, demanded 3 million men to be sent for training by 1919. But it would be summer 1918 before many came into active service.

Lloyd George's spell as armaments minister had also transformed industrial production, after 1915/16's shell shortages and, together with purchases of US equipment, Britain and France were significantly outperforming Germany on the materiel front. New aircraft coordinating with artillery created opportunities that would eventually be realised in 1918 but, as 1917 rolled on, both the present and the future looked bleak. War planning was looking as far ahead as 1919/20; it truly did seem to be a war without end.

Winter 1917/18 – German Dreams Realised

Although 1917 was the year when the Triple Entente, France, Russia and Britain, could - should - have won the war, the failures of the Nivelle offensive, the subsequent French army mutiny, the failed breakthrough in the mud at Passchendaele, and the collapse of Russia and its effective withdrawal from the war by the late summer, left the boot on the other foot.

Germany wanted war in the West mainly as a way of preventing France and Russia encircling her - but it was principally fear of Russia and the hope of vast gains in the East (precursor to Hitler's Lebensraum) that really motivated them in 1914. By the end of 1917 the French and British were still finding it impossible to dislodge the Germans from the trenches in the West and the latter increasingly hoped to negotiate either an advantageous settlement with-or even to defeat-the French and British, now the Russians were out of the way.

So with the Russians defeated, the Germans had achieved their main war aim and the craved mineral, oil, food and land in the East lay at

Hindenburg and Ludendorff with the Kaiser. They had taken full control of the War following the German reverse at Verdun.

their feet. And bit-by-bit these jewels fell into their lap. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, negotiated with or rather imposed on the new Soviet government, gave Germany 40% of Russia's total industry - everything in European Russia of any value. Colonisation of the great plains of the East was opening up to them, promising food supplies on a scale that would invalidate the British blockade. In March 1918 Germany occupied the Ukraine and set up a satellite colony. Finland and Romania were subsequently occupied and began to be turned into economic colonies. The oilfields of Baku were captured and the slow collapse of their allies, Austria and the Ottoman Empire, were seen as providing even more potential gains for the expanding Empire. The Teutonic Knights' dream was to be realised.

These successes gave the Germans every reason to think they had won the War and could become the equal of the growing industrial super-power, the United States, and of a greatly diminished British Empire. All that remained was to inject the massive armies released from the Russian front to defeat the exhausted French and British armies, who were still faced with the prospect of continuing to sacrifice men in trying to dislodge heavily entrenched German defenders in the West.

Two clouds did trouble this happy prospect. The first was the impending arrival of the Americans and the second was the increasing starvation, social discontent and strikes arising from the effects of the British blockade. German attitudes to the Americans were ambivalent. They were aware of her industrial strength but regarded them as militarily inexperienced and undisciplined. Moreover German naval commanders had assured Ludendorff, on the declaration of war by the US, that not a single US soldier would make it to Europe; they would all be sunk on the way. As it transpired, losses from that source were miraculously small and by mid-summer 1918 the Americans were landing 250,000 men a month - 1.8 million in all.

At the same time, the blockade meant the German army was beginning to find it more difficult to maintain supplies, compared to the British and French, whose wartime armament production was far better organised and this was reinforced by the effects of the blockade on raw material supplies. However, the army's problems were insignificant compared with the increased suffering of the civilian population, who were literally being starved to death. The winter of 1916/17 was known as the Turnip Winter and large numbers of children and the elderly died of cold and starvation in the streets of Berlin and Vienna. The difference of experience between the army and the civilians contributed to increasing numbers of strikes and to political unrest in the winter of 1917-18 and also to the violence that overwhelmed Germany at the

end of the war. Vitally, for the politics of the 1920s and 30s, it created the myth of the 'stab in the back' delivered to the German army.

Nevertheless, the German high command could approach 1918 in good spirits with high expectations of achieving a satisfactory outcome within the year and quelling domestic disruption with the fruits of victory. Moreover, whether or not to seek a negotiated peace was splitting the British and French political establishments at the highest levels and, as Hew Strachan writes, despondency was such that, 'those who could envisage the war ending in 1918 could only do so on the basis of a German victory'.

However, the fear that the Americans could a make a significant contribution by 1919 prompted a growing German urgency to bring the War to an end before that could occur. On 11 November 1917, Ludendorff told army commanders that they must 'strike the earliest possible blow, if possible by the end of February or the beginning of March, before the Americans can throw strong forces into the scale.' This led to a change of German tactics; to armies coming out of the trenches, to new tactics involving artillery and movement, which provided their opponents with a chance to fight them in the open, which had been denied since the first few weeks of the War in August and September 1914.

