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**UNWILLING ALLIES?: TOMMY-*POILU* RELATIONS ON THE  
WESTERN FRONT 1914-1918**

D.Phil Thesis

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree:

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University of Sussex

CHRIS KEMPSHALL DPHIL THESIS

Unwilling allies? Tommy-Poilu Relations on the Western Front 1914-1918

SUMMARY

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This thesis examines the relationships and interactions between British and French soldiers on the Western Front of the First World War. To date the historical approaches to inter-allied relations has been predominantly focused on those interactions taking place at governmental or command levels. Whilst previous studies have touched on the relations between common soldiers, this has often been within specific case studies. I have drawn particularly on the contemporary diaries, letters and written records of British soldiers within the Imperial War Museum and also the postal censorship records of the French army at the *Archives de l'armee de terre* in order to trace the nature and evolution of these relations across the war. My study covers the time-period of 1914-1918 and focuses on periods of sustained contact in 1914, 1916 and 1918.

This focus shows that the arrival of Kitchener's New Armies in 1915-16 was a crucial development in forming strong relations between British and French soldiers. British military command took little interest and made no substantial plans for ensuring friendly relations between soldiers of the two armies and, as a result, these early interactions were largely self-directed by the soldiers. They were also driven by the apparent insecurities of the British volunteer soldiers who viewed themselves as being less accomplished than their French fellows, who were largely well-disposed to welcoming and teaching the new British arrivals in order to achieve swift victory. I argue that, although serendipitous in nature, this uneven starting point allowed relations between British and French armies to evolve positively whilst allowing both sides to maintain a sense of their own national identity without having to overly sacrifice their own ideals. However, the French desire for a decisive victory and a professional response in the trenches led to a rupture in Tommy-Poilu relations following the British failures in 1918. This changed the dynamic between the two nations in the build up to, and aftermath of, the armistice and provided a prelude to the difficult inter-war relationships at governmental levels.

### **Acknowledgements**

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I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to my family, particularly my brother and Nan, for their support and interest in this project. However this study would not only never have been finished it would never have even begun without the love and support of my Mum and Step-Dad. A thesis that took longer to write than the war did to fight seems a poor offering in exchange but it is dedicated to them regardless.

## **Unwilling allies? Tommy-Poilu Relations on the Western Front 1914-1918**

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## **Introduction**

### **A grassroots trans-national history**

Historians tend to see the aims and objectives of the masses through the eyes of leaders or institutions that claim to represent popular interests. In this way the problems of the leaders become the problems of the class.<sup>1</sup>

There is a movement within the sphere of First World War studies towards a more trans-national approach to examining and researching the war. This is particularly visible through the recent activities and conferences of the International Society for First World War Studies, which has been pioneering examinations into other combatants and other fronts. This study is reflective of the movement towards new approaches to the First World War. It may still be rooted in the Western Front and in the two primary Entente nations, but its focus and approach are not towards the principal actors, the respective heads of armies and governments, but rather on the ordinary soldiers.

The narrative of Anglo-French relations has tended to highlight the rancour between the two neighbours and there has been much evidence to draw upon. Interactions have verged more towards conflict than co-operation. There have been hundreds of years of imperial rivalry that, even after the fall of Napoleon, still led to friction between the two nations despite the temporary alliance in the Crimea. The Entente Cordiale that brought Britain and France together to fight in the First World War was also a fractious affair that saw British and French generals regularly butting heads whilst leading politicians in the two capitals would attempt to gain a measure of control over the fighting. However, this image should not be viewed as the totality of Anglo-French relations and interactions. There are alternative views and sources from which a very different picture can be drawn.

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Lamb, *Mutinies; 1917-1920* (London: Solidarity, 1977). p.1



The scope and benefits of this study are multifaceted. At its simplest it is a social study into the interactions between ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. 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 British culture. However, the historiography has traditionally been incredibly Anglo-centric to the point where other national experiences have been pushed out of focus almost entirely. 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 purely civilian life. That they managed to form their own understandings and workable relationships speaks a great deal as to the common humanity and adaptability of these men. Additionally however, this study has very clear military implications. A symptom of the focus on the military and political actors of the war is the overlooking of what the actual soldiers were capable of achieving.

The allied setbacks of 1914 were not just defeats of strategy; they were defeats of co-operation. The British Expeditionary Force's (B.E.F.) commander Field Marshal Sir John French was undergoing a nervous breakdown and didn't trust any of the French armies around him. However, beneath him the men of the B.E.F. spoke practically no French and had no way of properly reaching out to and organising themselves with the French soldiers who passed around them. The B.E.F. became utterly isolated as a result and the allies came close to defeat. In 1916 by contrast the British and French soldiers were able to come to their own form of understanding to pass on experience and lay the foundations for the more adaptable relationships between British and French soldiers in 1918. The evolution and nature of the relationships built between the British and French soldiers needs to be understood as an additional factor in

explaining how and why the allies eventually proved successful in defeating Germany in 1918.

This study has focused on the experiences and interactions undertaken by the regular British and French soldiers in and around the Western Front. It has drawn upon the diaries and memoirs of British soldiers held in the Imperial War Museum archives, published memoirs by British and French soldiers, and the records of the *Commissions de contrôle postal* in Paris.<sup>2</sup> From these sources it is possible to see particular areas of evolution in the relationships between British and French soldiers across the duration of the war and from these identify particular trends and areas of key importance.

Principal amongst these is an overarching element that, whilst not surprising, needs to be understood and accepted; the soldiers have their own concerns and agendas that do not often mirror those of their commanding officers and leaders. Whilst Britain and France were allies and both shared the ultimate goal of winning the war, they were also primarily concerned with their own spheres of responsibility and their own national interests. These had been made very clear to General Sir John French at the deployment of the B.E.F. in 1914 and in many ways do not appear to have evolved very far since then. The interactions between the commanding generals and their aides therefore often took on a very different dynamic to that seen between the soldiers in the trenches. First of all discussions about imminent strategy and the movement of armies were undeniably important matters and, in military terms, outstripped the importance of many trench-based interactions. However, as both Philpott and Greenhalgh explain in detail, 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 took on a more pan-

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<sup>2</sup> The methodology and approaches to these sources will be discussed in detail below.

military appearance than their specific British-French aspect. Of course the personalities of the actors and some wider national characteristics come into play here, but many of the aspects of the conversations would likely be the same regardless of nationality because of the inherent focus on preserving each individual's national interests.

Throughout this study it is widely apparent that the political disputes and considerations of generals and wartime leaders do not filter down into the trenches and play any particular role in forming utilitarian opinions. 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.<sup>3</sup> However, these images and understandings did not translate into anything that those in the trenches could immediately recognise nor become interested in. Alongside this is the additional factor that both the British and French military commands took an extremely hands-off approach to considering and legislating for harmonious relations between their two groups of men. This is particularly prominent in the planning undertaken by the British for the initial deployment of the B.E.F. in 1914 and then the further deployment of Kitchener's New Armies in 1915 and 1916.<sup>4</sup> What is apparent from examining these plans is the distinct divergence between what was deemed necessary and worthy of consideration and what was not.

The need for interpreters to be deployed alongside the British soldiers was a matter examined and considered in great detail but even then the actual numbers of interpreters legislated for would ensure that they spent large portions of their time serving with divisional, battalion and regimental officers rather than having direct and lasting contact with the regular British soldiers. Further to this no substantive plans were made in regards to easing the newly arrived British soldiers into contact with

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<sup>3</sup> See p.185, and p.234

<sup>4</sup> See pp.75-78, and pp.120-123

their French counterparts or organising particular events or meetings between the two groups. Given the timeframe at the start of the war between the British arrival in France, their defeat at Mons and the subsequent retreat such plans would have likely never been implemented in the first place but that shouldn't detract from the fact that such a scenario had never been considered. With a lack of direction or structure from the officers above them regarding how to interact with their new allies the soldiers of Britain and France embarked upon an almost entirely self-directed process of introduction and interaction and it is from this process that the major themes and arguments of this thesis arise. As might be expected in a study that focuses on two countries in turn the results of this research and analysis do break down along national lines and whilst there are clear areas of similarity in reactions and contact between British and French soldiers there is no universal experience that can be said to encapsulate both.

### **British responses: 'Soldier' and 'Civilian'**

In regards to the British experience it is beneficial to think not of a single army and discuss the experiences of its soldiers over the course of the war but rather instead to consider two separate entities; the British Expeditionary Force deployed to France in 1914, and the arrival of Kitchener's New Armies from 1915 onwards. I make this distinction because of the dramatically different approaches both of these groups had to the war, France and the French. These can best be explained by understanding the predominant difference between the British army of 1914 and that which began arriving in 1915.

The men of 1914 represented and reflected the army institution of the time. They were already serving within the armed forces at the outbreak of the war and, as a result, were fully immersed in military and army culture. As part of their training they would already have at the very least a rough working knowledge of military tactics and practice. The men were possessed of a deal of confidence in their own abilities and a

particular view of what it took to be a good soldier. When confronted by the French army of 1914 and the circumstances surrounding the initial defeats in battle and the great retreat towards Paris, the British of 1914 react primarily as ‘soldiers’. The criticisms that emerge from British soldiers during the last months of 1914 towards the French often focus on their apparent lack of willingness to defend the British, their lack of soldierly appearance, the fear of betrayal by traitors, and the unwillingness of certain groups of French civilians to aid in the defence of their own country. These were matters that would have an immediate and recognisable impact on the military and tactical situation of those soldiers at that moment. This ‘soldier’ response can be viewed as synonymous with ‘tactical’ or ‘professional’ and represents a pragmatic approach to any situation; how will this affect the immediate military or tactical situation?

In comparison the men of Kitchener’s New Armies who arrived from 1915 onwards were not soldiers in the same way as those who had come before. They had volunteered (and later been conscripted) for service during the conflict and undergone the training provided to them but this did not turn a civilian into a soldier overnight. As a result when these men arrived in France and were confronted by both the war and French soldiers they did not predominantly react as ‘soldiers’, rather most reacted through the identity which best applied to them; as ‘civilians’. This ‘civilian’ approach was often marked by less pragmatic and more social reasons such as inquisitiveness, fear, curiosity, sympathy or, importantly, a mix of respect and self-doubt. They gave much less consideration to macro or micro military consequences, and this is particularly evidenced in 1916.

It is important to note that neither of these terms is supposed to be viewed as preferable to the other, rather they are simply two different forms of identity. We should not take from this that the ‘soldier’ model of response is in any way less fair or reasonable than the ‘civilian’. It is a method of response based on a clear logical

expression where the ultimate goal is the winning of the war, the defence of a particular area of the line or, at its most basic, a desire to survive the current situation. All interactions are then measured in regards to whether they help or hinder the achievement of those objectives. The objectives of the 'civilian' response are less easy to quantify because of the wider variety of motivations. They are almost more of a reflex than the 'soldier' responses in that the men expressing them often pay no thought at all to the wider military context. In addition a 'civilian' response could be just as negative as a 'soldier' one, often more so as they could be based upon long-held prejudices. The difference between the 'soldier' and the 'civilian' responses and the different time-periods they are predominant in can essentially be explained by the fact that the men of the B.E.F. in 1914 viewed themselves predominantly as soldiers whilst those men arriving at the front from 1915 onwards viewed themselves as civilians. Not only were they civilians but when confronted with the French army there was a clear manifestation of collective self-doubt concerning their own abilities compared with perceived French expertise. It is this difference between the British army of 1914 and that of 1916 and the inner-conflict that it created that is the key result of this thesis pertaining to the British.

From mid-1915 up to early 1918 interactions from the British side towards the French are largely motivated by the 'civilian' response rooted in their own sense of insecurity and perceived lack of martial ability. From this starting point they study the French army not with the same pride and confidence held by the B.E.F. of 1914 but rather as a group to be looked up to and potentially imitated. This makes 1916 the crucial year in the formation of the British army regarding both the French and the perception of their own ability. The British army that was deployed around the Somme became increasingly unsure of their own martial prowess when confronted with a French army that seemed far more proficient, confident and masculine than them. What emerged was a highly beneficial compromise where the British soldiers seemed willing to learn and the French soldiers seemed willing, in the most part, to teach and appear as good

hosts. The British army would come to increase its skill across 1916 and into 1917 and by 1918 would be possessed with the sort of soldierly confidence that had marked the B.E.F. of 1914. However, whilst the men of 1914 had never had a real opportunity to interact with the French before the battles of that year and 1915 had effectively destroyed it, the army of 1918 was built upon an evolution both of martial skill and French co-operation. It was this journey of evolution that meant that the army of 1918 was in many ways a mix of the abilities of 1914 and the friendships and interactions born in 1916, and from this the British army drew a degree of balance that would prove crucial.

