British Battle Planning in 1916 and the Battle of Fromelles: a Case Study of an Evolving Skill

Author:
Lee, Roger

Publication Date:
2013

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/16470

BRITISH BATTLE PLANNING IN 1916 AND THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES: A CASE STUDY OF AN EVOLVING SKILL

ROGER VERNON LEE

Thesis submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of New South Wales
Canberra

2013

ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.'

Signed .....

Date 31 October 2013

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

'I hereby grant the University of New South Wales or its agents the right to archive and to make available my thesis or dissertation in whole or part in the University libraries in all forms of media, now or here after known, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I retain all proprietary rights, such as patent rights. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.
I also authorise University Microfilms to use the 350 word abstract of my thesis in Dissertation Abstract International (this is applicable to doctoral theses only).
I have either used no substantial portions of copyright material in my thesis or I have obtained permission to use copyright material; where permission has not been granted I have applied/will apply for a partial restriction of the digital copy of my thesis or dissertation.'

Signed .....

Date 31 October 2013

AUTHENTICITY STATEMENT

'I certify that the Library deposit digital copy is a direct equivalent of the final officially approved version of my thesis. No emendation of content has occurred and if there are any minor variations in formatting, they are the result of the conversion to digital format.'

Signed .....

Date 31 October 2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has had a long and tortuous gestation. It has mirrored the dramas in my life for the past 15 years. For this reason, I am indebted to a large number of people. First among these are of course my two supervisors. Professor Jeffrey Grey has had the unenviable task now of supervising a number of my forays into academic endeavour and, despite this exposure, has remained calm and supportive and forever encouraging. I remain amazed our friendship has survived the experiences. To my co-supervisor, Emeritus Professor Peter Dennis, I owe a debt of gratitude beyond recounting. When my morale flagged, Peter was there to pick me up. When my endeavour failed, he was there to prod me back into action. It is fair to say without his support and guidance, this exercise would never have seen finality. I am also indebted to two very good friends, Professor Peter Stanley and Professor Gary Sheffield. Indeed, ultimately, this exercise is entirely their fault. Peter Stanley, with his engagingly entitled paper *Paul the Pimp reconsidered: Australian 'G' staffs on the Western Front* captured my imagination and started me on the road of discovery about that most misrepresented group. Gary Sheffield then fuelled this interest and, with his interest, enthusiasm, nay passion, for properly and objectively examining the British effort in World War I, encouraged me to look more deeply into one of the many myths that so plague this field of study. Apart from his extensive publications, upon which I have drawn freely, Gary has always been a willing foil for my more extreme (arguably silly) ideas and a great source of guidance when the way ahead seemed lost.

The staff at the Australian War Memorial and the National Archives in London have always been wonderful. No effort was too much and I thank them unreservedly. In particular, I would like to thank Craig Tibbitts of the AWM, both a fellow traveller and an indefatigable source of obscure documents.

A part-time PhD is madness and it would have been impossible for me to even consider it without the constant backing of my work colleagues and my employer, the Australian Army. My Army supervisors have always been understanding supporters of my enrolment and assisted me with both study leave and with their patience when the pressures of study and work became a little over-burdensome. My colleagues, especially Bill Houston, Neil Dailey and Andrew Richardson, have been understanding itself when I spent my extended lunchtimes buried in some dusty tome or furiously typing. Andrew Richardson also read the final draft and provided some well-needed criticism. Having the physical and intellectual resources of the Army History Unit around me has also been of enormous benefit.

Finally, I cannot say enough to express my gratitude to my family, both for their support and for their forbearance. My father-in-law, Ugo Bayada, read the entire thesis as it was produced, chapter by chapter, and saved me from many a grammatical pitfall or garbled expression. The family routine has largely revolved around my study. There were never complaints when, leaving a pile of dirty dishes, I went back to my books. My late wife Cathy was with me at the beginning and it was she who encouraged me to set off down this road. After she lost her fight with cancer, and when it looked like this journey had reached its end, Jenny came into my life, shouldered the burden and reignited my drive to finish. It is Jenny who deserves any credit from this enterprise. When my interest flagged, she combined with Peter Dennis to rebuild it. She kept me plied with coffee and food and tried to shield me from the daily grind of domesticity so I could focus on this task.

She has steel in her soul too: woe betide me if I was caught playing computer games when I was supposed to be working. Without the support of both these wonderful women, this study definitely would not have happened. My children (Ben, Nick, Tom, Phil and Heather), who primarily laughed at my stupidity, also deserve my thanks for motivating me to keep at it. My son Ben's constant cheerful predictions that I would never finish were a powerful motivation. The last word, as usual, should go to my stepdaughter, Heather. Now in her honours year at James Cook University and about to embark on her own PhD journey, the often-repeated jibe that she would finish her PhD before me was another major motivation. Sorry, Heather!!

ABSTRACT

Bad planning has become a standard explanation in the historiography of World War I for poor British battlefield performance. Often, poor planning is explicitly charged with being the cause of high casualties and tactical defeats. Rarely though are the failures of the plan identified in detail or with precision and even more rarely do the critics place the alleged failure of the plan into the context of what the plan was, what the limitations on the planners were and why elements of the plan allegedly failed.

This thesis examines the process by which a military plan was developed and implemented by the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front in 1916. A battle plan was nothing more than a blueprint for bringing together at the right time and in the right place all the combat elements needed in order to give the attacking infantry the greatest chance of success. British battle planning had no doctrine and no Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide it. At each level of headquarters, planning was driven by different perspectives and requirements, factors seldom exposed in analyses of why battles unfolded the way they did. This study examines the battle planning process vertically, in that it follows the progress of a battle plan from its inception in the strategic designs of the supreme commander down through the various intermediate level commands at operational and tactical headquarters until it becomes the orders that sent the infantry forward into the attack. It does so by analysing the following in the context of a case study of the Battle of Fromelles, 19 July 1916:

- Composition and nature of the specialist planning staff;
- The strategic level concept and its strategic context;
- The operational level plan in the context of the Somme campaign;
- The higher or grand tactical plan at the Corps headquarters;
- Conversion of the grand tactical plan into a Divisional plan; and
- The detail of the Brigade plan to guide the attack.

The Battle of Fromelles provided the structure of the study as its small scale enabled the process of the evolution of the plan to be followed, the factors that influenced and occasionally changed the intention or the explicit orders from superior headquarters to be identified and the clear separation of the original intentions and objectives from the eventual outcomes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GLOSSARY OF COMMON ACRONYMS

AA&QMG	Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General
ADC	Aide de Camp
ADMS	Assistant Director Medical Services
ADOS	Assistant Director Ordnance Services
AFA	Australian Field Artillery
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AO	Army Order
APM	Assistant Provost Marshal
ASC	Army Service Corps
Bde	Brigade (approximately 4,500 men)
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BGGS	Brigadier General General Staff
BGRA	Brigadier General Royal Artillery
BM	Brigade Major
Bn	Battalion (approximately 1000 troops)
CB	Counter-Battery
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CHA	Commander Heavy Artillery
CO	Commanding Officer
Coy	Company (approximately 220 troops)
CRA	Commander Royal Artillery
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
CT	Communication trench
DA	Divisional Artillery
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
DAC	Divisional Ammunition Column
DADMS	Deputy Assistant Director Medical Services
DADOS	Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Services
DAQMG	Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General
DA&QMG	Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster General
Div	Division (In 1916, approximately 18,000 troops)
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DMT	Director of Military Training
DTMO	Divisional Trench Mortar Officer
FOO	Forward Observation Officer
FSM	Field Service Manual
FSR	Field Service Regulations
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff Officer
HA	Heavy Artillery
HAG	Heavy Artillery Group
HE	High Explosive
HQ	Headquarters
IO	Intelligence Officer
LO	Liaison Officer

LofC	Lines of Communication
MG	Machine Gun
MGGS	Major General General Staff
MGO	Machine Gun Officer
MGO	Master General of the Ordnance
MGRA	Major General Royal Artillery
OC	Officer Commanding
OR	Other Rank
POW	Prisoner of War
psc	Passed Staff College
RAFA	Royal Australian Field Artillery
RAGA	Royal Australian Garrison Artillery
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
SAA	Small Arms Ammunition
SC	Staff Captain
TM	Trench Mortar
TMB	Trench Mortar Battery
TMO	Trench Mortar Officer
TO	Transport Officer

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Definitions of terms used throughput this analysis.

Strategic: Refers to the politico-military level where war-winning strategies and policies were decided.

Operational: In a specific sense, refers to activity within a defined area of operations. This could be the British zone on the Western Front or a specific part of the British zone when considering a major action. Thus the Somme is described as an operation, being a major offensive both in terms of scale, timing and objective. Operations are usually the primary concern of armies and corps, although many examples exist in which this level of headquarters became involved in the detailed planning and implementation of actual battles.

The use of the term 'operational' to describe the actions of the intermediate level planners and commanders is a relatively new. More traditionally, the tactical level of war was broken into 'grand tactics' which included coordination, support and supply for the frontline troops and 'minor tactics' that referred to actions of the front line troops alone. The term 'operational' now encompasses what was traditionally included in 'grand tactical' and provides a clearer demarcation between the differing levels of command in a battle.

Tactical: The lowest level of military activity, the tactical level, refers almost exclusively to the manoeuvres associated with battle. Tactical actions usually meant those conducted by divisions, brigades, battalions and companies.

In theory, Sir Douglas Haig, being the commander-in-chief of the British forces on the Western Front, operated at the operational level – the Western Front being a theatre of operations defined by set geographic boundaries. While interested in, and with some influence over, British operations on other Fronts, such as Italy or in Palestine, Haig had no command role in these other areas of operations. (In most respects, he was a competitor with them for priority in men, supplies and equipment.) However, given his command, the British Expeditionary Force, was engaging the main enemy on the main front, in concert with Allied forces, he could not avoid being involved at the strategic level in developing plans to win the war and in formulating national policies to achieve that outcome. Given the British Army's lack of experience in operating with such large forces, Haig, and his headquarters, also found it impossible not to become involved in tactical matters, often prescribing very minor tactical details into general orders. For an example of the latter, see Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (eds), *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 190.

Combat support and **combat supply support** are modern-day terminology used to describe the complexity of support available to an attacking force. In addition to the artillery and engineers mentioned above, combat support would also include aircraft and armoured vehicles directly assisting the attacking troops while combat supply support included all the reinforcement and resupply elements that brought more combat power forward to help the attackers. For the Australians in this war, the most famous of the

combat supply elements were the carrier or load-carrying tanks used by Monash at Hamel in 1918. In 1916, especially in minor operations such as Fromelles, combat supply support usually came from the carrying parties of the reserve brigade or reinforcing battalions within the attacking brigade itself.

INTRODUCTION

> In every great tragedy there has to be a villain, but in military affairs the British never give the enemy that part, for that would be to concede that the enemy was of some importance. Instead, the British commanders are singled out for the part; the situation being summed up in the phrase 'lions led by donkeys'. Decisions made at the time are, with the advantage of hindsight, seen as wrong, but the factors behind the decisions are rarely explained.[1]

One of the persistent myths of World War I remains the perception that the British armies, including that small element of it known as the Australian Imperial Force, were led by unintelligent men of limited imagination who lacked basic skills of command, leadership, planning and organisation. Despite the concerted efforts of some scholars for the past forty years, arguably beginning with the work of John Terraine,[2] opinion, including much academic opinion,[3] of the British military leadership of the war, at all levels of command down to and including the brigade, remains convinced that they were talentless, incompetent and callous. Included in many of the pejorative assessments is the frequently encountered assertion that British military leadership was particularly poor at battle planning. Even a brief examination of the literature on the war will quickly uncover statements such as 'the battle was badly planned' or 'poor planning ensured the attack was doomed to failure'.[4] Statements such as these have been repeated so frequently and have stood unchallenged for so long, that they now are accepted, almost universally, as one of the principal underlying causes of poor British military performance throughout of the war, even overshadowing the eventual British victory.

Rarely though do the critics actually explain what they mean by planning. Planning a battle, of any scale and at any time, is a complex and uncertain activity. Despite those who see careful and complete planning as the solution to military uncertainty, it remains a most imprecise art. Military planning, unlike the type of planning that occurs in civil engineering or project management, faces unique challenges. The scale, range and diversity

---

[1] P. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', *British Army Review* 86 (August, 1987), 30.
[2] John Terraine, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* [1963] (London: Cassell & Co., 2000).
[3] While there are many, the works of Tim Travers are arguably the most vitriolic in the scholarly literature. E.g. Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990). Among the populist views, any of the works by John Laffin are staunch perpetuators of the myth while others, such as Alan Clark, have helped create it. Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961).
[4] J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 305, 326.

of the factors involved in military planning is enormous. Key among the unknown and frequently unknowable factors is the enemy, who has never been predictable, cooperative or quantifiable. However, there are many others, of which only some are in the authority of the military planner to control. Battlefield planning during the war, as now, encompassed every facet of the battle. The planners had to plan for every action, from the preliminary logistical build-up including calculating then stockpiling sufficient ammunition, food and engineering stores. They had to identify, prepare and move the troops to be employed. They had to identify, prepare and move all the various combat support arms, from aircraft and artillery to medical facilities and prisoner-of-war holding cages. They had to coordinate building roads and railways with deciding where and when to attack. Nothing happened on a World War I battlefield, with the possible exception of daily routine activities, that was not planned. Yet there is little coverage in the literature on World War I, that addresses in any analytical sense how a battle was planned. Even less has been written about the planning process itself and practically nothing has been written about the process that converted the broad concepts from higher headquarters into the tactical orders directing the actions of the assault troops.

The basic fact overlooked by many critics of British military leadership in this war is that they were not men who lay awake at night devising schemes to get their soldiers, particularly their Dominion soldiers, killed. They were the men charged with trying to win the war that their politicians and citizens had embraced so enthusiastically and they had to do it with the tools their country had given them, including their own experiences, skills and training. Undoubtedly, the British military leadership made errors; in many cases grievous errors that resulted in many soldiers being killed, often unnecessarily as it later transpired. It is a simple yet unreasonable step to blame the military setbacks and disasters purely upon the leadership involved. A more balanced assessment of the performance of specific commanders and planners needs, however, to be drawn from within the context and against the background of the situation in which they found themselves.

To criticise the British command for errors in battle planning not only requires that the errors themselves be identified but evidence that the means to change the plan to avoid these errors were available to the commanders and planners. It is not reasonable to criticise Haig, in the context of the Third Ypres campaign, for failing to predict the heaviest rains in one hundred years. Conversely, if poor battlefield planning indeed contributed to the

British military misfortune during the War and it can be shown how this occurred, then criticism is warranted. If a British General neglected to provide enough ammunition for an attack, despite it being available to him and the means to move it was present, because his logistics plan did not allow the time to move stocks forward, then clearly his plan was flawed. If, however, the same General failed to provide enough ammunition because none was available to him or the roads were destroyed by last-minute enemy action, it was not a failure of planning that led to the outcome and it was not a failure of the General himself. In this war, generals had much less discretion over whether or not to attack than the critics presume, as there were so many other factors at play, both politically and along the whole Front. The notion that the British could have stood on the defensive and not tried to defeat the Germans in battle is a theme which appears to have gained some currency among recent commentators on the war. It is unsustainable when placed into the political environment of the day.

The further complication in the analysis of British battle planning is that the planning process itself was not a simple or clear procedure set down in any manuals or standard operating procedures. Analysing a battlefield outcome does not, of itself, identify whether there was underlying planning methodology to assist planners in their role. Before any criticism of planning failures can be fully sustained, analysis of the process by which the battle plan was devised, developed and disseminated is necessary. Yet there is little written on British battle planning and virtually nothing that examines the process by which broad strategic and operational concepts were turned into specific orders to squads of assault troops to go somewhere and do something.

This thesis seeks to redress this gap in understanding of the command and control process. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the process or steps by which the strategic commander identified a military problem, proposed a military solution and the planning process produced a set of orders and plans for the attacking infantry to implement. It will examine the structure of the planning hierarchy within the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the process by which plans and orders were developed and examine the planners themselves. The Battle of Fromelles provides a useful case study to examine this process for several reasons. It was a comparatively small action so orders and plans, while still voluminous, are not so extensive as to overwhelm the analysis. The Battle occurred in 1916 mid-way through the War. The core of the pre-war trained staff officer cadre was either

killed by this stage or so diluted by the expansion of the BEF that individual skills were less likely to be able to compensate for poor process. Similarly, at this time the number of skilled and experienced junior tactical leaders was still so small (relative to the needs of a rapidly expanding army) that, unlike the experiences in 1918, there was much less opportunity for failures in the planning process to be corrected at the implementation stage by experienced junior leaders. The controversy that now surrounds the battle also serves to highlight the usual grounds the critics of British planning and leadership use to sustain their arguments.

At six o'clock on the afternoon of 19 July 1916, two infantry divisions, one British and one Australian, launched an attack on a part of the German front line approximately one hundred kilometres north of the major Anglo-French operation then underway on the Somme. After a night of vicious fighting, the enemy was back in possession of his line just after dawn the next day and heavy casualties had been incurred by the two assaulting divisions, including over 1700 killed in the 5th Australian Division alone. The short duration, heavy casualties and failure to hold any captured territory have made the attack one of the more controversial British attacks in a year marked by controversial and bloody infantry assaults. The tactical order that initiated the attack, from the controlling XI Corps headquarters of the British First Army, made clear the intention of the operational planning staff. It was to be a limited assault intended to pin in place the German units in the area of the attack and prevent their being sent as reinforcements to the Somme sector.[5] In a mix of tactical and operational objectives, the action was intended to seize and hold a small section of the first line of the enemy's defences and thus threaten the disruption of his defensive line protecting the strategic target of Lille.

The repulsed attack attracted little official attention at the time amid the dramatic developments on the Somme and was accorded little recognition in the later official accounts of the British war effort for July 1916. After initial recriminations by some Australians involved in the battle, many years of relative obscurity about the battle almost

[5] 'It has been ascertained that the enemy is moving is troops on our front to resist the attacks of our comrades to the South. The Commander-in-Chief has directed the XIth Corps to attack the enemy front of us, capture his front system of trenches, and thus prevent him from reinforcing his troops to the South. Two Divisions are to attack the enemy's line of trenches along a front of 4,200 yards. I wish all ranks to understand the plan of attack, and I trust them not to disclose it to anyone'. XI Corps Order RHS 1146 of 16 July 1916, signed R. Haking, Lieut-General. General Staff, XI Corps, War Diary. WO95/881, The National Archives.

caused it to become one of the many minor, rarely noted actions of the war. In recent years, due largely to the publication of Corfield's book and the later discovery of the remains of 250 Australian and British dead from the battle, the justification for and conduct of the battle has again become topical and controversial. A number of valid questions about it have been raised: was it a failure, was it unnecessary, could it have been implemented better and why did the official record fail to make much mention of it? Most popular opinion now regards the outcome as a tragic failure based, it would appear, almost solely on the inability to hold the captured line and the high casualties incurred.

When taken in isolation, the high casualties involved do show the battle was indeed a tragedy. Equally, the failure to take and hold the section of enemy trench line as planned, suggests the attack was a failure. However, before any such judgment can be considered well-grounded, it needs to be tested against the objectives set for the attacking force and in the context of attacks of this type at this stage in the war; in other words, what did the plan set as the real objectives for the attacking force to achieve? Regrettably, most commentaries on Fromelles do not test the 'futile failure' judgment against the planned intended outcomes sought for the attack.[6] Most pejorative assessments are rarely supported by analysis and, arguably, the almost complete acceptance of the critical view of the battle has discouraged more analytical examination of the underlying assumptions. It might even be argued that unquestioning acceptance of the claimed failures of the commanders and planners, relying solely on the high casualties incurred as evidence, has completely obscured the original intention of the operation and derailed any objective debate as to its success or failure.

The controversy about the battle was and remains greater in Australia than in the United Kingdom. It was the first major battle fought by the Australian Imperial Force

---

[6] A comprehensive example of this style of critique without full context is found in Robin Corfield's book on Fromelles, in which he states, 'Both of these assaults [Neuve Chapelle and Festubert] were directed by Haig, both were total failures, but curiously Haig got away from them without a blemish to his reputation. One of his senior officers at this time was Haking, and likewise, he was never held accountable for the lamentable planning.' In the preceding paragraphs, there is an emotional recording of casualties, with passing references to a breakdown in communications and lack of ammunition but nowhere is there a detailed analysis of the final plan and of the implementation, with links established between what did or did not go according to this plan and why. Failure of the infantry to adhere to a planned rate of advance is a planning failure if this rate is beyond the capacity of the men to comply because the terrain was observably bad or their load too heavy. It is not a planning failure if their inability to comply is due to actions of the enemy beyond what the planners could reasonably have been expected to know, such as new and undiscovered defences or a new weapon system. Such criticisms fail to acknowledge that war is a most uncertain activity and no plan is guaranteed of success. Robin Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles* (Melbourne: Miegunyan Press, 2009), 24.

(AIF) on the Western Front. It was also considered by some Australians who took part at the time, including several senior officers, to have been a bloody failure and the epitome of the incompetent and callous British generals and their staffs.[7] Encapsulated in this now entrenched Australian view is the idea that if the battle had been better planned the outcome might have been different.[8] However, as with the general comments, these partisan Australian judgments are also made without taking into consideration either the context in which the battle was fought or basing them on any analysis of the plans that directed the attack.

The obvious but usually overlooked fact that Fromelles was fought as part of and in reaction to the Somme campaign is a major influence on any assessment of the battle. Because Fromelles was peripheral to, and not part of, the main Somme attack, the planning of what was essentially a small tactical supporting action was of secondary importance to the higher command level of the BEF.[9] However, this lesser priority and limited interest in Fromelles by the senior command group of the BEF has been used as prima facie evidence to support their claims that, in allowing the battle to commence in the circumstances that then existed and with allegedly inadequate plans in place, the planners and commanders were clearly incompetent. Indeed, some commentators accuse the British high command of lacking moral courage in the final implementation of the plan to attack Fromelles.[10] Such a damming judgment however, can only be sustained if clear causal links are established between the outcome of the attack and the plans that directed it.

There is so much controversy about the battle that it is difficult to summarise the key points of criticism. Many critics focus on the futility of the attack, most linking the casualties incurred to the failure to seize and hold ground. Others, especially those critical of the British high command in this war, use Fromelles as an example of poor planning, poor decision-making and poor leadership. It is rare in any account of the battle to find discussion of or criticism of the competence of the private soldiers or junior leaders involved, yet it mattered little how good a military plan was if those charged with its implementation lacked the skills necessary to achieve the goals set. The underlying base of

---

[7] Brigadier-General H.E. 'Pompey' Elliott, quoted in Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber*, 165.
[8] Patrick Lindsay, *Fromelles* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2007), 75-6.
[9] Fromelles involved two new, essentially raw divisions in what was intended to be a feint. Just five days earlier, five divisions had been engaged in the second major attack of the Somme campaign and the fighting from that attack was continuing during the final planning phases of Fromelles.
[10] A.H. Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme* [1964] (London: Pan Books, 1966), 200.

all the critics is that the battle should not have been fought. Some critics claim that the high command understood this even before the first attacking soldier left his trench. Others claim the problem was a misunderstanding of the purpose of the attack. They state that the British divisional commander did understand the intention of the attack, whereas the Australian divisional commander did not and this misunderstanding explains the marked difference in the casualties sustained by the two attacking divisions.[11] What the body of material about this battle does reveal clearly is that it is extremely difficult to take a single event out of the context in which it is occurring and, without fully analysing the factors contributing to success or failure, arrive at a simple assessment of blame or ultimate responsibility.

Characteristics of the critics themselves contribute to the enduring image of the battle and the planners who conceived it. One of the best-known Australian critics, the commander of the 15th Australian Brigade, Brigadier H.E. 'Pompey' Elliott, described the battle as 'incredibly bungled' and called into question the abilities of the planners and commanders who oversaw the attack.[12] Elliott, while a participant, was not an objective commentator on the battle, as his brigade suffered very heavy casualties and, to his eyes, achieved very little for its efforts. There were other reasons to treat his views, and many of the other commentaries on the battle, with caution. He was too far down the command chain to understand the full picture and the way the plan meshed together; he had insufficient time to familiarise himself with the battlefield; and as Fromelles was his first battle in France, he lacked any experience or understanding of warfare on the Western Front. Yet, and despite these well-known limitations, his views have served to shape both serious analysis and popular opinion of the battle for more than ninety years.[13] The factors that led Elliott to his views were in many cases similar to those that contributed to the outcome of the battle itself: inexperience and inadequate training, insufficient time to prepare and initial confusion over the nature of the attack. Like the bulk of the troops in the attack, Elliott had little experience of conducting a formal, frontal infantry attack on a prepared and alert enemy position. He was not, at that time, well-equipped either to lead his troops in such an attack or to analyse afterwards what went wrong. He fell back upon

---

[11] Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: the British & the Somme 1916* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 186.
[12] H.E. Elliott, 'An Echo of War: British Inefficiency at Fleurbaix', quoted in Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber*, 401.
[13] Ross McMullin, *Pompey Elliott* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2002).

the time-honoured, but now largely discredited, tradition of defending the reputation of his men by discrediting his leaders and commanders. In addition to his incapacity to comment objectively on what he experienced at Fromelles, Elliott also failed to state precisely to what failures he was pointing. In all his words, and indeed in all the subsequent commentary and analysis, there is little precision about, or hard evidence provided of, the 'incredible bungling' the critics allege occurred, other than the standard emotive pointing to the appalling casualty count and to the fact that the attacking infantry did not retain any of the trenches they captured at such human cost.

Controversy aside, the small-scale of the operation combined with its relative remoteness from the massive Somme operation, provides an unparalleled opportunity to examine the full range of processes that went into planning a 1916 battle and of comparing the final plan for the attack with the outcomes it achieved. Given also that the conception of the Fromelles action occurred as part of the formulation of the strategic plan for the Somme campaign, the operational and tactical planning stages of Fromelles can only be analysed within the context of the overarching strategic picture and the operational planning for the Somme itself, thus providing some insight into the breadth of operational planning that characterised the Somme planning process as well.[14]

The literature on British battlefield performance during the war is vast. Much of this examines in great detail the actions of commanders both at the strategic or tactical levels and of junior leaders and the troops themselves in tactical actions.[15] Most of this consideration is 'horizontal', in the sense that it looks at decisions and actions of individuals at the same level, rather than following decisions vertically, that is, up and down the chain of command. Even in the literature that does examine in detail the interaction between commanders who could be seen to be operating at differing levels, such as the

---

[14] The strategic and operational setting is essential to understand factors such as troop numbers and availability for the operation, the extent of combat support provided and tactical decisions such as continuing the attack when all apparent rationale for it to continue had evaporated – its continuation might have been necessary to distract the enemy from another operation elsewhere.

[15] Books on Haig alone run to the hundreds. Many do not focus on the command and planning aspects of Haig's tenure. Among those that do, the most relevant and useful include John Terraine *Douglas Haig*, Gary Sheffield, *The Chief Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Arum Press, 2011), Andrew Wiest, *Haig The Evolution of a Commander* (Washington, DC: Potomac, 2005), Walter Reid, *Douglas Haig: Architect of Victory* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009), Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999) and, with some qualifications, J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig*. In addition, the timely appearance of Gary Sheffield and John Bourne, *Douglas Haig War Diaries and Letters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005) permitted Douglas Haig to give his own views on the question.

relationship between Haig and Rawlinson during the planning of the Somme, the focus is very much on the personal relationship between them as individuals rather than on the process by which plans for the battle evolved.

Command and control is a very broad concept and although there are many works that do look at the relationship between command and battle planning, these still tend to focus on what was occurring at the specific command level, usually either at the higher headquarters of the BEF or in headquarters of battalions. There is practically nothing written on the process of battlefield planning in the British Army in France that traces the process from the originating higher headquarters through to the issue of tactical orders to the assaulting infantrymen, examining the influences exerted upon the plan both from within the chain of command and from external sources.

Most of the literature that does consider battlefield planning does so in the context of command and does so as part of an analysis of an individual commander.[16] Prior and Wilson's excellent analysis of the career of Sir Henry Rawlinson does reveal some of the factors that impinged on his planning responsibilities and reveals the important dynamics in the development of higher level plans.[17] However, it was beyond the remit of that book to follow through on the process that saw Haig's plans converted into orders for the front line infantry. Consequently, it does not show the lower level influences, at Corps, Division and Brigade headquarters that shaped, and occasionally changed, higher command orders. The same can be said for Geoffrey Powell's study of General Sir Herbert Plumer.[18] Paul Harris, in his book on Haig,[19] frequently mentions areas of planning failure but usually does so in relation to the strategic and operational levels. He offers no reasons for the failure of planning, beyond attributing it to Haig's 'character'.

In addition to works examining the players in the command and planning role, there are innumerable specific and more general studies on aspects of the British Army's

---

[16] For example: Michael Senior, *Haking A Dutiful Soldier; Lt Gen Sir Richard Haking XI Corps Commander 1915-18* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012); Edwin Astill, *The Great War Diaries of Brigadier Alexander Johnston 1914-1917* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007); Don Farr, *The Silent General Horne of the First Army* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion, 2007); Christopher Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002) and John Baynes, *Far from a Donkey: The Life of General Sir Ivor Maxse* (London: Brassey's, 1995).
[17] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1915-1918* [1992] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004).
[18] Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer The Soldier's General* [1990] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004).
[19] Harris, *Douglas Haig.*

performance on the Western Front, including Divisional, Regimental and Battalion histories, that include relevant and useful information.[20] Again, however, the process by which plans developed and matured is not examined in useful detail. In these works, the focus tends inevitably to be upon the outcome of actions, not the processes that shaped the action in the first place.

There is even less written about the key planning element - the commander's staff. Planning was not an individual responsibility. Each headquarters had a large number of positions dedicated to planning. Despite this, the literature contains little that provides insight into them, their roles or responsibilities. Most published commentary consists primarily of critical asides and repeated jokes about their inefficiency, concerns for creature comfort and distance from the fighting. There are some scholars,[21] and a small number of works,[22] that have examined the staff objectively. Brian Bond has approached analysis of the staff systematically and systemically. He has both examined the training staff officers received in the pre-war period and, through his capable editing of two memoirs of staff officers,[23] has provided an essential insight into the responsibilities of these critical soldiers.

There are a few books that focus on the theory of command and control as exercised by the British on the Western Front. Martin Samuels' book on the subject still tends to examine command and control at each command level separately,[24] rather than following the process and progress of a plan down the command chain. Tim Travers, a vehement critic of British leadership, similarly does not examine vertically the process by which plans and orders were developed, although in his study on 1918 he does look at the

---

[20] G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: MacMillan, 2000); Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003); Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* [1980] (London: Pan Books, 2000); and Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons & Theories of War 1904-1945* [1982] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004).

[21] David French and Brian Holden Reid (Eds), *The British General Staff Reform and Innovation 1890-1939* London: Frank Cass, 2002).

[22] Col. W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18* [1939] (Stevenage, Herts: The Strong Oak Press, No date) and "G.S.O.", *G.H.Q. Montreuil-Sur-Mer* (London: Philip Allan and Co, 1920).

[23] Brian Bond and Simon Robbins (eds), *Staff Officer: The Diaries of Walter Guinness (First Lord Moyne) 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987) and Brian Bond (ed.), *Chief of Staff. The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall* (London: Leo Cooper, 1972).

[24] Martin Samuels, *Command and Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

changes and developments in British battle planning.[25] There are a number of excellent collections of edited chapters on command and planning that address command, control and planning in more detail.[26] Within the limitations of the short contributions to such works, only single specific aspects of command and planning are examined. The problem is that by the nature of such works, there is no linkage between each level of command to show how the process worked from top to bottom.

Given the place of Fromelles within the strategic and operational context of the Somme, a number of excellent studies of that operation provide some insight into the planning process. Prior and Wilson again provide considerable detail on the Somme plan and how it was implemented but again, they have neither the space nor, arguably, the remit in what they were seeking to achieve to follow the evolutionary process of the planning stage, except in broad detail.[27] Other works also focus on the broad outline of the plan but spend little analysis on the conversion of the operational concept into the tactical plan that guided the actions of the assaulting infantry.[28]

In contrast to the literature on British commanders and about the Somme, material on the battle of Fromelles has been, until comparatively recently, rare. Thanks to Robin Corfield's ground-breaking study,[29] renewed interest has seen several books, of varying quality, appear.[30] Most of these capture the essence of the battle well, many relying quite obviously on the relevant section of the Australian Official History with additional use of material from Corfield's book.[31] Few add much to the understanding of the battle and none considers the planning process or the battle plan itself in any detail, except for the old Divisional history, and then the planning is mentioned only peripherally.[32] Other detail on

---

[25] Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that Led to Victory in World War One* [1992] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005).
[26] Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman, *Command and Control on the Western Front. The British Army's Experience 1914-18* (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 2004) and Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann, *Leadership in Conflict 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000).
[27] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
[28] Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2003), and William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Abacus, 2009).
[29] Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber.*
[30] Lindsay*, Fromelles*, Peter Pedersen, *Fromelles* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2004), Paul Cobb, *Fromelles 1916* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2007).
[31] C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol. III, The A.I.F. in France: 1916* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1940).
[32] A.D. Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920).

the battle is contained in a number of battalion histories and some biographies but again, apart from the biographies of the more senior commanders,[33] planning is not considered.[34]

Battle planning has become enveloped in a shroud of mystery when applied to the process of sending soldiers to battle in 1916. This appears to be because it provides a 'short-hand' way of attributing everything that went wrong in a battle to 'poor planning'. This should not be the case. Battle planning, in 1916 as in 2013, was about preparing and co-ordinating a schedule of events and movements all designed for one purpose; to provide the attacking infantry with the best possibility of achieving the objectives set for them. There was nothing mysterious about the process so it should not be the scapegoat for poor performances of the attacking infantry or the supporting artillery. Planning should be assessed on what it said and what it coordinated, not on outcomes that, on examination, could be the result of factors well beyond the capacity of the plans that initiated the action to control. This thesis will attempt, by examining the process from the top of the chain of command to the infantry sections at the bottom, to show the strengths and weaknesses of British battle planning in 1916.

---

[33] McMullin, *Elliott;* Christopher Wray, *McCay;* and Peter Sadler, *The Paladin: A Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[34] Ron Austin, *Black and Gold: The History of the 29th Battalion AIF 1915-18* (Melbourne: Slouch Hat, 1997) and Robin Corfield, *Hold Hard, Cobbers The Story of the 57/60 Battalions* (Melbourne: 57/60 Battalion Association, 1992).

CHAPTER ONE

PLANNING THE BATTLE: WHO WERE THE PLANNERS?

> The foundation of a bureaucratic means of handling operations was well and truly laid during this winter [1915-1916] lull. And the tide was in flood that carried the great part of the personnel borne on the War Office vote into what were colloquially called 'Staff jobs'; the suction of it was already draining the combatant units. A gibe among us was that the War would end when a Staff job had been found for everyone and there was none left to man the fire-step.[1]

The battle of Fromelles was planned and implemented within the strategic setting of the great attritional battles of 1916: Verdun, the Brusilov Offensive and the Somme.[2] While it was not fought within the defined area of operations of the Somme offensive, it was still planned as a tactical supporting action within the overall concept of the Somme campaign. The critical point is that Fromelles, like practically every other attack on the Western Front, was a planned action. Despite some claims that Fromelles happened merely to promote the personal ambitions of an individual corps commander,[3] the available evidence suggests the British Army operated in a regulated, ordered environment where actions, from the smallest trench raid to a major defence against a German attack, occurred as the result of a plan, resulting from (using current military phraseology) the standard military appreciation process within a known concept of operations.[4] To mount an action the size of Fromelles required considerable operational, training, logistical and transport infrastructure preparation that could only be identified, coordinated and delivered once a plan had been developed. Being part of, but separate from the huge and complex Somme offensive, Fromelles provides a unique opportunity to examine the offensive planning process functioning in 1916 and identify

---

[1] J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* (London: Sphere Books, 1989), 177.
[2] See explanation of terms, page v.
[3] Brigadier-General H.E. 'Pompey' Elliott, quoted in Robin Corfield, *Don't forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles* (Melbourne: Miegunyan Press, 2009), 165.
[4] The volume and thoroughness of the training and advisory material circulated to the troops on the Western Front ensured that any soldier, of whatever rank (if interested enough to read the material) could be well-informed about the latest tactical innovations – of all nations involved – or the British Army's tactical or operational methods. Slow to begin, these training pamphlets rapidly became a common feature of life in the trenches. For example, in March 1916 a pamphlet on bombing was issued - General Staff at GHQ, *The Training and Employment of Bombers* (London: HMSO, 1916). In the same month, a pamphlet on trench warfare was issued: General Staff, *Notes for Infantry Officers on Trench Warfare* (London: HMSO, 1916). In September, a pamphlet on the use of small units in the offensive, based on lessons from the early French experiences, was issued: General headquarters, *The Offensive of Small Units* (London: HMSO, 1916).

its strengths and weaknesses and determine whether planning failures did contribute to the eventual outcome of that battle.[5]

The high number of casualties and apparent lack of success of the Somme offensive has given rise to a perception, encountered in both academic and popular historical commentary on the war, that the outcome of a specific battle or operation was due either solely or in large measure to poor or incompetent planning by incompetent commanders and staffs.[6]

> The first day of the battle of the Somme has always been perceived as a day of tragedy, with the slaughter of 60,000 men on the battlefield. What was deemed to be poor planning on the part of the British command meant that soldiers were sent into No Man's Land to face the horrors of uncut barbed wire and waves of German machine gun fire.[7]

Logically, this perception has some appeal: the thoroughness of any initial planning process must influence the final outcome.[8] In this view, poor planning must play its part, whether in relation to planned battles such as the first day of the Somme campaign, to unplanned, reactive battles such as the great British defensive battles of the German Spring Offensive in 1918 or the opportunistic exploitation battles that typically

---

[5] Unique because all the planning was done by staff not concerned with the larger battle. Planners of individual actions in the main Somme attack had to factor in coordination with other forces, shared support and competition for resources from common pools. None of these considerations were involved with the Fromelles planning once the final scope of the operation with its parameters of troops and supplies was established.

[6] In commenting on the planning for the second battle for Bullecourt in 1917, Andrews and Jordan well illustrate this point. 'The ANZAC commanders, Lieutenant General Sir William Birdwood, and Major General Sir Brudenell White, his chief-of-staff, were determined that this time they would do the job properly. They would have nothing to do with tanks, but instead organized a set-piece artillery and infantry assault using the 2nd Division. They therefore had the date of the attack postponed to give them more time to cut the wire, managed to have Gough's furthest objective cancelled, and made detailed preparations. They built roads and light railways to bring up the artillery and set up bases and supply dumps, while the troops practised on ground specially prepared to represent the German lines. Afterwards, there were conferences of the commanders at all levels. Tragically, it was all to no avail.' A.M. Andrews and B.G. Jordan, 'Second Bullecourt revisited: The Australians in France, 3 May 1917', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 15 (October, 1989), 34-5. See also Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 189.

[7] Andy Robertshaw, *Somme, 1 July 1916: Tragedy and Triumph.* (Oxford: Osprey, 2006), back cover synopsis.

[8] A Training Pamphlet, issued in March 1916, specifically recognised this: 'Confusion is apt to occur in any assault: it *is specially to be expected when attacking a maze of carefully prepared positions, and is the most frequent cause of failure.* Unless it can be prevented or minimised by careful preparation and training, the enemy, whose counter-attacks will have been planned and will be taking place over familiar ground, will probably succeed in driving the attackers back again.' General Staff, War Office, *Notes for Infantry Officers on Trench Warfare* (London: HMSO, 1916), 56 [emphasis added].

followed the first day of large offensive operations such as the Somme or Third Ypres.[9] Successful operations, for example the battle for Hamel in July 1918, are explained as being due to good planning. Command and planning indecision, or over-optimism, at any level either before or during an action had the potential to affect the outcome adversely.

Yet care is needed not to 'reverse the onus of proof' on planning. Even famous commanders disagree on the importance of the totality of planning in the final outcome of military operations. One relevant military adage, 'no plan survives the first contact with the enemy,' attributed to Helmut von Moltke (the Elder), is counterbalanced by Napoleon's oft-quoted maxim that 'nothing succeeds in war except in consequence of a well-prepared plan'.[10] There is still a big gap between what appears logical and proving the causal link between planning and outcome.[11] The complex process that constituted battle planning had too many moving parts to be reduced to simple one-word descriptions. The popular perception that poor planning was the issue is rarely informed by any critical analysis of what was planned, who did the planning or how it was done, and is rarely linked to specific examples of where mistakes in the planning process translate directly to specific failures in the operation.[12] Whether poor planning itself was ever solely to blame for failure, or simply provided the potential for command error as Monash appeared to imply,[13] requires a detailed analysis of the wide range of elements that constituted battle planning in World War I before it can be considered proven - analysis notably absent in most commentaries on this war.

---

[9] 'Both Watson and his very able British GSO1, Lieutenant-Colonel Edmund Ironside, displayed appalling overconfidence and particularly a lamentable – and for their troops, fatal – ignorance of gas warfare practices. Although Watson's 4th Division generally performed ably thereafter, the 11th and 12th Brigades' foredoomed attack at Mont Dury on 2 Sept 1918 suggests that haste and sloppiness at Divisional Headquarters were never entirely eliminated.' P.H. Brennan, 'Byng's and Currie's Commanders: A Still Untold Story of the Canadian Corps', *Canadian Military History* 11: 2 (Spring, 2002), 13.

[10] P.G. Tsouras, *The Greenhill Dictionary of Military Quotations* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000), 363.

[11] Carl von Clausewitz remarked: 'A plan which succeeds is bold, one that fails is reckless'.

[12] Most criticisms focus in broad brush assessments, such as 'the Commander-in-Chief failed to move his reserves up in time' or 'the artillery failed to cut the wire as planned'. While a useful summary of the events themselves, such comments do not provide much illumination of why these events occurred.

[13] 'The whole programme is controlled by an exact time-table, to which every infantryman, every heavy or light gun, every mortar and machine gun, every tank and aeroplane must respond with punctuality; otherwise, there will be discords which will impair the success of the operation and increase the cost of it.' Sir John Monash, *The Australian Victories in France in 1918* [1920] (Nashville: The Battery Press 1993), 56. Monash was the commander of the Australian Corps in 1918 and was regarded by the British Expeditionary Force's high command as a competent field commander and battle planner.

The many critics of British planning who attribute the many battlefield failures largely to poor or incompetent planning also rarely entertain the view that the planning process might have produced a good plan but the action failed for reasons beyond the capacity of the planners or the process to counter. The most obvious example is the way in which the impact of weather is rarely allowed as a reason for success or failure in an otherwise sound plan.[14] But there were many other external influences that could combine to defeat an attack, however well planned it may have been. Equally, there are some examples of poor planning that succeeded: the landing of the Australians at Gallipoli being a prominent example.[15]

Crediting the plans and the planners alone for specific military battlefield outcomes serves to conceal these other possible contributory factors. While the historical evidence can readily identify weaknesses, potential issues and other influential factors that clearly were visible to the planners at the time, their mere existence and the failure of the planners to take them into account does not of itself prove incompetence. The fact that signs may have been available to the planners needs to be put in the context of the volume of material being received, the nature of the material and what else was happening. Planning and operations staff faced a daily torrent of information, including but not limited to weather reports (important for aerial reconnaissance availability and in considering the prospect of a gas attack), reports on recent enemy activity, intelligence assessments both short term on the enemy forces opposite and longer term strategic assessments of likely developments, a wide diversity of reports on the number and condition of friendly troops, rations status, transport issues and

---

[14] A good example would be the criticisms of the Passchendaele operation of July to November, 1917: although the operation did exhibit several failures of planning, popular criticism focuses on the failure to progress once the battlefield turned to mud as a result of the heaviest period of prolonged rain in Belgium for 150 years. No commander or planner is or was expected to plan for events of such rarity yet, ultimately, it was this unanticipated weather event that determined the outcome of the Passchendaele operation. Both Monash with regards his attack at Amiens in 1918 and the Germans in the initial success of the March 1918 offensive attribute much of their success to the unanticipated morning fogs and mists.

[15] Among the many criticisms levelled at the Gallipoli operation in the post-war investigation into the lessons to be learned – the Kirke Report – the lack of cooperation between the Army and the Navy on pre-mission planning well demonstrates the issue. 'The disastrous changes of plan from a predominantly military operation to a purely naval attack on the forts, finally changing back to a military operation, when all element of surprise had been dissipated, can be traced back to lack of reasoned pronouncement by the combined staffs. Moreover, the enterprise was eventually initiated without the General Staff having formulated any plan.' W. Kirke et al., *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War* (London: War Office, 1932), 58-9.

ammunition state.[16] Paper deluged the combatant planners at all levels and at all hours. It had to be processed and evaluated quickly to determine both its importance and reliability and to identify any action required as a result.[17] The scale and type of planning involved in directing an operation or battle in 1916 was so complex and detailed that it challenged the capacity of the officers tasked with doing it. With a rapidly expanding army, it also taxed the capacity of the British training system to produce sufficient officers with the abilities and training necessary to fulfil the role.[18]

While both tactical and operational level planning could, within a national army, occur separately from the overall allied strategic framework, it was this overarching strategic level that determined the parameters of lower level planning. It did so by identifying where and when the action was to occur, the level of resources the operational/tactical level commanders were to have and the end–point for the action. For Fromelles, as will be shown, the planning process was driven more by the strategic context and the operational circumstances external to its direct tactical setting than was the case for the tactical battles fought as a direct part of the Somme operation.

Context is also important for identifying the degree of superior supervision of the planning and implementation process in the lead-up to a battle. Although fought as part of the Somme campaign, the battle of Fromelles was not a tactical action at the main focus of the fighting by the Fourth and Reserve Armies. Consequently, its detailed tactical planning process was, to the highest command level of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), of secondary importance. BEF headquarters was, for most of the initial

---

[16] 'There is a great paper war on and I found a great deal of typewritten material which had to be waded through.' Colonel C.J.L Allanson, GSOI, 57th Division. Diary, entry February 1917. Allanson Papers, DS/MISC/69, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM).

[17] Haig was criticised, both during the war (by the War Cabinet) and since – for accepting too unquestioningly the advice of his Intelligence chief, Charteris. Andrew Wiest, *Haig: The Evolution of a Commander* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 89. While hindsight has shown that the criticism is perhaps justified, it is not clear how Haig was supposed to have arrived at this conclusion at the time. The critics often suggest Kiggell told Haig what he wanted to hear but there is an alternative proposition – that Kiggell told Haig what he (Kiggell) thought to be correct.

[18] Australia's most competent staff officer of this war, C.B.B. White, regularly reported having to work excessively long hours just to stay abreast of all the issues he was responsible for, and White was well trained for his staff role, unlike most of the rest of the staff in 1916. One critic of excessive attention to detail by senior commanders and staff was the highly regarded German commander in the East, Paul von Hindenburg. 'He recognised as well the risks of micromanagement – increasingly characteristic of all combatants in this bureaucratised war.' William J. Astore and Dennis E. Showalter, *Hindenburg: Icon of German Militarism* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), 35.

and implementation phases, distracted by the larger battles occurring in the south.[19] This understandable distraction, when added to the reaction to the large casualty cost, has become part of the evidence used to give Fromelles its current notoriety as a prime example of incompetent command and poor planning.[20]

> The focus of any planning process should be to develop a timely, flexible, tactically sound, fully integrated and synchronised plan that increases the likelihood of mission success with the fewest casualties possible.[21]

However, before any examination of the contribution of planning to the outcome of the battle of Fromelles can be undertaken, it is essential to identify what is meant by the term: what the planning task was, what it entailed and who did it. While the word 'plan' is frequently encountered in studies of World War I, it is rarely defined.[22] Also, while planning in its general sense is a simple concept,[23] in the context of military planning during the war it became a shorthand expression used to describe any number of different actions and activities by a wide range of military specialists in practically all military activity.[24] It was used to describe informal and formal processes, short and long-term preparations and individual and group activities, as well as a specific published document, the 'plan'.[25] More precisely, the word 'plan' was used to describe a proposed range of sequential and concurrent events that, when completed, would provide the solution to a military problem or initiative: an arrangement that set out a course of

---

[19] However, as will be shown, the structure of the British command system was such that the Commander-in-Chief could not avoid becoming involved, through his staff, in several critical aspects of the planning and decision process.

[20] Patrick Lindsay, *Fromelles* (Prahran: Hardie Grant, 2008), 75-6.

[21] Rather than resort to inventing a suitable definition, a modern military definition of the concept has been included which also provides a useful basis for this analysis. Australian Army, *Land Warfare Procedures – General: The Military Appreciation Process* (Puckapunyal: Land Warfare Development Centre, 2001), 2–4.

[22] The most comprehensive book on Fromelles, by Robin Corfield, interchanges plan, enterprise and scheme almost indiscriminately to describe the preparation and instructions for future actions. Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber,* 91.

[23] In its dictionary definition, it means: 'To order, enjoin, bid with authority, to have authority over, to compel.' C.T. Onions, *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 347.

[24] Planning is the attempt by the command system to bring some order into what is essentially a chaotic environment: the battlefield. This drive for order continues today with the employment of new technologies to enhance the planners' capacity to impose order. 'One of the main motivations for digitisation in advanced Western military establishments is the belief that the process will impose a new order on the inherent chaos of the battlefield. While this is a doubtful proposition, it remains a powerful idea among many Western soldiers.' Jim Wallace, 'The Ghost of Jomini: the effects of digitisation on commanders and the workings of headquarters', in M. Evans and A. Ryan (Eds), *The Human Face of Warfare* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 123.

[25] Instructively, there is no definition of 'planning' in any of the pre-war doctrine of British Empire forces. There are innumerable references to it, for example 'when the Commander has made his plan', War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part One: Operations* (London: HMSO, 1912 [amended version]), 129.

action and brought together all the elements necessary to enable that action to succeed. General Sir John Monash, allegedly one of Australia's best World War I generals, once likened an attack to conducting an orchestra; bringing together at the right time the right elements to achieve the intended aim.[26] The orchestral score was the plan by which this was achieved. Another popular analogy for a battle plan was the jigsaw puzzle: when all the pieces came together, the picture was complete. While useful, the permutations and complications in even a small scale attack were far more complex than these simple analogies suggest.

In contemporary military theory, command planning is held to be a simple process, essentially intended to identify the five key points necessary for subordinate commanders to do their own planning then implement the task. In simple terms, the five factors to be set out are:

1. A clear statement of what the commander wants achieved, including timings, exact area of operations and clearly defined objectives (the commander's intent).
2. Who is to undertake the operation?
3. What support will be provided to those undertaking the operation and when it will be available and from where it will come?
4. As much detail as can be provided on the physical aspects of the battle space, including nature of the ground, likely weather issues and important geophysical features.
5. As much information possible on the nature of the enemy, including likely strengths, known defences, morale, weapons and leadership.[27]

---

[26] Martin Marix Evans, *1918: The Year of Victories* (London: Arcturus Publishing, 2003), 120-30.
[27] Australian Army, 'The Military Appreciation Process', *Land Warfare Procedures – General. LWP-G 0-1-4* (Canberra: Australian Army, 2001), 1.13-1.32.

This modern encapsulation of the basic composition of a good plan was as valid in 1916 as it was for Napoleon or Hannibal. These are the key elements to be considered when assessing a plan and, due to their utility, will be the benchmark against which the various levels of planning for the Fromelles will be assessed.

However, other factors also shade the meaning of the term and need to be identified in any analysis. Related concepts such as 'command' and 'support' were an integral part of the planning cycle and thus their impact needs to be factored into any analysis of battlefield planning. The planning task was qualified by the rank of the decision-makers involved; a plan by a brigadier was entirely different in scope, scale and anticipated duration from that drafted by General Headquarters (GHQ). Equally, the information available to the brigadier was quite different from that known to the Commander-in-Chief: the brigadier would have an excellent understanding of the terrain in his area and the state of his troops but he would not have, for example, the extensive intelligence picture of the enemy or the complete understanding of the British ammunition situation that was available to GHQ. The planning functions at GHQ were broad and conceptually focussed,[28] while the battalion commanding officer's planning process was very specific and detailed and limited to tactical factors within his own small sphere. It varied according to the task: planning a major or a minor attack differed markedly from that necessary for a trench raid or simply a trench garrison rotation.[29] Planning also varied depending on the time it was undertaken. Planning prior to an operation was quite different from the planning that occurred once an attack was launched. In summary, 'planning a World War I battle was a multi-stage and multi-layered process'.[30]

Between 1915 and the beginning of 1918, the offensive battles of World War I were, essentially, set-piece assaults on well-designed, well-established and well-fortified

---

[28] Noting, however, all headquarters were unable to resist the temptation to become involved at the lowest level of the tactical spectrum - a tendency that was as prevalent in the French and German systems as in the British.

[29] Planning is also a vital part of the logistics support for and administration of armies in the field. While this analysis focuses on the operational planning task, similar factors arose in logistics and administrative planning. Indeed, as argued by Correlli Barnett, Haig's appreciation of the need to convert a simple break-in to a strategically significant breakthrough seems not to have been accompanied by any logistics plans necessary to support such a major follow-on operation. Barnett, 'Haig's Outline Plans for the Exploitation of Breakthrough in 1916-1917', *Bulletin of the Western Front Association* 87 (June/July 2010), 9.

[30] William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Abacus Books, 2010), 60.

defensive positions.[31] Surprise attacks and meeting engagements (where the protagonists encounter one another unexpectedly) were rare. Surprise, at either the operational or tactical level, was extremely difficult to achieve.[32] For those responsible for planning and then oversighting the attack, the static nature of the fighting offered both advantages and disadvantages. Because the battle took place in an area determined by the attacker, at a time also determined by the attacker, the planners could, with some confidence, minutely determine lines of advance, timings of artillery support and the arrival of reinforcements. Planners could ensure the assaulting troops were well briefed on objectives (at least those that were directly visible) and the known state of the enemy, were well fed, rested and well equipped for the task. They could ensure sufficient supplies and stocks of consumables such as ammunition, flares, barbed wire etc. were built up in the required areas.

Contrary to the established popular view, most deliberate assaults undertaken by the British Army on the Western Front exhibited these positive characteristics. Detailed planning (as opposed to effective planning) characterised nearly all the battles fought by the British.[33] Planning was not a single or simple process. In planning the Somme battle, strategic and operational planning was intermeshed through constant meeting and letters between Haig and his operational commander, Rawlinson. The plan evolved through time and in scope, as the French changed their commitment and pressured for earlier commencement.[34] Simple comparisons of the bulk of orders issued do not reflect the degree of prior consultation and planning that preceded the issue of those orders.[35]

---

[31] Accusations of bad planning do not stop with the advent of manoeuvre warfare in August 1918. In describing the battles of the last 100 days, Tim Travers notes that the commander of the Canadian 2nd Division complained that an attack failed 'because the barrage was thin, the wire was not cut, there was a strong machine gun defence and his men were very tired, having had only a few hours sleep in the last eight days.' Tim Travers, *How the War Was Won: Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front, 1917-1918* (London: Routledge, 1992), 146.

[32] Apart from the obvious signs of preparation, other factors mitigating against the possibility of surprise were the lengthy period needed to assemble troops, artillery and stores, increased activity in the rear areas behind the attack, aerial observation of Allied movements, the need for a lengthy artillery barrage (until new techniques and better skills allowed a more effective but much shorter artillery preparation) and the British habit of using specific troops for an attack all provided the Germans with plenty of warning. Poor security was a major contributor to the inability to achieve surprise. The 34th Division, through poor communications security, alerted the Germans to the time of the July 1 attack. Robertshaw, *Somme,* 40.

[33] Even the battles of 1915, including the initially successful but ultimately a comprehensive defeat at Loos, were characterised by careful deliberative planning. See J. Edmonds, *History of the Great War. Military Operations, France and Belgium 1915* 2 (London: MacMillan, 1928) (hereafter *BOH)*, 133-8.

[34] The appendices to the British Official History include 19 items that were part of, or relate to, the development of the final plan for the Somme campaign.

[35] In any case, Haig was not a believer in detail in orders as he was a strong supporter of the principle of leaving the man on the spot to use his initiative. Andy Simpson 'British Corps Command on the Western

Much of the specific detail was either already worked out in conferences or was 'lower order' detail to be decided by experts. The artillery fire plan was always a case in point: it was developed by the gunners on the basis of the timings and objectives supplied in the overall plan. Contrary to some popular perception, comprehensive, detailed planning was still no guarantee of success.

Static warfare also encouraged the evolution of some undesirable practices among staff and commanders. At all levels, commanders became focussed on the difficulties of breaking into the enemy's defences. Few – with the notable exception of the Commander-in-Chief himself – gave much thought to the exploitation of any successful break in and even fewer gave much thought to the operational or tactical requirements necessary to convert a break in into a successful exploitation. For most staff planners and commanders, the immediate battle became the end in itself. Ironically, history has treated those whose focus was on the battle, the proponents of the 'bite and hold' tactic, more kindly that those who saw the battle merely as a means to a strategic end.[36]

Another unwelcome development was the tendency for operational planning to become over-management of the tactical battle. A number of commentators, both veterans and later historians, have noted the tendency for orders to become more extensive, more detailed and more complex as the static phase of the war advanced.[37] This tendency had a number of undesirable consequences.[38] The physical problem of drafting, clearing, printing and disseminating voluminous orders in sufficient time to enable subordinate headquarters to do the same and get the final orders to the attacking infantry sections introduced significant lost time between conception and implementation of an operation.[39] During this delay, critical factors could have changed.

Front 1914-1918', in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman, *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918* [2004] (Stroud: Spellmount, 2007), 100.

[36] Robin Neillands, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: Robinson, 1999), 298.

[37] Simpson, 'British Corps Command', 103-12.

[38] In many instances, different types of orders contributed to growth in order length and complexity. Many of the orders issued for Day One of the Somme were administrative rather than tactical: for example, the orders for XIII Corps ran to over 30 pages and covered everything from pigeons to flares and from Russian saps to metal identity discs on each man's back. Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 58.

[39] The issue of warning time remained contentious in the post war period. The British Official Historian took issue with his Australian counterpart over a comment relating to the chapter on Pozières that orders

For example, the weather might have changed or new enemy forces moved into the area of operations, but the difficulty inherent in changing complex and voluminous orders frequently meant planners could not react to these new developments and draft and disseminate new plans in the time remaining before the attack commenced.[40]

In becoming long and complex, orders also started to directly impinge on the prerogatives of lower level commanders.[41] By attempting to foresee and prepare a response to every eventuality and include this response in the operational orders, senior commanders and their planning staff seriously inhibited the ability of field commanders and junior leaders to react or exercise initiative on the actual battlefield.[42] It also tended to cement in place the assumptions that had been used in developing the plan and made senior commanders less inclined to accept contrary comment or advice from lower formation commanders.[43] Again, it is ironic that those commanders who practised a command style comparable to the modern notion of directive control, have been roundly criticised for failing to intervene during the operation to 'instruct' their subordinate commanders on how to implement their plan. One example of this, Sir Ian Hamilton's failure or refusal to issue tactical orders to his tactical commander on the

---

arrived *only* at 7.00 pm. 'Why "only"? 3½ hours' notice was more than a company usually got.' Edmonds to Bean, 11 September 1928. Bean Papers, 3DRL7953, item 30, AWM.

[40] Perhaps the reason behind the statement from Bean that Haig fervently believed that 'a mediocre plan consistently followed is better than a brilliant one frequently changed.' C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 Vol. III. The A.I.F. in France 1916* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1940), 464.

[41] It could be argued that, in 1916 with the influx of the new volunteer forces and the initial intakes of conscripted men, the training and experience level of the junior leadership was so poor that detailed guidance was necessary.

[42] While a valid issue, initiative on a World War I battlefield dominated by its complex inter-relationship between infantry, artillery and machine-guns coupled with poor communications could get small groups of soldiers into greater trouble with their own forces than with the enemy's, if they exercised their initiative and, for example, seized an empty part of the enemy line just as the British artillery attacked it. With no way of letting higher command know of their actions, they ran a real risk. 'In viewing 1914-16, I feel I must remember that from the highest to the lowest, we were all amateurs. The generals and staffs of the Regular Army, though professionals in name, had never been trained to fight continental armies or deal with such masses of troops; the officers and men of the new armies had only, in 1914-1916, a veneer of training and their very valour led to high casualties which should not be blamed on the leading.' Letter, 11 September 1928, Sir James Edmonds to Bean, commenting on his draft chapter on Bullecourt. Bean Papers, 3DRL7953/34, part 1 item 38, AWM.

[43] In the post-war comments of an Australian Brigade commander, Brigadier R. Leane, on the British Official Historian's draft chapter on the battle for Bullecourt, he remarked that 'The decision to make the attack at this time seemed ill conceived and badly arranged, and personal experience proved to me that it was not understood by certain of the Higher Command.' Letter R. Leane to Bean, 27 July 1931, commenting on Bean's draft chapter on Bullecourt. Bean Papers, 3DRL7953/30, part 2 item 38, AWM.

spot, Major General Hunter-Weston, on the first day of the Gallipoli campaign, has led to some critics virtually accusing him of negligence.[44]

Ironically, some commanders who planned every detail with meticulous care – Monash being the most frequently cited example – are lauded for this tendency. Other commanders – such as Gough – are criticised for giving less attention to detailed planning before operations and trying to lead while the operation was in progress.[45] Apart from the obvious conclusion that World War I generals are remembered for their successes rather than their methods, the difference appears to be not in the degree of planning but in how the plans were implemented. Monash acquired his reputation in 1918, when those implementing his plans were skilled veterans who knew how to carry out set-piece attacks with little help or direction from higher headquarters, whereas Gough's reputation with the Australians was earned in 1916, when both the troops and the planners were essentially novices.[46]

The time factor was critical in operational planning. An operation – a major campaign such as the Somme was a series of connected battles – had two distinct planning phases. In the lead-up to a major operation, planning was deliberate, usually meticulous and painstakingly detailed: a 'deliberative' planning style. Higher level

---

[44] Allan Moorehead, *Gallipoli* (Geneva: Heron Books, 1956), 146-7.

[45] Gough was a particularly unlucky commander – his command style and leadership qualities suggest that had he been a commander in World War II, his reputation could well have been high. John Croft, 'Horsed Cavalry in the 1914-18 War', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Review* 115:2 (April, 1985), 214. Largely as a result of his unsuccessful attempts at innovative attacks at Bullecourt in 1917, he has a reputation, in Australia, as a commander who would drive his troops on regardless of the realities of the battlefield. However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest this simple view of his ability is misleading. During the battles for Passchendaele, he was, correctly as it turned out, worried about the weather and its potential to derail the attacks. In commenting on Bean's chapter on Passchendaele, the British official historian noted 'Gough wished to stop the attack but, being under Plumer for everything that had to be settled at the last moment, referred [his concerns] to him by telephone. Plumer did not give an immediate answer. He consulted all his corps commanders by telephone and one or two of his divisional commanders. When the corps commanders were doubtful, he also consulted "Meteor" who replied that the rain was not likely to continue. This done, Plumer told Gough that the orders held good.' Thus it was Plumer, who finished the war with an outstanding reputation as a battlefield commander, who ignored the battlefield reality and Gough, the reputed 'thruster', who did not and wished to call an end to the offensive. Edmonds to Bean, 1932. Bean Papers 3DRL7953/34 part 2 item 38 AWM. See also the debate about Gough in Gary Sheffield, 'An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough' in Sheffield and Todman, *Command and Control,* 72.

[46] 'These [pre-war British junior] leaders had been accustomed to command troops in which everyone knew their job and disliked interference from above; they had not even, in 1916, tumbled to the fact that new "enemies" require different instructions and handling to "old" and must often be held back. I try not to judge 1915-1917 by 1918 standards.' Edmonds to Bean, 11 September 1928. Bean Papers, 3DRL7953/34, part 1 item 38, AWM.

headquarters had to decide where the operation was to occur, what the objectives would be, approximately when it was to begin, which forces were to be used and what support would be supplied. A critical part of this planning process was the attempt to identify all potential problems and unexpected events that might arise and put into the plan measures to deal with them. In parallel, an intelligence picture of the enemy, especially the number and quality of opposing troops, the nature and disposition of fixed defences and the strength and location enemy supporting artillery, had to be built up. Planning had to be interactive. As more information about the enemy, the terrain and the weather became available, the initial very broad plan had to be refined to accommodate the new information.

However, especially with large operations like the Somme, once the decision had been made to conduct an operation at a certain time and in a specific location, and the logistics and administrative arrangements had begun to prepare for it, the scope to change or vary the plan quickly became very limited. Once the thousands of tons of ammunition and trench stores had been stockpiled, troop training facilities and accommodation developed (in the rear of the area of operations), troops, artillery, catering and supporting transport systems assembled, the capacity to quickly move them to a new area of operations in reaction to some newly perceived problem was non-existent.

The second type of planning, best described as reactive planning, occurred once the operation was under way. This planning has received much less attention than the preparatory planning process. Many of the histories of operations and battles constantly refer to the process that is reactive planning without recognising it as such. Reactive planning was the process used to correct unanticipated problems or, less frequently, to exploit unanticipated success. For the most part, reactive planning was short in time-frame, limited in scope and scale and focused heavily on adjustment of the local tactical plan or on getting more support or reinforcements to a specific part of the battlefield.

Plans made while an operation was in progress tended to be hastily developed, usually much smaller in scale and disseminated quickly only in the immediate proximity of the headquarters making the decision. The primitive communications systems severely inhibited the ability of commanders at any level to influence events once the

battle had begun. There was insufficient time to debate fully and evaluate every possible variation or outcome. Such planning was inevitably more limited in scale and scope, focusing primarily on initiatives aimed at restoring the original plan, particularly the original timetable of the operation. Occasionally there was an unexpected major victory, in which case reactive planning was necessary to capitalise on this success.[47]

A common misunderstanding of planning and the conduct of operations in World War I is that they were the exclusive preserve of Corps, Army and supreme commanders.

> The Great War imposed two particular constraints on Commanders. First, battle plans and tactics were almost invariably dictated at corps or higher levels, so divisional commanders were rarely able to develop and implement their own battle plans and brigade commanders virtually never.[48]

This view appears to be based on the perception that the only planning that mattered, in terms of military outcome, was at the strategic and operational level.[49] It ignores both the reality and the consequence of the planning that was conducted at all levels of command: planning, the evidence shows, that was an ongoing task at all levels of command from generals to lance corporals.[50] Apart from underestimating the military skills of well-trained and professional soldiers of all ranks, who clearly understood the

---

[47] General Plumer's Major General General Staff (MGGS), Major General Sir Charles Harington, in a post-war comment to the British Official Historian, illustrates this point when he said: 'As a matter of fact, it [the Battle of Messines] worked well and was a thorough show, but in my opinion the capture of Broodseinde Ridge on 14 October 1917 was a far better bit of work. We had nothing like the time for preparation and it went off like clockwork.' Harington to Edmonds, 27 January 1931. Bean Papers, 3DRL7953/34, part 1 item 38, AWM.

[48] Peter Sadler, *The Paladin: A Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84.

[49] If the only planning that mattered was at this level, it is thus easy to attribute responsibility for the disasters solely to the higher direction of the war and the battle. 'Responsibility for tactical mistakes was not that of the brigadiers or divisional commanders, but of the High Command and the civilian War Committee. Field Marshal Haig is shown repeatedly deficient in strategy, tactics, command, and organisation.' Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), cover notes. The British official post-war examination of the conduct of the war – the Kirke Report – may have contributed to or even initiated this view. 'There was a tendency to throw responsibility on to subordinates which should have been shouldered by the higher command, more adequately staffed to discharge it.' Kirke et al., *Report*, 17. While the strength of argument clearly supports the view that errors at the highest level may have been partially responsible for the disaster, the errors that occurred in planning and, more importantly, implementation, at all levels often compounded it.

[50] For example, the Australian Battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Leslie Morshead (33rd Battalion), spent his time while convalescing in England from Gallipoli thinking and reflecting upon current British tactics and planning their application to fighting on the Western Front. David Coombes, *Morshead: Hero of Tobruk and El Alamein* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2110), 36.

need for any prospective action to be well thought through, it also provides a false understanding of the reasons battles were fought in so many different ways and with such different results. As the evidence in the detail of many of the battles shows, the tactical planning of the infantry battalion commander or the artillery forward observer could be as important to the final outcome of that specific action as the Corps Commander's original plan.[51]

Planning in its widest, most informal, sense was a major preoccupation of most officers and most NCOs for most of their time in the front line.[52] Evidence suggests that even ordinary soldiers spent time planning what their response would be should an enemy attack suddenly occur or should they find themselves cut off by artillery fire.[53] The ongoing historical focus on large scale operations and offensives has skewed understanding of the total planning function in a way that has caused many important elements of it to be underrated or forgotten.

Formal planning, the deliberate act of deciding to do something somewhere at a specified time, also occurred at all levels in the Army, as it was the prerequisite for successfully co-ordinating the actions of groups of individuals. For the basic fighting element, the infantry platoon, planning was more of an extension of standard operating procedures, including standard tactics, and was restricted mainly to small scale, local offensive operations, especially actions such as raids, and to local defensive arrangements.[54] However, within its own operational sphere, the platoon did need to plan details of likely actions, taking account of local terrain, known local German defences, the state of the wire, the nature of the operation (silent raid, reconnaissance of No Man's Land or a full scale assault) and the individual strengths and weaknesses of

---

[51] Gary Sheffield, *New Light on the Somme: A Reassessment of the Performance of the British Army in Battle, July to November 1916,* SHLM Divisional Battle Assessment Project, Publication No. 1 (London: IWM, 1996), 5.
[52] While difficult to quantify, the evidence of personal diaries and letters suggests that concern for and interest in planning increased as experience increased – probably indicative of a growing recognition of the failings of Standard Operating Procedures and current training.
[53] Usually, such planning was based closely on standard operating procedures and the training they had received. However, there are references to ordinary soldiers who, finding themselves in authority after all their officers and NCOs had been killed, had planned their own solutions to tactical problems. Brand Papers, 3DRL2750, item 2, AWM.
[54] The detail for more routine activities, such as relief in the line, movement behind the line, training and support work was planned and organized at company and battalion level. In large scale operations, detail even down to this level tended to be planned for by higher headquarters but the platoon still did its own planning of what and how to operate when the high command's plan began to fall apart. In this instance, established doctrine and training were the major influences.

the other NCOs and men. The officer (or in many cases the senior NCO) in charge of the platoon made the decisions but diary evidence suggests he tended to take into account opinions of other experienced members of the platoon in formulating his plan. This was, in broad concept, the process that occurred all the way up the chain of command. The only three real elements of planning missing at the platoon and company level were the timing decisions, determination of final objectives and the arrangement and co-ordination of external or non-organic specialist support, notably artillery, trench mortars, medium and heavy machine guns and engineers.

The brigade was the lowest or smallest organisational level where planning did involve coordination of others not in the direct chain of command. Offensive planning at this level was routinely directed at minor tactical advantages not involving the seizure for retention of significant amounts of ground. Trench raids, to gather intelligence or to neutralise a particularly troublesome enemy position, and patrolling, for intelligence purposes or to deny information to the enemy, were the most common forms of activity requiring local planning by brigades. It was at this level that the characteristics common to all offensive planning, especially the need to co-ordinate artillery, trench mortar and machine gun support and the need for close liaison with adjoining formations, were first encountered. Usually, the brigade was also the lowest command level invited to comment on the planning and preparation being undertaken by higher headquarters for more major operations. As the war progressed, the notes relating to brigadier input at divisional and corps headquarters suggest more value was placed on their arguments in developing attack plans.[55]

For more major offensive operations, for example minor tactical adjustments to the front line or the neutralization/destruction and/or seizure of strong points or important terrain, planning was normally conducted, even originated, at divisional level or beyond, even if only a battalion or less was to be involved in the action. This is the lowest level where timing decisions could be made. Variations to the line had such

---

[55] 'Given that brigadiers had a better chance of controlling the battle as tactics became more fluid and complex, good brigadiers became even more important to the battlefield as the war progressed. Moreover, the well-developed Canadian system of institutionalised, universalised learning would never have flourished had senior commanders not been innovative and fully committed. The only alternative is to believe that the Corps' success depended almost entirely on Currie and a handful of brilliant British staff officers.' P.H. Brennan, 'Byng's and Currie's Commanders: A Still Untold Story of the Canadian Corps', *Canadian Military History* 11:2 (Spring, 2002), 13.

strategic implications, especially in relation to the effect on the security of the overall line and the impact on resources necessary to retain captured enemy trench lines (resources that brigades seldom had within their own command structure), that it was rare for an attack to seize and retain part of the front line to be initiated below the army or corps level, although divisions could request authority under some circumstances, such as the desire to deal with a troublesome German defensive position or to straighten the line to improve its defensive strength. While the actual detailed planning was frequently devolved to the division, or even brigade, the authority for such operations was retained at higher headquarters. Brigade and below involvement tended to be more focussed on methodology, taking the higher command's plan and translating those parts relevant to their sector into tactical orders for the brigade's own battalions.[56] At the divisional level, there were the same requirements for local detail to be added to broader plans, especially for co-ordination between internal elements and between the flanks of the brigades and adjoining units, as existed for brigade level planning. The scale of artillery, aviation and engineer support was likely to be larger and would therefore require more detail on how this would work.

The planning involved in major offensive operations was initiated at the highest headquarters - usually HQ BEF - and subject to a complex process of review and dissemination. The potential for the brigade or its components to influence basic elements in such planning was minimal, although some examples of successful variation do exist.[57] Corps, division and brigade staffs were all involved, at different stages and different times, in taking the broad directions from their superior headquarters and adding the details that finally enabled troops to implement the plan. Co-ordination of the various offensive and supporting arms became the key to the plan, and largely provided most of the complexity. Even elementary tasks assumed major importance in offensive planning: the movement in and out of the front line was itself a complex

---

[56] Although this was not always the case – much depended on the character of the Brigade Commander and his superiors. Brigadier J.H. Cannan's 11 Brigade provided most of the planning input for a minor operation on 3 July 1917 intended to drive the enemy outposts off a ridge during third Ypres. C.E.W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol. IV. The A.I.F. in France 1917* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1938), 713.

[57] Peter Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), 227. Note also Paddy Griffith's assessment in Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 7: 'The High Command too often wilfully closed its ears to voices of reason from below, too often responded too hastily to imperatives from above and, in Haig's case especially, too often made destabilising last-minute alterations in the perfectly sound plans of subordinates.'

operation with considerable potential for confusion and, if the enemy were aware of the movement, high casualties from the enemy's artillery.

The distinction between planning at platoon and battalion level and higher commands was characterised by a number of factors but the most immediately obvious was that, at the lowest levels of organisation, those planning the operation also implemented them. There was no specialist planning staff below brigade. At platoon level, a poor plan would directly affect the planner. At army level, a poor plan did not directly affect the planner. Rarely were corps or army level planning staffs killed in the pursuit of their planned objectives.[58]

With the strong focus in historical analysis on the offensive actions on the Western Front, the importance of defensive planning is often overlooked. Yet defensive planning demanded as much if not more effort from the troops at all levels than did offensive planning. Defensive planning was essential if confusion were to be avoided and an appropriate response initiated if the enemy launched an attack of his own.

> I recognise today how big is the task in front of one: there is the reconnaissance of 8000 yards of line, all the artillery and machine-gun positions, trench mortar emplacements, observation posts, signal communications, strong points, roads and tramways all of which one must be thoroughly conversant with; **plans must also always be in one's head of exactly how to react in the event of an enemy attack.**[59]

Each element and formation in the line devised, or inherited, a defence plan. This was an agreed procedure to counter a successful enemy action that penetrated or threatened the integrity of the line. At battalion level and below, it was usually simply standing instructions that on receipt of the appropriate order, all troops were to go to assigned places and do certain things. At the higher formation levels, the defensive plan introduced new elements such as the movement and/or release of reserves, pre-planned responses by artillery and the possibility of tactical withdrawal to previously prepared positions. As with offensive planning, detail in the plan was in inverse proportion to scale as responsibility progressed up the chain of command. The battalion defence plan

---

[58] See F. Davies and G. Maddocks, *Bloody Red Tabs: General Officer Casualties of the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995). Many senior commanders and staff were killed, but usually not during the execution of plans they had prepared. Most senior officers and planners were killed during routine visits to the Front Line.

[59] Diary. Allanson Papers, diary 4, DS/MISC/69, IWM (emphasis added).

for a specific sector would include detailed movement directions and specify individual trenches while the corps commander's would be much more focussed on the rear area, where his reserves were and on larger picture issues such what approach lines the reserves could use and what artillery he could employ to repel the enemy advance.

Defence planning was particularly time consuming because 'the plan' needed constant updating to allow for changes in adjoining units, new levels of artillery support, changes in the front line, changes in enemy unit strength and capability and even factors such as wind direction and speed and other natural phenomena. Unlike offensive planning, defensive planning was much more a routine, ongoing and 'bottom up' process, relying on constant judgements on conditions from the front line itself.[60]

Planning also occurred in relation to other, more mundane, military activities and for quite different purposes. Planning for front line administrative activities, including routine movements into and out of the line, training and battle rehearsals was different again from both operational planning and administrative or 'housekeeping' planning such as feeding the troops, arranging resupply and re-equipment and the movement of personnel. While less glamorous than offensive and defensive operational planning, changeover planning was a major responsibility of the staff at brigade and divisional level.[61] Its importance to the troops and to command generally is evidenced by the numerous references in every unit war diary to the problems associated with smooth relief – especially when problems arose, such as the late arrival of relieving formations.[62]

---

[60] This was of particular importance in relation to the possibilities of enemy gas attacks. Local defence plans invariably included the requirement for the Brigade (or frequently, the Battalion) Gas Officer to advise higher headquarters of changes in wind speed and direction that made conditions favourable for the use of gas.

[61] The larger staff size at Divisional and above formation level enabled specialist staff to be dedicated to relief planning, which tended to fall under the administrative and quartermaster side of the headquarters.

[62] General Staff, 1st Australian Infantry Brigade. War Diary, 11 Feb 1917, 23/1/19, AWM4: 'Rang up DHQ re relief as we understood that the 3rd Brigade was to relieve this Brigade tonight and tomorrow night. No orders had been issued by Division. Was told by GSO I to arrange relief with 3rd Brigade. Did so'. Also 'All this delay and uncertainty was simply bad staff work. But it was the first day and all were very new to the conditions. Still, I have often since, both as brigade and divisional staff officer, arranged reliefs, and it is not hard to allow for what was later elaborated by repeated practice; and having regard to what should have been known at the time, I cannot entirely acquit our staff.' Lieutenant Colonel Henderson, Indian Army staff officer who served in France in 1914 with the Indian Army Meerut Division. Diary 1914. Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2 117, IWM.

The Somme campaign, including the Fromelles attack, was planned in accordance with a fast evolving yet still discernibly British army planning style. In this method, once the decision to undertake an offensive operation was agreed, along with basic matters such as approximate location and timing,[63] the superior headquarters delegated the planning of the next operation to the subordinate headquarters that had been selected to command it.[64] This approach, it could be argued, reached its most extreme manifestation in July 1916. It placed Haig's supreme headquarters at the apex of the planning of future operations but gave responsibility for making indicative concepts into a specific plan to the tactical headquarters - usually an Army - identified to conduct the operation. Thus, in the lead-up to the Somme, the identified tactical commander for the attack (in this case General Rawlinson) was given general directions and left to work out the details. Once he had developed the plan - frequently also lacking in full detail as he did not always have confirmation as to how many troops, which troops and how many supporting assets he would eventually have - he submitted it back to GHQ for Haig's critique. Haig would consider the detail and make changes or request a rethink on key aspects of Rawlinson's plan. Rawlinson's headquarters would apply the same approach to the corps commanders who would in turn apply the same methodology with their divisional commanders.

This approach has been widely criticised in post-war commentary for being unnecessarily complex, too proscriptive by the superior headquarters and too wasteful of time. While arguably much of the criticism is warranted, there are also some positive aspects to this command style.[65] At least for the Somme campaign, Rawlinson knew exactly what Haig wanted from him and how Haig expected the operation to unfold. In modern terminology, Rawlinson knew very clearly what Haig's commander's intent was,

---

[63] The debate about where and when to launch the planned 1916 offensive was both extensive and tense at the supreme headquarters level. The British Official History contains long reports on the debates between Marshal Joffre, the French supreme commander, and Haig about locations and timing for the joint offensive. By the time it was acknowledged that the German attack at Verdun had derailed the planned offensive, the essential strategic decisions of where and when had been locked into place. James Edmonds, *BOH* Vol. I, 1-5 and 22-35.

[64] It was General Allenby who was initially asked to conduct a study for an attack north of the Somme soon after Haig assumed command of the BEF. On 4 February 1916, General Rawlinson, the designated commander of the Fourth Army that was to undertake the attack, was despatched to collaborate with Allenby on the development of the plans. Edmonds, *BOH* Vol. I, 246.

[65] For a full examination of the planning process at this operational level, see Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918* [1992] (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2004).

unlike for example the German field commanders under von Falkenhayn at Verdun,[66] and could make his own plans accordingly. The British continued this style of command until almost the last six months of the war when the combination of staff experience and fast-moving mobile operations made it unnecessary and largely unworkable.

An alternative view to the argument that the cause of failure of attacks such as Fromelles was the incompetence of commanders and planners or their flawed plans is that military planning was comparatively sound but other factors, beyond the control of the planners or those implementing the plans, caused or contributed to the plan's failure. Most of the reasons the Somme offensive was so spectacularly unsuccessful have been well enunciated.[67] They range from tactical issues such as the failure by the artillery to properly cut the German wire and failure to suppress German machine gun and artillery fire, to strategic level issues such as the limited stocks and unreliability of the British artillery ammunition. Many of these issues have an obvious 'cause and effect' relationship, a relationship that perhaps was not as apparent to the planners in 1916 as it is today. Others were clearly errors of judgment but, again, may only be clearly errors with the benefit of hindsight. Unquestionably, mistakes were made, including in the planning process. The difficulty is determining whether the planning process itself was flawed or whether it was the way in which the product of the process, the 'plan,' was applied.

The British army that went to war in August 1914 has long been the subject of critical analysis that suggests it was unprepared for the style of warfare it would face on the continent. [68] Fifty years before the outbreak of the war, at Crimea, commanders had been able to observe personally the disposition and performance of their entire force. They could plan and implement a tactical engagement knowing they would be able to observe and vary plans during the course of the engagement. By 1914, the size of the

---

[66] German strategy had been to *threaten* the occupation of Verdun and force the French to defend it and thus allow superior German artillery to destroy it piecemeal. The original intention was not to try and occupy Verdun or stage a breakthrough - it was to be an attritional battle, *Ermattungsstrategie*. However, at the tactical level, the German commanders were encouraged to follow-up French withdrawals, thus bringing their infantry into the French artillery zone and negating Falkenhayn's strategic concept. Astore and Showalter, *Hindenburg*, 35-6.

[67] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 300-9.

[68] 'Why blame leaders because the enemy is a first-class one, nearly equal in bravery skill and equipment to ourselves? That - and our improvised staffs and untrained troops - was the reason for our slow progress. If we had had a big army in 1914, there would have been perhaps a short war.' Edmonds to Bean, 27 June 1928. Bean Papers, 3DRL7952/34, part 1 item 38, AWM.

battlefield and the size and complexity of their own forces meant this was simply impossible. In the new climate of industrial age warfare, commanders were required to become more like factory managers than the charismatic leaders of the past. Their focus had to be more on co-ordination of fighting assets, co-operation with other combat elements and the efficient organisation of logistic support than on personally leading troops into enemy fire or riding around the battlefield shoring up morale. This revolution in the nature and exercise of command is one of the less well understood but most important developments in the military arts to emerge during World War I.[69] In parallel with it was the rise in the role and responsibility of the Staff Officer. No study of the contribution of planning to a battlefield outcome can occur in isolation from the specialist planners, the staff, who carried out planning. With the growth in complexity of modern war, the staff officer was the other side of the coin to the planning function: in the British Army of 1914, this development was imperfectly understood.[70]

Not only was the British Army of 1914 simply too small to campaign on the continent,[71] but it had a culture and a focus on imperial policing that ill prepared it for the kind of fighting it would encounter even in the early engagements of 1914. Unlike its continental counterparts, senior British policy-makers in the decade and a half leading up to the war still regarded the Army's primary role to be the protection of Royal Naval bases, defence of the British Isles against invasion and the internal security of the extended empire.[72] While the war in South Africa, and the observations of professional military observers in the Russo-Japanese war, had given the British army a sharp warning about the likely nature of modern war, it was slow to adopt and absorb

---

[69] Even contemporary analysis can fail to understand this fundamental shift in the role of command: 'There was also a difference in the commanders; Brigadier General J. Gellibrand placed his 6th Brigade headquarters very near the front line. In contrast, Brigadier General R. Smith, the commanding officer of the 5th Brigade, placed his headquarters in the village of Noreuil, some 2100 metres from the front. When disaster struck, he could not react as quickly as Gellibrand, and seems to have lost control of events.' Andrews and Jordan, 'Second Bullecourt Revisited'. 36.

[70] 'Anything tending to demonstrate that war can be entered on without preparation or training (particularly of the Staff or regimental officers) by a number of individuals simply because they are brave, have natural fighting instincts and are fine specimens of manhood is to be deprecated. The lesson of the war, to my mind, is that men of a much lower type – such as the Germans were – can by system and discipline be trained so as to stand up to a first class nation.' Edmonds to Bean, 21 September 1927. Bean Papers, 3DRL7952/34, part 1 item 38, AWM.

[71] Lord Kitchener: 'Did they remember, when they (the British Government) went headlong into a war like this, that they were without an army, and without any preparation to equip one?' John Hussey, 'Without an Army, and Without any preparation to Equip One', *The British Army Review* 109 (April, 1995), 76.

[72] John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 15.

changes, particularly cultural shifts that threatened the traditional British Army way of 'doing things,' such as the regimental system.

Partly the problem was that the bulk of the British Army, especially its officer class, did not necessarily accept that the problems identified in its performance in South Africa were serious enough to warrant radical change. While with hindsight this is an indefensible position, at the time, it was not necessarily as clear-cut. While the problems of 1916 and the successful methods of 1918 demonstrated the pre-war concerns over deficiencies in organisation, capability and modern-war experience were well justified, even prescient, without the benefit of the latter experience to confirm what was a subjective assessment, the deficiencies were perhaps less obvious; especially to the rank and file of the professional army. Armies and generals are frequently accused of preparing to fight the last war rather than the next but subsequent to the war in South Africa, the British Army hastened slowly to adapt to new organisations and structures based on lessons learned in that conflict.[73] While the British performance in the Boer War undeniably had been poor, caution was needed in making fundamental changes based on an experience that could easily have been an aberration. In the future, the role of the British Army could again have been focussed on protecting the Empire, for which role the complex, expensive and much larger continental model was arguably unsuitable and unnecessary.[74]

However, this military caution was not matched at the political level and the British military performance in South Africa sparked a series of Parliamentary inquiries into the British Army, culminating in two major Parliamentary inquiries established to look at the problems and recommend solutions.[75] The 1904 War Office

---

[73] As Lord Wolseley reminded the Government and the Army Council in the post-Boer War years. Hussey, *Without an Army*, 77. This can be interpreted in either a favourable or a pejorative light. Tim Travers portrays the pre-war British Army as a class-bound and conservative institution, focussed on protecting its officer class and their traditional values. Travers, *The Killing Ground*. It can be argued to the contrary though that the emerging staff college-trained thinkers of the pre-war period, including Haig and especially Robertson, were sufficiently aware of the need for a British Army to be shaped for a particularly British Empire role that they were cautious about too rapid changes to a structure that had worked reasonably well: noting they did not know what was to happen in 1914.

[74] The commencement of the Third Afghan War in 1919 was clear evidence that the British Army was not free from its internal Empire protection role.

[75] 'The more I study the South African war, the more I see that Staff incompetence, muddling and disorder lay at the very root of our humiliations.' Sir George Clarke, Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence. Gooch, *The Plans of War,* 64.

(Reconstruction) Committee, chaired by Lord Esher,[76] was asked to inquire into the administration of the Army and the War Office while the Norfolk Inquiry looked at the 'auxiliary forces', the Army's reserves. Both made major recommendations for fundamental changes. While many of the key recommendations were adopted – sometimes in the face of considerable internal opposition – in time to prepare the Army in some measure for the demands of the next war, it was Esher's recommendations in relation to the formation of a General Staff that had the most important implications for British military planning. His recommendation for the creation of a General Staff, along the lines of the French and German systems, was recognition that any future British Army needed a command and control system that could plan and conduct complex operations involving large numbers of troops in large, unfamiliar formations and groupings.

