

LEADERSHIP IN CONFLICT 1914-1918



Edited by
Matthew Hughes & Matthew Seligmann

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LEO COOPER

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Foreword

Having edited collections of essays on the First World War and contributed to other volumes, I am all too well aware of the difficulties and possible pitfalls involved. Quite apart from the inevitable problems of deadlines and wordage, there are the more serious challenges of achieving a coherent structure and presenting fresh, original work to a readership which, though keen in principle, may suspect that the subject matter is already familiar to them.

The editors of *Leadership in Conflict 1914–1918* emerge with a good deal of credit on these criteria. True, some of the Western Front commanders re-assessed here, notably Foch and Rawlinson, have been much studied recently, but the worthwhile contributions on these controversial figures are complemented by two on the less well-known Sir William Heneker and on Trenchard as commander of the Royal Flying Corps. There are original – and critical – reappraisals, both based on doctoral research, of Moltke the Younger and Falkenhayn, but an opportunity has been missed to re-assess German commanders in the latter part of the war, or in other theatres.

Two essays are devoted both to the United States and Italy which all admirably sustain the volume's focus on civil-military relations and domestic politics as distinct from operations. It is again a matter of regret that space permits only one representative commander from each country to be studied (Pershing and Cadorna). One would have welcomed more than two contributions devoted to the 'Home Front', stimulating though these are. The volume concludes strongly with two excellent reappraisals of the roles and influence of the monarchs of Britain and Germany. Ian Beckett, in particular, has drawn on a wide range of sources, notably the royal archives at Windsor Castle, for a judicious reappraisal of the role of King George V.

Thus, so far from leaving the impression that this is just another canter over well-trodden battlefields, this lively collection which is

mostly a showcase for a new generation of historians, opens up exciting possibilities for further research and publications along the lines developed here.

Brian Bond

(Professor of Military History at King's College London and President of the British Commission for Military History)

Introduction

People and the Tides of History: Does Personality Matter in the First World War?

Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann

‘The death of one person is a tragedy. The death of a million people is a statistic.’

(Joseph Stalin)

‘Millions of individuals,’ to cite the words of Professor Derek Beales, ‘have found no defence against the juggernauts of history: the Cathars of Montailou, the American Indians, or in the twentieth century those who fought in the trenches . . .’ That the First World War was one of these so-called ‘juggernauts’, a movement so powerful that no one single soul could hope to influence, let alone deflect, its course single-handedly, seems at first glance self-evident. It entailed such a massive array of force and forces that clearly no one person could be its master. It was such an overwhelming combination of the dislocative and destructive that it could not help but engulf the participants in their millions. Those caught up in the grasp of this colossal cataclysm were the masses and not the singular or the solitary.

Making sense of so vast a movement has led some historians to seek explanatory devices of comparable scope and grandeur. The bigger picture, it seems, when it is on the scale of the First World War, has required a gazetteer no less massive. As we will see, masculinity, agriculture, modernity and capitalism have all been wheeled out to serve as the base for a comprehensive explanatory model of the conflict. In this sense, the complaint of the nineteenth-century French historian, Monod, that ‘historians are too much in the habit of paying attention only to the brilliant, clamorous and ephemeral manifestations of human activity, to great events and great men, instead of depicting the great

and slow changes of economic and social institutions . . .² does not apply to current historical treatment of the Great War. Historians have long viewed the war as one of history's 'juggernauts' and have all too often reached out for broad generalizations.

Is this situation satisfactory? To some historians this answer is clearly in the negative. If we return, for example, to the quotation from Derek Beales, it is clear that it is just such assumptions about the explanatory power of trends – 'the mythology of trends' he calls it – that he is trying to resist. As he perceptively comments: 'It must be remembered on the other side that the juggernauts are powered and directed by men . . .'³ In other words, excluding acts of God, many, if not most, of the events of history are the product of some form of human agency. The First World War, we would argue, is no exception to this rule. In saying this, we recognize that we are going against the currents of contemporary historical opinion, the tide of which is to stress the sweeping overview and, thereby, deliberately to marginalize individual experience.

An example of a book that develops a broad theoretical approach, incorporating gender and the primal instinct to kill, and in so doing has raised much interest and controversy, is Joanna Bourke's recent *Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (1999). This volume builds upon ideas from her earlier work *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (1996) to suggest that men (and women) like killing, that institutional structures channel this aggressive urge, and that war – including the First World War – is a logical outcome of a society that emphasizes such macho virtues. This emphasis, which is also discussed in Niall Ferguson's much noted *The Pity of War*, provides valuable insights into understanding conflict: in particular, it offers a psychological framework for explaining why soldiers fight.⁴ As a result, in this interpretation, the Great War becomes a testing ground of masculine virtues and identities.

Another recent example of the way in which the First World War can be rendered subordinate to a single overarching historical principle is Avner Offer's *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (1989). Focusing on agricultural production and distribution, it examines the war in the light of food supplies. For Offer, the First World War was 'not only a war of steel and gold, but a war of bread and potatoes.'⁵ In particular, the way in which these could be interdicted by enemy action and/or increased by domestic regulation and control is used as an explanatory device for the war in general.

