



CHRIS KEMPSHALL

**BRITISH, FRENCH AND AMERICAN
RELATIONS ON THE WESTERN FRONT,
1914-1918**



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Cover illustration: A French 'poilu', accompanied by American, British, and other Allied soldiers, scales a blood-stained peak, atop which waits a German Imperial eagle. text: EUG. COURBOIN un dernier effort et on l'aura IMP. CORNILLE ET SERRE, PARIS VISA 13.625 [One last effort and we'll have him]. © IWM.

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*For my parents
For Jo
For the Tommies, Poilus, and Doughboys
I've spent the past ten years with*

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To truly acknowledge and thank everyone who assisted in the creation of this work would, I fear, require more words than are available to me. This book began as my Ph.D. in 2008 and has evolved beyond that to its current form. With that in mind I would like to initially thank both of my Ph.D. supervisors, Professor Ian Gazeley and Dr. Chris Warne, for giving me the opportunity to do this in the first place. In addition, I would like to thank my examiners, Professor John Horne and Professor Claire Langhamer, for their hugely helpful advice. I would also like to thank all of the staff at Palgrave Macmillan for their support and belief in this project and for answering my increasingly strange questions as we approached the conclusion.

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Because of the international nature of this study it has taken in archives and libraries in Britain, France, and the USA. As a result,

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Ruzich repeatedly sent me amazing sources and information during her own work, and I am profoundly grateful for this. The work of Dr. Elizabeth Greenhalgh initially inspired the Ph.D. which became this book and I continue my hunt to read all of her amazing work.

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Jo Baines has quite literally shared her life with this book for the past four-and-a-bit years. She has been supportive and loving, and barely complained about the fact I have reproduced trench systems using piles of books in our lounge. I love her very much. I'm looking forward to being able to properly interact with our friends Ruth, James, Lorraine, Bethany, Matt, and Jessica again.

My family, particularly my mum and step-dad, have been as supportive and as interested in this work as anybody can be when the topic is not actually that interesting to non-obsessed people. They have proofread and listened to my ponderings and complaints about this process. I will never be able to repay them.

I have spent the last ten years with this project in a variety of forms. A decade with long-dead soldiers from Britain, France, and America is a very long time. I could continue working on this exact book for another ten years. Decisions over what to include, what to cut out, and what leads to pursue or abandon have been supremely difficult. Trying to squeeze the wartime experiences of three nations into one book has been a challenge. As a result, this book could easily never be finished. However, in its final form I believe it provides the information I wanted it to. It is the book I always wanted to write.

I recently asked some of my students what gave me the right as a historian to read the diaries, letters, and more of men who had lived a hundred years ago. It is a difficult question to answer. I have read almost everything ever written during the war of the men who are quoted or who appear in this book. For some I have read the letters their parents received informing them that their sons were dead. The study of history is critical in the modern world but that should not allow us to forget that even at a historical distance it is an intrusion into writing that was never meant for us.

Whilst researching at the USAHEC I came across the Veteran Survey Questionnaire of Lt. McKoy who declared: 'This is an evidence of "futility." Many hours, money, and time was wasted in preparing this questionnaire. My time was wasted in filling in the answers. No one will ever read or be influenced by it.' Historians cannot undertake research without access to the documents of the past. I wish I could inform Lt. McKoy of how wrong his belief was and reassure him that these would be read and they would have an influence.

So, my final acknowledgement is to the men who appear in this book. I both thank and apologise to them. I hope I have done them justice.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|----------------------------------------------|
| AAT | <i>Archives de l'Armée de Terre</i> |
| AEF | American Expeditionary Forces |
| ANZAC | Australian and New Zealand Army Corps |
| BC | <i>Brigade de cuirassier</i> |
| BEF | British Expeditionary Force |
| CC | <i>Corps de cavalerie</i> |
| CEP | Portuguese Expeditionary Corps |
| DIT | <i>Division d'infanterie territoriale</i> |
| GHQ | General Headquarters |
| GQG | Grand Quartier Général (French headquarters) |
| KOYLI | Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry |
| IWM | Imperial War Museum |
| NCO | Non-Commissioned Officer |
| OHL | Oberste Heeresleitung (German high command) |
| POW | Prisoner of war |
| RC | <i>Régiment de cuirassier</i> |
| REF | Russian Expeditionary Force |
| RFA | Royal Field Artillery |
| RH | <i>Régiment de hussards</i> |
| RHA | Royal Horse Artillery |
| RI | <i>Régiment d'infanterie</i> |
| SHD | <i>Service historique de la défense</i> |
| SSA | <i>Section Sanitaire Anglaise</i> |
| SWC | Supreme War Council |
| TF | Territorial Force |

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PROLOGUE: 21ST MARCH 1918

Flashing lights in the fog at 04:40 on 21 March 1918 signalled both a beginning and an end. British and French soldiers, who were shocked from their beds, hurried forward into trenches to watch with fear and trepidation. Behind them, Americans were stepping off ships and rushing east towards the Front. The men of these three nations were a varied mix: the skilled and the fortunate, the veterans and the newrecruits, the survivors and the yet to be tested. However, as the lights resolved themselves into the largest artillery bombardment the war had seen, the situation they existed within changed irrevocably.

Those men who had lived through the war's opening battles of 1914 and the large-scale battles of 1916 would perhaps now look back on those moments to try and draw strength and solace from the relationships that had emerged from them and the lessons they had learned. The relationships between British, French, and American soldiers and the evolutions they had undergone (the confused early meetings, the joys, the despairs, the triumphs and the disasters) were about to be placed under pressure and strain that was even more cloying and suffocating than the mustard gas falling at Flesquières.

The men of the British Expeditionary Force who arrived at Le Havre in 1914 scarcely had time to meet French soldiers before the weight of the German Army was brought to bear against them at Mons and Le Cateau. The days that followed were marked by fear, paranoia, and death. Around the Somme in 1916, British soldiers had written of how accomplished and accommodating the French had been towards their

British allies; how they hoped to be able to match the apparent skill and ferocity of the French fighting soldier, and how they were acutely aware of their own shortcomings when held in comparison with them. By 1917, a British soldier would write about the great debt he believed was owed to France. The French would temper their frustrations about the lack of skill and training of the British armies in 1916 by paying tribute to the bravery and indefatigability of the British Tommy. They would reach out to the men of Kitchener's New Armies out of a desire to be good hosts and also in the hope that they would learn quickly the skills needed to aid in the liberation of *la Patrie*.

The Americans, though not involved at the outset of the war, were beginning to arrive in greater numbers. They had been wooed by the French, particularly Marshal Joseph Joffre, and the shared republican spirit of the two countries created an immediate bond between the men of the two armies. British soldiers, on the other hand, looked on these new arrivals with suspicion and discontent. The freedom and democracy that the Americans celebrated seemed, to the British mind, to make them a military liability.

At the commencement of Germany's 1918 Spring Offensive, these were the men who made up the bulk of the alliance. Thousands of German soldiers had been redeployed from the Eastern Front to the West. Their aim was to split these allied armies apart. As shells began to drop amongst them, the men of the Entente nations had nobody left to reach out to or trust but each other. Other allies such as the Russians had come and gone. The Belgians had been ever-present, but their army and resources were dwarfed by those arrayed around them. If the war was to be won it would be through the efforts of Britain, France, and the USA.

In the early morning of 21 March 1918, the men who manned the defences knew this and to an extent they trusted in those around them to do their job, to hold the line, and to rely on the relationships produced by years of cooperative allied warfare. In the weeks and months that followed, victory and defeat would go hand in hand. Within days of the German attack, the Entente allies would be forced onto the retreat. Within weeks, relations began to break down into suspicion, displeasure and, eventually, furious recrimination. At the same time, men would stand fast alongside those of other countries. The fluid nature of the fighting meant that soldiers would fall under the control of allied generals in a bid to turn the tide. Some relations would hold as others were

ruptured. Following 11 November 1918, some allied soldiers joined arms to sing in triumph whilst others would brawl in the streets.

Victory was symbolised by the singing of each other's national anthems; defeat by anger, betrayal, and violence.

How had it come to this?



Introduction: ‘Liberty and Union ...’

For many years we have had a long-standing friendship with France [An HON. MEMBER: “And with Germany!”]. I remember well the feeling in the House and my own feeling – for I spoke on the subject, I think, when the late Government made their agreement with France – the warm and cordial feeling resulting from the fact that these two nations, who had had perpetual differences in the past, had cleared these differences away; I remember saying, I think, that it seemed to me that some benign influence had been at work to produce the cordial atmosphere that had made that possible.

(Sir Edward Grey addressing Parliament, 3 August 1914¹)

Perhaps more than with any other countries, the relationships between Britain, France, and the USA came to represent and define Western civilisation and power in the twentieth century. Enduring through two world wars, the division of Europe, and the remaking of the world after the Cold War this is a relationship which appears sturdy and more successful than most others in modern times. However, this does not tell the full story. Breakdowns in agreement in London, Paris, and Washington have been equally common at times. Old rivalries, disagreements over policy, and in the development and direction of Europe have introduced cold anger into one of the world’s most powerful but

¹‘Statement by Sir Edward Grey (Hansard, 3 August 1914)’, accessed 12 November 2017, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1914/aug/03/statement-by-sir-edward-grey#column_1814.

also most unwieldy alliances. The origins of this alliance lie in both the lead-up to and the midst of one of Europe's and the world's most traumatic events.

Much scholarship and indeed public interest both in the lead-up to and during the First World War centenary have been focused justifiably on answering questions about why war began in 1914 and what motivated the empires of Europe to wage war upon each other. An offshoot of this is the additional question of why the USA was eventually moved to join the conflict in 1917 on the side of France and Britain. The steps, decisions, and military plans that brought Britain, France, and the USA into an alliance were complex and at times contradictory. Understanding them will be an important part of this study. Further to this, it will also primarily concern itself not with the 'why?' of this alliance but the 'how?': How did the nations of Britain, France, and the USA fight together as allies?

Before the outbreak of the First World War, Britain, France, and the USA did not appear to be a natural triumvirate of allies. Britain and France had no history of mutual cooperation, with their joint efforts in the Crimean War little more than a confused blip set against an historic backdrop of distrust, rivalry, and conflict. Franco-US relations had been warmer over the preceding hundred years but even then, their most notable attempts at military cooperation had been aimed at thwarting the British. The Americans still remained resolutely neutral and largely disinterested in European affairs in 1914, so had no position in the original Entente Cordiale. It was an alliance that did not require Britain to actually do anything it did not wish to do, and included the Russians far to the East, the country which had been the opposition for Franco-British efforts in the Crimean War. However, by 1918 the Americans had been drawn into the conflict, effectively replacing Russia, which had sued for peace whilst collapsing into revolution and civil war. And yet despite this, the alliance and military power of Britain, France, and the USA proved victorious over Germany and the Central Powers. How did three countries with plenty of history of suspicion and enmity create a victorious alliance? Who ran it? How did it function in practice?

The direction and the course of the First World War were governed, given the numbers of men involved in the fighting, by a very few people. Leading politicians and heads of the respective militaries decided on the overall strategy and focus of the war effort. However, whilst each of the allies shared the same overall goal of victory, they were also concerned

with their own spheres of responsibility and their own national interests. In many ways the men who decided the strategy became the embodiments of these interests and were charged with protecting them. This had certainly been the case regarding the orders presented to Field Marshal Sir John French at the deployment of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in 1914, and it did not evolve very far in the years that followed.²

The interactions between the commanding generals and their aides therefore often took on a very particular dynamic. Discussions about imminent strategy and the movement of armies were undeniably important matters, but these discussions could often become bogged down and entrenched over a myriad of issues ranging from who had operational command in certain sectors and scenarios, the responsibility for resupplying, and which nation would bear the weight of an assault. In this sense the discussions highlighted the inherent weakness of a large-scale coalition; the final goal may well have been the same, but each country had its chosen path to reaching it and a price they thought reasonable in achieving it. Further to this, none of the primary combatants wished to achieve a victory that greatly benefited everyone else but left their efforts unrewarded, nor did they want to risk one of their coalition partners 'going it alone' and making a separate peace.³

Exploring the relationships between politicians and generals of these three nations is crucial in understanding the political and military decisions that defined and directed the alliance. Steering the actions of three nations that, whilst allied, each had its own desires and objectives was no small undertaking. However, the role of those at the highest levels of power does not represent the totality of experience within the alliance itself. Below this world of high strategy, national bargaining, and realpolitik, however, lay another world of national interaction. If the activities of the leading generals and politicians represented the First World War being governed by a small group of men under maximum focus and direction, then the opposite clearly lay in the huge numbers of soldiers who encountered each other with no interference or guidance. From examining the records that these men kept of their meetings with the

²Lord Herbert Kitchener, 'Instructions for the General Officer Commanding the Expeditionary Force Proceeding to France', 1914, War Office Records; WO 32/5590, National Archives, Kew.

³Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 2.

strangers from foreign lands, who had become their principal allies, it quickly becomes apparent that the political disputes and considerations of generals and wartime leaders did not filter down into the trenches. The concerns of those in power did not begin to play any particular role in forming opinions until word of President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points began to spread amongst the French soldiers in 1918.⁴

At the highest levels, the business of attempting to coordinate a coalition war was often combative in itself. Whilst the relationships between soldiers of different nations could be equally fraught, the reasons for it differed greatly. That is not to suggest that those in positions of command and authority did not have their own views on their allies' men and national traits; they absolutely did. However, these images and understandings did not translate into anything that those in the trenches could immediately recognise or become interested in. This strongly suggests that whilst directing the alliance both politically and militarily, the assorted generals and politicians gathered in capital cities and at the front were not the ones facilitating interactions further down the ladder. Therefore, to fully understand how this alliance actually functioned as a social, cultural, and military organism, we must also understand the soldiers who comprised it.

An examination of relations between regular soldiers within the armies of Britain, France, and the USA produces a variety of initial questions. How well did these men from different nations interact? What were the key factors in producing positive or negative encounters? To what extent did existing cultural and social awareness of different countries play a role in these interactions? However, whilst important, all of these questions relate to a single more encompassing one; What impact did relations between allied soldiers have on the overall war effort? Whilst any discussion of relations between those of different countries is going to have strong social and cultural importance, it is also important to consider these interactions within the context in which they occurred. The events of the First World War would have a direct impact on how well different soldiers reacted to one another, with the events leading up to the Battle of the Marne in 1914, and the German Spring Offensives of 1918 in particular, providing clear examples of this. However, by the

⁴Even in this case, it can be argued that the soldiers and generals each dismissed the notion on similar grounds rather than the opinion of those in command filtering down to those in the trenches.

same token, this particular door does not swing in just one direction. It must also be understood that the ability, or lack thereof, for allied soldiers to build lasting and workable relations with one another would have a significant impact on their ability to wage war together and, by extension, to win battles. The British soldiers stationed along the southern flank of the Somme alongside the French before the offensive in 1916 had a very different experience of the opening day than those further north, and some of this must be considered an outcome of cohesive allied behaviour. Similarly, the attack by the Germans in March 1918 which forced the allies into a new retreat, and which French soldiers in particular viewed as almost a betrayal by their British allies, should not just be viewed with regard to how it changed the strategic nature of the Western Front but also considering how it changed the way the alliances worked on the ground.

Understanding both the motivations behind soldiers' behaviour and the evolution in their relationships with others must also be understood within the framework of existing studies on soldiers' experiences and the place they already have within historiography. The experiences of First World War soldiers have become increasingly popular, and writings from the trenches (be they letters, diaries, or poetry) have found a particular resonance within both French and British culture. However, the historiography has traditionally been focused on the experiences of each country's particular soldiers. This eventually reaches the point where other national experiences have been pushed out of focus almost entirely. The founders and members of the International Society for First World War Studies have helped pioneer the shift to more transnational examinations of the war and those who experienced it, which has brought back a more panoramic approach to the conflict.

That British and French soldiers were often in such close proximity but never given a full examination is one of many peculiarities about the approach to soldiers' histories of the war. In this regard, the interactions between British and French soldiers is of great social and cultural interest. The opportunities for these groups to meet in such numbers would never have existed in civilian life. That they managed to form their own understandings and workable relationships speaks a great deal about the common humanity and adaptability of these men. Additionally, these interactions have very clear military implications. A symptom of the focus on the military and political actors of the war is the overlooking of what soldiers were capable of achieving.

The allied setbacks of 1914 were not just defeats of strategy; they were defeats of cooperation. The BEF's commander, Field Marshal Sir John French, was undergoing something akin to a nervous breakdown and had lost all trust in the French armies around him. Beneath him the men of the BEF spoke practically no French and had no way of properly reaching out to, and organising themselves with, the French soldiers who moved around them. The BEF became utterly isolated as a result. This was a potential disaster founded upon dual circumstances; the collapse in confidence of Field Marshal French and the fact that British soldiers were not in possession of either the skills or the time to form any sort of relationship with their allies. Had either of these circumstances been improved upon, the situation might not have developed so disastrously and the allies might not have come so close to defeat.

By contrast, in 1916, British and French soldiers were able to come to their own form of understanding and pass on their experiences and lay the foundations for more adaptable relationships by 1918. As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, relations between British and French military commands could still be fraught and tumultuous during this same period, but upon assuming command of the BEF in 1915, General (and later Field Marshal) Douglas Haig never appeared likely to replicate the collapse and isolation of Field Marshal French. Both of these situations served to provide this alliance with stronger foundations for the battles to come. The evolution and nature of the relationships built between British and French soldiers need to be understood as an additional factor in explaining how and why the allies eventually proved successful in defeating Germany in 1918. The addition of the Americans to this dynamic in 1917 and 1918 was both a blessing and an obstacle to the long-standing Entente allies, with the French being very pleased with their new allies and the British far less so. The reasons behind this are as complicated as those which drove Anglo–French relations at the soldierly level.

An examination of these grass-roots allied relations during the First World War is not a simple undertaking, but it is one that several historians have previously called for.⁵ The very nature of transnational

⁵Alexandre Lafon in particular outlined the requirement for a specific study on this aspect of the alliance, and Elizabeth Greenhalgh, in the article which originally inspired this study, commented on the under-examined nature of allied relations at this level. Alexandre Lafon, *La camaraderie au front: 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), p. 180; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, “‘Parade Ground Soldiers’: French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916”, *Journal of Military History* 63, no. 2 (April 1999): 283–84.

examinations history, particularly of warfare, is about understanding the limits of both restrictive 'national' experiences and also of ideas about universality. Wartime experiences do not stop at the boundaries of armies; they are shared across nationalities, and the differences and similarities between them are not limited by nation or language. At the same time, there are clearly national motivations and ideologies that are unique to the various combatants and need to be understood in context. Furthermore, the very notion of each nation's army being a homogeneous group is itself a fallacy. Each army was composed of men from various demographics, be they rural or urban, young or old, working, middle or upper-class, northern or southern. Britain, France, and the USA each claimed a unity of purpose and mind at the outbreak of their wars, but each was also riven by internal feuds which festered below the surface. Many of those in power within Britain had expected military action in Ireland rather than Europe before August 1914. France was still emerging from the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War and political scandals, such as the Dreyfus Affair had laid bare the political factions within the Third Republic. Meanwhile, the USA had only become the United States once again after the end of the Civil War in 1865. Whilst the Confederacy may have been defeated, the racial and economic tensions that had brought it into being had not. Further to these issues, both Britain and France would also have to administer and call upon the men of their empires to support the military effort. Before the signing of the armistice in 1918, all of these issues would re-emerge in one form or another to cause turmoil within the members of the Entente alliance.

What becomes particularly apparent when examining the experiences of British, French, and American soldiers is how often certain situations replicate themselves across the war. This is particularly true of British and American experiences upon arriving in France. When British soldiers arrived in France during 1914 and 1915 they found themselves confused by the nature of the French in general and their colonial troops in particular. They would write at length about the supposed barbarity and fearsomeness of these men fighting under the French flag, based upon existing notions of race. Later, when advancing through recently liberated territory, they would grow to fear that the French civilians around them were potential spies and treat them with suspicion as a result. These experiences were then replicated in 1917 and 1918 by arriving Americans. Furthermore, both the British and the Americans would express their surprise at the tendency of French soldiers to form unofficial truces with the Germans in quiet sections of the line. For their part,

the same French soldiers would have their own concerns that the arriving allied soldiers would not understand the nature and necessity of these truces and stir up trouble. The circular nature of these wartime experiences gives an indication as to the cultural and experiential similarities of men from the USA and Britain upon arriving in a country that they did not understand.

What is also noticeable is how the relations between the men of these three countries evolved around notions of military education and cultural learning. The men of the BEF in 1914 did not believe they had much to learn from the French who, for their part, did not have the time to teach them. This dynamic changes in 1916 with inexperienced British soldiers looking to their French counterparts in order to understand the war. These French soldiers, partially out of an interest to appear as good hosts, began to give the British a learning experience based upon exposure rather than direct instruction. Many British soldiers write about being invited to French trenches where they were then presented with an up-close view of how the French orchestrated their defences, went about their daily lives, and dealt with artillery bombardments. This exposure then transmitted itself back through the battalions and regiments of the British army alongside the French. In 1917 and 1918, the British and French gave direct training to US soldiers. But, particularly in the case of French units, many of the beneficial lessons for the Americans again came when given prolonged exposure to French methods of warfare whilst US units were embedded alongside the French army.

Relationships between the soldiers of the Entente allies would evolve and change over time, but they largely fit into three defined periods of time and of success. These periods are mirrored in this book's structure. The first part, 'Confusion', contains chapters which examine the relationship between Britain and France from the period after the defeat of Napoleon up until mid-1915. The first of these chapters focuses on the pre-war period, focusing in particular on relations between Britain and France, the portrayals of each nation within national presses and consciousness, and also the make-up of their armed forces. Of particular focus in this chapter will be the movement towards a structured alliance from the original signing of the Entente Cordiale through the 'military conversations' between the two nations after 1906. The second chapter examines the early months of the war up until mid to late-1915, and covers the opening months of the war to the middle of 1915, when British and French soldiers attempted to understand each other whilst the events

of the war made such attempts extremely difficult. As discussed above, circumstances conspired to prevent a good working relationship between the British and French armies at the outset of the war, but it must also be acknowledged that there were clear deficits in the planning and preparation for the BEF to fight alongside French forces in Europe.

Part II covers the period of 'Cooperation'. The first chapter here is primarily concerned with the change in relations between British and French soldiers, particularly around the Somme, following the arrival of Kitchener's New Armies. During this time, men from both armies began building grass-roots working relationships with each other. By fighting side by side at the Somme, British and French soldiers were able to begin a process of cultural and military knowledge exchange which greatly benefited the forming of a workable relationship. The second chapter then expands upon this to examine the allied attempts to draw the USA into the alliance, and reaction of both the British and French armies to the American arrival in 1917. In many ways, this period is the crucial moment in relations between these allied soldiers. The relationships built up between French and British soldiers around the Somme in 1916, and then the warm feelings between French and American soldiers in 1917, produced an environment where military experience could be easily shared and, most importantly, trust could be built up between the men of the three nations. Perhaps crucially, they also lifted the level of relationship between the three armies up to a point where they could survive a catastrophic rupture.

The final year of the war also provides both the final stage in this evolution and the aforementioned moment of rupture: 'Collapse'. The first chapter in this part examines the events of 1918 where the German Spring Offensive and the subsequent allied retreat placed huge strain on the links between Britain and France, whilst the suspicion that President Woodrow Wilson was going to cheat France of its victory swiftly soured relations with US soldiers. In many places, the relationships which had been nurtured since 1916 descended completely into angry bitter recrimination that was only beginning to heal by the time of the Armistice. The final chapter examines the state of allied relations from the Armistice up to the Treaty of Versailles negotiations and beyond into the inter-war years.

Whilst this study of the oscillating nature of these alliances draws upon records and evidence from each of them, it is important to understand that there is often not an equal power dynamic at play during these

events. Often the experiences and actions of a single nation will have a profound effect on the experiences of the other two. It is not as simple as dividing up the focus evenly between all three, for often it is a process of action and then reaction that drives the evolution. For example, to fully understand the nature of the alliance in chapter two, covering 1914 into 1915, it is the British soldiers who are the main focus. As a small army thrust into an expanding war, the experiences of the BEF in France and Belgium are crucial in understanding how they came to understand the French and how the French then reacted to their replacements in 1916. Similarly, the collapse of allied relations in 1918 can be principally understood through the eyes of the French. It is they who became filled with recriminations for the British after the latter retreated in March, and then similarly rebelled at the notion of a US president stealing their moment of victory through diplomacy. Meanwhile, to fully grasp the difficult relationships between British and US soldiers it is necessary to examine those on both sides to see where the animosity came from and which snubs and insults appear to have been intentional and which were accidental.

Whilst the French army held the largest portion of the Western Front and supplied by far the most men, it is also the more difficult army about which to find substantial information relating to inter-allied contact. This is principally because, whilst French soldiers were numerous, the geography of the Western Front meant that many had only limited contact at times with their British and US allies. It was far more common for British and US soldiers, in a much smaller army and surrounded by Frenchmen, to come into contact with allied nations.⁶ Therefore, whilst records for British and US soldiers have often been drawn directly from personal accounts such as diaries and letters, much of the French content for this study has been drawn from the collections of the *Commissions de contrôle postal* for the French army during the war.⁷ Whilst a familiar

⁶This is something also noted by: Franziska Heimburger, 'Mésentente cordiale? Langues et coalition alliée sur le front de l'ouest de la Grande Guerre' (EHESS, 2014), p. 238.

⁷The *Commissions de contrôle postal* would be instituted only in 1916 by the French, but, disappointingly, were not replicated in other armies. For a full history and background of the Commissions, see: Jean-Noël Jeanneney, 'Les Archives Des Commissions de Contrôle Postal Aux Armées (1916–1918). Une Source Précieuse Pour l'histoire Contemporaine de l'opinion et Des Mentalités', *Revue d'histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* (1954–) 15, no. 1 (1968): 209–33; and Greenhalgh, "'Parade Ground Soldiers': French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916", pp. 287–90.

source for other studies of the French army, it is perhaps under-utilised as a method of surveying popular opinion within the French armies during the war.⁸ Entire sections of the censor reports are given over to discussions of interactions with the allies, and they provide a crucial insight into how the *Poilus* viewed their comrades.

The war, the alliance itself, and victory all meant very different things to the soldiers who made up the armies of Britain, France, and the USA. The issues of 1914 and the collapse of 1918 prove this. However, the cooperation of 1916 and 1917 allowed the alliance to survive these collapses and made it possible for the men who made up these armies to secure the victories necessary to bring the war to an end. This was not easily achieved and nor was it a guarantee. Britain, France, and the USA each had very different attitudes towards Europe and each other in the years leading up to 1914. These views were a mix of institutionalised memory and selected historical prejudices. For all the eventual success they would find in defeating Germany in 1918, at the start of 1914, the trio did not appear to be a successful alliance-in-waiting.

Whilst the soldiers of the British, French, and US armies did bring their own views and experiences to relations with each other, and these differences have to be understood, there are common trends that appear across time periods and nationalities. The primary criteria that influenced and produced good relations between soldiers of different nationalities has been previously established by Elizabeth Greenhalgh as 'proximity' and 'success'. In essence, this model outlines how the proximity between soldiers of different nations and their ability to distinguish and appreciate their comrades' successes allowed these soldiers the opportunity for both first-hand contact and activity that could be verified and appreciated by their own eyes rather than through rumour or second-hand accounts. As chapters three and five in particular will show, close proximity between British and French soldiers around the Somme and then US soldiers embedded alongside the French and the British (particularly the former)

⁸As noted by Greenhalgh, the Commissions have been useful to some specific studies in the past but none tackling the entire war in detail: Jean Nicot, 'Perceptions Des Allies Par Les Combattants En 1918 d'après Les Archives Du Contrôle Postal', *Revue Historique Des Armées*, no. 3 (1988): 45–53; Annick Cochet, 'L'opinion et le moral des soldats en 1916 d'après les archives du contrôle postal' (Paris X Nanterre, 1986); and as cited by Greenhalgh, "Parade Ground Soldiers": French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916', p. 284.

in 1918 would assist in breaking down barriers that would not have been as easily navigated had that proximity not been there. Distances between soldiers of different nationalities could cause a form of detached friction which was further exacerbated by a system of rumours, myths, and paranoia on both sides. Rumours and stories would often spread between the armies of the Western Front and rapidly metamorphose into a particular form of truth. This is especially in evidence amongst French soldiers within armies that were furthest from the Somme. These men were often the most scathing of the British efforts based upon second-hand stories about their deficiencies which had spread across the front.⁹

Proximity by itself was not enough to secure good relations. Being close enough to a foreign army to watch it repeatedly fail in battle was not a recipe for success. British evaluations of their Portuguese allies prove this point. Winning the war was, after all, the primary objective for the various soldiers, and living next door to an army that wasn't capable of bringing about that victory would cause negative encounters not positive ones. Understanding the nature of their allies' successes and failures was important for each nation in evaluating their military worth and potential. The French in particular proved highly adept at not just recognising successes and improved performance in their allies but also in rationalising whether a failure was due to errors by their fellow soldiers or by the command and direction of the battle itself. This is clearly evident both in 1916 with the British army on the Somme and in their time alongside the Americans in 1918.

However, focusing simply on proximity between soldiers of different nations and their observable military performance does not account for all of the relations and evaluations that occurred. These men brought their own beliefs, stereotypes, and predispositions to war with them. Sometimes what these soldiers saw and what they believed would become conflicted. At times they would base their understandings on beliefs that were in no way verifiable and actually ran counter to the realities of the war. Once the Russians dropped out, the French turned very strongly against their former ally. However, before this, when the Russians were still involved but contact with them was minimal, the French seemed to base their opinions of them upon more popular

⁹Greenhalgh, "Parade Ground Soldiers": French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916'.

notions and stereotypes of 'the Russian hordes' that 'would sweep into Germany from the east' rather than any realistic notion of what the Russians were capable of.¹⁰ This sort of occurrence was not simply confined to the French either; the British would indulge in it, too, suggesting that there is an extra level for defining relations that goes beyond both 'proximity' and 'success' and which incorporates an acceptable national narrative or stereotype to fill in information that is lacking to the individual because of an absence of the two existing criteria. This third element is perhaps best understood as 'perceived ability or expertise'. The average French soldier would have no idea about the abilities and make-up of the Russian army, but the preexisting notion of the Russians being ferocious fighters and their army being huge meant that the lack of proximity and inability to witness any successes did not lead to opinion turning against the third member of the Entente alliance until their collapse and exit from the war in 1917. This ongoing belief in the power of the Russian army continued even after some French soldiers came into direct contact with the Russian Expeditionary Force on the Western Front. These Russian soldiers were, as Jamie Cockfield's excellent work *With Snow on their Boots* outlined, 'sold for shells' by the Russians to the French in exchange for ongoing supplies of ammunition.¹¹ This was clearly not a country or a military that was on the brink of steam-rolling its enemies. Similarly, soldiers from Britain and the USA often had strongly formed beliefs about the nature of their enemies and allies which could only be rooted in existing cultural understandings.

What is most apparent from analysing the various periods of contact and relations is that this was an alliance that in many ways had serious flaws. Lack of consideration for how disparate groups of soldiers were supposed to work together undermined the military effort, certainly in 1914, and at other points as well. However, this same lack of oversight also provided one of the alliance's greatest strengths. Because there was no direction from above, soldiers formed their own relationships with each other built upon common causes, interests, and desires. These organic relationships proved surprisingly durable during combat but could be disrupted by heavy-handed interference from above. During periods in 1916 and in 1918, when the leadership of various armies tried

¹⁰Jamie H. Cockfield, *With Snow on Their Boots* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 7.

¹¹Cockfield, *With Snow on Their Boots*.

to impose relations on soldiers who had previously been interacting without issue, they invariably worsened relations in the sector. What is therefore clear is that the alliance between Britain, France, and the USA was both weakened and strengthened by its flaws and the reaction to them. It was not perfect, and at times the weaknesses gravely risked the military balance on the Western Front. At the same time, however, it proved highly resilient and was able to survive the military disasters of 1914 and early 1918 and eventually carry the three nations to victory. However, the wounds inflicted to the alliance in 1918 and the nature of the peace negotiations around Versailles ultimately split the allied nations apart. Diplomatically, at least, many of the warm feelings nurtured through the war would collapse in the peace. But the memories and acknowledgement of a cooperative and functional alliance would endure into the inter-war years.

Understanding how the alliance changed over time is one of the primary concerns of this study. The men who came to make up the Entente Alliance did not exist in a vacuum and nor did their interactions with each other. To understand how they progressed it is necessary to also understand from where these ideas of each other originated and what value they had to different national societies. It is therefore with the birth of the Entente Cordiale and the decisions that brought Britain and France into an alliance and, eventually, together into war that this study will begin.

PART I

Confusion



Building the *Entente Cordiale*

The fundamental fact of course is that the Entente is not an alliance. For purposes of ultimate emergencies it may be found to have no substance at all. For the Entente is nothing more than a frame of mind, a view of general policy which is shared by the governments of two countries, but which may be, or become, so vague as to lose all content.

(Lord Eyre Crowe, February 1911¹)

The relations between Britain and France, at higher military and governmental levels, as well as those between soldiers, have foundations in various parts of the century preceding the outbreak of war in 1914. Following the final defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1815, relations between Britain and France entered a form of stability until the latter years of the nineteenth century, when competition over particular colonial interests caused friction between the two nations. An agreement would eventually be reached over these areas with the signing of the *Entente Cordiale* in 1904. Whilst this agreement laid the foundations for a future military alliance, it was not an agreement to support each other in times of war in itself. In fact, Britain and France had already undertaken such an operation to deal with Russian incursions in the Crimean War and to maintain the balance of power in Europe.

¹As cited by: Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 80.

It is this balance of power and the Great Power system itself that must be understood as a preliminary for what followed. Confidence in their place as Great Powers underline many of the actions that both Britain and France took when in positions of strength. The eventual erosion of this confidence at the beginning of the twentieth century in the face of growing German power brought about a series of military agreements that, particularly in the case of Britain, would not have been considered in the decades before. Britain was highly pragmatic in its diplomatic relations with the rest of Europe, and this pragmatism is highlighted by the manner in which it entered the war in 1914. However, the system of alliances and pragmatic agreements that began to criss-cross the Continent would not ordinarily have ensnared Britain.

It was not just the rise of German power that brought about closer relations between Britain and France in the years before 1914. Military difficulties and disasters for both countries undercut their apparent place within the list of Great Powers. British efforts against the Boers in South Africa made the country the object of scorn across Europe, whilst the devastating defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War brought about a collapse in French prestige and political power both at home and abroad. During periods of strength, the Great Power system had acted as a method for Britain and France to test themselves against each other without risking open warfare. Following the drop in perceived power after their respective military setbacks, Britain and France were pulled closer together to prepare for contingencies given the emergence of Germany as a rival.

BRITAIN, FRANCE, AND THE GREAT POWER SYSTEM

Defining a nation's Great Power status is notoriously difficult to qualify. If using Benedict Anderson's theory, whereby a nation is an 'imagined community' of participants, then the Great Power system is the further extension of this imagination.² Great Power status is supposedly

²Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Anderson's definition has been described as being both 'invaluable' and 'loose' by the likes of Colley: Linda Colley, *Britons; Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (London: Vintage Press, 1996), p. 5. Some of these issues are likely sourced from deficiencies in particular methods of study, with Evans suggesting that diplomatic historians in particular were, in the end, unable 'to come up with a balanced, informed and convincing account of the history of individual modern European

self-evident not just internally to individual countries but to the international community as a whole.³ Whilst historians have suggested various units of measure, the most prominent amongst them comprises qualification by military power; though even this criterion is divided up between arguments of whether such power is an internalised ability to defend territory and interests or the ability to wage a successful war against rivals.⁴ Being a member of the Great Powers had clear benefits to the European nations, principally because it was these select few who administered the system and viewed themselves as ‘the guardians of the Peace of Europe’.⁵ Beneath the Great Powers existed various grades of lesser state, but it was ‘the strongest second-class states’ that had the greatest cause to resent ‘the existence of this “exclusive club”’ and therefore greatly to desire access to it. The fear of falling from the top table and becoming a second-class power was often a motivator for the behaviour of the strongest nations of Europe.⁶ By the self-evident nature of the system, if a nation was not recognised as a Great Power it would be restricted to the periphery of power. In this case, a lack of power represented irrelevance. To be irrelevant in the eyes of the Great Powers was to be unable to impose one’s own views, demands, requirements, and will on the world. The Great Powers did not ask the opinions of lesser states, nor did they feel bound to respect their wishes.

Whilst there is a clear history of attempted brinkmanship and dominance between France and Britain, the primary goal of each nation was the preservation and perpetuation of its own power. Being a Great Power was a largely self-evident pursuit based upon the perception of military

states’: Richard J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 123. Additionally, there are numerous frames of reference for measuring national characteristics, and they did not always sit comfortably alongside each other. In their book regarding representations of national characters, Beller and Leerssen list over 60 ‘relevant concepts, related disciplines’ spread over nearly 200 pages: Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen, eds., *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters* (New York: Rodopi, 2007).

³Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), pp. 8–44.

⁴Jack S. Levy, pp. 11–14.

⁵F. R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States Systems 1814–1914* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 2.

⁶Bridge and Bullen, p. 2.

strength; an element of restrained belligerence was therefore engineered into the system. To continue to prove Great Power status, it was necessary to utilise the power such status brought. Britain and France had, for centuries, been constant Great Powers with a personal rivalry born out of geography and competing ideological and imperial aims. This rivalry had, for all its ability to vex and frustrate both nations, become comfortable, convenient, and habitual in its own way.⁷ What better method of testing your own position as a Great Power than by forcing a quarrel with your most familiar rival? Britain and France had, through their respective militaries, come to embody opposing strengths. France (certainly during Napoleonic times) prided itself on being the premier land army in Europe, whilst Britain had the largest navy.⁸ France concerned itself originally with domination of the Continent, whilst Britain favoured a more global view facilitated by sea power. The ability of one to comprehensively defeat the other rested not so much on their strengths but their opposing weaknesses. A method of evaluating those respective weaknesses exists within the dynamic of Great Power rivalry.

When viewed in this manner, the Fashoda Crisis (which will be examined in further detail below) becomes much easier to understand. France, still recovering from its humiliation by Prussia and riven with internal disputes, took the opportunity to test its own power against that of Britain. However, this also means that incidents like Fashoda should not simply be viewed as an Anglo-French confrontation when, equally, they can be viewed as a test of Great Power status. What complicates this relationship further is that the Great Power system was already beginning to unravel at the end of the nineteenth century through what Kennedy refers to as the 'crisis of the middle powers'.⁹ The supposedly second-class powers (and even those Great Powers which were perhaps not immediately or historically viewed as being as strong as France or Britain) had, through methods of industrialisation and economic and political changes, begun to acquire the tools to level the playing field.¹⁰

⁷Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English Society, 1748–1815* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), Chapter 3.

⁸Robert Tombs and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy* (London: William Heinemann, 2006), pp. 256–67.

⁹Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), Chapter 5.

¹⁰Kennedy, pp. 198–202.

Previously, the cost of being a Great Power had been beyond what most smaller states could ever hope to produce. HMS *Victory*, for instance, had cost nearly £400,000 over her lifetime; which represented the entire annual budget of some countries.¹¹ Principal amongst these new modern nations which threatened Britain and France, and essentially changed the relationship between the pair, was Prussia/Germany.¹² When Germany used its Great Power bellicosity to build up its strength and test its limits, it didn't so much prey on the weaknesses of its rivals (Britain and France) but instead challenged their strengths through a system of naval construction and army modernisation that took it into spheres which both Britain and France had always considered largely their own. Additionally, Britain and France were no longer as powerful or secure as they had once been. Losing the Franco-Prussian War had been a humiliation for France, and Britain's difficulty in overcoming the Boers had laid bare its military shortcomings. Furthermore, the Prussian/German state had created its own ideological framework regarding the army in particular as a social institution that cut into the weaknesses of the British and French models and built upon the existing 'history and traditions' of militarism which were 'deeply rooted' in Germany at the time.¹³

It is probable that Germany aspired more to the 'moderate and indeed more legitimate ambition' of becoming a 'World Power (*Weltmacht*)' rather than actual world domination, but both Britain and France blocked the path towards this goal to varying degrees.¹⁴ Kaiser

¹¹Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 260.

¹²There is some dispute over when, exactly, Prussia/Germany should be considered to have gained Great Power status. The Congress of Vienna is often given as a clearly implicit view of who was a Great Power at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and Prussia was a major part of the negotiations. Levy argues that Prussia should be considered a Great Power from 1740 onwards: Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975*, p. 40. Bridge and Bullen seem equally convinced of Prussia's Great Power status: Bridge and Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States Systems 1814–1914*. It is Kennedy who outlines some of the issues regarding Prussia's relative position in Europe: Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, pp. 160–2 and 182–90. However, there is little doubting that, following the Franco-Prussian War and the resulting unification, Germany represented a Great Power at the end of the nineteenth century.

¹³William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p. 54.

¹⁴Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars: The Ford Lectures in the University of Oxford 1971* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1972), pp. 31–2.

Wilhelm II's foreign secretary Bernhard von Bülow declared his desire for Germany to 'have our own place in the sun', but there was only so much suitable territory left to claim. Geographically, Germany was penned in amongst European nations, with only a route into the North Sea offering naval expansion. Whilst Germany yearned for the prestige and profit of an empire, Britain and France appeared to have taken all the best property. The existence of a 'British dominated world-system' was one that Germany already 'found so intolerable and which they were determined to challenge on a basis of equality'.¹⁵ A German movement promoting naval equality would always represent both a concern and a challenge for the British. Having rejoiced at the defeat of the Russian navy by Japan, and having 'used the size of the Russian fleet as a standard for their own building', Britain quickly 'saw in its destruction at Tsushima a compelling reason for laying down yet more keels against Germany'.¹⁶ Lord Milner noted in 1915 that it was because Britain was not sufficiently strong on its own terms 'to disregard the European balance' that the country had been forced into war against Germany.¹⁷ The extent to which the Great Power system had begun to unravel in the build-up to the First World War coincided with Germany's growing power and purpose. As Britain and France both struggled to fully decide on their own defensive strategies and marshalled forces, Germany was expanding into dual spheres; the increase of its navy served as a clear threat to British interests, whilst the expansion of its armed forces and geographic position threatened France.

The declaration before Parliament by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1903 that 'the defence of the United Kingdom could be safely entrusted to the power of the Royal Navy ... and the activities of voluntary territorial forces' was not well received by 'a large body of opinion'.¹⁸ This led to prolonged discussions amongst the military and the government regarding the future of the armed forces as either a professional body or one compelled with the powers of national service and conscription. The decision to avoid conscription meant that the Liberal Government was able

¹⁵Howard, p. 32.

¹⁶Howard, p. 33.

¹⁷Howard, p. 34.

¹⁸Howard, p. 37.

to stick to its roots.¹⁹ However, it did not dramatically change the strategic problem faced by the military, and from 1906 onwards the ‘General Staff ... increasingly concentrated on the problems of a war against Germany, to the gradual exclusion of all other preoccupations’.²⁰ It had also become clear in both Britain and France that if war were to come, given their relative positions, neither country would feel confident of checking Germany by itself. Great Powers threatening each other was not a new development, but Britain and France would come to feel so concerned as to profoundly reconsider their relationship with each other as well as with this new and invigorated rival. Despite this, any agreement that brought Britain and France together was not a simple one. It was rooted in a century of complicated diplomatic interactions and eroding power.

WAR, COOPERATION, AND CRISIS

The beginning of the nineteenth century saw Britain and France locked in conflicts emerging from the French Revolution, an event which had crystallised in the minds of men like Edmund Burke profound differences in British and French psyches.²¹ The terror that followed the Revolution appalled the sensibilities of many in Britain, whilst the rise of Napoleon imbued France with a new confidence and military desire to directly dominate its neighbours and challenge its rival across the sea. The resulting wars between Napoleon’s empire and the various alliances of Europe brought Britain and France into constant levels of conflict. However, Britain maintained an economic advantage over France for much of this period. Certainly, at the end of the eighteenth century, the British economy dwarfed that of its continental rival, particularly in regard to ongoing trade deals.²² With France having gone through a recent revolution, with economic failure a key component, this divergence was not surprising. Britain’s economic power would not simply be utilised in supporting itself. The different alliances between European

¹⁹James Wood, ‘Anglo-American Liberal Militarism and the Idea of the Citizen Soldier’, *International Journal* 62, no. 2 (2007).

²⁰Howard, p. 45.

²¹Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 11th ed. (London: Dodsley, 1791).

²²Roger Knight, *Britain against Napoleon: The Organization of Victory 1793–1815*, Penguin History (London: Penguin Books, 2014), pp. 22–3.

powers opposing Napoleon were often financed directly from London. The British were aware that they could not defeat Napoleon alone and, in order to secure alliances that stood a chance, they would have to foot the bill. The financial drain from maintaining these alliances, whilst also funding their own armed and naval forces, brought Britain to the brink before Napoleon's eventual defeat.²³

With Britain and France locked in varying degrees of conflict at the beginning of the nineteenth century, soldiers within those armies had numerous opportunities to meet and interact with their cross-Channel neighbours. These interactions provide early themes and points of comparison with the more sustained contacts established during the First World War. Even during some of the hardest periods of fighting of the Peninsula Campaign, there was a 'remarkable lack of animus' between the British and the French, particularly when compared with their feelings regarding the Spanish, who were often infuriated by the apparent friendliness between the supposed enemies and the relative disdain with which both treated the Iberian population. Religious differences with the Spanish created distance between British Protestants on one side and French anticlericals on the other; one British ensign bluntly declared that: 'I hate a Spaniard more than a Frenchman.'²⁴

Such was the emerging ambivalence towards maintaining a constant state of hostility towards their enemies that it was not uncommon for either side to spare courageous fighters, issue warnings regarding imminent attack, and widely fraternise across lines and ranks, with many of these practices seemingly occurring with Wellington's approval.²⁵ By the time that Napoleon was losing the Battle of Nations at Leipzig in 1813, Wellington was invading southern France and British troops were being received as welcome liberators by the French people they met. Whilst part of this was due to an extended charm offensive launched by Wellington through the implementation of band concerts, parades, and dances designed to win over the French people, it would not have been nearly as successful if the retreating French troops had not so alienated their own population through 'arson, devastation,

²³Knight, pp. 386–7.

²⁴Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 280.

²⁵Tombs and Tombs, pp. 280–1. This sort of fraternisation bears many of the hallmarks of activities that would occur between the respective enemies during the First World War, and will be examined in time.

murder and carnage'.²⁶ Some towns, such as Toulouse and Bordeaux, almost actively refused to be defended by the French army and eagerly awaited the arrival of the British.²⁷ The British fallen at the last clash of the war on French soil, and in fact of any war between France and Britain, were interred in the *Cimetière des Anglais*, which, in time, became a 'patriotic shrine, visited by vacationing royalty'.²⁸ Whilst Napoleon's return and the Battle of Waterloo would briefly stir up armed conflict between the two countries, his defeat and final exile initially opened up a new period of cultural exchange and interaction but also created the circumstances for a future alliance of convenience.

The military union between France and Britain in fighting the Crimean War owed much to Great Powers posturing.²⁹ However, the relationships between soldiers themselves seemed largely positive, with most differences between the allied armies being centred on perceptions of professionalism, with the French General Canrobert declaring that 'seeing the British was like going back a century'.³⁰ Relations were not universally positive and there were areas of consternation or bemusement. French soldiers watched with a sense of mystified amazement as British tourists arrived by the boatload following the capture of Sevastopol 'to see the famous battle sites and collect souvenirs ... from the bodies of the Russian dead'.³¹ Additional disputes over allied strategy caused conflict, with the aide-de-camp of Lord Raglan, Captain Nigel Kingscote, declaring his hatred of the French and his belief that members of the French staff were 'just like monkeys, girthed up as tight as they can be and sticking out and below like balloons'.³² For their part, the French view of the British in some cases tended to be couched as a backhanded compliment. Captain Jean-Jules Herbe told his parents that 'visiting the English camp makes me proud to be a Frenchman', and

²⁶Tombs and Tombs, p. 285.

²⁷Tombs and Tombs, p. 285.

²⁸Tombs and Tombs, pp. 287–8.

²⁹For details on the background of the Crimean War see: Orlando Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), Chapters 1–4; Trevor Royle, *Crimea: The Great Crimean War, 1854–1856* (London: Abacus, 2000), Prologue; and Julian Spilsbury, *The Thin Red Line* (London: Cassell, 2006), Chapter. 1.

³⁰Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 359.

³¹Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade*, p. 409.

³²Figes, p. 177.

described how, whilst he believed the British to be ‘enthusiastic, strong and well-built men ... [with] elegant uniforms’, they were afflicted with a weakness for comfort that would hamper them greatly when the armies began to move.³³ General Bosquet probably uttered the most famous evaluation of the British army in his declaration about the Charge of the Light Brigade: ‘C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre.’³⁴

Both British and French soldiers were more than capable of flexibility in their relations depending on context and circumstance. The arrival of French reinforcements during a particularly desperate stage of the Siege of Sevastopol was greeted with near jubilation amongst British soldiers.³⁵ There still has not been a full investigation regarding allied relations during the Crimean War, but there are early signs of issues and themes that recurred during the earliest days of the BEF’s deployment in France.

Following Napoleon’s final defeat and exile and building on the ‘generally untroubled relations the army had established’ with the French people, the British seemed eager to ‘let bygones be bygones’ from 1815 onwards and began to arrive *en masse* in France as tourists. Following 1815, ‘70–80 percent of all visitors’ to the Channel ports, around 14,000 visitors, were British travellers, and their presence brought about a dawning of an anglicised holiday industry with ‘English’ hotels and English-speaking waiters becoming increasingly common.³⁶ This was not one-way traffic during the nineteenth century. Paul Gerbod’s use of official records shows that ‘more French people visited Britain by choice in the decades after Waterloo than ever before.’³⁷ Furthermore, the opportunity to make a living wage on the other side of the Channel brought thousands of skilled workers, particularly railway workers, from Britain to France despite the fact it was technically illegal until 1825.³⁸ The ease of cross-Channel travel would also make Britain and France realistic destinations for a variety of political exiles across the century from Oscar Wilde to Victor Hugo.

³³Figes, p. 177.

³⁴Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 359.

³⁵Spilsbury, *The Thin Red Line*, p. 232.

³⁶Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, pp. 310–11.

³⁷It was not a movement on the same scale as that of Britons to France but, regardless, there was a definite increase in French tourism, with estimates of ‘1450 in 1815; 3700 in 1835; and 4290 in 1847’. Much of this can be understood by the improvements in cross-Channel travel and the decrease in ticket prices, making the journey far less time-consuming and expensive than it had been in previous decades Tombs and Tombs, p. 329.

³⁸Tombs and Tombs, p. 328.

Whilst there was ongoing cross-cultural exchange between Britain and France regarding tourism, relations between the two nations for much of the nineteenth century were largely marked by antipathy and ambiguity. Whilst a trade deal was struck between the two nations in 1860, the activities of both within their competing empires ensured that a degree of caution characterised most diplomatic contacts. British interests in Egypt and French ones in Morocco would bring the two countries close to conflict late in the 1800s, but would also provide the foundation for a new level of diplomatic understanding. However, before these events could happen, a disaster was to befall France.

Napoleon III's politicking and Otto von Bismarck's schemes had left France isolated on the Continent, with Britain unwilling to enter into any active military pursuit, particularly one supposedly centred on the Spanish monarchy.³⁹ When conflict broke out between the French and Prussian armies, initial British public support lay with what they perceived to be the Prussian underdog.⁴⁰ Bismarck's move of leaking Napoleon III's plans for a possible annexation of Belgium had cast the French firmly in the role of aggressor, as far as the British were concerned, and the latter were content to watch the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 play out on the Continent. When the Prussian army began to rout the French from the field, Gladstone 'made it clear that France should make concessions' to Prussia to secure peace.⁴¹ However, the situation in Britain soon began to change, with some British ministers feeling a great deal of concern regarding the growing 'arrogance and self-sufficiency' of the Prussian state.⁴² This feeling was exacerbated by news of the harshness of the terms Bismarck was attempting to force upon the French, and Prussia was perceived to have moved away from being the unwilling 'injured party'.⁴³ Furthermore, the siege of Paris left 4,000 British residents trapped within the city for the rest of the war. As a result, British public opinion began to turn quite fiercely in favour of the French, particularly the besieged Parisians, and even formerly

³⁹ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴⁰ Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 379.

⁴¹ Tombs and Tombs, p. 379.

⁴² Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–1871*, p. 188.

⁴³ Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 82.

Francophobe commentators and outlets such as *The Times* began to give voice to protests regarding the apparent desire of the Prussians to push France into impotency.⁴⁴ Whilst a British officer cadet, Herbert Kitchener was so moved by France's plight that he joined up with one of the hastily formed French armies in the provinces; and a demonstration was held in Trafalgar Square in 1871 when Paris was subjected to artillery bombardment.⁴⁵

The official British position at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War had essentially been one of disinterest, which was mirrored in wider public opinion. France had not endeared itself much to Britain by its actions before the conflict, and Britain clearly did not see any reason to intervene in the struggle. However, both popular and official opinion changed during the course of the conflict and the nature of these changes highlighted some of the similarities and discrepancies between government and people. The governmental shift was fairly pragmatic in its roots. Once it became clear just how powerful Prussia had become, and that this power was married to a spirit of bellicosity, Britain recognised the changing of the power dynamics in Europe.

For their part, the French civilians had started off by judging the British as unwelcome bystanders who seemed to be taking an almost voyeuristic interest in the combat.⁴⁶ When the depth of the crisis became clear, however, and Paris was besieged, irritation turned to fury. Streets in Paris with British names were changed, and *Les Nouvelles* ran an article proposing that all the British in the city be shot at once. It became, in the words of Alistair Horne, 'positively unwise to fly a Union Jack in Paris'.⁴⁷ The depth of this anger would continue to echo through France for decades. Such was the perception that Britain (and Prime Minister Gladstone in particular) had, through inaction, allowed the Prussians to seize power in Europe and drive France to the brink of destruction, that one French historian declared, after Gladstone's grandsons had died fighting in 1915, that they had effectively been killed by their

⁴⁴Horne, pp. 162–6.

⁴⁵Following this bombardment, 'the allegorical representations of France ... for the first time ever are unambiguously heroic and pathetic, while the Germans begin to appear as heartless barbarians, foreshadowing the "Huns" of 1914–1918'. Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 382.

⁴⁶Tombs and Tombs, p. 380.

⁴⁷Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 166.

grandfather.⁴⁸ Despite this, in her hour of need, Paris's demands for food were met by Britain and the USA. The London Relief Committee alone sent thousands of tonnes of food and provisions to the besieged city.⁴⁹

The eventual fall of Paris was followed by the rise and then collapse of the Commune and, for a time, the streets of Paris became a literal battlefield for competing ideologies. The fighting and the bloodshed swiftly appalled British observers, and *The Times* wrote that 'the French are filling up the darkest page in the book of their own or the world's history' and postulated how 'the Versailles troops seem inclined to outdo the Communists [sic] in their sheer lavishness of human blood'.⁵⁰ The war and its immediate aftermath had done grave damage to France, and the emerging Third Republic would bear the scars of it both before and during the First World War. Equally, the conflict had elicited both sympathy and revulsion among the British, and a mix of fury and slight gratitude among the French. But it also marked a dramatic departure from historic relations between the two countries. Previously, conflict involving either France or Britain almost inevitably involved, or was focused on, the other. Now, a third party had fully entered into the equation and, whilst Britain had stood on the side-lines, France had been effectively crippled. The emergence of the new German state was the cause of consternation in both Paris and London, and moved the focus of the balance of power in Europe from the Channel to the Rhine, a geographical position that the French had long believed was the 'frontier of liberty'.⁵¹ Whilst Anglo-French relations from this point onwards would still have their dramas, the shadow of Germany in the background altered the wider European dynamic.

Following the victory over France, the chancellor of the newly created German state, Bismarck, attempted to further secure German power by building closer ties with Russia and Austria-Hungary through the *Dreikaiserbund* of 1873. However, by 1875, this plan appeared to have failed and Bismarck's next course of action was an attempt to further downgrade the power of France. Whilst initially crushed by their defeat

⁴⁸ P. M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940: Entente and Estrangement* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p. 9.

⁴⁹ Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 248.

⁵⁰ Horne, p. 417.

⁵¹ Peter Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 52.

in the Franco-Prussian War, the French had made significant headway down the road to recovery. By 1873, they had cleared the last of their financial penalties, and the remaining German soldiers had left French soil.⁵² In 1875, the French passed new legislation that would greatly expand the size of the French army in the event of war, and Bismarck used this as rationale to threaten further military action against them which, if allowed to proceed, would likely reduce France to the level of a minor power.⁵³ Such an action held clear benefits for Germany, but Bismarck did not appear to have anticipated the level of resistance it would produce in Britain and Russia.

Following the Crimean War, Russia had undergone a sustained diplomatic effort to reforge links with France. These efforts, along with ongoing distrust between Russia and Austria-Hungary, were among the principal factors which undermined Bismarck's *Dreikaiserbund*. In Britain, the emergence of a powerful German state at the centre of Europe had not been warmly received, and German newspapers in 1875 asking 'Is War in Sight?' did not help.⁵⁴ Once upon a time, the prospect of France being permanently relegated from the top tier of European Powers might have been worth consideration in London, but that time had clearly passed. Even following the final defeat of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna had preserved the French position as a Great Power. A (likely permanent) reduction in French power by a Germany that would grow immeasurably stronger as a result was not in the best interests of Britain. The result was an outcome that in many ways brought about the beginnings of a situation that Bismarck had worked very hard to avoid. Through British and Russian cooperation, it was decided that the Tsar would bring diplomatic pressure on Berlin. This cooperation and pressure came, in the words of Otte, as an 'unpleasant surprise' to Bismarck, and he had little option but to back down lest he find himself in a situation where the Russian military might be brought into the equation.⁵⁵ Instead of forging links with Russia to

⁵²Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War*, Armies of the Great War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 8.

⁵³T. G. Otte, 'From "War-in-Sight" to Nearly War: Anglo-French Relations in the Age of High Imperialism, 1875-1898', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 17, no. 4 (December 2006): 696.

⁵⁴*Berliner Post*, 8 April 1875 quoted by Otte, p. 696.

⁵⁵Otte, p. 697.

the east and further crippling France to the west, Bismarck's miscalculation had opened the door for future relations between Paris and St Petersburg. The culmination of this new relationship would eventually be the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894; one that explicitly referenced the perceived threat of, and military response to, Germany. Bismarck's gamble had also caused further acceptance in London that the preservation of France was intrinsically linked to preventing further German expansion in Europe.

Despite this, there would be moments of ongoing dispute between Britain and France before circumstances arose that demanded closer diplomatic relations. Whilst many of these were rooted in ongoing imperial activities, it was a burgeoning crisis within the French army and government that began the process.⁵⁶ The first, of several, trials of Captain Alfred Dreyfus (for espionage based upon evidence manufactured against him) was an immediate scandal not just in France but across Europe.⁵⁷ The guilty verdict handed down to Dreyfus was accompanied by a sentence of degradation and solitary confinement near French Guiana. The British, neither knowing nor seeming to particularly care whether Dreyfus was guilty, took the whole trial as an indication of French 'rotteness'.⁵⁸ That the immediate and seemingly instinctive reaction of British observers was to take both the verdict and the trial as signs of French failure does not suggest that the actual details or circumstances were what drove the British evaluation. A French officer being tried for treason provided usable justification for any active anti-French stereotypes. When the full details of the conspiracy regarding Dreyfus began to unravel and he was tried and subsequently found guilty again, the reaction of Britain, and indeed the rest of the world, was one of scornful fury heightened by 'knowledge that Dreyfus's persecutors were Anglophobic nationalists'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 425.

⁵⁷Concerning the Dreyfuss affair: Emile Zola, *L'Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1969); Roger Mettam and Douglas Johnson, *French History and Society* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 117–20; David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), Chapters 16 and 17; Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter 1; and Herbert Tint, *The Decline of French Patriotism 1870–1940* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1964), Chapter 5.

⁵⁸Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 426.

⁵⁹Tombs and Tombs, p. 426.

It was against this backdrop of suspicion and emerging bellicosity that, in 1898, Jean-Baptist Marchand and his tiny force of French and Senegalese soldiers raised the tricolour over the ruined fort of Fashoda on the White Nile River.⁶⁰ The rationale behind his two-year trek through West Africa was broadly defined as ensuring that Britain was forced to uphold a previous pledge over ongoing occupation of Egypt.⁶¹ Previous attempts to negotiate settlements between the two nations over Egypt had been in vain, and, from the wings, Bismarck encouraged the French to continue applying pressure to Britain.⁶² How likely this was to succeed remains highly debatable. By the time Marchand arrived at Fashoda in 1898, Foreign Minister Théophile Delcassé appeared to have reached the viewpoint that the Nile valley was not worth fighting a war over, particularly given that the British military presence in the area and at sea rendered any such conflict unwinnable.⁶³ Berenson corroborates this view by explaining that ‘Marchand’s project made little geopolitical, military, or economic sense’ and by highlighting the fact that Edward Grey (the British under-secretary-of-state for foreign affairs) had already declared in 1895 that such an expedition launched by France would be considered ‘an unfriendly act’.⁶⁴ None of this explains why an expedition that seemed so reckless was undertaken in the first place, beyond indicating an instinctive policy of testing the strength and patience of Britain. The French seemed to hope that the British would offer some form of deal about Fashoda involving the ongoing disputed nature of British and French claims over Egypt, but it did not materialise. Instead, Herbert Kitchener, fresh from achieving the reconquest of Sudan, arrived with

⁶⁰For a general history of the Moroccan dispute see: Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, Chapters 2 and 3; and Paul Jacques Victor Rolo, *Entente Cordiale; the Origins and Negotiation of the Anglo-French Agreements of 8 April 1904* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1969), Chapter. 7. The original plan had called for Parfait-Louis Monteil to make the expedition, but delays to this schedule and his eventual dispatch to the French Congo by Théophile Delcassé, then Minister of the Colonies, meant that Marchand would be sent in his stead.

⁶¹Christopher Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale a Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy 1898–1905* (London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin’s press, 1968), p. 41.

⁶²Otte, ‘From “War-in-Sight” to Nearly War’, p. 700.

⁶³Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 9.

⁶⁴Edward Berenson, ‘Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Myth of Jean-Baptiste Marchand’, *Yale French Studies*, no. 111 (2007): 135–6.

five gunboats and an armed force that dwarfed the tiny French garrison. It was perhaps only the fact that Kitchener's orders were to remove them by persuasion rather than force that stopped armed conflict.

With the Fashoda drama playing out concurrently with the Dreyfus Affair, popular opinion regarding Britain and France plummeted in both countries. Queen Victoria cancelled her traditional French holiday and British tourists also avoided travelling there, whilst the French ambassador in London insisted that 3000 policemen be deployed in Hyde Park to prevent the tricolour from being insulted by a demonstration of 50,000 people.⁶⁵ In France, Marchand was viewed as a hero, the man who had brought imperial pride back to the country, and his refusal to give way to Kitchener's military only elevated him further.⁶⁶ However, Marchand and his men had not been aware of the Dreyfus Affair rumbling at home until Kitchener provided them with copies of French newspapers. These outlined the precarious state of French politics and had the French soldiers 'trembling and weeping' within an hour.⁶⁷ Delcassé initially hoped that there might now be a way for the French to extricate themselves from this situation with the minimum of embarrassment, but the British (both irked at the French attempt to undermine them in Egypt and seeing the difficulty its near-neighbour now found itself in) declined to provide them with such an escape route.

With no real chance of a victory over the British, who continued to strengthen their Mediterranean Fleet, with Marchand and his expedition now essentially trapped at Fashoda, and facing a rising diplomatic crisis, the French had no real option but to completely back down.⁶⁸ Delcassé recalled Marchand in November of 1898. In doing so he received nothing by way of compensation from the British and changed Marchand from a hero to a martyr: the man who had had the vision of France's imperial potential only to be betrayed by his own weak government and the constant machinations of Britain.⁶⁹ When he returned home, he was welcomed as a figure of potential by both the nationalist and republican conclaves who had made a victory of France's seeming defeat.⁷⁰

⁶⁵Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, pp. 426–7.

⁶⁶Berenson, 'Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Myth of Jean-Baptiste Marchand', p. 130.

⁶⁷Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 429; Berenson, 'Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Myth of Jean-Baptiste Marchand', p. 139.