Esher's Committee had envisaged a *corps d'élite* of officers who, during war, would direct operations in the field.[77] These specific recommendations were not universally accepted,[78] and the process of implementing them was delayed by tense internal Army debate, aided by the inevitable Treasury resistance to a new initiative that would cost money. The disputes over what the new General Staff should be continued for most of 1904, during which debate on the main issue, the requirement for a 'passed staff college' (*psc*) qualification for appointment to the staff as opposed to allowing regimental officers with relevant field experience to be appointed, presaged some of the criticism of the staff performance during the war.

> Institutional reforms at the summit after the South African War had not shaken, nor had it been designed to shift, the institutional conservatism of the British Army itself. Indeed, the reforms impeded change in that direction. For the Commander-in-Chief's appointment had been abolished but the new General Staff, able and willing as it may have been to co-ordinate and direct the Army's development, had neither inherited nor acquired his authority to change attitudes that were entrenched. A source of the frustration of staff officers, such as Edmonds, was the want of an authority to direct them in their work or to create military institutions with the responsibility and the power to co-ordinate the professional work of the Army.[79]

---

[76] Reginald Baliol Brett, 2nd Viscount Esher, briefly a Liberal member of the British Parliament, became a central figure in the Liberal Governments of Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Asquith in the period between the Boer War and World War I. In addition to chairing the War Office Reconstruction Committee, he served on Lord Elgin's South African War Commission.
[77] Gooch, *The Plans of War,* 56.
[78] Gooch lists several influential senior officers who voiced considerable misgivings: a reaction that served to slow the pace of adoption. Ibid., 62.
[79] Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2004), 41.

The conservatives, opposed to the establishment of an educated staff college elite,[80] argued that such officers would lack understanding of field conditions and would be out of touch. While this did occur to some extent during the war, the life of a junior peace-time regimental officer was not so complex that a prospective staff officer of similar rank would find it difficult to understand how the regimental system worked in the field.[81]

The debate and contention over how the new General Staff was to function continued for several years. Following the 1909 Imperial Defence Conference, the General Staff arrangement was extended to include India, under the direction of Douglas Haig. It became clear in the six years between when it was finally adopted and when the war broke out that even its architects did not want an exact replica of the German General Staff, with its all-powerful, centralised command and planning authority.[82] The problem remained, though, that there seemed no alternative system. When the need was revealed during the early months of the war, the embryonic British staff system, caught between both the old ideas and the slow shift to the new,[83] not only had to expand dramatically in numbers, it had to expand its concept of how to employ these specialists.

Accurately defining a staff officer in an Empire force of July 1914 was not a straightforward exercise. Staff were employed in many roles at several different levels of

---

[80] A.J. Trythall, 'J.F.C. Fuller: Staff Officer Extraordinary', David French and Brian Holden Reid (eds), *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation, 1870-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 145.

[81] 'Not that there was much glory in the daily life of a company commander in 1913. When the officer commanding E Company of 2 Blankshires could raise his head above the routine of training drafts, attending to 'compassionate' and minor disciplinary cases, inspecting his men's feet and socks after marches, wondering how he would find enough men for the beginning of the collective training season, or simply checking the serviceability of equipment in his company quartermaster sergeant's stores, he was aware that there was much concern in high places about fire and manoeuvre on the battlefield. But all staff 'guff' (loose 'shop' talk or rumour) above brigade level was unreal compared with the mundane problems he had to solve in his company office. An item of 'guff' was that conferences and trials on a new battalion organisation had ended with a decision. Then one morning rumour took material form as a letter from the Adjutant. From 1 January 1914, the Battalion would be organised in four large companies of 200 men each instead of eight companies of 100 men. E Company would cease to exist; he would cease to be a company commander. Suddenly the dreary responsibilities of command seemed less drear.' Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power*, 35.

[82] Ibid., 43

[83] As demonstrated by the wholesale abandonment of their staff positions by offers keen to return to their regiments and play a tactical combat role rather than remain in the less appealing staff position for which they were trained. Kirke et al, *Report*, 7.

headquarters and held widely different ranks. They could hold the formal staff qualification of Passed Staff College *(psc)*, gained by completing an approved course of study at a Staff College.[84] But many who worked in staff positions, often quite successfully, did not have that qualification. In the immediate pre-war period, the term 'staff officer' was not applied to as specific a category of officer or staff function as Esher's Committee had intended. Instead of being an elite form of strategic and operational experts, distributed vertically through the various headquarters of the field army, in its formal application it had come to be used much more narrowly. In this meaning, a staff officer was someone who served on the newly formed Imperial General Staff, later more usually shortened to General Staff, from where the shorthand reference 'G Staff' came, and wore distinctions on his uniforms to identify him as a Staff Officer. Until the war, the term was more commonly, but not exclusively, encountered in relation to officers serving at the politico/strategic level in organisations such as the War Office or the Committee of Imperial Defence.

To add confusion to an already dysfunctional pre-war system, the term 'staff officer' was also used informally to describe any officer attached to or on a staff of a headquarters higher than the basic unit of organisation in the British Army, the battalion. Headquarters were fundamentally concerned with command, control and co-ordination. Above a certain number of men, the scale of planning and coordinating operations became too great to be done by officers with other direct command responsibilities.[85] Officers with no direct command responsibilities were appointed to undertake operational planning and co-ordination, administration and logistics support. The brigade administrative officer (the Staff Captain) was as likely to be called a staff officer as was the principal intelligence officer in the War Office. This almost dual meaning continued forward into the war, although it became much more complex when new roles and responsibilities arose out of the new type of warfare encountered, such as specialist mining engineers or gas officers.

---

[84] There were other sources of staff training (other than Quetta or Camberley). The first were the administrative courses held at the London School of Economics since 1907 and designed to fit officers for higher administrative staff posts. By July 1914, 235 had qualified, of whom 220 were still serving in 1914. The second were short Intelligence courses held since 1904 in the home commands: these ranged wider than strict intelligence work and, judging by a surviving course report, were both imaginative and intense. They were seen as a useful preliminary to Staff College and, in India, as actually providing GSO3s in war. N. Evans, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers 1914-18', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 78: 313 (Spring, 2000), 29.

[85] In 1914, the battalion of 1000 men was the limit.

Officers not classified as staff officers undertook duties that were considered to be staff duties and others who were qualified as staff officers filled regimental positions. The limited and disjointed progress Britain had made in developing the General Staff meant that, with the need for rapid expansion to an army capable of operating on the continent , the pool of officers with any experience of the staff process was inadequate.[86] The combination of insufficient numbers and rapid expansion also made the goal of a German-style planning elite even less achievable.[87] The wholesale return of the few qualified staff officers to their regiments and the severe shortage of officers who had passed a staff course, relative to the number of staff positions, saw most staff posts, particularly those at the lower levels, either filled by aged retired officers with no formal staff training and little understanding of the new army or by regimental officers unfit for field service.[88] The basic distinction of whether or not the staff officer had passed a recognised staff course did not survive past the first day of the war, with far-reaching consequences for efficient staff work, particularly planning.

This staff planning arrangement was clearly different from either Britain's allies or opponents. The continental armies, especially Germany and Austria-Hungary, operated under a much more hierarchical and centralised planning structure, where the General Staff worked out operational plans.[89] The continental system did allow a much more flexible command style at lower levels of the command structure, where the discretion allowed subordinate commands to adapt the overarching plan as circumstances developed was greater than in the British system in 1916. While this style of command worked well when implemented by experienced and fully trained practitioners in an army that understood how it was meant to work, the absence of a well-established British general staff tradition,[90] combined with the severe shortage of

---

[86] Trythall, 'J.F.C. Fuller: Staff Officer Extraordinary', 143-5.
[87] Even when the system of a specialist staff structure was accepted, the size of the pre-war British Army ensured that the staffs had little opportunity to practice their responsibilities. 'The Regular Army staffs were meagre in peacetime: GHQ of the Expeditionary Force, like a butterfly, came to life for only the few days in the years when it exercised on manoeuvres. Its performance was then amateurish, as might be expected. Only one of the three Corps HQ existed, even in skeleton, for it was originally intended that GHQ should control the Divisions directly.' Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power*, 42.
[88] Kirke et al., *Report*, 7.
[89] Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 172.
[90] Even in 1915, the structure of the General Staff was a subject of intrigue. A meeting between Haig and Lord Esher in November 1915 resulted in Esher resolving to take a plan to move the Directorate of Military Operations and the Directorate of Staff Duties out of the War Office and put under command of the Chief of the General Staff to form a strengthened Imperial General Staff and reduce the War

trained staff officers and the lack of time to develop them,[91] meant that the British could not emulate the continental planning system until near the end of the war.[92] In addition, the Army needed to understand how the centralised staff system worked and accept its somewhat radical formula for external 'control' on the local commander so it could synchronise the work of the staff with the regimental command group. It also needed a regimental system in which the officers and senior NCOs understood how to work with the centralised staff system. The small size of the pre-war British Army,[93] its massive expansion in just two years and the high casualty rates among professional junior leaders, meant that insufficient numbers of experienced regimental officers and senior NCOs were available who could make highly centralised planning but devolved implementation work.

The British system, at least until mid-1918, differed in two key areas from the German model. The operations and planning staff on a headquarters were answerable to, and under the full command of, their commander, not split between their commander and a staff chain of command to a higher level staff officer in a higher headquarters. This meant that it was the commander, not the staff officer, who made the planning decisions.[94] Secondly, British operations and planning staff were expected to

---

Office to an administrative organisation. Apart from the fundamental error of splitting operational planning from the essential administrative support function, the fact that Lord Esher could contemplate such radical surgery in the middle of a war suggests that the Imperial General Staff was largely irrelevant to the conduct of the war. Sheffield and Bourne (eds), *Douglas Haig. War Diaries and Letters,* 169.

[91] An individual infantryman can be reasonably competent after about three months of continuous training. After another three months of collective training, he is an effective combat soldier. The accepted rule of thumb was that under wartime conditions, it took two years of training and experience, with the right candidate, to develop a competent infantry battalion leader. A senior commander and a senior planning staff officer took many more years unless, as happened between 1914-18, the time was not available and these critical planners had to be developed in a compressed timeframe and the mistakes they made accepted as part of the cost of their accelerated learning. War time demands also affected the German General Staff. 'In war, promotion of General Staff Officers is also accelerated. For instance, a number of General Staff Officers, who became Captains in March 1912, were promoted to the rank of Major in December 1916, thus gaining nearly two years seniority over regimental officers of the same service.' David Nash, *German Army Handbook April 1918* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1977), 22.

[92] 'In August 1914, there were only 447 officers in the army who had received formal staff training. By 1916, there were 18 corps, each of which required 400 staff officers.' P. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', *British Army Review* 86 (August, 1987), 32.

[93] In August 1914, the BEF consisted of six divisions of infantry (of which only four deployed to the continent immediately) and one of cavalry. Gordon Corrigan*, Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War* (London: Cassell, 2003), 193. This meant there was not a 'critical mass' of skilled and experienced junior officers and NCOs available to both lead the newly raised large volunteer (and later even larger conscript and mass) Army and provide the large number of skilled instructors required to train the huge numbers of new junior leaders that this expansion demanded.

[94] 'Everyone has been kind on Messines and I am always so glad for my old chief's sake (Plumer). There wasn't a detail of that show that he didn't go into himself. The whole credit belongs to him and not his staff. We did everything under his guidance.' Letter, 27 January 1931, General Sir Charles Harrington to

take on additional duties, such as training and operating formation schools, outside their planning responsibilities.[95] Given this institutional confusion over their correct role, it is not unsurprising that the average soldier's ignorance as to their role and function helped them acquire a poor reputation with the regimental side of the Army.[96] Whether the role of the commander, or the distraction of the training burden, did constitute a limitation on the British planning methodology has yet to be tested.

Despite some of the criticism of the British approach, the evidence from this war makes it clear that the formal General Staff model was no more likely to guarantee operational success than the British method. The highly trained, vastly more experienced German General Staff had not been able to guarantee the Germans victory in the opening months of the war – when all the advantages had lain with them. The French General Staff (GQG) had not been able to devise and implement a plan to counter the German invasion: the French counter-invasion of Germany, the so-called 'Battle of the Frontiers', had proved an unmitigated disaster for the French Army.[97] What these examples do demonstrate is that, irrespective of how good lower level planning in the theatre of operations may or may not be, it will always be subject to the impact of strategic planning errors that occurred at the highest political levels both before and during the conflict. Thus, for the British on the Somme, the planners were having to deal with, and make plans affected by, such difficult political/strategic decisions as going to war with an army inadequate in men and material and an industrial base incapable of immediately satisfying rapidly increasing demand for weapons, materiel, food and transport. These high level factors set the stage for operational and tactical planning yet rarely feature in assessments of the planners' performances. For example, a cause usually cited in analysis of the Somme 'disaster' as being incompatible with the means he had

---

Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds regarding Bean's draft chapter on the Battle of Messines. Bean Papers, 3DRL 7953, AWM34.

[95] The operation and appropriate location of the various specialist schools continued to be a source of some debate amongst the staff even until 1917. Col C.J Allanson in commenting on the formation of Corps schools of musketry, Lewis guns etc., which replaced the divisional schools, observed that this was a good thing as it allowed the divisional officers – for whom teaching at the divisional school schools was a distraction – to think entirely about the offence and defence of their line. Allanson Papers, 1917 Diary. 10 DS/MISC/69, IWM.

[96] The poor reputation of the staff officer did not originate in this war and was probably just part of an ongoing tradition. 'Did not the great Duke of Wellington once complain that he has been sent two staff officers, of whom one was a lunatic and the other a chronic invalid? And still he won the war.' A.B. (Banjo) Patterson, *Happy Dispatches* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1934), 13.

[97] Edmonds, *BOH,* I, 43; Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 74-5.

available was the Commander-in-Chief's operational objective: attrition of the German Army versus a major break-through to return to a war of manoeuvre. While this statement is undoubtedly correct, it needs qualification by reference to the problems, recognised by Haig, of inadequately trained and insufficient numbers of troops,[98] insufficient and unreliable artillery and shortages of and unreliable high explosive shells.[99]

If the number of officers described as 'staff officer' in the pre-war British Army was relatively small, this was as much a reflection of the lack of standing regular formations higher than the Regiment in the peace-time Army to provide the staff positions as it was of a system for producing appropriately qualified officers. There were some higher command organisations, such as the Aldershot Command, in which officers were employed as staff in staff-like functions,[100] but the Army rarely collected its disparate units together into formations larger than divisions.[101] There was no GHQ in existence, although its structure was known and officers were 'shadow posted' to some of the positions within it.[102] Consequently, the opportunity for even the small number of qualified staff officers to practise their trade was very limited. After the War's outbreak, the problem became even worse for the formations left behind in England that were expected to provide the expansion base for the BEF.

> This Division (the 64th Highlanders) has just moved down from Perth, and does not impress me in the least. The Staff work is, to say the least of it, extremely poor. There are boys of 21 on it who cannot know much, though I am sure they do their best, important and secret letters are left lying about all over the place My senior staff

---

[98] Edmonds, the British Official historian, is quite clear on this matter: 'This [referring to inadequate resources of trained men] applies to practically every British operation in the War until August 1918. The means available were insufficient because directly Haig managed to collect a reserve, the French demanded he should take over more of the line, but at the same time implored, begged and insisted on offensive operations.' Edmonds to Bean, 17 March 1931. Bean Papers, 3DRL7953/34, part 1 item 38, AWM.

[99] The French Liaison Officer at GHQ certainly recognised Haig's dilemma: in a report to Joffre in April 1916, he highlighted the British lack of troops, artillery and ammunition. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory*, 279.

[100] 'Aldershot Command provided the nucleus of one Corps staff.' Richard Holmes, *Riding the Retreat: Mons to the Marne 1914 Revisited* (London: Random House, 1996), 28.

[101] Until 1897, the UK had not had any training areas large enough to concentrate more than a small brigade except Aldershot and the Curragh. This changed when Salisbury Plain was purchased in 1897 but it was still difficult. Michael Glover, *Warfare from Waterloo to Mons* (London: Cassell, 1980), 222. The comment is more correct for the British Home Army than for the British Indian Army, where columns of forces larger than division size were a more common occurrence. However, the impact of Indian Army officers on the thinking and operation of the BEF was limited.

[102] Holmes, *Riding the Retreat,* 28.

> officer is an ex-soldier who had retired and was a barrister at Sierra Leone, no staff training and has not seen service during this war.[103]

The slow growth of understanding within the Imperial army as to the nature, role and function of staff officers, including even recognising the differences between strategic policy roles and combat formation staff duties, was mirrored in Australia in the years prior to 1914.[104] The term Staff Officer had been in use since the beginning of the Army, but its meaning was only clear from the context in which it was used.[105] In his first Annual Report to Parliament in May 1903, the GOC Sir Edward Hutton complained of the lack of 'assistance of experienced and qualified Staff Officers of the Imperial Army'.[106] From the description of the roles he needed assistance with, it is clear that he meant administrative and organisational staff (Adjutant General functions) as well as operational planners and strategic thinkers. The staff function at the lower levels of command, especially in the context of tactical planning for larger formations, was still not recognised in practice although the staff positions, such as Brigade Major, were in existence.[107] Published brigade orders of battle, that included positions described as 'Brigade staff',[108] make it clear that the duties of those occupying these positions were, primarily, administrative.[109]

---

[103] (Col.) C.J.L. Allanson, Letter, 1 April 1916, to his brother Henry. Allanson Papers, DS/MISC/69, IWM.

[104] Bruce Faraday, 'Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918' (Canberra: Unpublished thesis, UNSW, 1997).

[105] A report on a Militia exercise in 1907 includes an example of how titles, such as Brigade Major were loosely applied during this period. An order by the Officer Commanding (OC) of one of the Exercise Forces (Blue Force) was promulgated by a Captain with no clear appointment signing himself 'Brigade Major, Blue Force.' McGlinn Papers, 3 DRL 632 item 3, AWM.

[106] Commonwealth of Australia, *Annual Report Upon the Military Forces of the Commonwealth for the Period January, 1902 - 30th April, 1903* Parliamentary Papers, 1903 Session, Vol. II: No. 37.

[107] It is probable that the type of support envisaged from a brigade major was still perceived by the traditional military establishment in Australia as the responsibility of the Commander alone. In his promotion examination for major, John Monash had to pass exams testing his knowledge of all three arms, including practical tests on the formation and movement of cavalry, infantry and artillery and their co-operation in up to brigade-sized formations. There was no reference to employing this knowledge in a staff or supporting role – it was considered an essential skill of the commander. Peter Pedersen, *Monash as a Military Commander* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985), 17.

[108] Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901-2001* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29.

[109] J. P. McGlinn, Brigade Major of 1st Infantry Bde in Sydney 1907, notes that his duties included planning the Easter brigade training exercise (based on his CO's, Colonel Ranclaud, concept), undertaking all the administrative and logistics planning necessary and being responsible for the Brigade Guard. Once the exercise began, McGlinn appears to have functioned as both the Camp Commandant and as an exercise referee. There is no evidence in his papers that he was required to support his commander in the field as an assistant or provider of tactical planning or advice. McGlinn Papers, 3 DRL 632 item 3, AWM.

Staff officers of either type were rare for most of the pre-war period in Australia. One of the main reasons for the creation of the Royal Military College at Duntroon was to try and rectify this deficiency. The Australian Section of the Imperial General Staff came into being on 1 July 1909, and comprised three departments: Intelligence, Defence Organisation (which in 1912, became the Directorate of Military Operations and absorbed the Intelligence function within its expanded role)[110] and Military Training. Small developments followed, such as the creation of District Military Libraries which were intended to provide information for military planners. Those officers who did occupy staff posts fell into two categories: a small number of mainly permanent officers in Army Headquarters in Melbourne and the larger group of mainly militia officers, especially those in the Intelligence Corps, whose duties theoretically included planning and advice to senior commanders in the field formations.[111] Even among the latter group though, it was rare to find anyone with any experience of operational planning involving formations of troops. Under some commanders, notably Monash, the Intelligence Corps trained its officers for strategic and operational level planning, although here too it tended to be more for logistics or Adjutant General and Quartermaster General functions than for operations planning.[112]

The problem remained that Australia did not have, and could not produce quickly enough, suitably trained and/or experienced staff officers for a force the size of the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) after its initial formation as a division. In 1913, there were just 220 permanent officers on establishment. (See Table 1.)

---

[110] Australian Military Forces, Military Order 444/12 of 1912.

[111] Other permanent force personnel were employed as instructors with militia units, and many of these functioned as an administrative staff for that unit. Palazzo, *The Australian Army,* 32. However, there is no evidence that these permanent force instructors were intended to be the operational staff for brigade or larger formations on mobilization, rather they seem to have been focussed on training the Militia in basic military skills.

[112] According to Pedersen: 'The distinction between "pure" intelligence functions and what would now be called operational staff duties was soon blurred, as at least some of Bridges' hopes for the (Intelligence) Corps were realized. In October 1908, Monash's section began preparing plans for the mobilization of each unit in Victoria and in the following year for the trans-shipment of troops at Albury-Wodonga. At a much lower level, he set simple staff problems involving an infantry brigade; his officers had to calculate the road space occupied and the amount of supplies needed and to prepare the march orders.' Pedersen, *Monash,* 24.

In 1914, the number of qualified staff serving in Australia was just four,[113] including British and ex-British regulars. When the AIF left Albany, Western Australia, on 1 November 1914, they were augmented first by Captain T.A. Blamey and then Major C.H. Foott, both of whom joined the AIF from postings with the British Army in England.[114] Another, Captain J. Lavarack, was at Camberley when the war broke out and was passed out early. Lavarack did not join the AIF for another two years, serving in the War Office, then in staff positions with British units and formations until 15 July 1916, when he joined the AIF in France.[115] Early graduation of the first intake of RMC cadets also provided a nucleus of junior and completely inexperienced staff officers but the AIF staff officer requirement was never completely satisfied by Australian officers during the war. The problem in the operations planning area was compounded by the decision that where possible Australians should be administered by Australians, so many of the original AIF officers with some staff experience, or peacetime civilian skills that would provide some basis for staff work, were inevitably posted into administrative slots. This situation was further compounded when the AIF experienced its rapid growth in early 1916 with the raising of three additional infantry divisions.[116] For the 5th Division, formed in February 1916, the pool of available Australian staff officers was insufficient and several of the key positions were filled by Imperial or Indian Army officers.

---

[113] Officers who attended either of the two Empire Staff Colleges, and passed the assessments, were awarded the qualification, Passed Staff College, usually abbreviated to *psc*.

[114] Lieutenant Colonel C.B.B. White, Major D.J. Glasfurd (British regular seconded to the Australian force), Major J. Jellibrand (formerly of the Manchester Regiment) and Captain F.D Irvine (Royal Engineers). While by later war standards, this number of qualified staff officers was inadequate, it still compared favourably with most British Divisions at the time where the ratio of qualified staff to regimental officers was considerably smaller. Captain Irvine, serving as Brigade Major of the 1st Infantry Brigade, was killed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915.

[115] Brett Lodge, *Lavarack: Rival General* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998), 3.

[116] Even by 1918, when the AIF had some 9411 officers, fewer than 500 could be defined as having some staff officer type or related non-staff but planning function. Australian Imperial Force, *Gradation List of Officers, October 1918* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1918).

Table One

Establishment of Officers of the Permanent Forces, 1912-1913.[117]

UNIT	Lieutenant Colonel or higher	Major	Captain	Lieutenant	Surgeon-General	Veterinary Capt.	Veterinary Lieut	Quartermaster	Honorary Rank	**TOTAL**
Administrative and Instructional Staff	17	27	33	34	1			7	4	123*
Royal Australian Field Artillery	1	3	3	6						13
Royal Australian Garrison Artillery	2	6	10	23						41
Royal Australian Engineers		2	3	8				1	8	22
Royal Australian Service Corps						3	2	1		6
Army Medical Corps								2		2
Ordnance Department								1		1
Sub Total	20	38	49	71	1	3	2	12	12	208
Borrowed+	3	3	6							12
GRAND TOTAL	23	41	55	71	1	3	2	12	12	220

* includes 9 Officers at RMC

\+ 1 Inspector General; 1 Director, Military Training; 2 Directors, RMC; 1 Instructor, RMC; 1 Director Engineers; 1 Staff Officer Engineers; 1 General Staff Officer Grade II; 1 Director, Ordnance Services; 1 Communications Officer; 1 Instructor, Field Artillery; 1 Director, Supply and Transport and Chief Instructor Aust. Service Corps.

Education and Training the pre-War Planning Staffs

Surprisingly, in view of its importance to the conduct of this war, planning is little discussed in the training material that was available to British and Empire officers prior to the outbreak of the war. Planning, or the various elements of a plan, were not defined

[117] Department of Defence, 'Military Order 34 of 1913', *Military Orders 1913* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1913), 19.

or described in either the Field Service Regulations Part One 1909 (hereafter FSR1),[118] or the Field Service Pocket Book 1914 (hereafter FSP).[119] The result of the planning process, the orders issued, is discussed in some detail in FSR1 but there is nothing to guide the planner on what is required to be considered, quantified, timed or assembled prior to the issuing of the order.[120] The basic requirements of a plan, that it clearly sets out what is to be done, when and by whom, are left to be deduced from the body of both documents. That a plan should have a specific outcome in mind, an outcome which should be known and understood by all those participating, is not acknowledged. Likewise, the importance of conducting reconnaissance and evaluating all the available data so that the plan can be informed by a complete understanding of the likely impediments to its implementation was not identified as a prerequisite. There was no suggestion that all the participants in the planned action should be aware of the issues and assumptions that influenced the formulation of the plan, so that should events not go according to the plan, alternatives could be adopted that might still enable the overall outcome to be achieved.

There was one excellent manual available to guide the prospective staff officer. Unfortunately, as it was a translated German work entitled *The Duties of the General Staff,* [121] its immediate utility to the British was limited.[122] The book sets out in great detail the role and function, as well as the organisation and administration, of the General Staff in both peace and war. It contains a Foreword to the translated version by the then Director of Military Operations in the War Office, Major General J.M. Grierson, which contains no indication of his views as to its relevance to the British Army. Notably lacking also is any encouragement to British staff officers or candidates to consider the material in the book as valuable to them.

---

[118] General Staff War Office, *Field Service Regulations Part One – Operations 1909 (Reprinted with Amendments) 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914).
[119] General Staff War Office, *Field Service Pocket Book, 1914,* (hereafter FSP14) (London: HMSO, 1914).
[120] Ironically, given that command appears to subsume the planning process, the 1914 list of military manuals available for the education of officers lists only a translated German Officer's pamphlet on the art of command. FSP14, 5. Even the sole recommended training pamphlet on Operation Orders is another translated German work. FSP14, 17.
[121] Bronsart von Schellendorff, *The Duties of the General Staff* (translated) (London: HMSO, 1905).
[122] 'The English Army is in every respect so entirely different from any of the great European armies, not only as regards the system of recruiting of the Army but also as regards administration and the duties of the higher military authorities, that it must not appear surprising if the character, duties and business of the General Staff belonging to it are totally different from that of any other Army. The "Staff" in the English Army is looked upon rather as consisting of the General Officers holding commands and the staffs attached to them in peace or war; moreover, a great deal of the duties connected with Army administration is transferred to the General Staff.' Schellendorff, *Duties*, 105.

The British staff planning system was also affected by the lack of some basic building blocks common to most of its continental contemporaries at the commencement of the war. Doctrine, the basic blueprint for how an army operates and fights, was poorly developed in 1914.

> Wrong though the French proved to be, it was better to have some doctrine and some plan than no doctrine and no plan. General Langlois, the French artilleryman, observed that although the British manuals in 1914 were excellent, lack of doctrine made them useless.[123]

The lack of accepted doctrine thus compounded the problems of inter-arms cooperation and support. One of the main functions of the divisional and higher planners was the provision and coordination of supporting elements to aid the infantry. Pre-war thinking that continued well into the war tended to see a battle in separate and unrelated components: unless the artillery was in the line next to the infantry, it likely would not engage targets as required by the infantry.

> The pointless attacking tactics that the infantry pursued in 1916 and 1917 might have been avoided had a clear statement been made in the manuals before the war to the effect that fire-tactics were concerned with the progressive occupation of advantageous fire-positions and their effective use by all arms to inflict casualties on the enemy. Of course, companies practised the positive principle when they moved from fire-position to fire-position in the fire zone. But before the war, commanders above them did not envisage attacking defences that were organised in depth. Consequently battalion, brigade and divisional commanders did not regard the infantry battle as a progressive fire-fight. They did not select objectives from the point of view of ensuring continued fire support. In 1915-17, at the highest levels of command, the decisive and compelling facts of ground and fire-control were too often lost to sight when Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig conceived plans on a larger canvas.[124]

The failure to establish centrally organised and controlled schools further contributed to this 'arms insularity' that so characterised the British Army's approach to war.[125] The old view that training was the responsibility of the commander meant the War Office, its specialist Staff Duties and Military Training branches, was largely unable to influence pre-war training in basic military functions. It was only with regard the controversial staff officer function that the War Office had input into training.

---

[123] Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power,* 15
[124] Ibid., 27.
[125] 'Indeed, commanders at all levels opposed the conception of Arms Schools or centralised training, fearing that either would weaken their own power and encourage a German type of General Staff.' Ibid., 42.

In 1914, there were two establishments in the Empire training staff officers: Camberley and Quetta. The oldest and main college of education for staff officers, Camberley in Surrey in England, had been operating independently of Sandhurst since 1870. The College was established, somewhat imprecisely, to train future commanders and staff officers. While Camberley had begun to be an attractive opportunity for ambitious young officers from about the mid-1890s, and while it had begun to offer a syllabus that tried to prepare officers for a future staff appointment, it was still not structured to turn out the type of highly educated *intelligentsia* elite that the German Staff College, the *Kriegsakadamie,* was producing. The Camberley course was twenty-two months and included military history, strategy and tactics, fortification, staff duties and applied science.[126] While a good academic foundation for a staff officer,[127] it was all largely wasted in the pre-war period by the lack of sufficient opportunities for graduates to practice on sufficient troops to refine their knowledge. Nor did Camberley ever produce the volume of graduates the Army would need with its rapid expansion: 60 to 80 per course appears to have been the norm (and probably adequate for a small Imperial army).

The restricted intake by Camberley had become an issue for the Indian Army as well. Operations on the North West Frontier in 1897-98 had revealed a major weakness in the staff system of the Indian Army yet the only avenue for staff training was Camberley. While Camberley was willing to accept six Indian Officers on each course, the cost associated with attendance prevented many from either applying or attending. The obvious solution, initially proposed by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, and later seen to fruition over the intense objections of the Army Council by Lord Kitchener, was for an Indian Staff College. The new college was required to mirror the entrance standards, curriculum and assessment of Camberley and accepted its first intake in 1905. Included in the total of 24 students were seven Imperial Army officers. Moving to Quetta in 1907, the Indian College was an important additional source of staff training for the whole of the Empire: both colleges began accepting Dominion officers, as well as Royal

---

[126] J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 16.
[127] Sir James Edmonds was less positive about either the course or the academic rigour with which it was taught. He claimed he managed to pass the unimaginative and undemanding course with very little work, while at the same time completing a major study of the American Civil War. Ibid., 18.

Navy Officers, from this period.[128] Both colleges closed on the outbreak of war and remained closed for the duration, thus depriving the British Army of two institutions experienced in the delivery of this specialised training.[129]

In Australia, until Royal Military College Duntroon was established in 1911, the lack of available training was a major cause of staff officer shortage for the newly established Australian Army. Two options were available. For a very select few of the permanent force, attendance at either of the two Imperial staff colleges – Camberley or Quetta – could be arranged. For most officers however, and particularly for the part-time militia, no specific staff training was available. Hutton instituted 'staff rides' as one form of specialist training and the University of Sydney offered some military science courses that included some subjects relevant to staff functions. The usual formal qualifications required for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, as set out in Army Orders, included little that was directly comparable to the type of operational and tactical training offered by the staff colleges. In 1907, these qualifications were:

> Syllabus of subjects for promotion of Officers to the rank of LTCOL:
>
> Tactical Fitness for Command:
>
> Subjects include:
> 1. map reading and estimating;
> 2. disposition of troops (1 or 2 Bns, 1 Bty, 1 or 2 Sqdns and 'Departmental' troops in a tactical problem;
> 3. order writing – for 2 tactical problems. Tied to the solution for (2);
> 4. (a) handling, in a tactical operation, a Regt or a Bn or a Bty (candidate to choose);
> (b) carrying out changes of position, front or formation as a result of surprise situation; and
> 5. commanding in the field a force of all arms in any operation involving minor tactics and issuing orders within ½ an hour of getting the problem.[130]

Within this syllabus, the problem of commanding an all-arms force would introduce the candidate to some of the problems and issues confronting a staff planner

---

[128] It appears to have been very successful in providing sufficient *psc* for the Indian forces sent to France in 1914. 'It is said that staff officers were urgently needed to complete the staffing and training of the New Armies in England; that it was noted that in the Meerut Division (of the Indian Army) all the Brigade Majors and Staff Captains were *psc* officers and that one or the other in each brigade should be spared for the purpose.' Henderson diary, December 1914. Henderson Papers, DS/MISC/2, IWM.
[129] Recognition of the need for formal staff training during the war saw the Army initially establish schools within Corps for specialist staff training (primarily for tactical planning and implementation staff training) and later augment this basic level of instruction with contracted short (six months) staff courses at several British universities, including Cambridge. Louch Papers, PR 65/363, AWM.
[130] McGlinn Papers, 3 DRL632 item 4, AWM.

but the time limit imposed suggests the end result was not likely to be a complex, lengthy or sophisticated product. Furthermore, the limited all arms resources and infrequent combined exercises conducted in pre-war Australia severely limited the opportunities to expose middle ranking regimental officers to this type of complex undertaking.

Even at the basic level of staff appointment, brigade major and staff captain, pre-war Australian staff officers were not well prepared for the role by either training or experience.[131] In the pre-war period, brigade level staff duties appear to have been much more focussed on the administration training and preparation for brigade exercises than on developing operational or tactical staff skills.[132]

If the definition of a staff officer defies easy generalisation, the same difficulties apply to the organisational structure in which the staff officer worked and the duties he performed.[133] By 1914, all purely 'staff' functions fell into three categories, known by the letters G, A and Q.[134] Of these, the G staff were responsible for operations and operational planning, the A or administrative staff dealt with personnel and the Q, or quartermaster staff, were concerned with all matters of supply or logistics. The A and Q functions were often considered complementary areas of responsibilities and at some

---

[131] A major part of the problem was that Australia, following the British lead, did not conduct its first military exercise involving a formation of troops larger than a brigade until 1910, when the visit of Lord Kitchener prompted the gathering together of all the Brigades in Victoria into almost a divisional-sized formation for an exercise. Pedersen, *Monash,* 27.

[132] McGlinn Papers, 3 DRL632 item 4, AWM.

[133] The perception of a staff officer from below was also an enlightening observation. "This means that for some months at least, I shall be engaged on staff work on the 7th Brigade HQ staff, and then perhaps someday, when a vacancy occurs, I shall become a Staff Capt. When that day comes, you may congratulate me in your heartiest manner, because staff appointments are the "plums" of the army, and a staff officer is a sort of superior being who is quite a thing apart from the common or garden variety of regimental captain. You need to be a soldier yourself to realise with what awe and wonder a staff officer is regarded by us ordinary mortals. As you know, they are supposed to be the "brains of the Army" and they are the men who really play the best of the game, and without actually fighting or dealing directly with the men, or shooting or struggling with the enemy, match their brains and cunning against that of the other side, and accomplished success or otherwise by moving the pawns from place to place, and directing operations from the end of millions of wires. My life is very much more comfortable than hitherto. Instead of living and billeting in farms and shops, I now swank around with the General, live in a beautiful Chateau and have two horses instead of one - in case one gets tired, I suppose. There is a great deal of work to do at present - mostly office work and inspections but it is a great change to me and carried out under the pleasantest conditions.' Captain G.L. Maxfield. Maxfield Papers, 1DRL/0489, AWM.

[134] General Staff, War Office, FSP14, 25.

command levels were discharged by the same individual.[135] A detailed outline of the various responsibilities of the three staff streams, at the highest level of command in the British Army, is set out in Annex A (page 310). For divisional and brigade staffs, the scale, complexity and diversity of their responsibilities would of course be correspondingly less encompassing but more focussed on the tactical performance of their respective formations.

In the structure of a pre-1914 British Empire army (including Australia), the brigade was the smallest formation with a formal staff structure. Lower level formations such as battalions did have officers, for example adjutants, whose duties had many of the appearances of staff duties. For minor operations, planning responsibility was often delegated even further down the military hierarchy, to the commanders of the company or platoon conducting the mission. However, on this limited and relatively uncomplicated scale, planning and co-ordination were accepted as a normal part of the commander's responsibilities.

Figure 1.

The Structure of an Infantry Brigade.

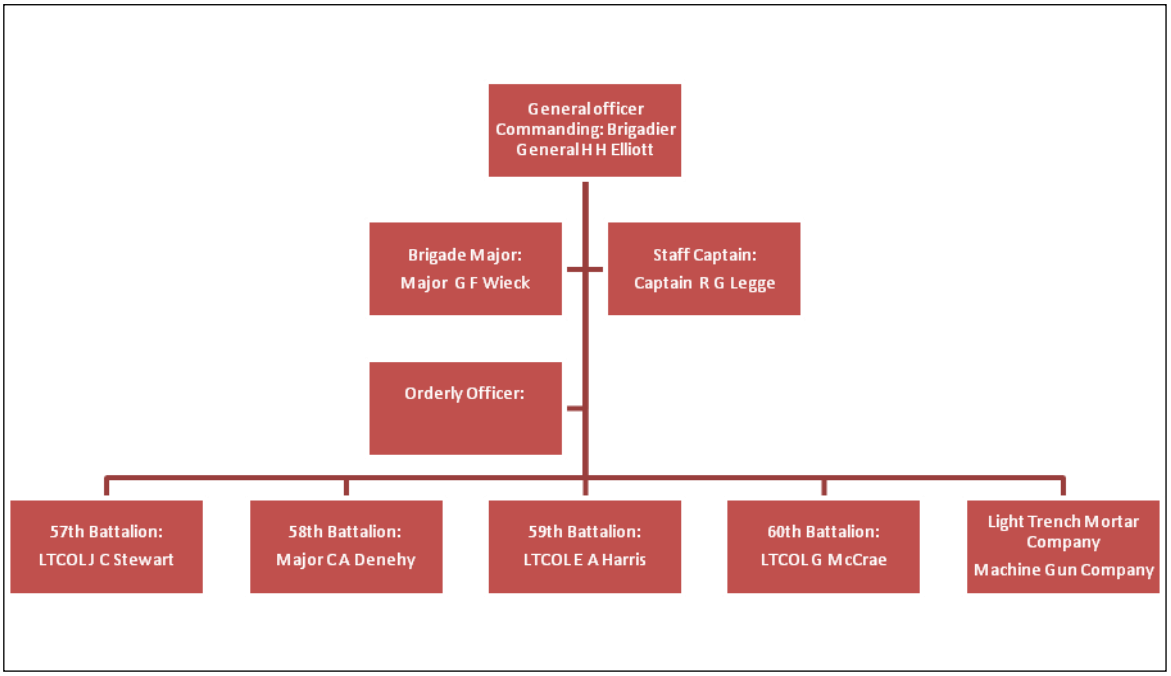


Figure 1 shows the Australian 15th Brigade as at 19 July 1916.

[135] This mainly occurred at the smallest formation level, infantry brigade or light horse regiment. Here, the staff captain was responsible usually for both administration and the quartermaster roles.

The brigade was also, arguably, the smallest distinguishable combat element engaged on the Western Front. Before 1914, the brigade was usually the largest formation of the British Home Army that routinely exercised together. The same was true in Australia.[136] In 1914, the brigade had an authorized war establishment strength of 124 officers and 3,931 men, made up mainly of riflemen in four battalions. Each battalion consisted of eight rifle companies, a machine gun section and a headquarters element, totalling 1007 officers and men.[137] The remaining 27 men were the brigade headquarters staff.[138] In late 1914, a radical restructuring occurred that reduced the number of companies in the battalion from eight to four and introduced platoons as a lower level manoeuvre element: the lowest commanded by an officer. There was no change in the overall authorized strength of the battalion

To plan the activities of this force, the brigade commander, usually a brigadier general or senior colonel, was assisted by two officers, a major, who was known as the Brigade Major (BM), and a captain, known as the Staff Captain (SC).[139] There was occasionally a third officer on the headquarters strength, known as the Orderly Officer.[140] He was, in effect, a staff trainee, although he did tend to act as the personal assistant to the brigade commander. The brigade also had an authorized 'Administrative Services' officer to administer its veterinary needs. Several other functions, such as postal and policing responsibilities, were discharged by non-commissioned officers and men attached for the purpose. They usually came under the command of the Staff Captain.

---

136 Pedersen, *Monash,* 27.

137 The equivalent pre-war Australian infantry battalion was slightly stronger, having an authorized strength of 1023.

138 The headquarters strength of the 2nd Brigade, as raised in 1914, consisted of 16 privates, 3 drivers, 1 corporal, 1 lance sergeant, 1 squadron sergeant major, 1 veterinary corps captain, 1 staff captain, 1 brigade major and the brigade commander (a colonel). The missing appointment would appear to be the medical corps captain. AIF Project Database. www.aif.adfa.edu.au.

139 When Australia first raised the 1st Division, command of the component brigades was by a full colonel. By 1916, when the expanded force moved to France, full colonels tended more to be specialist appointments on higher headquarters and the new rank of brigadier general was introduced to command brigade sized formations. Initially, appointment to brigadier general was temporary only, being made while commanding the brigade. The officer was expected to revert to full colonel if he lost his brigade commander's appointment.

140 The orderly officer position can be a cause of some confusion in relation to the AIF. When the Australian 1st Division was raised, the A&Q role in the brigades was filled by a captain (or a senior lieutenant) called an orderly officer. On arrival in Egypt, this was standardised and this role was filled by the staff captain. The orderly officer position was retained and used to as positions for staff trainees or additional staff officers.

The BM's role was to plan the brigade's operations, both in small scale brigade operations and within a larger operation involving divisional forces, and even more occasionally, involving other troops such as assigned cavalry or artillery units.[141] The Brigade Major's principal task was to interpret the commands from either his commander or higher headquarters and transform them into precise instructions and specific actions for each of the brigade's combat elements.[142] He also advised the brigade commander on all matters relating to the fighting efficiency of the brigade. It was at this level that the minor tactical planning for the battle usually was undertaken. Within the limits set by the overall plan, it was the BM who advised his brigadier on the local objectives that should be achieved and who coordinated the unit actions and tactics necessary to secure them. In theory, he arranged/coordinated any artillery and/or cavalry support that was made available and provided the liaison with adjoining formations.[143]

The three infantry Brigade Majors of the 5th Division who did the basic operational planning for the assault on Fromelles were an interesting mix of age, experience and training. The BM for the 8th Brigade, Major Charles Stewart Davies, was a British regular officer (Leicestershire Regiment) who had been instructing at RMC Duntroon when war broke out. Even though he was relatively young for his rank, thirty-six years of age, he had seen service as a very young subaltern in the South African War. He joined the AIF as Staff Captain 8th Brigade on 29 March 1915 and was promoted to the Brigade Major position on 21 February 1916. At forty seven years of age, the 14th Brigade's Major Arthur Brander Baker, DSO, was considerably older and had had much more experience in the role and rank. He had been a major in the Australian Military Forces before the war and had also seen service in South Africa as

---

[141] Sometimes, considerable additional forces were attached to a brigade for specific operations. In his diary entry for 15 April 1916 (i.e. while still in Egypt), Brigadier 'Pompey' Elliott noted 'I now have under me one Regiment of Light Horse – the 8th under Lieutenant Colonel Maygar VC – one Company of Field Engineers under Major Sturdee, one troop of Bikaneer Camel Corps, 8th Field Ambulance and Signal Engineers.' Elliott Papers, 2DRL513 item 3, AWM.

[142] 'At the 13th Brigade General Glasgow left all but the most important paperwork to his staff; but I soon discovered this did not suit Gellibrand who liked to do his own staff work and use the officers on his staff in the way liaison officers were used in the Hitler war. Having prepared what I regarded as a routine order for a move, I sent it out and put a copy in his basket for him to read at his leisure. He told me never to issue another order unless he had seen and approved it first.' Louch Papers, PR 65/363 part 3, AWM.

[143] Pre-war, British artillery was notorious for 'independence' of thinking when it came to the provision of fire support for the other combat arms. Co-ordination of accurate and effective artillery support remained a challenge for the Brigades when they arrived on the Western Front. J.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (Oxford: Military Press, 1987), 120.

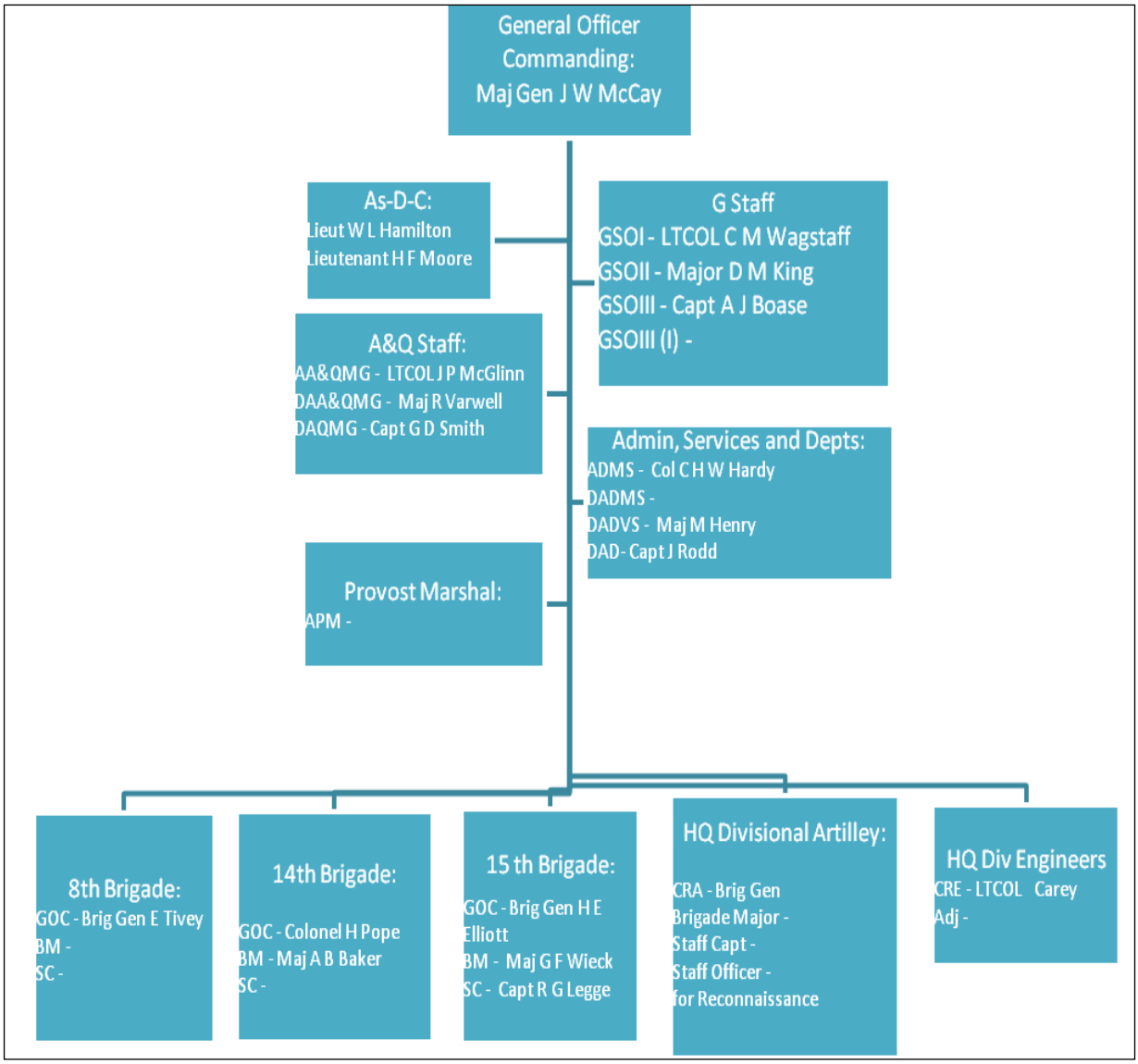
well as being wounded on Gallipoli. He had been Brigade Major of the 4th Light Horse Brigade before being posted to the 14th Brigade on 15 February 1916. The last of the three, from 15th Brigade, was Major George Frederick Gardells Wieck. A year older than Davies, Wieck was an Australian regular officer of the pre-war Administrative and Instructional Service and had seen service in South Africa as an eighteen-year-old. He had seen service on Gallipoli and had been Staff Captain with the 9th Light Horse Regiment. He joined 15th Brigade a few days after it was formed in February 1916. Thus while none of the three key Brigade operational planners had had any formal staff training, by experience they were as well prepared as most of their peers at this stage of the war and their brigades had some prospect of proper, accurate planning prior to their first tactical assault.

The four staff officers of the General Staff Branch were together the divisional equivalent of the Brigade Major, having major responsibility for planning and managing the division in action. The senior G staff officer, known as the GSOI, was usually a lieutenant colonel although, both before and during the war, this could vary.[144] He was responsible for all planning relating to the combat employment of the division. He was the main point of contact between higher and lower level headquarters and with headquarters of other formations. Unlike the Brigade Major, the GSOI was not solely responsible for coordinating the supporting arms such as artillery or the engineers.

[144] In the AIF, T.A. Blamey held the appointment as a full colonel, although he was by then a temporary brigadier general seconded to Monash's staff at Corps Headquarters.

Figure 2.

The structure of an Infantry Division



This figure shows the Australian 5th Infantry Division on 19 July 1916.

The GSOII, usually a major, was responsible for the actual drafting and distribution of orders, monitoring the battle efficiency of the division and preparing all correspondence relating to the division's operations.[145] In some divisions, he was also responsible for training although this was frequently devolved to one of the GSOsIII. The third G staff officer, the GSOIII, was usually a captain. By 1916, the original one position had been split into two with the creation of a GSOIII (I) with responsibility for the headquarters intelligence function although this restructure was still in progress in

[145] In July 1918, 1st Australian Infantry Division returns list Lieutenant Colonel S.L. Milligan (previously BM of 1st Inf. Bde) as GSOII.

July 1916 and not all divisions had filled the position. The original GSOIII position had a less clearly defined role, being an assistant to the two senior GSOs, and had additional duties added as the need arose. For example, in some pre-war divisions, the GSOIII arranged the training schedule – such as it was.

It is illustrative of the functioning of a post-Victorian army that while operational planning was the responsibility of three officers, eight staff officers were necessary to administer and supply the division.[146] The A and Q function was a critical factor in operational planning yet by this classification into areas, input from these specialists was not always possible or welcomed. The size of the divisional headquarters promoted a more rigid compartmentalisation than in the brigade, a circumstance in which the importance of A and Q was not always recognised by either the divisional commander or the G staff planners.

The A and Q function came under the oversight of one individual, the Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General (AA&QMG). A lieutenant colonel, the AA&QMG was responsible for all personnel and quartermaster matters, including administrative responsibility for the medical services. The daily demands of a combat division were so extensive that he required two senior staff in support, one for each area of responsibility. The Deputy Assistant Adjutant General (DAAG) had particular responsibility for discipline, prisoners-of-war (POWs), personnel administrative matters such as promotions, leave, casualties, reinforcements, working parties and fatigues, cookery and (with the Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal) police matters and traffic control. His equivalent on the supply side of the staff was the Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General (DAQMG) whose principal responsibility was the provision of supplies of all kinds. He was responsible also for the provision of maps, supervision of all movements and transport and had oversight of the veterinary care of the significant number of animals required by an infantry division.

Separate from these staff officers, but working closely with them, were the heads of specialist services or departments, the Administrative Services. As with their brigade

---

[146] While operational planning was a recognised responsibility for commanders, administration rarely was treated with the same seriousness by middle and senior commanders in the Victorian and Edwardian British Army. Neglect of the administrative of command by senior British commanders contributed significantly to British defeats in 1914 and 1915.

equivalents, these appointments were more closely connected to the administrative and supply side of the division's activities than with operational planning. However, as war-time experience was to demonstrate most dramatically, their expertise could make an important contribution to operational planning.

The Assistant Director Medical Services (ADMS), for example, was principally involved in the delivery of routine daily medical support but thus also had a role in the planning and conduct of operations. Frequently senior in rank to all the other members of the staff, the ADMS had a role beyond caring for the sick and wounded. He worked closely with the AA&QMG to protect the physical and mental well-being of all the troops in the division. Matters of sanitation were also his responsibility. However, the medical component of the operational plan, covering both the evacuation plan and the placement of aid posts and casualty clearing stations, was important both for the rapid retrieval and evacuation of casualties and for the quick return to the line of lightly wounded. This had a major bearing on troop availability as the battle progressed, as well as the obvious benefits for troop morale and confidence. However, despite these obvious responsibilities, the medical input in operational planning frequently depended on the personalities of the Commander, the ADMS and the GSOI, and the evidence suggests that medical matters were, more often than not, only an afterthought in the planning process.

Much the same issues revolved about the Deputy Assistant Director Veterinary Services who, like his brigade counterpart, had responsibilities for the division's animals, similar to ADMS's responsibilities for the men.[147] If the medical input into planning was unpredictable, the capacity for the ADVS to influence operational planning, especially on the Western Front, was small. Yet failure of the veterinary services would have seriously compromised the division's fighting efficiency, especially its capacity to supply combat materiel to the front line.

While the DAQMG was the division's supply staff officer, he worked closely with several other departments and specialists. Chief among these was an organization

[147] A 1914 division on war establishment had nearly five and a half thousand horses on strength, of which over three-quarters were required to pull guns and transport. Clearly, without an efficient veterinary service, the division's mobility would be quickly compromised, as was the British experience in the South African War of 1899-1902.

known as the divisional train. This was a large unit, usually commanded by a lieutenant colonel, and was responsible for the movement of supplies and stores between major distribution points to the division. While the divisional train was a divisional unit, its commanding officer was not included on the divisional staff. Advice on supply was channelled from the train into the planning process via the DAQMG.

One key supply officer who was not on the pre-war Divisional staff strength but was created quickly once war began was the Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Services (DADOS). This officer was responsible for the supply, maintenance and replacement of all equipment in use in the division.

There were two officers on the staff of the 1914 division whose positions were unlike the more mainstream staff roles.[148] The commander of the divisional artillery, known as Commander Royal Artillery or CRA, was the senior gunner of the formation. Usually a brigadier, the CRA was responsible for all aspects of the employment and development of the division's organic artillery. In theory, he prepared the fire plan with which the guns would support the infantry in attack and defence. He was responsible, again in theory, for the training and professional development of the gunners.[149] Although not common before the war, he could also command the division in the absence of the GOC. Consequently, the CRA exercised both a staff and a command function. His role in planning the artillery support for an infantry attack was crucial for the attack to have any probability of success yet, for the early years of the war, the CRA had no direct authority over the division's artillery and his commander could always ignore his advice.[150]

---

[148] The debate about whether either of these two positions was a staff appointment continued in recent historical debates: 'Mr Hussey's assumptions on *psc* posts in Divisions are incorrect. Firstly, the Commander RA [Royal Artillery] (CRA) was, as his title suggests, a commander, and though no doubt being *psc* would have been valuable, it was not essential. The CRA's peacetime role was training; his wartime tasks were command of the guns and advice to his GOC. However, the CRA's staff officer, or as he had been retitled by 1914, his Brigade Major (BM), responsible for co-ordinating the divisional artillery, clearly required staff training. The same arguments apply to the Commander RE (CRE). His duties were more specialised, he commanded far fewer men than the CRA and his technical education was probably seen as a substitute for formal staff training.' Evans, *The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers*, 30.

[149] This was largely a theoretical issue for pre-war British artillery understood, but rarely followed or practised, the principle of massing guns and concentrating firepower on the decisive point. In pre-war Britain, gunners practiced mobility, not fire support. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower*, 120.

[150] The control of British artillery, like that of the German arm, was nominally vested in the divisional Commanders Royal Artillery (CsRA) but neither their small staffs, a brigade major added in 1913, a staff captain and a reconnaissance officer, nor their communications, permitted them to control the fire of their guns. There was no artillery reserve under corps and the army siege howitzers were not practised on

The Commander Royal Engineers (CRE) was usually a lieutenant colonel and was responsible both for commanding the specialist engineer troops attached to the division and for providing specialist engineering advice to the divisional commander. The CRE provided the division's communications through the divisional signals unit, which was then an engineer unit. As with the CRA, the CRE worked closely with the G staff in operational planning. The CRE's role was, as with the CRA, not exercised fully or properly in the pre-war period.

The General Officer Commanding (GOC) the division usually had two aides-de-camp. Contrary to some popular opinions among the troops, they in theory occupied positions of some responsibility. The senior ADC was the 'Camp Commandant' for the headquarters staff while the other was the private secretary and personal assistant to the GOC.[151] Both could play a minor role in operational planning, through their acting as a 'sounding board' for their general and by acting as an informal conduit of information on troop morale and readiness.[152] In the pre-war army, these appointments were often used to expose well-connected junior officers to the higher command function.

The 5th Australian Infantry Division was not unusual in that on the eve of the battle of Fromelles its key operational planning staff were mainly British officers. Both the GSOI and GSOII were British regulars as was, unusually, the DAA&QMG. Lieutenant Colonel C.M. Wagstaff, a thirty-eight-year-old Royal Engineer, was an Indian Army professional who joined the Australian forces along with General Birdwood.

---

exercises. No firm ruling was given to divisional commanders or CsRA about the deployment of the three brigades of field guns, one brigade of field howitzers and the heavy battery, available to support the three infantry brigades and twelve battalions of infantry, under their command. Consequently, some divisional commanders automatically sub-allotted field brigades to infantry brigadiers and ignored the CRA in the field, using him as trainer and administrator. Others tended to deploy and control the artillery as they deployed infantry brigades, using the CRA as a channel of command like a brigade commander, although his means and task were quite dissimilar. Yet others kept their artillery as a reserve under the CRA, until the battle developed, confusing fire reserves with gun reserves. Each solution was a natural reaction to the notorious weakness of artillery communications, to the conception of artillery fire as only an accessory in the fire tactics of the infantry but not a partner in the planning of operations, and to the novelty of the idea of a CRA who was both an adviser to the divisional commander and the commander of the field artillery brigades and heavy battery of the division. Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power*, 20.

[151] The progression of former ADCs through the ranks is most spectacularly illustrated by the illustrious career of R.G. Casey, who started in 1914 as an Honorary Lieutenant in the Automobile Corps, moved to become ADC to the GOC 1 Division and then moved up through the G staff structure, before retiring in 1969 as Governor-General of Australia.

[152] Their contribution depended entirely on the whim of the commander and how he chose to use his personal staff.

Initially the GSOII in the Corps Headquarters, he had been to Gallipoli and was appointed GSOI to 5th Division on its formation. He was a staff college graduate. His immediate subordinate, the twenty nine year old Major D.M. King of the Liverpool Regiment, had been a Captain on secondment to RMC Duntroon when war broke out and was offered the Staff Captain (then called Orderly Officer) position with 1st Infantry Brigade in August 1914. By February 1915, the title of his substantive position corrected, he began acting in the Brigade Major role of 1st Brigade and was posted to the GSOII in the Divisional Headquarters position on 12 March 1916. Captain A.J. Boase, an RMC graduate and now the GSOIII, also joined the Division on 12 March, on promotion from Lieutenant in the 9th Battalion. The Division was fortunate that its two critical operations planners had had some real staff experience.

The corps was not a formation that the British Army of 1914 was comfortable with. Unlike the continental armies, the British rarely formed corps in peacetime or exercised even the staff component of a corps. Only one corps headquarters existed at the outbreak of war and its role was uncertain.[153] The Australians had even less experience of this high-level-style formation, having no familiarity with such a large formation until the establishment of the ANZAC Corps in Egypt in early 1915. A corps was the grouping of two or more divisions, under a lieutenant general. (Two or more corps comprised an army.) In theory, the role of a corps was to plan operations and exercise command and control over the implementation of these operations by its component divisions, either as a separate force or as part of a larger concentration. On Gallipoli, the corps was the main manoeuvre element of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force whereas on the Western Front, separate armies assumed this function. The Corps was not a stable organisation, unlike its principal component (the division) and divisions frequently cycled through the various corps of the BEF as operational needs dictated. Sir Richard Haking, commander of XI Corps at the Fromelles battle, commented to one of his departing divisions on 8 July 1916 that in the six months the corps had existed, sixteen divisions had been under its command at some time.[154]

---

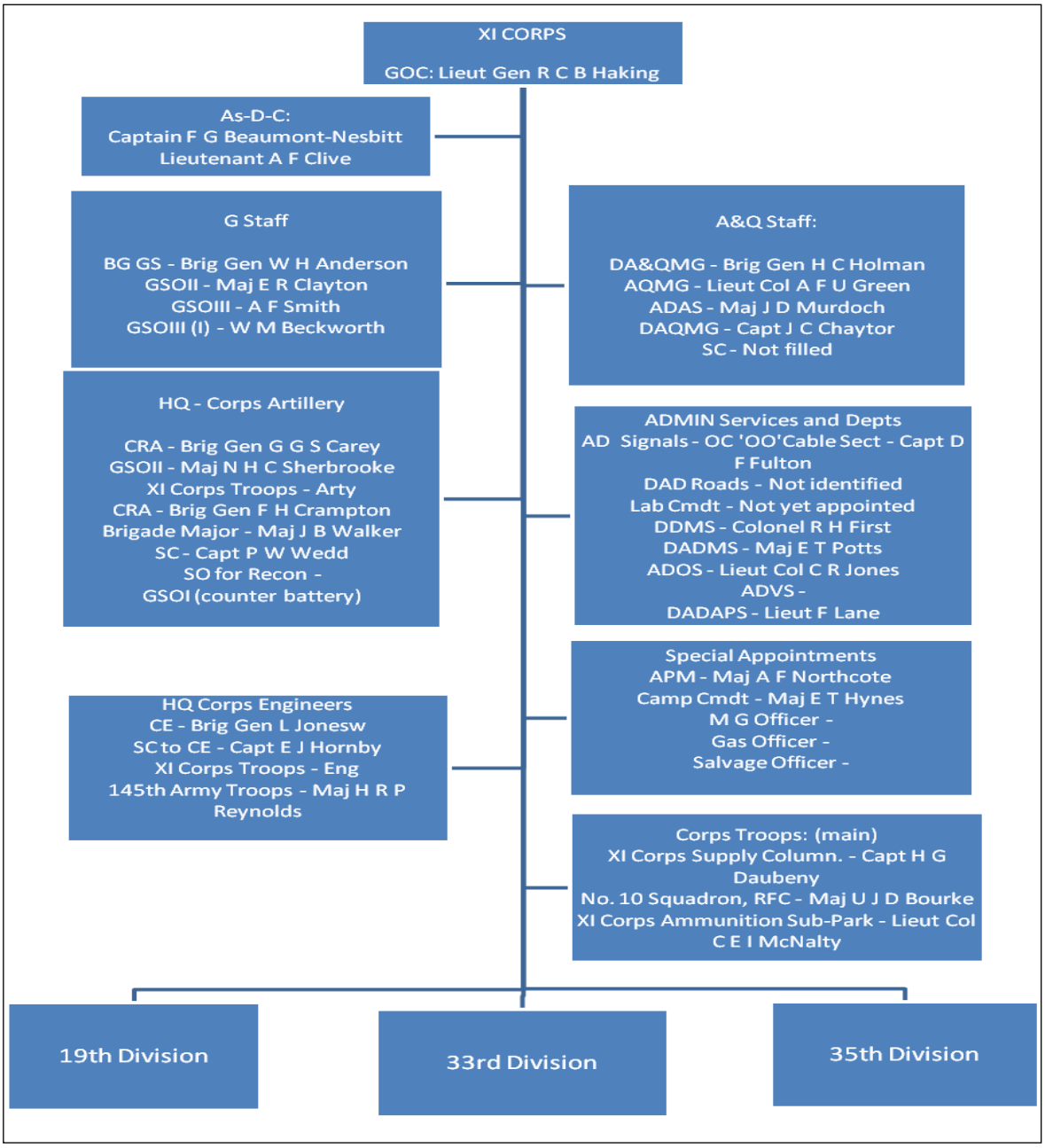
[153] According to Bidwell and Graham, it was always intended that GHQ of the Expeditionary Force would control the divisions directly. Bidwell and Graham, *Fire Power,* 42.
[154] General Staff XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881 The National Archives.

Even more than was the case for the lower level formations, the staffing level and composition of the Corps evolved under the experiences of war. The principal corps planner and chief of staff of the corps headquarters was the Brigadier General, General Staff, or BGGS. His duties were broadly the same as those of the divisional GSOI, although far more complex. He was assisted by a larger team of G staff officers. Of increased importance was the intelligence function, while responsibility for training and skill standards, at least in the early part of the war, was lessened with the increased distance from the troops. The A and Q staff also shared duties broadly similar to their divisional counterparts but on a more extensive and complex level. As the corps role was heavily focussed on coordination of resources, the number of specialist and attached officers with a support function increased significantly in proportion to operational planners. In 1918, the Australian Corps had five staff for planning operations but thirteen on the 'A&Q' side plus ten of the fifteen attached specialists were involved in support.[155]

[155] Australian Imperial Force, *Staff and Regimental Lists of Officers. August 1918* (Melbourne: Albert J Mullett, Government Printer, 1918), 8.

Figure 3

The Structure of a Corps



This figure shows the structure of XI Corps at the end of April 1916: the number of unfilled positions reflected both the shortage of available strained staff and the high turnover in many positions. Also, the occupants of some positions were not identified in the report on the Corps structure. Finally, it is of note that the Corps Commander had both an artillery adviser and a commander of his artillery and his engineers, reflecting the role and structural changes occurring in both those branches during this period. It should also be noted that the Divisions shown were replaced by the 31st, the 39th and the 61st by July 1916.

The corps had one other group of staff who were to become a key element in operational planning as the war progressed. As understanding and appreciation of the

power of modern massed artillery increased, heavier calibres of artillery tended to be grouped together at corps level. Specialist artillery officers appeared on corps headquarters strengths in growing numbers to plan and control the application of this operationally critical force multiplier.[156]

This was the staff organisation and structure with which Great Britain (and Australia) embarked on a new type of warfare – warfare involving massive numbers of troops and equipments, technological change, and dramatic tactical and operational improvements. The fact that the basic structure survived this war and was mirrored in the next is evidence that it did provide the most efficient means of commanding large bodies of troops. The fact that the number of staff officers and the number of staff positions on all levels of headquarters rose more than threefold between 1914 and 1918 is also evidence of the massive increase in complexity of the battlefield.

The British, and by extension, the AIF, entered the war unprepared for the complexity of industrial era warfare. This complexity stemmed from two basic aspects: the scale of the forces involved, with the commensurate problems of control, coordination, communications and supply, and the growth in technological innovations. The Imperial Army of 1914 would have been strange but not unfamiliar in its organisation or tactics or even size to Napoleon or the Duke of Wellington. By 1916, it would have been unrecognisable to them. For the Australians, 1916 was a torrid introduction to continental war. It is arguable that Gallipoli was an essential precursor to Fromelles for without that introduction to intensive combat, the casualties from early encounters with the Germans could have been much worse. While Gallipoli gave little warning of the power of German artillery or the strength of their defences, it did demonstrate the need for effective, careful and detailed planning before an operation was attempted. In a force where the commanders all lacked any experience of planning under battle conditions, except for what they had learned on Gallipoli, the importance of the operational staff planners was even greater.[157]

---

[156] In July 1918, the CRA had a staff of 3, the same as for a standard divisional G staff.
[157] Even in 1917, with the experiences of the previous year to serve as a guide, the Brigade Major of 15th Brigade, Major Wieck, was forced to go over his Brigadier's head on Elliott's intention to launch an unauthorized, and ill-thought-through minor attack. Ross McMullin, *Pompey Elliott* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2002), 272-5.

Surprisingly, the 5th Australian Division was well supplied, by 1916 standards, with qualified, experienced operations staff officers. In this, it would appear the Indian Army connection through Birdwood provided the unexpected bonus of bringing in his entourage officers with the very skills the Australians (and, it could be argued, the new Kitchener Divisions) lacked. While they were by no means experienced in Western Front conditions, they did have the theoretical background knowledge to fulfil the role. Despite Gallipoli, they still needed real experience to refine their skills and knowledge: Fromelles would be the test of how well they had adapted their theory to the practice of planning a battle.

CHAPTER TWO
THE STRATEGIC INTENT AND THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

> The defeat of the enemy by the combined Allied Armies must always be regarded as the primary object for which the British troops were originally sent to France, and to achieve that end, the closest cooperation of French and British as a united Army must be the governing policy; but I wish you distinctly to understand that your command is an independent one and that you will in no case come under the orders of any Allied General further than the necessary cooperation with our Allies above referred to.[1]

By 1916, it had become clear to the operational commanders of both sides, if not to their political leadership, that with the advent of industrial age warfare and its associated availability of massive quantities of war materiel, mass firepower and huge conscript armies,[2] military options for obtaining a quick or cheap victory had all but disappeared. This was a particularly difficult realisation for the British Government, its empire and its people. Ill-prepared materially or psychologically for the high political, economic and human cost of industrial warfare continental-style,[3] the first two years of war were characterised by the British Government searching assiduously for any military option that would win without the political costs of a huge disruption to society or industry. This was undeniably demonstrated by Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister, in a public speech in Newcastle in April 1915 in which he vehemently, but erroneously, claimed that the Army had all the ammunition it needed – a claim promptly and prominently disputed by *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* newspapers. Asquith was already uncomfortable with the changes being forced on British industry to meet the demands of the BEF and was seeking to placate similarly concerned members of his government who worried that public dissatisfaction with the support provided to the Army might provoke demands for even more radical measures.[4] The Government remained uncomfortable with the massive commitment of British manpower to the continent and even in February 1916, key members of the British cabinet were opposed

---

[1] Letter, Kitchener to Haig. Haig's diary, 28 December 1915. Andrew Wiest, *Haig: The Evolution of a Commander* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2005), 45.
[2] Walter Reid, *Architect of Victory Douglas Haig* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009), 262.
[3] Richard Bryson argues that Britain approached World War I seeking to *avoid* (emphasis added) a continental commitment of her army. Richard Bryson, 'The Once and Future Army', British Commission for Military History *Look To Your Front: Studies in The First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 26.
[4] Keith Hammond, 'French – The Waste of a Talent', *Army Quarterly* III:2 (April, 1981), 191.

to Britain prosecuting 'total' war because of its potential disruption of the British economy.[5]

Unfortunately for the political policy-makers, the Gallipoli and Salonika adventures had shown that strategies based on indirect approaches, usually underpinned by hopes that the bottomless depths of Russian manpower would be the decisive strategic factor, were likely to fail. The traditional British strategy of relying on funding other nations to fight their continental wars had not survived the opening round of the war, although the British Treasury had already become the major source of finance for prosecuting the war. Haig reported on a Cabinet meeting in April 1916 at which it was revealed the French were unable to meet their share of the subsidy to be paid to Russia, £300 million, and in addition needed at least £60 million themselves to sustain their war effort (and would probably need more).[6] The naval blockade of Germany had not yet seriously affected Germany's ability to wage war. By 1916, most strategists including, at this stage, key British political decision-makers such as David Lloyd-George, accepted that the only path to victory lay in defeating the German Army on the Western Front. From December 1915, the only instrument by which this outcome could be achieved was the BEF, commanded by General Sir Douglas Haig, working with the French and Belgian Armies.

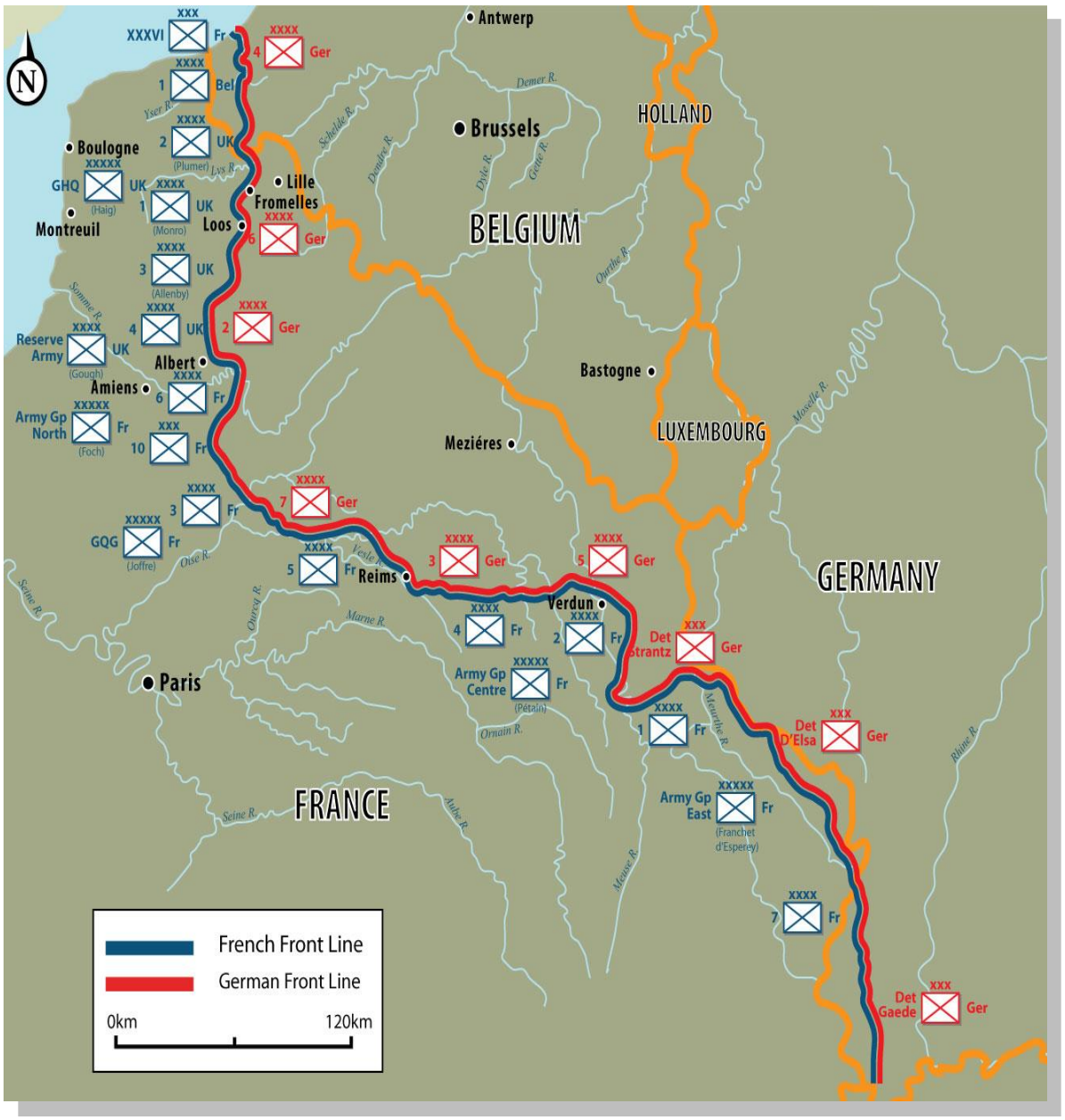
As the British operational commander for the French and Belgian theatre,[7] Haig had ultimate authority over the conduct of operations by the British Army there. Despite the opinions of many, including some British politicians at the time, it was his responsibility alone to translate the political directive, given to him by his government through his military superiors, into a strategic concept that would guide and direct the operations of the BEF. This concept, in modern military parlance the commander's intent, would then inform the operational and tactical planning processes that, in their turn, would deliver military success on the battlefield and thus achieve victory. The terms of Haig's directive, given to him when he assumed command of the BEF in December 1915, are evidence that a reluctant Asquith Government had finally

---

[5] Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (eds), *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 179.
[6] Ibid., 183.
[7] Reid states that Haig was both the Theatre commander and the Army Group commander and, because of the French connection a player at the strategic level of war, all at the same time: the only British General ever to attempt such a complex command. Reid, *Architect of Victory*, 263.

recognised that a military victory could only be achieved on the Western Front. (See map 1.) The directive required Haig to satisfy two distinct and separate objectives: the liberation of occupied France and Belgium and the destruction of the German Army in the field.[8] (While Haig's Directive was similar to that given to Field Marshal Sir John French, his predecessor, there was one major critical difference. While Lord French was directed to cooperate with the French Army, it was made clear to him he was not to risk British troops in offensives where they might

Map of the Western Front.



(Map 1)

[8] Robin Neillands, *Attrition: The Great War on the Western Front - 1916* (London: Robson Books, 2001), 38.

be unduly exposed to attack. Haig was given, in the clearest terms possible, a direction that the closest co-operation between the French and British as a united army must be the governing policy. This instruction left Haig with even less capacity than Lord French to develop an independent strategy to defeat the Germans.) Thus any proposal, be it for a major battle or a minor raid, for the Somme offensive or for the raid by 1st Australian Division on the enemy's trenches near Fromelles in March 1916, had to comply with these broad aims in their intended outcome and factor them into the planning process.

The challenge for Haig was to define a commander's intent that would achieve victory when the reality of modern industrial scale warfare, with mass national conscript armies and new and much deadlier technologies, had removed most traditional military solutions from his list of options. His army was still struggling to evolve from a superbly-trained but small-scale imperial police force, with tactics and equipments based largely on the needs of limited, low intensity and mainly manoeuvre-based warfare.[9] It lacked the experience of its allies and opponents in the organisation, employment and support of mass armies acquired from their large, conscript-based peace-time forces although, as the War progressed, it became clear that none of the other armies involved, despite their pre-war experiences, were any better organised or equipped for a sustained war either. Constant references in their reports to ammunition shortages, insufficient manpower and concerns over basic supply appeared almost from the first day. Not only did the BEF have to learn how to conduct large scale attacks and manoeuvres, it had to develop a system to inform, supply and reinforce an army that, within eighteen months, grew to more than ten times its usual size. It had to do this simultaneously with conducting intensive operations that both killed off its future core of potential instructors and raised new military problems to be dealt with. Haig had every right to be concerned, and apprehensive, about how capable the new inexperienced BEF was of making these necessary changes, surviving the inevitably traumatic experience that it would be and still winning victory. In his role as chief planner and architect of British operations in the main theatre of the war, these concerns about the adequacy of his

[9] P. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', *British Army Review* 86 (August, 1987), 30.

army must have been a major factor influencing his decisions on strategic, operational and even tactical planning.[10]

Furthermore, Haig had to develop and apply a military strategy in the midst of unprecedented advances in military techniques and technologies.[11] (See Table Two.) The potential impact of these new technological advances on the battlefield also added to Haig's own list of personal tasks, in that he had to learn and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the new systems so he could employ them with best effect on the battlefield. While the technical details could and were the responsibility of a new and growing class of specialist staff officers, senior officers including Haig had to have a basic understanding of the technology to appreciate its battlefield potential.

Table Two.
Variations in Weapon Types and Availability between 1914 and 1916

Weapon Type	Infantry Division in 1914	Infantry Division in 1916
Hand grenades	N	I
Bolt action rifles	I	I
Light machine guns	N	I
Medium machine guns	I*	I
Light trench mortars	N	I
Medium trench mortars	N	A
Heavy trench mortars	N	A
Light field guns (18-pounder)	I	I
Light Howitzers (4.5-inch)	I	I
60-Pounder guns (5.5-inch)	I	I
6-inch howitzer	A*	A
4.7-inch gun	A*	A
8-inch howitzer	N	A
9.2-inch howitzer	N	A
12-inch gun	N	A*
14-inch howitzer	N	A*
15-inch howitzer	N	A*
Aerial reconnaissance and support	N	A
Gas	N	A

N= not available, I = issued to troops under command of the Division, A = available to support the Division but not normally under command, * = only in very limited numbers.

[10] 'An attack had three elements: time, place and method. The first two were matters of strategy, the third of operations'. William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Abacus Books, 2010), 70.

[11] Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds (ed.), *History of the Great War: Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (hereafter *BOH*) Vol. I (London: Imperial War Museum, 1932), v.

Contrary to popular understanding, Haig was always keen to exploit new technologies and has even been accused of rushing new technologies into service too soon.[12] His interest in new techniques and technologies were very likely well known to his subordinate commanders. It could be argued, although there is little evidence, that knowing Haig's enthusiasm for new techniques and technologies encouraged his subordinate commanders to frame tactical plans specifically to feature the types of innovation in which he had confidence. The constant experimentation with artillery barrages in an attempt to find the technique that best supported advancing infantry is one example. Commanders, encouraged by the same expectations, would have been foolish not to factor, for example, the newly conceived creeping barrage, into any new attack plans. Certainly, the plan to use new aerial rockets on aircraft to shoot down the German observation balloons over the Somme and thus partially 'blind' the German command was an unqualified success in July 1916.[13]

Haig's enthusiasm for new solutions was not, of itself, a detrimental influence on planning when recently developed new tactics or equipments were used to improve the chances of success. However, incorporating new, not well understood technologies into tactical plans did risk imposing a significant time penalty on finalising the details of operational and tactical plans and significantly increased the risk of mis-applying the new technologies or tactics.

> The G.O.C. referred to a paper issued by G.H.Q. in February entitled "Preparatory Measures to be taken by Armies and Corps before undertaking operations on a large scale". Sir Charles [Monro, commander First Army] considered there was a great deal in the paper which would be of the greatest help. Possibly, some of the divisions which had recently arrived in the Army were not aware of the principles contained in the paper. He desired particularly to invite attention to that section of the paper dealing with gas and smoke attacks and the Staff arrangements in connection therein. The paper was the product of expert work and was entitled to great attention, especially by those who were to carry out the gas and smoke attacks on the Army front.[14]

---

[12] 'Much nonsense has been written about Haig's supposed antipathy to technology, and particularly machine guns. In reality, just before he left for Egypt [in 1898], Haig had taken the trouble to visit the Royal Ordnance Factory specifically to learn the mechanism of the Maxim [machine] gun'. Gary Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Aurum Press, 2011), 31.
[13] J.H. Boraston and C.E.O. Bax, *The Eighth Division in War, 1914-1918* (London: The Medici Society, 1926), 70.
[14] General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164, The National Archives (hereafter TNA).

With the 'top-down' method of command and planning that was practised in 1916, the exercise of initiative by the subordinate commanders would also have been curtailed by a higher command's enthusiasm for something new, especially if the new capabilities were either not well understood or were complex (such as the use of gas or tanks). Uncertainty then and now would have prompted caution among subordinate planners and encouraged 'text-book' uses of the new technology rather than innovative new ideas for their employment. Indeed, for Fromelles, the early experiences of the Somme fighting were passed on to the subordinate command and planning teams in the days immediately prior to the attack commencing, presumably with the expectation that the planners would incorporate these lessons but giving them no time in which to do so.[15] Whatever the case, it is doubtful that Haig's subordinate commanders would have been unaware that the Chief regarded the utilisation of all available technologies as preferable to excessive casualties.[16]

The evolving technology of warfare, as even Haig's harshest critics recognise, had given the German defenders such a marked advantage over any Allied attackers that all previous military strategies and tactics were now of questionable value in achieving a quick and decisive victory.[17] In 1916, there was no obvious solution to the dominance of defence. The Germans were master builders of an evolving defensive system that quickly and systematically applied the lessons of previous battles. They did not plan these trenches as temporary bulwarks; they viewed them as the borders of the new, greater Germany.[18] Thus they were designed and built to fortress standards, constructed on a scale and quality unmatched by their opponents. The defences of each area were specifically designed to take advantage of the existing strengths of the site, either capitalising on possession of the high ground or integrating a river or canal into the defensive system. This reflected the advantages the Germans had received from having been the invader or, in military terms, having seized the strategic initiative. Having

---

[15] The 8th Australian Infantry Brigade Order, No. 23 of 16 July 1916 (the order for the attack at Fromelles) notes at paragraph 14, 'The special instructions and suggestions issued to Brigadiers regarding the conduct of the Assault which was issued yesterday to commanding officers is to be studied and all ranks made conversant with any points which will be useful for them to learn'. 8th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 Australian War Memorial (hereafter AWM)4.

[16] J.P. Harris, 'Haig and the Tank', Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999), 148-9.

[17] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 6.

[18] Peter Barton, *Fromelles A Report based upon Research in the Hauptstaatsarchiv Kriegsarchiv, Munich, November and December, 2007* (Canberra: Unpublished Report for the Australian Army, 2007), 44.

invaded and seized a significant portion of France, the Germans could afford to give back less defensible portions of their gains to focus their lines on the best defensive terrain. They then developed the natural advantages of the terrain with extensive defensive systems and waited for the Allies to come to them. Rational appreciation would have been to find another, non-military solution. Yet with the Germans in occupation of a quarter of France and ninety-five percent of Belgium, to do nothing was neither a strategic option for allied Governments nor a tactical option for allied commanders. The dilemma for Haig was that, in the face of these defences, the tool (the BEF) he had available to achieve his directive was, in 1916, inadequate for the task, and he knew it.

He also understood that the need for the Western Front to be the focus of national strategy was still not fully accepted at the War Committee level. He knew very well that any strategy based on a Western Front focus which required a pre-determined and guaranteed level of domestic support could be negated by last-minute variations to national strategies emanating from a political whim or fixation.[19]

Haig had still other demands which competed with, and distracted him from planning the strategic and operational course of Britain's war in France and Belgium. As well as being the chief strategist, he was also the chief director of a massive new business enterprise - the BEF. Larger than any city in the UK except London, Haig was the equivalent of both the mayor and the Chief Executive Officer. Although his headquarters and specialist staff assumed day to day responsibility for a bewildering array of responsibilities, under the military command system, Haig was the one accountable. Thus, he was directly responsible for everything from morale, discipline and public relations to traffic control and running the railways. He was responsible for feeding and training the troops and compensating the French for his troops' indiscretions. In many ways, governance and accountability appears to have demanded as much of his thought and time as planning the war. The impact of these, essentially domestic, service-type functions on his ability to formulate and deliver a coherent strategic direction to the Army is not well understood. In terms of the demands on his time, they cannot be underestimated as a debilitating factor in his ability to understand

---

[19] Victor Bonham-Carter, *Soldier True: The Life and Times of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Bart, GCB, GCMG, KCVO, DSO 1860-1933* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1963), 134.

and guide the development of the plans and proposals of subordinates submitted for his approval.

Yet another challenge was how to develop plans for operations that complied with his strategic vision for winning the war while preserving the BEF as a force in being. Having seen the destruction of the small professional British Army in 1914 and the bulk of the Territorial Force in 1915, the potential destruction of the BEF before it had acquired the skills to become a competent battlefield force was a very real concern for all levels of the command structure. Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, advised Haig in late March 1916 of the need to 'husband the strength of the Army in France,' to which Haig replied that he had no intention of attacking with all available troops. He then, famously, noted that in his opinion he still did not have an army in France but a collection of divisions untrained for the field.[20] Almost as soon as he assumed command, Haig was faced with Allied (French) demands for him to launch 'wearing out' attritional attacks, a strategy he considered wasteful and futile.[21] His strategic understanding was more sophisticated than the attrition strategy that eventually he had to adopt for want of alternatives. Having been forced by the nature of the battlefield to accept attrition, he then recognised that the British priority strategic need was to preserve, build and train his army until it reached a combat state sufficient to meet the German Army in the field on an equal if not superior footing: [22] The Russian experience of 1914 and 1915 had shown that even an army with vastly superior manpower could still lose an attritional war if its individual soldier's combat skills were so lacking that the smaller, more capable force was able to inflict exponentially larger casualties. Until he had the instrument ready, Haig understood making ambitious strategic plans was premature. Unfortunately, being the junior partner in a military alliance, especially one where the other members were in increasing military difficulty, meant making them was also inevitable.

Arguably the single largest factor having an impact on Haig's strategic military planning was the French Government and military. Haig quickly discovered that having to develop a military solution that met Britain's strategic and political interests, while

---

[20] Sheffield and Bourne, *Douglas Haig,* 183.
[21] Ibid., 180.
[22] Ibid., 184.

operating at the same time as the junior partner within an alliance, created constant tension and drove several critical compromises, including the one on the location and timing of the agreed offensive operation for 1916 (the Somme).