Germany goes for broke

It was recently noted by historian Nick Lloyd that 1918 remains the least understood period of the war. Starting in March, this final phase was markedly different from the long period of trench warfare that haunts our memories. The change was triggered, as noted above, by the Germans' emergence from the trenches and resuming war in the open. They had succeeded in avoiding defeat in the West by bogging their enemies down in trench warfare. But, with the arrival of the Americans, they had to try to win the war - and quickly.

All the other participants could see that Germany had a window of opportunity to do that. Following Russia's collapse and the Bolsheviks' seizure of power, they could now release a million men from the Russian front to complete victory on the Western Front. Moreover, these troops had not endured the horrors of the trenches; their war had been one of movement and victories. These were just the skills needed to take advantage of the opportunity.

However Ludendorff knew that he had to seize this opportunity quickly

and the French and British resistance defeated before the Americans could bolster them. So he and Hindenburg conceived bold plans for a series of offensives that, by the summer, saw the Germans once again on the Marne, shelling Paris.

Meanwhile, tensions were growing, on both sides, between the army, the home front and the politicians. In Germany, although Ludendorff and Hindenberg had taken control of the war, with the Kaiser largely side lined, civilian politicians, mainly Social Democrat, in the Reichstag were increasingly challenging their authority, although they had no formal, constitutional power over the Emperor's government.

Knowing that the Germans would mount a major offensive forced the French and British finally to put in place a proper joint command structure. However this took place against a background of political infighting. Clemenceau, who became French Prime Minister in November 1917, favoured Foch as overall commander while both of them ignored Petain's advice, which was strategically much sounder, having a clearer grasp of likely German plans.

Lloyd George continued to scheme against Haig and managed to replace his main supporter in the army, General Robertson, installing

British PoWs after the first German offensive in March 1918.

General Wilson, who Haig hated, as his personal adviser on the war. Foch was appointed overall commander and Petain was given the task of forming a reserve army which could be rushed to the front at any point which came under severe pressure from the German offensive. The Americans wisely refused to put their troops under the joint command, fearing their men would simply be used as cannon fodder to fill the growing shortages in the French army's ranks.

The German offensive began on 21 March between St Quentin and Arras and at first appeared devastating, sweeping aside the British 5th Army, taking many prisoners. Haig panicked and said that, without the help of the whole French army, he would be beaten, advising London he would have to make peace on whatever terms he could. However by 26 March, Petain had put half the total French army across the German advance, effectively stopping it. It is now clear is that much of the German gains were in militarily unimportant areas and they were creating hard-to-defend salients, while the British 3rd Army successfully defended the strategically vital railheads at Amiens.

The offensive failed because it lacked any strategic overview and Ludendorff specifically rejected the need for one. As previously described, his greatest triumph had come in Russia in 1914 by sheer opportunism, going forward to see what happened next and try to exploit it. His spring offensive did the same; grabbing territory that was often of little value and failing to put a critical mass of troops into attacking key targets. If he had concentrated on taking Amiens, he would have split British and French forces and taken essential railheads, cutting off supplies. That would have won the war. Instead his offensives were strategically aimless and massively costly in terms of losses of his best troops.

The offensive came to a head in May and June, the latter in the vicinity of St Chemain des Dames, which had seen horrific French casualties in the Nivelle offensive in 1917. This action in the Champagne salient is often called the Second Battle of the Marne. Effective French deployment of deep defence and rapid retreat from the front lines drew the Germans into a trap. Assisted by some US divisions, temporarily under French control, having no experienced officer corps of their own, the French counter attacked on 18 July and drove the Germans back, turning the tide of war. Just as in 1914, they could not sustain their overstretched supply lines, had exhausted their manpower and could no longer withstand the attrition imposed on them by revitalised French and British Empire Generals.

The Endgame

The Second Battle of the Marne saw the seemingly irresistible German tide held and turned back. Their run of victories, starting with the collapse of Russia in mid 1917, was about to end. Their supply lines could not sustain their advances and they were losing their best men faster than they could be replaced.

Ludendorff had stripped all his armies of their best men to create 'Storm Troopers'. They were the cutting edge of all the German advances from March to July but their losses were catastrophic. Indeed, the cost of this period of the war, which eventually became six months of continuous fighting, when mobility replaced the stalemate in the trenches, was enormous on both sides - roughly one million each German and Allied casualties. But while the Germans had lost many of their best units for no strategic gain and lacked reinforcements, American troops were landing at the rate of a quarter of a million a month, from March onwards. The balance of advantage had changed decisively and by July, the underlying strength of the Franco-British-US alliance would tell. These advantages were massive, with availability of fresh manpower only one.