⁶⁸Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁹Berenson, 'Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Myth of Jean-Baptiste Marchand'.

⁷⁰Berenson.

The French President, however, seemed to realise just how close his country had come to the brink when he declared that ‘we have behaved like madmen in Africa’.⁷¹ As far as the British were concerned, that was largely the end of the matter and almost immediately Fashoda began to drift out of public memory. In France, however, Marchand and the insult to French pride remained a politically charged issue for right-wing supporters well into the 1940s.⁷²

Whilst France had little resort but to retreat and lick her wounds, it was not long before Britain became embroiled in a messy colonial misadventure. Britain’s struggles in South Africa against the Boers provided France with an immediate outlet for anger at the nation that had seemingly humiliated them over Fashoda and mocked them over Dreyfus. Admittedly, protests against the Boer War were not simply confined to the French but were fairly worldwide, as evidenced by the creation of a ‘picturesque International Legion’ (composed of around 1600 French, Russians, Germans, Dutch, Irish, and other nationalities) that aimed to assist the Boers.⁷³ French public opinion towards the conflict rested heavily on suggestions that the war was due to the ‘insatiable appetites of the City gold merchants’, and the issue provided an opportunity for unity between the disparate and fractured elements of French society.⁷⁴ President Kruger himself was given a rapturous reception by the French at the start of a European tour.⁷⁵ Under the direction of Delcassé, France would later begin to explore the possibility of intervening in the conflict along with Russia, Germany, and possibly Spain.⁷⁶ The confirmation of German ‘antagonism’ towards Britain was seen as a good sign in Paris, not just regarding the ongoing Boer War but also as a possible ally to check British colonial endeavours after Fashoda.⁷⁷ These plans would eventually fail, but the attempts had not been overlooked in London.

⁷¹Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 430.

⁷²Otte, ‘From “War-in-Sight” to Nearly War’, pp. 707–8; and Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 10.

⁷³Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, pp. 432–3.

⁷⁴Tombs and Tombs, p. 432.

⁷⁵Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale a Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy 1898–1905*, p. 136.

⁷⁶Andrew, pp. 148–9 and 158–61.

⁷⁷Andrew, p. 162.

In Britain, one of the world's foremost powers, the difficulty experienced in defeating a poorly armed militia of farmers was a veritable crisis. If Britain could not maintain control over its own empire, then what sort of power could it be? Such an international embarrassment made Britain particularly prickly towards any perceived mockery; the ambassador to France was recalled after a satirical cartoonist who had made fun of the Queen was later awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*.⁷⁸ Of equal concern was the fact that Britain had been forced to commit 400,000 soldiers to the war and as a result was left with nothing in reserve should other crises have appeared elsewhere in the empire.⁷⁹

A great deal of the expressed animosity between Britain and France in this period was clearly focused on specific aspects of perceived hypocrisy. Examples were the suggestion that France was preaching republican values whilst persecuting Dreyfus and trying to force a confrontation at Fashoda; and Britain decrying colonial aggression at Fashoda and then launching a war on the Boers, or espousing the benefits of freedom of trade whilst forcing hidden tariffs on French wine imports.⁸⁰ However, the simple fact of the matter was that these disagreements had not been enough to bring the two nations into conflict. The confrontation at Fashoda did not provoke Britain to wage war on France, nor does that appear to have been an objective the French actually desired. The rising spectre of German power in Europe further underlined the likely futility of a conflict between Britain and France when something more serious appeared on the horizon.

Both Fashoda and the Boer War raised huge questions that did not appear to have easy answers. For France, her imperial and domestic defence and security were not aligned. Rivalry with Britain in Africa and with Germany in Europe left France dangerously isolated. Establishing who was the true enemy was also controversial, with historical enmity against Britain set against current humiliation by Germany. Something would have to give and, as Bell references, the view by Clemenceau that France could not go to war with Britain over some African marshland whilst the Germans continued to hold Strasbourg was a convincing one.⁸¹

⁷⁸Andrew, p. 136.

⁷⁹Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 26.

⁸⁰Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale a Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy 1898–1905*, pp. 201–02; and John V. C. Nye, *War, Wine and Taxes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁸¹Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 10.

Meanwhile in Britain, the performance of the armed forces in South Africa was an ongoing cause for concern that would need to be rectified. More problematic though was the ongoing effect on British self-confidence. Britain still maintained a large empire but the costs of administering it were proving burdensome. In isolation, this might not have been an issue, but the burgeoning economies and industrial output of both Germany and the USA placed pressure on Britain to keep up. If conflict with either of those nations had broken out whilst the British were trapped in the Boer War, the result would have been disastrous. All of this begged the internal question: Just how powerful was Britain in reality?⁸² If the answer was one that reflected vulnerability, then, in a scenario almost unprecedented since Napoleon, perhaps Britain could not survive without friends and allies.⁸³ Whether they wanted to or not, and in a manner that none would have predicted in 1815, the relationship between Britain and France began to evolve beyond instinctual suspicions and wariness into a new legal framework.

THE *ENTENTE CORDIALE* AND THE MILITARY CONVERSATIONS

That the *Entente Cordiale* has continued as a concept and term into the twenty-first century, long after it was originally signed, is one of the many quirks of a poorly understood international agreement. The Entente, signed on 8 April 1904, settled many important issues for Britain and France but did not address the one that would become the most pressing. Even reaching the point of an agreement required a fair degree of tactful diplomacy to help defuse some of the lingering tensions from both Fashoda and the Boer War.

Some of this damage was healed by Edward VII's trip to France in May 1903. There had been a great deal of fear, particularly amongst the French government, that the King would be jeered by the French crowds and assailed by shouts of 'Vive les Boers!' or 'Vive Fashoda!', and *La Patrie* had run a headline of 'Down with Fashoda! Down with the murderers of Boers!' in the lead-up to his visit. However, Edward was

⁸²Bell, pp. 12–13.

⁸³Robert Tombs, 'Ennemis Héréditaires, Alliés Par Nécessité', *Revue Historique Des Armées* 264, no. 3 (2011): 11–18.

something of a *bon vivant* who ‘played effectively on his reputation as a Parisian *homme du monde*’.⁸⁴ Largely fluent in French and able to speak without requiring notes, Edward successfully charmed his audiences and the result was crowds shouting a curious mix of slogans such as ‘Vive notre bon Edouard!’, ‘Vive notre roi!’, and ‘Vive la République!’ The result of this successful trip to France was an equally well-received visit to London by President Loubet and what Tombs and Tombs describe as ‘cross-Channel reconciliation in homeopathic doses’ centred on particular interpretations of each man. The British liked Loubet for what they thought were his un-French qualities, just as the French liked Edward for his un-British ones.⁸⁵

It was from this form of grand diplomatic gesture between the two nations that relations were not simply healing but would eventually reach a stage of rapprochement that resulted in the negotiations for and enshrinement of the *Entente Cordiale*. However, the creation of this and other international agreements of the period can be best understood from a French rather than a British perspective. Firstly, the ongoing desire within the French foreign ministry to inscribe their agreements in international law must be understood, particularly as this was the method seen as having the best chance of ensuring French security.⁸⁶ In addition was also the long-term acceptance in France that the very concept of a European ‘balance-of-power’ system was so subjective and nebulous as to be essentially meaningless.⁸⁷ No country in Europe would be willing to accept a ‘balance’ that disadvantaged its own nation whilst lifting up potential opponents. In fact, some French dissenters against the current international system, such as Theodore Ruysen, compared it to a form of anarchy.⁸⁸ Ruysen and his fellows may well have had a point in their arguments. Any system of governing international relations which relied upon maintaining a form of peaceful equilibrium in Europe had, to their minds, serious shortcomings in its ability to secure such peace.

⁸⁴Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, pp. 439–40.

⁸⁵Tombs and Tombs, pp. 440–41.

⁸⁶Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*, Chapter 1. This point is at the heart of Jackson’s magnificent study of French planning and foreign-policy law making in the years around the First World War.

⁸⁷Jackson, pp. 51–2.

⁸⁸As quoted by Jackson, p. 64.

Principal amongst these concerns was the fact that maintaining balance was entirely at the capricious whims of the participants. Whilst the system had appeared to work as intended during the Crimean War, it had utterly failed during the Franco-Prussian War. Too often, discussions about the inability of the European alliance system to prevent war in 1914 have been hampered by the lack of recognition of the fact that the essence of a balance of power had already failed in 1870.

Following their defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the punishing terms of the treaty inflicted on them by the newly unified Germany, France was placed in the position of requiring firm national security in future. Achieving this required either a system of adjudication in Europe that would prevent further conflicts or, failing that, strong military allies who would act in support of French sovereignty in the event of another invasion from across the Rhine. It is in this context that the Franco-Russian alliance (which emerged out of discussion and plans from 1891 until it was signed in secret in 1894) must be understood. This alliance was explicitly focused on protecting both nations from attack by a mix of Germany, Italy, and Austria-Hungary, with Germany being central to these plans. The alliance between France and Russia was, as a result, hugely pragmatic and overlooked the very clear ideological differences between the governments and peoples of the French Third Republic and Tsarist Russia. Ensuring national security was viewed as being of greater importance than fostering relations with those countries which shared their world view. In this sense, the Franco-Russian alliance, because of its legal framework and explicit focus, was everything that the future *Entente Cordiale* was not.

Furthermore, certainly in Paris, there was widespread acceptance of the view that if Britain had not suffered so badly in the Boer War then an agreement with France would have been both unthinkable and impossible.⁸⁹ That the apparent growth of German influence in Europe and Germany's desire for influence further afield also brought them into closer dispute with the British was also of benefit to the French.⁹⁰ However, the *Entente Cordiale* was not focused on solving European-based problems, but rather on reconciling ongoing differences between British and French imperial policies. The agreement, when it was finally

⁸⁹ Andrew, *Théophile Delcassé and the Making of the Entente Cordiale a Reappraisal of French Foreign Policy 1898–1905*, pp. 202–3.

⁹⁰ Andrew, p. 204.

reached, consisted of a Convention on Newfoundland, West Africa and Central Africa, and Declarations on Egypt and Morocco, and another on Siam, Madagascar and the New Hebrides.⁹¹ Of these, perhaps unexpectedly in the modern age, it was the rights of French fishermen to the waters around Newfoundland that proved most controversial.⁹²

In amongst these agreements was a variety of secret clauses; some of the most important related to British and French intentions in Egypt and Morocco. The French had wanted to diffuse lingering tensions from Fashoda in an attempt to receive British backing for an eventual change in Morocco's political system. Initially, it had been thought that France had nothing to offer Britain in order to achieve this, but through delicate negotiations they were able to give Britain assurances regarding the future division of Morocco, including part of the country going to Spain, which allayed British fears and were seen as an acceptable trade.⁹³ The result of these negotiations and agreements was an *Entente Cordiale* that never mentioned Germany specifically or dealt with Europe in general. It was certainly not an alliance that was likely to see both nations travel to war together. It would likely have stayed that way had it not been for a series of German interventions that began to draw Britain and France closer together.

When France made its long-planned move in Morocco, Delcassé was confident of tacit British support and approval. He was, however, taken very much by surprise by the intervention of Germany.⁹⁴ The application of German power and prestige into the equation caused the French a significant problem. Their solution to this issue was to engineer for Delcassé himself to be dismissed as the scapegoat. This might have been enough for the Germans but their demand for further concessions was probably an overreach. French public opinion had, surprisingly, been supportive of Delcassé's dismissal.⁹⁵ Trying to force more from France succeeded only in them moving closer to Britain, which was watching from the side-lines with disapproval as Germany once again interfered in imperial spheres that did not appear to concern it. The result of this

⁹¹ Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 23.

⁹² Bell, p. 30.

⁹³ Bell, p. 29.

⁹⁴ Bell, pp. 33–4.

⁹⁵ Bell, p. 36.

Moroccan Crisis was a series of ‘military conversations’ between Britain and France that began in 1906 and were continued with the approval of Edward Grey, the new Foreign Minister. The focus of these conversations was the pressing diplomatic and security question: What would happen if war broke out with Germany?

Given the Franco-Prussian War, France had its own immediate history to point to regarding the threat of Germany. Meanwhile, fears of an invasion from an unfriendly European power had lingered in Britain since the Napoleonic War, but had been building again since the 1850s and the construction of coastal defences in southern England under the direction of Palmerston.⁹⁶ These fears had been stoked by popular literature following the publication of the short story ‘*The Battle of Dorking*’ in 1871, which told the story of Britain being invaded and subjugated by an unfriendly European power. These stories often focused on the implied lack of readiness and training of the British army for an invasion, and the inability of the Royal Navy to protect the mainland.⁹⁷ The enemies in these stories changed over time with France, sometimes supported by Russia, being the invader. This would evolve at the beginning of the twentieth century into focusing primarily on the threat posed by Germany.

France had already struck a deal with Russia in order to secure Continental allies in the event of war against Germany, but the British Royal Navy would also be a useful ally in any conflict. The British had no firm Continental allies, and getting the French onside made good sense, particularly as their nearest neighbours and best route for deploying men to Europe. Initial discussions between Britain’s General Grierson and France’s Colonel Huguet began in 1905, and included a war game at the British Staff College where Britain and France fought together against Germany.⁹⁸ The war game, though useful, did create the belief within the British military that if war in Europe came the British would have time and space to manoeuvre their forces on the Continent.⁹⁹ This

⁹⁶John Gooch, *Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900–1916*. (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2016), p. 278.

⁹⁷This is discussed in greater detail in: David G. Morgan-Owen, *The Fear of Invasion: Strategy, Politics, and British War Planning, 1880–1914* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), Chapters 5 and 6.

⁹⁸Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 46.

⁹⁹Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 280.

belief was to prove an obstacle when the BEF was deployed in 1914. Furthermore, by becoming closer to France, Britain was also able to claim a long-desired diplomatic bonus prize: an agreement with Russia. The Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 would prove to have future benefits concerning attempts to outmanoeuvre Germany, but, at its heart, the primary British aim of this new *Entente* was to remove any Russian threat to India through Afghanistan.¹⁰⁰

Whilst these agreements would lay the initial foundations for future military agreements between Britain, France, and Russia, the *Entente Cordiale* itself was not primarily designed with Germany in mind; nor did it actually demand any particular action from Britain in the event of a German attack on France, a point which future British governments would be forced to guarantee to Parliament. Whilst an agreement of sorts was now in place with France and Russia, this did not immediately transfer into any substantive plans for the deployment of British forces to France in the event of war, with the state of readiness before December 1905 being described as ‘little more than thinking aloud [sic]’.¹⁰¹ Whilst there was no legal framework for British participation on the side of France in any military disputes against Germany, the planning for just such an eventuality emerged out of the discussions surrounding the *Entente Cordiale*.

The Agadir Crisis of 1911 would further stir tensions between France and Germany over Morocco, and place Britain in a position to, at least nominally, pick a side in the event of war (an event that Sir Edward Grey became convinced was imminent after one meeting with the German Ambassador).¹⁰² However, the emergence of the Franco-German dispute in Morocco and the ongoing naval arms race between the British and Germans did not move the British government towards a more sustained preparation for the outbreak of war, but rather caused a Cabinet crisis in November of 1911: Prime Minister Asquith ruled that no further communications between Britain and France would commit Britain to a path of war. Lord Eyre Crowe minuted the notion that, to all intents and purposes, the *Entente Cordiale* could mean as much or as little as Britain

¹⁰⁰Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War* (London: Cassell Military, 2004), p. 35.

¹⁰¹Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 62.

¹⁰²Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, pp. 43–6.

required it to; with the emphasis being on little.¹⁰³ The Cabinet accepted this ruling, but Grey privately impressed on Asquith that any change in Britain's conversations and plans with France would risk undermining French confidence in Britain and leave them isolated. There was no easy way to assuage both of these concerns; Britain carried on with ambiguous inertia.¹⁰⁴

Whilst the threat of imminent war had subsided by the end of 1911, the crisis had illuminated several underlying issues for Britain and France. Since the beginning of military conversations in 1906, the British plan had been to take up position on the right of the Belgian army, which would likely defend Antwerp. However, Ferdinand Foch (the man who would eventually command all allied forces in 1918) believed that these Belgian plans were 'useless'.¹⁰⁵ With the easing of tension following the Agadir Crisis, General Grierson was also able to visit the Belgian army and was left far from impressed with their ability to fight any form of modern war.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, competing schools of thought within the British military were split between the value of deploying a defensive force to Europe or attempting to launch naval actions against German territory. Admiral Sir John Fisher was a strong proponent of naval raids, and refused to guarantee he could transport the BEF safely to Europe should it need to be deployed, an action he opposed.¹⁰⁷ The Royal Navy was a force to be respected but, as Premier Rouvier of France had noted during the Moroccan Crisis in 1905, it did not run on wheels and could not protect Paris.¹⁰⁸

The eventual discussions between Britain and France regarding the possible deployment of the BEF to France evolved from the plan initially suggested by General Wilson during the Agadir Crisis of 1911.¹⁰⁹ The result would be the 'With France' plan for the deployment of 160,000 men across the Channel in the event of a Continental war; the plan had

¹⁰³ See Note 1.

¹⁰⁴ Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁶ Gooch, p. 283.

¹⁰⁷ Gooch, p. 282.

¹⁰⁸ Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ Bell, p. 45.

been largely finalised by 1913.¹¹⁰ This plan was not without its flaws, with particular criticism focusing on the lack of thought given to any form of unified command between the French and British forces: Who would command these joint armies in the event of war?¹¹¹ Additionally, the decision to adopt a 'With France' plan made it increasingly difficult to then organise any coordinated action with Belgium. The latter, keen to preserve the appearance of neutrality, did not want to be seen formulating plans for a joint action with Britain and France against Germany.¹¹² Furthermore, at various stages of this planning, the French were unconvinced by the size of any force the British would be able to deploy.¹¹³

Whilst it was also difficult to fully design accurate strategy for a forthcoming war, particularly for the defensive side forced by necessity to react to enemy moves, the plan developed did not (despite its depth of logistical details) pay any regard to 'the B.E.F.'s role after battle had been joined'.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the French strategy in the event of war (Plan XVII) was not even communicated to Wilson until the majority of the 'With France' strategy had been written.¹¹⁵ The War Office created a *Handbook of the French Army* for the British General Staff which provided a 'Historical Sketch' on French history since the Franco-Prussian War. This drew the conclusion that 'to nine-tenths of Frenchmen the army is sacred' and that France was a country 'which knows that social and material progress is possible only when its peace is guaranteed by its own armed strength', all of which had its roots in interpretations of French nationalism and proved an interesting portent to the eventual

¹¹⁰There is some confusion over the use of the initials WF for the plans regarding the deployment of the BEF to France. Though some took them to stand for 'Wilson-Foch' it was generally understood to mean 'With France'. As discussed by: Chris Phillips, 'Henry Wilson and the Role of Civil-Military Cooperation during the Planning of British Mobilisation for War, 1910–1914', *Ex Historia* 5 (May 2013).

¹¹¹Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition: Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 1–5.

¹¹²William Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914–18* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 5–6.

¹¹³William Philpott, 'Plus Qu'un « simple Soldat »: La France et La Perspective d'un Soutien Militaire Britannique Avant 1914', *Revue Historique Des Armées* 264, no. 3 (2011): 32–40.

¹¹⁴Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, p. 6.

¹¹⁵Philpott, p. 6.

British move towards conscription in 1916.¹¹⁶ This *Handbook* also featured a rough breakdown of France's political spectrum, the material resources on offer to the country, and a thorough examination of the French military institution.

Because the minutiae and general logistical considerations for the planned deployment of the BEF to France were undertaken in such depth, it is of interest to this study to examine the provisions made for interactions between British and French soldiers. It is striking that, whilst there was a clear thought process regarding the interactions of the two staffs in these plans (understandably, given the importance of accurate communication between the respective commands), little or no consideration was given to preparing the way for relations between the men. Chapter 2 of the Wilson-Foch plan (entitled 'Outline of the scheme and staff announcements') features the following instructions:

(m) British units will have French interpreters permanently attached to them.

(n) 'Liaison' generally [*generally* added by pencil notation] between British and French Armies will be provided by the mutual attachment of officers, at respective G.H.Q., and the H.Q.'s of the lower formations.

The British Chief Paymaster will have a French financial official attached to him.

The British D.A.S. will have a French Telegraph Officer attached to him.¹¹⁷

The actual provision of interpreters was broken down in a later appendix to show that the British believed they required 47 officers and 378 men for their mounted units, whilst requiring a further 190 dismounted ones.¹¹⁸ Each Infantry Battalion was to receive two interpreters.

¹¹⁶General Staff, War Office, *Handbook of the French Army* (London: Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books in association with The Battery Press and Articles of War Ltd., 1995), pp. 1–16.

¹¹⁷'Wilson-Foch Scheme: Expeditionary Force to France (1913)' (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 106/49A/2, n.d.).

¹¹⁸'Wilson-Foch Scheme: Expeditionary Force to France (1913)'.

This amounted to 146 interpreters spread amongst the infantry at the outbreak of war. The mathematics of this suggests that a huge number of British soldiers would have little or no contact with a French interpreter during their deployment to France. In the years before the war, both Britain and France had engaged in a process of recognising and training military interpreters. The French approach was to enable competitive exams between potential interpreters on selected languages (a mix of European ones and others of colonial value) whilst the British method focused on a wider range of 'rare' languages that had direct connections to Imperial provinces.¹¹⁹

After the beginning of the Military Conversations in 1905, the British began offering more direct financial rewards for selected languages but French was only rewarded with £23 as opposed to German at £50.¹²⁰ French would become more common in the lead-up to the outbreak of war in 1914, as would German, but British policy (largely influenced by imperial norms) was still to solve the issue on the ground through the recruitment of civilians in whichever country the British army happened to be operating. As a result of these policies, whilst the British and the French did possess numbers of soldiers who spoke the language of the other, there was no collective planning for the utilisation of such men in a prolonged coalition endeavour. What would eventually benefit the French in this situation appears to have been the number of soldiers who, before being called back into the military, had worked in cafes and restaurants in Britain and spoke the language.¹²¹ Matters were assisted somewhat by the fact that both countries had begun a process of military exchange to allow British and French officers to meet and grow to know each other. This move could help increase cooperation and efficiency at command level, but was unlikely to immediately translate into any clear benefits amongst

¹¹⁹Franziska Heimburger, 'Imagining Coalition Warfare? French and British Military Language Policy before 1914', *Francia* 40 (2013): 398–400.

¹²⁰Heimburger, p. 402. However, this did lead to an increase in officers registering as French-speaking. Heimburger speculates that, to an extent, this £23 could be seen as easy money for a man who had undertaken French language classes at school and would probably lead to them turning a profit.

¹²¹A number of British soldiers comment on encountering French soldiers who, having worked in the British service industry, had good levels of language. The reverse does not appear to be true.

the ranks.¹²² The matter of British and French soldiers communicating with each other was a running issue throughout the First World War.

If the plans for communication between the soldiers of Britain and France were lacking in practical details, then the guidance transmitted to Sir John French from Lord Kitchener was equally vague, simply highlighting the need to 'support, and cooperate with, the French Army against our common enemy'.¹²³ The notion that this was to be a cooperative but independent affair was also made to the individual soldiers in the BEF, and each man would depart for France with the following message from Lord Kitchener:

You are ordered abroad as a soldier of the King to help our French comrades against the invasion of a common enemy. You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience. Remember that the honour of the British Army depends on your individual conduct. It will be your duty not only to set an example of discipline and perfect steadiness under fire but also to maintain the most friendly relations with those whom you are helping in this struggle. The operations in which you are engaged will, for the most part, take place in a friendly country, and you can do your own country no better service than in showing yourself in France and Belgium the true character of a British soldier.

Be invariably courteous, considerate and kind. Never do anything likely to injure or destroy property, and always look upon looting as a disgraceful act. You are sure to meet with a welcome and to be trusted; your conduct must justify that welcome and that trust. Your duty cannot be done unless your health is sound. So keep constantly on your guard against any excesses. In this new experience you may find temptations both in wine and women. You must entirely resist both temptations, and, while treating all women with perfect courtesy, you should avoid any intimacy.

Do your duty bravely. Fear God. Honour the King.
Kitchener, Field-Marshal¹²⁴

¹²²Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, p. 25.

¹²³Lord Herbert Kitchener, 'Instructions for the General Officer Commanding the Expeditionary Force Proceeding to France', 1914, War Office Records; WO 32/5590, National Archives, Kew.

¹²⁴It is also worth noting that this message does not differ greatly from that inscribed within the pocket Bibles of Cromwell's Ironsides in the seventeenth century: Hans Kohn, 'The Genesis and Character of English National Identity', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1, no. 1 (1940): 69–94.

The focus was clearly on the importance of British soldiers maintaining the dignity and honour of Britain through their own actions, with a high value placed upon courtesy and restraint in the face of foreign temptations.¹²⁵ However, the actual practicalities of how the British soldier might build ‘friendly relations’ with those he would serve alongside were not discussed. British soldiers were provided with a basic set of French vocabulary but, as Colonel Charles à Court Repington would reflect after the war, the average British soldier ‘though not knowing a word of French at the start and uncommonly little at the finish, seemed to get on very well with the French people, and especially with the girls’, which rather suggests that Kitchener’s request for restraint in such matters was no more successful than the vocabulary provided to the British soldier in the hope of aiding proper communication.¹²⁶

Set against this backdrop of comprehensive, preliminary, logistical planning for a war in France, there was clearly precious little consideration of how the British soldiers would actually adapt to their new surroundings and allies. Further to this, there were also growing concerns that the British army might not be up to the job at all. In his role as military correspondent for *The Times*, Repington had secured an interview with Lord Kitchener, with whom he was ‘on the best of terms’, having already suggested in *The Times* that Kitchener be appointed War Secretary.¹²⁷ It was in this article that Kitchener and Repington were able to give rise to their shared belief that the British army at the time was, ‘not all that Lord Kitchener would have wished it to be’.¹²⁸ In the article, Kitchener aired his opinion that the war would be a prolonged affair and, in order to meet its demands, Britain would have to greatly increase the size of its own armed forces. Kitchener also made the point that:

¹²⁵ This also seems reminiscent of the moves Wellington made to win over the French people at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

¹²⁶ Charles à Court Lieut.-Col Repington, *The First World War 1914–1918*, vol. 1 (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1920), p. 32; and Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition*, pp. 8–9. Repington himself is a fascinating character in the background of the First World War. For more on him, see: A. J. Anthony Morris, *Reporting the First World War: Charles Repington, The Times and the Great War, 1914–1918*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹²⁷ Repington, *The First World War 1914–1918*, 1, pp. 20–1.

¹²⁸ Charles à Court Repington, ‘Lord Kitchener’s Plan’, *The Times*, 15 August 1914.

We have stout allies and many other advantages for which to be thankful, but our two foremost allies, France and Russia, have certain characteristics to which we must not remain blind. France has already thrown the whole of her manhood into the war. She can do no more, and except for her new contingent of recruits she cannot even increase by a man her power in the field. Russia is a mighty power with immense capacity for defence, but with untried and unproved offensive powers.¹²⁹

This article, in the words of Repington, ‘aroused the greatest public interest’ but also led to a break in relations between himself and Kitchener, after the War Secretary conveyed the fact that ‘the Radical editors had made the devil of a fuss about his having given me the exclusive knowledge of his plans’ and that he had also then been ‘bitterly attacked in the Cabinet on the subject’.¹³⁰ As a result, Kitchener decided not to be in direct personal contact with Repington again for the duration of the war and the two men would not properly converse again before Kitchener’s death in 1916.¹³¹ However, between the pair of them, Repington and Kitchener had given voice to the opinion that, whilst Britain was the preeminent Global Power of the age, her armed forces (aside from the Royal Navy) were not of a comparable status. Such an argument placed Britain in an unusual place regarding its relationship with France: a general rapprochement from 1904 was one thing but the Great Powers were not accustomed to formally acknowledging relative weaknesses compared to their fellows.

What resulted was almost a perfect storm: an apparent acknowledgement from the War Secretary of the limitations of the current BEF, a sense of discomfort and unease regarding the relationship between Britain and the Continent, and a seeming lack of understanding about the French and France. The declaration of war against Germany and the initiation of the planned deployment of the BEF to France would therefore take place against this backdrop of practically non-existent consideration regarding how the British would interact with their French fellows. In the wider background, there existed profound differences regarding the relationship between the civilian populations and social institutions

¹²⁹ Repington.

¹³⁰ Repington, *The First World War 1914–1918*, 1, p. 22.

¹³¹ Repington, 1, pp. 22–3.

in both countries, particularly the army. These differences laid the foundations for dramatically different interpretations of military life in the men who went to war in 1914 and those who would leave Britain as volunteers in 1915 and 1916. In many ways, it was this difference, originating in the nineteenth century, that created the foundations for what was to come.

THE BRITISH AND FRENCH ARMIES

The differing roles of the British and French armies throughout the nineteenth century made full cooperation between the two countries difficult. However, much of the relationship between Britain and France during this period up to the *Entente Cordiale* was rooted in the divergent understandings of their armed forces and how these soldiers interacted with each other on the field of battle. For much of the nineteenth century, the British army was a small, volunteer, recruit force and not particularly well regarded as a career choice for young men.¹³² By the late 1860s, Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan was bemoaning the fact that not only was the army underdeveloped but also that it was not a fair or comprehensive reflection of the state of British democracy at the time.¹³³ Trevelyan raised the image of European conscription when suggesting that the British army needed to mirror the French approach of ‘opening the military career to the whole nation’ as a method of motivating recruitment for coming wars.¹³⁴

Trevelyan’s arguments highlight that the organisation and administration of the army did not adequately replicate the balance of society in Britain at the time, and, moreover, did not have a great deal of influence in the social and political life of Britain in a manner similar to its role in France, Prussia, and the other European nations. Trevelyan advocated a more French model of wider interaction between the population and the armed forces in order to get the greatest number and quality of recruits. The Cardwell Reforms aimed to increase the levels of recruitment by reducing the years of service in the army to ‘six years with the Colours

¹³²Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, pp. 102–3.

¹³³Charles Edward Trevelyan, *The British Army in 1868* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868), p. 7.

¹³⁴Trevelyan, pp. 8–11.

and an equal period in the reserves' rather than the 21 years' 'virtually life service' that had been the post-Waterloo norm.¹³⁵ This move was an inventive solution to the problem of recruitment without having to consider conscription, which was still viewed dimly in Britain at the time, although the successes of the Cardwell Reforms were later subject to some dispute.¹³⁶ Conflicts in Africa and particularly the British difficulties during the Boer War further highlighted the lack of efficiency in the army towards the end of the nineteenth century, when 'over 400,000 troops took two and a half years to defeat less than 100,000 Boers' and showed that 'an untrained Reserve, numerous auxiliary forces, and an appeal to patriotism were no substitute for an efficient Army, organised for war and ready for embarkation'.¹³⁷

Whilst the French would have their own military problems throughout the nineteenth century, their armed forces were already far more integrated into society and were heavily politicised as a result. The French army did not operate in some form of political middle ground; rather, it was the site of fierce contest between the competing political groups within France, culminating in a situation where 'Republicans looked on the army with suspicion or worse', a matter which would only be exacerbated by the Dreyfus Affair.¹³⁸ The humiliating defeat during the Franco-Prussian War saw an increase in the years of conscription for French men, and also saw continued political arguments over the length of this service, the notion of conscription at all, and what it would mean for a healthy French Republican democracy.¹³⁹

What can be seen from these debates are the almost polar opposite roles of the armed forces in Britain and France towards the end of the nineteenth century. Britain was trying to find a way to allow the army to reflect the demographic make-up of the country without resorting to conscription. The British army was clearly a step removed from mainstream British society and was seen as neither a viable career for young

¹³⁵Brian Bond, 'Recruiting the Victorian Army 1870–1892', *Victorian Studies* 5, no. 4 (1962): 331–38.

¹³⁶Albert V. Tucker, 'Army and Society in England 1870–1900: A Reassessment of the Cardwell Reforms', *Journal of British Studies* 2, no. 2 (1963): 110–41.

¹³⁷Bond, 'Recruiting the Victorian Army 1870–1892'.

¹³⁸Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918*, p. 16.

¹³⁹Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, p. 19; and Etienne Dennery, 'Democracy and the French Army', *Military Affairs* 5, no. 4 (1941): 233–40.

men nor a well-administered institution by the government.¹⁴⁰ In France, by contrast, the army had become representative of the increased internecine fighting within French political society; where disputes over conscription and the role of the army became embroiled in debates over the very heart and soul of the French Republic. By understanding these roots and the consequences of these debates in both Britain and France, the interactions between British and French soldiers during the First World War become much easier to understand, particularly following the arrival of Kitchener's New Armies in mid to late 1915. Each country's soldiers came from wildly different backgrounds in regard to military service, citizenship, and interaction with key institutions. The reaction to the wave of dissent and mutinies in 1917 and 1918 owes a great deal of their formation to these differences.

Also important to understanding the British and French armies' roles is how professionalization affected countries and impacted on what were, essentially, subject-soldiers and citizen-soldiers. British troops throughout the nineteenth century remained closely tied to the ruling elite and the preservation of the existing status quo in a manner that also prevented any decisive moves towards militarism or intervention.¹⁴¹ Not only was there a clear unwillingness on behalf of the government for the army to intervene in domestic political discourse, but the social connections between the ranking British officers and government also strongly suggest a lack of interest within the army to do so as well.¹⁴² When confronted by the emergence of the earliest Officer's Schools within Europe, the British treated them with a mix of curiosity and bemusement, especially regarding the shared identity they fostered.¹⁴³ It was not until the 1860s that a proper system of examinations and mandatory promotions began to emerge within the British army, with 'successful completion

¹⁴⁰As Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly explain, the Secretary of State for War was not seen as a key position in the pre-War government and many of the occupants of the role had brought 'little intellectual dynamism to the post'. Ian F. W. Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 8.

¹⁴¹C. B. Otley, 'Militarism and the Social Affiliation of the British Army Elite', in *Armed Forces and Society: Sociological Essays*, ed. J Doorn (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), pp. 86–7.

¹⁴²Otley, pp. 88–105.

¹⁴³Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 54.

of the Staff College course' becoming 'a prerequisite to duty at general headquarters'.¹⁴⁴ Even then, as Huntington explains, 'a true system of professional advancement was impossible in the British Army so long as purchase existed'.¹⁴⁵ The upper reaches of the British army organisation were still only on offer to those of the upper classes or with a wealthy background not simply because of the cost of purchasing a rank (by 1856, a captaincy cost approximately £2400 and a lieutenant colonelcy £7000) but because the wages were so low that those without considerable private means found it overly restrictive.¹⁴⁶

The British solution to the Boer War debacle comprised the Haldane Reforms; instituted between 1906 and 1912, and designed to reorganise the elements of the BEF stationed in Britain. This reorganisation would see the BEF formed into seven divisions; six of infantry and one of cavalry, and the organisation of auxiliary forces in a Territorial Force (TF).¹⁴⁷ It was the TF that caused most controversy in Britain with a variety of major newspapers opposing it. Even though *The Times* leant qualified support, Charles à Court Repington was markedly against the endeavour.¹⁴⁸ Opposition to the TF was often a measure of a split in British politics regarding the nature of the army, with those on the left fearing that the TF would be used as a stealth measure to create a pool of trained personnel for the regular army that could be deployed around the Empire. Others on the right believed that the TF was little more than a delay on the route towards the (apparently necessary) measure of compulsory military service.¹⁴⁹ Advancing the cause of the TF was problematic for Haldane and was not assisted by the fact that, whilst nominally numbering men in the hundreds of thousands, many did not bother to turn up to their yearly training camps.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ Huntington, p. 46.

¹⁴⁵ Huntington, pp. 46–7.

¹⁴⁶ Huntington, p. 47.

¹⁴⁷ Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, pp. 7–8. Whilst these measures were billed under the heading of reorganisation, as Connelly, Beckett, and Bowman note; Haldane's primary motivation was financial in a bid to bring down the cost of the armed forces.

¹⁴⁸ Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, pp. 8–12.

¹⁴⁹ Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, pp. 9–10.

¹⁵⁰ Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, pp. 11–12.

The French were much quicker in developing their specialised military school than the British, but they still lagged someway behind the Prussians, who had been the real visionaries of the movement. The French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War led French officers to begin ‘organizing themselves informally for their own military self-education just as the Prussian officers had done in 1807’.¹⁵¹ The French had attempted, in 1818, to institute laws that would ‘exclude non-professional factors’ from influencing promotions or advancements within the army.¹⁵² The movement towards professionalism in France was seen as being in keeping with the role of the citizen and democracy; that is, not just within the army but within French society where ‘professionalism challenged the dominant aristocrats; consequently they identified it with democracy’.¹⁵³ The lack of political competitors in Britain, with a generally clear acceptance of the legitimacy of Parliament and the Crown, stands in stark contrast with the more contested political landscape across the Channel. In France, by contrast, there can be seen an almost fickle element of the population during the merry-go-round of revolutions, empires, monarchies, and republics that marked the nineteenth century from the initial revolution right up to the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁵⁴

Every aspect of the Franco-Prussian War had been a disastrous humiliation for France. From the moment Napoleon III had been the one to declare war, handing Prussia a public-relations coup, the endeavour had developed into a military and governmental farce. The bottling up of France’s armies in fortresses at Verdun and Sedan, the coronation of King William I as German Emperor in Louis XIV’s fabled Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, through to the culmination of the Treaty of Frankfurt and the annexing of French territory all painted a frankly apocalyptic image of decayed French power. The plans for some form of military overhaul and eventual response began almost immediately, but the actual organisation of them would prove difficult. The attempt to enlarge

¹⁵¹Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations*, p. 49.

¹⁵²Huntington, p. 45.

¹⁵³Huntington, p. 35.

¹⁵⁴Alistair Horne, *Friend or Foe: An Anglo-Saxon History of France* (London: Phoenix, 2005), p. 295, <http://prism.talis.com/sussex-ac/items/1097745>.

the French army in 1875 nearly had the result of provoking war with Germany again, a war that the French could not possibly hope to win alone. A great deal of French energy after 1871 (especially after 1875) went into securing alliances in Europe first with Russia and then, eventually, with Britain. These alliances strengthened the French strategic situation, but would only bring victory if coupled with similar changes to the army itself.

The creation of the Superior Council of War and the Superior Council of National Defence was designed to help modernise the command of the French military without requiring a strong hierarchy during peacetime; a situation that Republicans were keen to avoid lest another Napoleon should appear from the ranks.¹⁵⁵ If measures were being taken to improve the command and eventual strategy of the French army, its actual size was an ongoing source of concern. Debates over whether a professional or a conscript army would best serve France were ongoing, but simple mathematics highlighted a significant problem in France compared to Germany, its expected military rival. The German population was growing at an exponential rate; a 60% increase between 1870 and 1910, although some of this can perhaps be attributed to the unification of the German states. By 1914, the French population was 39.8 million, while in Germany it was 69 million.¹⁵⁶ The German policy of national service combined with professional military training meant that France would have to utilise conscription itself if it were to stand a chance. Whilst France had paid off its reparation debts to Germany after 1871 relatively quickly, the country was still left in financial trouble and, as a result, could not easily afford to train and keep its entire eligible male population in military structures.

Assorted laws were passed after the Franco-Prussian War regarding how long French men would spend in the army. Initially, the process called for five years' service in the army itself followed by four more years in the reserve and a further 11 in the territorial army, though only half of the eligible contingent would be used in this last stage for financial reasons.¹⁵⁷ These laws themselves had evolved by 1889 so that men would

¹⁵⁵Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (London: Belknap, 2005), pp. 7–8.

¹⁵⁶Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁷Greenhalgh, p. 11.

serve two years in the army, seven in the reserve, and a final 15 in the territorial army. By 1905, this had changed again, with a reduction to two years active service and an increase in the years of reserve. The fact that men would only serve two years in the army was the result of an attempt to potentially mirror some of the military policies in Germany, but also perhaps a consequence of the Dreyfus Affair as some accused the French political left of trying to limit the power and influence of the army.¹⁵⁸ The outcome of the pre-war planning was that France mobilised some 3.5 million men in 1914, of whom 1.8 million were immediately dispatched to combat units.¹⁵⁹ France was now going to need its army, but the pre-war period had also been marked by ongoing concerns as to its political reliability.

The French army had been the centre-ground for many of the debates regarding the political direction and soul of France. This did not mean that the French did not embrace the notion of the army; they did, particularly under the Third Republic following the Franco-Prussian War. The French deeply desired the recapture of lost territories and this would not be achieved without the army; the legacy of the French military hero was still well represented in national festivals and celebrations of the time.¹⁶⁰ Their fear instead took on dual aspects: principally that the purity of the French army and the French soldier were hijacked politically by forces within the country opposed to revolutionary notions. Much of the controversy surrounding the Dreyfus Affair can be seen as part of the process of fully ‘republicanising’ the armed forces and making them a representative image of modern republican France. The other aspect was that the soldier’s overall loyalty was not necessarily to the army or to the French state but rather to the ideals of the revolution enshrined within the person of the French Citizen. This became extremely apparent during the French Mutinies of 1917 where, although the soldiers still operated within the framework of the military, their actions were deeply driven by their own understanding and beliefs of their rights and responsibilities as citizens of France.

¹⁵⁸Greenhalgh, p. 12.

¹⁵⁹Greenhalgh, p. 32.

¹⁶⁰Charles Rearick, ‘Festivals in Modern France: The Experience of the Third Republic’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 3 (1977): 435–60.

The clear division between the soldiers of Britain and the soldiers of France was therefore rooted firmly in notions of what it meant to be a soldier in these nations at the time, and, most importantly, what sort of service was being carried out. The British subject-soldier served both Parliament and the Monarch, and existed within a system that made political intervention or competition almost impossible. The army itself existed quite contentedly within this system, and, whilst being a British soldier had the appearance of a career (though not in all cases a greatly prized one), it was not necessarily imbued with any greater civic rights. This was despite the fact that, particularly with regard to the French, taking up arms in defence of Britain had been seen as a path to greater unity and national citizenship. Colley has written at length on how Francophobia provided a unifying factor in Britain not just because it presented a clear and common enemy, and one so removed from established ideology as to almost appear alien, but also because it provided a pathway to national unity through citizenship.¹⁶¹ By taking up arms against a defined national enemy, people were also taking a stake in the defence and ideals of their nation. That these ideals were often, at best, intangible was not the issue. Additionally, Kumar quotes Greenfeld's assertion that 'in a way, nationality made every Englishman a nobleman'.¹⁶² Whilst this may well have been true, this new sense of purpose did not overrule the existing structure. A subject-soldier remained a subject and in fact this position was strengthened. The soldiers who had taken up arms against France during the Revolutionary Wars may have had individual reasons for doing so, but had effectively been used to protect their country, monarch, and the very concept of monarchy.

For the French, however, becoming a soldier was an extension of citizenship. The Revolution had empowered both them and the Republic but also given them a greater responsibility for its maintenance and defence. Whilst this would be carried out and French men would enter the military, they did not believe themselves to have sacrificed their rights as men and as citizens. The French mutinies of 1917 proved that French soldiers did not believe themselves to be restricted politically by their

¹⁶¹ Colley, *Britons; Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, pp. 330–2; and Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 22–3.

¹⁶² Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, p. 96.

military service, quite the opposite. Those who had defended the nation believed they should have been afforded greater influence in deciding their own fates and the fate of France. The French soldier was, therefore, a far more political being than the British equivalent. This became apparent repeatedly throughout the War, especially during 1917 and 1918. Although it can be said that both groups had essentially firm loyalties, whilst the British soldier was loyal to the country and system that sculpted him, the Frenchman's loyalty was to the revolutionary spirit and traditions that had empowered him.

This interpretation of national loyalty becomes more obvious when consideration is given to the fact that France in particular was not averse to replicating British approaches to national challenges during the Third Republic. During the late nineteenth century, France attempted to reeducate the rural peasants and enforce an acceptable identity upon them.¹⁶³ However, it was not just a common civilisation that these people were lacking; they were viewed as savages not just because of their 'barbarous' ways but because they were 'unassimilated to French civilisation'.¹⁶⁴ The Third Republic was particularly concerned with matters of national character following the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, but moves like this also spoke of a wider conflict between the state and population over who got to define the nation and its identity. The reeducation of French peasants was indicative of a centralised government implementing reforms and programmes to bring an element of the population viewed as being noticeably un-French into line. In a similar vein, the Third Republic also pushed an aggressive programme of teaching masculinity and male citizenship to the male population in conjunction with newly instituted laws on compulsory military service.¹⁶⁵ It was not simply enough to rebrand the new social institutions and expect them to operate flawlessly; they had to be based on something reliable, and the Third Republic had no qualms in studying Europe to see how their neighbours conducted such matters. Britain, in particular, with its extremely stable national infrastructure and its undisguised desire 'to hymn the virtues of British

¹⁶³Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977).

¹⁶⁴Weber, Chapter. 1.

¹⁶⁵Denis M. Provencher and Luke L. Eilderts, 'The Nation According to Lavissee: Teaching Masculinity and Male Citizenship in Third-Republic France', *French Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007): 31–57.

institutions' was a source of interest.¹⁶⁶ During the early 1870s, the French sent numerous observers to examine British methods of teaching set curricula in schools.¹⁶⁷ Whilst this could probably not be termed as an active cultural exchange, this movement to replicate elements from across the Channel narrowed some of the cultural distances between the nations.

Despite this, there were still British concerns and confusions over what exactly the French represented in the lead-up to war. The *Daily Mirror* published a series of cartoons in September 1914 by W. K. Haselden which attempted to examine the relationship between Britain, France, Germany, and Europe as a whole.¹⁶⁸ Whilst the caricatures they contained would not likely have been official in a governmental sense, they had an accepted resonance amongst contemporary readers. At the very least they can be taken as indicative of perceptions held by Haselden himself along with the *Daily Mirror's* editors. These cartoons were appearing in print once the war had started and Britain and France were confirmed allies; yet they still speak of a difficulty in perception of the French (see Fig. 1).¹⁶⁹

Figure 1 seems fairly typical of wartime propaganda, with a clear message: the Germans are both distrusting and untrustworthy through their use of spies, whilst the British are inexperienced in dealing with espionage because they are not underhanded enough to utilise it. The interest in this cartoon however comes from the fact that the foreign soldiers don't appear to be German at all; they are French. The men all wear the *kepi*, an item that had long held French connotations and did not appear in the military uniforms of any other European nation at the time (although it had been worn by the Confederate Armies during the American Civil War). Furthermore, the German uniform was composed

¹⁶⁶Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), <http://prism.talis.com/sussex-ac/items/1097241>.

¹⁶⁷Howard F. Andrews, 'A French View of Geography Teaching in Britain in 1871', *The Geographical Journal* 152, no. 2 (1986): 225–31.

¹⁶⁸For further information regarding Haselden, see; 'William Kerridge Haselden', n.d., <http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/artists/william-kerridgehaselden/biography>.

¹⁶⁹The text below the cartoon in Fig. 1 explains: 'We may have been unprepared for spies in England, but on the Continent they certainly were not. There was a period when, in Germany at least, an unoffending tourist had only to take a photograph in order to be arrested.'

THE SPY MANIA BEFORE THE WAR.



We may have been unprepared for spies in England, but on the Continent they certainly were not. There was a period when, in Germany at least, an unoffending tourist had only to take a photograph in order to be arrested.—(By Mr. W. K. Haselden. Reprinted.)

Fig. 1 W. K. Haselden, *The Spy Mania Before the War* (19 September 1914, *Daily Mirror*—Image courtesy of Mirrorpix)

of obvious distinguishing characteristics, particularly the spiked helmet, which Haselden might have used instead. Additionally, this particular image being used as a reference point for the French has its roots in cartoons and images from the 1840s and 1850s. After ‘the dictatorships of Cavaignac and Louis Napoleon-Bonaparte’ there was an evolution in the iconography used to personify France, with ‘the commonest symbols of Frenchness’ becoming the ‘army uniform and fashionable military mustache [sic] and goatee’.¹⁷⁰ The suggestion of a French military unfairly persecuting an innocent man also has roots in the British perception of the Dreyfus Affair and would be a recognisable reference to the British public.

Haselden was not ignorant about the French military uniform’s design and character, as was proved by the cartoon published on 21 September (Fig. 2).¹⁷¹

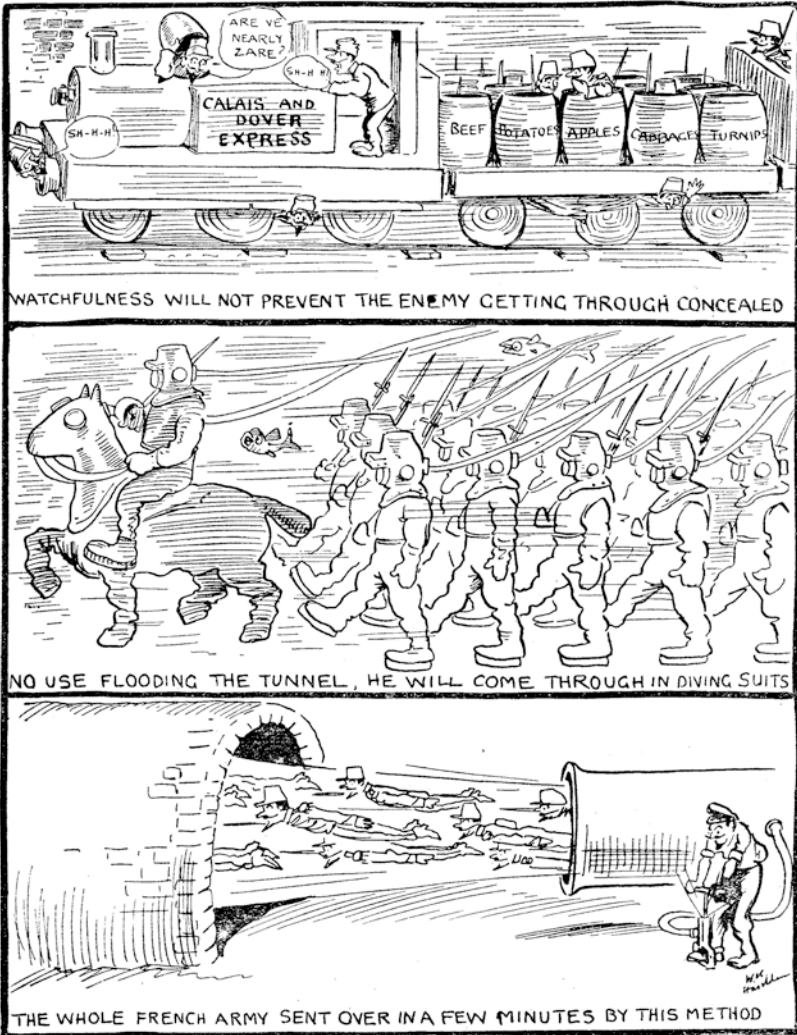
The text accompanying the cartoon identifies the scenarios as ‘the sort of thing’ opponents of the Tunnel had predicted would occur upon its completion. The final panel also clearly identifies the invading soldiers as French and, once again, we should note the clear portrayal of the French *kepi* acting as an indicator of the soldiers’ nationality. The only clear difference between the soldiers in the ‘Spy’ cartoon and those in the ‘Tunnel’ is that the former appear to be drawn carrying more weight than those in the latter.¹⁷² Despite the fact that the Channel Tunnel comic is seeking to ridicule those who suggested that the French were untrustworthy, when juxtaposed with the espionage images there are clear signs of an ingrained and innate suspicion of the other European powers, symbolised and represented by France. It can also be seen to represent the conflict in attempting to reconcile the old France, as both

¹⁷⁰Tombs and Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy*, p. 352. Some of these new cartoon images were actually produced by French artists such as Gavarni, who worked for *Punch*.

¹⁷¹For further information on the Channel Tunnel discussions before the war, see Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, pp. 51–3.

¹⁷²Of additional interest here is that the actual visual personification of French soldiers by the British (or vice versa) was extremely uncommon in posters and propaganda during the war. Some publications (like *Punch*, for example) would draw French soldiers as will be discussed in relation to 1916; but there was rarely an ‘official’ image of the French *Poilu* or the English Tommy. There were some isolated exceptions, of course, but, by and large, both nations seemed to use the flag of their ally to symbolise the men without creating a consistent personification.

WHAT DO 'CHANNEL-TUNNELPHOBES' THINK NOW?



Once upon a time many very wise people in this country opposed the Channel Tunnel scheme, because, they said, the French would use it for invading England. This is the sort of thing they foretold would happen as soon as the tunnel was completed. But that was before the great war.—(By Mr. W. K. Haselden. Reprinted.)

Fig. 2 W. K. Haselden, *What do Channel-Tunnelphobes Think Now?* (21 September 1914, *Daily Mirror*—Image courtesy of Mirrorpix)

a rival and a military threat, with the new France as friend and ally. The triple crises of Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Boer War at the end of the nineteenth century had raised the spectre of Anglo-French conflict again.

It is this conflict regarding perceptions of French loyalty or enmity that likely provoked the Channel Tunnel cartoon in the first place. It is a fairly unsubtle attack on those who believed that such a link would compromise Britain's security and present a chance for the nation's oldest adversary to invade. The English Channel represented a formidable barrier protecting Great Britain from invasion. Enduring British foreign policy dictated that European troubles were the concern of nations based on the European mainland; Britain only rarely saw fit to intervene. Britain's decision to change this policy in response to the German threat marked a significant departure, and it is not surprising that this would have caused some concern amongst the populace. The reassuring presence of the Channel as a protective barrier would likely have been a source of comfort. The Channel Tunnel question also echoed insecurities regarding relative strengths and weaknesses of the British armed forces.

Regardless of their previous fear and weaknesses, when war came in 1914, Britain and France entered it as allies with plans drawn up in advance through their precautionary military conversations. The widespread optimism now attributed to the feuding nations at the outbreak of the First World War is somewhat overstated; Kitchener certainly did not believe that the British army was anywhere near powerful enough to defeat the Germans alone. However, in their French ally they at least had what appeared to be a powerful friend. It would not take long for the German invasion of France and Belgium to test that friendship.



Initial Interactions: The British Expeditionary Force in France (1914–1915)

The special motive of the Force under your command is to support, and cooperate with, the French Army against our common enemy ... [w]hile every effort must be made to coincide most sympathetically with the plans and wishes of our Ally, the gravest consideration will devolve upon you as to participation in forward movements where large bodies of French troops are not engaged and where your force may be unduly exposed to attack.

(Lord Herbert Kitchener's instructions to Marshal Sir John French¹)

With the outbreak of the First World War and the need to deploy the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to Europe in support of the French and Belgian armies, the British army began to encounter many of the obstacles discussed earlier. The negotiations that had taken place between the British and French governments and militaries were plagued by secrecy and narrow considerations. To preserve neutrality, the Belgians had not been included and the British had only the most limited understanding of what the French would do independently in the event of war. Furthermore, no consideration had been given to how the British and French soldiers would cooperate with each other during battle. As indicated by the emerging depictions of their French allies in the popular press, Britain appeared to have a fairly caricatured view of the

¹Lord Herbert Kitchener, 'Instructions for the General Officer Commanding the Expeditionary Force Proceeding to France', 1914, War Office Records; WO 32/5590, National Archives, Kew.

French and neither side had any real understanding of the uniforms or appearance of their fellow soldiers, and even less regarding their nature and temperament.

The temptation at the time was similar to the one today; to examine these two armies as homogeneous single entities. It would not take long in 1914, however, for British and French soldiers to realise that the men who fought under the flags of each nation could differ wildly from their existing limited expectations and from the other soldiers they encountered. This only became clearer when British and French soldiers began to encounter the colonial and dominion soldiers who also made up the armed responses to the German invasion. Relationships between British and French soldiers were difficult enough, but the addition of each nation's empire to proceedings would only complicate interactions further. Additionally, the proximity between the British army and French civilians caused issues of its own. During the retreat from Mons, British forces regularly sympathised with the plight of these refugees. This sympathy would be sorely strained by largely unfounded fears that these same civilians were spying for the Germans and waiting for the opportunity to betray the BEF.

With regard to military movement and strategy, 1914 stands apart from the years and the events that followed. Whilst events such as the Battle of the Marne and the 'Race to the Sea' would prove crucial in shaping the Western Front, it was the outcomes of these events rather than the battles themselves that laid the foundations of trench warfare. Similarly, whilst interactions between British and French soldiers during this time were important, they also did not bear any great relation to those that followed. However, the trials, tribulations and, ultimately, casualties of the BEF in France during 1914 accelerated the need for Kitchener's New Armies to be deployed in France as reinforcements and, therefore, bring about the upturn in relations around 1915 and 1916. Because the nature of the fighting during 1914 was so fluid and, largely, formless, there was little chance to build any form of constructive discourse between the two nations. British military planners had made no particular plans to encourage cooperation and interaction between British soldiers and their French fellows. Even if they had, the speed at which the situation deteriorated in France following the arrival of the BEF would likely have prevented any such plans from being collectively initiated.

Whilst there were clearly moments when relations between British and French soldiers were strained and even threatened to break down completely, these instances seem to have been built more on the utter chaos of the war's earliest months than any profound clash between the soldiers of the two nations. That is not to say that the men at this point shared any sort of profound ideological similarity: this was certainly not the case. The men of the BEF in 1914 were professional soldiers, whilst the French armies of the time were composed of those men who had undergone their nation's compulsory military service. Both groups were shaped and moulded by their own particular institutionalisation and profound national and cultural differences. But whilst these men of 1914 would create the situation from which the future Tommy–*Poilu* interactions of the war would emerge, the very crucible that helped form them would also destroy them, and the core of the BEF from 1914 would not long survive the opening months.

At the outbreak of war, the decision had been made for an initial deployment of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th Divisions to France, with them being joined in short order by the 4th Division and the Cavalry Division. Whilst the majority of these forces would begin to embark on their way to France on 9 August, advance portions of the BEF began to depart Britain on 7 August and arrive in France on the following day. The initial arrangements regarding the arrival and deployment of the BEF in France were undertaken in cooperation with Colonel Victor Huguet, the French liaison officer to General Headquarters (GHQ), but, despite this, it was a struggle to overcome some of the inbuilt secrecies and limitations of the pre-war plans which restricted information on the area reserved for the British deployment.²

Notwithstanding this, the initial deployment of the BEF was carried out largely without incident and the force was swiftly organised into its order of battle. The 1st and 2nd Divisions were combined into I Corps under Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig, 3rd and 5th Divisions were grouped into II Corps under Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson and, upon their completed arrival in France at the end of August, 4th and

²J. E. Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914*, History of the Great War Based on Official Documents, by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (London: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 29–30.

6th Divisions would create III Corps under Lieutenant-General William Pulteney.³

Early interactions between British and French soldiers were marked by key moments of stress that combined to make the opening months of the war hugely difficult for either side to find a point of reference with the other. For the British, the induction of the BEF into a foreign situation and society was not helped by a trio of developing misfortunes that created a sense of isolation within the ranks. This began, initially, with the untimely deaths of one of the leading British generals. The soldiers of the BEF were aware of officers who would make the initial communication and operations with the French easier and, right at the beginning of the war, they were robbed of one of their most competent. Lieutenant-General Grierson was an accomplished linguist who, in the late nineteenth century had enjoyed a good relationship with the German military command, and wrote extensively on the formation and abilities of the German army, before realising that a split between the two countries was almost inevitable. In the years that followed, he formed stronger links with the French military, in particular Colonel Huguet with whom he laid the foundations for Anglo-French military cooperation as discussed in the previous chapter. Grierson was also a noted tactician, defeating Haig during war games in 1912 after adopting aerial reconnaissance (at the behest of his cavalry commander).⁴ However, on 17 August, the day after arriving in France, Grierson died of a heart attack during a train journey to Amiens. How great a role Grierson would have had during the war is open for debate but the soldiers themselves were certainly aware of him, and his death was recorded in the diaries of several.⁵ His reputation was known within the ranks of the British Army, and those soldiers had clearly hoped that he would be a suitable representative of them and their interests to the French.

³Edmonds, p. 31. Elements of 4th division would take part in fighting at Le Cateau and the subsequent retreat before being formed into III Corps.

⁴For information on Grierson see: 'Sir James Moncrieff Grierson', n.d., <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/article/33574?docPos=6>.

⁵Grierson's death is mentioned by both Lieutenant Geoffrey A. Loyd, 'Typescript Diary', 1914, IWM: DOCS - 98/2/1, Imperial War Museum, 18 August 1914; Sapper Hugh Bellew, 'Manuscript Diary', 1914, IWM: DOCS - 91/23/1, Imperial War Museum, after 17 August 1914.

Grierson's replacement in command of II Corps was General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

Latent fears regarding initial interactions between British and French soldiers were not improved by the fact that neither side appeared to have much understanding of what its new allies looked like. Lieutenant Edward Spears, a liaison officer to the French 5th Army, found himself accosted by French soldiers in mid-August because his 'strange uniform was totally unfamiliar to them, and they jumped to the conclusion that I was a German prisoner'.⁶ Lieutenant Lionel Tennyson experienced a similar issue in October when French sentries shot at him, thinking he was a German.⁷ Spears had already been pushing for the creation of 'postcards and coloured plates showing British army uniforms', and for them to be dispersed amongst French units. He credited Colonel Macdonough, Head of Intelligence, for achieving this 'miracle' before the Battle of Charleroi.⁸ In addition to this, it was rapidly becoming clear that many French civilians and soldiers spoke far better English than the men of the newly arrived BEF spoke French. Upon the arrival of the 8th Brigade Royal Field Artillery at Le Havre on 19 August, Lieutenant Walter Fyrth noted that the French crowd awaiting them kept up a continual shout of 'vive l'Angleterre', to which Fyrth and some others replied with cheers of 'vive le [sic] France', which was swiftly taken up by the other men.⁹ The French civilians' grasp and understanding of English, however, was not just restricted to simple statements but also to the use of British idioms, with Lieutenant Tennyson witnessing French civilians singing 'Tipperary' on his arrival in France.¹⁰

⁶Edward Spears, *Liaison 1914* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 69.

⁷Lieutenant Lionel Hallam Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', 1915 1914, 8 October 1914, IWM: DOCS - 76/21/1, Imperial War Museum.

⁸Spears, *Liaison 1914*, p. 69.

⁹Captain Walter Fyrth, 'Manuscript Diary', 1914, 19 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 97/4/1, Imperial War Museum; '8 Brigade Royal Field Artillery—War Diary', n.d., 19 August 1914, WO 95/1527/4, National Archives, Kew. It is interesting to note the incorrect use of 'le' in the cheers of the British soldiers that suggests that even if they have a basic understanding of the French vocabulary they were still not yet fully acquainted with the gendered nature of the language.

¹⁰Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', 24 August 1914. Tennyson was deployed in one of the divisions that was initially held back in Britain at the outbreak of war and was only moved to France after the Battle of Mons. Therefore his arrival and initial interactions with the French are coming several weeks after the first British arrived in Europe, but because of the clear similarities I have included them with the rest of the BEF

The BEF were receiving their assigned interpreters shortly after arrival, with Fyrth hoping that they would be able to teach the British ‘what to ask for in “pukka” French’, but such language training was going to take time. By contrast, some of the French civilians Fyrth was encountering had native levels of English, having worked in service jobs in England before the war, therefore leaving the British soldiers at a distinct disadvantage.¹¹ Furthermore, there were ongoing debates over what the exact role of interpreters and liaison officers was intended to be; were they, in the words of Heimburger, to be ‘fixers or fighters’?¹² In the absence of trained linguists and interpreters, some British soldiers received instruction from French civilians, including Boy Scouts and schoolgirls.¹³ Whilst Brigadier General A. F. U. Green would, not entirely unreasonably, bemoan the fact that he rarely encountered any French officers who could speak English, the fact this was an issue at all indicates, as Cowman argues, that there were similarly few British officers who could bridge the gap by conversing in French.¹⁴ A variety of French-language dictionaries and vocabulary guides would be published in Britain during the war and distributed to the British soldiers, but their success was likely limited.¹⁵ Whilst language difficulties between soldiers would persist throughout the conflict, it was the war itself which many

accounts. The use of ‘are we down hearted?’ as an appreciative chant by French civilians was not simply localised to Le Havre but there is no indication of where the French might have first heard (and come to understand) the phrase.

¹¹Fyrth, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 20 August 1914.

¹²Franziska Heimburger, ‘Fighting Together: Language Issues in the Military Coordination of First World War Allied Coalition Warfare’, in *Languages and the Military: Alliances, Occupation and Peace Building*, ed. Hilary Footitt and Michael Kelly, Palgrave Studies in Languages at War (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 50–3. For an indepth examination of the role of these interpreters and liaison officers during the war see Heimburger’s fascinating thesis: Franziska Heimburger, ‘Mésentente cordiale? Langues et coalition alliée sur le front de l’ouest de la Grande Guerre’ (EHESS, 2014).