> It will be shown that the great battle of the year was fought, like the battle of Loos, not only on ground and on the date chosen by the French but at the very hour selected by them; and that neither place, nor date nor time was what the British C-in-C would have chosen, had he been free to do so.[23]

Military alliances generally function efficiently and easily when not under any pressure and when all sides agree on the purpose and priorities of the alliance: when the alliance comes under pressure, from unanticipated enemy successes or internal conflicts over priorities or focus, they become a major management problem. The strategic military difficulties that most confronted Haig arose from operating as the junior partner in a coalition in which the other partner had different strategic aims. The problem was exacerbated because these differences were only poorly understood by the British Government,[24] the result being that Haig was forced to spend much of his time and energy reconciling differing pressures being applied by the French and his own Government.[25] The inevitable result of continual compromise was adaptation and variation to both his long term strategy and his operational and tactical plans, with unfortunate consequences for both responsibilities. The process by which the final decision as to location, timing and ultimate objectives of the Somme campaign was reached provides ample evidence of this.

> Few great operations of war are planned, let alone executed, without fault; but the Somme suffered exceptional handicaps *before* it was launched: at the beginning by the fact the British Government clutched hold of the brake in a panic effort to stop the battle being fought at all; at the end by the fact the French Government and commanders cut the brake cable in two, for precisely the reverse reason.[26]

Irrespective of the strategic defensibility or otherwise of Haig's plans, or the arguments over the competence or intent of their architect, the Western Front was where the war had to be won and it was his responsibility to devise the operational concepts to achieve that victory. For Haig, operating as he was at both the politico-strategic, the military strategic and the operational level of war, reconciling competing

---

[23] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I., vi.
[24] Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, even warned Haig 'to beware the French'. Sheffield, *The Chief*, 163.
[25] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 1-11.
[26] Bonham-Carter, *Soldier True*, 172.

political and ally priorities was part of his job: for his subordinates, such a responsibility would have been a dangerous complication and part of Haig's job was to protect them from such interferences. (See Annex B, page 314, for a schematic representation of Haig's command relationships.) It is clear from his diaries he understood the implications of his position. His challenge was to devise a strategy which met the requirements of his directive, largely complied with the wishes and plans of the French, was politically acceptable to the British Government and was achievable by his new and at that stage largely untrained, inexperienced and under-equipped armies. Having done this, he had then to transmit this concept to his subordinate commanders in an unambiguous way that ensured their tactical plans conformed to his intent.

Neither Haig's Directive, nor the attitude of the French, permitted Haig to adopt a defensive posture. One common criticism of his policy of frontal attacks was that they were militarily unlikely to succeed, wasteful of manpower and 'unnecessary'. The post-war notion that the western allies should have stood on the defensive and awaited, first the Russian and, following the Russian defeat, the US, to provide such manpower superiority that the Germans could not resist them all, was not a strategic approach likely to be acceptable to the French in 1916. Of all these concerns, the formulation and devolution of a clear and unambiguous concept of operations was arguably one of the most important militarily for, without it, his subordinates could not know what to do or how to structure and implement plans to progress the war.

> All this means is that to many Great War soldiers the concept of 'tactics' must have represented something akin to an acrimonious shouting match that we regularly conduct with staff officers and other arms over bad telephone lines. It was not so much that the execution was especially difficult (even though it might very well be hair-raisingly dangerous) but that the preliminary arranging and haggling certainly was. Six hours was established as the minimum time needed for an order to pass from Corps Headquarters to Company Headquarters; but the same time limit also applied to even the smallest alteration to the details of the order, not just to the order itself. A divisional plan of attack might thus take several hours to prepare, most of the day to distribute and then still find itself stymied at the last minute because a few precise details of the barrage had to be changed.[27]

The relevance of these external pressures to the question of individual tactical battles such as Fromelles lay in the impact they had on the understanding that Haig's

---

[27] Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 25.

subordinates had of his plans and priorities. In other words, while they did not have to know the detail of the rationale behind the commander's intent, they would be better planners if they understood why he was thinking the way he was. In particular, the need for operational and tactical plans to remain consistent with specific planning base guidelines, such as acceptable casualty rates, degree of aggressiveness, importance of capturing terrain or the equation between commitment of resources and objectives sought would have been virtually impossible to prepare without a clear commander's intent to set the parameters. Haig's eventual development of a strategic concept for the conduct of the war should, in the context of a planning environment in which the Commander-in-Chief was answering to, or at least attempting to cooperate with, two groups with differing long term objectives and short term requirements,[28] be seen as evidence of his sound leadership and management abilities. The operational misunderstanding and confusion that could and did arise in 1916, well illustrated by the tactical decision-making process around the Battle of Fromelles, was evidence more of Haig still learning to function at this level while at the same time fighting a war than of any deep-seated incompetence on his part. Fromelles was part of Haig's own personal 'learning curve':[29] whether his inexperience contributed significantly to the eventual outcome will be considered in the following chapters.

Against this shifting backdrop of strategic uncertainties, planning proceeded that would, on 1 July 1916, see launched the single largest attack in the history of the British Army. The battle of the Somme, which raged intermittently from 1 July to 18 November, is arguably the most infamous and least understood military operation in the English-speaking world. (See map 2.) It has become the encapsulation of all that could go wrong in a military operation. As with Fromelles, the focus on huge casualties for small territorial gain has rendered it almost impossible for historians of the Somme campaign to change popular perceptions that the battle was a complete and unnecessary disaster. Like the view of Fromelles, the reputations of the individual commanders have

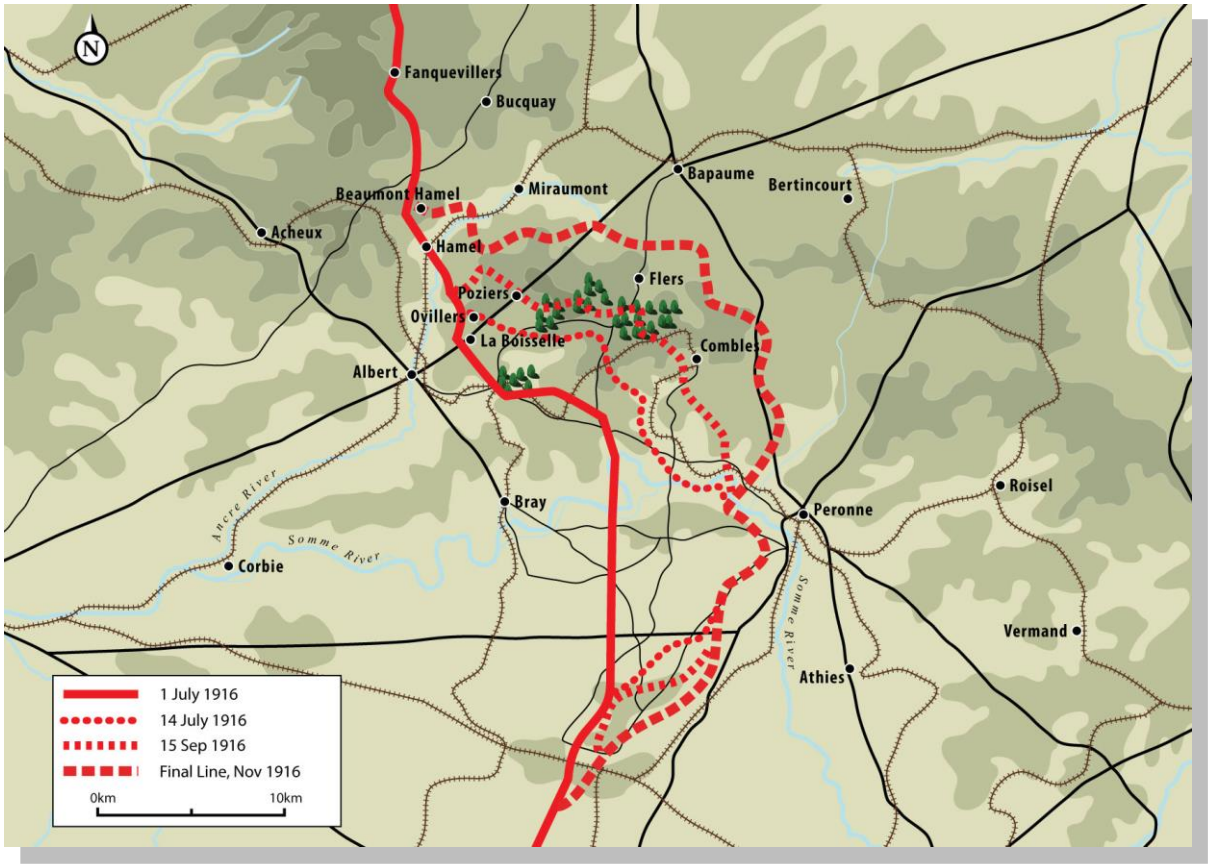
---

[28] A further complication was the divergence of opinion between the French politicians and military leadership. A meeting between Haig and the French chairman of the Senate Military Committee, M. Clemenceau, revealed an alarming divergence of view on the best strategic direction of the war between him and the French C-in-C, Joffre. Sheffield and Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries,* 185.

[29] Much has been written on the 'learning curve' experienced by the British Army in moving from enthusiastic but unskilled amateurs in 1916 to hardened competent professionals in 1918. See for example Gary Sheffield, 'Finest Hour? British Forces on the Western Front in 1918: An Overview', Ashley Ekins (ed.), *'1918 Year of Victory: The End of the Great War and the Shaping of History* (Auckland: Exisle, 2010), 54-69.

become defined by whether or not they advocated caution or approached the impending battle with the conviction of success. Certainly, the Somme is the battle that has come to define combat on the Western Front, even to the point of attracting emotive images (such as deep mud) more appropriate to different operations. Other battles, especially the successful, but still costly, advances in late 1918, are virtually unknown and almost discounted by the general public.[30] Indeed, it is almost impossible to reconcile the popular view of warfare on the Western Front, as presented with depressing regularity in the popular media, with the awkward fact that ultimately the British and French armies prevailed.

The Somme Battlefield.



(Map 2)

Again as with Fromelles, the casualties suffered, especially by the British, effectively have obscured the reasons the battle was fought and any military successes, short or longer term, that were achieved. The casualty count, approximately 20,000

[30] Well illustrated by Ian V. Hogg in his book on artillery in WWI when, in a 160-page work tracing the evolution in the technology and application of artillery throughout the war, he deals with the period July to November 1918 in less than half a page. Ian V. Hogg, *The Guns 1914-1918* (London: Pan Books, 1973).

British killed on the first day, has earned a place in history as the British Army's greatest disaster. What is often overlooked is the fact that the casualties on the Somme were inflicted on the largest British Army ever fielded in the single largest land operation it has ever conducted. Because of the numbers involved, casualty numbers also, inevitably, were high. However, as a percentage of those actually fighting, the casualty rate for the British Army in the Normandy campaign of 1944 was higher and when compared with loss rates in other arms, such as Bomber Command in WWII, the Somme rate would have been regarded as almost acceptable. None the less, the 'gross numbers' came as a shock to a British public much more attuned to the very small casualty numbers, at least of white/European British soldiers, of a small army engaged in Imperial policing duties. What is also missing from these critical judgments is any analysis of the reasons why the casualties were so large.

The strategic origins of the Somme operation (and thus of Fromelles) lay in the Allied joint strategic planning conference, held at Chantilly in December 1915. It had become clear to the Allies that the Germans had a major strategic advantage in being able to use their interior lines of communications to shuffle reinforcements between the various fronts to reinforce areas under pressure:[31]

> 2. The excellent interior communications in the hands of the enemy facilitate the application of the system of war on which he relies. He can mass troops on any of his fronts and move them from one front to another far more readily and securely than we can.
> 3. Large Allied forces cannot be removed from existing fronts in France or Russia, to conduct a campaign elsewhere, without the enemy's knowledge. Consequently, with his superior communications, their removal to a new theatre would enable him either to launch an attack against the front so weakened, or to transfer an equivalent force from that front in at the time to meet the attack.[32]

The Allied solution, agreed to at Chantilly, was to launch simultaneous attacks on Germany's three fronts: the Russian Front, the Italian Front and the Western Front. Simultaneous attacks would prevent the Germans from thinning out forces on unengaged fronts to reinforce those under attack and,[33] by forcing the Germans into a

---

[31] In the report on the situation in January 1916, the official historian of the British military history of the war, J.E. Edmonds, makes the telling point that it took the British four months to move the nine divisions from Egypt to France after the end of the Dardanelles: the Germans moved ten divisions from the Eastern to the Western Front in nine days. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 23.
[32] Extract from a paper prepared by the General Staff on the future conduct of the War, 16 December 1916. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 6.
[33]Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War,* 204.

comparatively high tempo of operations, exhaust their reserves of manpower.[34] Following this strategic decision, planners in all the Allied armies began developing concepts of operations for major offensives in 1916.[35] Within days of assuming command of the BEF on 29 December 1915, Haig visited the French General Headquarters (GQG) and was invited to commit the BEF to a combined offensive in France/Belgium in April 1916. Initially, the planners had looked to begin all the offensives in March, to maximise the good campaigning weather of the northern spring but this proved impractical for several reasons, including the inability of the British to accumulate sufficient stocks of men, weapons and ammunition.[36] In addition, the inability of Russia to position sufficient men and materiel quickly ensured that any coordinated attack could not occur until well into the summer.[37] Following the December initial meeting, a series of subsequent planning meetings were held at both command and staff level, in all the Allied Headquarters. Not every senior Allied command fully supported the Chantilly plan. In Russia, the decision was met in many quarters with concern: many in authority felt that Russia was not in a position, as a consequence of the huge losses that had already been suffered, to undertake operations on the scale envisaged. Most felt fighting merely a holding battle was all Russia could do and, as late as April 1916, that was still the intention of the Russian High Command. [38]

Haig had his first detailed planning meeting with his French equivalent, General Joseph Joffre, on 20 January 1916, at which initial planning for the proposed Anglo-French offensive began.[39] In this discussion, Joffre revealed that he would, by the end of April, have five separate offensives planned. Which attack would be carried out when would depend on the military situation. It was at this meeting that Joffre first raised the notion of wearing-out or attritional battles. He wanted the British to attack north of the Somme on a large scale around 20 April. In a letter dated 23 January, he stated: 'I regard it as indispensable that before the general offensive, the British Army should seek to wear down the German forces by wide and powerful offensives, as the French Army did

---

[34] Robin Neillands, *Attrition: The Great War on the Western Front–1916* (London: Robson Books, 2001), 199.
[35] A.R. Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme* (London: Pan Books, 1964), 33.
[36] As Bean notes, however, British planners continued to work towards the offensive still commencing in May. C E W Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* (hereafter *AOH*) Vol. III (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1929), 94.
[37] Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme,* 33.
[38] Neillands, *Attrition,* 199-200.
[39] Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2003), 13.

in the course of the year 1915, with a minimum of 15 to 18 divisions'.[40] He wanted one battle fought around about 20 April and another in May at some other part of the front. Haig replied that he was not in favour of wearing-down battles in the weeks before the main event. He noted, quite reasonably, that such attacks, not being a carried out to a conclusion, would be regarded by the enemy, by the public at home and by neutral countries as Allied defeats. Haig did not believe such attacks would prevent the enemy from replacing losses from his depots or organising new reserves in time to meet the main offensive.

Haig favoured a succession of raids which would be more effective as they would undoubtedly wear down the enemy's morale and possibly attract reserves: preparatory actions fought shortly, say 10 to 14 days, before the main action at points some distance from the place selected for the decisive attacks and over a wide front might induce the enemy to engage his reserves without allowing him time to organise others to take their place. Of central concern to Haig was the awkward truth that the British Expeditionary Force did not have sufficient heavy artillery to carry out both a large-scale preparatory attack and then a decisive attack elsewhere 10 to 14 days later. However, it is in this discussion the genesis of the initial reasoning for actions such as Fromelles can be seen: a limited supporting operation some distance from the decisive point a few days before the main attack. Joffre was unconvinced and saw in Haig's statements confirmation of long-held French fears that the British were not willing to fully engage the enemy.

After further, sometimes heated discussion, a compromise was reached. Both French and British high commands agreed that the planned offensive would be a two-stage campaign, with a major British offensive in Flanders early in the summer, followed by the main French offensive further south. The original French plan for the main Western Front assault was quite spectacular, with the proposed front extending from Lassigny (west of Noyon) to Gommecourt (a distance of over 45 miles or $72^1/_2$ kilometres) and a total troop commitment of sixty-four divisions.[41] The British were to provide major but only subsidiary support to the French attack. Events conspired to prevent this coming to fruition.

---

[40] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 28.
[41] Boraston and Bax, *The Eighth Division*, 65.

In their planning, Haig and Joffre also had to allow for British political resistance to a major assault. British political indecision still hindered the strategic planning task. Even as late as 31 March 1916, General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, submitted a paper to the British War Cabinet requesting the Committee to agree British participation in the proposed 'combined offensive operations' put forward by the Allied planning meeting (again held at Chantilly) on 12 March. [42] An attack in Belgium was politically more attractive to domestic political opinion and thus more acceptable to the Cabinet. In the context of Haig's directive from the Government on his appointment, this strategic focus on Belgium was both valid and understandable. Clause 1 of Haig's Directive from Lord Kitchener identified the requirement 'eventually to restore the neutrality of Belgium, on behalf of which, as guaranteed by Treaty, Belgium appealed to the French and ourselves at the commencement of hostilities.[43]

Apart from obvious British political interest in Belgium, an attack there made good military sense as well. For much the same reasons as the Germans invaded via Belgium, the absence of major river systems cutting across the lines of advance made it good terrain on which to conduct military attacks.

Against the backdrop of the expectations of Chantilly and his allies, Haig began a series of weekly meetings with his army commanders to begin planning the British offensives.[44] The commander chosen to plan and lead the main attack was General Sir Henry Rawlinson and, on 1 March, he was given the British Fourth Army as the means of carrying it out.[45]

In turning the strategic direction into an operational and then a tactical plan to mount a combined attack, both the French and British High Commands followed a similar style. They both had two critical decisions to make: where and when to begin the

---

[42] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 30-31.
[43] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 40.
[44] Sheffield and Bourne, *Douglas Haig,* 178.
[45] In the Boer War, Rawlinson had commanded a Battalion of 1000, in 1914 he had commanded a division of 20,000, in 1915 a Corps of 150,000. Within four months of being given command of Fourth Army, he had 500,000 men to organise into an army and coordinate in a major assault. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', 37.

attack and who was to plan and implement the tactical phase. In both armies, standard practice was to have the designated subordinate formation headquarters undertake the detailed tactical planning, based on the broad planning parameters provided by the high command. The process was two-way, in that a broad direction was given by the higher headquarters to the planning headquarters that then drew up a detailed response which was in turn re-submitted to the higher headquarters for criticism and final approval. As developing a final plan for large and complex operations was an iterative process, this cycle was repeated many times during the preparation for the Somme.

Rawlinson prepared a detailed plan which was itself criticised and amended by Haig. Rawlinson then issued a second version which was again submitted to GHQ for assessment. This process of refinement has been widely criticised by post-war analyses as being unwieldy and too drawn out. General opinion is that Haig should have issued his concept then allowed Rawlinson to get on with his planning and implementation of the attack free for interference from above. However, there was also a significant benefit to be obtained from this evolutionary approach. It did ensure that all levels of command and planning were aware of the final agreed way forward and had a good grasp of both the commander' s intent and of the key elements of the plan. Such an approach could have minimised the type of confusion that characterised the Gallipoli landing (for which critics condemn Sir Ian Hamilton for being too remote and un-involved in the planning and implementation of the tactical attack). Appendices 8 and 9 in Edmonds clearly show the detailed, complex incremental approach to planning the Somme. [46]

By February 14, General Joffre had agreed to cease demanding his wearing out attacks and, as long as the British remained committed to the combined offensive on the Somme, he would be supportive of a partial attack in the La Bassée–Ypres area.[47] This coincided with continued British interest in an assault in the Messines area. Little planning had occurred, however, before the German offensive at Verdun began on 21 February.

---

[46] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 64-75.
[47] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 31.

After initial early success, the German advance at Verdun was slowed and eventually halted in June 1916. When the British offensive on the Somme opened on 1 July, and the Austro-Hungarian Army faced collapse under pressure from the Russian Brusilov Offensive, German reserves intended to sustain the Verdun attack had to be drawn off to face these new threats. German plans for further attacks at Verdun had to be cut back severely until, by 11 July, all large scale planned offensives were called off and, by 2 September, all attacks were cancelled. The French never ceased their tactic of counter-attacking and, once the Germans went on the defensive, increased the tempo until, by December 1916, practically all the ground lost to the Germans had been recovered. While Verdun does not feature in an analysis of the Fromelles action, it is relevant to the overall allied concept for the offensive operations in 1916 as the result does appear to vindicate the basic concepts and strategy of the combined allied offensive, Germany's inability to deal with simultaneous attacks, which was at the core of the Chantilly strategy.

The possibility of a spoiling attack such as Verdun had been foreseen by the Allied planners early in 1916,[48] but German success was such that the planning and focus of the Allied Western Front offensive was forced to change, slowly initially but as the French situation became parlous, more quickly and fundamentally. In addition to a refocussing of strategic planning, Verdun forced the British to take responsibility for more of the front line defences, at a time when Haig would rather have had them training and preparing for the planned offensive. (British Third Army took over the line occupied by the French Tenth Army on 14 March.) No study has been undertaken to quantify the effects on its eventual performance of this diversion from preparations of the BEF for the attack, but it did represent a significant distraction and command problem that could not have assisted orderly preparation. Although Belgium retained its attractiveness as the focus of the main British offensive effort, not even the most anti-French member of the British planning staff could ignore the strategic implications of the possible destruction of the French Army. While still keeping the Belgium option

[48] Lieutenant General Sir Archibald Murray, 'Paper by the General Staff on the Future Conduct of the War. 16 December 1915', Edmonds, *BOH 1916,* Appendices II, 26-27. Also Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig Diaries,* 178. See also David R Woodward (ed.), *The Military Correspondence of Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief Imperial Staff December 1915-February 1918* (London: The Bodley Head, 1989), 33.

open, with increasingly more limited ambitions, priority in British operational and tactical level planning began to shift to the Somme operation.[49]

French losses at Verdun meant that the original Somme plan for the French to take the lead, with the British providing subsidiary support, was no longer workable. The British would now have to take the lead for the main attack. The evolution of the Somme plan continued to be very much inhibited though by the continuing reluctance by many elements in GHQ, including Haig, to commit unequivocally to the Somme. At one stage, a view was put that an attack on the Somme would distract the Germans sufficiently to make the major attack in Belgium even more viable. (Given GHQ were more aware than anyone else that combat resources were very limited and marginally adequate for one major offensive, this ongoing focus on Belgium is arguably evidence of the strong political pressure the British felt they were under to liberate the country whose invasion had brought them into the war in the first place.) Haig himself, even though he was better informed on the declining state of the French Army than most of his senior commanders, remained strongly attracted to a separate operation there. As late as 10 April, Haig was still considering a proposal from the commander of the British Second Army, General Sir Herbert Plumer, for an offensive in the Messines area in May.[50] (Given that the state of the German defences in the Messines/Ypres salient were much less developed at this stage than those on the Somme, it is an interesting historical 'what if' to speculate on how successful a British attack of similar scale and intensity as the Somme attack might have been.) [51]

Although the combination of lack of resources for the main attack and a requirement to take over more of the front line from the French Army caused major indecision over whether or not to continue with the preparations for this alternative operation, [52] it was never entirely abandoned during the drawn-out offensive planning

---

[49] There was concern to at the political level. Lloyd George was suspicious of French motives: 'the French General Staff was … unavoidably biased, for it was quite a natural desire of the French nation to drive the Germans out of France'. Philpott, *Bloody Victory,* 75.

[50] This plan was the result of a direction by Haig to Plumer in on 14 January and never cancelled. Plumer had been ordered to plan schemes for a possible offensive in three separate areas: Messines, Lille and the Forest of Houlthurst. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 31. Also, see Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 71-2 and 77.

[51] Sheffield, *The Chief*, 160.

[52] According to a letter dated 27 May 1916, reproduced in the Official History, Plumer's Second Army was still planning for an operation in Flanders that would replace Rawlinson's Fourth Army as the main offensive operation. 'Preparations for taking the offensive on a large scale are being made on two sections of our front, viz.-

period. Indeed, as late as 28 May, Plumer was warned by Haig that if the French could not support the Somme attack at all, it might be necessary to launch the Messines attack first. A number of tactical plans were developed and some preparatory troop movements conducted, including the move of some AIF elements to Flanders in July. However, the Belgian option also began to unravel due, amongst other concerns, to the un-cooperative stance of the Belgian King, who wanted no major attacks launched on Belgian soil, and to Haig's worst-case assessment that Verdun could prevent the French launching an offensive at all in 1916.[53] Ultimately, Haig compromised again and finally committed unequivocally to the Somme.

The difference between the debate in the early months of 1916 over timing and location, involving the highest planning level, and the final agreed plan for the July offensive does, however, illustrate a confused and uncertain planning process that vacillated between various options driven by the differing national objectives of the alliance partners involved: two offensives became one main offensive with additional early 'wearing out' attritional attacks and then, as Verdun imposed unbearable pressure on the French and continued to undermine the Allies original strategic plan, transformed into one large combined offensive, with minor operations ready to be launched merely to pin potential German reinforcements in place.[54]

The location of the proposed attack was an issue not only for the British. The French Commander-in-Chief, General Joseph Joffre, exercising de-facto strategic control of the western allied war effort, had as noted initially proposed using the British in a series of attritional attacks,[55] including in Belgium, as preparation for the final attack. This idea was abandoned soon after it was proposed both because of Verdun

---

(a) By the Second Army, and
(b) By the Fourth Army and a portion of the Third Army.' Letter O.A.D.912 from GHQ to Rawlinson. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 84.

[53] Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 80-1.

[54] A note in the commander XI Corps papers, in his own handwriting, from a June 1916 Corps Commander's conference, talked about the two planned major British offensives: 'two great offensives have been prepared along the front held by the British armies, one in the South and one in the North.' XI Commanders notes' from Corps Conference June 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/881, TNA.

[55] As Tim Travers notes, the notion of using attrition as an essential precursor to any attempt to force a breakthrough of an established enemy defensive line was well understood by British commanders at all levels, and was based in many cases on operational experience from 1915. Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900-1918* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 129. See also Rawlinson's original concept of operations for the Somme attack. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 69.

and because Joffre had well-founded concerns over the size and ability of the BEF.[56] Haig's focus on preparing the BEF to a level of technical proficiency sufficient to conduct the intended operations was also a cause of concern to Joffre,[57] who saw it as a reluctance to attack. Haig always argued he was not ready to conduct the Somme operation at the time the French insisted he should because his army was inadequate for the task.[58] Joffre feared waiting for the BEF to reach the size and trained status Haig desired would delay the joint attack for so long that the Germans would have destroyed the French Army at Verdun before the British engaged them. Joffre needed a location that would have the British and French attacking in concert – an approach that would prevent the British from delaying or reducing their agreed commitment.[59] The Somme Valley, the junction point between the French and British armies and the place originally agreed in the post-Chantilly discussions, provided this connection.

Joffre also felt the Somme region offered some tactical advantages when compared with other potential areas of operation, including terrain that did not give the defenders an overwhelming tactical advantage. The Somme did not provide the Germans with the streams, marshy ground and forests of the *Chemin Des Dames* or the sodden bogs of Passchendaele to incorporate into their defensive line. Despite this, there was much adverse criticism, both after the battle and after the war, of the choice of the Somme area.[60] This was based on the valid point that the Somme did still give significant defensive advantages to the German defenders with its broken, ravine-crossed terrain and soil composition enabling strong defences to be constructed. The point though, as few of the critics ever acknowledge, was that prior experience and the military appreciation process had shown the allied planners that there were no soft options anywhere along the line to attack. The critics are universally silent on where the attack could have been launched.

---

[56] Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2005), 279.
[57] Haig's diary notes he did understand the requirement for a joint attack as soon as possible. In a letter to Joffre in January 1916, he stated he hoped to have the BEF ready for its role 'no later than June'. Duff Cooper, *Haig* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), 300.
[58] Even on such basic issues as this, disagreement exists between commentators. Robin Corfield cites Liddell Hart as evidence of Haig's keenness to commence the attack, claiming 'Haig's anger was unconcealed, and in the face of his objection to any postponement Foch did not argue the point'. Robin Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles* (Melbourne: Miegunyan Press, 2009), 31.
[59] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 31.
[60] Victor Bonham-Carter was forthright in his criticism, claiming the Somme was of no strategic importance and was purely the decision of the French High Command. Bonham-Carter, *Soldier True*, xvi.

The orders clearly show the planners had a good understanding of the difficulties the defences would provide but had an overly optimistic view of the allied ability to counter any advantages provided, especially of the capacity of artillery to eliminate fixed defences.[61] The science of geophysics, especially understanding of the compressibility of chalk soil and its capacity to withstand high explosives delivered by shells, was not well advanced in 1916.

The planned major allied offensive of 1916 was to be the first major test of Britain's new mass army and of its new commander. It was to be major undertaking that tested the leadership, management, command and organisational skills of all involved, from the Commander-in-Chief down to the most junior planners on brigade staffs. While debate still surrounds Haig's approach to command and planning,[62] he has attracted much criticism for his close personal involvement in the detail of the tactical aspects of the campaign. Even if he was not, as he has been described, a commander who 'was over-tasked: trying to function at too many levels of war at once',[63] his giving close personal attention to the tactical detail of the first major operation of the BEF under his command would still appear entirely reasonable: he wanted to leave nothing to chance. (Critics of the conduct of this war do not deal consistently with commanders on the issue of personal attention to detail in planning: another commander, the Australian Corps commander, Sir John Monash, had a reputation for focussing on the minute detail of his plans but this was held to be a virtue.)[64] This command style of Haig's has been drawn on to create an unflattering image of the command interaction within the senior echelons of the BEF: that is, that Haig's subordinates were so in awe of him and so deferential to him on all matters of strategy and tactics that they seldom argued with his directions. This, it is argued, effectively stifled critical debate that could have

---

[61] Plan for Offensive by the Fourth Army G.X. 3/1, 3 April 1916, Edmonds, *BOH 1916,* Appendices II, 64-5.
[62] Tim Travers argues that Haig was not in control and did not dictate to his army and corps commanders while Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, in the analysis of Rawlinson and the development of the Somme plan, argue the opposite. Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987) and Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2004).
[63] J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 540.
[64] Roland Perry, *Monash: The Outsider Who Won the War* (Sydney: Random House, 2004).

improved planning outcomes.[65] Even with the evidence of Haig's close control of the development of the tactical plan for the Somme, the presumption that deference stifled debate is difficult to sustain in light of the exchanges that occurred between all levels of planners during the planning phase.[66] Nor did this style of command extend to the relationships between subordinate commanders, for which the evidence suggests there were genuine exchanges of opinion and disquiet.[67]

Another view or explanation of Haig's inclination to become closely involved in the detail of battle planning (and indeed in its implementation) could be that his subordinates, while good at identifying the tactical problem, were less confident about producing a guaranteed successful solution and thus tended to leave major decisions to Haig.[68] Certainly, in developing the concepts and plans for the Somme tactical battle, Haig could have been excused for believing Rawlinson's focus on detail had blinded him to the need to plan an offensive that could end the war. Rawlinson's capitulation in the face of Haig's critique of his first draft plan is frequently used as an indictment of this style of command and planning because Rawlinson who, it is claimed, had a superior understanding of the realities of the tactical situation,[69] should have stood up to, or been able to convince Haig to accept the subordinate's original plan. Whichever view is correct, Haig and his headquarters planning staff did micro-manage the Somme planning phase and nothing proceeded or was agreed except with his explicit approval and input.[70]

The reason Haig's command style is relevant to an analysis of a small action such as Fromelles is because much is made of the alleged reluctance or inability of Haig to delegate full authority to subordinates. This alleged reluctance has then become central to the argument over the intention, timing and ultimately the decision to proceed with Fromelles. Somewhat surprisingly, it has become so for the reverse reason: his

---

[65] Tim Travers, *How the War Was Won: Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western front, 1917-1918* (London: Routledge, 1992), 9.
[66] This judgment does not sit easily either with Haig's acknowledged use of and trust in specialist advisers, such as Sir Hugh Trenchard for advice on aviation. Sheffield, *The Chief*, 151.
[67] Letter, GOC 32nd Division to Commander X Corps, 26 March 1916. 'In para77 4, p.3 of the notes, I am not at all clear why the Regiment at PYS should move by WARLENCOURT-FAUCOURT to COURCELETTE'. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, March 1916, WO95/850 TNA.
[68] John Hussey, 'Portrait of a Commander-in-Chief', in Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999), 25.
[69] Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, 150-1.
[70] Ibid., 149.

critics allege that he did not exercise full control over his subordinates, allowing them to follow personal agendas separate from his intent.

> Right up to 16 July Haking was still floating the idea of getting to Aubers Ridge but Haig seems to have been absolutely against it. It was a pity he did not express himself with the same resolution instead of the ambiguous couple of sentences he wrote on the Report for the attack.[71]

Other analysts, critical of the Fromelles battle and Haig's perceived failure to control it decisively, try to link him to responsibility for the eventual outcome by claiming this purported 'environment of deference' prevented his Army and Corps commanders from objecting to, or proposing major changes to, plans approved by the Commander-in-Chief.[72] While there may be some validity in the comment, it is important to recognise that the Army is not a democratic institution – a fact sometimes forgotten by Haig's critics – and that there are limits to a subordinate's capacity to resist his commander. As with Haig himself, if a commander is unable to accept the superior's directions and judgments, the military solution was, and is still, that the subordinate should resign. There is also the issue that the superior headquarters had a number of specialists who had expertise to bring to the planning process. Haig's objections to Rawlinson's plans in many instances were based on planning staff assessments of problems with combat support plans, approach march arrangements (road congestion was a major impediment to tactical flexibility due solely to the inability to move large numbers of troops about the battlefield quickly) or similar technical issues: issues not always apparent to junior commanders and their planners.[73]

This command style of Haig's was centrally relevant to the Somme planning environment. The evolution of the Somme tactical plan, discussed in more detail in following paragraphs, made it clear that the three commanders principally concerned had, almost up until the moment the infantry attacked, quite different conceptions about its conduct. The French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, desired an attritional battle (to be fought mainly by the British) to exhaust the enemy's reserves and to take the pressure off Verdun. General Haig took a different view: initially at least he believed that a breakthrough, that is an advance through the three German defensive

---

[71] Corfield, don't *forget me, cobber,* 34.
[72] Bean, *AOH* Vol. III, 350.
[73] The problems of supplying and sustaining the offensive were well understood: they were not all resolved before the fighting commenced. A.M. Henneker, *Transportation on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: HMSO, 1937), 122-136.

lines, was possible during the initial assault. Once the breakthrough was made, he planned to send his forces, 'not wildly ahead into the blue, but northwards, so that, working in cooperation with the troops on the Gommecourt-Arras front, it should settle with the opposing Germans in that sector, and definitely upset the enemy equilibrium: that is, he wanted penetration followed by rapid exploitation'.[74] Rawlinson, the tactical planner, thought that no more was possible than a slow and methodical step-by-step small scale advance, each step made from a secure footing created following the previous small advance, and preceded by a thorough bombardment. He was, in effect, favouring the French initial attritional approach, leavened with some political benefits from capturing some territory. (This was important also for British political consumption. According to General Murray, 'Politicians thought rather too simplistically, measuring success in terms of trenches, towns and territory captured, and had difficulty in grasping the abstract strategic concepts of attrition and moral dominance.')[75] Rawlinson understood a breakthrough was unlikely but was, in the end, persuaded to plan such an attack. Thus the three principal architects of the operational plan began their planning with fundamentally different objectives for the grand assault. Fortunately for the attacking British infantry, the British command system, represented by his critics as Haig's inflexibility, ensured that the different operational intents of the Commander-in-Chief and his principal commander were harmonised during the planning period by the process of review and criticism.

This debate over the final objectives for the battle and the proposed plan to achieve them does tend to conceal the point that Haig was trying to win the war and that slow or defensive strategies simply would not achieve this. Haig had initially shied away from the French plans for a series of purely attritional battles for the two reasons that he was not convinced that this would result in a decisive outcome and that it was likely the British Army would be the one to be destroyed. However, the impact of Verdun on his French allies caused him to reassess his approach when applied to the main attack. The agreed final plan was for a three-stage battle: a preliminary attack would see the assaulting troops make inroads into the enemy's defences; an attrition stage during which the defenders would exhaust themselves trying to eject the attackers and prevent further advances; and a final, or exploitation phase, when the defending

---

[74] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, vii.
[75] William Philpott, *Bloody Victory,* 77.

enemy would lose his ability to resist and be defeated. Unquestionably, Haig believed his attack would achieve a strategic victory. He was well aware that the Germans had suffered as much at Verdun as the French. British and French intelligence services, both before and during the battle, continually provided Haig with optimistic assessments claiming the fighting strength of the German defenders was declining as was their morale. Logic dictated that, if the French doubted their ability to hold on much longer at Verdun due to their losses, then the Germans would likewise be unable to maintain the rate of additional loss inflicted on them by the onset of a major British offensive. With these major strategic and operational issues dominating his thoughts, it is entirely reasonable that Haig was not focussed upon developing the tactical detail for any of the several planned supporting/diversionary actions that were a part of the overall plan.

Following the direction to Rawlinson to switch his planning to the Somme, BEF GHQ issued their first direction to prepare a plan for an offensive at a Conference of Army Commanders held at Aire on 18 March 1916. Fourth Army HQ responded with the first draft (G.X.3/1) of the tactical plan for the main Somme operation on 3 April.[76] In just over seven pages, Rawlinson's translation of Haig's concept was both concise and comprehensive. It identified the boundaries of the operation, the critical terrain, the tactical limits, a number of the assumptions underlying the plan, including an assessment of the enemy's defences and an assessment of the strengths and minuses of the plan. It specifically identified certain critical technologies, such as artillery, gas and smoke, which would be important during the implementation phase. It included tactical guidance on how the infantry was to conduct the attack. Finally this plan was quite clear on the objectives to be achieved. As many later analyses of the battle have noted, however, Rawlinson's plan failed in one critical area to meet Haig's expectations: that is, the plan did not promise a breakthrough of the enemy's lines.[77] Haig's response was quick and to the point:

> the Commander-in-Chief desires that further consideration may be given to the possibility of pushing our first advance further than is contemplated in your plans.[78]

---

[76] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 64-71.
[77] 'Haig's objection was not to Rawlinson's tactical methods, but to his operational conception.' Philpott, *Bloody Victory,* 108.
[78] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 74.

Rawlinson reacted equally quickly and a new plan was submitted on April 19. In it was mentioned the possibility that Rawlinson had not understood Haig's original intent.

> Certain information, not previously at my disposal, has been communicated to me, both verbally by the commander in chief and in your letters Nos O.A.D. 710 and 710/1 of 12 April 1916, since I submitted my proposed plans on the 3rd of April (G.X.3/1).
> Of this information, the most important points are as follows:
> a. The objectives on the capture of which the commander in chief places the most importance.
> b. The direction in which our advance is to progress in the event of the initial attacks being successful.
> c. The proposed introduction of one or more French divisions between the right of the Fourth Army and the Somme.
> d. The nature of the cooperation on the part of the French north of the Somme.[79]

In addition to the new operational end-state, Rawlinson's amended plan also noted a significant increase in the numbers of troops and guns that were being provided – a development that also required modifications to be made to the original plan. Rawlinson was still concerned that the initial objectives sought were overly ambitious:

> I came to the conclusion that two courses were open to me. The first and most alluring one was to attempt the capture of the whole of the enemy's lines of defence as far south as the Albert-Bapaume Road in one attack. The second, less ambitious but in my opinion more certain, is to divide the attack in two phases, the first of which would give us possession of the enemy's front system and all the important tactical points between the front system and the second line. The second phase to follow as soon as possible after the first, so as to give the enemy as little time as possible to construct new defences and bring up guns and reserves.
> The first alternative, I considered, was a gamble which involved considerable risks.[80]

However, despite his misgivings, Rawlinson proceeded to develop his original plan to accommodate as many of Haig's concerns as possible, recognising that taking risks was part of the role of senior commanders in war trying to win rather than merely hold on.

> After further consideration, it seems to me that an attempt to attain more distant objectives, that is to say, the enemy's second line system, under the circumstances described above, involves considerable risks. I, however, fully realise that it may be necessary to incur these risks in view of the objective to be obtained.[81]

---

[79] Ibid., 76.
[80] Ibid., 77.
[81] Rawlinson's reply to Haig in his amended plan. Ibid., 77.

Contrary to popular belief, the Somme was not an example of an ill-planned operation that sent troops to their death simply because their leaders were short of ideas. The planning process was characterised by months of staff work and the final orders filled hundreds of pages. Indeed, it could be, and has been,[82] argued that the tactical plan was too detailed, too inflexible and too prescriptive: at an original seven pages it could also be argued that the operational plan was, by comparison, relatively simple and original. The plans at both levels clearly built upon British experiences in the battles of 1915, operationally in the calculation of attack frontages based on troop numbers and the number of guns needed to support such a frontage, and tactically with new techniques and weapons aimed specifically at trench warfare, such as gas, grenades and Bangalore torpedoes, assuming major importance.

It is beyond the scope of this analysis to examine in detail either the Somme tactical plan or its outcome. In summary, the plan called for a massive frontal assault on a 22,500 yards (about 20,500 metres) by the infantry of 17 Divisions (about 200,000 infantry plus another 100,000 in support in the artillery and engineers etc.), not including the massive French contingent on the right (southern) flank of Fourth Army. The objectives, which as discussed above were contentious during the planning phase, were finalised on achieving a breakthrough of the enemy's three lines of defences. The attack was planned to last only a few weeks. A week long artillery barrage was conducted prior to the launch of the attack to destroy enemy defences, particularly strong points and the enemy's barbed wire entanglements, and kill and demoralise his troops in the forward parts of the line.

As is well known, the implementation of the battle did not go according to the plan. In general terms, the criticisms levelled at both the planning and the execution of the Somme attack resonate with the critics of Fromelles. The principal criticisms made relate to tactical overreach and inadequate and poorly delivered artillery support, with the two-day delay to the assault caused by the weather exposing the precarious state of the British ammunition supplies. This unplanned extension to the bombardment ran the batteries very short of ammunition and the rate of fire each day had to be curtailed. This both enabled the defenders to regain some of their shattered morale and institute some

---

[82] Martin Samuels, *Command or Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 141.

last minute repairs to key defences.[83] As well as these problems, the critics also point to inadequate and poorly executed infantry tactics and inadequate logistical preparation to exploit any breakthrough achieved.

> In the case of the Battle of the Somme, Haig explained his plan in a General Staff letter a fortnight before Z-Day. If the enemy resistance broke down, the British advance was [in Haig's words]: 'to be pressed eastwards far enough to enable our cavalry to push through into open country beyond the enemy's prepared line of defence. Our object then will be to turn northwards, taking the enemy lines in flank and reverse, the bulk of cavalry operating on the outer flank of this movement'. …. This ambitious exploitation was allotted to Hubert Gough's Reserve Army, consisting of three infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions. Obviously, the Cavalry Corps was to leave this sweep to the North. Now, my [Barnett's] question to the experts is this: where were the contingency logistical plans for this 25 mile advance by six divisions? What were the preparatory arrangements for establishing and re-supplying forward depots? (He goes on to state he can find none.)' Barnett concludes that due to the failure to plan properly or indeed at all for the logistics of the advance and exploitation phase, the much hoped for strategic level breakout and exploitation 'would in all likelihood have been defeated by the scale and nature of the logistic problem.[84]

Other factors played their part, including weather, poor quality supplies, particularly artillery ammunition, and insufficient numbers of men. It is a mistake, however, to focus solely on the negative results of this attack.

> Now that the history of 1916 has fallen into perspective, we can see how the original plan was eroded by events: how the Somme was prised off into isolation and expected by itself to achieve the hardest of all victories: namely, the defeat of an enemy in a defensive position of exceptional strength, without any real prospect of strategic gain; and how finally it was left to tactical ingenuity and to the courage and blood of thousands of men on the battlefield to see it through.[85]

The Somme represented a ghastly and expensive initial training program for a new British army that, having learned some bitter lessons in 1916, could search for solutions in 1917 and apply the results of this search in 1918 to achieve victory. New infantry tactics, new artillery tactics, integration of the various combat arms, new weapons and more experienced troops were all the direct result of the Somme operation. Some of these lessons were learned early enough in the Somme attack to

---

[83] Boraston and Bax, *The Eighth Division*, 67.
[84] Correlli Barnett, 'Haig's Outline Plans for the Exploitation of Breakthrough in 1916/1917', *Bulletin of the Western Front Association* 87 (June/July, 2010), 9.
[85] Bonham-Carter, *Soldier True,* 173.

become available to help guide the attack at Fromelles, if only there had been enough time for the inexperienced attack formations to benefit from them.[86]

All military plans require a start point. A military plan differs from the extant body of military knowledge that is often reflected in the then current military doctrine. A plan is the blueprint for an operation leading to a specific military result: doctrine is the fundamental way in which the Army in question will fight to implement its plans. A military plan usually has an end point; doctrine can continue to guide an army until some external factor, such as technology or societal developments, force a change. Many of this war's military plans were developed in reaction to tactical or strategic circumstances or were a reaction to standing instructions, either doctrine or specific orders passed on from one formation to the next. The most common form of a specific but local plan, passed from one formation to another, was the local defence plan. Developed by one of the earliest defenders of a trench section and based on a military appreciation of terrain, enemy capability and own support, the plan was passed on to successive relieving forces, thus obviating the need for these new troops to go through the same military appreciation process again. This ensured consistency in both the procedure and the plan itself, especially when local developments needed to be incorporated, and also ensured that combat support elements, especially artillery, understood was required of them in the case of an enemy attack. The disadvantage was that the enemy often acquired knowledge of such plans from captives or intelligence gathering in No Man's Land.

However, unlike these general and ongoing plans, specific operations with specific timing and geographic objectives, such as the Fromelles operation, needed a direction to be given to begin planning the operation. Offensive operations rarely happened spontaneously or in reaction to an enemy initiative. They were deliberate actions that required lead times and sound, considered preparation. This was as true for Fromelles as it was for the British assault on the Somme. While the genesis of Fromelles

[86] Two relevant examples would be the recognition that the artillery barrage supporting an infantry assault needed to remain close in front of the advancing troops and that it was an artillery responsibility to ensure this happened. Memorandum of 14 July 1916 from Chief of Staff of the Reserve Army, Neil Malcolm, to his Corps commanders on lessons from the recent fighting. General Staff Reserve Army War Diary AWM26. In the same document is a reference to how to employ 'mopping-up parties' once a trench had been overrun.

was in the strategic thinking behind the Somme,[87] it was the tactical battle of the Somme that determined both the timing of the attack and the size of the attacking force. Yet despite this, identifying a clear decision path for the Battle of Fromelles has proven a challenge. A number of different initiatives eventually resulted in the battle being fought and they were largely responsible for the shape and outcome of the battle.

Three different original purposes serve to confuse the identification of a specific instruction or a specific planning start date for Fromelles. The first is its links to, and confusion with, the full range of deception planning that GHQ had set in place, before the Somme attack began, to attempt to confuse the enemy. The second is the continuing British interest in a major assault in or near Belgium as an alternative to the Somme attack. (See map 3 for the geographical location of Fromelles.) Finally, the Fromelles attack owed much to the preparatory thinking and planning of the Corps Commander, Sir Richard Haking, who was instructed quite early on in his command of the sector to develop contingency plans for an attack in the Fromelles are should circumstances develop that would enable the successful recapture of Aubers Ridge. (Map 4 illustrates the geography Aubers Ridge and shows why, although only a low rise feature, its capture was considered a sound military objective.) Each of these purposes continued to influence/inform the development of the Fromelles plan, not always aiding the clarity of the process.

As will be shown, the initial thinking about Fromelles was not for the reactive attack to stop the Germans from moving troops that it eventually became; its genesis was in the well-known military strategy of deception. When a major attack is planned in one location, part of the pre-attack strategy is to convince the enemy the attack is coming elsewhere. Once the attack has been launched, the strategy is convince the enemy that the main attack is only a feint and the real effort is about to start somewhere else. The Somme planners identified the need for deception operations quite early in the planning cycle. However, as both the planning for support actions like Fromelles and the main Somme battle evolved, Fromelles began to offer the prospect of achieving

[87]John Terraine, '1916: The Year of the Somme', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Review,* 116: 4 (1986), 445.

Geographic Location of Fromelles.

(Map 3)

Topography of Aubers Ridge

(Map 4)

several different but still desirable military tactical outcomes, including deception, minor attrition and the pinning of enemy troops to the Lille sector. The benefits of these outcomes lay with the fact that they could be achieved with a comparatively small investment of combat resources: a typical characteristic of secondary or support

operations. The problem was that they each required different tactics to implement and different types of combat support. Before considering the strategic requirement to be addressed in the operational planning for Fromelles in detail, some explanation of the differing types of supporting operations available to the supreme command is necessary to explain why the lack of clear decision on which type of action Fromelles was intended to be created confusion in the minds of the Fromelles planners.

As outline above and in simple terms, there were three different types of supporting operations available to the Somme planners. These were attritional attacks, deception operations and pinning actions. Each of these had different characteristics, required different preparations, had different objectives and needed to be conducted in quite different ways. While all three were conventional military undertakings for which pre-war doctrine existed, in the context of the Somme operation, there were some major differences.

Attritional attacks have long featured in military tactics. Attrition was designed to reduce the enemy's capacity to wage war by destroying his military organisation, killing his soldiers and forcing him to consume scarce resources of ammunition, barbed wire and similar war materiel. Although attrition was a contentious policy, with its focus on killing enemy soldiers, it had its place in this war given the lack of alternative military options. If implemented well, attritional attacks had (and still have) the capacity to severely reduce the enemy’s fighting efficiency. Indeed, both Verdun and the Somme had attrition as one of the concepts underpinning them. If handled poorly, attritional attacks ran the risk of imposing greater cost on the attackers than on the defenders. A key decision planners had to make in relation to any action, especially an attrition battle, was whether to conceal preparations and thus improve significantly the chances of minimising own casualties but running the risk of finding the enemy trenches comparatively empty, or permitting the enemy to see the preparations, and thus mass his forces to resist, which would ensure more enemy in the killing zone but also increase the risk of casualties to the attacking force.

Attritional attacks came in different types. Some involved the isolation of sections of the enemy's trench which were then overwhelmed with numbers. Others used minimum numbers of attackers, but still sufficient to force the defenders to man

their trenches in strength. Once the enemy was out of his shelters manning his trenches, artillery and mortars were then used to do the actual killing of the enemy troops, now in their exposed positions, while the attacking infantry took cover themselves to minimise their own casualties. An attritional battle of whatever size was fought to the attacker's timetable, on the attacker's chosen battleground with the attacker able to decide when to terminate the attack. The attacker could always determine the size of the attack to be mounted and what the final objective, the 'end state' in modern military terminology, was. Because the attacker could pick the time, the assembly of essential supporting combat elements such as artillery, engineers and aircraft could be planned well in advance and positioned in time prior to the attack. Similarly, as the intention was to kill the enemy, attacking troops could be given very limited objectives. As long as they were sufficiently threatening to force the enemy to man his defences to enable indirect means, such as artillery and mines, to do the actual killing, territorial objectives in attritional warfare could be unimportant. This was the plan, on a much larger scale, behind the German attack at Verdun. The infantry were to threaten to capture an area the French could not lose so would strongly defend it. German artillery was then to bombard the defenders so heavily as to inflict disproportionately large casualties while the German infantry stayed in cover. As the French reinforced, the process was to happen again. To be effective, an attritional battle did need the attacker to commit sufficient infantry to the attack to convince the enemy that the attack was a genuine attempt to seize and hold ground but it would fail as a tactic if the casualty rate among the attackers equalled or surpassed that of the defenders – as occurred at Verdun.

In relation to Fromelles, attrition was intended as much to distract the Germans and force them to waste scarce resources defending areas of the line distant from the main attack as it was actually killing German soldiers. However, while deception was an important consideration, within the context of the attritional attacks Joffre had demanded Haig conduct in the lead-up to the Somme, it was the attrition potential that encouraged initial planning for small-scale operations in the Lille area. The strategic need to reduce or 'wear down' German combat power was seen as a major prerequisite of the Somme attack. (Such preparatory actions are known to modern military planners as 'enabling' actions.)

Deception operations were a major part of any major battle plan of WWI. The intention behind deception operations was to prevent the enemy thinning out the defences of the non-threatened parts of his line to reinforce his defenders in the main theatre of the offensive. Deception operations could occur at any time during the lead-up to and during a major attack. If it was clear before the main attack was launched that the deception operation had failed to prevent troop movements, the intensity and scale of renewed deception operations could be increased. Deception operations, which included feints as a sub-category, were always more intangible actions than either attritional or pinning attacks: assessing whether the enemy had in fact been sufficiently deceived to lead him to squander resources defending against a non-existent threat was always difficult.

Arguably the biggest problem planners of deception actions, indeed all planners and commanders, faced was the demanding requirement to understand what was in the enemy's mind. The problem of 'second-guessing' became a serious issue for commanders during this war: their inclination was often to assume the enemy was cleverer than he was, that an operation was too obvious and thus had an ulterior motive or that a genuine operation was in fact merely a feint.

> Cutting our own wire.
>
> General Cavanagh raised the point contained in G.H.Q. instructions regarding the cutting of lanes in our own wire. He thought such a procedure would not deceive the enemy as, were we intent on a serious attack, we would delay the cutting of our own wire till the last minute and do all in our power to render it inconspicuous.[88]

This uncertainty placed an enormous strain on the commanders, planners and their intelligence officers. Deception operations ranged from making deliberately obvious preparations for an attack, such as preparing dummy gun positions and jumping-off trenches, to conducting artillery bombardments of varying sizes or mounting small infantry raids against specific parts of the enemy's line. More serious endeavours included launching comparatively large infantry attacks designed to capture and hold, for short periods, important parts of the enemy's trench system.[89] In deception

---

[88] Notes on Conference held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle on 22nd June 1916. General Staff First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

[89] 'The 1st Anzac simulated a raid by artillery action, but the infantry did not leave their trenches. The enemy evidently withdrew, and subsequently, after a heavy trench mortar preparation, bombed his way back into his own empty trenches.' Summary of Operations - Second Army for the period 6.0 p.m. 30th June to 6.0 p.m. 7th July, 1916. General Staff, Second Army. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/274 TNA.

operations, feints,[90] manoeuvre and preparatory activities short of actual attack were as common a feature as sending infantry into battle.

One problem with deception operations was that once the main attack had commenced, they had little prospect of deceiving the enemy sufficiently to prevent him moving troops away from unthreatened areas. If the deception operation was itself a major attack, and the BEF in 1916 lacked the resources to mount more than one large scale attack at any one time, the enemy would still be forced to treat this secondary action as a genuine threat even if they were not deceived. There was one situation in which deceptions operations, implemented after the main attack had commenced, could influence the enemy's reaction. If the defending commander was convinced the attacker had more resources that in fact had been committed to the attack, he could continue to harbour doubts as to the main point of the real attack. He might then interpret an attack of a lesser intensity than he was expecting as a deception attack, even if this was the full strength and the main effort of the attacker, and hold back on decisions to rearrange troop dispositions in his defensive plans. The German commander, von Falkenhayn, initially thought the Fromelles attack was a new major British assault.[91] More usually though, once the main attack was clearly identified, deception operations tended to be replaced by the third type of support operation, pinning attacks.

Pinning operations have long been part of the military planning repertoire. Even for the Somme operation itself, the key strategic concept behind the Allied proposal, simultaneous attacks on all fronts, was strategic pinning of Germany's forces. A number of widely dispersed attacks would pin German forces in place and prevent the German high command from using internal lines of communications, the highly efficient German railway system, to move reinforcements from quiet fronts to threatened ones: there were to be no quiet fronts. The same logic applied to the tactical planning for the

---

[90] A feint was a pretend attack, using small numbers of troops making much noise and behaving in an obvious manner: waving helmets and bayonets above trenches in view of the enemy, blowing whistles etc.
[91] According to Farrar-Hockley, when Falkenhayn (the German Commander on the Western Front) first heard of the 19 July attack, he assumed it was the new British offensive he had long forecast would follow the Somme attack and had to be reassured by Rupprecht that it was not. Given the German position at Verdun and the Somme, Farrar-Hockley implies that Falkenhayn was very relieved by this news, suggesting that Haig's oft-criticised aim of launching an additional offensive was at least a strategy the Germans feared. Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme*, 200.
[91] Representative of these views is the comment by Peter Pedersen: 'Haking also had a fixation about Aubers Ridge.' Peter Pedersen, *Fromelles: French Flanders* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2004), 36.

Somme. Within the theatre of operations, it was well understood by the military commands of both sides that thinning out troops from a quiet sector, to increase the size of the attacking force and provide the necessary superiority in numbers to launch an attack, or to provide reinforcements to defenders under pressure, was a standard military practice. Planning for any battle would normally include provisions to try and prevent this occurring. Both deception and pinning attacks had to be sufficiently convincing that the enemy would leave combat resources in the threatened area. One key difference between the two was that pinning operations usually required the attacker to physically launch an assault on the enemy line. This assault could be very limited in both vigour and time but the troops involved had to constitute a serious threat to the enemy's defences. Pinning operations gained more credibility with the enemy, and thus kept more of his combat strength away from the main attack, if they were launched at a part of the enemy's line that had significant value to him: for example, if the threat was to a part of the enemy line that occupied tactically significant ground. Actions to capture high ground or major strong-points in the enemy line were typically the type of attack the enemy would strive to defeat. Similarly, if the enemy defences protected strategic targets such as major communications hubs or centres of population, the enemy was more inclined to treat attacks seriously. Thus an attack on Aubers Ridge, which then also posed a threat to the major city of Lille, was a threat the enemy would be forced to take seriously.

As noted, pinning attacks did need to engage the enemy in battle but this caused a definitional problem in differentiating between a planned pinning action and the much more frequent trench raids and artillery demonstrations that were also often intended to force the enemy to maintain a higher defensive readiness in a certain location. To an extent raids and demonstrations were still pinning actions, in that even small scale attacks helped keep the enemy off balance and uncertain as to the attackers' intentions. However, in the context of support operations for the Somme, such small scale actions had little prospect of altering German defensive thinking. This assessment was confirmed when British intelligence began warning Allied High Command during the build-up for the Somme that the Germans were becoming less likely to be deceived by small scale actions or by artillery alone. For pinning operations to be successful, they had to convince the Germans that the attack was a genuine attempt to seize and hold the German lines.

The strategic level planners at GHQ had considered the need for pinning attacks, of the type that Fromelles eventually became, quite early in the process, but only in an abstract sense. Such attacks were, by their nature, purely reactive.[92] They could not be initiated until the main attack was under way and the enemy was known to be moving troops from an unengaged sector to oppose the main attack. Before the main attack commended, any minor operations would have been deception or attritional attacks but not pinning actions. There is no evidence the strategic planners sought to predict potential locations for conducting tactical pinning operations. No subordinate commanders were instructed to commence operational or tactical planning for specific pinning attacks before the Somme attack began. Indeed, until the Somme attack was finally launched and the Germans had begun to react to it, there would have been no purpose in specific planning for a reactive battle.

One other important difference distinguished deception operations from the other two support operation types and this was the issue of operational and tactical security. Allied security in 1916 was poor and notorious for betraying the intentions behind, and the details of, allied attacks. Compounding the security problem was the enemy's command of the high ground, which enabled him to monitor activity in the British lines. For deception operations, utilising poor security and being under observation was an important component of the plan's likelihood of success: for a deception operation to succeed, it was important that the enemy was aware of heightened activity during the lead-up and build-up phases. No enemy commander was likely to be deceived by actions he was unaware were occurring. However, for the other types of support operations, deliberately allowing the enemy to become aware of the impending attack would have been suicidal for the assaulting troops. In 1916, an enemy in established defensive positions, possessing strong artillery support and prepared for an infantry assault, was a formidable tactical problem. However, even if the aim was to allow the enemy to 'discover' the preparations, it needed to be done carefully, because too obviously poor security or obvious levels of heightened activity would usually warn the enemy that the action was a deception. Given the likely disastrous consequences for

[92] In a letter to Haig on 3 March, Joffre 'begged Haig to cooperate in holding the enemy [and preventing reinforcement of the Verdun attack] by means of minor operations carried out by fairly large bodies of infantry and prepared by important concentrations of artillery'. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 39.

any troops involved in an assault that the enemy had been inadvertently alerted to, an early decision in the planning process as to real intent of the attack was vital. If an attritional attack was planned but poor security alerted the enemy, the reality was that the attacker would suffer disproportionate and massive casualty rates among the assault troops. As inflicting disproportionately higher casualties on the enemy than received was the whole point of an attritional strategy, no attritional attack could afford poor security. Similarly, once the decision was made to mount a deception action and actions begun to alert the enemy, the scope for commanders to change the intent to a simple attritional or pinning action was non-existent.

As will be seen, the shifting debate at the operational level of command about the purpose of the Fromelles attack resulted in several actions that undoubtedly risked compromising operational security for the eventual attack. One example was the range of deception options still being considered by First Army even at the time the decision to launch the Fromelles attack was made. The order from First Army to XI and I Corps agreeing to the Fromelles proposal was followed shortly after by an instruction stating:

> In order to mislead the enemy as to the real point of the attack, the I Corps will, on the 16th and morning of the 17th instant, carry out bombardments of the enemy's front line trenches between the HOHENZOLLERN REDOUBT and the LA BASSEE CANAL: and, as regards the best hours to do so, will communicate direct with XI Corps.[93]

The sheer increase in signals traffic necessary to manage the coordination of the two actions alone would have served to alert German signals intelligence that an operation was close to being launched. The problems of reallocating and moving guns and ammunition to both areas of operation would also have provided the Germans with an excellent indication of the likely attack point. No analysis of the planning for the battle can ignore the question of whether uncertainty as to the purpose of the attack contributed to a laxness in operational security or whether letting the Germans discover the plan was deliberate, as would have been the case had the aim been purely deception: the purpose of the attack as initially understood by First Army planners.

As the planning for the Somme operation evolved, generic proposals for attacks to pin the enemy were caught up in and confused with other thinking on attrition

[93] First Army letter, No. G.S.421, 15 July 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881, TNA.

operations, intended to weaken the enemy, and larger scale offensive operations with more ambitious objectives, such as seizing critical terrain. Specific proposals for attacks intended to pin German forces in place away from the main attack were first raised in the Somme planning process in the Haig-Rawlinson exchanges that occurred during the development of the overarching tactical plan. The need to distract the enemy's attention, and by default, force him to leave significant troop strength in areas distant from the Somme area of operations (AO) was directly addressed:

> Simultaneous activity against the Gommecourt salient, designed to hold the attention of the enemy's artillery and reserves on that side is advisable so far as it can be arranged. The Third Army will probably be able to give some assistance of the same nature further to the north.[94]

and:

> In the event of (b) [the Somme attack] being decided upon, then the First, Second and Third Armies will take steps to deceive the enemy as to the real front of the attack, and wear him out and reduce his fighting efficiency both during the three days prior to the assault and during the subsequent operations.[95]

By the time the Fromelles battle began, the Somme fighting had been in progress for 19 days and German casualties were growing at a significant rate, particularly when the German Commander-in-Chief, Erich von Falkenhayn, issued the command that any ground lost had to be retaken, at whatever cost. This denied the Germans the ability to trade ground for casualties and, when combined with the attrition they were experiencing at Verdun, pushed them close to complete military exhaustion.[96] After the initial disappointment of the first few days, the British attack recovered momentum and began to make slow but steady progress, especially in the southern sector of the front. The advance was enough to alarm the German defenders and cause them to call for reinforcements. With the Battle of Verdun still ongoing, and the unforeseen demands on German manpower arising from the new Brusilov Offensive in the east,[97] reinforcements were scarce and only readily available from the more lightly engaged sections of the adjoining front line sectors or from remote but quiet fronts outside Russia, France and Belgium. A report from the interrogation of a

---

[94] Letter O.A.D. 710/1, GHQ to Rawlinson, dated 12 April 1916. Edmonds, *BOH 1916,* Appendices II, 74.
[95] Edmonds, *BOH 1916,* Appendices II, 84.
[96] General (Erich) Ludendorff, *My War Memories: 1914-1918,* Vol. I (London: Hutchinson, 1919), 292.
[97] In addition to drawing off German divisions from the Western Front to prop up the crumbling Austro-Hungarian Army, Brusilov entangled Germany in the operational management of the War on the Austro-Hungarian part of the Eastern Front until the Russian surrender over a year later. Harris, *Douglas Haig,* 204.

captured member of the German 3rd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, suggested that some reinforcements were being sourced from much further away than expected, claiming they had been transported from the Italian Front to the Somme, departing the Loretto Heights on 8 July and arriving in the German III Corps area on 13 July.[98] The British had always anticipated that this would be the likely German reaction to the pressure being applied on the Somme, so when reports appeared identifying new German reinforcements sourced from around Lille, senior BEF commanders were unsurprised.[99] Consequently, the standard military counter, small-scale pinning operations, was initiated. In a letter to Rawlinson, GHQ anticipated that preliminary preparations of feints, random wire-cutting, gas and artillery demonstrations and raids would be sufficient to discourage the Germans from reducing their defences along the whole front line. As events were to show, demonstrations and raids were insufficient.[100]

The strategic plan called for commanders of British armies not engaged in the Somme battle to devise and develop a program of feint attacks, limited attacks and demonstrations designed to keep the Germans off-balance and uncertain as to where new attacks might occur.[101] The unfortunate corollary of this instruction, necessary in view of the lack of British reserves and the much higher-than-predicted consumption rate of men, ammunition and material in the main Somme battle, was that these plans had to involve minimal resources. Thus the British planners faced a dilemma: because they had only the estimated bare minimum of combat resources needed to conduct the Somme attack, they needed to ensure the Germans did not alter the equation by bringing in reinforcements but they also lacked the combat resources to make diversions and threats sufficiently convincing to prevent this occurring.

---

[98] CRA Third Corps, 18 July 1916. Artillery Staff, Third Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/689 TNA.
[99] Warning Order: Second Army G. 46, dated 13 July 1916, to all Corps and independent formations in First and Second Armies. General Staff, Second Army. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881 TNA.
[100] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices II, 84.
[101] The plan was activated by BEF HQ Order O.A.D. 9, which instructed First, Second and Third Armies to commence their subsidiary operations, to conform with the Somme attack program, and as laid out in O.A.D. 912, with wire-cutting operations on 20 June. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June, 1916, WO95/164, TNA. Even within planning for the Fromelles battle, this notion of confusing the enemy as to the start point for the attack was employed. First Army Order No. G.S. 421 of 15 July 1916 stated 'that in order to mislead the enemy as to the real point of attack, the I Corps will, on the 16th and the morning of the 17th instant, carry out bombardments of portions of the enemy's front line trenches between the Hohenzollern Redoubt and the La Bassée Canal.' General Staff, First Army. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881, TNA.

As noted, at the early stage of overall planning, these pinning operations could not be developed very far nor could the higher levels of command provide much in the way of guidance as to likely location, timing or resources to be employed. Standard deception strategies, such as false but elaborate ostentatious preparations of jumping-off points, new gun positions and dummy stores dumps could and were undertaken as a matter of routine. Post-war evidence suggests the Germans were rarely deceived by such elementary trickery. A serious pinning operation was different and, if conducted on a scale and at a target of sufficient importance, the German defenders could not afford to ignore it. However, proper timing of such an action was also critical and difficult to achieve. It was very difficult to ensure that the accumulation of sufficient troops and artillery to appear genuinely threatening coincided with the enemy's timing to withdraw his defenders from that sector. The general intent of the local army commander, and the tactical plan to be devised by local planners, could only be produced at the moment they were required, because the need would only become apparent once the Germans had commenced thinning out troops from a quiet sector of the line.

As this meant the timetable for the attack would be determined not by the attackers but by the actions of the enemy, the planners had to develop a solution that either involved the accumulation of enough resources all along the Front (apart from the Somme itself) to mount an attack of sufficient scale to be launched anywhere at any time or set up a logistics support system that would enable the necessary resources to be moved to the specified point in the line in sufficient time and in sufficient volume to sustain the attack. As noted, the BEF simply lacked the combat strength to be strong everywhere on the front and, in 1916, had a severely under-developed logistics network barely capable of supporting one major action.[102] Manpower resources were a challenge for the British, even though they had the largest army Britain has ever fielded.

These problems were tacitly acknowledged by the GOC First Army in a letter to the GOC Second Army, in which he pointed out that the XI Corps was forced to hold its front with all four of its divisions in the front line, contrary to British practice of

---

[102] Before the battle of the Somme, 55 miles of standard gauge railway, including 20 miles of sidings had to be built specifically to support that battle while an overall 417 miles had to be built simply to sustain the whole BEF. As the Official History of Transportation on the Western Front candidly noted 'The year 1916 brought about a crisis'. A.M. Henniker, *Transportation on the Western Front 1914-18* (London: HMSO, 1937), xiii.

keeping one division back in Corps reserve. The problem was XI Corps had to defend a length of front line that was too long for its resources to deal with.[103] In 1916, there was no solution to the problem of insufficient combat power, so planning for even such a limited attack as Fromelles posed almost insurmountable challenges. First Army was, together with the other two armies not directly engaged on the Somme, given only very limited additional resources (mainly of artillery ammunition) in anticipation of the need to conduct deception operations,[104] and additional manpower was specifically excluded from any calculations.

> The IV Corps commander did not think IV Corps had sufficient men to hold any enemy trenches that might be captured, although there was one salient in the enemy's lines which might be held if more men were placed at his disposal. The G.O.C. First Army replied that no more men would be available.[105]

While the availability of additional artillery ammunition did address a major combat deficiency (offset by the unreliability of many of the shells supplied), deception operations needed manpower to be convincing, and additional troops were simply unavailable without stripping them from other Fronts.[106]

As noted, a further complication for the planners was the issue of having to develop plans for deception operations and outlines of possible pinning operations in the absence of any target or specific enemy initiative, as a First Army instruction to the three Corps commanders, dated 1 June, made clear:

> I send herewith for the personal information of you and your Brigadier-General, General Staff, a memorandum showing the role to be played by the First Army during the offensive which is to be carried out by the British Expeditionary Force.
> 3. Would you kindly submit to me:-
> (a) Your proposals for operations on the front of your Corps during the three days prior to the assault and during the subsequent operations.
> (b) The preliminary preparations which you propose making at once as regards the advancement of saps, construction of dummy assembly trenches, gun emplacements, etc.,
> (c) Your estimate of ammunition expenditure in addition to the normal allotment, basing your calculations on the assumption that

---

[103] Letter, Monro to Plumer, 10 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164, TNA.
[104] First Army Memo G.S. 360/28 (a) 1 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June, 1916, WO95/164, TNA.
[105] Summary of Proceedings of Corps Conference Commanders held at by G.O.C at Chateau Jumelle at 11 a.m. on 14 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164, TNA, 3.
[106] The French insistence on maintaining the Salonika Force in Macedonia was a constant irritation to Haig and his Western Front colleagues as it diverted significant numbers of British troops to a Front of little strategic significance.

> the monthly allotment be on the scale as up to date, and bearing in mind the total amount allotted to First Army.
> (d) Your estimated requirements in gas and smoke appliances.
> 5. I am unable to inform you even as to the probable date on which the offensive will take place but your calculations should be based on the assumption that at least three to four weeks will be available for the preliminary arrangements.
> 6. Commencing on Monday, the 5th of June, I should be glad if you would forward, so as to reach First Army Headquarters by 6 p.m. on each Monday, a brief report showing what preparations it is proposed to carry out on the front of your Corps during the ensuing week.[107]

Initially, all the unengaged army commanders favoured artillery demonstrations and raids, in preference to the more potentially costly infantry assaults. Given these raids were being conducted anyway for intelligence, training and morale purposes, extending their intensity, size and frequency to sow doubt in the Germans' minds as to whether they were just raids or something more serious was a logical extension of the existing strategy,[108] provided there were adequate resources of infantry and artillery to sustain an increased tempo. Thinking along these lines was occurring in early June, but for the reasons outlined above, little detail could be added to the concept until the enemy began moving his troops.

> Reference paragraph 2 of paper entitled 'Preparations for deceiving the enemy', forwarded under cover of First Army No. G.S.360/28 (a), d/- 1st June, under instructions from G.H.Q. the operations generally defined in the above mentioned paragraph should include the isolation, with artillery barrages from 18-pdrs, of small, well-defined salients in the enemy's line.[109]

By the middle of June, all the unengaged army commanders had been fully briefed on the pending major attack and on what supporting role was expected from their forces. Raiding and artillery were still the preferred methods of conducting pinning operations.[110] In a report on a conference on 14 June of the senior commanders of First Army, the GOC First Army, General Sir Charles Monro, advised his corps commanders that:

> Everybody must be strained up to the highest pitch of efficiency and energy with a view to harassing the enemy, **containing his reserves** and giving him no rest by day or night.[111]

---

[107] Memorandum, First Army No. G.S. 360/28 (a), HQ First Army to Commanders I, IV and XI Corps, I June 1916. Copy in General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June, 1916, WO95/881 TNA.
[108] Bean, *AOH* Vol. III, 328.
[109] First Army No. G.S.405/30 (a), 30 June 1916. Copy in CRA Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June, 1916, WO95/888 TNA.
[110] Summary of Proceedings of Corps Conference Commanders held at by G.O.C at Chateau Jumelle at 11 a.m. on 14 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.
[111] Ibid. (emphasis added).

It was during this conference, however, that the first indications (in the context of planning for the Somme) arose that the Commander XI Corps was thinking of taking enemy positions and then holding them for a longer period than usual with simple raiding, as a more convincing way of pinning the German defenders in place.

> The G.O.C. referred to the question of holding certain portions of the enemy's line which might have been captured. G.H.Q. had been informed that the XI Corps was prepared to hold any of the enemy's trenches which might be captured as the result of raids on the Corps front, but whether they could be held was a matter for the Corps Commander himself to decide.
> The G.O.C. XI Corps said it depended on what the higher commanders desired. From the point of view **of containing the enemy's reserves** there was no doubt that holding portions of the hostile trenches would be by far the most efficacious method. It would make him counter-attack, spend ammunition and keep his men going.
> The G.O.C. First Army said he would ascertain from the Commander-in-Chief what was to be the policy. Sir Charles agreed that the holding of the enemy's trenches would be by far the most effective method of fulfilling the spirit of the G.H.Q. instructions.[112]

Although there is little reaction in the official correspondence following this conference, Haking clearly continued to develop his more ambitious concepts. Apart from the encouragement of his immediate superior, there were other reasons for him to do so. His initiative in developing his ideas was consistent with sound command principles and indicated he was a competent local commander alert to military opportunities. He was also developing his plan 'in case it was needed' as a result of developments on the Somme battlefield: had the anticipated German collapse occurred, Haking's planned action would have exploited this in a way that potentially shortened the war. Moreover, in the tense month before the commencement of the Somme attack, it was inevitable that such a promising deception concept would become more widely known and that other senior commanders would become interested in and supportive of Haking's concept. A note from Haking to Commander First Army, dated 20 June, revealed that Monro had granted Haking permission to discuss his more ambitious plan with the Commander, Second Army, General Sir Hebert Plumer.

> The Army Commander gave me permission to consult direct with the G.O.C. 2nd Army as regards offensive operations on my extreme left flank. [Haking's Corps was on the left flank of First Army and thus adjacent to the right hand Corps of Second Army.] I saw G.O.C. 2nd Army today and he agreed to all I suggested, and asked me to put my scheme of attack in writing and send it to him. This I have now done and I attach a copy of the letter I have sent to him. It should be

[112] Ibid.

> clearly understood that this attack will not be delivered until I receive orders to that effect from 1st Army.[113]

Haking's notes make it clear that his intention was to develop a plan that was more effective in meeting the offensive policy required by the Commander-in-Chief of those armies not directly involved in the Somme attack than the purely deception operations that had been devised up to that point.

More high level conferences followed the June meeting and, after one on 8 July, Haking submitted a much more developed concept, essentially a refined version of his outline plan to Plumer, to Commander First Army. This proposal, which has become the source of much of the criticism of Haking, will be examined in detail in the analysis of the development of the tactical plan (see chapter 4). With Plumer's involvement, Haking's plan ceased to be merely a minor tactical proposal in a small-scale Army-level deception operation but became a strategically significant concept involving a larger offensive action involving two otherwise unengaged armies. At this stage, it had grown from a proposal for an 'if required' pinning operation into a plan to meet the Commander-in-Chief's direction for more convincing offensive operations to deceive and confuse the enemy with a possible further escalation into a major exploitation operation if the enemy's defences collapsed. Its level of development, including as it did identified objectives, resources and timing, offered a much greater likelihood of success than any of the other less-refined support concepts put forward. While it could be argued that perhaps Plumer's enthusiasm for Haking's proposal was because it seemed almost a substitute for the abandoned British attack in Flanders, it is possible his support reflected his understanding both of what Haig was seeking to achieve and the limited resources available to do so. Haking's concept addressed both of Plumer's concerns.

Despite all the other support options considered and in a few cases implemented, Fromelles was the sole example of a major pinning operation conducted during the Somme battle. Despite the casualties incurred and the failure to hold the ground captured, post-war evidence suggests that it was successful in discouraging

---

[113] General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/881, TNA.

further troop removals from the Lille sector for use on the Somme.[114] If this was the outcome, the battle would represent a classic example of a well-conducted pinning operation. Such an outcome would justify the inclusion of deception and pinning actions in the strategic concept of the Somme. From the perspective of the Commander-in-Chief, both Haking's plan and the eventual outcome demonstrated that the strategic concept and Haig's intent were sufficiently well understood to inform the operational and tactical planners about what was wanted in a support operation within the overall strategic plan for the Somme. The fact that the operation was launched comparatively quickly on discovering that the Germans had withdrawn nine battalions from the Lille defensive area and moved them to the Somme, and that it appeared to stop any further movements, further supports a positive assessment of the soundness of the strategic concept.[115] Its value was increased because the plan (and its execution) made few demands on the BEF's combat resources: the plan was flexible enough to permit a major reduction in its original scale and yet still represent a sufficient threat to a vital German strategic target that the Germans were forced to react to it.

If the evidence supports the view that the battle achieved its strategic aim, the question must then be asked as to why it has gained such notoriety. Adverse reactions at the time and later to the size of the casualty count are only a part of the answer. The much more subjective question of whether the price paid was greater than it needed to be for this result to be achieved requires a more detailed examination of the operational and tactical plans that directed the battle and a close analysis of the implementation of those plans.

---

[114] Paul Cobb, *Fromelles 1916* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 180.
[115] Warning Order: Second Army G. 46, dated 13 July 1916, to all Corps and independent formations in First and Second Armies. General Staff, Second Army. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/274, TNA.

CHAPTER THREE
FROMELLES: THE OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND PLANNING DIRECTIONS

> But before their translation from the Flanders front, 5th Australian Division was committed with the British 61st Division in a venture ill-devised by Haig to tap the enemy front to see whether, owing to the reinforcement demands on Prince Rupprecht's army for the Somme, it was hollow. General Sir Charles Monro believed that the best way to do this was a frontal attack in full daylight with singular lack of coordination between either of the attacking infantry forces or their artillery. He had the opportunity, as the weather was bad, to cancel the operation - Haig had left his decision in his hands. But he lacked the moral courage to do so.[1]

A developed strategic concept and commander's intent together were but one third of the sequence of military planning required in 1916 to initiate a major attack: converting the commander's intent into an operational concept and thence into a tactical plan were essential sequential steps. These crucial interpretative stages were the responsibility of lower level headquarters and planners, found at Army, Corps, Divisional and Brigade level. In 1916, these steps posed a major challenge, as the largely inexperienced planning staffs and commanders of the junior headquarters of the formations chosen to direct and implement the idea were operating on a scale and in a strategic and technological setting entirely unimaginable even two years prior.

With only very recent experience as a relevant guide, planners and commanders at the operational level in particular faced a major challenge. In the smaller scale actions that comprised so much of the British Army's (pre-war) experience, the middle level of the planning process was not nearly as critical. For the new mass armies, with complex combat support and logistics requirements, the operational or middle level stage of the planning process was arguably much more important to eventual success than the purely tactical plan.

> The relationship between these two tactical levels [grand and minor] is also itself a matter of great interest,[2] since in the conditions of the Western Front the higher staffs could no longer interfere directly in minor tactics, as Wellington had been able to do at Waterloo. 'Chateau Generalship' was a notorious feature of the Great War, whereby the practitioners of grand tactics lived in a totally alien physical environment from the exponents of minor tactics – and often had not even a working telephone to establish contact with them. Higher battle

---

[1] A.R. Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme* [1964] (London: Pan Books, 1966), 200.
[2] See Explanation of Terms, v.

> handling therefore became exceptionally difficult unless everything ran according to a very precise timetable; and if anything went wrong, the front-line soldier would quickly find himself unsupported from the rear. In a sense, this was the most important tactical difficulty of all, although it has often been overshadowed by fearsome descriptions of the shells, bombs and machine guns that actually did the killing.[3]

This was true for all attacks, be they main assaults or minor supporting operations, where the requirements for artillery and other specialist support and for manpower went beyond the organic, or normal, resources of the attacking formations. Thus for the Somme, the operational plan was developed and refined by Fourth Army Headquarters before the tactical level thinking and planning commenced in earnest. There were inevitably tactical matters that arose and needed to be decided upon while the operational plan was emerging but these were comparatively few. One possible explanation for this was that the tactical forces were not fully decided until the operational thinking was well advanced. Logically, the same ordered process should have preceded the Fromelles battle but, on the evidence available, it did not.

As the following chapter will demonstrate, it was at the operational planning level that the seeds of the Fromelles result were sown. However, developing the argument to support that conclusion has proven to be most difficult. As mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, identifying even a simple decision sequence that preceded Fromelles proved impossible but, in the search, revealed much about the lack of attention to precise details from high command given to planning practically all the supporting operations intended to assist the main attack on the Somme.[4] The Fromelles operational plan, instead of preceding and directing the tactical planning, was delivered late in the overall planning cycle, lacked essential details and, arguably most importantly, failed to define the real purpose of the attack. While there were a number of causal factors, many beyond the control of the operational planners to fix, the available evidence reveals confusion at all levels, lack of clear planning structure and sequence and, most alarmingly, suggests that the existence of some prior tactical thinking about

---

[3] Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 23.

[4] Haking's own summary of the decision process, in his report on the Fromelles operation, truncates the entire planning and decision process into two weeks, suggesting the first verbal instructions he had received for the attack was at a Corps Commanders' conference on 8 July. This is clearly contradicted by the available evidence. 'Report on Operations on Front of XI Corps on 17th and 19/20th July 1916 against Enemy's Trenches from FAUQUISSART-TRIVELET ROAD to FERME DELANGRE'. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881 The National Archives (hereafter TNA).

the Fromelles action was as much the driver for its initiation as any assessment of its strategic or operational merits. As analysis of the relationship between First Army and XI Corps shows, there was no clear devolution of concepts and intent from Army to Corps planners.

As mentioned, much of the tactical planning for Fromelles seems to have preceded the operational plan. Given the poor operational order that finally appeared, it could be argued that the operational (First Army) level planners must have failed to look closely at the tactical plan already produced by XI Corps because key issues raised by the tacticians during the planning process were not considered or resolved. This then caused 'knock-on' problems for the tactical level, when the additional combat resources required could not be found and the tactical plan thus needed a radical overhaul at the last moment. The evidence reveals that, on some occasions, it was the existence of Haking's prior thinking about possible tactical options, rather than a clearly identified and defined operational requirement, that encouraged First Army to continue planning some sort of operation in the Fromelles area. The lack of an identified operational justification for the attack until near the end of the planning period and the lack of consistent thinking was further evidence of the confused, at times ad hoc, interaction between all three levels of command and planning responsibility: GHQ, First Army and XI Corps.

The problem of analysis is further compounded by the nature of the evidence itself. With the tempo of planning building up for the Somme attack and with the understandable focus of most of the senior officers on this main effort, commensurately less time was available for comprehensive all-level thought and discussion about the subordinate supporting operations required to assist the main attack. As with the planning of the main attack, much of the debate and planning decision-making was done at meetings and conferences, for which records of conversation or minutes of meetings are neither comprehensive nor complete. The official records, specifically the formation war diaries, are replete with references to such meetings and conferences but much less complete or helpful on what was discussed and why specific decisions were taken. Often the best guide to the discussions held are the personal notes of the participants, where they exist, but these tend to be focussed on that individual's responsibilities, rarely capture the full range of the debate and only reflect that

individual's understanding of what occurred. The problems with the evidence makes establishing a clear time-line of decision and direction difficult and may even, if it is characteristic of how the process did work, help explain why subordinate headquarters did not always appear to be working to the written directive they had apparently been given. They could well have been reacting to a variation to the plan given as an oral order that was not then captured in the formal records.

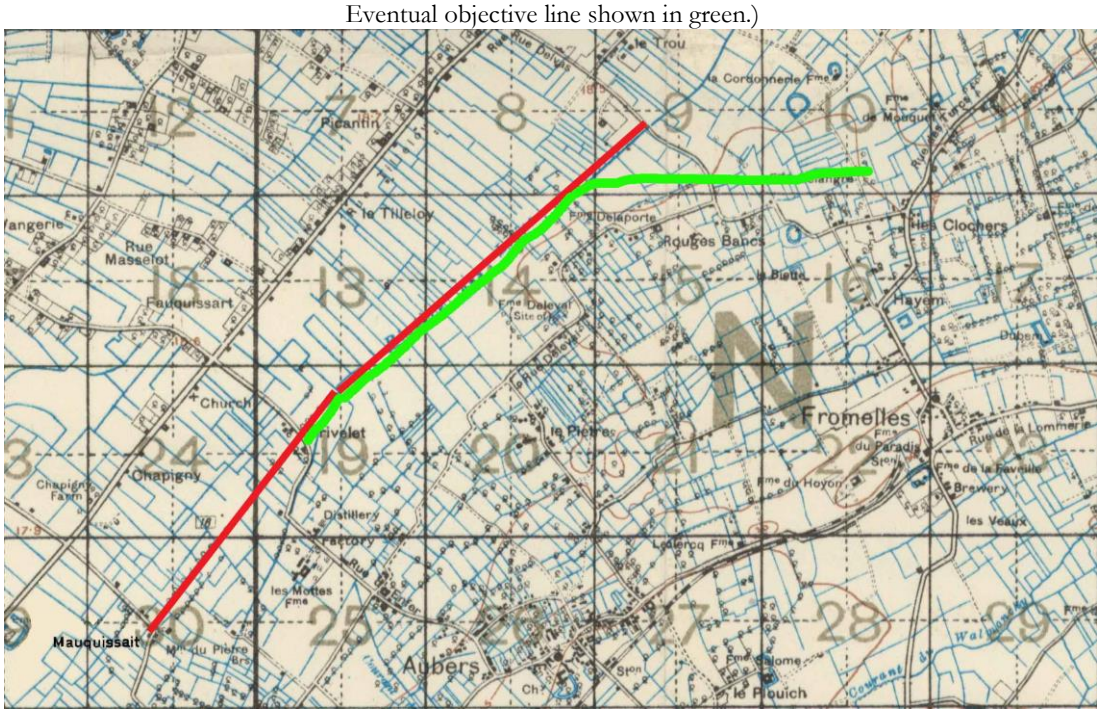
Specifically in relation to Fromelles, the planning process at the operational level for these support operations had to cope with less-than-clear direction on what the operation was to be and when it was to occur. Haking, the tactical commander, indicated he had first started planning an action in the Lille area in the winter of 1915-16, in response to a direction from his then Army commander, Douglas Haig. This planning was clearly well before even initial thinking about the Allied 1916 offensive began.

> In order to carry out the offensive policy of the Commander-in-Chief, I prepared a scheme **during last winter**, in cooperation with the G.O.C. III Corps, for the capture of the German front and support line of trenches, so as to cut off that portion from about MAUQUISSART [sic] (M.30.c, 1:20,000 map 36SW) across the FAIQUISSART-AUBERS Road and along the River LAYES to where that river cuts our front line on the SAILLY-Fromelles Road at N.9.c – a distance of about 4500 yards.[5]
> (see map 5)

His tactical planning was further encouraged at an early stage by strategic-level interest in an attritional battle in the area to reduce the enemy's strength and improve the chances of success of the proposed major attack on the Somme. When planning for support operations began in earnest, different types of attack, deception, attrition and pinning actions were all proposed and planned for, almost indiscriminately. The available evidence suggests there seemed to be little comprehension at the strategic or the operational command and planning levels of the differences between them. If any one factor could be held responsible for the outcome at Fromelles, this failure to decide

[5] Note, Haking to Plumer, GOC Second Army, 20 June 1916, Annex. General Staff XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

Early Objectives
(Proposed in December 1915, marked as red line.
Eventual objective line shown in green.)



(Map 5)

precisely what type of supporting operation that attack was to be would be a strong contender.