Also germane to any discussion of overarching approaches to the First World War are those interpretations that focus on the issue of modernity and the war's role in ushering in a new era. This is an exciting area of inquiry that has produced some substantial scholarly advances.

Works by Modris Eksteins, Volker Berghahn and Stephen Kern, for example, have done much to alter our understanding of the extent to which the First World War represented a caesura in modern history.⁶ However, best known in this context – perhaps because of his role in the well-received television documentary series ‘1914–18’ – is Jay Winter. In his work *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* he looks at popular reactions to the tragedy of the Great War, and examines how ordinary people expressed grief through various mourning processes. He shows that ‘the universality of bereavement in the Europe of the Great War’ was such that these grieving processes had the effect of changing societies irrespective of national frontiers. This approach challenges Paul Fussell’s classic *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) which approaches changes in postwar society through the wartime experience of the educated class and their use of the ironic style in their later literary output.⁷

Not all of the impersonal interpretations of the First World War are recent. Lenin, for instance, provided the classic Marxist analysis of the First World War in his 1916 polemic *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Lenin’s paradigm reduces the war to a clash between the capitalist monopoly conglomerates of the various protagonists, which use nations and peoples to wage their struggle for control of markets, raw materials and capital outlets. The Leninist approach focuses on industrial monoliths fighting across national borders. Therefore, people vanish from the picture.

Taken together, the above examples illustrate a variety of ways in which broad historical generalizations have been used to make the Great War more explicable. By subordinating the role of the individual and focusing on the more massive forces of historical change, all of the above-mentioned works have contributed a new understanding to the place of the First World War in the historical development of the modern period. Given the success these approaches have enjoyed, the question might be asked: why advocate a return to a methodology based upon examining personal traits and determining the role of the individual? There are, in fact, a number of reasons for so doing.

First of all, there are questions that can be raised with respect to the impersonal approach to history. As Otto Pflanze, editor of the *American Historical Review*, has observed, albeit in the context of modern German history, there is a danger in constructing a comprehensive explanatory model of major human events. It can lead to history that is ‘frequently determinist and thoroughly depersonalised’. This can create circumstances in which the models become more important than the historical events that they purport to explain. As Pflanze put it, for some historians the models ‘have ceased to be merely heuristic instruments but have themselves developed into fictitious historical reality.’⁸

While we do not believe that Bourke, Offer or Winter have fallen into this trap, few (non-Marxists) would deny that this has been a problem for Marxist historical interpretations in general, and for Lenin's view of the First World War in particular. Likewise, many 'post-modern' views suffer from this problem. One is reminded of the current joke among academics: 'Okay, so it works in *reality*, but does it work in *theory*?'

Another reason for adopting an approach that focuses on individuals and their personalities is that many of the people who read history find this to be both interesting and revealing and regret the passing of such ideas from the pages of history. The manner in which the removal of these foci from the history books might diminish popular appreciation of the historian's art has been examined by Robert Birley. He saw the matter thus:

Should we tell these stories today? At least, I feel, we should realize how we cut ourselves off from the past if we do not. . . . More and more the historian has to concern himself with what is regarded as the essential substructure of society. . . . And yet Life, the actual life of individuals, goes on in the despised superstructure. Its twists and turns produce dramatic episodes, tragic or comic, pathetic or just plain exciting, and moments which test men and women so that their true character is displayed. These make good stories, which men feel instinctively to be significant, and much of the significance of History will be lost if they are ignored."

A number of contemporary historians have demonstrated the validity of this point by writing acclaimed historical works with the stories about people not only left in, but given a prominent dimension. Orlando Figes, for example, makes substantial use of personal reminiscences in his *A People's Tragedy*, and in doing so brings alive the fact that Russia's part in the First World War involved a series of individuals interacting and competing at a time of great crisis.¹⁰ In so doing, Figes' penmanship brings the war to life and keeps the reader's attention from beginning to end. There is perhaps an ironic contrast here in the fact that many Post-Modernists and Neo-Marxists, themselves uninterested in personalities, produce impenetrable general theories on history aimed at the initiated and inaccessible to the ordinary reader. Yet it is precisely these ordinary people that Post-Modernists are so keen to rescue from elite history. In failing to do so, they give substance to Disraeli's quip 'read not history, nothing but biography for that is life without theory. . . .'¹¹

On top of this, many historians regard a focus on the individual as a useful explanatory tool. The American historian, Barbara Tuchman, whose book *The Guns of August* about the outset of the First World

War won a Pulitzer Prize, is among their number.¹² As she observed: 'Biography is useful because it encompasses the universal in the particular. It is a focus that allows both the writer to narrow his field to manageable dimensions and the reader to more easily comprehend the subject.'¹³ Complementing this judgement from the other side is J.S. Mill's timeless comment that 'Men are not, when brought together, converted into another kind of substance.'¹⁴ One must still look at the individual to understand the masses and the past.