Industrial productivity in France and Britain, even without US contributions, was far greater than Germany's. Twice as many guns, aeroplanes and tanks were being produced in Britain as in Germany. After a brief food scare in April and May 1917, at the onset of the U-boat offensive, British food production had increased. Meanwhile the British naval blockage starved Germany. In 1918, relatively undernourished German troops started succumbing to the first of the great 'flu outbreaks of 1918/1919.

Shell shortages were a thing of the past - vast build-ups of stocks allowed enormous artillery barrages to be launched at very short notice, directed by innovative new techniques for spotting and aiming accurately at targets. New technologies, not previously available, had transformed the effectiveness of the war machine. Even the US army benefitted from this Anglo-French manufacturing superiority. The rapidity of their manpower build-up was possible because the ships carried only troops, with virtually no equipment. French and British factories equipped them with rifles, artillery and tanks when they arrived.

Not that this turning point in the War had been fully appreciated by either the Generals or the politicians. In June, at the height of the German offensive, the British Cabinet debated pulling the BEF out of France and calling for peace, while Clemenceau faced down furious

attacks on Petain and Foch in the French parliament, even as the war turned in their favour. But by the end of July there was only one outcome; the real surprise is how surprised everyone was when it happened, in just 100 days after the German's defeat at the decisive battle of Amiens, starting on 8 August.

Much of this was down to technological advances and to new tactics employed, which were often the refinement of many small lessons learned in the seemingly endless carnage of the trenches. They were based on greater mobility which technology made possible. Radio communications were not available in 1914, but they now allowed aeroplanes to be co-ordinated with artillery and tanks, replacing some of the tasks the infantry had to undertake since 1914.

Aerial bombing became an effective tool in the land war in 1918, as did better artillery targeting, which meant that short, accurate artillery bombardments became more effective than the long, futile, bombardments of 1916 and 1917. Small hit squads of infantry backed with machine guns would move quickly into the enemy lines and suppress resistance, allowing larger forces to move up quickly and hold ground. This combination of forces became known as the 'All Arms' strategy and it so outstripped the Germans tactically that they had nothing left but the ferocious fighting spirit of their troops.

In this new approach, it should be noted that along with electric communications, a significant new element came into its own; the airforce. This was also exploited more effectively by the Entente than by the Germans, despite the legends of the Red Baron and other aces. Initially there were two British airforces; the Royal Flying Corp, the eyes of the Artillery, identifying targets and increasingly undertaking bombing raids and the Royal Naval Air Service. This undertook reconnaissance for the navy and was particularly important in the battle against the U-boats. The two forces were merged in 1918 into the Royal Air Force, after panic caused by German heavy bomber raids on London. After starting the war in 1914 with some 2,073 personnel and five squadrons, the RAF ended the war with almost 4,000 combat_aircraft and 114,000 personnel in some 150 squadrons. In its spotter and photographic role the RAF was crucial in the All Arms battles of 1918, because it enabled precise artillery targeting followed by insertion of infantry and tanks far more effectively than the blunderbusses of the earlier big heaves.

And while Haig remained British Commander in Chief, talented generals from the Commonwealth, such as Canadian commander Arthur Currie and John Monash, the Australian corps commander who A.J.P. Taylor described as the 'only General of creative originality produced by the

First World War', fully employed the new tactics and technology.

As Hugh Strachan writes, 'the biggest single intellectual shift in making war between 1914 and 1918 was that the combined arms battle was planned around the possibilities of guns rather than the infantry'. The generals had finally learnt quite a lot after all, but the Germans' desperate need to finish the war in 1918 was the key to permitting the lessons to be implemented.

The battle of Amiens, August 8 -11, saw all these lessons combined in what Ludendorff famously called the Black Day for the German Army. Led by Monash and Currie, but planned with and approved by Foch and Haig, the Allies assembled all their new technology and tactics in a massive attack involving over 400 tanks. The allies gained eight miles of battlefield and the German army was in total retreat. Although the attack was held after a few days, other, equally devastating attacks in different areas followed, increasingly demoralising the German army.

Much of the remaining course of the war was determined by what had become Ludendorff's extremely fragile mental state. Over the next six weeks he oscillated between extreme gloom and wild schemes for winning the war, while blaming everyone else for the German army's plight. In a conference called by the Kaiser on 12 September, he blamed the mood on the Home Front and misled him about the severity of the German army's position.

Meanwhile, parts of the German frontline were still fighting hard although many other units had had enough and were surrendering *en masse*. Throughout September, French, American and British Empire armies were advancing in the Argonne Forest in co-ordinated, highly mobile attacks that the infantry of the Somme and Passchendaele could only have dreamt of.

American troops drive French Renault tanks; Argonne Forest, September 1918.