¹³Krista Cowman, “‘The ... ‘Parlez’ Is Not Going on Very Well ‘Avec Moi’”, in *Languages and the First World War: Communicating in a Transnational War*, ed. Christophe Declercq and Julian Walker, Palgrave Studies in Languages at War (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 25.

¹⁴Cowman, p. 28.

¹⁵Cowman, pp. 30–6.

believed gave the British and French soldiers a shared method of communicating even without an understanding of each other's languages.¹⁶

The deployment of the BEF to France was conducted in secret under tight censorship imposed on the press by the War Office. Whilst aspects of the BEF had been arriving in France since 7 August, it was not until 18 August that the presence of British soldiers on mainland Europe became public knowledge.¹⁷ Much of the initial British activity took place under cover of darkness. As a result, soldiers leaving Britain were met with differing reactions from civilians. Gunner Joseph Butterworth recalled wives and children hugging and kissing departing men, and Lieutenant Helm wrote that there were cheering crowds lining Grafton Street, Dublin on 14 August when the 2nd Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI) paraded through the town to the docks.¹⁸ However, the following day, Cummings wrote that nobody was present in Aldershot to cheer the Royal Horse Artillery off.¹⁹

Whilst the departure of troops from England could be managed and disguised, there was no plausible way for their arrival in France to be kept from the civilians living in the coastal towns such as Le Havre. The reaction from these French civilians was universally positive, with numerous arriving British soldiers commenting on the cheering crowds, the warm reception afforded them, the singing of national anthems, and children and women hunting for souvenirs of buttons from the men.²⁰ The act of meeting their first British soldier was also a source

¹⁶This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

¹⁷Martin J. Farrar, *News from the Front* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), p. 6.

¹⁸J. Butterworth, 'Manuscript Diary', 1914, 15 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 04/37/1, Imperial War Museum. Colonel Cyril Helm DSO OBE MC, 'Typescript Diary', 1915 1914, 14 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 99/13/1, Imperial War Museum; '2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary', n.d., 14 August 1914, WO 95/1558/1, National Archives, Kew. Lieutenant Helm was a Medical Officer attached to the battalion.

¹⁹NCO E. J. Cummings, 'Manuscript Diary', 1914, 15 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 04/4/1, Imperial War Museum. 'J' Battery Royal Horse Artillery—War Diary', n.d., 15 August 1914, WO 95/1135/2, National Archives, Kew.

²⁰See particularly; Bellew, 'Manuscript Diary', 5 August 1914, Bellew was amongst the first British soldiers to arrive. Loyd, 'Typescript Diary', 13 August 1914–15 August 1914. 2nd Lieutenant Douglas J. McDougall MC, 'Typescript Diary', 1914, 14 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 79/51/1, Imperial War Museum. Butterworth, 'Manuscript Diary', 16 August 1914. And, Saville W. Crowsley, 'Manuscript Diary', 1914, 18 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 02/6/1, Imperial War Museum.

of excitement for the French. Fernand Laurent, a French interpreter assigned to the British, described how he and some fellows made a thorough examination of their first British soldier and then attempted to get him drunk.²¹

Whilst the arrival of the BEF in France was largely a triumph, there were early signs of a growing disconnection between the British soldiers and the world they understood back home. The day after his arrival in France, Lieutenant Geoffrey Loyd, 1 Battalion Scots Guards, would comment on an emerging difficulty in acquiring up-to-date newspapers and how, as a result, British soldiers had no idea of events beyond their own location.²² Kitchener had placed stringent restrictions upon the press regarding what they could print about the situation in France.²³ Kitchener's focus with these press controls was clearly the home front but the upshot was to restrict accurate news reaching the men in France. This was the final of the three situational developments that made the initial arrival of the British soldiers difficult: the loss of a man like Grierson highlighted and exacerbated the difficulty British soldiers were having with the language and, finally, these men became increasingly disconnected from the events back home and in the wider war.

By themselves these incidents would not necessarily have caused a huge issue for relations between British and French soldiers. They were obstacles that could be overcome given the right amount of time and contact between the two groups. However, this time and contact would be denied as the progress of the war took a significant turn for the worse, and a disaster began to unfold along the allied line.

MONS, LE CATEAU, AND THE MARNE

The BEF made initial contact with the German army on 22 August and further word was spread from General de Mas-Latrie commanding the French XVIII Corps that German infantry was in position north of the Sambre canal.²⁴ In response, the BEF began to form up around

²¹Fernand Laurent, *Chez Nos Allies Britanniques* (Paris: Boivin and Ce Editeurs, 1917), p. 20.

²²Loyd, 'Typescript Diary', 14 August 1914.

²³For more information about these reporting restrictions see: Farrar, *News from the Front*.

²⁴Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914*, pp. 62–4.

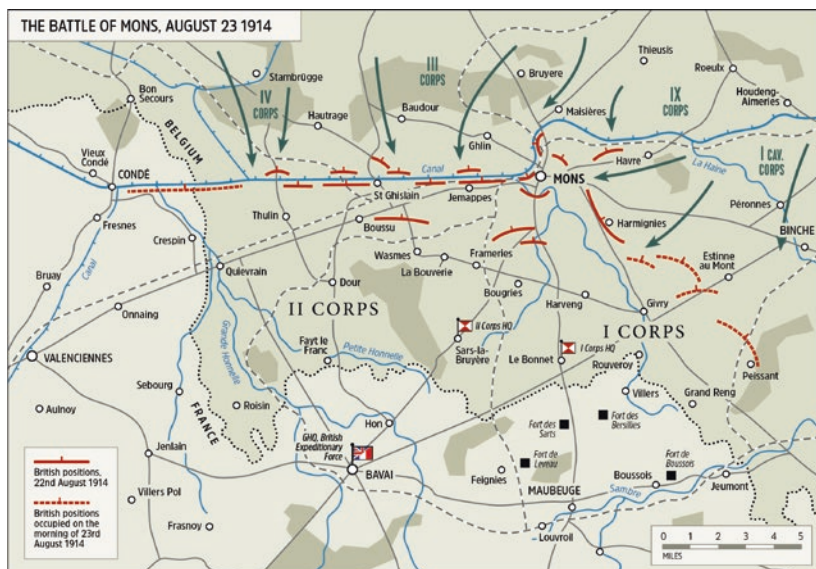


Fig. 1 Battle of Mons (1914)

the town of Mons. The town itself formed the pivot in the line, with II Corps maintaining a line along the canal to the west of the town. The unattached 19th Infantry Brigade was to their left and the French 84e Division d'infanterie territoriale (DIT) lay beyond them. To the east of Mons, I Corps held a line descending to the south-east where the gap between the right flank of the BEF and the left flank of the French V Army was screened by the cavalry force of General Sordet (see Fig. 1).

Having arrived at Mons on 21 August, British commanders soon began to hear reports of multiple German Corps in the vicinity. Aerial reconnaissance also confirmed that multiple German divisions were now marching directly towards II Corps.²⁵ On 23 August, the first of these German divisions then effectively stumbled onto British positions and the battle began. Whilst initially the British were able to utilise

²⁵These German divisions were unaware that the BEF was actually ahead of them.

their defensive arrangements to maximise their fire onto tightly organised German infantry who had not realised the danger they were in, the situation rapidly began to turn in the attackers' favour. German artillery advancing behind their infantry had far better conditions to target British lines than the British guns, which had an obscured view and lacked reliable observation. When Marshal French came to realise the gravity of the situation and began to understand exactly why General Lanzerac's V Army had actually been retreating away from his own flank, he gave the order for the BEF to also begin a widespread withdrawal from the area.²⁶

The build-up to, duration of, and retreat from the Battle of Mons was characterised by confusion, misidentification, and eventual recrimination amongst the British and French high commands.²⁷ The initial news from Lieutenant Spears that General Lanzerac's V Army had been hit by a substantial German force and was not going to close up alongside the BEF was a particular source of concern for Marshal French until he later understood the reality of that situation.²⁸ Even afterwards, it led to an apparently furious confrontation between the two men.²⁹ Whilst the confusion stemming from these battles can be most clearly seen in effect on the British military command, elements of it can also be found in the experiences of the soldiers. On 22 August, the 13th Brigade, part of the 5th Division, was apparently put into danger by faulty French intelligence regarding the number of German Corps approaching them.³⁰ Two days later, reflecting on this, Lieutenant Helm's growing distrust of the French army became more apparent:

²⁶Ian F. W. Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 213–6.

²⁷Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Western Front* (London: Pan Books, 2001), pp. 10–13. The British performance at the Battle of Mons has also been critiqued in Terence Zuber, *The Mons Myth: A Reassessment of the Battle* (Stroud: History, 2010).

²⁸Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, p. 213.

²⁹Bruno Cabanes, *August 1914: France, the Great War, and a Month That Changed the World Forever*, trans. Stephanie Elizabeth O'Hara (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 121.

³⁰Helm DSO OBE MC, 'Typescript Diary', 22 August 1914.

Towards the end of the day a lot of French cuirassiers passed and we thought that we were now all right as they were probably the advance guard of a large body coming to our relief. We were to be bitterly disappointed, however, as next morning there was not a Frenchman in sight or within miles. (It came out afterwards that a French General had been ordered to bring his men to our relief, but instead of coming towards us he had gone off in the opposite direction. It turned out that his wife was a German and that he was in their pay. He was given 24 hours in which to shoot himself, which he did.)³¹

Two French generals, Raffanel and Rondoney, were killed during August 1914, both on 22 August, both dying in action further to the south at Rossignol in the Battle of the Frontiers.³² There is no evidence to suggest either of these men died in any circumstances other than battle. The events and circumstances of this errant French general whom Helm describes may have been an unsubstantiated rumour which gathered steam amongst British soldiers. However, for Helm, the story of a French betrayal followed by a secret suicide clearly had some verisimilitude. The dissemination of rumour as fact was an ongoing trend during the First World War, and can also be attributed to the lack of information about the war available through newspapers. Furthermore, the rationalisation by British soldiers of a military error or mistake as an attempted betrayal would continue throughout the remainder of 1914 and the early months of 1915.

Both Helm's description of the non-appearance of French relief sources, and his report of erroneous intelligence from French army sources regarding the nature and composition of the enemies ahead of his battalion, become further complicated by the fact that neither of these episodes is corroborated within the war diary for the battalion. The initial handwritten entry for 22 August reports that the battalion received an enthusiastic reception from French civilians along their marching route before taking up a position on the canal between Herbieres and Mariette.³³ The expanded typewritten note for 23 August does go into detail about an attempt by the German army opposite

³¹ Helm DSO OBE MC, 24 August 1914.

³² Anthony Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918* (London: Cassell Military, 2003), pp. 15–16; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 41.

³³ '2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary', 22 August 1914. This entry in the Battalion diary is smudged and damaged.

to force a crossing of the canal, which proved to be unsuccessful.³⁴ Additionally, the entry for 24 August makes no mention of any French relief forces and reports that the battalion was deployed in the vicinity of Wasmes in Belgium before A and B companies took a position in the firing line. Later in the day, the whole battalion was withdrawn to Bavay, just inside the French border, before being redeployed the following day to beyond Le Cateau.³⁵ This therefore raises several questions as to either the validity of Lieutenant Helm's testimony from these days or the sources of his information. War diaries by their nature were prone to revision and editing as further details appeared and, during moments of combat, would not be kept constantly updated. As a result, this episode from Helm highlights the difficulty for historians in trying to corroborate the experiences of individuals with evidence from other sources that do not appear as detailed.

The likeliest explanation for the difference between Helm's account and the 'official' one for his battalion is, once again, the existence of ongoing rumour. The phrasing that Lieutenant Helm uses in his own records often suggests a distance between the events in question and himself; as if they had passed into a collective memory rather than been witnessed first-hand. If this is the case, then the details may never have been recorded in the official diary regardless of whether or not they were actually true.

The issue is complicated still further by a wider examination of likely French forces in the area during the deployment of the Helm and his fellows. Given the placement and positioning of the KOYLI for these days, it is difficult to ascertain who these French cavalry may have been. The KOYLI were part of the 13th Infantry Brigade, within 5th Division and II Corps. When holding position along the canal to the left of Mons, they were sandwiched between the unattached 19th Infantry Brigade to the left, and Mons to the right, with I Corps holding a line to the south-east. On initial appearances, the nearest French forces within the vicinity were the 84e DIT holding a position beyond Conde on the left of the

³⁴ '2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary', 23 August 1914—Typed Record. The KOYLI initially covered the movement of other British forces towards Wasme on 23 August before entering the town themselves; Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914*, pp. 90–101.

³⁵ '2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary', 24 August 1914–25 August 1914.

19th Infantry Brigade. The only cavalry within this division were the 14e Régiment de hussards (RH), and it is unlikely that Helm would mistake them for cuirassiers given that he had identified them as such. However, on the right flank of the BEF was the I Corps de cavalerie (CC), under the command of General André Sordet. The 2e Brigade de cuirassier (BC) was composed of the 1er and 2e Régiment de cuirassier (RC), who both provided an ongoing cavalry screen as the British retreated from positions at Haucourt, Coudy, Beaumont, and Le Cateau.³⁶ These are almost certainly the French troops whom Helm reports meeting on 24 August. Such was the necessity of the work undertaken by these French troops that, in December 1916, General Smith Dorrien, who had been commanding the British II Corps in 1914, wrote to General Sordet to express his gratitude for the ongoing presence of French cavalry and to express his regret at having never been able to thank him in person.³⁷

Furthermore, the actual assistance of Sordet's cavalry corps, when linking with the 84e DIT and other forces under the command of General D'Amade on the left flank of the BEF³⁸ has been the subject of some controversy, with Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas D'Oyly Snow criticising Sordet for an apparent lack of support and further suggesting that Sir John French had chastised him because of it. This may have been an exaggeration in itself, and French eventually praised Sordet in his own memoirs, though this was at the expense of Smith Dorrien himself. However, Sordet would shortly find himself removed from command by General Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief for the French army in 1914, for withdrawing his forces from the attack on the Marne on 7 September because of exhaustion. Sordet, along with many other French generals at the time, was redeployed to the garrison town of Limoges.³⁹ It is possible that the removal of Sordet from command may be the origin for the story that later morphed, after re-telling by British soldiers, into a French general committing suicide. Regardless of the actual veracity of the episodes referenced by Lieutenant Helm, the lasting impact of them is the

³⁶'Historique Du 1er Régiment de Cuirassiers', n.d., p. 6, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k63314933>, SHD (Service historique de la défense).

³⁷'Historique Du 2e Régiment de Cuirassiers', n.d., pp. 10–11, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6399807v>, SHD (Service historique de la défense).

³⁸Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1914*, p. 117.

³⁹So many officers ended up being redeployed to this town that 'Limoges' became a byword for military retirement. Cabanes, *August 1914*, p. 117.

way they came to inform his subsequent interactions with the French military. A few days after reporting the suicide of the French general, Helm's battalion was informed that two French corps were approaching to relieve them, so called a halt for the night. When this relief did not arrive, Helm's mood and suspicions towards the French darkened further.⁴⁰ The overall situation was not aided by the heavy casualties the British were beginning to sustain.

Following the action at Mons, the BEF began a withdrawal towards Paris in line with the French army which was also being forced back by the advancing Germans, with the First Army under General von Kluck in particular pressing the attack on the British II Corps. An eight-mile gap in the line rapidly appeared between II Corps's right flank and the left flank of Haig's I Corps to the east. Despite an order from Marshal French on the evening of 25 August to continue the withdrawal, Smith Dorrien decided that not only were his soldiers too exhausted to keep up a retreat, but their deteriorating morale was such that it had become necessary to stand and fight. The location he picked was at the small town of Le Cateau, and the order was given to prepare defensive positions and await the arrival of the German army. II Corps was to find itself relatively fortunate that, when the Germans arrived the following day, only three divisions were available in the area to attack the British positions, with the rest of the German First Army, including von Kluck himself, unable to arrive in time to assist in the attack. II Corps fought a delaying action all day before recommencing the retreat towards Saint-Quentin with assistance again from General Sordet's cavalry.

The decision to stand and fight at Le Cateau poisoned relations between Marshal French and Smith-Dorrien but did significantly delay the German advance on Paris. However, it was not without a high cost. Of the 40,000 British soldiers who fought throughout the day at Le Cateau, 7812 had become casualties. These were casualties which could not be easily sustained or replaced, and II Corps was essentially rendered incapable of further fighting for several days. Helm's battalion had been devastated during the battle, with 18 officers and 700 men killed, wounded, or missing on 26 August, leaving 7 officers and about 150 men.⁴¹

⁴⁰Helm DSO OBE MC, 'Typescript Diary', 26 August 1914.

⁴¹Helm DSO OBE MC, 25 August 1914. Helm's account appears to be dated 25 August 1914 but it is likely this is an error. Helm's testimony is further supported by the battalion war diary which records 18 officers being either killed, seriously wounded,

Events surrounding the BEF had become chaotic. On 26 August, Major Brereton of the 14 Brigade Royal Field Artillery (RFA) wrote that he and his men were informed that 35,000 French soldiers were about to take up a position to their left, only for them never to appear and instead news spread of a General Retreat.⁴² Similarly to Helm's entries above, this episode does not appear in the battalion war diary, with the entry for 26 August reporting that all three batteries came into action after finding infantry engaged at Haucourt. This fighting continued for much of the rest of the day until clearing at 6 p.m., and the battalion continued to retire from 7 p.m. towards Vendhuile.⁴³ Whilst this was taking place, further along the line at Berlamont, the French army detonated a bridge to prevent the German army seizing it and crossing, but failed to give sufficient warning to a company of British soldiers from the 5 Infantry Brigade, 2 Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, accidentally wounding two of them. These wounded men were later captured by the Germans in a field hospital.⁴⁴ The day after this accident, French forces began repeatedly retiring through British positions, leaving the BEF exposed and, as a result, forcing them to retire also.⁴⁵

Whilst there were certainly examples of confusion amongst the British ranks during the earliest days of the war, their allies and enemies did not seem to fare much better. Henri Desagneaux wrote on 2 September that he 'spent the night waiting for orders that fail to come' and encountered German prisoners who did not know that England, Russia, and

or captured. This particular entry was edited several times with updated information. '2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary', Appendix II.

⁴²Major C. L. Brereton, 'Typescript Diary', 1914, 26 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 86/30/1, Imperial War Museum.

⁴³'14 Brigade Royal Field Artillery—War Diary', n.d., 26 August 1914, WO 95/1466/4, National Archives, Kew.

⁴⁴Lieutenant Albert V. Spencer DSO, 'Manuscript Diary', 1914, 26 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - 87/26/1, Imperial War Museum; '5 Infantry Brigade: 2 Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry—War Diary', n.d., 26 August 1914, WO 95/1348/1, National Archives, Kew.

⁴⁵Spencer DSO, 'Manuscript Diary', 27 August 1914; '5 Infantry Brigade: 2 Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry—War Diary', 27 August 1914; Helm, 26 August 1914.

Japan were at war with them.⁴⁶ Charles-Henri Poizot commented how rumours had circulated from August 1914 onwards of an imminent Portuguese intervention into the war, but that ‘England refused the proposals of a country that seemed low because of its economic problems’ and preferred to utilise their own strategic colonies.⁴⁷

Following the retreat from Mons, the BEF and the French desperately tried to maintain an orderly withdrawal and remain in touch with each other. The notion that the French were not fully supporting or protecting the British, which Helm and others had already begun to express, became more prevalent. On 27 August, Sapper Bellew, working with a signal company in the Royal Engineers, made the comment that the British were losing ten men to every one French, and that their ally did not appear interested in helping.⁴⁸ It is incidents such as this that highlight the divergence between the micro view of individual British soldiers and the wider macro view of the emerging strategic situation on the Western Front. Bellew clearly did not know the losses the French were taking in the early battles of the war, and considering the ongoing paucity of reliable information this is not surprising.⁴⁹ From his position, he was simply aware of the British casualties and knew that the French army was many times larger than the BEF and, logically, it should therefore be doing more to protect the British.⁵⁰ However, the situation, and indeed the issue of allied cooperation, was far more complicated than Bellew and his comrades believed.

⁴⁶Henri Désagneaux, Jean Desagneaux, and Godfrey J. Adams, *A French Soldier's War Diary, 1914–1918* (Morley: Elmfield Press, 1975), p. 8.

⁴⁷Charles-Henri Poizot and Dominique Bussillet, *Histoire d'un poilu: carnets de Charles-Henri Poizot, du 67e R.I* (Parçay-sur-Vienne: Anovi, 2003), p. 16. Portugal would eventually become involved in the war on the side of the Entente allies and their relations with British soldiers will be discussed below during the events of 1918.

⁴⁸Bellew, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 27 August 1914.

⁴⁹By the end of August, some 75,000 French soldiers had died already (27,000 of them on 22 August alone) and their total killed and wounded numbered 260,000. D. Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 54. Cabanes puts the total number of killed or missing in the French army for August and September at 235,000. Cabanes, *August 1914*, p. 110.

⁵⁰Anon Soldier #10539 had also noted the size of the French army and reported seeing French infantry spread out across eight miles of countryside, on the same day as Bellew made his entry. Anon Soldier 10539, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 1915 1914, 27 August 1914, IWM: DOCS - Misc 33 (597), Imperial War Museum.

Whilst the allied armies continued to pull back, Marshal French was facing a difficult decision with regard to how best to fulfil his own orders. If the French did not appear to be forthcoming in maintaining coherent contact with the BEF, it is equally true that the British were none too clear on their intentions either. The orders Kitchener had given to French as the BEF was deployed raised several operational concerns at the outset, with the British general charged with halting the German invasion whilst also, wherever possible, avoiding undue losses to the BEF itself.⁵¹ Given the sizes of the armies arrayed around the invasion path, how the British commander was to achieve this was open to some question. Additionally, the BEF was given the dual responsibilities of assisting their French allies whilst, at the same time, remaining entirely independent. That these orders from Kitchener were never shared with any representatives of the French military or government suggests that the battle between maintaining national interests and secrecy, and full cooperation with their allies, was slanted fairly heavily in one direction.⁵²

In addition to this, as the situation began to deteriorate along the defensive lines, so too did Sir John French. With the retreat underway, the loss of trust in the French commanders on his flanks had caused the British commander to enter a period of apparent depression and mental breakdown.⁵³ French now hesitated over how best to fulfil his orders and whether or not it was now necessary to withdraw the British Expeditionary Force back towards the Channel ports and potentially prepare for an evacuation. It was only when Kitchener himself arrived in France on 1 September and gave General French the explicit order to withdraw in line with the French army in a bid to maintain defensive cohesion that the operational limbo was broken.⁵⁴ Against this backdrop of confusion and, in some cases, mounting panic, it becomes easier to detect the breakdown of relations between the soldiers making up the British and French armies. These criticisms were not always apparently

⁵¹ Kitchener, 'Instructions for the General Officer Commanding the Expeditionary Force Proceeding to France'.

⁵² Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 17–19; William Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914–18* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 22–7.

⁵³ Spears, *Liaison 1914*, pp. 175–6.

⁵⁴ Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, p. 19.

military in character, but do become more so when placed in their proper context. On 26 August, Lieutenant Lionel Tennyson and his fellows in the 1 Battalion of the Rifle Brigade witnessed:

a company of Frenchmen marching off as we were told to the front, all very drunk, decorated from head to foot with flowers as well as their rifles and their wives and sweethearts hanging on to their arms. Fine fighters they looked, all I hope is we are not near this lot.⁵⁵

The implication was that the French's lax attitude towards their presentation and their duty lessened their ability to fight effectively, a suggestion which gained weight in Tennyson's mind when he arrived at French barracks on 31 August, to a rousing reception from French soldiers, but later found his bed, in the room of a French NCO, infested by lice and fleas which had 'devoured' him.⁵⁶ The difference in presentation between the British and French is perhaps best highlighted by national interpretations of facial hair. Sapper Bellew and Lieutenant Tennyson, in particular, serve as good representatives for the 'British' view that being clean-shaven and smart in appearance is an important aspect of being a soldier. On 25 August, Bellew wrote that 'it would make you weep to see our wounded, with about a fortnight's beard on them and clothes torn to pieces and no kits', whilst on 27 August he noted that he 'saw a brigade of R.H.A. pass here yesterday all with beards, you would not

⁵⁵Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', 26 August 1914. There is, of course, an alternative reading to this statement where Tennyson's final sentence is not meant to be sarcastic, but instead acclaiming the fearsome appearance of the French soldiers. I, however, do not believe this reading to be accurate. Tennyson was, as we shall see, a consistently vocal critic of the French army and I do not feel it likely that the French soldiers he saw would have stirred a positive response in him.

⁵⁶Tennyson, 31 August 1914. Additionally, it should be remembered that the French uniform itself might have given weight to Tennyson's supposition. Arthur quotes the French Private Frank Dolbau: 'We were shot down like rabbits because you know for them we were a real target, as we had red trousers on. When we were fired at we were like sitting ducks in the field'. Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (London: Ebury, 2002), pp. 25–6. The French began the war clad in outdated nineteenth-century uniforms that, whilst looking heroic, made them easy targets for German soldiers. It was not until the end of 1914 that the French adopted the new *bleu horizon* uniforms that they would wear for the remainder of the war, Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918*, pp. 27 and 73.

know them'.⁵⁷ On 3 September he would also joke that 'you would laugh to see our troops with beards, the officers as well.'⁵⁸

By contrast Tennyson, writing near to a company of Zouaves on 17 September, criticised the French soldiers and in particular the captain and lieutenant who 'had beards and were very unsmart to look at, as all the French troops are'.⁵⁹ What Tennyson and Bellew viewed as being 'unsmart' and, as an implied consequence, unfit for duty, the French soldiers were particularly proud of.⁶⁰ War was, after all, a dirty business and the defence of *la patrie* could not be successfully undertaken without the defenders themselves becoming immersed in both the soil and a particular image of French masculinity.⁶¹ This divergence of ideology between the British and the French would eventually lead to pointed French criticism of their allies two years later on the Somme.

Tennyson's principal complaints against the French in August and September, which seem to focus on the appearance and activities of the French army, can also be viewed as a criticism of the apparent lack of sophistication of the French. By not appearing dressed or shaved in the manner of the British army, they also failed to resemble a British gentleman.⁶² The inbuilt social hierarchy of the British army did not evolve well to deal with the introduction of French soldiers who did not appear to fit within any acknowledged class sphere. There appeared to be a particular issue regarding French interpreters, who were 'at

⁵⁷ Bellew, 'Manuscript Diary', 25 August 1914 and 27 August 1914.

⁵⁸ Bellew, 3 September 1914.

⁵⁹ Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', 19 September 1914.

⁶⁰ '[T]hey became known as the *poilus*, or "hairy ones." With unruly hair and beards or mustaches [sic] grown at the front, soldiers and civilians alike embraced a term that connected the defenders of the country to Samson from the Bible, who likewise drew his strength from his hair. The *poilus* created their own world, with its own rules and strategies of survival, separate from yet intimately connected to both the generals' war and the war of the civilians in the interior.' Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 76.

⁶¹ Kempshall, Chris, 'Le Poilu', ed. Ute Daniel et al., *1914–1918 Online—International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10871>.

⁶² The British Officer Corps and their uniforms were often specifically tailored to ensure the man cut a smart and imposing figure. Middle-class officers were also, on average, five inches taller than working-class recruits Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 32; Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 163.

best non-commissioned officers', being refused entry to some British Officers' Messes' as a result of a 'perceived discrepancy between the interpreter's actual rank in the French army and the rank he might have held in the British army, due to his social standing'.⁶³

The account of Paul Maze, a Frenchman who joined up to serve as a liaison officer and interpreter for the British in the earliest days of the conflict, bears out the difficulties faced by those Frenchmen attached to the British Army.⁶⁴ Maze began the war by joining up with the BEF at Le Havre, before eventually being sent to the French Army headquarters to be registered and then returned to serve amongst the British. In this role he filled a variety of roles such as interpreter and translator, messenger and runner, general fixer, intelligence gatherer, and artist for enemy positions. The unstructured and fluid nature of his role would cause confusion for British soldiers throughout the war, with one British sentry being chastised by a superior for saluting Maze who was 'only a private', only for the sentry to retort: 'I salute whom I bloody well please'.⁶⁵

In addition to this, as will be examined in greater depth below, the British, unlike their French counterparts, showed either a profound lack of understanding of French politics and Republicanism or a profound lack of interest in it. The difference between a subject-soldier and a citizen-soldier almost universally passed them by, and they did not show any great curiosity into the inner workings of the French political system or the demographic make-up of the political scene in France beyond the faint suspicion that the French were somehow more demanding than the British as a result of their Republican nature. Despite this lack of insight into the inner workings of the French Republic, Laurent, by now well embedded amongst the British soldiers, was rather more impressed by their military strengths and organisation during the retreat.⁶⁶ Laurent would also use his memoir to provide both a study of the British and also to muse over particular aspects of British social and military character. He was particularly interested in the role that both the army and the

⁶³Franziska Heimburger, 'Mapping Allied Space in the Franco-British Coalition on the Western Front—The Officers' Mess' (Other Fronts, Other Wars?, Innsbruck, 2011).

⁶⁴Paul Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki* (Eastbourne: Naval and Military Press, 2004). His service and reputation in his task were so esteemed that his published memoir features an introduction by Winston Churchill espousing his virtues.

⁶⁵Maze, p. 236.

⁶⁶Laurent, *Chez Nos Allies Britanniques*, pp. 29–30.

upper-class officers played in forming contemporary Britain, and his conclusions highlight the very different foundations of British and French military-civil societies. He noted that the British army, which was viewed as little more than an ‘accessory cog’ and second to the Royal Navy in British military thinking, was a product of two schools; Sandhurst, for the infantry and cavalry; and Woolwich, for the artillery and the engineering. From these schools came a string of ‘gentlemen-cadets’ drawn from the aristocracy.⁶⁷ Laurent also showed a remarkably accurate eye for differences between the British and the French, and would note how the British army seemed entirely focused on enforcing similarity of appearance and outlook even to the extent that British officers through their clothing and facial hair began to look identical when French officers were far more individual.⁶⁸ The discussion over the differences in facial hair is particularly relevant and interesting considering the mixed reaction the heavy beards and moustaches of the French *Poilus* elicited from the British soldiers. Laurent would go so far as to say that the British were almost unnaturally preoccupied with maintaining their appearance:

Our brave Allies, as everyone knows, have two main concerns: making their tea and shaving. No danger can distract them from these two preoccupations.⁶⁹

The changing nature of the overall strategic situation was also reflected by a change in the relationships between British soldiers and French civilians. Where, previously, the British had been greeted as liberating warriors, once the retreat began and the French population had to flee before the German advance, all signs of hope were, like their possessions, abandoned. Bellew wrote repeatedly that it was ‘pitiful to see the refugees’, and that he would not be at all surprised if the Germans took Paris.⁷⁰ Sergeant Saville Crowsley was serving with the 3 Brigade, RHA and, unlike many in the BEF, seemed to be getting accurate reports during the retreat. He knew that the French government had evacuated Paris

⁶⁷Laurent, p. 51.

⁶⁸Laurent, pp. 55–6.

⁶⁹Laurent, p. 45. This observation by Laurent, drawn from a wider statement on the British, was picked up by both the *Daily Mirror* (17 September 1914, p. 3) and *The Times* (17 September 1914, p. 7).

⁷⁰Bellew, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 30 August 1914.

for Bordeaux, which in his opinion pointed towards a disaster.⁷¹ During this retreat, encounters with the French refugees were overwhelmingly characterised by the use of words such as ‘pathetic’, ‘terrible’ and ‘pitiable’. It is important to note that these terms are not used at any point in any form of gloating or malicious way: the soldiers were genuinely moved and dispirited by the state of the French civilians, and, undoubtedly, by the defeat they themselves were facing.⁷² Both Gunner Butterworth and a British soldier named Myatt came to reflect on the plight of these refugees and how disturbing they found the idea of it possibly happening in Britain.⁷³

Whilst the British soldiers were deeply moved at times by observing the plight of the French and Belgian civilians fleeing from the advancing German armies, there was always an insurmountable divide: they were not British, they were French. The British lamented the possibility of watching British civilians in a similar predicament, but there was no national connection between the soldiers and the refugees. Many French soldiers had no idea where they were withdrawing to and where the retreat would end.⁷⁴ As a result, for every town they evacuated they left behind defenceless French civilians. For men like Marc Bloch, this was almost a form of agony, and he bemoaned the fact that he was unable to protect his own countrymen.⁷⁵ The French were fighting directly for their own land and their own people, and the impact this had on their approaches to the conflict cannot be ignored. Whilst both sides would have been focused on winning the war, ‘victory’ itself had different appearances to the two nations, and achieving it meant very different things. There was, realistically, no plausible way that the British could

⁷¹Crowsley, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 31 August 1914.

⁷²This is particularly relevant in relation to the (now fairly antiquated) meaning of the word ‘terrible’. Whilst in its modern form it refers to the sadness of an event, it can also be used to describe how something invokes terror. In this case, it is reasonable to suggest that the word choice is used to describe how the appearance of the refugees is not only sad to behold but also inspires emotions of fear in the British soldiers.

⁷³Butterworth, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 26 August 1914. B. C.; Myatt, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 1914, 17 October 1914, IWM: DOCS - 97/4/1, Imperial War Museum.

⁷⁴Maurice Genevoix and H. Graham Richards, *Neath Verdun: The Experiences of a French Soldier During the Early Months of the First World War / Maurice Genevoix; Translated by H. Graham Richards*, 2010, p. 36.

⁷⁵Marc Léopold Benjamin Bloch, *Memoirs of War, 1914–1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 84.

replicate an environment where they were faced with the destruction of their own country, nor could they imagine the plight of their own people on a comparable level to that which the French faced. This divergent approach to the war can account for a large part of the differing experiences of the two sides. The French were fighting a war to save themselves and through this to save civilisation itself.⁷⁶ If the British were not yet viewing the war in a similar manner it should not be surprising, but it would dramatically change the eventual relationships between the two nations.

The effect that the defeat at Mons and the losses at Le Cateau had on the psyche of the British soldiers as they fell back towards Paris is also crucial. In both cases, they had fallen into combat with the advancing Germans and, despite acquitting themselves well, had incurred heavy casualties and been forced onto the retreat. The British had been forced to face up to the realisation that they were not part of an all-powerful army and were, in reality, grossly outnumbered by their enemies and their allies. All of their interactions around this time with the French should be considered with this situation in mind. The French refugees were, in many cases, the same people who had been cheering the passage of British soldiers only days earlier and who now were forced to flee because of the apparent failure of those whom they thought would protect them. The French soldiers whom Tennyson so disapproved of greatly outnumbered the British army and they all seemed to be fairing equally badly. In such circumstances, how exactly was Tennyson to maintain his belief in the superiority of the British martial approach? These stresses would eventually manifest themselves in him taking an angry swipe at French civilians who cheered passing British soldiers but, to his mind, should have been fighting themselves.⁷⁷

The ability to move beyond, or at least balance, the immediate situation with the wider strategic one often depended on a mix of personality and position. Lieutenant Loyd commanded No. 1 Platoon in the Cyclist Company, and apparently spent a great deal of time alternating between the front lines and the Divisional Headquarters. As a result, he was able to provide both a personal and strategic view of the war around him.

⁷⁶See: Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918*, p. 58; Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 14–18, *Understanding the Great War*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 116.

⁷⁷Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', 29 August 1914.

He was clearly aware of the strain the BEF had been under and the need for it to regroup and recover before entering into any further engagements. He also appears to have been sufficiently informed of the Germans' current movement and numbers as well as the comparative strength of the French armies around them.⁷⁸

As the British and French fell back towards Paris and the Marne, the BEF's precarious position between the French V Army to the right and the forces of General D'Amade to the left continued.⁷⁹ Neither the BEF nor its French allies were able to maintain a coordinated retreat as each group began to fall back at a differing pace to those alongside, something which only intensified the ill-feelings and recriminations between allied generals.⁸⁰ With Marshal French's mental state collapsing as he sunk into an effective nervous breakdown, only the direct intervention of Lord Kitchener had forced him to maintain the BEF's place in the allied line and continue the retreat in the direction of Paris.⁸¹ In response to the German advance, the French government withdrew from the capital whilst General Joffre created a new VI Army under General Maunoury.⁸² As the German First Army began to swing south-east, away from Paris, in an attempt to outflank the allied forces at the Marne, they in turn separated the *Groupe D'Amade* from the BEF but also opened up a gap for the newly formed French VI Army to enter. Meanwhile,

⁷⁸Loyd, 'Typescript Diary', 3 September 1914–04 September 1914. Most interestingly, there is no overt editorialising in Loyd's diary. His diary is a simple summation of events with no evidence of blame being attributed when things went wrong. Importantly, in the context of this study, Loyd recorded almost every encounter or story of the French, such that the use of his diary allows us to follow some of the French military activity and manoeuvres that have little bearing on or relation to the British. During this specific period, from Loyd's diary we learn his Battalion was ordered to reinforce outposts at short notice if required, before crossing the River Marne at Germigny and reaching Coulommiers in the early hours of the following day. '1 Battalion Scots Guards', n.d., 3 September 1914–04 September 1914, WO 95/1263/2, National Archives, Kew.

⁷⁹This French contingent is often referred to as *Groupe D'Amade* and was composed of three DIT largely comprising men past their military prime.

⁸⁰Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, p. 44.

⁸¹For a fuller explanation of French's precarious mental state at this time and the meeting between French and Kitchener, see Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914–18*, Chapter 2; Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, Chapter 2. Philpott (1996) Chapter 2, and Greenhalgh (2008) Chapter 2.

⁸²Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, pp. 44–5; Jean-Yves Le Naour, 1914: *La Grande Illusion* (Paris: Perrin, 2012), pp. 249–50.

by 6 September, the German First Army had advanced 140 km beyond their own railhead. As a result, this force required an ongoing level of supplies, ammunition, and materiel that could not be gathered from territory which had already seen heavy fighting and been picked clean by the withdrawing British and French armies.⁸³

With guarantees that his right and left flanks would be secured by the French V and VI Armies respectively, French agreed that the BEF would be able to join the Sixth Army in launching an attack against the exposed flank of the German First Army. With the gathered French V, IX, IV, and III Armies holding position from the BEF down to Verdun, the British force alongside the VI Army was able to press against the Germans' flank. During the fighting at the Marne, French soldiers found themselves in 'trenches' that were only deep enough to provide shelter if they kneeled down.⁸⁴ To provide additional reinforcements, General Gallieni arranged for a further 6000 men to be delivered to the front by Parisian taxis.⁸⁵ The actual military impact of these men is debateable, with far more being brought into the area by train, but as an exercise in boosting morale and demonstrating the perceived value of the *union sacrée* it played an important role in what became known as the Miracle of the Marne.⁸⁶ This joint allied attack caused the German First and Second Armies to begin a withdrawal away from the offensive. This forced the German Third Army to reluctantly withdraw as well in order to maintain security on its own flanks.⁸⁷ With the impetus lost and casualties on both sides mounting, the Germans began a retreat of their own from Paris and, eventually, entering into a race to the sea that would see the front stabilise by the end of the year. The failure of the German aim to capture Paris had potentially cost them the war but would also lead to

⁸³Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, p. 46.

⁸⁴Genevoix and Richards, *Neath Verdun*, pp. 43–4.

⁸⁵Le Naour, 1914, pp. 300–1.

⁸⁶For in-depth examinations of the Battle see: Le Naour, Chapter 10; Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, pp. 45–9; Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (London: Belknap, 2005), pp. 76–94; Pierre Miquel, *La Bataille de La Marne* (Paris: Plon, 2003).

⁸⁷Greenhalgh, *The French Army*, pp. 48–9.

the creation of the defensive trenches and fortifications that would come to define it.⁸⁸

During the Battle of the Marne itself, British soldiers did not record much about their relations with the French soldiers or civilians. This is indicative of a trend that proved to be standard throughout the war; when both sides were engaged in fighting, soldiers did very little writing about their allies beyond the most basic references. At the conclusion of the battle, the allied forces again began to advance in pursuit of the retreating German armies and this movement would initially take them back over land they had previously occupied in August, and then move beyond into areas of France and Belgium that the Germans were hurriedly vacating. Whilst this change in the direction of the war would bring the British soldiers further east than had previously been managed, it would also open them to new fearful situations. Collective morale, initially buoyant after the Marne, began to sink. British confusion over the nature of some of the French forces arrayed alongside, and suspicions about the local civilian population, began to heavily blur the lines between allies and enemies.

SUSPICIONS, SPIES, AND SAVAGES

Following the ‘Miracle on the Marne’ the focus of the *Entente* nations switched back to the offensive and they began advancing across a wide front. Accidental meetings between the French and the British became more commonplace and the two groups began to share and spread news and rumours each time they met, as Loyd reports happening with a French Cavalry Division on 11 September.⁸⁹ However, with the Germans presenting a fighting retreat and the BEF and French armies encountering each other almost at random, mistakes and accidents were almost inevitable. Loyd described a British patrol shooting the horse of a Frenchman after mistaking him for a German soldier.⁹⁰

⁸⁸The nature of the German strategy on the Western Front in 1914 is generally described as the Schlieffen Plan, but this has been contested to a degree in Terence Zuber, *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning, 1871–1914* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁸⁹Loyd, ‘Typescript Diary’, 11 September 1914.

⁹⁰Loyd, 11 September 1914. ‘1 Battalion Scots Guards’, 11 September 1914.

With France seemingly saved from a swift and crushing defeat, both armies also began to turn their attention to rewarding and recognising the efforts of those who had participated in the battles so far. Lieutenant Loyd was awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* and a sergeant friend of Bellew was recommended for a French decoration after laying cable under heavy fire.⁹¹ Two of Tennyson's men were awarded medals on 17 October, with one receiving the *Légion d'Honneur du Chevalier* for 'bravery and coolness on the retreat' whilst Sergeant Walker was awarded the *Médaille Militaire*, after losing his leg on the Aisne.⁹² Regardless of what some of the British soldiers may have thought about France or the French army, they were seemingly happy enough for their efforts to be recognised and rewarded. As a public-relations move by the French Army, it was skilfully done as an attempt to strengthen the bonds between the soldiers of the two countries whilst also to subtly highlight France's own proud military history. In amongst these tangible rewards for their service, British soldiers were also happy to take varying levels of credit for the success of the allied forces on the Marne with both Helm and Tennyson, at different times, reporting that the BEF was being looked upon as 'the saviours of France and Paris'.⁹³

There were those amongst the French Army who were far less impressed with the newfound British confidence. Some French soldiers began to wonder, particularly after reading the writings of Bertrand Russell, about their ally's intentions and how Europe might be reorganised in the future. Paul Tuffrau reported the former's conclusion that after a period of war 'the balance would be restored between the English and the Russians, and subsequently between Western Europe and the Russians'. An outcome which would presumably leave England largely untouched and victorious, with the French simply incorporated into 'Western Europe'.⁹⁴ Furthermore, some of the relationships British

⁹¹Loyd, 'Typescript Diary', 11 September 1914; Bellew, 'Manuscript Diary', 17 September 1914.

⁹²Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', 1914.

⁹³Helm reported this on 8 September 1914, and Tennyson informed a Frenchwoman that she was 'quite right' in her belief that 'if it had not been for the English the Germans would have been in Paris' on 11 September 1914.

⁹⁴Paul Tuffrau, 1914–1918, *Quatre Années Sur Le Front: Carnets d'un Combattant* (Paris: Imago, 1998), p. 54. At the end of 1917, Eric Dillon, who was serving as a liaison to the French High Command, was writing that he expected France to downgrade in its status over the next 100 years and it was merely a question of which other European

soldiers appeared to be cultivating with the French populace where not welcomed by French soldiers. In October 1914, Etienne Tanty wrote about rumours that British soldiers had ‘consoled’ a number of the female residents of Le Havre.⁹⁵

Because the *Entente* allies were now advancing in close proximity, the British began to gain a better view of the abilities of the French army. In particular, they developed a keen appreciation for French artillery doctrine. Helm had his first encounter with the vaunted French 75 mm guns on 12 September and was surprised that the French fired constantly during the night whilst the British ceased action at dusk.⁹⁶ The next day he would again note the disparity between French and British shooting.⁹⁷

The British also began to have more substantial contact with the French colonial forces, and the results provided moments of real shock and concern. On 20 September, Bellew recalled how ‘some Moroccan mounted troops came through here the other day. One chap had a German head in his bag, others had German hands and ears as souvenirs’.⁹⁸ On 23 September, Lieutenant Loyd reported that two ‘Turcos’ had killed 12 German prisoners, with one also attempting to keep a severed head.⁹⁹ On 28 September, he made further comment on the ‘fighting lust of the French African native’, having witnessed a ‘Turco leaping onto the back of a German prisoner’ and biting his ear.¹⁰⁰ Atrocities by allied forces occupy a difficult place within this literature, as the BEF soldiers make numerous references to the crimes committed by the German invaders in both France and Belgium and point to these events as justification for armed resistance. Therefore, examples of colonial soldiers

power would absorb her. Brigadier The Viscount Dillon CMG DSO, *Memories of Three Wars* (London: Allan Wingate, 1951), pp. 100–1.

⁹⁵Etienne Tanty, Annette Becker, and Claude Tanty, *Les violettes des tranchées: lettres d'un poilu qui n'aimait pas la guerre* (Triel-sur-Seine: Editions Italiques, 2002), pp. 122–3.

⁹⁶Helm DSO OBE MC, ‘Typescript Diary’, 12 September 1914. The firing that Helm reports was probably whilst his battalion was at Serches, when there was heavy fighting from their left in the direction of Soissons. ‘2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary’, 12 September 1914.

⁹⁷Helm DSO OBE MC, ‘Typescript Diary’, 13 September 1914.

⁹⁸Bellew, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 20 September 1914.

⁹⁹Loyd, ‘Typescript Diary’, 23 September 1914. The term ‘Turcos’ describes a member of the Algerian infantry.

¹⁰⁰Loyd, 28 September 1914.

murdering prisoners and taking souvenirs must have caused some consternation within the British ranks. It also raised questions about the nature of imperial nationality. Whilst the French were, to the British, an 'other', there were degrees of 'otherness'. For all the confusion and lack of understanding about the French nature and nation they were, at least, fellow Europeans with a more directly shared racial and intersecting history. Whilst colonial soldiers wore the colours of European nations (be they French Africans or British Indians), they were a far more removed and disconcerting form of 'other' that manifests itself as a type of Western Front Orientalism.¹⁰¹

The initial decision to use colonial soldiers in Europe was in some cases 'influenced by German fears' regarding such men.¹⁰² At the start of the war, the popular British view of colonial soldiers, and Indians in particular, was not favourable and was heavily influenced by 'persisting memories of the oddly-generated (in British eyes) mutiny of Indian soldiers' of 1857. The British authorities were forced to launch a sustained multi-platform propaganda campaign in an attempt to correct these negative perceptions.¹⁰³ When it came to the way British soldiers then interacted with the colonial soldiers, there were 'a number of threads that dominated British soldiers' contemporary texts', with most revolving around the supposed savagery and natural martial prowess of such men.¹⁰⁴ Such stories acted as both a source of fear and of comfort for British soldiers in proximity to them. The result of these considerations was a mixed scenario of shock and appreciation regarding the exploits, both real and rumoured, of their exotic allies. That these men could achieve such brutal feats was taken as a sign that they were truly

¹⁰¹ For further discussion of how France viewed and used its African empire during war, see: C. M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, 'France, Africa, and the First World War', *The Journal of African History* 19, no. 1 (1978): 11–23; Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918*, War, Society, Culture (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Richard Fogarty, 'The French Empire', in *Empires at War: 1911–1923*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, First published in paperback, *The Greater War* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰² Paul Dominick Hodges, 'The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914–1918' (Birkbeck College, University of London, 2006), p. 213. Hodges describes that, 'for the Germans, one of the greatest Allied war crimes committed in the course of the conflict was the deployment of colonial, non-white troops'.

¹⁰³ Hodges, pp. 214–5.

¹⁰⁴ Hodges, p. 221.

dangerous to the enemy.¹⁰⁵ French soldiers themselves often seemed slightly unsure how to treat these men, whom rumours suggested kept trophies and killed prisoners, from their own colonies and empires when encountering them on the front lines.¹⁰⁶ Some French soldiers, in an evaluation similar to that which the British would pass, marvelled at the ferocity of these men but felt that they lacked the ‘cold stoicism’ and appreciation of the tactical details they would need to be successful in this European war.¹⁰⁷

There is an additional undercurrent to this. Whilst these atrocities and their perpetrators were made to seem decidedly ‘other’ in the writings of the British soldiers, they themselves often treated prisoners of war far worse than colonial soldiers did.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, the work of Paul Hodges documents numerous accounts of atrocities committed by British soldiers, with the execution and murdering of German prisoners being a constant trend. The British soldiers such as Loyd and Bellew may well, therefore, have been shocked by the apparently brutal actions of the French colonial soldiers they saw, but the deaths of German prisoners at British hands were not seen as being a racial or a national issue. What results is a situation where there are different degrees of atrocity, divided along racial and cultural lines, where one form of prisoner abuse, murder, or mutilation is acceptable and another is not.¹⁰⁹ What further complicates this issue is the fact that, as will be discussed in detail below, the British would regularly tell Americans they were training not to accept

¹⁰⁵Hodges, pp. 221–4. There is further evidence of this within the diary of Loyd, who reports that ‘Turcos of I Division bayoneted 150 Germans in their trenches’ Loyd, ‘Typescript Diary’, 23 September 1914.

¹⁰⁶Alexandre Lafon, *La camaraderie au front: 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), pp. 184–5.

¹⁰⁷Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, pp. 55–6.

¹⁰⁸Hodges, ‘The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914–1918’, p. 217.

¹⁰⁹Joanna Bourke has also written on how the collection of souvenirs from defeated enemies on the battlefield could rapidly become an institutionalised practice, with some combatants making this behaviour the norm in order to highlight not just their fighting prowess but also to distinguish themselves from those soldiers who occupied areas and positions behind the lines and were not exposed to fire or danger. Therefore, the collection of body-part souvenirs did not just serve to highlight the military skill of the collector but also to highlight the fact that they had seen action at all. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (Granta Books, 2000), pp. 37–43.

surrenders from German soldiers and to kill such men almost as a matter of course.

Whilst the British were busy attempting to understand the different colonial aspects of the French Army, the French themselves were using the terms 'British' or 'Tommy' to cover a much wider group of soldiers than used by the British themselves. Joseph Aulneau spent a large portion of the war amongst the Australian soldiers on the Western Front, but still referred to this as the '*Front Britannique*'. Laurent recognised that whilst the 'British army' covered a multitude of different nations, all of whom appeared highly similar in appearance and uniform, such men would be quickly irritated if their nationality was incorrectly identified.¹¹⁰ The fact that the term 'British' also covered soldiers of different nationalities just from the British Isles would cause some issues in 1916 and beyond. Many of the difficulties that French and American soldiers would eventually have with the British in 1918 could perhaps more accurately be described as problems with *English* soldiers.

Aulneau's approach to the Australians is particularly interesting because, whilst at times he would amalgamate the British and Australians into a single group, he would also use his time to ruminate on aspects of the 'Anglo-Saxon character'.¹¹¹ He particularly focused on how the two nations differed in their approaches to life and the war, especially with regard to the nature of obedience and military discipline.

The Australian is still very disciplined. He makes it a point of pride to say that he is even more so than the Englishman. Is this true? This is not the place to say. There is every reason to believe that he is more so than the French Poilu. The difference is considerable in the manner of greeting the chief, of looking at him, of standing before him, of speaking to him. All these actions show obedience, but obedience freely given, considered, it could be said. Neither is this the fearful obedience of the German who is afraid of punches or kicks!¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Laurent, *Chez Nos Allies Britanniques*, p. xv.

¹¹¹ He was not alone in studying the nature of Australian soldiers: Elizabeth Greenhalgh and Frédéric Guelton, 'Soldats Australiens de l'ANZAC Vus à Travers La Correspondance Du Chef d'escadrons de Bertier, Mars-Décembre 1915', *Revue Historique Des Armées* 264, no. 3 (2011): 41–7.

¹¹² Joseph Aulneau, *Au Front Britannique* (Paris: Renaissance du Livre, 1919), pp. 7–8.

This sort of consideration of British (and Australian) national character and traits is, as will become apparent, reminiscent of the writings of British soldiers during 1916 as they attempted to understand the French soldiers they met. It also gives an early insight into the character of Australian soldiers that Americans would later find so appealing.

When it came to more traditional French soldiers themselves, there were early signs of a slight thaw in relations, at least amongst those British soldiers in fairly regular contact with them. In October, Colonel Eric Dillon, who would later serve as a liaison officer to General Foch, reflected on the apparent fearsome determination of the French nation to motivate its soldiers and to win the war. He was also starting to reflect on the various merits of the allied and enemy armies arrayed around the British, and how they fared in comparison.¹¹³ Dillon was a little ahead of the curve with this sort of reflection on the comparable merits of the assorted armies on the Western Front and how the British fitted into this martial hierarchy, as it would become a key theme to the experience of British soldiers in 1916. He was not alone in doing this in 1914, however; there are examples of other British soldiers feeling something akin to a pang of fear or insecurity. In late August, Bellew reported that a German prisoner had informed a British officer that, whilst the British were ‘very brave to come out and meet us’, he ominously predicted that ‘your chance of doing harm is useless we are out to win and we are going to win’.¹¹⁴ Later on he saw ‘200 prisoners’ passing through and declared ‘my word they are big chaps, twice as big as our chaps’.¹¹⁵ Lieutenant Loyd would also write that ‘the combination of German skill and French explosives would be disastrous to any foe’.¹¹⁶ By the end of September, Tennyson quotes from a letter written by a wounded German, who reported that they had lost all their horses and were now reduced to using local and captured replacements in the fervent hope that ‘the French will not push forward for if they do they will occupy Reims’.¹¹⁷ The British soldiers appear to have realised early on that with regard to numbers and firepower they were grossly outnumbered, and we can

¹¹³ Brigadier The Viscount Dillon CMG DSO, *Memories of Three Wars*, pp. 38–40.

¹¹⁴ Bellew, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 31 August 1914.

¹¹⁵ Bellew, 9 September 1914.

¹¹⁶ Loyd, ‘Typescript Diary’, 13 September 1914.

¹¹⁷ Tennyson, ‘Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3’, 24 September 1914.

begin to see the first signs of a reframing of their role in the overall context of the Western Front.

There were other ongoing concerns within British ranks at this time. Principal amongst these was the emergence of a particular strain of spy fever. As the men of the BEF pushed further into previously occupied territory, the fear of betrayal by spies secreted within the French population began preying on the minds of some British soldiers. On 3 October, Tennyson reported that a flickering light had been seen in caves at the top of a hill, signalling the German troops. Initial suspicions had fallen on a French Red Cross doctor who had been seen in the area, but eventually French troops arrested the Mayor of Venizel's daughter and she was subsequently executed.¹¹⁸ On the same day, Tennyson also reported how a nearby farmer had become the subject of investigation. The man owned a white greyhound that had been seen running from German lines into his house but, subsequently, could not be found. In addition, the farmer's property was completely untouched by shellfire and when he suggested the British place their guns in certain positions (a suggestion which was not taken) those areas were heavily shelled the following day. A few nights later the dog was found to be carrying messages between the farmer and the Germans, and the farmer was shot.¹¹⁹

Some of this emerging suspicion was likely due to a lack of understanding on behalf of the British, built upon pre-war norms, on how to react to supposedly friendly civilians.¹²⁰ However, they were not entirely alone in the fear of enemy agents lurking within a civilian population they did not know or understand. The German treatment of Belgian and French civilians during the initial invasion and subsequent occupation was built upon a heightened fear of the *francs-tireurs* who had dogged them during the Franco-Prussian War and resulted in numerous executions and atrocities.¹²¹ The most obvious of these came in the burning

¹¹⁸Tennyson, 3 October 1914.

¹¹⁹Tennyson, 3 October 1914.

¹²⁰Craig Gibson, *Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 53.

¹²¹See: John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

of Louvain and the execution of 248 civilians with another 1500 being forcibly deported to Germany.¹²²

In the British case, when confronted with a civilian population they did not fully trust, soldiers behaved in accordance with a kind of institutional memory regarding colonial or imperial populations. Britain's colonial experiences would not have left soldiers predisposed towards a fondness for the civilians they encountered on military deployment, and when the situation in France worsened the response would be to fall back on these approaches and doctrine. The official response to the burgeoning fear of spies seems to have been muddled at best. Spears was despairing about the proliferation of stories in late August, declaring that paranoia was making the men nervous and, as a result, dangerous.¹²³ Whilst Spears was writing on the necessity for restraint and common sense, the British adopted a new policy whenever they captured a village of breaking in the doors of every house to allow the interior to be searched.¹²⁴

This spy fever only deepened as the British advanced. Previously, during the retreat, the British had at least known roughly where the enemy were. Now, while advancing into the unknown, the fear of ambush or betrayal became more of a concern. This fear was coupled with the ongoing stress brought about by the cumulative effect of random bursts of combat, and it weighed heavily upon the soldiers of the BEF. Although Paul Maze largely found his early time amongst the British army to be without incident, he would find himself caught up in the burgeoning 'spy fever' of the general retreat and came perilously close to being executed as a spy before his rescue by a familiar British officer.¹²⁵ Under these circumstances, particular themes began to emerge. During a single week in October, Myatt oscillated between sympathy towards French civilians and then fierce condemnation of them following an accurate German artillery bombardment; he accused the locals of being spies who would 'sell their own homes'. He would then soften his stance upon seeing the ongoing civilian suffering before again placing the

¹²² Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 6–30.

¹²³ Spears, *Liaison 1914*, p. 219.

¹²⁴ Gibson, *Behind the Front*, p. 54.

¹²⁵ Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki*, pp. 39–46.

blame for a German barrage on a French spy in a clock tower.¹²⁶ Myatt reported that his battery was undergoing heavy artillery assault during these days, with a particularly large bombardment on 15 October causing numerous casualties and much damage to the town centre.¹²⁷ It is therefore questionable whether Myatt's changing opinions were really based upon an active suspicion and dislike of the French, or were instead the manifestation of combat stress that then focused on a more easily identifiable target; in this case, the civilian population. Certainly, this was not a fleeting issue for the British soldiers, and it carried on well into 1915 at various places around the front line.

The fact that these suspected spies were French (or Belgian in some cases) does not appear to have been the source of the suspicion. It was not an issue of national unreliability on the part of the French themselves; it was more a matter of circumstantial paranoia and fear combined with a profound sense of isolation and uncertainty both culturally and in relation to the pursuit of the war. These opening months of the conflict were fractured and disjointed in most regards for the British soldiers. Their induction into a European alliance was both underthought and ultimately given no chance to take place naturally because of the

¹²⁶Myatt, 'Manuscript Diary', 12 October 1914–18 October 1914. It's also possible that Tennyson witnessed this last event as, on the same day, he wrote 'caught a man signalling the German guns. He was French and had 2 sons in the French army. He was shot.' Tennyson, 'Manuscript Diaries—Vols. 1 & 3', October 1914.

¹²⁷Myatt, 'Manuscript Diary', 15 October 1914. These bombardments are not mentioned in detail within the brigade diary for this period, but some references to them do exist. According to this diary on 12 October, they marched towards Vielle Chapelle and Fosse during the day and were billeted at Loeon by 7 p.m. The brigade was then held in reserve for the following few days before beginning to see further action. Myatt's battery (109) accompanied the left column of the 9th brigade on 16 August before the column was held up outside Aubers and the attack was called off because of mist later in the day. Aubers was taken without opposition on the 17th before 'the whole brigade was in action between Aubers and Haut Pommereau, supporting the attack on Herlies. At 7:20 a.m. on 18 October, 109 battery opened fire in support of an attack on the brigade's left and remained in action all day. '23 Brigade Royal Field Artillery—War Diary', n.d., 12 October 1914–18 October 1914, WO 95/1399/4, National Archives, Kew. The section within this war diary specifically for 109 battery does not provide much additional information in support of Myatt's testimony. The entry for 15 October simply states that the battery was held in reserve near Lacon. Also, whilst it does report action occurring on the following days, it states that the battery did 'very little firing' in response to several of these. '23 Brigade Royal Field Artillery—War Diary', 15 October 1914–18 October 1914–109 Battery section.

fluctuating nature of the opening battles. The period from November 1914 until February 1915 is also noteworthy for having the most incidents of attempted desertion and self-inflicted wounds for the entirety of the war.¹²⁸ The opening months of the war had been a horrendous trial for British morale, and it seems many men had despaired. Their sense of isolation even when alongside the French armies likely played a significant role in this. ‘The ‘Race to the Sea’ and the eventual settling of the armies into more recognised fortified positions would bring more structure to proceedings and also change many of the interactions between the British and the French.

THE TURN OF THE YEAR

The final months of 1914 and the first ones of 1915 were marked by several distinct trends. The frantic attempts to outflank the enemy to the north led the British to move from France to Belgium. They deployed initially around Antwerp but, following the abortive attempt to defend the city, they dug in around Ypres.¹²⁹

The BEF was a well-trained and highly effective military force but it lacked the size of the other armies on the Western Front. Its best traits were clearly demonstrated during the early movement battles when it was able to use its Divisional flexibility to attack larger German formations. It was this tactic that was used at the beginning of the Battle of Mons to great effect, only for weight of German numbers to force it into a retreat. However, as the evolving circumstances led the competing armies to eschew movement and reorganise for defensive entrenchment, the BEF lost its greatest attribute. The move to Ypres placed the BEF in front-line trenches facing the might of the German army. Chained to a single spot and denied the room for movement, the BEF found itself forced to fight a type of battle that it was not suited to. The battles at the

¹²⁸Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 142–3.

¹²⁹For a further investigation of the defensive actions at Antwerp, see: Robin Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2004), Chapter 11: ‘The War in the North, 2–18 October 1914’ gives a good overview. For further reading on the disagreements between the British and French regarding Antwerp, consider Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, pp. 19–23; Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914–18*, pp. 34–46.

end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915 took a terrible toll on the BEF, and effectively destroyed the core of this army as a fighting force.¹³⁰

The cessation of movement across the Front brought about by the deployment to Ypres also meant that interactions with the French became fleeting. The stationary nature of the front line prevented the more impromptu encounters between French and British soldiers of the previous months. The constant threat of fighting focused the minds of British soldiers away from their allies in a similar manner to that which had been noticeable during the Battle of the Marne. The distraction of active combat removed the element of consideration and reflection, leaving only the opportunity for instantaneous judgement on any interactions. This inevitably led to a reduction of encounters described within these soldiers' diaries. The casualties the BEF had sustained, particularly during August and September, only exacerbated this situation. As the fighting continued throughout the autumn and into the winter, the casualties amongst British ranks steadily increased.¹³¹ The use of new weapons, such as poisonous and asphyxiating gas would also start to take their toll in 1915.¹³²

With the end of 1914 approaching, there was an apparent attempt to reach some form of shared cooperation between the British, French, and Belgian soldiers around the Ypres salient. Myatt's brigade was in position near Kemmel. He wrote of playing football against the nearby French on Christmas Day; how it seemed that whilst the British and Belgians got along well, the French and Belgian soldiers did not. This seemed

¹³⁰Spencer Jones, "‘To Make War as We Must, and Not as We Should Like’: The British Army and the Problem of the Western Front, 1915", in *Courage Without Glory: The British Army on the Western Front 1915*, ed. Spencer Jones, Wolverhampton Military Studies, no. 10 (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2015), pp. 39–40.

¹³¹On 29 October, Helm's battalion had been weakened to barely 200 men with only five officers remaining. Helm and the Quartermaster were the only two remaining of those who had left Dublin in August. Helm DSO OBE MC, 'Typescript Diary', 29 October 1914.

¹³²Helm DSO OBE MC, April 1915. Helm was deployed to Ypres in November 1914, where he served until April 1915 before being evacuated back to Britain after being subjected to a gas attack. The battalion diary reports the use of gas by the Germans on 22 April 1915, and also reports on 'rumours' that were later proven 'to be only too true' about the gas attack causing French Algerians to retreat, leaving Canadian lines isolated and vulnerable with the Germans advancing on Ypres. As a result, these Canadian soldiers had also been forced to retire. '2 Battalion Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry—War Diary', 22 April 1915.

to be based on a reluctance by the French to be fighting outside their own country.¹³³ With Christmas 1914 being largely, and often erroneously, synonymous with football matches between the Germans and the British on the Western Front, Myatt's account is an interesting example of how the allies marked Christmas Day between themselves. The historically close relationship between Britain and Belgium is in evidence and, whether or not it stemmed from the 'Rape of Belgium' propaganda, there was certainly affection towards the Belgian army and soldiers. However, this might be a sign that, through their homeliness and acceptance of the British army, the Belgians knew their place in the wider narrative of the war. As such, greater affection for them than for the French was perhaps really a comment on the nature of Great Power politics and the jockeying for position within Europe.