* * *

The essays in this volume provide a coherent analysis of the many different roles that could be played by individuals in a range of fields during the First World War. For ease of access and to encourage ready comparison, they have been organized into six different sections, each of which reflects a different theatre of conflict or point of authority. Thus, Part One looks at the Western Front from the perspective of key figures who served on the Entente side. It opens with two essays, one by Peter Simkins and the other by William Philpott, that take as their theme inter-Allied interaction and interchange. As is well known, although successful coalition warfare requires close co-operation, relations between Allied military leaders were often fraught. This was partly a reflection of national chauvinism, but also reflected the temperament and personality of those involved. Some generals, as Peter Simkins shows with the example of Sir Henry Rawlinson, handled the diplomacy of alliance warfare better than others. Yet, there were other aspects to the relationship. When the British formed a minority proportion of the Allied army in France, they were more amenable to French direction of operations. By 1918, when the British formed a qualitative and quantitative majority on the Western Front they were more insistent on fighting the war the way they wanted. Moreover, as Philpott demonstrates, Foch as Allied generalissimo was able, by force of personality, to smooth over these differences and co-ordinate the British and French forces and take them to victory in November 1918. The following chapter moves from inter-Allied relations to the difficulties that could occur within particular armies. Through a study of the operational level of war, as illustrated by the career of Major General Sir William Heneker, John Bourne illustrates the impact a determined colonial soldier, with reasonable relations with his superiors, could make on the performance of a division. This is complemented by a chapter on inter-service rivalry by David Jordan. The First World War witnessed the advent of three-dimensional warfare as combat began to fill the skies as well as the land and sea. Some people recognized the importance of air power. As Jordan shows, Sir Hugh Trenchard figured

large in the development of British air power. He had to fight to achieve this, as other commanders had different visions of future patterns of the war in the air.

Part Two takes a similar approach but this time looks at the Germans on the Western Front by way of two key commanders: Helmuth von Moltke the Younger and Erich von Falkenhayn. Both of these men were in charge of German strategy and war planning: Moltke was in command during the crucial days up to the failure at the Marne in 1914, Falkenhayn until his dismissal in late 1916. Both were found wanting as they struggled not only with a determined enemy but also with internecine conflicts within the German decision-making elite. Moltke, as Annika Mombauer convincingly shows, broke down under the strain of interference from the Kaiser, his military entourage and other generals hungry for his job. As Robert Foley goes on to argue, Falkenhayn suffered similarly from intrigues and backstabbing from those envious of his position and from those who opposed his war strategy. In particular, Falkenhayn was under pressure from Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg, the men who would eventually take Germany to defeat in 1918 (and then claim it was not their fault). The role of these two influential figures is discussed in more depth in a chapter by Matthew Stibbe in Part Six.

America is the subject of Part Three. The entry of the United States into the war was a decisive factor in the eventual Allied victory, as the arrival of the doughboys gave the flagging Entente powers an immense psychological and material boost. Yet if morale increased at the popular level, at the top things were different. The forces of the United States were led by the imposing 'Black Jack' Pershing. An ardent American patriot, Pershing wanted the 'American' contribution to the war to be distinctly and unambiguously independent. As a result, he was determined to keep his troops together as a single force, against British and French pressure to dilute the American army in France. This led to a series of increasingly acrimonious personal exchanges as the British and French tried to dominate Pershing and use his men in penny packets with their own forces. Pershing would have none of this and, thus, fully deserves Woodward's sobriquet of 'Proconsul'. The next chapter switches the focus from American forces on the Western Front to American propaganda on their Home Front by looking at the activities of James Watson Gerard, America's ambassador to Berlin up to 1917. In this essay, Matthew Seligmann explores Gerard's portrayal of the German enemy to the American people. Looking at the spoken and written word as well as the motion picture, it details the way that Gerard's abrasive personality, not always useful as a diplomat, came into its own as Gerard toured the country detailing the wickedness of the 'Hun'.

Part Four moves the emphasis to Italy. This oft-neglected area of study is the subject of two essays. Firstly, James Gentsch examines the Italian army and its commander, Luigi Cadorna, in the period up to the battle of Caporetto in 1917. The Italians were faced with fighting a war in the Alps: a war as much against the inhospitable terrain as the Austro-Hungarian army. Gentsch shows that this was not the only difficulty for Cadorna: struggles within the Italian military, in particular rivalry with the navy, as well as lack of co-ordination with politicians, hampered an already difficult position. Then Matthew Hughes takes up the story by looking at the period after Caporetto. Following this battle, an Anglo-French force was sent to stiffen the Italian line and Hughes examines the civil-military dispute within Britain over the deployment and objectives of the force. Hughes shows that Britain's generals did not attempt to usurp civilian control, unlike the situation in Germany described in Part Two. This was one of the reasons why Britain won the war.