Finally, at the end of September, British and French Armies breached the 6,000 foot-deep, Hindenburg line and, in what was regarded

as the greatest feat of the war, captured the St Quentin canal. By then, the Supreme Allied Commander, Marshal Foch, had co-ordinated a continuous and crushing All Arms battle by British, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, French and American armies and even a re-constituted Belgian army in Flanders. The German High Command recognised they must sue for peace.

The decision was precipitated by Ludendorff's serious mental collapse on 28 September and he decided to seek an immediate Armistice on the basis of Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points. Although soldiers carried on killing each other right up to the eleventh hour on 11 November, the war was effectively over - but stopping it was still a problem. What followed throughout October was a furious game of bluff and double bluff, as the Germans tried to negotiate terms directly with Wilson, to the fury of the French whose country had been partly ruined, in order to secure terms that neither the French nor the British would ever agree.

The only outcome of this was to change President Wilson from an impartial arbiter, who thought poorly of all the European powers for creating this calamitous war, into a fierce German hater who was now prepared to stand with France and Britain in demanding an end to the war, not just a pause in the fighting to see what terms could be had.

Political bickering in Berlin protracted this process, as the abdication of the Kaiser was arranged and plans made to make post-war Germany look more like the kind of democracy that would win Wilson's approval. It was also intended to allow the German High Command the opportunity to blame a civilian government for whatever peace terms were agreed. After coming close to rejecting what was on offer on several occasions and threatening to widen the war, the German High Command capitulated. The prospect of peace was too much for civilians and many solders and sailors to reject. The German Navy mutinied; Soviets were being formed and civilian politicians and the army feared being overwhelmed by revolution, so the Armistice was finally signed and fighting ceased on the Western Front at 11 am on 11th November.

But with the German army far from totally defeated and fighting going on to the last minute, was this victory sufficient? When the German army went home from France and Belgium to heroes' welcomes, banners flying and bands playing, most soldiers and the people did not believe they had lost, but had earned an honourable draw. As many post-war problems stemmed from this, as could be laid at the door of Versailles. But even Haig and the French generals, let alone the politicians, baulked at yet another year's killing to finish the job off and the Americans thought the job was done and wanted to go home.

After more than four years of the worst carnage the world had ever seen, up to that point, the war, suddenly, anti-climactically, ended. No one was ready for it and, Wilson apart, no one seemed to know what was to happen next. And sadly for Europe, Versailles was to show that, in the real world, his vision for future peace and national self-determination was completely defective and created more problems than it solved.

The Versailles Peace Conference

Politicians, generals and even peoples were wrong-footed by the unexpected and sudden ending of the war on an indecisive note. Germany was defeated but didn't really believe it. The Kaiser had abdicated and for the first time in its history Germany had a constitution that gave a passing imitation of a liberal democracy. But with the German army still in France and Belgium able to go home in good order, had the Allies won and could they dictate a lasting peace at Versailles?

Some of those questions were irrelevant in the short term, as revolution swept Germany. Soviets were set up, most famously in Berlin by the Spartakist, Rosa Luxemburg and in Bavaria. The Social Democrat leaders of the Reichstag soon found themselves in alliance with returning soldiers, fighting to put down these revolutionaries, which they did fairly quickly, but the civilian population was still starving and the British naval blockade was still in place. Meanwhile fighting continued in Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and Russia until 1923 and that was beyond the control and influence of the Peace Conference.

Significantly, the Soviet Government took no part in the peace process, being both pre-occupied with its on-going civil war and regarding anything that was agreed as irrelevant because they expected their revolution soon to engulf the rest of Europe. As for the peacemakers, they did not really need them, given that so much formerly Russian territory in Europe had been handed to the Germans under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, they could rearrange that as they wished, beyond the Soviet reach.

That was the immediate background to the Versailles Peace Conference and meant that issues in many parts of even Europe were beyond the ability of the Conference to settle.

Versailles has been blamed for so many ills over the last century and it has become fixed in the popular imagination as the reason for Hitler's rise and the Second World War. Even with a century of evidence in refutation, it is still often blamed for these future horrors by imposing savage, punitive and unfair terms on Germany, particularly 'reparations'. Certainly Versailles

failed to deliver the intentions of its signatories, but reparations were not its fatal error.

In her brilliant account of the Conference*, Margaret MacMillan demolishes the claims that reparations, bankrupted Germany. In reality, the headline sum of £6.6bn was immediately reduced by a series of complex bond arrangements by half: Germany regularly defaulted - not least in the great inflation of 1922-23 and later agreements further reduced the amounts payable. MacMillan concludes that Germany might actually have paid around £1.1bn in the whole period 1918-32 - hardly crippling.