### **French responses: Hope and Catastrophe**

As should be expected the French experience of fighting alongside their allies differs considerably from that of the British and is in many ways much less complicated than the ‘soldier’ and ‘civilian’ dichotomy that dictated British attitudes. This contrast should not however, be viewed purely as a representation of national difference but also of national circumstance. Regardless of whether the British were predominantly soldiers or civilians the constant of their situation was that they were an army fighting on foreign soil. It was not their homes, their people or their country being ravaged by the war around them. For the French however, this was a war to defend their own country, people and way of life. Everything about their relationship with the British should be viewed with this simple but crucial fact in mind.

The crucial period for the British in their relations with the French was in 1916 as the circumstances at the time allowed them to build their confidence over time. The French seemed more than willing to assist in welcoming this new army to the war and offering their services as hosts and teachers but this was not an entirely equal relationship. The French army wanted something from the British army that, at the time, it was not really capable of delivering; competence, skill and victory. It is with this aim that Greenhalgh’s model of ‘proximity’ and ‘success’, which will be

discussed in greater detail below, becomes important. At the points where the British and the French were in closest contact the French were able to see the attempts of British soldiers to learn and to improve and whilst the slow pace would frustrate them at points they were able to see the process with their own eyes. However, those French soldiers deployed near Verdun, for example, and having no contact with the British had no such point of reference and knew only that the British had heralded the arrival of their new army and yet there seemed to be no results to measure its worth.

What this created was a deeply formed divergence in the French attitude towards the British split between those who had the chance to watch their progress and those who did not. Those who were in contact with the British around the Somme built up some firm friendships with nearby British troops and there are plenty of examples of cross-national socialising and fraternisation. However, the primary objective of winning the war was always lurking behind these encounters for the French soldiers and this combined with the unequal periods of contact would lay the foundations for a catastrophe. The key period for the French was not 1916, as it was for the British, but rather 1918. Following the mutinies of 1917 there was an emergence of a French disillusioned determination to simply win the war. As a result when the British were unable to hold their own front during the German Spring Offensive of 1918 this military failure nearly destroyed all the hard work the British had done in winning over their allies. It is unclear if the British ever fully understood just how close this Tommy-*Poilu* Entente came to collapse but the French were in equal parts furious and horrified at being pushed once again to the brink of defeat and largely laid the blame squarely on the British and almost fell into the arms of the American army instead. Foch's halting of the Germans and the emerging desire from Woodrow Wilson to negotiate less stringent armistice terms would go some way to re-uniting the French and British soldiers but the relationship on the French side was badly damaged and the roots of inter-war disputes can perhaps be viewed in the disaster of 1918.



### **Chapter layouts**

The first chapter of this thesis seeks to examine the role particular institutions, primarily the army, played in the makeup of British and French societies from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century up to the beginning of the war. Further to this though it also seeks to re-examine the nature of the perceived ‘Anglo-French’ rivalry and the Great Power System and the role this played in the politics of both countries. From this understanding it then becomes possible to analyse the preparations, or lack thereof, for war in the run up to 1914.

Chapters Two, Three and Four all focus predominantly on the British experiences of fighting alongside the French in 1914, 1916 and 1918 respectively. Chapter Two examines the difficult relationships and military situation that greeted the original men of the B.E.F. and how the stress of battle, fear of spies, and lack of stability would hinder Tommy-*Poilu* relations for Britain’s first soldiers in France.

Chapter Three is focused on what would become the crucial period of Tommy-*Poilu* relations around the Somme in 1916. This was the period where the men of Kitchener’s New Armies arrived in France and would, through their dual sense of inferiority and curiosity towards the French begin to build the warm and co-operative relations that would carry the Tommy-*Poilu* Entente through 1917 and into 1918.

The primary concentration of Chapter Four is on the initial military setbacks and then eventual victory of 1918. 1918 would also prove to be a crucial year in Tommy-*Poilu* relations, but not for the British. This chapter serves to initially highlight the clear lack of understanding amongst the British of how their actions during the German Spring Offensives would come to be viewed by their French allies.

Chapters Five and Six focus on the French responses to British soldiers. In many ways these two chapters should not be viewed entirely in isolation; they are two

halves of a wider examination. Chapter Five takes in the records and published memoirs of individual soldiers to show the reactions of clearly identified men within the French military. Chapter Six uses the records of the *Commissions de contrôle postal* to then build a much wider image of the concerns of French soldiers regarding their allies. Between them these two chapters combine to give a more cohesive picture of French opinions on the British.

### **Methodology and approaches**

The majority of the accounts of British soldiers used in this study have originated from the archives of the Imperial War Museum's Department of Documents. In taking this approach I am effectively following the example of Malcolm Brown and his collection of rigorous studies drawn from the Imperial War Museum (IWM).<sup>5</sup> Of primary interest to me was access to documents such as letters and diaries that were written during, or as close as possible to, the events they described. Temporal distance from the event creates numerous methodological problems as described by both Dan Todman and Alistair Thomson who have both written at length on the effect time, and by extension cultural pressures, can have on the memory of First World War soldiers.<sup>6</sup> I have not utilised oral histories or interviews for my primary research regarding the British experiences in order to avoid issues arising regarding the changing of memory and recollection over time. However, it is important to acknowledge that some of the accounts drawn from the IWM have been either re-edited or constructed in the years following the war and therefore some of the considerations regarding oral history practice must also be applied here. Where relevant I have sought to highlight this discrepancy between the event and the creation of the document. Additionally I have, where relevant, highlighted the differences

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<sup>5</sup> Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of 1918: The Year of Victory* (London: Pan Books, 1999); Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum book of the Somme* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1996); Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Western Front* (London: Pan Books, 2001); Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton, *Tommy goes to war* (Stroud: Tempus, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Todman, *The Great War : myth and memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005). see Chapter Six, and; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac memories : living with the legend* (Melbourne ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). see Appendix One.

between any accounts written at the time and any later edited or altered accounts relating to the same author.

Furthermore there are some particular quirks to the records within the holdings of the IWM. The accounts left by the men of the original B.E.F. do differ quite markedly from those left by men after 1915. The B.E.F. of 1914 and 1915 would suffer high casualty rates, particularly amongst the infantry. This is reflected in the fact that the accounts I will draw upon for this period have a higher percentage of authors who served in the artillery than is the case for later chapters. It is entirely possible this reflects the disparity between the survival rates in the different branches of the service and thus is worthy of note here. It is also well recognised within the IWM that a great number of their records relate to soldiers who survived the war. This study does feature several accounts by soldiers who were killed in action but it is still important to note that the pool of documents I drew from was statistically slanted in favour of those who survived. From the position of this study this is actually of great benefit as it increased the chances of following soldiers right across the war and charting the evolution of their experiences and interactions with the French army. However, particularly in regards to 1914 and 1916 those British soldiers that are killed would likely have had different attitudes and characteristics compared to some of those who survived. As mentioned above the 1914 records are drawn predominantly from the artillery which means that the experiences of wider infantry soldiers has been lost both from the historical record as a whole and, as a further result, from this study. Furthermore the soldiers who feature in this study who are then killed often prove to be some of the most useful sources. Men such as Loyd and Macardle for example both produce a great deal of insightful and considered writing regarding the French and their deaths deny the opportunity for these experiences to continue to evolve and draw clearer conclusions.

The selection of suitable British subjects was made in accordance with a particular set of criteria created in order to achieve my research objectives. The first and most logical of which was to create a pool of potential candidates who mentioned the French army in some way, and this was achieved through repeated and stratified searches of the IWM document database abstracts. However, from within this pool I applied further criteria. As stated above this is a study aimed at exploring the interactions between regular British and French soldiers. Therefore I was not primarily interested in the writings and experiences of those from the upper echelons of command. The majority of subjects for this study therefore do not hold a rank any higher than Lieutenant. There are some departures from this with men being promoted during the course of the war or where a soldier of a greater rank offers evidence that is of very clear worth and could not justifiably be omitted but these instances are firmly in the minority.

Further to this the breadth of this study was built around three particular time periods where contact between British and French soldiers was frequent and guaranteed. These periods were the Battle of the Marne in 1914, the Battle of the Somme in 1916, and the Hundred Days Offensive in 1918. Therefore subjects were selected in regard to their presence and activities during any of these time periods with higher preference given to those who appeared in multiple periods and could therefore have their experiences charted across the war. Finally, as discussed above, further preference was given to those soldiers whose records were created in closest temporal proximity to the events that they described. There were then further issues regarding the scattered deployment of these men to avoid creating a study overpopulated with soldiers from a few specific military divisions and this is discussed in greater detail below with regard to good life history practice. The details of all British soldiers drawn from the IWM and featured in this thesis can be found in Appendix One.

Because of the selection criteria utilised and outlined above it has been possible for this study to draw on a longitudinal sample of certain writers and contributors who wrote at varying points in the war but whose experiences have either; a) crossed over into multiple years, b) therefore been used in multiple chapters of this study, or, c) continued to be considered or written about in the post-war period for wider publication. To be able to utilise experiences and life writing that covers a greater time period is of clear research and methodological benefit as it helps eliminate any concerns over repeated changes to the research sample. The dual natures of life history research and soldiers in warfare do not necessarily lend themselves to guaranteed longevity, which could be problematic for a study that is aimed with assessing changing attitudes over time. However, through the selection of my contributors I have been able to build upon a core group who either survived or wrote (and often both) for a prolonged period during the war and therefore created a useful comparison for evolution over time.

The members of this longitudinal group of British soldiers are as follows; William Henry Bloor whose diary covered the period from November 1915 up until his death in January 1918. R Cude, one of the most important contributors of this entire study, kept detailed and regular diaries from his arrival in France in 1915 up until his departure after the war. G W Durham who wrote diaries and letters regularly from 1914 to the end of 1916. L Gameson who wrote his diaries from 1916 to 1918 and then collated his diaries in the 1960s. Harry Gore who, likewise, was a diarist from 1916-1918 and had his records then collated by his son after death. Both C. A. Hartley and F. C. Gilman served with the French *Section Sanitaire Anglaise* ambulance divisions during the war and both men kept diaries of their activities from 1916 to 1918. Percy Arthur Glock served with several Royal Artillery units during 1915 and 1916 when he was keeping a diary. Cyril Helm recorded diaries during 1914-1915. F Mulliss served in the Duke of Cambridge's Own, Middlesex Regiment from 1915 until 1918 and then collected his experiences into post-war memoirs. C. R. Smith kept

diaries of his wartime experiences with “The Buffs” during 1915 and 1916. O.P. Taylor served with a Heavy Trench Mortar Battery from 1916 through into 1918 and kept a diary during this period. Lionel Tennyson would record his experiences both during the war and then release an edited account of these in his post-war memoirs. W. Graham Wallace served from 1914-1918 and would also record his experiences in a collated post-war diary. Other soldiers would, to lesser extents, have diaries and records that would carry over time periods but with the fourteen examples given it has been possible to build in an element of a core control group from which to examine the changing attitudes regarding British and French soldiers without having to regularly change the subjects themselves. The presence of these longitudinal samples does not of course guarantee the evolutions that might be hoped for nor does it guarantee that each of these individuals will appear substantially in each chapter but their wider experiences do still provide the opportunity for wider analysis.

When taking the entire British sample of soldiers as a whole it totals forty-one individuals spread across the three chapters with fourteen featuring in Chapter Two, another fourteen in Chapter Three and fourteen again featuring in Chapter Four. There are some cross overs as explained above but the majority of these men will appear predominantly in a single chapter or time period with most sampled soldiers arriving from 1915 onwards. The first fourteen soldiers featuring in Chapter Two all appear to have been professional soldiers at the outbreak of war but, crucially in regards to this study, not many of them continue their diaries or recorded recollections after the Spring of 1915. The men that come to replace them all appear to have either been reservists called up in response to the war or volunteers to the army. There is nothing in any of the records of the soldiers I have studied that suggest any of them were ever conscripted into the armed forces and many if not all of these soldiers were already in the army by the end of 1916. Fourteen of the men studied would hold the rank of Lieutenant, three were Captains and there were two Corporals of varying rank. The rest of the men either held basic Private rank (or the artillery equivalent of ‘Gunner’)

or their rank has not been fully recorded within the archives themselves. This oversight suggests that they were lacking in substantive rank as those who had been promoted to Lieutenant or above had their positions recorded with much greater reliability and regularity. Ten of the soldiers sampled in this study served in assorted branches of Artillery and of these six men were serving there in 1914. Only one soldier served in the Cavalry whilst two soldiers served in the Royal Engineers, three served in British or French Ambulance services, and two in Cyclist Companies. The rest of the men served exclusively in infantry roles, amongst which I include the Machine Gun Corps.