In Part Five the Home Front comes under scrutiny. An in-depth essay by Keith Wilson examines the way in which a number of forceful personalities responded to the perceived inadequacies of a civilian administration fighting a total war, by forming a new party above politics dedicated to winning the war. Denise Poynter adds to our understanding of the Home Front at war by looking at the topical subject of shell shock victims and the treatment offered to them by the famous Dr Rivers. Rivers, along with some like-minded souls, were struggling with a medical establishment unfamiliar with the mental traumas of war and sceptical of the efficacy of new treatments for minds shattered by war in the trenches.

Finally, Part Six takes royalty as its theme. In 1914, the contribution of monarchs to military policy was still a substantial one, even in Britain. As Ian Beckett shows, King George V had many channels whereby he could have an input into British strategic planning. George V comes out of this as someone willing to interfere, but within constitutional limits; his cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II, played a different role. Once seen as a weak-willed dilettante who was out of his depth when real fighting began, Matthew Stibbe shows that, while this was true, Wilhelm nevertheless resisted encroachments on his rights of appointment to command level positions. Hindenburg and Ludendorff challenged this. They were eventually able to marginalize the Kaiser and in so doing took away the restraining influence that had prevented foolish policies such as unrestricted U-boat warfare. As a consequence, the Germans moved from total war to absolute war to defeat.

As these essays make clear, both individually and collectively, in response to the question posed in the title of this introduction: personality did matter in the First World War. This was true not only in the

clichéd sense that the war was a test of character, but also in respect to the fact that it produced situations in which successful co-operation and amicable interaction were vital for military success. In such scenarios some personalities meshed and others clashed – a true example of what we mean by leadership in conflict.

To conclude our summary of the role of the individual in this ‘age of extremes’, we would draw attention to the recent words of the eminent historian of Germany, Fritz Stern: ‘These days my discipline and our culture like to deny the historic importance of individuals . . . an odd conclusion to reach at the end of a century that has had some terrifying and a few benign examples of people who by themselves shaped world history.’¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Derek Beales, ‘History and Biography: An Inaugural Lecture’, in T.C.W. Blanning and David Cannadine (eds), *History and Biography: Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p.282.
- 2 Quoted in G.V. Plekhanov, *The Role of the Individual in History* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), pp.23–4.
- 3 Beales, ‘History and Biography’, p.282.
- 4 Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), ch.12.
- 5 Avner Offer, *The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.1.
- 6 Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983); Volker R. Berghahn, *Sarajewo, 28. Juni 1914: Der Untergang des alten Europa* (Munich: Dt. Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997).
- 7 For a detailed look at the shortcomings of Fussell’s work see Robin Prior & Trevor Wilson, ‘Paul Fussell at War’ in *War in History*, (1994) 1, 63–80.
- 8 Otto Pflanze, quoted in John C.G. Röhl, *The Kaiser and his Court: Wilhelm II and the Government of Germany* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p.109.
- 9 Robert Birley, *The Undergrowth of History* (London: Historical Association, 1955), pp.28–9
- 10 Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1996).
- 11 Quoted in Karina Urbach, *Bismarck’s favourite Englishman: Lord Odo Russell’s Mission to Berlin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), p.2.
- 12 Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1962).
- 13 Barbara Tuchman, *Practising History* (Basingstoke: Papermac, 1983), p.81.

- 14 J.S. Mill, *A System of Logic*, vii, 1. Quoted in E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1978), p.31.
- 15 Fritz Stern, *Einstein's German World* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999). Quoted in the review by David Blackbourn in *London Review of Books*, 3 February 2000, p.32.

Part One

The Allied Powers on the Western Front

Chapter 1

For Better or For Worse: Sir Henry Rawlinson and his Allies in 1916 and 1918

Peter Simkins

The current upsurge of renewed interest in the First World War has been marked by the publication of several perceptive analyses by British, Commonwealth and American scholars, of inter-Allied relations from 1914 to 1918, particularly those between the British and Dominion forces and the armies of the other Entente powers on the Western Front.¹ However, as William Philpott, one of the leading specialists in this subject area, has observed, the primary focus of such studies has been 'the high political decision making which lay behind alliance military policy'.² At the other end of the scale, attention has also been paid by scholars to the many contacts between British and Dominion junior officers and other ranks and Belgian and French civilians behind the lines.³ Rather less research has been devoted to inter-Allied command relationships at Army, corps and divisional level and the extent to which these influenced, or were affected by, the day-to-day conduct of operations on the Western Front. Like Philpott's own recent study of Britain, France and the Belgian Army, this essay seeks to fill another small part of that gap in the historiography of the Great War by examining how *one* of the British Army commanders – General Sir Henry Rawlinson – got on with his French and American counterparts at their crucial stages of the war in 1916 and 1918.