By contrast several issues with the French emerge, beginning firstly with the announcement that the Belgians dislike the French. Whilst this is not overly surprising, given the history between the two countries, it does also provide a sense of united camaraderie between Britain and Belgium. With Myatt suggesting that the French believed they did not require the assistance of the British and Belgian forces, and also that the French should be fighting in their own country, they were at odds with the consensus reached by their British and Belgian allies. It is understandable that the British soldiers would have felt that their efforts and sacrifices during the war were devalued by this French attitude, whilst the British were already fighting in a foreign country so had little sympathy for French soldiers fighting in Belgium. Myatt's issue here is the perception of French arrogance and, in the face of it, the British formation of an impromptu alliance with their Belgian comrades.

There is an additional economic aspect to Myatt's recollection, with French soldiers left shocked by the apparent wealth of Britain and the British soldiers following the arrival of the Princess Mary Christmas Tins.¹³⁴ A private in the British Army was paid a shilling a day compared to just sixpence a day for the equivalent rank in the French army.¹³⁵

¹³³ Myatt, 'Manuscript Diary', 25 December 1914–26 December 1914.

¹³⁴ Myatt, 26 December 1914.

¹³⁵ Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 343; General Staff, War Office, *Handbook of the French Army* (London: Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books in association with The Battery Press and Articles of War Ltd, 1995), pp. 365–9.

With the British soldiers already on double the pay of their French equivalent, the move towards fixed positions allowed more regular postal deliveries from home which further emphasised to the French soldiers the apparent wealth of Britain. French soldiers noting the way Britain appeared to be throwing money into the war would become an ongoing theme in later years. The image of a British army that was paying double the wage to its soldiers whilst, in 1914, being much smaller than the French army and seemingly doing less work was not likely to engender warm feelings between the two groups of soldiers.¹³⁶ Even when the British were making a direct effort with the French it didn't necessarily mean communications were simple. In 1915, Eugène de Caux, deployed with the British near a French territorial division, watched with some bemusement as British soldiers and officers passed by and exchanged 'a "bong jour [sic]" or a "Boche no [sic] bôn" with a sentry and retire with a great feeling of superiority'.

Additionally, relations between British and French soldiers became further strained given the haphazard nature of some of the French positions and the supposed friendliness between the French army and the enemy across No Man's Land.

We reached the firing line and found it in a weak state of defence, this line had been held by the French, and the trenches were in a bad condition, the mines they had laid were useless as they were too shallow and did very little damage. The lines we held was [sic] known as the Jamboul [sic], a veritable death-trap, as we soon learnt to our cost. The French had been very indolent and in eight months had only one man killed per month, we had men killed every day. You may ask why the French had such few casualties, the reason was this, the opposing trench was held by Saxons, a different type of German to the real Uhlan, and they became so friendly that they made a rule not to shoot if the French did not, and in plenty of dug outs, in the advanced part of the line we found evidence of their fraternising, such as hidden bottles of wine, half-smoked cigars, and German helmets, French bayonets, a deplorable state of affairs for a successful

¹³⁶ Britain's gross domestic product (GDP) at the start of the war was dramatically higher than France's. In 1913, the United Kingdom's GDP stood at \$226.4 billion whilst France's was \$138.7 billion. This translated into a 'per head' result of \$4921 and \$3485 respectively. Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, 'The Economics of World War I: A Comparative Quantitative Analysis', 2005, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/academic/harrison/papers/ww1toronto2.pdf>.

campaign. They used to visit one another in the trenches, so we had a poor chance, all the while the French had been doing this, the Germans had been secretly mining their trenches and making sketches of their fortifications, so we had everything to find out when we took over their line. The Germans knew we were to relieve the French, so they waited until we came, then they commenced.¹³⁷

This would prove to be a difficult lesson for the British to learn about the fluctuating relationships between allies, enemies, and truces; and would play an important role in 1916 around the Somme. What also became a common criticism of the French was the supposed poor nature of their trenches. British soldiers would complain repeatedly throughout the war that French trenches were poorly maintained or in dire need of repair. The common explanation for this was, because of the tactics and general French strategy at the time, French soldiers were not expected to be in their trenches very long.¹³⁸ Paul Maze backed this viewpoint up in 1917 by declaring that ‘a tenant who knows that his lease is up does not bother to repaint the house or install new bathrooms’.¹³⁹ He was also quick to point out that, in his experience working alongside British units, their trenches were no better. What complicated understanding of each other’s defensive arrangements was a fairly bizarre situation involving spades and entrenching equipment. In his 1934 work *Les Techniques du Corps*, Marcel Mauss wrote of a curious incident where a British division had to scrap around 800 recently acquired French spades because they did not know how to use them. He also suggests that the French used to do much the same thing when taking up British spades. Further to the issue with the spades, though, Mauss reported that British troops found it extremely difficult to march in time with French music as the two styles differed with regard to beat, length, and frequency and, as a result, destroyed their marching rhythm.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷C. R. Smith, ‘Manuscript Journals—Vols. 1 & 3’, 1917–1914, IWM: DOCS - 99/56/1, Imperial War Museum. During the third week of September (1915).

¹³⁸See: Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau, and Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918*, p. 79 for a further discussion on how ‘The poilus created their own world, with its own rules and strategies of survival’.

¹³⁹Maze, p. 265.

¹⁴⁰Marcel Mauss, ‘Les Techniques Du Corps’, *Journal de Psychologie* XXXII, no. 3–4 (1936).

Interactions between British and French soldiers in 1914 and early 1915 were complicated by circumstance and also by the lack of time for each side to create a workable and durable image of the other. Throughout this period, examples appear of suspicion, criticism, and negativity towards the French. However, these instances need to be considered within their wider military and strategic context. When the war was progressing well, and the British were not under attack, they appear to have been well disposed towards the French. It was only when the situation begins to deteriorate and during the occasions where the BEF was under heavy or constant attack that the relationship turned sour. Even at the darkest points in relations, it is questionable whether the criticism was based on a dislike or distrust of anything intrinsically 'French' or rather on something that was 'other' to the understandings and experiences of the British soldiers at the time. With this in mind, it seems that the swing into negative perceptions is reminiscent of the instinctive reactions which marked Anglo-French relations at the turn of the century as discussed in the previous chapter. Evidence suggests that upon a situation becoming dangerous, difficult, and by extension stressful, the British automatically reached for a suitable scapegoat upon whom to manifest their fears. In these circumstances, the French were the most obvious candidates. In some respects, it is almost possible to apply the term 'fair weather' to the alliance at this point, with the British reverting to negative interpretations at each hint of an issue but enjoying amicable relationships with their allies when times were good.

Having likely had little exposure to the French in the pre-war years, the images of the French the British carried with them to the battlefields in 1914 were confused and not fully formed in a collective consciousness; the French appeared as lazy, scruffy, and lacking in the social requirements for adequate martial ability. The comparison with these impressions and those that appear during periods of relative calm shows how detached the reality of these interactions was from the more negative portrayals present during battle. It also highlights just how much room for change there was in the coming years of the war, as Kitchener's New Armies arrived on the Western Front to replace and reinforce the army of 1914.

Because of the casualties that the BEF would sustain during 1914 and 1915, the ideas and interactions they began to form with the French never really had a chance to fully develop before the men who created them were killed, replaced, or faded away into the larger British army

that was being constructed. It is therefore not so much the experiences of these 1914 men that became crucial as the war progressed but rather the imminent absence of the men themselves. The passing of these original soldiers necessitated immediate reinforcements and the subsequent early deployment of Kitchener's New Armies. The men of this new British force were themselves a departure from the professional soldiers who had been deployed at the outbreak of war, and it would be they who would play the crucial role in the future interactions between British and French. It was, as we will see, not something that the British high command gave any more thought to during the war than they had before it.

As a result, many of the same obstacles that had existed for the BEF in 1914 would continue to exist as a potential impediment when reinforcements began to arrive in force during 1915 and 1916. The differences between late 1915 and 1916, and the men who were arriving in France as reinforcements, were crucial ones, however. With the move to stabilised trench warfare, the likelihood of a reoccurrence of the events following the Battle of Mons was unlikely. Equally, the growing size of the British army meant that these newly arrived men would not be so heavily outnumbered by both enemies and allies as the men of 1914 had been. Nor, as we shall shortly see, would they be immediately launched into battle without having suitable time to adjust to their displacement. Most important, though, would not be the circumstances surrounding the arrival of Kitchener's New Armies but the nature and backgrounds of the men themselves. The BEF of 1914 had been composed of professional soldiers who had been well trained and had confidence in their own abilities. The men of the new armies were civilian volunteers. Many of them had no history or experience of serving in the armed forces, and no previous martial abilities to fall back on. Whilst, in military terms, this represented a real problem for the British army in preparing for the major offensives of 1916, so far as interaction with their French allies was concerned, the varied, adaptable, and, as time progressed, insecure nature of Kitchener's volunteers provided a fortunate reprieve from disaster. It was these men who would move the alliance forward.

PART II

Co-Operation



‘My Heart Softened to the French ... All at Once I Loved Them’: The *Entente Cordiale* at the Somme

The Relations between Great Britain and France have been established happily upon unshakeable foundations, and during the testing experiences of the War those relations have become marked by intimacy and affection.

Prime Minister Herbert Asquith¹

The period of Tommy–*Poilu* relations during 1916 came to be defined by the changing composition of the British army. Where previously the BEF of 1914 and 1915 had predominantly been formed of professional soldiers, the arrival and deployment of Kitchener’s New Armies to France introduced a new mass of men who largely had no martial background. In the early months of the war, disagreements between British and French soldiers had often been framed and understood through differences in military approach, even when those same differences were rooted in culture. However, when the new British soldiers arrived in France, they had no professional military opinions or institutionalisation upon which to draw in their comparisons with the French. This change in background for the majority of the British army had a profound effect on their approach and actions towards their French allies for most of 1916.

The results of these shifts were that British soldiers deferred, and reached out, to their French allies, who, in turn, extended their services

¹ *War Speeches by British Ministers, 1914–1916* (London: T. F. Unwin Ltd., 1917), p. 104. Speech to French Senators and Deputies, 10 April 1916.

as both hosts and teachers towards the British and allowed relationships to form that superseded any sense of serious military rivalry. This allowed the British and French to communicate on a more personal level that reaped precious dividends for the rest of the war. However, to understand how these grass-roots relationships grew, it is important to understand how, once again, a lack of direction from the military authorities played an important formative role. Diplomatically, at least on the surface, the British were attempting to put forward a united front with their French ally. Prime Minister Herbert Asquith elucidated the ‘unshakeable foundations’ that existed between Britain and France during a speech in France in April 1916. However, as might be suspected, behind the scenes things were not running as smoothly as hoped.

THE GRAND ALLIED OFFENSIVES OF 1916

The failures of allied strategy in 1915 had not brought about the conclusion of the war as had initially been hoped. Militarily speaking, 1915 was not a good year for the allies, and Britain struggled firstly to assert any form of control over its French ally and then, similarly, failed to assert itself on the battlefield against the Germans.² Ongoing fighting in Flanders had dramatically reduced the strength of the original BEF and expedited the deployment of Kitchener’s New Armies before he had initially intended. Whilst the move to bring reinforcements to France before originally intended was a problem for the British, it was dwarfed by the crisis of munitions production which unfolded over much of the year. Although the ‘The Shells Scandal’ was ostensibly triggered by the British performance at Aubers Ridge, its origins lay in clear deficiencies in British pre-war planning.³ The long-term consequences of the British

²For detailed overviews of British performance in 1915, see: Spencer Jones, ed., *Courage Without Glory: The British Army on the Western Front 1915*, Wolverhampton Military Studies, no. 10 (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2015) and Ian F. W. Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), Chapter 7.

³For an overview of the Shell Crisis and the British efforts to supply munitions to the army in 1915, see: John Mason Sneddon, ‘The Supply of Munitions to the Army, 1915’, in *Courage Without Glory: The British Army on the Western Front 1915*, ed. Spencer Jones, Wolverhampton Military Studies, no. 10 (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2015). Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly have argued convincingly that the real shortage facing the British in 1915 was not shells but artillery pieces from which to fire them: Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, pp. 257–8. For further background

munition shortfall would be the nationalisation of their manufacturing effort. In the short-term, however, both Lord Kitchener and Marshal French would be effectively removed from power.

The French army had its own issues regarding munition production during 1915. General Joffre was caught between wanting to continue putting pressure on the Germans and lacking the tools to do so. At the end of 1914, he was already warning that he lacked 'siege weapons' to really trouble German defensive positions. The French had alleviated some of this shortage by repurposing large artillery pieces from French defensive forts. This was a process that paid dividends in the short term, but would also leave positions like Verdun utterly underdefended into 1916.⁴ Joffre had also begun a process of clearing away those generals and officers who were viewed as being ineffective or unfit in order to further streamline the command and control of the French army.⁵ Despite this, the French did not fare any better than the British in their attempts to break the deadlock on the Western Front in 1915.⁶

The eventual outcome of the failure to end the war in 1915 was a definitive change in allied strategy and direction. This would, on one level, see an evolution from the approach of *percée* to one of *grignotage*.⁷

on the existing deficiencies within the British army and munitions production from pre-1914 until the beginning of the Shell Crisis, see: William Sanders Marble, "The Infantry Cannot Do with a Gun Less": The Place of the Artillery in the BEF, 1914–1918' (King's College London, 1998), p. 15; Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighly: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 74 and 81–5. For an examination of how armament production increased following the nationalisation of the munitions industry, see: D. Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 232–3.

⁴Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *The French Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 71–4.

⁵Greenhalgh, p. 72.

⁶For detailed overviews of French performance in 1915, see: Greenhalgh, Chapter 3; Anthony Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918* (London: Cassell Military, 2003), Chapter 4; Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (London: Belknap, 2005), Chapters 3 and 4; F. Cochet and Rémy Porte, *Histoire de l'Armée Française: 1914–1918: Évolutions et Adaptations Des Hommes, Des Matériels et Des Doctrines* (Paris: Tallandier, 2017), Chapter 2; Jean-Yves Le Naour, *1915: L'enlèvement* (Paris: Perrin, 2013).

⁷Leonard V. Smith, Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 77–84.

On a wider scale, though, it would also see plans being put in place for far more coordination in the efforts of all the allied partners. A number of Franco-British conferences were held during the final months of 1915, which paved the way for wider cooperation.⁸ However, the conference held at Chantilly on 6 December 1915 was intended to incorporate all the allied participants, with representatives from France, Britain, Italy, Russia, Serbia and Belgium in attendance. In theory, this was an impressive gathering of allied military power, but, in reality, that power had been greatly reduced during 1915. The British and French issues have already been discussed, but the Russians had fared even worse on the Eastern Front and effectively put paid to the notion that they might be capable of rolling over German and Austro-Hungarian positions. So desperate had been their need for materiel with which to fight that they effectively sold over 40,000 of their own soldiers to France in return for rifles and ammunition.⁹ The Serbian army had been forced from their own country and evacuated to Corfu, whilst the Belgians were, in the words of Philpott, ‘now an army rather than a country’ and were content to sit out most of the fighting to avoid further devastating the remains of their nation.¹⁰ In a diplomatic victory, the Italians had been successfully removed from the Central Powers and then further tempted out of neutrality to join the Entente Alliance, but they ended 1915 locked in a stalemate along the Isonzo River.¹¹

To try and harness the remaining power and potential of the assembled allies, the framework was put in place for a series of interlinked offensives during 1916 with the aim of wearing out the German army through attrition. ‘Attrition’ as a concept and strategy has proven highly controversial within considerations of the First World War, but has also been heavily misunderstood. The best and most succinct refutation of its image is that by Dennis Showalter, who characterises the dominant view of attrition as implying ‘mindless mutual commitment of forces until at some unspecified future time the last three surviving French and British

⁸Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 39.

⁹Jamie H. Cockfield, *With Snow on Their Boots* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998).

¹⁰William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p. 52.

¹¹John Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Chapter 3.

soldiers would totter on aged legs across No Man's Land and bayonet the two remaining Germans'.¹² The reality of attrition at this time would be found in Joffre's proposals discussed over two days at Chantilly. Essentially; the four principal allied armies of Britain, France, Russia, and Italy would undertake the maximum effort against the enemies on their own fronts whenever such an attack could be planned and undertaken.¹³ A detailed agreement and series of plans was not likely to be created over the course of a few days, and (despite some issues that Joffre had to navigate, including an alternative Russian plan), there was general agreement over the proposed strategy.¹⁴

Planning for the Russian and Italian approaches to their fronts would be a matter for them to undertake, but the Franco-British involvement was generally agreed to take place along the River Somme at the point where the two armies met and could offer mutual support. There were early issues with this plan, however. Whilst in attendance, Marshal Sir John French knew he was only days away from being removed from command; having already tendered his resignation; and General Sir Archibald Murray, the other ranking British officer in attendance, was similarly aware that his position as Chief of the Imperial General Staff was likely to be terminated in the coming days.¹⁵ Therefore, neither man was in a position to really guarantee anything for the British military whilst also sitting in on strategic meetings that would eventually be presented to their replacements. This meant that when French and Murray were indeed removed from their positions in the days that followed Chantilly, Joffre would have to undertake the job of selling his allied offensive all over again to General Sir Douglas Haig, the new commander-in-chief of the BEF. Whilst an obstacle, there was an added benefit to this British change in command. French's relationship with his allied counterparts had never really recovered from the exertions of 1914. This

¹²Dennis Showalter, "It All Goes Wrong!": German, French, and British Approaches to Mastering the Western Front', in *Warfare and Belligerence*, ed. Pierre Purseigle, 2005, p. 42. Philpott has also undertaken an in-depth examination of the theory and practice of attrition warfare: William James Philpott, *Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (London: Little, Brown, 2014).

¹³Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 57–60.

¹⁴Philpott, p. 59.

¹⁵Philpott, p. 59.

inability to work well alongside the French had probably played a part in his eventual downfall. Further to this, French effectively spoke no French so coordination and discussions between the allies were often tortuous. Haig did have a stronger grasp of the French language, even if he was not able to fully 'seize all the *nuances*' of the language.¹⁶ With Haig, both the British and French could at least try and start again.¹⁷

This change would not entirely bring smooth sailing to the alliance as, by the end of 1915, Haig had developed a fairly low opinion of French generals and the efforts of the French army.¹⁸ He would also require some convincing about the merits of attacking at the Somme when his preference, one that would be demonstrated repeatedly throughout the remaining years of the war, was for an attack in Flanders that might threaten German U-Boat pens but also secure the Channel coast and provide a tangible military success which could be sold to politicians back in Britain.¹⁹ The French general chosen to oversee the planned offensive on the Somme was Ferdinand Foch. Foch's evaluations of failed French approaches in 1915 had been incorporated at least partially into the new doctrine being composed ahead of the 1916 offensives. However, Foch himself had not been present at Chantilly and, as a result, his belief that the area around the River Somme, the Northern Army Group Sector, was unsuitable for any major battle was not voiced.²⁰ Foch would be left with the unenviable job of planning an attack in a location where he did not wish to fight. In order to facilitate the cooperation between the British and French armies, a new liaison

¹⁶A report from General Pierre des Vallières to General Joffre, as cited by Greenhalgh in: Pierre des Vallières, *Liaison: General Pierre des Vallières at British General Headquarters, January 1916 to May 1917*, ed. Elizabeth Greenhalgh (Army Records Society [Great Britain], 2016), p. 102.

¹⁷Whilst Kitchener had given Haig a similar set of instructions regarding his command in France as had been presented to General French, he did also privately counsel trying to ensure strong relationships with their French ally. Lord Herbert Kitchener, 'Commanding the Expeditionary Force in France', 1915, War Office Records; WO 159, National Archives, Kew; Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, p. 68.

¹⁸Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, pp. 43–4.

¹⁹Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 71–2.

²⁰Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command: The Forging of a First World War General*, 2014, p. 140.

officer was appointed. Previously, General Huguët had handled liaison between British and French military commands but, during 1915, concerns had emerged within the French military that his close relationship with the British General Henry Wilson was more of a liability than a benefit. As his replacement, General Pierre des Vallières was instructed to liaise between Haig and Foch. General des Vallières was seen as more politically reliable than Huguët had been. Of particular reassurance to the French were his partial Irish roots and the fact that he had no particular love of the British.²¹

The initial stages of planning for the Somme Offensive were marked by complicated negotiations between the British and French commands over spheres of responsibility, particularly with regard to preliminary 'wearing down' attacks on German positions away from the intended battlefield.²² No sooner had a form of agreement been reached than the plans were heavily disrupted by the German attack on Verdun in February 1916.²³ The ongoing battle at Verdun in 1916 would eventually have the knock-on effect of changing the balance of forces assigned to the combined offensive at the Somme.²⁴ Whilst the French would initially continue with the plans for the Somme largely undisturbed, by the end of May Joffre announced that the French army could not defend at Verdun whilst also committing men to the Somme Offensive in the previously agreed numbers. The effect of Verdun on the planning for the Somme has become a contentious point in evaluating the effects of the 1916 campaigns.²⁵ The Somme Offensive had been planned before the Germans attacked at Verdun and was not designed as a measure

²¹Vallières, *Liaison*, pp. 1–6.

²²Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 77–8.

²³Alistair Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916* (London: Penguin, 1993); Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 81–2.

²⁴Jean-Michel Steg, *Ces Anglais Morts Pour La France: Le Jour Le plus Meurtrier de l'histoire Britannique: 1er Juillet 1916*, Histoire (Paris: Fayard, 2016), pp. 93–5.

²⁵Greenhalgh and Philpott traded articles debating the rationale for British soldiers fighting on the Somme and its relationship to Verdun: Elizabeth Greenhalgh, 'Why the British Were on the Somme in 1916', *War in History* 6, no. 2 (April 1999): 147–73; William Philpott, 'Why the British Were Really on the Somme: A Reply to Elizabeth Greenhalgh', *War in History* 9, no. 4 (November 2002): 446–71; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, 'Flames over the Somme: A Retort to William Philpott', *War in History* 10, no. 3 (July 2003): 335–42.

to alleviate the pressure on the French army, but this goal did become wrapped into the overall objectives for the offensive. However, an examination of General des Vallières's reports, letters, and diary entries for the planning stage of the Battle of the Somme highlight growing doubts about both the British ability to wage the coming battle and the supposed good-faith nature of this new allied cooperation.²⁶ In logistical terms, though, the reduction in French presence at the Somme meant that the British role would have to be expanded. The immediate result of this was a wider commitment of British forces being required from the men who had signed up to be participants in Kitchener's New Armies.

BRITISH HIGH COMMAND AND THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE NEW ARMIES

In 1915, the British military command were contemplating dual foreign deployments of new soldiers. They were faced with the prospect of a joint expedition with the French to Salonika in an attempt to support the Serbs and open up a new front against the Central Powers.²⁷ Alongside this joint military venture was also the prospect of deploying Kitchener's New Armies to the Western Front. As discussed previously, the joint military plans originating from the Military Conversations undertaken by Wilson, Foch, Grierson, Huguot and others had made comprehensive arrangements for many of the matters and situations that might arise from the deployment of the BEF in France, but had made few plans for what would happen once the fighting began. As a result, no real consideration or planning for allowing the British and French soldiers to interact with, and operate alongside, each other had been undertaken.

It is clear when examining the military documents of 1915 that no more consideration had been put towards this issue than in the years

²⁶General des Vallières' records for this period, as collected and translated by Greenhalgh, really have to be viewed together to gain an insight into just how badly he suspected the Somme Offensive was likely to proceed. Vallières, *Liaison*, pp. 41–108.

²⁷For the difficult diplomatic situation regarding this deployment, see: David Dutton, *The Politics of Diplomacy; Britain and France in the Balkans in the First World War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998). For work on the experiences of British soldiers during this deployment and their interactions with both locals and French soldiers, see: Rachel Richardson, 'Home Away from the Home Front: The British in the Balkans during the Great War' (Birkbeck, University of London, 2014).

leading up to 1914. The documents relating to the New Armies themselves are largely planning and logistical in their nature, similar in their approach to the Wilson-Foch pre-war plans, with no breakdown of potential external obstacles or considerations regarding the establishment, creation, and deployment of new divisions and armies from volunteers.²⁸ The records that Kitchener himself kept of his meetings with the War Office and the Imperial General Staff prove equally bereft of consideration towards creating a smooth process of deployment and induction for the New Armies.²⁹ On his promotion to replace John French as commander of the BEF, Douglas Haig, like his predecessor, would receive a letter from Kitchener detailing his instructions and urging 'the closest cooperation of French and British as a united Army' whilst also pressing home the point that 'your command is an independent one'.³⁰ The message was one of cooperation with the French army in defeating the enemy, but the impression is one of high-level military cooperation rather than a grass-roots movement between the soldiers themselves. Furthermore, similar to the instructions given to John French; this was a cooperation with implicit limitations. The British national interest was an ever-present consideration. Haig's compiled war diaries also make no mention of any plans regarding soldier-to-soldier interaction; neither does the correspondence of Field-Marshal Robertson, who had, by the end of 1915, replaced General Murray as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.³¹

For their part, the French seemed to have decided the British needed to introduce their forces to quiet areas of the front in 1915 in order for them to 'train and acclimatise', but the training and acclimatisation they had in mind was entirely military in its focus; learning the art of trench warfare and learning to defend the line whilst undergoing extensive

²⁸'New Armies: Organisation' (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 162/3, 1915 1914); 'New Armies: Establishments and Strength' (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 162/4, 1915 1914).

²⁹Herbert Lord Kitchener, 'Kitchener Collection' (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 159, 1916 1914).

³⁰Kitchener, 'Commanding the Expeditionary Force in France'.

³¹Sir Douglas Haig, G. D. Sheffield, and J. M. Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918* (London: Phoenix, 2006); William Robertson, *The Military Correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1915-February 1918* (London: Bodley Head, 1989).

drilling.³² There was no more consideration of the inter-troop implications of the new deployment emerging from the French than was present amongst the British.

What results, therefore, is a temptation to consider the planning behind this increased deployment to be inadequate or potentially negligent, but whilst the former may be the case the latter seems overly harsh. Negligence itself connotes the recognition of an issue and the active decision to do nothing to address it. What is more likely is that these inter-troop interactions and the need to ease soldiers into new environments were simply not thought of as a factor for consideration. Or, at least, not a consideration regarding soldiers at the very bottom of the pyramid. As will become apparent through some soldier's experiences in 1918, when soldiers began to move away from the normal environment of the trenches into positions of more active liaison with the French for command or coordination purposes, then GHQ started to take a far more active interest in preparing and briefing the men.

With the British High Command not devoting any time or consideration to this issue, it can be said that they had outsourced responsibility for good relations between British and French soldiers to the men themselves. However, the self-directed nature of the interactions between the two groups of soldiers may well have been the secret to their success. It allowed the British and French soldiers to manage their own affairs and expectations and, therefore, find a middle ground they were both comfortable with. However, it isn't possible to fully extract the results of those interactions and the lack of planning for them from the military context at the time.

As it transpired, the latter half of 1915 and the first half of 1916 contained the sort of military environment which allowed British and French soldiers to meet and interact positively in and around the Somme. If the military situation had deteriorated, however, or been more akin to that which greeted the British soldiers in 1914, these new volunteer soldiers would not have had the military background to rely on, and relations with the French soldiers could have failed before they had even had a chance to blossom. Late 1915 and 1916 can be viewed as a triumph of the spirit and the camaraderie of British and French soldiers. But because

³²Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 50–1.

of its undirected nature, this process could just as easily have become a disaster.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

The gentle introduction of the New Armies to the Western Front and the French meant soldiers were far less affected by the damaging aspects of either combat or culture shock. The trench system meant that most interactions between British and French would now be between soldiers. Whilst there would still be contact with civilians further behind the lines, and these contacts would become increasingly fraught, the constant proximity of the French army would allow British soldiers to focus far more on them whilst the stationary nature of the fighting meant that relations could evolve over periods of prolonged contact. Furthermore, whilst the British army had greatly increased in size since the 100,000 men deployed in 1914 it was still noticeably smaller than the French army. Some French *Poilus* saw in Christmas 1915 with a group of Scottish soldiers whom they seemed to like but found very strange.³³

At the start of January 1916, the British had deployed 38 infantry divisions to the Western Front, totalling in the region of 1 million men.³⁴ Even when, with the arrival of the first groups of conscript soldiers, this figure grew to 1.3 million men by October 1916, the British had not sufficiently closed the gap. In the early part of 1916 the French had 95 infantry divisions deployed on the Western Front, giving them an army in the field of around 1.6–2 million men.³⁵ By the end of the year, the French army on all fronts had risen to 114 infantry and six cavalry divisions. By January 1916, 7.3 million Frenchmen had been mobilised;

³³Alexandre Lafon, *La camaraderie au front: 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), p. 182.

³⁴Peter Hart, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2006), p. 32; Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War*, p. 204.

³⁵Hart, *The Somme*, p. 33; Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918*, p. 98. A French infantry division numbered between 15,000 and 17,000 men during the course of the war: General Staff, War Office, *Handbook of the French Army* (London: Imperial War Museum, Department of Printed Books in association with The Battery Press and Articles of War Ltd, 1995), pp. 108–111.

but of these, 900,000–1 million had already died, been severely wounded or captured.³⁶

Whilst the Somme had not been as active a sector as the Ypres Salient or general Flanders areas, where the British army was also stationed, the meeting point of the British and French armies at the river would become the source of intense fighting early in 1916, and would provide the resident British forces with a clear view of the French military. At the end of January, the German army attacked on the River Somme area. This attack was ostensibly timed to coincide with the Kaiser's birthday, though it may also have been intended to act as a diversion for the imminent offensive at Verdun. It became apparent that the primary focus of the German assault was the small village of Frise, which lay in the French section of the front. The village was captured during the night of 28 January and '1000 prisoners were taken and enormous losses sustained.'³⁷ Second-Lieutenant Kenneth Macardle (who had been stationed in Suzanne with the 17th Battalion, Manchester Regiment on the night of the Frise attack) wrote in mid-February that the Germans had captured Frise without a fight after cutting off 700 French soldiers.³⁸ Macardle's evaluation of the German attack was not far from the truth. On the night of 28 January, the Germans had launched their attack on Frise and captured it following only around an hour of actual infantry action. In doing so they also managed to effectively take an entire battalion, most likely the 2e of the 129e RI.³⁹ On the same night, Captain

³⁶Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918*, pp. 120–1; Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War*, p. 316.

³⁷Captain W. H. Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 1917–1915, IWM: DOCS - 99/22/1, Imperial War Museum, 19 January 1916.

³⁸2nd Lieutenant Kenneth C. Macardle, 'Manuscript Diary', 1916, IWM: DOCS - P210, Imperial War Museum, 18 February 1916. The 17th Battalion, Manchester Regiment was stationed in Suzanne on the night of 28 January 1916, and was still deployed there on 18 February when Macardle made this entry in his diary, though they'd recently received orders (which would subsequently be cancelled) to move to Corbie. '17 Battalion Manchester Regiment', n.d., WO 95/2339/2, National Archives, Kew.

³⁹Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division During World War I* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 129; 'Historique Du 129ème Régiment d'infanterie', 1920, pp. 25–7, SHD, <http://argonaute.u-paris10.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267961aCwYs4>.

Bloor reported that the Germans heavily shelled the area of Maricourt and Suzanne with lachrymatory gas.⁴⁰

The loss of Frise left the surrounding villages dangerously exposed and untenable for further civilian occupation.⁴¹ It was clear that an attempt would have to be made to recapture it, and, as it lay within the French area of responsibility, it would be they who would launch the assault. This meant that whilst British artillery would be added to the bombardment of German positions, the British soldiers stationed on the extreme right of their line would have a perfect viewing position for the French counter-attack, which was launched on 29 January and carried into February by the 274e RI and the 22e RI.⁴² The 149th Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery was based near Suzanne at the time of the French counterattack, and Lieutenant Bloor wrote about how he and his fellows were able to stand atop the dug-out to watch the battles 'as one sees the stage from the stalls'.⁴³ There was however, an important element in how the British soldiers viewed this French attack, and it is noticeable in Bloor's tendency to refer to the attacking forces, which were predominantly French, as 'we'.⁴⁴ The sense of shared endeavour that appears in Bloor's account is a departure from that seen in 1914 when 'we' had been exclusively used to mean the British. The battle for Frise would eventually come to an end by 13 February with the Germans retaining the village and having consolidated further entrenched positions for about two miles.⁴⁵

Whilst the French initially feared that this might be the beginning of a wider German offensive in the region, the Somme sector would become relatively quiet following the capture of Frise, allowing the allies time to adjust to the new shape of the line.⁴⁶ British soldiers would continue

⁴⁰Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 28 January 1916.

⁴¹Private Robert Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 1921, IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C48, Imperial War Museum, 17 March 1916.

⁴²'Historique Du 129ème Régiment d'infanterie.', p. 27; 'Historique Du 274ème Régiment d'infanterie.', n.d., pp. 18–24, SHD, <http://argonnaute.u-paris10.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267961YffRa5>.

⁴³Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 29 January 1916–31 January 1916; '149 Brigade Royal Field Artillery', n.d., WO 95/2321/4, National Archives, Kew.

⁴⁴Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 29 January 1916.

⁴⁵Bloor, 13 February 1916.

⁴⁶État-major des armées—Service historique, *Les Armées Françaises Dans La Grande Guerre. Tome III—Les Offensives de 1915. L'hiver 1915–1916. Annexes 4* (Paris: Imprimerie

to arrive in France and begin their journey to the Somme. From this period onwards, British soldiers would enter a crucial period of contact with French soldiers, which would see them questioning what exactly defined 'being French'. The first indicator of this comes from Lieutenant Macardle who discovered that the French and German troops in the Frise region had previously made an agreement to regularly exchange documents in order to keep the peace. The arrival of British soldiers to take over a nearby portion of the line 'scuppered' this arrangement, but the remaining French soldiers continued to be unconcerned about the intentions of the opposing Germans and were regularly found to be keeping sentry whilst carrying no ammunition.⁴⁷ Of particular interest in Macardle's impressions of his nearby allies is his evaluation of the French as not being 'a stern people'. At various points during 1916, Macardle attempts to understand the actions of the French soldiers through their cultural identity in a way that was never present during the battles of 1914 or early 1915. The incidents Macardle references are actually quite serious in the context of military behaviour, with clear fraternisation between the French and the Germans in addition to a French sentry being effectively unarmed whilst on duty. Either of these events would likely have been a court martial offence and yet Macardle does not appear to view them as inappropriate, rather as indicative of an aspect of French personality.

Whilst, before long, 1916 would, for the French, come to be dominated primarily by the Battle of Verdun and then, later and to a lesser extent, by the fighting on the Somme, the first month of the year saw an examination of their British allies in the 12th edition of the trench newspaper *L'Echo Des Gourbis* under the headline 'NOS AMIS ANGLAIS'.⁴⁸ Based on the testimony of a young [unnamed] French Parliamentarian who had been attached to the British, it reflected on 'his impressions of the leaders, soldiers, the army of our brave allies and friends'. This man was initially struck by 'the indomitable courage and tenacity of the British troops' but also by the money the British were 'spending lavishly

nationale, 1926), p. 730. The major attack that the French feared would shortly begin at Verdun to the south.

⁴⁷ Macardle, 'Manuscript Diary', 25 February 1916 (approximately).

⁴⁸ Jean-Pierre Turbergue, *Les Journaux de Tranchées, 1914-1918* (Paris: Le Grand livre du mois, 1999), p. 78.

on its fighters'. The image of Britain being a rich nation and benefiting from its wealth, in the eyes of the French, is not a new one and there were signs of it in the diaries of British soldiers during the Christmas of 1914. However, with the war already well underway by this point, the fact that the British were now fully throwing their wealth into waging it seems to present a mixture of feelings in this French soldier. There was admiration, certainly, for the way the British were now conducting themselves, but he only rules out the phrase 'throwing their money away' because of connotations of disorder or lack of intelligence, rather than it being a reasonable course of matters. This may just be an indication that this soldier thought Britain was trying to buy its way through the war rather than using its armies. Indeed, he suggests that 'it's only left to say that the English are brave fellows and that if their khaki colours are so inspiring, we wouldn't do badly to adopt them'.

This French soldier was particularly taken with the work of General Monro, describing him as a 'wonderful leader' and also remarking how he had steadied his men under fire.⁴⁹ This article was placed alongside an illustration depicting the appearance of the British soldiers and a selection of other commonwealth representatives; the Highlanders, two variations of the Indians, and soldiers from New Zealand. The British officers were depicted as fairly stern whilst one of the Scottish soldiers was depicted with his kilt blowing upwards in the breeze, an image that reinforces the notion of caricature behind national portrayal.

The notion of the British officers being unreasonably stern and implacable finds resonance within the diaries of George Connes, who had been fighting for the French at Verdun before his capture in June. Connes certainly found the presence of foreign men on French soil jarring and uncomfortable, declaring that any foreign uniforms and foreign voices in France were 'the most blatant forms of evil'.⁵⁰ During his time at Mainz, Connes would come to form a highly negative impression of the British officers sharing the prisoner-of-war (POW) camp, based upon their apparent disdain for those of other countries and social classes. Connes would reflect on the difference between 'the verbs *ignorer* in

⁴⁹Turbergue, p. 78. The French soldier has likely made an, understandable, spelling error in naming the British general, and was almost certainly referring to Sir Charles Monro.

⁵⁰G. A. Connes and Lois Vines, *A POW's Memoir of the First World War: The Other Ordeal*, English ed. (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 24.

French (simply not to know) and *to ignore* in English (to voluntarily pay no attention to someone or something)'.⁵¹ Connes speculated that the Germans had arranged for the French, British, and Russians to share camps in this way 'to make their enemies ... aware of all that set us apart from one another'.⁵² So far removed from the front lines and the ability to actively join together in struggle against the Germans, and therefore share a common purpose if not common languages or national traits, the POWs found prolonged contact with their allies to be an isolating experience rather than an affirming one.⁵³ Connes would at times find some measure of respect for the British defiance in the face of the Germans, but for him, watching the interactions between the British POWs and the German guards conjured up images of something troubling and sinister. The elitism that allowed a British lieutenant to stare down a 'Prussian colonel' was indicative of one that would also ensure that international cooperation for peace would remain an unachievable goal.⁵⁴

The role that Verdun plays in the French experience of 1916 is key in understanding not just criticisms of British soldiers but also how the fighting around the Somme differed in its approaches and aims. Whilst the manpower requirements at Verdun had lessened the French representation at the Somme, it was still an allied operation. That the British ended up taking on the majority of the front does not invalidate the French presence there. Additionally, the Battle of the Somme was fought if not to win victory in itself then at least to create a situation from which victory could be achieved. Neither of these two aspects was present in

⁵¹Connes and Vines, p. 41.

⁵²Connes may have had a point with this assertion. In 1915, upon hearing that British officers were not pleased to be held as POWs alongside Russians, the German Military Authority replied with a statement suggesting that '[I]f the Allies find each other unattractive when they are brought into close contact, it is no fault of the Germans.' The thought process behind this may well have been to try and use close contact between the different allies to drive a wedge between them. 'British Parliamentary Papers, [Cd. 8108] 1915, Misc. No. 19 (London), Correspondence with the United States Ambassador Respecting the Treatment of British Prisoners of War and Interned Civilians in Germany [In Continuation of Misc. No. 15 (1915)], Enclosure 3 in No. 13', (HM Stationery off, 1915) as quoted by; Oliver Wilkinson, "They Chatter like Monkeys": Anglo-Allied Interactions in First World War Captivity' (Researching the Entente Allies, National Archives, Kew, 2017).

⁵³This is a slightly odd moment where Connes is reflecting his post-war experiences back into his wartime memories.

⁵⁴Connes and Vines, *A POW's Memoir of the First World War: The Other Ordeal*, p. 42.

the French fighting at Verdun. Firstly, Verdun was a purely French battle and, because of General Pétain's '*Noria*' system, the vast majority of the French army would rotate through Verdun at some point in order to spread the casualties around and prevent any single division from being destroyed.⁵⁵ This meant that far more French soldiers would experience the fighting at Verdun than would serve alongside the British on the Somme. By June 1916, some French troops were on their third tour at Verdun.⁵⁶ The experience of fighting at Verdun would have a pronounced effect on the psyche of the French *Poilu*.⁵⁷ In the short-term it would lead to there being less of a French presence at the Somme, but beyond this the French army would become increasingly exhausted by their efforts defending Verdun. French soldiers there were not fighting to secure victory. Instead they were fighting to secure survival.

The full motivation for the German attack on French positions (whether it was to stage a breakthrough, or to 'bleed the French white', or a combination of these two) remains contested within historiography, but it was clear that the Germans were content to pursue battle there for the duration of 1916.⁵⁸ However, because of this eschatological element to the fighting at Verdun, some French soldiers took a dim view of, what they believed to be, ongoing British delays and excuses regarding an offensive which committed their own soldiers. One soldier from III Army bemoaned the fact that Britain boasted of having an army of 5 million men, but have done nothing with it outside of 'their lamentable Dardanelles expedition'; he also claimed that the one piece of territory the British had captured and held was the main boulevards of the French capital.⁵⁹ Similarly, a soldier from IV Army claimed that the British simply stood by with their arms folded and watched the French suffer at Verdun without offering to lend a hand.⁶⁰ These feelings would continue

⁵⁵Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*, p. 228.

⁵⁶Horne, p. 269.

⁵⁷Jean-Yves Le Naour, *1916: L'enfer* (Paris: Perrin, 2014), Chapters 2–5; Pierre Miquel, *Les Poilus: La France Sacrifiée* (La Fleche: Pocket, 2014), Chapter 5; Jacques Meyer, *Les soldats de la Grande Guerre*, Nouv. éd., La vie quotidienne (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1998), sec. Le Soldat De Verdun.

⁵⁸Horne, *The Price of Glory: Verdun 1916*, pp. 34–6.

⁵⁹Ian Sumner, *They Shall Not Pass: The French Army on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2012), p. 134.

⁶⁰Sumner, p. 134.

to evolve over the remainder of the war, largely out of sight of the British army itself. The sacrifices made by French *Poilus* at Verdun would have a direct impact on the eventual French mutiny in 1917. More than this, however, they would also become a crucial factor in the French reaction to the British retreats in 1918. The experience of fighting at Verdun would eventually change what *Poilus* were willing to accept from their allies.

Despite this, there appeared to be a burgeoning recognition and appreciation for the efforts of the French within Britain. A school pupil named John Hicks was rewarded for his good conduct in the school year 1915–1916 with a book that, through illustrations depicting toy soldiers, explained the righteous cause of France in the ongoing conflict.⁶¹

Meanwhile, with the outbreak of fighting at Verdun, *Punch Magazine* was moved to celebrate the bravery of both the French soldiers and the French nation as a whole (Fig. 1). The image itself is cut along traditionally heroic lines with the French soldier standing bravely and unflinchingly under fire. This image also bears a remarkable similarity to the famous ‘*On ne passe pas!*’ poster of 1918 which also built upon the image of a French *Poilu* defying the German invaders at Verdun. The *Punch* cartoon, however, is actually slightly more dramatic with its use of explosions to show the battle is still ongoing and the French soldier, stood in the open, is displaying the sort of bravery under fire that the British soldiers themselves would note during the build-up to the Somme. Additionally, *Punch* reproduced poetry that suggested that, although British and French soldiers could still not converse with each other, relations between the pair had begun to transcend language issues:

But Tommy at the front manages to converse with the *poilu* without any vocabulary at all:

I met a chap the other day a-roostin’ in a trench,
 ‘E didn’t know a word of ours nor me a word of French,
 An’ ‘ow it was we managed – well I cannot understand,
 But I never used the phrase-book, though I ‘ad it in my hand.

⁶¹“‘At War!’—by Charlotte Schaller: Leigh School Pupil Receives a Book for Good Behaviour 1915–1916 | Wiltshire at War”. Accessed 18 February 2018, <http://www.wiltshireatwar.org.uk/story/at-war-by-charlotte-schaller-leigh-school-pupil-receives-a-book-for-good-behaviour-1915-1916/>.



TO THE GLORY OF FRANCE.

VERDUN, FEBRUARY—MARCH, 1916.

Fig. 1 *Punch Magazine, To the Glory of France* (1916, Image courtesy of Punch Ltd.)

I winked at 'im to start with; 'e grinned from ear to ear;
 An' 'e says "Tipperary," an' I says "Sooveneer";
 'E 'ad my only Woodbine, I 'ad 'is thin cigar,
 Which set the ball a-rollin', an' so-well, there you are!

I showed 'im next my wife an' kids, 'e up an' showed me 'is,
 Them funny little Frenchy kids with 'air all in a frizz,
 "Annette," 'e says, "Louise," 'e says, an' 'is tears began to fall;
 We was comrades when we parted, but we'd 'ardly spoke at all.⁶²

An additional development in the unfolding 1916 dynamic was the arrival of British soldiers from other theatres of combat. In 1914, the soldiers of the BEF had no other immediate point of reference in their interactions with the French. By 1916, however, soldiers such as Private Graystone of the 10th Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment arrived in France having spent a prolonged period in Egypt. These men had already experienced a different 'other' and, upon then meeting the French, declared that it was 'good to be among civilisation again and to be able to speak to people who are rational human beings and not jabbering, quarrelsome and pestering semi-savages like the Arabs we have left behind'.⁶³ Graystone's experiences in North Africa appear to have made him predisposed towards the French (as fellow Europeans) before he had even had any form of significant interaction with them. His first, proper, contact with French troops would shortly follow as he was 'hailed out as some sort of official interpreter' to discuss matters with French troops, 'many of them carrying medals – newly won', and heading for Verdun.⁶⁴ Upon examining these men more closely, Graystone would leave with an appreciation for the French steel helmets that 'were quite bullet-proof

⁶²Punch, *Mr. Punch's History of the Great War* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1920), p. 69. It is the unspoken in this scenario that is of key importance rather than what the two soldiers actually say to each other; which is practically nothing. They are both descended from different nations and heritages but the war has brought out a commonality of experience and existence in which fathers and husbands of different nations can sympathise with each other's longing for family and home, and therefore socialise with each other on an emotional level which can transcend the need for spoken communication.

⁶³J. W. Graystone, 'Typescript Diaries', 1916, IWM: DOCS - 91/3/1, Imperial War Museum, 6 March 1916.

⁶⁴Graystone, 7 March 1916.

and had saved many a man's life'.⁶⁵ Similarly French soldiers who met their British comrades seemed to be equally taken with their great coats and a series of trades took place in the early months of 1916 for them.⁶⁶

We should not, however, automatically assume that relations between British and French troops in 1916 were universally positive. Honeymoon period or not, there would still have been numerous grounds for contention between the two groups. A Scottish soldier complained in a letter to his niece that the French were a 'lot of b—y thieves and robbers'.⁶⁷ It seems that this antipathy towards the French stemmed from their habit of referring to him, and his Scottish fellows, as '*angleterre*'.⁶⁸

There were other cultural differences between British and French soldiers when they met, but these become notable for the level of self-reflection displayed by some of the British soldiers and also the slightly embarrassed way that they accepted a form of cultural culpability in not matching the views of their allies. On 15 March, Lieutenant Macardle recounted in his diary the results of a meal he and some of his companions had shared with a French soldier a few nights before:

They are a strange people – so undoubtedly are we. A Frenchman dined with us the other night – he was silent and reserved, a handsome little man with dark hair and a lovely rich dark colour in his skin – I think he felt embarrassed with our languages – but suddenly [word illegible] of some casual remark of ours he burst into glittering animation “ah! But to die in the hour of victory” he sighed ecstatically “who would be sad?” we all looked rather foolish and uncomfortable – we felt it would be the very limit to die in the hour of victory and rather lost for a suitable reply. “Well I don't know” some brave man murmured “I'd be rather fed up.” Our guest lapsed again into unbroken silence – What barbarians they must think us!⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Graystone, 7 March 1916.

⁶⁶ Louis Barthas and Edward M. Strauss, *Poilu: The World War I Notebooks of Corporal Louis Barthas, Barrelnmaker, 1914–1918*, 2015, p. 182.

⁶⁷ J. P. Fowler, 'Manuscript Letter to His Niece', 1916 1915, IWM: DOCS - 82/3/1, Imperial War Museum, 18 March 1916.

⁶⁸ Fowler, 18 March 1916. The underlining is Fowler's. Fowler's annoyance that the French had failed to recognise his nationality and labelled him simply as being English (so not even covered by the 'British' caveat) created a situation where the French were an extension (albeit it likely unwitting) of his nationalistic conflict with the English.

⁶⁹ Macardle, 'Manuscript Diary', 15 March 1916.

The French soldier's opinions on the joy of combat are not too far from the recognisable (although not always accurately represented) offensive *à outrance* philosophy of Lieutenant-Colonel Grandmaison, built upon the supposed *élan* of the French soldier.⁷⁰ It is the reaction of the British to this viewpoint, however, that provides the real interest. Their initial reluctance to offer their more cautious opinion of war, and then Macardle's supposition that the French soldier would regard him and his friends as 'barbarians' for failing to share his ideological view of war, suggests a certain inferiority complex when measuring themselves against the French. A lack of understanding about the nature of the war for France, and its effect on French soldiers, was a running theme at times. In 1917, a reviewer of Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*, itself inspired by the events of 1916, remarked that; 'If an Englishman hated war as M. Barbusse hates it, he would not only not write about it, he would almost certainly not take part in it.'⁷¹

In 1914, the men of the BEF compared themselves against the French in martial terms and, often, ruled themselves to be far more proficient and skilled as soldiers. For this to have changed by 1916 may seem strange. However, the British army of 1914 (the original, professional, and highly-skilled BEF) had been replaced by civilian volunteers. Macardle hadn't participated in combat by this stage of 1916 and he was not alone in that. The men of Kitchener's New Armies were civilians first and foremost who had signed up in 1914 and early 1915. They were not soldiers. More to the point, they knew they were not soldiers. The French, by comparison, had been through a process of at least two years' active military service. In the face of that, some British soldiers were left feeling slightly intimidated by their French comrades when measuring their own efforts against the bar the French had set. The officer classes, in particular, having volunteered in 1914 and undergone their training before reaching the front in 1915 and 1916, seemed to be instructed in methods and techniques relating to Napoleonic-era battles only to find that, upon joining their battalion, they had been scarcely prepared for the war awaiting them.⁷²

⁷⁰ Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918*, p. 25.

⁷¹ John Middleton Murry, 'Le Feu', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 April 1917, p. 164.

⁷² Peter Parker, *The Old Lie; the Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), pp. 37–8.

The soldiers of the New Armies had only recently undergone army training, a process designed to fill the recruits with confidence in their own abilities and, more importantly, with the ideals of the military institution. So, at what point did this self-confidence begin to evaporate? Was it unexpectedly lost somewhere on the trip across the Channel? What seems most plausible is that, rather than setting the dominant tone of self-confidence over uncertainty, the military training these men went through was the anomaly in this process rather than the norm. From the moment they signed up to the army to the time they entered the training regime, these men may have had a rough idea about the nature of war but they were not professional soldiers and would not have thought of themselves as such. During the training process, this would conceivably have changed as they were taught the martial skills they would supposedly need both to survive and triumph in France. The transition from Britain to France and from Home Front to Western Front would have brought about feelings of anticipation and excitement but also of nervousness, particularly as the men began to hear the fighting and the guns in the distance. The arrival in the trenches represented the final step in the deployment, and was often the moment that some of the soldiers began to recognise the deficiencies in their training. The French did not create this lack of self-confidence and assurance in the British but they did give it a recognisable form. The British did not yet fully know who or what they were but, upon seeing the French soldiers, they knew they were not yet them.

The lack of composure felt by some British soldiers under fire, in comparison to the French, was further commented upon by Lieutenant Bloor when he was given a tour of French front-line trenches near Frise. During this visit, Bloor was left initially terrified by ongoing German shelling but simultaneously awed by the 'picked colonial troops' who scarcely seemed to notice the attack.⁷³ The notion of French soldiers constituting an elite and displaying the benefits of their heightened martial ability adds to the suggestion that the British troops believed they were lacking in something, whether it was simple experience, or a more intangible military quality in comparison.

Bloor was not alone in this period in receiving an invitation to visit French trenches. Other British soldiers also began to spend time in the

⁷³Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 29 March 1916.

trenches of their nearby ally. Some of these invitations can be understood as a manifestation of the French desire to be a good host, but there may also have been an instructive element to them as well. As noted by Greenhalgh, there was little in the way of ‘*formal* transmission of French documents or tactical lessons’ in the months before the Somme offensive.⁷⁴ However, at an informal level, French soldiers could give their British comrades an exposure to their methods of waging war. This learning by exposure rather than by instruction allowed for lessons to be passed between nearby French and British soldiers almost by osmosis. This was then further enhanced by what little formal approaches did exist for the dissemination of knowledge between British and French armies. Some formal measures did exist after mid-1915 to allow the British to receive French pamphlets covering topics such as combined offensive actions.⁷⁵ Information traded between the two armies at lower levels is harder to quantify than more formalised practices, but it had the benefit of avoiding the ‘top down, vertical intervention’ that was often resisted by those within the military.⁷⁶ The continuing production and dissemination of French doctrine would lead to the 1917 English-language version of the French *Manual for commanders of infantry platoons* for commanders of infantry platoons effectively replacing most American equivalents after 1917.⁷⁷

It was not just the perceived military skill of the French that struck the British. Shortly before the launching of the Somme Offensive, Bloor would reflect on the apparent physical differences between the French and British troops, declaring that ‘the Britisher is a boy, in size, looks and manners, whilst the French are all men – bearded and manly-looking’.⁷⁸ Such sentiments do once again raise the issue of the British feeling a sense of inferiority when compared to the soldiers of the other principal combatants in a way that would also strike at their very masculinity.⁷⁹

⁷⁴Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition*, p. 62.

⁷⁵Aimée Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 147–8.

⁷⁶Fox, p. 152.

⁷⁷Arthur W. Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine—The Story of New York’s Colored Volunteers* (New York: Covici Friede, 1936), p. 168.

⁷⁸Bloor, ‘Typescript Diary’, 23 June 1916.

⁷⁹Whilst there may have been some localised discrepancies in the heights of different nations’ combatants, in general terms the British were taller than their French comrades and possibly taller than the Germans as well. Regular British army recruits between 1910

The French seemed distinctly more masculine than the British, both through their appearance and the martial confidence with which they held themselves.⁸⁰

Similarly, Lieutenant Stansfield of 19th Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment, who had previously believed he knew the composition of the French army, would soon discover the variety of different men within it from 'Landsturm' to 'strapping Parisians'.⁸¹ Stansfield would come to bond with these newly discovered Frenchmen over a sense of shared loss and disaster after witnessing a shop in the nearby town being bombed, resulting in the death of four French cavalymen and a civilian.⁸² In response to this attack, the British soldiers sent 'three men and a wreath ... to the French soldiers' funeral' and in response got 'a splendid letter of thanks from the French major commanding the troops at Guillacourt'.⁸³ This strengthening of bonds between British and French soldiers as a result of combat death added to the shared experience of the two armies. Whilst they may have been operating in different ways, they

and 1913 had an average height of 168.4 cm (if aged 20–24) and 168.9 cm for those aged over 25. By contrast, French adult men of the same age groups had an average height of around 167 cm for those aged 20–24, or 166 cm for those older. German men of the same age had an average height of 165 cm or less. That British soldiers during the war, therefore, had the impression of being shorter or smaller in some ways than their fellows is more an indication of a developing perception of inferiority than a true reflection of wider height trends. Roderick Floud et al., *The Changing Body*, New Approaches to Economic and Social History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 144 and 230–1. <http://prism.talis.com/sussex-ac/items/1123182>. Additionally, to help control the rush of volunteers in 1914, the British had temporarily raised the minimum height requirement from 5 feet 3 inches (160 cm) to 5 feet 6 inches (167.6 cm). De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, p. 46.

⁸⁰For further discussions regarding the effect of the war on male masculinity, see: Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male; Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1999); Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁸¹F. O. Stansfield, 'Typescript Compendium: Diary & Letters', 1916 1914, IWM: DOCS - 06/32/1, Imperial War Museum, 2 April 1916.

⁸²Stansfield, 2 April 1916.

⁸³Stansfield, 1 April 1916. This excerpt came from his diary, rather than his letters home, which accounts for the discrepancy in dates.

were occupying the same front, facing the same dangers, and, as such, had taken on a 'brothers-in-arms' mentality.

Alongside the feelings of martial inferiority, we can also begin to see a fairly rapid thawing of any tensions following soldiers' arrival in France. This was often due to engaging on a face-to-face level with French soldiers. Upon his arrival in August 1915, Cude had stated that he did 'not ... care very much for France'.⁸⁴ However, Cude was placed in close proximity to the French army when he was deployed to the 'extreme right of the British Line', allowing him to 'make friends with some "Froggies" (French Soldiers) who are now on our right'.⁸⁵ Cude related the story of a nearby French who spent every day watching his wife and mother who had found themselves in the town behind German lines. His knowledge of the town was invaluable for the British soldiers, but he would not allow the area to be shelled for fear of losing his loved ones.

This was a key moment not just for Cude but also for the evolving nature of the British relationship with the French, which moved away from just seeing the French as a single homogeneous entity (although that would remain an important and understandable factor of the inter-cultural discourse) but also recognising the individuals who made up these larger groups. Cude's discovery of this particular French soldier's story adds a new human element to his future relations with the French. They were no longer the 'others' of 1914, they were still allies but they were also becoming fellow men and, in many cases, friends. The stationary nature of the 1916 battlefield meant that British soldiers were in position long enough to recognise the French soldiers alongside them. The line dividing impersonal and personal contact was being crossed, and the British soldiers making the move would not go back again.

The new and burgeoning relationships of some British soldiers with the French should also be understood not just in terms of respect or

⁸⁴Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 8 August 1915.

⁸⁵Cude, 17 March 1916. This also represents one of the few times that recognisable colloquialisms such as Frogs or Froggies are used by the British to describe the French. Cude is almost unique amongst the British contributors to this study in using the term. Nor does it appear to be intended by Cude as an insult, for, as becomes apparent across the war, Cude holds the French in a good deal of esteem so the term takes on a more endearing quality than perhaps would otherwise have been expected. However, there is clearly a substantial contingent within the British Army who do intend for the term 'Frogs' (and variants of it) to be used as an insult as they subsequently, and potentially mischievously, primed American soldiers in its use from 1917 onwards.

inferiority but also a form of deference that ran through the British social system during this period. The British class system at the time encouraged deference to those wealthier or from better families than oneself, and also the aping of their behaviour and mannerisms.⁸⁶ There was a greater division between the working classes regarding skilled and unskilled workers and again between those living in poverty regarding whom to defer to, but the general trappings of deference stayed largely the same. Touching the cap as a mark of respect or holding a famer's horse were the suggested responses to encountering one's betters.⁸⁷ The skilled working classes were generally viewed as being superior to the un-skilled or poor below them, and would often consider themselves as being the 'respectable working class' and 'a little bit above the labouring class', but there was still a clear deference not just to social betters but those within the community who had real power over them such as the police.⁸⁸

It is from these roots that an emerging deference for the French fits into the existing customs of these new British soldiers. With a form of deference present in most spheres of British class life, the French began to occupy a spot perhaps best described as skilled working class, but presented in a manner that would encourage deference from those of the middle classes as well. A movement towards imitation by British soldiers followed as they attempted to replicate the behaviour and approaches of the French army and, at times, their language as well.⁸⁹ The French demonstrated a clear ability and skill in their approach to waging war, but unlike within the class structures back home, the French did not hold any actual power over them. Deference itself could also be multi-faceted and habit-forming in itself. It was not purely based on economic wealth. British soldiers had already realised that, relatively speaking, they were paid more than French soldiers of the same rank.

⁸⁶Paul Richard Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London: Weidenfeld, 1975), p. 106.

⁸⁷Thompson, pp. 126 and 147.

⁸⁸Thompson, pp. 126–133. In addition to this there are examples of those amongst the poor who held a great deal of respect for 'what we'd call intellectuals of the working-class people' who performed services 'from the goodness of their heart' Thompson, p. 171.

⁸⁹Whilst the British soldier would never really master the French language, the use of terms such as 'l'après guerre' rapidly spread amongst them as a method of discussing not just the end of the conflict but the potential world it would produce.

However, this additional wealth did not translate into a sense of superiority, as money did not translate into an ability to fight effectively. Rather, it was deference as a reflection of a recognisable inferiority that was most relevant. The French soldiers were recognisably more skilled and composed in the face of battle, and, as a result, tapped into the existing framework for deference.

As these relationships between British and French soldiers began to develop, some men would have to try and translate them into a manner understandable to those left behind in Britain. Lieutenant Stansfield, after being invited to dine in the French Sergeants' Mess at the nearby hospital, recorded two very different versions of the same evening in his diary and a letter home. Whilst his diary presented a much shorter version of the evening, his letter offered an expansion of several key aspects where he sought to describe not only the evening but also the other guests:

It was a unique experience, both for the food that I ate and for the company I was in. The latter included a Paris solicitor, a Martinique negro (this sounds dreadful, but he was an awfully nice chap), a portly black-whiskered and typically French sergeant whose wife and children are at present in the invaded portion of France without any means of communication with him, a Parisian tapestry-worker (a perfect dandy) and others.⁹⁰

The description of the character of the 'Martinique negro' is particularly revealing here, especially as it was not included in Stansfield's diary entry.⁹¹ The focus on this man's race is swiftly followed by an attempt to dismiss what might be supposed are instinctive or automatic prejudices from the letter's recipient. Given how Stansfield himself appears to warm to the man it seems that, on his behalf at least, another stereotype was left by the wayside after a pleasant interaction.

Whilst the attempts to define their allies had clear benefits for the British soldiers, taking a simple one-dimensional view of these interactions neglects the very real self-reflective element of such an approach. The implications of this are laid out clearly by Lieutenant Macardle in mid-April during a lengthy passage of his diary:

⁹⁰Stansfield, 'Typescript Compendium: Diary & Letters', 2 April 1916.

⁹¹He was simply referred to as 'a Martinique negro' in the diary entry dated 30 March 1916.

Underneath me three men were singing 'un peur [sic] d'amour'. I sat on my bed with a cigarette and indulged in a reflection on the artistry of the French. It was pleasant to find justification for a preconceived idea and I had seen little among the French peasantry before to support the notion that they were all dreamers, idealists and sentimentalists; but here below me were three soldiers on leave singing softly and sweetly over their native wine one of the muses loveliest love songs – the soft harmony of their voices rather saddened me, theirs was surely a truer sentiment than the sort our Tommies love, they were not ashamed to be sad. My heart softened to the French who had disgusted me with the filthy habits of their poorer classes, all at once I loved them. The singing stopped, glasses clicked below, they were drinking to la Belle France, or to Jean [sic] and Mare [sic] and Felice. Then they started again but they had changed their tune "oh my! I don't want to die! I want to go home." I went down and peaked into the estarmine [sic]; there were three of my own men there drinking beer and that was all the company ... I went to my window and looked out on the sloppy street and drenched lines of miserable horses in a vacant lot on the other side of it. Something had depressed me, the rain, 'un peur [sic] d'amour', perhaps being tricked into loving the French and finding it was only Tommy who I had always loved, but not quite understood.⁹²

That Macardle, or indeed any other British soldiers, had formulated a set of particular stereotypes of the French peasantry based upon romantic concepts is not surprising, but this clear statement of it shows how Macardle had anticipated his interactions with the citizenry and the elements in their behaviour he had been looking for. It is also apparent that Macardle was, initially, relieved to have this preconceived idea validated, as it meant that he would not have to alter his existing model for understanding the French. Additionally, the singing of the ersatz Frenchmen had the effect of softening Macardle's approach to the citizenry who had previously disgusted him. However, his diary carries no indication of this disgust, in fact the French civilians are scarcely mentioned at all and may have been internalised.