Because of the time periods covered during the defined chapters there are numerous examples of men serving and writing during different time periods who then do not feature heavily within particular chapters. In total there are twenty-three men serving and writing during 1914-1915, seventeen during 1916 and seventeen from 1917-1918. The precise details of the soldiers who feature in each time period of this study can be found within the accompanying appendices with those featured in the 1914-1915 period of Chapter Two available in Appendix 1.1. Those soldiers serving in 1916 and featuring in Chapter Three are found in Appendix 1.2. Finally, those soldiers serving from 1917-1918 and who appear in Chapter Four are located in Appendix 1.3. Additionally, and where I feel it adds to the record, I have included in the appendices further information regarding individual soldiers, their service and the creation or disposition of their written records.

The sources relating to the French army have, however, been drawn from slightly different means. Whereas I have made use of the IWM collection of original documents for individual British soldiers, finding similar usable equivalents for the French has been slightly more problematic. With this in mind I have drawn instead on published and distributed accounts by French soldiers that feature interactions with the British. There are numerous examples of French soldiers having had their war

experiences published in the post-war era. However, the same difficulties face these sources as their British equivalents; whilst there is no shortage of accounts of wartime experience a relative minority of them mention the British or the other Allied soldiers. To extend the available sources I have also drawn upon edited compilations of French soldiers' diaries and letters. This obviously raises questions about the representative nature of these accounts (which is where the quantitative evidence comes in and will be discussed shortly) but for practical purposes it means that the research has to take place within a limited pool that can be difficult to track down. Despite this, there are useful accounts and evidence to be drawn upon. Similarly to the selection of the British accounts the initial criteria for potential inclusion in this study was whether or not the sources discussed the British. As before I also aimed to draw upon regular soldiers who had been present at one or more of the Marne, the Somme or the Hundred Days but this was less of a requirement than for the British for several reasons. Primarily because the pool of potentially published French soldiers writing about the British was much narrower than the records returned by searching the IWM. There were also far more French soldiers than British soldiers throughout the war and this increased the number of eligible regular soldiers.

However, there are more French soldiers included in this study that either held officer positions or were directly liaising or being exchanged with the British army. Several of the French contributions included in this study are of such unique value that the actual circumstance of the author themselves had to be balanced out against the worth of the account. Despite this however, I have attempted to avoid overly using records from French translators and interpreters assigned to the British army unless they were of very specific and unavoidable relevance. This decision was made so as not to encroach upon and duplicate the forthcoming research of Franziska Heimburger at *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* and Trinity College Dublin who is working on that exact topic.



Additionally to provide a wider body of evidence and make up for any shortfall in ‘regular’ soldiers I have also drawn heavily from a source that is unique to the study of the French for the First World War; the reports of the *Commissions de contrôle postal* located at the *Archives de l’armee de terre*. These records are from the French postal censors and chart the areas of interest and concern for the entire French army from 1916 onwards. Their utilisation provides this study with a vast pool of information and potential correspondence from which to find the feelings of French soldiers towards the British. Because this source differs so dramatically from the more traditional documents and artefacts discussed above I will deal with the methodology and history of the *Commission* in isolation at the beginning of Chapter Six.

Because of the slightly different source base drawn from the *Commission* it has not been possible to entirely replicate the same longitudinal approach for the French subjects as has been previously discussed for the British. However, every effort has been made to use soldiers who created extensive and long-reaching memoirs, as already discussed above, and to select armies from the AAT that would provide a measure of institutional consistency so as to make the conclusions drawn as secure as possible given the expected variations regarding the changing of subjects over time.

Whilst there are differences between the creation and dissemination of these assorted sources there are clear methodological questions that need to be considered to ensure an informed and responsible utilisation. Ken Plummer has written on the key tension at the heart of life documents and their use as research.

At the very core of life documents is a very problematic subject matter. We have here stories – discourses – that aim to capture the continuous, lived flow of historically situated phenomenal experience, with all the ambiguity, variability, malleability and even uniqueness that such experience implies. ... But if a study fails to get this ‘intimate familiarity’ with a life, then such research must run the risk of simply getting it

wrong: of speculating, abstracting and theorising at too great a remove; and worst of all, of substituting the researcher's own view for that of the participant.<sup>7</sup>

Because of their individual nature, in reality life stories can speak only of the experiences of the author or subject themselves. However, that is not to say they cannot be used to extrapolate wider conclusions as the very act of telling a tale is 'very much a product of a culture'.<sup>8</sup> What is necessary is to strike the right balance between an understanding of the individual's experience and the wider conclusions and contexts it may reveal. This must be accomplished without allowing the expectation of result to displace the actual result. This is clearly of great relevance when it comes to understanding the best methods of utilising the surviving records of First World War soldiers. In order to maintain this ethical and intellectual balance I have sought to institute several methodological checks. Primarily I have drawn documents and testimony from as wide a sample of soldiers as possible in order to both highlight the recurring themes whilst also mitigating for any accusations of wildly divergent individual experiences that don't adequately make a 'whole'. Further to this I have attempted to draw on records, particularly for the British soldiers within the IWM, that were created by men in different divisions, regiments and battalions in order to avoid any possibility of narrow or localised prejudices that could affect the results of the research.

It must also be understood that whilst life-writing documents are a reflection of individual experience they are not necessarily a firm representation of consistent or clear responses on a given topic.

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Plummer, *Documents of life, 2, An invitation to critical humanism, 2nd ed* (London: SAGE, 2000). p.37

<sup>8</sup> Plummer, p.41

Researchers seek consistency in subjects' responses when subjects' lives are often inconsistent. The life history technique is peculiarly suited to discovering the confusions, ambiguities and contradictions that are played in everyday experiences.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned above the circumstances encountered by these ordinary people during the First World War were, by any definition, extraordinary. This needs to be taken into firm consideration when it comes to any analysis of their writings and the conclusions they seem to be drawing. It is at this point where the greatest danger of a researcher projecting their own conclusions onto their subject is at its most prominent. It is not the job of the historian to necessarily declare what they believe their subject meant to say. However, there is a difference between overriding the writing of the subject and offering what you believe to be additional extenuating information and motivations that might add depth to a particular piece of writing or that you suspect is actually driving a particular reaction. Dan Goodley's description of 'non-participatory ethnographic research', which in many regards is my approach regarding individual soldiers' records, makes this point even more clearly.<sup>10</sup> This is most relevant to 1914 during the discussion of the 'spy fever' gripping British soldiers and how it then manifests itself in their writing.<sup>11</sup>

It is also necessary to give proper consideration as to what the created purpose of these diaries and letters may have been. Margaretta Jolly has written, with a particular view towards letters but I feel it can equally be applied to diaries, on notions of both life writing as a pragmatic career in itself, and of the therapeutic benefits of life writing. If we consider the first of these to begin with, particularly in regards to contributors such as Lionel Tennyson then we must acknowledge that there is a clear possibility that for some the act of recording their wartime experiences was done with an eye to future career or publishing opportunities. This should not be viewed as

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<sup>9</sup> Plummer, p.40

<sup>10</sup> Dan Goodley, *Researching life stories: method, theory and analyses in a biographical age* (London: Routledge, 2004). pp.56-60

<sup>11</sup> See pp.101-111

criticism; rather it is simply an extra consideration that must be made when approaching some of these documents. Jolly's article on the subject focuses in part on striking the right balance between the life writer and their work and the critic/reader and understanding that the gap 'between creative and critical practice may to a degree reflect creative versus intellectual personalities'.<sup>12</sup> There is an issue regarding any potential betrayal of trust for the reader regarding the constructed notion of a life document but this is not a problem restricted only to those writers who have a view to future publication. To believe that 'normal' documents are less constructed as a result would be a grave methodological mistake.

With regard to this point, Jolly's argument regarding the therapeutic nature of letter writing, or indeed life writing in general, is of clear relevance to this study. Soldiers in wartime who would face regular reminders of their own mortality and their own fears could easily find some form of relief through their own writing. Jolly describes the role of letter writing as part of a clinical therapy procedure but her findings on the matter do have a clear transference into First World War diary writing.

The emphasis on writing for oneself, getting away from an internal censor that may tell you that you cannot write or express your needs, seems belied by the reappearance of alternative forms of instruction which urge the expression of needs and traumas, and which admonish the resistant or faint-hearted writer.<sup>13</sup>

This matter goes right to the heart, once again, of the purpose of the diaries and records both for the creator and for any future theoretical reader. During the heightened periods of fear and paranoia of the 1914 'Spy Crisis' for example there is ample room for suggestion that the diaries of British soldiers were used as a place to alleviate their own concerns, fears and stresses following regular German artillery

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<sup>12</sup> Margaretta Jolly, "Life Writing as Critical Creative Practice," *Literature Compass* 8, no. 12 (2011).

<sup>13</sup> Margaretta Jolly, "What I Never Wanted to Tell You: Therapeutic Letter Writing in Cultural Context," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32, no. 1 (2011).

attacks. In these circumstances the diaries take on a more therapeutic role rather than as an object of record. This is not always the case of course and life writing records, diaries in particular, are almost infinitely changeable and adaptable to meet whatever the author requires them to be at any given time. For the periods when these records do have a role in the psychological well being of the author then Jolly's work is important to understand both how and why. Additionally given the nature of some of the recorded events in these diaries and the reasons the author may have felt motivated to record them, then it is important to recognise the emotional aspects of both the record and the research. David W. Jones has written on the practice and considerations of oral history interviews that confront 'distressing' subjects. Whilst as discussed above this study does not utilise oral history I feel that the considerations and frameworks he discusses are of relevant consideration not just in understanding the subjects and authors but also in martialling my own responses to difficult topics and imagery contained within the records.<sup>14</sup>

The negative aspects and emotions within the records are not the only ones that require further interrogation though. This is a study concerned with understanding how and why positive reactions occurred between British and French soldiers. Through the evidence that will be presented below I aim to build a cohesive and understandable framework for understanding these interactions but even so it is also necessary to understand these positive emotional responses further. Gazeley and Langhamer have made use of the records of Mass Observation (MO) to examine notions of happiness in Bolton during the 1930s and 1940s. In regards to location and circumstance there may not appear to be great similarities between the men of the First World War and these MO responders, but the conclusions and analysis of Gazeley and Langhamer do produce results that can be considered in relation to the emergence of happiness amongst British soldiers. It is with Gazeley and Langhamer's

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<sup>14</sup> Jones, David W. in Barbara Harrison, *Life story research*, V. 4 (Los Angeles, Calif London: SAGE, 2009).

declaration that ‘the most powerful discursive evidence of the factor considered ... to be a vital pre-requisite for happiness: security’ that is of possible interest.<sup>15</sup> ‘Security’ being so important carries a direct relevance into this study particularly in regards to the reactions and responses of British soldiers. At times, particularly in 1916, I speak of the increasing ‘warmth’ from British soldiers directed towards their French counterparts. I feel that this emotion in particular can be linked in to Gazeley and Langhamer’s point on security. It is important not to overstate the potential relationship between security in 1930s Bolton and the trenches of the First World War, they are clearly very different worlds. However I do think it is an area worth considering. Security itself can be a multi-faceted concept with the French soldiers not simply providing an actual military security to the British but also a form of emotional security through their willingness to act as guides and teachers. It is this dual security of both physical and emotional consideration that I believe is important in understanding where these feelings of happiness from the British arise.

Further to these issues is the obvious requirement of providing adequate translations for material originally created in French. Whilst it relates principally to the act of translation for oral history Susan K. Burton has written on the methodological requirements regarding translation and many of her themes carry across into life writing sources as well.<sup>16</sup> The French sources that I have used have differed between French language and those that have already been translated. I have tried to ensure that sources were not rejected simply because of their language. All translation work undertaken has gone through multiple stages to ensure the highest accuracy. The initial stage was a preliminary translation of material undertaken by myself and assisted by written and electronic translation aids. Following this a more comprehensive translation was undertaken on the material deemed most relevant also

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<sup>15</sup> Ian Gazeley and Claire Langhamer, "The Meanings of Happiness in Mass Observation’s Bolton," *History Workshop Journal* (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Susan K. Burton in Alistair Thomson and Robert Perks, *The oral history reader*, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 2006). pp.166-177

undertaken by myself whilst conversing and discussing all the material with several French native speakers. Where there was any confusion over ambiguity or interpretation of meaning in these sources all final translation meanings were made by myself. Further to this whilst the English translations are included in the body of this thesis I have also placed the original French in Appendix Two. It goes without saying that any errors in translation are entirely my responsibility.

Further to these methodological questions and practices I have further supplemented choices of subject and focus with existing studies and historiographies that have either a direct relevance to my topic or provide the wider contextual framework that it inhabits.

### **Greenhalgh: Proximity and Success**

Greenhalgh has been the principal source for the existing studies on relations between British and French soldiers. At the centre of this topic are two articles concerned with the Battle of the Somme which present the dual experiences of French soldiers. On the one hand there is clear frustration at the seeming inability of the British army and on the other there is an example of the ability and benefits of warm co-operation between the two armed forces. However, more than just these two examples, Greenhalgh also provides a framework for understanding and defining some of these inter-national interactions which has been useful when analysing the British side. The framework that Greenhalgh creates and the need to understand it are at the heart of this section.