In fact, from the end of the war German civilian politicians were making excuses and creating myths about Germany's treatment, because the military and nationalist right constantly accused them of ending a war they could have won. They were guilty of 'stabbing the army in the back', and then subsequently signing a shameful treaty. But the real problem was the Allied victory had not been decisive enough and Germany remained too strong.

It was the behaviour of these Weimar politicians and factions and eventually of Hitler that prevented the Weimar Republic developing into a peaceful liberal democracy rather than the divided paranoid society that allowed Hitler to seize power. With better leaders in the western democracies, a mature democracy in Germany and without the Great Depression, there was nothing in Versailles that made the events in 1939 inevitable. They were caused by the weakness of poor leaders in dealing with wicked men and the victors' failure to remain united and enforce the Treaty on those determined to breach it.

Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson open the Versailles Peace Conference 1919.

Reparations apart, the Germans had agreed an armistice in November 1918 based on their understanding of Woodrow Wilson's "14 Points". Amongst these were an end to secret treaties, the greatest practicable level of disarmament, freedom of the seas and a league of nations to arbitrate international disputes. These were however broad general objectives and were subsequently modified after the Armistice, as the Allies could not agree a number of them. So immediately the Germans claimed to have been cheated.

Wilson's 14 Points apart, understanding Versailles requires identifying the

key aims of France, Britain and the US. France and Belgium had suffered terrible damage to their countries; destruction of towns, factories, mines and vast loss of life. They wanted Germany to pay for repairs and for war widows' pensions. Moreover, the fact of geography still left France with a far richer, militaristic nation with almost double its population, on its eastern border. What France wanted was security, reducing that power imbalance by occupying Germany's border regions and taking over some of her industrial areas and de-militarising it.

Britain also wanted payments for widows' pensions and assistance in paying off its massive war debts - mainly to the US. Otherwise it had achieved most of what it wanted. The German fleet and merchant navy were in its hands, its East African colonies had been incorporated into the British Empire and it had reached a deal allowing France to control Syria and Lebanon and giving Britain effective control of Iraqi and Iranian oil fields and ports.

Wilson obviously wanted repayment of war loans to American banks and Treasury but he also wanted to see European trade and prosperity recover as quickly as possible, to the benefit of US world trade and secure the debt repayment. However his most notable contributions were idealistic. He wanted to ensure nothing so awful as this could happen again, caused, as he saw it, by misunderstandings and secret diplomacy. His great idea was the League of Nations to which Versailles would commit all signatories, while inviting other nations to join too, to create transparent relations and refer future disputes for arbitration and, if necessary, joint enforcement.

His other key idea, which was the source of endless conflict between the wars, was national self-determination. He saw the great pre-war empires, particularly Austria-Hungary, with their myriad of ethnicities, as oppressing the rights of people in their own countries. The problem, as his chief advisor Colonel House said at the time, was that he had no idea what he meant by the term and did not understand how many ethnic minorities in Europe might want self-determination. The outcome was the creation of Yugoslavia, for a time the most successful of the new states because all the Slavs wanted to be together and Czechoslovakia, also successful, but bedevilled by problems of German minorities. But Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and above all the new Poland saw major boundary changes resulting in losses or gains of territory and their populations - Poland particularly gaining at the expense of Germany and Russia; a death warrant by 1939.

A new ethnic patchwork of Europe was created, resulting in many minorities finding themselves in 'other people's' countries rather than in traditional, multi-ethnic empires. It is estimated that this amounted to 30

million people between the wars. Inevitably, the newly self-determined quickly oppressed the minorities on a scale that had not been the norm under the old empires. Amongst these minorities in several countries, were ethnic Germans, whose 'plight' was subsequently exploited by Hitler.

After six months of wrangling over maps and population statistics and hearing petitions from people half way around the world seeking grievances to be righted, most of which were completely ignored, an agreement was cobbled together by the big three - Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George. On 7 May 1919 the German delegation - deliberately self-excluding anyone with any leadership role in the war, to ensure anyone signing could be subsequently vilified (indeed, one of the signatories was subsequently assassinated) - were summoned to receive the peace terms. Predictably they were horrified, not just at the reparations bill, the loss of Silesia to Poland and other territory and the occupation of the Rhineland and the Saar coalfields, but at what the Germans mendaciously called the 'war guilt' clause-although both Hungary and Austria made no fuss about it being applied to them or paying reparations.

Finally on 28 June 1919 the Germans sent a low ranking delegation to sign the treaty. By then they were resigned to their fate but the Allies had also started in-depth soul searching and worrying about the long-term consequences. John Maynard Keynes, then an advisor attached to the British delegation, rushed out a world-wide, best selling pamphlet, 'The Economic Consequences of the Peace,' denouncing it. Naturally, this was very popular in Germany.