However, this 'softening' towards the French was ultimately shown to be misplaced as the three soldiers turned out to be British. Macardle

⁹²Macardle, 'Manuscript Diary', 19 April 1916. This diary entry then concludes with the three British soldiers heading into the street and, upon confronting a 'hideous woman of huge proportions' saying something to her which is not legible in the diary.

was initially depressed by this realisation but this swiftly evolved into a more complicated intellectual crisis as he wrote that he had been ‘tricked into loving the French and finding it was only Tommy *who I had always loved, but not quite understood*’.⁹³ In his attempts to understand the French, Macardle had once again been forced to return to his fellow Britons and attempt to decipher them. British attempts at understanding the French were twofold. The clearest aspect was of course the obvious one, and generally focused on three inter-linked questions; Who are the French? What are they? What makes them so? However, the questions relating to the composition of the French also provide further detail in reverse with the answers being applied to the British. Macardle had not solved any of his queries regarding the French; he was still faced with the possibility that his preconceived notions of the French peasantry were flawed and exposed by a lack of qualitative evidence. As a result, he was certainly no closer to reconciling their actions with their motivations and, more importantly, he was now faced with further questions relating to the composition of the British Tommy. At this stage, he was in no position to answer those questions.

These attempts to further understand themselves were complicated again by the evolution the British army was undergoing, an evolution that was beginning to exhibit similar traits to those the British had initially detected, and been perplexed by, within the French army. By mid-May Graystone was reporting that the German soldiers were putting up an ‘unofficial notice board’ upon which they attached amusing messages that showed ‘how utterly fed up they are with the war. And what is more they know we are too!’⁹⁴ At the same time, he reported that British and German troops regularly repaired their barbed wire side by side, studiously pretending not to notice the other and the Germans even warning the British soldiers across the way when an artillery bombardment was about to take place.

This sort of live-and-let-live relationship with the Germans mirrors some of the characteristics of the French soldiers that the likes of Macardle and Bloor had encountered earlier in 1916. The key moment in this new state of affairs may be Graystone’s acknowledgement that he and his men were ‘fed up’ with the war. They had not yet taken part in

⁹³Italics added.

⁹⁴Graystone, ‘Typescript Diaries’, 12 May 1916.

large-scale action during their time on the Somme, but they were quickly coming to appreciate the fragile balance of trench warfare. An offshoot of this knowledge appears to have been an appreciation of the benefits to be gained from a peaceful truce.⁹⁵ There had been initial fears, upon the British arrival, that the unofficial peace brokered between the French and the Germans would be compromised by the British officers' wish to commence aggressive operations and, in some cases that indeed proved to be the case.⁹⁶ However, the British soldiers themselves were also recognising that the war could be a lot easier and safer if hostilities outside of large attacks were kept to a minimum.

THE COUNTDOWN TO 'ZERO HOUR'

Whilst there had been combat operations carried out by both sides over the first half of 1916 in the area around the Somme, the largest battle was yet to come. As the year progressed, the allied forces which would contest the Somme began to assemble and prepare their positions. Despite the eventual Verdun-induced change in the ratio of British to French forces which would participate in the battle, Bloor wrote that the valley running from Suzanne and Maricourt, a position which lay right along the dividing line of the two armies, was being taken over by the French and was covered in blue French uniforms.⁹⁷ Bloor was especially struck with how many guns the French were preparing to deploy, with over thirty batteries being introduced to an area where the British had previously placed only seven.⁹⁸ Bloor would write further over the following few days as the British and French armies began to crowd into the sector and trench systems were expanded in length and depth until Bloor was given to state his belief that 'this district will feature in the annals

⁹⁵The benefits of these truces would become much clearer during the Somme offensive: Richard Van Emden, *Meeting the Enemy: The Human Face of the Great War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 194–8.

⁹⁶Graystone, 'Typescript Diaries', 28 March 1916.

⁹⁷Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 1 June 1916.

⁹⁸The deployment of these heavy batteries is detailed in the following map: État-major des armées—Service historique, *Les Armées Françaises Dans La Grande Guerre. Tome IV—Verdun et Le Somme. Cartes* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1926) 20.000c.—Plan d'action d'ensemble de la VI^e armée. Déploiement de l'artil. lourde.

of the war before long'.⁹⁹ He would also report that elite troops from Verdun, 'the "Iron Corps"', were also being deployed to the Somme in preparation for the coming battle.¹⁰⁰ The notion that the French soldiers they encountered were often elite or seasoned veterans is an ongoing one within the records of British soldiers. Many of these French soldiers may well have been more experienced than their British counterparts, but the desire to see them as 'elite' is a recurring factor and one that would later be reproduced by American soldiers when they met French infantry.

For their part, the French soldiers of VI Army who had been installed alongside the British in May started to become far more optimistic about the upcoming offensive and about the work and chances of the other allied forces. A soldier from the 89e RIT declared that 'England will find itself in a position of strength' and that Russian advances were also boding well for the allies, a belief that was echoed by soldiers in the 9e RAC and the 76e RIT.¹⁰¹ The burgeoning optimism of the French on the Somme not just towards their British allies but also the Russians is marked for numerous reasons. Whilst, as previously discussed, the Russian Expeditionary Force (REF) was active in France during this period, the number of French soldiers who had interacted with it was fairly small. Additionally, the references in these letters do not speak of the REF, but rather of the main Russian army in battle in the east; an army and a nation that the French soldiers would likely have had zero contact with. The issue of proximity was undoubtedly an important one in creating an informed impression of a neighbouring allied force, but a lack of proximity would not automatically translate into a negative response. If there was an existing common perception of a country and its military force, it could easily override the lack of proximity and become the dominant perception.

⁹⁹Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 3 June 1916.

¹⁰⁰Bloor, 11 June 1916.

¹⁰¹SHD - 16 N 1417, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée', 1916, 16 N 1417, Archives de l'Armée de Terre. Both the 89e RIT and the 76e RIT had only recently been deployed to the area after leaving Dunkirk, and the 76e had been heavily gassed previously in 1915. 'Historique Du 89eme Régiment d'infanterie Territorial', 1920, pp. 14–15, SHD, <https://argonnaute.parisnante.fr/ark:/14707/a0114032679637QEqQL>; 'Historique Du 76eme Régiment d'infanterie Territorial', 1920, pp. 10–12, SHD, <https://argonnaute.parisnante.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267964TMd8bF>.

As a result, proximity to the British was not always guaranteed to produce beneficial results. Soldiers in the French V Army were far less enamoured of some of their allies' activity at the time than their fellows in the VI Army, some of whom were particularly concerned about 'Albion colonising' the north of France around Artois and Normandy.¹⁰² The idea of Britain colonising France was not simply restricted to soldiers of the V Army, with some civilians writing that '[E]verything is theirs; housing, cafes ... In short, the country, men and women, are completely anglicised'.¹⁰³ By the final year of the war, some French soldiers had come to view the Somme as being 'almost in England'.¹⁰⁴ These concerns would be a running theme amongst some French soldiers throughout the year and into 1917 and beyond.¹⁰⁵

Additionally, the French seem to have had a greater awareness of the political aspects of the war and of the role of their allies, best exemplified by their reaction towards the Irish Uprising in the Easter of 1916. This is mentioned several times in the postal censor reports of the V Army, alongside suggestions that 'it seems to have had an effect the instigators had not intended' and how the English had been maintaining a level of silence on the events of the uprising.¹⁰⁶ The uprising itself is not examined in any great political or analytical depth, but the awareness of it and the interest shown in it does differentiate the French from the British with regard to curiosity about political matters. Likewise, the death

¹⁰²AAT, 'Rapport', in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la Ve armée*. – 16 N 1412 (1916). All from the report dated 5 June.

¹⁰³Craig Gibson, *Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 186–7. This 'Tommification' of areas of the Western Front was more to provide the British soldiers with something more recognisable and understandable amid the confusion of France and the war than it was to actually 'colonise' France, but it is easy to see how the French would have found the dramatic changes to their own country and landscape jarring. Ross J. Wilson, "'Tommifying' the Western Front, 1914–1918", *Journal of Historical Geography* 37, no. 3 (July 2011): 338–47, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2011.01.001>.

¹⁰⁴Gibson, *Behind the Front*, p. 187. The impact of such changes were [sic] deleterious: that the BEF had come to be seen by the natives as 'masters' in the areas they occupied was not uncommon.

¹⁰⁵Barthas and Strauss, *Poilu*, p. 277.

¹⁰⁶SHD - 16 N 1412, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée', 1916, 8 May 1916 and 23 May 1916 respectively, 16 N 1412, Archives de l'Armée de Terre.

of Lord Kitchener had produced ‘a great effect’ amongst the French soldiers.¹⁰⁷

With the preparations continuing apace and British and French forces trading defensive positions and responsibilities around the Somme, confusion and communication breakdowns became increasingly common. Having been charged with turning trenches near Maricourt over to the French, Macardle and his men found that, on the first morning, the French had neglected to make any mess arrangements for the British. Upon discovering this, the French colonel in charge was so mortified that he organised a veritable banquet for the British soldiers, and insisted they stay to eat.¹⁰⁸ As a result of this, Macardle was able to spend additional time bonding with these French soldiers and to hear their tales of fighting at Verdun.

Many British soldiers and personnel, and indeed US ones when they arrived in 1917 and 1918, found something both fascinating and mystical about the continuing fighting at Verdun. Captain Frederick Sadlier Brereton, who served with the army throughout the war, wrote a number of historical fiction books both before and after the conflict, and, in 1916, he released *With Joffre at Verdun*.¹⁰⁹ Some 901 babies born in Britain during the First World War were named ‘Verdun’.¹¹⁰ C. A. Hartley, a British motor ambulance driver with the Section Sanitaire Anglaise (SSA) 10 spent most of his time in the Verdun region in 1916 attempting to firstly get into the town itself and then to be allowed to visit the front lines; a feat he eventually achieved in September and promptly crawled out into No Man’s Land in order to photograph the French trenches.¹¹¹ Similarly, Group Captain F. C. Gillman of the SSA 19 was delighted to be able to secure tours and lectures of the city in 1918, despite the fact that the war was still going on.¹¹² The British may well have seen something particularly valiant in the French

¹⁰⁷SHD - 16 N 1412, 19 June.

¹⁰⁸Macardle, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 23 June 1916.

¹⁰⁹Captain Brereton, *With Joffre at Verdun* (London: Blackie & Son, 1916).

¹¹⁰‘Battle Babies | The National Archives Blog’. Accessed 22 February 2018, <http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/battle-babies/>.

¹¹¹C. A. Hartley, ‘Typescript Diary’, 1917 1916, 28 September 1916, IWM: DOCS - 87/54/1, Imperial War Museum.

¹¹²Group Captain F. C. Gillman, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 1918, 24 August 1918, IWM: DOCS - 88/6/1, Imperial War Museum.

defence of Verdun that chimed with their particular notions of heroism. Furthermore, by seeking out information from soldiers fresh from Verdun, they may also have been seeking first-hand knowledge of large-scale battles in order to prepare themselves. The extent to which this knowledge proved useful is difficult to say, but there remained a desire to learn from the French as the Battle of the Somme began.

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

On the morning of 1 July 1916, the week-long artillery bombardment that had been underway (and in fact extended because of bad weather) reached 'a crescendo' at 06.25 ahead of the final countdown.¹¹³ The detonation of underground mines beneath the German lines at 07.28 preceded the infantry assault from both British and French trenches. Understandably, with the onset of the battle, many of the social interactions between British and French soldiers appear to have ended or, at the very least, disappeared from their writing. This does not mean, however, that all interactions between the two parties ceased, far from it. Rather, the focus shifted more towards an appraisal of both sides' military abilities and successes. In addition to the change of focus, the reality of the earliest days of the offensive depended very much on where you were stood. Whilst British forces north of the river rapidly became bogged down, to the south, where the two armies met the progress was far more dramatic. Seemingly, no sooner had they left the trenches than men from the 17th Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment (1st Liverpool Pals) were celebrating in German trenches with the French soldiers of the 153e RI who had advanced alongside.¹¹⁴ In fact the cooperation between 30th Division and 39e DIT had proven so effective on the first day of the Somme that, upon seizing the Dublin Redoubt, they were left facing lightly defended German reserve positions and contemplating the very real possibility of a breakthrough.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile Captain Bursey and

¹¹³ Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, p. 174.

¹¹⁴ Philpott, pp. 175–6. This attack and the 'great admiration' for the British felt amongst the French is outlined in 'Historique Du 153ème Régiment d'infanterie.', 1920, p. 14, SHD, <http://argonnaute.u-paris10.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267961UHWgVF>.

¹¹⁵ Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, p. 176.

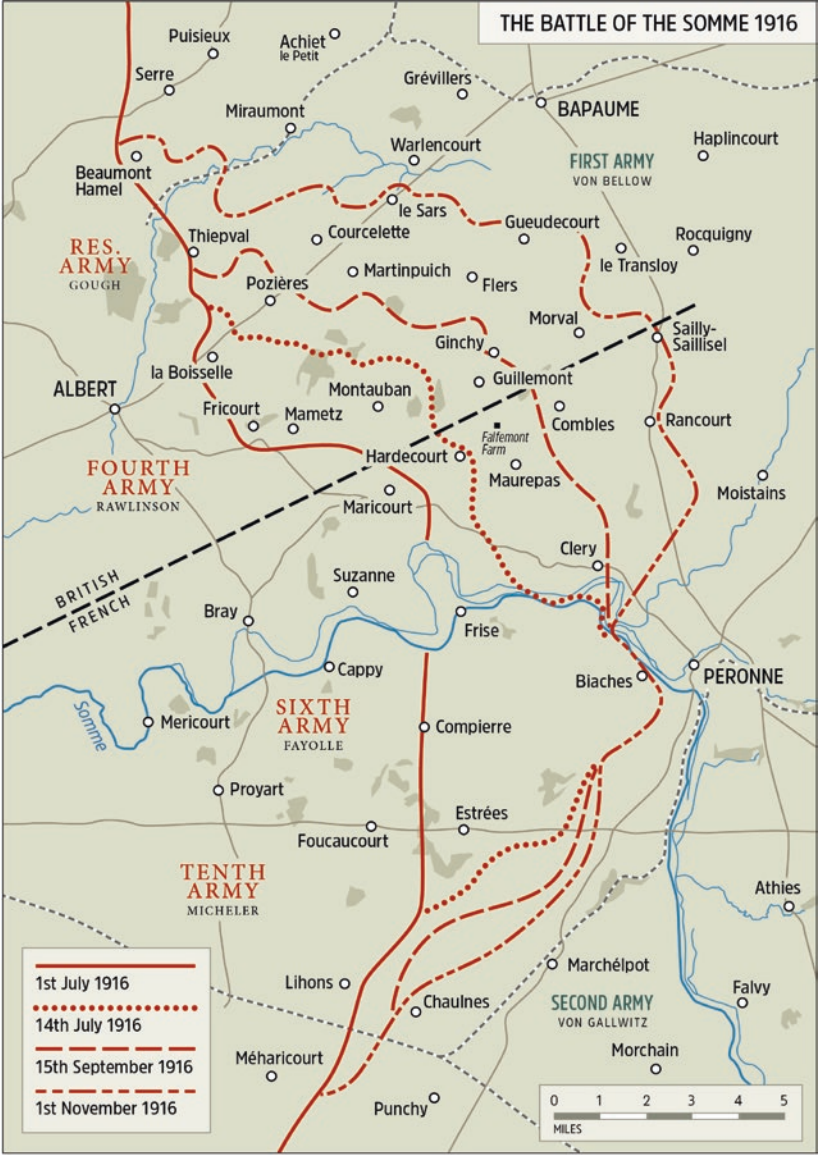


Fig. 2 Battle of the Somme (1916)

1st Lieutenant Bloor, both part of XIII Corps near the southern flank of the British line, recorded rumours regarding the progress of their nearby French allies.¹¹⁶ Bursey would also claim that French soldiers had admitted the British had a far tougher task on their hands.¹¹⁷ However, French tactics, particularly their practice of artillery saturation, greatly increased their own combat effectiveness, improved their chances of success, and in no small part accounted for their great successes on the morning of 1 July (see Fig. 2).¹¹⁸

Though the British at the southern end of their line were able to utilise French artillery cover, it did not guarantee safety. The 17th Battalion Manchester Regiment advanced towards Montauban on the morning of 1 July and met heavy resistance, though they would capture the town. Lieutenant Macardle would later recount the numerous losses he witnessed from German machine-gun and artillery fire.¹¹⁹ This situation was replicated many times along the front line heading north towards Thiepval; with the German positions particularly well defended, a catastrophe was unfolding.¹²⁰ Macardle's diary account of the fighting at Montauban proved to be the final entry as, on 9 July, he was killed in action whilst fighting near Trones Wood. His body was never recovered and his name adorns the monument to the missing at Thiepval.¹²¹

By the second week of July, the British and French forces were acting in support of each other on particular areas of the Somme. Given the nature of the fighting at this point, and the difficulties of accurate allied cooperation during military operations, mistakes were inevitably made. These mistakes, though, were not based on a lack of desire for smooth cooperation. During the Battle for Falfemont Farm, the British Fourth and the French VI armies undertook a variety of methods to help

¹¹⁶Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 2 July 1916; Captain H. F. Bursey, 'Manuscript Diary', 1916, 2 July 1916, IWM: DOCS - 96/48/1, Imperial War Museum.

¹¹⁷Bursey, 'Manuscript Diary', 3 July 1916–7 July 1916.

¹¹⁸Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 146–7 and 177–8.

¹¹⁹Macardle, 'Manuscript Diary', 6 July 1916. The battle was on 1 July but Macardle would not get chance to recount this until several days later.

¹²⁰For more on the details and reasons for the British disaster on 1 July 1916, see: Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, Chapter 5; Steg, *Ces Anglais Morts Pour La France*, Chapters 10–13; Hart, *The Somme*, Chapter 4.

¹²¹It is listed as Callan-Macardle, K.

in coordination of tactics.¹²² These measures included a direct telephone line between the two armies and a permanent exchange of liaison officers. Whilst these developments were of excellent tactical use, they were set against a backdrop of growing anger within the French command, particularly from General Fayolle, who had been unable to exploit his earlier success near Maurepas because the British had proven incapable of capturing Falfemont Farm on his flank.¹²³ Whilst the preliminary attack on the Farm was a failure and cost an inordinate number of British lives, many of these losses were due more to the difficult, even impossible, job given to the British soldiers, rather than the official account which blamed a lack of coordination between the British and French and, in particular, the failure of French artillery fire.

The Farm would eventually be captured by the 1st Norfolks at 03:00 on 5 September. Despite the initial failure on 30 July, relations between the British and the French had remained highly positive in the area and that the two sides had been engaged in joint operations, with the British offering on 20 July (in the words of the French official history) ‘in a fine spirit of spontaneous friendship to cover the left of a French attack’.¹²⁴ For their part, the French appeared to be particularly astute in separating the activities of soldiers from those of officers, and often paid particular tribute to perceived instances of British courage or bravery.¹²⁵ This focus on the spirit of the British soldiers has strong echoes of the prized characteristic of French *élan*, but, on a practical level, it also reflected one of the consistent elements that the French were able to judge the British on. Generally, on the Somme, the British and French assessed each other on the activities they could see and adequately judge for themselves; for example, both armies mentioned, in positive terms, the artillery skill of the other.¹²⁶ Artillery being largely fixed in position and easily observable, soldiers of both armies could watch its progress and attacks with

¹²²Elizabeth Greenhalgh, ‘The Experience of Fighting with Allies: The Case of the Capture of Falfemont Farm during the Battle of the Somme, 1916 (World War I)’, *War in History* 10, no. 2 (April 2003): 157–83.

¹²³Greenhalgh, p. 163.

¹²⁴Greenhalgh, ‘The Experience of Fighting with Allies’.

¹²⁵SHD - 16 N 1417, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VI^e Armée’, report for week of 23 July–29 July.

¹²⁶The French would still be praising the British artillery into August. See: SHD - 16 N 1417, report for week of 6 August–12 August.

relative ease. Likewise, whilst both countries were able to watch and judge some of the infantry preparations before an attack and perhaps observe them going over the top, they could not easily view and then rate the actual tactics and abilities of those men during any attacks or whilst defending against counter-attack.

Their bravery, however, could transcend this and become verifiable on its own terms, particularly during periods of the Somme when the British were having trouble breaking through German positions and had to launch multiple assaults. Whilst the assaults themselves were not delivering the gains that the French desired, hence the concerns about the British 'slowness', the French were able to take from this that, at the very least, the British soldiers were courageous in launching attacks, particularly given the German tendency to immediately counter-attack if any ground or territory had been lost.¹²⁷ This praise for the courage of the British army should not, however, necessarily be seen as an indication that the French believed the British were on an equal level to themselves. There is little indication of that, and reports from the V Army at the start of the Somme offensive provide perhaps the most representative statements of the hopes and aims of the French soldiers, alongside the strength of belief in their own abilities and roles as the battle unfolded. One French soldier described his nation as 'the best student in the class of the Allies'.¹²⁸ Such a recognition of allied bravery would be replicated to a lesser extent during French appraisals of the Americans in 1918; however, the events of the war leading up to that point would drain the patience from many *Poilus*.

However, this movement towards understanding and analysing the worth of the British troops versus the abilities of their commanders was highly predicated on being in a position to differentiate the two. When it came to assessing the British army, if this was done at a distance, the results amongst the French in 1916 were often negative and tended

¹²⁷For a rundown of the German defensive doctrine on the Somme, see: Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 165–6.

¹²⁸SHD - 16 N 1412, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée', 3 July 1916. For further examples of soldiers in other French Armies being somewhat grudging in their appreciation of the British, Greenhalgh provides a group of six from across July as well as further evidence that the French rated themselves as better soldiers: Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "'Parade Ground Soldiers": French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916', *Journal of Military History* 63, no. 2 (April 1999): 283–312.

to focus along particular lines of complaint, with soldiers in both the French III and IV Armies asserting that Britain used its colonial soldiers, and the French, as fodder whilst themselves being incredibly reluctant to attack.¹²⁹ These accounts offer varying approaches to the same central theme, namely that the British were not doing enough by 1916 and the French were suffering for it as a result. The opinions of the French soldiers recording these sentiments were influenced both by the perceived distance of the British army from active fighting and also the impression that they had secured that distance by manipulative and cynical means.

Greenhalgh hypothesises that ‘French attitudes towards their British ally fluctuated according to two factors; proximity and success’.¹³⁰ However, at this time it can also be said that *perceived experience* is of greater importance to the British army in their interactions with the French than actually witnessing a French military success. At repeated points during 1916, there appears to have been a military inferiority complex amongst some of the British soldiers when comparing themselves to the French army. It was a French army that had been formed through military service, and had been fighting the Germans on a far larger scale than the British. Within this framework, it seems reasonable to suggest that the British already believed the French were more successful, and hence held the French in greater esteem. They did not need to have witnessed this success with their own eyes as their own insecurity would have implied it. To further reinforce the belief that close contact between the two armies provided plentiful opportunity for bonding and mutual appreciation, when French VI Army moved from Verdun to the Somme in May, and began to spend time around the British, they too began to embrace them.¹³¹

However, proximity also brought French soldiers into a position to witness failures as well as successes. The ongoing fighting during the Battle of the Somme provided the French with the opportunity to observe the abilities of their allies in large-scale battle. The British delay at Thiepval, coinciding with the French halt at Maurepas and Barleux, was seen by nearby French soldiers as a bad sign for the operation’s

¹²⁹Greenhalgh, ‘“Parade Ground Soldiers”: French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916’.

¹³⁰Greenhalgh.

¹³¹Greenhalgh, pp. 295–6.

future.¹³² Paul Maze served amongst the Australians during the Somme in 1916 and would go over the top alongside them near Pozières on 22 July.¹³³ Whilst alongside these men, Maze would continue his examinations of the different nations that composed the British Empire. He found these dominion soldiers 'genial and ready to help', and declared how much he liked them.¹³⁴ The British attacks around the Somme at times left French troops both bemused and dispirited as they struggled to rationalise the British behaviour. French soldiers noted the bravery of the British soldiers, a bravery which seemed to them to be highly reckless. These French reported British soldiers seemingly unwilling to take cover or lie in the mud for fear of getting dirty or being viewed as cowards, a state of affairs which was complete anathema to the French *Poilus*, who sculpted their identity on a willingness to get dirty for their country. The result was an evaluation of the British by the French which suggests that their allies were 'very fine but not very clever'.¹³⁵ Other French soldiers who were close to the fighting could be equally grudging in their praise for the British, with one soldier acknowledging that the British were 'only beginners' and confessed to having expected more of them, whilst noting that the French advance was 'superior' to the British one.¹³⁶

Despite the occasional stop-start nature of the Somme offensive, 2nd Lieutenant Hodgkinson and his men had been able to strike up a strong relationship with their French counterparts, and during August there was a major social gathering with the XXII Battalion of the *Chasseurs Alpin*.¹³⁷ This gathering featured a large meal, regimental bands playing music, repeated speeches, and a huge amount of alcohol. The result for Hodgkinson was requiring the assistance of three French officers to

¹³²Paul Dubrulle and Henry Camille Bordeaux, *Mon Régiment Dans La Fournaise de Verdun et Dans La Bataille de La Somme. Impressions de Guerre d'un Pretre Soldat*. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1917), p. 174.

¹³³Paul Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki* (Eastbourne: Naval and Military Press, 2004), pp. 159–171.

¹³⁴Maze, p. 156.

¹³⁵Greenhalgh, "Parade Ground Soldiers": French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916'.

¹³⁶Sumner, *They Shall Not Pass*, p. 138.

¹³⁷The *Chasseurs Alpin* would also have direct contact with US soldiers during 1917 and 1918.

mount his horse ‘Deadwood Dick’ at the end of the event, which then galloped off and got them both lost on the way home.¹³⁸ Whilst this party may not have ended with the most respectable scenes, it does show that there was a great deal of affection and social interest between the French and the British, even after the Somme offensive had begun to get bogged down as the battle settled into a prolonged attrition campaign. In fact, from mid-August onwards, references to the French army in the diaries of these contributors begin to wane as it entered the ‘Muddy Stalemate’ of October to December.¹³⁹

With the slowing of operations in August, the postal records, as noted by Greenhalgh, began to produce common comments regarding the decreasing pace of the advance. However, this did not mean that relations between French and British soldiers completely waned. A gunner in the 83e RI noted both the size of the British army and the ongoing bravery of its troops in pressing the offensive, whilst a corporal in the 73e and a soldier in the 94e RIs also reported ongoing socialising between the two armies and how it ‘proves once again the entente cordiale and the harmony of these two peoples’.¹⁴⁰ What makes these latter examples more significant is that both the 73e and 94e had seen heavy fighting at Verdun earlier in 1916.¹⁴¹ The fact that these men were well disposed towards the British indicates not only an improving performance by the BEF but also the spreading of war regards between the two armies. In fact, this shift towards extended camaraderie was not

¹³⁸ 2nd Lieutenant Guy Hodgkinson, ‘Typescript Diary’, 1917–1915, IWM: DOCS - 99/13/1, Imperial War Museum. The exact date of this entry is unknown but the event occurred during the ‘Middle of August’.

¹³⁹ Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century*, Chapter 11.

¹⁴⁰ Gunner in the 83e and Corporal in the 73e regiments, both: SHD - 16 N 1417, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée’, both from report 27 August–3 September. Soldier in the 94th regiment: SHD - 16 N 1417, report of 17 September–23 September.

¹⁴¹ The 73e had served at Verdun early in the year before being sent to the Chemin des Dames and then on to the Somme in August. ‘Historique Du 73ème Régiment d’infanterie’, 1920, Chapters 3–5, SHD, <https://argonnaute.parisnanterre.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267960bDWZ7Q>. The 94e had sustained significant casualties at the Mort Homme at Verdun earlier in the year. ‘Historique Du 94ème Régiment d’infanterie’, 1920, pp. 21–5, SHD, <https://argonnaute.parisnanterre.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267960j71AJ0>.

restricted to those soldiers in the VI Army who were in contact with the British. It had begun to spread to the other Armies by the end of July and was producing similar reactions, with the British being praised for their 'persistence' and for the 'submissions and dedication of all its colonies'.¹⁴² These burgeoning relations were not simply reserved for the trenches; news of allied interactions on the home fronts was also delivered to soldiers via mail, with the postal censors recording a letter sent from England at the end of August praising the ongoing French efforts not just at the Somme but also at Verdun.¹⁴³

The long-running, manpower-intensive, attritional battle for Verdun, to whose defence the French were committed, is important as a lens through which to understand many of the French evaluations of Britain during 1916. Some of the fiercest examples of criticism are from French soldiers stationed around Verdun, who decried 'the perceived lack of will' of the British army.¹⁴⁴ Both the difference in battles between the defensive actions at Verdun and the offensive nature of the Somme, but also the distance of Verdun from the British army, played a role in the forming of opinion. In the absence of any words of success regarding the British and no immediate proximity from which to help form opinions, the French soldiers stationed at Verdun constructed their evaluations based both on their understandings of their own strategic situation and on rumours spread from elsewhere. In this case, the evaluations were based upon the accepted fact that the French were in a brutal fight for their very survival and, simultaneously, certainly before July 1916, the fact that there was no particular movement to report from the British. These two aspects combined to form a belief that the British were not doing enough to alleviate pressure on the French army. Additionally, the French experience on the defensive at Verdun would also lead to the consolidation of General Pétain's reputation as an officer who cared for his men. When, during the mutinies of 1917, the French soldiers needed someone in command whom they could trust, it was in Pétain that they placed their faith. With such a clear example of a 'good leader' of their own from whom to draw strength, this would only highlight the

¹⁴²SHD - 16 N 1412, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée', report dated 5 August.

¹⁴³SHD - 16 N 1412, report 28 August.

¹⁴⁴Greenhalgh, "Parade Ground Soldiers": French Army Assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916'. This extract is from a letter dated 2 June 1916.

apparent deficiencies with the British military leaders and exacerbate the failings of the men.

Whilst the French were grappling with distance and nuance in evaluating their allies, opportunities remained for British soldiers to be surprised by the French. At the start of October, Corporal Durham witnessed a French artillery commander halt the ongoing and successful bombardment of a German position to ensure that a passing covey of partridges was not caught in the fire. Only when the birds had been moved did he recommence obliterating the German trench.¹⁴⁵ Durham found the whole episode both mystifying and moving. The French colonel is described in heavily paternal terms both in his protection of the birds but also in how he addressed his men as '*enfants*'. The image of a paternal French military commander is not a rare one and makes up a significant part of Phillipe Pétain's reputation in this period. But this is one of the clearest signs yet of how the British and French soldiers had grown closer whilst still puzzling each other.

THE NEW ENTENTE

In comparison to the events of 1914 and early 1915, it certainly appears that Franco-British relations had come a long way by the end of 1916. The BEF had been worn away by Easter of 1915. The British soldiers at that point had not had any real opportunity to acclimatise to their new surroundings or their new ally and, whilst there were examples of positive interactions between the two groups, at the point of increased stress or fear those relationships more often than not would break down into negative rhetoric and feelings of bitter recrimination.

Because of the decision taken in 1915 to deploy British soldiers on the Somme to allow them to acclimatise to war conditions, this produced the secondary benefit of allowing the soldiers to overcome the immediate culture shock whilst in a far less intensive combat situation. The fixed deployment along a well-defined front also ensured that the British divisions on the far right of the line would be in steady and continuous contact with the nearest French division. Under these circumstances, familiarity bred understanding and, more importantly, curiosity. It is striking how often themes and trends have been replicated within

¹⁴⁵G. W. Durham, 'Manuscript Letters', 1917 1914, IWM: DOCS - 90/7/1, Imperial War Museum, 1 October 1916 and 14 October 1916.

the diaries for 1916, and how they have appeared at the same relative points in time. There was a continual willingness on behalf of the British soldiers to meet and interact with their French counterparts, and this willingness was mirrored within the French army. In addition to this, however, we can also see that the opportunity to meet the French caused some of the British soldiers to take an anthropological interest in their ally. Men such as Macardle, Cude, Graystone, and Stansfield took a real interest in what the actions of the French soldiers meant in defining a wider French personality. The offshoot of this was that any and all actions by the French soldiers, even those which might have justifiably produced a negative reaction or one of displeasure, become excusable because of the nature of the investigation. To suggest that the British soldiers were turning a blind eye is too simplistic: these men were actually studying the French whilst withholding judgement.

Part of this desire to understand the French appears to have come from a simple cultural curiosity, but also reflects the sense of military inferiority British soldiers felt when comparing themselves to the French army. By attempting to understand some of the French nature, and also what combat situations they took seriously, British soldiers could learn lessons which might save their lives. Further to this, the greater skill and assurance of the French army also played into the culture of deference present within British society at the time of the war. The French appeared as a more knowledgeable people in the ways of warfare, a skilled working class in the military industry, but in a manner that was neither threatening nor particularly domineering. They provided an example to follow and learn from without changing the Tommy–*Poilu* relationship into one of master and servant or apprentice and, as a result, avoided any chafing or resentment between the groups.

The British reactions upon finding that the French had unofficial truces with the Germans, did not fully repair their trenches, and stood guard without loaded rifles were not marked by outrage but curiosity. The British men on the Somme were, by and large, volunteers from the earliest days of the war in 1914. They were civilians in uniform rather than career soldiers, and as such had not been subjected to the same military institutionalisation as the men who had arrived in France in 1914. The arrival of conscript soldiers towards the end of the year would begin to change the make-up of the British army again but the French would continue to outnumber them throughout the war. In fact, the conscripted soldiers would arguably have less investment in the military

institution, having not volunteered for duty and only serving because of government decree. The BEF in 1914 was arguably one of the most skilled armies on the Western Front at the time, whilst the army of 1916 was not. However, it would begin to win its spurs during the latter stages of the Somme Offensive. The soldiers who comprised it were still learning martial skills, and the close proximity of an apparently accomplished French army gave them something to measure themselves against and, more importantly, to learn directly from.

The impression that emerges from the French 1916 postal reports in some ways replicates the experiences within the diaries of the British soldiers at the time. The French were certainly dubious about the abilities and inclination of the British to perform well on the Somme, and, considering the apparent inferiority issues the British were wrestling with at the time, those concerns were not specific to the French. These French concerns would, then, largely, diverge along lines of distance, with those in the VI Army, closest to the British, beginning to be convinced about their allies' ability before the men of the V Army (or the other Armies, as highlighted by Greenhalgh). It was often the spirit of the British which won over their French allies or, at least, acted as a starting point to build upon. The 'courage' of the British soldiers was repeatedly commented upon, even during periods when the British were struggling to make significant gains against determined German opposition. In its own way, this perhaps represents a clear divide in the minds of the French soldiers between their appreciation of the instrument of the attack (the soldiers themselves) and the orchestrators (the generals). They could show a strong appreciation for the work of the British soldier and recognise some of the traits that they often viewed in themselves, without necessarily tying it into the tactics, strategies, and decisions being imposed upon the soldiers by their commanding officers. For their part, it also appears that the French soldiers were more than happy to act as relaxed mentors for their British counterparts, and there are numerous examples of moments where British and French soldiers socialised together, sympathised when men were lost, and supported each other in battle.

From each of these small moments, the combined level of respect and cooperation rose to higher levels. *Punch Magazine* provided evidence of improved relations between the British and the French. A cartoon printed after the Battle of Combles captures soldiers of both nations engaged in a congratulatory conversation, each in their own languages, with no suggestion that they are proficient in that of the other.

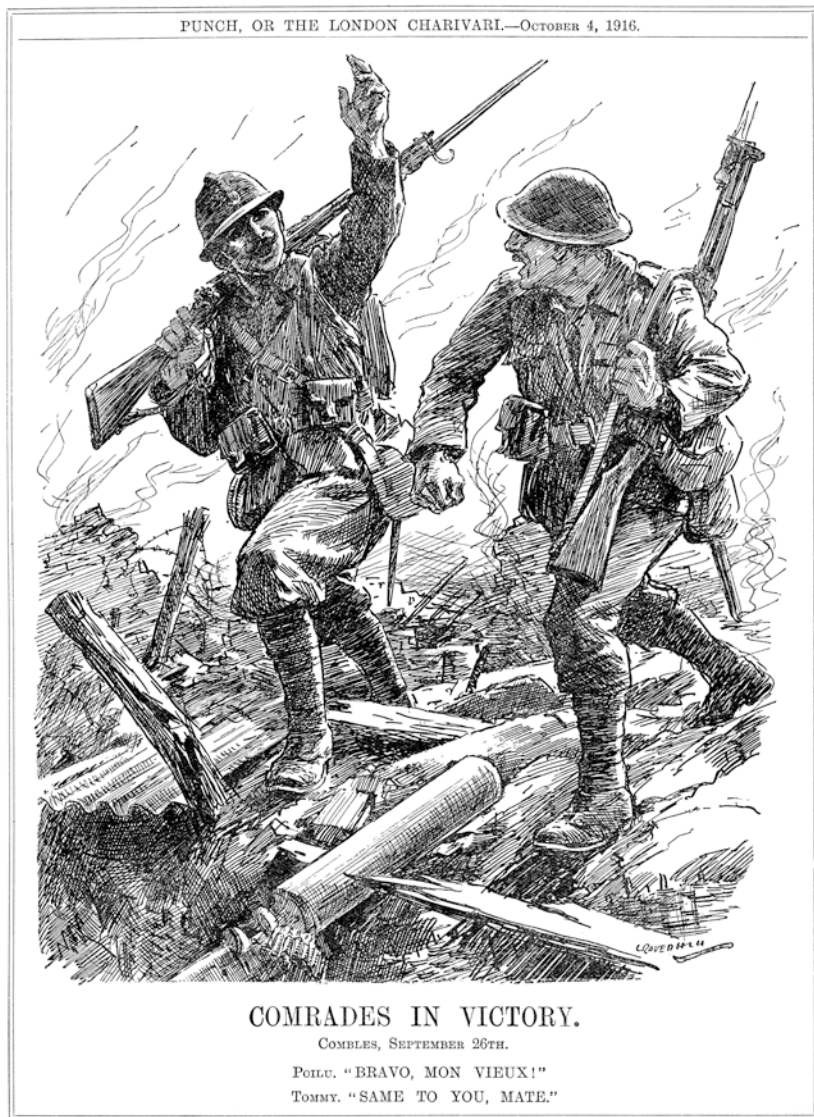


Fig. 3 *Punch Magazine, Comrades in victory* (1916, Image courtesy of Punch Ltd.)



Fig. 4 *La Fessée* (1916, Image courtesy of Prof. David Welch)

Nonetheless, the message and the warm camaraderie carries across completely so as to make communication and cooperation natural (Fig. 3). The French also released a new propaganda image in 1916, this one depicting a Tommy and a Poilu cooperating to spank Kaiser Wilhelm II (Fig. 4). Whilst the French soldier appears to be wearing uniform from 1914, this image provides one of the few examples of a British and a French soldier actually being depicted together in a photograph for the purposes of propaganda or recruitment. Relationships between Britain and France were not universally good in 1916. There were moments that caused displeasure in the ranks of both nations, but the general trend was of an emerging and workable level of cooperation. The ructions and antagonisms of the previous years had seemingly been overcome, and now the situation appears to have been one where British and French troops were almost entirely comfortable in their interactions on both social and military levels.

Whilst 1917 would prove to be a trying year (for the French in particular), and the German offensive at the beginning of 1918 would risk defeating the Entente completely, the eventual success of the allied forces at the end of 1918 can be further understood through the increased cooperation that blossomed in and around the Somme. During the particularly cold opening months of 1917, Lieutenant Gameson began to forge one of the more enduring relationships of the war with his French interpreter. His recollections of these moments provide an interesting insight into the dynamics that existed during more relaxed moments between the British and French, and how competing senses of humour and intellectual approaches manifested themselves. Upon discovering that the French translator Macé was possessed of a reserved sense of humour born of his religious beliefs, a British soldier named Francis Graham took it upon himself to tell increasingly lewd jokes. This continued until Macé leapt at the man and removed him from the mess. Within moments, Graham returned with apologies before goading him again with similar results. Gameson however explained that Macé bore no ill will during these encounters, accepted the jokes at face value, and was potentially simply playing his expected role in the exchanges.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶Captain L. Gameson, 'Typescript Memoir', 1923 1922, IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C47 and P395 - 396 and Con Shelf, Imperial War Museum. This encounter is not accurately dated but took place during January or February of 1917.

The divergent religiousness of different areas of France, and how this faith was represented and portrayed, was a topic that had been noted by some soldiers during 1916 as an aspect that greatly distinguished the populace from many of the men of the BEF.¹⁴⁷ But in Gameson's example, the religiosity of Macé was not a subject of bemusement but rather the opening for some British soldiers to engage in light-hearted mischief. Whilst the French interpreter was clearly not willing to fully go along with the line of conversation, there is also the suggestion that he recognised the playful nature of the jesting and was fulfilling his role within it. Gameson would find Macé a complex and compelling character who helped to add a greater level of depth to his understanding of both strangers and the French. So taken was Gameson by the man that he would often reflect upon his character in depth and detail, and muse on its wider implications for understanding the French.¹⁴⁸

The years from 1914 to 1917 had not, however, produced entirely complimentary conclusions about the British amongst the French troops. In October 1914, Etienne Tanty was already writing about how British activities in Le Havre, where he alleged they had become well accustomed to consoling French women, were a 'disgusting scandal'.¹⁴⁹ By June 1917, Tanty had begun to write off the British entirely, declaring that they spent their time in Le Havre chasing women.¹⁵⁰ As Tanty's disillusionment with the British deepened, he began to ponder the potential of making peace with the Germans, who were preferable to 'the only real and hereditary' enemy of Britain.¹⁵¹ Such concerns over the intentions of their British ally were not yet fully widespread amongst the French army, but the events of early 1918 would do much to bring them to the forefront.

¹⁴⁷ Graystone, 'Typescript Diaries', 7 March 1916 and 19 March 1916; Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 14 May 1916.

¹⁴⁸ Gameson, 'Typescript Memoir'. This reflection is not specifically dated but occurred in reference to events during May and June 1917.

¹⁴⁹ Etienne Tanty, Annette Becker, and Claude Tanty, *Les violettes des tranchées: lettres d'un poilu qui n'aimait pas la guerre* ([Triel-sur-Seine]: Editions Italiques, 2002), pp. 122–3.

¹⁵⁰ Tanty, Becker, and Tanty, p. 454.

¹⁵¹ Tanty, Becker, and Tanty, p. 468.

For the British, perhaps the clearest culmination of the spirit born out of the interactions on the Somme is evidenced by Cude's writings and reflections on the French on Christmas Day in 1917.

I wish all in Blighty was having as good, and more so the poor of France, for they deserve so much from us all. However I know that it is a matter of impossibility in these days of rationing. ... We have a huge debt to pay to France, but am afraid that unless one has seen the war as vividly as I have and the general conduct of the entire civilian population, almost without exception, it is an impossibility to estimate how huge that debt is, if only for holding up Jerry in his mad rush to the coast. Another little matter to which the French home is in direct contrast, and that is in the matter of hospitality. One has only to knock and enter a French home, and one is made to feel quite at home. There is always in attendance the cup that cheers, "coffee" and one has to drink it, or else risk the displeasure of Madame for years to come. No, in comparing the two nations, I am compelled to acknowledge that although it is nice to be an Englishman, it is much nicer to be a Frenchman at heart. They are a wonderful people – the French.¹⁵²

The importance of this statement cannot be underestimated, particularly coming from a man such as Cude. From being unimpressed by France upon his arrival in August 1915, to this point in 1917 represents an extended and dramatic evolution in how Cude viewed the French. It is this evolution undergone by the soldiers on the Somme more than anything else that was the lasting legacy of Tommy-*Poilu* relations during 1916. It was this spirit that the British soldiers would carry through into the final year of the war where they would face possible defeat by the German army, the fallout of 1917, and a crumbling in their relationship with the French.¹⁵³ Before this could come to pass, however, a third party would be introduced into the equation.

¹⁵²Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 25 December 1917.

¹⁵³Lafon, *La camaraderie au front*, p. 183.



‘That Liberty Shall Not Perish from the Earth’: The USA and the *Entente Cordiale*

America has joined forces with the Allied Powers, and what we have of blood and treasure are yours. Therefore it is that with loving pride we drape the colors in tribute of respect to this citizen of your great republic. And here and now, in the presence of the illustrious dead, we pledge our hearts and our honor in carrying this war to a successful issue. Lafayette, we are here.

(Colonel Charles Stanton, 4 July 1917¹)

Whilst US volunteers had been populating French units almost since the outbreak of the war, particularly the famous *Escadrille Lafayette*, the USA as a nation did not join the allied war effort until 1917.² Even then, the decision to enter the war was a contentious one. At the end of 1916, Woodrow Wilson had won reelection as president based on the slogan that he had ‘kept us out of the war’. For the situation to have changed from determined neutrality in November of 1916 to a declaration of war in April of the following year may seem dramatic, but it is apparent that, at the very least, an acknowledgement of potential conflict had been alive and well in Washington, DC for some time.

¹This quote has at times been attributed erroneously to General John J. Pershing, but Pershing himself verified that it was Stanton who made the declaration; John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), pp. 92–3.

²Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), Chapter 1.

For the US evolution from neutrality to war to be properly placed into context, it must be understood that this particular form of neutrality had, certainly by 1916, become something of a misnomer. Whilst the USA had maintained an active position of isolationism and neutrality towards the events of the outside world, and Europe in particular, it was drawn into the conflict in a manner that was both similar to, and unique from, the other combatants. Whilst there was little fear of US neutrality being violated in a similar way to Belgium's, the war did pose economic and naval threats to US sovereignty. However, the US's early concerns regarding the possibility of conflict in Europe were spread amongst the various expected participants. The expected British naval blockade of Germany would prevent most shipping and trade with the nation and, as a result, threatened international accords on commerce. The perception that Germany was the aggressor was only hardened by the perceived violation of Belgian neutrality.³ Whilst America made requests to both nations, particularly Germany regarding Belgium, it effectively lacked the political capital or power to cause more than a small 'dent' in the plans of the feuding nations.⁴

NEUTRALITY AND IMPARTIALITY

There lies a strange dichotomy at the heart of the contemporary concerns over America entering the war: the allies saw US support as a powerful objective, whilst German actions were often executed with considerations towards the impact on the USA. However, when it came to enforcing their policies, the USA did not possess either the military or political strength to immediately influence the actions of the combatants. Furthermore there were ongoing concerns within the USA itself over what exactly they would be able to offer even if war did become inevitable.⁵ In 1916, Lloyd George was forced to agree with Asquith's evaluation that the USA had 'no coercive power' to bring against Germany.⁶

³M. Ryan Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality: Woodrow Wilson and the Beginning of the Great War, August 1914–December 1915*, First edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 7–8.

⁴Floyd, p. 8.

⁵David R. Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 43–4.

⁶Woodward, p. 35.

The US military in particular was, for a country of its size, almost non-existent and utterly unsuited for the type of warfare underway in Europe. In this sense, for a period of time, the USA occupied a similar theoretical space as Russia did in the minds of those fighting in the war. Whereas Russia was long believed to be only moments away from unleashing its population power in a juggernaut that would roll away resistance, the USA was viewed not as it was but what it could potentially be should it focus its industrial power to a single goal. The erroneous belief held by President Wilson in 1917 that an American entry to the war would bring the conflict to a swift end was not helped by Prime Minister Lloyd George informing him of much the same thing in a bid to bring about US participation.⁷

Alongside its potential as an emerging world power (albeit theoretical in the earliest years of the war), the USA’s demographics had an ongoing influence on policy towards the war. A significant proportion of US citizens traced their lineage back to the Old World.⁸ The alliances that now divided Europe would therefore have repercussions for the immigrant populations of the USA. It would be a brave president who sought to ride roughshod over their potential loyalties. Of these, the loyalties of German and Irish Americans were often seen as being prohibitive for the USA joining the allies, but these ties were not necessarily as strong as may be supposed.⁹ The military actions and decisions made by the European powers would test the loyalties of Americans of European descent. The sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 placed pressure on the German–US population through association with the regime in Europe. The response of a fourfold increase in applications for US citizenship from those with German ancestry gave an early indication of the direction the tides would eventually take.¹⁰ However, the impact of the German decision to wage unrestricted submarine warfare in 1915, resulting in the sinking of several passenger ships including the *Lusitania*, may have been overstated with regard to actual changes in US policy.

⁷David R. Woodward, *Trial by Friendship: Anglo–American Relations, 1917–1918* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), p. 45.

⁸Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality*, p. 12.

⁹Michael S. Neiberg, *The Path to War: How the First World War Created Modern America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 36.

¹⁰Neiberg, p. 86.

The German decision in 1915 to declare any naval or merchant ships approaching British waters to be legitimate targets was always likely to trigger repercussions. That the culmination of this policy was the sinking of an ocean-going passenger liner now seems almost inevitable, as does the fact that a number of US lives would be lost in the attack.¹¹ The German government and military high command maintained that the ship was a legitimate target and pointed to the warning they had placed in US newspapers and the rumours, later proved correct, that the ship had been carrying munitions for the allies.¹² Regardless of the veracity of the German claims, the sinking of a passenger liner with over 1000 civilian deaths, including those of neutral nations, was never going to be well received around the world. Whilst the use of submarines in this manner was seen as a response to the British blockade of Germany, the two strategies did not appear to have the same results. Whilst the restriction of food and supplies to Germany would have notable impacts on the lives of those living in Germany, particularly by 1918, these consequences were not as visible as those suffered by seemingly innocent civilians killed by German torpedoes.

The sinking of the *Lusitania* was a public relations disaster for Germany, but it also helped expose further the ambivalence within the US population about joining the war. US newspapers decried the sinking as an act of wanton barbarism by the German government.¹³ The fury that gripped the populations of both Britain and the USA following the sinking, with Britain in particular seizing on the attack as a propaganda weapon, raised the possibility that the USA might be on the brink of entering the conflict. However, the popular anger in the USA was mixed with an equal determination not to be pulled unwillingly into a conflict. President Wilson himself declared that he was ‘too proud to fight’ in the war at this time, a position that enraged General Pershing.¹⁴ Whilst Wilson would toughen his language towards Berlin over their use of submarines, the US government would also go to great, and increasingly

¹¹Chelsea Autumn Medlock, ‘Lusitania, Sinking of’, ed. Ute Daniel et al., *1914–1918 Online—International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10051>.

¹²Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality*, pp. 129–30.

¹³Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 66–77.

¹⁴Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, p. 19.

paradoxical lengths, to ensure that these conversations with Berlin did not appear to be influenced by similar conversations with the British.¹⁵

The sinking of the *Lusitania* was certainly a serious diplomatic issue between the USA and Germany, and offered some of the first indications that the German Oberste Heeresleitung (OHL) might have misunderstood the potential consequences of its planned strategies. This would become increasingly clear in 1917; but, to begin with, once the initial burst of anger had flared and subsided, there seemed little likelihood that the USA would launch itself into the fray. It again seemed reckless when, a mere three months later, off the coast of Ireland, the Germans followed up by sinking the *SS Arabic*, but still the USA did not enter the war.¹⁶ The German ‘Arabic Pledge’, which laid out their new rules of engagement regarding passenger ships, seemed to assuage the US government and also indirectly helped the U-Boat fleet become more effective. Unrestricted submarine warfare was useful as a weapon of naval terror, but sinking passenger liners did not assist the stated aim of starving Britain of food and supplies. Freed from their requirement to sink everything, U-Boat commanders were able to become far more selective in their choice of military targets. The torpedoing, but not sinking, of the passenger ferry the *SS Sussex* in the English Channel was potentially a more serious error by the Germans than the attack on the *Lusitania* as it dramatically weakened the political weight given to their promises.¹⁷ The ‘Sussex Pledge’ that followed once again redefined the rules of engagement regarding such vessels, but also provoked doubts about how long Germany would maintain its naval strategies in the face of a worsening military situation in Europe.

By the same token, however, these diplomatic crises also exposed some of the flaws in the US approach to neutrality. Whilst Washington had proven willing to confront Berlin over the use of U-Boats (although not always with the power to back up its rhetoric), it had been equally unwilling to take a similar stance with London over the ongoing naval blockade of Germany. With the Royal Navy making trade with Germany an impossibility, the USA took the decision to freely trade with Britain. Whilst the British interference with US trade and economic

¹⁵Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality*, pp. 139–40.

¹⁶Floyd, pp. 166–8.

¹⁷Simone De Santiago Ramos, ‘Sussex Pledge’, 1914–1918 Online—International Encyclopedia of the First World War, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10649>.

opportunities reportedly enraged President Wilson, he did not react to the British blockade in the same way as he did the German actions.¹⁸ The resultant trade deficit between the Entente Allies and the Central Powers emerging from dealings with the USA greatly benefited the British and French cause. Furthermore, by tying its trade prospects to the Entente, the USA had far more to lose from German naval activity than British.¹⁹

Whilst neutral in name, the USA was becoming noticeably partial through its own actions. Wilson may have wanted to serve as a suitable mediator for the conflict, but it became increasingly clear that the combatants were not interested in such mediation. There were also legitimate question marks over how 'neutral' the USA would be able to remain in such a role.²⁰ Additionally, the spectre of US intervention in the war might have actually increased its duration rather than reduced it. By appearing as a potential prize for the Entente and a potential threat to the Central Powers, the USA influenced the strategic decisions of both sides.²¹ Certainly, Britain and France continued their charm offensive on the USA in attempts to bring them into the conflict on one side or the other. In 1917, France dispatched Marshal Joseph Joffre on a mission to win US; in 1916, the British had worked hard to mitigate emerging anti-British sentiment in the USA regarding their economic policies and the suppression of the Easter Rising in Ireland.²²

The actions of the German government in 1917 that did finally draw the USA into the conflict highlight both evolving opinion within the USA at the time, despite the recent Presidential election, and also the almost reckless short term-ism that marked some German strategies during at that time. The introduction of Vladimir Lenin to Russia paid off in bringing Russia to its knees, but without a great deal of consideration

¹⁸Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 48.

¹⁹Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality*, pp. 170–1; Neiberg, *The Path to War*, p. 121.

²⁰Floyd, *Abandoning American Neutrality*, p. 183; Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 209–10.

²¹Ross Kennedy, 'Peace Initiatives', ed. Ute Daniel et al., *1914–1918 Online—International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10405>.

²²Robert B. Bruce, 'America Embraces France: Marshal Joseph Joffre and the French Mission to the United States, April–May 1917', *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 2 (2002): 407–41; Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 152–4.

for what a civil war and emerging Bolshevik regime might mean in a near neighbour. Similarly, the return to unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 did have a strategical veracity to it. Following the heavy casualties inflicted on the German army at the Somme and Verdun, and the subsequent retirement to the Hindenburg Line at the beginning of 1917, it was clear that such losses were unsustainable.²³ The decision to then reinstitute unrestricted submarine warfare was designed to starve Britain out of the war as quickly as possible. There was a clear understanding and acknowledgement that this might result in a US entry into the war. Having been warned repeatedly by President Wilson, the Germans were wary of once again breaking one of their pledges. However, this does not fully account for the decision by the German foreign minister Arthur Zimmerman to try and goad Mexico into war with the USA as a contingency plan.

The US decision to break off diplomatic contact with Germany following the new U-Boat announcement was not unexpected in Berlin. However, in an attempt to prepare for a worse outcome, Zimmerman, through a meandering route of diplomatic cables, invited the Mexican government into a military alliance aimed at seizing provinces previously lost to the USA. That these signals would be intercepted and decoded by the British government and eventually make their way into the hands of the US government was an unforeseen circumstance. However, Zimmerman’s decision to then verify their accuracy was a further curious blunder that effectively backed the US government into a corner.²⁴ This was especially strange as there was very little evidence to suggest that Mexico would agree to such an arrangement or that Germany was in a position to offer them the assistance promised. For the USA, the war was no longer simply a matter of economics or principles. Admittedly Americans had been losing their lives in it since at least the sinking of the *Lusitania*, but now Germany had been exposed plotting with a potentially unfriendly nation to wage war on US soil. The resulting shift of popular opinion was a catastrophe for the German war effort as Zimmerman managed to deftly create exactly the situation he had hazardedly tried to avoid. The resulting declaration of war by the USA clarified the situation for both competing alliances, but it did not immediately change the practical balance of power.

²³William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), pp. 600–3.

²⁴Neiberg, *The Path to War*, pp. 219–23.

THE US ROLE

The military power of the USA before the First World War existed almost entirely as theoretical potential. With a volunteer army that numbered 3820 officers and 84,799 men, it was comparable to an 'Indian constabulary' rather than a modern fighting force.²⁵ At the outbreak of the 1898 war with Spain, the US army of 28,748 men and officers was outnumbered almost 4 to 1 by the 80,000 Spanish soldiers on Cuba.²⁶ By the conclusion of that war, the US army had, however, grown to over 260,000 men and over 11,000 officers.²⁷ Whilst the USA finished victorious, that war had exposed glaring issues concerning equipment, infrastructure, and preparedness to deal with a military crisis.²⁸ These obstacles were not easily overcome, and nor were they particularly confronted.

Whilst determined in the earliest years of the First World War to remain out of the conflict, the USA found itself caught up in one far closer to home. The notorious Mexican bandit Pancho Villa was left enraged in October 1915 by what he saw as US intervention in Mexico's government, particularly its support for his rival Venustiano Carranza and his potential transformation of Mexico into a US protectorate.²⁹ In response, Villa led forces in an attack against Columbus, New Mexico and a nearby army base in March 1916, and killed soldiers and civilians. The US response was to dispatch the Punitive Expeditionary Force, led by General John Pershing, which crossed into Mexico a week later and took up the pursuit of Villa and his forces.³⁰ This expedition into Mexico did serve the purpose of preventing further raids, but it also strained relations with the Mexican government to the point where the German Foreign Minister, Arthur Zimmerman, clearly thought it could be exploited. However, it also further exposed vulnerabilities in the USA's defensive ability.

President Wilson found himself caught in a difficult situation. He could not continue to espouse neutrality and a peaceful solution to

²⁵Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, p. 1.

²⁶Woodward, p. 5.

²⁷Woodward.

²⁸Woodward, pp. 4–6.

²⁹Woodward, p. 28.

³⁰Woodward, pp. 28 and 96–7.

conflict in Europe whilst at the same time building up an armed force that was already woefully small. However, by the same token, if neutrality was to fail, or conflict to break out in or around the USA, the army was utterly ill prepared to deal with it. In 1915 and 1916, President Wilson had been left furious upon discovering that the Army War College had been undertaking war games against a theoretical German enemy. Wilson believed it would undermine the US position of neutrality.³¹ Similar concerns in the run-up to war in 1914 had led Belgium to avoid any joint exercises with Britain or France, or even a presence at the strategic table. Plans were authorised for the expansion of the peacetime US army, and provisions were made for the event of war in the wake of Pancho Villa’s raid, but the expansions did not produce an army that would keep any of the combatants in Europe awake at night with hope or fear.³²

When war was declared by the US Congress on 6 April 1917, Britain and France welcomed this new power into the Entente Alliance but also began a series of individual charm offensives. Both countries were keen to ensure they had the strongest relationship with the USA, and both believed themselves to have something of an advantage; Britain because of shared language and France because of shared revolutionary heritage. By the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, both nations would be left somewhat disappointed in how the relationship had played out, but there had been clear indications early on that France had the upper hand and sought an understanding that effectively excluded Britain.³³ The news of the USA’s entry into the war was met with an outpouring of relief and emotion in Paris.³⁴ Within days, General Robert Nivelle had exchanged messages with the US Army chief of staff Major General Hugh Scott espousing the close military history of the two nations as manifested by Lafayette and Rochambeau.³⁵

Following hot on the heels of this exchange was the announcement that France would deploy a military mission to the USA led by Marshal Joseph Joffre. Joffre had been effectively side-lined following the perceived failures of the 1916 offensives, but was still much admired around

³¹Woodward, pp. 19–20.

³²Woodward, pp. 29–33.

³³Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 38.

³⁴Bruce, pp. 32–3.

³⁵Bruce, pp. 33–4.

the world and in the USA for his role in the Miracle of the Marne. More importantly, from the French perspective, Joffre was intimately familiar with the ongoing military situation and what France might need in order to force victory. Joffre spent most of his journey to the USA studiously acquainting himself with US history and what this new ally might be able to provide for the Entente.³⁶ The British had selected Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to lead their military mission, accompanied by Lieutenant General Tom Bridges to offer military insight.³⁷ Balfour was seen as a strong delegate who could interact with Wilson as an 'intellectual equal'.³⁸ Bridges did not have the same military weight as a marshal of France, but having been wounded during the Battle of Mons he could bring a front-line perspective to conversations.

The mission from Britain arrived first, the French shortly afterwards. Both were warmly welcomed, though the French reception seemed better.³⁹ Both groups began the process of simultaneously charming the Americans and beginning to organise them for war. It did not take long for both the British and the French to begin to notice the inherent weaknesses in the US military set-up. The day after the British were warmly greeted in Washington, Bridges reported that the capital now resembled a quiet 'university town' with no sense of urgency on display.⁴⁰ The Americans were beginning the process of creating and ratifying the Selective Service Bill, which came into effect on 18 May 1917. This bill allowed for the creation of a new US army through an intricate draft process which would, when the draws were made on the morning of 20 July, create a potential pool of 3 million men to serve in the armed forces.⁴¹ However, this pool did not exist when the British and US missions arrived in France, and, even after 20 July, only existed in a theoretical space. For the time being, the actual US army was still comparable in size to the BEF of 1914, and that army had been almost destroyed by the spring of 1915. The lack of an effective US fighting force ready for

³⁶Bruce, pp. 37–40.

³⁷Woodward, *Trial by Friendship*, pp. 50–2.

³⁸Woodward, p. 50.

³⁹Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, pp. 41–2.

⁴⁰Lieut.-Col. Charles à Court Repington, *The First World War 1914–1918*, vol. 1, 2 vols (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1920) cited in; Woodward, *Trial by Friendship*, p. 52.

⁴¹Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 48–51.

deployment acted as both an opportunity and an obstacle for Britain and France because ownership of this potential army was the secret objective of both.

The British War Cabinet had instructed Balfour to try and achieve two goals; first, that US units be dispatched to France and complete their training there; second, that the major combatants should be allowed to recruit Americans into their armed forces.⁴² Meanwhile, the French Minister of War, Paul Painlevé, and General Nivelle had come to a similar conclusion over their own desires and believed at least 500,000 US volunteers could be incorporated swiftly into the French army.⁴³ The allied perspective was that time was of the essence and it would be far swifter for the USA to make its huge potential manpower open to Britain and France to recruit from directly to plug the gaps left by previous losses. These men could be trained in the field and deployed directly to the front where they were needed. This was not what the Americans had in mind, and it did not go down well in Washington, particularly when those amongst the US military began to learn about it.

Major James Logan of the US mission in Paris learned of the ‘Nivelle scheme’ in mid-April and quickly relayed it to his superiors whilst explaining to the French how it would ‘never be acceptable’ to the Americans. At the same time, General Bridges was attempting to make a similar case in the USA by espousing the benefits of sending 500,000 US men to England for training, where he claimed that with a mere nine weeks’ training there and nine further days in France they could be killing Germans.⁴⁴ Bridges had already caused some friction with his US hosts through his personality and the bombastic manner in which he delivered advice, but this demand had to be dropped when President Wilson found out about it. Indeed, Bridges could scarcely get the US President to discuss anything about the war.⁴⁵

This ‘Amalgamation Crisis’ was the first source of real disagreement between the existing allies and the USA. That the Americans were able to stand their ground and resist the pressure from Paris and London gave them their first military victory months before they were

⁴²Woodward, *Trial by Friendship*, p. 52.

⁴³Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, pp. 38–9.

⁴⁴Woodward, *Trial by Friendship*, p. 53.

⁴⁵Woodward, p. 53.

in a position to take the field. That the US army would be largely kept together as a recognisable sovereign unit was exactly what General Pershing wanted, and he came out of the endeavour with his reputation enhanced in Washington having been appointed commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in May. Pershing was possessed of the firm belief that Americans had ‘special inherent characteristics and capabilities’ that differentiated them from their European allies.⁴⁶ Though the nature of the instructions given to Pershing by both the Secretary of War and the President mirrored some of the instructions presented to Marshal Sir John French by Lord Kitchener in 1914, the reality of these orders gave Pershing a tremendous amount of freedom for exercising his command of the AEF when it was deployed in Europe.⁴⁷

However, the process of preparing the US army for war should probably also be considered a victory for the French and a block on the ambitions of the British. The French certainly reacted far more quickly than the British to the collapse of the amalgamation plan. Part of this was based on the fact that Joffre himself had never been keen on the ‘Nivelle scheme’; he believed that ‘no great nation having a proper consciousness of its own dignity’ would accept such an agreement, and that the USA of all nations was even less likely to do so.⁴⁸ Having realised that the Americans would never accept the carving-up of their armed forces to fill Entente losses, Joffre was equally quick to realise that if the US army was to be a cohesive unit then it would be far better for it to serve alongside the French than alongside the British.⁴⁹ The catastrophic fallout of the Nivelle Offensive at the *Chemin des Dames* only heightened the concerns within the French military over their ability to successfully wage war in the coming months.