Operational planning was not an easy exercise on any front for any army at any time in this war. For operational level commanders and planners, a battle was, and still remains, largely an exercise in coordination. The 1916 operational concept was somewhat similar to a large construction project plan. It was designed to inform all the participants what the purpose of the action was, who was doing what, when it was to happen and what materials and support would be provided to each participant to help do the job and when it would be available. The tactical plan which followed also had some similarity to a construction plan but with the focus much more on the detail: identifying when the various trade elements would be on site and what each would be doing, setting the timing for when one specialist trade had to be finished to allow the next to begin and inspecting the job for quality control to determine when the job was finished. An operational level commander's main responsibility was to define the boundaries of the operation, where it was to occur, when and how and to bring together at the crucial time all the combat and combat support elements needed to conduct the attack and overcome the enemy's defences. At the operational level, timetables covering

movements of troops, equipment and supplies were as important as the level of training of the troops. Operational planners worried about roads and railways, accommodation and kitchens and medical facilities. Consequently, operational planners had to try and predict the course of a battle, anticipate where and when reinforcements and resupply would be needed, preposition artillery and engineers and assemble sufficient aircraft to support the tactical implementation of the battle. Operational planners sought to impose strict timing and usage controls on the tactical level so that they could guarantee support when required and, if the opportunity arose, have sufficient additional combat power to exploit success.

At the operational level, the weather, coordination, transport schedules and timetables and supply states were the main preoccupation. The problem for commanders was that the 1916 battle presented challenges for which solutions had yet to be developed. Even with a support operation such as Fromelles, First Army had to deal with the problems of assembling and repositioning the attacking troops, assembling additional artillery, shells, gas, food and engineering stores in the undeveloped rear area of the attack. Such infrastructure redevelopment as laying new light railways, preparing large stores dumps and establishing training areas for the assault troops all had to be completed while still devising the operational plan that these necessary preparations would underpin. As will be discussed later, all of these preparations had either to be made covertly, if battlefield surprise was intended as part of the plan, or overtly if the overall intent was to deceive the enemy as to what purpose of the attack was. Given the long lead times on this type of infrastructure development, the operational planners should have already determined the purpose of the attack, prior to these infrastructure preparations commencing. First Army's operational plan for Fromelles is silent on this important aspect.

One of the immediate challenges for the First Army planners was assessing the opportunities offered by new technologies and incorporating them into the operational concept for the proposed supporting action at Fromelles. Communications, transportation, combat support such as artillery and aircraft, and new intelligence gathering capabilities all produced overwhelming amounts of information, often contradictory, and raised new management and leadership challenges in assimilating, exploiting and applying all the new information received. Conversely, limitations in

critical supporting technologies, especially transport and communications, fatally restricted the capacity of commanders and planners to adapt quickly and change key elements of plans. (As an example, communications technology was developing at an astounding rate but the requirements placed on communications, especially arising from the enormous expansion of the Army itself, meant that communications growth could not keep up with demand.) With inadequate technology, it was very difficult to change the point of attack, timing, scale and scope or the timing and size of artillery support in reaction to sudden developments. Close to the start date of the attack, the capacity for planners at either the operational or tactical level to make last-minute refinements to plans was almost non-existent: it was virtually impossible once the attack had started. With the operational level serving essentially as the link between the broad scheme of the strategic level and the minute tactical detail the operational level commander perhaps faced the greatest challenge in integrating these technological developments into a coherent plan. These dramatically changing technical circumstances, which also markedly changed the battlefield itself, demanded considerable command and planning flexibility yet also limited commanders' capacity to be flexible.[6] By 1916, experience had taught the British planners that the best approach to battlefield planning was a thorough, detailed and complete-in-every-detail plan, prepared well before the battle began and widely disseminated to all the participants so that they knew what their role was. The obvious drawback with this was that if the battle did not go according to plan, the ability of commanders to correct the problems on the battlefield itself was extremely limited. While there was no workable solution to this command conundrum, the unavoidable lack of flexibility in the 1916 battle plan has been criticised widely in post-war analyses, including being used to question the competence of commanders who had no alternative.

The post-war military inquiry into the conduct of the war – the Kirke Report – pointed out that in trying to be thorough, the process followed made orders become overly long, too intricate and too meticulous. The Inquiry felt this hampered the battle performance of both soldiers and leaders. The Kirke Report, however, added a new

---

[6] 'If there is any criticism to be made of the Serbian Army it must concern its **lack of adaptability to alter preconceived plans rapidly**. [emphasis added] Not even the Prussian is more thorough in the conception and preparation of a plan of campaign, but the Serbian Staff, in the Second Balkan War at least, showed want of initiative in dealing with a new situation.' A.H. Trapmann, 'How Serbia made ready to meet her Giant Antagonist', H.H. Wilson and J.A. Hammerton, *The Great War: The Standard History of the all-European Conflict* (London: Amalgamated press, 1914), 361.

concept to the debate on lengthy plans and orders by suggesting this 'over control' was due, in addition to the communications problems, to high command doubts about the initiative and tactical competence of subordinate commanders and the troops of the new armies.[7] Therefore, in the context of 1916 battlefield planning, while flexibility and initiative in junior commanders was recognised as desirable, a lack of confidence in subordinate commanders' and planners' abilities saw higher commanders and planners overcompensate with detail and direction that would have been considered unnecessary in either the highly trained pre-war army or in the skilled and experienced forces of late 1918. The effect, according to Kirke, was to discourage junior leaders from exercising their initiative.

Kirke's view of the high command's attitude is supported by comments pointing to this concern in the report from a Conference of Corps Commanders held at Fourth Army Headquarters on 16 April 1916. After describing in some detail the combat support to be provided by artillery, mortars and the French, the report included the statement: 'on the whole, therefore, our chances of success are favourable, apart from the smaller details of tactics of the Corps and Divisions concerned'.[8] The planning for the Somme also provides a substantial mass of evidence illustrative of the tendency to over manage subordinates. Thus, with a number of the failures of the initial Somme attacks arising from confusion and lack of initiative among junior commanders on the spot, the campaign would seem to provide indisputable justification for a less centralised approach to planning a battle. Yet Fromelles, which was also a failure as a tactical attack, is almost universally condemned in modern commentary on the battle for being poorly and inadequately planned and lacking sufficient detail. Logic would suggest that if the outcome was much the same, the same flaws in planning would have been apparent and the same over control of subordinates through long and complex orders would have been characteristic of the lead-up stages to both battles. This was demonstrably not the case.

Fromelles does, however, provide a remarkably comprehensive illustration of the whole range of factors than came into play in the 1916 approach to developing an operational concept from a broad strategic intent. However, unlike the tactical battles of

---

[7] W. Kirke et al., *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War* (London: War Office, 1932), 23.
[8] General Staff, Fourth Army. War Diary, April 1916, WO 95/431 TNA.

the first day of the Somme, the conversion of the strategic concept into an operational and tactical plan followed neither a logical sequence nor occurred as a clear transition from one phase to another. Fromelles did not develop as a top down evolutionary planning exercise, even though this was then current British planning doctrine.[9] While the initial overarching strategic concept was set first at BEF headquarters, the operational and tactical detail that was developed by the subordinate formations, First Army and XI Corps, did not follow the clear path of decision-making implicit in the doctrine. Decisions, planning and physical preparations intermingled with each other and frequently worked at cross-purposes, especially in the crucial later stages of preparation when troops and materiel had to be allotted to the operation, moved to the location, assembled, briefed and deployed. Lower level commanders, particularly Haking but including all the First Army Corps Commanders, put forward operational suggestions which, on superficial examination at least, appeared beyond the scope of their directives and almost impinged on strategic level plans. However, rather than being dismissed as inappropriate, several of these lower headquarter suggestions were adopted by the strategic level headquarters as inputs into further planning and refinement of existing plans. While this suggests Haig and his planners were not as inflexible in their approach to battlefield planning as critics and the debate on the planning of the Somme attack might suggest, having lower-level headquarters involving themselves in the overall planning process undoubtedly did complicate the planning for secondary operations like Fromelles, as timings, resources and objectives were constantly changing in response to this flow of new ideas.

In the context of planning the Somme campaign, the first proposal for an offensive operation in the Fromelles area, and for others in areas north of the Somme, was made by the French Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Joffre, on 23 January 1916. At this early stage in the planning process, Joffre still envisaged the French providing most of the combat power for the main Somme attack and he wanted the British to improve French chances of success by conducting a series of attritional-type attacks all along the British section of the Front. The aim of these attacks was to wear down the Germans, exhaust their reserves and run down their war materiel stockpiles. Haig, concerned that

---

[9] A method also followed at this time by the French. James E. Edmonds, *History of the Great War. Military Operations France and Belgium 1916* (hereafter *BOH*) Vol. I (London: MacMillan, 1932), 26.

it would more likely be the British who were worn down by this tactic, largely resisted Joffre's notions.[10]

Haig was still focussed on building up the BEF's combat readiness and was not at all attracted to a scheme that would continually weaken it. He also had another objection: he was still considering a British major attack in Belgium,[11] possibly in addition to the joint attack, and was unwilling to fritter away British resources unnecessarily. Despite these two objections however, he did recognise that diversionary minor operations would be necessary to support the main attack and his headquarters had already begun to plan for minor supporting operations away from the main theatre. Consequently, he did not categorically rule out some form of operation in the Lille area; a decision that was to have a major impact on the development of the Fromelles plan. In the debates between French and British high commands, Joffre's plans never came to fruition but neither did they cease influencing British higher command thinking and planning for the months prior to the Somme, particularly in the context of supporting operations.[12]

The type, size and location of any proposed supporting offensives were questions that constantly changed and evolved between January and July 1916. This was both in reaction to German initiatives and to the inevitable concessions necessary when the two allies sought to reconcile somewhat different strategic and operational ambitions. Elements of Joffre's concept for attritional supporting operations remained in British operational thinking and continued to encourage some ongoing low level tactical planning for limited attritional attacks within several British Army and Corps headquarters.[13] Haig's ongoing interest in finding options for the main British offensive attacks in areas separate from the French-preferred Somme theatre of operations also inevitably encouraged interest by subordinate commanders in other operations, either as minor support for the main attack or as more major operations designed to take advantage of likely German distraction once the main attack commenced.

---

[10] Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (eds), *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 179. Also J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 207.
[11] Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldier's General* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2004), 149.
[12] Edmonds, *BOH 1916*, Vol. I, 309-10.
[13] Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig Diaries*, 188.

By May 1916, and largely due to the impact of Verdun and the long-delayed final British commitment to the Somme,[14] Joffre's original concept, more constrained by Haig's resistance to it, had changed and metamorphosed into concepts for much more limited supporting operations such as feints and deceptions: limited actions designed to confuse the enemy as to the main point of attack of the main assault and actions for which attrition was not now the central intention. These supporting operations then became the planning focus of all British armies not directly engaged in the Somme attack.

The shifting concepts and priorities that characterised the background to the operational planning for Fromelles existed also in the wider operational planning for the whole Somme enterprise. The ongoing indecision at the strategic level over different potential offensive operations continued throughout the period from March to June 1916 and led to requests for options for different types of offensive proposals, some major and some supporting, from all the subordinate commands except Fourth Army.[15] From the moment Fourth and Second Armies were tasked with planning the potential major Allied offensive for 1916, the roles of the two remaining British Armies changed, becoming principally defence of the existing front line and the preparation of support missions, such as deception operations,[16] to confuse the enemy as to the point of the main attack.[17] (Second Army arguably was over-tasked by being directed to develop ideas for smaller supporting operations while at the same time having to continue planning for the major assault if the Belgium attack option was selected instead of the Somme.)

The lingering interest in a British attritional operation in the Aubers Ridge area was still present in operational forward planning within First Army. This interest

---

[14] The uncertainty with regard British intentions persisted throughout the British command structure. Haig noted in his diary on 14 April that he was still questioning Kitchener over whether the Government approved his conducting the planned combined offensive with the French. Ibid., 184.

[15] Fourth Army was formed on 1 March 1916 and tasked with undertaking the Somme offensive at the same time.

[16] Third Army Order No. 11 of 21 June stated this task explicitly: The object of the Third Army is to prevent the German forces on its front from sending reinforcements southwards. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

[17] Although until at least the end of June, both Armies also had to be prepared to launch an immediate attack if the French Army cracked and broke at Verdun. Haig had put this necessary contingency plan before Government as early as 25 February. Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig Diaries*, 182. The role for Third Army also changed when the Somme planning firmed and it was given a specific role on the northern end of the Somme front.

became relevant to the final planning of the Fromelles attack largely because the existence of a partly suitable plan developed by one of the Corps commanders of First Army, XI Corps' Sir Richard Haking, shaped the approval process and hastened the production of a final tactical plan for that attack. Indeed, it could be argued that without the existence of the work done by First Army in response to GHQ's direction, first for a major attack and then for deception operations, the Fromelles attack could not have been conducted. The planning that was undertaken, and was for two quite different types of operations in the Fromelles area, was still sufficiently relevant to provide most of the necessary calculations to underpin a third type, the eventual pinning attack.

Most of GHQ's command and planning effort during the critical months of May and June 1916 inevitably was focussed on developing the operational plan and defining the tactical methods for the main Somme attack. There were, however, discussions and instructions from GHQ to the Army Commanders on developing the planning for supporting actions. The discussions at these meetings revealed the lack of real understanding of either the scale required or the desired outcome to be obtained from them. On 9 May 1916, the First Army Commander briefed his Corps Commanders on the outcome of one such meeting between the Army Commanders and the Commander-in-Chief. The Commander of XI Corps took detailed notes that revealed much about the still evolving operational picture for First Army and its forthcoming role. His notes revealed that, while priority for planning for First Army formations was to be on the development and continuation of an active program of smaller scale raids, the then current planning for an offensive operation somewhere on the First Army front by a larger infantry force was to continue.

> A more powerful and extended offensive is to be carried out by XIth Corps in conjunction with the Australian Corps on our left, the ultimate object being to gain the AUBERS and FROMELLES ridge and to turn the LA BASSEE defences from the North, thus making a pronounced salient in the German line without any marked salient in our own.[18]

Clearly both First and Second Armies [the Australian Corps (sic) was a Second Army formation at this stage] were still examining the prospects for the offensive attrition operation first proposed by Joffre in January and the XI Corps Commander was still acting under earlier instructions to develop a concept for the capture of the

[18] Notes by the Corps Commander for Conference at XI Corps Headquarters, 9 May 1916. SS/837/5. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, May 1916, WO 95/881 TNA. It is noteworthy that even at this stage, the capture of Aubers Ridge was the focus of the plan: this did not carry forward into the final tactical plan but post-war critics have seized upon this as evidence of Haking's 'obsession' with Aubers ridge.

tactical high ground, with the additional benefit of turning the flank of the strong La Bassée defences, an action that would convert tactical success on the Somme into a strategic victory. If an attritional attack was now not required, it is difficult to understand why Haig, when appraised of the ongoing planning for it, did not clearly direct that it stop. On the contrary, Haking's notes from the briefing demonstrate that an attack more substantial than a mere raid was still under active consideration at the highest command levels and, it can be argued, such an attack was still consistent with Haig's overall strategic intent.

Haking's notes from the May meeting point to the general interest in another part of the high command's original operational intent: that for those armies not engaged in planning the major operation either on the Somme or in Belgium, the vigorous prosecution of active raiding programs plus limited schemes to seize and hold sections of the enemy's frontline were to be priority undertakings. These schemes were not viewed as alternatives to a major attritional attack but as complementary, although the evidence suggests the high command did not consider the availability of the extra combat resources these operations would demand. While accepting the need for such operations, Haking also understood their potential costs and risks. He noted down the implications for his troops of an active and intense program of raids conducted with inadequate artillery and other combat support. His comments provide evidence that at the operational and tactical level, the implications of limited availability of combat resources, i.e. potentially large casualty counts and high risk of failure, were well understood. Arguably even more important though, is the recognition at this transitional level of command, between the operational and tactical, that the compelling strategic justification behind the proposed operations made taking risks necessary.

> As regards the first of these [raids] - I need say very little, except that I realise that there are many difficulties to be overcome and that after each raid the Germans are more ready for the next. This very fact, however, produces the situation we require. It keeps the Germans constantly alert, anxious, and in considerable strength in their frontline. **It prevents them from withdrawing troops for offensive or defensive purposes to some other part of the line**.[19]

Haking's notes from this conference do not include anywhere the term 'deception' as a description of the operations under discussion. Given the timing (still

[19] Notes by the Corps Commander for Conference at XI Corps Headquarters, 9 May 1916. SS/837/5. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, May 1916, WO 95/881 TNA [emphasis added].

only May) and the still evolving aim of these supporting operations, the question must be asked whether he was advised that this particular proposed action was to be more than a limited deception operation of the type that First Army was planning more widely. Given the context in which Haking was making these notes, it is reasonable to assume the operational commander, Monro, was at this stage also still thinking along these lines.

There were also two planning imperatives directly relevant to the operational plan for Fromelles that can be deduced from Haking's notes that provide some insight into the thinking of the high command at this time. One was the requirement for local commanders to plan operations to kill Germans, i.e. attritional warfare on a more limited scale, and to keep the enemy's line under pressure via constant trench raiding. The second was a less obvious, but potentially more problematic requirement for commanders at the operational level, namely that limited resources were not to be inhibiting factors in planning, or a deterrent to planning, an ambitious action.

> (v). Each Division must be prepared to carry out such an attack with the troops it has available, and no more. I [Monro] can merely provide a Reserve in the rear which would be used only in the event of the operation being unsuccessful and our own front trenches being captured by a hostile counter-stroke - a contingency we need not consider too seriously.[20]

In one sense, this was not new. The British Army spent the entire first half of 1916 planning major offensives in the knowledge they lacked critical capabilities, especially heavy artillery. As the Official Historian observed:

> During the discussions in January and February 1916 over the idea of the attritional battles, everyone recognised there weren't enough heavy guns to support both a major assault and a number of subsidiary attacks, unless they could be quickly relocated, which they could not.[21]

However, in the context of preparing an operational plan for attacks to support the main effort, these two requirements can only have served to discourage planners from exercising caution in setting objectives and in forcing attacks to continue when tactically unwise to do so.

As the date for the main action approached, the need for decision at the highest level on what specifically was required by the supporting armies became more critical.

---

[20] Ibid.
[21] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 29.

To enable planners to focus on the principal tasks that would be necessary to support the opening of the main offensive, decisions needed to be made on the various competing planning priorities. Haig effectively ended the unguided thinking and unfocussed planning in a direction, on 27 May, to all his army commanders at a meeting at GHQ:

> I asked the First, Second and Third Armies to put forward **plans of operations for misleading the Enemy as to the real point of attack**. These operations should be ready to take place at the end of June ...General Plumer then explained to me the state of the preparations which were being made for a big attack on the Second Army front in accordance with my orders ... I gave him till beginning of August, and told him to expect possibly 200 new heavy guns after 1 July.[22]

While this direction was effective in determining the priority for supporting operations, it did not assist the operational planning for Fromelles. His direction to Second Army to keep developing plans for an attack in northern France/Belgium served to keep First Army planners caught between the need for operations to support the Somme and for other, less well-defined actions, to support Second Army in Belgium. In addition, Haig failed to give Monro any explicit instructions concerning Haking's ideas for a major assault on Aubers Ridge: he was neither told to stop nor directed to continue. Given the context of the discussion, on planning support operations, this was a serious omission by Haig.

Monro himself did not raise the proposed action and in the days immediately following the meeting, he [Monro] appeared more concerned with potential First Army involvement in the possible major attack by Second Army than with any actions of his own Corps. In a letter he wrote to Plumer on 10 June, Monro explained in some detail the location of his artillery that would be available to help Second Army if it was to conduct the major attack. He also outlined some planned divisional moves that were intended to provide some reserve forces to cover the left flank of First Army and the right flank of Second Army, should Second Army require assistance: further evidence suggesting First Army planners were more concerned even at this late stage with the larger strategic picture. Monro also discussed concerns about a possible German attack on the junction point of both armies,[23] the very point identified in the earlier planning

---

[22] Diary entry, commenting on a conference between Haig and his army commanders. Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig Diaries*, 188.
[23] Letter. Monro to Plumer, 10 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

for a joint operation between First and Second Armies and the point at which the attack finally occurred. At no stage in this exchange, however, did he refer to Haking's proposed joint action.

This lack of comment can be interpreted in two ways. It may have been because Monro, or indeed Haig, was losing interest in or, in Haig's case visibility of, First Army's plan for this exception to the standard supporting operations being proposed by the other Corps commanders in First Army. Such a conclusion would be reasonable in view of the understandable focus of all levels of senior command on the impending main operation. A more likely explanation, however, is that planning for this special action merely continued on at Army and Corps level and, being for a minor operation, required no special attention at this time from the C-in-C. This conclusion is supported both by the simple fact that the planning for the previously proposed combined attack by XI Corps and I Anzac Corps on Plumer's southern boundary did continue and by later correspondence revealing Haig's familiarity with Haking's scheme.

While it is reasonable to assume that, as the concept at this stage was for only a support operation, it would not attract higher command attention, the same logic does not explain why Haig did not take the opportunity to clarify his intent in regard two specific and critical operational planning issues: was the priority objective for this attack now no longer to be attrition but deception and, if this was the case, how vigorously was the deception operation to be prosecuted? Guidance on both these important objectives was a notable omission from Haig's instructions. Given the persistence of attrition in British strategic and operational thinking during the whole period prior to the Somme attack, a clear direction to the effect that deception was the priority was necessary if that was indeed Haig's intent. The lack of such clear direction suggests a continued confusion in operational and tactical thinking and planning at both GHQ and in First Army in relation to the Fromelles proposal, even in June.

There is another possible explanation for this apparent omission which would counter any notion of confused intent. It can be argued that Haig did not need to try and constrain his subordinates in their operational and tactical thinking as long as this thinking was in broad harmony with his overall strategic intent for the Somme operation. As pointed out above, both levels of command would have seen the planned

operation, deception or attrition, as being well within Haig's intent. There were also benefits in not constraining his planners on minor attacks, as long as the junior commanders had the ability to know what the limitations were for these actions. Successful small scale attacks did offer the prospect of a strategic benefit for a small investment of combat power. Haig understood as well as any commander that opportunities arose quickly and unexpectedly on the battlefield and that, when they did, there was no time for the local commander to seek higher command approval to act before seizing them.[24] As Haig's intelligence was providing him with a picture of a German defence under stress, allowing planning for an action that could capitalise on an unexpected collapse in part of the German defence line was both prudent and obvious to both Haig and Monro.

Allowing some confusion in the minds of the planners before the attack, with the attendant risk of higher casualties and greater potential for failure, may well have been seen as a risk worth taking if the action created doubts in the minds of the enemy and caused him to alter his defences. Whatever the reasons, Monro and Haking, together (belatedly) with the commander of I Corps, continued to develop the proposal for attacks to seize and occupy sections of the enemy's front line trenches opposite First Army and even with suggestions for exploiting local success with further advances; a scale of operation much larger than would have been warranted by a mere deception action.

Haig followed his 27 May instruction with a further instruction (O.A.D 912/1) of 30 May, developing his intent for and finally giving priority in planning and resource allocation to the Somme attack. It was during these days that Haig and the CIGS, Robertson, were involved in difficult discussions with the French over the likely French contribution to the big offensive, to the point that Haig warned Rawlinson that he might have to launch the attack with no French contribution or participation.[25]

In late May and early June 1916, First Army, in addition to the expected focus on deception planning, examined in more detail a number of proposals, including

---

[24] Haig never forgot how close the Germans came at Ypres in 1914 to brushing his almost-broken troops aside and driving through the British defences. Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig Diaries*, 75-9.
[25] Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Vol. I, 44.

Haking's long-considered option for some form of offensive action on a larger scale than mere trench raiding. These proposals continued the focus of First Army on attrition: a different tactic with a different outcome and one that could not be achieved by deception operations. One possible explanation could be that attrition potentially provided a greater contribution to the Somme objective than mere deception. Given both Monro's and Haking's appreciation of the strategic importance of Lille, it is possible also that they understood they could achieve a strategically important outcome as well. The attrition focus is clearly identified in a reply from Monro to a question from GHQ in which he submitted a 'progress report' on planning being undertaken by his General Staff team:

> I beg to submit herewith:-
>
> (a). A memorandum, marked 'A' , showing the operations which it is proposed to undertake on the front of the First Army with a view to misleading and **wearing out the enemy and reducing his fighting strength**.
>
> 2. In the scheme of proposed offensive operations, no reference is made to holding any portions of the enemy's frontline, which may be captured. If, however, **the situation at the moment permits**, it is intended to do so in some cases on the XI Corps front, and also, possibly, on the I Corps front at the TRIANGLE (M.4.d. and M.5.c)[26]

There is no mention of the more ambitious plan in this report, although it does appear in some earlier tactical notes Haking had supplied to Monro. Monro also reported on plans for and progress with purely deception operations, including obvious but false preparations for an attack, such as the previously mentioned building of dummy jumping-off trenches, dummy gun positions and clearing out old and abandoned front line assembly trenches. Demonstrating his appreciation of the vulnerability of such preparations to aerial observation, Monro sought to capitalise on this in his deception plan by directing at one point that the preparations were to be made in such a manner as to make them visible to enemy aeroplane observation. First Army was also to continue obvious construction of new tram-lines that could both be used to move troops about the Army front quickly and help to convince the Germans that new infrastructure was being developed to support a major offensive.[27]

---

[26] Report, Monro to GHQ. First Army No. G.S. 386/13 (a) of 12 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. June 1916, War Diary WO 95/164 TNA [emphasis added].
[27] C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 The A.I.F in France* Vol. III (hereafter *AOH III*) (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1929), 324.

With the poor state of the transport infrastructure in this part of France, no major attack could commence until after major improvements were effected to the road and rail network to enable the necessary men and material to be concentrated reliably and quickly in the area of planned operations. In 1916 and 1917, before the transport network had fully matured, such preparations were a major reason operational surprise was rarely achieved by the attacking force as the build-up of troop numbers and especially artillery and supply dumps was difficult to conceal or achieve quickly. Infrastructure preparations were also very obvious, almost impossible to conceal from reconnaissance aircraft and pointed directly to the planned area of the attack. Conversely, the lack of suitable infrastructure, and the inability to develop it in time, was the major cause of the abandonment or deferral of planned large attacks including, as it transpired, Plumer's planned attack in southern Belgium in 1916. It was Plumer's assessment that he could not sustain a major attack in the Messines area with the infrastructure in its current state that helped the decision to focus on the Somme attack.[28]

Monro also included in his report advice on the progress being made with specific XI Corps actions that, working in conjunction with I Anzac in Second Army, kept open the option for the long-considered limited but still sizeable attack intended to seize and hold territory. These actions included, as preliminary preparations for the proposed joint action, an active program by both Corps of constructing jumping off positions, including attacking saps,[29] in front of the front line.[30]

> It is intended that eventually all the above forward positions should be held as a summer line, in order to convey to the enemy the impression that we intend making the offensive on the same front as last year.[31]

Monro also commenced a program of replacing the iron and wood posts supporting the defensive barbed-wire entanglements in front of both I Corps and XI Corps with the more easily moved chevaux-de-frise,[32] to provide prepared easy exit points through the

---

[28] Farrar-Hockley, *The Somme*, 74.
[29] A sap was a roughly constructed, hastily prepared narrow and shallow trench dug forward from the main front trench towards the enemy line to provide some covered passage across No Man's Land for the assaulting infantry. Much inferior in terms of concealment and protection than a normal trench, they were only ever intended to be temporary.
[30] Annex A. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Chevaux-de-frise was the name given to an obstacle constructed by fixing pointed stakes and bars into a log or tree-trunk. With spikes covering all surfaces along the length of the log, it presented a formidable obstacle to men or horses approaching it from any direction along its length. It could be moved relatively

wire for any attack. First Army had a number of different offensive and deception plans under development in early June, all to be ready to be implemented three days before the main offensive began. However, despite these actions and preparations, no specific operational plan was yet prepared to direct the proposed joint XI Corps-Australian Corps attack at Fromelles: it remained as merely an option, albeit with a number of essential preliminary construction works already under way, and awaited the final decision from GHQ. While Haking did not have a detailed tactical plan finalised at this stage,[33] he had done the calculations and conducted the necessary reconnaissance to provide him with the information required to enable a tactical plan to be produced quickly. Haking noted later, in a letter to First Army dated 21 June, that

> Hope I have made it clear that the big attack on the Fauquissart front requires 6 days notice and the use of two brigades of 35th Division in addition to the 61st Div. who are actually going to carry out the attack.[34]

On 3 June, the Chief of Staff at GHQ, Lieutenant General L.E. Kiggell, asked the three Army commanders to forward to him by 15 June their plans and schemes for operations to support the main attack.[35] Monro called a commander's conference on 8 June to discuss the state of development of these plans: one item for discussion, item 3, was: 'Proposals received from Corps regarding the operations to be carried out on Corps fronts with a view to deceiving and wearing out the enemy.'[36] Clearly at this stage in planning, deception and attrition were the intended priority outcomes of the planned support operations. Monro tabled copies of the report he planned to provide to GHQ, in which was detailed the proposals developed by his three Corps commanders. Of note, the report also referred to the significant field-work preparations already being undertaken in preparation for the proposed larger joint assault on the Aubers Ridge defences:

> XI Corps front.
>
> (i). Completion and construction of the following saps:-

---

easily when approached from either end of the log. Its name dated from the medieval French period when it was employed mainly in an anti-cavalry role.

[33] According to Haking's own report on the operation, as noted earlier, he was not instructed to prepare a detailed plan until 8 July. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/881 TNA.

[34] General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

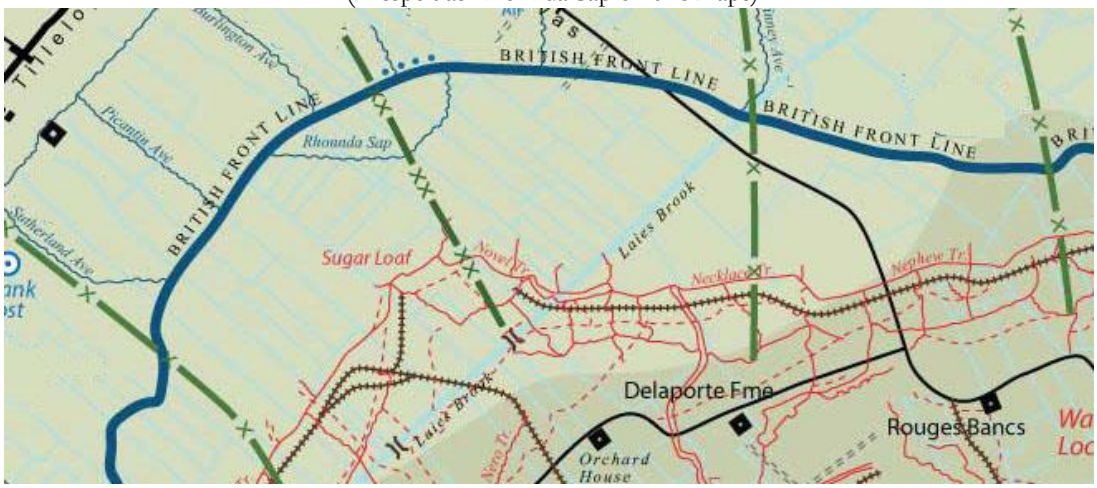
[35] Although undocumented, the Army commanders clearly had received earlier verbal warning of the request as Monro had sent a similar request to each of his Corps commanders on 1 June.

[36] Agenda for Conference to be held by G.O.C. First Army, at 11. a.m. on Thursday 8 June. First Army No. G.S. 386/5 (a). General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

> Completion of the RHONDA sap (N.8.c.7.5) and construction of a new sap from the end of that sap in a south-westerly direction, to join up with the end of SOUTHERLAND AVENUE (N.8.c.4.0.) and the prolongation of PICANTIN AVENUE (N.8.c.5.3.) and BOND STREET (N.8.D.2.8.). The Anzac Corps has agreed to co-operate in this work by prolonging RHONDA sap in a north easterly direction, and by running a fresh sap out to the work thus formed.[37]

(see map 6)

Map showing location of Rhonda Sap
(misspelt as Rhonnda Sap on this maps)



(Map 6)

As will be shown in the chapter on the implementation of the attack, Rhonda sap and the other new saps were critical factors in the conduct of the assault but were developed during a period when the intention for the attack was still more focussed on an offensive attritional action with possibilities for exploitation into a territory-seizing operation than on the requirements of the pinning operation that it eventually became. Both Monro and Haking were still thinking in terms of a conventional attack, although they were still unclear as to the required end-state: Monro appeared to believe the attack was to be an attritional attack with an emphasis on killing Germans with the additional benefit of deceiving them about the Somme. Haking was still planning for a conventional attack which, best case, would result in the recapture of Aubers Ridge or, minimum success, would result in the capture of the current German front lines, enabling them to be incorporated into a new British front line. Neither Haig nor his planners provided any guidance at this stage.

[37] Operations to be carried out with a view to deceiving and wearing out the enemy and generally reducing his fighting efficiency. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

Monro's report listed a comprehensive program of deception operations planned to occur across all three corps of First Army, commencing three days before 'Z Day'.[38] IV Corps, on First Army's southern flank, was to conduct a rolling program of artillery and trench mortar strikes, including using gas and smoke, to cut the enemy's wire and to force him to man his defences. Once out of his shelters and manning his fire-steps (see diagram 1 next page), rifle and machine gun fire was then to be used to inflict losses on him. In addition, the Corps had to conduct five small (40 men or less) raids. I Corps, in the centre, was also to mount wire-cutting operations, with machine guns placed so as to keep any breaks open. The Corps divisional and heavy artillery was to attack the main German communications trenches, command and communications points and road junctions, while the assembled 1,900 gas cylinders were to be used in two separate gas attacks.[39] I Corps was also to conduct three larger (1 x 180-man, 1 x 136-man and 1 x 90-man) raids. XI Corps was given eight raids to conduct, using between one and four companies for each. In the one major deviation from the operational concept of First Army for supporting actions, XI Corps also had to be prepared and ready to 'capture and hold parts of the German trenches in four locations – one opposite each division.' The comment in the Report on this part of the plan again included terms such as 'reducing [the enemy's] fighting efficiency', which suggests attrition was still part of the planners' intent.[40]

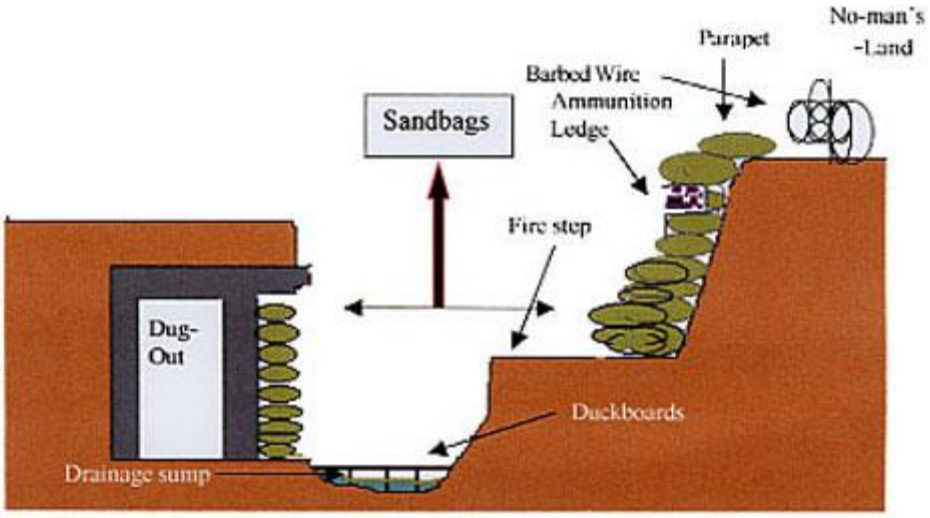
---

[38] 'Z' Day was the day the infantry began their attack on the Somme: it is important to note this was not the day the artillery barrage to prepare for the attack was to begin.

[39] Contrary to claims by some historians, the Australian General Monash did not discover and nor was he the first to mix smoke in with gas to encourage the Germans to don their gas protection when smoke appeared. I Corps was instructed to mix gas and smoke initially then, after some releases, to just release gas, intending to catch any Germans too slow to don their masks without the visual cue of the smoke shells.

[40] Operations to be carried out with a view to deceiving and wearing out the enemy and generally reducing his fighting efficiency. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164, TNA.

Cross-section of a typical trench.



(diagram 1)

On 13 June the Major General General Staff (MGGS), chief operations officer of First Army and Monro's chief planner, wrote to Haking instructing him to continue his preparations for his proposed joint operation.

> The proposals contained in your SS/849/S/15d/- 5/6/16, are generally approved, and you will take steps forthwith to press on your preparations to give effect to these proposals. Further instructions will be issued as regards cooperation between Corps.[41]

Wearing out the enemy and depleting his war stocks was still the operational intent: attrition was still the objective even if it was being concealed within a deception framework. The instruction also advised Haking of the additional artillery, ammunition and gas that he was allocated to support his operation. While the initial proposal was for a small increase in heavy artillery support of an additional eight 60-pounder and four 4.7-inch guns,[42] First Army did finally offer him support from No. 26 Heavy Artillery

---

[41] First Army No. G.S. 405/1 (a) to G.O.C. XI Corps. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[42] Although the amount of additional artillery offered initially was quite small, it represented the estimate of unassigned barrels likely to be available in the XI Corps area at the time. Artillery and ammunition was in short supply and most of what was available was allocated to the main effort on the Somme. However, to put the initial offered artillery supplementation into perspective, the total heavy artillery support eventually employed at Fromelles was 71 guns: the initial supplementation represented 16.9%. In July, however, the promised additional artillery was again cut back, demonstrating the dynamic and unpredictable state of British artillery stocks. Losses and unserviceability with British guns of all calibres was much higher in battle conditions than originally anticipated, which affected forward planning of artillery support.

Group (HAG).[43] There was no indication at this point as to the likely level of additional artillery support from Second Army and, as the Operational Plan had still not yet been prepared, Haking was attempting to prepare a tactical solution to an Operation Order that did not exist. The availability or otherwise of artillery was only one of a number of issues that must have caused him difficulty in the absence of a defined set of objectives, an agreed timetable and an agreed allocation of troops, combat supplies and, if the Plan was still to include the possibility of exploitation, reinforcements.

On 14 June the First Army Commander held another Corps Commanders conference at Army Headquarters at the Chateau Jumelle. Haking made a summary for his divisional commanders of the overview Monro gave of the British strategy for the Somme as revealed at this conference and how the non-engaged armies fitted in to that strategy:

> Two great attacks have been prepared along the front held by the British Armies, one in the South and one in the North. The plan of attack is quite simple, it will commence on June 20 by cutting the enemy's wire and damaging his defences and his nerve with artillery all along the whole front. This will continue until June 22? [sic] On that day a series of raids into the enemy's trenches, which will be carried out by every Corps in the line, will commence, and culminate on the 25th by the infantry assault along the front selected for the great attack. Corps not taking part in the first great attack will continue these raids every day and use every means in their power to hold the enemy to his ground, until six July before which date fresh instructions will be issued. You are all aware of the preparations which have been made for carrying out of this offensive policy, and every Division in the Corps (except 61st) has had practical experience of getting into the enemy's trenches and driving out the defenders.[44]

In his opening remarks, Monro also noted that as he and the Corps Commanders now knew the period during which the main Somme operations were to be conducted, they should consult to arrange some cooperation between their varying missions. (Haking hand-notated this paragraph with the words: 'programme 61st and Anzac Corps on 16/6/16. SS/99', indicating the joint attack was still under active consideration.)[45] Having been given clear direction that deception operations were now the focus, the meeting canvassed some of the difficulties faced in implementing GHQ's intention.

---

[43] See Annex C (p. 318) for a full description of the composition of a heavy Artillery group. No. 26 HAG brought seven additional heavy weapons to the firing line, including three 12-inch howitzers and two 9.2-inch guns.

[44] Haking, handwritten orders following on from Commanders' Conference of 14 June 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA. Also, shortly after this, 61st Division did undertake several large, and generally successful, raids.

[45] Summary of proceedings of Conference of Corps Commanders held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle at 11. a.m. on 14 June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

Most telling in the discussion was the admission of the shortage of heavy artillery and the need for careful use of the few heavy pieces available to maximise their impact: without heavy artillery, there was little prospect of deceiving the enemy that a serious attack was imminent.

The commander of I Corps raised the problem of employing untrained troops in the proposed operations, noting his 40th Division had two brigades in the front line trenches learning trench warfare and an entirely untrained brigade in reserve. The Army Commander tacitly acknowledged the problem caused the planners by the poor state of training of the troops and their junior leaders. Clearly, there were no easy solutions available, although Monro did note that available tactical instructional and 'lessons learned' material, that might help the new arrivals improve some of their deficiencies, was not being provided to them. He also noted that recently arrived divisions seemed unaware of some very useful and recently produced GHQ training material, especially on conducting gas and smoke attacks, and he wanted his Corps Commanders to ensure their troops were fully briefed on these lessons as quickly as possible. (At the next Commanders conference on 22 June, Monro again acknowledged the issue of deficiencies in trained and experienced junior leaders and specialist planning staff, mentioning the concerning scarcity of Brigade Majors and the difficulty, with the constantly changing formations and commands in the expanding BEF, of identifying suitable officers for selection and training for this key tactical appointment.)[46] Noting that these discussions predated Fromelles by a month, the acknowledged poor state of training of the troops and their unfamiliarity with current attack techniques suggests much about why the plan for the eventual operation against Fromelles included so few of the tactical lessons learned weeks earlier in the fighting on the Somme. It is likely the troops were not experienced enough either to be able to benefit from them or even to adapt their tactics to accommodate them in the time available.

The 14 June Conference did however demonstrate an increased sophistication on the part of the tactical planners in the lead-up to an attack. In discussing the proposals by IV Corps to conduct four raids on its front as part of the deception plan, the Commander First Army noted:

---

[46] Notes on Conference held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle on 22 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

> Everything should be done at once to perfect the arrangements for the raids by the study of air photographs, thorough reconnaissance, provision of material, and physical training of the men. The success of operations of this description was contingent on accuracy of drill, previous practice, and rehearsal. Nothing should be left to chance.[47]

There were a number of other technical tactical discussions which would also have served to increase the degree of confidence among the corps commanders that limited raids and attempts to seize sections of the enemy's trenches were militarily possible, even with the resources they had available. Commander First Army observed trench mortars were a much better weapon for destroying wire than the 18-pounder field gun. He noted that the thickness of the enemy's wire had in the past been a deterrent to carrying out raids, but he advised that the effect of trench mortar fire on the enemy's wire, particularly the 2-inch mortar with the new Newton fuse,[48] now ensured the wire 'presented no obstacle'. He invited the Corps Commanders to 'try it for themselves'. Using trench mortars to destroy the enemy wire also enabled the field gun batteries to be better employed suppressing enemy defenders, an important consideration when all commanders recognised the shortage of all calibres of artillery required to support the proposed secondary operations. In discussing the seizing and holding of the enemy's frontline, the meeting again acknowledged that the Corps was deficient in manpower, so the ability to conduct offensive-type operations across the whole extent of First Army's front would be restricted.

The Conference again addressed the specific question of the more ambitious attacks proposed by XI (and now I) Corps. The discussion revealed some confusion over who was to make the final decision to initiate these assaults. Monro noted that:

> GHQ had been informed that the XI Corps was prepared to hold any of the enemy's trenches, which might be captured as the result of raids on the Corps front, but whether they could be held or not was a matter for the Corps Commander himself to decide. The GOC XI Corps said it depended on what the higher commanders desired. From the point of view of containing the enemy's reserves, there was no doubt that holding portions of the hostile trenches would be far the more efficacious method. It would make him counter-attack, expend ammunition, and keep his men going. The GOC First Army said he would ascertain from

---

[47] Ibid.

[48] 'The 2nd Division will make preparations at once for two raids of about the strength of a company each, to be carried out on separate days after June 22nd. Wire cutting for these, and at other places as feints, will begin on June 20th. For the purposes of wire cutting an unlimited number of 2" Trench Mortar bombs and Newton fuzes is available. Shrapnel may also be used for wire cutting but it will be considered a subsidiary method.' Letter. BGGS IV Corps to First Army. IVth Corps No. H.R.S. 669/6, 14 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

> the Commander-in-Chief what was to be the policy. Sir Charles agreed that the holding of the enemy's trenches would be by far the most effective method of fulfilling the spirit of the GHQ instructions.
>
> The IV Corps Commander did not think that the IV Corps had sufficient men to hold any of the German trenches, which might be captured, although there was one salient in the enemy's lines, which might be so held if more men were placed at his disposal. The GOC First Army replied that no more men would be available.
> The GOC I Corps asked whether, if he succeeded in gaining and holding a portion of the enemy's lines, more ammunition could be allotted to his Corps. The GOC said that there was an Army Reserve and doubtless the I Corps requirements could be met. [49]

It is therefore clear that in the middle of June, seizing and holding sections of the enemy trench lines to hold his reserves in place was a more widely considered planning option for the non-engaged Corps than earlier reports suggested. The issue now was not whether to seize and hold trenches but how to hold them once they had been captured and for how long. In view of what eventually transpired at Fromelles, this concern was warranted and again points to the problems being generated by the absence of an approved final Operation Plan.

On 20 June, Haking formally advised First Army that he had, with the prior approval of Monro, met with Plumer, the Commander of the Second Army, to discuss further the concept for a joint limited attack at the junction of the two Armies. Plumer asked him to put his scheme of attack in writing and send it to Second Army.[50] While Haking was well advanced with his tactical thinking and thus well-prepared to answer Plumer, he also clearly understood, as this letter shows, that authority for the attack lay with First Army and not with him (or Plumer): 'It must be clearly understood that this attack will not be delivered until I receive orders to that effect from 1st Army'.[51] Given that no First Army operational plan yet existed, this exchange is further evidence for the proposition that the Fromelles attack occurred the way it did because of the work Haking had already done. It is perhaps also evidence that Monro was more flexible in his command style than post-war critics have suggested. The exchange between the two Armies of well-developed tactical ideas suggests that First Army planners had, with little fanfare, incorporated Haking's calculations and ideas for a major offensive operation into their wider program of purely deception operations.

---

[49] Ibid.
[50] Letter, Haking to Plumer, 20 June 1916. SS/649/5/26. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[51] Ibid.

> The G.O.C. [Monro] then dealt with the major operation which had been prepared by the G.O.C. XIth Corps, which he said was exactly what he wanted. The G.O.C. wanted all divisions and corps to be prepared with a scheme for an attack straight to their front with a view to holding the enemy, should such an attack be ordered, so as to assist the main attack taking place elsewhere.[52]

GHQ BEF and First Army produced a final program, on 21 June, of operations to be initiated on First Army's Front,[53] 'assuming that the assault will take place on the sixth day (Z Day)'.[54] This meant raids and artillery attacks were to commence during the six-day preparatory barrage planned to precede the Somme attack: the objective of such a program with this timing was deception rather than attrition, although the intention to use heavy concentrations of gas as well as smoke in deception attacks indicated reducing the enemy's combat power was still seen as an opportunistic benefit.[55] The content of this program provided further evidence of the imprecision with which the support operations had been conceived, as the instruction demanded aggressive attacks rather than either deception or pinning actions. This emphasis from the high command on aggressive actions could only have further convinced Haking that his intention to seize and hold a significant section of the enemy's defences was fully in accordance with the supreme commander's intent.

On Day Seven (that is, the day after the start of the Somme attack), XI Corps was given another, and equally aggressive, assignment:

> The 39th Division will, with two battalions, capture and hold the enemy's trenches at the BOARS HEAD (M.10.c.8.2.). Smoke will be used in conjunction with this attack on a wide front, with a view to concealing the actual point of attack and causing the enemy to distribute his artillery fire.[56]

The purpose of the action was not clarified nor was there a timeline indicating for how long the area was to be held or any guidance on how aggressively the attack was to be pursued.

---

[52]Notes on Conference held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle on 22 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.
[53] The first paragraph of the Operational Order to Haking made clear that his role was to support the main operations further south. Order 100. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, WO95/164 TNA.
[54] Programme of Proposed Operations on Front of First Army. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[55] Notes on Conference held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle on 22 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.
[56] Ibid.

On Day Twelve, it was to be the turn of the 33rd Division which was to 'with one Battalion, capture and hold the enemy's trenches between A.9.b.1.4. and A.9.b.0.5. Smoke will be used in conjunction with this attack in order to conceal the actual point of the attack and at the same time induce the enemy to distribute his artillery fire'.[57] Clearly, some planned deception operations at least were intended to be more than mere feints. However, as noted, the program did not contain any reference to the more ambitious attack that was still in First Army's plans. That planning for this action was continuing was confirmed the next day when Monro, at his commanders' conference, singled out Haking's proposed 'major operation' for special mention.[58] Why reference to this action was not mentioned in the program is unknown although it is possible that the mentioned attacks were already confirmed as going to occur while Haking's action was still only proposed.

Lack of mention had another implication as well. If GHQ had intended to instruct First Army to abandon the specific plans for the limited offensive attack and concentrate on purely deception action planning, this was a good opportunity. There had been several others previous to this. Given Plumer had been clearly told that the offensive in Messines was not going to occur, Monro and Haking could only assume, in the absence of instructions to the contrary, that GHQ did intend planning and preparation for the XI Corps scheme to continue. Later developments appeared to confirm this assumption: the visit in July of GHQ's main planner, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff GHQ (Major General Richard Butler), and Haig's instruction (O.A.D. 74 of 16 July) to carry out the attack as soon as possible, suggested GHQ was well aware of progress with planning the scheme and that XI Corps could implement it quickly. Haking himself noted in his 20 June letter that preparations for his proposed attack 'can be completed in a few days', so it is also reasonable to assume that much of the essential planning for his operation had already been completed by then. He further acknowledged that his planned operation 'did not form part of the definite programme to be carried out by the XI Corps during the offensive operations to be carried out shortly; but will be ready for execution should the situation render it desirable'.[59]

---

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Annex A to Haking letter to Plumer, 20 June 1916. SS/649/5/26 (sic). General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

In a direction to the three Corps of First Army, also dated 20 June, the MGGS First Army reaffirmed the priorities for First Army's supporting operations for the coming Somme attack: [60]

> Under instructions from GHQ, the operations generally defined in the above mentioned paragraph (in the paper entitled Preparation for Deceiving the Enemy) should include the isolation, with artillery barrages from 18 pdrs, of small well-defined salients in the enemy's lines. This should be done in combination with infantry action opposite the salients, and all possible approaches to these salients should be kept under fire night and day with a view to preventing the garrisons being relieved and obtaining food and water.[61]

Unfortunately for this indirect approach to deception, subsequent directives focussed strongly on the problems with ammunition stocks and the likely very limited quantity of the essential heavier shells necessary to achieve this planned isolation of sections of the enemy's front lines. The problem remained that the Haking concept did not conform to this tasking either and thus further posed the question as to what attention was being paid in First Army to Haking's continuing development of his tactical plan for the Fromelles attack.

All the strategic and operational uncertainty was removed when the great Anglo-French offensive on the Somme commenced on 1 July. While planning did continue in Second Army for the proposed offensive in Belgium, it was recognised that it would now not occur for some time. Bean stated:

> Although the vast requirements for reinforcements on the Somme forced Haig to give up the plan for the important side-stroke at Messines, he was still very anxious that forces holding the rest of the British line should endeavour, by all possible activity, to pin down the German divisions on their front and prevent their being brought round to meet his strokes upon the Somme. An appeal had been sent to the First, Second and Third Armies to endeavour to achieve this result by continuing their programme of raids. On July 3 General Plumer of the Second Army passed on this appeal to his Corps commanders.[62]

Planning in First Army became even more closely focused on the need for operations to support the Somme attack, but now the aim was two-fold. One was the obvious and long-planned need for actions to prevent the Germans stripping troops from the quiet sectors to reinforce their defenders on the Somme front. The second (with hindsight, hopelessly misguided) was a plan to exploit success on the Somme front

---

[60] Major General General Staff, the principal staff officer and chief planner of First Army.
[61] First Army No. G.S. 405/30 (a). SS/649/5/27. 20 June 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[62] Bean, *AOH III*, 328.

by opening actions elsewhere that could break through the stretched German defences. On 8 July, at a conference of Corps commanders and their Brigadiers General General Staff (BsGGS) held at First Army Advanced Headquarters, Monro advised that as the battle of the Somme was progressing favourably, it was possible that the course of operations might lead to the desirability of an attack on the enemy somewhere on the front held by First and Second Armies. He further stated that he had been in discussion with the GOC Second Army regarding the possibility of a combined attack by troops of both armies in the area where the two armies met, an interesting comment because, as noted earlier, Haking had already been in close contact with Plumer over this very plan, with Monro's full knowledge and approval, and reported on this at First Army Commanders conferences in June. In what Haking later stated was the first official instruction he received for the Fromelles action, he received verbal instructions to prepare a scheme of attack in accordance with the above, on the assumption that GOC Second Army would place one division complete and some heavy artillery at the disposal of First Army.[63] According to Haking's post-Fromelles report, after that decision, the sequence of events was quite straightforward, although he also avoided mentioning the still missing Operational Plan and also failed to note that the nature of his attack had been changed again. It was now not an attritional attack, nor a deception or even a pinning action: it was now being thought of as a possible strategic breakthrough.

Following the receipt of his formal instruction to devise a scheme, on 9 July Haking sent forward the plans he had been working on for the past several months. On 13 July, Monro informed him that he had been visited by Butler who had advised that information had been received that the enemy had withdrawn troops from the Lille defences in order to employ them resisting the offensive on the Somme.[64] Monro further informed Haking that Butler had stated that the Commander-in-Chief was of the view that a threat to Lille would seriously embarrass the enemy. Haking was told (again) that the GOC Second Army was prepared to place a division at the disposal of First Army to enable the previously discussed combined attack to occur. At 6.30 p.m. on the

---

[63] Report on Operations on Front of XI Corps on 17 July and 19/20 July against Enemy's Trenches from FAUQUISSART – TRIVELET Road TO FERME DELANGRE. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[64] According to Bean, GHQ discovered on July 5 that the 13th Jäger Battalion had been sent south to the Somme from the front of II Anzac Corps. Bean, *AOH III*, 328.

same day, Haking and his BGGS were informed that the attack along the lines that he had proposed previously was to occur as soon as possible and that it would be under his command. In an echo of the June direction to continue the development of his plan, Haking was again advised that he would receive additional artillery to support his attack. At this stage, Haking said he was planning to attack with three divisions, the 31st and the 61st from his Corps and the division supplied by Second Army. Unlike in June, however, the promised additional heavy artillery support was reduced significantly and, for this reason, he reduced the proposed size of his attack to a two-division frontage.[65] All this change and variation pointed to hasty and confused thinking. It is unclear whether Butler's arrival in the area of operations encouraged First Army to return to the idea of using the Haking attack as a simple pinning action or whether Butler and GHQ still harboured some hope that Haking's stroke might be rewarded by the sudden collapse of the defenders, enabling him to break through. In the absence of any plans for exploitation forces it does not appear likely that this was in Butler's mind.[66] Haking, however, focussed on planning the tactical engagement, could have been forgiven for being a little confused as to what GHQ expected his action to achieve.

The constant shifting of thinking at the strategic and operational level of command, with its consequent changing of the operational intent, which in turn meant Haking had constantly to readjust his tactical planning, was a serious failure of the planning process. The shifting of thinking illustrated above clearly demonstrated why an operational plan should have been produced much earlier in the cycle. Even if Haking had been conceptually working on tactical operations on his Corps front for some time, an early operational plan would have given him clear directions as to objectives, timings and resources before any tactical planning reached the stage of 'the attack having to be reduced because the artillery available to support the action was insufficient for three divisions'. Almost as an afterthought, an Operational Order was eventually issued by

---

[65] Hand notation, dated 29 July, to XI Corps copy of First Army Order No. 100: 'only four brigades RFA from 4th Australian Divisional RA were at disposal of GOC XI Corps and not 8. This difference was the main factor in the decision of GOC XI Corps to attack with two and not three divisions'. First Army Order No. 100, issued 1.00 pm 15 July 1916. Signed: Major General G. Barrow MGGS, First Army. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[66] Indeed, in CEW Bean's correspondence is an exchange of letters between White (then the principal Australian planner in the headquarters of I Anzac Corps) and Bean in which Bean states 'It is clear from the Army records of the Battle of Fromelles that, on July 16 (i.e. the day before the attack was to have taken place), Haking received at a conference with the Deputy C.G.S. (Butler) the impression that G.H.Q. was not very anxious for the attack to be made.' Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1, AWM38.

First Army. Although it did provide Haking with the authority to commence final planning of the tactical attack and perhaps more importantly, it emphatically removed any idea that the attack was to attempt a break-through, it did not provide clear guidance on most other critical planning areas. Given all the thinking about support operations that had occurred in First Army prior to the Fromelles action, Haking could reasonably have expected this Order would provide him clear directions on which to plan the final stage. As will be seen, First Army failed to deliver.

The formation with main responsibility for the operational level planning and execution of the Fromelles attack was the British First Army. It was formed on 26 December 1914 when the BEF, now so large that its operational management was beyond the capacity of a single commander, was split into two armies. First Army was commanded by Sir Douglas Haig from its formation until 10 December 1915, when Sir Charles Monro was appointed to command. Monro was reviewing the Dardanelles operation when appointed so Sir Henry Rawlinson took temporary command until Monro returned from Egypt on 4 February 1916. Monro was still in command on 19 July 1916. The First Army had been heavily involved in much of the fighting in 1915 and had ended the year with a hard core of veteran troops. However, the continuing rapid expansion of the BEF, with its concurrent demands for experienced junior leaders and staff officers and, perhaps most disruptive of all, the need for experienced middle level commanders for all the new formations, rapidly depleted the existing skill/experience base of First Army as it faced the challenges of 1916.[67]

Monro was an experienced leader, having been a divisional and a then corps commander during the fighting of 1914-15. He had commanded I Corps during the bloody 1915 battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Givenchy and had a detailed understanding of the terrain and the difficulties of operating in the Lille area. He had been part of the growth of understanding in the British middle and higher command level about how to fight-set piece infantry assaults on fixed defences.

> In the course of the small but fierce battles of Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Aubers Ridge and especially Loos there grew up at least a rough outline understanding of what ought to be done. Artillery fire plans rose to major prominence among the infantry's concerns, especially the question of their precise timing and density, for which effective formulae were glimpsed but not grasped. The first creeping barrage and the first machine gun barrage

[67] P. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', *British Army Review* 86 (August, 1987), 32.

> were fired while some novelties such as aircraft, gas, smoke, trench mortars, Lewis guns and signals – even wireless – began to be absorbed into the general picture, to the extent that it was fair to say that British tactics would continue to be based on the model of Loos until late 1917. They would be characterised mainly by short objectives, caution and even larger quantities of artillery.[68]

Arguably, Monro (if not his Army) was a sound choice to prepare the operational concept and oversee the development of a tactical plan for an attack in this area, given his knowledge and experience.[69]

On 15 July, First Army Headquarters issued Order No. 100, being the summation of the instructions Monro had given to Haking at the commanders' conference on 8 July. British planning doctrine demanded that verbal instructions be recorded by the recipient and his staff officer or adjutant, whenever it was practical to do,[70] or followed by written confirmation.[71] The one-page instruction that constituted Order 100 set out in very general terms the objective of the attack, the troops to be involved and the support that would be provided.

> The XI Corps, assisted by portions of the Second Army, will carry out an offensive operation as early as possible with a view to seizing the enemy's first line system of trenches on the front between FAUQUISSART – TRIVELET road and LA CORDONNERIE FARM.
> The object of the operation is to prevent the enemy from moving troops southwards to take part in the main battle.
> For this purpose, the preliminary operation, so far as is possible, will give the impression of an impending offensive operation on a large scale, and the bombardment which commenced on the morning of the 11th instant will be continued with increasing intensity up until the moment of the assault.

---

[68] Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, 53.

[69] Griffith also makes the valid point that these small and unsuccessful battles can show at least a few moments when the infantry came very close to a complete victory. He admits such successes had a lot to do with the state of the German defences, the cleverness of the BEF staff work and the intensity of the artillery preparation, but nonetheless the British infantry had gone close on several occasions to achieving their tactical objectives. This point needs to be remembered when assessing the tactics chosen for the 1916 battles. Ibid., 53.

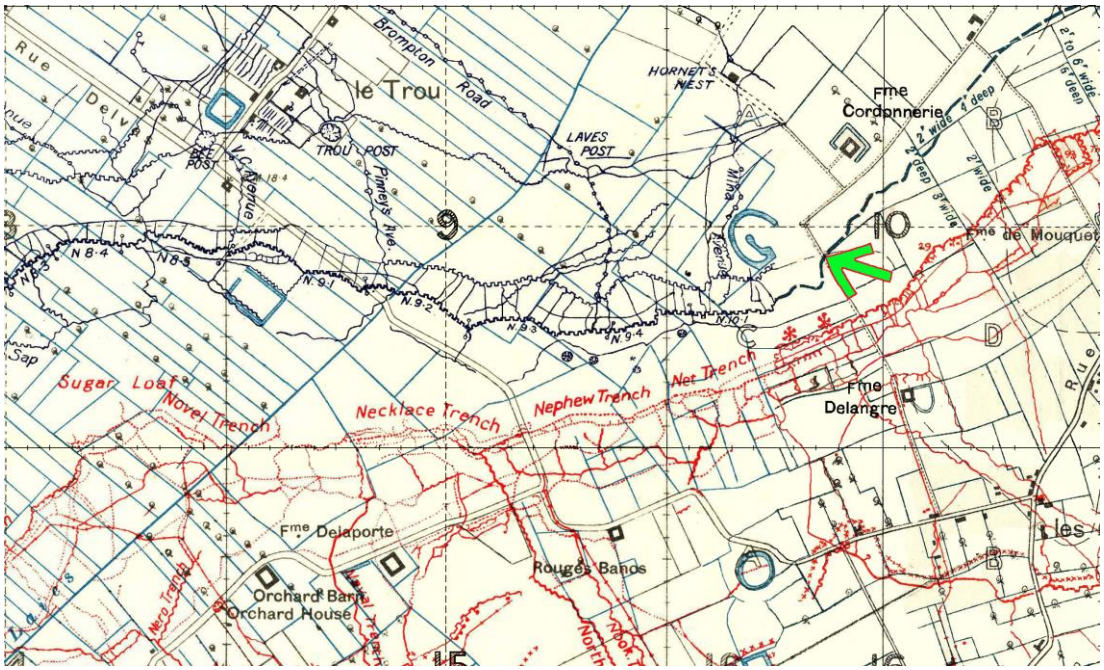
[70] "The whole tendency of our manuals and teaching since the war has been to lay too much stress on the importance of orders as such. F.S.R. [Field Service Regulations] II Chapter XII glorifies the precise and formal written order." Kirke, 23. A junior Australian Officer of the 4th Division, Arthur 'Tubby' Allen, better known for his defence of the Kokoda Track in WWII, also criticised this British characteristic of relying too heavily on detailed, complex written orders. 'A Commander must train his staff and his subordinate commanders to work and act on verbal orders or instructions. The practice of higher commanders issuing detailed instructions and forwarding a large number of copies for circulation down to a low level is greatly to be deprecated. It breaks the chain of command, cramps initiative and is unsound in every way.' Comments upon a pamphlet *High Command in War*. A.S. Allen Papers, 3DRL/2381, Australian War Memorial.

[71] General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations Part I Operations 1909* (London: HMSO, 1914), 23.

> For the period during which the operations last, the XI Corps will continue to hold the front as far North as point N.10.c.7.8.[72] (See map 7.)

Northern End of XI Corps Front Line during proposed operation

(Green arrow)



(Map 7)

For a period when British headquarters have been attacked for being verbose, overly prescriptive and detailed in their orders,[73] at one page in length, Order 100 was remarkably brief. Clearly, in view of the absence of essential information, the imprecise terms used and an almost complete lack of detail on essential supporting formations except the artillery, it can only be seen as summary of a previously agreed plan: even the information on the additional artillery was of limited utility to tactical planners. Of itself, Order 100 was a flawed planning document.

The first problem was that it did not provide a clear statement as to what the operational commander wanted achieved or when. Phrases such as 'as early as possible' or 'so far as is possible' lacked precision. The tactical commander could reasonably have asked whether the attack was really wanted if it was possible to be so flexible in its

---

[72] First Army Order No. 100, issued 1.00 pm 15 July 1916. Signed: Major General G. Barrow MGGS, First Army. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[73] By way of comparison, an equivalent operational order by XIII Corps on the Somme ran to thirty pages. Edmonds, *BOH 1916* Appendices, Vol. I, 152-82.

implementation. Timing became a central part of the problem, with major delays due to weather eventually causing the attack to be launched at 6.00 pm rather than the 4.00 am originally planned. In the absence of any indication of how the timing of this action fitted into other supporting actions, the tactical commander was given little guidance as to what flexibility he had with regard implementation. In setting the geographic limits of the action, the Order fared better. While the side boundaries for the operation were clearly delineated by known terrain features, (see map 8) the depth of the attack was less precisely described: 'the enemy's first line system of trenches'. Although not of First Army's making, this boundary was not easily identified on the ground and was the cause of much confusion for the assaulting troops.

Map showing objectives – from XI Corps War Diary.

(Map 8)

As an indication of the commander's intent, Order 100's main failing was in not clearly identifying all the objectives. Also missing was any indication as to the importance of success in actually capturing the enemy's line and, if this was a tactical priority, how long it was to be held. Haking could not know from this Order alone whether he was to push hard to capture the trenches, irrespective of casualties, or merely make a show of it: nor did he know how long he had to hold the enemy's line should he manage to capture it. In his initial concept, he had proposed incorporating the captured line into a new British front line but First Army gave no advice on whether

that was an objective of the attack. Without a direction, Haking could not know whether to load his assault troops down with engineer stores and the additional food and ammunition necessary to sustain them until the captured lines could be linked to the old British lines. If the idea was only to hold the enemy positions briefly, he could afford to send his troops out with the minimum of additional ammunition and no trench stores or construction materials. This lack of direction on the longer-term intention also affected the planning of other vital combat support troops. The engineers, who would be needed to rebuild the captured enemy line; the artillery, who would need to adjust observation points, fire plans and battery locations to compensate for the change in the frontline; and especially the logisticians, who would need to plan for new infrastructure, supply routes and stores dumps to reinforce the captured positions; all needed clarity in the overarching attack plan and order. Order 100 did not provide it.

A big part of the problem with this Order was the degree of assumed prior knowledge about the planned tactical battle that was necessary to understand what was required. Noting the wide distribution the order received,[74] including to the logistics and medical elements (groups who were unlikely to have been closely involved in the preceding planning stages), the brevity of the Order was a major potential problem. Many of those supporting troops, including engineers, Royal Flying Corps, ammunition columns and the medical evacuation teams, could not extract the necessary detail on which to plan even outlines of their own supporting roles. These rather obvious deficiencies in Order 100 raise two possible explanations as to why the Order was issued in that state. Either all of these supporting groups had participated in the verbal planning sessions at First Army Advanced Headquarters or had been made privy to Haking's earlier plans,[75] or First Army did not intend the operation to be anything more than a brief demonstration and thus long-term combat support was unnecessary. Neither of these explanations, in the context of the months of debate that had preceded the attack, is plausible. There is no evidence either in the form of follow-up orders or annexures to any later issues of the overarching operational order to suggest that First

[74] The address list included: I Corps, IV Corps, XI Corps, 1st Bde, RFC, MGRA, DDAS, Intelligence (sic) DA&QMG, CE, DMS, Second Army and Advanced GHQ. First Army Order No. 100. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[75] It is difficult to find evidence that this did occur. The II Anzac War Diary notes that a conference to plan the attack was held at 10.30 p.m. on 13 July between Godley, the Corps Commander, the GOC 5th Australian Division (McCay), his GSO I and the Brigadier General, Heavy Artillery. None of the other combat support elements were included in this preliminary planning meeting. General Staff, II Anzac Corps. War Diary, July 1916, 1/32/5 AWM4.

Army had planned for the support phase of the attack but dealt with this aspect separately. The only possible conclusion to be drawn is that First Army was not involved in any tactical planning for combat support or logistics forces for the attack. Whether this was a critical deficiency will be determined in the analysis of the final tactical plan and its implementation.

There was a number of overarching omissions relating to the implementation of the Order. First among these was the lack of any direction on the question of maintaining operational secrecy. It is clear from both this order and some supporting orders for diversionary actions elsewhere that First Army Headquarters was confused by the different need for secrecy in relation to feints and demonstrations on the one hand and a real attack on the other.[76] As previously noted, Monro directed that certain operations be conducted in a way to ensure the Germans were aware of them while directing that preparations for other, but similar, actions be closely concealed. While enabling the enemy to discover preparations for a feint or demonstration, as neither involved a real infantry attack on the German trenches, was part of standard tactics, it was never a tactic when a real attack was involved, especially when the real attack was intended to capture and hold the enemy's positions. Order 100 should have included a clear direction that either, because the infantry were going to attack the enemy line, secrecy during the build-up phase was essential or, if the attack was not to be pressed with real vigour, allowing the enemy to learn of it prior to its implementation would assist the objective of keeping his forces away from the Somme. Indeed, on this subject, Order 100 appeared to be internally contradictory:

> 1. The XI Corps, assisted by portions of the Second Army**, will carry out** an offensive operation as early as possible with a view to seizing the enemy's first line trenches.
> 2. The object of the operation is to prevent the enemy from moving troops southwards to take part in the main battle. For this purpose the preliminary operations, so far as is possible, **will give the impression** of an impending offensive operation on a large scale, and the bombardment which commenced on the morning of the 14th instant will be continued with increasing intensity up till the moment of the assault.[77]

It is difficult to reconcile the two intentions, overtly threatening a large offensive and then conducting that large offensive, unless Monro was confident the level of combat

---

[76] First Army Order G.S. 421 of 15 July 1916. Orders I Corps to conduct a bombardment 'in order to mislead the enemy as to the real point of the attack.' General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[77] Ibid. [emphasis added].

support he had provided was sufficient to balance the loss of tactical surprise. Even with the accepted need to run high risks of loss and failure in pursuit of strategic gain, it is unlikely Monro would have deliberately exposed a genuine attack to the waiting defences of an enemy deliberately alerted when it was not necessary to achieve his objective.[78]

Another major omission was the lack of any intelligence information on the state of the enemy, his defences, artillery resources or potential reinforcements. While the tactical commander had local information from captured enemy, raids conducted by his own troops and his own observation teams, he had only limited access to information from specialist intelligence sources. Only GHQ and the operational level headquarters could provide data on the number of enemy troops in the support zones to the rear of the target area, assessments of enemy troop and ammunition states across the whole front or even give warnings and suggested counters to new enemy weapons, tactics or defensive technologies (such as the new concrete and steel reinforced shelters that were beginning to appear). There was, of course, much informal advice on these matters and verbal briefings at commanders' conferences: the previously mentioned example of Monro briefing on the results of tests with the 2-inch mortar as a wire-cutter was just one example. However, for planning purposes, this type of information needed to be, and usually was, incorporated into the formal operational plan and set out in the operational order.

There was no guidance on tactics. While the tactical commander had full responsibility for this, his superiors usually would use the operational plan to bring to his notice new developments in tactics. A good example of this was Haig's comments to Rawlinson with regard the 14 July attack on the Somme, in which Haig emphasised the value of the new artillery bombardment method and urged Rawlinson to ensure the

---

[78] After the war, this contradictory intent was discussed by a Sapper in the 14th Field Company, Engineers, who was part of the team digging the communications trench across No Man's Land between the British front line and the part of the German front line captured by the 14th Brigade. In an account of the battle provided to the Australian Official Historian, CEW Bean, he stated: 'In the first place, I strongly disagree with any suggestion that any attempt was made to screen the attack. In fact, I understood right from the start that we were to make as big a demonstration as possible in order to provide a feint to cover the Somme offensive. … Remarking on how openly preparations were being conducted if there was to be an attack, I can remember a general agreement with the 'good oil' among the troops that we were being moved about to give the impression of preparations on a large scale.' Letter S.K. Donnan, dated 3 Feb. 1934. Bean Papers 3DRL606/243A/1 AWM38.

infantry understood the need to work with the gunners on the new approach. Given the rapid evolution of critical tactical relationships such as these on the Somme battlefield, the operational plan was the ideal vehicle for Monro to bring these developments to Haking's attention. Developments such as the creeping barrage, improvements in aerial spotting for artillery and more flexible infantry assault tactics would all have been of use to the tactical commanders at Fromelles but on these critical developments, Monro's plan and order was silent.

The operational order contained no advice on critical administrative matters, such as which formations could use which roads and at what times: such advice, common in other operational plans, was completely absent from this Order. The tactical commander needed to know when and how his allocated reinforcements from Second Army were to arrive in the area of operations, when his assigned heavy artillery would be available and for how long he could retain it. While the Order did set out the additional ammunition available to support the attack, it did not indicate when it would be supplied or to where. Clearly, Haking had made many of his administrative arrangements and been advised of these details well in advance of the appearance of the Order but the omission of such critical detail from the Order itself calls into question First Army's attention to detail on what was the largest of its actions in support of the Somme campaign.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the evolution of the operational plan for Fromelles. The first is that the plan was deficient. Whether its deficiencies, numerous though they were, were the sole or even principal cause of the result of the battle can only be established by examining both the influence of the operational order on the subsequent tactical plan and by what eventually happened at the base of Aubers Ridge on the night of 19/20 July 1916. Although an operational plan was a critical step in the setting up of an operation, a lucky or skilled tactical commander could adapt his implementation plan to work around the shortcomings and achieve his objectives, despite the problems imposed upon him from his superior headquarters. Equally, a sound, well-developed operational plan could be negated by an incompetent conversion into the tactical plan. The tactical commander had the right, even in 1916, to approach his operational headquarters and seek clarification and additional resources if he believed the objectives set for him were too ambitious or he was not being given

sufficient resources. As will be seen, Haking did alter his tactical plan in response to reductions in the forces he was assigned to conduct the operation. It would be premature therefore, even with the strong evidence of confusion, imprecise thinking and lack of direction that so characterised the development of the operational plan for Fromelles, to blame this part of the planning process solely for the outcome. The contribution of the tactical planners and commander also need to be weighed against the outcome.

The second conclusion is that the Fromelles action was an orphan. It did not fit into any of the templates for a supporting action and was not planned to the same degree of detail as any of the actions of the main Somme operation. Its gestation appeared almost wholly unguided by any operational concept but due almost entirely to the active anticipation of the local tactical commander. At the strategic and operational level, Fromelles appeared more as a footnote or a late addition to the planning agenda than as a focus of support operations planning. Given the scale of the Fromelles attack, this lack of detailed attention is difficult to explain unless it was because the higher headquarters and their planners did regard it as a 'one-off' action outside the usual parameters for supporting or secondary actions. One valid conjecture is whether the battle of Fromelles would have occurred had any other British general been in command of XI Corps in the first half of 1916. The evolution of the operational concept and the eventual operational plan suggests strongly that the battle really occurred the way it did because Haking had already developed a useable and apparently sound tactical plan. As the need to pin German defenders in the Lille region was clearly established, why was there no other attack similar to Fromelles launched by any of the other Corps in First Army? All the other support actions, both deception and pinning, were conducted as limited attacks, usually employing artillery demonstrations, raiding and deception.

The lingering influence of Joffre's desired attrition operations, combined with optimistic assessments of progress on the Somme clearly encouraged both the operational and tactical commanders at Fromelles to regard the action as having considerable potential to be more than a simple pinning attack. The failure of raids and false preparations to deceive the enemy as to British intentions must have had an influence on the thinking about this attack. The evidence reveals a planning

environment of constantly changing intentions and assessments in which the written formal direction for the attack failed to clarify the intent, scale and timeframe for the operation. Perhaps it was not necessary: the regular and frequent commanders' conferences must have worked through the concept. Perhaps Haking, given his detailed knowledge of the area of operations and the tactical plan, was able to apply the strategic and operational intent to his final refinement of the tactical plan. Determining the extent to which the poor written operational plan affected the final outcome can only be determined by analysis of the final tactical plan and the implementation of that plan.

CHAPTER FOUR
FORMULATING THE GRAND TACTICAL PLAN[1]

A General without a telephone was to all practical purposes impotent
– a lay figure dressed in uniform, deprived of eyes, arms and ears.[2]

As Paddy Griffith suggests, the role of the senior tactical commander in a battle, even one with the comparatively modest scale of Fromelles, was largely one of command, control and coordination (C^3). The days of the tactical commander personally leading his troops from the front, in the style of Wellington or arguably even the British tactical commanders in South Africa, were gone. Scale, complexity and timing meant the tactical general was now simply the 'brain' of the action and not an active participant in the fighting. While considerably closer, in both the geographic and command sense,[3] to the fighting than either the strategic or operational level commander, the senior tactical commander still filled a role that more resembled these comparatively remote leaders than the colourful image of the 'follow me' commander of popular memory. Due to the limitations of communications technology in 1916, once the action began, the capacity of the senior tactical commander to influence the direction of the battle was extremely limited, and diminished even further the longer the battle progressed.

The tactical plan for any battle in 1916 had several different layers. The senior, or overall, tactical commander and planner, in this case Haking, had to translate the strategic and operational commanders' intents into precise, specific and identifiable objectives. He, or more correctly his command and planning team, was responsible for determining just which of the forces he had under his command would attack in which

---

[1] The number and complexity of differing command levels involved in planning in a 1916 battle requires the use of some 'artificial' terms. The tactical plan for Fromelles involved everything from the tactical instructions of the commander of XI Corps down to and including the orders given by the platoon and section commanders in the attacking battalions. To try and distinguish between these widely different scales and perspectives, the higher headquarters' perspective – from XI Corps – has been referred to as the 'grand tactical' plan while the plans and orders of the divisions, brigades, battalions, companies and platoons will simply be referred to as tactical plans.

[2] Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 159.

[3] Despite this purportedly clear delineation of command responsibilities, as has already been noted, even the Commander-in-Chief (Sir Douglas Haig) was frequently drawn into tactical issues and spent much time in the vicinity of the front line during battles. As a letter from the Australian Official Historian, C.E.W. Bean, to Lieutenant General Sir C.B.B. White on the fighting at Pozieres noted, Haig was believed to have visited the front at times when the war diaries had no record of him doing so. Letter, Bean to White, 3 May 1928. Bean Papers, 3DRL 7953/4 Part 1, AWM38.

area. It was his responsibility to decide when the attack would start, which troops would be supported by which artillery, engineer or combat support and supply support units,[4] which formations would have the use of which roads for movements and logistics and where other support functions, for example prisoner-of-war cages or engineer supply dumps, would be located.[5] It was also the senior tactical commander's responsibility to set the limits of the attack, in terms of area to be captured and for how long the attack was to proceed, to meet the objectives set by the operational commander. As noted previously, a poorly prepared operational level plan could create uncertainty in the mind of the tactical commander if the real intention for the attack was not clearly defined, and thus cause him to include qualified, possibly ambiguous and potentially fatally flawed instructions into the tactical plan.

Commanders at the intermediate tactical level, i.e. divisional and brigade commanders, had then to turn these precise instructions into detailed orders for the men leading the attack; consequently, at this level, orders focussed on specific details of timing, movement and support. This intermediate level was concerned more with the intricate details of the troops' specific roles than with the tactical grand plan,[6] but the essential decisions to be made were largely similar: which troops to use, although now the size of the units being identified was much smaller, where they were to go and at what time, and how to assist the attacking troops if they got held up or into serious trouble. It was at the intermediate tactical level that the concepts and intentions of the higher headquarters had to be translated into orders for the basic combat elements, battalions, companies and in some instances specialised platoons, sections and individuals, to move somewhere specific and achieve specific objectives. Within the limitations of the communications technologies then available, commanders at this intermediate tactical level did have some capacity to react to local developments in the battle and influence its direction once it had begun.

---

[4] See Explanation of Terms, *v*.

[5] As with everything else, even the operation of prisoner-of-war cages was hierarchical. The smallest formation at which a specific POW collection centre was operated, and initial interrogation conducted, was the division. Following an initial interrogation, the prisoner would be moved to the Corps cage then into the prisoner administrative system.

[6] For example, the commander of the 5th Australian Division at Fromelles had no interest in, and no information about, the actions of the British 182nd Infantry Brigade on the far right of the British 61st Division, as actions of the 182nd had no effect upon his tactical plan. Conversely, the actions of the British 184th Brigade, on the immediate right of the Australian 15th Brigade, were a major preoccupation of the Australian divisional commander throughout the attack as its actions directly affected the success or otherwise of his tactical plan.

The last or lowest layer of tactical planning and command, battalion, company and platoon commanders, identified by name the particular individuals and/or small groups who were to attack specific objectives and determined how they were to achieve this. This last layer of command was less focussed on conceptual planning than on what is now known as minor tactics. For this basic level of combat planning, standing tactical doctrine and training were as much part of the battle preparation as were unique and specific instructions in setting the tasks for their troops. In another distinction, at this level, orders were more frequently delivered verbally than in writing, and the person issuing the order was much more likely to be involved in its implementation and thus involved in sharing the risks. Direct personal interaction was a key distinction between base tactical and higher level command: only at the lowest tactical stage did planners mention particular individuals matched to specific objectives and precise timings for completion of their instructions and only at this level did planners and commanders have the capacity to change the course of the battle while it was occurring.

A successful tactical plan demanded close understanding between each of the tactical command levels as to what was required of whom and when. The plan needed to be a balance between a carefully timed and relatively rigid attack plan, to ensure the movements of the attacking infantry were coordinated with shifts in supporting artillery fire patterns, yet still be flexible enough to allow for unexpected developments. There were many factors, some simple and others resulting from the rapidly increasing technological complexity of the battlefield that mitigated against the commanders' abilities to develop this requisite close understanding. Two examples serve to demonstrate the issue.

One constant source of differences in perception between commanders and planning staffs at the different tactical command levels was the result of looking at the battlefield on a different map scale. While higher level tactical headquarters tended to plan using maps with scales of 1:40,000 and 1:20,000, at the lower levels, the scale became the much more detailed 1:10,000 and 1:5,000, frequently resorting to hand drawn 'mud maps' of even 1:500.[7] At the latter scales, individual topographical features

[7] British mapping is one of the success stories of the war. At the beginning, there were few maps of the operational areas available and they were in differing scales and employed differing symbols. During the

such as woods, re-entrants or hills could occupy most of the map and, for the planners at this level, became the main focus of their attention, rather than just one minor detail amidst a myriad of others. At this lowest planning level, failure to identify and factor in small geographic features could have serious consequences for the attacking troops, and indeed for the planners themselves. It could be argued that a simple difference such as this could have contributed to several of the critical decisions that altered the course of the battle, such as the decision to leave the boundary between the two attacking divisions on, rather than to one side or the other of, the main enemy defensive point at the Sugar Loaf or overlooking the obstacle threat posed to the Australians by the Layes River. These two features look different depending on the scale of the map used.

Another often overlooked illustration of the tensions between planning levels that distance from the battle tended to generate was the constant challenge of battlefield security: the 'need to know'. While maintaining the security of the plans of a prospective attack was clearly of critical importance, concern to protect security often resulted in essential tactical information being withheld from lower level formations. There was no clear guidance on what should or should not be included in orders to help commanders at any level. The Field Service Pocket Book defined Operations Orders as:

> Orders which deal with all strategical and tactical operations and which include such information regarding supply, transport etc, as it *is necessary to publish to the troops*.[8]

A note from the XI Corps Commander to each of his Divisional Commanders about a prospective, highly secret raid on the enemy lines on the night of 3-4 June provided a more extreme illustration of the problem.[9] Under direction from GHQ, Haking explicitly forbade each of his division commanders from discussing the proposed action with any of the other divisional commanders in the Corps implying, wrongly, that they were not involved and thus had no 'need to know'. More controversially, he identified several critical staff officers as potential security risks:

---

war, the British devised a logical and standardized mapping doctrine without which such essential actions as indirect shooting by the artillery, complex manoeuvre by the infantry and any form of aerial support by the Royal Flying Corps would have been almost impossible.

[8] War Office, *Field Service Pocket Book 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914), xi [emphasis added].

[9] This minute was part of GHQ initiated plan for all Armies in the BEF to conduct as many simultaneous raids as possible, on the night of 3-4 June, to 'mystify the enemy and disorganise his plans'. Haig's Chief of Staff, Kiggell, created the secrecy mania by directing that it was not necessary to let Divisional commanders know either the exact time of the raids or that there were to be a number of different attacks at the same time. Michael Senior, *Haking A Dutiful Soldier: Lt General Sir Richard Haking XI Corps Commander 1915-18. A Study in Corps Command* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012), 85.

> You will be very careful to prevent anyone belonging to the Divisions on your flanks from becoming aware that any special operation is contemplated and you will be particularly careful to close the following fruitful sources of leakage:
> (a) The C.R.A of the Division discussing details, especially as regards ammunition supply, with group and other Artillery Commanders;
> (b) Conversations on the telephone, picked up by "Signals" or by the enemy;
> (c) Administrative staff: such as Ordnance, Supply etc, who do not appear to recognise any great responsibility as regards secrecy.[10]

While secrecy was essential to surprise the enemy and thus increase both the chance of success and decrease the potential casualty count, it is difficult to understand how Haking envisaged this operation, involving a large number of troops from adjoining formations, succeeding and not descending into confusion and muddle, with a very real prospect of friendly fire causing heavy casualties, if none of the participants was aware of the involvement of the others. Clearly, to be successful, commanders at all levels needed to achieve a balance between the timely requirement to prepare troops for the attack and the need to protect the security of the operation. In the above example, this balance was not evident and several potential likely causes of failure immediately became apparent. Preventing discussion within the organisation would have made essential preparations impossible: no prepared cross-force artillery fire-plans, no logistics plan to support any unforeseen developments and no knowledge of what flanking troops were doing. Fortunately for the troops, the great combined raid of 3-4 June did not eventuate. While there is no evidence to suggest that essential information was withheld by Haking from his Divisional Commanders in the planning of Fromelles,[11] this reluctance to provide information could be one reason the orders he issued, as will be shown, tended to be short and focussed only on core information.

There were also several more general factors influencing the relationships between commanders, planners and subordinates that affected the planning process at the tactical level. Some of these were specific to the Fromelles action but most were to found across the battle planning environment throughout 1916.

The first of these factors was the relationship between the commander, the decision-maker, and both his subordinates and his planning staff. Following closely on

---

[10] Commander XI Corps Minute to Divisional Commanders, dated 21 May 1916. General Staff XI Corps. War Diary, May 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[11] As Haking left no personal papers, attributing motives to his actions needs to be approached carefully.

an era in which the tactical commander had traditionally made all decisions based on his own personal knowledge and experience, the use of a command and planning staff was both a challenge intellectually for the commanders and itself an innovation that needed to be practised, refined, developed and universally accepted to become successful. The new approach to command was forced on all armies by the increase in size, tempo and complexity of the new style of warfare. While Orders Groups, 'O' Groups in modern parlance, had been a common feature of all pre-war armies and were already a common feature at the tactical level in this war,[12] Army and Corps level planning conferences, at which the opinions of specialist junior officers had to be listened to,[13] were a new phenomenon for which few pre-war examples were to be found, and then only in embryonic form. As noted in an earlier chapter, this innovation was primarily based on the German General Staff system and, consequently, was not universally accepted into the British system until the war began, when its necessity could no longer be denied. However, learning the strengths and weaknesses of such a radical change in traditional command roles and responsibilities while concurrently fighting a war, posed a challenge that had not, by 1916, been fully resolved. As will be shown, Haking and Monro both appeared to find the authority of the commanding officer of the Special Gas Battalion in relation to the use of this new weapon difficult to accept.

Given that this more 'collegiate' approach to tactical planning was comparatively new in the BEF, its success was still heavily dependent upon the character of the tactical commander, especially his capacity to articulate clearly his intention and upon his willingness to accept advice contrary to his wishes. In this respect, Haking's alleged reputation as something of a bully would suggest the process was limited in its

---

[12]'O' Groups differ from planning and command conferences in that they were, and are, the meetings of command groups at which commanders issued their orders and explained what was required. While some discussion was possible at these gatherings, major debate about objectives, intent or timings was not encouraged.