Her first study on this topic was based on evidence from three differing areas and largely replicates the methodology applied in this thesis.

Three sources have been used to provide the evidence on which to base judgements of the state of French opinion. The first consists of the diaries, memoirs and letters

(both published and unpublished) of participants. The second is the unrivalled barometer of opinion provided by the records of the army postal control service. Each French army had a postal control commission which read and censored an enormous volume of the letters exchanged between the armies and the civilian zones. The third is derived from the second. The French general staff used the reports of the postal control commissions to draw up regular evaluations of army morale. Taken together, these three sources give at least as good a basis for judgements as, say, modern telephone polling techniques with their small samples and extrapolated results.<sup>17</sup>

Using this dataset, Greenhalgh surveyed opinions of French soldiers around the Somme to the British and theorised that 'French attitudes towards their British ally fluctuated according to two factors; proximity and success'.<sup>18</sup> This is a point I agree with in principal, however, there are some variations I feel need to be made in order to update and hone the model. As discussed above I selected my sources based upon sustained proximity between British and French soldiers. Whilst there are periods of time when there was a greater distance between my selected contributors, be they British or French, I do not make a great intervention into the opinions of those soldiers who had little contact with their allied fellows. However, because my study is much wider in scope than Greenhalgh's original *Parade Ground Soldiers* article I can highlight some of the discrepancies regarding distance that exist in the sources and provide a greater understanding of what constituted a success or a failure and why reactions to these can differ depending on circumstances. It is from this position that I contend whilst 'proximity' is an important aspect in forming positive French responses to the British that it is 'success' that proves the constant deciding factor.

In order to explain these adaptations I will make use of the following contingency table to highlight which criteria I believe are most likely to produce a positive evaluation of the British army from the French. There can, of course, never be a

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<sup>17</sup> E. Greenhalgh, "'Parade ground soldiers': French army assessments of the British on the Somme in 1916," *Journal of Military History* 63, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>18</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)



guarantee regarding responses but through the evidence I will come to present I believe that it is ‘success’ that produces the most consistently reliable reactions for evaluation.

	<b>Success</b>	<b>Failure</b>
<b>Near</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO/YES (Qualified)</b>
<b>Far</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

Table 1: Success and Proximity Contingency Table

The principal issue regarding proximity and distance is not actually represented by the British but rather the Russians towards whom Greenhalgh’s formula does not reasonably cover the reactions of the French. Once the Russians drop out of the war the French turn very strongly against their former ally but at times, when contact with the Russians had been minimal, the French seemed to base their opinions of them upon popular notions of ‘the Russian hordes’ that ‘would sweep into Germany from the east’ rather than any realistic notion of what the Russians were capable of.<sup>19</sup> This sort of occurrence would suggest that there is an extra level for defining relations that goes beyond both ‘proximity’ and ‘success’ and which takes in 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.

Furthermore the notion of ‘failure’ must also be qualified. Whilst proximity to the British would not necessarily produce positive reactions, particularly if it meant that the French were close enough to see the British struggle, it is also the case that

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<sup>19</sup> Jamie H. Cockfield, *With Snow on their Boots* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998). p.5.

‘success’ itself can be a relative concept. In her article focusing on the Anglo-French assaults on Falfemont Farm during the Battle of the Somme, Greenhalgh explains that relations between the British and French soldiers stationed along the point of attack had been warm, friendly and marked by co-operation.

Not only were relations good, but the men had already undertaken joint operations. On 20 July the British had offered, ‘in a fine gesture of spontaneous friendship’ (the words of the French official history), to cover the left of a French attack on Hem by attacking around Maltz Horn Farm. Although the British units were back in their trenches by the start of the afternoon, the French division had reached all its objectives.<sup>20</sup>

When the original attacks on the position failed to achieve a favourable result, relations between the two groups of soldiers do not appear to have been greatly damaged by it.

So, during July, little had been achieved since the decision was taken to capture the portion of the German line that included Falfemont Farm. The reasons were the poor weather and, more importantly, the penny-packet methods of attack. The French were unable to move so long as the British did not move their line forward. Likewise, the British had been unable to move successfully on Guillemont because of the French being pinned down further south. Except for the minor success of Maltz Horn Farm, little had been achieved, and the consequent risk to harmonious allied relations remained.<sup>21</sup>

The ‘risk to harmonious allied relations’ to which Greenhalgh refers does not seem to be those relations between the soldiers, but rather the interactions between the competing high commands. The notion of ‘success’ can take on quite a fluid appearance based upon examples like this, because the French soldiers, as shall be

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<sup>20</sup> E. 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 (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Greenhalgh (2003)

investigated further in a forthcoming section, whilst not reluctant to criticise British soldiers became adept at spotting the difference between a soldierly failure and one of planning and direction. Therefore, the lack of success in these early attempts at Falfemont was not ascribed to the British soldiers and, as a result, allowed the two groups to continue to operate effectively alongside each other. French proximity to the British during the 1918 German Offensive and the subsequent British retreat would cause an outpouring of anger and recrimination, as the French were quick to castigate their ally for the failure to hold the line. This again showed that proximity to the British did not guarantee anything in itself and that it was the French evaluations of British success that would prove the crucial deciding factor.

Whilst both distance and failure could therefore become relative concepts, important on their own terms but also open to further interpretation, it was success that remained a constant. French soldiers who were closely deployed alongside the British on the Somme soon came to recognise their bravery and courage in battle even if they did question their leadership and overall tactics. Word of military successes elsewhere on the front spread widely within all armies and both British and French soldiers would react to stories of success by their allies (even the Russians; again highlighting the limitations of distance) with a sense of approval. Success was clearly easier to evaluate at closer proximity but even rumours of a military success by one allied army or another was enough to produce a positive reaction.

This outcome also strengthens the suggestion that as the war meant very different things to British and French soldiers that it was the French requirement for British capability that took dominance in their evaluations. When all interactions are measured, to greater or lesser extent, against the criteria of 'success' then the differences in relationship, particularly in 1918, become much clearer.

### **Existing Studies and Historiography**

In addition to Greenhalgh's two articles her book *Victory through Coalition* has also been of great use to this study providing as it does a thoroughly well-researched examination of the policy decisions and command infrastructures that guided the Anglo-French Entente. Alongside this Philpott's *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-1918* provides an additional insight into the inner-workings of the Entente Cordiale. The perspectives of Greenhalgh and Philpott have not always been fully compatible with one another, as will be discussed below, but the two publications do provide a wider view of the internal politics of the alliance even if they do not necessarily share the same overall conclusions.

Separate from the studies done by Greenhalgh and Philpott, Craig Gibson's thesis *Relations between the British Army and the Civilian Populations on the Western Front, 1914-1918* is highly relevant to this study. Whilst there are not many areas of direct crossover between my study and Gibson's they do in many ways represent two sides of the same coin and together can be used to build a comprehensive picture of the competing interactions going on across the Western Front throughout the war. Gibson's thesis is extremely well researched and offers up a vivid image of the different political conflicts that both British soldiers and French and Belgian civilians experienced when they came into contact. Further to this it also shows the difficulty of trying to fully rationalise or define how and why particular concepts originated. The most important result of Gibson's work was to directly challenge what he calls the myth that 'contacts between British soldiers and French and Flemish inhabitants on the western front' were 'negligible, ephemeral, and more significantly, of little importance to the British war effort'.<sup>22</sup> Gibson declares that 'even a cursory glance at officer and soldiers' letters, diaries, and memoirs' showed that this existing image was not based in reality and that the roles of civilians had a great impact on the

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<sup>22</sup> Kenneth Craig Gibson, "Relations between the British Army and the Civilian Populations on the Western Front, 1914-1918" (University of Leeds, 1998). p.222

experiences of British soldiers for both good and ill. This situation has then been replicated within my own study as it has become increasingly clear over time that the relationships between British and French soldiers were of far greater importance to both the soldiers social situation and the general military situation of the war than had been previously understood or appreciated.

Whilst the field of Tommy-Poilu relations has been largely untapped beyond aspects within the above studies the social aspects of Anglo-French interactions, experiences and reactions to the First World War have been the source of further study. John Horne's examination of the labour movements in Britain and France in *Labour at War* has been of interest to this study in regards to understanding the public spheres in both countries throughout the war. The First World War was a 'Total War' and required the combatants to mobilise their entire societies. Whilst this thesis is focused on the relationships between soldiers it is also borne of a new movement to see wartime experience as being spread further afield than just the Western Front trenches and comparative studies regarding British and French civilians and workers are of great interest. Similarly Frank Field's *British and French writers of the First World War* has proved equally valuable in examining the different trends, techniques and approaches held by writers of both nationalities.

In covering the key battles of the Marne, the Somme and the Hundred Days Offensive of 1914, 1916 and 1918 respectively I have made use of the following studies. I have drawn particularly from van Hartesveldt's collected annotated bibliography *The Battles of the British Expeditionary Forces* with regard to the fighting in 1914. Van Hartesveldt's study manages to simultaneously be an excellent entry source for wider reading for the period and being a useful summation of the key events whilst Pierre Miquel's *La bataille de la Marne* provides a useful French perspective. Alongside this Robin Neillands' *The Old Contemptibles* and Lyn MacDonald's *1915: The Death of*

*Innocence* have both proved useful regarding the makeup and activities of the B.E.F. during 1914 and 1915.

One of the most enduring images of the Somme originates from A J P Taylor and his hugely critical assertion that 'the Somme set the picture by which future generations would view the First World War'. However, Taylor was by no means alone in making such arguments, particularly during the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> The events of 1 July 1916, with 57,470 casualties of which 19,240 were killed, have become a dominating force within British consciousness which has led to a narrowing of focus away from the rest of the battle, indeed Philpott refers to a '1 July Syndrome'.<sup>24</sup> The view of the Somme has, however, been the subject of attempted revisions with more of these appearing during recent years. This has not always been a harmonious development however, Greenhalgh and Philpott traded academic articles in the journal *War in History* from 1999-2003 focusing on the motivations behind the Somme offensive, with particular regards to Haig's intentions and the relationship between that front and the fighting at Verdun.<sup>25</sup> This debate eventually culminated most recently with the release of Philpott's *Bloody Victory* in 2009 which sought to examine the Somme in the wider strategic and political context and also evaluate the British efforts alongside their French allies. There are other key texts relating to the study of the Somme, particularly Prior and Wilson's 2005 book *The Somme*, Peter Hart's 2005 *The Somme* and Malcolm Brown's 1996 *Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*. Whilst considering the wider tactical and strategic issues of the war (particularly Prior, Wilson and Hart) they have also drawn on the diaries and personal writings of the soldiers in the theatre (with Brown working exclusively from within the Imperial War Museum's archives) to reconstruct the events of the battle.

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<sup>23</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: an illustrated history* (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p.140.

<sup>24</sup> Brown (1996) p.92, and, William Philpott, *Bloody victory: the sacrifice on the Somme and the making of the twentieth century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), p.599.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "Why the British were on the Somme in 1916," *War in History* 6, no. 2 (1999). Followed by; William Philpott, "Why the British were really on the Somme: A reply to Elizabeth Greenhalgh," *War in History* 9, no. 4 (2002). Finally; Elizabeth Greenhalgh, "Flames over the Somme: A retort to William Philpott," *War in History* 10, no. 3 (2003).

In regards to 1918, as Greenhalgh explains, a thorough study of these final battles of the war has yet to be undertaken.<sup>26</sup> Greenhalgh herself provides a good summation of the events within the allied command structures during 1918, particularly in reference to the Entente's reaction to the German offensives and the eventual rise of General Ferdinand Foch to taking command of the Allied armies.<sup>27</sup> David Stevenson's *With our backs to the wall* presents a useful breakdown of the changing military situations at the end of the war, with particularly valuable references to the intervention of American soldiers.<sup>28</sup> Philpott provides two additional useful contributions to the subject. Firstly with his work on Anglo-French relations and tactics, which alongside Greenhalgh's *Victory through Coalition* aids in providing an insight into the structure of allied military command.<sup>29</sup> In more particular military terms, one of the later chapters of his work *Bloody Victory* also deals with some of the fighting on the Somme during 1918.<sup>30</sup> Additionally Peter Hart's work *1918: A Very British Victory* gives an analysis of the role the B.E.F. played in securing the final victory in 1918.<sup>31</sup> For an extra dimension on the final days of the war both on the Western Front and within a rapidly disintegrating Germany, Nicholas Best provides a very readable study of the last seven days of the First World War.<sup>32</sup>

When it comes to studies focusing on the individual experiences of the French and British armies there is something of a divide. In regards to the British army many of the aforementioned texts focus on them almost to the exclusion of other nationalities. Therefore works on the Somme, in particular, often have a great deal of information

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Greenhalgh, *Victory through coalition : Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)., p. 186

<sup>27</sup> Greenhalgh (2008), see Chapters 8 & 9

<sup>28</sup> D. Stevenson, *With our backs to the wall; victory and defeat in 1918* (London: Allen Lane, 2011)., see Chapters 15 & 16

<sup>29</sup> William Philpott, *Anglo-French relations and strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> Philpott (2009) see Chapter 14

<sup>31</sup> Peter Hart, *1918 : a very British victory* (London: Phoenix, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Nicholas Best, *The greatest day in history : how the Great War really ended* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008).

and concentration on the history and build up of the British army. However, De Groot's *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* and collected accounts from Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices* series alongside the works of Malcolm Brown, discussed above, have been beneficial in placing the British army in a social sphere and in building up the wider general context and chronology of the war.