Clemenceau, a cynic to his core, believed that the Treaty was the best that could be gained for France, in terms of guaranteeing its security against Germany. He persuaded himself that inter-allied treaties and Wilson's League of Nations, would deliver that. He was furious when, at the signing ceremony, Foch, the architect of final victory, stood up uninvited, and demanded that the Rhine be made a barrier between France and Germany, saying, 'The next time, remember, the Germans will make no mistake. They will break through into Northern France and seize the Channel ports as a base of operations against England'.

Of course, Foch was right. Wilson failed to get Congressional approval for the League and the US, which might have been the most powerful guarantor of French security, did not join it or implement the Treaty. The British soon lost interest in France's quarrels with Germany and left the French and Belgians to take action, including occupying the Ruhr in 1923, in order to enforce compliance on the Germans. In 1940, the French discovered all their fears about their security were justified. Versailles and subsequent loss of collective will by the Allies left Germany

too strong, making the French the real losers from Versailles, not the Germans. Effectively, the Allies threw away the peace for which the War to end all Wars was fought, by failing to enforce the peace terms through what we now call collective security. It had been a Carthaginian peace after all, and the problem of an over mighty Germany in Europe had to be settled once again. **The Peacemakers-Six Months That Changed the World", Margaret MacMillan, 2001.*

Finale

The War was a tragedy but, extraordinarily as it now seems to us, many people wanted it and thought they could win something significant. On discovering that they could not, a stalemate emerged due to the genuine intractability of overturning strongly defensive positions, rather than to the pure stupidity of generals.

A frighteningly accurate prediction of the future for Clemenceau (The Tiger) and the other Peacemakers of 1919.

Their stupidity - particularly the Germans and Austrians - was in starting the whole thing at all, and then being unable to see a way to end it.

For Britain and France it was a war that had to be fought and won to defeat Prussianism and recover French and Belgian territory. In a sense, the need to defeat Prussianism was reinforced by the second World war against Nazism, which itself encompassed and embraced all the Prussian militaristic and autocratic doctrines that Hitler imbibed in his youth, while adding his own racial theories, which were hardly unusual, even if not so extreme, in 19th Century Germany.

Incidentally, Prussia was formally abolished by an edict of the Occupying Powers in Germany in 1947.The preamble said; *"The Prussian State which from early days has been a bearer of militarism and reaction in Germany has de facto ceased to exist."*

France finally resolved the problem of its impossible German neighbour by agreeing jointly to sink their sovereignties into the institutions that eventually became the EU. For Germany, that was the price of being allowed back into the comity of civilised nations after 1945. For France, it was the final guarantee of her security.

PART THREE

Eaton in the War

In 1914 Eaton village was still mainly a small agricultural hamlet on the southern borders of Norwich, although the parish as a whole was becoming a residential suburb of the city. The population of the parish grew from 1,300 in 1885 to 3,000 by 1903 and would probably have been almost 3,500 by the time war broke out.

The residential northern end of the parish, mainly in the growing number of streets built between Newmarket and Unthank Roads, housed a population of artisans, clerks and other respectable members of the lower middle and rising working class.

In the village, the population had recovered from diseases resulting from the overcrowding, squalor and poor sanitation found in the cottages in the second half of the 19th century. By 1914 it had grown back to earlier levels of about 300, but it remained overwhelmingly agricultural, although there were also railway workers, dressmakers and others also lived there. Most agricultural workers would have found work on the farms and nearby estates, such as Intwood. Others were employed in the market gardens by the River Yare and along Newmarket and Unthank Roads while others worked in the brewery.

By the time the war came, Norwich was an important manufacturing centre, and it came to play a significant role in the war effort. Bolton and Paul became a major aircraft component manufacture, making bodies for the famous Sopwith Camel aircraft, barbed wire and wire netting. Colmans took many acres out of mustard production to grow essential crops for the troops. Before the War, Howlett and White made women's satin and brocade dress shoes. They volunteered to make army boots and ended up supplying the finest to the French as well as British Armies and were asked to make Cossak boots for the Russians. So good were they, German soldiers regarded them as a great prize, when taking prisoners wearing them. They were but one of many Norwich firms supplying boots and shoes to the Entente armies, the navy and even designing and manufacturing the sheepskin flying boot. Chamberlins' clothing factory in Botolph Street was converted, within a month of the start of the war, to supplying the Admiralty and the War Office with uniforms and other essential supplies.

Many of the residents in the suburban end of the parish worked, before

the war, either in these major manufacturing enterprises in the City, as clerks at Norwich Union or the large fruit and flower growers in the parish, such as Daniels, Adocks and Morse. Colmans were not the only grower to substitute its main crop to meet the needs of the troops at the Front. Feeding them and the Home Front, as the main text explains, was just as important a battle as armaments production. In Eaton, where rose growing was a major industry, production was switched to more fruit. A fundamental part of every ration issued to Tommies at the Front was a pot of apple and a pot of plum jam, however much they came to hate them.