[13] 'The GOC then dealt with the question of the use of gas and smoke and the possibility of damage to our own troops connected therewith. He enquired who was the authority responsible for deciding whether gas should or should not be discharged. The OC Special Battalion said that the OC the special company would decide. He would be at Brigade Headquarters, in telephonic touch with his section officers in the trenches, who were carefully trained. From his own observations and the reports from the trenches he would be in a position to say whether the conditions for discharging the gas were favourable, and he would give the order.' Summary of proceedings of Conference of Corps Commanders held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle at 11. a.m. on 22 June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

effectiveness.[14] At the next level, the Australian troops may not have benefited as much as they could from the process either, as their own Divisional commander, Sir James Whiteside McCay, also had a reputation for not listening to his superiors or his subordinates, especially when they disagreed with his own views.[15]

Another impediment to good understanding between commanders and planners was the problem of lack of familiarity. As occurred at Fromelles, not all the troops assigned to the tactical commander were drawn from the commander's own formation and so both parties would have been unfamiliar with the practices of the other and each other's strengths and weaknesses. When, as was not uncommon, these additional troops were a major part of the attack, the timing of their allocation to the new command thus became very important. If the time between when they were given to him and when the battle had to begin was too short, developing the kind of understanding necessary to make this collegiate style of battle planning work was unlikely. Haking did not receive formal operational control of the Australian Division or his additional artillery until 15 July 1916, just two days prior to the intended commencement of the attack.[16] It was thus almost impossible for him to understand McCay's strengths and weakness as a planner and commander or to make any assessment of his subordinate's competence, in time to cast his orders in a way designed to compensate for any identified characteristics or short-comings. Given McCay's extremely limited experiences of warfare on the Western Front, he (McCay) may also have felt inhibited in questioning a commander of Haking's experience. There is no evidence, beyond the allegations of his critics, that Haking's personal command style affected the planning for Fromelles. However, given some of the confusion revealed during the battle over the objectives, the ineffectiveness of the artillery and some reluctance by some intermediate commanders to make decisions, his alleged forbidding personality could offer one possible explanation.

---

[14] Peter Pedersen, *Fromelles* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2004), 36. Although this assessment of Haking's personality appears in a number of different sources, the common origin for all of them appears to be the opinion of the then Lieutenant Colonel Phillip Game, GSOI of the 46th Division. Game was later removed from his position on Haking's orders, allegedly for below-par performance of his duties, so it is a reasonable assumption that Game would not be a completely objective or unbiased commentator on Haking.

[15] Christopher Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

[16] First Army Order 100, dated 15 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

A smooth evolution of the tactical plan also depended on the time the corps commander, as the chief planner, had available to work on its development and on the absence of distractions during its development.[17] Haking was commanding a section of the front line that was classed as 'quiet' or a 'nursery sector'. Even so, as the XI Corps War Diary for July 1916 noted, he was much involved with the activities and small-scale actions of his other divisions, which took him away from his headquarters and his planning staff for long periods during the days that the tactical plan for Fromelles was being developed. On 11 July, he visited the officers of the 92nd Infantry Brigade, part of the 31st Division, and then went to the 39th Division's Headquarters where he waited for the results of two trench raids that evening by troops from that Division. The next day he was at Calonne, visiting the troops of the 94th Infantry Brigade. On 13 July, he was at Busnes visiting the 93rd Infantry Brigade and then waited at the Divisional Headquarters for the results of a trench raid by troops of the 61st Division (the 2nd Battalion, the Royal Berkshire Regiment).[18] He also hosted a visit by the GOC First Army to the troops who had raided the enemy on 11 July. Yet, at 2.00 a.m. on 14 July, his headquarters was able to issue the first order relating to the attack on Fromelles, some six days after he was warned to prepare an attack and only one day after the warning was confirmed.[19]

Similarly, his planners would have found difficulty in concentrating solely on the planning requirement. Although the following comment from a senior staff officer was made a year after Fromelles, the picture of the level of activity in the General Staff (GS) Office in a major headquarters is illustrative of that type of environment in 1916.

> Time simply flies and one never seems to have a moment to oneself; one's duties seem innumerable; there are constant interviews and visits from the officers of all arms and all branches as in General Staff office largely lies the power of co-operation for all arms. To mention only some of the officers with whom one comes into daily contact, besides the sappers and gunners of one's own and other divisions, there are officers of trench mortars, medium, light and heavy, signals (the unit responsible for all communications from the front line back to G.H.Q. and whose importance cannot be over-estimated) gas, machine gunners, heavy artillery, flying corps, tunnelling company officers, anti-aircraft, balloon observers, A.S Corps and ammunition columns with reference to all

---

[17] This was one reason why, when Gough was given responsibility for planning a breakthrough action for the Somme, he had only small numbers of troops - but an Army-scale planning staff - under his command in the Reserve Army.

[18] Summary of Events and Information. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[19] These are the timings as contained in Haking's post-battle report. General Staff, XI Corps, War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881 TNA.

> question of supplies, intelligence officers. Liaison officers from corps, armies, G.H.Q., and divisions on the right and left.[20]

The potential for an enemy spoiling attack was also a constant distraction. First Army had been subjected to a series of attacks along its front in May and June and the First Army Corps Commanders were regularly subject to reminders to be prepared for an enemy spoiling attack. Clearly, neither Haking nor his planners had any days clear of distractions and interruptions in which to focus solely upon the evolving plans of the Fromelles operation: a less-than-ideal planning environment even for a limited operation.

As noted previously, the tendency of critics of World War I battlefield planning and command has been to judge the quality of the plan and its implementation purely on the basis of the outcome. The critics rarely acknowledge the effect of external factors or factors beyond the capacity of the planners to predict, including luck. Fromelles was a bloody affair and the presumption has been that flaws in the tactical plan were the cause, although neither the plan itself nor its alleged flaws are usually explained.[21] Haking's tactical problem was complex,[22] and whether or not blame for the high casualties can legitimately be attributed solely or even partly to the plan he developed requires an assessment of the tactical influences preceding its formulation, analysis of the detail it contained and a comparison between the plan and the outcomes achieved, before any definitive conclusion can be reached.

Potentially, one of the biggest influences on both the evolution of the plan and upon its final shape was the period of time Haking had already had to contemplate the tactical problems associated with an attack in the Fromelles area. Haking took command of XI Corps and control of the Fromelles area in September 1915. He had experience of the difficulties in assaulting Aubers Ridge, both as a divisional commander in the Battle of Aubers Ridge and as a corps commander during Loos. Of all the British commanders in the line, Haking arguably was the Corps Commander best prepared by personal experience and time spent studying the tactical problem, to plan yet another attack on

---

[20] Allanson Papers. Diary entry 16 March 1917. DS/MISC/69 Imperial War Museum.
[21] Paul Cobb, *Fromelles 1916* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 176.
[22] In simple terms, Haking had to attack an enemy in fixed defences, who also had the advantages of ground, excellent observation, secure lines of communications through protected and hidden trenches, protected communications and good familiarity with the battlefield, with insufficient infantry and mostly inexperienced and untried artillery support.

the feature. In all the analysis of Haking's plan that has occurred since Fromelles, little consideration has been given to the impact of this rare circumstance: the opportunity for an extended analysis by the future tactical commander of the battlefield and the tactical requirements for a successful attack.

As examined in the preceding chapter, some form of attack in the Fromelles-Aubers area had been regularly discussed by all three levels of command for the six months in the lead-up to the Somme offensive. Logically, some of this thinking about the problem would have influenced Haking's appreciation of the military problem he was given and would have been a factor in his development of the tactical plan. However, whether the wide diversity of possible actions being considered, the confusion over what action was to be fought and the inevitable issues of inadequate combat resources and logistics limitations, all combined to neutralise any possible advantage to Haking has never been determined.

The first challenge for Haking was that, between January and June 1916, he was subjected to two differing imperatives driving his planning intent for XI Corps. The first was the routine responsibility, as the local area commander, to be prepared at all times to launch an attack that might help improve the tactical or strategic position on his front. This was a common command responsibility for all Army and Corps Commanders, and the War Diaries for most of the Corps in the BEF contain evidence of such preparatory planning throughout most of the War. The types of potential actions the generals routinely considered ranged from, at the low end, raids on the enemy's front-line trenches to capture men and equipment for intelligence collecting purposes, small scale attacks to capture small lengths of the enemy's line to permit straightening of the British defensive line, up to attacks to capture a tactically important piece of the ground, for example a hill or a river bank. Haking had commented several times in correspondence and at commanders' conferences on the desirability of straightening the British front line in the XI Corps sector, taking the high ground to its front and reducing the number of salients, such as the Sugar Loaf and Wick, which threatened the security of his own line. At the other end of the scale, commanders needed to be prepared to mount major, exploitative attacks should the enemy on his front collapse unexpectedly or, as happened in February 1917, withdraw suddenly from

his trenches, or to mount major diversionary attacks to take pressure off some other threatened part of the line.

Haking did prepare his Corps for these types of action. First Army War Diaries for January 1916 include references to several successful raids over the winter of 1915-1916, actions which attracted the enthusiastic support of the former First Army Commander, Sir Douglas Haig, and the interim Commander, Sir Henry Rawlinson. Haking planned many more attacks of varying levels of commitment, although the growing need to husband resources for the planned major offensive did inhibit his more ambitious plans. Undoubtedly, these actions provided Haking with an intimate understanding of the battlefield, the enemy's defences and the enemy himself. There were other physical benefits for the Fromelles plan that grew out of these actions. As mentioned at a Commanders' Conference in June, he had built near his headquarters a large model of the German trenches opposite a portion of the XI Corps front, which was in constant use by officers and NCOs planning raids or similar offensive actions and, arguably, would have been an important tool for his planning staff in considering more ambitious undertakings.[23]

The second imperative focussing his tactical thinking came from his higher headquarters, when, along with all the other Corps Commanders not directly engaged on the Somme, he was tasked to begin planning support operations for that great enterprise.[24] As noted, on 29 February at a First Army Corps Conference, Haking was ordered to start planning minor offensive actions, designed to degrade the enemy's combat capability and to confuse him as to the real British intent.[25]

> Stress was laid on the value of minor enterprises. Ruses and schemes by infantry should always be combined with artillery bombardment in order to induce the enemy to man his parapets and thus inflict loss on him by shell-fire. The GOC hoped that Corps Commanders would continue and even increase their efforts to arrange for the carry out of such enterprises.[26]

---

[23] Minutes of Conference of Corps Commanders, held by the G.O.C. at Chateau Jumelle on Thursday, 8th June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[24] Even in early June, other Corps in First Army reported on 'a number of minor operations' to be carried out 'with a view to harassing the enemy and holding him to his ground.' IV Corps, Minute No. H.R.S. 669/4 of 14 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[25] According to Pedersen, Haking had prepared no fewer than thirteen operations that XI Corps could undertake in support of the Somme operation. Pedersen, *Fromelles,* 37.
[26] General Staff, First Army. War Diary, February 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

The scale of this second imperative increased significantly in May, when all the non-Somme Corps Commanders were instructed to consider more ambitious actions to occur concurrently with the Somme attack. Notes from an XI Corps Conference of 9 May 1916 show how the original purely deception idea had begun to be refined into potential offensive operations of two new and entirely different types: capturing part of the enemy's line and mounting a major action to break through the enemy's line and threaten a strategic target such as Lille.

> (b). Preparation for the capture of a part of the German front trench opposite each Division, with the object of assisting more extensive operations elsewhere. Schemes to be all ready and the ground reconnoitred so they can be carried out by the infantry, artillery (excluding heavies), engineers and trench mortars after a few days (from four to six) notice.
>
> (c). A more powerful and extensive offensive to be carried out by XIth Corps in conjunction with the Australian Corps on our left, the ultimate object being to gain the AUBERS and FROMELLES ridge and turn the LA BASSEE defences from the north, thus making a pronounced salient in the German line without making any marked salient in our own.[27]

As Haking's candid and critical analysis of these latter ideas showed, he had already given considerable thought to the problems of how to conduct this type of limited but still major supporting operation. His analysis showed clearly that he understood, arguably better than his superiors, the risks and the subtleties of such supporting actions within an overall offensive plan. He observed that, as proposed, such actions were neither necessarily simple in concept nor as limited by time in execution as the senior planners appeared to be implying. He was concerned that an overly complex or unlimited supporting operation both ran the risk of escalating beyond the intended limited level and thus becoming counter-productive to the overall plan, or simply failing through being unworkable. The impact of this early appreciation on the Fromelles plan was significant: Haking made it quite clear to both his commander and his own planning staff that, for an attack such as he had originally proposed in his 9 May concept to have any real chance of success, it had to be a multi-stage attack. The successful completion and consolidation of phase one was the essential prerequisite before commencing phase two.

> The objective of the attack of the XIth Corps and the Australian Corps would be strictly limited to capturing the enemy's support line all along the front of attack, consolidating it and holding it permanently against all hostile

[27] Notes on by the Corps Commander for Conference at XIth Corps Headquarters, 9 May 1916. SS/837/5. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, May 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

> counter-strokes. **The next stage, after careful artillery preparation and re-organisation of our new front line**, would be an attack to gain a position as close to the enemy's defences of AUBERS as possible, with a view to the capture of that place and linking up to NEUVE CHAPELLE. [28]

Its significance for Fromelles was when, for reasons explained later, the operational commander at the last minute reduced the scope in the operational plan to what was essentially the original phase one of Haking's 9 May concept, Haking was able to adapt his final tactical plan to conform to this new direction with a minimum of disruption. The evidence does not reveal whether in fact it was Haking's division of the attack into two distinct phases that influenced his superior command to set as the overall objectives for the eventual proposed attack, Haking's first phase.

With both these higher command imperatives directing Haking's tactical thinking, the military appreciation process used by his planners had to have been under considerable pressure. Identifying, collecting and assimilating the wide range of information needed would have forced his planners to come up with options for an equally wide range of attacking options: many more so than would have been the case had he been working to a clear, singular requirement. This in itself had to have been an impediment to Haking's thinking, as the information needed for either type of attack was both extensive and not all the same. Haking and his headquarters would have encountered the growing dilemma for battle planners on both sides during this war: managing and exploiting the voluminous information available. However, when these problems were compounded by the lack of clarity from his headquarters on the specific issue of the scale and intention of the Fromelles attack, it could almost be argued that having six months to prepare an attack was, rather than advantageous, potentially counter-productive. While he did have six months to ponder the tactical problems of the battlefield and the possible options for different types of attack, it was only in the last few weeks, following his receipt of the operational directive to plan an attack, that he could have drawn together all this acquired understanding to formulate his plan. Unfortunately, for the initial planning period, he was planning the wrong battle.

For most of the time he was developing his Fromelles plan, Haking remained under the impression he had been ordered to plan for the successful capture and

---

[28] Notes by the Corps Commander for Conference at XIth Corps Headquarters, 9 May 1916. SS/837/5. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, May 1916, WO 95/881 TNA. [emphasis added].

occupation of Aubers Ridge, from Aubers to Fromelles, and the incorporation of this captured section of enemy defences into the British line. There is no mention in either his proposal, or in the direction he received on 8 July, that the task he was given was to mount a minor or deception action, or even a limited attack to pin the enemy in place. Rather, as he stated in his 9 July response to that request, XI Corps S.S. 1205/1:

> The situation I am told to work upon is that the great battle in the south is progressing favourably**, that the enemy has been compelled to use all his available reserves in that direction**, and that a successful attack somewhere on the front held by the First and Second Armies will greatly assist the course of our operations.[29]

This clearly was not a direction to plan something small like a feint or deception action. The direction implicitly required him to develop a scheme for a major attack, with the objective of breaking through the full depth of the enemy's defences and attaining a potentially strategic success. Haking's response was to produce a concept for a major tactical-level operation, that was a

> Scheme of attack to capture and hold the AUBERS Ridge, from AUBERS to FROMELLES, both inclusive, and to connect up the flanks with our original line.[30]

At the first Army Commanders' Conference after Haking submitted his proposal, on 13 July, Monro confirmed that the basis of planning for the coming operation was to be in general accord with the outline in S.S. 1205, thus a major attack designed to seize not just the enemy front line but the whole of the enemy's defences up to and including his third line on the top of Aubers Ridge. (See diagram 2, showing the structure of the German defences.) It was not until First Army's Operation Order 100 was received on 15 July, which substantially reduced the scope and, consequently the objectives, to capturing only the enemy's first line trenches, that Haking could finally align his plans to the operational command's intent. As noted, the enemy front line trenches had been just the first phase objective in Haking's initial concept plan. This last minute reduction in the scale of the attack constituted a major last-minute alteration to the orders he was working to in preparing his final tactical plan.

---

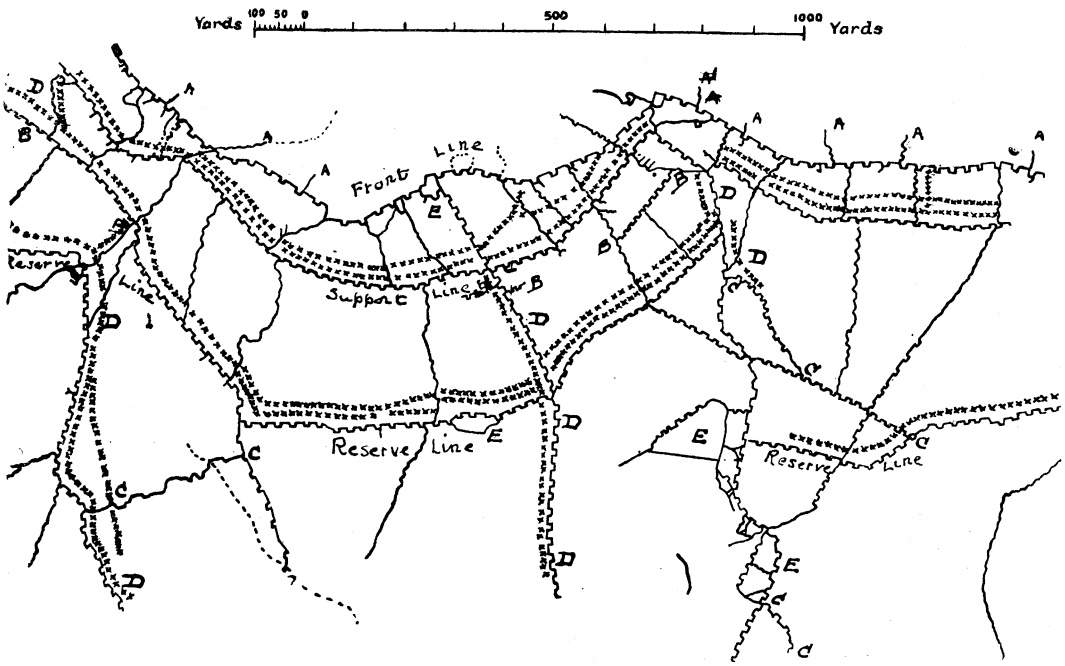
[29] Letter to First Army, SS/1205.1. 9 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA. [emphasis added].
[30] Ibid.

Diagram 2

Two diagrams:

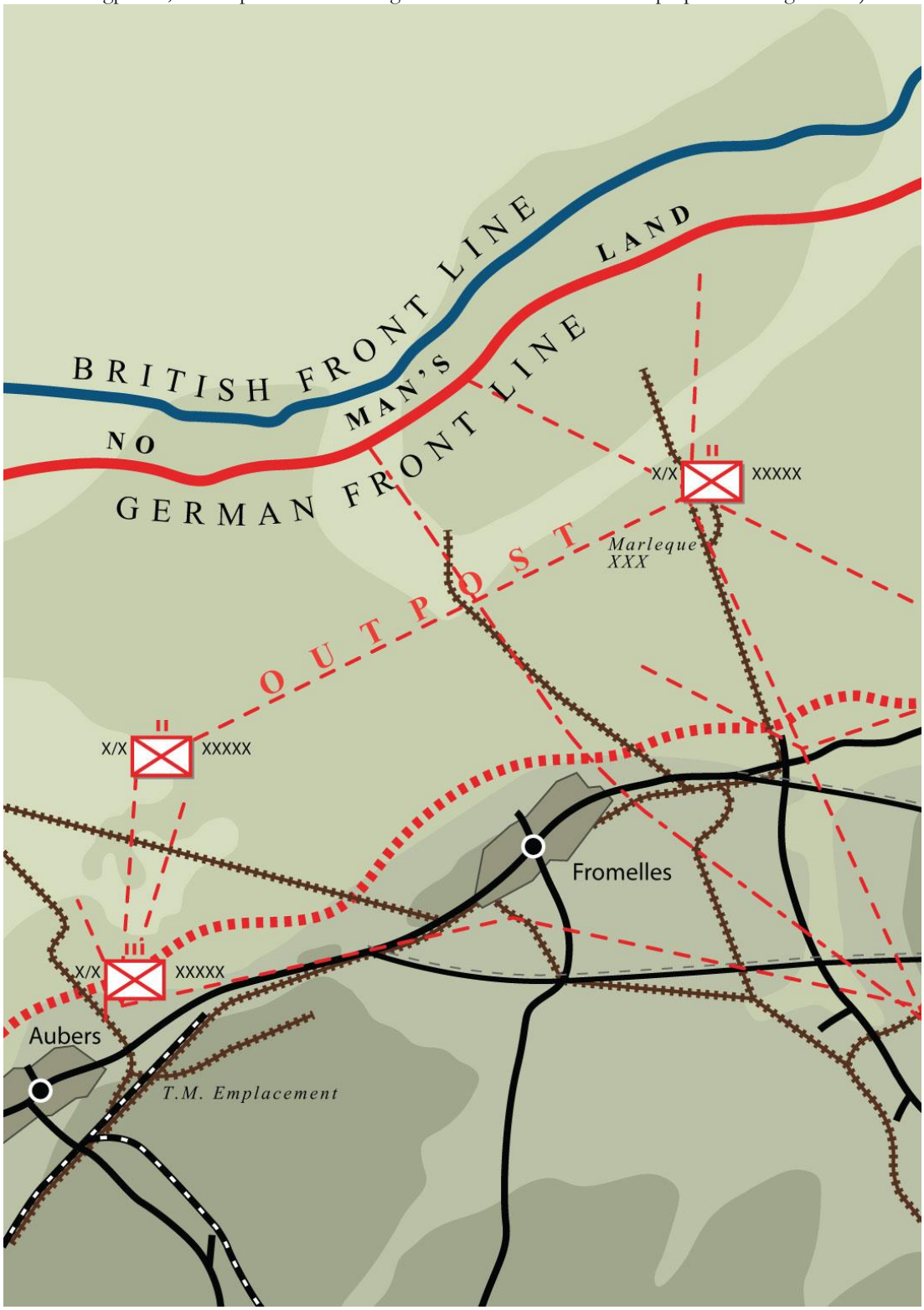
The first showing the general structure of the German Defence line and the second showing the three layers of the German defences at Fromelles.

FIG. 1.—PORTION OF GERMAN FRONT LINE POSITION. (From Trench Map, front wire omitted.)
SCALE = 1:10,000



(diagram 2.a)

(Thick red line is the German first line, the line of red squares on the ridgeline near Fromelles is the third line and the area marked outpost is the intermediate or second line. By clever use of obstacles and strongpoints, the outpost line was designed to channel attackers into prepared 'killing zones'.)



(diagram 2.b)

The tactical problems that Haking had to deal with in preparing the Fromelles tactical plan were in many ways common to any tactical attack plan in 1916. Many of the factors to be considered, such as weather, the terrain, the state of the enemy and the calculations of troop numbers and supporting arms were constants. Haking's plan would also have benefitted from his understanding of specific local factors such as the limitations imposed by an inadequate transport infrastructure or the problems with ammunition availability and supply. Another planning benefit, arguably, lay in the broader, non-specific understanding he had already gained through his Corps-conducted trench raids of the local tactical problems posed by the unique combination of enemy, terrain and own-force characteristics. He had already experienced the problems of visibility, lines of sight and dead ground, the impact of adverse weather on the local battlefield,[31] the difficulties of maintaining battlefield security during the build-up phase and the problems of an undeveloped transport network to support any attack. While the differences between actions as diverse as ruses and major attacks reduced the potential benefit to Haking's planning in terms of identifying objectives, timings and troops-to-task, the other tactical information that would have been common to both, such as knowledge of the terrain and the enemy, were still important, arguably key, factors in successful battle planning.

His six months of Corps command also gave him some first-hand experiences of the dominating restriction on British basic tactical planning in 1916: the problem of combat resources, especially troops, guns and ammunition. Arguably, one of the most important benefits Haking gained during the six-month lead-up period was a well-developed understanding of the crude but undeniable relationship between troop numbers and the probability of success. It was this experience also that enabled him to revise rapidly his plans for Fromelles when the number of combat assets he was promised for the attack changed at the last minute. The experience that prepared him for this notable but largely overlooked feat of planning agility was the six months of planning he had conducted when he had only his own organic Corps assets to factor

[31] This part of French Flanders exhibited a number of characteristics making it a difficult battlefield. It was flat, barely above sea-level and had a layer of impervious clay, called Ypsian clay, which trapped water close to the surface. In peacetime, surface water was controlled by an intricate drainage system. This had been destroyed in the first year of the war so the whole area quickly turned to mud and deep pools of water after even small amounts of rain. The Germans, holding the high ground and, having access to electric power from Lille and thus to reliable water pumps, did not suffer nearly the tactical disadvantage that the British did in coping with mud.

into his attack force. Haking understood very well that he did not have the combat power to achieve his more ambitious tactical objectives without additional reinforcement which, with the exception of informal arrangements with adjoining Corps, was extremely unlikely. The limited combat power of his Corps on its own was a possible explanation for why, given the necessary external combat supplementation was not available, none of his larger-scale Corps-based proposals during this period went ahead. What this constraint on resources did do was train Haking and his staff in planning for smaller scale and largely self-contained tactical actions: a scale of action only marginally less than the size of the eventual attack at Fromelles.

One benefit from his extended appreciation that became apparent very quickly in the planning process was Haking's well-developed understanding of the need for adequate numbers of artillery, especially heavy artillery. All his assessments from this preceding period identified the need for substantial artillery assets to overcome the enemy's advantages of position, strength of defences and the width of No Man's Land. His understanding of the limited support his organic artillery could provide, even with the presence of the new heavy artillery brigade,[32] was of crucial importance in the evolution of the final Fromelles plan: indeed, as will be shown, it was the problem of insufficient artillery that drove the last minute changes in the final plan. In calculating the number of barrels and shells needed to support the infantry assault, Haking was benefitting from his experiences in 1915, the growing knowledge of 1916 artillery planners and his good tactical understanding of the ground and the enemy defences at Fromelles. His problem was that, despite him recognising the level of artillery support needed, it simply was not available.

The influence on the plan Haking eventually prepared of his tactical appreciation of the ground, especially his judgments on the size of the assaulting force required, was marked. Arguably, Haking's preparation of a reasonable tactical concept in a very short time constituted the best evidence of the benefits the extended period he had had to ponder the tactical problems of an attack on Aubers Ridge had given him. He was able

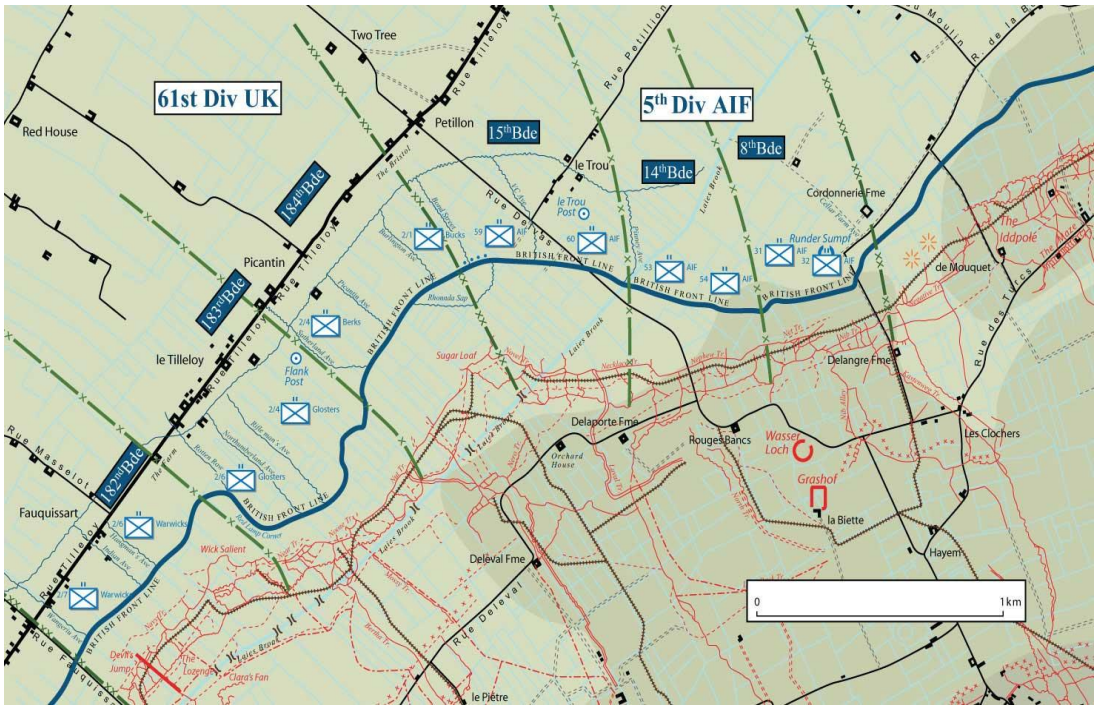
[32] No. 1 Heavy Artillery group became XI Corps heavy Artillery on 11 March 1916, giving Haking direct control over a major combat element. A.F. Becke, *History of the Great War - Order of Battle of Divisions. Part I – The Regular British Divisions* (London: HMSO, 1935), Appendix 3, p 290.

to deliver his initial, three-page concept to Monro just one day after being asked for it.[33] This untitled document, which provides a useful insight into the battle Haking thought he had been directed to plan, and which is clearly the starting point for the final tactical orders issued on 14 and 15 July, could only have been prepared in such a short time if he had already given much thought to the problem. His concept of 9 July demonstrated that he understood that what he was being asked to do was tactically challenging but he shaped the plan to attempt to minimise the risks.

Given the separation of the two main objectives, Fromelles and Aubers, the attack would have to be on a wide front, to prevent the enemy concentrating artillery fire on a small area, and to ensure the attacking infantry line included the two objective villages simultaneously. (The boundaries proposed in this initial concept, on the right the Fauquissart-Trivelet Road and, on the left the Cordonnerie Ferme – Les Clochers Road (see map 9), also became the boundaries for the final attack.) Because at this stage he was planning on an attack by only two divisions, one of his and one from Second Army, he recognised he would be forced to use all six brigades from these two divisions in the initial attack. This was contrary to established British practice but reflected the lack of attacking troops he had available. He recognised that this left the assaulting divisions with no reserves. This planning decision resulted in a wide frontage of attack of some 4,200 yards. Each of the three brigades in each of the divisions was to have two battalions deployed side by side for the initial attack with the remaining two battalions immediately behind as follow-on troops: the frontage and troop numbers available meant each battalion would have to attack, on average, 350 yards of trench line. Once the enemy's front line had been secured, the follow-on battalions were then to drive on to capture the Ridge in the second phase of the attack.

[33] Letter to First Army, SS/1205.1. 9 July 1916.

Planned Boundaries.



(Map 9)

The plan meant the initial infantry assault wave averaged out at about three men to every yard of trench. By the standards of this war, these were low numbers of attacking troops. Although not stated explicitly, this appeared to be acknowledged at the operational level of command, for a last minute solution was attempted. At a Commanders' Conference at 6.30 p.m. on 13 July, Monro agreed to a reorganisation of First Army dispositions to shorten the XI Corps front line, thereby releasing another division for the attack. Troops from I Corps were to move to their left thus freeing 31st Division to be included in the attack. With the size of his force suddenly increased by a third Haking, as noted in his post-battle report, immediately and inexplicably, extended the left flank of the proposed assault northwards (into Second Army's front) up to La Boutillerie.

> G.O.C. XIth Corps stated that he proposed to attack with three divisions, 31st and 61st of XI Corps and the division of the Second Army which would be at his disposal.[34]

It is not clear why Haking chose to extend the width of the attack rather than use these additional troops to thicken up the attack on the existing planned frontage. One possible explanation may lie in the recognition by all Allied commanders of the

[34] Report on Operations on Front of XI Corps on 17 July and 19/20 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

effectiveness of German artillery in breaking up attacks. He may have been attempting to follow the then standard tactic of attacking upon as wide a front as possible to prevent the enemy concentrating his guns on one point. Another possible explanation could have been that Haking feared the confusion that would potentially result from compressing such inexperienced troops together in dense formations. [35] Whatever the reason, the decision, taken late in the planning cycle, lasted less than 12 hours. The inability of Second Army to provide promised essential additional artillery only became apparent in the early hours of 14 July but this sudden reduction was considered so critical that by 8.00 a.m., Haking had decided to reduce the operation back to the original two divisions. Unsurprisingly, after the rapid overnight variations of the plan to encompass a three-division attack, the final plan looked remarkably similar to his initial proposal, at least to its initial phase.

The reason Haking moved quickly to reduce the size of the attacking force when he was informed he would not receive the promised amount of artillery reinforcement was the recognition of the central importance of artillery to an infantry success. While massive amounts of artillery were a partial solution to the problem of low infantry numbers in an attack, the converse was not true. Haking understood a third infantry division without the essential additional artillery was largely impotent on the 1916 battlefield. Infantry needed artillery and Haking expressly framed his plan around the promised additional artillery. Unfortunately, both for his original concept and for the final attack, additional artillery was not easy to obtain. The Somme was making enormous demands on both barrels and ammunition and British industry had yet to meet the demand. Finding the amount of artillery necessary was a problem in his initial concept and remained a problem when the plan for the final attack was developed. Even so, the artillery resources he did eventually field were impressive by the standards of 1916. (See Table Three for a summary of both the number of guns by type.) The fact that all this artillery proved inadequate to the task was both illustrative of the importance artillery had achieved on the battlefield by 1916 and of the scale of the tactical problem the artillery was intended to overcome.

[35] There is no documentary evidence to support either proposition but given Haig's rationale for the width of the Somme attack, fear of effective German artillery was the most likely explanation.

Table Three.
Artillery Resources available to XI Corps on 19 July 1916[36]

GUN TYPES	NUMBER OF BARRELS
18-pounder field gun	210
4.5-inch howitzer	48
60-pounder gun	36
6-inch howitzer	20
6-inch gun (Quick firers on Armoured Train)	2
9.2-inch howitzer	8
12-inch howitzer	5
9.2-inch gun	1
2-inch mortar	70
240-mm mortar	2
Total - Field guns	258
Total – Heavy guns	72
Total – all guns	330

There was another problem. Much of the artillery in France was new and inexperienced: having a lot of artillery available was quite different from having a lot of effective artillery available, as the battle was to demonstrate. The way artillery was employed demanded new and sophisticated methods of command and control and a high degree of skill by both the gunners and those relying on their support. Unfortunately, the pre-war methods of controlling artillery, developed on small battlefields and with the guns deployed in the front line, needed only mounted messengers, semaphore or similar elementary communication devices to be effective. Frequently, the gun crew's own observation and tactical understanding was sufficient for them to know what to do. On the 1916 battlefield such primitive systems, rendered impotent by the dramatic changes in the employment of massed artillery some distance from the front line and where the gunners could see nothing of the movement of the troops they were supporting, were found wanting. Unfortunately, for both the gunners and the infantry who relied upon them, new techniques to overcome the technical limitations had not yet been fully developed and assimilated and there were insufficient

[36] Order of Battle, XI Corps. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

gunners trained in the new techniques required. Many of the problems, especially those requiring quick reactions to a changing battlefield, in particular lacked the communications technology needed to support new methods of control.

While many solutions were tried in 1915, by 1916 the best solution available was the timed artillery barrage. Elaborate calculations were used to try and predict both the weight of shell required on a given length of trench to destroy the enemy's defences, and the rate of advance of the infantry so that artillery could provide covering fire directly in front of where the attacking troops should be. The fire plan, the core of all tactical battles on the Western Front, laid down a timetable of changes in the range of the artillery so that, even though the gunners and their observers could not see or communicate with the infantry, the barrage of shells advanced just in front of the attacking infantry. This solution had two major flaws: if one part of the plan, usually the infantry, fell behind the timing, they lost their artillery support. The second was that it was technically demanding on the gunners. The problem for Haking was that the bulk of gunners with the required level of skill and experience were needed to support the Somme offensive and thus were not available to implement his own artillery plan. As will be shown, it was this match of a demanding artillery plan with troops unable to conduct it that was to be a major factor in the eventual outcome.

Haking's post-battle report noted both the problems with the provision of sufficient artillery and with the timing of the supply of additional artillery: much of it arrived far too late to be properly employed. He noted that one of the critical elements, the identification, movement and inclusion in the battle line of the additional division with all its organic artillery and the additional artillery by Second Army, could not begin to occur until the plan was confirmed and orders issued. This did not occur until 6.30 p.m. on 13 July, just four days before the planned commencement of the attack. As Haking observed in this report:

> At 6.30 p.m. G.O.C. XIth Corps and B.G.G.S. proceeded to Advanced First Army Headquarters, and the Corps Commander was informed by the Army Commander that an attack on the German front and support line would be carried out in general accordance with the scheme which he had submitted, at as early a date as possible.; that the operation would be under the command of G.O.C XIth Corps

> **and that the Second Army would place one division and additional artillery at his disposal.**[37]

As noted previously, the loss of a significant proportion of the promised additional artillery support was a major setback to Haking. Just prior to the issue of the order for the attack, Second Army informed Haking that only one, not two, additional divisional artillery groups would be available to support his operation and that the number of trench mortars, especially the 2-inch mortars that were especially useful for wire cutting, would be far fewer than originally planned. Consequently, at 8.00 a.m. on 14 July, Haking was forced to make the first major change to his developing plans to accommodate the reduction in artillery support. As a direct consequence and just three days prior to the attack's scheduled start date, he was forced to cut the whole attack by a third, reducing the number of divisions in the attack back to the two he had originally been planning to employ. Such a reduction in scale in a plan is simple to state but the planning and reorganisation consequences were enormous.

Everything, from the organisation of the infantry in the front line to revised objectives, to the location of the artillery, and from logistics arrangements to the dissemination of the latest intelligence, would have had to be reorganised, rearranged and reissued to all the relevant units and formations involved. Haking had already given orders to formations to begin the series of complex moves in and out of the front line to position the attack forces in their correct locations. Artillery had already begun to move to new positions. Roads for movement had already been allocated. Haking had to recall these orders and prepare and issue new ones. Apart from the confusion this undoubtedly engendered in the troops moving to new positions, Haking also had to ensure that the resulting confusion did not affect his defences anywhere else along the Corps front line. It was a major achievement of the XI Corps planning staff that this fundamental change to the plan was achieved and in a time that would still have enabled the attack to begin, had the weather been satisfactory, on the original planned date of 17 July.

Even before issuing his attack plan to his assault troops, Haking had to concentrate them into the appropriate areas of the front. Hence, the first three of the

---

[37] Report on Operations on Front of XI Corps on 17 July and 19/20 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA [emphasis added].

four orders issued in pursuance of his plan were movement orders, issued on 14-15 July.[38] As they related primarily to troop movements, the first two, issued on 14 July, were quite limited in their tactical detail, although the reason for the complex movements was made clear at the beginning of the first order, XI Corps Order 54:

> 1. XIth Corps will concentrate on its left for offensive operations as follows:[39]

XI Corps Order No. 54 was primarily a movement order, but the moves were complex and designed to maximise his attacking strength quickly while at the same time providing security for the rest of the front line in the XI Corps sector. Haking needed to concentrate his forces on the left of the Corps sector, abutting Second Army's Area of Operations. As a result of Order 54, on 14 and 15 July, including throughout both nights, three full divisions, together with the artillery of a fourth, were reorganised within the Corps sector. The detail is spelled out to demonstrate the complexity of what was achieved in a very short time. A division from I Corps relieved 39th Division as far north as the La Bassée Canal, enabling Haking to move two brigades of this division to the left and thus shorten the section of front line being held by the adjoining 61st Division, the first of his attacking divisions. To the left of 61st Division, the 31st Division, briefly included in the attacking force, was to concentrate on the front line between a new divisional boundary based on the communication trench known as Bond Street and across the army boundary, between First and Second Armies, to occupy part of Second Army's front to the track running north and south through Delangre Farm. The 31st Division was to relieve the 5th Australian Division in the front line, thus enabling the third of the attack divisions to concentrate its forces. Haking also received additional supporting artillery from I Corps, from 8th Division,[40] which he had to move into place to support the 61st Division. In addition, Corps troops such as the Cyclist

---

[38] Order 54, issued at 2.00 a.m. on 14 July, Order 55, issued at 10.00 a.m. on the same day, and Order 56, issued at 2.00 p.m. This was while Haking was adapting his tactical plan from the original two division to a three division attack then back to a two division version, all between 6.30 p.m. on 13 July and, due to advice received from Second Army at 1.30 a.m. on 14 July that the promised additional division's worth of field artillery would not be forthcoming, and 8.00 a.m. on 14 July. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO95/881 TNA.

[39] XIth Corps Order No. 54. 14 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

[40] 8th Division was allocated to First Army on 5 July, having been relieved for a rest from the Somme fighting. Its gunners, while more experienced than most of the other artillery supporting Fromelles, would still have been unfamiliar with the area of operations and with Haking's style of command and would have had equipment that needed repair and refurbishment, while the gunners themselves would still have been tired. General Headquarters, British Expeditionary Force General Staff. War Diaries, July 1916, 1/2/7 Part 3 AWM.

Battalion and No. 5 Motor Machine Gun Battery were to be taken from supporting 61st Division as originally planned and moved into the trenches with 39th Division to shore up the defensive line.

Order 55, personally issued by Haking at 10.00 a.m. on 14 July to the commanders of the troops involved, was a refinement of the earlier movement order. It was necessary due to Haking's decision, at 8.00 am that day, to reduce the size of the attack from three divisions to two, which meant his attack formations were now not moving to their proper positions. The British 31st Division, originally the central attacking Division, had to be relocated to another part of the line. Haking retained the 61st Division as the XI Corps assault formation, possibly due to its recent experience in raiding that part of the enemy's line due to be attacked. On the evening of 14 July, however, it was south of the position it needed to be in to attack alongside the Australian Division. The British 31st was ordered to cancel its planned move to relieve the 5th Australian Division in the trenches on the left of XI Corps and take over the trenches between the Oxford Street trench and the Fauquissart –Trivelet Road. The 61st Division was to move to its left and close up onto the Army boundary at Picantin (also, coincidently, opposite the Sugar Loaf salient), which was now the divisional boundary between the two attacking divisions. At 2.00 p.m. on 14 July, Haking issued a third movement order, XI Corps Order No. 56, cancelling the previous two and clarifying the movements and destinations for his forces. The main change in this last order was movement details concerning the decision to divert the reinforcing Corps troops from 61st Division to 39th Division. While the confusion caused on the roads behind the front line as massed formations of men and equipment struggled to find their way to new locations in the dark and frequently under fire had to have been considerable, it was a reflection of the efficiency of Haking's headquarters team that he could, with hours, revise his plans to accommodate major last minute changes, reissue the necessary orders and have all the prospective assault troops in location to meet the agreed attack timeframe.

Apart from the previously mentioned thinking about the tactical problem he faced, Haking's attack also benefitted from some of the work done in pursuit of the

original deception plans. As early as June,[41] he had indicated the completion of the RHONDDA Sap and its link to the British front line in Second Army's sector would help any attack against the Sugar Loaf by reducing the width of No Man's Land across which his assaulting troops would have to move exposed to enemy fire:

> 5. On the left flank of the XI Corps front, a sap called RHONDDA sap has been run out for 250 yards from N.8.c.7.5. to N.8.d.2.5. This sap has been traversed and wired and a listening post at its eastern end is occupied every night.
> THE G.O.C. 1st Anzac Corps has already commenced a trench in continuation of the RHONDDA sap to join up with the head of his right sap, about N.8.d.6.8.; and as soon as this is ready, the new line thus formed will be held as our new front line. **This will greatly lessen the distance to be crossed to the hostile Sugar Loaf salient, towards which I propose to dig a fresh sap as soon as the new forward** trench **is occupied.**[42]

By mid-July, this had occurred and use of the sap was incorporated into his battle planning. In the same way, a number of the dummy gun positions he had had prepared as part of the earlier deception plans were available for his artillery reinforcements.

Contrary to a popular view of Haking in relation to Fromelles, 'There is little evidence of practical capacity or intellectual ability in Haking's preparations for the attack',[43] the picture that emerges is one of a tactical commander with a sound understanding of the tactical problem, the battleground and of the enemy. The potential problems he faced in developing his plan were not those imposed by the enemy but arising from problems with his own high command. Planning a battle, even a limited supporting attack, was a complex business. For Haking, planning Fromelles must have been even more difficult due to the last minute changes to the objectives set and the additional resources he was to be given. Arguably, it could only have been to the benefit of the final plan that he had had the opportunity to study over time the tactical problem as the last minute changes would have been much harder to effect without this detailed understanding of the problems of the battlefield. It was to the credit of his headquarters and planning staff that a new but comprehensive tactical plan still appeared in time to meet the original timing of the attack.

---

[41] Progress Report: XI Corps to First Army. XI Corps SS/849/s/15 of 5 June 1916. General Staff, First Army War. War Diary, June 1916, WO 995/164 TNA.
[42] Hand-written note, Haking to G.O.C. Second Army. No date, but based on correspondence sequence numbering likely to be about 20 June 1916. SS/849/5/28. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[43] Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay,* 177.

Although the written order setting out Haking's tactical plan, XI Corps Order No. 57, was not formally issued until 9.30 p.m. on 15 July (only 31 hours before the attack was originally scheduled to begin), he had discussed its contents and outline at a commanders' conference the previous day.[44] This four-page order, plus two small additional orders, XI Corps Order No. 58 and First Army No. G.S. 421, was the base upon which all the other tactical orders for Fromelles were built. Several critical supporting orders, such as the artillery fire-plan, were also developed but are not referred to in Order No. 57. While containing a mix of relevant information, it is interesting as much for what it did not include as for what it did. Order No. 57 had both strengths and weaknesses in its contents for the subordinate planners who had to use it. Its strengths included clarity with regard objectives and which formation was to do what. Its weaknesses were in the supporting information it neglected to provide, especially up-to-the-minute information on the enemy's situation and on the range of tactical options available to the attacking forces. Certainly, its brevity is a firm rebuttal of those critics who have complained about the British habit of producing voluminous, overly detailed and prescriptive orders.[45] Unfortunately because, in this instance, the plan involved inexperienced commanders, planning staffs and troops, arguably it should have contained much more advice and guidance. The Order comprised several parts.

Part One was a two-paragraph background to the attack, confirming that its purpose was a pinning action intended to prevent the enemy from stripping troops from the Lille sector and moving them south as reinforcements. While making clear the intent of the attack, this section failed to specify just how determinedly the action was to be pursued in support of this objective, and the Order contained no instructions in either this background section or in the later discussion of specific objectives as to the intensity of the attack to be mounted. It did not include any direction on how long the captured trenches should be held, although the wording of the instructions to both Divisions, "assault and capture the German front line … and will hold and consolidate", could be interpreted as implying that the enemy's line was to be held permanently. Given Haking's own concern with these very issues expressed to Monro, it can only be

---

[44] Those in attendance were: commander and chief of staff of XI Corps and of II ANZAC Corps, the commanders, GSOs I and commanders, Royal Artillery, of the 5th Australian, 31st, 39th and 61st Divisions.

[45] E.g. W. Kirke et al., *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War* (London: War Office, 1932) and Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 58.

assumed he was planning to develop this aspect of the attack as the action unfurled. Nonetheless, it was a surprising omission. The other possible explanation, that this was clarified by verbal briefings at a commanders' conference, is negated by the evidence of the course of the battle itself. The two divisional commanders interpreted the requirement regarding the intensity with which the attack was to be prosecuted quite differently.

The second part of Order No. 57 clearly identified which troops, either internal to First Army or externally sourced reinforcements, were under Haking's command for the attack. On paper, these reinforcements represented a major augmentation of XI Corps and perhaps support the contention discussed in Chapter Three that the attack was originally intended by the higher commands also to be more than a simple pining operation.[46] Given the state of the attack on the Somme, the augmentation Haking received was a surprising redirection of scarce combat resources to what was described merely as a supporting operation.

> 3. The following troops are placed at the disposal of G.O.C. XIth Corps:-
>
> (a) <u>From SECOND ARMY.</u>
> 5th Australian Division
> Div R.A. of 4th Australian Division
> 4 batteries of 6" howitzers
> 2 batteries of 9.2" howitzers
> 6 batteries of 60 pounder guns
> 2 x 12" howitzers on railway mountings
> 5 x 2" Trench Mortar batteries (inclusive of Div. R.A, of 4th and 5th Aust Divs.)
>
> (b) <u>From FIRST ARMY.</u>
> Div. R.A. of 8th Division
> 2 batteries of 60 pounder guns
> $1^1/_2$ batteries of 6" howitzers
> 7 x 2" Trench Mortar Batteries
> 1 x Heavy Trench Mortar Battery[47]

The additional artillery, plus most of the organic XI Corps heavy artillery, was allocated to the support of the two attacking divisions. The precise supporting arrangements were clarified in the third part of the order which, on 15 July, set down the dispositions of all the forces under command of XI Corps.

---

[46] It is also, perhaps, evidence of the way the influence of Haking's original concept had permeated up through the higher planning staffs.

[47] XIth Corps Order No. 57. 15 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

The third and longest section of the Order related to the objectives of the attack, the timings of both the infantry assault and the supporting artillery and some specific instructions regarding how the attack was to evolve. It set down some ruses to try and persuade the Germans to leave their shelters early and be caught by a renewed artillery barrage on the front trenches. These ruses required some coordination between the infantry and the artillery and added some additional complexity to the plan.

> Lifts.
> During the bombardment, there will be lifts to Barrage lines for the following periods:-
> From 4.25 till 4.29
> From 5.04 till 5.09
> From 5.29 till 5.36
> From 6.21 till 6.31
> During these lifts, the Infantry in the trenches will show their bayonets over the parapets: dummy heads and shoulders will be shewn over the parapet, officers will blow whistles and shout orders, in order to induce the enemy to man his parapets. At the end of these lifts, the artillery will shorten range on to the enemy's front parapet and continue the intense bombardment of the front and support lines.
> During the last phase of the intense bombardment the infantry will be deployed in No Man's Land as near as possible to the enemy's trenches, and will assault at 7.00 immediately the Artillery lift to barrage lines.[48]

The critical part of this section was, however, the identification of the objectives for the attacking infantry. Until this point, the objectives were identified only imprecisely as the enemy's front line between some general map references. Order No. 57 established them quite precisely as:

> 5. The German front line and support trenches will be captured and held by the 61st and the 5th Australian Divs. on the front opposite our trenches from the FAUIQUISSART-TRIVELET Road (M.24.b.8.8.) to South of CORDONNERIE FARM (N.10.c.8.7.)
>
> The assault will be carried out as follows:-
> 61st Division.
> To assault and capture the German front and support line from FAUQUISSART-TRIVELET Road (inc) to N.8.d.9$^{1}/_{2}$.1. where the River LAYES cuts the German front line, and will hold and consolidate the support line N.19.a.3.3. – N.14.c.2.2. – N.14.a.8.2. – N.14.b.8$^{1}/_{4}$.9$^{3}/_{4}$. where the support line crosses the R. LAYES.
> The Division will attack with 3 Brigades in line, each Brigade with 2 assaulting battalions, and each battalion on a front of assault of about 350 yards.

[48] XIth Corps Order No. 57. 15 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

> The remaining battalions of the Division will be kept in Reserve and will not be used for assaulting the position without orders from G.O.C. XI Corps.
> 5th Australian Division.
> To assault and capture the German front and support line from where the R. LAYES cuts the German front line, N.8.d.9$^1/_2$.1., to track running North and South past FME DELANGRE (N.10.c.9.6.) and will hold and consolidate the support line – N.14.b.8$^1/_2$.9$^3/_4$. where it crosses the R. LAYES – N.14.b.8$^1/_2$.9. – N.15.a.7$^1/_2$.8. – N.15.b.5.9. – N.10.c.8.3$^1/_2$.
> The Division will attack with 3 Brigades in line, each Brigade with 2 assaulting battalions, and each battalion on a front of assault of about 300 yards.
> The remaining battalions of the Division will be kept in Reserve and will not be used for assaulting the position without orders from G.O.C. XI Corps.

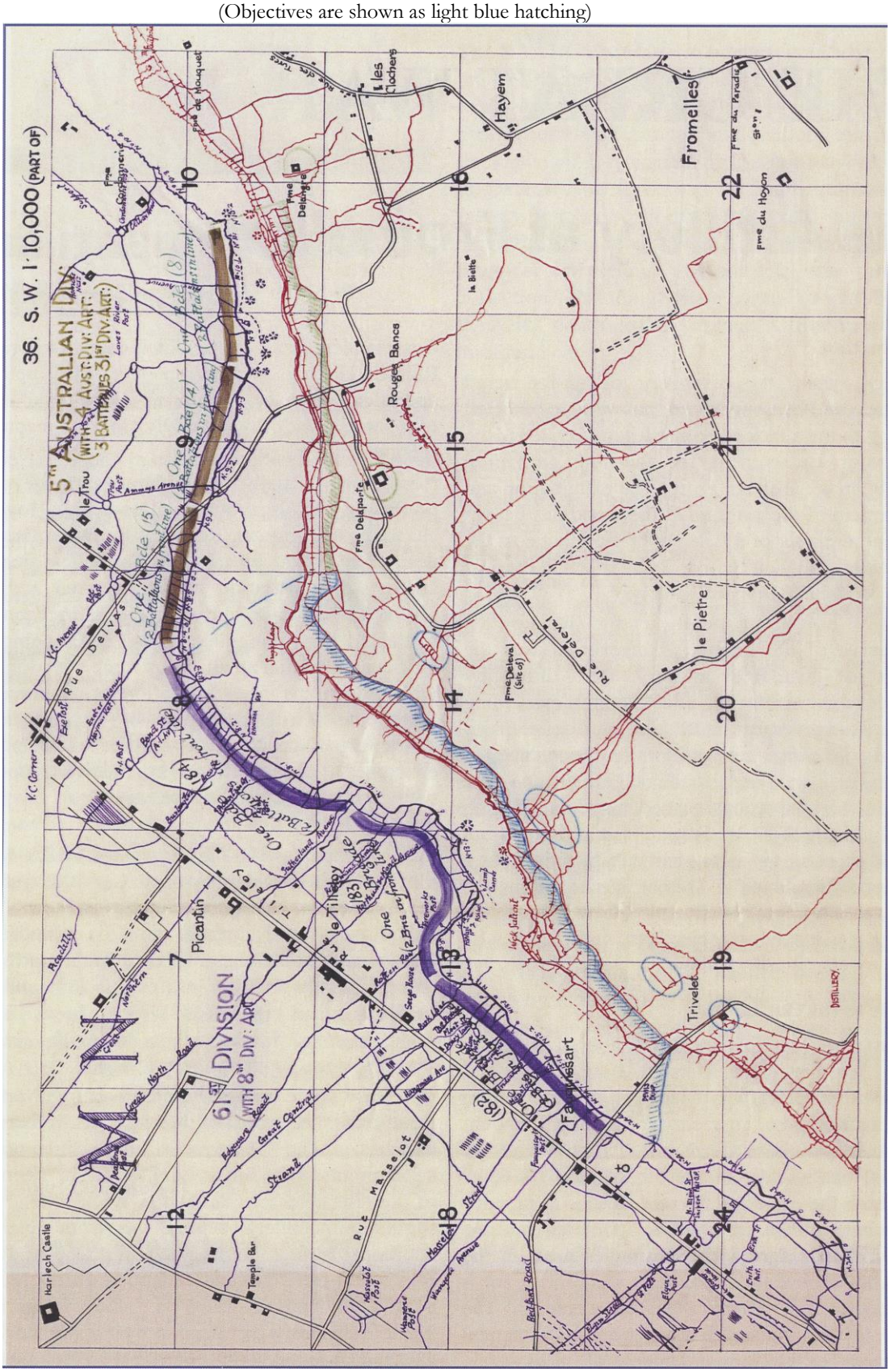
See map 10 for the representation of these objectives. Haking clearly harboured some concerns over the tactical competence of the Australian Division for, even with the reported shortcomings of the 61st Division well known to him and acknowledging the different tactical circumstances of differing widths of No Man's Land, each of the 61st's assaulting Battalions was given an additional 50 yards of frontage to cover in the attack compared with that of their Australian equivalents.

The fourth section of Order No. 57 was, in the context of the technological developments of 1916, surprising in that it was a comparatively lengthy description of the aviation support available for the attack and how it was to be employed. In terms of aircraft availability generally, and considering priority went to the demands of the Somme campaign, XI Corps was well-supported by the Royal Flying Corps during this action. Two squadrons, No. 10 from 1st Brigade RFC and No. 16 from 2nd Brigade, with a total of 24 aircraft, were available for tactical reconnaissance, artillery observation, liaison, photography and local air control. In addition, an offensive patrol line by fighters of 10th Wing RFC, to prevent enemy aircraft operating over the battlefield, was to be established on the line ILLIES-BEAUCHAMPS to operate from dawn until dusk throughout the operation.

Some specialised air assets were also given specific orders by XI Corps in Order No. 57. No. 10 Kite Balloon Section (at R.21.c on Map 36A, 1:40,000) was to provide additional artillery spotting. An aircraft with a full plate camera, still a comparative rarity at this stage in the War, and its associated RFC Photographic Interpretation Section,

Objectives of the Attack

(Objectives are shown as light blue hatching)



(map 10)

(From XI Corps War Diary)

was to be stationed at XI Corps Headquarters for the duration of the operation. In partial acknowledgement of the anticipated problems of communications during the battle, Order No. 57 also included instructions for the location and use of wireless sets to work with the spotting aircraft. Both divisional headquarters and XI Corps Advanced Headquarters had wireless reporting centres attached.

Following the example of the tactical orders for the Somme, Order No. 57 was very light on logistics matters. The last section of only two brief paragraphs covered matters such as prisoner-of-war management, medical evacuation, road control, billeting and supply, 'and other administrative arrangements for 61st and 5th Australian Divisions will continue to be carried out by XIth Corps and IInd Anzac Corps respectively'.[49] As noted, there was no reference to either the artillery plan or to communication methods between infantry and the guns. Haking's own artillery planner, his Brigadier General Royal Artillery (B.G.R.A.), was not mentioned nor his responsibilities defined.

Before examining the shortcomings of Order No. 57, the contribution of the two supporting orders, XI Corps Order No. 58 and First Army Instruction No. G.S. 421, need to be addressed. Order No. 58, with No. 57 as the referenced background, provided some additional clarification. This order set the time for the attack to commence at 4.00 a.m. It also set out the timings for the artillery support from the unengaged divisions of XI Corps to coincide with that of the overall artillery fire plan. There were some minor corrections to the objectives for the 61st Division and to the location of the 5th Division headquarters. The only major new instructions were the orders to the assaulting divisions to carry Stokes mortars forward to the captured positions as soon as possible to deal with strong points behind the objective line and to the unengaged divisions of XI Corps to mount raids on the enemy's trenches on the night of 17-18 July. The First Army Instruction was to the commander of I Corps, on the right hand front of First Army, and ordered him to conduct bombardments of the enemy's front line "in order to mislead the enemy as to the real point of attack".[50] There

[49] XIth Corps Order No. 57. 15 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[50] First Army No. G.S. 421 of 15 July 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

was little in either Order No. 58 or the First Army Instruction to assist the lower level tactical planners refine or improve their own plans.

While Haking was to be praised for keeping his tactical orders short, there were a number of issues that, arguably, he should have addressed, especially in view of the acknowledged inexperience of half his attacking force: the 5th Australian Division.[51] There was little guidance in his formal order to the two Infantry commanders about the tactics he expected them to employ in achieving their objectives. As noted previously, Haig had not felt constrained from offering tactical advice to Rawlinson for the Somme operation nor had Rawlinson remained aloof from the tactical debate with his own subordinates. To some extent, Haking was exhibiting the same reluctance to interfere in a subordinate's responsibilities that had earned Sir Ian Hamilton, the Commander of the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, much criticism. While such interference is now, and was even by then, not considered desirable, it was arguably defensible when the combat forces at Haking's disposal were so inexperienced in the ways of warfare on the Western Front.

Surprisingly for a Commander who had made his pre-war reputation on training troops in tactics, Haking offered no advice on the tactics each assaulting battalion should employ. The lessons coming out of the Somme were providing a number of sound principles for assaulting infantry, particularly working in conjunction with the artillery barrage and for dealing with enemy strong points and deep bunkers, yet Haking made no reference to them in his orders. There were even lessons available from the experiences of First Army itself. A report on an infantry raid by troops of IV Corps on the night of 2/3 June 1916 provided an example.

> The success of this raid was due to the effective co-operation of artillery, trench mortars and infantry, and to the fact that owing to there being no apparent 'lift' on the part of our artillery, and to our raiding party having advanced so quickly, a complete surprise was effected. (The Stokes mortars continued to fire five rounds rapid after the artillery lifted from the front trench and concealed the artillery lift.)[52]

---

[51] The only offsetting factor was the fact that the 5th Australian Division's two main staff planners, the GSOI Lieutenant Colonel C.M. Wagstaff, and the GSOII, Major D.M. King, were both staff college graduates and so, theoretically, should have been well-versed in battle planning.

[52] After Action report by 68th Infantry Brigade to G.O.C. IV Corps on infantry raid on 2/3 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

In particular, Haking should have provided the inexperienced Australians with some guidance on the tactical developments arising from experience on the Somme and from raids his own troops had conducted. This hard-won experience was centrally relevant to the primary tactical problem of Fromelles – how infantry could cross a heavily defended, well-wired No Man's Land and still succeed in assaulting the enemy's trenches. Tactics on the Western Front were evolving rapidly as a result of the experiences already gained: indeed Haking himself alluded to the problems of getting all the available guidance to new troops in time to help them improve their tactics. Yet, apart from some discussion of the use of artillery, Haking provided no advice in this Order for the guidance of either the G.O.C. of 61st Division, Major General Sir Charles Mackenzie, or Major General McCay, commander of the 5th Australian Division.

Another surprising omission was the absence of any reference to ways to deal with enemy barbed-wire defences. Given Haking's own enthusiasm for trench mortars, especially the 2-inch with the new Newton fuse, lack of any reference to the utility of this weapon for wire cutting was unfortunate.[53] Similarly, Haking did not draw to the attention of his Australian commander another wire-cutting weapon with which he (Haking) had had much recent experience. Haking clearly knew about and previously had used Bangalore torpedos. He specifically mentions them in a report to First Army about preparations being discussed in early June for the diversionary actions to support the Somme.

> Q.7. Means to be adopted to cut enemy wire.
>
> A. Mostly trench mortars, also by Bangalore torpedos, by hand and by artillery.[54]

An XI Corps weekly Summary of Operations for week 13 -20 July 1916 included the comment:

> In the FERME DU BOIS sector.
>
> … In spite of the wire not being cut, owing to the failure of a Bangalore torpedo to explode, and the difficulty of locating the gap, portion of the raiding party succeeded in entering the enemy's trenches.[55]

---

[53] Although he may have avoided mentioning them as he was well aware of the lack of such weapons in the Australian Division.
[54] Reply, Haking to First Army regarding preparations for diversionary actions. SS/849/s/16 dated 8 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[55] XI Corps Summary of Operations for the week 13 – 20 July 1916. RHS 691/28. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

Bangalore torpedos, although somewhat unreliable and awkward to use, still offered the infantry a much quicker and more effective means of blowing a path through uncut wire than cutting by hand once the attack was under way. Haking's failure to emphasise these alternative weapons to the inexperienced Australian commander was a distinct failing on his part.

Another surprising omission was the absence of any consideration of the use of smoke for concealment or of gas. Haking clearly knew about and had used smoke previously.[56] He specifically mentioned it in a report to First Army about preparations being discussed in early June for the diversionary actions to support the Somme.

> Q.9. How smoke is to be used and where.
>
> A. The smoke will be used on a wide front as explained in the original report, with the main object of disrupting the effect of hostile artillery fire and the general hostile defensive arrangements.

Similarly, he knew about gas. Gas was deployed in both Divisions' tactical areas but, apart from causing casualties among the attacking infantry when enemy artillery burst several cylinders, it was not employed in the attack and there was no reference to its possible use in Order No. 57. This was not for any lack of earlier consideration, as revealed by discussions at the Commanders' Conference held on 22 June demonstrated.

> Gas.
>
> The G.O.C. then dealt with the question of the use of gas and smoke and the possibility of damage to our own troops connected therewith. He enquired who was the authority responsible for deciding whether gas should or should not be discharged.
>
> The O.C. Special Battalion said that the O.C. the Special Company would decide. He would be at Brigade Headquarters, in telephonic touch with his section officers in the trenches, who were carefully trained. From his own observations and the reports from the trenches, he would be in a position to say whether the conditions for discharging the gas were favourable, and he would give the order.
>
> The G.O.C. remarked that the question of bends in our line would have to be taken into consideration, and asked whether the Company Officers had taken that into account.
>
> The O.C. Special Battalion said that that would be watched.
>
> The G.O.C. said that it was necessary that early information should be got back to the higher Commanders as their plans would be affected by the non-liberation of the gas. He also drew attention to the necessity of flank Corps Commanders knowing whether Corps Commanders on the flanks were doing anything in the way of gas attacks so that our men would not be caught unawares by gas blown onto their trenches.

---

[56] Smoke had already been extensively used, including for limited attacks. Edwin Astill, *The War Diaries of Brigadier General Alexander Johnston 1914-1917* (Barnsley: Pen & sword Books, 2007), 136.

> The G.O.C. IV Corps remarked that care would have to be taken in warning flank formations that the gas was to go off, otherwise the enemy would get to know.
>
> The O.C. Special Battalion produced a code which had been formulated to meet such a contingency.
>
> The G.O.C. then read a letter received from G.H.Q. regarding the use of White Star Gas.[57]

Additionally, the June note of Haking's to Second Army (copied to First Army) SS/849/5/28 mentioned both smoke and gas.

> 4. Gas cylinders have already been installed in our front line trenches from the FAUQISSART Road (M.24.6.8.8.) to about N.8.c.7.5. for use in connection with this attack, and arrangements have been made for the use of smoke on a wide front on the right flank of the attack, from the FAUQUISSART Road to about RICHEBOURG L'AVOUE, along which front the wind suitable for the gas (NW) will also carry the smoke across the enemy's trenches opposite. It will also assist matters if smoke could be arranged along the front of the Second Army for a distance of a few thousand yards from my left flank, with a few gas cylinders here and there to deceive the enemy.[58]

Haking clearly had given much thought to the use of gas and smoke during June when preparing both his deception options and his big attack.

> 4. As regards GAS – exact details are difficult to furnish, until I have had the advantage of consulting the O.C. Gas Battalion, who is to visit my Corps this week, but I can use it best in the GIVENCHY and CUINCHY fronts, where the enemy's trenches and dugouts are close and where they are always strongly held.
>
> Gas on the Islands front could not well be put in, and would not be very effective because this line is lightly held by the Germans.
>
> North of RICHEBOURG L'AVOUE the general tendency of the most suitable wind would be N.W., and winds North of westerly do not seem likely to be prevalent, according to the notes forwarded with your instruction.
>
> I should prefer the slow, wearing down process, and should require, as a rough estimate, on a front of about 2,000 yards in the GIVENCHY and CUINCHY sectors about:
>
> 800 cylinders - Red Star or Two Red Star
>
> 500 cylinders – White Star.
>
> I could probably employ on the remainder of the Corps front about another:
>
> 200 cylinders – Res Star or Two Red Star
>
> 200 cylinders – White Star
>
> Making a total of
>
> 1000 cylinders of Red Star Two Red Star, and
>
> 700 cylinders of White Star.
>
> But this can only be regarded as a very rough approximation.
>
> For the above estimate, I shall require at least one company, or more probably $1^1/_2$ companies, from the Gas Battalion.

---

[57] Notes on Conference held by G.O.C. First Army, at Chateau Jumelle on Thursday, 22nd June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

[58] Hand written note, Haking to G.O.C. Second Army. No date, but based on correspondence sequence numbering likely to be about 20 June 1916. SS/849/5/28. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

> 5. For smoke demonstrations to be effective, they must be employed on a very wide front, although I could also employ them in connection with raids and in conjunction with gas. I estimate therefore that I shall require about:
> 15,000 – P hand grenades
> 20,000 – smoke candles.[59]

XIth Corps had already attacked Wick Salient with gas on night of 15-16 July 1916.

> In the FAUQUISSART Section.
>
> We successfully discharged gas on the right battalion front at 8.30 p.m. The gas cloud passed over WICK SALIENT (N.13.d.1.5.)[60]

Yet despite all this thought and prior experience, and despite the specific indication both were to be used to support the attack, Order No. 57 remained silent on the employment of either weapon. In particular, the failure to plan for the use of smoke, especially as the delayed start of the attack meant moving in daylight, was to have severe consequences for the attacking troops. There is no evidence either to suggest their use was discussed at the Commanders' Conference of the morning of 16 July and the administrative exchanges concerning artillery ammunition and trench stores do not mention smoke shells or smoke candles. Gas cylinders were already in place but the plans for their employment clearly did not involve the divisional commanders or their staffs.

Haking was also surprisingly reticent about his concerns with communications on the battlefield. Communications problems were well understood in First Army. A report on a major raid on the enemy's trenches by 2nd (British) Division – specifically 6th Infantry Brigade – highlighted this very well.

> Communication was very difficult. One wire held out till just at zero hour when it, too, gave out. The wireless did not work and runners could not get through the barrage in the valley. The 1st message was sent by lamp signal. Runners began to get through from midnight onwards.[61]

Being aware of this, it is surprising that Haking did not emphasise the need for all levels of subordinate command to establish multiple communications means back to their

---

[59] Report, Haking to First Army regarding preparations for diversionary actions. SS/849/s/15 dated 5 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[60] XI Corps Summary of Operations for the week 13 – 20 July 1916. RHS 691/28. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[61] Report on an attempt to seize MOMBER CRATER. G.O.C. 6th Infantry Brigade to HQ 2nd Division. 6th Inf. Bde. No. M.224 of 2 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

next highest headquarters. Certainly, he should have addressed the difficult relationship between extensive, multiple communications links and battlefield security. Communications security was becoming a well-understood problem at the higher command levels but positive reinforcement of the risk at more junior levels was needed. A post-action report of 2nd British Division was illuminating of the extent of the problem:

> Every possible precaution was taken against the enemy listening to our telephones: all our lines were metallic. All the orders were written and despatched by an officer of the Divisional Staff, and not typed. The same procedure was carried out in the Brigades and Royal Artillery.[62]

Haking also should have included references to the importance of working with the numerous aircraft XI Corps had available, to offset some of the land-based communication problems. Haking was aware of the difficulties of troops cooperating with aircraft but equally, he understood the value of this comparatively new means of battlefield command and control.

> The G.O.C. (First Army) also referred to some instructions which had been issued regarding communications between aeroplanes and infantry, and the G.O.C. XI Corps pointed out that there would be no difficulty about doing it when troops were out of the line, but it was not possible to train troops in this respect who are actually in the front line.[63]

As the battle was to demonstrate, failure of communications was one of the main factors in the high casualty count. Haking understood the need for robust communications during the course of the battle, as did every senior British commander with any experience of the 1915 battles, so it remains a mystery as to why he failed to stress the importance of communications in his tactical orders.

However, there were two more serious omissions from Order No. 57. The first was any detailed instructions on how the infantry and artillery were to work together. This may have been because the artillery situation confronting the commander of XI Corps was not ideal. Since June, his artillery resources had been in a constant state of flux.

> The Staff Officer to the M.G.R.A., First Army, explained to Corps Commanders how it was proposed to distribute the heavy artillery which would remain with the First Army after the remainder of the earmarked

---

[62] Memo, G.O.C. 2 Division to G.O.C. IVth Corps, 20 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[63] Minutes of conference of Corps Commanders held by the G.O.C. First Army, at Chateau Jumelle on Thursday, 8th June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

> guns had been taken away. Corps Commanders were asked to inform First Army in the event of their changing any of the positions of the heavy guns.[64]

While there was much discussion at the highest levels of command about the best way to employ artillery and the need for close cooperation between artillery and trench mortars, it is not clear that these discussions filtered down to the tactical commanders. There was also recognition that the most effective use of mortars, especially the larger types, was being affected by a lack of exposure of the infantry to the weapons and a lack of skilled mortar crews.

> The G.O.C. XI Corps pointed out that it would be a very good thing if each Corps could have one or two of the heavy trench mortars allotted to them at an early date in order that men might be trained to use them and to make the necessary emplacements to put them in. The G.O.C. First Army said that G.H.Q. would be asked to provide two 240mm mortars per Corps if possible. The G.O.C. XI Corps asked if any reserve of Trench Mortars to replace those knocked out was kept at Army Headquarters. General Haking was informed that no reserve of 2" or 3" Stokes Mortars was kept at Army Headquarters. The D.A. & Q.M.G. was unable to say whether there were plenty of these on the Lines of Communication but he thought not. Enquiries were to be made as to what supply of mortars was available for the purposes of replacing casualties.[65]

A Commanders' conference in late June was still debating minor tactics for the field artillery.

> The G.O.C opened the conference by reading the G.H.Q letter directing that, during the forthcoming operations, barrages from 18-pounders are to be placed on well-defined hostile salients, with a view to preventing relief or rationing of the troops occupying them.[66]

In addition, there were still problems with the ammunition available to the guns. A Corps Conference in June 1916 noted that:

> the question of the propellant being used with the 4.5" Howitzer ammunition was also being discussed and it was pointed out that the IV Corps was now carrying out tests with this propellant. The result of the tests would be forwarded to G.H.Q.

Nonetheless, close cooperation between infantry and artillery was the key to success for any battle in 1916 and Haking well knew it. Despite all these issues, Haking had, as shown earlier, comparatively strong artillery assets to support his attack.

---

[64] Ibid.
[65] Minutes of conference of Corps Commanders held by the G.O.C. First Army, at Chateau Jumelle on Thursday, 8th June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.
[66] Notes on Conference held by G.O.C. First Army, at Chateau Jumelle on Thursday, 22nd June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO95/164 TNA.

Coordinated effectively, they should have been able to suppress the enemy sufficiently to enable his limited attack to succeed. Whether the omission of specific artillery-infantry cooperation for his Order 57 was due to the constantly changing situation with his artillery or whether it was because the artillery plan was being developed separately from the overall plan is unclear but the effect was his infantry commanders were left to plan the infantry part of the battle without any clear idea of how the artillery was to work with them. Why his Order 57 did not contain, as a minimum, the same type of direction that Rawlinson had used in his 14 July orders to his commanders to ensure the infantry stayed close to the barrage is unknown. It is likely that this tactical necessity would have been strongly emphasised to his Divisional commanders during his final Commanders' Conference before the battle began, but it should have been included in the original order to ensure all members of the planning staff on both Divisions understood the tactical requirement.

The second serious omission was any information about the enemy, his defences or any similar tactically important information. Haking had a good understanding of the ground. The commander of the 61st Division also had a good grasp of the ground and the nature of the enemy as he had been in the area for several months. The Australians had no knowledge or experience of the battlefield terrain, the enemy or the tactical problems. Haking should have provided some details to assist his junior planners, in the same way the higher headquarters of the Somme attack provided as much tactical information as they could to their subordinate headquarters. Haking knew a good deal about the tactical situation on his front. He knew of, but did not mention, the excellent cover provided the enemy by his strong shelters. The strength of German defensive features was often commented upon in post-raid reports; for example an after action report dated 20 June 1916 by the G.O.C. 2nd (British) Division to the G.O.C. IV Corps and copied to First Army stated:

> To my mind the Germans were able to withstand our bombardment owing to the excellence of their overhead cover.[67]

Similarly, Haking knew of but did not alert his commanders to the problems with different German defensive wire patterns. A Report of an infantry raid by 114th Infantry Brigade, part of 38th Division of XI Corps, on night of 4/5 June in the

[67] Memo, G.O.C. 2 Division to G.O.C. IVth Corps, 20 June 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.

FAUQUISSART section, reported the presence of a large amount of strong enemy wire hidden by the long grass which was not affected by trench mortar bombardment.[68] A report of an infantry raid by 14th Royal Welsh Fusiliers on night of 4/5 June on enemy trenches at M.30.a.4$^{1}/_{2}$.1. reported on the state of the enemy trenches.

> A dummy trench was found to be immediately in front of the enemy's fire trench. This was unoccupied by the enemy. The German trench was reported to be in excellent condition, with a fire step, about 7' deep and about 2' wide, with trench boards. It was apparently commanded to a certain extent by the support trench which was close in the rear.[69]

Haking was also well aware of specific defensive structures in the enemy trenches that had the potential to be a serious obstacle to attacking troops, yet he provided neither warning nor possible solutions.

> The GOC then read an extract from a report by the GOC XI Corps on a new departure in trench construction as discovered in a raid on a hostile line. About 40 yards apart, blocks composed of sandbags and revetted with wood have been installed in the enemy's line, and communication from one of these "enclosures" to the other was by means of dugouts. This was an important discovery as it laid portions of our troops engaged in a raid open to the risk of being cut off from each other. When engaged on such an enterprise careful watch would have to be kept on all entrances to dugouts.[70]

These omissions are even more inexplicable when the period of time available to the subordinate planners to develop their tactical plans was so short. While the Commanders' Conference held on 14 July did discuss in general the plan of attack and did settle some of the coordination issues between the 61st and the 5th Australian Divisions, the list of attendees and the time available was hardly sufficient to cover the major points. The conference itself appears to have been relatively short.[71] The commander of the 61st Division had the experience of several months in the front line and of some recent trench raids to draw upon to provide the essential details to draft his orders but the commander of the Australian division lacked this source of information. There does not appear to have been sufficient time for him to discuss in detail the overall tactical situation with Haking, and there is no evidence, apart from the 14 July conference, to suggest he did. Therefore, McCay was at a disadvantage from the moment he began planning his division's attack.

---

[68] Post action Report: Infantry Raid, Night 4th/5th June. [No further description.] General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Summary of proceedings of Conference of Corps Commanders held by G.O.C. First Army at Chateau Jumelle at 11 a.m. on 22 June, 1916. General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[71] Report on Operations to HQ XIth Corps, G 6/229, 25 July 1916. General Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 3 AWM4.

As indicated, the key element in Haking's tactical concept was the provision of adequate artillery support to the assaulting infantry.

> To ensure the success of the infantry assault it is imperative to gain superiority of artillery and infantry fire. Superiority of artillery fire can only be gained by compelling the enemy to move his guns to some place out of reach the battleground; this will be accomplished partly by the successful action of our forces in the great battle to the South and partly by the action I propose to adopt on my own front. Superiority of infantry machine-gun fire can only be gained by killing and demoralising the men behind the machine guns and infantry garrison of the front trenches.[72]

Preparation of the artillery plan began at a conference of Artillery Group commanders during the morning of 14 July, at about the time the senior infantry commanders were being issued Haking's tactical order. The artillery commanders ordered an immediate reconnaissance of the area of the attack while additional orders covering movement to new positions issued. All officers and NCOs at schools were recalled to their units.[73] Unfortunately, there seemed little coordination between this specialist group and the infantry who were to rely on the plan they devised. Haking's Order simply did not contain enough detail to provide any tactical link between the two groups. This was particularly the case given the new artillery brought in to support this attack. In addition to the division from Second Army, complete with its artillery, Haking also requested ten extra brigades of field artillery and some additional heavy artillery. In view of his recognition of the importance of artillery, it is surprising that Haking's tactical plan does not make more detailed mention of how he intended to employ it supporting the attack. Instead, the artillery fire-plan received little prominence in either his tactical plan or in his post-action report and it is clear that, as with the infantry tactical plan, he left the detail of the artillery program to his specialists and the infantry divisional commanders.

XI Corps Order No. 57 did outline in general terms the artillery's role:

> (14th, 15th and) 16th July.
> Wire cutting by artillery and trench mortars along the whole Corps front; and to the south by batteries of I Corps and to the north by batteries of IInd Anzac Corps.
> 16th July.

---

[72] Letter, Haking to First Army. SS/1205.1, 9 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.
[73] Headquarters, 5th Australian Divisional Artillery. July 1916. Artillery Staff, War Diary, July 1916, 13/14/6 AWM4.

Bombardment of the GIVENCHY and CUINCHY fronts by artillery of XIth Corps and I Corps with a view to inducing the enemy to move guns opposite that front.
Slow registration and bombardment by Heavy Artillery (9.2 inch and upwards) on the front of the attack.
17th July.
Early in the morning the GIVENCHY and CUINCHY fronts will again be bombarded by artillery and trench mortars; and the following programme will be carried out on the front of the attack.

From	To.	
0.00	0.30	Registration by Divisional Artilleries and Trench Mortars
0.30	2.00	Registration and bombardment by Heavy Artillery (9.2 inch howitzers and upwards). Registration only by 6 inch Howitzers will be included in this period.
2.00	4.00	Wire cutting by 18 pounders.
4.00	7.00	Wire cutting by 18 pounders continued. Wire cutting by Trench Mortar Batteries. Bombardment by 18 pounders, 4.5 inch howitzers and 6 inch howitzers.
5.00	7.00	Heavy Artillery (9.2 inch howitzers and upwards) slow bombardment.
7.00		Artillery . Lift to barrage lines.

The lift sequence was indicated previously.[74] Considering the number of guns he had available and the scale of the tasks, this direction was of limited use to the gunners in determining target priorities and limited use to the infantry as there was no indication of any flexibility in the artillery support. Equally, the terminology was vague: slow bombardment was a rate understood by his gunners but it would have required some mental agility for McCay to fully absorb the detail and both include it in his plans and explain what it meant in terms of rate of fire, protection and destructive potential to his planners and troops.

Apart from barrels, the second factor in artillery support was the availability of ammunition. In this regard, Haking was well served by GHQ and First Army, as the following table indicates:

Table Four
Available Ammunition

Calibre	No. of rounds	Calibre	No. of rounds
18-pounder	200,000	9.2-inch howitzer	1,000
4.5-inch howitzer	15,000	12-inch howitzer	210
6-inch howitzer	1,500	6-inch Quick Firing (QF) gun	180
60-pounder	1,100	9.2-inch gun	30

[74] See page 186.

Given the frontages involved and the amount of ammunition available, each Division had approximately one 18-pounder field gun for every 20 yards of trench to be attacked and one 4.5-inch or 6-inch howitzer for every 60 yards. This coverage compared well with the Somme in terms of barrel-to-trench length, although it was negated somewhat by the three lines of German trench to engage and from the fact that most of the artillery was firing at and across, rather than down the line of, the enemy trenches which called for much more accurate shooting than most of his inexperienced artillery was capable of at that stage.[75] Similarly, the ammunition stocks, while apparently generous, had to sustain a five-hour barrage for wire cutting, a three-hour pre-attack bombardment and four hours of protective barrage firing. There was little uncommitted ammunition remaining to allow for a rapid increase in intensity of fire to compensate for any failures in the planned artillery program.[76]

The use of artillery as set out in Order No. 57 constituted one of the rare examples of Haking not being fully aware of the developments on the Somme. Haking's focus for his artillery was on destruction, not neutralisation of the enemy. In his Order of the Day to all the assault troops on 16 July, he observed:

> Finally, when we have cut all the wire, destroyed all the enemy's machine-gun emplacements, knocked down most of the parapets, and killed a large proportion of the enemy and thoroughly frightened the remainder, our infantry will assault and capture the front and support lines...[77]

While the rolling barrage was still at an early stage, the Fromelles battlefield was the ideal location for its employment, given its proven effectiveness in suppressing enemy machine-guns and front line defenders. There are no indications in the reports as to why this type of new artillery tactic was tried but possibly neither Haking nor his artillery commander considered his gunners possessed the necessary skills.

Haking's tactical plan for the battle of Fromelles was a curious mixture of information and direction. It was clear from the discussions he had had prior to the

---

[75] 'The probability of a properly registered hitting a target the thickness of a breastwork, trench and island traverse combined, say 30 feet in all, was approximately 27% for the 18pr and 24% for the 4.5in how.' J.P. Stevens, *Artillery Support for the Fifth Australian Division in the Attack at Fromelles, July 1916* (Canberra: Unpublished paper, 2010), 7.
[76]Ibid.
[77] Haking Order to the Troops. XI Corps RHS 1146, 16 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

preparation of his plans that he did possess a well-developed understanding of the problems of a tactical action against Aubers Ridge. The extended period he had had to plan for different types of attacks clearly benefitted him in terms of the speed of production of an achievable plan. He had the advantage of direct experience through raids and minor attacks on the enemy's defences which had identified the tactical problems of the ground.

The conundrum is, therefore, why did so little of this experience and understanding appear in his Order for the battle? While his briefings of his commanders in Corps Conferences would have provided some opportunity to impart some advice on the specific problems of fighting in this area, there is little evidence in the orders his subordinates produced to suggest this occurred. Did Haking expect too much of his senior subordinates? It could be argued that Mackenzie of the 61st Division could have resisted too much direction from Haking, given his recent experiences, but McCay had had no such exposure to battle conditions. Irrespective of Haking's commitment to the still-extant British principle that the commander issued his order and let his subordinate get on with its implementation, he should still have provided better guidance on tactics and coordination. This was the principal responsibility of the senior tactical commander and in this instance, Haking appeared guilty of an error of judgment.

The other question raised by Haking's tactical order was the extent to which he was still in two minds about the final objective of the attack. Although his order, and the order from his superior, stressed that the final objective was the enemy's front–line trenches only, his orders lacked the essential detail necessary to enable his subordinate commanders to make their plans. As noted, the lack of direction on the importance of capturing, as opposed to threatening to capture, left his subordinate commanders in the same uncertainty as he himself faced. By failing to make this clear, he left the way open for the inexperienced commander, McCay, to press his division on in a series of attacks that cost lives but ultimately had little effect upon the enemy.

Haking's planning of Fromelles suggested that battle planning was still an evolving art. He did provide clear direction on what was to be done, by whom and when. He failed to 'value-add' to the process by providing advice that might have made the planning challenges of his subordinates less complex. It is arguable that his plan

would have had an entirely different outcome in 1918, when it would have been implemented by experienced commanders, planners and troops who would not have needed the kind of advice Haking neglected to include on this occasion, as they would have had their own battlefield experiences to draw upon. Perhaps then, the fairest criticism to be directed at Haking was that he failed to understand the limitations of the weapon he was given to implement his orders.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DIVISION PLANS THE ATTACK

> The Great War imposed two particular constraints on Commanders. First, battle plans and tactics were almost invariably dictated at Corps or higher levels, so divisional commanders were rarely able to develop and implement their own battle plans and brigade commanders virtually never.[1]

The above quotation from Peter Sadler's biography of General Sir John Gellibrand represents the standard current perception of the role of the operational and grand tactical command level in the planning process. However, even a cursory examination of the evidence available suggests this observation was predicated upon a flawed understanding of what battle planning was. This misunderstanding, a view of the process that has persisted for almost 100 years, has created an entirely false picture of the role and responsibility in battle planning of the lowest levels of tactical command. Even with the example of Fromelles itself, which was not a major attack, the evidence suggests that the direct opposite of the Sadler conclusion is a more accurate representation of the role of the junior command level.

While it cannot be denied that the operational level command, First Army and XI Corps, did make the final decision both in relation to commencing the attack and its timing, it is equally clear the divisional and brigade planners did much more than merely copy and re-transmit the orders of their superior headquarters.[2] To them went the responsibility of deciding how to attack (i.e. the tactics to be employed), the approach lines to be followed by the assault troops, the methods of support from organic forces such as machine guns and mortars, which particular battalions would conduct the attack, and finally, whether to call off the attack if it failed. Due to the enduring perception as expressed by Sadler and others, however, the direct involvement by divisional and brigade commanders in drafting the final plan for Fromelles has largely been overlooked in subsequent assessments of the command and planning performance.

---

[1] Peter Sadler, *The Paladin. A Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84.

[2] 'It (the Division) was where operations and tactics met.' J.M. Bourne, 'Major General W.C.G Heneker, A Divisional Commander in the Great War' in Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann (Eds), *Leadership in Conflict 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), 54.

As shown previously, the operational level planners and commanders had had a significant amount of time to ponder the tactical issues involved in an attack against Fromelles. This was not the situation for the divisional planning and command group. The first indication the Australian 5th Divisional command team had that they were to plan and implement an attack on 17 July 1916 arose when the Divisional Commander was called to a meeting at headquarters II Anzac at 11.00 p.m. on 13 July. At this gathering, he was 'informed that 5th Australian Division would [shortly] be employed in an offensive operation under the GOC XI Corps'.[3] What followed this warning order was a brief but intensive period of planning and preparation, summarised in the following table.