For the French army key texts have been Robert Doughty's *Pyrrhic Victory* and Anthony Clayton's *Paths of Glory*. Doughty in particular is an exhaustive study of the French Army across the war and includes both the wider political situation and context as well as the major battles and engagements that it would undertake. Audoin-Rouzeau, Becker and Smith are three of the key figures in regards to the French experience of war. The two principle texts I have utilised are Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker's *14-18 Understanding the Great War* and Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker's *France and the Great War 1914-1918*. This trio of historians has probably contributed more to the understanding of the war in French modern culture as well as the pressures and motivations of France as a country and the French as a people during the conflict than anyone else.

I argue that this study creates through my selection and approach to the primary sources discussed above and substantiated by the existing historiography a rounded and intriguing image of the relations between the British Tommy and the French *Poilu* across the course of the war. Before entering into that evidence however, it is necessary to begin by first examining the historical context, and social and political climate that gave birth to these First World War interactions.



## **Chapter One**

### **British and French interactions: Armies, People and Power**

The primary focus of this thesis is the relationships developed and maintained between British and French soldiers during the First World War. In order to understand the meanings, significance and development of these interactions it is also necessary to recognise that they did not appear from an historical vacuum. British and French relations in 1914 were not in their infancy; far from it. There had been centuries of precedence, interaction and conflict from which any existing ideas may have been drawn.

Whilst this is a study of interaction between Britain and France the first section of this chapter will examine the situation between them as Great Powers in the lead up to 1914. The Great Power relationship between Britain and France had become complicated by divergent circumstances towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. With this in mind I will also examine relations between Britain and France not simply in regards to a national rivalry, but rather as a series of interactions between Great Powers. It would be an error to class every dispute between Britain and France as an example of their ability to clash across the long-term when there is an alternative viewing of these interactions as being a result of the Great Power system itself. Further to this, the rise in power and status of Germany had further unbalanced the dynamic between Britain and France to the extent that an alliance became a pressing consideration for both nations.

By establishing the Great Power context at the outset it then becomes possible to examine one of the other key aspects for this chapter and for this study; the relationship between civilians and institutions and how they diverge greatly from those interactions at the upper echelons of government and military command. The social upheaval and uncertainty in France during this time period stands in fairly stark

contrast with the relatively more stable conditions in Britain and produced greatly differing reactions from civilians and citizens towards institutions be they state, religious, civil or military. At its heart this thesis is a study of the experiences and relations forged between regular French and British soldiers, civilians and citizens. Whilst it may be necessary in this chapter to examine the evolution of states and the experiences of key actors that does not mean that the remainder of the populations must be relegated to a homogenous supporting cast. As the following chapters will show the expectations, desires and interactions of those in military authority differ dramatically at times from those of the lower ranks. Similarly the cooperations and antagonisms between Britain and France at the national level since the fall of Napoleon do not always carry down to the citizenry. It is this difference and the results of it that I believe have a key role to play in understanding some of the interactions between Britain and France in 1916 and most importantly during the mutinies of 1917.

Therefore I will examine the role of the army in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain and France both in regards to the institutions themselves but also the opportunities they presented for Anglo-French interaction. The following section will then seek to examine some of the differing methods and experiences of direct contact between French and British civilians and tourists during this time period in regards to how official narratives or directives did not always influence the wider public.

I will then conclude with an examination of how the Entente Cordiale came into being, what exactly it required of its participants and what the British public understood by France and the French in the immediate prelude to the First World War.

### **Britain, France and the Great Power System**

What defines a nation for Great Power status is, historically speaking, notoriously difficult to qualify. If, using Benedict Anderson's theory, a nation is an imagined community of participants then the Great Power system is the extension of this imagination. Being a Great Power is supposedly self-evident not just to that particular country but to the international community as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Whilst historians have suggested various units of measure the most prominent amongst them is of qualification by military power though even this criteria is divided up between arguments of whether this power is an internalised ability to defend its own territory and interests or the ability to wage a successful war against its primary rivals.<sup>2</sup> Being a member of the Great Powers had clear benefits principally because it was they who administered the system and viewed themselves as 'the guardians of the Peace of Europe'.<sup>3</sup> Beneath the Great Powers existed various grades of lesser state but it is that of 'the strongest second-class states' that, as described by Bridge and Bullen, had the greatest cause to resent 'the existence of this 'exclusive club'' and I believe it is with this notion of being a second-rate power that we must concern ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1983). pp.8-44. For further discussions regarding Benedict Anderson or other work on defining nation states see; Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). pp.15-16. I do not wish to become bogged down in an in depth discussion of the merits of different schools of national identity or the theory of its evolution but will acknowledge here some of the primary schools of thought. 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 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).

<sup>2</sup> Levy. pp.11-14

<sup>3</sup> F.R. Bridge and Roger Bullen, *The Great Powers and the European States Systems 1814-1914* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005). p.2

<sup>4</sup> Bridge & Bullen. p.2

Some of the criteria for judging and qualifying nationalism and national interactions are problematic and contradictory but to fully illustrate my argument I am going to borrow some of the arguments made by Wallerstein in his theses on World-Systems Analysis.<sup>5</sup> Some of these terms and doctrines would obviously not have been actively used or understood by the Great Powers as presented here but as recognised theories we can use them to understand the structure and interactions of the Great Power system. To understand how these nations act when in power we must understand what it means to be weak.

Strong states relate to weak states by pressuring them to keep their frontiers open to those flows of factors of production that are useful and profitable to firms located in the strong states, whilst resisting any demands for reciprocity in this regard. ... Strong states relate to weak states by pressuring them to install and keep in power persons whom the strong states find acceptable, and to join the strong states in placing pressures on other weak states to get them to conform to the policy needs of the strong states. Strong states relate to weak states by pressuring them to accept cultural practices ... that will re-inforce the long-term linkage between them. Strong states relate to weak states by pressuring them to follow their lead in international arenas (treaties, international organizations). And while strong states may buy off the individual leaders of weak states, weak states as states buy the protection of strong states by arranging appropriate flows of capital.<sup>6</sup>

Wallerstein's principal point relates to the lack of autonomy of states that are not 'strong' and the pressure they find themselves put under by those who have amassed greater power. During the nineteenth century the discussion of major issues was reserved for the Great Powers themselves and the smaller states were not included in

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<sup>5</sup> Wallerstein has used his model of analysing international relations and the uses of power to examine the period from the 1600s onwards and whilst there is a clear element of the modern system in his writings the use of vassal states and spheres of influence and power particularly during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries does make his work relevant to the time period under discussion.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-systems Analysis: An Introduction* (London: Duke University Press, 2004). p.55. See also: Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Essential Wallerstein* (New York: The New Press, 2000). and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III* (London: Academic Press, 1989).

these deliberations; they were manifestly less powerful and less influential than their 'superiors'.<sup>7</sup>

It is the relationship between the 'strong' and the 'weak' within the Great Power system that becomes important to begin with. At its most basic level the Great Powers themselves are obviously the 'strong', whilst the second-class powers and smaller nations fulfil the role of the 'weak'. By its very nature you are either a Great Power or you are not and, if you are of a lesser standing, then you must be restricted to the periphery of power. In this case a lack of power represents irrelevance, not necessarily a uniform irrelevance amongst themselves, particular smaller nations will outrank some of their fellows, but irrelevance in regards to the Great Powers and irrelevant in the fact that they are unable to impose their own views, demands, requirements or will on the world. The Great Powers do not ask the opinions of lesser states nor do they feel bound to respect their wishes.

And it is this that I feel must be considered when examining some of the Anglo-French disputes of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. 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. As mentioned previously being a Great Power is a largely self-evident pursuit based upon the perception of military strength. With this in mind there is a clear suggestion that an element of restrained belligerence is actually engineered into the system. To continue to prove Great Power status it was necessary to utilise the power it brought. Britain and France had, for centuries, been constant Great Powers with a personal rivalry borne out of geography and competing ideological and imperial aims. This rivalry had, for all its ability to vex and frustrate both nations, become comfortable,

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<sup>7</sup> Bridge & Bullen. p.2

convenient and habitual in its own way.<sup>8</sup> 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, in a particular view, actually represent the mirror image of each other. France, certainly during Napoleonic times, prided itself on being the premier land army in Europe whilst Britain had the largest navy.<sup>9</sup> France concerned itself originally with domination of the continent, whilst Britain favoured a more global view. 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, takes the opportunity to test its own power against that of Britain. The issue with such an instinctive approach is laid bare by the French President's view that his country had behaved as 'madmen in Africa' because of the risks they had taken versus the potential reward. However, this also means that incidents like Fashoda should not simply be viewed as an Anglo-French confrontation and therefore not scrutinised further when, equally, it could be viewed instead 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 19<sup>th</sup> century through what Kennedy refers to as the 'crisis of the middle powers'.<sup>10</sup> The supposedly second-class powers and even those Great Powers who were perhaps not immediately or historically viewed as being as strong as France or Britain had, through methods of industrialisation, economic and political changes begun to acquire the tools to level the playing field.<sup>11</sup> Previously the cost of being a Great Power had

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<sup>8</sup> Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English society, 1748-1815* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000).

Chapter Three discusses this in regards to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Tombs and Isabelle Tombs, *That Sweet Enemy* (London: William Heinemann, 2006). pp.256-267

<sup>10</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988). Chapter 5

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy. pp.198-202

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.<sup>12</sup> Principal amongst these new modern nations who threatened Britain and France, and essentially changed the relationship between the pair, was Prussia/Germany.<sup>13</sup> 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 as Britain and France seem to have done but instead challenge their strengths through a system of naval construction and army modernisation that took them into spheres that both Britain and France had always largely considered their own. Additionally Britain and France had both suffered recent military difficulties and were no longer as powerful or secure as they may once have been. Losing the Franco-Prussian war had been a humiliation for France and Britain's struggles to overcome the Boers had laid bare their military shortcomings.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

As Michael Howard suggests it is probable that Germany aspired more to the 'moderate and indeed more legitimate ambition' of becoming a 'World Power

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<sup>12</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.260

<sup>13</sup> There 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, p.40 argues that Prussia should be considered a Great Power from 1740 onwards. Bridge and Bullen seem equally content in Prussia's Great Power status. It is Kennedy who outlines some of the issues regarding Prussia's relative position in Europe; pp.160-2 & pp.182-90. However there is little doubting that following the Franco-Prussian war and the resulting unification that German represented a Great Power at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>14</sup> The French in particular had noted Britain's inability to impose themselves militarily, as will be examined in Chapter 5 p.238

<sup>15</sup> Philpott (2009) p.54

(*Weltmacht*)’ rather than actual World Domination but both Britain and France blocked the path towards this goal to varying degrees.<sup>16</sup>

But the German interests pressing for development of world power were not concerned with expanding within what they saw as a British dominated world-system. It was precisely this system which they found so intolerable and which they were determined to challenge on a basis of equality.<sup>17</sup>

A German movement towards 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’ quickly ‘saw in its destruction at Tsushima a compelling reason for laying down yet more keels against Germany’.<sup>18</sup> Howard quotes Lord Milner in 1915 to suggest 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.<sup>19</sup> The extent to which the Great Power system had begun to unravel in the build up to the First World War coincided with the growing power and purpose of Germany. 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

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<sup>16</sup> Michael 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

<sup>17</sup> Howard p.32

<sup>18</sup> Howard p.33

<sup>19</sup> Howard p.34



by 'a large body of opinion'.<sup>20</sup> 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 did mean that the Liberal government were able to stick true to their roots.<sup>21</sup> 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'.<sup>22</sup> 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 suitably concerned as to profoundly reconsider their relationship between each other as well as this new and invigorated rival.

### **The army in Britain and France**

The role of the army in both Britain and France is of specific interest to this study. Not only can we further examine the different reactions towards social institutions but the demands and expectations of the armed forces and the level to which it would then become involved in the everyday life of the nation during the First World War are key factors in understanding the differing expectations and interactions between British and French soldiers.