As the men left for the forces, so women filled the jobs they left behind. Bolton and Paul employed 1,226 women in the course of the war and some were sent by the Ministry of Munitions around the country to tutor other women in that industry. Every other major employer had to make the same adjustments and by 1917/18, women made up between 45 and 50% of the workforce in Norwich. The women in Eaton would have played a full part in that.

The men of Eaton go to war

When the war came, men employed in all these occupations volunteered for the Forces or were later conscripted. In total, around 1,000 men from the parish took part in action in all the branches of the forces and 110 died in action or in accidents and disease. Many others were wounded.

The men from Eaton who served reflected the class composition of the parish. At its City end, the sons of better off merchant and professional classes, many who attended the High School and the now defunct Bracondale School, became junior officers – Second Lieutenant to Captain - while the artisan and working classes joined the other ranks. Across the army as a whole, the death toll amongst officers was the highest, running at around 17% as opposed to 13% for all ranks, but the toll amongst junior officers – subalterns - was horrific, with some estimates putting it at over 60% casualties.

The Rev Colin Way has researched the men from the parish who fought and he describes the patient process of identifying them, starting in 1919. A street by street survey of households was first compiled that year showing a total of 673 names, but as Colin says, the list is not complete and contains both omissions and errors. Of those original 673, most were other ranks - more often than not in the Norfolk Regiment - and 116 were commissioned (17%), 23 served with the Royal Navy and

54 served in the Royal Flying Corps or the RAF.

'It is interesting to note' he says ' that some roads sent proportionately more men to war than others - presumably this is partly down to where the younger families lived. For example, Eaton Village sent 86 husbands and sons to war; Melrose Road sent 68; Unthank Road sent 53; Portland Street sent 56; Glebe Road sent 50; Newmarket Road sent 38; College Road sent 30; Lincoln Street sent 28; and Dover Street sent 22.


War Memorial on Newmarket Road

Sadly, 89 men were not to return home (13%). Most of those who died were buried in France or Belgium, though some who served in Mesopotamia or Gallipoli were buried there. 72 men (11%) returned home with physical wounds, but most carried wounds of the mind, which were seldom talked about. Records show that nine men from the parish were also taken prisoner at some point in the war and that twenty-two were decorated for exceptional gallantry - three with the DSO; seven with the Military Cross; eleven with the Military Medal; and one with the Legion of Honour.

Every single death in a family was a tragedy, bringing pain and suffering and a deep sense of loss to those who loved them so dearly back home - parents, wives and sweethearts, but there were six families who lost not just one son but two - the Collers of Newmarket Road, the Fosters of Eaton Street, the Hingles of Warwick Street, the Howells of The Gardens in Eaton Village, and the Huffams of Mount Pleasant. The story of one family, the Collers, illustrates the tragedy all suffered.

Bernard Tarrant Coller lived at 'Hartsmere' on the corner of Judges Walk and Newmarket Road. He was an undergraduate at Oxford when war was declared, but quickly joined up and was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the 10th Norfolk Regiment. In 1916 he transferred to the military flying school at Farnborough where he earned his wings on 21st February. Within a few days he was sent to France and not long after, in September of that same year, he was killed on a reconnaissance mission over enemy lines, aged just twenty two. Sadly, the life expectancy of flying officers like Bernard was very short - often less than six weeks.

But the story doesn't end there, because two years later Bernard's younger brother, Charles Mervyn Coller, who had also been an undergraduate at Oxford, was killed in action at Arras. We must feel great sympathy for his parents who had now lost not one but two very talented sons. After the war, the Coller family erected two fine windows in St Saviour's chapel in Norwich cathedral in their memory.'

By the time the War Memorial on Newmarket Road was unveiled on 1 May, 1921, the total number of identified war dead had risen to 107 and another three men whose names were omitted have been identified, making a total of 110 who have been remembered during the commemorations of the last four years. A full list of their names, where and when they died and where they are buried can be found on the Eaton Parish website.

Other memorials and a Mystery

Colin Way also drew attention to two further names that appear on a memorial on the choir stalls in Christ Church. One is in memory of Lt Stewart Wainwright, who died in Miraumont in 1917, and whose name is also on the Parish War Memorial.

The other memorial reads as follows: *'To the glory of God and in memory of Ida Marguerite, wife of Patrick Walker and daughter of Josiah and Emily Ames of this parish who was taken prisoner in Baghdad, wandered in Mesopotamia for two years, and died in Constantinople in 1916'.* Exactly who Ida was and how she came to this sad end remained a mystery until 2017, when Elizabeth Cannon pieced together her story.