SEQUENCE AND TIMING: ORDERS RECEIVED/ISSUED BY 5th AUSTRALIAN DIVISION

Date	Time	Place	Actions/Orders	Comments
13 July	11.00 p.m.[4]	La Motte	Headquarters II Anzac Corps. Warning Order re forthcoming battle. Preliminary orders regarding objectives and overview of the plan. Attack scheduled for 17 July.	
14 July	7.00 a.m.	Sailly	Div. Order No. 28 issued to Brigades to be prepared to withdraw from current positions (in frontline) and to commence 'reconnaissances' of fronts provisionally allotted to them.	
	9.45 a.m.	Hinges	XI Corps Conference. 'At this Conference, the *probable* programme of attack was given out.'[5] (Note, however, that it was the first time that a reduced two-division attack was mentioned. Caused a change to the fronts allotted.)	Only 5th Australian Division commander and GSOI present.
	6.30 p.m.	Sailly	Div. Order No. 29. Following an afternoon commanders' conference at HQ 5th Aust Div., movement order issued to concentrate attacking units in their designated areas.	No mention of objectives or any tactics/formations to be adopted.
15 July	12 noon	Sailly	Div. Order 30 issued. Broad direction only. Order stated 'Separate instructions are being issued to Brigadiers regarding the dispersal and forming-up of their Brigades.	One major error, relating to a map reference boundary for 8 Brigade. It was corrected at 10.45 the next morning.

[3] G 6/229. General Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 3 Australian War Memorial (hereafter AWM) 4.
[4] The 5th Australian Division War Diary noted on 15 July that the Division had to adjust to using a.m. and p.m. in denoting time. It observed that, on Gallipoli and up to this date, they had been using the French system (of the 24 hour clock). General Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 1 AWM4.
[5] General Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 3 AWM4. [emphasis added]

16 July	12.30 p.m.	Sailly	Order No. 31, the main Divisional Order covering the attack, was released. This two-page Order provided details on reasons for the attack, objectives, and troops assigned. It briefly mentioned artillery support and prescribed some basic infantry tactics to be employed, including forming up in No Man's Land during the barrage. The Divisional War Diary noted, optimistically, 'final details of attack fixed up'.	Again mentioned separate instructions to the Brigadiers concerning the conduct of the attack. Annexes included artillery program summary, basic logistics instructions and medical arrangements. The separate instructions did contain significant advice/suggestions as to the tactical methods with which to conduct the attack.
	6.00 p.m.	Sailly	Order 32 issued. In effect, it was Appendix C to Order 31, and changed some of the administrative arrangements.	
	8.00 p.m.	Sailly	Order 33 issued, advising Zero hour would be 4.00 a.m., unless subsequent orders to the contrary were issued. Also instructed infantry to move Stokes Mortars into the captured enemy trenches as soon as possible, to deal with strong points behind the enemy support line of trenches.	
17 July	11.45 a.m.	Sailly	Order 34 issued, advising Zero postponed to the following morning. No explanation. Some rearrangement of the assault troops, completion of some minor trench works and other instructions also included.	Significantly, much of this Order was devoted to directing the infantry to undertake as much reconnaissance of No Man's Land and the enemy front trenches as possible.
	4.30 p.m.	Sailly	Order 35 confirmed the deferral of the attack until at least 19 July and directed some more administrative changes.	
18 July	8.00 a.m.	Sailly	Order 37 issued advising the attack would take place on 19 July with Zero hour not before 11.00 a.m. Warned of the diversionary bombardment to be fired against Givency and Cuinchy. It directed Brigadiers, CRA, CRE and the Div signallers to push ahead with preparations for the attack.	
	12.00 a.m.	Sailly	Order 38 advised of the support from the Royal Flying Corps, including squadrons assigned and their identification marks.	On 17 July, an instruction had directed brigades to become familiar with aircraft communications methods and equipments that had just been issued.

	4.00 p.m.	Sailly	Div. Order 39 issued, confirming the attack for 19 July. Contained more detailed instructions for employment of different infantry battalions in the attack, including formation of the Divisional reserve. Some last-minute tactical instructions, such as requiring all assaulting infantry to carry two empty sandbags. This was the last formal order issued before the attack began.	Included some trivia – such as a reminder to all commanders to ensure their men 'have a good breakfast, and a good midday meal, on the 19th'.[6]

(table 5)

For the planners and soldiers of the 5th Division, who comprised half of the troops allotted for the attack,[7] the five days between 13 and 17 July can only have been a period of intense confusion and frustration. Barely having moved into the front line, they were withdrawn almost immediately and relocated to another section a mere kilometre south of where they had just been. In five days, their minds had to adjust from the anticipation of a comparatively quiet period of familiarisation with the (to them wholly new) Western Front battlefield to preparing for that most difficult of military actions, an attack on a fortified and prepared position. The Divisional planners, as unfamiliar with methods and conditions on the Western Front as their men, must have faced with equal trepidation the prospect of planning a major divisional attack.

The 5th Division was a poor choice for this attack, indicative of the manpower problems already confronting the British. Only 15 days earlier, it had been disembarking at Marseilles from Egypt.[8] Not only had the Division no experience of the front line trenches, it had not yet even acclimatised to the Western Front weather. Taking several days to make the move from Marseilles, many of the infantry did not arrive in the rear area billets until 4-5 July, giving the troops little time to accustom themselves to the new environment.[9] The Division's first military activity was the relief of the 4th Australian Division in the line east of Estaires, approximately two to three kilometres north of the Fromelles battle site, commencing on 10 July.[10] Its inexperience in the new environment

---

[6] Ibid.
[7] Order 57, dated 15 July 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 The National Archive (hereafter TNA).
[8] The Divisional Headquarters, including McCay, had arrived at Blaringham in the rear areas on 26 June but the brigades did not all arrive and consolidate until 2 July. General Staff, II ANZAC Corps. War Diary, 1/32/4 AWM4.
[9] The war diary of 5th Division artillery noted that, when moving into their new locations, 'each battery … spends as much time as possible in gaining information of the country, registration, communications etc. Brigade commanders do likewise with respect to the Group headquarters'. Entry 10 July 1916. Artillery Staff, 5th Division. War Diary, 13/14/6 AWM4.
[10] This relief was to enable I ANZAC Corps to move south to the Somme battles. War Diary entry 7 July 1916. General Staff, II ANZAC. War Diary, 1/32/5 AWM4.

showed almost immediately: the move to the rear of the line on 8 July was a shambles,[11] with the War Diary noting dryly:

> There was some delay (one hour) in getting 14th Infantry Brigade into billets owing to a miscalculation of time due to 8th and 15th Brigades marching out by companies at intervals of five minutes. Police arrangements are very necessary for traffic control when a formation as large as a Brigade marches into a town with narrow streets and many crossings. 5 enemy balloons were up for most of the day. Possibly they saw the movements.[12]

To add to the difficulties arising from the Division's inexperience, immediately on arriving in the rear billets, the Division sent one of its critical planning staff, the GSOII, to join the GSOII from the 4th Division in preparing for the takeover of Divisional Schools of Instruction near Sailly from the Australian Divisions in I Anzac Corps.[13] Other disruptions to the troops' preparation also occurred. New weapons systems such as the light trench mortar required officers and troops to operate them: troops that had to be found from within the Division's existing establishment.[14] Selecting troops for these new roles inevitably forced other disruptive planning staff changes, such as the move of the Staff Captain of 14th Brigade to assume command of the 14th Light Trench Mortar Company which meant his replacement, a Captain (G.A. Street) from the 1st Australian Division, did not arrive until immediately prior to the attack commencing.[15] Other new but key appointments in the Divisional staff had to be filled and this proved a drawn-out process.[16] The Divisional Bombing Officer was not appointed until 11 July and more importantly, given the importance of mortars in supporting an attack, a temporary Divisional Trench Mortar Officer (Major Keene) was not appointed until 15 July.[17] In those early few days, a large volume of relevant instructional material was received from higher headquarters, requiring dissemination and the preparation of new training notes.[18] Some of the material was directly relevant to the pending attack, yet the evidence suggests it was of little value to the attacking

---

[11] Christopher Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002), 175.
[12] 9 July 1916. General Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 1 AWM4.
[13] Although, given Divisional Order 30 of 15 July was signed by Major King, the GSOII, it would appear he was recalled as soon as the Division was identified for this attack.
[14] Entry, 4 July 1916. Artillery Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 13/14/6 AWM4.
[15] 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.
[16] The issue was not only the time it took to identify and appoint an appropriate officer to fill the position but also the time it would take for that officer to learn his roles and responsibilities. Two days between appointment and first battlefield experience was arguably insufficient for the Divisional Mortar Officer to know anything about his job in time.
[17] Entry, 15 July 1916. Artillery Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 13/14/6 AWM4.
[18] General Staff Memorandums relating to the Signal Service, Nomenclature (code for use in signals) and machine guns and automatic rifles (Lewis Guns) were all received by Divisional Headquarters on 9 July.

troops who either did not receive it or had no opportunity to adapt their methods in the time available.[19]

The brigades began their relief of 4th Division in the front line on the nights between 10-11 and 12-13 July. Almost immediately, at 7.00 am on the morning of 14 July,[20] they were then ordered to commence a partial withdrawal 'with a view to a prospective attack'.[21] The march from their rear billets to the front line in the period 8-10 July was approximately 40 kilometres for most of the troops. The decline in their general physical fitness, after having been in transit from Egypt for some five weeks,[22] was indicated by the large number of 'drop-outs' during the approach march: sufficient to cause the Divisional Commander to issue a sharp rebuke to his troops and appeal to their sense of pride to not let it happen again.[23] Their inexperience compounded their understandable stress caused by moving and living in narrow cramped trenches close to the enemy for the first time on the Western Front.

Starting on the night 14-15 July and having barely settled, they were then required to begin leaving the front-line trenches, retracing their steps until a move south-west put them into the rear areas of the positions they were to occupy prior to the attack. As part of the preparation for the attack, they then moved back into the front line, not far from where they had started.[24] The average distance covered was more than 50 kilometres in less than a week which, when added to the additional carrying and fatigue party duties they were required to undertake in preparation for the attack,

---

[19] As the after-action report of Lieutenant Colonel Cass of the 54th Battalion made clear. 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.

[20] The Divisional artillery war diary noted that at 1800 hours on the 13 July, a divisional conference was only discussing the occupation of the front line with no mention of any attack. Entry 13 July 1916. It is not until several hours had elapsed and another conference was called, at 1.00 o'clock in the morning on 14 July, that the proposed scheme for the attack was discussed. Artillery Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 13/14/6 AWM4.

[21] 14 July 1916. General Staff, 5th Australian Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 1 AWM4.

[22] The Division had begun to leave Alexandria on 5 June 1916. Another interpretation of the impact of the move from Egypt to France was given by the historian of the 22nd Battalion who, in commenting on an early relocation march of the newly arrived Battalion, stated: 'The distance [13 miles] seemed more like thirty miles to men whose feet, lately used to sand, were now jarred by cobble. Next day's stopping place was between Sailly and Estaires, a fifteen mile trek, finished with swollen feet and unlaced boots.' Captain E. Gorman, MC, W*ith the Twenty-Second: A History of the Twenty-Second Battalion, AIF* (Melbourne: H. H. Champion, 1919), 29.

[23] Wray, *McCay*, 175.

[24] The 15th Brigade had occupied, as part of this initial relief of the 4th Division, a number of posts and length of the front line trench system that would be occupied by the 8th Brigade following these rearrangements. 15th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4, 23.

severely sapped both their fitness and their morale. The impact was significant.[25] A number of reports warned of the tiredness, approaching exhaustion,[26] of the assault troops and some noted this was a factor during the actual attack. The Divisional command understood the undesirability of working the assault troops too hard and there are many references to the need to ensure the men were well-rested before launching the attack. Unfortunately, with the man-power issues confronting the British, the absence of dedicated labour battalions in the Anzac Corps and the inescapable need to prepare dumps of supplies and ammunition to support the attack, there were few alternative options available to the planners.

Apart from tiring the troops out, this manoeuvring also prevented them from gaining an appreciation of the battlefield and receiving up-to-date briefings on, and having time to become comfortable with, the new weapons and equipment they were receiving.[27] The new materiel ranged from steel helmets to the new trench mortars and Lewis guns.[28] Of particular concern was the lack of time to learn about the various communications methods in place. This lack of experience and familiarity with new systems was to be a major factor in the troops' performance during the attack. None of this activity was ideal preparation for an impending battle and, it could be argued, their initial exposure to the Western Front added confusion rather than clarity to their understanding of moving and operating in these conditions.

As noted, the first warning the Divisional planners received that they were to participate in a major attack occurred at 11.00 pm on 13 July, at a meeting at II Anzac Corps Headquarters at La Motte. Those in attendance were the Corps Commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Godley, Sir James McCay, GOC 5th Division,

---

[25] The Australian Official Historian, Charles Bean, discussed at some length the undesirable effect of the movement and labouring tasks on the preparedness of the assault troops. C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol. III. The Australian Imperial Force in France 1916* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1940), 342-2. (Hereafter *AOH III.*) Reference is made to the exhaustion of the troops and the impact of this on the attack by the commander of the 15th Brigade, Brigadier H. Elliott. Elliott Diaries in Elliott Papers. Diary entry 17 July 1916. Item 3, 2DRL/513 AWM.

[26] 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4, 8.

[27] The 8th Australian Infantry Brigade's War Diary for 5 July noted: 'Light Trench and Medium Trench Mortar batteries formed'. The next day it noted: 'Medium Trench Mortar Battery proceeded to LYNDE for instruction. Light Trench Mortar Battery being instructed here'. 8th Australian Infantry Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4.

[28] Divisional schools of instruction to teach the troops designated to operate the new equipment were not opened until after the attack, even though the takeover of the departing Divisions' schools had commenced as soon as the 5th arrived in the Fleurbaix area.

Lieutenant-Colonel C.M. Wagstaff, the GSOI of the 5th Division and the Brigadier-General commanding the Corps heavy artillery. The evidence from the War Diary suggests there was little specific detail given out on what was intended. The planners had to await the meeting at 9.45 the next morning with the real architect of the tactical plan, Sir Richard Haking. At this meeting, which again included the Divisional GSOI but not the brigade commanders, the 'probable programme of the attack' was given out. Following the conference, XI Corps issued Corps Order No. 57 and the divisional planning began.

Given the ongoing relief operation in the front line, it was not until the afternoon of 14 July that the main divisional planning conference, involving the divisional planning staff, the Commander Royal Artillery (CRA), the Commander Royal Engineers (CRE) and the brigade commanders was held. The GOC of the British 60th Brigade, whose troops were both to take over some of the front line in consequence of the 5th movements, and who were to support the Australian brigade on the left of the attack, was also present. At this meeting, the grand tactical plans 'as they were known' were explained and the subordinate planning process commenced.[29] The planned start time for the attack was initially set at 4.00 am on 17 July, which gave the subordinate tactical planners just two days to conduct their reconnaissances, develop their ideas and prepare orders while at the same time moving the assault troops, artillery and engineers into place. The only order issued on 14 July, Division Order 29, was a movement instruction to initiate the withdrawal and repositioning of the brigades. The final plans for the attack itself did not appear for another day.

Preparing the 18,000 troops in a 1916 infantry division for a battle was a remarkably complex task. Detailed plans covering every aspect of the attack needed to be developed, refined and coordinated with the other participating and supporting forces. Orders had to be prepared, printed and disseminated, ammunition and engineering stores assembled and troops briefed. Although the timing of this attack ensured there was little opportunity for any of these essential preparations to be completed to the desired extent, the fact that the attack occurred at all is a compliment to the Divisional command and planning staff involved. It could also have been a

[29] Sir James McCay, 'Report on the Operations of 19/20 July 1916'. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA, appendix E.

reflection of the advantages arising from having trained staff: the 5th Division was unusual in that it had more than one trained staff officer in the G Branch of the Divisional headquarters. Both the principal Divisional planners, the GSOI, Lieutenant Colonel C. M. Wagstaff, and the GSOII, Major D.M. King, were staff-trained. In addition, the officer responsible for planning the logistics support arrangements, Lieutenant Colonel J.P. McGlinn, while not a staff college graduate, had had much experience in the Boer War, the pre-war militia forces and with the 4th Infantry Brigade on Gallipoli, in the administrative and logistics role.[30] However, whether these individuals influenced either the preparations for the attack or indeed the eventual outcome of the action is almost impossible to discern, given the conventions of reporting decisions in the British and Empire armies.[31] Only in the quality of the final plans produced and the orders issued to the subordinate commands can clues as to the soundness and effectiveness of the plans, the planning process and the planners themselves be discovered.

Because it was at this low tactical level that the plans made, and the orders they spawned, involved the detailed movement and coordination of the actual combat elements, the following analysis of the 5th Division plans for the attack has been structured around the five criteria identified earlier as constituting the critical elements in a good plan.[32] As the orders issued represent the culmination of the planning process and the thinking behind it, the focus of the analysis is as much upon the orders themselves as on the thinking/planning that gave rise to them. The analysis will follow the chronological sequence in which the Orders were issued. The artillery plan will be considered separately.

The first requirement of a good tactical order was that it clearly identified what the commander wanted to achieve, including precise identification of what had to be done, when and where. One consequence of the short notice the divisional command and planning team had of the Fromelles attack, and of the constant movement around

---

[30] McGlinn Papers, 3DRL/632 AWM.
[31] A comment in a letter from Sir James Edmonds to C.E.W. Bean, commenting on his draft Chapter XVI of Vol. II of the Official history explains the issue succinctly: 'Page 775, line 5 from bottom. You might say "General White" with the authority of General Birdwood. It is contrary to service custom to give staff officers credit, as the GOC, not the staff officer, is responsible.' Letter, Edmonds to Bean, 11 September 1928. 3DRL/7953/34 Part 1 AWM 38.
[32] See Chapter One, p. 19.

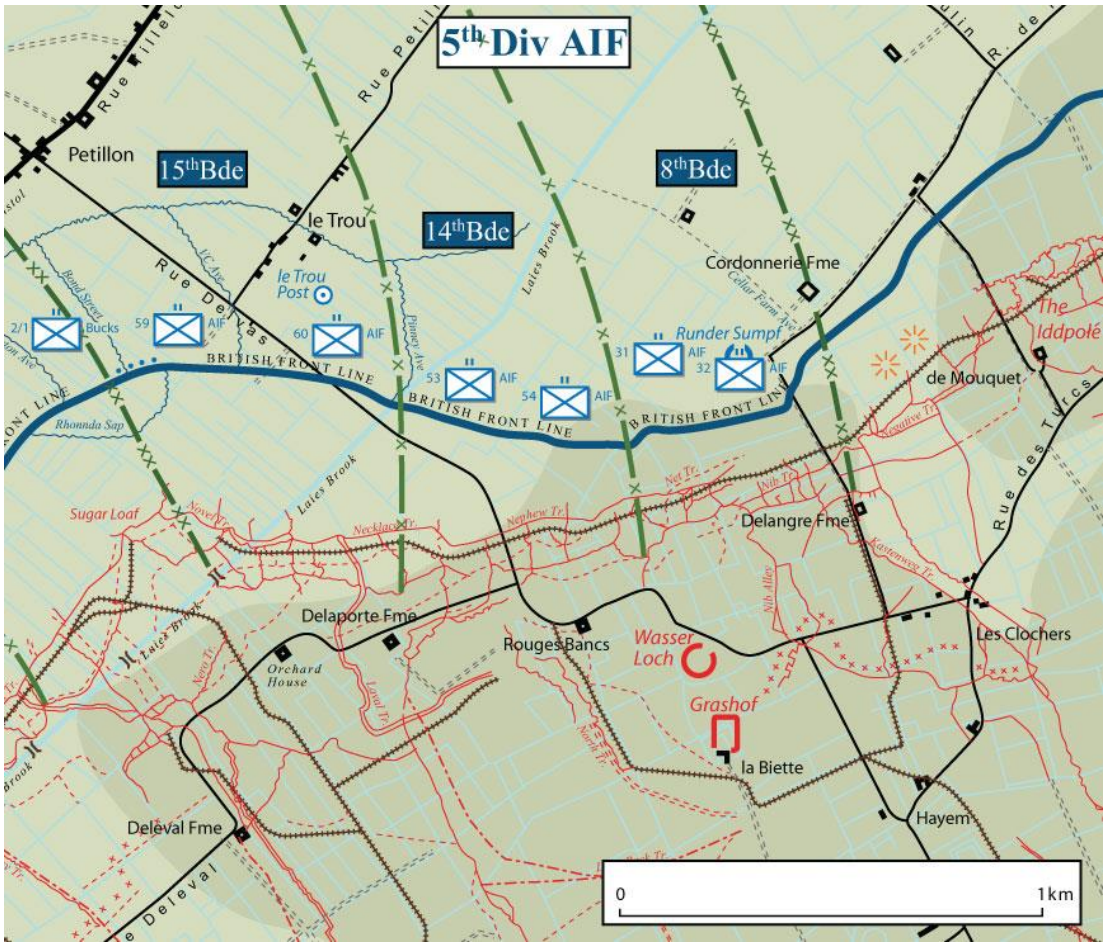
the battlefield subsequent to that notice, was that no single order encapsulating the commander's intent was issued by 5th Division command, although one (Divisional Order No. 31) came close to meeting the requirement. Divisional Order No. 30 was the first order issued that mentioned the forthcoming attack and it did so only in general terms. Order No. 31, issued 24 hours later, contained much more detail and did provide the basic information and direction the brigade and battalion planners needed but, as will be shown, it too was still deficient in several areas. For the infantry planners at least, Order 31 needed to be read in conjunction with some supporting separate instructions. Order 31 also included some critical information, such as the supporting artillery program, in appendices. The Orders subsequent to Order 31 and ending with the final Order, No. 39, issued immediately prior to the attack commencing, focussed on specific aspects of the tactical plan (such as its postponement) or supporting administrative arrangements although, as will be shown, several did include updated or new information important to the brigade and battalion planners. The delayed start of the attack also enabled the Divisional planners to amplify, through these subsequent orders, some of their earlier instructions such as methods for communicating with aircraft. In addition to these orders to the assaulting infantry, 5th Division also issued related orders to the supporting elements such as the artillery and engineers and had to 'harmonise' orders to the combat troops with those of higher commands in relation to more remote supporting troops such as the assigned Royal Flying Corps squadrons or the Heavy Artillery groups.

Divisional Order 30 was what is known in modern military planning as an 'enabling instruction', in that its purpose was primarily to alert the participating formations to the planned offensive and organise the movement of the participating troops to their required forming-up areas prior to the attack. Against one element of the first criterion for a good plan, Divisional Order 30 did meet the requirements. Although essentially only repeating in greater detail the instructions from XI Corps, it did provide the brigade and battalion planners with a clear guide to their assigned areas of operation. The order defined the Divisional area assigned as 'the front from BOND STREET (exclusive) N.8.d. $^{1}/_{2}$.8 to CELLAR FARM AVENUE (inclusive) N.10.b.9$^{1}/_{2}$.1'.[33] (See map 11.) Following that, it clearly identified the three brigade areas of operation:

[33] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 2 AWM4.

15th Brigade - from BOND STREET (exclusive) N.8.d. $^{1}/_{2}$.8 to PINNEYS AVENUE (inclusive) to N.9.c.7.7$^{1}/_{2}$.
14th Brigade – from N.9.c.7.7$^{1}/_{2}$ to N.10.c.$^{1}/_{2}$.6.
8th Brigade – from N.10.c.$^{1}/_{2}$.6. to CELLAR FARM AVENUE (inclusive) N.10.b.9$^{1}/_{2}$.1.

5th Division Area of Operations



(Map 11)

It is important to note that these locations were not the objectives for each of the brigades but rather the area in which they were to assemble prior to the attack: their forming-up zones. This is an important distinction frequently not made in post-war analysis of the battle and was a primary contributor to the outcomes of the battle for both the 15th Australian Brigade and the British 184th Brigade.

Against this criterion, Order No. 30 was a sound planning instrument in that it precisely identified communication routes, assigning roads and communications trenches exclusively to each brigade. While this was routine staff procedure within the BEF, it was not always done carefully or with attention to detail and the war diaries of most British Empire formations are replete with complaints about confusion and delay

arising when two or more formations were assigned the same road or trench system for movements and communications.[34] Order 30 did not make this error, although it could be argued the movement plan was overly complex and challenging for newly arrived brigades and inexperienced staff and the drafters did rely on information provided rather than checking the situation themselves:

> 5. Communications are allotted as follows:-
> 15th Brigade - Roads No. 4, No. R, V.C. Avenue, Finneys Avenue.
> 14th Brigade - Impertinence Avenue, Brompton Road.[35]
> 8th Brigade - Cellar Farm Avenue (south of Rue Petillon), Mine Avenue.
>
> 6. The Main Roads are allotted as follows:-
> 15th Brigade - Road Sailly - Rouge de Bout - Petillon.
> 14th Brigade - Road Bac St. Maur - La Croix Lescornex thence along Rue du Quesnes to Emergency Road No.15 and Rue du Bois to Impertinence Avenue.
> 8th Brigade - Road Fort Rompu - Fleurbaix - Croix Blanche - Rue de Bassières - Rue Petillon.

However, in providing clearly defined objectives, this Order also set in place one of the major planning errors of the battle. The planners' decision (at all levels of the planning hierarchy) to use the existing administrative boundaries between the various brigades as the boundaries for each brigade's area of operations in the attack was a failure of the military appreciation process. Although it was only when the close tactical detail was added to the plan that the problem became obvious, the potential for it to arise should have been recognised by all the tactical, and arguably even by the operational level, planners during their initial assessment of the tactical problem. Given that even in the post-battle reports it was not identified as an issue, the fact that it was not identified and corrected before the battle began is arguably central to any assessment of the competence/experience of the planners at Army, Corps and even Divisional level. Given the potential impact on the outcome of the battle of poor boundary selection and given it was a problem that was already understood, it should have been identified and corrected. It was not.

---

[34] The problems caused to both sides throughout the war by traffic congestion cannot be underestimated. Constant references occur in war diaries to delays in forming up, receiving supplies, evacuating wounded and getting messages through by runner and despatch rider due to traffic congestion, crossing troops, guides and troops getting lost. Clearly articulating traffic control, route allocation and timings was an essential part of the brigade and divisional planning staff's regular duties. Reference to its importance appeared in translated German and French texts as well. Commandant Lachèvre, *Notes on the Attack. Impressions of a Battalion Commander* (General Headquarters: General Staff, S.S.113 O.B./1703, June 1916) (Translated and issued by the General Staff), 4-5.

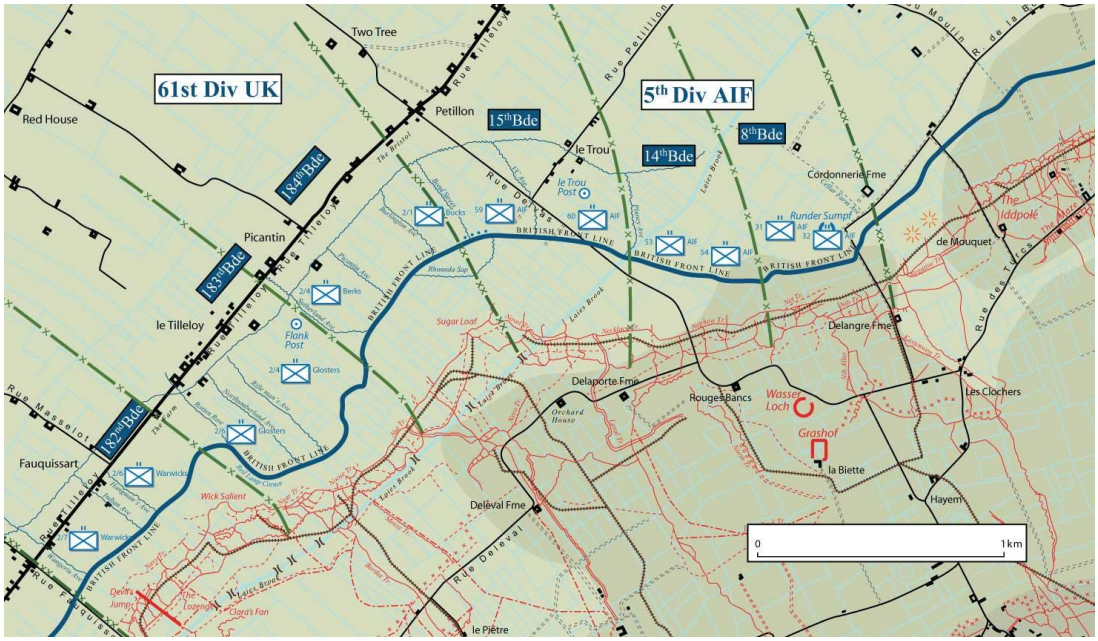
[35] The 14th Brigade war diary recorded that there was only one communication trench available to the brigade, and this was Brompton Road. Further, it noted that the trench had to be 'reopened up and duck-boarded where necessary' before it was usable. 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.

The boundary line between different units and formations had long been recognised as a vulnerable point in any battle. Unless the adjoining units/formations were battle-experienced and commanded by experienced leaders, battle results from all combatants from the very beginning of the war had already shown that attacks broke down along this artificial division between the attacking formations. Troops on either side of it tended not to cooperate or coordinate very well. Examples of junior commanders exercising their initiative to cooperate in an unplanned way with troops from different units alongside them, or deviating from their own orders to assist an adjoining formation or to capitalise on a local success of an adjoining unit were rare among inexperienced or poorly led units.[36] Consequently, ensuring that boundary lines between attacking units lay on tactically good ground and did not lie across poor terrain or across major enemy-held features was an already established tactical planning principle. Unfortunately, for this attack, the forming-up areas and the objectives for both attacking formations were aligned to a pre-existing boundary. Thus, the brigade and even the divisional boundary between 5th Division and 61st Division was on a line that predated the formulation of the plan. The problem was compounded because the line was also the Corps and Army boundary. (See map 12.) It was primarily an administrative demarcation line but, when coupled with the British tendency to leave Armies and Corps in much the same geographic area for extended periods, tended to become a convenient dividing line for all military activity in the area, including defence plans, artillery support and use of roads in the area. Thus, the boundary line was less influenced by tactical factors on the ground than by administrative convenience.

[36] Cooperation even between formations within the same organisation had to be officially sanctioned. On 16-17 July 1916, the day before the attack was originally scheduled to begin, there was an exchange between the GOC 5th Australian Division and II Anzac Corps about the cooperation between the left hand brigade of the 5th Division, the 8th Brigade, and the British 60th Brigade, who were to protect its exposed left flank during the battle. Approval had to be asked and given for the two brigade commanders to liaise directly. G6/49, 16 July 1916. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.

The Boundary Line between the Two Divisions

(Marked by the green line with the XX symbol. The green lines with a single X are Brigade boundaries.)



(Map 12)

In this case, the boundary cut straight through one of the most formidable enemy defensive features in this part of the front: the Sugar Loaf Salient. The right hand flank of the right hand brigade of the 5th Division, the 15th Brigade, was directly opposite the Sugar Loaf, and the boundary between it and the left hand brigade of the 61st Division, the 184th, lay on the Sugar Loaf itself. This ensured that the most difficult tactical attack of the whole battle was not the sole responsibility of one formation but required the cooperation of and coordination between two, neither of which was familiar with the other and both of which still lacked the developed tactical skills required to undertake such a complex action with any confidence of success. Adding the need to work with another chain of command simply compounded the problems of both command and planning groups.[37] Arguably, this was not a lack of familiarity with the tactical problem: British planners at all levels did understand the enemy's use of strong-points and salients.[38] They were dotted along the German front

[37] In military hierarchies, decisions of junior commanders need to be approved by their immediate higher commanders. For more complex decisions, this could be repeated up through several levels of the command chain. For this attack, there were three intervening levels of command between the battalion commanders on either side of the boundary line and the point at which the chain of command joined.
[38] The British Official History noted the British had observed the developments in the German defences, including the liberal use of salients, following their experiences in the battle of Neuve Chapelle. James Edmonds, *History of the Great War. Military Operations France and Belgium, 1915 Vol. II* (London: MacMillan, 1928), 15.

line every few hundred yards and represented a formidable tactical problem. Indeed, the last minute tactical changes which saw 15th Brigade machine guns moved into the emerging gap between the two formations in attempt to neutralise the Sugar Loaf with machine gun fire was belated recognition of the Salient's importance. The question that arises therefore is, why did the tactical planners adhere to the use of this administrative separation line when even a simple basic tactical appreciation would have revealed that it was located on probably the most undesirable point on the whole battlefield?

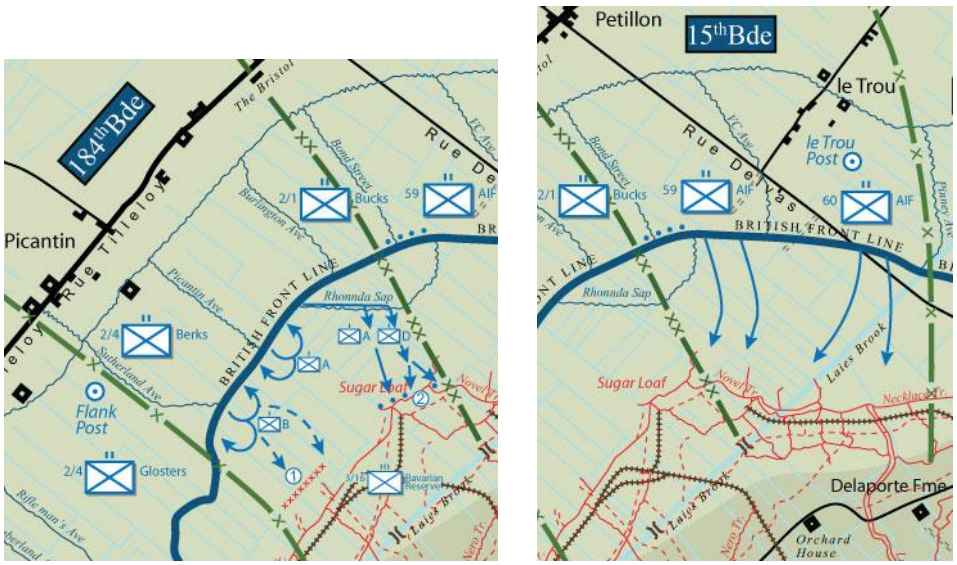
One explanation could be that the tactical planners were so inexperienced that no one in the divisional or brigade planning groups gave a second thought to the tactical implications of the boundary. At the Corps planning level, especially as the attack was planned as only a limited action, the implications of the location of the boundary on a difficult defensive position may well simply have been missed by planners more concerned about limited resources and timings. Familiarity may also have been a problem: this was a major delineation point between First and Second Armies. It had been in place since December 1915. It is questionable whether a junior level planner would have even considered not basing dispositions on such an important and well-known line, even if it was tactically less than ideal. If the problem was even recognised at the junior level, it was much more likely other means of compensating for it would have been identified.

Further confusion related to the boundary question arose from the objectives set for the attack. When the tactical plan was finalised, the 15th Brigade was not given the task of capturing the Sugar Loaf. That difficult assignment was given to the left hand British brigade on the left of the 61st Division, the 184th: not unreasonably as, by comparison with the Australian brigade, it was more experienced and familiar with the battlefield. However, for the Australians, this decision meant that in moving from their assembly area to attack their objectives, which were the trenches linking the Sugar Loaf to the main front-line trench network in the enemy lines, they had to attack across the face of the Sugar Loaf. (See map 13.) For one of the attacking battalions, the 59th, this meant they also had to carry out the comparatively complex tactical manoeuvre of changing direction during an advance.

The XI Corps planners ought to have been aware of this mismatch between formation boundaries and difficult objectives during the early planning stage when deciding the tactical boundaries between the two attacking divisions. Given the planners were well aware of the inexperience of both formations, they could have adjusted both the assembly areas and the objectives assigned to minimise the impact of this known potential for confusion. By ensuring no prominent enemy defensive features were on a boundary, the Corps planners would also have increased the chances of success of the plan.[39]

The Attack on the Sugar Loaf.

(Left map shows advance of 184th Brigade and the right-hand map shows the move of the 15th Brigade, including the move across the eastern face of the Sugar Loaf. The four blue dots represent the position of the 15th Brigade machine guns firing in support.)



(Map 13)

Two solutions were possible, had the problem been recognised. By far the easiest would have been a minor adjustment to the 15th Brigade's forming-up area. A simple move to the left by just 100 yards would have corrected the problem. However, there is no evidence in any of the war diaries that indicates that the planners considered a local rearrangement of the existing forming-up boundaries to align the assembly areas with the objectives and reflect the realities of the enemy front line. As noted previously,

[39] The other strong point in the enemy line facing the attack, the Wick Salient, was the sole tactical responsibility of the British 182nd Brigade, within which the 2/6th Battalion of the Warwickshire Regiment was given responsibility for its the capture or, failing that, its neutralisation.

the strength of the Sugar Loaf itself was well-recognised, as shown by the emphasis given in the artillery plan to its early destruction but this recognition did not appear to have extended to correcting the errors in the assigned forming-up areas and assigned objectives for the assaulting troops. The second solution was to re-assign the objectives and, as the experience of the 59th Battalion was to show, this planning oversight was to have serious consequences for the attacking troops. However, by the time Order 29 was released, the planning of the battle had moved beyond the point where such a fundamental error could be quickly corrected.

Given the limited purpose of Order 30, some of the other criteria of a good order were not relevant to it. It did identify which formations were to undertake operations in which areas but it did not attempt to set out in any detail at all other factors such as support arrangements or any information on the enemy or the battlefield.

The main detail of the attack followed twenty-four hours later when Order 31 was issued. This was less than 24 hours before the original planned start date of the attack. As with XI Corps Order No. 57, and unlike First Army Order 100, this Order contained enough detail in its two pages plus four pages of appendices to enable the brigade planning staff to begin their work, although supplementary material and direction was provided to brigadiers shortly after the issue of the Order, by way of two separate 'Instructions to Brigadiers'. These supplementary Instructions provided the essential detail on the methods and tactics to be used. Subsequent orders, made possible by the delay in the launch date for the attack, also provided additional detail for and clarification of Order 31's tactical plan.

Order 31 was logically structured, beginning with a brief explanation of why the attack was to be launched and a brief indication of the full extent of the operation, before moving on to more detailed instructions specifically for the Division. It contained a clear but brief statement of the objectives of the attack, the artillery support that would participate and the tactical formations to be employed. It was also clear in describing the tactical timings of the attack, including several planned initial deception moves, and specific means of communicating progress. It also included a reference to the separate instructions that had already been issued to the Infantry Brigade

commanders regarding precise arrangements 'regarding the conduct of the assault', so at least the principal supporting units knew of the existence of these important documents,[40] and to the arrangements for consolidating the positions won. It could be argued that this information should have been included in the more widely circulated Order 31 itself, so that all participants in the battle were aware of the details of the tactics and formations the infantry were being directed to employ.

The commander's intent and the rationale for the attack maintained the same argument as existed in First Army's and XI Corps' orders for the operation: namely to prevent the enemy from withdrawing troops from this front for use further south. It is clear that, despite claims of Haking's obsession with Aubers Ridge to the contrary, Fromelles was seen by his planners at all command levels as purely a pinning action with very limited objectives.

> The 61st Division and the 5th Australian Division will capture and hold the German **front line and support trenches** on the front opposite our trenches from the FAUQUISSART - TRIVELET Road (M.24.b.8.8) to south of CORDONNERIE FARM (n.10.C.8.7)[41]

Further clarification was verbally delivered at the Corps conference, as shown in the 5th Division Post-operation report.

> The objectives given to the 5th Australian Division were the enemy's front and support lines from the Apex of the SUGARLOAF N.8.d.6.2. to the road at N.10.c.9.6. It was also suggested that FARME DELAPORTE and FARME DELANGRE should be taken if possible. In subsequent interviews **it was ordered by the Corps Commander that the two farms would not be included in the first objectives**.[42]

Although brief, the limitations and intent of the superior planners was further reinforced in the divisional tactical plan by clearly expressed, carefully defined objectives (see map 14):

---

[40] There is no evidence in the war diaries to suggest why the circulation of the supplementary material was restricted to the infantry brigades. Possibly, it could have been concerns over security but the more likely explanation was that it was either overlooked or abandoned as being unachievable in the time available. The CRA did receive some of the additional material, but sometime after it had been circulated to the Brigade Commanders.

[41] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 2 AWM4. [emphasis added]

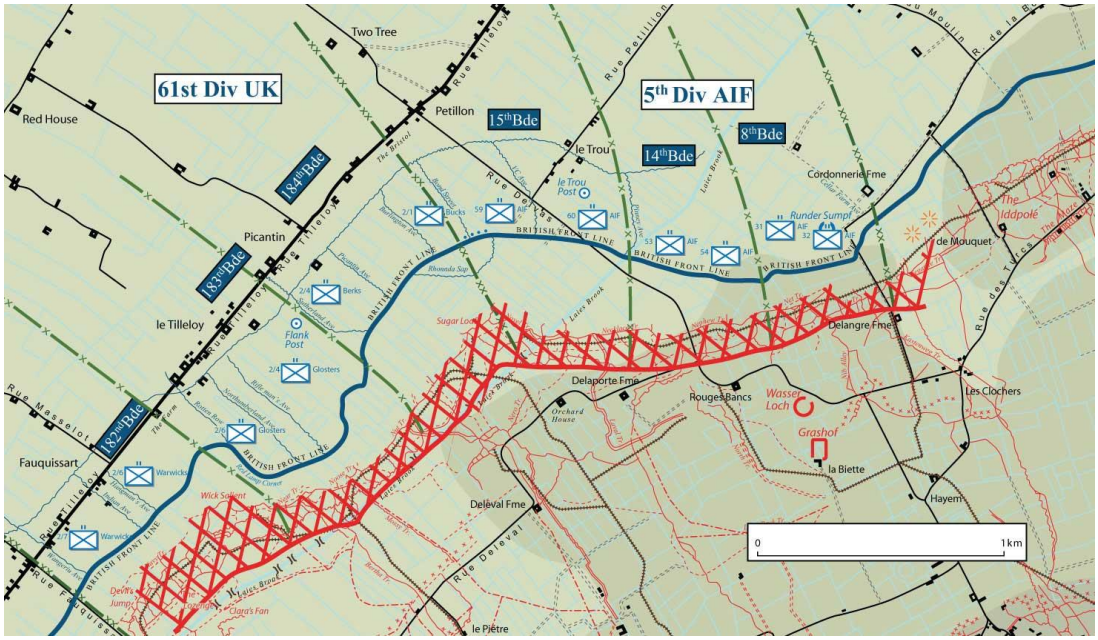
[42] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 3 AWM4. [emphasis added] However, the 14th Brigade war diary noted that this decision – to exclude FARME DELAPORTE from the objectives – was not received by the Brigade until 5.20 p.m. on the day of the attack: i.e. forty minutes before the infantry assault was to begin. 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.

> The 5th Australian Division will assault and capture the German front line and support line from where the River LAYES [sic] cuts the German front line (N.8.d.9$^{1}/_{2}$.1) to the track running north and south past FME DELANGRE (N.10.c.9.6) and will hold and consolidate support line N.14.b.8$^{1}/_{2}$.9$^{3}/_{4}$ (where it crosses the River LAIES) – N.14.b.9$^{1}/_{4}$.9$^{3}/_{4}$ – N.15.a.0.8$^{1}/_{2}$ – N.15.a.7$^{1}/_{2}$.8 – N.15.b.1$^{1}/_{2}$.9 – n.15.b.5.9 – N.10.c.1$^{1}/_{2}$.0 – N.10.c.8.3$^{1}/_{2}$.

With regard timing, Order No. 31 was mixed in the success of its efforts. Given the scale of the attack and the amount of artillery and engineer support available, the timing of the moves of the various component parts of the attack needed to be carefully worked out and all parties needed to be fully briefed on the attack schedule. Given the constant slippage of the final start time, these preparatory timings also needed constant readjustment, which required even greater care to be exercised to ensure all parties were aware of the final arrangements and timing conflicts had not been created by the delay.

Divisional Objectives

(Marked by red hatching – the thick red line marks the deepest intended depth of penetration of the enemy's line.)



(Map 14)

The detail provided by Order 31, particularly the necessary coordination and timing between the infantry and artillery in the initial stages, was comprehensive. However, it was much less satisfactory with regard to the timing for the assaulting infantry approach moves and coordination of supporting troops.

Arguably, Order 31 was based upon the movements and timings of Order No. 30 but in the 24-hour period between those two orders, several of the critical factors underpinning the assumptions made about timings had changed. For example the destruction by enemy artillery of a number of communications trenches had increased significantly the time taken for troops to move through the communications zones behind the forming-up area.[43] Consequently, troops moving up for the attack and conforming to the original prescribed timetable were delayed. To attempt to restore the timetable, some moved in larger bodies than prescribed,[44] others attempted the risky method of moving outside the protection of the trench system in the open ground and,[45] with the slippage in the eventual start time, most of the assaulting infantry made their return move back into the jumping-off trenches in daylight.[46] Given the Germans' comprehensive overview of the British front line, this ensured they were seen during these moves and heavily shelled. Heavy casualties were taken which in turn severely reduced the strength of the lead battalions and thus lowered their fighting strength so badly they needed to be reinforced to launch the attack.[47] The reinforcements had to come from the support forces which in turn meant there were far fewer troops available to consolidate any captured positions. The plan thus began to unravel before it had even begun and this was due in some part to inflexibility in the timetable of movements. A more experienced planning team, as shown by moves by the same formations later in the war, would have factored in longer approach times and allowed for delays, rather than try and force troops to conform to the initial timetable.

There was another side to the timetable and timing issue as well. The commander of 15th Brigade, Brigadier H.H 'Pompey' Elliott, moved many of his assault troops into his front lines quite early on the afternoon of the 19th. In this way, he ensured he would have all his first wave forces available at the start time. However, it also left his troops packed tightly in the forward trenches and exposed to enemy artillery

---

[43] 8th Australian Infantry Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4. See also 14th Brigade War Diary 23/14/4 AWM4.
[44] The relevant Order, Order No. 39 of 18 July, stipulated that the assault troops would be moved into their positions by 'dribbling into the positions of assembly during the day'. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 2 AWM4.
[45] Signal sent from 14th Brigade to Divisional Headquarters at 5.25 p.m. 19 July. 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.
[46] Bean, *AOH III*, 355-6. Also Peter Pedersen, *Fromelles* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2004), 49-50.
[47] Pedersen, *Fromelles*, 65.

and mortar fire for a long period. Elliott's brigade experienced the heaviest casualties of any of the brigades in the battle and many of these were caused by enemy indirect fire into his densely packed trenches before the attack had even begun. While Elliott's decision had, in the context of the plan, made sound tactical sense, it did serve to demonstrate that there was no 'right' answer in dealing with tactical problems and that any decision could have unfortunate consequences in terms of heavy casualties. It was experiences such as Elliott's that saw British tactics evolve to make dawn attacks standard procedures for most actions for the rest of the war. It also resulted very quickly in an order from the GOC I Anzac Corps to his subordinates explicitly forbidding such a move:

> Note from 4th Division HQ to brigade commanders and divisional troops, dated 30 July 1916.
> The following points have been brought to notice by senior officers and staff who have reconnoitred the battle front during the last days:-
> 1. The first line should not be overcrowded. It should be lightly held. To enable this to be done safely, communications with it must be improved as rapidly as possible.[48]

The second requirement of a good order was that it clearly identified those who were to undertake the operation. In this, the Divisional Order followed the example of the First Army and XI Corps orders and identified the next lowest formation, but not specific units within this formation, assigned to each objective or tactical attack area. The Divisional planners did not attempt to pre-empt the brigade command and planning team by identifying specific battalions to lead the attack or assign specific roles to individual battalions. As noted, the order was quite specific on which objectives were the responsibility of each brigade but the only explicit orders regarding individual units related to supporting troops such as engineers and the Pioneer Battalion.

> 15. Field Companies (less special sections required by C.R.E) will work under the orders of the Commanders of their Brigade groups. Pioneer battalion will be held in a state of readiness, with Headquarters at G.24.a.7.0. to provide working parties or to act as a mobile reserve from 4.30 a.m. 17th inst. Up to which time it is at the disposal of the C.R.E.[49]

The third criterion for a good order was the degree to which it provided accurate and detailed information about the combat support to be provided, when and by whom it was to be delivered. To qualify as good, the Order also needed to make clear

[48] Durrant papers. Item 1. PR 8/009 AWM.
[49] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 2 AWM4.

how to access/request such support. As mentioned several times, even by mid-1916, the war on the Western Front had begun to be accepted as being an artillery war. Even infantry commanders preparing plans recognised any orders they issued concerning an attack had to contain the details of their artillery support: frequently this was very detailed and included relevant parts of the artillery fire plan. Of greatest concern to the infantry commanders were questions such as which guns were directly under the tactical control of the Brigade commander and what the instructions were for artillery-infantry cooperation on ruses and similar devices intended to confuse the enemy. Order 31 contained some detail on the artillery support, including the timings of the artillery program and the timings of each 'lift' of the barrage, but not to the ideal extent.[50] The artillery plan was the key to the success of the operation and it will be examined in more detail later but for the infantry, Order 31 contained most of the information they needed, except on one vital matter. While the order did generally identify the artillery supporting the Division and did set out the artillery fire-plan timings (in Appendix A to the Order), there was no break-up by artillery groups showing which supported which Brigade nor was there any laid-down clear line of communication between the brigades and their supporting artillery.[51] The Order did state that planning the artillery program was the responsibility of the Commander Royal Artillery (CRA) of the Division but there was no imperative laid upon him to ensure his detailed plans were passed to the Brigadiers. Nor did the Order indicate how Brigadiers were to communicate with or liaise with the CRA, the presumption being they would do so either formally through the G Staff at Division or informally through the Forward Observation Officers (FOO) attached to each of their headquarters.[52]

---

[50] A 'lift' was when the artillery changed the range of the barrage they were firing, either lengthening or shortening it according to the pre-determined plan. This was critical information for the infantry as they had to move closely behind the barrage to benefit from its suppression of the enemy defences. If however, they got the timing wrong, they would either walk into the back of the barrage and take casualties from their own guns or be left behind, giving the Germans time to man the defences. Given the enemy could man the defences within a minute of the barrage moving on, this left little time for the attacking infantry to cover the intervening 100 yards (the normal distance between the advancing troops and the back of the barrage). If left behind by the barrage, this protection was lost. Most attacks failed when outpaced by their barrage.

[51] This was in marked contrast to the orders issued by 61st Division which, in its corresponding Order, No. 28, clearly identified which artillery units were supporting which infantry brigade. General Staff, 61st Division. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/3033 TNA.

[52] Forward Observation Officers (FOOs) were artillery officers drawn from the Divisional artillery who, with a small team of signallers, were stationed in the front line trenches and used to direct the fire of their artillery and to provide information to the artillery organisation generally on the effectiveness or otherwise of the artillery support. They had their own communications networks separate from the infantry but usually cooperated closely with the local brigade headquarters. This forward control of indirect fire was a

This was particularly important with regards the supporting heavy artillery. Most of its targeting was decided at Corps level with the Divisional CRA having limited opportunity to add to its orders. Targeting was based on battlefield-wide needs, rather than short-term tactical support for individual brigades. Usual fire tasks included, for example, counter-battery fire, interdiction of key points to the enemy's rear or demolition of enemy strong-points. Time-critical tasks, however, such as re-barraging a specific strong-point,[53] could only be called for by the commander on the spot, usually the Brigadier commanding the attack in that location or the FOO, if he was tactically astute and confident. In these situations, a pre-planned method of requesting additional artillery support was essential.[54] Such arrangements did become standard later in the war but were noticeably absent from Order 31. This lack of guidance, when combined with the vast array of the artillery support which was now available,[55] could only have induced some uncertainty and confusion into the planning and conduct of the brigade attack, as they could not plan on specific artillery support. It could not have been assisted either by some recent changes to the organisation and command of the Heavy Artillery. The arrangement of the supporting heavy artillery into Heavy Artillery Groups (HAG) only began to occur in XI Corps in April 1916 and movement of individual artillery formations and units in and out of these new groups continued to occur even as the preparations for the battle were taking place.[56] How the brigade staffs were to access this powerful battlefield support in an emergency was not explained. The FOO was a critical part of the tactical battle but his role and function was not specified either. Later in the war, this would not have been necessary but this was the first action where these sophisticated means of artillery control were being employed and it surprising that no mention of them is made in the Order.

---

new and still evolving skill in British Armies on the Western Front, as was the whole science of artillery, and the Australian artillery had had no prior experience of it.

[53] Only the local infantry commander could know for certain whether an enemy defensive position was still fighting strongly enough to threaten the advance and thus warrant re-engagement by the artillery.

[54] Such pre-planned artillery support arrangements were common characteristics of defensive planning: systems of coloured rockets or Very lights brought immediate artillery support in a pre-arranged pattern to pre-determined locations. This was much more difficult to do in an attack as the possible variations in requirements and the locations of friendly troops was so much greater.

[55] In comparison with the artillery available on Gallipoli, which was the brigadiers' only battlefield experience. See Table Three in Chapter Four for a summary of the number of guns available for this operation.

[56] General Staff, First Army Minute No. G.S. 291. R.H.S./858/2 of April 1916. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, April 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

There was other support available that needed to be described and the coordination arrangements explained: this support included troops internal to the Division, such as the pioneers and engineers mentioned earlier, plus the important support provided by external sources, notably the Royal Flying Corps with its observation, artillery-spotting and 'contact' aircraft,[57] the Engineers Special Brigades and their gas weapons and the Tunnelling and Mining Companies that prepared and detonated mines under the enemy's defences. While there was some information included in the Order about co-operation or liaison with these groups, it was very limited and not particularly informative. Despite the importance of establishing clear links to this additional combat support, particularly working with the Royal Flying Corps, and establishing and maintaining good battlefield communications, Order 31 dealt with co-operation with the RFC in only one paragraph and with the engineers in another, and did not mention any of the other groups at all. The omission regarding aircraft cooperation was eventually corrected, in Divisional Order 38, but as this was not issued until midnight on 18 July, the likelihood of it being understood and incorporated into minor tactical plans was small.

By far the most important 'command' support function on the battlefield was the establishment and maintenance of good communications. Without communications, the complex plan of support and reinforcement was useless. Additional artillery support could not be requested, changes to the artillery plan could not be advised or requested, reinforcements could not be called for and progress or otherwise could not be notified to higher commands. Order 31 dealt with this critical subject in one short paragraph:

> 14. Infantry Brigades will make special arrangements for signal communications with the captured trenches, using runners, visual and pigeons as well as cable.
> A wireless report centre for receiving communications from aircraft will be established at 5th Divisional Headquarters.

While these provisions may appear simplistic and somewhat naive, the reality of the 1916 battlefield and the elementary state of the development of communications

[57] A contact aircraft was one used by higher commanders to establish the position on the battlefield of friendly troops. Many procedures were developed to enable this system to work: common tactics included troops showing coloured panels or smoke candles in response to the aircraft signalling to them with a klaxon horn or signalling lamp. Given identifying troops on the battlefield was difficult, special highly visible identification devices, including for example triangular pieces of tin or patches of coloured cloth were sewn onto the back of the troops uniforms to enable land and air-based observers to identify them from a distance. Given such devices negated the camouflaging effect of their uniforms, they were generally not well received by the troops.

technology severely limited the planners' options. These proposed arrangements closely resembled the communication plans issued to units engaged on the Somme. Commanders well recognised the limitations of their communications and the difficulties of conducting the battle once the leading elements had moved beyond the zone of deeply buried telephone wires.[58] Possibly the only criticism that could be levelled at the planners responsible for the communications plan under this criterion could be their failure to include the battle location of the separate brigade and the advanced Divisional headquarters in the plan itself.[59] However, this was only a minor omission as their locations were well-known to the signallers themselves and it was they who had the responsibility for implementing the communications part of the overall plan. It also was corrected in another order, Order 35 issued later the same day, that clearly set down the locations of the various headquarters.

As well as combat support arrangements, there was one other area of coordination and cooperation that needed to be carefully planned and then fully articulated in the orders for the action. The modern term for this is logistics: at that time other descriptions were frequently employed, including resupply, although none captured the totality of the function as well as the modern term does. Logistics, especially reinforcement and resupply, was a critical force-multiplier and the key to battlefield sustainment. British operational and tactical planning staffs had a notorious disregard for logistics matters.[60] In this instance, lack of attention to logistics was not a planning issue, at least at the Divisional level, where a genuine attempt to plan the logistics support for the attack was made: the outcome was spelt out comprehensively in the three-page Attachment (B) to the Order.

Against the last two criteria for a successful plan, Order 31, and most of the rest of the commands and orders issued during this planning phase, failed almost completely

---

[58] The bulk of communications on the battlefield was done via telephone but telephone cables proved very vulnerable to shell fire, moving vehicles and even the boots of passing infantry. Cables were duplicated and separated into multiple paths and, when possible, buried at least six feet deep. The need to protect fixed communications lines did, however, severely restrain the tactical flexibility of headquarters elements as they needed to remain close to established communications points. Deep-buried telephone lines could not be quickly moved or replicated.

[59] Information which was necessary to ensure the efficient operation of the message runner service which employed infantry from the battalions, rather than specialist signallers. If the runners did not know where to go, much time was lost while they found their way.

[60] As noted in Chapter One, Haig has been widely criticised for the lack of logistics planning to support the whole Somme operation.

to satisfy the requirement.[61] As with both the Corps and Army Orders, there was very little or no information included in the orders providing lower level planners with details of the battlefield terrain or of the enemy and the enemy's defences.[62] There was recognition that this was important but, instead of providing information gained from other sources and from previous occupiers of the area, the brigades were themselves ordered, in Divisional Order No. 34, to find the information. They were ordered to conduct active patrolling in No Man's Land and then to incorporate what they had found into the pre-attack training of the assaulting infantry: this was a poor solution to an information problem, as the recipients were such an inexperienced force still trying to settle into the operational area and complete preparations for the attack, that not only did they have little time to conduct the patrols, they lacked the experience to know what to look for.

> 8. Patrolling will also be done in No Man's Land to learn the terrain. Reports of these patrols are for Company and Battalion Commanders. They will be reported to Divisional Headquarters as part of the daily intelligence report.
> 10. Plans of enemy trenches should be laid out and parties of assaulting battalions, so far as they are not required to hold the trenches, will be exercised over them. On the plans, enemy strong points and machine gun positions should be marked.

These were reasonable stop-gap instructions had they been given to a force with the skills and the time to implement them but, given Order 32 was only issued at 11.45 a.m. on 17 July, there was practically no opportunity for the brigades to do this before the attack commenced.

Nor was this approach a solution to the need to acquire the type of knowledge even the reputedly second-rate 61st Division possessed of, for example, the enemy's methods of blocking trenches and moving troops within the forward trench system. 61st Division had acquired their knowledge of the terrain and of enemy methods from

---

[61] The orders issued by 61st Division are similarly silent upon the enemy and the battlefield terrain. While this was an equal shortcoming in planning practice, the planners of this Division could perhaps be excused as their own troops had very recent combat experience in the German trenches and had been operating in No Man's Land for several months. The reasonable presumption could be made that unless higher headquarters had become aware at the last minute of important changes in the enemy's dispositions, there was little new information that could be provided to the brigade planners of 61st Division that would have assisted the formulation of the tactical plan. This was not the case for the 5th Division.

[62] Included in the 14th Brigade War Diary for July 1916 is a two-page note entitled "Report on Enemy's defences about the Sugarloaf", signed by Captain S. B. Pope, the GSOIII at II Anzac Corps. It is not dated and no other copies appear in either the Divisional or either of the other two brigade War Diaries. There is no distribution list so its purpose remains unclear. The note was not referred to in any of the orders drafted and does not appear to have influenced any aspect of the tactical planning process. Based on a comment in the last paragraph, it is possible the note was a post-battle report but there is no evidence to indicate who received it or why it was prepared. 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.

limited actions and raids on the positions they were now required to attack, in the months in which they had been occupying that section of the line.[63] Patrolling was a useful information-gathering tool, as demonstrated both by the 61st, and the New Zealand Division operating further north. Both reported on the enemy habit of supporting their barbed-wire defences with horizontal patterns of wire hidden in the long grass of No Man's Land. This wire was a major obstacle and was difficult for conventional methods of wire-cutting (shrapnel and mortar shells) to destroy. The Australians had no time to acquire this type of local knowledge and it should have been provided to the brigade planners by Corps and Divisional planners.[64] If nothing else, the Australian brigade commanders should have been warned about the standard tactical defence patterns employed by the enemy in the face of an attack, such as their doctrine which demanded immediate counter-attack to recover lost ground.

Even had the brigades followed the instruction to conduct patrols, this action would not have provided tactical information useful for the troops once they had entered the enemy trench system. For that, the brigade planners needed the details of the trench system itself, the direction, size and strength of the support trenches and the pattern and strength of the various communications trench systems that were the objectives of the attack. This information could not be obtained from patrolling in No Man's land: it could only come either from information obtained during previous raids or from specialist sources such as the analysis of aerial photographs and the observations of Allied airmen.[65] Maps of the enemy's trench systems did exist – the higher command war diaries are replete with them – yet there is little evidence this critical information was provided to the assaulting infantry.[66] There was a reference in

---

[63] The 61st Division had had troops raiding the enemy line opposite their positions on the evening of 13-14 July. The Division itself had the most current information available about the enemy positions and, due to their several penetrations into the enemy's front trench system, the most accurate picture of the system itself and of German defensive methods. The Australians had none of this information, or the recent experience gained in acquiring it, to guide their planning.

[64] 14th Brigade war diary for the night of 17 July noted that their patrols had gone out but the enemy artillery and machine gun activity was effective in preventing them from examining the enemy's wire. 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.

[65] The two related skills, aerial reconnaissance photography and photographic interpretation to extract intelligence material, were still in their infancy at this time. The RFC had been taking cameras over the enemy line since 1915 but official recognition, support for and use of the resulting images was slow in coming. Interpreting aerial photographs was (and is) a skill that took some time to develop, and in mid-1916 was still embryonic.

[66] There was knowledge even of the Sugar Loaf. In May 1916, the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 1st Australian Division had conducted exercises against a mock-up of the Sugar Loaf in preparation for a raid upon it (which did not eventuate). 1st Brigade. War Diary, May 1916, 23/1/10 AWM4.

one of the previously mentioned Instructions to Brigadiers about the location of an enemy trench, 'where an enemy short communication trench is shown on the map' but there is no example of the map referred to in the diaries of the Division or any of the Brigades. It is possible the brigadiers had rough 'mud maps' provided to them during one of the several Divisional planning conferences held prior to the attack but there is no evidence of this in the official records.

There was no advice provided on the characteristics of the enemy weapons the infantry were likely to encounter. Again, had this been a formation experienced and familiar with warfare on the Western Front, this requirement would have been unnecessary, but the two days the Division had spent in the front line would have added little to their understanding of the characteristics of the enemy's arsenal of weapons: factors such as the lethal burst radius of the more common types of shells and grenades, the highest and the usual sustained rate of fire possible by the enemy's machine guns and the standard organisation of the enemy's weapons (German machine guns were normally deployed in pairs) were all important considerations in planning the minor tactical battle. Although not used in this battle, specialist weapons such as flame throwers were also a potential problem of which the Corps planners were aware. The Order should have contained warnings on, and advice about appropriate counters to, these unfamiliar technologies.

Despite these deficiencies, Order 31 was still a useful planning basis for the subordinate command levels. Arguably, its deficiencies must have materially affected the quality of the lower level planning but it still gave the attacking infantry enough information upon which to develop their plans. The communication issues potentially were the most likely to affect the outcome of the battle but in the context of 1916 there was no better technical solution.

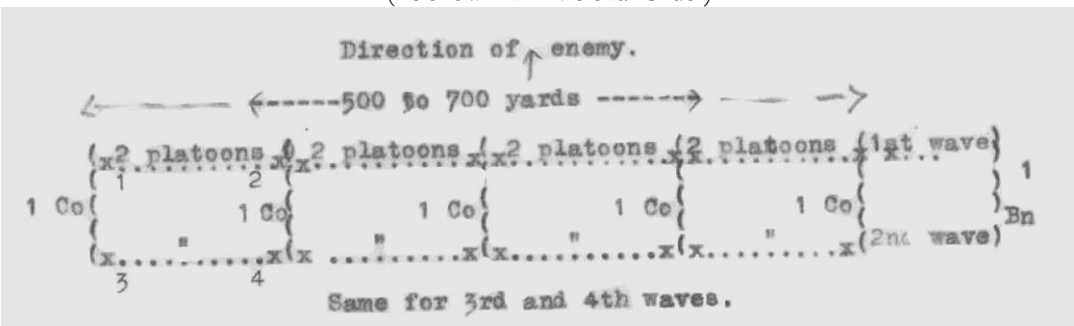
While the artillery plan will be discussed separately, the subsidiary Instructions issued to the three brigadiers, specifically related as they were to Order 31, were major amplifications of the information it contained. The first of these was the undated Minute entitled *Instruction* which was handed to Brigadiers at the Divisional planning conference on 16 July. In the context of planning and commanding a battle, this document can only be described as bizarre. While it commenced with a clear, and

somewhat inflexible, order setting out the tactical formation to be adopted by each brigade in the attack, it then changed into two pages of what can only be described as speculation and meandering suggestions.[67] The *Instruction*, which has a signature that appears to be than of the Divisional commander, McCay, lacks the precision in language used and clarity of instructions given found in Order 31, suggesting that the two documents were authored by separate individuals.[68] Possibly the *Instruction* was merely a follow-on from a face-to-face discussion at the planning conference at which these issues had already been raised. It did provide detail amplifying that in Order 31 and was framed using language that indicated it was clearly intended to guide an inexperienced commander and his planning staff in the formulation of their own plan of attack. On the basis of its contents, however, it would appear more probable that it added indecision and confusion to the planning process.

The opening part of the *Instruction* related, as already mentioned, to the formation to be adopted by the brigades during the attack. (See diagram 3.)

> 1. It appears approximately correct that if each wave consists of the equal of the half of a battalion, the wave will be of a suitable density. This is subject to modification by specialities of ground, e.g. net-work of ditches in front of our right Brigade. The following remarks, so far as they relate to formation, number and size of waves, assume the above numbers and may require modification in each wave where the numbers are modified by Brigadiers [sic]. It is not necessary for each wave in each brigade, or corresponding waves in different brigades, to be exactly the same in numbers or density.[69]

Infantry Attack Formations
(As shown in Divisional Order)



(diagram 3)

[67] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.
[68] Usually, such a document would have been drafted by the GSOI. In this case, the experienced and staff-trained Lieutenant Colonel Wagstaff would have been extremely unlikely to have used such imprecise language or to stray into what was the responsibility of the brigadiers.
[69] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.

In this, it provided firm direction and sound guidance. In the tactical context, and set against the recent experience of battles on the Western Front, the formation described was unusual, a little inflexible but appropriate.[70] Given No Man's Land was flat and the approach under constant enemy observation, keeping the attacking waves in lines and on a direct approach minimised as much as possible the capacity for defending enemy machine guns to obtain enfilade fire (except from the two salients in the enemy's line and from the high ground behind the flanks of the attack) and presented the defending artillery with a narrow, more difficult target. The Instruction also reminded inexperienced commanders about the need to ensure some elementary preliminary actions were occurring:

> 7. It is assumed that Officers' patrols with N.C.O's (sic) in them are already at work covering all their ground from our rear to our front [presumably this was an error and should have been 'their'] trench and also observers in respective sections of front trench. If not, they are to begin at once. Thorough reconnaissance of everything is essential.[71]

The concern was warranted: the reminder in the *Instruction* was followed on the morning of 17 July by a blunt signal from McCay to the GOC 14th Brigade:

> Please refer to para 10 of instructions issued to you yesterday. You will see there that you were most emphatically directed to send a patrol out last night 16/17 to enemy's wire to report on its exact position and condition and to what extent it had been cut. Your front has been defined for you. Please report why this most explicit instruction was not obeyed.[72]

Unfortunately, apart from these few examples of clear direction, the *Instruction* was characterised by imprecise language suggesting, rather than clearly directing, subsequent actions. It almost debates with the subordinate command level the appropriate tactical solutions. While such an approach may have had validity in a planning meeting, by the time an order was issued, there was no scope for further discussion: too much else had to be prepared on the basis of that order. The *Instruction*

---

[70] Both the French at Verdun and the British on the Somme were by this stage adopting much less rigid and formal formations for their attacking infantry. They were beginning to use a more flexible form of 'fire and manoeuvre', in which the assaulting troops were able to range over their part of the battlefield, taking advantage of terrain and obstacles to cover their approach. However, given the inexperience of the troops of the 5th Division, it was doubtful whether they could have employed these new tactics and still have arrived at the point of the attack as an organised assault force. For them, using a more rigid structure at least kept them together in an attacking formation.

[71] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.

[72] General Staff 5th Australian Infantry Division War Diary 1/50/5 Part 5 AWM4. No reply to this question was found in the records.

used words such as 'it will **perhaps be possible**' and 'the right Brigade **may be able** to get most of its first and second waves across the River LAIES before the bombardment of the enemy parapet finally ceases', rather than providing emphatic and clear tactical direction linked to precise timings.[73]

The *Instruction* was also a curious mix of higher tactical direction and very basic tactical micro-management, which would point to problems at the Divisional planning level in understanding precisely what their planning responsibilities were. Paragraphs five and six well illustrate the point, with the first paragraph representing almost over-management of a single small tactical procedure while the next paragraph, quite properly, addressed one of the core directions about taking and holding the objectives, but in doing succeeded only in adding uncertainty:

> 5. Pegs (and cross-pieces on wooden uprights) will be fixed along the parapet during the morning of the 17th to help men to step over the parapet. It is very doubtful whether troops can get out any other way than by crossing the parapet. They should go beyond the wire once they get out.
>
> 6. It is hoped the attack and holding of enemy trench may succeed with two Battalions of each Brigade but perhaps Brigadiers will use their third Battalions to hold the enemy trenches, if captured, but not to take them if the first two Battalions fail. If this suggestion is altered Brigadiers will be notified. They will not let anyone except Brigade Majors know this. It would be bad for moral (sic) if even Battalion Commanders of 3rd and 4th Battalions knew they were not being definitely expected to attack.

This small sample serves to illustrate the point that both the Divisional planners and the subordinate brigade staff lacked essential experience to plan an action, even one as limited as Fromelles. Paragraph five represented an attention to detail that, even six months later, would have been considered unwarranted interference. This was basic routine planning that was the normal responsibility of the Battalion commanders. The engineers would have provided, also as a matter of routine, the necessary trench stores while the individual assault platoons would have constructed climbing supports that suited their men. The necessity for the Divisional planners to even mention it suggested either a lack of confidence in the junior leadership of the Division or that the troops of

---

[73] While the absence of reliable communications made adjusting precise timings very difficult once the fighting had commenced, precision in both objectives and timings were vital during the planning stage to provide a timetable for the coordination of all the elements of the assault force, infantry, artillery and RFC.

the Division lacked even basic trench-fighting skills.[74] The level of detail into which the Divisional planners engaged also suggests a severe lack of confidence by the Divisional Commander and his planning staff in the competence of the brigade commanders. Although it was not unusual for commanders at all levels to become embroiled in minor tactical matters, these were usually issues of broad application and sustained relevance. Famously, during planning for the Somme, Haig issued instructions on the employment of Lewis guns and on the care of men's feet, but these instructions were relevant to the whole BEF and addressed some well-known failings at all levels of command. In the 5th Division case, paragraph five points to a Divisional commander trying to cover every aspect of the attack down to unnecessarily minor and routine matters. The irony was that he did this while failing to provide other, arguably more critical, planning information.

Paragraph six, on the other hand, represented the opposite end of the tactical scale and was an important instruction about the management of the combat force as a whole in the attack. Deciding which troops to use as initial assault troops, which to use as follow-on forces and which to hold in reserve to exploit opportunities or defend against failure was one of the major responsibilities of the brigade commanders. It was usually his responsibility, as he knew best the state of competence of each of his battalions and their preparedness to undertake the attack. Paragraph 6, which avoided the temptation to identify which battalion should be assigned which task, did however seek to limit the brigadiers' freedom to conduct the local battle by restricting his freedom to employ his full force as he wished, based on his understanding of the tactical situation.

Closer examination of paragraph six highlights some even more fundamental problems with the planning that occurred at this minor tactical level. The first issue is with the wording of the paragraph itself. It is unclear what the three brigadiers were expected to do. Clearly, the author expected the attack with the first two waves, which were composed of the first and second battalions in the brigade, to succeed. After that

---

[74] Evidence supporting the inexperience of the 5th Division is found in the casualty figures. Of the 1703 killed at Fromelles, only 220 (216 KIA and 4 DOW) had had prior military experience on Gallipoli. http://www.aif.adfa.edu.au/index.html In addition, one of the battalion commanders noted in a report that 'this was the first fight for about 80% of the men'. Notes by Lieutenant Colonel Cass, 54th Battalion, for Mr. Bean's personal use. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1, AWM38.

point is made, however, his intentions and even the clarity of his directions fail. Initially he implied that brigadiers could use their third battalions only to hold and consolidate already captured trenches but he then stated that this might change but did not indicate what this change might be. Brigadiers thus were required to develop three plans: one plan to capture the trenches with two battalions only and consolidate with the third, another to allow for the third battalion to be used to help capture the trench, and the third based on the presumption that the third battalion could not be used at all, either to attack or to consolidate. This then raised the question, what was the third battalion to do and what role was to be assigned to the fourth battalion? Normal doctrine required the last battalion in a brigade to be employed as carrying parties in support of the attack but this Instruction assigned them no role in the attack itself at all. Were they available to be used as reinforcements of the earlier waves, the other standard role for supporting troops? Most of the discussion in the paragraph appeared to imply they were not. Yet the last sentence suggested they were – so the question thus posed the brigadiers was, if they could not be used to attack or consolidate the captured position, what part of the attack were they expected to participate in? If they were to be part of the brigade reserve, as other documents later suggest, this should have been made clear. This role, logical given there was no divisional reserve, still did not explain the reference to the 4th battalion in this paragraph's last sentence. It was a paragraph illustrative of confused thinking about how the prospective battle might unfold. For the brigadiers to develop a workable tactical plan, these uncertainties needed to be resolved: there is no evidence in the records to suggest they were.

However, with the attack less than two days away, the brigadiers needed to make decisions on which battalions to use in which way and they clearly did so in the absence of clarifying information. Brigadier E. Tivey, commanding the 8th Brigade, chose to interpret this instruction as meaning the third and fourth battalions were both to be held in reserve.[75]

A worse example of unclear and ambiguous thinking appeared in paragraph 8:

> 8. On **consideration** the left Brigadier **may probably** decide that his attack's extreme left will reach enemy trench at N.10.c.9.6$^{1}/_{2}$., for **if he prolonged** Eastward as suggested yesterday FARM DELANGRE if not taken would be in

[75] 8th Brigade Order No. 23 of 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916 23/8/8, AWM4.

> rear of his eastward looking flank. He would **perhaps then take** up as his rear flank a line echeloned back from 10.c.9.6. to 10.c.9.3., where en [sic] enemy short communication trench in his front line system is shewn on the map.[76]

While Brigadier Tivey no doubt fully understood that this muted debate was really a command, its tone was easily interpreted as only a suggestion. Perhaps it was but at this stage of the planning cycle, the minor tactical commanders needed to assign objectives with timings and supporting plans to troops and Tivey adopted the 'suggestion' and made the reference N.10.c.9.6$^{1}/_{2}$ the left edge of his 32nd Battalion's objective. Changing options at the last minute, or indeed after the battle had commenced, would have been the cause of much confusion in the attacking and supporting infantry and to their supporting artillery. It is difficult to understand how the language in the document, as illustrated by this paragraph, clarified for the Brigade planning staff the final shape of the defensive position in the captured objectives. While speculation over the likely course of the attack was understandable, the document was issued to supplement Order 31 to add precision to the planning process and for that purpose, arguably, it would have failed but for the willingness on the part of the subordinate commanders to make a firm decision.

Fortunately, for the brigade planners, a more comprehensive and detailed set of instructions was issued in the morning of 15 July.[77] Entitled *Instructions for Infantry Brigadiers*, this new subordinate element of Order 31 was everything the first *Instruction* was not. Although again signed by McCay, the tone and language used was entirely different. It was precise, well-structured and clear. It set out in a chronological sequence what each brigade was to do and when. The objectives set were clearly and unambiguously defined and the limits of the attack clearly established.

> 5. Every work in enemy first line system is to be taken, but no troops are on any account whatever to go beyond that line. See that communication trenches leading back from the first line are not mistaken for parts of the first line.

---

[76] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4. [emphasis added] In the XI Corps summary of this operation, Haking included his own understanding of the role of the fourth or reserve battalions: 'Reserve Battalions of Brigades were not to be used for assault without orders from G.O.C. XIth Corps. If the assault on part of the line were to fail, Divisional Commanders would commence a fresh bombardment of that portion, and the time required would be sufficient to enable the Corps Commander to ascertain the local situation and decide whether to employ the reserve battalions for another assault or not." Unfortunately, this clear intent of the role of the reserves was not discernible in the orders transmitted by the 5th Divisional commander.

[77] The precise time of issue is obscured on the original document.

> 6. These communications trenches must be blocked (with double block where possible) and watched.
>
> 7. It is the rearmost row of enemy's first line that is to be at once fortified and held when it is taken.[78]

From this, the document proceeded to set down directions on what each attacking wave was to achieve and what was to happen should the initial plan not proceed as intended. It clarified the role of the fourth battalion: 'The fourth battalion of each Brigade will not be used without the express authority of DHQ (Divisional Headquarters). Assembly positions for them will be notified in orders later'.[79] This suggested that the fourth battalion was viewed by DHQ as the reserve, possibly to be used to hold the existing line if the attack failed badly and the enemy counter-attacked. Consequently, the battalion had to be protected from destruction and not wasted by trying to salvage a lost attack, a not-uncommon fate for reserves at this stage of the war.[80] The *Instruction* directed that each platoon commander had to have a sketch of the enemy trench in front of him and had to explain it to his troops. (There is no information in the war diaries as to where the information necessary to draw such a sketch map was to come from and the most likely conclusion is that these inexperienced junior leaders were expected to create one from their own reconnaissances and observations.) It also reiterated the importance of maintaining communications and contained explicit directions concerning this vital element of the conduct of the battle:[81]

> 24. Brigadiers must make special and efficient arrangements with signalling discs, trench runners etc to maintain communication across NO MANS LAND in case telephone wires are cut, which is most likely.[82]

---

[78] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.
[79] Paragraph 19.
[80] There was, and is, a very fine line between some standard military truisms. One states that commanders should not reinforce failure; that is they should not continue to send troops into a battle that was 'clearly lost'. The other was that commanders should not withdraw from an attack too soon, as they may have the enemy 'on the ropes' and a premature cessation of the attack would thus waste the success achieved thus far and enable the enemy to regroup and resist further attacks. While hindsight has provided critics with the opportunity to recognize when each of these conditions was in place, the evidence was not always available to the protagonists at the time. Consequently, one of the most contentious command decisions of this war was the decision to halt an attack or to press on with it.
[81] Reliable communications were clearly a problem for the tactical level commanders even before the battle commenced. As noted in the 14 Brigade war diary of 14 July 1916, there were major problems with the divisional signal system. 'Attempt made to get message through to our artillery but failed. Enemy bombarded B Company Sector until 1200 but owing to the useless Signallers of 5th Division Artillery, it was found impossible to get any satisfaction from them when sending a message. Apparently the Signallers were not informed by their Officers as to the meaning of code messages likely to be sent from the infantry in the Front Line trenches.' 14th Brigade. War Diary, 23/14/4 AWM4.
[82] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.

This document even provided useful advice, including some specific suggestions, for strengthening the defences in the captured trenches that was based on recent trench-warfare experience.

> 14. Each brigade must provide for guarding its flanks, in case it succeeds and the next brigade does not. The mode of blocking the flank still held by the enemy has been practised, double block is the best method, the farther breastwork of sandbags keeping the enemy out of bombing range.[83]

Arguably, the *Instructions for Brigadiers*, when read in conjunction with Order 31, provided the minor tactical planning teams with all the information they required to enable them to plan the movement of their troops into and across No Man's Land and into the enemy trenches and also on how to secure them once seized. It provided some information on the support arrangements, especially from the artillery, and some guidance on battlefield management (for example, the collection of stragglers).

However, against the criteria of a good planning document, both these supplementary Instructions failed to address and correct the identified deficiencies in Order 31 and thus left the planning process exposed to error. Their principal failings were, as for the original Order itself, the absence of any specific information on the enemy or the battlefield. In neither of these supporting planning documents was there any reference to the enemy's trenches, wire patterns, strong points or any minor tactical advice on how Bavarian soldiers fought, including whether they used different tactics from the rest of the German Army. Given these Instructions were specifically focussed on the attacking infantry, they were the logical place in which to provide advice on wire-cutting techniques, clearing trenches or warning about the German practice of deep dugouts with concealed entrances. All of this was known to the Divisional planners and information of this type was already appearing in orders to other Australian units, including those planning to attack Pozières on 22/23 July, so presumably it was not contrary to instructions to provide such material.[84] While it is likely this type of

---

[83] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4. As the outcome of the battle demonstrated, these were sound warnings. Unfortunately, they were not generally or widely put into effect, as the after-action report of Lieutenant Colonel Cass of the 54th Battalion made clear. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916 23/14/4 AWM4.

[84] While basic, an attempt was made to provide attacking infantry with some assessment of the enemy's condition and of the ground in the objective: see 1st Australian Infantry Brigade order No. 21 of 22 July 1916, relating to the forthcoming attack on Pozières. 1st Brigade. War Diary, July 1916 23/1/12 AWM4, 143.

intelligence material had been discussed at conferences, there is no evidence in the orders issued that the tactical planning teams were aware of any features of the enemy position or defenders. Indeed, one paragraph in *Instructions for Infantry Brigadiers*, paragraph 20, implied that this basic intelligence material was unknown, even in part, to the divisional planners. If true, this was a serious failing of the pre-battle process, and steps should have been taken in the intervening two days between the notice of the attack and the scheduled commencement to obtain it from XI Corps and pass it on to the attacking troops.

> 20. It is vital to ascertain and report at once and exactly the positions of the enemy's Machine Guns, in order that the Artillery may deal with them.[85]

Further evidence pointing to the planners indeed not knowing this important piece of intelligence was a note from the Divisional Commander to the CRA directing that, 'pending definite identification of machine gun emplacements in enemy line, either parapet or support trenches, you will suspect every least salient of being such an emplacement and go for it accordingly'.[86] There was much evidence already available pointing to likely locations of enemy machine gun emplacements in the intelligence reports of the previous occupants of the trenches and their higher headquarters and in many of the RFC reports for the sector. The planning staff of XI Corps knew their locations.[87] Therefore, this apparent lack of knowledge of such basic tactical information, which was a key part of developing the battle plan, and its omission from the preliminary orders provided to subordinate planners, is difficult to understand or to explain. Possibly, in the haste of planning both the attack and the preceding physical movements to reposition the troops and the artillery, the necessary staff processes failed. Alternatively, the direction in paragraph 20 could simply have been an instruction to identify the tactically important locations to enable their plotted positions to be verified or confirmed. This is unconvincing for, if this was the reason, it still does not explain why the original locations were not identified and the brigade planners and the CRA informed of them from the beginning. From the Corps perspective, they knew that the troops of 61st Division were aware, from their previous forays into No Man's

---

[85] General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 2 AWM4.
[86] Ga66. Minute to CRA, 5th Division, dated 15 July 1916. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.
[87] The war diary for XI Corps contains several maps prepared during the battle planning phase showing the locations of German strong points in the front and second line trenches and in the rear defence zones. General Staff, XI Corps. War Diary, June and July 1916, WO 95/881 TNA.

Land, where the main defensive positions, including machine gun and *minenwerfer* emplacements were, and it was possible they simply did not realise the Australians lacked this information.

Following the release of Order 31 and its amplifying Instructions, there was a constant stream of amendments and instructions to Brigade commanders and to the CRA about minor aspects of the attack. Some of these either reinforced some aspect of the instructions already issued or drew the attention of the Brigade planners to updated information about specific responsibilities such as the need to cooperate with aircraft. Others concerned administrative detail relating to the troops' withdrawal from the forward trenches, following the postponement of the attack, and their reinsertion to be ready at the new launch time. While some of these Orders and signals were typical routine administrative instructions/signals,[88] there were others that either reinforced or subtly changed the intent of Order 31 and its two supplementary Instructions.

Order 32 was a clarification of the administrative arrangements contained in Appendix B to Order 31 and related to the movement of resupply wagons in the rear areas and details of stores handling. Indicative of the attention to detail the planners were showing, this order spent a paragraph explaining the issue and potential use of Notice Boards. However, while an important and necessary part of the future battle sustainment, notice boards were not especially relevant to the battle planners. This was not the case for the next Order, No. 33. A brief two paragraphs, this Order advised planners and commanders that the commencement time of the attack was to be 4.00 a.m. It then went on to order the attacking infantry to take their new, and still secret, Stokes Mortars forward with them 'in order to deal with strong points in the enemy's line behind their support trenches'. Given the known sensitivities in higher command over the potential loss of these weapons, this Order was a timely and useful clarification for the Brigade planners.

[88] One was a curious and rather naive exchange between HQ 5th Division and 15th Brigade over the enthusiasm of one of the 15th Brigade battalions, useful for its indication that morale in the attacking troops was high. 'Divisional Commander wishes me to say that if the 58th want to get even with the enemy, that battalion might be left in the line and we will give them a chance.' General Staff, 5th Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 2 AWM4.

Order 34, issued at 11.45 a.m. on 17 July, confirmed, as the troops must already have realised, that the attack had been postponed. However, the Order reflected the planners' attempts to use the unanticipated additional time to attempt to improve the preparations for the attack. Apart from having to manage a rearrangement of the troops in the front line, Order 34 also directed that patrolling of No Man's Land be conducted, to inform battalion and company commanders about the conditions of the terrain, the enemy wire and the enemy's parapets. Additional 'reconnaissance' was to be undertaken of No Man's Land using periscopes, with the data collected being provided to all ranks for the area to their front. It also recognized that there was a brief opportunity to improve the troops' understanding of communicating with aircraft and directed 'Brigades and units [will now] learn methods of, and arrange to use apparatus for, communications with aircraft, issued yesterday'. This Order is evidence that there was at least an embryonic form of review of plans and orders within the headquarters of the Division. Certainly, the emphasis placed on conducting additional reconnaissance of the battle field suggested recognition by the divisional planners that the assault troops were not well-prepared for manoeuvre in the battle space.

Order 35, issued at 4.30 p.m., was more focussed on the consequences of the delay. While a delay of just two days may not appear significant, for troops in the front line it was a major issue. Tired or under-strength units needed to be relieved. The numbers in the front trenches needed for defence were considerably lower than for an attack, so the density of troops in the front line had to be reduced, both to minimise losses through enemy fire and to reduce the logistics efforts required to feed and resupply them. Order 35 was primarily the plan that guided the reorganisation of the troops in the front line, although it too emphasised that the opportunity provided by the delay should be taken to improve preparations for the attack. Order 36, issued at 10.45 p.m. on 17 July was a specific instruction to the CRA and the Commander 15 Brigade and related to an artillery barrage in retaliation for an enemy barrage of the 15th Brigade front line. It was unrelated to preparation for the forthcoming attack apart from trying to dissuade the enemy from firing on the front lines. Artillery also featured in Order 37, issued at 8.00 a.m. on 18 July. It was not until this Order was released that the brigades were made aware of the deception plan being mounted by the artillery of I Corps further south around Givenchy and Cuinchy. Little detail of this action was included and arguably was not needed, given the focus of the division and brigade planners was

on the lowest tactical part of the attack. The Order also confirmed the new zero hour for the operation as 'not before 11.00 a.m.' on 19 July.

The last two Orders issued before the attack finally was launched were important final instructions for the brigade planners and the assault troops. Order 38, issued at 12.00 a.m. on 18 July, provided the assault troops with the identification markings of the aircraft with which they were to work. Given there was less than twenty-four hours before the attack began, one test of the utility of this last minute provision of critical planning information would have been whether the assault troops were informed of these identification markings before they attacked and whether they remembered the details sufficiently to cooperate with the aircraft as intended. Unfortunately, with the attack only lasting throughout one night, the test was never taken.