The differing roles of the army in Britain and France throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century would make full co-operation 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

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<sup>20</sup> Howard p.37

<sup>21</sup> James Wood, "Anglo-American Liberal Militarism and the Idea of the Citizen Soldier," *International Journal* 62, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>22</sup> Howard p.45

these soldiers interacted with each other on the field of battle. For much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the British army was a small volunteer recruit force and not particularly well regarded as a career choice for young men.<sup>23</sup> By the late 1860s Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan was bemoaning the fact that not only was the army under-developed it was not a fair or comprehensive reflection of the state of British democracy at the time.

The object to be aimed at is to make the army a true representation of the nation. It should be neither more aristocratic nor more democratic than the rest of English society. The upper, the middle and the lower classes cordially co-operate in every other public and private undertaking, and why should the army be the solitary exception?<sup>24</sup>

Trevelyan raised the image of European conscription when suggesting that the British army needed to find a way to motivate citizens into recruitment for coming wars.

In the rest of Europe this object is secured by compulsory conscription, but it may be still more perfectly attained by voluntary enlistment. The voluntary principle is based upon the craving of mankind to improve their condition; and, if the army were properly regulated, abundant means exist of gratifying this natural desire without creating a single new appointment or making any further addition to the pay of the soldier. ... In the Austrian, Prussian, and Russian armies, cadets ('aspirants,' or as they are called in Prussia, 'avantageurs') perform all the duties of privates, and are promoted in the ordinary way to be non-commissioned officers, before they become eligible for commissions. In the French army there are no cadets, but the best of the non-commissioned officers are promoted to commissions. Of these two arrangements, the French is to be preferred, because, by opening the military career to the whole nation, it offers a strong inducement to a superior class of men to enlist, and extends the choice of officers to the whole army, instead of confining it to a few young men who had previously been appointed cadets.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The pity of war* (London: Allen Lane, 1998). pp.102-3

<sup>24</sup> Charles Edward Trevelyan, "The British Army in 1868," (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1868). p.7

<sup>25</sup> Trevelyan pp.8-11

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 more than this 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. In fact he advocated a more French model of, at the very least, 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 and an equal period in the reserves' rather than the twenty-one years 'virtually life service' that had been the post-Waterloo norm.<sup>26</sup> This move was an inventive solution to the problem of recruitment without having to consider conscription that was still viewed dimly in Britain at the time, although the successes of the Cardwell Reforms are now subject to some dispute.<sup>27</sup> Conflicts in Africa and particularly the British difficulties during the Boer War would only further highlight the lack of efficiency in the Army towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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'.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst the French would have their own military problems throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century their armed forces were already far more integrated into society and were heavily politicised as a result.

Throughout the history of the Third Republic, parties and factions at all points on the political spectrum fought over the soul of the army. Catholics and monarchists admired and advocated traditional military virtues of order and hierarchy. But militarism also had roots on the Political Left. Revolutionaries since 1789 had echoed

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<sup>26</sup> Brian Bond, "Recruiting the Victorian Army 1870-92," *Victorian Studies* 5, no. 4 (1962).

<sup>27</sup> Albert V. Tucker, "Army and Society in England 1870-1900: A Reassessment of the Cardwell Reforms," *Journal of British Studies* 2, no. 2 (1963).

<sup>28</sup> Bond

the cry of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: "Every soldier a citizen, every citizen a soldier." Universal male conscription, which ended completely in France only in June 2001, institutionalized the *levee en masse* of 1793, in which the Republic ordered its entire population of young men to organize into battalions bearing the banner "The French people risen against tyranny." French political culture profoundly shaped the French army, and vice versa. The French army of August 1914 reflected a variety of antagonisms and compromises at work in the preceding decades.<sup>29</sup>

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 then be exacerbated by the Dreyfus Affair which will be examined in greater detail below.<sup>30</sup> The humiliating defeat during the Franco-Prussian War saw an increase in the years of conscription for French men, and also saw continued arguments between the political vestiges of France over the length of this service and the notion of conscription at all and what it would mean for a healthy French Republican democracy.<sup>31</sup>

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 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Britain was trying to find a way to allow the army to reflect the demographic makeup 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 men nor a well-administered institution by the government. 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.

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<sup>29</sup> Smith et al p.16

<sup>30</sup> Smith et al p.16

<sup>31</sup> Smith et al p.19, and; Etienne Dennery, "Democracy and the French Army," *Military Affairs* 5, no. 4 (1941).

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 as the soldiers of each country come 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 owe a great deal of their formation to these differences.

Of further importance in understanding the role of the army in both countries is noting how professionalization affected countries and impacted on what were, essentially, subject-soldiers and citizen-soldiers in Britain and France respectively. British soldiers throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century remained closely tied to the ruling elite and the preservation of the existing status quo in a manner that also further prevented any decisive moves towards militarism or intervention.

Relative immunity from invasion has permitted civilian institutions and procedures to grow without major interruption. The specially early and prolonged development of parliamentary forms of government have given Britain's representative and civil institutions a great authority and 'density'. Since the Cromwellian era the political elite has shown a great awareness of the possibility of military intervention in politics and has deliberately asserted the sovereignty of parliament over the armed forces. Parliament regulated the discipline and finance of the army, demanded property qualifications of officers and set up militia forces to counterbalance the standing army. ... The British regular army, usually smaller, active mainly in the colonies, hedged around by constitutional limitations, set in a context of fully legitimised civilian authority and stable political succession, has, in Finer's terms, lacked both the *disposition* and the *opportunity* to intervene.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> C. B. Otley in J. Doorn, *Armed Forces and Society: Sociological Essays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968). pp.86-7

Not only was there a clear unwillingness on behalf of the government for the army to intervene in domestic political discourse, the social connections between the ranking British officers and government also strongly suggest a lack of interest within the army as well.<sup>33</sup> Further to this when confronted by the emergence of the earliest Officer's Schools within Europe the British treated them with a mix of curiosity and bemusement particularly in regards to the shared identity they fostered.

The whole of the officers of the Prussian army look upon themselves as forming a single corps – the Offizier-corps – united by common ties and sympathies; admission to this body is regarded at once as conferring distinctive privilege, and as imposing peculiar duties.<sup>34</sup>

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 of the Staff College course' becoming 'a prerequisite to duty at general headquarters'.<sup>35</sup> Even then, as Huntington explains, 'a true system of professional advancement was impossible in the British Army so long as purchase existed'.<sup>36</sup> The upper reaches of the British army organisation were still only on offer to those of the upper classes or with a background in wealth not simply because of the cost of purchasing a rank ('by 1856 a captaincy cost approximately £2,400 and a lieutenant colonelcy £7,000) but because the wages were so low that those without a background in wealth found it overly restrictive.<sup>37</sup>

The French would be much quicker in developing their specialised military school than the British but they still lagged somewhat behind the Prussians who had been the real visionaries of the movement. The French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war led

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<sup>33</sup> Otley pp.88-105

<sup>34</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Harvard U.P, 1957). p.54

<sup>35</sup> Huntington p.46

<sup>36</sup> Huntington pp.46-7

<sup>37</sup> Huntigton p.47

French officers to begin ‘organizing themselves informally for their own military self-education just as the Prussian officers had done in 1807’.<sup>38</sup> Even before then the French had attempted, in 1818, to institute laws that attempted to ‘exclude non-professional factors’ from influencing promotions or advancements within the army.<sup>39</sup> The movement towards professionalism in France was seen as being in keeping with the role of the citizen and democracy not just within the army but within French society where ‘professionalism challenged the dominant aristocrats; consequently they identified it with democracy’.<sup>40</sup> That is not to suggest however, that the political situation created by and required for professionalism was entirely slanted in favour of France. In theory it should have been easy in Britain.

A professional officer is imbued with the ideal of service to the nation. In practice, he must be loyal to some single institution generally accepted as embodying the authority of the nation. Where there are competing authorities, or competing ideas as to what ought to be the authority, professionalism becomes difficult if not impossible to achieve. The conflict of constitutional ideologies and governmental loyalties divides the officer corps and superimposes political considerations and values. The nature of an officer’s political loyalties becomes more important to the government than the level of his professional competence.<sup>41</sup>

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 to the merry-go-round of revolutions, empires, monarchies and republics that marked the 19<sup>th</sup> Century from the initial revolution right up to the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War.

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<sup>38</sup> Huntington p.49

<sup>39</sup> Huntington p.45

<sup>40</sup> Huntington p.35

<sup>41</sup> Huntington p.35

In the time-honoured sequence of French revolutions, the mob quickly set about effacing all traces of the fallen regime. Just as, at the onset of the Hundred Days, the fleurs-de-lys had been unpicked from the Tuileries carpets and replaced with Napoleonic bees, so now all the Ns and imperial eagles were chiselled and ripped off the public buildings, and busts of the deposed Emperor pulled down. At the main entrance of the Tuileries, later in the afternoon of 4 September, Edmond Goncourt saw scribbled in chalk the words 'Property of the People'.<sup>42</sup>

However, to view these actions as just a form of French capriciousness is, in my opinion, to greatly misunderstand what is really happening in these situations. Such an error is based on the belief that the symbols of power and institutions were the same as the will of the people which by this time in France they manifestly were not and had not really been since the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

But royalism or 'crown-centred patriotism' is not nationalism. That became clear in the early eighteenth century when French thinkers increasingly began to distinguish the French *nation* from the king-centred *state*.<sup>43</sup>

The split between the French nation and the king-centred state is indicative of a wider distinction between the people and the institutions and pillars of power. Whilst the revolution was primarily focused on the monarchy, aristocracy and church it also marked a watershed moment for the French in regards to any institutions or organisations that had previously been seen as either legitimate or sacred. What resulted from this was the opposite of the situation in Britain. If the British drew their own legitimacy from their state institutions then in France the people themselves represented the legitimacy and conferred it upon state institutions and, over time, attacked those which fell from favour. The fracturing of French popular opinion into various competing conclaves and groups would only widen the potential for conflict

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<sup>42</sup> Alistair Horne, *Friend or foe: an Anglo-Saxon history of France* (London: Phoenix, 2005). p.295

<sup>43</sup> Kumar. p.92



with the apparatus of the state and any institutions viewed as being counter to French ideals; be they on the left or the right.

From this we can see the contested nature of the French army within wider French society. Whilst, as discussed above, the French army was the centre-ground for many of the debates regarding the political direction and soul of France it 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 and the notion of the French military hero and legacy was still well represented in national festivals and celebrations of the time.<sup>44</sup> Their fear instead takes on dual aspects. Principal amongst these is that the purity of the French army and the French soldier have been hijacked, politically, by those forces within the country opposed to the notions of the revolution. The Dreyfus Affair will be discussed in greater detail below but the existence of men like him in the first place 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 of this, however, is that the overall loyalty of the soldier is not necessarily to the army or even to the French state but rather to the ideals of the revolution enshrined within the person of the French Citizen. This becomes extremely apparent during the French Mutinies on 1917 where, although the soldiers operate still within the framework of the military, their actions are deeply driven by their own understanding and beliefs of their rights and their responsibilities as citizens of France.<sup>45</sup>

This then represents the clear division between the soldiers of Britain and the soldiers of France. It is rooted firmly in notions of what it means to be a soldier in either of these two nations at the time and, most importantly, what sort of service is being

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Rearick, "Festivals in Modern France: The Experience of the Third Republic," *Journal of Contemporary History* 12, no. 3 (1977).

<sup>45</sup> See; p.174

carried out. The British subject-soldier serves both Parliament and the Monarch and exists within a system that makes political intervention or competition almost impossible. The army itself existed quite contentedly within this system in most respects and whilst being a British soldier certainly had the appearance of a career it was not necessarily imbued with any greater civic rights. This despite the fact that, particularly in regards 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.<sup>46</sup> 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, intangibles is not the issue. Additionally Kumar quotes Greenfeld's assertion that 'in a way, nationality made every Englishman a nobleman'.<sup>47</sup> However, 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 had done so to protect their country, their monarch, and the very concept of monarchy.

For the French however, becoming a soldier was an extension of the citizenship. The Revolution had empowered them but also given them a greater responsibility in its maintenance and defence. But whilst this would be carried out and French soldiers would enter the military they do not appear to have sacrificed their rights as men and as citizens. The French Mutinies of 1917 proved that the French soldiers did not believe themselves to be restricted politically by their military service, quite the opposite. Those who had defended the nation should be afforded greater influence in

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<sup>46</sup> Colley. pp.330-2, and Kumar. pp.22-3

<sup>47</sup> Kumar. p.96

deciding their own fates and the fate of France. The French soldier was, therefore, a far more political being than the equivalent within the British army. This becomes apparent repeatedly throughout the war and is discussed below numerous times particularly 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 had sculpted him, the Frenchman's loyalty was to the revolutionary spirit and traditions that had empowered him.