Rawlinson represents an interesting case study in this regard for a variety of reasons. As commander of the British Fourth Army, he was at the head of the principal formation which served directly alongside the French throughout the Somme offensive in 1916, in the defence of Amiens at Villers Bretonneux in April 1918, and finally in the victorious 'Hundred Days' offensive of August to November 1918. In each of the

offensives in question, Rawlinson's Fourth Army was in the forefront of the battle and arguably constituted the cutting edge of the Allied effort. Moreover, in his very full daily diary entries, Rawlinson presents a substantial body of personal evidence about the events which he witnessed and influenced. Of the other army commanders who, under Douglas Haig, had the most prolonged and direct contacts with Allied units and leaders, Herbert Plumer, of the British Second Army, left no papers, while Henry Horne, of the First Army – whose daily letters to his wife do survive – dealt mainly with the Portuguese, a minor ally in comparison with the French, Belgians and Americans.⁴ Fourth Army's operations in 1916 and 1918 were, of course, described in considerable detail in the British official history, but while the relevant volumes give extensive coverage to the discussions, agreements and occasional disputes between the Fourth Army and its allies, the official historians do not often deal with matters of temperament and personality and their record of inter-Allied relations is consequently rather flat and colourless in this respect.⁵ Similarly, the excellent study by Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson of Rawlinson's period of command does contain frequent references to French operations and the problems of co-ordination between Fourth Army and the French Sixth and First Armies in 1916 and 1918, yet reveals relatively little of Rawlinson's private thoughts and feelings. Sir Frederick Maurice's life of Rawlinson only fleetingly touches upon these issues and hardly makes any mention at all of Rawlinson's recurrent difficulties with General Debeney of the French First Army in the spring, summer and autumn of 1918.⁶ Even Rawlinson's Chief-of-Staff, Major General Sir Archibald Montgomery, diplomatically glosses over this controversial topic in his weighty account of the Fourth Army's operations and achievements in the 'Hundred Days'.⁷ Rawlinson's own diary, therefore, offers us perhaps the best means of gaining a real insight into the personal aspects of inter-Allied relations at Army command level.

One should emphasize that, as a rule, Rawlinson's dealings with his allies – and especially the French – were rarely tinged with the mixture of prickly intolerance, contempt, suspicion and chauvinism which all too often characterized the attitudes of his Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig. As early as November 1914, shortly after the First Battle of Ypres, Haig – then still commanding I Corps – was complaining of the French failure to relieve his hard-pressed and weakened formations. This, Haig commented, was because 'ever since we landed in France they seem ready to drain the last drop of blood out of the British force'.⁸ In March 1916, he wrote that 'there are not many officers in the French staff with gentlemanly ideas. They are out to get as much from the British as they possibly can'.⁹ Haig was no less acerbic in his remarks about individual Allied military leaders or officers from nations other

than France. Of Joffre, the French Commander-in-Chief, Haig observed in April 1916: '... I gather that he signs anything which is put in front of him and is really past his work, if indeed he ever knew anything practical about tactics as distinct from strategy'. General Wielemans, the Belgian Chief-of-Staff, was judged to be 'a nice kindly old man, but quite stupid and I should say very lazy', and officers of the first Portuguese contingent were seen as 'conceited wretches'.¹⁰ All would be much easier. Haig reflected, 'if I only had to deal with the Germans'.¹¹

In Haig's defence, he found Foch's command style more agreeable than that of Joffre and, though sometimes fractious, his relations with the former were, according to Philpott, generally 'based on mutual understanding and respect', a factor of great importance in the crises and in the final offensive of 1918.¹² Haig also formed a good opinion of a few Allied senior officers, such as General Rosada, who took over the Portuguese forces on the Western Front in the autumn of 1918, and General Degoutte, of the French Sixth Army, who was appointed Chief of Staff to the King of the Belgians in September that year. Degoutte, he remarked, 'has a Mongolian type of head, but I think him a first rate soldier, apparently honest and very keen. I think his selection to help the King of the Belgians is a very good one'.¹³

Although not totally free of the kind of prejudices revealed by Haig, Rawlinson – in his own diary entries – is, on the whole, less acid or patronizing than his superior when commenting upon Allied generals and politicians. For much of the time, Rawlinson seems to have been on genuinely good terms with the French and American soldiers and statesmen with whom he came into repeated contact. When, in February 1918, Rawlinson began his brief period of service on the Executive War Board of the Supreme War Council at Versailles, the *National News* reported that 'it is understood that General Foch particularly likes him' and the *Manchester Guardian* stated that his relations with the French had always been 'cordial'.¹⁴ During both the planning and operational phases of the Somme offensive between mid-February and mid-November 1916, Rawlinson recorded some twenty-three personal meetings with Foch, then commanding the French Northern Army Group, and seventeen with General Fayolle, commander of the neighbouring French Sixth Army.¹⁵ There were also, of course, many other written exchanges or telephone contacts, as well as reciprocal visits by staff and liaison officers, between their respective headquarters. After a fair proportion of these meetings, Rawlinson noted, for example, that Foch had been 'very affable', was 'in his best form and ... most cordial in every way' or that they had been 'entirely in accord'.¹⁶ Following a lunch with Fayolle on 26 April, Rawlinson wrote that the French Sixth Army commander 'has sound ideas and is