Joffre quickly set to charming General Scott. Without ever mentioning the British or ‘allied’ armies, he impressed upon him the importance of a close working relationship between the US and French militaries. His key proposal was that an US division be dispatched to France where it would be trained and supplied by the French army to serve as a model

⁴⁶Mark E. Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I*, 2010, p. 43.

⁴⁷Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 97–8.

⁴⁸Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 39.

⁴⁹Bruce, p. 40.

for future divisions. These divisions would then be placed under French command until the Americans were ready to resume control of them.⁵⁰ Such a plan played very well with Scott and others in the US government and military, and was only solidified in further meetings with such officials. By 2 May 1917, Joffre was given confirmation from President Wilson that US divisions would begin to head for Europe as quickly as possible, even if they were not yet fully trained or supplied.⁵¹

The British appeared to have lost the game before they had even realised it was being played. Balfour and his mission had noted that, whilst cordial, the reaction they received from the Americans was not as effusive as that given to the French. Part of this was because of lingering animosity over the British blockade activities, but the suppression of the Irish Easter Rising and latent fears over a potential conflict between the two countries was making full cooperation difficult.⁵² In the end, the decision was made that an eventual six divisions of the AEF would train abroad with the British whilst the rest would all head for the French.⁵³ In the meantime, both Britain and France would assist in the training of US units in the USA before they were shipped to France for their final advanced training before undertaking combat operations.

In order to further sell the war effort to the US people, the government there began the process of creating posters and propaganda imagery designed not just to increase recruitment or to financially assist in the waging of the war, but to define both the reason for the war and the US role within the alliance. With their need to construct an army, the challenge facing the Americans was not hugely different to that facing the British in 1914. In an acknowledgement of how well recruitment had gone for the British in the first two years of the war, the Americans reproduced the famous ‘Your Country Needs You’ poster, but replaced the image of Kitchener with Uncle Sam. In his speech to Congress calling for war to be declared, President Wilson had espoused the need to make the world ‘safe for democracy’, and it was this angle that US propaganda efforts pursued. The British

⁵⁰Bruce, pp. 43–4.

⁵¹Bruce, pp. 47–8.

⁵²Bruce, pp. 48–50.

⁵³United States Army, *United States Army in the World War 1917–1919*, vol. 3: Training and Use of American Units with the British and French (Centre of Military History, Washington, DC: United States Army, 1989).

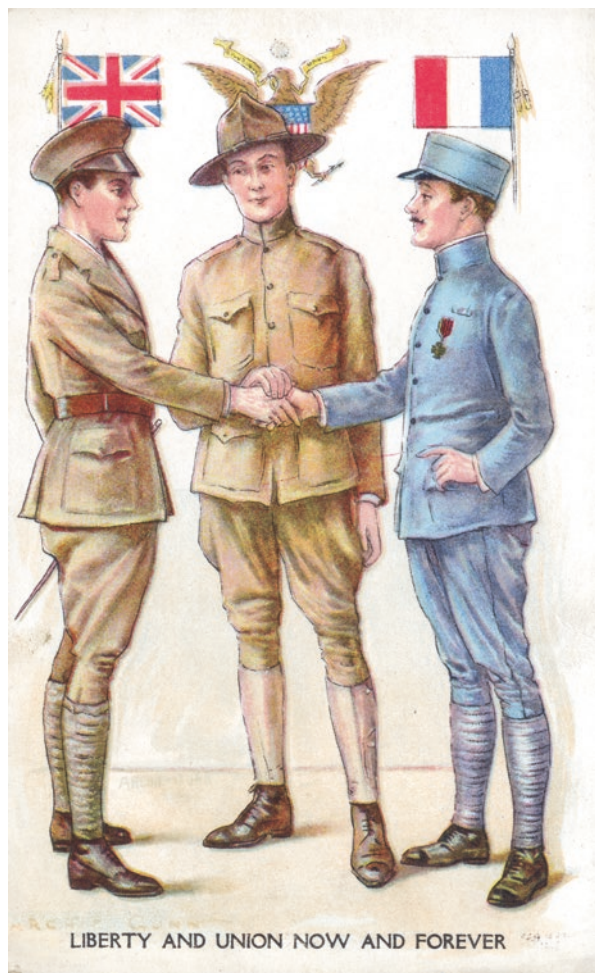


Fig. 1 Archie Gunn, *Liberty and Union Now and Forever*

cartoonist Archie Gunn was hired after the declaration of war to produce a series of cartoons to help publicise the US involvement both in the war and in the Entente Alliance with Britain and France. Perhaps the most famous of these images is of French, British, and US soldiers joining together above the declaration 'Liberty and Union Now and Forever' (Fig. 1). That Gunn would further the assertion that France, Britain, and the USA were joined by their mutual love of freedom and



Fig. 2 Joseph Pennell, *That liberty shall not perish from the Earth* (Image courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC 20540 USA, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>)

democracy against the Central Powers, who were now characterised by their barbarity, was no surprise. What perhaps may have raised eyebrows in London and Paris was the fact that the framing of the image makes it look very much as if the USA is at the centre of this alliance having brought the British and French together.

By 1918 and with US soldiers beginning to arrive in France in greater numbers, the imagery associated with the ongoing war began to evolve. The core tenet that the USA was fighting for democracy and freedom remained, but it was entwined with additional threads; ones which spoke of the danger to the USA should the war be lost and others that also linked the USA's past wars into the ongoing conflict (Fig. 2). The possibility of the USA itself coming under attack was so remote in 1918 as to be practically inconceivable. However, the imagery that appeared on Joseph Pennell's poster strongly mirrored that seen in British depictions of theoretical German attacks on the Sussex coastline during 1914, when the possibility of invasion was seen as 'possible but improbable'.⁵⁴ The use of a quote from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address to motivate the US populace to financially support the war effort explicitly linked the efforts of the USA in the current war with the belief of the Union States in the Civil War that they were fighting for a cause greater than themselves. How such a sentiment was received in the southern states which had made up the Confederacy is hard to tell, but ongoing tensions between northerners and southerners had continued to be felt within the AEF. during the early months of the war. Furthermore, the selection of the Statue of Liberty as the symbol to be destroyed by German bombers was no surprise in itself, but by utilising such a symbol Pennell also inextricably linked the USA to the country which had provided the statue and shared in its joint message of liberty: France.

TRAINING THE AEF

On 15 June, the US military began the process of constructing 32 new training centres for the preparation of the AEF. Of these new camps, 16 would consist of wooden barracks for the National Army, 16 of tents for

⁵⁴Chris Kempshall, 'Defending Sussex's Shores', East Sussex WW1, 29 July 2014, <http://www.eastsussexww1.org.uk/index.php?>.

the National Guard, and a further 13 for schools of advanced study such as officer training and the tank corps.⁵⁵

To assist in the training of the US units, both Britain and France dispatched instructors to the USA. France volunteered 286 officers whilst Britain sent 261 officers and a further 226 non-commissioned officers.⁵⁶ This number of instructors was not likely to be sufficient to help create an army most hoped would grow to number beyond a million men. The selection of these instructors remains unclear as does any possible discussion between Britain and France over who was best placed to provide training in each form of modern warfare. The French contingent certainly gave an indication as to their believed superiority in artillery training, with a quarter of their total instructors coming from an artillery background.⁵⁷ It appeared that the British then took on much of the infantry and bayonet training, but any records of negotiation between Britain and France regarding training spheres remain elusive.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that many US officers, Pershing principal amongst them, did not believe that the tactics and strategies the British and French were teaching were the ones they needed to learn. Supply shortages and a lack of pre-war investment in modern weaponry only exacerbated this problem.⁵⁸ The US *Field Service Regulations* were, as explained by Grotelueschen, a fair replication of the approaches and strategies the European powers had employed in 1914 and, as a result, were no longer suited for industrial trench warfare.⁵⁹ US planners placed a degree of emphasis on infantry assault and open warfare, complete with turning and envelopment manoeuvres, which had not been considered viable in Europe since the emergence of trench warfare at the end of 1914.⁶⁰ Furthermore, weapons now viewed in Europe as being absolutely crucial (such as the machine gun or heavy

⁵⁵Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, p. 55.

⁵⁶Woodward, p. 73.

⁵⁷Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 99. Certainly, some of the American trainees held French artillery trainers in the highest esteem. Russell Gordon Carter, *The 101st Field Artillery—A.E.F. 1917–1919* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940), p. 11.

⁵⁸Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, pp. 13–14; Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 73–4.

⁵⁹Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, pp. 14–16.

⁶⁰Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, p. 76.

field artillery) were thought in the USA to be either useless or 'emergency weapons'.⁶¹ The *Field Service Regulations* were also accompanied by a 'veritable avalanche of books, booklets, pamphlets, and bulletins' covering various aspects of waging war and most originating from the War Office.⁶²

Because of the need for trained and prepared men in Europe, the training in the USA does not appear to have been easy on any of those involved. The British and French instructors might have been forgiven for thinking that the primary feat the Americans would achieve would be in getting all of their men killed. One of their primary challenges was to begin the process of sculpting civilians into well-drilled soldiers. This was not always well received by the men undergoing the training. The 47th US Infantry was trained by French officers named Captain DuPont and Colonel Roudiez.⁶³ Roudiez rapidly became known for his repeated use of regimental reviews in order to bring the standards of the US soldiers up to acceptable standards, once having the regiments paraded three times in a single afternoon. The British and French trainers would no doubt have seen that the process of moving from civilians to soldiers, and functioning within a system of military discipline and the army institution, was a crucial part of preparing the men for war.

For the Americans, the notion that their training was designed to rob them of their individuality and ability to think for themselves proved to be one of the most difficult aspects to acclimatise to.⁶⁴ The idea that the British and French were not teaching the Americans relevant skills is something of a running theme in these records. The official history of the 120th Infantry gave the evaluation that much of the trench-warfare training proved 'of little value' as 'conditions existing to-day are out of date to-morrow'.⁶⁵ What is interesting about this attitude is that

⁶¹Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, p. 16.

⁶²Robert Stewart Sutcliffe, *Seventy-First New York in the World War* (The United States, 1922), p. 41.

⁶³James E. Pollard, *47th US Infantry: A History* (Michigan, USA: Seeman & Peters, 1919), pp. 17–18.

⁶⁴Chaplain F. C. Reynolds and Chaplain W. M. F. McLaughlin, *115th U.S. Infantry—The World War* (Baltimore, USA: The Read Taylor Co., 1920), pp. 35–6.

⁶⁵Major John O. Walker, *Official History of the 120th Infantry Division* (Virginia, USA: J.P. Bell Company, n.d.), p. 7.

the US writer Major John O. Walker manages to be both prescient and short-sighted at the same time. The war that the Americans would find in France during the summer of 1918 was very different to that which they had been trained for and the conditions of fighting in trenches were changing significantly with the end of trench warfare being nigh. However, the British and French experience of fighting over the previous years proved overwhelmingly that skill at fighting in trenches was absolutely necessary, and, similarly, conditions in those trenches had not been changing day by day.

The reality for many US soldiers following the declaration of war was ongoing training, repetition of exercises and, when the winter of 1917 arrived, freezing conditions in training camps. This was not the heroic experience that many of them had expected when they volunteered or been drafted, but extended experience of such conditions would, from a pragmatic military point of view, serve as a useful prologue to fighting in the trenches of France and Belgium. With regard to combat training, the British and French were clearly keen on preparing these new soldiers as much as possible and, as a result, gave the Americans as much as they could. This included training in gas warfare followed up by lectures from soldiers who had themselves been gassed.⁶⁶ Trying to impress the necessity of such precautions on US soldiers was seen as an ongoing requirement, with one gas-warfare school having a single sign outlining that ‘In a gas attack there are just two classes of men; the quick and the dead’.⁶⁷ Incorporated into these routines were also exercises led by US officers, such as mock battles in open ground between ‘red’ and ‘blue’ armies, clearly designed to imbue the men with sufficient offensive zeal.⁶⁸ Some of the infantry training areas were vast, with the 71st New York Division regularly training on an area 30,000 acres in size which ‘covered a very diversified terrain, including small villages, woodland, cotton fields and farms, as well as rugged mountain sections’.⁶⁹

This infantry training in particular was viewed both by the instructors and the soldiers as necessarily intense, partially to prepare infantry for their role in the coming battles but also as a means to keep the

⁶⁶ Sutcliffe, *Seventy-First New York in the World War*, pp. 58–9.

⁶⁷ Reynolds and McLaughlin, *115th U.S. Infantry—The World War*, p. 41.

⁶⁸ Reynolds and McLaughlin, pp. 44–5.

⁶⁹ Sutcliffe, *Seventy-First New York in the World War*, p. 46.

men permanently occupied and out of trouble.⁷⁰ The process was also designed to fill the US soldiers with confidence in their own abilities before deployment. Despite some reporting that by the conclusion of their training the Americans had ‘acquired all the skill with the bayonet and rifle, all the intricacies of trench work, and all the expertness with grenades and bombs that energy, ingenuity and skill could impart’, similar to the British civilian soldiers in 1915 and 1916, some of this confidence would begin to evaporate upon deployment to France.⁷¹ To help maintain discipline but also to encourage good behaviour amongst the trainees, some camps, such as Camp Syracuse, introduced a card system where men whose conduct was rated as ‘good’ were permitted to be absent ‘from retreat to reveille and from inspection on Saturday until reveille on Monday morning’.⁷² Some soldiers had a single notion drilled into them: ‘he who sows discord in our ranks is a comfort to the Kaiser’.⁷³

Aside from providing these soldiers with the right motivations for good behaviour and discipline, the British in particular seemed keen on taking every opportunity to teach the Americans what they perceived to be the correct way of fighting a war as well as some of its shadier aspects. One British officer lectured US soldiers for over an hour on the importance of maintaining smart uniforms as a sign of discipline and professionalism.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the collected notes of Corporal Elmer Dewey report that a British officer in his training camp had given a ‘censored interview’ to the camp newspaper *The Wadsworth Gas-Attack*, outlining how Americans should never accept the surrender of any German soldier if there was nobody behind them to keep him in check.⁷⁵ Additionally, Sergeant Madden, the English Instructor

⁷⁰Elmer A. Murphy and Robert S. Thomas, *The Thirtieth Division in the World War* (Lepanto, AR: Old Hickory Publishing Company, 1936), pp. 33–4.

⁷¹Sutcliffe, *Seventy-First New York in the World War*, p. 53.

⁷²Pollard, *47th US Infantry: A History*, p. 12.

⁷³Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), p. 23.

⁷⁴Captain X, *Our First Half Million: The Story of Our National Army* (New York: The H.K. Fly Company, 1918), pp. 173–5.

⁷⁵Stephen A. Banks, *Doing My Duty: Corporal Elmer Dewey—One National Guard Doughboy's Experiences During the Pancho Villa Punitive Campaign and World War I* (Springfield, VA: S.A. Banks, 2011), pp. 130–1.

for the 115th Infantry, ‘put lots of pep, snap and savagery into his pupils’ as he taught them the necessity of duelling and killing Germans during bayonet training.⁷⁶ The training offered by British and French instructors, which also continued overseas, could be equally brutal but also contradictory:

There was special instruction to bayonet them in the belly wherever possible. If you bayoneted a man you were chasing, you must get him through the kidneys and not in the rump. If your bayonet stuck, shoot it out. The British at that time were crazy about the bayonet. They knew it was going to win the war.

The French were equally obsessed with the grenade. They knew it was going to win the war. So we also got a full dose of training in hand grenade throwing.⁷⁷

Whilst they would provide practical training for battle, the differences in how the British and French approached the war, how they viewed and rationalised it, and how they thought of their friends and allies would also be transmitted to the US recruits under their control. As an extension of this arrangement, it is also necessary to consider that the AEF’s experience began whilst still on US soil and was therefore a variation on normal ideas of ‘the home front’. It is with Britain that the notion of the ‘home front’ is most commonly associated. The English Channel provided clear geographic distance between the war and life at home, allowing them to operate in separate spheres. The home front became the place that soldiers wanted to return to and where the production of materiel for the war was undertaken safely away from the dangers of the front. By contrast, whilst large parts of France were removed from the fighting on the Western Front, as an invaded nation, their ‘home’ was not a safe place far from the fighting, but an occupied land that needed to be liberated. Furthermore, significant parts of France’s industrial heartland had fallen into German hands. It would not be until they were

⁷⁶Reynolds and McLaughlin, *115th U.S. Infantry—The World War*, p. 39.

⁷⁷Colonel Frederick M. Wise, cited in James H. Hallas, ed., *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 53.

deployed overseas that most of the AEF would begin to share in similar moments of dislocation and adaptation that the British had experienced in 1914 and 1915.

OVER THERE

Whilst preparing the US recruits for combat was an ongoing objective, so was binding them together into a shared identity. The British 'Tommy' and the French '*Poilu*' identities were largely organic terms that had evolved out of a national martial history. Achieving the same sense in a country which had only recently been split by civil war and that had not really undergone a period of political reunification similar to the *union sacrée* in France during 1914 was going to be problematic. The spectre of Confederate and Union loyalties was something that would need to be either eradicated or managed to provide motivation, as in the case of the 80th 'Blue Ridge' division.⁷⁸ Even forming a collective name for this group of men was to prove problematic. Overt references to 'Johnny Rebs' were unlikely to be well received in some quarters. Similarly, the men of the southern states were not likely to take well to being referred to as Yankees, though the 26th Infantry Division, predominantly composed of New Englanders, adopted the moniker of 'the Yankee Division' through a mix of its commanding officer General Edwards's personal choice and a suggestion made by the attached war correspondent Frank Palmer Sibley.⁷⁹

Upon the Americans' arrival overseas, the British and French soldiers would sometimes attempt a variety of nicknames for them, not all innocent, as we shall see. The term 'Sammie' (a reference to 'Uncle Sam') was a common name but one that US soldiers did not particularly take to. The official army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* would eventually label 'Sammie' as 'a name he [the US soldier] did not invent, does not like, never uses and will not recognise'.⁸⁰ This may have been an extreme position, but soldiers in the 71st New York

⁷⁸Russell L. Stultz, *History of the 80th Blue Ridge Division in World War I A.E.F.*, ed. Bill J. Krehbiel, n.d., Chapter 5.

⁷⁹Frank Palmer Sibley, *With the Yankee Division in France* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1919), p. 10.

⁸⁰Gary Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), pp. 66–7.

Infantry, part of 27th Division, became annoyed at Australians calling them ‘Sammies’ as it did not sound grown-up, whilst the Australians were under the impression that Americans did not want to be called ‘Yanks’.⁸¹ The Australian soldiers were not wrong in this belief, and amongst US soldiers there was an ongoing feeling that men from both the Confederate and Union states were still fighting the Civil War.⁸² Despite this, there is evidence from early interactions with their British and French allies that Americans would, at least, answer to the name of ‘Sammie’, at times it would be a grudging acceptance though some would come to bear it with pride.⁸³ However, *Stars and Stripes* had made clear the issue of an unwanted identity being imposed upon the soldiers of the newly formed armies. A uniform and unifying identity could not be fully imposed from the outside, it required a degree of assent from the group themselves. The term ‘Doughboy’ itself had mixed ancestry and Gary Mead has charted the various origin stories for the name, many of which were again played out in the pages of *Stars and Stripes*.⁸⁴

However, as a term it did appear to have limitations when compared to ‘Tommy’ or ‘Poilu’. These terms both expressed an aspect of British and French military political identity. Tommy Atkins represented the everyman nature of the British soldier, an embodiment of a happy-go-lucky spirit and a comfort of being an ordinary part of a larger mass. The French embraced their own dedication and love of *la patrie* by immersing themselves in the soil and growing their hair long. Both of these terms told the world something about the identity of the holder. The ‘Doughboy’ moniker did not immediately lend itself to a transmission of cultural information. In fact, the hostility of some US soldiers to other terms like ‘Yankee’ was far more indicative of cultural tensions within US society, though US soldiers within the 26th ‘Yankee’ Division would maintain it as a badge of honour regardless of

⁸¹Sutcliffe, *Seventy-First New York in the World War*, p. 160.

⁸²George Griffith Ross, ‘Veteran Survey Questionnaire’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 546 (33rd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

⁸³Banks, *Doing My Duty*, p. 114.

⁸⁴Mead, *The Doughboys: America and the First World War*, pp. 67–8.

each soldier's state of origin.⁸⁵ Whilst this in itself did not cause serious issues between US soldiers and their new allies, it does help one to understand some of the friction between them later in the war. What further exacerbated this friction was the fact that some US soldiers were, in many ways, incredibly naïve in their interactions with their allies. This fact led some British troops to use them as a vessel for causing future mischief.

Some early relations between French and US soldiers in 1918 were soured by the tendency of the US soldiers to refer to the French as 'Frogs', 'Froggies', or variations on that theme. This tendency by US soldiers was given as a potential reason why relations between French and US troops soured towards the end of 1918.⁸⁶ One US soldier of the 32nd Division espoused the belief that this nickname had come from an observation of the way French children pestered US soldiers for biscuits or treats with the words 'bisquee, bisquee' a claim which seems wildly improbable.⁸⁷ The reality was that this term for identifying the French did not appear to exist in the writings of US soldiers until they had undergone some contact with the British. It is possible that these US soldiers just picked up the parlance from the British, but there also exists the possibility that British soldiers, slightly more savvy after years of warfare and interacting with their French ally, had mischievously primed the Americans with a nickname they knew the French would find offensive. For their part, US soldiers then also became annoyed that the British would alternate between calling them 'Sammies', 'Yankees', and 'Doughboys' (and invariably getting the wrong term for the wrong group), which suggested that the British were either mischief-making here as well or struggling to grasp the fractured nature of their allies' national identities.

US soldiers did begin to notice what they believed to be a highly patronising attitude towards them from British soldiers once they had made the trip across the Atlantic Ocean. The eventual result of this sort of treatment was US soldiers losing patience and erupting in anger. There were repeated stories circulating in Liverpool of ongoing fights

⁸⁵James T. Duane, *Dear Old 'K'* (Boston, MA: Thomas Todd Co., 1922), p. 125.

⁸⁶Sibley, *With the Yankee Division in France*, p. 36.

⁸⁷Hakon Anderson, 'My Life in the Army of World War One', n.d., USAHEC WWI 6801 (32nd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, pp. 6–7.

between British and US service personnel, and Leonard Van Norstrand of the Tank Corps eventually gave up on the British entirely, describing them as:

[a] decadent nation, they are 50 years behind the times and so damn dumb they don’t know it, but they are good fighters and courageous people. The ordinary English does not lack courage, he is fairly intelligent, selfish, a tightwad and always wants to fill his stomach, hard drinker and not too well educated, but a fine fellow to hold a lady’s hand and stand around a drawing room. The Scotch are bully ... we cannot say too much for the Scotch, best fighters, best everything.

A great many US soldiers reportedly found it difficult to warm to their British allies. The growing feeling amongst the men of the AEF was that the soldiers of the British army were arrogant and patronising.⁸⁸ One American wrote that over time they came to respect the British and the great efforts they had clearly undertaken during the war, but Americans were never able to fully like them.⁸⁹ There had been fears that Americans might struggle to get along with their British allies since the outbreak of the war, and The Vigilantes, ‘a patriotic, anti-pacifist, non-partisan organisation’ in the USA took it upon themselves to ‘overcome the stupid prejudice the average American holds against the English, a prejudice largely due to the false statements regarding the events leading up to the American Revolution that one finds in our school histories’. The Vigilantes began a ‘campaign to present the truth to the American people about their Allies, the English’.⁹⁰

Ill-feeling over the Revolutionary War was not confined to the US side alone, however, and some men from the AEF reported that British soldiers did not like to be reminded of the conflict.⁹¹ When King George V inspected men of the AEF, one soldier from the 120th Infantry speculated that the reason the US soldiers had not been given weapons for the

⁸⁸Stultz, *History of the 80th Blue Ridge Division in World War I A.E.F.*, Chapter 17.

⁸⁹Stultz, Chapter 12.

⁹⁰Eugenie M. Fryer, ‘The Vigilantes’, ed. J. Wanamaker, *Book News: An Illustrated Magazine of Literature and Books* 36 (1918). I am indebted to Connie Ruzich for bringing this item to my attention.

⁹¹Fred P. Jones, ‘Veteran Survey Questionnaire’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 5008 (33rd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

inspection was because of British fears that one of them might try and shoot the King.⁹² Regardless of the motivation for this animosity, there were reports throughout the AEF of British soldiers heckling Americans during training, which would lead to fights breaking out.⁹³ Indeed rumours continued to spread of friction and ongoing running battles in the streets of Liverpool between British and US service personnel.⁹⁴ Following a series of arguments, men of the 2nd Division were given a half-hour lecture on 'How to get along with the British' and threatened with being confined to quarters if relations did not improve.⁹⁵

The commonality of shared language between the British and Americans had given the British an advantage over the French in both training and interacting with the Americans.⁹⁶ As a result, whilst in general, relations between US and British soldiers struggled to get off the ground, a number of US soldiers would take it upon themselves both in America, and again when they reached France, to simply copy British forces as they seemed to know what they were doing and it could be more easily explained. Such a response from US soldiers rather neatly mirrored what British soldiers had done in 1916, when many of their new soldiers took it upon themselves to copy the activities of the nearby French for no stronger reason than that the French appeared to know what they were doing. However, whilst the US soldiers would gravitate towards some British forces, it was more often towards the dominion armies than the British army proper.

Men of the 30th and 33rd Divisions in particular forged strong bonds with Australian and New Zealand soldiers.⁹⁷ These relationships only

⁹²Walker, *Official History of the 120th Infantry Division*, p. 13.

⁹³Ralph L. Williams, 'The Luck of a Buck', 1984, USAHEC WWI 5499 (2nd Division - Folder 3), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, pp. 67–8.

⁹⁴Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War*, p. 32; Albion D. Albright, 'Veteran Survey Questionnaire', n.d., USAHEC WWI 2252 (33rd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

⁹⁵Williams, 'The Luck of a Buck', p. 63.

⁹⁶Although, like the British before them, some American soldiers soon encountered French soldiers who had previously worked in the service industry in the USA and, as a result, spoke perfect English. First-Lieutenant Bryant Wilson and First-Lieutenant Lamar Tooze, *With the 364th Infantry in America, France, and Belgium* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1919), pp. 52–3.

⁹⁷The Veteran Survey Questionnaires for men of the 30th and 33rd Division are replete with references to the good friendship existing between American and ANZAC soldiers.

deepened when US soldiers also encountered Scottish and Irish soldiers who told them that the British army often used such men as shock troops to soak up enemy fire before moving in themselves to take the objectives. As a result, according to these men, Scottish and Irish soldiers avoided contact and socialising with the British and so, apparently, did the Australians, Canadians, and New Zealanders.⁹⁸ Having found men like the Australians who were, in the words of one soldier from the 33rd Division, ‘more like our own soldiers’, many Americans were content to maintain a relationship with these men and ignore the British.⁹⁹ Such an unwelcome development did not pass unnoticed amongst the British.

The arrival of the first US soldiers in France, at the town of Saint-Nazaire, was greeted with great fanfare by the population after the local mayor had placed posters around the town instructing the civilians to warmly welcome the new arrivals.¹⁰⁰ The language issues that had plagued the British in 1914 were now replicated amongst the Americans. Captain George C. Marshall, later chief of staff in the US Army in the Second World War, botched his first attempt at French communication. As a result, over the next twenty-six months, he ‘never spoke French again except when forced to’.¹⁰¹ Attempts by US soldiers to impress British and French women were equally difficult in the early days of their arrival. Some men of the 26th Division, having attempted to charm some British women, were told to wait outside a shop and stayed there for several hours before realising they were not coming back.¹⁰² Other men from the same Division would later try and impress a woman in Paris, who seemed interested but reluctant to speak with them. Later the same day, they would again see this ‘girl’, with her hat and wig removed to reveal a male German spy.¹⁰³

⁹⁸Williams, ‘The Luck of a Buck’, p. 64.

⁹⁹William J. Gorden, ‘Veteran Survey Questionnaire’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 1726 (33rd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

¹⁰⁰Isabelle Clarke and Daniel Costelle, ‘Apocalypse: World War 1’ (Francetv 2, 18 March 2014), Episode 4: Rage. Saint-Nazaire would continue to serve as an arrival point for Americans in the months to come. Hélène Harter, *Les États-Unis Dans La Grande Guerre* (Paris: Tallandier, 2017), pp. 240–8.

¹⁰¹Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 91.

¹⁰²Corporal Ralph Moan, ‘My Trip “Over There”’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 6195 (26th Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, p. 4.

¹⁰³Duane, *Dear Old ‘K’*, pp. 80–1.

Whilst US soldiers shared generally good relations with their French counterparts, building upon the foundations of shared revolutionary heritage and liberty which had aided negotiations at the outbreak of the war, many US soldiers were surprised at just how tired the French army appeared. Reflecting on their time in France during the war, many men who completed the Veteran's Survey Questionnaires in the 1980s remarked on the physical and spiritual fatigue which appeared to have taken hold of the French army. US soldiers found that the French *Poilus* were particularly resistant to US soldiers arriving in trenches and stirring up trouble with the Germans opposite where none had recently existed.¹⁰⁴ In these circumstances, the men of the AEF were having an almost identical experience to that of the British soldiers of 1915 and 1916. In an attempt to gain the respect of the US soldiers, the French ensured repeated contacts between the US 1st and 2nd Divisions and their own elite *Chasseurs Alpin*.¹⁰⁵

However, the aspect that perhaps caused the biggest issue between the USA and France in the early part of the war, before resurfacing again after the armistice, was the treatment of African-American men within the AEF. Whilst General Pershing had been resolute in his desire for the AEF to serve together as a cohesive army, this desire was soon found not to extend to the black soldiers within the 92nd and 93rd Divisions. The arrival in training camps of the men who would make up the 93rd Division, in fact an incomplete division that would lack supporting or service troops, had initially been delayed in 1917 so that they could complete the picking of South Carolina's cotton crop.¹⁰⁶ With Southern States harbouring ongoing concerns about the use of African-Americans in the AEF, the men of the 92nd and 93rd found themselves heavily mocked throughout their training by white soldiers, and rumours that some had been lynched by white residents of nearby towns often spread through the ranks.¹⁰⁷ Pershing's solution to the issue of black and white

¹⁰⁴Edward Schaffer, 'Diary Recollections (Ms)', n.d., USAHEC WWI 2761 (26th Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵2nd Lieutenant John Dodge Clark, 'My War', n.d., USAHEC WWI (2nd Division - Folder 1), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 180–1.

¹⁰⁷Kelly Miller, *Authentic History of the Negro and the World War*, 1919, p. 529; Arthur W. Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine—The Story of New York's Colored Volunteers* (New York: Covici Friede, 1936), pp. 57–62.

soldiers serving alongside each other beneath a US flag was to effectively trade the 92nd and 93rd Divisions away to the French. The latter became the only US Division to be permanently assigned to a foreign power for the duration of the war. Such was the manner of this transfer that many of the men in these Divisions were unaware it was happening until after the deal had been struck.¹⁰⁸

What may initially have been thought of as an ideal short-term fix to this US problem rapidly began to cause long-term issues in itself. As Richard Fogarty has argued in his excellent book *Race and War in France*, whilst France was not a colour-blind or post-racial society, the manner in which it interacted with its black citizens and colonial subjects was a world away from that which African-Americans had routinely encountered back home.¹⁰⁹ Black soldiers within the regiments and divisions now loaned to the French rapidly discovered that the norms of segregation back home did not apply to French units who ‘knew no colour line’, and black US soldiers were instructed in the necessity of ensuring that no such line was introduced.¹¹⁰ African-Americans in the 92nd Division came to have excellent relations with their new French allies and one man reported that he was treated far better by French civilians than he ever had been by men in his own army.¹¹¹ Further to this, white US soldiers had begun to interact with French colonial troops in a manner highly reminiscent of the British in 1914 and 1915. These Americans too noted that the French Algerian and Senegalese men appeared to be a ‘peculiar race’ at best or ‘savages’ at worst, who collected body parts from their defeated enemies.¹¹² Like the British who had come before

¹⁰⁸ Chester D. Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War—The Story of the 371st Infantry* (Commonwealth Press, 1928), pp. 32–3.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918*, War, Society, Culture (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 2–6.

¹¹⁰ Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine—The Story of New York’s Colored Volunteers*, pp. 128–30.

¹¹¹ Walter Robinson, ‘Veteran Survey Questionnaire’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 2380 (92nd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre; Virgil Ragsdale, ‘Veteran Survey Questionnaire’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 1987 (92nd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

¹¹² Duane, *Dear Old ‘K’*, p. 16; Malcolm D. Aitken, ‘Personal Experiences of the War’, n.d., p. 23, USAHEC WWI 273 (2nd Division - Folder 3), US Army Heritage and Education Centre; Carter, *The 101st Field Artillery—A.E.F. 1917–1919*, p. 100.

them, whilst impressed with the ferocity of these French colonial soldiers, the Americans viewed them through a strict prism of racial identity.

If African-American men were now revelling in their new-found sense of freedom, French legislators and army personnel were often left appalled at the behaviour of the US army and government in relation to these same men. How could a nation built upon the notion of liberty and democracy, one that had famously declared that 'all men are created equal', behave in a manner so counter to the ideals of a republic? Blaise Diagne, a black African deputy from Senegal (whose very existence in office would have been an aberration in the USA) vehemently complained to President Georges Clemenceau about the recommendations of Colonel J. A. Linard, a French liaison officer embedded with Pershing's staff. Colonel Linard had drafted a memorandum explaining US racial prejudices and recommending a series of actions to avoid insulting the sensibilities of their trans-Atlantic allies which included avoiding treating black Americans with any semblance of equality or praising them too heavily in front of white Americans as it would 'deeply offend the latter'. In Diagne's eyes, such recommendations were 'outrageous prejudices' and an affront to the virtues of French civilisation.¹¹³

As much as those within the French military and government might have agreed with Diagne, they found themselves in a difficult situation. The reason why US involvement had been so warmly and enthusiastically greeted was because the French army was rapidly running out of men and momentum. They could not easily risk offending their new allies lest they open a rift between them just as the US army was beginning to arrive in greater numbers. Similarly, the British, whilst not pleased by the cosy relationship springing up between their own dominions and the US soldiers, were equally reluctant to take action that might make military cooperation more difficult. Whilst the alliance of France, Britain, and the USA was now finally in place, there were noticeable underlying issues that would cause serious fractures in relations in 1918 following the onset of the greatest series of battles the world had ever seen.

¹¹³Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, p. 6.

PART III

Collapse



Careless Disasters: Allied Relations in 1918

Neither personal considerations, nor political passions will turn us from our duty No more pacifist campaigns, no more German intrigues. Neither treason, nor half treason. War. Nothing but war.

(Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau¹)

Through the coinciding confluence of events, 1918 proved to be the crucial year of victory on the Western Front. The removal of Russia from the war freed up German divisions in the east and enabled their redeployment west. Similarly, the entry of the USA into the war in 1917 would provide much needed reinforcements for France and Britain, although their benefit would not be felt in the immediate short term. The difference in time scale between German troops moving from east to west, and US soldiers crossing the Atlantic would provide Germany with a narrow window of opportunity to win the war. The Spring Offensives that began in March with Operation Michael were targeted at the junction of the British and French armies. If the two could be split apart and a corridor opened for the German army to pass through, then the war could be won.

Whilst 1917 had brought about the entry of the USA into the alliance, in most other respects it had been a fairly disastrous year for France and

¹Speech to the French Department of Deputies, November 1917 taken from; Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (London: Belknap, 2005), p. 402.

Britain. The collapse of Russia to the east had removed one of the founding members of the Entente alliance and dramatically reshaped the strategic situation in Europe. The gruelling battles of Verdun and the Somme in 1916 had produced upheaval in the allied armies, most specifically in the French. Marshal Joffre, having finally lost the confidence of the French government, had been effectively promoted into retirement as the ‘general-in-chief’ of the French armies. His replacement was the charismatic and charming General Robert Nivelle, who claimed to know the solution to the strategic deadlock on the Western Front. He did not. His attacks at the *Chemin des Dames* brought the French army to its knees in 1917 as waves of mutinies broke out amongst soldiers who were no longer willing to have their lives wasted in pointless offensives. Nivelle was rapidly relieved of command and replaced by General Phillipe Pétain.

Whilst on the British side General Haig had maintained his command of the BEF following the Battle of the Somme, he found his powers curtailed by Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who had long been suspicious of Haig’s motives and abilities. Haig had wanted to launch an attack in Flanders in 1917, but he was ordered instead to hold position and provide assistance to the French planned action. Only in the event of a failure by the French army would he be permitted to make his desired attack in Belgium.² Following the *Chemin des Dames* disaster, Haig was able to make his assault at Ypres, but fierce German resistance and the worst autumn on record led to the attack becoming both literally and metaphorically bogged down in the mud leading up to the village of Passchendaele.³

As a result of these 1917 exertions, both the British and the French armies were undergoing a manpower shortage. The British army had grown consistently from the first year of the war and, on 1 January 1918, consisted of 1,750,892 men; an increase of around 218,000 men from the year before.⁴ This increase, however, was actually a shortfall in the

²Ian F. W. Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 308–9.

³For an in-depth examination of the events of 1917, see Stevenson’s masterful book; David Stevenson, *1917: War, Peace, and Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁴Peter Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory* (London: Phoenix, 2009), p. 229.

potential strength Haig had anticipated; having requested 615,000 men in order to maintain the army in the field and overcome what he saw as an existing 75,000 man deficit.⁵ Over the duration of the war the British army was populated with 2.4 million volunteers and 2.5 million conscripted men.⁶ The French army, whilst still larger than the British one, was also undergoing a manpower shortage. A study compiled by the French Grand Quartier Général (GQG) assumed that the French would lose 920,000 soldiers between 1 October 1917 and 1 October 1918.⁷ When all combined losses were factored together in order to maintain the army and grow its artillery, engineers, and aviation units it was projected that 1,078,000 recruits would be required, and that was 328,000 men over the anticipated recruitment numbers for the period.⁸ Despite these manpower shortages, the British and French were able to jointly field 156 divisions on the Western Front at the beginning of 1918, with the French continuing to hold the edge in size with 972 battalions spread over 350 miles as opposed to 806 British battalions spread over just 100.⁹

Offsetting the British manpower shortfall was the fact that the British soldiers still deployed on the Western Front, particularly the survivors from 1916 and 1917, had grown in experience and self-confidence. Whereas the new recruits of 1916 had lacked the military skill to independently assess the French in battle, the subsequent years had made them battle-hardened. With the creation of the Supreme War Council (SWC) in 1917 to assist in joint-planning, and the eventual promotion of General Foch to supreme commander of the allied armies in April 1918, pronounced improvements came in coordination between the *Entente* forces.¹⁰ From this, however, there would also be increased opportunity for interactions between the British and some of the other

⁵Hart, p. 28.

⁶D. Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2005), pp. 201–2.

⁷Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War*, p. 416.

⁸Doughty, p. 416.

⁹Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory*, pp. 26 and 33.

¹⁰For more on the SWC, see: Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 7; David F. Trask, *The United States in the Supreme War Council* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961).

nations fighting alongside them, particularly the Americans. These relationships would prove so uniformly negative as to throw into greater relief the evolution undergone by the British and French soldiers.

Because of the changing strategic balance in Europe, it rapidly became apparent that the Western Front would now be the theatre which would decide the outcome of the war. With the removal of Russia from the war following multiple revolutions and the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, in March 1918 the German army began the process of redeploying its forces from Eastern to Western Front.¹¹ Whilst the Germans were strengthening their own position on the Western Front, the Entente was doing likewise, with the eventual arrival of reinforcements from the USA. However, both Britain and France continued to have serious concerns over the length of time it was taking for US soldiers to reach Europe.¹² Only 77,000 US soldiers had arrived in France by November 1917.¹³ By spring and summer 1918 this number would begin to rise dramatically.¹⁴ However, as mentioned previously, many of these arriving US soldiers would comment on the apparent fatigue evident in the Entente armies, and how either unready or unwilling they seemed to be to continue the war effort. Part of this can be ascribed as the contrast between war-weary veterans and excited new recruits who had not yet tasted combat. But on a deeper level, it also reflected a lack of understanding amongst the Americans of exactly what their two allies, particularly the French, had recently been through, and their motivations for continuing to fight.

MUTINY, DISSENT, AND FATIGUE

The newly appointed French supreme commander, Robert Nivelle, had arrived with much fanfare and much outpouring of confidence. He declared that he had the plan necessary to crack open the Western Front and defeat the German armies. He reported to his political masters that it was possible to break through the German defences 'on condition it is made at a single stroke and by a sudden attack, in twenty-four to forty-eight hours'.¹⁵ His planned attack around the *Chemin des Dames*

¹¹Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War*, p. 399.

¹²Jean-Yves Le Naour, *1918: L'étrange Victoire* (Paris: Perrin, 2016), Chapter 10.

¹³Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War*, p. 368.

¹⁴Stevenson, p. 441.

¹⁵J. Williams, *Mutiny 1917* (London: Heinemann, 1962), p. 6.

and the Aisne was to be a moment of French *blitzkrieg*, however when the offensive failed, it was not a simple sense of disillusionment that gripped the surviving *Poilus* but one of betrayal. Nivelle's return to a method of attack which had largely failed in 1915 was bad enough, but his loose approach to operational security had meant that the details of the planned offensive were openly discussed in Parisian parties and eventually newspapers. The Germans were able to discover much of what Nivelle had planned without having to work for it.¹⁶ German defensive positions around the Aisne were already well sited, with many artillery positions on the reverse slopes of hills and, therefore, protected from French counter-battery fire. When French soldiers went over the top and attempted to storm the heights at the *Chemin des Dames*, they were once again met by heavy artillery bombardments and withering machine-gun fire. With the offensive losing momentum and direction, French soldiers began refusing to advance beyond their trenches. Those further back behind the lines similarly then refused to enter into the trenches ahead of planned attacks, and from there the mutiny began to spread.

However, whilst the cause of the French dissent was military in its nature, the response to it became part of a thorough examination and expression of the French political and democratic nature.¹⁷ As Leonard Smith has explained, the mutinies 'resurrected one of the oldest tensions within French democratic identity – direct democracy versus representative government'.¹⁸ The French response to this military disaster was to express their democratic rights as citizens as well as soldiers. However, whilst effectively mutinying and expressing their unwillingness to continue going forward in attacks doomed to fail, the *Poilus* were equally

¹⁶Anthony Clayton, *Paths of Glory: The French Army, 1914–1918* (London: Cassell Military, 2003), p. 136. For a more detailed examination of the events and specific failures of Nivelle's offensive, see: Clayton, Chapter 7; Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War*, Chapter 7; Jean-Yves Le Naour, 1917: *La Paix Impossible* (Paris: Perrin, 2015), Chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁷Because of the embargo placed upon the records of 1917 by French authorities, it was not until the 1960s that it was possible to begin fully analysing the mutinies and to dispel some of the myths surrounding them. However, for a thorough examination of the mutinies and mutineers themselves, G. Pedroncini, *Les Mutineries de 1917* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967) remains the seminal text on the subject.

¹⁸Leonard V. Smith, 'Remobilizing the Citizen-Soldier through the French Army Mutinies of 1917', in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p. 158.

unwilling to abandon their trenches completely and gift the war to Germany. This movement from a military statement to a wider political one effectively occurred the moment that the soldiers successfully began to refuse their orders.¹⁹ The mutineers were also particularly streetwise about their interactions with officers during their dissent. By treating officers with respect, where possible (even whilst disobeying their orders) and by restraining the protests from becoming violent, they further complicated official attempts to disable the movement.²⁰ There were often suggestions that the French mutineers were drunk during the height of the dissent, but this was not universally the case and many French soldiers purposefully eschewed alcohol so as not to lose sight of the overall aim of the movement.²¹ This put the French military in a difficult position when it eventually came to the reimposition of order, with Pétain operating a ‘carrot and stick’ approach which was aimed at demonstrating ‘that reforms came from benevolent but strict fathers, rather than as concessions won by citizen-soldiers who had changed the operation of a war waged in their name’.²²

Whilst Pétain, and the newly appointed Chief of the General Staff Ferdinand Foch were able to begin the process of rebuilding the morale and trust of the French army, this process was not completed by the early months of 1918. The newly elected Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau had promised the French people ‘nothing but war’ in a bid to breathe new life into the faltering war effort following the collapse of the *union sacrée* at the end of 1917. Simultaneously, however, Pétain had been telling the *Poilus* to ‘wait for the Americans and the tanks’.²³ These two statements shared the same overall goals (maintaining the war effort and keeping France in the front lines), but they also showed some emerging differences, despite the fact that Clemenceau would assure Pétain that he did not want France to take the offensive.²⁴ France would remain

¹⁹Smith, p. 146.

²⁰Smith, p. 144.

²¹Adam Zientek, ‘Surtout Que Personne Ne Boive: The Curiously Sober Mutiny of the 129th Regiment of Infantry’ (Violence in French History, Trinity College Dublin, 2009).

²²Smith, ‘Remobilizing the Citizen-Soldier through the French Army Mutinies of 1917’, pp. 144 and 150.

²³Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003), p. 84.

²⁴Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War*, p. 404.

resolutely committed to the war, but it would no longer look to carry the main effort, nor would its soldiers obey if so ordered. As a result, not only would the mutinies therefore have an effect on what the French were prepared to accept from their own leaders, but they also had a profound impact on what they were prepared to overlook from their allies. This would have consequences later in the year for the arriving US soldiers, but in more immediate terms would prove disastrous for relations with the British in 1918.

The British, however, had their own concerns at the start of 1918. Whilst the British army had been growing in strength and influence from 1916 onwards, particularly with the deployment of the volunteer armies and the move to conscription, they were not, and would not, be in a position to carry the burden of fighting alone. Indeed, the evolution of the BEF was actually following the rough plan laid out by Kitchener and hinted at by Repington in 1914. This entailed arriving at a situation where the British were a dominant force so would have a strong presence at the peace table. But the British were not able or prepared to fight the Germans alone or with hamstrung allies; and, therefore, the events of 1917 were the cause of great consternation amongst British leaders.²⁵

Whilst the mutinies were occurring in 1917, the British army struggled to get substantial details of what was going on in the French army. In response to their mutinies, the French GQG became, in the words of Sir Frederick Maurice, 'somewhat chary of imparting precise information' regarding the extent of the trouble.²⁶ As a result, the British High Command would have to surreptitiously investigate for themselves to uncover the current state of the French army.²⁷ This job went to Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Spears, who, as we have seen, had experience as a liaison officer between the two nations. However, whilst Spears was seen as suitable for both the British and the French, the information

²⁵David French, 'Watching the Allies: British Intelligence and the French Mutinies in 1917', *Intelligence and National Security* 6, no. 3 (1991): pp. 573–4.

²⁶French, p. 574.

²⁷There were multiple obstacles facing this attempt, however, foremost amongst them the dual political implications of such an approach. Firstly, the investigation would have to be carried out by someone who was seen as amenable by both the French and the British. Initially, this role was to be filled by Lieutenant-General Henry Wilson, a recognized francophile; but this same reputation made him 'suspect in Haig's eyes' whilst his 'close association with Nivelle' meant that General Pétain was equally reluctant to deal with him. French, p. 575.

he and others would be providing to the British was to become heavily politicised. Kitchener had already ensured in 1915 that military attachés 'should by-pass their ambassadors and communicate directly with him'.²⁸ This meant that much information was immediately fast-tracked to particular military officials for first view whilst the Foreign Office and War Cabinet were kept relatively in the dark, and this process continued in the years after Kitchener's fall from power and then subsequent death. The Intelligence Bureau would begin to tear itself apart with internal fighting as the various departments withheld information from each other. When the likes of Haig did then present information regarding the state of the French army to the War Policy Cabinet Committee, it was highly selective with regard to both the issues portrayed and the analysis made. Haig's primary aim was to secure backing for his long-wished-for attack in Flanders and Ypres, an outcome he eventually succeeded in achieving.²⁹

The British soldier in the trenches had no real awareness of what was going on in the French army at the time, and in that respect, it means things continued largely as they were for the perception of their French allies. However, the French were not alone in having morale issues during 1917. The British too would have their own smaller-scale uprising around the Etaples Military Camp. However, the differences between the two events are marked and suggest fundamental distinctions between the men who made up the two armies. C. A. Hartley, a British motor ambulance driver with the SSA 10, explained in July 1917 how the French struggled to understand the British 'voluntary' spirit and army stating that the *Poilus* were given to wondering 'why Englishmen should want to do this work, and voluntarily go to the front, run risks, work during meal hours, and expose themselves to a good many hardships, all for 2½d a day'.³⁰

As a rule, it appears that British soldiers did not display any great interest in or understanding of French politics or the ideological motivations of contemporary republican France and its citizen-soldiers. Whilst the French did have far more interest and curiosity regarding the politics of their British ally, there is a clear suggestion that the French had a

²⁸French, p. 576.

²⁹French, p. 584.

³⁰C. A. Hartley, 'Typescript Diary', 1917 1916, IWM: DOCS - 87/54/1, Imperial War Museum, 2 July 1917.

fundamental difficulty in understanding the motivation of a supposedly volunteer army during wartime. This is clear even at a time when the British army was no longer an exclusively volunteer force. The introduction first of the Derby Scheme in 1915 and then conscription at the beginning of 1916 had meant that, by the conclusion of the war, roughly half of the British soldiers who served had not volunteered for duty.³¹ These first conscripts had begun arriving at the end of 1916 in time for the last weeks of the Somme offensive, and they would continue to arrive in numbers until the Armistice in 1918. The new conscripted soldiers do not at any point appear to have greatly changed the French perception of the British, and, as Hartley shows, they were still looked upon as being a predominantly volunteer army. Whilst France of course had its own social and political divisions which had, for a time at least, been put to one side by the *union sacrée*, it was still founded on the ideals of the Third Republic. The British class system and process of government by parliament and rule by monarchy was still fairly removed in both practice and approach.

The British had their own breakdown in 1917, centred on the training camp at Etaples, but this demonstration of dissent was not really motivated or manifested along lines similar to those seen in French ranks. Those soldiers who had passed through it remembered the Etaples Base as being particularly oppressive. Morale finally collapsed completely at Etaples during September 1917 as a mixture of Military Police activity and the imprisonment of what the various soldiers maintained were innocent men reached boiling point when a Red Cap opened fire during an altercation with an Australian soldier, wounding two men and killing a third. Days of demonstrations and the general abrogation of duty in the face of what was perceived to be the oppressive rule of the camp leaders followed. The eventual result of this would see wholesale changes taking place at Etaples.³²

Whilst the Etaples incident had clear differences to the French mutinies, it did highlight the role of morale and discipline in the British army following the arrival of both the New Armies and the conscripts of 1917. Furthermore, it showed how both dissent and punishments broke down

³¹Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 92–6.

³²Douglas Gill and Gloden Dallas, 'Mutiny at Etaples Base in 1917', *Past & Present*, no. 69 (1975): 88–112.

along national lines which would have lasting impacts on the way British soldiers viewed their dominion comrades. The British army, and indeed the other armies of the war, had placed a high value on aggression and an offensive mentality as indicators of strong morale and discipline. The arrival of new volunteer and conscripted soldiers raised problems and concerns with regard to how best to manage and instil this mind-set. General Haig was resolute in his belief that it was 'discipline which most distinguishes our New Armies from all similarly created armies of the past'.³³

Whilst those at GHQ were determined to make use of the methods they had seemingly perfected, there was also an acknowledgement that the men being processed through the military system had changed dramatically as the war went on. Therefore, the British continued in the aim to create the perfect soldier.³⁴ The new recruits into the British army largely fell between comfortable characteristics for the high command. They lacked the institutionalisation present within the men of the original BEF and as a result were seen as less politically reliable. The army had taken moves of course to ensure that individual politics would not divide the men, and political discussion was forbidden by the King's Regulations. This 'left a void to be filled by a selfless and noble patriotism', a fact greeted with relief by those in authority who 'found an explanation in national character. British compliance was voluntary and personal whereas German submission was imposed'.³⁵

However, this desire to sublimate individual desires and freedoms in the face of military discipline was not universal amongst those soldiers fighting under the British flag. Australian and New Zealand soldiers were 'contemptuous of the narrow discipline to which British troops subscribed, and were led by officers who had invariably first shown their qualities as privates in the ranks'.³⁶ These ANZAC soldiers were secure in the knowledge that, unlike ordinary British soldiers, they could not be executed by firing squad following a court martial. These men then married their safety from the perceived harshness of British military law by forming relations with other dominion soldiers but also the likes of

³³David Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', *War in History* 1, no. 3 (1994): 127.

³⁴Englander, p. 126.

³⁵Englander, pp. 138–9.

³⁶Gill and Dallas, 'Mutiny at Etaples Base in 1917', p. 99.

the Scottish and Irish as well who, in some quarters, had no love for the British either. The mutiny at Etaples involved soldiers of multiple nations, but a great deal of the original antagonism and movement was driven by non-English soldiers; namely those from Australia and New Zealand and the Scottish who seemed far less compliant when confronted with the institutional disciplinary machinery of the 'British' army. There were various methods of preventing breakdowns of morale and discipline. General Gough, 'in his attempts to boost morale, addressed the men as citizens and soldiers'.³⁷ This method of reaching out to the men both as free citizens and as soldiers usefully combines the twin aspects of their existence but also their twin responsibilities, by reminding them of why they volunteered in the first place and the duty they have been entrusted to carry out. If these appeals to the men's better nature was not successful then the British army would not be in the slightest averse to imposing discipline upon them.³⁸

With this in mind, it becomes simpler to see why some of those serving under the British flag were less well disposed towards the disciplinary process. The ANZAC nations were serving in the war under the express understanding that the British military were not allowed to execute them under courts-martial, as was permitted for the standard British soldiers. However, despite all of this, the morale and discipline system did seem to largely work as intended. The mutiny at Etaples was not an uprising in protest against the war; it was a show of dissent and objection to the standards and practices of Etaples itself. A. J. P. Taylor may have suggested that the result of the fighting in 1916 had been that 'after the Somme men decided the war would last forever', but this does

³⁷ David Englander, 'Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917–1918', in *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War*, ed. John Horne, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare 3 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 129.

³⁸ Englander, 'Soldiering and Identity: Reflections on the Great War', pp. 131–2. There were two sorts of Field Punishment in the British army; Field Punishment No. 1 consisted of the soldier being 'attached to a fixed object' (usually a gun carriage/wheel or a post in the ground) for two hours a day in three out of any consecutive days, up to a total of 21 days in all. Field Punishment No. 2 was essentially the same but 'the prisoner was not liable to be attached to a fixed object'. Anthony Babington, *For the Sake of Example: Capital Courts Martial, 1914–1920* (London: Paladin, 1985, 1983), p. 113.

not tally with the evidence of the remaining years of the war and the actions of the British soldiers.³⁹ Regardless of how they actually managed it (through a mixture of military control and the willingness of the British soldiers to continue fighting and to submit to the authority of the military seems plausible), what cannot be questioned is that, whilst there were instances of dissent such as at Etaples, the British military did not endure a collapse in morale or widespread despair during 1917.

The British dissent was very much focused on the conditions at Etaples and the contempt in which trainers, officers and military police, whom the soldiers did not respect, held them.⁴⁰ The French were far more focused on the war itself; the means through which it was waged, the manner in which commanders used the lives of their men, and the role of the citizen-soldier in French political discourse.⁴¹ That these two mutinies would eventually see both armed forces returning to the front line and active service should not mask the fact that the events themselves were rooted in deeply divergent anxieties and were then expressed and motivated in a manner that does not bear much similarity. The political motivations and expressions of the Tommy and the *Poilu* were laid bare during these months of 1917, and, whilst there had been many similarities between the soldiers on evidence beforehand, this was a moment of contrast not of commonality.

The mutinies and instances of dissent within both armies had laid seeds of trouble for allied relations at the grass roots, and these would be particularly evident within the French ranks. Having undergone the trauma of the Nivelle Offensive and the mutiny that then resulted, the French soldier had been, in the words of Smith, 're-mobilized' both for military action and politically. The French had undergone an intensive reevaluation of the war, its methods and its costs. They had paid the highest price of the allied armies and had shouldered the bulk of the fighting for the majority of the war. Their return to the trenches and the system of military discipline and governance indicated that the *Poilus* were prepared to continue the struggle against Germany, but their patience for pointless offensives and military mistakes had passed.

³⁹A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 140.

⁴⁰Gill and Dallas, 'Mutiny at Etaples Base in 1917'.

⁴¹Smith, 'Remobilizing the Citizen-Soldier Through the French Army Mutinies of 1917', pp. 152–3.

It would be glib to suggest that the war had not been serious for them before this moment, but the strengthening of their resolve at the end of 1917 was a dual-edged weapon; they would fight to the end but they would also be swift and brutal in passing judgement on those who had failed them. Furthermore, whilst the mutinies themselves produced the moment of fracture in the military contract between the *Poilus* and GQG, the roots for it probably lay at Verdun in 1916. Almost the entire French army had cycled through the 'Meuse Mill' in that year in the desperate defence of both the town and the road to Paris. Exhausted by their efforts, the French army came to draw a line in the sand in 1917. However, the fighting at Verdun had also taken place largely out of sight of their British allies. The British knew that the battle was taking place and they had a keen interest in it; but they did not experience it or a battle like it for themselves. Therefore, whilst the British and the French around the Somme were forming stronger ties, the Battle of Verdun was simultaneously changing the nature of the *Poilus*. The Somme laid the foundations for cooperative relations between the two armies. Verdun laid the foundations for the eventual schism.

Not only would the mutinies therefore have an effect on what the French were prepared to accept from their own leaders, they also had a profound impact on what they were prepared to overlook from their allies. This would have consequences later in the year for the arriving US soldiers but in more immediate terms would prove disastrous for relations with the British in 1918. Meanwhile the deterioration in relations between the English portions of the British army and their assorted dominion or British Isles neighbours would also be the cause of significant issues in 1918. These non-English soldiers were happy to band together as it provided an opportunity for socialising without the involvement of a demographic they were rapidly losing patience with. This alone was not a serious issue but it was rapidly exacerbated by the introduction of US soldiers who then joined in with this anti-English clique. As far as the English were concerned, this was almost the worst-case scenario. They needed US assistance on the Western Front but they were not prepared to be shunned and ignored by a nation that, whilst a growing power, they did not yet consider their equal. Particularly if it laid open the possibility of bad habits being exchanged in both directions between US and dominion soldiers.

The final members of the *Entente* alliance had finally begun to assemble in France at the beginning of 1918, but there were serious

weaknesses in the make-up of this alliance both at the command level and down amongst the soldiers in the trenches. Given time, these differences might have been solvable, but, as in 1914, the actions of the German army would rob Britain, France, and the USA of the opportunity to recover from the exertions of 1917 and acclimatise to the new situation on the Western Front.

THE *ENTENTE* ON THE EDGE

A series of German attacks on the Western Front appeared to be largely an inevitability in the early months of 1918. The complete collapse of the Eastern Front and the Russian portion of the Entente Alliance into revolution and civil war in 1917 was rapidly followed by the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty on 3 March 1918. This removed Russia from the war completely, much to the dismay of French soldiers.⁴² This change of strategic balance presented both sides with a race against time. The Germans, realised that the number of US soldiers in Europe was still not decisive, but were well aware that more were completing their training and would begin to arrive *en masse*. Britain and France, realising that the Germans would look to use their temporary numerical advantage to force a resolution on the Western Front, knew that if the attack could be held then eventually US reinforcements would likely tip the balance of power back in their direction. The Germans elected to seize their moment to attack, whilst Britain and France adopted a strategy of *tenir*: to hold.⁴³

However, the German decision to launch multiple offensives had not been reached unanimously. General Ludendorff was the principal architect and supporter of the operations, but both Crown Prince Rupprecht and Crown Prince Wilhelm were unconvinced.⁴⁴ Going on the offensive in 1918 would actually represent a change in strategy on the Western Front from 1917, when the Germans had adopted a passive position in

⁴²Jean Nicot, 'Perceptions Des Allies Par Les Combattants En 1918 d'après Les Archives Du Contrôle Postal', *Revue Historique Des Armées*, no. 3 (1988): pp. 46–8.

⁴³Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 77–84.

⁴⁴D. Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. 31.

the hope that ongoing U-boat activity would bring Britain to its knees and fracture the alliance.⁴⁵ By this point, wider German strategic thinking about the front facing Britain and France was to hold what they had in the aim of at some point being able to achieve a negotiated settlement that allowed Germany to prosper. Launching an offensive might have allowed Germany to defeat Britain and France in the field, but it also risked the territorial gains Germany had already made and defended for three years. The manpower mathematics of the situation, however, laid bare both the opportunity and the dangers for the German army. With the previously untapped potential of the USA feeding into the Entente armies, the longer the war continued the less chance of a German victory there could be. In the short term, however, Germany could now make use of a notable advantage. By beginning the withdrawal from the Eastern Front and disengaging from Italy, the German army in the east fell in numbers from 2 million men to around 1.5 million. By then redirecting these forces west, the German army in France and Belgium was able to increase from 3.25 million men in November 1917 to 4 million by 1 April 1918. This included an increase in divisions from 147 to 191 facing a combined allied force of 175 divisions.⁴⁶

The target for the first German offensive was debated again by OHL, with three potential targets considered and given codenames. Operation 'Michael' would see an attack at St. Quentin, 'St. Georg' would be an assault at Lys, whilst 'Mars' would have the Germans attack near Arras. After careful consideration by Ludendorff, 'Michael' was selected and approved by Hindenburg in his attack order of 10 March.⁴⁷ The location chosen for Operation Michael held tactical advantages and disadvantages. The principal benefit of the area was that it lay at the join between the British and French armies. Where in 1916 these two forces had selected the Somme to fight as it allowed them to support each other, in 1918 Ludendorff would be able to make use of the continuing lack of coordination and cooperation between the British and French commands. If he had focused the German attack on either the British or the French, then, whilst disruptive, the overall command and control of the situation

⁴⁵Stevenson, p. 34.

⁴⁶Stevenson, pp. 35–6. Stevenson explains that whilst German divisions tended to be smaller than the British and French equivalents, they were able to achieve tactical manpower superiority on the Western Front by careful positioning of their forces.

⁴⁷Stevenson, p. 39.

on the allied side would have been centralised within either GHQ or GQG. By hitting the junction of British and French forces, however, the Germans could potentially create chaos as both nations would be forced to react without fully knowing the plans of their allies. Whilst coordination and cooperation could be possible, it would take time; time Ludendorff did not intend to allow them. New infantry tactics previously trialled in the early attacks at Verdun in 1916 but now enhanced from battles against the Italians at Caporetto and in the counter-attacks against the British at Cambrai would be unleashed upon the allies, with instructions to keep moving forward, bypassing strongpoints, in an attempt to pierce defensive lines.⁴⁸ The problems for the Germans would arise when these forward troops began to move beyond the allied lines and had to traverse the shattered ruins of the Somme battlefield.

The British and French forces in the area quickly became aware of the build-up of German forces (they could scarcely be disguised), but there was hope amongst the men of the Third and Fifth Armies that the attack might be delayed or not come at all. However, on the night of 20 March, reports began to come in of German guns having been brought into the open and an increase in activity behind the German lines.⁴⁹ It was clear that whatever the Germans were planning was imminent. Where exactly the blow would fall was not yet known, but those men holding the front-line trenches knew that they were likely to feel the full force of it regardless of the direction in which the Germans would ultimately advance. In the early hours of the morning, the Germans began (Fig. 1).

A thick fog had settled over the British lines in the very early hours of 21 March. Visibility had been reduced to yards in some places, effectively nullifying the British defensive positions. At 04:40, sheets of flame appeared through the darkness as 6608 German artillery pieces combined with 3535 trench mortars began to fire simultaneously.⁵⁰ British observers in their trenches had just enough time to be shocked at the sheer size of the bombardment before they were forced to take immediate cover. The main purpose of the German bombardment was not simply to annihilate British defences but to effectively destroy the

⁴⁸Stevenson, p. 38.

⁴⁹Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory*, p. 61.

⁵⁰Hart, p. 65; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command: The Forging of a First World War General*, 2014, p. 297.