Whilst Britain and France would have different ideological approaches to their armed forces during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, soldiers within those armies would have numerous opportunities to actually meet and interact with their cross-channel neighbours as both enemies and allies and 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, as Tombs and Tombs describe, a 'remarkable lack of animus' particularly when compared with their feelings regarding the Spanish.<sup>48</sup>

Many British felt ashamed to be defending a reactionary despotism. British Protestants and French anticlericals despised Spanish Catholicism and indulged in sacrilegious horseplay and vandalism. Both treated the civilian population as fair game, and each other with relative respect, even with a friendliness that infuriated their respective Iberian allies. One Ensign Wheatley put it bluntly: 'I hate a Spaniard more than a Frenchman.'<sup>49</sup>

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 fraternized across lines and ranks, with many of these practices seemingly occurring with Wellington's

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<sup>48</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.280

<sup>49</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.280

approval.<sup>50</sup> By the time that Napoleon was losing the Battle of Nations at Leipzig in 1813 Wellington was invading southern France where British troops were being received as welcome liberators by the French people they met.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> However, it would not have been nearly as successful if the retreating French troops had not so alienated their own population through ‘arson, devastation, murder and carnage’.<sup>53</sup> The French people of the South, in a manner entirely in keeping with the discussion of changing relationships to political symbology above, moved quickly to raise Royal Standards, call for the reinstatement of the Bourbons and chant slogans calling for an end to conscription and an end to war. 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.<sup>54</sup> Whilst the Southern French people did not have a great deal in common with the newly arrived British forces it is also worth noting that they may not have had a great deal in common with the Parisian and Northern French either. In fact Paris was far closer to the British mainland than it was to the towns on the Franco-Spanish border and, as seen by the programs of the Third Republic, there would be continuing suspicion directed at the more provincial French peasantry regarding their true French credentials.

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 *Cimetiere des Anglais* which in time became a ‘patriotic shrine, visited by vacationing royalty’.<sup>55</sup> Whilst Napoleon’s return and the Battle of Waterloo would briefly stir up armed conflict between the two

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<sup>50</sup> Tombs and Tombs. pp.280-1. This sort of fraternization 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.

<sup>51</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.285

<sup>52</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.285

<sup>53</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.285

<sup>54</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.285

<sup>55</sup> Tombs and Tombs. pp.287-8

countries, his defeat and final exile opened up a new period of cultural exchange and interaction which will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

The military union between France and Britain in fighting the Crimean War owed much to Great Powers posturing but 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’.<sup>56</sup> Relations were not universally good of course 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’.<sup>57</sup> Additional disputes over allied strategy had filtered down through the ranks 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’.<sup>58</sup> 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 describing that, 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.<sup>59</sup> General Bosquet probably uttered the most famous evaluation of the British army in his declaration upon the charge of the Light Brigade; ‘C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre’.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.359

<sup>57</sup> Orlando Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade* (London: Allen Lane, 2010). p.409

<sup>58</sup> Figes. p.177

<sup>59</sup> Figes. p.177

<sup>60</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.359

However, both British and French soldiers were more than capable of flexibility in their relations depending on context and circumstance and the arrival of French reinforcements during a particularly desperate stage of the Siege of Sevastopol was greeted with near jubilation amongst British soldiers.

We cry "Thank God!" We cheer – how we cheer – "*Wive Francais*" (Such was the unscholarly pronunciation of the benediction). The French reply with equal heart, "*Vivent les Anglais! Les Anglais sont les plus braves soldats du monde!*" and on every side hot Zouave hands are stretched forth to clasp ours.<sup>61</sup>

As with more contemporary wars there still hasn't been a proper investigation regarding allied relations during the Crimean War but there are certainly early signs of issues and themes that re-occurred during the earliest days of the B.E.F.'s deployment in France, particularly in regards to the already discussed notion of 'success' being of great importance in forming workable ties and bonds.

### **Official Interactions and Public Opinions**

Whilst the relationships between British and French soldiers serve as strong supporting evidence it is also necessary to examine the divide regarding official and public opinion amongst the British and French in the lead up to war. One of the recurring themes throughout this study is that the opinions and beliefs of those in positions of authority or command do not often transfer down to the soldiers and ordinary citizens. This is a point that can be noted repeatedly throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Building on the 'generally untroubled relations the army had established' with the French people, the British seemed eager to 'let bygones be bygones' and from 1815

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<sup>61</sup> Julian Spilsbury, *The Thin Red Line* (London: Cassell, 2006). p.232.

began to arrive en masse in France as tourists.<sup>62</sup> In fact tourism from Britain to France had been popular at various times during Napoleon's reign with 'tourists and two-thirds of the House of Lords' crossing the Channel 'to spend willingly and savour the abandoned joys of post-Directorate Paris' in 1802 and making use of the £5 tickets available from Charing Cross.<sup>63</sup> Following the final defeats of Napoleon around '70-80 percent of all visitors' to the channel ports, around 14,000 visitors were British tourists and, their presence brought about a dawning of an anglicised holiday industry with 'English' hotels and English-speaking waiters becoming increasingly common.<sup>64</sup> It wasn't simply a case of the channel ports or Paris benefitting from this influx either. More provincial towns such as Pau saw hundreds of British (mainly Scottish) visitors arriving during the 1820s and 30s and would also become increasingly anglicised over the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with the Pau Hunt being 'the only genuine fox-hunting pack on the continent' and 'Packer's *Guide to the Pyrenees*' being the first guidebook published in 1862.<sup>65</sup> This was not a period of full integration of course; there were still distinct national traits that each population clung to with the French still finding 'the British stiff and inarticulate' whilst the British evaluated the French as 'forward' and talkative'.<sup>66</sup> Additionally 'opponents of the Bourbons' still held Britain accountable 'for political and economic ills'<sup>67</sup> whilst there were ongoing suggestions during the 1850s and 60s that the tourist industry in Pau was now exploiting the wealth of its visitors.<sup>68</sup>

This was also not a one-way exchange during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Paul Gerbod's use of official records shows that 'more French people visited Britain by choice in the

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<sup>62</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.311. Tombs and Tombs' study of Anglo-French relations is of particular use in regards to this aspect and as a result I have drawn heavily upon it. At present there is not a full and detailed examination of Anglo-French tourism during this period or of particular social relations between the civilians of both countries. As a result I have made great use of the rigorous and convincing research and rationales espoused by Tombs and Tombs.

<sup>63</sup> Horne, Alistair (2005) p.226.

<sup>64</sup> Tombs and Tombs. pp.310-1

<sup>65</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.318

<sup>66</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.311

<sup>67</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.313

<sup>68</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.319

decades after Waterloo than ever before'.<sup>69</sup> It was not a movement on the same scale as that of Britain to France but, regardless, there was a definite increase in French tourism with estimates of '1,450 in 1815; 3,700 in 1835; and 4,290 in 1847'.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup> 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 the latter of whom did not enter into the spirit of his new surroundings to the degree of the former and declared that 'when England wishes to converse with me, it will learn French.'<sup>73</sup>

The ease of cross-channel travel and the resulting tourism would become one of the defining-characteristics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century regarding Anglo-French interactions and even led to an unofficial tourism war between Paris and London with the latter hosting six 'increasingly grandiose International Expositions' in the eighty years following 1855 in a bid to 'outdo the Great Exhibition and supplant London as the world's metropolis'.<sup>74</sup> The travel pioneer Thomas Cook extended his business into the continent resulting in 26,000 British tourists visiting Paris in 1852, 40,000 in 1856 and 60,000 in 1867.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.329

<sup>70</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.329

<sup>71</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.329

<sup>72</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.328

<sup>73</sup> For further information regarding the different situations of Oscar Wilde and Victor Hugo during this period then see; Tombs and Tombs. pp.396-7 & pp.352-5 respectively.

<sup>74</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.372

<sup>75</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.328



Neither country seemed as geographically remote as it had once done. The channel that still provided Britain with a sense of security against any European crises was clearly no longer a serious obstruction towards those motivated by curiosity. However, there does appear to be a certain trend of middle to upper class tourism, particularly from Britain to France that would still prevent large numbers of workers and ‘ordinary’ civilians from fully engaging with their neighbour. Relations between Britain and France may have thawed significantly but the benefits of this were still largely restricted to those with particular privileges, be they financial or positional. The general British civilian may well have had no more contact with their French equivalents after the fall of Napoleon than they had done before.

British public opinion towards France changed dramatically over the course of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-1. Napoleon III’s politicking and 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.<sup>76</sup> When conflict broke out between the French and Prussian armies initial British public support lay with what they perceived to be the Prussian underdog.<sup>77</sup> 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 they were content to watch the battle play out on the continent.<sup>78</sup>

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.<sup>79</sup> 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

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<sup>76</sup> Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War : the German conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Provides a fuller examination of the roots and rationales behind Napoleon and Bismarck’s competing plans for Europe and the consequential outbreak of war between France and Prussia.

<sup>77</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.379

<sup>78</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.379

<sup>79</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.379

state.<sup>80</sup> This feeling was exacerbated with news of the harshness of the terms Bismarck was attempting to force upon the French and had moved away from being the unwilling 'injured party'.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore the siege of Paris left 4,000 British residents trapped within the city for the remaining duration of the war. According to Alistair Horne, British public opinion began to turn quite fiercely in favour of the French, particularly the besieged Parisians and even formerly 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.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> A demonstration was held in Trafalgar Square in 1871 when Paris was subjected to artillery bombardment and, as described by Tombs and Tombs, '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 1914-18'.<sup>84</sup>

The official British position at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War had essentially been one of disinterest. France had not endeared itself much to Britain in its actions before the conflict and Britain clearly did not see any reason to intervene in the struggle. British popular opinion was largely similar at the outbreak as well. However, both popular and official opinion would change during the course of the conflict and the nature of these changes would highlight some of the similarities and discrepancies between government and the people. The governmental shift was fairly pragmatic in its roots. Once it became clear just how powerful Prussia had become and that they had married this power to a bellicose spirit Britain recognised the changing of the power dynamics in Europe. Public opinion however, appears to have been more nuanced. There is a definite element that could at best be described as

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<sup>80</sup> Wawro. p.188

<sup>81</sup> Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris* (London: Penguin, 2007). p.82

<sup>82</sup> Horne, Alistair (2007), pp.162-6

<sup>83</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.382

<sup>84</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.382

‘humanitarian’ in its concern for those besieged in Paris by the Prussians. Coupled to this may also have been a degree of fear for what a dominant Prussia might mean. A reasonably powerful France had been a constant in the lives of those around Europe since Napoleon. There may well have been lingering or lasting concerns over what French intentions may be but there was a degree of residual comfort in the current balance of power. What a humbled France and a conquering Prussia may mean for the people of Britain was much less clear.

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.<sup>85</sup> 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 and it became, in the words of Horne, ‘positively unwise to fly a Union Jack in Paris’.<sup>86</sup> Despite this ‘in her hour of need’ Paris’ demands for food were met by Britain and the United States with the London Relief Committee alone sending thousands of tonnes of food and provisions to the besieged city.<sup>87</sup>

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 to wage war for the heart of France. The fighting and the bloodshed swiftly appalled the onlooking 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 that ‘the Versailles troops seem inclined to outdo the Communists [sic] in their sheer lavishness of human blood’.<sup>88</sup> The war and its immediate aftermath had done grave damage to France and the emerging Third Republic would bear the scars

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<sup>85</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.380

<sup>86</sup> Horne, Alistair (2007), p.166

<sup>87</sup> Horne, Alistair (2007), p.248

<sup>88</sup> Horne, Alistair (2007), p.417

of it up to and throughout the First World War itself. Equally the conflict had elicited both sympathy and revulsion in the British, and a mix of fury and slight gratitude in 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 sidelines, 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.<sup>89</sup> 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.

The Third Republic had been born of a defeat and bloodshed into a world that had dramatically shifted from the previous stability of Anglo-French rivalry. The new German state had seemingly changed these relationships forever. However, there were signs of both new cooperation and residual competition between the cross-channel nations.

When France adopted a republican constitution in 1875 its largely anglophile creators tried to make it as close as possible to a parliamentary monarchy, with a conservative upper house and a president with the right to be informed to advise and to warn. Global competition led to a wave of imperial expansion that saw Britain and France again as rivals, as in the 1840s.<sup>90</sup>

During the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain remained, as ever, primarily focused on its Empire. Europe was still predominantly a sideshow distraction and whilst Germany's rise was of concern it was not yet enough to gravely trouble the primary power on the planet. France, still recovering from its mauling at the hands of Prussia

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<sup>89</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.392

<sup>90</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.392

and the loss of its sovereign territory remained, in social terms, a coalition of competing ideologies held together by loose threads. With each country seemingly focused on its own endeavours and concerns it was not immediately obvious that the balance of relations between them were headed for catastrophe.