very wide awake for a man of 67'. When Foch and Fayolle came together to see Rawlinson on 7 May to discuss the thorny problem of the boundary between the two armies, Rawlinson felt that 'it is something to have come to an agreement without a squabble. They were both very nice about it and we parted the best of friends'.¹⁷ General Balfourier, whose XX Corps was deployed on the immediate right flank of Fourth Army, was deemed by Rawlinson to be a 'charming old gentleman'.¹⁸ In April 1918, the critical month in the defence of Amiens, Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister, visited Rawlinson's headquarters on at least three occasions, obviously seeking reassurance but also full of goodwill, and on 6 April – just after the First Battle of Villers Bretonneux – he brought Rawlinson a gift of chocolates.¹⁹ Later in 1918, as it was becoming clear that the Allies were within sight of victory, Rawlinson was generous in his praise of Foch's strategy of mounting successive, rolling attacks at different points along the front to keep the Germans off balance. 'Foch deserves all possible credit for the combination of these attacks. . . . It is good war . . .', Rawlinson commented on 12 September that year.²⁰

Rawlinson's mainly cordial relations with his allies stemmed, in part, from his moderate temperament. 'Rawly had a way of floating over and away from his troubles', wrote Edward Spears. Rawlinson himself confessed at the height of the Battle of the Somme: 'There are many worries and troubles in fighting a battle like this but I sleep like a top so am always fresh again the next day'.²¹ Sometimes the intense demands of operational command caused him to show signs of strain. He admitted, on 22 July and 19 October 1916, that he had experienced a 'worrying' day and, at the end of October, complained that it was 'the constant interviews and decisions that take it out of one, and most of all the people who will multiply their little worries till they look as if the future of the Empire depended on them'. Even then he added: 'Thank God, I have a sense of humour and can see the funny side of most of them'.²² Given Rawlinson's overall equability, his criticisms of his French and American allies, when they do occur, are therefore all the more significant.

Many of Rawlinson's initial problems in planning Fourth Army's role in the Somme offensive centred around the junction between the French and British forces in the Maricourt-Montauban area. He was especially concerned about the tactical and logistical difficulties created by the Maricourt salient. It would have made better administrative and logistical sense if the dividing line between the British and the French had been formed by the River Somme itself, but Foch insisted that Fayolle's Sixth Army should attack astride the Somme with Balfourier's XX Corps north of the river. The actual dividing line was settled in meetings between Foch, Fayolle and Rawlinson at the end of April and in May

1916, and, since the French needed access to Bray as a railhead, the boundary – as eventually agreed – ran through the middle of Bray and Maricourt. In the words of the British official historian, this was ‘a most awkward arrangement for both parties. . . . The Maricourt salient was too small, as the Fourth Army had pointed out, to be shared by two corps, particularly corps belonging to two different Armies of two different nations, with different ammunition and equipment, and with separate communications’.²³ Rawlinson felt it advisable to establish a defensive flank from Maricourt to Mametz and to oppose the inclusion of Montauban as part of the first objective.²⁴ He anticipated some trouble with the French on this question, noting in his diary on 18 April: ‘I know it will make the negotiations with the French more difficult but I am responsible for the attack of the Army and must deprecate taking in too much’.²⁵ In fact, Rawlinson appears to have discovered some common ground with Fayolle. After meeting Fayolle and Foch on 30 April, Rawlinson wrote: ‘I did not find Genl.Fayolles [sic] anxious to do much from the Maricourt Salient’. Two days later he was told that ‘Fayolles [sic] has put in a strong letter protesting against attacking from the Maricourt Salient and I am inclined to agree with him’.²⁶ However, Haig had already made it quite clear to Rawlinson that he was anxious to secure Montauban in the first attack and to develop subsequent operations ‘with due regard to the need to assist the French Army’, confirming his wishes regarding Montauban in writing on 16 May. As Rawlinson had confided in his diary over a week before: ‘. . . I am prepared to undertake it if D.H. so decides’.²⁷ Rawlinson’s preference for ‘bite and hold’ tactics rather than an attempted breakthrough again seems to have been shared by the French – notably Foch – but was similarly overruled by Haig.²⁸

The settlement of the inter-Army boundary did not completely allay Rawlinson’s fears about possible congestion in the Maricourt salient. ‘We shall be able to fix up the gun positions but it will be the hell of a squash’, he wrote on 30 April, and on 7 May he still thought it would be ‘a very tight fit’.²⁹ However, if, to date, his views had sometimes coincided more with those of the French than with the wishes of Haig, Rawlinson, from this point, encountered increasing difficulty with his allies on such issues as the timing and co-ordination of the assault – a problem which was to recur frequently throughout the Somme offensive and which would beset the Fourth Army again in 1918. Indeed, as the start of the offensive drew near, there were distinct signs of strain and reciprocal criticism between the various British and French headquarters. The choice of a mutually acceptable zero hour was one potential source of dispute. On 16 June Rawlinson took his chief of staff, Archie Montgomery, with him to discuss ‘several intricate points’ with Foch and Fayolle. Rawlinson recorded that the boundaries for the