The final order issued before the attack began was, arguably, the most important for the brigade planners after Order 31. Order 39, issued at 4.00 p.m. on 18 July, contained much information that ought to have been provided initially. Apart from a brief reconfirmation of some aspects of the original plan, such as reaffirming the timing of the artillery barrage, the focus of Order 39 was on the employment of the various battalions and engineers/pioneers, on the use of artillery to protect captured trench lines and on the requirement for last-minute patrolling of No Man's Land on the night of 18-19 July. The direction regarding the employment of the troops made, for the first time, the role of the third and fourth battalions in each brigade unambiguous. The third battalion was to be used as carriers and as a garrison force for their own lines. The fourth battalion of each brigade was to be the Divisional reserve and was required to assemble on the line Du Quesnoy-Rue Rataille, thus effectively removing them from the brigade forming-up positions. They were not to advance until the third battalions' garrison force had occupied the 300-yard line behind the old British front line. While this clarified the role of over a quarter of the Brigade combat force, it appeared far too late in the preparatory stage of the attack to have assisted brigade planners unless it had been foreshadowed in planning conferences. For example, the decision to move the fourth battalions back behind the forming-up zone made it impossible for them to be used in the initial assault, even if circumstances had suggested they should be. The third battalions' dual role as both carrying parties and front line garrison troops meant that

only half their number was available to conduct the essential ammunition resupply of the assault force task. The order does not appear to permit the garrison force to be reduced to replace carriers killed so battle attrition could, under this arrangement, have endangered the success of the whole operation should resupply fail through inadequate numbers of carriers. The rationale for this optimistic arrangement of the combat troops is difficult to discern. Possibly, the divisional planners had an unrealistic view of the capacity of the artillery to suppress enemy defensive fire. Alternatively, they may have been concerned that the attack might fail and, if all the brigade's strength had been expended in the attack, there would be no reserve left to resist the inevitable counter-attack. Most likely, the reason was simply that there were insufficient troops with insufficient skills to do everything necessary in even a limited attack such as this.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, while the infantry conducted the attack, it had little hope of success unless it had adequate and well-planned artillery support. This was no different for Fromelles, indeed given the inexperience of the attacking infantry, it is arguable that the artillery had an even greater responsibility to suppress enemy defences and prepare the way for the infantry. The importance of having sufficient artillery to support an attack such as this was well understood: as previously noted, the commander XI Corps had changed his basic plan when the amount of supporting artillery he had been promised was reduced. That said, and by the standards of July 1916, the 5th Division attack was well supported in terms of the number of barrels firing. In addition to its own four field artillery brigades, it had the four field artillery brigades of the 4th Division and a further field artillery brigade from the 31st (British) Division. This gave a total of 132 field guns. In addition, the Divisional Commander Royal Artillery Brigadier General S. E. Christian, could call on mortars, both the Division's own and the supplied additional mortar units, and could request additional support from the heavy artillery. In terms of barrels to length of trench, this represented a ratio of one gun to every eight metres of trench to be attacked: a ratio similar to that supporting the successful attack on the Somme on 14 July. In terms of numbers alone, it should have been sufficient to enable the infantry to take and hold all their objectives. They did not and in searching for answers as to why they did not, the artillery is frequently accused of having failed. While this was far from an uncommon finding in post-battle analyses conducted by the BEF as a matter of routine after an

operation,[89] in the context of this analysis, the question to be considered is more specific. Was the failure of the artillery, if indeed there was a failure, due to poor or inadequate planning or were there other, more deep-rooted problems at work?

While the role of the artillery in supporting an attack has already been examined, it is important to highlight the differences between broad explanations, especially those explaining the role of the heavy guns, and the narrowly specific support the artillery provided directly to the infantry divisions. Even at Fromelles, as a direct consequence of the increase in available heavy artillery, the type of tasks allocated to the big guns versus the organic field artillery and the new mortars of the divisions, had begun to become more specialised.[90] The first, the pre-attack phase, was an extended period of bombardment of the enemy lines and rear zones, with a varying intensity and rate of fire, where the emphasis was on preparing the battlefield for the attack. The second, or the attack phase, was when the emphasis shifted to directly supporting the assaulting infantry as they attempted to cross No Man's Land and seize the enemy's positions. The third phase, or post-attack phase, was focussed on the protection of the infantry in their newly captured positions until they were in a position to defend it themselves.

The role of the heavy artillery was shown in more detail in the last chapter so will not be repeated here. The artillery plan for the heavy guns was the responsibility of the specialist artillery commander at Corps (BGRA) or Army (MGRA) headquarters level. Any direct connection between the heavy artillery and the assaulting infantry was relatively rare, except during the assault phase when the heavier guns might be called upon to destroy a particularly difficult enemy defensive position. Equally, the capacity of the Divisional artillery planner to assign targets directly to the heavy artillery was limited and most requests for heavy support were funnelled through the higher command. The situation was different for the lighter field artillery and the Divisional artillery

---

[89] A report to First Army from the GOC IV Corps on a failed attack to recover part of the line lost to the Germans near Momber Crater on 1 June, included an illustrating statement: 'When the Army Commander has read these papers I hope he may modify his opinion that the attack lacked forethought and combination and the **task given the artillery was not thought out well**. I can assure the Army Commander that this was not so. The attack was as carefully prepared and as anxiously thought out as it could be in the time at our disposal.' General Staff, First Army. War Diary, June 1916, WO 95/164 TNA.
[90] Australian divisions in this war had only 18-pounder field guns and 4.5-inch howitzers as organic artillery. They lacked the 60-pounder field guns of their British equivalents and all British Empire Divisions lacked the organic heavy artillery found in their German and French equivalents. This made Australia infantry divisions very reliant on support from Corps - and Army - level heavy artillery.

commander, the CRA, had much more direct control over, and planning responsibility for, these more numerous weapons.

The lighter guns, many of which were part of the infantry divisions' normal establishment, had somewhat different roles from the heavy guns, largely due to lighter shell weight, shorter ranges but higher rates of fire. In the pre-attack phase, the field artillery was much more likely to be engaged on cutting the enemy's barbed-wire defences with shrapnel or directly engaging the closest enemy defensive positions. The explosive content of the field artillery's shells was insufficient to cause much damage to well-constructed German defensive positions while shrapnel, which even at this stage in the war was still 50% of field artillery ammunition used, had no effect on the enemy's trenches.[91] During the attack phase, the primary role of the field artillery was suppression and neutralisation. By firing a barrage on to the enemy's front line trenches while the assaulting infantry were crossing No Man's Land, the German defenders were forced to remain in their shell-proof bunkers. If the attacking infantry and the artillery got the coordination and timing right,[92] the attackers were able to enter enemy trenches before the defenders were in a position to resist them. By the end of the war, with much experimentation and experience to support it, a variation of this tactic, known as the 'rolling barrage', was standard procedure and usually effective. During the post-assault phase, the field artillery was primarily responsible for maintaining the protective barrage around the captured positions.

Given the artillery's role was well understood, the planning function had two key purposes: very broadly, the planners had to calculate how many shells would be required to be fired by each gun over what period to achieve the desired result - destruction or neutralisation - and which part of the battle field needed to be bombarded to ensure priority targets were dealt with. A key determinant of the artillery's success was its

---

[91] The British gunners were well aware of the effectiveness of various calibres' and natures of ammunition against various target types. 'Left Group artillery report yesterday's shelling proved that cupolas covered with sandbags, bursters and loose earth will take the burst of 4.2-inch shells.' 1st Brigade. War Diary, June 1916, 23/1/12 AWM4.

[92] As noted in Chapter Four, the coordination of the attacking infantry and its supporting artillery was the preoccupation of all levels of command. The further down the command chain the more detailed the planning to achieve this as the ground scale became bigger and the numbers involved smaller. Each level of command and planning had a legitimate role in this basic tactic, which was one reason coordination between levels of command were very important and why higher commands and planners needed to listen to the views of those junior planners closer to the actual battlefield.

accuracy but, with the existing state of the technology and skills, accuracy depended on having the guns properly 'registered' or ranged onto the designated targets. For this reason, a significant part of the artillery planning process was focussed upon registering the guns. As many barrels of different calibres could all be attempting to register on the one location, great care had to be taken to ensure registration was not confused by shells from one battery being attributed to another.[93]

As noted, the command arrangements for the field artillery gave principal planning responsibility to the Divisional CRA as the field artillery had, as its primary role, the direct support of the infantry brigades.[94] However, the CRA still needed to work within the overall artillery plan devised at Corps level as this brought together all the different roles and responsibilities and ensured every requirement of the total attack plan was met. It was the overall plan that ensured that different types and/or groups of guns did not interfere with the work of others. The responsibility to ensure the direct support of the infantry occurred still resided, however, with the Divisional planning team and the 5th Division's CRA and it is this aspect of the artillery plan that will be analysed.

As with the Division itself, the artillery of the 5th Division was not an ideal choice to conduct this operation. It did not begin to arrive in the divisional area of operations until 1 July and immediately had to organise and man one heavy and three medium trench mortar batteries from within its existing personnel. It had to send staff from each of the field artillery brigades to schools of instruction in trench mortars at St. Omer. Several days were spent reconnoitring the positions they were to support and learning defence plans, communications procedures and new equipments, such as gas helmets. From 10 July, planning started for the relief of the 4th Divisional artillery in

---

[93] Because the time required to register took so long, this technical requirement ensured that there was little hope of achieving battlefield surprise for the attacking infantry. It was not for another year, and after further technological developments, that the artillery could conduct a short-duration 'hurricane' bombardment to achieve the same battlefield effect but not provide the enemy with early warning of the attack.

[94] For example, a note on the use of high explosive and shrapnel from the Brigade Major of the 61st Division's artillery was circulated to the XI Corps gunners, the CRA of the supporting artillery and the commanders of the three field artillery groups supporting 61st Division. It was not circulated to any Australian artillery formation or headquarters supporting 5th Division's attack. Note 696 of 15 July 1916. 61st Division Artillery. War Diary, July 1916, WO 95/3039 TNA.

support of the front line which began on the night of 12-13 July. The next day, the CRA of 5th Division first learned that his guns were to support a divisional attack.

On 14 July, at 1.00 a.m., the CRA was called to divisional headquarters for a conference to discuss the proposed attack with the artillery brigades being informed some five hours later at 6.00 a.m. This was the first mention of the attack in the artillery war diary. Following this conference, another of the artillery group commanders was held at Royal Artillery Headquarters (XI Corps) to explain the scheme while a further conference was held later that day of artillery group commanders at the centre group headquarters where the command arrangements covering the artillery support the attack were laid out.

> 5th Australian Division placed under command of XI Corps for operation. B.G.R.A. 2nd Army and B.G.R.A. XI Corps visited C.R.A. C.R.A. 31st Division and C.R.A. Heavy Artillery also visited D.A.H.Q. Detailed orders issued re occupation of new positions. Groups commenced to change. All officers and N.C.O.'s at Schools rejoined their units. Batteries registered positions during the day and wire cutting batteries turned on to the wire at intervals during the day.[95]

At this stage, most of the planning appeared to have been done in conferences but written orders initiating the necessary moves quickly followed with the first, Divisional Artillery Order No. 6, being released late on 14 July. This Order contained the new deployment area for each field artillery brigade, its target area and the reinforcement each was to receive from 4th Division's artillery. It also contained the first instruction on targeting:

> This reconnaissance will include suitable positions for six (6) batteries per group as wire-cutting batteries in their respective zones.[96]

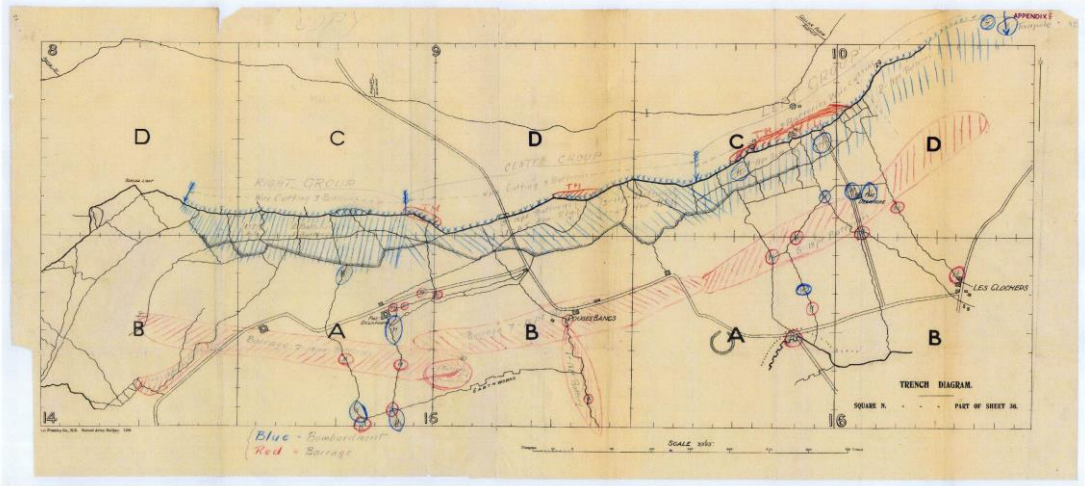
With less than three days before the original planned commencement date of the attack, the artillery still had no formal advice on the number of rounds per gun they were to be allocated to support the operation or the barrage/bombardment pattern they were to follow. The bombardment task was advised the following day in Order No. 9 which gave each artillery group its targets. (See map 15.)

---

[95] 5th Division, Artillery Staff. War Diary, July 1916 13/14/6 AWM4.
[96] Ibid.

Artillery Map

(Blue hatching = initial bombardment lines: red hatching = barrage lines)



(Map 15)

(Map from XI Corps War Diary)

Order 10, issued on 16 July, was the first mention in the artillery record of why the operation was taking place: this order commenced with the same explanation used in the infantry orders about preventing the enemy moving troops from this sector to the fighting on the Somme. It also included a good overview of the infantry's plans, including timings, forming-up areas and objectives. At Appendix A, it also included the timings for the artillery barrage, including the 'lifts' that were part of the ruse Haking wanted to employ to try and kill German defenders misreading the lift as the beginning of the attack and leaving their shelters. This Order was supported by a subsequent, more detailed explanation of the lifts and the ammunition types to be employed and rates of fire. This supporting Instruction also included reminders for the inexperienced gunners about staging the cleaning and cooling of guns and the resting and feeding of the gun crews. A second Instruction, issued the same day, provided greater detail on the rates of fire at various points during the barrage. Overall, the artillery plan developed by the Divisional CRA was comprehensive, achievable (in terms of assets available and supply of shells etc.) and appropriate to the infantry plan it was supporting.[97] Also, given the very short period the planners had to pre-position all the additional artillery,[98]

[97] J.P. Stevens, 'Artillery Support for the Fifth Australian in the Attack at Fromelles, July 1916' (Canberra: Unpublished paper, 2010), 21.

[98] According to one Field Engineer, when ordered to place the location of an artillery battery on the map of the brigade commander the battery was supporting, he discovered the battery was not in the location it thought it was. Further inquiry showed the French maps the artillery had been employing were very inaccurate. The combination of inexperienced gunners firing indirect fire missions and being in the wrong

organise ammunition supply and develop the plan, the absence of any serious or discernible flaw in the basic barrage plan or support plan was quite an achievement.

If there was any omission from the plan, it was the absence of a scheme to react to developments in the attack. The plan appeared rigid in its timing requirements and provided little opportunity for last-minute variations. This was to be a problem when the barrage failed to achieve its objectives in the first instance, such as its failure to destroy or neutralise the Sugar Loaf feature. However, the rigidity in the plan may well have reflected the unskilled nature of the gunners and the need to keep the planned barrage simple. While there has been much debate since the battle about the effectiveness of the artillery, is difficult to discern any obvious flaw in its planning, apart from this rigidity, which contributed to the artillery's alleged poor performance. The barrage plan for the supporting field artillery did cover all the requirements of the attacking infantry: the fact that in many places the wire was uncut or the enemy's parapets were undamaged was not due to the lack of identification in the plans of the need for this to be done.

Planning the battle of the divisional level was much less focused on the 'big picture' than it was on the movement of men on the battlefield. The plan that the 5th Division 'G' Staff developed, against most criteria, met all that was required to conduct a successful attack. It was clear in its objectives and timings, it was clear in identification of who was responsible for what actions and objectives and what combat support would be provided. While the error in assigning an administrative boundary between formations as the division between combat elements, in isolation from any appreciation of the battlefield, was undoubtedly a failure of the planning process, the capacity of the divisional planners to correct it was limited. In the same way, an unrealistic assessment of the ability of the artillery support to achieve the scale of destruction and neutralisation it was asked to do was an error but an understandable one. The command/planning team themselves had little experience on which to make that type of assessment. In one of the ironies of this war, as the capacity of the planners to recognise shortcomings in combat ability increased, the real deficiencies disappeared

---

position provides strong evidence to support the claims of the infantry that their own guns were shelling their positions. Letter S.K. Donnan, dated 3 Feb. 1934. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1 AWM38.

under the combined impact of a national war effort filling the equipment gap and battle experience filling the combat skill gap.

The orders were not merely a refrain of the higher headquarters original instructions: the divisional-level planners added their own instructions, coordination directions and clarifications. Not all higher command instructions were passed to the assault troops: the 5th Division orders do not repeat Haking's instructions about holding onto a position once it was captured. Nor did the orders include any reference to further exploitation should success follow the attack. The divisional planners kept their orders precisely within the framework of XI Corps instructions. There were differences between the orders issued by 5th Division and 61st Division but these more reflected the relative inexperience of the Australians and their lack of time in the front line in the attack area. The same reasoning could be applied to the impact of some of the less-than-precise language used in some of the divisional orders. While the tone and general vagueness clearly could not have assisted the planning process, the outcome of the battle does not contain any failures that could be directly linked to this problem.

Of all the deficiencies in the planning process identified, there was one for which the planners should be criticised. This was the lack of information known and publicised about the enemy's machine gun positions. The attacking infantry should have been given this information to guide the development of the minor tactical plan as the locations of the positions would have materially decided how to approach the part of the enemy's line I which they were located. Although the Australian infantry at this stage were not trained in the 'fire and movement' tactical method that proved very effective later in the war, their approach lines needed to take account of the enemy gun positions to ensure minimal time exposed to their fire. The information was available and should have been provided to the brigadiers at least, if not the battalion and company commanders.

While there were clearly some problems in the planning process and the subsequent orders, none of these, either singly or in combination, were so poor as to support the claims that the result was an example of poor battle planning by the Divisional planning staff. While the artillery may have failed to achieve the support needed, it was not because this task had been overlooked. Tactical communications may

have failed but not because the need for communications, and alternative means of establishing them, were not identified in the planning process and included in the orders. Neither the assault plan nor the attack formation was the cause of the high casualties. The single most obvious conclusion to be drawn is that, irrespective of the quality of the planning, the outcome was determined by many other factors, most of which were beyond the planners of 1916 to influence.

CHAPTER SIX

FROMELLES: THE BRIGADES PLAN AND PREPARE

> It (the brigade) remained the principal 'building block' of divisional attacks, representing an indispensable link between corps and divisional headquarters on the one hand and the front-line infantry on the other.[1]

While the planners at the higher headquarters had little contact with, or knowledge of, the infantry who were going to implement their ideas, the Brigade planning staff knew them well. As Simkins noted, it was the brigade that served as the link between the planners and the implementers. The brigade was both the smallest formation at which staff had a recognised formal planning responsibility and the highest headquarters in which the staff were likely to be involved in the actual fighting. The GSOI of the divisional planning staff would have little prospect of being fired at directly during the battle (indirect artillery fire was a hazard even for Corps headquarters) but his brigade counterpart, the brigade major, faced the real prospect of being exposed to direct enemy infantry fire.

Because the brigade represented the transition between the higher command/planning level and the implementation level of the planning process, clearly defining the role and responsibility of the brigade command and planning staff is not as easy as it is for the higher headquarters. Much of the planning function mirrored that of the higher headquarters but in smaller scale and greater detail. It was the brigade staff who decided which battalions would lead the attack, which would provide the support and which would remain in reserve.[2]

> Gen. Tivey. The 31st and 32nd Battalions were sent in first at Fromelles because they were older harder men. The 32nd was especially fine.[3]

The brigade staff decided where the brigade support troops, the machine gun company and the light trench mortar company, would be placed and how they would support the attack. The brigade planners had to make tactically important but minor

---

[1] Peter Simkins, 'Building Blocks: Aspects of Command and Control at Brigade level in the BEF's Offensive Operations, 1916-1918', in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds), *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-18* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004), 144.
[2] There were of course exceptions to this: divisional commanders who lacked confidence in the judgment of their brigade commanders or those with a high regard for specific battalions would and could interfere in this selection process. It did, however, become much less common as the war progressed.
[3] Loose note. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.

decisions regarding all manner of detail. For example, they decided when the machine guns would go forward to support the assault, how many additional rounds of ammunition and how many hand grenades the assaulting troops would carry and what additional equipment,[4] such as picks, sand bags and extra barbed wire, would go forward with the attacking waves.[5] A critical part of the brigade planning process was deciding the timing of the various moves of the different elements of the attacking formation, and in this regard, many of decisions made at Fromelles were wrong, primarily reflecting the inexperience of the brigades:

> To show how new we were, the six Lewis guns were sent over in this attack in the last wave.[6]

The brigade command team also had to oversee the preparation of No Man's Land for the attack, by arranging the preparation of exit lanes through their own defensive wire, clearing natural and man-made obstacles, marking approach lines and oversighting the digging of 'jumping-off' saps or trenches. Again, it was a matter of timing: too soon and the enemy could observe the preparations and take suitable counter-measures, too late and the attack would be disrupted. It was the brigade staff's responsibility to ensure the local preparations for the assault, such as the establishment of dumps of sufficient stocks of ammunition and food,[7] were ready, prior to zero hour, and that the battalion providing the carrying and resupply parties was advised of the location of the different dumps. It was also the responsibility of the brigade staff to ensure preparation of the areas behind the friendly lines ready to facilitate the follow-on

---

[4] In some Battalions, details such as the number of rounds to be carried were specified in Battalion Routine Orders. '5. Each man will carry 150 rounds of S.A.A. in web equipment & and extra bandolier of 50 slung on his left shoulder.' 54th Infantry Battalion War Diary, July 1916, 23/71/6 AWM4.

[5] No clear direction on whose responsibility these tactical decisions were was provided by the existing doctrine on planning. Higher headquarters could, and frequently did, issue instructions including these details. It was not uncommon, especially in the early years of the war, for higher headquarters to provide divisional and brigade planners with unnecessarily precise and detailed orders about minor points in the attack. Common examples related to ammunition to be carried (120 rounds of ammunition per man was a common demand), or extra grenades or Lewis gun ammunition to be taken forward with the assault troops. When this occurred, the task for the brigade planners was to enforce the orders, clarify or provide details on points overlooked by higher headquarters or, occasionally, to amend any such orders, if possible, where the instruction was contrary to the effective mounting of the attack.

[6] Report by 53rd Battalion on the Fromelles attack. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.

[7] 'The construction, siting and concealment of these dumps was also an important element in the brigade planning process: in the case of both the 8th and the 14th Brigades, the location of the dumps materially affected the attack. Given the effectiveness of the German artillery, any errors in the placement and management of the dumps usually resulted in their quickly being located and destroyed by German shelling, with major consequences for the resupply of the forward troops later in the battle.' Notes by Lieutenant Colonel Cass, 54th Battalion. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.

support of the first waves of attacking troops. This responsibility involved planning and organising the cutting of additional paths through the defensive barbed-wire entanglements between the front line and support line trenches to improve the movement forward of men and supplies, and identifying and marking 'in and out' routes to minimise confusion in the flow of reinforcements and supplies forward and casualties and messengers to the rear. This was planning at its most basic but nonetheless, it was still critical to the success of the broader plan.

The brigade staff had another, and frequently unrecognised, responsibility as well. As they were the planners closest to the battle zone, they were the ones best placed to determine whether all the essential precursors to the attack had been achieved: higher headquarters planners had to rely on the observations and reports of others. The brigade staff used their own observations and the reports of their own patrols and of the other specialists collocated with them, including the artillery forward observers, to assess the success of the preparations. They could easily and quickly determine, for example, the extent to which the supporting artillery had succeeded in destroying the enemy's wire and fixed defences. Based on their judgments, and subject to the willingness of higher headquarters to accept their observations, they could arrange for the attack to be delayed briefly or for a change to be made to the artillery bombardment program to re-attack an area not adequately damaged. For Fromelles, the evidence indicates that Haking did receive this kind of information from his forward elements, mainly the artillery observer network, and did arrange for the re-bombardment of sections of the enemy wire, but that the brigade planners either did not know, or lacked the experience,[8] to utilise this process directly in their operating area.

However, the main planning contribution of the brigade staff was, as noted, to add the local detail to the plans and to allocate specific roles to specific units.[9] The importance of these brigade responsibilities to the overall success of the plan is often under-rated, misunderstood or simply overlooked, arguably because they were

---

[8] 'Dreary afternoons, officers learning director work, best thing they could as their ignorance is marvellous regarding artillery work'. Diary entry, 18 July 1916. Gunner M.E. Liley. Liley papers, PR89/086, AWM.
[9] The Commander of the Australian 15th Brigade at the last moment replaced one of the battalions, the 58th, which he had selected for the initial assault line when he decided its command and leadership was poor and its morale and fighting spirit had suffered accordingly. Ross McMullin, *Pompey Elliott* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2002), 212.

considered administrative responsibilities or merely standard operating procedures, rather than actual plans. However, their routine nature or simplicity did not offset their capacity, if done badly, to become the cause of failure for the whole attack. If the brigades made fundamental mistakes in their selection of assault units, or directed the attacking infantry to carry too much or too little equipment, or to carry the wrong extra equipment, the attack might fail. If they ordered insufficient or too much combat supply to be carried by the initial assault troops, or directed the employment of incorrect minor tactical formations or simply failed to fully complete the preparation phase, it would have mattered little how complete and accurate the higher formation plan may have been, as failure would have been the most likely outcome. The planning process was not an abstract activity. It had but one purpose: to give the attacking infantry the best prospect of success that could be arranged. If the infantry failed, the attack failed. It was at the brigade level, with all the minor planning details, that the success of the attack was really decided because it was at this level that all elements of the plan finally came together.

Extra pressure was placed on the brigade-level planners because, unlike the planners in the higher headquarters, they also had specific parts to play in mounting the attack, additional to planning. It was often the brigade major who prepared the 'jumping off' tape lines in No Man's Land upon which the attacking infantry formed up upon before the attack. The brigade staff generally acted as the brigade commander's eyes and ears during the fighting, being expected to be out on the battlefield monitoring the brigade's progress, and on whose reports and recommendations the brigadier could ask for assistance from higher headquarters or send forward his reserves in response to a local development.[10] In some extreme cases, the brigade staff acted for the brigadier and gave orders directly to the battalions.[11]

> Major Crowshaw, who had been sent forward by Colonel Pope to see how matters were going, reported that the telephone connection from

---

[10] Even some brigade commanders, notably 'Pompey' Elliott, tended to go well forward, even past the front line, to observe progress. His diary of 17-21 April 1916 notes several instances of him going out in front of the front line (defending the Suez Canal) 'to observe it from an enemy's point of view'. Elliott Papers, 2DRL/0513, Item 3, AWM.

[11] It was not common for the staff to issue orders on their own volition as the staff theoretically had no command status, but it was extremely common for them to suggest to their brigadiers that such an order should be given and for the brigadier then to act upon their recommendation.

> our front line trenches back to our report centre in RUE PETILLION [sic] was cut.[12]

The brigade staff captain, who in addition to his responsibilities for the resupply and reinforcement of the troops engaged in the fighting, was often required to go forward to gather reports on progress, state of the troops and their supply situation. Where one was present, the brigade intelligence officer had the responsibility of informing the higher headquarters of the progress of the fighting and especially of anything unusual about the enemy and his defences to enable the brigadier to seek additional combat support to counter the developments discovered.[13] Given this combat role, it was the brigade planners who stood to pay the highest personal price for any failures in the planning process.[14] Yet, as the lowest level involved, they also had the least influence in developing the overall plan.

It is important to recognise the limitations on the planning role of the brigades, lest they become the scapegoats for failures higher up the chain of command.[15] As Simkins notes, the ability of the brigade planners to influence the overall nature and composition of the assault plan itself was very limited:

> Historian and soldiers alike have generally tended to emphasise the limitations of the brigade commander's role and influence on planning in the Great War. John Gellibrand, one of the most successful of all Australian brigade and divisional commanders of the war, succinctly summarised the constraints rather than the opportunities of brigade command when he wrote, a decade after the Armistice: 'The Brigadier had little scope beyond oiling the works and using his eyes'.[16]

---

[12] Narrative of Events, 17/7/16 to 20/7/16. 14th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4. Much depended on the initiative of the Brigade Major himself too. 'Not being quite satisfied that all was well with the latter (an attack by the 10th Cheshire Battalion), I decided to go up and see what the situation was for myself. Got up to the 1st Wilts and went out to their Grange Crater Post, where everything was alright but the Boche was chucking a few bombs over.' Edwin Astill, *The Great War Diaries of Brigadier General Alexander Johnston 1914-1917* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2007), 145.

[13] 'The Intelligence Officer, Rogers, acts as a sort of liaison officer to the front line'. Bean Diary note, 25 July 1916. Bean Diaries, 3DRL 606, Item 55, AWM38/1/55. It was a dangerous responsibility: 'I went out last night with Captain Doyle, Brigade Intelligence Officer, to try and locate an enemy spy. Unfortunately, got into a cone of machine gun fire and Doyle got hit'. Diary entry 2 Sept 1916. Elliott Papers, 2DRL/0513, Item 3, AWM.

[14] 'Life on a Brigade Headquarters was a little more comfortable, and a little less dangerous, than regimental duty, but it was still no sinecure.' Brigadier T.S. Louch, unpublished manuscript on his service in 1914-1918, *In the Ranks*. Louch Papers, PR 85/363, AWM.

[15] 'Brigadier General Spooner of the 183rd Brigade called upon me this morning. He replaces, I hear, one of the British Brigadiers who were sacked over the last assault. Seemed a decent chap. Has the DSO and CB ribbons up. Young-looking for a British General.' Diary entry 3 August 1916. Elliott Papers, 2DRL/0513, Item 3, AWM.

[16] Simkins, *Building Blocks*, 145.

Such a judgment is entirely valid in relation to the more 'strategic' elements such as determining objectives and setting the duration of the action. With the scale and complexity of the 1916 battle, there was indeed little scope for major alterations in the critical elements of the plan by the time the brigades entered the process: all the attack and supporting forces would already have been identified, ammunition stocks would have been allocated, objectives identified and broad timings decided. Even were flaws in the higher command planning identified by the Brigade staff, the small amount of time remaining before the attack was due would have made major changes, short of the complete abandonment of the attack, difficult to initiate from the brigade level.

Yet this focus on the constraints on the junior planners often leads to their genuine contribution to planning being overlooked. As the major part of their planning responsibility was to make the plans received from higher headquarters as effective as they could, through correct and skilful tactical decisions, they did possess the very real capacity to add value to the overall plan. While this contribution was both recognised and considered almost standard procedure later in the war, it was not a skill or an option available to brigade teams at Fromelles: they simply lacked the combat experience to recognise either any potential problems with the plan or identify and suggest any possible solutions. They did, however, still have to plan the final details of the attack, so their contribution was the last step in the process that commenced in Haig's headquarters in January 1916.

As with the divisional planners, the brigades of the 5th Division had limited warning of the proposed attack and even more limited opportunity to plan the details of their part in it. The Divisional Order directing the brigades to commence planning, 5th Divisional Order No. 30, was issued at 12.00 noon on 15 July and received in the brigades within two hours.[17] Somewhat surprisingly therefore, in view of the short time remaining until the attack was due to commence,[18] the war diaries of all three brigades for that entire day show the focus of attention of the brigade command teams remained firmly upon repositioning movements and routine trench occurrences. There was no indication in any of the Brigade records, except for a single line entry at 11.00 p.m. in

---

[17] The 15th Brigade diary noted receipt at 1.50 p.m. 15th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/15/5 AWM4.
[18] At this point, it was still planned to commence at 4.00 a.m. on 17 July.

15th Brigade's diary,[19] that any planning, or even preparatory thinking, for the attack had commenced. The last section in each brigade war diary illustrates this focus on routine well:

> **8th Brigade entry**: Situation normal – 29th and 32nd Bns moved to FLEURBAIX and billeted – NZ Brigade partially took over front line.
>
> **14th Brigade entry:** Orders received to move out of the FLEURBAIX SECTOR and to relieve 1 Bn of the 15th AIF Brigade from PINNEY'S AVENUE exclusive to MINE AVENUE exclusive. FLEURBAIX SECTOR being taken over from us by 60th Infantry Brigade. General Butler commanding.
>
> **15th Brigade entry:** Enemy retaliatory bombardment damaged our parapet and communications trenches. He also threw a number of aerial torpedos, one of which killed a few men.

The first formal reaction to the Divisional Order did not occur until the issue of the first Brigade warning orders in the evening of 16 July: 8th Brigade Order No. 23, issued at 8.30 p.m., 14th Brigade Order No. 5, issued at 8.15 p.m. and 15th Brigade Order No. 16, no time of issue recorded. While the first order of 14th Brigade did refer to 'instructions already communicated confidentially to C.O.'s [sic] of Battalions', the need for clearly defined goals and timings still required written plans and orders to be issued to the battalions for them to act upon. The thirty-two-hour gap between the issue of the divisional order and the issue of the brigades' orders based on this order represented a lost opportunity for the assaulting battalion commanders. This was time they could have used to undertake more detailed reconnaissances of their objectives, No Man's Land and the approach trenches.[20] While unfamiliarity with the battle zone would have been much less of a problem for the brigades in 1917 or 1918, when experience and training were both at a high level, the brigades of 1916 were so ignorant of conditions on the ground they were to fight over that any additional time could only have benefitted battle preparation.

---

[19] The last entry of the day noted: '5th Div. Order No. 30 was received and 15th Brigade Order No. 15 issued'. However, while this Divisional Order did warn of the impending attack, the 15th Brigade Order that the diary links to it did not mention the proposed attack at all. While the Brigade Commander thus was made aware of it, he did not appear to have formally advised his battalion commanders for several more hours. 15th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/15/5 AWM4.

[20] A hand-drafted narrative of events between 17 and 20 July in the 14th Brigade war diary does provide evidence that some preparations did occur behind the Australian lines on 16 July, but it also make it clear that most of the planning and preparation for the attack by the Brigade occurred after this date. Appendix B 32/1/15, 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

The elapse of time between the issue of the Divisional order and the brigade response was also indicative of the high level of activity the brigades were experiencing at that time. It exposed the extremely limited command and planning resources available to the brigades and demonstrated just how much of the planning at this level was last minute and short time-frame. Again, as was regularly demonstrated later in the war, short time-frame planning was not a problem for experienced units and formations but the 5th Division was neither experienced nor fully trained.

Arguably, there was even less room in brigade planning for generalities or imprecise detail. It was the brigade plan, and the consequent orders, that precisely determined the direction, shape and intensity of the attack. For this reason, the same five criteria against which the divisional plan was judged apply with even greater validity to the plans the brigades advanced to control the attack.[21] Having been given the higher command's synthesised instructions as to the objectives each brigade had been assigned, the most important task the brigade staff had to fulfil was to interpret them and convert them into an order to the battalions clearly setting out what they had to do, where to go and when to move. Clear objectives, clearly identified areas of operation and, most importantly, clear timings were the core of the attack and the attacking battalions needed these to be clearly articulated unambiguously in their orders.

As will be shown, the tactical problem confronting each of the three Brigades of 5th Division was sufficiently different that the orders of each to their battalions had to be precisely tailored to the situation they were likely to encounter and thus should have been different from each other. Overall, differences, apart from layout, were surprisingly small. There was also much repetition between them, due to the need to outline the overall Commander's Intent and to provide the essential background 'situational awareness' that each battalion needed to avoid being surprised by friendly actions near them on the battlefield.

As noted, the Divisional Orders had made the overall purpose of the attack clear. Divisional Order No. 31 and its supporting material had provided a brief but arguably sufficient overview of the Commander's Intent, the objectives and the timings.

---

[21] See Chapter 1, page 19.

Unfortunately, the supporting material accompanying the Order had moved beyond the normal areas of divisional responsibilities for outlining overall direction and descended into levels of detail about the infantry's role that were more appropriately left to the Brigades to decide. As noted previously, the Divisional Commander had directed the structure and arrangement of the attack formation to be employed by each brigade. He attempted to limit any possible confusion over the objectives by emphasising the enemy's front line trenches as the sole objective for the attack but inadvertently, as it transpired, sowed the seeds of tactical confusion for the battalions when they arrived at their objectives.

> 4. The mode of taking the trenches should be as follows – first wave stays at and clears enemy out of first row of enemy trenches in which the enemy are, whether they resist or not. Then advance further. Meanwhile second wave passes first wave to next enemy row where resistance or enemy are; and so on until all works of enemy first line system, which in most places extends about 100 yards behind their first line parapet, are taken.
>
> 5. Every work in enemy first line system is to be taken, but no troops are on any account whatever to go beyond that line. See that communications trenches leading back from the first line are not mistaken for parts of the first line.
>
> 6. These communications trenches must be blocked (with double block where possible) and watched.
>
> 7. It is the rearmost row of then enemy's first line that is to be at once fortified and held when it is taken.
>
> 13. Clearly understand that each wave, so soon as it has cleared of enemy the work it gets into, goes <u>on</u> to the prescribed limit of attack, i.e. the rearmost enemy work in his front line system, 100 yards to 150 yards behind his parapet, unless earlier waves have done the job when later waves can stay in close support in parallel enemy works.[22]

Apart from any issues relating to the soundness of the Divisional Commander becoming involved to this degree in the formulation of tactical detail, his emphasis on limiting the objectives failed to include any guidance for the local tactical commander should the assault troops encounter unplanned or unpredicted developments. The most likely of these was that the German defences did not fully conform to the structure assumed in the plan. The lack of accurate information about the German defence system, generated in large part by the errors of the planners in interpreting aerial

---

[22] Instructions for Infantry Brigadiers. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4. Also copied in 14th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

photographs, caused much confusion when the attackers could not reconcile their objectives with what they encountered in the enemy's trench system.[23]

Given recent experiences on the Somme, the lack of knowledge about German defensive systems prior to their occupation and examination was something the Divisional planners could reasonably have foreseen and made provision for. By insisting on a rigid adherence to the tactical objectives as described, the Divisional Commander, whether inadvertently or by intention, had reduced the capacity of the assault commanders to adapt the detail of the plan to fit the realities of the battle and the ground. Noting this, more experienced brigade planners and commanders could have attempted to provide more tactical flexibility in the final orders, subject only to maintaining the intent of the superior orders and to the technical limitations, especially in communications, that affected the degree of flexibility possible on the 1916 battlefield. The Australian brigade planning teams did not possess the necessary experience. They lacked both the skills and experience necessary to enable them to recognise the implications and potential problems caused by the rigidity of the Divisional tactical approach and, arguably, lacked the confidence and skills to build in any flexibility and redundancy to compensate.[24]

Post-battle comments by both brigade and battalion commanders confirmed that the tactical command level did have some problems with aspects of the detail of the plan from the Division. However, their assessments also reinforce the conclusion that, with the sole exception of the commander of the 15th Brigade, they did not raise these concerns until after the attack, by which time it was too late. Care also needs to be taken in taking these assessments at face value. The assessment of one of the assault battalion commanders (Lieutenant Colonel W. E. F. Cass, 54th Battalion) in the immediate battle review process merely stated that the plan was 'simple':

---

[23] 'By this time the second wave had joined us, and a move was made on the enemy support line. With astonishment, we discovered that no support line existed at this point.' F. Law, Bean Papers, 3DRL606/261/1, AWM38.

[24] The famous exchange between Elliott and the Staff Major (Howard) from Haig's headquarters about the tactical problem confronting the 15th Brigade was perhaps the closest any Australian brigade commander came to trying to change his orders, although Elliott's contribution was mainly to attempt to call the attack off. C.E.W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* (hereafter *AOH*) Vol. III (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1929), 346.

> The general plan of the attack was simple. Of each brigade, two battalions were to assault in waves about 50 yards apart; one battalion was to provide carrying parties for wire, ammunition, sand bags, tools and water, and the fourth battalion was detailed to hold the front line from which the advance was made to form a base in case of forced retirement.[25]

Whether this was because he failed to comprehend before the attack, or failed to appreciate afterwards, the complexities of the tactical problem his battalion faced or whether it was a positive comment suggesting there was nothing complex, and therefore unsatisfactory, about the plan is unclear from the context of his statement. In other commentary, Cass was critical of the performance of the attacking troops themselves and suggested their poor showing contributed to the eventual outcome. Whether his criticism can be interpreted as indicating he considered the plan itself was satisfactory but failed because of this poor performance is unclear. None the less, his assessment of the plan given to him by his brigade was correct: it was a simple plan. The low skill levels of the assaulting infantry made simplicity an imperative.

In post-war commentary, there has been a tendency to assume that merely because a plan was simple, it was also flawed or had greater potential to fail. Several factors may have contributed to the employment of a simple attack plan. First among these could be that the tactical problem only required a simple plan. However, even a basic military appreciation of the Fromelles action would have revealed the complex problems confronting what was stressed as only a limited attack,[26] so even a plan simple in concept would have had to include some complex tactical directions to overcome those problems. There is no evidence to show that for Fromelles, the brigade or indeed the divisional planners consciously kept the assault plan simple by design; indeed, the assault formation to be employed by the attacking infantry, prescribed by the Divisional headquarters, was not at all a simple requirement. The lack of warning time could also have contributed to the limited detail in the brigade plans, thus reducing their complexity. The inexperience of the troops also provided a justification for keeping tactical manoeuvring simple: it was concern over the likely inability of the New Armies to utilise complex tactical manoeuvres that led Haig and Rawlinson to adopt simple

---

[25] Notes by Lieutenant Colonel Cass, 54th Battalion, for Mr Bean's personal use. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.

[26] These included the ground, which was boggy and difficult in places, the obstacle created by the Lais River, the coordination of so much artillery and other combat support and, especially, the two exposed flanks of the attack.

tactics for the first day of the Somme. For all these reasons, Cass's comments should not be assumed to be a criticism of the eventual tactical plan from his brigade.

A contrary view was held by the commander of the 15th Brigade, Brigadier General H.E. 'Pompey" Elliott, who did not regard the tactical plan as at all simple and who was the sole exception to the general acceptance of the plan. Unlike Cass, he felt it was fatally flawed.[27] In the event, however, his arguments did not convince his higher headquarters, nor is there any evidence to suggest he either attempted to modify the plans he subsequently issued to correct any of the perceived shortcomings he identified. The 15th Brigade is considered later.

The brigade with the most challenging assignment was the 8th Brigade. Being on the northern or left end of the whole attack, they faced the difficult prospect of advancing with their left flank fully exposed. (See map 16) This was recognised as a vulnerability at the higher headquarters and vague plans had been developed to support and protect the left flank of the 8th Brigade by infantry fire from a British brigade moved into the front line next to them specifically for this purpose. The 8th did have the advantage of being the closest to the enemy trenches, No Man's Land in front of

Map showing Advance of 8th Brigade
(red symbols identify enfilading German machine gun fire.)

(Map 16)

[27] Letter, Elliott to Bean, dated 17 August 1926. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.

them was less than 200 yards wide,[28] and thus having the shortest approach move of the assault groups. However, it also meant the brigade ran a greater risk of being hit by their own supporting artillery during the preliminary and supporting barrages.

The relevant order for the 8th's attack was Brigade Order No. 23, issued at 8.30 p.m. on 16 July 1916.[29] Given the original attack was due to commence at 4.00 a.m. on the 17th, this left the battalion commanders with less than eight hours to receive, understand and plan the attack and issue the necessary orders to the battalion commanders.[30] Later in the war, with experienced junior commanders and combat-hardened troops, this short time-frame would have been neither unusual nor an impediment to success.[31] For troops, and more particularly for their commanders, facing their first attack on a Western Front battlefield, such a limited time was a high-risk approach.[32] It left brigade and battalion planners very little time to absorb and understand the plan, conduct the necessary reconnaissance of the attack area and then to draft and issue instructions to the four thousand troops assigned to the attack in time for them to understand their tasks. Fortunately, the weather intervened and the ensuing delay did provide some opportunity to refine the attack plans and for the battalions to prepare.

Brigade Order No. 23, consisting of three pages plus three pages of appendices, provided, on initial examination, a comprehensive tactical plan. By repeating in the early

---

[28] Several sources suggest that No Man's Land in front of the 8th Brigade was closer to 100 yards than 200 yards wide but SGT Francis Law, in a letter to the Official Historian, stated that in front of 31st Battalion, 'No Man's Land at this point about 170 yards wide'. Letter, Law to Bean, dated 30 March 1928. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1, AWM38.

[29] The order was recorded as being received at 8.45 p.m. by 31st Battalion – indicating there was little delay in the transmission from Brigade headquarters to the relevant battalions. 30th Battalion. War Diary, July 1916, 23/47/12 AWM4.

[30] The Commander of the 31st Battalion noted that 'On the 15th July, received verbal instructions re contemplated operations as outlined in Battalion Order No. 1 "Appendix A", Brigade Order No. 23 dated 16.7.1916, and continuation order No. 23 "Appendix A"', suggesting he at least was aware of the broad details before the receipt of the formal order. He does not elaborate on whether this enabled him to begin planning or whether he needed to await the full details. 31st Battalion. War Diary, July 1916, 23/48/12 AWM4.

[31] 'Cass considered that at the time of the Fromelles [attack] the 8th Brigade suffered from the want of training of its officers. They were not, in many cases, old Anzac men and had not been to the same extent under fire as much as other officers of the Force. When the 8th Brigade retired on the left in what appeared to be panic, like a crowd running across a field at the end of a football match, he thinks this was probably due to the want of experience on the part of their officers.' Historical Note – Fromelles. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1, AWM38.

[32] Bean, *AOH* Vol. III, 342.

paragraphs the information in the divisional order, the Brigade Order clearly identified the Commander's Intent, scale of the attack and the forces to be involved. It also clearly explained the ruses to be tried during the initial bombardment. The brigade order repeated in some detail the divisional commander's tactical requirement for the attack formation to be used and emphasised the need for close cooperation with reporting contact aircraft. The order contained comparatively detailed instructions to battalion commanders covering the specific tactical actions each battalion was to undertake, for example:

> 22. Battalion Commanders will detail special parties to construct covered communications back from captured trenches which must be done as soon as possible.
>
> 24. Patrols tonight MUST report absolutely accurately condition of enemy's wire. Exact location to be given. Patrols must go to the wire. Must report both what there is and what of it has been cut.
> All information must be sent to Brigade Head Quarters immediately.[33]

The core purpose of the Brigade Order was to define the objectives to be captured, the tactics to be employed in doing so and the timing and coordination of the separate assault groups. Brigade Order No. 23 was only partially successful in this, however. Identifying the objectives took several paragraphs. The first reference, in paragraph 2, was the identification of the overall objectives for the whole attack intended, presumably, to provide the battalion commanders with some understanding of the scale of the attack and a feeling for where their actions fitted into the overall plan. While this was important, it was really only background information for commanders at the bottom of the planning hierarchy. Of more interest to the battalions was the specific identification of objectives for the two assaulting battalions the brigade was employing. For the 8th Brigade, the identification of their objectives came early in the issued Orders.

> 7. One Company of the 30th Battalion and 8th Field Company Engineers will move to N.10.a.4.8.
> Brigade Headquarters will move to H.26.d.3.2.
> The 31st and 32nd will be the assaulting Battalions.
>
> 8. Objectives.
> 32nd Battalion from N.10.c.9.6.$^1/_2$ inclusive to N.10.c.5.$^1/_2$.3.$^1/_2$. where enemy communication trench meets his front line exclusive.
> 31st Battalion from N.10.c.5.$^1/_2$.3.$^1/_2$. Inclusive to N.10.c.$^1/_2$.2.$^1/_2$. exclusive.

---

[33] Brigade Order No. 23. 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4.

> The enemy's front line and support trenches will be taken and consolidated.
>
> 9. The method of attack will be:-
> Each Battalion of the Assaulting Battalions will have two Companies in the first and second waves and two Companies in the 3rd and 4th waves.
> Companies distributed in depth, that is, two platoons in front with two platoons of the same Company in rear as per diagram on following page. (The orders then reproduced the Divisional Commander's diagram from Div. Orders.)[34]

This precisely identified the width of the objective and appeared to limit the depth of the advance to the enemy's support trenches. To reinforce the depth, the orders later quoted verbatim from the divisional planning instructions to stress that the support trenches were to be the absolute limit of the advance:

> 17. Every work in the enemy first line system is to be taken, but no troops on any account are to go beyond that line. See that communication trenches leading back from the first line are not mistaken for parts of the first line.[35]

The problem with this, as was quickly revealed during the attack, was that the enemy defensive works were not as clearly laid out or constructed in the manner this Order presupposed.[36] Given the objectives had come from superior headquarters precisely defined in this way and given the brigade planning staff had had little time to examine the objectives for themselves, however, there was little reason or indeed scope for the Brigadiers to either qualify or vary the instructions.[37] Given their lack of experience and complete unfamiliarity with both the battleground and German defences, it would have been unreasonable to expect them to have had any concerns with this description of the objectives assigned to them. However, the precision in the identification of the limits of the attack led to immediate confusion when the features could not be identified. It was for this reason that elements of both the 8th and the 14th Brigades advanced well beyond the objectives, into the enemy's secondary defence zone. (See map 17 for a

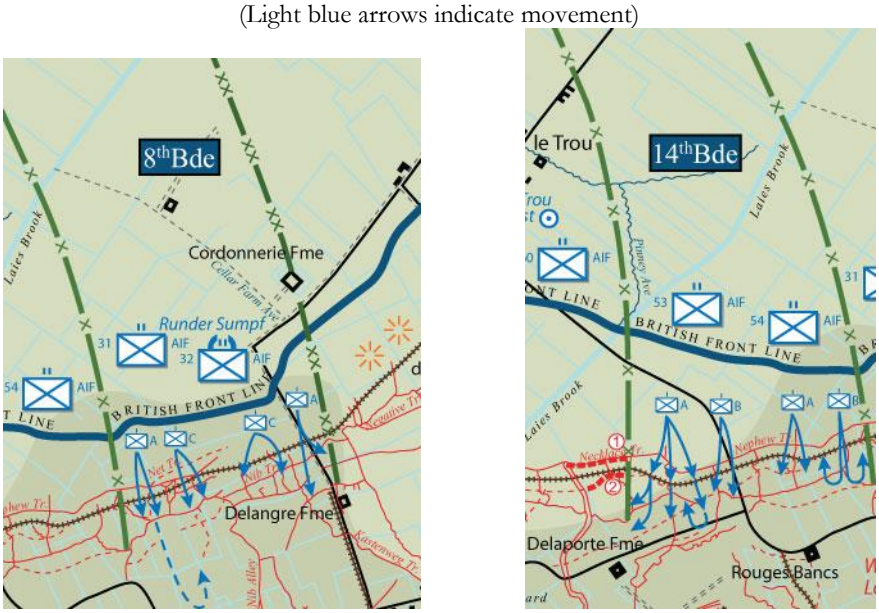
---

[34] Brigade Order No. 23. 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4.
[35] Ibid.
[36] 'Hughes agreed that, according to the meagre description in the battalion's orders, this must be the objective.' Bean, *AOH*, 376.
[37] This was not an unusual problem for planners in 1916. Although it is clear from the evidence that the description of the objectives provided by Corps Headquarters, based on interpretation of aerial photographs, was incorrect there were other possible reasons that the description could have been in error: Allied artillery in particular tended to so damage the enemy's trenches as to make them unrecognizable. Astill, *War Diaries of Brigadier General Alexander Johnston,* 136.

representation of these penetrations and map 17a for a graphical representation of these deep penetrations as recorded by the CO of one of the Battalions involved.)

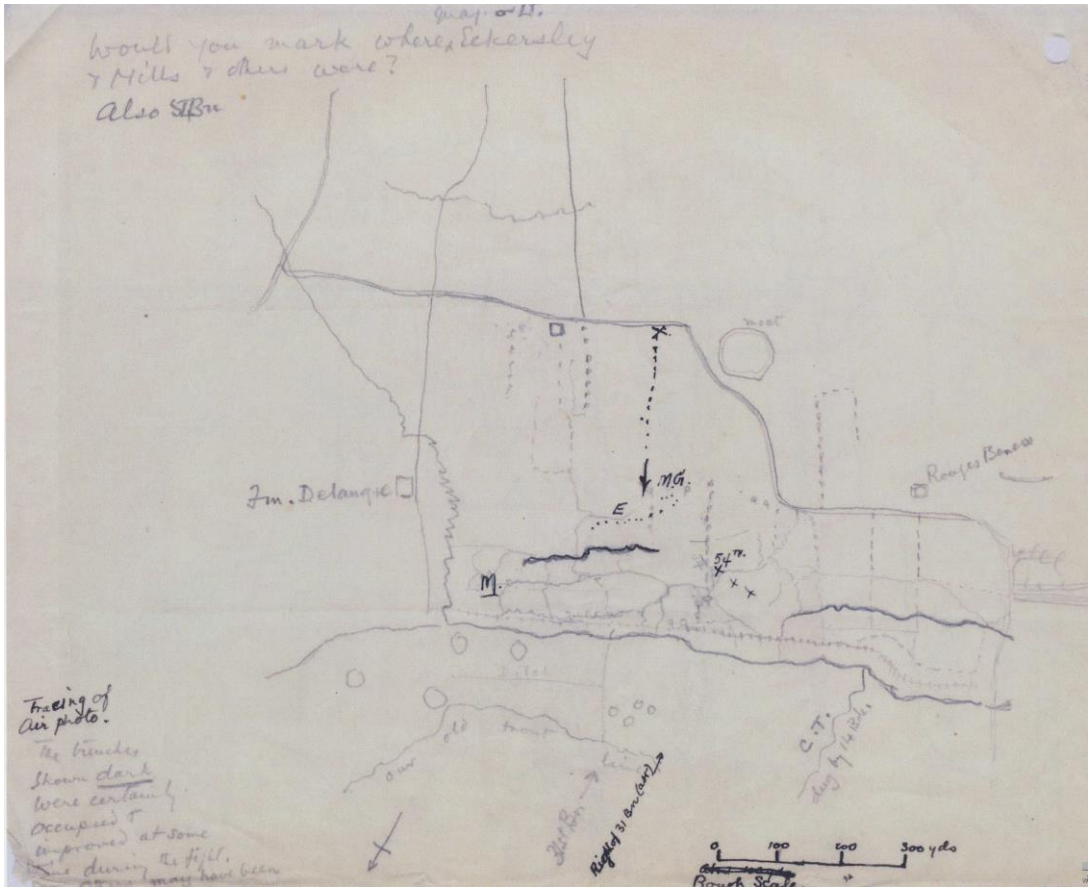
The other critical part of the tactical orders, a clear explanation of timing linked to location, was dealt with in some detail in the brigade orders. Given timing had been set in the Divisional plan, which linked the infantry timings to the supporting artillery barrage and to contact aircraft reporting, the responsibility for brigade planners was simply to ensure these timings were accurately passed on to the assaulting troops and understood by all the participants. The capacity for brigade planners to alter this vital component was non-existent, given the number of external support functions that needed to be coordinated. Had brigadiers had any concerns about the planned timing for the attack, as will be discussed in the examination of the 15th Brigade's planning phase, the only option available was to recommend the delay or cancellation of the whole attack. It was simply too complex a task, too demanding on the primitive communications systems available and arguably beyond the skill of the inexperienced troops being used, to make complex last minute changes. The commander of the 8th Brigade merely passed on, without comment and presumably without any concerns as to the capacity of his brigade to comply with them, the timings given to him in the divisional orders.

Penetrations by 8th and 14th Brigades
(Light blue arrows indicate movement)



(Map 17)

Map provided to C.E.W Bean by Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Toll, Commanding Officer of the 31st Battalion, recording the depth of his unit's penetration.



(Map 17a)

Somewhat surprisingly, therefore, the timing for the moves of the 8th's infantry, totally tied to the structure and pace of the artillery barrage, was addressed only briefly in the body of Order 23, although the order did repeat the divisional timetable for the artillery fire plan in an annex to the order .

> 15. During the last phase of the intense bombardment, the infantry of the first two waves will be deployed in 'No Man's Land' as near as possible to the enemy's trenches opposite their sections of attack and will assault at 7.00 immediately the artillery "Lift" to Barrage lines.[38]

There was no detailed timing for the forward movement of each element of the assault force nor was there any indication of the time when the support troops would move forward. It was the divisional order that had set the vital timing point, the moment the

---

[38] Note that in this order, the timings were based on the original plan to launch the attack on 17 July. Following the delay to the attack and then to the actual time on the 19th that the attack was to commence, the timings of both the infantry moves and the artillery bombardment were of course adjusted.

barrage would lift and the moment the assault would begin, but it was the brigade responsibility to ensure the assault troops knew when to begin their move to the assault point. For the 8th Brigade, given the closeness of the enemy line, the assault could almost have been mounted directly from the front trenches. However, as Bean notes, on the day of the attack, the two assault battalions did move into No Man's Land at 5.53 p.m., some seven minutes prior to the assault time. While the move itself was ordered in Order 23, at no point, in either brigade or battalion orders, does a specific time appear that set the moment for the assaulting troops to commence their move.

> 10. A little before bombardment of enemy parapet finally lifts (remember it will lift to support trenches and return to parapet several times) first and second waves will cross the parapet and take up position in "No Man's Land" as near as possible to the enemy wire with an interval between sections.
> One wave to be through the enemy wire before the next wave reaches it, unless the wave in front breaks.
> 15. During the last phase of the intense bombardment the infantry of the First [sic] two waves will be deployed in "NO MAN'S LAND" as near as possible to the enemy's trenches opposite their sections of attack and will assault at 7.00 immediately the artillery "Lift" to Barrage lines.[39]

While the higher command's starting point was contained in the artillery program, each brigade commander was required to calculate the appropriate time for his troops to move forward and advise them of that calculation. The divisional instruction was that when the artillery made its last intense bombardment of the enemy front line, the first waves of the assaulting troops were to move into No Man's Land. Brigadiers were supposed to adjust the timings of the move to allow for the varying depths of No Man's Land, presumably to minimise the exposure of the assault troops in the open in No Man's Land. Neither brigade nor battalion war diaries for the 8th Brigade attack include written orders, either for the original attack planned for 17 July nor for the final attack, which set down the final forward deployment time.

As with the 15th Brigade, the commander 8th Brigade ignored the explicit direction from the Division that it was the Brigadier's responsibility and delegated the decision to the battalion commanders. Consequently, while a movement time clearly was decided and made known to all the participants, there is no evidence in the war diaries to show how this was done or how the calculations used to identify the correct time to move was derived. There was some discussion in the subsequent Brigade Order

---

[39] Brigade Order No. 23. 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4.

No. 24 of the difficulties the assault troops faced in trying to determine exactly when the artillery barrage lifted. The solution was made to commence the attack based on the time by synchronised watches rather than by the lift of the barrage.

> 20. With reference to Brigade Order No. 23 para 15, it must be understood that the lifting of the Artillery fire to "Barrage" lines at 7.00 may not be apparent to the leading troops. These will advance into the enemy's trenches at 7.00 working by the watch.[40]

However, this attention to detail was not reflected in determining the time for the troops to move out into No Man's Land.

As noted earlier, the diaries do show that the troops moved forward during the barrage, so presumably the timing of the move was decided by the battalion commanders and passed verbally to Brigadier Tivey for his concurrence.[41] This lack of detail or the late consideration and notice of it, when combined with another minor error in the order's advice on timing, suggests the pressure of the prospective attack was causing some loss of attention to detail in Tivey's planning team. Another and perhaps more compelling example of the lack of attention can be found in the Brigade Order itself. Instead of following the order to 'fix the time for their first wave to leave', the brigade planners merely copied this direction in the Divisional Order across into the Brigade Order without amendment, suggesting they had not read it.

> **Brigade** Commanders will fix the time for their first wave to leave the front trench according to their distance from the enemy's line. The deployment must be completed before 7.00.[42]

This section should have included the precise detail of the initial movement timing, as worked out by the brigade and passed to the battalions the set timings. While this

---

[40] Brigade Order No. 24. 18 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4. It is important to note that, at this stage, the attack was planned to commence with the barrage at 4.00 am on the 19th. This change was directed by Divisional Headquarters in a planning memo on 18 July to each Brigadier and the CRA. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, July 1916, 1/50/5 Part 6 AWM4.

[41] SGT Law noted that 'As six o'clock approached, our officers counted of the minutes for us. "15 minutes to go, boys, … ten … five … four … three … two … one, get ready, boys" and the first wave were over the top.' F. Law, Recollections of the Battle of Fromelles, France, July 19th 1916. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/261/1, AWM38. Unlike the 14th Brigade War Diary, the 8th Brigade diary makes no mention of any brigade commanders' conferences during these days. Clearly, they had to have occurred but in the absence of information on when they happened and who attended, it is dangerous to speculate on what was discussed or agreed upon. At 33 pages, the 8th diary has significant limitations compared with the 163 pages of the 14th Brigade diary.

[42] It should have read 'Battalion Commanders'. Brigade Order No. 23. 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4. [emphasis added]

appears to be a minor matter, when combined with the other shortcomings, it does point to evidence of a surprising lack of attention in brigade and battalion planning.

Given the assault troops needed to make a number of preparations that flowed on from the decision on when to move forward, this lack of attention to timing could only have caused further delay in finalising the battalion plans. Division required a number of preparatory actions, including full briefing of the assault troops on likely conditions to be faced, protecting exposed flanks and the exact movements required of them, to be completed before the attack.[43] Platoon commanders were to be issued with sketch maps of the areas of their responsibility, probably based upon aerial photographs, to assist them in the assault phase. In the time available and lacking critical timing instructions, it is difficult to see how these essential preparations could have been completed in time. Early, clear and unambiguous timing was an important requirement for the assault commanders and troops and, based on the orders given, it was clear that in this, the 8th Brigade planners had failed their troops.

There was another problem with the 8th Brigade's plans and orders, the evidence for which is found in the orders distribution list. The Brigade's orders contained the information required by surrounding formations, including those in a support role, on what the brigade planned to do, when and how. The orders should have been distributed to all external formations with a need to know. According to the distribution list however, the only external recipient was the Divisional headquarters.[44] This action suggests both a narrow focus by the lower-level planners on what their own formation was doing and little appreciation that their brigade's actions constituted only a part of a much larger activity. Arguably, the most vulnerable part of the attack for the 8th Brigade was its exposed left flank. For the attack to succeed, this flank had to be protected. Close liaison and communication with the formation providing that protection thus should have been the brigade planners' highest priority, especially keeping it informed of the planned timings of moves and locations. Ideally, the brigade should also have posted a liaison officer to the supporting force. That neither of these

---

[43] Instructions for Infantry Brigadiers. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, July 1916, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.
[44] Brigade Order No. 23. 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4.

initiatives occurred arguably demonstrates the brigade planners' lack of experience in attack planning on a scale of this magnitude. The protection force was not only outside even the Divisional chain of command, it was in an entirely different Army (Second Army). Instead of developing direct links with the flank protection brigade, 8th Brigade staff left the essential coordination and liaison responsibility to Divisional Headquarters. Reliance on higher headquarters for this critical action, while the correct procedure according to regulations, was usually ignored by more experienced headquarters. It was too high a risk. Divisional Headquarters before and during a major attack was a busy place and the staff there had much else to coordinate. Leaving them to keep the flank forces informed of the plans of one combat element ran a high risk that this vital information flow would be overlooked. The consequences for 8th Brigade of its lack of initiative could easily have been even more severe than eventually eventuated.[45] Fortunately for the planning process if not for the eventual outcome, the two-day delay of the attack enabled the commanders, including those in a support role, to study the overall plan and gain a better understand their role.[46] This failure to establish direct liaison with the flanking formation before the attack began was to be an issue also for the 15th Brigade.

For the 14th Brigade, the equivalent order warning of the attack was Brigade Operation Order No. 5, issued at 8.15 p.m. on 16 July.[47] This order was followed by three more, all of which served to amplify and explain the divisional orders. For the first time in the sequence of planning and order transmission, 14th Brigade Order No. 5 did not follow the typical structure and arrangement of contents as those from Corps, Division or the 8th or 15th Brigades. Whether this was due to the more usual reasons

---

[45] While it can be argued both that security and the potential for confusion required tight control of orders such as these, it was also high risk. The potential for support to fail to materialize because the requirement was either not received or was not accurately articulated suggests that more certain liaison arrangement should have been employed. Given the inability of the supporting British brigade on the left flank (the 60th) to protect the advancing troops from counter-attacks coming in behind that flank, it could be argued that not including the supporting brigade on the 8th Brigade's orders distribution list materially contributed to this failure of support. The supporting brigade commander had been present at higher level planning sessions, which makes the omission of it from the distribution list inexplicable.
[46] Condensation of Operation Order No. 3, by Lt Col W.E.H. Cass C.M.G., commanding 54th Bn. In the field 16/7/16. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1, AWM38.
[47] Perhaps indicative of the slight confusion being caused by the transition from the 24-hour clock system used on Gallipoli to the 12-hour a.m./p.m. system used by the BEF, this Order was timed at 2012 hours while containing 12-hour clock references in the body of the order. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

such as the acting brigade commander, T/Brigadier Harold Pope, having only been in command of the brigade since March and who therefore lacked experience, or because his Brigade Major, Major N.K. Charteris (a British officer), lacked experience in drafting complex orders, would appear on the evidence unlikely. Pope was an experienced battalion commander while Charteris, a Royal Scots Regiment Officer, had come to the brigade from command of the Machine Gun School in Egypt. An alternative explanation, that the written orders served merely as detail to the verbal orders delivered at brigade planning conferences,[48] may be the more likely explanation. However, if this was so, the planning outcome still constituted poor staff work on the part of the brigade staff as it contravened British doctrine.[49] Given the circulation of this Order was far wider than the number of attendees at the Brigade Conference,[50] the lack of detail can only have affected the understanding of those required to support the Brigade's attack of what the Brigade was planning to do.[51] Whatever the reason, the written orders for the Brigade for this attack were deficient in a number of critical areas.

Order No. 5 did not follow the pattern of the 8th Brigade orders in that it did not simply repeat sections from the divisional order. In setting out the Commander's Intent, the timings, area of operations and objectives, Order No. 5 appeared to attempt

---

[48] The opening paragraph of Order No. 5 refers to 'Instructions already communicated confidentially to C.O's [sic] of Battalions'. Brigade Order No. 5. 16 July 1916. 14th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4. This is also confirmed in Operation Order No. 7, which identified the only participants in the conference on the afternoon of 16 July as being the Battalion COs. Brigade Order No. 7. 18 July 1916. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

[49] General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations 1909 (Reprinted with Amendments, 1914)* (London, HMSO, 1914), 23. Also, 'The Passing of verbal orders and messages is to be reduced to a minimum owing to the liability of errors in transmission.' General Staff, War Office, *Infantry Training (4-Company Organisation) 1914* (London: HMSO, 1914), 131.

[50] The Brigade 'Narrative of Events', that was compiled after the attack, noted only that OCs brigade units were involved and that they were confidentially informed, imprecisely, of the 'line to be occupied by the Brigade and orders issued for the 53rd & 54th Bns to occupy the front and 300 yard line of the sector allotted to the 14th Bde'. It is possible to interpret this as referring to the portions of the British front line to be taken over, rather than as a guide to the set objectives, and nowhere in the orders are the objectives clearly set out. Narrative of Events, 17/7/16 to 20/7/16. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

[51] The critical addressees were the 8th and 15th Brigades and 5th Divisional HQ. In a major failure of process, there was no copy to any of the supporting artillery units or the artillery commander, suggesting the brigade commander was relying on the Divisional artillery commander to coordinate artillery support. Brigade Order No. 5. 16 July 1916. 14th Brigade War. Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4. It is also illustrative to compare these orders with those issued one month later for a raid, in which considerable detail is included about the supporting artillery and the supporting artillery was included on the distribution list for the Brigade's orders. The Brigade orders, again signed by the BM, Charteris, also followed the standard structure and sequence of instruction, unlike those of July. 14th Brigade. War Diary, August 1916, 23/71/7 AWM4.

to interpret and apply the original divisional order in a form more relevant to the brigade's assault battalions. In this, the planners failed, as none of this brigade's orders mentioned the overarching operational justification for the attack: preventing the movement of German troops south to the Somme. As noted, Order No. 5 did refer to a confidential briefing of battalion commanding officers but did not indicate whether the Commander's Intent was discussed at that meeting. While containing considerable detail on how the brigade was to form up and where, and on how the advance was to be conducted, the Order had another surprising omission. Nowhere in Order No. 5, or indeed in any of the supporting material or subsequent orders, did Brigadier Pope formally set down with map references the objectives of his Brigade. Operation Order 7 did identify, using map references, the sections of German wire that the trench mortars were to destroy, so this reference, when taken in the context of the verbal instructions given to COs at the 16 July conference, arguably did provide some indication of the frontage of the Brigade's objectives for the assault commanders. However, it did not provide any guidance on the depth to be occupied and nor did it provide an accurate boundary between his brigade's operating area and those of the neighbouring brigades. Operational Order No. 7 did correct this omission briefly and not very precisely in a short summary of the divisional instruction:

> 7. Objective.
> Special attention is directed to the following Order issued by G.O.C. XI. Corps, dated 16.7.'16, that the attack is to capture the enemy's front system of trenches, and that the objective will be strictly limited to the enemy's support trenches and no more.
> This order has already been issued to Battalions.

Although this did indicate that an order on objectives had already been issued to the battalions, there is no record of any such order in the war diaries of the brigade or any of its subordinate units. Given there is no reference in Orders 5 or 6 to objectives, it can only be concluded that 14th Brigade was not using written orders to advise subordinates on critical planning matters, particularly the Commander's Intent and the objectives of the attack. As British doctrine had noted, verbal orders contained the potential for error, and for Pope to rely on them to provide guidance for his inexperienced commanders was another high-risk approach.

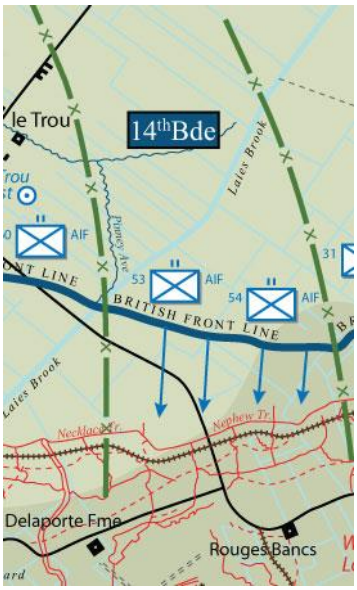
The nearest the formal orders came to specifying objectives occurred in the third paragraph of Order No. 5:

> 3. The line allotted to the 14th.Australian.Infantry.Brigade [sic] will be equally divided between the 53rd.Battalion on the right and the 54th.Battalion on the left during the night of 16/17th.July, who will take over from the 58th.Battalion.15th A.I. Brigade. Each of these Battalions will place two companies in the front line and two companies in the 300 yards line. Such Lewis Guns only as are necessary will be put into the front line.

Given specific map references did appear in the subsequent battalion orders, it can only be assumed, as noted previously, that somewhere in the planning sequence, but not formally recorded, this vital information was given to battalion commanders by some other means. Even when describing the brigade area of operations, Pope or his Brigade major employed vague language.

> 1. The 14th Bde will attack on a front of 600 yards from N.9.e.8. to N.10.c.3. The 53rd Bn will be on the right and the 54th on the left. 55th and 56th Bn in the second line.
> 2. The frontage allotted to 54th Bn is approximately BRAMPTONS ROAD – MINE AVENUE trench numbers N9/4 to N10/1. The time will be stated later.[52]
>
> (See map 18.)

14th Brigade Attack



(Map 18)

If the Brigade orders were lacking in clearly defined objectives, they were much more precise and informative with regards tactical timing:

---

[52] Battalion Operation Order No. 3. 16 July 1916. 54th Infantry Battalion. War Diary, July 1916, 23/71/6 AWM4.

> 5. During the last phase of the intense bombardments the Infantry of the first two waves will be deployed in "No Man's Land" as near as possible to the enemy's trenches opposite their sections of attack, and will assault at 7.00 immediately "lift" to barrage lines. The first wave of the 53rd.Battalion will leave the trenches at 6.45 - that of the 54th.Battalion at 6.43. The deployment must be completed before 7.00. The assaulting Infantry will notify their front positions in the enemy's trenches to aeroplanes of the Royal Flying Corps by means of flashing mirrors and flares at 8.00. (One hour after assault) and 9.00 (Two hours after assault) and at intervals of one hour subsequently during daylight. Signal sheets will also be used according to special instructions issued.[53]

Essential timing information, when to deploy and when to attack, was quite clear and showed evidence of the calculations necessary to determine the time required to leave the trenches to form up in time to launch the assault. The two-minute time difference between the battalions' deployment time was the direct consequence of the slightly wider No Man's Land in front of the 53rd Battalion.[54]

There was, however, a major potential danger in this instruction, one that was present in all three brigades' planning. It was the calculation that determined the distance from the enemy's trenches at which the battalions were to form up during the barrage. Theoretically, this was based on the size of the danger zone of the exploding shells of the supporting artillery barrage. One reason the final barrage of the enemy front line was by light field guns and light howitzers alone was because the danger zone of a light shell was significantly smaller than that from a heavy gun or heavy howitzer.[55] This smaller zone enabled the attacking infantry to form up comparatively close to the enemy line and reach the enemy trench before the defenders had emerged from their shelters. However, this was only true if the supporting artillery was capable of accurate fire. Demonstrably, this was not the case for any of the artillery supporting the three assaulting brigades at Fromelles,[56] so the potential for heavy casualties from their own artillery, 'drop-shorts' as the infantry called them, was much higher if they formed up too close to the enemy trenches. For the 14th Brigade, and unlike the 8th beside it, the calculations must have been as lucky as they were accurate because the assaulting

---

[53] 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.
[54] Noting again that these were the original assault timings. They were subsequently amended to allow for the delay caused by the weather.
[55] Light guns and howitzers, the field artillery, usually meant 13 and 18 pounder field guns and 4.5-inch howitzers only.
[56] The war diaries both of the brigades and all the battalions involved contain numerous references to the inaccurate shooting of their supporting artillery in the period preceding the attack.

infantry were indeed able to enter the enemy's front line without suffering excessive casualties from their own guns before the defenders recovered from the disorganisation caused by the barrage.[57]

While the orders of 14th Brigade were arguably deficient in identifying the Brigade's objectives, they did contain a remarkable amount of detail intended to assist the Brigade form-up in the right locations and control and manage the advance. Unlike 8th Brigade, 14th Brigade orders included important information in the initial orders on the planned employment of machine guns, light trench mortars and engineers:

> 8. Six machine guns will be in front line and fire will be used to cover the use [sic] of infantry by firing with sights at 1200 yards, guns laid on top of enemy's parapets. These guns will cease fire at the same time as the artillery finally lifts to barrage lines viz. 7.00 exactly. These six guns will remain in our present front line. The remaining 10 guns will follow after the fourth waves of infantry from their reserve position in or about the 300 yard line into our present front line. As soon as it is fairly clear that our infantry are holding the enemy trenches these 10 guns will move forward and assist in consolidating the ground won. Immediately on arrival at their new and advanced position they will at once open fire to prevent enemy counter-attack and for the sake of moral effect on the enemy. Any subsequent action will be such as the situation demands.
> 7. The O.C. 14th L.T.M. Battery will select positions and cover the advance of infantry during its progress across "No Man's Land". The mortars are not to be taken forward to our present front line until it is clear that the enemy trenches have been taken. None of these mortars all [sic] their ammunition are on any account to be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy.
> 8. The O.C. 14th Field Coy Engineers will detail 2 half sections to report respectively to O.C. 53rd and 54th battalions to assist in the consolidation of any captured trenches. He will also detail two sections to mark out and assist in the construction of two communication trenches from our own to the enemy's present position.[58]

---

[57] By 1917, formal mathematical calculations were in standard use, including some allowance for own casualties from 'drop-shorts'. 'Seeing that it is absolutely impossible to get quite accurate shooting with any gun, allowance must be made for odd shells dropping short. In the standard diagram, X represents the target. Oblong ABCD is what is termed the 100% zone, or the ground on which every round aimed at X will fall. EFGH is the 50% zone and represents one quarter of the 100% zone. The 50% zone represents 1% of the range of a gun of any calibre thus of the field gun be firing at a 3000 yard range, the depth of the 50% zone is 30 yards that of the 100% zone 120 yards. In following up a shrapnel barrage, troops can with absolute safety follow right up to the line CD. With high explosive (HE), they would necessarily need to keep further back.
Barrage. A barrage must conform to a given timetable. It cannot be held up for any section that cannot advance. To overcome this, the speed of the barrage is previously arranged by the infantry in accordance with local conditions and may vary from 3 to 15 min for every 100 yards.' Notes from a lecture on Artillery Methods, October 1917. Brossois Papers, 3DRL/4182, AWM.

[58] Brigade Order No. 5. 16 July 1916. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

Operation Orders 6, 7 and 8 also addressed in considerable detail the logistics preparations for the attack. Detailed instructions covered such aspects as the preparation and location of ammunition and supply dumps, improving communication trenches, availability of and use of working parties and medical evacuation arrangements. In this, they differed noticeably from the planning and orders of the 8th Brigade.

However, as the primary responsibility of the brigade command and planning team was to clearly define the objectives for the attack, the evidence of the written orders indicated that this was not well done. Given the confusion that eventually occurred when the assault elements of the brigade did enter the enemy lines, the lack of clarity of the objectives in the written orders of 14th Brigade contributed to that outcome.

Unlike 14th Brigade, the relevant operational orders issued by the command team of the 15th Brigade did conform to the pattern and structure of those received from higher headquarters. 15th Brigade's operational orders were clear and precise in terms of objectives, Commander's Intent and timings, although they spread this information across several Orders.[59]

> 1. With the object of preventing the enemy withdrawing troops from our front, offensive operations are to be carried out by troops of the XI Corps and 2nd ANZAC, under the command of the G.O.C. XI Corps.
> 2. The 15th Australian Infantry Brigade will assault and capture the German front line and support line, from where the River Layes cuts the German front line (N 8 d $9^1/_2$ - $1^1/_4$) to N 9 c 7 – 1.
> 184th Brigade will attack on our right and the 14th Australian infantry brigade on our left.
> 4. The 57th Battalion will attack the enemy trenches from where the River Layes cuts the German front line to N 9 c $3^1/_2$ – 1, and will hold and consolidate the enemy's support trenches N 14 b $8^1/_4$ $9^3/_4$ – N 14 b $9^1/_4$ $9^3/_4$ – N 15 a 0 $8^1/_2$.
> The 58th Battalion will attack the enemy trenches from N 9 c $3^1/_2$ 1 to N 9 c 7 1, and will hold and consolidate the enemy support trenches N 15 a $7^1/_2$ 8.
> One Section 15th M.G. Company and the M.G. Section 60th Battalion from position between BOND STREET and the Tram Line will cover the advance with fire; this must be carefully controlled to prevent loss to ourselves.
> The 15th A.L.T.M. Battery from selected positions in the front trench will cover the advance from the time the artillery fire lifts.

---

[59] The first three orders relating to the attack, Order Nos. 16, 17 and 18 were all issued on 16 July.

> One Section 15th M.G. Company from a position near JUNCTION POST will use indirect fire on the enemy's second line system.[60]

(See map 19.)

The assaulting battalion orders reflected the clarity of Elliott's orders. While not repeating the Commander's Intent, they comprehensively addressed the objectives to be attained and the timings to be adhered to:

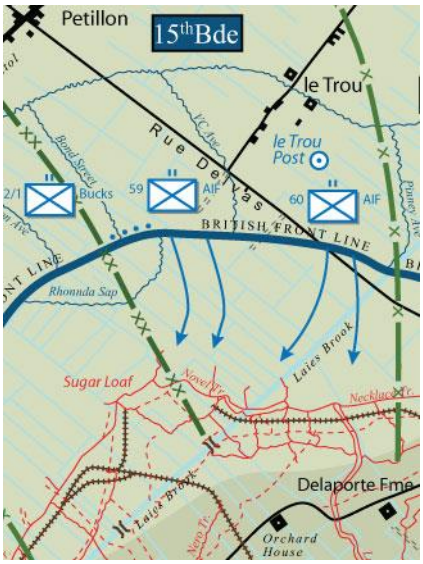
> INFORMATION
>
> 1. The 15th Infantry Brigade has been ordered to assault and capture the enemy's firing line and Support Trenches opposite our front where the River Layes cuts the German front line (N 8 D $9^1/_2$ $1^1/_4$) to N 9 C 7 1. The 184th brigade will attack on our right and the 14th Australian infantry brigade on our left.
>
> INTENTION
>
> 2. The 59th Battalion will attack the enemy's trenches on a frontage to be pointed out personally to Company Commanders, advancing to the assault in four "waves".
>
> DISTRIBUTION
>
> 3. "A" and "B" Companies will form the first two waves, each company having two platoons in the first wave with two platoons in the second wave supporting them.
> "C" and "D" Companies will form the third and fourth "wave" distributed the same as "A" and "B" Companies.
> All platoons in the first "wave" and second "wave" will be made up to strength of 50.
>
> Artillery Programme.
>
> The assault will take place precisely at 7.00 after zero, working by the watch. Officers will not wait for an order but will signal the advance at the hour.[61]

What was missing from Elliott's order was the time set for the battalions to deploy into No Man's Land before the assault. It is clear from the sequence of orders that Elliott, like Tivey with the 8th Brigade, delegated this calculation and decision to his battalion commanders. In doing so, Elliott expressly went against the orders he had received from 5th Division.

---

[60] Brigade Order No. 18. 16 July 1916. 15th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/15/5 AWM4. Note also that the attacking battalions were changed prior to the attack commencing.
[61] Battalion Operation Order No. 2. 18 July 1916. 59th Infantry Battalion. War Diary, July 1916, 23/76/6 AWM4.

15th Brigade Attack



(Map 19)

Apart from the timing, the method by which the men were to move into No Man's Land also generated considerable disagreement at all levels of command before, during and since the battle. The attacking British commanders chose to use sally ports, that is, prepared exit points in the breastwork which enabled them to move out, in single file but in protection until the last minute, into No Man's Land. The Australians chose to exit the breastwork by going over the top in waves of men. Despite the criticisms expressed later by Elliott and others about the use of sally ports, [62] both methods had advantages and disadvantages. As the British found, sally ports dramatically increased the time for the troops to exit their trenches and, should casualties be experienced in the ports themselves, the whole exit plan could be seriously delayed. The method chosen by the Australian commanders, men going over the top in waves, could have been equally disastrous had the Germans been able to bring unsuppressed machine gun fire to sweep the top of the parapet or had a German barrage caught them at the point of exit. At Fromelles, the Australians were fortunate that neither of these happened, while the British experienced major problems with blocked sally ports. The choice of exit method was, however, a central factor in

[62] The Commander of the 15th Brigade, Brigadier H.E. Elliott, claimed after the battle that he had warned the commander of the British brigade on his right about the risks of using sally ports, based on his Gallipoli experience. Diary entry, 21 July 1916. Elliott Papers, 2DRL/0513 Item 3, AWM.

deciding the deployment time, and the Australian approach did enable the deployment to be delayed until the last moment.

Working back from the assault time, the Battalion Commanders calculated the time necessary to move their men over the parapet into No Man's Land, advance the intervening 300 yards and form up in battle order 100 yards short of the enemy's trenches. Part of the timing calculation was determining how long it would take men to climb the 10-foot high and up to 20-foot thick sandbag-constructed walls or breastworks that constituted the trench in this part of Belgium where the high water table prevented digging. To aid in this, pegs and ladders were built into the reverse side of the wall. The 59th Battalion advanced into No Man's Land at 5.45 p.m., thus revealing the Battalion commander had calculated that his first two waves (of about 400 men) could cross the breastwork and advance the intervening 300 yards in 15 minutes. As it transpired, this was a reasonably accurate assessment. Whether the brigade or battalion commanders, none of whom had had any prior experience of this type of calculation, should have been given this responsibility is questionable. Arguably, in view of the importance of this move, the timings should have been calculated by the experienced planning staff at Corps. Why it was left to the brigades is unclear but, as it eventuated, no major problems arose from this decision

As with the 8th Brigade, 15th Brigade also faced a liaison/coordination problem, this time on its right flank. It was not, however, as critical as the problem facing the 8th Brigade because this flank was protected by an advancing force, the British 184th Brigade. Unlike 8th Brigade, Elliott did include the British 184th Brigade on his Orders distribution list. The real liaison problem arose for him during the battle, when co-ordination of attacks and withdrawals failed due to the time the information took to move up and down the two parallel chains of command.

> Gen. Elliott. The message from 184 Brigade asking for his assistance at 9.00 p.m. 19/7/16 came through Divisional Headquarters, not direct. If we had organised, as we did later, for direct liaison, the attack by the 58th Battalion would have been avoided.[63]

---

[63] Loose note. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.

The 15th Brigade also faced a unique tactical problem, in that instead of a straight advance, its assaulting battalions had to move forward and then make a right incline to reach their objective. This was a particularly difficult manoeuvre even for experienced infantry, and while the two assaulting battalions of the 15th Brigade did include some veterans from the Gallipoli campaign, there was a severe shortage of experienced junior leaders and specialists which made this direction change a potential cause of disaster. The commander of the 15th Brigade, Brig H.E. 'Pompey' Elliott, recognising the difficulties, changed the two battalions identified for the assault to select those he considered were better led.[64] The 15th also faced the disadvantage of having to attack across No Man's Land across the face of one of the strongest of the enemy's salients in this part of the line, the Sugar Loaf. This, plus the fact that both the 15th and the British 184th Brigade, by attacking at a 45° angle to each other, created a triangle with the Sugar Loaf at the apex and no assaulting troops approaching it from the base, exacerbated the coordination of the two attacking brigades. The oblique advance on the Sugar Loaf left the German defenders much freer to engage the Australians advancing across their front, precisely the reason salients such as this were created. This error in the plan had its origins in Haking's failure to move the divisional (and Army) boundary so that it did not lie across the salient.

While it could be argued that the gap between the two advancing brigades was recognised as a major problem by 5th Division Headquarters, the vague solution in the Divisional Order 31, that '15th Brigade will employ fire from its right front not masked by the assault', does not support this conclusion. It would appear from the war diary evidence that it was Elliott who recognised the serious threat to the divisional tactical plan represented by this gap. He amended his local tactical plan to attempt at least to provide suppressing fire on to the Sugar Loaf with the bulk of his brigade machine gun assets, assets that could have been better used supporting his assault troops directly.[65]

---

[64] McMullin, *Pompey Elliott,* 212.

[65] According to McMullin, Elliott was also concerned about the possibility of the British brigade on his right flank failing to protect his flank and placed the additional machine guns there to provide protection by fire. While this may have been the real reason, it was unlikely he would have used it to justify diverting most of his organic sustained fire support to one flank. McMullin, *Pompey Elliott,* 210. The 59th Battalion war diary merely noted: 'One section 15th Machine Gun Company and the Lewis Machine Gun Section of the 59th Battalion from position between "BOND STREET" and "THE TRAM LINE" will cover the advance with fire.' No mention is made of the advance of the British brigade as a factor in this decision.

The overall plan primarily relied on artillery to destroy or suppress the Sugar Loaf which, given it was strongly constructed, well concealed and low to the ground, thus representing a very difficult target even for experienced gunners, was arguably an example of optimistic, rather than realistic, planning.[66] This provides the only example in the planning process where the junior level command varied the high command's plan, and even then it was only in minor detail.

Elliott had a more fundamental concern with the divisional plan that set out his brigade's role. Many of the post-war analyses of the battle highlight Elliott's concern with the width of No Man's Land in front of his brigade. In an exchange with staff officers from higher headquarters, Elliott noted that, on arrival in France, he had been given a French training pamphlet that warned against attacking across a No Man's Land wider than 200 yards. The distance between his front line and the enemy's trench was approximately 400 yards. While this French analysis would seem to support Elliott's misgivings about the plan, it really demonstrated that he was unaware of evolving tactics on the Western Front. As the Somme experience was already beginning to show, effective artillery suppression fire and new infantry assault structures were enabling the infantry to manoeuvre with some flexibility in No Man's Land,[67] irrespective of its width.[68] The critical point about this was not the width but the effectiveness of the supporting artillery. As noted previously, the infantry needed to be able to move as close to the enemy front trench as possible, to enable it to enter the defences before the enemy reorganised following the barrage lift. When the supporting artillery was effective in suppressing the enemy's guns and machine guns, the distance was not the issue.[69] As Elliott had not yet seen the power of artillery on the Western Front, his concern was likely based on his experience on Gallipoli as well as on the out-dated

---

Battalion Operation Order No. 2. 18 July 1916. 59th Infantry Battalion. War Diary, July 1916, 23/76/6 AWM4.

[66] Noting however that even the Brigade's own war diary recorded the widely held assessment that the Sugar Loaf had been dealt with effectively by the Brigade's own trench mortars. Entry 17 July 1916. 15th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/15/5 AWM4.