As she describes it, Ida was born in 1883 to Josiah and Emily Ames, and lived in a substantial house on Newmarket Road. Josiah was a silk merchant, with wide connections in the trade. Ida married Patrick William Baker Walker whose father was a tea planter in Ceylon, in Christchurch, Eaton, in 1911. They travelled widely because of his business; their son Raymond Neville being born in Kenya in July 1913. In September 1914 Ida and Raymond sailed from London to Basrah on the Persian Gulf, presumably to join Patrick who was already in Mesopotamia, probably in Baghdad.

This was not a good time to be in the Middle East and evidence suggests that Patrick and his family were caught up in political and/or military events, and were interned by the Turks, probably before the

end of 1914. So from being the only daughter of a prosperous family in a comfortable home Ida found herself a prisoner in a foreign land, maybe destitute, and with a small baby to care for.

Patrick survived four years of internment in Turkey and returned to England, and miraculously one would think, so did the baby Raymond Neville. The growing boy was probably brought up within the Ames family, and was educated at the Norwich School. Patrick continued his business career, travelling between India, the Middle East and UK until at least 1927.

What happened to the little family from 1914 -1916? In July 1916 Ida Marguerite appears in the International Red Cross Prisoner of War lists, in the Civilian Section. It is recorded there that in June 1916 one of the Ames family had written to the International Red Cross seeking information about them. The document suggests that they had been taken to Aleppo in Northern Syria, and a later addition, dated 22 February 1917, indicates that there had been no news of them in Constantinople for two years.

It seems that after two years in captivity they were moved across the Syrian Desert and through Turkey to Constantinople, where Ida very soon died. There, by 1916 the Turks were carrying out an ethnic cleansing campaign, mainly against Armenian Christians, but also others, under the slogan 'Turkey for the Turks'. Did Ida die of illness or exhaustion, or was she caught up in this new wave of terror? We shall probably never know.

Edith Cavell

Finally, Eaton added a minor postscript to the story of Edith Cavell, the nurse executed by the Germans in 1915. Her father was the Rector of Swardeston, but after his death, Edith's mother lived in College Road, Eaton. On the same day, 29 October 1915, as a Memorial Service was held for her in Norwich Cathedral, a parochial service was held at Christ Church, in the parish where her mother lived.

Suggested Reading

John Keegan	The First World War (1998 and 2014 update)
Hew Strachan	The First World War (2003)
David Stephenson	1914-1918 – the History of the First World War (2004)
Peter Hart	The Great War (2014)
Gary Sheffield	A Short History of the First World War (2014)

These are all single volume histories and are highly accessible to the general reader.

Christopher Clark	The Sleepwalkers – How Europe went to War in 1914 (2012)
Max Hastings	Catastrophe – Europe Goes to War in 1914 (2013)
Hugh Sebag-Montefiore	The Somme – Into the Breach (2016)
Gary Sheffield	Douglas Haig; From the Somme to Victory (2016)
Nick Lloyd	Passchendaele: a new history (2017)
Alexander Watson	Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War 1914-18 (2014)
Peter Hart	The Last Battle – End Game on the Western Front 1918 (2014)
Margaret MacMillan	The Peacemakers (2001)
David Reynolds	The Long Shadow - the Great War and the 20th century (2013)
Stephen Browning	Norwich in the Great War (2015)

There are a number of useful shorter articles to be found in the BBC History magazine e.g.

Gary Sheffield	The Somme (July 2016)
Nick Lloyd	The Forgotten Triumphs of Passchendaele (August 2017)
Nick Lloyd	The Battle of Amiens (July 2018)

Acknowledgements

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14	The Chain of Friendship,	Brooklyn Eagle, July 1914
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24	Gallipoli-the Norfolk Regiment embarks,	stevesmith 1944.wordpress.com
27	The Battle of Jutland,	channel4.com
29	Tommies in the trenches at the Somme,	en.wikipedia.org
32	Passchendaele – Mud,	awm.gov.au
33	Lenin at St Petersburg,	dailytelegraph.com.au
35	Hindenberg and Ludendorff take over,	centenarynews.com
38	British PoWs March 1918,	bonniedundee1689.wordpress.com
42	Americans drive Peugot tanks; September 1918,	gettyimages.com theconversation.com US National Archive
45	The Peacemakers,	pinterest.com
48	A Child Weeps, Daily Herald 1919,	pinterest.com
51	Eaton War Memorial	
back cover	The Cenotaph, Whitehall	Imperial War Museum

The Cenotaph, Whitehall
Designed by Edwin Lutyens, unveiled 11th November 1920