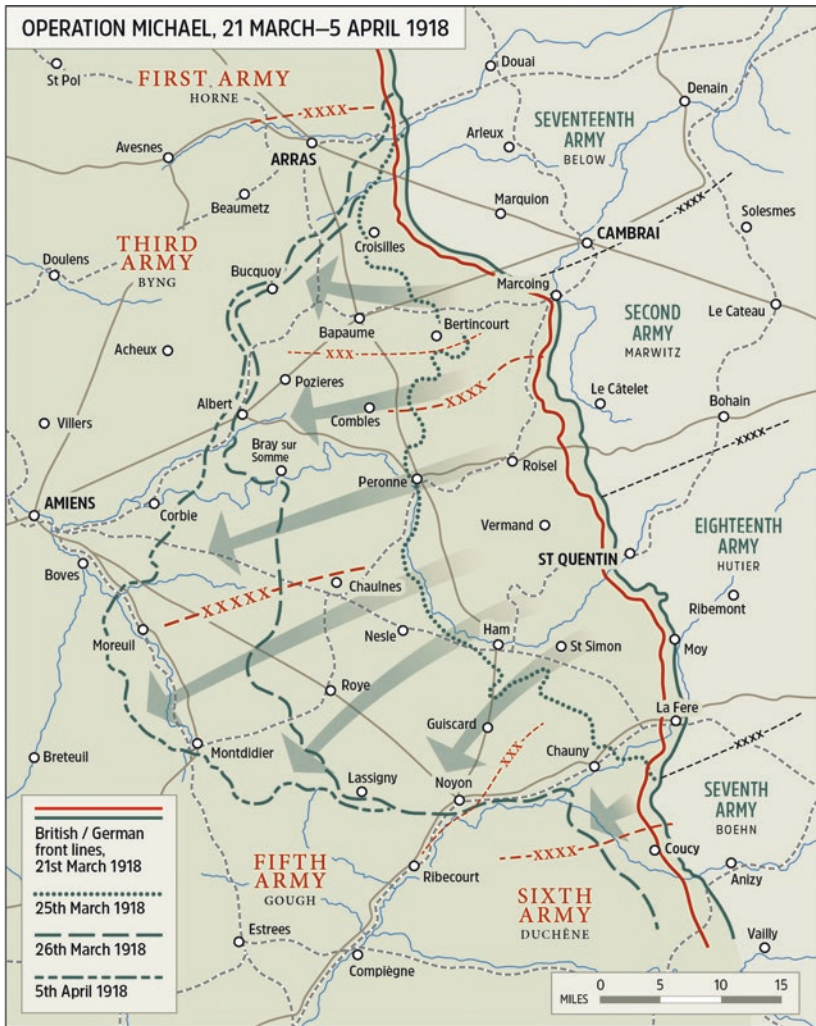


Fig. 1 Operation Michael (1918)

command and communications network in the sector and disrupt any possible British response. The salient at Flesquières was covered by mustard gas, whilst British artillery positions, command posts, and telephone exchanges were all specifically targeted in order to sever the link between

the front lines and the British command.⁵¹ The British Third and Fifth Armies bore the brunt of the German assault, and at 09:45, thirty divisions of German infantry began to advance against battered British positions. Over the duration of 21 March, the Germans fired in excess of three million artillery rounds against the enemy.⁵² Some of the surviving British soldiers in the front lines had been rendered virtually catatonic by the German artillery bombardment, and 21,000 men were taken prisoner on the first day.⁵³

As the German forces began to break through to the south-west of St. Quentin, the British support lines behind the front found themselves dangerously isolated and unable to see the oncoming attackers through the fog. Men of the 11th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry reported the gunfire becoming increasingly intense from the direction of St. Quentin and the sounds of battle drawing nearer. German voices could shortly be heard shouting and taunting in English through the fog and, realising they were about to be cut off, the battalion began a fighting retreat towards their own reserve lines.⁵⁴ Across the front, many others joined them. By the end of 23 March, the Germans had advanced a total of 26 km from their original positions.⁵⁵

Whilst acknowledging the German attack and ongoing losses, Marshal Haig remained apparently unconcerned about the situation developing around St. Quentin.⁵⁶ Members of the British press however, who had seemingly convinced themselves in the lead-up to 21 March that no attack was imminent, were left stunned and shaken by the assault whilst also questioning what had motivated the Germans to take such a risk.⁵⁷ Pétain felt sure that Gough's Fifth Army would begin to reform itself behind the Somme, but became increasingly concerned by the 23 March

⁵¹Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall; Victory and Defeat in 1918*, pp. 53–4.

⁵²Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, p. 297.

⁵³Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall; Victory and Defeat in 1918*, pp. 54–5. Total losses for both sides on 21 March were largely even, but, as Stevenson explains, German wounded would likely fight again whilst captured British would not.

⁵⁴'11 Battalion Durham Light Infantry (Pioneers)', n.d., WO 95/2108/2, National Archives, Kew, 22 March 1918.

⁵⁵Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, p. 297.

⁵⁶Sir Douglas Haig, G. D. Sheffield, and J. M. Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914–1918* (London: Phoenix, 2006), p. 390.

⁵⁷Le Naour, 1918, p. 155.

that the British no longer appeared to be functioning.⁵⁸ The situation would begin to reach crisis point when Ludendorff started to change the focus of the German push into forcing the British Third and the French VI Armies apart and then driving the British back towards the north-west.⁵⁹ So concerned were the French at the possibility of a rupture in the front that would leave a corridor open behind the lines that Clemenceau and President Poincaré discussed the possibility of the French government once again leaving Paris as they had done in 1914.⁶⁰

Whilst British and French commanders and politicians tried to gain a grip on the situation, British troops were fighting a desperate retreat from the German attack. On the evening of 23 March, two days after the opening of the offensive, Private Cude of the 7th Battalion, East Kent Regiment 'The Buffs', reported that they had managed to delay the Germans and allowed 'French storm battalions' to attack through them. However, because they were lacking the necessary ammunition, the attack was 'a ghastly failure' that meant 'instead of holding him up, they are chased back'.⁶¹ Cude reported that the French attack had been met with 'the heaviest machine gun barrage that I have ever witnessed. The fire was so deadly, that trees are cut into two'.⁶² On the same day, as the British were forced to withdraw from their position in a nearby village, Cude recalled the majority of people leaving except for the 'old Curé' who 'willingly gives up his freedom, to protect his church'.⁶³ As the British left the village the Curé was the last person Cude would see, despite raising his hat and bidding him 'a good day although I would have wished that he had come with us'.⁶⁴

Soon afterwards, Cude reported that his division had been cut off from the British and were now relying upon the French.⁶⁵ The next

⁵⁸Le Naour, p. 155.

⁵⁹Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, p. 298.

⁶⁰Le Naour, 1918, pp. 162–3.

⁶¹Private Robert Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 1921, IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C48, Imperial War Museum, 23 March 1918.

⁶²Cude, 23 March 1918.

⁶³Cude, 23 March 1918.

⁶⁴Cude, 23 March 1918. Cude seemed to direct a good deal of admiring sympathy towards the Curé, whom he describes as 'a brave man', and was reluctant to see this man left behind for the Germans.

⁶⁵Cude, 24 March 1918.

day the battalion was ordered to fall back towards Varesne where they found ‘trenches prepared for us by the Froggies’.⁶⁶ Cude later described these new trenches as ‘a splendid position’ from which they could ‘hold him up for years if necessary’.⁶⁷ During the fighting retreat, however, Cude reported on the level of chaotic confusion that was now unfolding in the area, when retreating French soldiers gave the indication that Germans had broken through advanced positions. Cude and his fellows were almost cut off as a result, and only the arrival of a dozen French armoured cars held back the attack and allowed the battalion to escape to safety. Despite this last-gasp rescue, Cude bemoaned the fact that the British could not get any assistance from the French military. Later, during an ongoing battle with attacking German infantry, a British soldier shot and killed a French civilian who was caught up in the fighting and holding a rifle.⁶⁸

On 26 March, Cude mentioned that British soldiers could ‘see Noyon burning’ and that, whilst he was unsure about the ‘latest news ... to the effect that the French have pushed him out of town’, he hoped ‘the news of the stand by the French is right, I hope that it will be maintained, for it is necessary for the morale of the troops’.⁶⁹ As the British were then fully withdrawn ‘back to the British Army’, Cude was given to wondering if there was a British Army left to return to.⁷⁰ The German attempt to drive a wedge between the two countries had stretched them but had not yet succeeded.

Elsewhere on the Western Front, news of the German assault on the British was greeted with horror, and rumours began to spread wildly amongst the allied armies. Corporal Henry Storm of the 101st US Engineers in the 26th Division initially reported stories on 25 March that 30,000 British soldiers had been captured and that the US 42nd Division had been annihilated near Toul.⁷¹ By the following day, noticeable elements of panic had set in as Storm again wrote that the Germans

⁶⁶Cude, 25 March 1918; ‘7 Battalion Buffs (East Kent Regiment)—War Diary’, n.d., WO 95/2049/1, National Archives, Kew, 25 March 1918.

⁶⁷Cude, ‘Typescript Diary’, 25 March 1918.

⁶⁸Cude, 25 March 1918.

⁶⁹Cude, 26 March 1918.

⁷⁰Cude, 29 March 1918.

⁷¹Corporal Henry Halgate Storm, *A Soldier's Diary of World War One—France 1917–1919*, ed. A. Margaret Bok (USA, 2006), p. 116.

had ‘crumpled the British lines at St Quentin’. Whilst remaining hopeful that the allies could hold the German advance, Storm’s realisation that ‘all hell has broken loose up there’ and that the US army had not arrived in time to support the British and French gives an insight into how some US soldiers were now coming to terms with the strategic reality.⁷² The initial French reaction to the German attack was one of hope regarding their British allies, mixed with a mild concern. Soldiers within the nearby VI Army reported that, whilst they were unanimous in recognising the severe shock of the German attack, they strongly believed that their British friends would hold the Germans despite their initial retreat.⁷³ However, as the fighting intensified, so too did the fears and concerns of the French soldiers and eventually their anger.

We relieved the English and have had no rest since yesterday. This is war more terrible than ever we must at all costs stop the Germans. Here everyone is fulfilling his duty, we will fight to the last if necessary. (French soldier)

We were the first Division responsible for protecting the English retreat ... Now things are better, but I confess that I was afraid it was going wrong! I relived the terrible hours of 1914 for 8 days without sleep, and barely ate. (Sous-Officier to his Sister)

Right now we are on the Somme Battlefield called in by the inability of the English. We will certainly restore the situation, for us there’s no doubt, but I assure you it was high time the French arrived because the English were completely out of action. (Redacted letter)

Contrary to what I thought ... the English soldiers whom we replace are absolutely disgusting, dirty, drunken and abandoning more equipment and ammunition than our men. (Soldier to his wife)⁷⁴

By the middle of April, summations by the postal censors began to speak of ‘rather severe’ criticism of ‘the British concerning their retreat in the

⁷²Storm, p. 117.

⁷³SHD - 16 N 1421, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VI^e Armée’, 1918, Section entitled: ‘Impressions of the Commission’ 26 March 1918, 16 N 1421, Archives de l’Armée de Terre; SHD - 16 N 1421, Section entitled: ‘Impressions of the Commission’ 28 March 1918.

⁷⁴SHD - 16 N 1422, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VI^e Armée’, 1918, 16 N 1422, Archives de l’Armée de Terre, all from reports dated 7 April 1918.

face of the Boche offensive',⁷⁵ before evolving to suggest that 'in relation to the English retreat' some of the soldiers 'bitterly find that the French resistance is always necessary and expensive'.⁷⁶ This situation was now viewed simply as 'a mark of disparagement for the English'.⁷⁷ Accounts from individual soldiers within these reports also indicated the level of hostility towards the British.

The English bastards have not been able to stop [the Germans] without our intervention. It's the same with the Americans: they want war, but not to be killed. So, it is always the French, who are the best cannon fodder. (From a soldier to his mother, letter redacted⁷⁸)

Whilst there was still some praise being directed towards the British, occasionally being generalised such as 'the Allied Armies are marvellous',⁷⁹ it could also take the shape of (at best) back-handed compliments outlining that 'the English are good, but their commanders do not seem to be on top of things'.⁸⁰ It would shortly become the case that letters in which the British were 'sometimes quite strongly criticised' were seized and provided to the commission for being 'defeatist and depressing'.⁸¹ Some reports began to break down the issues with the British by infantry regiment.⁸² What differentiated this criticism from some of that seen from French soldiers in 1916 was that this was originating from soldiers in the French VI Army; those closest to the battle. Whereas, in 1916, proximity to British forces had helped develop positive interactions between allied soldiers, here it simply allowed the *Poilus* to judge the situation with their own eyes. Their judgements would

⁷⁵SHD - 16 N 1422, Report dated 7 April 1918.

⁷⁶SHD - 16 N 1422, Report 13 April 1918.

⁷⁷SHD - 16 N 1422, Report 12 April 1918.

⁷⁸SHD - 16 N 1422, Report 11 April 1918.

⁷⁹SHD - 16 N 1422, Section 'England and Dominions' from report dated 14 April 1918.

⁸⁰SHD - 16 N 1422, Section 'Relations with Allies' from report dated 20 April 1918.

⁸¹SHD - 16 N 1422, Report dated 20 April 1918.

⁸²SHD - 16 N 1422, Section 'Relations with Allies' Report dated 21 April 1918.

begin to spread through the French armies.⁸³ In April, soldiers of the VII Army were writing how the British were ‘even more unlikable than the Boche’.⁸⁴ In a sign of things to come, the Americans were described as having wasted their time by parading through French cities yet, provided they arrive quickly, the French believed they could render a valuable service.⁸⁵

Paul Maze, still embedded within the British army, wrote a report during these German offensives which painted a picture of semi-controlled chaos as the British tried valiantly to hold the advance but were unable to prevent the Germans forcing a wedge between the British and French defenders.⁸⁶ For French soldiers, however, the viewpoint was decidedly different as rumours provided by civilians of the British withdrawal into the French army began to spread rapidly. Civilians claimed ‘that the English gave way and that, in several places, for distances of 10 kilometres there was absolutely nothing to stop the enemy’.⁸⁷ The inhabitants of Raincheval told arriving French soldiers that they no longer had any confidence in the English.⁸⁸ Similar stories were told by the civilians of Pas-en-Artois, who, in particular announced that ‘the English are hopeless, it’s the Scots, the Australians, and Canadians who do all the work’.⁸⁹ Under these circumstances, the fear and annoyance in the French ranks would begin to blossom into full-blown hostility.

By this point, the Michael offensive had actually come to an end after German infantry had struggled to maintain their momentum over the ruins of the Somme battlefield and their progress had been checked outside Ancre. Ludendorff began his next offensive in the Lys sector of Flanders in an attempt to maintain the pressure on the allied armies. The allies had managed to weather the main crisis in the week

⁸³Nicot, ‘Perceptions Des Allies Par Les Combattants En 1918 d’après Les Archives Du Contrôle Postal’, pp. 49–50.

⁸⁴SHD - 16 N 1430, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIIe Armée’, 1918, 16 N 1430, Archives de l’Armée de Terre, ‘Report Gare Régulatrice’, 11 April 1918.

⁸⁵SHD - 16 N 1430, ‘Report Gare Régulatrice’, 11 April 1918.

⁸⁶Paul Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki* (Eastbourne: Naval and Military Press, 2004), pp. 293–319.

⁸⁷Henri Désagneux, Jean Desagneux, and Godfrey J. Adams, *A French Soldier’s War Diary, 1914–1918* (Morley: Elmfield Press, 1975), p. 52.

⁸⁸Désagneux, Desagneux, and Adams, p. 57.

⁸⁹Désagneux, Desagneux, and Adams, p. 58.

following the onset of the Michael offensive, and had in an important way emerged stronger. With the British and French forces being subjected to severe German pressure after 21 March, both the British and the French began to accept the wisdom of appointing a single military commander to 'coordinate' the defensive arrangements. The creation of the SWC in November 1917 had been intended to increase allied cooperation without requiring a single *generalissime* to take command of the allied armies.⁹⁰ When the Germans attacked on 21 March and the British and French began to give way, it rapidly became clear that, whilst this body could help in joint organisation, despite the fact that it had begun the process of creating a General Reserve of allied soldiers and not yet properly followed through on it, it was not capable of instituting a command.⁹¹

Given the fact that France was still the major partner in the Entente Alliance, contributing far more soldiers and holding much more of the front than the British and the Americans, it was largely seen as inevitable that the commander chosen would be French. This was even more the case when it became apparent that Lloyd George would not accept the elevation of Haig to such a position given the long-running suspicion and animosity existing between the two men. Pétain had also taken the opportunity to place the majority of the blame for the crisis onto Haig and the British, further nullifying Haig's chances of advancement.⁹² With the acceptance that it would need to be a French general in charge, their appeared to be only two natural candidates: Pétain and Foch. In practice, though, Foch was the only man who could be properly considered. This was partly because of Pétain's ongoing belief that if the war was now lost it would be the fault of the British. Whilst such a viewpoint was already beginning to spread amongst the French soldiers, it was not conducive to allied cooperation with a Supreme Commander. Furthermore, Pétain's tendency to be dour and cautious did not encourage enthusiasm or security amongst the likes of President Poincaré, whilst Foch's energy and determination did the exact opposite. When faced with a

⁹⁰Elizabeth Greenhalgh, 'Supreme War Council', ed. Ute Daniel et al., *1914–1918 Online—International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10886>.

⁹¹Greenhalgh discusses the seeming delays in moving designated troops into position for use in the General Reserve at; Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command*, pp. 298 and 303.

⁹²Greenhalgh, p. 304.

choice between a commander who was not sure if it could be done and one who was, the French opted for the latter.⁹³ Foch was an acceptable choice for the British as well, although Haig would later claim falsely that the selection of Foch had originally been his own suggestion.⁹⁴

Jean-Yves le Naour describes the period from 21 March until Foch's appointment as Supreme Allied Commander at the beginning of April as 'the day our allies failed to lose the war'; a reflection of how close the British retreat had brought the Entente to the edge.⁹⁵ Despite initially averting a monumental catastrophe, it was strongly felt amongst the French that the British had brought them all to the brink. This situation was not improved by the apparent desire of Haig and other British officers to claim some form of credit for the appointment of Foch, and espousing the view that if Operation Michael had fallen on the French then surely the war would have been lost.⁹⁶ Whilst Foch began the process of attempting to stabilise the Western Front and halt the unfolding German offensives, in many ways, in the eyes of the soldiers in the trenches, the damage had already been done. Some within the British military began to realise the image problem they were now facing, as Colonel Eric Dillon, who was serving as a liaison to Foch at the time, recalled in his memoirs. Whilst 'the feeling that the French haven't done their fair share of this battle is very prevalent', Dillon had to acknowledge that undoubtedly 'the French say that our troops ran away from St Quentin'.⁹⁷

Although there were some positive comments emerging from French soldiers in the V Army, there were still those suggesting that 'without the French, the allies would now be in big trouble'.⁹⁸ Soldiers in the VI Army continued to believe that 'the retreat of the British in the North' was 'disgusting', and newspapers spread rumours about 'the abandonment of Ypres, Dunkirk and Calais' and of the English being 'threatened

⁹³Greenhalgh, pp. 305–6.

⁹⁴Greenhalgh, p. 300.

⁹⁵Le Naour, 1918, Chapter 7.

⁹⁶Le Naour, p. 176.

⁹⁷Brigadier the Viscount Dillon CMG DSO, *Memories of Three Wars* (London: Allan Wingate (Publishers) Ltd., 1951), p. 113.

⁹⁸SHD - 16 N 1415, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée', 1918, 16 N 1415, Archives de l'Armée de Terre, Report dated 27 April–3 May 1918.

with a careless disaster'.⁹⁹ These trends would largely continue within the French armies during April and into May. The elevation of Foch to *generalissime* of the allied armies proved a popular decision amongst the *Poilus*, but against the backdrop of the difficulties arising from the British, some French soldiers were taking the view that 'we have a single command but there is still much to do'. They demanded that 'the British increase their divisions and sacrifice themselves as we have been doing since the beginning'.¹⁰⁰ Other French soldiers were going a step further and claiming that unified command was one thing, but the British soldiers needed to be fully removed from their own officers and their bad leadership and amalgamated into French divisions.¹⁰¹

Some British soldiers had effectively been transferred from British to French control during the retreat following Operation Michael. To further enhance coordination between the two armies, the British began to make further use of liaison officers. Second Lieutenant W. G. Wallace was one such man selected for the role after being questioned on his ability to speak French by a Major Floyd. Having assured the Major that he could make himself understood, Wallace was then informed of his public role but also the actual job the British wished him to undertake whilst assigned to the French.

The Major succinctly outlined my job as being nominally that of assisting the French but actually that of preserving British Signal Routes from pillage and ruin at the hands of our happy go lucky Allies. He also added the cheering news that the Frogs were a sticky lot and that my predecessor had fallen foul of them and was being cleared out in a hurry.¹⁰²

With the previous liaison officer having 'fallen foul' of the French, the suggestion is clearly that given some form of French capriciousness meant he had been found unsuitable. The additional briefing that, whilst he was 'nominally' liaising with the French, his real job was the

⁹⁹SHD - 16 N 1422, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée', Report 17 April 1918.

¹⁰⁰SHD - 16 N 1422, Report 27 April 1918.

¹⁰¹SHD - 16 N 1422, Report 30 April 1918.

¹⁰²Captain W. Graham Wallace, 'Typescript—"Memoirs of 1914–1918"', 1935, IWM: DOCS - 86/9/1, Imperial War Museum. This period of Wallace's diary is not accurately dated beyond the approximate period between the end of March and beginning of April.

protection of British signal routes and by extension its wider interests, produces a picture of the British and French military commands still at odds with one another. It also reveals that national personality traits were proving troublesome in the task of working together. Following his briefing, Lieutenant Wallace, understandably, was not looking forward to his new duty. However, the situation he encountered on his arrival differed quite profoundly from his expectations, and he was given 'an extraordinarily warm welcome' from the French.¹⁰³

This difference between the expectation and the reality could simply suggest that Wallace had been fortunate in a way that his predecessor had not, but it also speaks of a wider practical and ideological difference between the way the lower-rank soldiers viewed the French in comparison to the higher-ranked and commissioned officers. This difference is best manifested in the way that Major Floyd described Wallace's duties in regard to the French, with liaison officer being a nominal position with the protection of British equipment and interests being the real focus. The result was the creation of two different and only occasionally overlapping spheres of experience, with the general and high command at the top and the trenches below. Major Floyd was likely describing the French based on his experiences with them and the experiences of other higher-ranking officers. However, it does not seem as though these particular types of experiences trickled down to the trenches or even had a real equivalent because, whilst the soldiers certainly seemed to want to win the war, the discussions over national interests were never really apparent in the British army. There are some comparable issues and disagreements, of course, and many of these have been detailed in previous chapters, but they too do not seem to have fed back up to influence the high command discussions. In their own way, these two spheres provide two very different levels of experience and interaction that produce markedly different results, effects, and conclusions.

When the British Command did try to exert some influence on relations at the soldier level, it only succeeded in causing nervousness and consternation between the two armies. Private Mulliss of the Duke of Cambridge's Own Middlesex Regiment, wrote how, following its withdrawal from the line in April, the regiment had been friendly with a nearby French unit. However, the British decision to institute a Divisional Transport Show caused the complete collapse of relations with

¹⁰³Wallace, *Ibid.*

the French, who were shortly afterward ordered to begin the process of ‘scrubbing up’ their own uniforms and materiel. The French soldiers responded by shunning the British and refusing them access to their mess.¹⁰⁴ The British desire to reassert themselves as soldiers being intrinsically linked to their appearance had resurfaced again, similarly to how it had in 1914. Lieutenant Wallace, upon learning more about the French approach, which he described as ‘slovenly’ but ‘amazingly efficient’ when duty called, was forced to wonder which nation had the right idea of it.¹⁰⁵

In the minds of the French, it appeared that any questions of who were the better soldiers had been firmly settled not by appearance in uniform but by ability on the battlefield. One soldier wrote in a letter that had to be redacted that ‘there is no doubt, the Tommies are not comparable to the *Poilu*’.¹⁰⁶ In the V Army at the start of May, the mood amongst some French soldiers seems to have changed to a mix of despair and hatred when discussing their British allies, with some postal reports now containing a dedicated subheading for cataloguing complaints about the British.

April 29

C – External Affairs

British (Complaints) –

If we are here it is the fault of the English, they fled with nothing, not even their rifles or guns, nothing.

(A soldier to his mother. Redacted¹⁰⁷)

We are about to get rid of the real English because they don’t want to do anything and given that we went to war because of them, if I did not hold them in esteem before, I hate them now and I think a lot are like me.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴F. Mulliss, ‘Typescript Diary—Recollections 1914–1918’, 1918 1914, IWM: DOCS - 98/33/1, Imperial War Museum. Around May–June 1918.

¹⁰⁵Wallace, ‘Typescript—“Memoirs of 1914–1918”’, dated in late March as in the previous Wallace quotations.

¹⁰⁶SHD - 16 N 1422, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée’, Report 1 May 1918.

¹⁰⁷SHD - 16 N 1415, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée’.

¹⁰⁸SHD - 16 N 1415, Report 1 May 1918.

I noticed that the English soldier is not very prudent when he is on the battlefield, he is too reckless and risky, and he therefore often gets himself killed unnecessarily. It's a point I made at the beginning of the war. It is not the same with the French soldier, who is rash if the situation requires it, but very cautious; I will give you an example: a French soldier never lights a fire to prepare coffee or tea when it is in view of the Boche; the opposite is true in the British army so they get bombarded. (To a friend in England¹⁰⁹)

One of the most important consequences of the decline of the British in the eyes of the French was the corresponding elevation of some of their other allies, particularly the Americans, and mid-May saw a definite swing in popularity towards the arriving US soldiers which would become a crucial theme across the rest of the year.¹¹⁰

We have the English here. They are not as good as the Americans. (From a soldier to a parent. Letter redacted¹¹¹)

Impressions of the commission.

The American army is starting to count – since the retreat of St. Quentin, friendliness between the French and British has weakened.

External Affairs

Allies –

The Americans are beginning to make an impression; their numbers are growing every day.¹¹²

Such was the catastrophic collapse in esteem for the British within French ranks during the spring of 1918, the increasing numbers of US soldiers, and the necessity to get them forward at speed in order to help halt the German offensive meant that they appear to have been cast in the role of welcome saviours. In contrast, the British now seemed to be

¹⁰⁹SHD - 16 N 1415, Report 25 May 1918.

¹¹⁰SHD - 16 N 1415, Report 6 May 1918. Letter redacted.

¹¹¹SHD - 16 N 1415, Report 15 May 1918.

¹¹²SHD - 16 N 1415, Report 17 May 1918.

an, at best, flawed ally and, at worse, either useless or dangerous to be alongside. Frequently, they were viewed to be both. The British soldiers, for their part, seemed largely oblivious of the contempt in which they were now being held by the French, and were instead focusing on the apparent limitations of some of their other allies.

British issues with US and colonial soldiers did not originate in 1918. In some cases, a level of antagonism had been boiling under the surface from much earlier in the war. Someone who, perhaps inevitably, was far less concerned with the state of relations with non-French forces was Cude. He had already been writing in 1917 of his dislike of Australian soldiers, based upon their apparent arrogance around British soldiers, their tendency to flaunt their own wealth, and the manner in which the British press seemed to react to even the slightest Australian achievement.¹¹³ When it came to their relationship with the French, the British seemed to feel a lot more secure and increasingly equal. They were both 'great powers', which gave them a shared sense of history, and a sense of superiority over their respective colonies, but they had also been in close contact through the previous years of war. The Australians and Canadians remained the little cousins of the allied movement, and the older siblings were not really willing to grant them much in the way of approval just yet. On similar lines, the arrival of US soldiers in France was also not particularly well received by the British soldiers, with Bloor describing their lack of discipline and shoddy equipment in 1917.¹¹⁴ Relations between the British and the Americans would reach their lowest points during 1918, but the seeds of discontent were already being planted in 1917. The image of brash, confident Americans arriving years into the war did not sit well with the British soldiers who, for their part, were not looked upon warmly by the Americans either.¹¹⁵ One British soldier noted how, during Operation Michael, upon encountering a

¹¹³Cude, 'Typescript Diary', roughly dated to 3 August 1917 and 1 September 1917. Also as Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), p. 343, describes; British soldiers on a shilling a day in 1917 reacted with indignation when they came into contact behind the lines with colonial troops on five or six times as much (hence 'fuckin' five bobbers' as a derogatory term for dominion soldiers).

¹¹⁴Captain W. H. Bloor, 'Typescript Diary', 1917–1915, IWM: DOCS - 99/22/1, Imperial War Museum, 26 July 1917.

¹¹⁵Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War*, pp. 168–9.

group of US soldiers asking where the battle was, members of his regiment told them it was ‘up there waiting for you to come, like we have the last four years’.¹¹⁶ Within days, two US soldiers were reported missing and, upon being discovered, told how British soldiers had beaten them up and robbed them of their money.¹¹⁷

In January 1918, Cude would firstly greet news that ‘the Yanks are attached to 8th Corps’ by speculating that this Corps ‘is feeling proud of them – I do not think’ before announcing his wish ‘that it is not long before they get what they deserve – a good hiding’.¹¹⁸ Issues with the Americans became one of the running themes for the British across 1918. The new advances would bring the British army into contact with the Americans, and the British did not find them impressive. Cude had already passed his typical judgement on them earlier in the year and Lieutenant Wallace was of a similar mind, declaring that:

As troops they were contemptible, inefficient and ill-disciplined and as ordinary human beings to associate with – terrible. They were the sweepings of the City of New York which appeared to me to mean ... the sweepings of middle Europe and Russia. The scared flame of democracy burned high in every breast and manifested itself in the grossest contempt of orders and the filthiest abuse in audible tones if one tried to enforce a necessary military order. I had Officers who hunted out safe dug-outs and sat in them all the evening, leaving the men in charge of the N.C.Os’, and N.C.Os’ who curled themselves up and went to sleep.¹¹⁹

Whilst the British had not shown a great deal of interest in, or understanding of, French politics, they appeared to be far more interested and scathing in their evaluation of what democracy had done to the Americans; they shirk orders, respond with abuse, and abandon their commands. The Americans had seemingly been empowered by their democratic rights but, in the eyes of the British, it was an empowerment

¹¹⁶C. R. Keller, ‘Private Papers (TS)’, 1919–1914, IWM: DOCS - 11876, Imperial War Museum, p. 81.

¹¹⁷Keller, p. 83. Keller later suggests that this story by the US soldiers was concocted to cover up the fact they had tried to threaten some local French women who had seen them off with French police.

¹¹⁸Cude, ‘Typescript Diary’, 23 January 1918.

¹¹⁹Wallace, ‘Typescript—“Memoirs of 1914–1918”’, August–September 1918.

that had led to disorder, a sense of entitlement, and a lack of respect for the natural military order of the army. Edward Lukens of the US 80th 'Blue Ridge' Division noted that the British soldiers clearly felt that the Americans were lacking discipline but, by the same token, the Americans believed the British to be lacking 'pep'.¹²⁰ The Americans, and the Australians at earlier parts of the war, seem to represent the fears expressed by the British military institution, one marked and organised by social class, of an enfranchised mass of civilians who had taken their rights and powers to the extreme.

The British could also be outright mocking to those members of the allied nations who were viewed as even less worthy of attention than the Belgians. The arrival of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP) in 1917 is a perfect case in point. Portugal had once been a significant power in Europe, but those days were long past. The CEP that arrived in the trenches did not particularly impress the British in either its abilities or its appearance.¹²¹ A fallen Great Power that could only muster such a small army was ripe for derision. In April 1918, the British soldier Harry Gore reported that the British had 'promptly nicknamed them the "Pork and Beans"' before GHQ issued orders for them to stop.¹²² In September of the same year, Lieutenant Gameson recalled another order from Command:

'On no account in future will our oldest and most gallant Allies of Portugal be referred to as "Those bloody Portuguese"' Bloody Portuguese was not the only gibe. The tragic phrase 'Missing, believed killed' was transmuted to 'Missing, believed at Boulogne!'¹²³

During the first half of 1918, without fully realising what had happened, Britain had begun a process of alienating most of its allies on the Western

¹²⁰Edward C. Lukens and Englar McClure Rouzer, *A Blue Ridge Memoir ... and The Last Drive and Death of Major G. H. H. Emory* (Baltimore: Sun Print, 1922), pp. 15–16.

¹²¹For information regarding the formation, motivations, and limitations of the CEP, see: F. R. D. Meneses, "'All of Us Are Looking Forward to Leaving": The Censored Correspondence of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France, 1917–18', *European History Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (July 2000): 333–55.

¹²²Harry Gore, 'Transcript Memoir', 1930s, IWM: Docs - 01/36/1, Imperial War Museum, Dated April 1918.

¹²³Captain L. Gameson, 'Typescript Memoir', 1923 1922, IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C47 & P395 - 396 & Con Shelf, Imperial War Museum, dated September 1918.

Front. As Foch began to take a grip here and the Germans struggled to maintain momentum, a power shift was taking place within the allied armies.

BREAKING THE SPRING OFFENSIVES

Allied generals had initially reacted to the German attack by furiously condemning each other; the French blamed the British for not acting swiftly enough to create reserve divisions, and both the British and the French blamed the Americans for not arriving in great enough numbers.¹²⁴ In London, plans were being drawn up for the possible evacuation of the area north of the Somme and the further contingency of the BEF being forced into a full retreat.¹²⁵ The German army had followed Operation Michael with the launch of Operation Georgette around Lys in Flanders. Both of these attacks played localised havoc with the British defensive positions and caused ongoing tensions and concerns within the Entente command. However, whilst the Germans forced retreats from the British, particularly during Operation Michael, General Ludendorff had weakened his own momentum by allowing himself to be led by the tactical successes of his operations rather than concentrating on the overall objectives.¹²⁶ As a result, Operation Georgette failed to capture the railway hub at Hazebrouck and the allies were able to maintain defensive cohesion. Ludendorff followed Georgette with Operation Blucher; an attack on French positions designed to weaken the morale of the French army and drag reinforcements away from Flanders in preparation for a further push in that sector.

The French army was unsure how best to react to this attack against its own lines. Pétain was adamant that reinforcements were going to be required, whilst Foch was, understandably, wary of draining soldiers from other sectors which might then invite a separate German

¹²⁴Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall; Victory and Defeat in 1918*, pp. 85–6; David R. Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, *Armies of the Great War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 240–1.

¹²⁵Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall; Victory and Defeat in 1918*, p. 85.

¹²⁶Alexander Watson, 'German Spring Offensives 1918', ed. Ute Daniel et al., *1914–1918 Online—International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10911>.

attack.¹²⁷ Once again, the Germans achieved notable tactical successes and began to create a salient in the French line.¹²⁸ However, once again, Ludendorff was unable to disengage from the attack. German momentum was already beginning to ebb along with their supply of ammunition and artillery shells. Capturing Reims would have allowed Ludendorff to more easily resupply his divisions in the field, but the very same lack of supplies that needed to be alleviated meant that the city could not be taken.¹²⁹ With the German advance slowing, the allies were able to launch limited counter-attacks including, for the first time, the significant involvement of US soldiers.¹³⁰

With the opportunity to either disengage from Blucher or make a substantial breakthrough, and with the German army only ninety kilometres from Paris, Ludendorff unleashed two further offensives. First, Operation Gneisenau, along the Matz River, ran into many of the issues that Blucher had but these were exacerbated by the declining supplies and energy levels of German soldiers who were rapidly becoming exhausted. Of greater concern to Ludendorff was the fact that the French had learned important lessons from the previous offensives, and were able to check the advances this time in relatively good order. Ludendorff's final throw of the dice was Operation Marneschutz-Reims; an attack in Champagne which became known as the Second Battle of the Marne and was a complete failure. Envisaged as a pincer attack on either side of Reims, it crashed directly into allied forces who were increasingly confident that they had the methods for halting the German offensives once and for all.¹³¹ This time, Foch was not content just to block German advances, but delivered a counter-stroke which would shift the momentum on the Western Front. Under General Mangin, French and US soldiers launched an offensive against German positions at 04:35 on 18 July and began a process where the allies would begin

¹²⁷Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall; Victory and Defeat in 1918*, p. 85.

¹²⁸Stevenson, p. 84.

¹²⁹Stevenson, p. 86.

¹³⁰Shipley Thomas, *The History of the AEF* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), pp. 89–91; Hélène Harter, *Les États-Unis Dans La Grande Guerre* (Paris: Tallandier, 2017), pp. 304–7; Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 241–9.

¹³¹Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall; Victory and Defeat in 1918*, pp. 105–6.

to recapture much of the ground lost to them in the German Spring Offensives. Forced onto the back foot, the German army had no answer.

During the earliest German offensives, the majority of US soldiers had still been training or embedded alongside the French. The 369th Infantry Regiment, composed of black soldiers, had been permanently assigned to the French army on 8 April 1918. During their first tour in the trenches they were paired with the 131e RI. Having previously served at both the Somme and during the Nivelle Offensive, the 131e were a hardened combat unit and they honoured their new allies by allowing them to fire the first US rounds in their sector before the French commandant declared that ‘for many months we have toasted the Americans as our friends. Tonight we shall toast them as our allies!’¹³² French commanders, upon hearing that the black soldiers they commanded had stood their ground under artillery attack, at the end of June stated their increasing confidence in these men.¹³³ Meanwhile, in May, the arrival of US soldiers to relieve weary French *Poilus* was said to have had the same pronounced effect on the morale of the French army as a blood transfusion.¹³⁴ Despite this, Major General Dickman, who would eventually command the US Third Army, reported French soldiers telling his men to turn back when they came to relieve parts of the front line at the end of May because it was ‘useless to try and stop the Germans’. This confirmed, at least in US eyes, that the French were not the force they might once have been.¹³⁵

One of the ongoing benefits of the Americans in the eyes of the French was that they, simply put, were not the British. At the beginning of April, soldiers in the French VII army continued to chastise the English (an important distinction in itself) for pretending they had been conducting the entire war themselves. Others noted how, whilst

¹³² ‘Historique Du 131ème Régiment d’infanterie’, 1920, SHD, <https://argonnaute.parisnanterre.fr/ark:/14707/a011403267961qsJiRj>; Arthur W. Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine—The Story of New York’s Colored Volunteers* (New York: Covici Friede, 1936), pp. 168–171.

¹³³ Chester D. Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War—The Story of the 371st Infantry* (Commonwealth Press, 1928), p. 76.

¹³⁴ Jean de Pierrefeu, *French Headquarters, 1915–1918* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1924), p. 272, <https://archive.org/details/frenchheadquarte00pieruoft>.

¹³⁵ Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), p. 44.

they saw little value in the English, they recognised the military value of Australians and Canadians.¹³⁶ At the same time, French soldiers were expressing their trust in the US soldiers and explaining how much they needed these men to strike the decisive blow.¹³⁷ Following their actions on 14 July, Major J. Corbaron, who was head of the French military mission attached to the US 42nd Division enthused about the Americans and expressed how many French officers had greatly admired them.¹³⁸

The upturn in allied fortunes at the start of July was further improved within the US and French armies by celebrations for Independence Day and Bastille Day on the 4 and 14 July. France and the USA had marked these national moments together in 1917, but now, with an increasing number of US soldiers in France and the allies on the brink of a potentially decisive series of offensives, the opportunity to celebrate together took on new meanings.¹³⁹ The response of British soldiers to these joint celebrations was, understandably, more muted. Men in the US 27th Division, attached to the British army, bemoaned the ongoing tendency of the British 66th Division, which they described as the ‘scrapings of the bottom of the barrel of British manpower’, to refer to England as the Americans’ ‘Mother Country’, and to the Doughboys themselves as ‘Colonials’.¹⁴⁰ Lieutenant Westerman of the US 33rd Division also recalled having to put on a party for British soldiers on 4 July.¹⁴¹

Some within the British army had alternative plans for US troops on 4 July. The British still had several divisions of US soldiers under

¹³⁶SHD - 16 N 1430, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIIe Armée’, Report: Front – Etranger: 2e–8e April 1918.

¹³⁷SHD - 16 N 1430, Report: Front—Etranger: 2e–8e April 1918.

¹³⁸‘Operations Report of French Military Mission with American Forty-Second Division’, *United States Army in the World War* 5, no. 170 (17 July 1918), cited by: Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 233.

¹³⁹There are numerous references within the records of US soldiers for joint celebrations on 4 and 14 July including: Alta Andrews Sharp, *War Diary*, n.d., p. 91; Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War*, pp. 66–7 and 76; Chaplain F. C. Reynolds and Chaplain W. M. F. McLaughlin, *115th US Infantry—The World War* (Baltimore, USA: The Read Taylor Co., 1920), p. 79.

¹⁴⁰William F. Clarke, *Over There with O’Ryan’s Roughnecks* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 44.

¹⁴¹Lawrence Westerman and James Pritzker, ‘Transcript Oral Interview with Lawrence Westerman’, 18 February 1995, USAHEC WWI 8175 (33rd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, p. 23.

their command and, whilst hoping that General Pershing would agree to enlarge this deployment, they had begun to grow frustrated at the possibility of training US divisions only to then have them transferred away without being able to make use of them. In June, Foch had moved US divisions around the front to partially reinforce French positions in Champagne and along the Marne River, but had also redistributed five US divisions from the British sector. Both Haig and Lloyd George tried to prevent this decision, claiming it was in breach of a previous agreement wherein US soldiers brought to France by British shipping would serve with them, but Foch simply pointed to his own position as Supreme Allied Commander and overruled them.¹⁴² Subsequently, Lieutenant General John Monash, in conjunction with General Rawlinson, had drawn up plans for an attack at the village of Le Hamel utilising two companies from the 131st and two from the 132nd regiments of US infantry and the Fourth Australian Division for 4 July. Pershing however, having been informed by Haig of the planned attack, had vetoed it. Word was passed from Haig to Rawlinson and then on to Monash that the Americans were not to be involved. When Monash received these instructions at 16:00 on 3 July, he realised that if the Americans were withdrawn the attack would not be able to take place at all. So, he promptly ignored Pershing's veto.¹⁴³ Whilst the attack was a success and granted an opportunity for the British to build up talk of a potential new Anglo-US alliance emerging, behind the scenes Pershing was furious.¹⁴⁴ Still striving to create a unified command and identity for the US army in France, Pershing was livid that the British appeared to have shrugged off his veto regarding his own forces. From now on he began to ensure that the British would not be able to utilise US manpower to fight their own battles again.¹⁴⁵

This was an increasingly important point for the Americans to establish, given their ongoing military commitment to the Western Front. Whilst the Spring Offensives had cost the German army some 500,000

¹⁴²Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War*, pp. 223–4.

¹⁴³David R. Woodward, *Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American Relations, 1917–1918* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), pp. 181–2.

¹⁴⁴Woodward, p. 182. The Australians bore the brunt of the allied losses in capturing Le Hamel losing 51 officers and 724 other ranks whilst the Americans lost 6 officers and 128 other ranks.

¹⁴⁵Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 220–1.

casualties, the lack of success had brought them directly up against the situation OHL had feared; the arrival of massed US infantry.¹⁴⁶ Though only numbering 284,000 men in France at the outbreak of Operation Michael, by July the number of Americans in the country had risen to just over 1 million.¹⁴⁷ Some 247,000 Americans arrived in Europe in July and this would rise again to 280,000 in August.¹⁴⁸ Ludendorff's problem was now stark; in March, the Germans had outnumbered their opponents on the Western Front by 300,000 men; by June–July, he had 200,000 fewer than the Entente armies.¹⁴⁹ Not only was Germany now losing the manpower battle but their industry was being decisively out-produced by the allies.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore conflicts within the German military industry had led to crippling delays in the production of tanks and armoured vehicles which could have been crucial.¹⁵¹

By the mid-point of July, the changes resulting from Foch's appointment and his preparations began to be recognised in the trenches. Lieutenant Harrison of the West Yorkshire Regiment, upon noting that the 51st and 62nd Divisions (the latter being his own) were heading for Reims whilst the 15th was *en route* to Soisson, declared this moment to be 'the turning point of the war' and predicted that these offensives represented 'the enemy's last throw and if we could hold them and thrust them back the beginning of the end was in sight'.¹⁵² The 62nd Division was shortly 'attached to the French V Army under General Berthelot', a man whom Harrison describes as being 'a most capable officer'.¹⁵³ As in the earlier part of the year, British and French divisions and armies were now being intermingled at various points of the line and the importance of surviving this German attack and then launching their own offensive

¹⁴⁶Woodward, p. 276.

¹⁴⁷Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War*, p. 420.

¹⁴⁸Stevenson, p. 441.

¹⁴⁹Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918*, 2014, p. 22.

¹⁵⁰Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p. 290.

¹⁵¹Ralf Raths, 'From the Bremerwagen to the A7V: German Tank Production and Armoured Warfare, 1916–1918', in *Genesis, Employment, Aftermath: First World War Tanks and the New Warfare, 1900–1945*, ed. Alaric Searle, Modern Military History 1 (Solihull, West Midlands, England: Helion & Company Limited, 2015).

¹⁵²Lieutenant Ivan R. S. Harrison, 'Manuscript Memoir', 1925 1920, IWM: DOCS - P323, Imperial War Museum, mid-July 1918.

¹⁵³Harrison, mid-July 1918.

was clear to all the combatants.¹⁵⁴ Harrison's men were still acting in concert with the French around 24 July but did have some difficulty in communicating with them under combat circumstances.¹⁵⁵ However, such had been the success of the relationship between the British divisions and the French V Army that, around 27 July, Harrison reported that the English General Braithwaite and the French General Berthelot 'had watched the advance from the rear and went wild with delight over it'.¹⁵⁶ These advances were not without losses, however, and Lieutenant Gameson was given to query the methods utilised by the French during the advance and the seemingly discriminatory selection of shock troops.¹⁵⁷

On a similar line, Group Captain Gillman of the SSA 19 had noticed that 'the 51st (Highland) and 62nd British divisions' had been brought up into the front lines at the onset of the offensive.¹⁵⁸ Suggestions that certain nationalities were being used as disposable fodder are not unusual in regard to the First World War, with both the Russians and the Portuguese also claiming unfair treatment. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of such claims, but Gameson's supposition is a sign that, even in 1918, there were still concerns that particular elements of the two armies might find themselves unjustly forced forward into the front lines. However, later in August, Gameson would report that the French soldiers did take notice of the sacrifices endured by the Scottish and constructed a monument for them near Buzancy.¹⁵⁹

With it clear by late July that the German offensives had not just been halted but that the enemy army had worn itself out against the defences of France, Britain, and the USA, Foch was now in a position to rally his combined armies and dramatically take the offensive. Beginning in August, the combined Entente nations launched a string of their own attacks. Demoralised not just by the recent failures of their Spring Offensives but also by the four years of war they had lived through, the German army began to break.

¹⁵⁴Harrison, 18 July 1918.

¹⁵⁵Harrison, 24 July 1918.

¹⁵⁶Harrison, 27 July 1918.

¹⁵⁷Gameson, 'Typescript Memoir', end of July–beginning of August 1918.

¹⁵⁸Group Captain F. C. Gillman, 'Manuscript Diary', 1918, 20 July 1918, IWM: DOCS - 88/6/1, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁵⁹Gameson, 'Typescript Memoir', 3 August 1918.

UN DERNIER EFFORT

What would eventually become known as the ‘Hundred Days Offensive’ began where, in many ways, the real alliance between British and French soldiers had first begun: the Somme.¹⁶⁰ On 7 August, Foch was promoted to the rank of Marshal. On 8 August, the British 4th and French I Armies launched an attack that had been evolving in the minds of allied commanders since earlier in the summer.¹⁶¹ Utilising similar tactics to those that the Germans had attempted in the spring; the attack began with a hurricane bombardment at 04:20, followed by a decisive infantry assault led on the British side by Australian and Canadian soldiers combined with mobile tank units.¹⁶² By nightfall, the allies had advanced nearly eight miles, a distance that had never been matched in the war so far, and the German losses were staggering. Nearly 16,000 men had been taken prisoner and over 27,000 casualties had been sustained, with nine German divisions effectively ‘wiped out’.¹⁶³ This was, as Ludendorff would term it, ‘the black day of the German army’. If previously there had been any in the German OHL still confident that the situation on the Western Front, and indeed the war, could be rescued, they were now few in number.

The shift towards offensive operations began to give each of the Entente nations the situation they had long been hoping for. The French, through Marshal Foch, were finally in command of allied strategy and were able to spread the load across allied armies. The British would soon be given their opportunity to advance and, where possible, make use of allied divisions in their attacks; particularly US ones. The Americans themselves were also now in a position to bring together their forces into the First Army and give Pershing the independent armed force he had always wanted. Whilst this fighting force would be joined by the Second and Third armies by the end of the war, the creation of distinct US formations was not entirely a source of celebration among the rest of the allies. Firstly, it brought about an end to their hopes of

¹⁶⁰The ‘Hundred Days’ moniker was popularised as a reference to Napoleon Bonaparte; Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, p. 1.

¹⁶¹William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), pp. 519–20.

¹⁶²Philpott, pp. 522–3.

¹⁶³Philpott, p. 524.

keeping all US divisions within their own armies for the duration of the war, though some would remain assigned to the British and French for the coming months. Further to this, however, was the fact that, whilst numerous, the Americans had not yet fully learnt the finer points of trench warfare and indeed still harboured their own ideas about how the advance should be handled. Major General Dickman, in his memoirs, explained how, although the Americans had absorbed the lessons handed down to them from the French and the British, ‘they all along had entertained, from the private to the Commander-in-Chief, fighting theories of their own, quite different from those of the trench warfare that had paralysed the offensive spirit of the Allies’.¹⁶⁴

These alternative fighting theories manifested themselves at the Battles of Saint-Mihiel, where the US First Army, alongside French colonial troops, attacked the German salient in mid-September and, more noticeably, at the Meuse-Argonne later the same month.¹⁶⁵ At Saint-Mihiel, the Americans smashed German defences in the town in little more than 36 hours. The US success was greeted with wild celebrations in the French ranks.¹⁶⁶ Some French soldiers praised the apparent warrior qualities of their US allies, whilst others believed peace and victory to be in sight if the Americans could push forwards.¹⁶⁷ One report for 25 September noted that there had been 239 references in letters from the men of the 74e DI regarding their allies, and 186 had expressed satisfaction; all of them for the Americans.¹⁶⁸

Much of the Americans’ success can be attributed to the allied artillery bombardment which caught a great number of the German defenders in the open and played havoc with coordination behind their lines, with many Germans either fleeing or surrendering as soon as the US infantry

¹⁶⁴Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War*, p. 140.

¹⁶⁵For a detailed overview of these battles and the logistical and operational issues surrounding their build-ups, see: Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, Chapters 17 and 18.

¹⁶⁶Within the postal censor records for the French IV Army, the Americans were given their own subsection to tally up the number of letters of praise for them. SHD - 16 N 1409, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La IV^e Armée’, 1918, 16 N 1409, Archives de l’Armée de Terre.

¹⁶⁷SHD - 16 N 1409, Reports dated: 17, 19, 21, and 25 September.

¹⁶⁸SHD - 16 N 1409, Report dated 25 September.

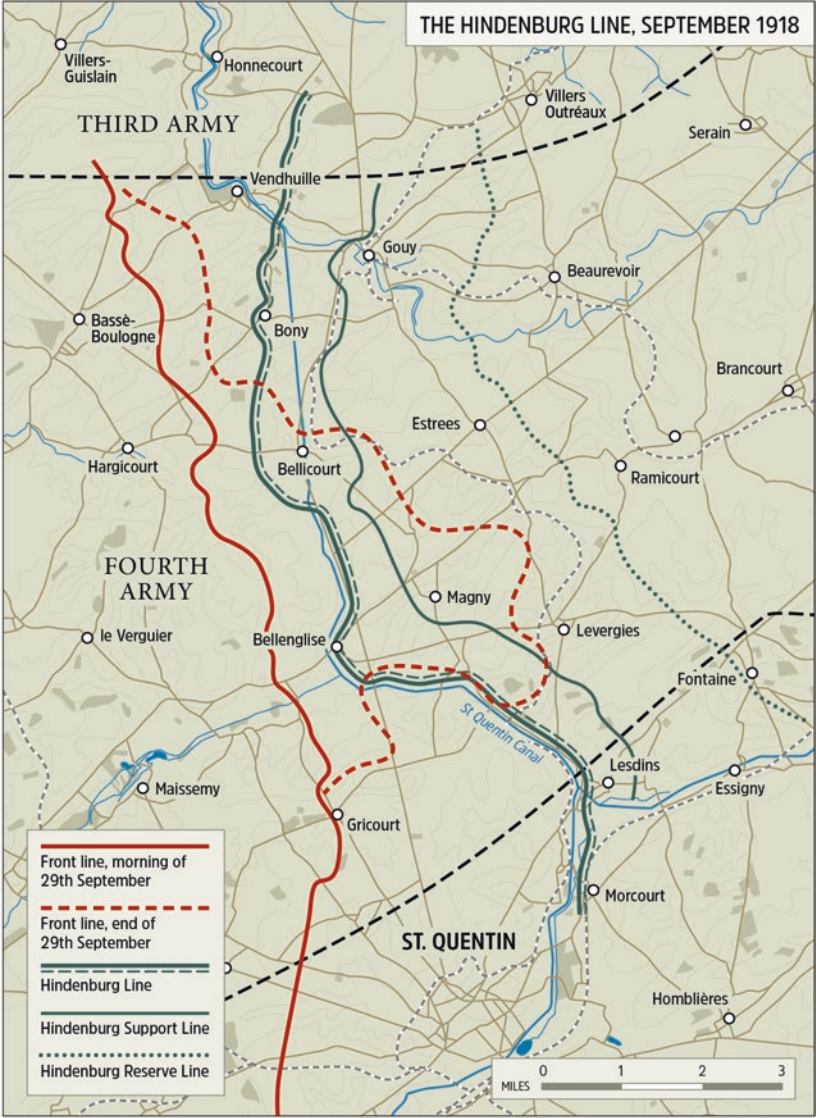


Fig. 2 Attack on the Hindenburg Line (1918)

advanced.¹⁶⁹ Both the aggression of the US attack and the nature of the artillery bombardment showed that, at least initially, the Americans had learned important lessons from their allied training and the previous months of war.¹⁷⁰ However, the Meuse-Argonne attack saw US forces reproducing many of the same tactics and approaches adopted by Britain and France in 1914 and 1915, and garnered many of the same results.¹⁷¹ Pétain had previously bemoaned the fact that the Americans ‘dream of operating in open country’ and, as a result, paid too much attention to operations that might create those circumstances and did not believe that the French or British could teach them anything useful about trench warfare.¹⁷²

At the Meuse-Argonne, the US First and Second Armies advanced in coordination with the French IV Army on the Argonne Forest. Whilst the offensive would eventually force the German defenders out of the Forest, the Americans suffered huge casualties through a mixture of inexperience among their commanders and infantry. The Germans, having created a defensive network which twinned barbed wire and defensive fortifications with the natural terrain to create a funnel through which the US army would have to pass, all the while raked their enemy with deadly machine-gun and artillery fire.¹⁷³ The 47-day battle at Meuse-Argonne resulted in 117,000 US casualties.¹⁷⁴ After the Saint-Mihiel offensive, one US soldier suggested that the US successes there had led the allies to asking Pershing for strategic and tactical advice. Given the

¹⁶⁹Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, p. 314.

¹⁷⁰Mark E. Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I*, 2010, p. 50.

¹⁷¹Grotelueschen, pp. 51–3.

¹⁷²US Army, *United States Army in the World War 1917–1919*, vol. 3: Training and Use of American Units with the British and French (Centre of Military History, Washington, DC: United States Army, 1989), p. 294.

¹⁷³Some personal accounts on the Meuse-Argonne Offensive can be found in: James E. Pollard, *47th US Infantry: A History* (MI, USA: Seeman & Peters, 1919), Chapter 4; Emil B. Gansser, *History of the 126th Infantry in the War with Germany* (Grand Rapids, MI: 126th Infantry Association, 1920), pp. 165–97; Clarence J. Minick, ‘Diary (Ms)’, n.d., pp. 100–108, 80.58.1, National WW1 Museum; Stephen A. Banks and Corporal Elmer Dewey, *Doing My Duty: Corporal Elmer Dewey—One National Guard Doughboy’s Experiences During the Pancho Villa Punitive Campaign and World War I* (Springfield, VA: S. A. Banks, 2011), pp. 166–96.

¹⁷⁴Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, p. 3.

results of the Meuse-Argonne attack, this seems unlikely.¹⁷⁵ The allies were able to maintain some controls on US activity, however, as for most of their actions on the Western Front support from artillery, planes, and tanks was provided by Britain and France.

Whilst the Americans pressed on at Meuse-Argonne, the British had pushed their positions up against the formidable Hindenburg Line, the strongest defensive position the Germans still possessed (Fig. 2).¹⁷⁶ The Germans had incorporated old British defensive lines into the Hindenburg positions, and these would need to be overrun even before the main German trenches could be attacked. If these fortified German positions could be breached, then the open countryside so many had dreamed of since 1914 might once again become a reality.¹⁷⁷ To storm the Hindenburg Line, the British Fourth Army under General Rawlinson brought together a huge force of infantry, artillery, cavalry, tanks, and planes.¹⁷⁸ Amongst the troops who would attack the German positions were the Australian 3rd and 5th Divisions and the US 27th and 30th Divisions, still embedded in the British forces. The main objective for this joint force of Americans and Australians would be the Bellicourt Tunnel, which was now an integral part of the defences. At 04:50 on 29 September, under the cover of a heavy fog, US forces advanced on the Hindenburg Line.¹⁷⁹ The weather made it almost impossible for tank support to keep up and coordinate at all with the attacking infantry, and, whilst the Americans began to capture their objectives, mopping up German resistance laid them open to sniper and machine-gun fire that began to claim numerous casualties.¹⁸⁰

Major General O’Ryan, commander of the US 27th Division, found it increasingly difficult to gather information on the progress of his men

¹⁷⁵Ralph L. Williams, ‘The Luck of a Buck’, 1984, pp. 159–166, USAHEC WWI 5499 (2nd Division – Folder 3), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

¹⁷⁶Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914–1918* (UK: Penguin Books, 2015), p. 534.

¹⁷⁷Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, p. 365.

¹⁷⁸Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, pp. 365–6.

¹⁷⁹Accounts of this attack can be found in: Clarke, *Over There with O’Ryan’s Roughnecks*, pp. 80–9; Robert Stewart Sutcliffe, *Seventy-First New York in the World War* (The United States, 1922), pp. 298–353.

¹⁸⁰Mitchell A. Yockelson, *Borrowed Soldiers: Americans Under British Command, 1918, Campaigns and Commanders*, v. 17 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), p. 172.

and coordinate with them as they attacked.¹⁸¹ Whilst the 27th Division got bogged down by German defenders, to their north, the 30th Division had advanced behind a creeping barrage and seized Bullecourt in a stunning success.¹⁸² US and Australian men had been forming bonds together almost since the moment the AEF arrived in France. Earlier, in the Hundred Days Offensives, after fighting side by side, Australian soldiers had declared the Americans would ‘do for me ... but you chaps are a bit rough’.¹⁸³ By the end of 29 September, these men had fought alongside each other to break open the last defensive positions protecting Germany from the allied advance. When questioned by a British general on the number of casualties the Americans had sustained in breaching the German position, General O’Ryan allegedly shrugged: ‘but we took the Line’.¹⁸⁴

Throughout September, events began to move quickly and the French, British, and US armies began to enter into fairly close quarters with each other as the advance picked up speed. Gillman reported that the Americans were taking over the sector he had inhabited and that he was being redeployed to the Somme area.¹⁸⁵ Cude wrote that ‘a total of 6 German Armies are in full retreat’.¹⁸⁶ Cude would also hear the ‘startling news’ that suggested that the Americans had been of great use during an allied assault.¹⁸⁷ Cude’s appreciation of the Americans would not last, and 12 days later he would declare that the time had come for ‘the yanks ... to justify their presence over here’.¹⁸⁸ Private Dunnet, however, was, at the same time, writing about how important it was to drive the Germans out of France and how the Americans wanted to go even

¹⁸¹Yockelson, p. 173.

¹⁸²Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War*, p. 369.

¹⁸³Donald F. Biggs, William Zimmerman Jr., and Watterson Stealey, eds., *Illinois in the World War—An Illustrated History of the Thirty-Third Division* (Chicago: States Publications Society, 1921), pp. 115–118 and 222.

¹⁸⁴Herbert Barry et al., eds., *Squadron a—A History of Its First Fifty Years 1889–1939* (New York: Association of Ex-Members of Squadron A, 1939), p. 241.

¹⁸⁵Gillman, ‘Manuscript Diary’, 7 September 1918.

¹⁸⁶Cude, ‘Typescript Diary’, 8 September 1918.

¹⁸⁷Cude, 13 September 1918.

¹⁸⁸Cude, 25 September 1918.

further and chase them home.¹⁸⁹ The feelings of some US soldiers are best indicated by the men of the 5th Marine Regiment encountering some Germans in the dark and opening fire upon them. As one lay on the ground pleading 'I'm dying comrade', the US column walked past and left him to die. It was the night of 10 November 1918.

With the German armies falling back before them, the British and French forces began moving into areas that had been occupied by the Germans for most of the war. The civilians that they found there were quick to express their gratitude but were also quick to reveal the difficulties of life under German control.¹⁹⁰ The British soldiers had been particularly touched and appalled at the refugees attempting to escape the Germans during the great retreat of 1914, and these stories of German atrocities played upon such feelings again but now, unlike during the period of advance and retreat in 1914, the British soldiers seemed to be in a far more secure position to liberate these towns and then keep them liberated. The British soldiers were becoming increasingly convinced that the German collapse was on.¹⁹¹ US soldiers however, now advancing into unknown territory, began to reproduce the spy fever previously seen in the British army of 1914. Numerous Doughboys began to fear that German spies lurked in French uniforms and amongst the civilian population of assorted towns.¹⁹² In an incident almost identical to a rumour reported by British soldiers in 1914, some Americans heard that a French attack in 1916 had failed because of the Austrian mistress

¹⁸⁹D. D. Dunnet, 'Manuscript Letters', 1918, IWM: DOCS - 78/59/1, Imperial War Museum, 26 September 1918. Dunnet's use of French in his diary entry is an affectation that several British soldiers seem to have acquired at various points in the war.

¹⁹⁰Percy Arthur Glock, 'Typescript Memoir—"Notes from 1914-1919"', n.d., IWM: DOCS - 99/84/1, Imperial War Museum, August-September 1918—with post 1918 notation added.

¹⁹¹Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 27 September 1918. For more on the reasons behind the German collapse on the Western Front, see: Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918*, Cambridge Military Histories (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chapter 6; Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, Chapter 8.

¹⁹²Stephen A. Banks, *Doing My Duty: Corporal Elmer Dewey—One National Guard Doughboy's Experiences During the Pancho Villa Punitive Campaign and World War I* (Springfield, VA: S. A. Banks, 2011), pp. 170-1; Gansser, *History of the 126th Infantry in the War With Germany*, pp. 84-6.

of a high-ranking French official who had passed information to the Germans.¹⁹³

The advance was not always flawless, however, and a number of US tanks were accidentally blown up on 29 September by a British minefield that they had failed to inform the Americans about.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the French had still neither forgiven nor forgotten the British failures earlier in the year and either ignored them or only ever mentioned them in conjunction with wider allied efforts. So damaged were the British in the eyes of the French when compared to the Americans that even by September, with the German assault long since arrested and the allied armies launching the counter-attacks that would shortly bring them victory, the British were rarely appearing on their own when praise was lavished on the non-French armies. Meanwhile, as the weeks passed, the Americans would gain their own sub-section within the postal censor reports to record praise towards them.¹⁹⁵

British soldiers almost dropped out of these reports completely during September and October. For a time, it appears as though the British soldiers simply faded away, replaced in the favour of the French by the Americans; doomed to be bracketed with other nations when it came to more general, non-specific, praise. By contrast, the French had bestowed the nickname '*les terribles*' on the men of the 32nd US Division, and the good feelings between the men of these nations seemed only to be growing.¹⁹⁶ Such was the state of the allied advance at this stage that the British, French, and US armies were in some ways becoming indistinguishable from each other. Of course, they existed as individual entities made up of the countrymen from each nation, but, at the same time, they were becoming joined together in a fluid and united allied effort. With minds fixed on securing the victory, there were also signs amongst the different allied armies of recognising the efforts made thus far. In October, upon arriving in the town of Cysoing just south of Lille, one

¹⁹³James T. Duane, *Dear Old 'K'* (Boston, MA: Thomas Todd Co, 1922), p. 32.