planned advance, as well as behind the line, were fixed without a great deal of trouble although the time of the assault proved harder to settle: 'I tried 7 a.m. but finally had to agree to 7.30. Fayolles[sic] would have preferred 9 a.m. but that I considered too late as it would keep the Infy. waiting in the trenches for 6 hours and more'. Fayolle was obviously still unhappy about this as late as 26 June, less than a week before the start of the offensive. 'He said some of his Corps Comrs. did not want to attack till the afternoon'. Rawlinson replied that 7.30 'was the latest hour I would deliver the assault. He left to talk it over with Foch . . .'³⁰ Edward Spears, the British liaison officer with the French Sixth Army, had written two days earlier that the French tended to look upon the British 'as a kind of enemy or rival at the least provocation'.³¹ Rawlinson remained anxious to give Foch room to bring through as many divisions as he could collect but was determined that 'he must do his fair share of the fighting. I cannot pull the chestnuts out of the fire for him'. On 30 June, the eve of the offensive, Rawlinson was convinced that the French admired the way Fourth Army's part in the attack had been prepared. Nevertheless, he could not refrain from adding: 'If we do bring off a great success they will be jealous. If we do not they will say it is hopeless to try and break the line and will begin again to talk of making terms. This makes one's relations with them very difficult for they are like children in many ways'.³²

Haig's insistence on including Montauban among the first objectives was, in some respects, justified on 1 July. The disasters elsewhere on the British front notwithstanding, a combination of more imaginative tactics by two good-quality divisions – the 18th and 30th – and substantial support from the heavy artillery of the French XX Corps made this the only sector where Fourth Army achieved any real success on the opening day of the offensive.³³ Now it had to be decided where the attack should be renewed. Once more Rawlinson found himself more in tune with the views of Joffre and the French than with Haig. Rawlinson opted to make the next major effort in the centre and north of his front and Joffre too asked the British Army to attack in the north to secure Pozières and Thiepval. Haig, on the other hand, wanted to exploit the success on the right at Montauban. Matters came to a head on 3 July when Haig felt compelled to remind Joffre that, as the British Commander-in-Chief, he was solely responsible to his own Government for the actions of the British Army and must therefore refuse to follow a tactical plan with which he did not concur. The official historian remarks that Haig 'emphasized his readiness to conform, as he had always done, to General Joffre's strategy, to this extent treating him as generalissimo of the Allied forces; but he could go no further'.³⁴

The irony of this situation, as Elizabeth Greenhalgh rightly suggests, was that 'Haig was proposing to maintain and exploit contact with the French while Joffre intended to break the connection which had been the linchpin of his 1916 strategy . . .'.³⁵ The fact that, on this occasion, Haig's view prevailed had a number of important implications. First, the incident drove Haig into a 'statement of independence which was to intensify in the coming weeks'.³⁶ Secondly, Joffre became less willing, for some time, to meet Haig in person and resigned himself to allowing the British greater freedom of action north of the Somme.³⁷ Thirdly, because Britain, in mid-1916, was still essentially the junior partner in the alliance, Haig was obliged to follow Joffre's overall strategic directives although he was equally resolved to determine for himself the best tactical means of fulfilling them. Consequently, as Philpott succinctly puts it: ' . . . for the next two-and-a-half months the Allied armies were effectively conducting separate offensive operations side by side, rather than the co-ordinated strategic operation they had prepared'.³⁸ The outcome for Rawlinson was a summer and autumn of preoccupation with operations alongside the French – initially at Trones Wood, then around Guillemont and Ginchy, and finally in the Lesbœufs-Morval and Le Transloy sectors. Joffre's desire, after 3 July, to leave the tactical details of the offensive to his subordinates had some benefits in this regard, as Rawlinson continued to get on reasonably well with Fayolle and Foch. The negative aspect for Rawlinson was that, as the pressure for him to succeed on the right grew with every passing week, so his relationship with his own Commander-in-Chief temporarily deteriorated while the possibility of problems with his French allies over matters of tactical detail likewise increased.

Rawlinson's difficulties were exacerbated by French criticism of, and doubts about, British operational methods, and by a divergence between the two armies, in some areas of tactics, as the offensive progressed. Advancing in small groups rather than long lines, and making good use of cover, the French infantry had performed well on 1 July and Fayolle's Sixth Army had gained all of its objectives and more on the first day of the battle, with the I Colonial Corps, south of the Somme, establishing itself within assaulting distance of the German Second Position by nightfall.³⁹ In contrast to the deliberate advance of the British infantry, the French 'swarmed forward . . . illusive as quicksilver', Spears recalled.⁴⁰ French officers compared the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to 'a second rate Italian force perpetually on the point of giving trouble'.⁴¹ Although much research needs to be undertaken on the subject of tactical cross-fertilization between the Allied armies, it is known that some French tactical manuals and pamphlets were translated and issued to the BEF. It is also apparent that Spears submitted frequent reports on French tactics and that Haig