[67] The best example of this was the British attack on the Somme on 14 July, when the experiences of the previous attacks were absorbed and resulted in successful new assault infantry tactics.

[68] This was only correct if British counter-battery work was also effective. By 1918, British artillery dominance in the counter-battery role was well established. In 1916, it was much less effective.

[69] A note from 4th Australian Divisional Headquarters to the Division's Brigade commanders made this point on 30 July 1916. '3. It has been found possible to get four waves (a company in four platoon waves deep) over the parapet and into "No Man's Land" under our first barrage fire and before it lifted.' Durrant Papers, Item 1, PR88/9, AWM.

French tactical theory he mentioned.[70] Had he expressed his concern in terms of the inability of the supporting artillery to neutralise the enemy defences, rather than an additional 200 yards to advance, it would have been well-warranted.[71]

Despite Elliott's concerns with aspects of the plans he had received, the orders he gave to his Battalion commanders were clear and comprehensive. His attention to detail, as demonstrated by his recognition of the tactical problem associated with the wedge of exposed terrain between him and the brigade on his right, supports the argument that he, best of the three brigadiers, understood the tactical challenges he faced. As with the 14th Brigade, he can be criticized for not identifying by map reference the objectives for individual battalions, but his orders carefully noted these objectives were to be specifically pointed out to battalion commanders. While this approach seemingly worked well enough on the day, it is unclear from the evidence whether lacking specific objectives identified by map references delayed the development of the plans of his assault battalions. Logically it should have done, as commanders would not have known which areas of No Man's Land and enemy trench to reconnoitre before developing their own plans, but there is no evidence in the war diaries to support such a finding. Similarly, there were too many additional factors affecting their performance during the attack to suggest this as one cause of the failure of the attack.

Despite the divisional plan identifying several areas critical to the success of the attack that the brigade planners were to address, there is no evidence in either the brigade or battalion plans that they did so. There were specified areas of concern, identified in the Divisional Orders:

> Para 14: each brigade must provide for guarding its flanks in case it succeeds and the next brigade does not. The mode of blocking the flank still held by the enemy has been practised, double block is the best method, the further breastwork of sandbags keeping the enemy out of bombing distance.
> Para 15: the exact mode by which waves, not at the first in our front trenches, are to reach our front trench must be predetermined and <u>all ranks</u> concerned must know the way.

---

[70] The power of the artillery came as a surprise to many of the Australians. "The bursting of the shells along our unprotected line was a sight I shall never forget, this being my first experience of the destructiveness of modern artillery fire at close range.' F. Law, Recollections of the Battle of Fromelles, France, July 19th 1916. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/261/1, AWM38.
[71] Diary entry, 17 July 1916. Elliott Papers, 2DRL/513 Item 3, AWM.

> Para 18: each platoon commander must have a sketch of the enemy trench in front of him and a bit to his right and left, and explain it to his command, as well as telling them all that is known of the part of No Man's Land they have to cross and of the open ground if any they have to cross behind our front trench.
> 21. Everyone of all ranks must be made fully acquainted with these instructions, and the suggestions so far as they are adopted, so far as they relate to his particular part of the front. This includes knowing of the way etc.[72]

Given these were sound, standard tactical principles, it was surprising therefore that none of the brigades or their assaulting battalions addressed the problem of how they were to do this once the enemy defences had been captured. While the very short time available between receipt of the orders and the time of the attack was a likely major contributor to this oversight, it was still a fundamental flaw in the tactical plan and, as the events were to demonstrate, another area in which the attacking forces did not perform effectively. Nor did the two-day delay produce any amendments to address the problem: the attention given in all the battalion orders to protecting their flanks during the battle was at best cursory, even for the 15th Brigade.[73]

> Lewis Guns. Two guns each will be allotted to "C" and "D" Companies for the protection of their flanks and the remaining two will go forward independently in the centre of these two Companies, the whole moving forward with the third wave.[74]

In some areas, the brigade and subsequent battalion orders were both clear and generally comprehensive. Each of the brigades identified the battalions that were to conduct the assault precisely and, except for 15th Brigade, early. In the case of 15th Brigade, the last minute change to the composition of the assault force may have created some confusion and placed the new attacking battalions at a disadvantage but there is no evidence from their forming up or from their conduct of the attack that this late change had been an issue for the battalion command teams. Both newly designated battalions still advanced on time and in the correct battle formation.

---

[72] Instructions for Infantry Brigadiers. General Staff, 5th Australian Infantry Division. War Diary, July 1916, 1/50/5 Part 4 AWM4.
[73] 59th Battalion's war diary included Battalion Order No.2, which contained much detail on the tactics to be employed but nothing on the points required to be addressed by Division. The 60th's war diary does not contain copies of any of the battalion orders relating to the attack. On the other flank, the 31st Battalion attack order, Order No. 1, contained most of the points passed on by brigade from Division but on these specific issues, it also was silent.
[74] Battalion Operation Order No. 2. 18 July 1916. 59th Infantry Battalion. War Diary, July 1916, 23/76/6 AWM4.

One area in which all of the brigade orders lacked full information was in the identification and advice to the assaulting troops of what support was to be provided, where it was coming from and, most importantly, how to request it. With the high casualty rate among officers and senior NCOs, the failure to set out in detail the type of support available and to ensure sufficient numbers of the junior leaders knew how to access it could have had serious consequences for surviving assault parties, especially those attempting to consolidate newly captured positions. Despite its importance, the question of combat support from artillery, engineers or aircraft did not feature much in any of the brigade orders,[75] unless it related to a specific task. One example of a specific responsibility was in 8th Brigade's Order 23, in which mention was made of employing the 8th Field Company engineers for a 'special duty':

> 11. One Company of the 30th Battalion, assisted by 8th Field Company Engineers, will carry out the special duty which has been allotted to them, after the 4th wave has cleared the parapet.[76]

None of the orders included such basic planning information as the agreed S.O.S. signals to summon additional artillery support to a specific location or an agreed set of signals to bring forward specific types of engineer stores or construction expertise. Artillery support was reported in some infantry post-action reports in terms that suggested the infantry saw this exclusively as an artillery matter:

> The (Artillery) Liaison Officer was in close touch with brigade Head Quarters throughout the action and assisted in every possible manner.
> The Artillery Group Commander responded promptly to every request sent to him for increased rate, Lifts [sic] etc.[77]

While this was correct, the corollary was supposed to be that the artillery observer was embedded in the command team of the attacking infantry battalion and under the orders of the assault commander. This was not the case at Fromelles, where the furthest forward the reports show the artillery observers going was to brigade headquarters. With the uncertain communications forward of this position, and in the absence of any prearranged signals, this was understandable. An artillery observer without a means of

---

[75] The brigades themselves did coordinate combat support, as explained clearly in their post-action reports. The issue was they did not seem to pass on to the assault formations what this support was and how the assault leaders could acquire or employ it.
[76] Brigade Order No. 23. 16 July 1916. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4. The 'special duty' was carrying engineering stores across No man's Land and building strong-points in the captured enemy lines. 8th Field Company, Australian Engineers. War Diary, July 1916, 14/27/11 AWM4.
[77] 'REPORT on OPERATIONS carried out by 8th INFANTRY BRIGADE 5th INFANTRY DIVISION on the night of 19th./20th. July 1916'. 8th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8 AWM4.

communicating with his guns was merely another untrained infantryman on the battlefield. However, further south on the Somme, it was clearly expected that the Artillery Forward Observers would be far forward at battalion headquarters so Fromelles represented either a failure of communications planning or a failure of liaison planning.[78]

A further problem did arise from this structure however: what was to happen to the artillery support if the artillery forward observers were killed or neutralised. If the infantry lacked the skills to provide basic artillery adjustment, the loss of their Forward Observers would have represented a major problem for their defence of captured trenches. Even when the observers merely lost communications, serious problems arose:

> It must not be supposed that our own guns were silent, but practically all our telephone wires to the front line had been cut again and again almost as fast as repairs could be effected. The Forward Observing Officers of the artillery were therefore very much handicapped in communicating the results of their fire to the guns, and in consequence could not support the infantry as they would have wished. The enemy on the ridge opposite was able to post observers in many places that gave direct view over our lines, and his shooting was consequently much more accurate.[79]

These basic pre-arranged artillery signals would routinely appear in planning and in orders later in the war, in many cases requiring only simple variations to Standard Operating Procedures already well understood.[80] They were to be found in the orders of the attacking elements of the British 61st Division. Their absence from the planning for the Australian part of the attack is yet further evidence of the problems arising from using inexperienced planners, commanders and troops on a major attack.

Clearly, there were some local arrangements in place for requesting support, as the post-action reports mentioned problems but,[81] as these were not covered in the written orders, it is impossible to determine how well they were developed, what limitations were placed upon their use or how widely they were known.

---

[78] Major General N. Malcolm, 'Memorandum on the Protection of Infantry in the Assault.' General Staff, Reserve Army, 14 July 1916, G.A.15/0/1. Durrant Papers, Item 1, PR88/9, AWM.
[79] Although this is a comment made by a battalion commander in 14th Brigade, it appears representative of views across the entire division. Notes by Lieutenant Colonel Cass, 54th Battalion, for Mr. Bean's personal use. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.
[80] For example, see copy of a Report carried out by 13th Battalion on Stormy Trench near Gueudecourt, 4/5 February 1917. Durrant Papers, Item 1, PR88/9, AWM.
[81] Narrative of Events, 17/7/16 to 20/7/16. 14th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

> Unfortunately, all the pistols and flares belonging to and carried by the 53rd and 54th Battalions were missing. Being carried by Company Commanders, every one of whom was killed or wounded, these pistols were not available when they were most required.[82]

As the results of Fromelles demonstrated, the failure to establish these fast and effective support request arrangements meant that the assault forces had to rely, often unsuccessfully, on traditional methods of direct communication, such as slow and unreliable runners or the inadequate carrier-pigeon service.[83]

> Communication was established between Brigade Head Quarters and the 300 yard line and the front-line by 'phone. An emergency line was also laid down to the 300 yard line. 12 Runners were stationed at each Battalion Head Quarters to communicate with Brigade Head Quarters.
> These runners were given a trial run during the morning of the 19th.
> Pigeons were distributed at Battalion Head Quarters 300 yard line and Company Head Quarters in the front line.
> Runners, discs, pigeons and telephones were all in readiness to move forward across 'No Man's Land'.[84]

As the limitations of communications links between the actual fighting and the first command node with secure fixed lines was already known,[85] the brigade planners would appear to have missed one opportunity to provide for more effective combat support.[86]

However, before criticising the lack of organised support procedures as a planning failure by the junior planning staff officers, it is important to consider possible reasons why this may have occurred. It could be argued, for example, that the brigade planners were following established British doctrine, which strongly advised against burdening orders with excessive and unnecessary detail.[87] It could be argued that knowing what artillery support was to be provided could not have affected how the assault troops attacked. Knowing the engineers were to drive a trench across No Man's Land behind the assault troops again may not have affected how they mounted their attack. Further, a view held by some of the command and planning staff in some higher

---

[82] Notes by Lieutenant Colonel Cass, 54th Battalion, for Mr Bean's personal use. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.
[83] Report on Recent Operation by Lieutenant Colonel Cass, Commanding officer 54th Battalion. 14th Brigade War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4. Also, 'The Brigade Signalling Officer will arrange for a carrier pigeon service between assaulting battalions and B.H.Q.' Brigade Order No. 7, 18 July 1916. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.
[84] 'REPORT on OPERATIONS carried out by 8th INFANTRY BRIGADE 5th INFANTRY DIVISION on the night of 19th./20th. July 1916'. 8th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/8/8, AWM4.
[85] Usually brigade but sometimes division headquarters.
[86] Ferguson argues that the British did not correct this problem, effectively, until 1918. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 304.
[87] General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations 1909*, 23.

headquarters, that the infantry were prone to call for support unnecessarily, may have encouraged the brigade planners to leave out detailed procedures to call for urgent support. Security and the need to know were also convincing reasons for not providing attacking troops with too much detail.[88] This was particularly true for inexperienced troops who, like the Australian officer captured at Fromelles with a copy of the complete plans on him, tended to forget to leave sensitive information behind. In view of the result of the Fromelles attack, there was clearly a 'middle ground' between burdening troops with unnecessary detail and providing them with critical battle procedures, especially how to seek assistance in an emergency. The evidence suggests that in other Australian formations, this middle ground was achieved, as the following comment from a Company Commander of the 3rd Battalion as he was preparing for the attack on Pozieres, suggests:

> Frequent conferences of Company commanders were held at Battalion Headquarters for final instructions in the attack and duties to be undertaken if the attack proved successful.
> To the delight of the company commanders, each company was allotted two Lewis guns with their trained sections of Gunner's placed entirely at the disposal of the Company Commander to play with as he pleased. In the previous organisation, the Lewis gunners had always been in the charge of the Battalion Lewis Gun Officer. Company Commanders had been issued with so many maps that their bulging pockets had no room for anything else. I seem to have had maps of every theatre of the war (except Mesopotamia).
> Next day was spent in completing preparations for the attack. As it was impossible for even the NCOs of the Company to visit in daylight the trench from which they were to 'hop over', every platoon commander was issued with a large-scale sketch map showing the objectives and any landmarks likely to be of use in guiding the advance and every section commander and the majority of the men were shown the map and given definitive instructions as to their tasks. [89]

None of these measures appear to have been followed at Fromelles so, even with the wide range of factors that contributed to the eventual outcome, it is arguable that the planners of the 5th Division attack did not get the balance right.

In terms of actually providing the assault troops with detailed information on the combat support that was to be provided to assist the brigade's attack, the 8th

---

[88] This became more recognised as an issue in later years, as a comment from the GSOI of 5th Division, Colonel Wagstaff in late 1916, warning of giving too much information to the troops in the field regarding future operations, including those in which the troops were to be involved, demonstrated. Wagstaff noted that captured German documents had revealed that captured British troops had disclosed much detail about forthcoming operations. Stewart Papers, 3DRL/1469, AWM.
[89] J.R.O. Harris, 3rd Battalion. Diary, Harris Papers, 1DRL/338 AWM.

Brigade Orders were vague and inadequate. Order No. 23 merely noted the artillery of the 4th Australian Division, some other field artillery from the 31st Division and some 2-inch mortars from Second Army were attached to the Division. Even more vaguely, the order noted that 'a force of heavy artillery is also supporting the attack under Corps control'. There was no indication given of the quantity of artillery supporting the brigade or the time for which it would be available. Even with regard to the vital operational matter of co-operating with supporting aircraft, the orders were brief and vague, consisting of one short paragraph directing the troops to signal their positions with mirrors, flares and ground sheets. There was no written advice in the orders issued to the assault troops on how to identify friendly aircraft, especially those they were supposed to be co-operating with.[90] As with the evidence on artillery co-operation, the post-action reports did contain comments supporting the conclusion that local arrangements for communicating with the contact aircraft were in existence but, as there is nothing in the orders issued, what these arrangements may have been are unknown.[91]

> Message received 9.15 p.m. Flare just dropped from aeroplane. Have no pistols or flares here with which to reply, neither have I any flares for use tonight. Is it possible for a supply of pistols and flares to be sent here, please? H.R. Lovejoy, Lieutenant. A/O.C. 'A' Company, 54th Battalion.[92]

One of the more surprising omissions from the planning process, and from the orders that eventuated from it, was the absence of any information about either the battle space or the enemy, information that was available in Corps and higher headquarters. That such information was necessary was evidenced by the number of references to battalion commanders and senior staff being directed to reconnoitre their areas of operation at the last moment, and to the common direction from the three brigades that officers' patrols be conducted during the nights 17-18 and 18-19 July, to 'reconnoitre the enemy's wire and trenches'.[93] However, none of the brigade orders

---

[90] The Divisional Order No. 31 had included detailed information on this vital function but this was not passed on by the brigades to the assault troops.
[91] This contrasted poorly with the 4th Division who issued a circular in July down to every battalion on how aircrews operated with infantry, how to identify aircraft and the roles of the various staff in aircraft/infantry communications. Durrant Papers, Item 1, PR88/9 AWM.
[92] 'Messages (received by 54th Battalion C.O.) from Brigade and Companies during the Fight.' Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243B/1, AWM38.
[93] Major O.M. Croshaw, Narrative of Operations carried out by 53rd Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, from 9.00 a.m. 17/7/16 till Noon 20/7/16. Appendix B 32/1/15, 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4.

provided any information that would have assisted the battalions in their analysis of the ground they were to fight over.[94] None of the brigade orders included any intelligence material on the enemy, enemy defences or the enemy's methods of defending fortified positions.[95] Given the inexperience of both the local tactical commanders and of the troops themselves, such information would have been invaluable to developing the local tactical assault plans. Certainly, the brigade commanders understood the need for timely information concerning the enemy:

> Reconnaissance reports and progress reports concerning our or enemy's action must be forwarded promptly otherwise the information is of little value and necessary help cannot be given.[96]

Given also that every senior commander from General Haig down recognised that the Australians knew little about conditions on the Western Front, overlooking the opportunity to provide basic tactical information about the enemy was even more inexplicable.

Responsibility for this omission must be borne by divisional headquarters.[97] As noted in previous chapters, numerous pamphlets and information sheets on both evolving tactics and on the enemy were in existence. It can only be assumed the provision of this information to brigades was overlooked due to the pressure to develop the tactical plans themselves. Arguably also, having already laid down the tactical

---

[94] By comparison, the Australian Brigades on the Somme were receiving regular intelligence summaries and intelligence updates as a matter of course. 'POWs to be sent as quickly as possible to Divisional Collecting Stations. Brigades are not to waste time interrogating POWs themselves. Any information obtained by Brigades, including where the POW was caught, is to be sent to Division. Division will send back to Brigade any information obtained on points Brigades want to know.' Memo on Intelligence, 19 July 1916. General Staff, 4th Australian Infantry Division. Durrant Papers, Item 1, PR88/9, AWM.

[95] Only one brigade war diary includes any reference to the enemy's defences. As noted at reference 61 in the previous chapter, 14th Brigade War Diary for July 1916 included a two-page note entitled "Report on Enemy's defences about the Sugarloaf", signed by Captain S. B. Pope, the GSOIII at II Anzac Corps. It is not dated and no other copies appear in either the Divisional or either of the other two brigade War Diaries. 14th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/14/4 AWM4. None of the battalions of the brigade referred to it in their records.

[96] Brigade Order No. 19, 17th July 1916. 15th Brigade. War Diary, July 1916, 23/15/5 AWM4.

[97] In 1917, even the 5th Division's routine standard defence plan included:

a. enemy order of battle in some considerable detail;
b. enemy defences also in considerable detail;
c. Boundaries of Divisional sector and description of Front Line;
d. Organisation of defensive system (i.e. description of own trench line system);
e. Distribution of own troops;
f. Artillery action in defence.

Copy of plan included in papers of Brigadier J.C. Stewart. Stewart Papers, 3DRL/1469, AWM.

structure and the methods to be followed by the assault teams, the divisional planners may well have considered providing further detailed information on both the ground and the enemy was unnecessary. No evidence has been found to substantiate this conclusion, but given the volume of relevant material widely available to British troops on the front, this is a possible explanation for what would otherwise be a serious oversight. Whether or not the brigades, with only two days to plan the attack, could have absorbed and utilised the information, had it been provided, is a separate issue.

The point needs to be made that not all orders issued for other set-piece attacks by British forces included detailed information on the enemy's defences. A major factor in the preparation for an attack was usually a full rehearsal by the assault troops. From 1915 on, standard British battle preparation involved the construction of full-scale accurate replicas of the enemy's defences, based on aerial photograph analysis, reports from patrols and information gleaned from enemy prisoners of war.[98] The assaulting infantry were encouraged to study these replicas until they both knew their area of responsibility intimately and had a good understanding of the wider battlefield. They also rehearsed their attack, usually over areas marked-up to represent these same defences.[99] In these circumstances, references in orders to the enemy defences tended to be minimal and primarily intended to note any changes to the defences that had occurred since the planning began. The most common references were to changes in the enemy units manning the defences to be attacked. Unfortunately, for the assault troops at Fromelles, the short period of time between the decision on which troops were to conduct the attack and the attack itself did not permit this elaborate preparation. There were no models for the troops to view and no rehearsals to train each soldier in his role. For this reason alone, there should have been more detail on the enemy, his defences and his methods included in the planning and command documents to provide at least a theoretical appreciation of what the assault troops would have to face. Again, arguably this was not a failure of process on the part of any

---

[98] GHQ, BEF had issued a paper by Lieutenant General L.E. Kiggell on 8 May 1916, entitled 'Training of Divisions for Offensive Action' that stressed preparations, rehearsals, reconnaissance of the area of the attack by the officers and NCOs who were to lead it and close attention to the plans of the attacking battalions by all of their superior headquarters. Durrant Papers, Item 1, PR88/9 AWM.

[99] As the 1st Division did before Pozieres. 'Between Friday 14 and Sunday, July 16, we practised the attack in open order, so that we knew we were going to take a very active part in the Big Push.' Letter dated 10 August 1916 from N.4 London General Hospital, by Captain T. W. Claridge, 8th Bn. Claridge Papers, 2 DRL/240, AWM.

one individual or level of command: it was the inevitable consequence of a battlefield requirement that exceeded available resources of time and experienced personnel.

The unavoidable conclusion to be drawn from the brigade and battalion orders issued was that planning and preparation for the Fromelles attack were not high priority tasks. It could be argued on the evidence from Fromelles that it was the Divisional level planning staff who prepared the tactical plan, based on an assessment of the task, the ground and the enemy, and the brigades and the battalions merely followed Division's orders. Thus the assessment by Peter Sadler, that junior level formation commanders and staffs had little genuine input into planning an attack,[100] would appear accurate. However, as this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, this is an assessment based on an oversimplification of what was involved in planning an attack against a well-defended, strong and well-prepared defensive position in 1916. Certainly the tactical formations imposed on the brigades and battalions by the divisional planners were rigid and, by later standards, dangerously inflexible. However, it was doubtful that the skill levels of the troops would have permitted anything more complex or free-flowing. As the attack by the 15th Brigade troops demonstrated, even a simple manoeuvre was difficult for these partially trained troops to make when under fire.

> It was easy to wander in a circle in [indecipherable] and more than one Australian setting out to return through mud and wire found himself back in the German line. (Barbour)[101]

Had the planners attempted to have the infantry employ the newly developed French dispersed attacking formations, the terrible confusion that beset the attackers during the assault would undoubtedly have been even worse. It is important in any analysis of the battle to remember that keeping everything comparatively simple was not an option but was the direct consequence of the low skill and experience levels of the troops involved.

While there were clearly deficiencies in both the brigade plans and in the information supplied by brigades to the battalions, it is unlikely that these materially affected the outcome of the battle. Even where the assault parties had overrun their objectives, they still managed to return to the advance line and contribute to the

---

[100] Quoted at the beginning of Chapter 5. Peter Sadler, *The Paladin. A Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84.
[101] Loose note. Bean Papers, 3DRL606/243A/1, AWM38.

defence of the captured areas. To the contrary, it could be argued that while there were deficiencies, there was still sufficient information and direction to enable the assault teams to prepare tactical plans sound enough for them to achieve their goals. The attacks that failed did so not because of poor orders or poor tactical planning by the brigade planners but because of poor execution, due almost entirely to the lack of the necessary skills and experience, combined with tiredness of the assault troops. It was lack of experience in both the planners and the assault commanders that saw basic mistakes made: leaving the machine guns in the rear wave and not having prearranged localised artillery support were errors that would not reappear in later years.

The use of the assault troops as labourers, carriers and trench diggers was a major failing of all military planning in 1916.

> No Corps Commander or Corps staff could possibly have done more for my Division than to give it TIME to train, during the four months preceding 1st July. Plan after plan for battalion and brigade training was made; every device was thought out; all were alert to getting training accomplished. But, our training programme came to nothing; every plan was necessarily vetoed on account of our manual labour being required day and night whenever battalions were out of the line.[102]

This was true for all the infantry involved in the Fromelles attack, not only the Australians. When added to the tiredness arising from the continual movements, exhaustion as much as planning became a significant factor in the outcome of the battle. As Maxse stated, there was nothing the brigade planners could have done to offset this self-inflicted disadvantage.

Inexperience and poor skills were also the primary contributing factors to the failure of the artillery support. The single primary cause of failure of the infantry attack was the inability of the artillery to destroy or suppress the enemy defenders, especially those in the Sugar Loaf and to the left of the 8th Brigade. When combined with the rigid assault formations made necessary by the unskilled infantry, the failure to suppress the defenders made high casualty rates and defeat inevitable. This was not a failure of planning or of command at the brigade or battalion level. It was reflective of the terrible manpower shortage faced by the British command at the time. Had the planners had

---

[102] Comment attributed to the British General, Sir Ivor Maxse, quoted in Richard Bryson, 'The Once and Future Army' in Brian Bond et al., *Look to your Front Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 48.

any choice, it is unlikely they would have chosen this group of troops to mount or support the attack but with the Somme placing impossible demands on all trained manpower resources, these were the only troops available.

CONCLUSIONS

> The whole operation was so incredibly bungled that it was almost incomprehensible how the British staff responsible for it could have consisted of trained professional soldiers of considerable reputation and experience and why, in the view of the outcome of this extraordinary adventure, any of them were retained in active service.[1]

British battle planning in 1916, as demonstrated by the battle of Fromelles, arguably had reached the lowest point on the pendulum swing between the skilled but small-scale actions characteristic of an imperial police force and the conduct of major operations with enormous resources of manpower and equipment. At the start of the war, there was an established process, a small but highly skilled cadre of trained staff officers to make the process work and a small but highly professional framework of commanders and junior leaders who knew how to implement a plan effectively. By 1918, the same structure of experienced and skilled planners and combat troops existed, having been rapidly rebuilt by massive effort to guide the BEF to its part in the eventual victory. In 1916, neither the skilled staff planners nor the experienced combat troops with their effective junior leaders existed in anything approaching the required numbers. The combination of massive and rapid expansion of the BEF, together with the high casualty rate among the trained staff officer ranks in the first year of the war,[2] saw the effectiveness of the planning process diminish in the early years of the war. In addition, further pressures were placed on under-strength British battle planning staffs by the new and constantly evolving style of warfare, new types of technology, co-operation with difficult allies and rapid tactical innovation.

Yet there was no diminution in the BEF's efforts during 1916, with the Somme operation still retaining the record for the single largest action by the British Army ever. While 1916 was clearly a difficult year for the BEF, the scale and intensity of the offensive operations conducted during that year also demonstrated that there was in place a battle planning process sufficiently robust to enable offensive operations to be launched and sustained over many months. Without question, the skill with which the

---

[1] H.E. Elliott, 'An Echo of War: British Inefficiency at Fleurbaix' in Robin Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber. The Battle of Fromelles* (Melbourne: Meigunyah Press, 2009), 401.

[2] On the outbreak of war, most of the trained staff officers, especially the younger ones, immediately returned to their parent units and many died or were incapacitated in fighting as regimental officers. This failure to keep the trained staff in staff positions was identified by the Kirke Committee investigation as one of the reasons for poor British command and staff performance in the early years of the war. W. Kirke et al., *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War* (London: War Office, 1932).

method was applied in 1916 was not as proficient as it was at the beginning or at the end of the war, for the reasons mentioned earlier, but it was still there. The process involved all levels of the command hierarchy discussing and refining concepts and plans, with more and more detail being added as the scale of responsibility for different parts of the action became smaller and the coordination of support became more specific. There were clearly errors made in the planning process but bad planning as a generic description of the reasons for failure in battle by the BEF in 1916 is clearly as unsustainable an explanation as are the vague accusations of command incompetence.

In 1916, success in battle appeared less dependent on the plan than on the skills of those required to implement it. While battle planning was a complex process, it had a simple intended outcome. At its most basic, battle planning was the timetable of events and preparations intended to provide the attacking infantry with its greatest possible chances of success. Planning complexity arose from the number of component parts which needed to be prepared and coordinated and the strength and number of underlying assumptions that guided preparations. The assumptions included calculations such as the number of shells required to destroy a given length of trench or the formation to be adopted by the attacking infantry to minimise casualties. If the assumptions were wrong, or some critical elements overlooked, the plan itself was flawed. As a general conclusion, it is hard to point to many specific instances where the planning process, as opposed to the attacks themselves, failed.

The planning decisions most commonly criticised after command incompetence were the underlying assumptions used to construct the battle plan. However, care needs to be taken in using even these factors to analyse battle-planning performance. For both the Somme and Fromelles, the assumptions about the ability of the artillery to destroy or supress the enemy's defences were overly optimistic. While it is frequently argued that the artillery support failed to overcome the defences on the Somme, the argument is not that the planners failed to recognise the need for this support or failed to provide an enormous collection of guns and ammunition to achieve this end. The failure arose because the guns did not do what the planners had anticipated they could do, for a number of reasons, mostly beyond the scope of the gunners or the planners. If the plan, rather than the execution of the plan, was the failure, it would have been because the number of guns and/or ammunition was inadequate. Patently, this was not the case.

The larger question of whether the Somme battle itself should continue to be regarded as a failure is still subject to debate.[3] For Fromelles, specific claims of errors of planning judgment such as these are even rarer. The attacking formation devised for the infantry for Fromelles, for example, was clearly not ideal but was arguably the only formation the untrained infantry could employ with any confidence of success. For Fromelles, the evidence suggests that, while there were planning mistakes, the principal cause of failure of the attack was the failure of the combat troops to implement the plan.

This conclusion is hardly surprising in the context of 1916. The means of implementation, including both the infantry who conducted the attack and the artillery and engineers who supported them, were not the professional soldiers of 1914 or the hardened veterans of 1918. They were the enthusiastic amateurs who had rallied to the cause and, while some had some military experience and training, most were barely trained and were totally unprepared for a Western Front battle. The situation was worse for the essential, but even by this stage of the war, still largely unrecognised combat-multipliers, the combat supply-support Corps. These critical combat sustainment troops, such as logisticians, military police, intelligence specialists (including aerial photograph interpreters) and repair and maintenance troops, both reflected the problems of rapid expansion of all the other troop types and also the shortcomings displayed by some commanders and planning staff in understanding and capitalising on the vital role they played.

Understanding the relationship between the dilution of planning skills and declining soldier-skills as a major contributor to battlefield failure in 1915 and 1916 has been made more difficult by the high casualty numbers experienced in the battles fought during this transitional or rebuilding phase. The emotive influence of the high casualty numbers, combined with a generally poor understanding of what was involved in planning and implementing a battle in 1916, has helped create the popular and enduring image of dysfunctional battlefield planning and incompetent and callous planners. This stereotype makes any objective assessment of the performance of the planners or of the British battlefield planning process that existed in 1916 difficult. From Elliott to

[3] A recent analysis challenging the established view of the Somme is Jeremy Black, *The Great War and the Making of the Modern World* (London: Continuum, 2011).

Lindsay,[4] commentators have universally condemned British commanders and staff for their performance on any 1916 battlefield, be it the Somme or Fromelles. Over time, this criticism has become so entrenched that popular opinion now cannot accept that there is a legitimate alternative view of these processes or individuals. Even incontestable evidence, such as the higher casualty rate during the last 100 days of 1918,[5] has failed to prevent the use of casualty rates of 1916 as proof positive of British leadership and battle planning incompetence.

For Fromelles, the influence of the high casualty count on the analysis of the battle itself has been even more marked. The conclusion to be drawn from the surviving evidence is that Fromelles was not the planning disaster frequently alleged and indeed was not a complete 'failure' in the military sense, yet this is far from the popular view. The problem is simple: too much emphasis is given to the tactical level of fighting and not enough to the strategic and operational levels. As the Red Army was to demonstrate so forcefully twenty-nine years later, battles could be lost while the war was won. Perhaps the heavy focus on the tactical aspects of the war on the Western Front by most modern-day commentaries explains why a war won is still seen as a military failure!

When the operational level objectives set for the Fromelles attack are compared with the outcome achieved, the attack can only be regarded as having met its objectives. The capture of ground was not, for this battle, the strategic and operational intent. The clearly articulated objective was to pin in place the enemy troops in the Lille area. On the evidence available, no further German troops were moved from Lille to the Somme after 19 July.[6] This was the aim of the Fromelles plan and it succeeded. From the military position, it is of little issue whether, as some critics have claimed, the Germans had no intention of moving any more troops south. For the point of view of the commanders in July 1916, a threat had been identified and a successful solution applied.

The failure to achieve some of the subordinate tactical objectives, while no doubt disappointing to the tactical command and planners, does not diminish the fact

---

[4] Patrick Lindsay, *Fromelles* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2008).
[5] Calculated as the casualties incurred as a percentage of total numbers of combat troops involved. For statistics on battle casualties, see John Ellis and Michael Cox, *The World War I Databook: The Essential Facts and Figures for all the Combatants* (London: Aurum Press, 1993).
[6] Paul Cobb, *Fromelles 1916* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 180.

that the operational intent was achieved. As has been shown, there were mistakes made in the planning process but these did not cause the attack to fail, in the military sense. There were reasons to criticise how this success was achieved and there are genuine questions to be asked about how much failure in the planning process contributed to the eventual death toll.

Failure to take and hold ground was a common criticism of World War One planners and commanders, and when that was the result at Fromelles, it inevitably spawned claims that the plans were flawed, the planners incompetent and the attack a failure. The tactical commander, Haking, contributed to this perception by adding the capture of the enemy's front-line trenches to the attack's goals. Adding tactical goals to the higher commands objectives has been a common feature of battle planning since disciplined armies first took to the field. Insofar as some of these later tactical objectives were not met, the attack was a partial failure. However, none of the critics of the plan or of the battle appear to understand this fundamental difference between the critical operational and desirable but secondary tactical objectives set. Nor do they demonstrate any appreciation of the differences between planning and conducting a pining action, as opposed to one to occupy territory, or of the contribution these differences made to the planning of the attack itself. Most of the criticisms rely on generalities and sweeping assertions. Where specific instances of alleged failures of the higher command have been raised,[7] these seldom relate to the stated purpose of the attack or the operational outcome. Most point to decisions that ultimately affected the casualty count, primarily decisions to continue the assault during the night and to refuse a cease-fire after the battle to clear the battlefield.

If the outcome of the battle can be considered an operational success, the logical conclusion to be drawn is that the planning of the battle was also a success. The process had clearly worked. Between Haig's original ideas for mounting some form of deception action in support of the Somme, to both pin enemy troops away from the main area and

[7] Robin Corfield does point specifically to Major General McCay's failure to allow a truce to collect the wounded as one example of senior command error. 'Nothing can pardon McCay for that neglect. Nothing.' In this, and on face value, Corfield had a point. However, again, he failed to put the issue into the context of the moment. It is unlikely McCay refused the truce merely because he wished to sentence his own wounded to a lingering death in No Man's Land. McCay had legitimate concerns about the possibility of a German counter-attack and also was uncertain whether another British attack might be ordered. Generals are required to make difficult choices and in this McCay had to decide on the evidence available to him at the time. Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber*, 409.

sow confusion in the German Commander's mind over the intentions of this attack, and the assaulting infantry leaving their front trenches at 6.00 p.m. on 19 July 1916, a huge effort by the planning staffs and the commanders involved brought the action into effect. The process ensured the artillery support planned was available, the troops identified were in position and armed and equipped for the task, the supporting aircraft were available and understood their role and the myriad of logistics support arrangements were finalised.[8] Where was the confusion, the late or non-arrival of essential equipment or personnel or mix-ups and the confusion of advancing troops that would have been the evidence for the claims of bungling and incompetence? There was none because, overall, the plan worked.

One of the biggest challenges to explaining why something as complex as the planning and execution of even a small battle like Fromelles can still be considered reasonably successful in face of the appalling casualty count is identifying and understanding all the pressures and friction points confronting those who did it. For an analyst who has never commanded or led troops in battle, who has had the benefit of time to sift through the mountain of information that flowed through a headquarters both before and during a battle, who has full knowledge of the situation of 'own' troops and enemy troops, including the eventual performance of both, and no experience of or real understanding of either the 'fog of war' or Clausewitz's 'friction', criticism of the actions or decisions of individuals or groups is easy. Yet every headquarters at every level in the planning process in 1916 had to deal with all these influences and issues. They did not have the luxury of time, certainty of performance or intimate knowledge of the many variables to guide their decisions. Indeed, as mentioned previously, many headquarters planning staffs in 1916 had to work through these effects with few officers trained for or experienced in the role. When these factors are considered, it could be argued that given the compressed tactical planning phase and the general inexperience of all the participants, the fact that the battle of Fromelles even happened at all was a credit to the staff planners.

[8] To qualify this on the basis of the lack of command and planner understanding of the role of combat support, it is important to note that the capacity to continue the attack following the consumption of first-line issue of stores and ammunition was problematic.

In the absence of solid evidence to the contrary, critics of the command and planning performance at Fromelles have attempted to determine what was occurring inside the mind of the principal players and explain the outcome of the battle through an assessment of what was motivating the commanders.[9] No study of such a subjective human process as planning a battle in which many men will likely be killed can ever ascertain with legal precision what was in the minds of every player in that process. The written record, especially for this period for which the records are comprehensive, notes primarily decisions and facts. There is little record of the thoughts or thinking processes behind those decisions.[10] For Fromelles, the thinking of the principal players is even more difficult to discern, as few personal papers have survived. Yet Fromelles does, by analysis of the official records and by linking outcomes to earlier proposals and decisions, provide much useful insight into the process that committed men to battle. The evidence does show there was structure, understanding and organisation behind the plan that eventually sent two divisions, one British and one Australian, forward into battle on 19 July 1916, and that the planners did have a sound understanding of how the various parts needed to be coordinated to work effectively.

As previously indicated, this is not to suggest that the plans were perfect or that the planners and commanders did not make mistakes. Inevitably, there were errors made, both at the operational and tactical levels of command and planning, which did directly affect the outcome of the battle, especially the casualty numbers. Both the purpose of the battle and the way it was to be conducted changed repeatedly during the lead-up phase, usually in response to occurrences elsewhere on the front, but also, on occasions, as a result of last minute changes to force composition and objectives, made at the operational level of command. There were also some directions and orders issued by senior commanders that were either ambiguous or simply wrong, as will be considered. However, the process by which the ideas, the concepts of the various command levels were developed, refined and then transmitted to both superior and subordinate command and planning teams, clearly followed the rational, logical path of the existing planning method. The eventual outcome, both the successes and the better-

[9] Patrick Lindsay, *Fromelles*, 155-8.

[10] There are some hand notations on records of meetings by Haking and others of his staff but critics such as Lindsay appear either not to have seen them or have chosen to ignore them for generally they reveal a command and a staff only too aware of what they were being asked to do and of the difficulties involved. These sources do not sustain the critics' portrayal of Haking as an ignorant buffoon with little military understanding.

known failures, were due primarily to problems in the implementation of the plan, not the plan itself. The number of errors in the planning process that had any direct impact on the shape or outcome of the final battle was still remarkably small, in view of the level of criticism it has since been subjected to. Whether these errors contributed to the high casualty rate is a different question, to which the evidence suggests the answer is that they did.

At the strategic and operational levels, the planning process was directly affected by the events on the Somme and few of the planning decisions taken at these two levels can be separated from that context. The critics who attack Haig for allowing the Fromelles attack to continue frequently fail to take account of what else might have been occupying his attention at the time. He was still commanding an enormous ongoing action on the Somme. On 19 July, the day the Fromelles attack occurred, Haig's attention was very likely focussed on the 18th Division's success in capturing the southern portion of Delville Wood, a critical battle that had been raging for several days. By comparison, Fromelles was a side-show. The reason Fromelles was fought, which was the interruption of German plans to reinforce the Somme from other parts of the line, was not a central planning issue by mid-July. It had properly exercised his attention both before the start of the Somme and briefly in the opening days of the Somme attack, but it was a problem for which a possible solution had already been identified and planned. Haig could not be expected to have to take personal oversight of every minor action that he had authorised, especially one not central to the main effort. Even having Butler, his Operations Officer, become involved in the final decision cycle at First Army Headquarters was arguably more involvement in this minor operation than HQ BEF should have had. Fromelles was never going to provide the strategic outcome that the Somme was intended to achieve.

As noted previously, it is difficult to fault the process by which Haig's plans for deception operations and pinning actions in the lead-up to and during the Somme campaign were implemented at Fromelles. There was disagreement and changed expectations about the intent and even the proposed location for the planned supporting attacks, but the system encouraged debate, analysis and criticism of the plans proposed, which improved their quality and comprehensiveness. On the evidence available, the development of the operational plan for Fromelles occurred largely as

intended. The only qualification that could be made is that between the original conception of a plan and the assigning of 'troops to task', the impact of the Somme invariably ensured that the best troops would not be assigned to this action. As the evidence demonstrates, even Haig understood this and fully recognised the limitations and the risks attached to the attack arising from the calibre of the troops given the task.

There were only two instances where the operational planning for Fromelles could justifiably be described as confused. The first occurred early in the strategic/operational planning stage when, as mentioned, the possibility that the Fromelles action could be used as a 'second front', rather than a simple diversion, for the Somme attack was considered. It was from this thinking that the critics draw their evidence to support their accusations that Haking harboured ambitious designs on capturing the whole of Aubers Ridge. The second example occurred when Fromelles was part of some revised preparatory thinking that followed optimistic assumptions about likely progress of the main British advance on the Somme. After the start of the Somme attack, however, no uncertainty about the intended operational purpose of the Fromelles attack lingered at the higher planning levels. The tactical planning that followed the commencement of the main attack never experienced any confusion over the priority purpose. Indeed, Haking's constant reiteration of the objective limits of the attack could be seen as direct evidence of his concern to prevent tactical over-reach in pursuit of the operational intent.

There were also, inevitably, some simple and avoidable planning mistakes. At the operational level, Monro and Haking did make some decisions for which they can legitimately be criticised. They also had problems that were not their responsibility but for which they are still criticised. Of the latter, the inexperience of the troops they were given to use in the attack and the very late identification of some of the troops to be used were major contributors to the final outcome. Yet over these matters, even Army commanders had little control.

One of the worst characteristics of the British command method during the entire war was the constant cycling of divisions between different corps and armies. Understanding of, and confidence in, the ability and judgment of others in the chain of command is well recognised as critical to success in battle. Yet, under the British system,

divisions rarely remained in the same chain of command long enough for this understanding and confidence to develop. At Fromelles, half of the attacking force was an unknown quantity to the operational commanders. Haking was an unknown quantity to the Australian divisional commander, whose only exposure to British corps commanders had been to the quite different Birdwood and Godley. Whether Haking's attack would have been more successful had he employed two of his own divisions, divisions used to his command style and who would have understood his intent, and merely used the Australian division to replace one of the attacking formations in garrisoning the front line, will never be known. However, had this happened, it would at least have resolved the ongoing debate over whether the Australian divisional commander simply failed to understand the limited intent of Haking's plan, and thus incurred many more casualties than he needed to have. Arguably also, it was this lack of confidence in his subordinates that led Haking to be so forceful, and repetitive, in his orders strictly limiting the objectives of the attack to the enemy's front trenches.[11] This repetition ensured there was no misunderstanding, but also ensured no tactical flexibility in his plan.

Haig and the operational commanders are sometimes criticised for thinking about plans to exploit any local success at Fromelles and about plans to use the Fromelles attack to exploit any serious break-through on the Somme. This criticism is both unjustified and demonstrates a failure by the critics to understand the military principle of exploitation. However, as part of the planning cycle, Haig and his commanders did need to decide quite early on in the process whether Fromelles was to be a feint, a demonstration, a limited infantry attack or a full-scale assault with more strategic objectives. In particular, as the date of the attack drew closer, they needed to be clear whether it was to be a deception action or an assault. Given a feint required the enemy to learn about the plans to attack quite early on, while an assault demanded full operational security so the enemy did not discover the plan, this decision could not be delayed until the last moment. While a feint had to be convincing enough to persuade the enemy an attack was going to occur, success of an actual assault was hugely dependent on achieving tactical surprise. Deliberately alerting an enemy to a proposed

[11] Once the limits of the action had been made clear to him. It is important to remember that the scope of the action between when Haking was first directed to plan an action in the Fromelles area and when final planning for the action that was fought occurred changed quite significantly.

attack, if one was to occur, would have been irresponsible in the extreme. The evidence demonstrates that neither the strategic nor operational level headquarters made the necessary decision on the nature of the operation until close to the attack date. The evidence also suggests that the enemy did know the attack was to occur, for a number of reasons including the careless actions of the British and Australian troops themselves. Whether the uncertainty that inevitably arose over what form the final action would take did result in command or planning actions that warned the enemy of the prospective attack, is difficult to establish. However, it is a reasonable assumption that the lax attention to operational security at all levels of command probably did add confidence to the enemy's prediction of an attack.

Another major operational failure was the decision to leave the divisional boundary between the two attacking divisions directly across the major tactical feature in the enemy line. For what appears to have been mere administrative convenience, as there were no geographic features to influence the location of the boundary, the operational planners converted a genuine but manageable tactical problem into a major military problem: a major problem with a low chance of success. By not making the capture of the Sugar Loaf the tactical responsibility of one brigade, the plan created an unnecessary need for complex manoeuvring by two of the brigades involved. It left a gap between the two brigades facing it and it ensured that the supporting artillery was not directly answerable to one assault headquarters. Additionally, it meant the artillery was confused by differing reports on their success in neutralising the target fortification from observers in different headquarters. The significance of the Sugar Loaf was well appreciated, as is evident from pre-battle commanders' discussions. It is difficult to explain, therefore, why Monro or Haking did not make a temporary adjustment to the Front Line and move the boundary 100 yards left or right. That measure, together with a better control of the artillery responsible for bombarding the Sugar Loaf, would have increased significantly the prospect of capturing or neutralising the Sugar Loaf and thus of success for the whole attack.

The operational level of planning and command is also often held responsible for the short time allocated between the identification of the troops to conduct the attack and the attack itself.

> The overall plan was unravelling under the pressures of trying to mount a corps attack with two inexperienced divisions on three days' notice.[12]

The lack of sufficient time for the troops and the tactical commanders to study the battlefield, plan their attacks and disseminate their orders was a major contribution to the outcome of the attack. So too was the necessity to employ the assault troops on carrying parties, trench maintenance fatigues and other similar labouring duties. Apart from tiring the men out, it also reduced their ability to think about the attack and their part in it. The very act of repositioning the 5th Division from one part of the front line to another in just two days, a complex manoeuvre even for experienced troops, added to their exhaustion and lack of time. Yet it is, arguably, not reasonable to hold Monro or Haking responsible for all of these decisions. They had to launch an attack and they were given as many resources as were available. It was not Haig's fault, nor that of his subordinate commanders, that Britain lacked sufficient experienced and skilled troops to fight a continental war. Nor was it the commanders' fault that they had insufficient labouring resources to meet the needs of preparing for an attack.[13] None of the commanders involved were blind to the inadequacies of the troops they had available or the level of demands they placed upon them for the task. They simply had no option.

The other point about the timing that is frequently missed is that unlike most set-piece battles, the timing of the Fromelles attack was determined by the enemy. There was no requirement to launch a pinning action if the enemy was not withdrawing troops. The Fromelles plan, if not the troops for the task, had been in existence for an extended time but the decision to launch was based upon intelligence that the enemy was withdrawing troops. Having made that discovery, the time window to launch an attack to prevent any more withdrawal was limited. It would have been of little assistance to Haig's strategy if the Fromelles attack was launched after significant German troops had already been moved south to the Somme, unless of course the weakened German defences then did give way. Quick reaction to the German initiative was required, so the British did not have the luxury of a lot of time. On this, neither

---

[12] Peter Pedersen, *Fromelles* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2004), 44.

[13] It was a comparative abundance of resources that enabled the Canadian Divisions to maintain a specialist labour battalion in each of their divisions; a resource that ensured their assault troops did not first have to do the preparatory carrying and labouring and thus were fresh for the attack.

Monro nor Haking can be held accountable. As it was, the weather did provide some additional preparatory time by delaying the attack for two days.

Errors were made at the tactical level. Haking did not provide, in his written orders, the degree of detail that he both possessed and his inexperienced junior commanders needed. There is nothing in the surviving evidence to suggest whether Haking assumed a degree of battle planning experience in his subordinates that McCay simply did not possess, but the failure to provide as much detail on the enemy, the defences and the potential tactical difficulties of the battle as he could from what he already knew, is inexplicable.

Why Haking and his planners did not prescribe the use of smoke for concealment in a daylight attack is not addressed in any of the evidence. Haking was well aware of, and familiar with, smoke. The records show he had considerable stocks of smoke candles. Perhaps he harboured doubts about the ability of his inexperienced troops to capitalise on concealment or perhaps he feared the smoke might offer a greater tactical benefit to the enemy. Whatever the reason, the experience from the Somme, where smoke was used, suggests that failure to employ this weapon was an opportunity missed. Similar arguments apply to the failure to employ the specialist wire-cutting weapon known as the Bangalore torpedo. It was a weapon known to Haking and his engineers. It was temperamental and difficult to use. However, it was effective in cutting wire and, given the difficulties the inexperienced artillery had in clearing the barbed-wire entanglements, its use should have been planned for.

The arguments for commencing the attack late in the afternoon have never been fully analysed. The initial plan called for an early morning attack and, given the experiences from the Somme, every battle planner understood the benefits of a dawn attack. The reasons for the slippage of the start time, essentially the poor weather, were well-explained. What is missing from the record is the justification for launching the attack at 6.00 p.m., when there was only limited daylight left to help consolidate the captured position yet sufficient daylight during the assault to aid the enemy. Having registered his artillery, Haking could have delayed the attack until dawn the next day with little impact on the strategic or operational aims.

From an Australian perspective, one of the largest alleged tactical failures was committed by the Commander of the 5th Australian Division. Most commentators, and many of the participants in the battle, accuse McCay of failing to understand that Haking intended the attack to be merely a feint or demonstration and thus did not require the degree of commitment of forces and sustained pressure that he employed. The evidence clearly does not support this assessment. Haking was concerned to ensure the attack was sufficiently compelling that the Germans would be forced to stop stripping troops from that part of the front. He had evidence that demonstrations and artillery diversions elsewhere had failed to convince the Germans that their line was under threat. The plan he issued strictly limited the objectives of the attack but the tactical objectives most definitely did include the seizure of the front trenches. (However, while the plans were clear, the lack of detail, especially about how to secure these limited gains, could have been interpreted by his subordinates as an underlying uncertainty in Haking's mind about the wisdom of the limited objectives.) While this was a degree of detail additional to the operational objectives, it was still within the tactical commander's responsibilities to decide. While, as has been argued, the attack was a success because no further troop movements were attempted, it is also a reasonable conclusion to make that the Germans were convinced of their local tactical vulnerability by the very vigour with which McCay prosecuted the attack. There is no conclusive evidence, either, to support the critics' view that the commander of the 61st British Division deliberately did not press home his attacks because he understood Haking did not require it. Indeed, the evidence indicates the opposite; that the 61st commander, Mackenzie, did attempt to press the attack but the disorganisation in his own troops caused by the strong German resistance prevented him from doing so. The evidence, as shown in the orders issued, does confirm that the plan required an attack with maximum effort. Were a limited effort intended, there would have been no requirement to use all three brigades of both divisions in the attack.

In the end, while these failures of planning did not affect the operational achievement of the attack, they undoubtedly did make a major contribution to the high casualty count. The inability of the artillery to suppress the enemy defences, the failure of the infantry who captured some of the enemy's trenches to hold them against counter-attack and the inability of the troops to connect the captured trenches to their own forward trenches were the consequence of inexperience and lack of training, not of

the battle plan. The tactical plan did include provisions for these actions but the instrument of implementation, the infantry and the gunners, was lacking in the necessary skills to make the plan work. It can be argued that the very effort they made attempting to achieve their tactical objectives was sufficiently convincing that, despite the capture on an Australian officer who was carrying a copy of Haking's plans and thus revealing the overall objectives of the attack, the Germans still felt sufficient uncertainty about British intentions that they stopped moving troops away from the sector.

Recognising that the use of inexperienced troops posed a serious risk of overall failure,[14] Haking adapted his original plan to attempt to compensate for their low skill levels. Haig ensured his representative monitoring the attack, Butler, was satisfied that the assault troops had all the support they needed. Having put in place all the risk mitigation that they could, it is difficult to see what else Haking could have done other than continue the attack. Asked by his commander whether he had sufficient artillery to provide the attack with sufficient prospect of success, he could hardly claim he did not, when the artillery at his disposal, in numbers alone, was more than that used on a comparable length on the Somme. He had adapted his plan to compensate for his concerns over the impact of their inexperience and, it can be argued, produced a reasonable and feasible scheme of attack. It is unreasonable to accuse him of failing to call off the attack because his troops were even more inexperienced and incapable than he imagined; at some point a commander and his planners have to accept that the resources they are given are fit for the task.

Nor can the planners be fairly accused of being out of date or out of touch with the planning requirements to conduct an attack like Fromelles. The fundamental problem critics of the direction and planning of battles at any stage in this war conveniently forget is the problem of scale in conflict with time. Even today, with much more sophisticated methods of information collection and dissemination, taking in vast quantities of information, assessing the accumulated material for accuracy and relevance then developing plans for future action based on that material remains a major challenge

[14] Both Haking and Haig have been criticised for comments made after the battle. In particular, Haking has been accused of being insensitive and callous for remarking that the battle will have done the Division a lot of good. Given the 1700 dead, there is some basis for this but what he meant was the experience they had gained from being under fire for the first time was something no amount of training could provide. He may have been insensitive but he was right.

for any organisation. For the largely untrained planning staffs of 1916, the challenge was complicated by the simple fact the processes they inherited were based upon methods of war and weapons capability that every day were rendered more obsolete. This meant they not only had to develop their planning skills, they had constantly to update the methodologies and assumptions they were employing. Applying new lessons, changing tactics and procedures in response to recent experiences or adopting new organisational structures or command arrangements when the recipients were still struggling to digest and apply existing procedures was a recipe for confusion and disaster.[15] British planners in 1916 faced all these challenges at a time when the responsibility for taking the major responsibility for prosecuting the war was shifting from the French Army to the BEF. They also had to plan operations in a strategic environment with a Government that was still unprepared to adopt a total war strategy. The scale and complexity of the planning for the Somme was immense and the outcome so controversial it is difficult to be objective in analysing the process. Yet the similarities between the planning methods for the Somme and Fromelles provide further evidence supporting the contention that the British already had in place by 1916 an effective method for devising battle plans. Once the methodology was backed by sufficient skilled planners and sufficient experienced combat troops, British battlefield planning methods provided the blueprint for final victory.

Ultimately, as Richards argues, the blame for the tactical failures and high casualties at Fromelles rested not with the men, the planners or the commanders. It lay with British defence policy and Empire intransigence prior to the war.

> Britain's contribution in August 1914, was a truly "contemptible" four divisions. "Contemptible" in the sense that a great power had deliberately chosen to do so little in its own defence…. Britain in the style of a colonial war of the 19th century raised an army of enthusiastic volunteers, but the scale and complexity of the task was beyond her in the time available. Twenty-two months after the outbreak of war, the crisis at Verdun forced the British hand and the price was paid on the Somme. The defence policies which Britain adopted prior to 1914 were approved in Parliament by the democratically elected representatives of the people. The military results were plain to see.[16]

---

[15] 'After the breakthrough, and not before, as so often seems to have been expected in France, the pursuit stage opens. [Whether the above conclusions are sound or otherwise] the one thing that is certain is that there can be no stereotyped way of fighting a battle, and we must avoid a too hidebound mentality on the subject. Manoeuvre and surprise are the key to the problem.' Major-General A.E. McNamara, 'Report on the Lessons of the Great War on the Western Front', W. Kirke et al, *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War* (London: War Office, 1932), 20.

[16] P. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', *British Army Review* 86 (August, 1987), 38.

As part of the Empire, the same criticisms applied to Australia's military contribution. Lack of attention to military skills had seen the Australian contribution to the war consist of partially-trained soldiers led by inexperienced and untrained staff and commanders. At Fromelles, the first battle on the Western Front for the Australians, this fundamental lack of preparation was unarguably one of the primary causes of the high human cost and the inability to hold the trenches they had captured. The AIF of 1918 would not have experienced the high losses or committed the failures that cost the tactical objectives, but the skills required for tactical competence were simply unavailable in the 1916 AIF.

ANNEX A

GENERAL ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE STAFF.[1]

Chief of the General Staff**		
General Staff Branch	**Adjutant-General's Branch ++**	**Quarter-Master-General's Branch ++**
Co-ordination of staff work as far as this power is delegated by the Commander.	Discipline.	Embarkation and landings within and if necessary outside the theatre of operations, subject to the general control of the C.G.S.
Advice on all matters affecting military operations.	Military Law, Administration of martial law, and compilation of regulations relating thereto.	Distribution, in detail, of quarters and buildings within the areas delimited by the General Staff.
Signing and issue of all orders, except routine orders and instructions, by the Commander.	Executive duties connected with the appointment and promotion of officers.	Questions concerning supplies.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding : - All military operations, including the general control, in co-operation with the Navy, of embarkation and landing within the theatre of operations.	Questions relating to the supply of military personnel to the army; interior economy, personal services, pay, promotion, honours and rewards, enlistments and applications of all kinds concerning the fighting troops, spiritual welfare of the army.	Questions concerning ammunition, equipment, clothing and stores of all kinds (except provision of medical equipment).
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding : - War organization and efficiency of the troops.	Sanitation.	Questions concerning land, inland water and sea transport
Responsibility for the	Provision of medical	Questions concerning

[1] General Staff War Office, *Field Service Pocket Book, 1914* London: HMSO, London, 1914), 25.

working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding selection of lines of operation.	equipment.	railway administration.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding all plans for the concentration, distribution and movement of troops and material by rail, road or inland waterways in the theatre of operations.	Casualties and invaliding.	Remounts.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding the general allotment of areas in which units or formations are to be quartered; security, marches and battle.	Mobilization of improvised units.	Veterinary services.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding : - Intercommunication in the field.	Police measures.	Postal services.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding special reconnaissances.	Disposal of Prisoners of War.	Rendering of proper accounts for expenditure of an abnormal character.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding policy connected with the raising of new units.	Burying Parties and Places.	Preparation of reports, despatches and diaries relating to the above.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding provision of guides and interpreters.	Routine garrison or camp duties.	Subject to strategical and tactical considerations, the limitations of which are communicated by the G.S., the co-ordination of all administrative arrangements between the **I.G.C.** and

		commanders of field units or formations.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding acquisition and distribution of information about the enemy, the country and its resources.	Ceremonial.	Drafting all orders regarding these duties, for insertion in orders issued over the signature of the C.G.S.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding questions of policy in connection with international and martial law, including, in the case of martial law, advice as to the necessity for and scope of its enforcement.	Preparation of reports, despatches and diaries relating to the above.	Signature and issue of all routine orders and instructions connected with above duties.
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding flags of truce and correspondence with the enemy, censorship over communications, *i.e.* the post, telegraphs, telephones and cables.	Drafting all orders regarding these duties, for insertion in orders issued over the signature of the C.G.S.	
Responsibility for the working out of all arrangements, and for the drafting of detailed orders regarding control of the press and press correspondents, secret services, ciphers, care and disposal of captured documents, provision, distribution and revision of maps, charge of foreign attaches.	Signature and issue of all routine orders and instructions connected with above duties.	
Preparation of reports, despatches and diaries relating to the above.		
Advice as to movements or disposal of all impedimenta, including supply of columns and parks and L.		

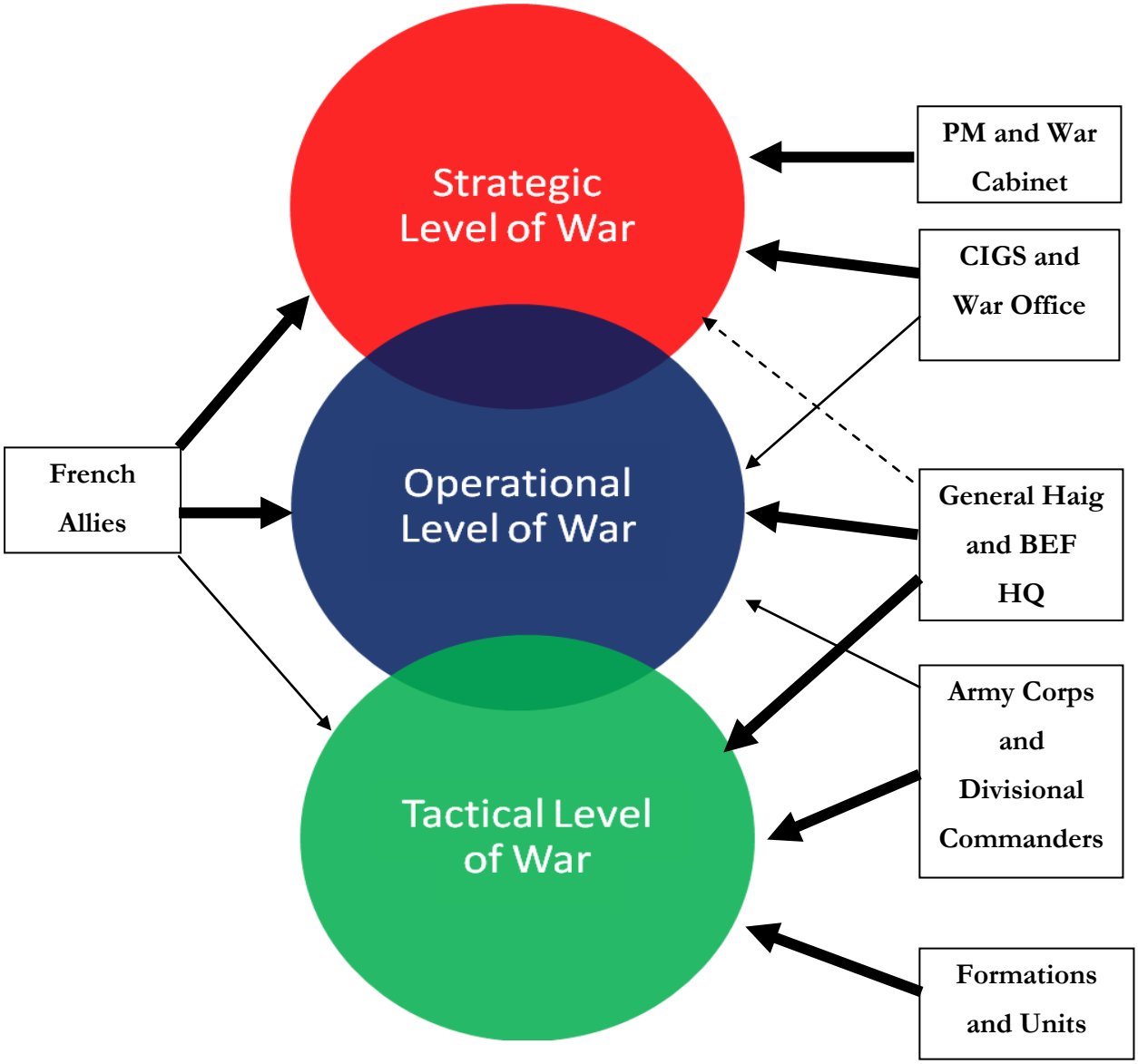
of C. units when the military situation requires it.		

** The power and responsibility of co-ordinating staff work at general headquarters is vested in the C-in-C.; but he will delegate it as he may think fit to the C.G.S., who is his responsible adviser on all matter affecting military operations, through whom he exercises his functions of command, and by whom all orders issued to field units will be signed. Other commanders will exercise their functions of command and issue their orders through their senior general staff officer on similar principles.

++ When certain staff officers of a headquarters are charged with duties appertaining both to A.G.'s and Q.M.G.'s branches of the staff, e.g. A.A. and Q.M.G., D.A.A. and Q.M.G., the senior staff officer of these branches supervises the work of both, the respective duties of the two branches being distributed among the several staff officers as may be most convenient.

ANNEX B

Planning Levels and Interrelationships



Annex C.

Heavy Artillery Group.

Pre-war, the British Army had no organisational structure for specialist heavy artillery. The heaviest guns normally deployed were 5.5 inch 60 pounders that deployed as part of organic divisional artillery. In previous conflicts, such as the Boer War, individual weapons such as naval guns were frequently mounted on wheels and used in support but the organisational arrangements were all ad hoc and based on the individual weapon. By February 1915, the growth in artillery weapons size, numbers and capability meant a more permanent organisational structure needed to be provided to command and administer the new guns becoming more widely available.

The solution devised, and one that continued in some form for the duration of the War, was to create structures loosely based on independent artillery batteries, four or five of which were then grouped together as a Heavy Artillery Group, and attached to Army and/or Corps headquarters on an 'as required' basis. Initially each Division lost its 60 pounder guns which were joined with newly arriving 6 inch howitzers to form the initial Heavy Artillery Groups. At first, there were two HAGs for each Corps but this later increased to four per Corps. Weapons larger than the six inch howitzers were, in 1916, sometimes grouped together into more traditional artillery structures known as Siege Brigades.

By the end of 1917, the HAGs and the Siege Artillery Brigades had both largely been replaced by Heavy Artillery Brigades. The number of weapons within each independent Battery varied depending on the gun's size and the manpower required to operate it. In the earlier years, there were usually four guns in each battery of weapons up to 9.2 inch calibre. In 1917, this was increased to six guns per battery. Larger weapons tended to be two weapons per battery except for the biggest ones, the 15 inch howitzers, which had one. A Heavy Artillery Group was a major provider of combat power and all infantry commanders wanted as many as possible to support their operations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Australian War Memorial

AWM4	AIF War Diaries
AWM25	Written records, 1914-18 War
AWM26	Operations Files, 1914-18 War
AWM38	CEW Bean Papers
AWM45	British War Diaries (copies)

The National Archives, London

WO95	BEF War Diaries
WO158	BEF Maps and Plans

PRIVATE PAPERS[1]

Army Museum of Western Australia

WWI/95	Lieutenant E.W. Morris

University of NSW at the Australian Defence Force Academy

G164 1/5 AFR	Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett

Australian War Memorial

3DRL/4142 & 3DRL/2381	Lieutenant Colonel A.S. (Tubby) Allen
2DRL/0204	Lieutenant H.S. Allen
2DRL/1222	Colonel J.H. Anderson
1DRL/0046	Captain H.C. Anthony
1DRL/0411	Captain W.G Boys
3DRL/2750	Brigadier C.H. Brand
3DRL/4182	Lieutenant C.J. Brossois
3DRL/3267	Major R.G. Casey
2 DRL/0240	Captain W. Claridge
3DRL/3071	Captain M.J.B. Cotton
PR88/9	Lieutenant Colonel J.M.A. Durrant
2DRL/513	Brigadier H.E. Elliott

[1] While over fifty sets of personal papers were examined, most had little or nothing of relevance to the topic. Those listed are the ones with relevant content, most of it small.

1DRL/277	Major R.E. Fanning
1DRL/297	Captain C.G. Forrest
PR89/086	Gunner M.E. Liley
PR65/363	Brigadier T.S. Louch
3DRL/632	Lieutenant Colonel J.P. McGlinn
2DRL/0840	Private H.G. Hartnett
1DRL/0338	Major J.R.O. Harris
1DRL/0411	Captain A.E. Leane
1DRL/0489	Captain G.L. Maxfield
3 DRL/0632	Lieutenant Colonel J.P. McGlinn
3DRL/1469	Brigadier J.C. Stewart

Imperial War Museum, London

DS/Misc/69	Colonel C.J.L Allanson
PP/MCR/197	Major General S.S. Butler
DS/Misc/2	Henderson papers

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS/MILITARY PAMPHLETS

Australian Imperial Force, *Gradation List of Officers, October 1918* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1918)

Australian Imperial Force, *Notes on the French Army* (Melbourne: Albert J. Mullett, Government printer, no date)

Australian Imperial Force, *Notes on the German Army* (Melbourne: Albert J. Mullett, Government printer, no date)

Barton, Peter. *Report on Research Carried out by Peter Barton in Geneva, Munich and Ingolstadt on behalf of the Australian Army and the Australian Fromelles Project Group* (Canberra: Australian Army, 2009) [made available online in 2009 and 2010 on the Army webpage: www.army.gov.au)

A.F. Becke, *History of the Great War - Order of Battle of Divisions. Part I – The Regular British Divisions* (London: HMSO, 1935)

C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, Vol. III, The A.I.F. in France: 1916* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1940)

Commonwealth of Australia, *Annual Report Upon the Military Forces of the Commonwealth for the Period January, 1902 - 30th April, 1903* Parliamentary Papers, 1903 Session, Vol. II: No. 37.

Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, *Reports and Despatches of the War, 1916*.

Department of Defence, 'Military Orders', *Military Orders 1913* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1913)

Department of Defence, 'Military Orders', *Military Orders 1914* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1914)

Department of Defence, 'Military Orders', *Military Orders 1915* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1915)

James Edmonds, *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium 1916* Vol. I (London: MacMillan and Co., 1932)

_____, *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium 1916* Vol. II (London: MacMillan and Co., 1932)

_____, *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium 1916* Appendices Vol. I (London: MacMillan and Co., 1932)

_____, *History of the Great War Military Operations France and Belgium 1916* Appendices Vol. II (London: MacMillan and Co., 1932)

A.M. Henneker, *Transportation on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: HMSO, 1937)

E.A. James, *A record of the battles and Engagements of the British Armies in France and Flanders, 1914-1918* (Aldershot, UK: Gale & Polden, 1924)

General Staff, Fourth Army, *Training Arrangements* (HQ, Fourth Army: G.S.37, 1918)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *Consolidation of Trenches, localities and Craters after Assault and Capture, with a note on Rapid Wiring* (GHQ, BEF: S.S.112, 1916)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *Diagrams of Field Defences* (GHQ, BEF: S.S.196, 1918)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *Notes for Infantry Officers on Trench Warfare* (GHQ, BEF, 1916)

General Staff, War Office, *The German Forces in the Field* Revised May 1916 (London: War Office, 1916)

General Staff, War Office, *Notes on the Attack: Impressions of a Battalion Commander* [Translation of a document by Commandant Lachèvre, 74th Regiment of Infantry] (GHQ, BEF: S.S. 113, 1916)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *Offence versus Defence in the Air* (GHQ, BEF: S.S.188, 1917)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *The Division in Attack* (GHQ, BEF: S.S.137, 1918)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *The Offensive of Small Units* (GHQ, BEF: 121/8905, 1916)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *The Tactical Employment of Lewis Guns* (GHQ, BEF: S.S.197, 1918)

General Staff, General Headquarters, *The Training and Employment of Bombers* (GHQ, BEF: S.S.126 and S.S. 398, 1916)

General Staff (Intelligence), General Headquarters, *Summary of Recent Information regarding the German Army and its Methods* (GHQ, BEF. S.S. 537, 1917)

General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Pocket Book* (HMSO: London, 1914)

General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations Part 1. Operations* (HMSO: London, 1909) [Reprinted with amendments, 1914]

General Staff, War Office, *Garrison Artillery Training VOL. III* (HMSO: London, 1911) [Reprinted with amendments, 1914]

General Staff, War Office, *Infantry Training (4-Company Organization)* (HMSO: London, 1914)

General Staff, War Office, *Manual of Map Reading and Field Sketching* (HMSO: London, 1906)

General Staff, War Office, *Musketry Regulations Part I 1909* (HMSO: London, 1916) [Reprinted with amendments, 1914]

General Staff, War Office, *Notes for Infantry Officers on Trench Warfare* (HMSO: London, 1916)

General Staff, War Office, *Officers Training Corps* (HMSO: London, 1909)

General Staff, War Office, *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations, 1913* (HMSO: London, 1913)

CAPT T.H. Gillman, *The New Platoon Instructor. Complete in Tactics and Drill as Required for France* (Cleveland, Ohio: Penton, 1918)

W. Kirke et al., *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War* (London: War Office, 1932)

Quartermaster General's Branch, General Headquarters, *Extracts from General Routine Orders issued to the British Army in the Field* (London: HMSO, 1917)

War Ministry Prussia, *The Construction of Field Positions* [Translated edition of captured document] (London: Darling & Sons, 1917)

A.H. Sandford, (Lieutenant Colonel, R.A.G.A.), *Key to Infantry Training, 1914* (London: Critchley Parker, 1915). With the permission of the Military Board.

Bronsart von Schellendorff, *The Duties of the General Staff* (translated) (London: HMSO, 1905)

Signals Experimental Establishment, *Power Buzzer – Amplifier* (Pamphlet No. 5, 1918)

C.B.B. White, *Notes on Staff Duties. Staff College Camberley 1919-1920* (Melbourne: Government Printer, no date)

UNPUBLISHED PAPERS/THESES

Bruce Faraday, 'Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918' (Canberra: UNSW, PhD thesis, 1997).

Jackson Hughes, 'The Monstrous Anger of the Guns. The Development of British Artillery Tactics 1914-1918' (Adelaide: University of Adelaide, PhD thesis, 1992).

Timothy Lupfer, 'The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine during the First World War' (West Point, US: US Military Academy, 1981).

Andrew Risio, 'Building the Old Contemptibles: British Military Transformation and Tactical development from the Boer War to the Great War, 1899-1914' (Leavenworth, Kansas: US Army Command and General Staff College, undated).

Peter Stanley, 'Paul the Pimp Reconsidered: Australian 'G' Staffs on the Western Front and the 'Kiggell anecdote'' (Canberra: paper presented to the AWM History Conference, July 1987).

G.D. Sheffield, 'How even was the learning curve? Reflections on the British and Dominion Armies on the Western Front, 1916-18' (London: King's College, no date).

Gary Sheffield, 'New Light on the Somme A Reassessment of the Performance of the British Army in Battle, July to November 1916' (London: SHLM Project c/- IWM, 1996).

J.P. Stevens, 'Artillery Support for the Fifth Australian Division in the Attack at Fromelles, July 1916' (Canberra: Unpublished paper, 2010).

Guy Verney, 'The Army High Command and Australian Defence Policy, 1901-1918' (Sydney: University of Sydney, PhD thesis, 1982).

ONLINE SOURCES

AIF Project Database. *www.aif.adfa.edu.au*

ARTICLES

E.M. Andrews, 'Bean and Bullecourt: Weaknesses and Strengths of the Official History of Australia in the First World War', *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire* No. 72, 1990.

E.M. Andrews and B.G. Jordan, 'Second Bullecourt revisited: The Australians in France, 3 May 1917', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 15 (October, 1989).

Jonathan Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', *Strategic & Combat Studies Institute* No. 22 (1996).

Chris Baker, 'Fromelles 1916: Is the Australian Official History more "truthful" than the British?', *United Service* 54:4 (December, 2008).

Theo Barker, 'Signals: A History of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals 1788-1947' (Canberra: Royal Australian Corps of Signals Committee, 1987).

Correlli Barnett, 'Haig's Outline Plans for the Exploitation of Breakthrough in 1916-1917', *Bulletin of the Western Front Association* 87 (June/July 2010).

_____, 'Leadership in Perspective', *British Army Review* 39 (December 1971).

Brian Bond, 'The Staff College, the General Staff and the Test of War, 1914-1915', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* Vol. CXVI No. 663 (September, 1971).

P.H. Brennan, 'Byng's and Currie's Commanders: A Still Untold Story of the Canadian Corps', *Canadian Military History* 11:2 (Spring, 2002).

Donald Cook, 'Divisional Commander in France: General Sir David Campbell GCB', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal* Vol 188 No. 2 (1988).

John Croft, 'Horsed Cavalry in the 1914-18 War', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Review* 115:2 (April, 1985).

_____, 'The Somme: 14 July 1916 – A Great Opportunity Missed?', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Review* 116:3 (July, 1986).

A.B.T. Davey, 'A Confusion of Staffs', *The British Army Review* 43 (December 1972).

N. Evans, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers 1914-18', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 78: 313 (Spring, 2000).

John Gooch, 'The Creation of the British General Staff 1904-1914', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* Vol. CXVI No. 662 (June, 1971).

Elizabeth Greenhalgh, 'Why the British Were on the Somme in 1916', *War in History* 6:2 (1999)

Keith Hammond, 'French – The Waste of a Talent', *Army Quarterly* III: 2 (April, 1981).

John Hussey, 'Without an Army, and Without any Preparation to Equip One', *British Army Review* 109 (April, 1995).

_____, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers in the Great War: 'A Generation Missing'?' *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 75: 304 (Winter, 1997).

Peter Liddle, 'The British Soldier on the Somme 1916', *Strategic & Combat Studies Institute* No. 23 (1996)

Ian McCulloch, 'Commander – General Julian Byng & the Canadian Corps', *Osprey Military Journal* Vol. 4 Issue 1. (No date)

H.M. de F. Montgomery, 'Cooperation of Infantry and Artillery in the Attack', *The Australian Army Journal* (January 1915).

Warren Perry, 'Lieutenant General James Gordon Legge', *Victorian Historical Magazine* Vol. 48, No. 3 (August, 1977).

_____, 'Major General Sir Charles Rosenthal', *Victorian Historical Magazine* Vol. 40, No. 3 (August, 1969).

W.L. Raws, 'Infantry Training, 1914', *The Australian Army Journal* (April 1915).

Brian Holden Reid, 'Major General J.F.C. Fuller and the Decline of Generalship', *British Army Review* 90 (December, 1988).

_____, 'War Studies at the Staff College 1890-1930', *Strategic & Combat Studies Institute* No. 1 (1992).

P. Richards, 'The First Day on the Somme', *British Army Review* 86 (August, 1987).

"Sapper", 'The Employment of Field Companies', *The Australian Army Journal* (April 1915).

John Terraine, 'Right Good Captains: British Generals and Generalship', *British Army Review* No. 67 (April, 1981).

_____, 'The Killing Ground: A Review Article', *British Army Review* No. 96 (December 1990).

_____, 'The Military Structure of the First World War', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Review* 115: 3 (1985).

_____, '1916: The Year of the Somme', *The Army Quarterly and Defence Review* 116: 4 (1986).

A.H. Trapmann, 'How Serbia made ready to meet her Giant Antagonist', H.H. Wilson and J.A. Hammerton, *The Great War: The Standard History of the all-European Conflict* (London: Amalgamated press, 1914).

John Williams, 'Words on a "lively skirmish": Fromelles in contemporary and foreign reports', *Journal of the Australian War memorial* No. 23 (October, 1993).

A.J. Wilson, 'The Riddle of Schlieffen. Some Comments on Captain Wynne's Analysis of British Tactical Failures in the First World War', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* Vol. CIII, No. 611 (August, 1958).

BOOKS

Ron Austin, *Black and Gold: The History of the 29th Battalion AIF 1915-18* (Melbourne: Slouch Hat, 1997).

Australian Army, *Land Warfare Procedures – General: The Military Appreciation Process* (Puckapunyal: Land Warfare Development Centre, 2001).

Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* [1980] (London: Pan Books, 2000).

Edwin Astill, *The Great War Diaries of Brigadier Alexander Johnston 1914-1917* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007)

William J. Astore and Dennis E. Showalter, *Hindenburg: Icon of German Militarism* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

J.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (Oxford: Military Press, 1987).

John Baynes, *Far from a Donkey: The Life of General Sir Ivor Maxse* (London: Brassey's, 1995).

Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* [1982] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004).

Brian Bond (ed.), *Chief of Staff. The Diaries of Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall* (London: Leo Cooper, 1972).

Brian Bond and Simon Robbins (eds), *Staff Officer: The Diaries of Walter Guinness (First Lord Moyne) 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987).

Ian Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front 1914-1919* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998).

British Commission for Military History, Brian Bond et al., *Look to Your Front: Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst, Kent: Spellmount, 1999).

Michael Carver, *The War Lords: Military Commanders of the Twentieth Century* [1976] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005).

Brian Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972).

Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds), *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years On* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999).

Victor Bonham-Carter, *Soldier True. The Life and Times of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson* (London: Frederick Muller, 1963).

J.H. Boraston and Cyril Bax, *The Eighth Division in War, 1914-1918* (London: The Medici Society, 1926).

C.E. Callwell, *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson* (London: Cassell, 1927).

Nigel Cave, *Battleground Europe: Thiepval* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1995).

Paul Cobb, *Fromelles 1916* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2007).

David Coombes, *Morshead: Hero of Tobruk and El Alamein* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2110).

Duff Cooper, *Haig* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935).

Robin Corfield, *don't forget me, cobber: The Battle of Fromelles* (Melbourne: Miegunyan Press, 2009).

Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003).

Christopher Coulthard-Clark, *A Heritage of Spirit. A Biography of Major-General Sir William Throsby Bridges K.C.B., C.M.G.* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979).

_____, *The Citizen General Staff: The Australian Intelligence Corps 1907-1914* (Canberra: Military Historical Society of Australia, 1976).

Robert Cowley, *The Great War: Perspectives on the First World War* (New York: Random House, 2003).

Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

Hermann Cron, *Imperial German Army 1914-1918: Organisation, Structure, Orders-of-Battle* [1937] (Solihull: Helion, 2002).

F. Davies and G. Maddocks, *Bloody Red Tabs: General Officer Casualties of the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995).

George Dewar, *Sir Douglas Haig's Command December 19, 1915, to November 11, 1918* (London: Constable, 1922).

Robert Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory. French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2008).

Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: the British & the Somme 1916* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006).

J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* [1938] (London: Cardinal, 1989).

T.N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (Fairfax, Virginia: Hero, 1984).

Ashley Ekins (ed.), *'1918 Year of Victory: The End of the Great War and the Shaping of History* (Auckland: Exisle, 2010).

A.D. Ellis, *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920).

John Ellis and Michael Cox, *The World War I Databook: The Essential Facts and Figures for all the Combatants* (London: Aurum Press, 1993).

Martin Marix Evans, *1918: The Year of Victories* (London: Arcturus Publishing, 2003).

M. Evans and A. Ryan (eds), *The Human Face of Warfare* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

Cyril Falls, *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* [1922] (London: Constable, 1998).

Don Farr, *The Silent General: Horne of the First Army* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion, 2007).

A.R. Farrar-Hockley, *Goughie: The Life and Times of General Sir Hubert Gough* (London: Granada, 1975).

_____, *The Somme* [1964] (London: Pan Books, 1966).

Niall Fergusson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

John Ferris (ed.), *The British Army and Signals Intelligence during the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, 1992).

David French and Brian Holden Reid (eds), *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation 1890-1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

Hubert Foster, *Organisation: How Armies are formed for War* (London: Hugh Rees, 1911).

David Gliddon, *The Battle of the Somme: A Topographical History* [1987] (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1994).

Michael Glover, *Warfare from Waterloo to Mons* (London: Cassell, 1980).

A.R. Godwin-Austen, *The Staff and the Staff College* (London: Constable, 1927).

John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

E. Gorman, MC, W*ith the Twenty-Second: A History of the Twenty-Second Battalion, AIF* (Melbourne: H. H. Champion, 1919).

Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

_____(ed.), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

_____, *Forward into battle Fighting: Tactics from Waterloo to the Near Future* [1981] (Swindon, Wiltshire: Crowood, 1990).

_____, *The Great War on the Western Front: A Short History* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2008).

"G.S.O.", *G.H.Q. Montreuil-Sur-Mer* (London: Philip Allan and Co, 1920).

Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command 1914-1918* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961).

J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Jock Haswell, *British Military Intelligence* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann (Eds), *Leadership in Conflict 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000).

Ian V. Hogg, *The Guns 1914-1918* (London: Pan Books, 1973).

Richard Holmes, *Riding the Retreat: Mons to the Marne 1914 Revisited* (London: Random House, 1996).

David Horner, *The Gunners A History of Australian Artillery* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).

J.H. Johnson, *Stalemate! The Great Trench Warfare Battles of 1915-1917* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1997).

Graham Keech, *Battleground Europe: Pozieres* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998).

Ian Kuring, *Redcoats to Cams: A History of Australian Infantry 1788-2001* (Sydney: Australian Military History Publications, 2004).

Patrick Lindsay, *Fromelles* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2007).

Brett Lodge, *Lavarack: Rival General* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998).

F.V. Longstaff and A. Hilliard Atteridge, *The Book of the Machine Gun* (London: Hugh Rees, 1917).

Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memories: 1914-1918,* Vol. I (London: Hutchinson, 1919).

Ross McMullin, *Pompey Elliott* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2002).

Charles Messenger, *Call-To-Arms: The British Army 1914-18* [2005] (London: Cassell, 2006).

Sir John Monash, *The Australian Victories in France in 1918* [1920] (Nashville: The Battery Press 1993).

Allan Moorehead, *Gallipoli* (Geneva: Heron Books, 1956).

David Nash, *German Army Handbook April 1918* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1977).

Robin Neillands, *Attrition: The Great War on the Western Front – 1916* (London: Robson, 2001).

_____, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: Robinson, 1999)

W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines: An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18* [1939] (Stevenage, Herts: The Strong Oak Press, No date).

Christopher Page, *Command in the Royal Naval Division: A Military Biography of Brigadier General A.M. Asquith* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999).

Albert Palazzo, *The Australian Army: A History of its Organisation 1901-2001* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001).

A.B. (Banjo) Patterson, *Happy Dispatches* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1934).

Peter Pedersen, *Fromelles* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2004).

_____, *Monash as Military Commander* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1985.

Roland Perry, *Monash: The Outsider Who Won the War* (Sydney: Random House, 2004).

William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Abacus Books, 2010).

Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldier's General* [1990] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004).

Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1915-1918* [1992] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004).

_____, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

M.A. Ramsey, *Command and Cohesion: The Citizen Soldier and Minor Tactics in the British Army, 1870-1918* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002).

Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

Walter Reid, *Douglas Haig: Architect of Victory* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2009).

Andy Robertshaw, *Somme, 1 July 1916: Tragedy and Triumph.* (Oxford: Osprey, 2006)

William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen 1914-1918* (London: Cassell, 1926).

Peter Sadler, *The Paladin: A Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Martin Samuels, *Command and Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

Shane Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1966).

Michael Senior, *Haking A Dutiful Soldier Lt Gen Sir Richard Haking XI Corps Commander 1915-18* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012).

G.D Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: MacMillan, 2000).

_____, *New Light on the Somme: A Reassessment of the Performance of the British Army in Battle, July to November 1916,* SHLM Divisional Battle Assessment Project, Publication No. 1 (London: IWM, 1996).

_____, *The Chief Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Arum Press, 2011).

_____, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2003).

Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds), *Command and Control on the Western Front. The British Army's Experience 1914-1918* [2004] (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Spellmount, 2007).

Gary Sheffield and John Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005).

Harry Siepmann, *Echo of the Gun: Recollections of an Artillery officer 1914-18* (London: Robert Hale, 1987).

Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester: Manchester University press, 1988).

Andy Simpson, *The Evolution of Victory British Battles on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: Tom Donovan, 1995).

E.K.G. Sixsmith, *Douglas Haig* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976).

_____, *British Generalship in the Twentieth Century* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1970).

A.J. Smithers, *The Fighting Nation: Lord Kitchener and his Armies* (London: Leo Cooper, 1994).

Dan Snow and Mark Pottle (eds), *The Confusion of Command: The War Memoirs of Lieutenant General Sir Thomas D'Oyly Snow, 1914-1915* (London: Frontline Books, 2011).

David Stevenson, *1914-1918 The History of the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

Robert Stevenson, *To Win the Battle: The 1st Australian Division in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Kenneth Strong, *Men of Intelligence: A Study of the Roles of Decisions of Chiefs of Intelligence from World War I to the Present Day* (London: Giniger Books, 1970).

John Terraine, *Impacts of War 1914 & 1918* (London: Hutchinson, 1970).

_____, *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* [1963] (London: Cassell & Co., 2000).

_____, *General Jack's Diary: War on the Western Front 1914-1918* [1964] (London: Cassell, 2000)

_____, *The Smoke and the Fire: Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980).

_____, *To Win a War: 1918 The Year of Victory* [1078] (London: Cassell, 2000).

Richard Travers, *Diggers in France. Australian Soldiers on the Western Front* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2008).

Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Command and technology in the British Army on the Western Front, 1917-1918* (London: Routledge, 1992).

_____, *How the War was Won: Factors that Led to Victory in World War One* [1992] (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005).

_____, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

Peter Tsouras, *The Greenhill Dictionary of Military Quotations* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000).

Philip Warner, *Field Marshal Earl Haig* [1991] (London: Cassell, 2001).

Andrew Wiest, *Haig: The Evolution of a Commander* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005).

David Williamson, *A Most Diplomatic General: The Life of General Lord Robertson of Oakridge 1896*-1974 (London: Brassey's, 1996).

B.T. Wilson, *Studies of German Defence near Lille* (Chatham: W&J Mackay, 1920).

David Woodward (ed.), *The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson Chief Imperial General Staff December 1915-February 1918* (London: Bodley Head for the Army Records Society, 1989).

Christopher Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002).

G.C. Wynne, *Landrecies to Cambrai: Case Studies on German offensive and defensive operations on the Western Front 1914-1917* (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion, 2011).