¹⁹⁴Anon, A. *Company Tank: 'Treated 'Em Rough' 301st Battalion Tank Corps*, n.d., p. 56.

¹⁹⁵SHD - 16 N 1415, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée', Report dated 2 September 1918.

¹⁹⁶Gansser, *History of the 126th Infantry in the War with Germany*, pp. 155–6; Walter Zukowski, 'Memoirs of a Sergeant', n.d., p. 45, USAHEC WWI 4419 (32nd Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

soldier reported that the British performed a service to France and erected a statue of a French soldier wrapped in the French flag to replace one lost in the Franco-Prussian War.¹⁹⁷

Although this was a monument to the Franco-Prussian War, there is evidence here of a respect by the British for French history, specifically when they had been in prior conflict with the Germans, and for their soldiers. Celebrations of France and its position as a Great Power also inevitably tie nicely into Britain's own view of itself as a Great Power. Whilst this statue and ceremony were directed towards France, there was also likely an element of reinforcement when it came to pre-war ideas of power and structure in Europe. Germany was the upstart nation born of war in 1870–1871. France and Britain were the eternal European powers that had endured wars and conflicts immemorial but, because of their shared heritage and power, would not be overcome. Such moments may have represented the pinnacle of relations between the British and French soldiers, and showed that a clear line of respect could still exist between the two.

By 13 October, Cude was reporting the rumours 'that Jerry is ready for our Peace Terms, so war is practically over'. He declared the Germans to be a 'a nation of toads', aiming 'to finish the war just when they fancy they will, and before any damage is done to their country, and, thanks to the sentimentality of some of the Englishmen over home, they will be allowed to do so. We have him entirely at our mercy now, and can break him for all times by military means'.¹⁹⁸ However, during the last weeks of the Hundred Days Offensive, British morale appeared to fluctuate between confidence that victory was close and, as a likely result, unwillingness to now risk dying in battle for a war that was nearly won.¹⁹⁹

The newly liberated civilians also seemed to be of the opinion that the war was drawing to its conclusion, and Skelton was greeted with banners

¹⁹⁷Major Alan Johnson, 'Manuscript Memoir—"Double Survivor"', 1977, IWM: DOCS - 87/6/1, Imperial War Museum, October 1918. Johnson also reported that the ceremony rapidly descended into a farce as the unveiling of the statue was nearly prevented by the knots the British had tied; and that the speeches by French dignitaries proved to be a source of amusement to the gathered Tommies.

¹⁹⁸Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 13 October 1918.

¹⁹⁹This is discussed in detail by; Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, Chapter 4.

proclaiming “*Bienvenu aux Libérateurs*” as the British moved into previously German-held French villages.²⁰⁰ Upon reaching a ‘a fairly large sized town which the 54th had taken’, Cude wrote that the inhabitants ‘judging by their look, had not had much to eat for years’. He declared: ‘I have seldom seen a worse sight. The poor beggars cry at the sight of our chaps, however, it is joy in their deliverance.’²⁰¹ Private Tinsley was welcomed into a newly liberated town by cheering civilians flying the French flag.²⁰² These expressions of joy were not only reserved for the French areas of occupation. Wallace reported that the arrival of General Watts and the XIX Corps into a Belgian town was greeted ‘with due pomp and circumstance by the City Fathers’.²⁰³ Wallace declared that ‘the whole affair reached great heights of splendour and Anglo-Belgian Entente’.²⁰⁴

However, whilst the allies advanced, as has been previously noted, the French soldiers maintained a fair degree of political interest in events going on around the war. With victory suddenly looming on the horizon, the praise the Americans had garnered for their martial feats was almost undone when news of Woodrow Wilson’s criteria for peace reached the French soldiers:

The demand addressed by Germany to President Wilson is a pure insult to England and France. The American effort is immense, but it’s not been for the whole of the war. While France and Britain want peace, we see the smile of the Kaiser sending his note to Wilson. The French and the English will respond by the guns of Marshal Foch.

The Americans thus want an end to the war; we want to return to our homes, but we would be disappointed ... if the war were not carried onto German soil. Germany must pay for its crimes.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰Godefroy Skelton, ‘Typescript Memoirs’, n.d., IWM: DOCS - 06/46/1, Imperial War Museum, shortly after 13 October 1918.

²⁰¹Cude, ‘Typescript Diary’, 18 October 1918. The town in question was probably Pommereuil, east of Le Cateau, France.

²⁰²Hugh Tinsley, ‘Manuscript Letters’, 1918, IWM: DOCS - 99/15/1, Imperial War Museum, 18 October 1918.

²⁰³Wallace, ‘Typescript—“Memoirs of 1914–1918”’, November 1918.

²⁰⁴Wallace, November 1918.

²⁰⁵SHD - 16 N 1416, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée’, 1918, 16 N 1416, Archives de l’Armée de Terre, Report 12 October 1918.



Fig. 3 *Pendant la bataille de l'Aisne* (Image courtesy of BNU de Strasbourg [ALS.AK.411,10. NBI 1])

The French soldiers admired the efforts of the Americans and were greatly appreciative of the work they had done, but they were not interested in having terms dictated to them, or, worse in their perception, forced upon them by an America which had sat out much of the fighting.

What do you think of the Americans? Their successes are very good but I think that after the war they will boast of what they have done, forgetting the very large contribution of the French and the English made for a long time before them. The Americans never thought they would enter this war. They are taking all the glory.²⁰⁶

C – State of mind

²⁰⁶SHD - 16 N 1422, 'Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée', Report 26 September–2 October 1918.

1 – Opinions of the allied troops –

Slightly less praise for the American soldier. The English are doing well.²⁰⁷

A report from the IV Army, the men of which had previously been so effusive with praise for the Americans after the Battle of St. Mihiel and fought alongside them at the Meuse-Argonne, declared that of 173 letters discussing an imminent armistice in a single week in October, 137 of them expressed disappointment or concern over the plans of President Wilson.²⁰⁸

As with the collapse in appreciation for the British coinciding with a rise in the popularity of the Americans, so again here we see a similar situation in reverse. The Americans did not fall so far as the British had, and, with their error being seen as political rather than military, this is understandable. What begins to emerge, therefore, may not have been a more carefully considered directing of praise from the French to their allies but perhaps what could be more accurately described as a moment of considered clarity. The damage done to the French perception of the British never fully healed in the last weeks of the war, but there was an acknowledgement that, whatever their mistakes, for the vast majority of the war the French had only the British alongside them. There were great hopes for the Russians and then later flirtations with the Americans, but neither of those really conclusively balanced out the efforts of the British soldiers who had been in for the long haul. So, what begins to emerge in the postal reports for October and early November is a far wider appreciation of the British certainly, but also acknowledgements of the other allies who had now made up this victory.

There were reports of ‘great camaraderie with the English’ and discussions of marching alongside ‘brave Tommies’ by French soldiers currently under the command of the British,²⁰⁹ and perhaps most indicatively, talk of how the British actions had ‘redeemed’ them after their

²⁰⁷SHD - 16 N 1416, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée’, Report 1 October 1918.

²⁰⁸SHD - 16 N 1410, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La IVe Armée’, 1918, 16 N 1410, Archives de l’Armée de Terre, report dated 18 October.

²⁰⁹SHD - 16 N 1423, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée’, 1918, 16 N 1423, Archives de l’Armée de Terre, Report 11 October 1918.

‘dark hours of failure’.²¹⁰ An illustration published in 1918 recalled the *sang*-froid of British soldiers during the 1914 Battle of the Aisne. The picture showed rows of British soldiers firing in tight formation whilst also, as ever, finding the time to stop for tea (Fig. 3).

The British were not alone in this sudden outbreak of warm civility amongst the French troops. The Americans still continued to be praised in similar ways to previously, and even the Belgian army suddenly begin to receive commendations within the records, having barely appeared in any form beforehand.²¹¹

With the liberation of French soil now well underway and the armistice imminent, jubilation begins to break out amongst the French ranks with letters crying ‘Vive la France! Long live our brave allies!’²¹² However, alongside this there was something more. There was a fair degree of triumphalism, of course, but accompanying the normal praise being offered to their allies was an extra level of appreciation for the British. This was not just for their services during the war, but also for small moments that allowed France to *be* French in its victory.

The English were very smart in Cambrai, where they entered with the French flag and not English, and in Lille, they bypassed the city to allow time for a regiment from Lille to enter first. That is waging war like gentlemen. (From a soldier to a friend in the USA)

One thing that has particularly affected us: the delicate attention shown by the British troops who have deployed the French flag in Cambrai The gesture has a double meaning, better than any speech, it says we are all soldiers of the same cause and the same army. But it also says that the English have taken Douai on behalf of the French and its for this that I thank them especially, because we are all brothers not only in arms, but in feeling. These are the things the Germans cannot understand. (From a soldier to a friend in England)²¹³

²¹⁰SHD - 16 N 1416, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée’, Report 1 October 1916.

²¹¹SHD - 16 N 1423, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La VIe Armée’, examples appear in the reports for 17 October and the report dated 18 October–23 October 1918.

²¹²SHD - 16 N 1416, ‘Commissions de Contrôle Postal de La Ve Armée’, 14 November 1918.

²¹³SHD - 16 N 1416, Report 26 October 1918.

The Germans probably were not the only ones who had failed to understand the relationship between the British and the French. The French themselves had had a clear idea of what they wanted from the British, but what they received had, to varying degrees, frustrated, confused, or surprised them. Whilst the 1916 period had been crucial for the British with the travails of 1918 merely testing their relationship with the French, it had nearly proved devastating within French ranks. The presence of the Americans in particular had complicated this relationship, and if, by 11 November 1918, the French had not fully forgiven the British for their perceived failings earlier in the year, they had at least become largely content with the services offered by their ally. The war was won and that meant that if their allies had not been suitably 'French' during the preceding years, they had done enough to be grateful to and thus receive a measure of thanks at its conclusion.

ARMISTICE DAY

Rumours of an imminent armistice had circulated repeatedly amongst the allied armies in the lead-up to 11 November. When word began to spread that the end might now be set, the reaction to it differed greatly on national lines and, in many ways, provoked one of the most controversial episodes of the war. Officially wanting to ensure that their divisions had suitable defensive positions, US commanders decided to go on the offensive early in the morning of 11 November. The 26th Division were given orders to advance at 10:58 and to then subsequently halt at 10:59, despite pleas not to force the men into battle.²¹⁴ Other US units continued to fight and die right up until the Armistice and beyond.²¹⁵ The final US soldier to die in the First World War was killed at 11:59 whilst charging a German machine-gunner who tried to wave him off. In total, around 10,944 men became casualties on the war's final day, of whom 2738 died in a war 'already decided'.²¹⁶ Such was the anger from some US soldiers at having been forced into combat so close to

²¹⁴Duane, *Dear Old 'K'*, pp. 154–5.

²¹⁵Banks and Dewey, *Doing My Duty*, pp. 229–35; Biggs, Zimmerman Jr., and Stealey, *Illinois in the World War—An Illustrated History of the Thirty-Third Division*, pp. 265–9.

²¹⁶Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, pp. 373–4.

the Armistice that on 13 November a bombastic speech by General Summerall to the 2nd Division was met with stony silence.²¹⁷

For the British, the news was greeted by a mix of relief and exhausted disbelief. Private Mulliss of the 4th Battalion The Duke of Cambridge's Own Middlesex Regiment received the news of the Armistice in complete silence, his claim that this was 'a common reaction amongst the forward troops' seems erroneous.²¹⁸ The diaries of other soldiers all follow roughly the same trend of relief and jubilation, particularly in those areas where the men were in close proximity to foreign civilians or soldiers. Captain Wallace, of the London Regiment, declared that 'I shall never as long as I live forget that morning – the memorable November 11th 1918'.²¹⁹ He had entered the Belgian town of Renaix and, whilst initially describing the refugees as 'pathetic little groups', by the time he entered the town proper 'excitement was reaching fever pitch. Deafening cheers greeted the arrival of any British Troops and although the infantry must have taken, as they deserved, the cream off the welcome there was plenty left for us'.²²⁰ There was an emerging sinister side to the jubilation, though, as Wallace reached Nederbaker to see women who had allegedly collaborated with the Germans having their hair cut before deportation.²²¹

Lance Corporal Abraham wrote that, despite having a few drinks on the evening of 11 November, and 'although we had every excuse for a skinful that night we were certainly not drunk as we made our way back to camp'. He encountered some French soldiers, 'each with a girl on his left arm while using his right hand to piss in the gutter. They greeted us like brothers and all four appeared to be very drunk'.²²² The desire to seek out their allies seemed prevalent in many British, French, and US soldiers. Men of the US 101st Field Artillery quickly launched into

²¹⁷John Ausland, 'The Last Kilometer', n.d., USAHEC WWI 146 (2nd Division – Folder 6), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, 'Chapter: The Very Last' p. 17.

²¹⁸Mulliss, 'Typescript Diary—Recollections 1914–1918', 11 November 1918.

²¹⁹Wallace, 'Typescript—"Memoirs of 1914–1918"', 11 November 1918.

²²⁰Wallace, 11 November 1918.

²²¹Wallace, 11 November 1918.

²²²Lance Corporal A. J. Abraham, '1914–1918: Memoirs of a Non-Hero', 1973ca, IWM: DOCS - P191, Imperial War Museum, 11 November 1918.

celebrations with their French comrades.²²³ Soldiers in the US 115th Infantry felt so overwhelmed with gratitude at the news of peace that they initially wanted to find a corner where they could sit and weep for joy, before they were heralded by celebrating French civilians.²²⁴ These men then rapidly discovered that the local French women were particularly grateful for their efforts.²²⁵ Some US soldiers only discovered that peace had come when French artillerymen alongside them began to celebrate.²²⁶

Lieutenant Harrison, of the West Yorkshire Regiment, wrote that, whilst the French people were the most excited by the news of peace, it was not widely shared by the soldiers, who seemed ‘scarcely able to realise that all was over’.²²⁷ He found the sudden cease of activity and movement to be ‘very quiet & strange’.²²⁸ There were some exceptions to this more generalised revelry. The reaction of Glock and his fellows to the announcement was muted due to a lack of satisfaction at the conclusion of the war.²²⁹ Whilst there were exceptions, along the line Americans, French, and British soldiers began to come together and word was also spreading behind the lines as well. Albert Cunliffe of the Royal Army Medical Corps and Private Gore of the Rifle Brigade were witnesses to the collapse of Germany from within POW camps. The military infrastructure at Cunliffe’s POW camp seemed to disintegrate almost immediately.²³⁰ Gore and his fellow prisoners had all been put to work in German factories at Ruhla. The night before the Armistice, Gore was in a cinema with other prisoners when a Frenchman barrelled into declare the Armistice. Gore reported that ‘the English and French vowing eternal friendships’ began to shake hands, drink, and sing national anthems

²²³Russell Gordon Carter, *The 101st Field Artillery—AEF 1917–1919* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940), p. 254.

²²⁴Reynolds and McLaughlin, *115th U.S. Infantry—The World War*, p. 164.

²²⁵Reynolds and McLaughlin, pp. 168–9.

²²⁶James H. Hallas, ed., *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), p. 305.

²²⁷Harrison, ‘Manuscript Memoir’, 11 November 1918.

²²⁸Harrison, 11 November 1918.

²²⁹Glock, ‘Typescript Memoir—“Notes from 1914–1919”’, 11 November 1918.

²³⁰Albert Cunliffe, ‘Typescript Memoir—“My Experience as a Soldier and Prisoner”’, 1919, IWM: DOCS - 94/11/1, Imperial War Museum, 9 November 1918.

and songs together in celebration.²³¹ It seemed only natural at the moment of victory for the prisoners of these two nations to join together and celebrate. However, when considering the wider breakdown in relations between French and British soldiers at times during 1918, even if they were slowly beginning to recover, and the feelings of elation that the armistice would have caused in the allied soldiers, this moment should be viewed as being exceptional both in the ongoing Tommy–Poilu trend and the wider war as a whole. The joining together of British and French soldiers in celebration was an entirely natural response and should be expected but, at the same time, it was also an abnormality with regard to the wider relations between the two at the end of 1918.

The military achievements of the combined British, French, and US armies in 1918 should not be overlooked. From having been brought to the brink of defeat during the German Spring Offensives early in the year, the introduction of Foch as *generalissime* had, for the first time in the war, given the Entente unified direction. From the halting of Ludendorff's attacks after 21 March, to taking the offensive in July, the Entente alliance had showcased the benefits of evolving and coordinated warfare. Infantry working in conjunction with artillery, tanks, and planes had firstly blocked the German momentum before forcing them back and shattering defensive positions that had previously been considered almost impregnable. The victory when it came was truly an allied one.

However, the removal of Germany as an enemy also removed them as a unifying power. Whilst the war had been ongoing the assorted men of the Entente armies had something to work together against. The end of the war brought about the end of this state of affairs. Now left to their own devices, allied relations, which had already been strained at various points in 1918, began to unravel. Further to this, the change of the war from seeking a military outcome to now enshrining a legal and diplomatic one, placed greater powers firmly into the hands of national politicians all eager to protect national interests. 11 November 1918 had been a triumph of the allied spirit and the determination of the *Entente* forces to push on until the end. It did not simply signal the end of the war; but in many ways rather the end of effective allied cooperation and friendship.

²³¹ Gore, 'Transcript Memoir', 10 November 1918.



Allied Relations and *l'après guerre*

In war books, novels, everywhere, the war of 1914–1918 is represented as the struggle between England and German superiority and the victory as an English victory. The name of France must be mentioned since it was on her soil that the greater number of military operations took place; but her own part in it, as well as the great deeds of her Army are intentionally passed over in silence, and there is no question to-day of the comradeship in arms which for four years united the two peoples.

(General Victor Huguet¹)

General Victor Huguet was a principal figure in the group that evolved plans of a Franco-British military partnership beyond the Entente Cordiale and the Military Conversations to the actual deployment of the BEF to France in 1914. As a colonel, Huguet, alongside *Général de Brigade* Foch on the French side, and Brigadier-General Wilson and Colonel Grierson for the British, helped lay the foundations of a substantive plan for both a military alliance between Britain and France and also how such an alliance would operate in the field. Perhaps more than any others, these four men changed the military relations between France and Britain before the outbreak of war in 1914. When war was declared, Huguet was attached to the BEF as head of the French Military Mission designed to further enhance cooperation between the two armies.

¹Victor Huguet, *Britain and the War: A French Indictment* (London: Cassell, 1928), p. 211.

Though he would later be relieved of that position, with the French military feeling he had become too close to the British to operate effectively, Huguët had played his part in keeping Britain and France in the war together after 1914.

In the years after the conflict Huguët would look back on the relations between the two countries and despair. He bemoaned the fact that, seemingly with no time passing at all, both countries had easily and conveniently forgotten the alliance that had existed between them. Of greater concern to Huguët, however, was how the alliance had withered and died between the Armistice and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The failure of the Entente allies to maintain cohesion and cooperation during the negotiations, with joint demands replaced by national interests, represented, for Huguët, not simply a failure but a betrayal. He placed the blame for this betrayal very squarely at the feet of Britain, which seemed to rub salt into the wound by relegating France to a mere supporting role in their own post-war histories. However, whilst the Paris Peace Conference would play a decisive part in splitting up the allies who so recently had fought and died alongside each other, in truth, the fractures were already apparent throughout 1918, and the alliance had begun to break down between the soldiers in the immediate aftermath of the Armistice.

AFTER THE ARMISTICE

What is striking about the post-Armistice period is how some of the Allied relationships begin to deteriorate following the beginnings of an upsurge before the end of the war. This deterioration further indicates that the greater cooperation between the allied armies before the Armistice may not have been a prolonged movement towards full reconciliation. Whilst areas of France were still in a jubilant state, some of the more simmering tensions between the allies were already rising to the surface. Private Cude of the East Kent Regiment 'The Buffs' reported a series of ongoing violent brawls between British and US troops in the days after 11 November:

Whilst visiting a café that I was on familiar terms with the occupants of, I am ordered out by the Yanks that are in occupation of the village. As I am on my own I am given 5 minutes to clear out, and in that 5 minutes, I have to listen to abuse of the British that even Jerry would not use. In

return, they have a little to listen to, and I get some truths home, especially the fact that the whole of the prisons of New York must have been emptied to fill the ranks of this Div that is the pride of that town. Again I run through the fact, that there is not one but that has more than a little of German blood in him, this fact is openly spoken of, and not a little German sentiment. There is uproar after this, and I have to fly for my life, ultimately putting up in the barbers that night.²

Following this incident, Cude also reported that a British soldier was stabbed in the neck by an American and, in response, an American soldier was jumped by some British, tied to the rear of a lorry and forced to run behind it for ten miles.³ Cude and other British soldiers had previously mentioned issues with the Americans, and it appears, with the war won, that any semblance of civility between some of the men was being eroded. Issues with French civilians only exacerbated the continuing ill-feelings that existed amongst some British soldiers. Upon arriving in France on 1 April 1918, Lance Corporal Abraham recounted a 'bright, pretty little girl of about ten or eleven' who was selling chocolate to the marching British soldiers at Boulogne.⁴ The soldier in front of Abraham offered 'half a crown' for a piece of chocolate worth a few francs and she seized the money to run off before sending a stream of British swear words back at the soldiers.⁵

Abraham, whilst writing his memoirs in the early 1970s, would admit that he still held lasting negative memories and feelings towards the French because of his experiences during the war. His experience in broad terms shows that whilst the relationship between British and French soldiers improved over the course of the war, there were still those who had negative experiences and perceptions of the French. Such was the power of wartime interaction that they could still affect the views of individuals over half a century after the event. Lance Corporal Abraham departed France in mid-January whilst writing that 'it had given me a great thrill to step ashore on to the soil of France, but now it

²Private Robert Cude, 'Typescript Diary', 1921, IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C48, Imperial War Museum, 21 November 1918.

³Cude, 21 November 1918.

⁴Lance Corporal A. J. Abraham, "1914–1918: Memoirs of a Non-Hero", 1973ca, IWM: DOCS - P191, Imperial War Museum, 1 April 1918.

⁵Abraham, 1 April 1918.

gave me an even greater one to go aboard that lovely ship and bid a soldier's farewell to France, a country I had come to detest'.⁶

US soldiers also began to notice a 'lessening of the mutual regard' at the end of the war between themselves and the French, who appeared to have grown tired of the US tendency to call them 'Frogs' and to not learn from the reaction such a nickname brought.⁷ US soldiers also began to ignore passing French officers instead of saluting them, a tendency that had to be addressed in a specific memorandum from the US command.⁸ Many of the French soldiers, whilst relieved at the end of the war, regretted the missed opportunity of chasing the fleeing German army completely out of French territory and back to the defeated capital. This feeling was not helped by what appeared to be growing fraternisation between allied soldiers, particularly Americans, and the Germans.⁹

Major-General Joseph Dickman had noticed a 'drift towards a lack of cordiality' between the allies in the days and weeks following the armistice.¹⁰ This began to form into notable animosity in December as the French liaison officer Reginald Kann protested to the Americans about the lack of restrictions being placed upon German civilians by Americans. He declared the situation to be 'intolerable' as German civilians were now receiving 'better treatment from the Americans than from their own Prussian officers'.¹¹ Dickman's explanation, that the Americans had 'larger and more varied experience in the military government of occupied territory than any European army', strangely did not assuage the grievances of officers of a France which had held colonial territories for hundreds of years and wished to revisit some of the ill-treatment their own civilians had received back onto the Germans. The situation continued to deteriorate and, after two French liaison officers were dismissed by the Americans on account of brutality to civilians whilst inspecting a

⁶Abraham, 18 January 1919.

⁷Frank Palmer Sibley, *With the Yankee Division in France* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1919), p. 36.

⁸Chester D. Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War—The Story of the 371st Infantry* (Commonwealth Press, 1928), p. 233.

⁹Private Clarence R. Lindner, *Private Lindner's Letters*, ed. Gladys Dudley Lindner (San Francisco, 1939), pp. 98–100.

¹⁰Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), pp. 209–210.

¹¹Dickman, pp. 217–20.

Moroccan regiment, there were nearly riots between US Military Police and French soldiers.¹² The solution to this problem was to increase the segregation of French and US soldiers, but Dickman also noted by April of the following year, that the Americans seemed to be the only army on the Rhine still obeying regulations whilst British and French soldiers, the French still in their uniforms, had taken up black-market trading and fraternisations with the German population ahead of the conclusion of peace talks.¹³ A soldier of the Yankee Division also noted how, as part of the army of occupation, the French civilians made the Americans feel increasingly unwelcome.¹⁴

Relations had not only begun to splinter amongst men on the allied side of the lines. Private Gore had celebrated the Armistice with French prisoners and, together, they had declared a joint strike action in order to force the German military to release them. However, whilst 'the English stood firm and refused to go in', this was not mirrored in the behaviour of the French who 'for reasons not known, broke their agreement and went in'.¹⁵ The next day, the British temporarily returned to work but, alongside some US prisoners, eventually made clear to the factory manager that 'the war was over, as far as we were concerned, and our services were no longer required' and that for a variety of reasons it would be best for them to return to the main POW camp.¹⁶ Within the main POW camp, Gore reported that a degree of segregation had also become apparent where 'each nationality kept to their own huts'.¹⁷ It was perhaps this segregation along national lines which led to the events of 27 November 1918 when, whilst the British prisoners were engaged in a game of football, French prisoners decided to try and pull down a concert hut in the camp. Their argument, according to Gore, was that 'as they had built it at their own expense they had a right to pull it down, being made of wood, for firewood and cooking purposes', but the Germans maintained that the building was still needed for the housing

¹²Dickman, pp. 229–230.

¹³Dickman, pp. 250–1.

¹⁴Corporal Henry Halgate Storm, *A Soldier's Diary of World War One—France 1917–1919*, ed. A. Margaret Bok (USA, 2006), p. 161.

¹⁵Harry Gore, 'Transcript Memoir', 1930s, 12 November 1918, IWM: Docs - 01/36/1, Imperial War Museum.

¹⁶Gore, 13 November 1918.

¹⁷Gore, 13 November 1918.

of prisoners. In response, the French prisoners rioted and the German guards opened fire onto the crowd and drove them back towards the ongoing football match. They continued firing to disperse all prisoners in the open. As a result, 'the casualties were about 17 killed and double that number wounded', who were buried in the camp on 28 November. Gore, reflecting on the incident, spread the blame between the Germans and the French.¹⁸

With relations between the different armies becoming strained, the Americans in particular began to turn their minds to their home front after the war. The French had previously expressed serious concerns over the US treatment of their own black soldiers during the war, treatment which seemed to run counter to the spirit of republicanism and liberty. They would have been left horrified by what was to come. After arriving in Brest in January 1919, the men of the 369th Infantry Regiment were in a jubilant mood; however, within a few minutes of their arrival, one private had his head split open by the club of a military policeman. Major Little questioned the assailant about his treatment of a man who had simply been asking for directions towards the latrines, and after forcing the man to attention the Military Policeman revealed that 'they had been warned that our "Niggers" were feeling their oats a bit and that instruction had been given to "take it out of them quickly just as soon as they arrived, so as not to have trouble later on"'.¹⁹ The US military, having sent their black soldiers to the French for much of the conflict, had now come to regret the decision to expose these men to a French system that did not recognise racial differences in the same way.

The initial benefits of not having to keep black and white Americans fighting side by side were now being drastically outweighed by the

¹⁸Gore, 27 November 1918. In Gore's post-war memoirs, he also added the following information about this event: The German Commandant was held to blame though he was not in the camp at the time, being away on a few days' leave. The incident caused a certain amount of ill-feeling between the French and the English who felt the French should have surrendered their concert hut to the Germans, especially as there were hundreds of prisoners coming into the camp from surroundings parts and the Germans were finding it very difficult to accommodate them.

¹⁹Arthur W. Little, *From Harlem to the Rhine—The Story of New York's Colored Volunteers* (New York: Covici Friede, 1936), pp. 351–4. The regiment would have ongoing issues with American Military Police during their time at Brest, all of whom seemed to be under similar instructions towards the treatment of black soldiers but also to disregard the intrusions of the regiment's commanding officers.

apparently empowering experience these men had undergone within the French army. If such newfound confidence was to be transmitted back to civilians on the home front then difficulties would lie ahead. Some attempts had seemingly been made to limit the freedom of black units whilst in France following the Armistice, with the 371st Infantry Regiment being unable to celebrate Thanksgiving because the US army had sent no supplies to them and because the French army, with whom they were assigned, seemingly not recognising the significance of the holiday.²⁰

Kelly Miller's *Authentic History of the Negro in the Great War* declared that, having travelled to fight for humanity, no American would now stand before them and declare them as 'a subspecies of mankind'; and, having 'proved his value and worth in all of these trying ways, when after this he asks for a full measure of equal rights', what American could possibly refuse him?²¹ Having returned to the USA in 1919, Private Malcolm Aitken recalled being part of a casual company utilised to put down race riots in Washington and Baltimore. On one occasion, after a member of the company (a man who had been all through the war in France) was shot and killed from an upstairs window, Aitken and his men became 'terrible'. After a 'pitched battle' for a minute or two in which they used all of their ammunition, Aitken and his men 'proceeded to finish the war'. Aitken 'did not care to report the number killed on the other side' but referred to this incident as 'Special Duty with the Blacks'.²²

Relations did not collapse everywhere between British, French, and US soldiers. Shortly after taking on the French in a football match,²³ Group Captain Gillman, who had spent the war in the SSA. ambulance service with the French Army, reported that, on the early disbanding of his division, his section took part in a "march past" before celebrating with the section staff and French officers.²⁴ Australian soldiers within

²⁰Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War—The Story of the 371st Infantry*, p. 234.

²¹Kelly Miller, *Authentic History of the Negro and the World War*, 1919, pp. 552–4.

²²Malcolm D. Aitken, 'Personal Experiences of the War', n.d., USAHEC WWI 273 (2nd Division - Folder 3), US Army Heritage and Education Centre, p. 28.

²³Group Captain F. C. Gillman, 'Manuscript Diary', 1918, IWM: DOCS - 88/6/1, Imperial War Museum, 5 January 1919.

²⁴Gillman, 10 January 1919.

the British army expressed a keen interest in visiting the USA at some point in order to keep up relations with the friends they had made in the AEF.²⁵ Despite the difficulties Major-General Dickman had noted between the French and his own men over the treatment of German civilians, he also noted that Generals Mangin and Gouraud had an affection for the USA which could not be impaired by ‘trivial’ differences of opinion.²⁶ The establishment of the AEF University gave US soldiers the opportunity to remain in Europe a little longer and take up study at a variety of British and French colleges.²⁷ Furthermore, the ‘Official Commendations of the 27th Division’ pamphlet created after the war was dedicated ‘to our comrades in the British Expeditionary Force’.²⁸ Men within the 106th American Field Artillery Regiment began raising money to ‘adopt’ French orphans between the Armistice and Christmas. A collection of ‘500 French francs’ would be able to ‘supply a French orphan with food, clothing, and schooling for a year’.²⁹

Private Cude had disliked almost every nation, race, and person he had come into contact with, including many of his own officers. Over the course of the war he had wished the Germans exterminated and for the Americans, Australians, and Canadians to be roundly drubbed in battle. In 1917, he also announced his preference, if given a choice, towards being French. Cude had arrived in France dubious about both the country and the people, and, as he left through Dieppe, noted that ‘this place is gaily decorated by bunting, and a huge flag upon the embarkation point reads—“Goodbye Tommy, we shall never forget you”’.³⁰ However, the feeling amongst some US soldiers as they departed France

²⁵Willard M. Newton, ‘Over There for Uncle Sam—A Daily Diary of World War One’, n.d., pp. 41–2, USAHEC WWI 200 (30th Division), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

²⁶Dickman, *The Great Crusade—A Narrative of the World War*, p. 232.

²⁷Russell L. Stultz, *History of the 80th Blue Ridge Division In World War I A.E.F.*, ed. Bill J. Krehbiel, n.d., Chapter 40. A number of soldiers in many US divisions noted the formation of this new institution.

²⁸‘Official Commendations of the 27th American Division—France and Belgium’, n.d., USAHEC WWI 3021 (27th Division – Within the folder of Robert Brown), US Army Heritage and Education Centre.

²⁹Stephen A. Banks, *Doing My Duty: Corporal Elmer Dewey—One National Guard Doughboy’s Experiences During the Pancho Villa Punitive Campaign and World War I* (Springfield, VA: S.A. Banks, 2011), pp. 217–8.

³⁰Cude, ‘Typescript Diary’, 21 January 1919.

was a wish never to leave their own country again, let alone travel to Europe. Some expressed the belief that if the Statue of Liberty ever wished to see them again she would have to turn around.³¹

The end of the war had changed the interactions between the men of Britain, France, and the USA. Whilst relations had held in some places, they had begun to utterly collapse in others, as British and US soldiers, weary from the war, began to express a desire to go home, whilst the French wanted the victory to mean something beyond the end. The relations at this level became tinged by personal desires and needs; the desire to go home and the need for the war not to have been in vain. The military victory had been secured, but many now waited to discover what it would translate into after the peace talks.

VERSAILLES AND THE 'BETRAYAL' OF FRANCE

The road to the Treaty of Versailles initially began in Paris, but the fact that the French capital would host the peace conference at all had already been the source of a split between the Entente allies. Neither the USA nor Britain had wanted to hold the talks in Paris; President Woodrow Wilson had initially been drawn towards neutral Switzerland before reports of German spies in the city had warned him off. Britain's Prime Minister Lloyd George had also been reluctant to allow the French to host the gathering and presumably to set the tone. It was France's Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau who was adamant that both France and Paris specifically must be the location for the peace conference. Lloyd George would later reflect that 'I never wanted to hold the Conference in his bloody capital ... I thought it would be better to hold it in a neutral place, but the old man wept and protested so much that we gave way'.³²

The negotiations surrounding the Treaty of Versailles in 1918 and 1919 brought about a curious change in the make-up of the allied relations. In a manner foreshadowed by the reports within the *Commissions de contrôle postal*, the French, who had previously viewed the Americans with warmth and friendship, became increasingly concerned as to the motives and objectives of President Wilson's negotiating position,

³¹ Alta Andrews Sharp, *War Diary*, n.d., pp. 265–8.

³² Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 27.

suggesting that he was ‘holding up the real business of the conference – the punishment of Germany – with his League. ... The Americans in return complained that the French were stingy for their accommodation in Paris and for the expenses of their army’.³³ The British and Americans rapidly became frustrated at what they perceived as a mix of French greed and intransigence over their demands on Germany.³⁴ By contrast, where previously the British and Americans had treated each other with scarcely concealed disdain and hostility, the negotiating process brought about positive developments in their relationship built upon the fact that, according to a member of the US negotiating team, the British were the ‘only people here who are not playing chauvinistic politics’.³⁵

The primary stumbling block between these negotiations was an ongoing and fundamental disagreement over what the war had been for and what the peace treaty should achieve. The French were committed to ensuring that the Germans could never be given the opportunity for revenge, whilst Britain and the USA were equally certain that anything that could be perceived as an injustice would increase the chances of a future war.³⁶ Such a split in the alliance had not been intended or expected in the immediate aftermath of the alliance. When Clemenceau had gathered ministers from the Foreign Ministry on 16 November 1918, they had agreed on two key points in advance of the forthcoming peace talks. First, Germany must be weakened and France strengthened in a manner that would drastically change the strategic balance of power in Europe; second, the coalition between Britain, the USA, and France must continue into the post-war years.³⁷ All at the meeting acknowledged that reconciling these two aims might be difficult, but it was the hope of France nonetheless.

However, the united front presented by Britain and the USA proved insurmountable for many of the French plans for the Treaty, specifically

³³Macmillan, p.144.

³⁴Macmillan, p. 28.

³⁵Macmillan, p. 144.

³⁶Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 14–18, *Understanding the Great War*, 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), p. 228.

³⁷Peter Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power: France and the Politics of National Security in the Era of the First World War* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 197.

the breaking-up of German territory or allowing for the permanent occupation of parts of Germany.³⁸ The initial hope had been for the permanent French occupation of the Rhineland, but such a plan, though fiercely backed by Foch, was strongly opposed by both President Wilson and Prime Minister Lloyd George, who both wanted to avoid another Alsace-Lorraine symbol of resentment.³⁹ Having been denied the opportunity to storm Germany by force because of the Armistice, Clemenceau was now keen on achieving French security by wrapping Germany in a series of legal restraints that would prevent her from threatening *la patrie* again.⁴⁰ Such a desire ran headlong into the reemergence of traditional British pragmatism in their own international relations. With the conclusion of the war, and aware of the damage sustained by their own economy, Britain began to calculate the fact that 'British industries needed markets; there were 70 million Germans'.⁴¹ A Germany brought low without the ability to rebuild itself was not an attractive business proposition for the British. Additionally, they strongly wished to avoid launching Germany into the type of chaos that was now consuming Russia further to the east.

The matter of what to do with Germany might have been at the forefront of France's mind, but it was not the only issue the other allies wished to discuss. Some of the fiercest disputes between Britain and France regarded the division of the Ottoman Empire and, whilst the French were far more concerned with dealing with Germany, they also had considerable interests in the Ottoman Empire that they wished to protect.⁴² The discussions over Turkey therefore became almost a double annoyance to the French as the British could be seen as distracting attention from the more worthwhile pursuit of punishing Germany whilst, at the same time, attempting to rob France of what it considered to be its own areas of interest.⁴³ As the negotiations dragged on, popular opinion in France began to turn. In cinemas showing newsreel footage, French

³⁸Jackson, p. 200.

³⁹Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003), pp. 288–9.

⁴⁰Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*, pt. III.

⁴¹Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, p. 198.

⁴²Macmillan, p. 374.

⁴³Macmillan, p. 395.

patrons who had, in 1917 and 1918, wildly cheered the appearance of President Wilson now sat in stony silence.⁴⁴

The culmination of these debates, discussions, and arguments was the Treaty of Versailles. As was perhaps inevitable, a treaty that was required by the different parties to be something very specific resulted in pleasing none of them. The final version of the Treaty had not been prepared in time for the final meeting of the main allied negotiations, so many of the British delegates fell asleep as a lengthy French version was read aloud. Henry Wilson ruefully noted that ‘we are going to hand out terms to the Boches without having read them ourselves first’.⁴⁵ The minor nations which had participated in the conference, such as Portugal and, specifically, China which aired complaints regarding lack of reparations and concessions regarding ex-German territory in China held by Japan. Italy complained about clauses which had been decided without their input.⁴⁶ Marshal Foch, who had repeatedly tried to intercede in the negotiations in order to press home his belief that the Rhine should become the natural barrier between France and Germany, saw one last chance to make his case.⁴⁷ He stood up before the gathered delegates to once again beseech them to reconsider. Instead, he was approached by a furious Clemenceau demanding to know why he had made such a scene. Foch’s response was; ‘to ease my conscience’.⁴⁸ When the German delegates were presented with the Treaty, Clemenceau opened proceedings with the words: ‘[Y]ou asked us for peace. We are disposed to grant it to you’. Upon reading the many articles presented to them, the leader of the German delegation noted that ‘they could have expressed the whole thing more simply in one clause – “Germany surrenders all claims to its existence”’.⁴⁹ Shortly afterwards, the Germans, to the fury of the French, sent their own counter-proposals, based significantly on President Woodrow Wilson’s famous Fourteen Points.

⁴⁴Macmillan, p. 144.

⁴⁵Macmillan, p. 459.

⁴⁶Macmillan, p. 459.

⁴⁷Jackson, *Beyond the Balance of Power*, p. 299.

⁴⁸Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, p. 459. For more on Foch’s attempts to influence the Paris Peace Conference, see: Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Foch in Command: The Forging of a First World War General*, 2014, Chapter 18.

⁴⁹Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, pp. 464–5.

Even at this stage, some of the allies were considering disowning the Treaty. The Archbishop of Canterbury had spoken out against the Treaty's harshness, and Lloyd George, aware of changing sentiments towards Germany back home, still believed the Treaty to be too harsh.⁵⁰ President Wilson, in response to British fears that Germany might not sign the Treaty, angrily pointed out that the fear was based upon 'things they insisted upon at the time of the writing of the Treaty'.⁵¹ Though Germany would hold out for as long as possible from signing, faced with the figurative and literal guns of the victorious allies they eventually had no choice. However, the damage had largely been done all round. President Wilson would take the Treaty back to the US congress with him where it was repeatedly rejected even after attempted amendments. The USA would eventually make its own treaties with the Central Powers, but they would not join the League of Nations; President Wilson's once great hope for making the world safe for democracy.

On 14 July 1919, Paris held its victory parade. Sixteen days had passed since the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, and representatives and soldiers from the assorted allied armies filed down the Champs-Élysées. Whilst some in the crowd cheered the passing British and US soldiers, it was not universal. Some stood in silence. A smaller number jeered. The assorted politicians and generals of the three principal nations could scarcely hide their animosity towards each other.⁵² As the Americans finally departed back across the Atlantic, many French leaders believed that one day Germany would return and the USA would not.⁵³

Reflecting on the failure of the Paris Peace Conference, General Huguet presents an image of France robbed not once but twice: 'France, the principal worker for victory and the one who emerged most bruised' had been left 'with bitterness that she alone will not obtain from it the just reparations on which she believed she could count'.⁵⁴ There was little doubt in Huguet's mind of where this betrayal of France had its roots and where France should look to see how it had been robbed of both overall victory and of the rewards it should have earned:

⁵⁰ Macmillan, p. 468.

⁵¹ Macmillan, p. 470.

⁵² Colin Smith, *England's Last War against France: Fighting Vichy 1940–1942* (London: Phoenix, 2010), pp. 23–4.

⁵³ Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms; America and France in the Great War*, p. 289.

⁵⁴ Huguet, *Britain and the War: A French Indictment*, p. 205.

What has wounded her most deeply and leaves her truly stupefied, is to see that it was her original Ally, the one who had come in on her side before any of the others, the one who gave the example of magnificent national spirit which grew throughout the course of the war, the one who, in 1918, to guarantee general salvation had agreed to the sacrifice – so hard for its national pride – of putting its Army under the orders of a French general; finally the one who, throughout four years, never failed to bring her loyal and faithful support; that it was the same self-same Ally who appeared to-day, not only to be cheating her of the fruits of her common victory, but to have set herself on the side of her enemy, sometimes even as the advocate of that enemy, whom, only just before, she was so fiercely fighting.⁵⁵

The epilogue of Huguet's memoir was a testimony to his anger and his anguish at what he perceived to be the betrayal of France by Britain in the post-war years. But lying at the heart of this is a second element to the sense of betrayal; namely, that Huguet was either wrong, or perhaps deceived, in his earlier definitions of British national character. He goes so far as to reconsider or reframe his earlier definitions, producing new criteria for understanding how British politics are conducted.⁵⁶ Whereas, previously, he had suggested that Britain's lack of cosmopolitan forward thinking was almost a charming quirk, now he accused Britain of maintaining an almost slothful self-imposed ignorance.⁵⁷ Even the lives of those lost in service to Britain cannot stand in the face of British self-serving pragmatism.⁵⁸ Huguet painted a picture of Britain as the perfidious Albion that is not far away from the oft-quoted sentiment of 'Britain having no permanent friends, only permanent interests'.⁵⁹ Upon finally realising this, Huguet looked upon the current states of France and Britain following the Armistice and despaired.

We were mistaken, in 1919, in the character of our adversaries, since in the peace we accorded them a treaty whose only result has been to allow them

⁵⁵Huguet, p. 207.

⁵⁶Huguet, p. 213.

⁵⁷Huguet, p. 215.

⁵⁸Huguet, p. 218.

⁵⁹P. M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940: Entente and Estrangement* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), pp. 105–6.

to deny their defeat, to escape from its consequences, and to develop in their hearts new feelings of hate, with openly-proclaimed hopes of revenge. We were mistaken at the same time also in the character of our Allies, when we believed in the permanence of feelings which were and could only be fleeting, and when we sacrificed our interests and our security for vain promises, which have never been realised and which never will be. May we in the future not fall into similar errors, thanks to a better understanding of the character of the peoples who surround us!⁶⁰

This utter collapse in the post-war relations between Britain and France should not be used to denigrate or redefine the relations of the soldiers on either side during it. Rather, it should serve to highlight a key point that has already been previously discussed; the war meant different things to France and to Britain. France's war was one of self-preservation and, whilst Britain was also feeling suitably fearful and threatened, by choosing to fight its battles on French and Belgian soil, it also took on a war of self-interest. Those two aspects were compatible during the conflict itself, particularly when the fighting was fiercest; but, post-Armistice, the divergence between them would prove telling.

What emerged then was the final ascendancy of national interests at governmental and command levels. The discussions and debates regarding the Treaty of Versailles would effectively dissolve what remained of the Entente Cordiale spirit and replace it with a more hard-nosed national pragmatism that would divide the former allies. Attempts at military planning between Britain and France in the post-war period were consistently hamstrung by the aftermath of Paris and Versailles, and specifically the attempts to enforce the Treaty in the 1920s.⁶¹ The significant debts owed to Britain and the USA by France left the country in a perilous position. They lacked the financial security to push forward alone, but could not convince the British, who viewed them as 'paranoiacs', of the ongoing danger to European security.⁶² By the time Britain and France were forced to begin planning for a future conflict, it was effectively far too late.⁶³ The year 1914 would not be repeated again in 1940.

⁶⁰Huguet, *Britain and the War: A French Indictment*, pp. 235–6.

⁶¹Bell, *France and Britain, 1900–1940*, p. 132.

⁶²Bell, pp. 133–4.

⁶³For specific details, see: Bell, Chapters 10–12; Daniel Hucker, 'De «quantité Négligeable» Au «renouveau de La France»: Représentations de La France En Tant Qu'alliée Militaire à La Fin Des Années 1930', *Revue Historique Des Armées* 264, no. 3 (2011): 48–58.

However, this was not the final result of wartime Anglo–French relations. Once again, operating under the surface, there is evidence of an ongoing understanding of a form of Tommy–*Poilu* friendship that existed during the war and extended beyond it even when official relations reached a nadir during the inter-war years.

THE ENDURANCE OF THE *ENTENTE*

Whilst the likes of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson, Foch, Haig, and Huguot would advance their own feelings regarding the Armistice and eventual Treaty of Versailles, it would not prove to have the same effect on the wider populations. Whilst, as Greenhalgh notes, ‘the English text of the Treaty of Versailles marked the end of French as the diplomatic language’, a ‘1918 command paper’ highlighted the fact that ‘ignorance of foreign countries and peoples’ and the ‘prewar deficiencies in teaching modern languages’ had all hampered the British war effort. It strongly recommended ‘the need to improve the teaching of ‘the most important European language for Britain, namely French’.⁶⁴ The echoes of the previous *Entente* relationship would continue to be noticeable. Regardless of the divisions that had split the *Entente* around the negotiating table, there were still definite warm spirits and feelings amongst those who had once been allies. They had fought a war together, and, whilst it had not always been an easy relationship, the evolutions of 1916 and the final victory in 1918 had brought about a joint allied victory. The image of the Tommy, the *Poilu*, and the Doughboy standing shoulder to shoulder did not simply evaporate as soon as the fighting stopped, and nor did it disappear as soon as the ink was dry on the Treaty of Versailles.

The fighting around the Somme and particularly the relationships between the British and the French soldiers there would produce literary responses both during and after the war. A short story published in 1928 by C. E. Montague bears a similarity to the ‘official’ explanation regarding a lack of French support during the initial failure to capture Falfemont Farm. ‘*A Cock and Bull Story*’ concerns the joint Anglo–French plans to simultaneously attack Bull Wood and Cock Wood (with the British assaulting Bull and the French attacking Cock). Despite the intricate plans laid out for the joint offensive, the French do not support

⁶⁴Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition: Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 284.

the British soldiers as the French commander refuses to 'receive 'instructions' from foreign commanders, however, described, of smaller bodies of troops'. The French soldiers, though, seemingly take it upon themselves to attack their wood in order to provide support to the British soldiers, only to be killed in huge numbers. The narrator later muses on the difficulty of command under such circumstances, whilst watching how a joint British and French rationing party ('an irregularity' and something the men of the two adjacent nations had worked out between themselves) dodged attacks from German snipers.⁶⁵ Having been written after the war at a time when official relations between Britain and France were at a nadir, we must be careful not to take this story as a truthful account. However, the fact that it is the positive relations between soldiers, beyond the bungling and antagonistic relations of the generals, that is highlighted does suggest that Tommy–*Poilu* relations had a longer reach than originally suspected. In a similar vein, in his popular *Bulldog Drummond* series, Sapper sends the eponymous hero to Paris during his attempts to stop the villain Carl Peterson. Having crashed their plane, Drummond and his companion are forced to try and communicate with a French *gendarme* who subsequently takes a shine to them because, whilst the English were 'truly an insane race', the *gendarme* had fought alongside them at Montauban and had grown to like them.⁶⁶

The notion that the British and French had not only existed in the same temporal space but had also functioned together quite well was clearly not an alien concept during the inter-war period. Furthermore, there were additional signs that even the most strident of French critics during the war had softened to their French allies across the conflict and afterwards. Tennyson's opinions regarding the French in 1914 were clearly entrenched, and he had either little willingness to change them or the context of the war at that time did not give him adequate time and space to fully reflect on them. However, he was then granted this time and space when he was wounded at the end of 1914 and returned

⁶⁵C. E. Montague, *Action and Other Stories* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928), pp. 32–50. This reference was kindly provided by Dr Ann-Marie Einhaus, having been discovered during the research for her doctoral thesis: Ann-Marie Einhaus, 'The British Short Story of the First World War: Form, Function and Canonisation' (University of Durham, 2010).

⁶⁶Sapper, *Bulldog Drummond: The Carl Peterson Quintet* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), p. 134.

to Britain for recuperation, therefore missing the worst of the fighting at Ypres. There is a gap in his diaries, with Volume 1 ending with his return to Britain and Volume 2 missing. The third volume continued his tale in September 1915, and there were important changes in his reaction to the French army. He became far more willing to attribute positive actions to the French and, perhaps more significantly, believe in rumours of the French doing well. This change was not only restricted to Tennyson's diary. Having survived the war, Tennyson wrote his memoir *From Verse to Worse* in 1933, based upon his diaries. However, his criticisms of the French military, specifically during 1914, are all but absent from this account.⁶⁷ There are a few references to events from the diary, such as the execution of the farmer as a suspected spy, but the vast majority of Tennyson's initial criticisms have not been included. It is possible that in the post-war years his attitude towards the French had softened to the extent that he no longer wished to criticise them; but, despite the clear change in his perspective by 1915, this seems a little unlikely, as Tennyson does not include any particular praise of the French either. Perhaps it is more realistic to suggest that the French had simply ceased to be an important factor in Tennyson's view of the war by this stage. Either way, Tennyson's evolving account of his experiences on the Western Front of the war show that, whilst at times he may have appeared unreasonably critical of all things French, it may not have been a permanent state and, given the extremity of his initial views this could be representative of an attitude shift within the BEF.

However, the lasting symbols of the strength of this alliance may be found not in literature but in stone. The Battle of the Somme holds a powerful place in the British social consciousness, and the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing is an instantly recognisable symbol to those who died in the battle. But it is not simply a British cemetery. Behind the huge monument itself lie 600 soldiers; 300 British headstones bearing the inscription 'A Soldier of the Great War known unto God' and, alongside them, a further 300 French crosses marked with the word '*Inconnu*'.⁶⁸ Six hundred Tommies and *Poilus* lie next to each other as the eternal reminder of what they did and sacrificed together. On the

⁶⁷Lionel Hallam Baron Tennyson Tennyson, *From Verse To Worse. [An Autobiography.] With Eight Plates [Including Portraits]* (London: Cassell & Co., 1933), p. 277.

⁶⁸Gavin Stamp, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (London: Profile Books, 2006), p. 97.



Fig. 1 *Le Monument Aux Morts*, Calais

Meuse-Argonne battlefield lies the largest American cemetery outside of the USA. Within its confines lie the bodies 14,246 US soldiers, with a plaque of remembrance to a further 954 who were missing in action. At the culmination of the First World War, the French allowed the allied nations not just the land and territory to bury their dead but also the room and space to raise monuments to them as well. Each monument to the gallantry and bravery of the British, the Americans, the Canadians, and others reflected not just on those nations themselves but also on France. Regardless of how the peace talks had broken down, gratitude and understanding that men from foreign shores had come to fight and die for *la patrie* remained.

In 1923, the city council of Calais appointed a commission to deal with the funding and construction of a war memorial in the city. Designed by Paul Moreau-Vauthier, a French artist who had won several awards as part of the *Société des Artistes Français* and had also been an officer in the war, being having previously been awarded the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* in 1910, was the man selected to create the monument. In 1928, opposite the town hall in Calais, his work

was unveiled (Fig. 1). The sculpture depicts French soldiers defending their embattled *patrie*. Above them, another French soldier is shown surrounded and supported by his allies: English, Belgian, Italian, American, Serbian and Portuguese. Calais, one of the principal gateways (both to France and, in reverse, to the outside world) enshrined in stone the role the allied armies had played in France's hour of need. Placed inside their city, it would forever stand as a monument to what the Entente alliance had achieved.

But, like relations between these countries, the monument would not last. When France and Britain went to war together again in 1939, the USA stood aside much as it had done in 1914. When the German attack eventually came in 1940, there would be no repeat of the Miracle on the Marne. Battered and outmanoeuvred by determined German armoured units, the Franco-British front collapsed. Whilst many British troops were able to escape back to their homeland from Dunkirk, France itself would fall and Britain would controversially take the decision to sink the French fleet in July 1940. Over the coming years of war, the Vichy Regime in support of German military efforts would participate in battles against Britain. All the while, the Free French Government in London would plan for the liberation of their homeland.⁶⁹ Following the USA's entry into the war and the D-Day landings, Calais and the rest of France would be freed from German occupation. By the time the invaders had left, however, the monument to France and its allies in Calais was gone. Destroyed in a war that Britain, France, and the USA had, in 1919, all been committed to avoid but had failed to prevent.

⁶⁹Smith, *England's Last War against France: Fighting Vichy 1940–1942*.



Conclusion: ‘... Now and Forever’

Officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers of the Allied Armies ... You have won the greatest battle in History and rescued the most sacred of all causes, the Liberty of the World. You have full right to be proud, for you have crowned your standards with immortal glory and won the gratitude of posterity.

(Marshal Ferdinand Foch, General Order: 12 November 1918¹)

There were many flaws in the alliance between Britain and France in 1914 which would then later be exacerbated by US inclusion after 1917. None of the military authorities involved ever paid much attention as to how soldiers from different nations, with only limited understandings of each other's cultures and languages, were supposed to maintain an active and successful alliance. Britain and France had been historic enemies for hundreds of years. A shift in circumstance brought about by a sudden change in the European strategic outlook surely could not undo such long-standing enmity. Amongst the British and French officers whose job it was to direct the war, this lingering suspicion as to each other's motives proved, more often than not, a hindrance to waging it. That it took the allied nations until 1917 to create a body such as the SWC is

¹ Marshal Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoirs of Marshal Foch* (Kingswood: Windmill Press, 1931), pp. 571–2.

almost farcical. That it took until the following year, with the *Entente* facing defeat squarely in the face, for complete control over the allied armies to be placed into the hands of a single *generalissime* is merely an extension of such counter-productive decision making. Elizabeth Greenhalgh retells the, potentially apocryphal, quote from Marshal Foch that: 'I lost some of my respect for Napoleon when I learned what it was to fight a coalition war'.² The allied officers, through lingering Franco-British suspicion, did not make the eventual victory any easier.

That this victory came about at all, however, has to be attributed at least in part, to the fact that, whilst the residents of GHQ and GQG ensured the protection of their national interests, the men in the trenches by and large did not care. This was not universally the case. In 1914, British institutional pride, and a touch of arrogance, placed within the British Tommy a firm sense of confidence in his own ability and a lack of interest in French techniques. French soldiers, who were busy defending their homelands, saw little reason why they should stop and show the British what they perceived to be the error of their ways. When neither army could stop the initial German advance, the lack of time for the British to acclimatise to their new environment was exacerbated by a changing tactical situation that left them isolated and fearful. If the Germans had succeeded in capturing Paris, the *Entente* alliance would have been a clear failure. However, German strategic errors allowed the British and French to rally and force the Western Front into trench warfare. The German attacks around Ypres in late 1914 and early 1915 drained the pre-war strength from the BEF. The loss of its experienced regular soldiers was a military disaster for the British. Though their numbers could be replaced, their experience and skills would take much longer to replicate. From this position of weakness, the *Entente* alliance was reborn.

New soldiers fresh from civilian life and the training fields of Britain arrived in France and were confronted with a war they were unsure how to fight and less able to win. Hesitant in their new environment, they made perhaps one of the smartest moves in the circumstances; they reached out to the French. The French army had grown frustrated by the apparent slovenly progress of the British army they had been promised. When discovering in mid-1915 and early 1916 that it was largely

²Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 6.

composed of rapidly trained civilians, some of them despaired. Similarly, however, many of them recognised that if France was to win the war then the British would need to be an effective military force. So, they assisted their allies in need, gave them tours of French trenches, brought them to situations where they would be exposed to German artillery fire, steadied them ahead of attacks. When the French fought at Frise in 1916, the British watched them. When the British and French attacked together on the Somme, those British divisions and regiments on the extreme right of their own flank advanced under cover of French artillery bombardments. Upon taking their objectives, the men of the two nations joined together and celebrated. At times, the British soldiers disappointed the French. They seemed obsessed with cleanliness and a desire to appear brave that would often get them killed. France did not need any more dead heroes. But together, the two nations persevered and this may have been the high point in these allied relations.

1916 did not bring the victory that many French and British soldiers had hoped for. When their soldiers had scrambled from their trenches at 07:28 on 1 July 1916, the winners might have hoped to 'live to see a different world', but at the conclusion of the battle, the old one remained.³ For all that the British had suffered at the Somme, however, the French had undergone many times over at Verdun. The complete failure of 1917 exacerbated what were already grievous wounds to the French psyche, and the mutinies that followed changed the way *Poilus* reacted to the war for the remainder of its duration. When the British fell back in March 1918, they were no longer seen as fellow comrades who needed assistance but, effectively, as cowards and traitors on the verge of ensuring that all the French suffering had been for nought. In such circumstances, it should not be surprising that the French began to look elsewhere for military support in ending the war. The Americans should have been the perfect partner for France. Both were republican nations with a commitment to the ideals of liberty. Both had a shared revolutionary heritage and, as a result, no great love of the British. The Americans were ready to be wooed in 1917 and the French had set about the task with gusto. Having skilfully outmanoeuvred the British equivalent (which had never been as welcome), the French Military Mission succeeded not just in getting the USA to send an expeditionary force

³William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p. 1.

following the declaration of war, but also in ensuring that most of those soldiers would at some point be attached to the French in order to expedite their training. The system that was offered to the Americans would have been absolutely perfect for the British in 1914 through to 1916. A dedicated system of training and introduction for a civilian army into the Western Front, with intensive training in specific skills, would have revolutionised the British fighting ability before the Somme. The British would never have agreed to such a system and the French would never have offered it, but the very fact that such a programme was offered by both France and Britain to the USA in 1917 indicates that both of the original Entente nations realised that there could be no repeat of the delays and shortcomings of the Kitchener Armies with the Americans.

However, despite all of this, the Americans did not turn out to be perfect allies either. Whilst willing to accept allied shipping across the Atlantic and, to varying degrees, the training programmes devised by Britain and France, neither General Pershing nor, indeed, his soldiers ever shook the view that France and Britain were, at a fundamental level, doing it wrong. Once out of the control of the British and French armies and able to do things his way, General Pershing's command of the AEF, whilst brave, seemed determined to revisit the battles of 1914 and 1915. If the French in 1916 had been unwilling to accept dead British heroes, they were even more reluctant to take similar US ones. Further to this, the manifestation of US politics drove wedges between them and the allies. French government and military officials struggled to reconcile their understanding of US liberty with the brutal treatment meted out to their black soldiers. The British found the Americans to be so empowered by their sense of democracy as to be practically impossible to command. By the war's end, this belief in a world safe for democracy would run the risk of robbing France of the reality of the victory that it had fought so hard to achieve.

Yet despite all of this, the alliance worked. Despite the shortcomings and the suspicions, the reconsiderations and the recriminations, on 11 November 1918 French, British, and US soldiers stood side by side on the Western Front. They were ready for the Armistice but equally ready to advance if it did not occur. When news of peace spread, they celebrated together. The collapse in relations in the immediate post-war period should not detract from the staggering nature of the achievement these men had secured.

Nor should it cause us to overlook the many similarities in experiences that occurred with these men from 1914 to 1918. It is highly notable how circular the nature of this coalition war actually was. When advancing into recently occupied territory in 1914, the British were overcome by spy fever and feared betrayal from every corner. When the Americans advanced late in the war in 1918, they experienced much the same thing. Both British and US soldiers, having a similar cultural approach to men from other races, found colonial soldiers to be a mixture of terrifying and peculiar. The obsession of these men with the 'natural fighting instincts' of Senegalese and Algerians and their supposedly cultural desire to collect bloody souvenirs speaks to both the cultures and curiosity of men reacting to situations they had not experienced before and could scarcely imagine. When the British lost confidence on their arrival at the front in 1916, the French reached out to assist them. When the Americans begin to realise what sort of conflict they are in, not only did the French help them, but Britain's own dominion troops did likewise. The relationship between the Americans and the 'English' may have been tense, but Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Scottish, and Irish soldiers were very well-disposed to these new allies. All of these men saw something of themselves in each other. Something not yet formed, still rough around the edges, but also marked with a confidence and a willingness to do things their own way. Such behaviour was frowned upon by the British military institution, but it was seen as a badge of honour among the assorted allies.

This study has not aimed to be an operational history of the Entente Alliance on the Western Front. Particular battles have been discussed and examined both for their influence on the alliance and for their importance on the progress of the war. But the focus was never simply on battles; it was on people. A transnational examination of how the soldiers of these three countries had actually interacted with each other and how those interactions were either affected by military events or how they in turn affected them. The final victory of the First World War cannot be understood in isolation. The defeat of Germany and the Central Powers was brought about by political, social, economic, and military pressures. However, an aspect of those pressures was the fact that, despite their best efforts, Germany could not split the alliance apart. They could drive wedges between them on the Western Front, they could force them into close quarters in POW camps, but aside from the defeat of Russia,

the Germans could not unlock the method of breaking the Entente in the west.

The sad reality is that it was the victory itself which put paid to the allied cause. The removal of Germany as a unifying objective released military figures, politicians, and ordinary soldiers from their obligation to cooperate and peacefully coexist. Into this vacuum came the desire to return home, the long-buried ill-feeling about military failures, disputes over societies and cultures, and the need to reestablish the national interest. The *Entente Cordiale* made itself. In 1919, it unmade itself just as decisively. Had Clemenceau been able to achieve his aim of guaranteeing French security whilst maintaining the alliance with Britain and the USA, things may have been very different. But the competing desires to define the Treaty of Versailles rendered such hopes impotent. Britain and the USA could not easily agree to a peace they believed to be overly harsh. France could not make them understand why they believed such harshness to be a necessity. The USA retreated into isolationism, Britain back to its own 'permanent interests', and France into a peculiar limbo of military and societal drift. None of the three combatants wished to fight a second war within two decades. None of them would ultimately be able to avoid it.

Despite this, though, understanding and appreciation of the alliance did not entirely fade away. Indeed, it still exists today. Though much misunderstood, the very term 'Entente Cordiale' continues as a staple of British vocabulary. Memorials to British, French, and US soldiers remain in France to this day. A statue to Marshal Foch stands outside Victoria Station in London. Visitors to *Les Invalides* in Paris are greeted by a bookstore that, certainly in recent years, has eulogised the US involvement in both World Wars. Even modern computer games have begun to examine the conflict and understand both its allied nature and the different soldiers who composed the *Entente* armies.⁴ The First World War Centenary has, at times, been a national affair, but there have also been moments of international remembrance and commemoration.

⁴Chris Kempshall, *The First World War in Computer Games* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Chris Kempshall, 'Pixel Lions—The Image of the Soldier in First World War Computer Games', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 19 October 2015, 656–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2015.1096665>.

In 1917, the cartoonist Archie Gunn composed a postcard image of a British, French, and American soldier joining hands in their shared goal. Their mission was supported by their shared ideals of 'Liberty and Union Now and Forever'. This sentiment, certainly for the inter-war years, went unfulfilled. But their union in pursuit of liberty lasted long enough to carry the three to victory. A flawed alliance it may have been, but a victorious one nonetheless.

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