himself tried to ensure that Rawlinson and the other Army commanders were made aware of the lessons of the fighting at Verdun. On 19 July, Haig urged Fourth Army to 'follow the example of the French, who were pushing forward small detachments and making good such ground as was possible without heavy fighting'.⁴² However, there is no real evidence in Rawlinson's diary for 1916 that he made any significant attempt to disseminate such lessons. On the contrary, Rawlinson seems to have studiously ignored French doubts and fears about his projected night assembly and dawn assault on the German Second Position between Longueval and Bazentin le Petit on 14 July, even though Balfourier sent Spears, on the eve of the attack, to point out that the operation was quite impossible for inexperienced troops.⁴³ Rawlinson did not give due credit to the support provided by French artillery for the attack, but the outstanding success of the operation served to intensify the BEF's burgeoning tactical independence. Again, an advance on Fourth Army's right made it inevitable that Rawlinson's future operations would continue to be inextricably linked with those of the French yet, at the same time, this growing British tactical independence henceforth caused joint planning to degenerate 'into often bitter arguments about lines of demarcation and matters of detail'.⁴⁴

Rawlinson's own reactions to criticism on tactical matters were somewhat inconsistent. On 21 September, he discussed the varying methods of the French and British with John Du Cane, who was shortly to take command of XV Corps and who had, in turn, recently been talking to Spears. 'The French', noted Rawlinson, 'say we do not study the ground sufficiently and are not so precise in our preparations as they are. Our Infy. is better than theirs, our guns are not so good'. Rawlinson went on to assert that: 'Our Arty. organisation differs in that we use the Corps to control the Arty. while they use the Divn. Who is right time can alone decide'.⁴⁵ However, on 29 September – following criticisms of British generals and methods reported to have been made to Foch by David Lloyd George, the Secretary of State for War – Rawlinson told Lord Derby, the Under-Secretary of State for War, that he did not think the BEF had much to learn from the French, particularly in artillery tactics. 'In this connection', he urged, 'it is interesting to note that the principle we have always adopted in the British Army of the establishment of a time-table for an attack, and the imposition of stationary and creeping barrages to cover the infantry advance, has been adopted by the French Sixth Army . . .' Even so, he reassured Derby about the health of the alliance: 'The French and British armies now fighting in France are one', he declared. 'The intimate relationship which exists between us is of the most cordial and confidential nature. There are no secrets, and each is out to help the other to the utmost of its powers, . . .'⁴⁶

The Fourth Army commander's claims on behalf of British tactics may have been a trifle premature but, nonetheless, had some substance as, by late 1916, the BEF had undeniably begun the process of tactical and technological improvement which was to earn it the leading role in the final Allied offensive of 1918.⁴⁷ By the same token, his remarks on Franco-British relations on the Western Front were, perhaps, more than a little disingenuous, since his own day-to-day dealings with the French in the summer and autumn of 1916 were not entirely straightforward. As at the start of the offensive, many of the minor squabbles were caused by problems over the timing and co-ordination of attacks, and such difficulties were not eased by Rawlinson's inability to secure Guillemont until the first week of September – a perceived failure which prompted Haig, in August, to criticize Rawlinson's repeated attacks with limited forces on narrow frontages and to send him a stern reminder of an Army commander's duties.⁴⁸ Postponement of attacks by either the French or the British, often for seemingly valid operational reasons, were possibly the most common cause of mutual irritation. A typical incident of this type occurred on 22 July, when the French – whose XX Corps was to have co-operated with an attack by the British XIII Corps against the German Second Position between Falfemont Farm and Longueval, including Guillemont – announced that they would not be ready until 24 July. After telephoning GHQ to bring some pressure to bear on Foch, Rawlinson wrote tersely in his diary: 'The postponement is very disgusting and it is most wrong of the French not to have given us more warning. It has much annoyed me'.⁴⁹ Sometimes – as on 5 August, when XIII Corps asked for the postponement of an attack on Guillemont – the boot was on the other foot. The French 'were by no means pleased at the alteration', Rawlinson admitted.⁵⁰ Four days later Rawlinson informed subordinate commanders, including Congreve of XIII Corps, that the attack on Guillemont must be renewed 'when we are ready but not before. We will not be pushed into a premature attack by the French'.⁵¹ On 25 August, after Rawlinson had been forced to cancel a XIV Corps operation near Guillemont, Haig told Rawlinson in person that 'the French are saying nasty things about us for not attacking yesterday on their left'.⁵² However, it should be acknowledged too that, in mid-August, Foch and Fayolle incurred the displeasure of Joffre as a result of their readiness to co-operate with the British in subsidiary operations. Joffre tried twice – in August and October – to re-impose the original strategy based upon combined attacks on a broad front rather than the succession of intermediate, narrow-front attacks with shallow objectives which had become the norm during much of July, August and September.⁵³ On the latter occasion, the implied criticism stung Haig – on 19 October – into another sharp