Three simultaneous crises – the Fashoda incident, the Dreyfus affair and the Boer war – made Franco-British relations worse at the turn of the century than they had been for at least fifty years ... All three crises were connected to the pervading fear of decline. The two African episodes stemmed from the urgent desire of both France and Britain to consolidate their imperial power before challenges from newer rivals, Germany, Russia, Japan and America, became too great. The Dreyfus affair grew directly from French fears of both external and internal threat.<sup>91</sup>

I do not intend to re-tell the minutiae of each of these crises here, for there are ample existing studies that can perform that service.<sup>92</sup> However, the cross-channel impacts of these events can be discussed in further detail as it relates a good deal to the difference between a purely Franco-British dispute and one between two Great Powers that fear loss of power and position. This is a difference built upon a functional and semi-conscious mythology revolving around each country's vision of itself and the role of the other in maintaining that illusion.

The first, of several, trials of Captain Alfred Dreyfus (for espionage based upon evidence manufactured against him) gives us our first indication of what could perhaps be best termed an instinctive culture of dispute between Britain and France.

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<sup>91</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.425

<sup>92</sup> In regards to Fashoda the following texts are useful: David Thomson, *Europe since Napoleon* (London: Penguin, 1990). pp.511-6, P. M. H. Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940; entente and estrangement* (London: Longman, 1996). pp.9-11 are useful.

Concerning 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, Thomson, Chapters 16 & 17, Smith et al Chapter 1, and Herbert Tint, *The Decline of French Patriotism 1870-1940* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1964). Chapter 5.

The Boer War is discussed by: Thomson pp.502-16, and the following article gives a good summation of the works concerning the Boer War released during the 2002 centenary: Bill Nasson, "Waging Total War in South Africa: Some Centenary Writings on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902," *The Journal of Military History* 66, no. 3 (2002).

The guilty verdict handed down to Dreyfus was accompanied by sentence of degradation and solitary confinement near French Guiana. As Tombs and Tombs explain 'British observers considered this treason a symptom of French rottenness, but had no inkling that Dreyfus was innocent'.<sup>93</sup> That the immediate and seemingly instinctive reaction of the British observers in this case was to take the verdict and the trial as a sign 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'.<sup>94</sup>

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.<sup>95</sup> The rationale behind his two-year trek through West Africa does not appear to have been ever fully structured. Tombs and Tombs suggest its primary function was 'to annoy the British in Egypt' and 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 had already declared in 1895 that such an expedition launched by France would be considered 'an unfriendly act'.<sup>96</sup> What emerges is a picture of French institutions acting with no real control from the President and falling into an instinctive policy of testing the patience of Britain. The French seemed to hope that the British would offer some form of deal regarding Fashoda but it did not materialise.<sup>97</sup> It was perhaps only

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<sup>93</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.426

<sup>94</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.426

<sup>95</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.428

<sup>96</sup> Edward Berenson, "Fashoda, Dreyfus, and the Myth of Jean-Baptiste Marchand," *Yale French Studies*, no. 111 (2007).

<sup>97</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.426

the fact that when Kitchener arrived with five gunboats and an armed force that dwarfed the tiny French garrison his orders were to remove them by persuasion rather than force that stopped armed conflict.<sup>98</sup>

With the Fashoda drama playing out concurrently with the Dreyfus Affair popular opinion regarding their near neighbours plummeted in both countries. Queen Victoria cancelled her traditional French holiday and British tourists also avoided France, whilst the French ambassador in London insisted that 3,000 policemen be deployed in Hyde Park to prevent the tricolour from being insulted by a demonstration of 50,000 people.<sup>99</sup> 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 might only elevated him further.<sup>100</sup> 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 which outlined the precarious state of French politics and had the French soldiers 'trembling and weeping' within an hour.<sup>101</sup> With no real chance of a victory over the British, who continued to strengthen their Mediterranean Fleet, it was the French who were forced into a humiliating climb-down and the Foreign Minister Delcassé recalled Marchand in November of 1898. In doing so he received nothing in 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.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup> They were not alone in deciding that France had somehow claimed a moral victory, as Winston Churchill would also espouse his

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<sup>98</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.426

<sup>99</sup> Tombs and Tombs. pp.426-7

<sup>100</sup> Berenson.

<sup>101</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.429

<sup>102</sup> Berenson.

<sup>103</sup> Berenson.

respect for Marchand's daring and bravery.<sup>104</sup> The French President however, seemed to realise just how close his country may have come to the brink when he declared that 'we have behaved like madmen in Africa'.<sup>105</sup> This realisation would lead to future avoidance of testing British claims but it was still a marked example of how this Franco-British taunting seemed to come far too naturally for comfort.

Britain's struggles in South Africa against the Boers provided France with an immediate outlet for their anger at the nation that had seemingly humiliated them over Fashoda and 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 1,600 French, Russians, Germans, Dutch, Irish and other nationalities that aimed to assist the Boers.<sup>106</sup> 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 actually provided an outlet for union between the disparate and fractured elements of French society.<sup>107</sup>

In France, admiration for the Boers' self-proclaimed 'struggle against the new world tyranny of Capitalism' united nationalists who detested the British and the Jews; socialists who detested imperialism and capitalism; conservatives who admired a patriarchal white race of peasant-farmers; and republicans who respected self-determination.<sup>108</sup>

A great deal of this expressed animosity is clearly focused on specific aspects of France and Britain and the perceived hypocrisy of each nation's actions; be it the suggestion that France was preaching republican values whilst persecuting Dreyfus and trying to force a confrontation at Fashoda, or Britain decrying colonial aggression at Fashoda and then launching a war on the Boers or espousing the benefits of

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<sup>104</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.430

<sup>105</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.430

<sup>106</sup> Tombs and Tombs. pp.432-3

<sup>107</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.432

<sup>108</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.432



freedom of trade whilst forcing hidden tariffs on French wine imports.<sup>109</sup> However, I do not believe that this is the only explanation for both how and why France and Britain found each other so instinctively objectionable. I have used the term ‘instinctive’, or variations of it, several times in this section as I feel it is best suited for describing what I feel may be better understood as a Great Power rivalry rather than an Anglo-French one.

This becomes more obvious when consideration is given to the fact that France, in particular, was not averse to replicating British approaches to particular challenges during the Third Republic. During the late nineteenth century France attempted to re-educate the rural peasants and enforce an acceptable identity upon them.<sup>110</sup> 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’.<sup>111</sup> The Third Republic was particularly concerned with matters of national character following the defeat in the Franco-Prussian war but moves like this also speak of a wider conflict between the state and the population over who got to define the nation and its identity. The re-education of French peasants is indicative of a centralised government implementing reforms and programs to bring an element of the population viewed as being noticeably un-French into line. In a similar vein the Third Republic would also push an aggressive programme of teaching masculinity and male citizenship to the male population in conjunction with the newly instituted laws on compulsory military service.<sup>112</sup> Of course it wasn’t 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

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<sup>109</sup> John V. C. Nye, *War, Wine and Taxes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1977).

<sup>111</sup> Weber, Chapter One.

<sup>112</sup> Denis M. Provencher and Luke L. Eilderts, "The Nation According to Lavis: Teaching Masculinity and Male Citizenship in Third-Republic France," *French Cultural Studies* 18, no. 1 (2007).

its undisguised desire 'to hymn the virtues of British institutions' was a source of interest.<sup>113</sup> During the early 1870s the French sent numerous observers to examine methods of teaching set curricula in schools.<sup>114</sup> Whilst this could not probably be termed as an active cultural 'exchange' this movement to replicate or borrow elements from across the channel was narrowing some of the cultural distances between the two 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* would publish a series of cartoons in September of 1914 by W.K. Haselden that attempted to examine the relationship between Britain, France, Germany and Europe as a whole.<sup>115</sup> Whilst the caricatures they contained would not likely have been 'official' in a governmental sense, they would have had an accepted relevance and resonance amongst the readers of the time. At the very least they can be taken as being roughly indicative of some of the perceptions held by Haselden himself along with the editors of the *Daily Mirror*. These cartoons were appearing in print once the war had already started and Britain and France were confirmed allies and yet they still speak of a difficulty in perception of the French. The cartoon of 15 September gave a representation of the Entente Cordiale as a unified creature to which the Kaiser had neither answer nor defence.

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<sup>113</sup> Mandler

<sup>114</sup> Howard F. Andrews, "A French View of Geography Teaching in Britain in 1871," *The Geographical Journal* 152, no. 2 (1986).

<sup>115</sup> For further information regarding Haselden see; "William Kerridge Haselden," "British Cartoon Archive", <http://www.cartoons.ac.uk/artists/william-kerridgehaselden/biography>.



Image 1: W. K. Haselden, *The Bird He Will Fail to Bring Down*, (15 September 1914), *The Daily Mirror*

However, the cartoons that followed reveal, if not an outright suspicion of France and the French, then at least a form of confusion about them and possibly Europe in general.

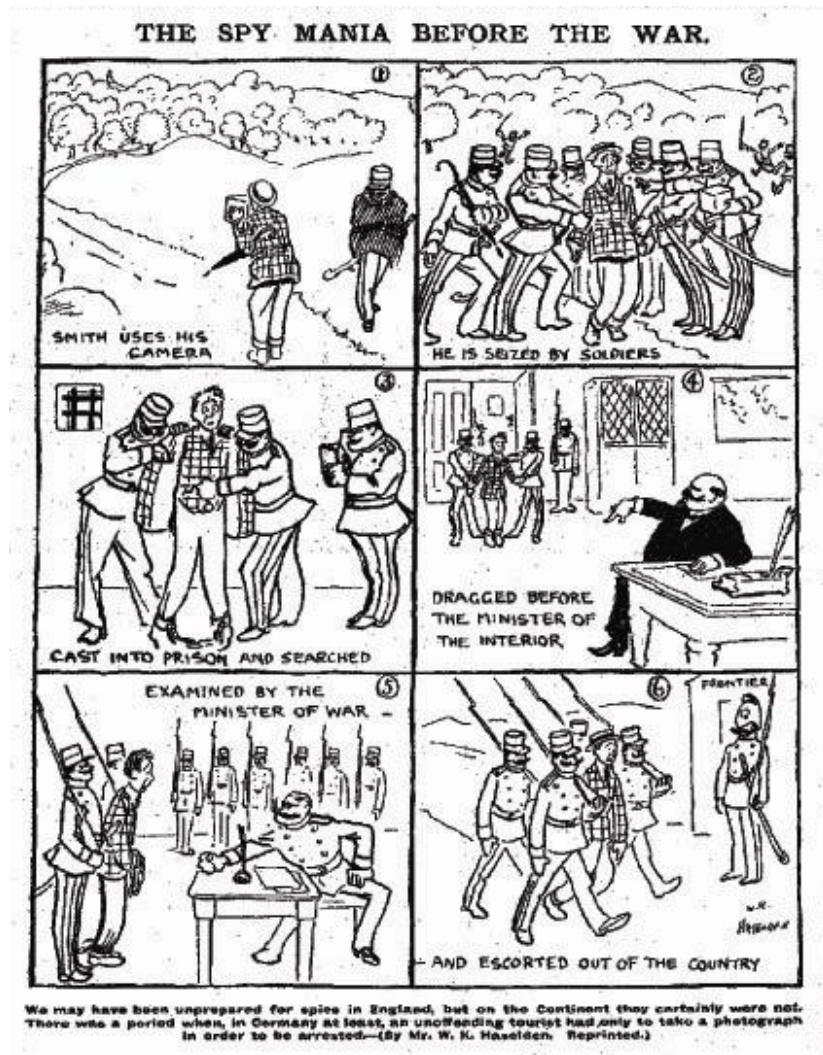


Image 2: W. K. Haselden, *The Spy Mania Before the War*, (19 September 1914), *The Daily Mirror*

The text below the cartoon 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.

This seems a fairly typical piece 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're French. Whilst misidentification is of course possible, I do not believe this to be an error. 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 was worn by the American Confederate Armies during the Civil War). Furthermore the German uniform was composed of obvious distinguishing characteristics, particularly the spiked helmet, which the cartoonist might have used. 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 where 'following 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'.<sup>116</sup> The suggestion of a French military unfairly persecuting an innocent man also likely has roots in the British perception of the Dreyfus Affair and would be a recognisable reference to the British public.

Haselden himself was not ignorant as to the character of the French military uniform as was proved by the cartoon published on September 21.

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<sup>116</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.352. Some of these new cartoon images were actually produced by French artists such as Gavarni who worked for *Punch*.





Image 3: W. K. Haselden, *What do Channel-Tunnelphobes Think Now?* (21 September 1914), *The Daily Mirror*.<sup>117</sup>

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 of the cartoon 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’

<sup>117</sup> For further information on the Channel Tunnel discussions before the war see; Bell pp. 51-3

cartoon and those in the 'Tunnel' is that the former appear to be drawn carrying more weight than those in the latter.<sup>118</sup>

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 innate suspicion of the other European powers symbolised and represented by France. On a deeper level, it perhaps represents the conflict in attempting to reconcile the 'old' France as both a rival and a military threat with the 'new' France; 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. There was a swell of literature at the turn of the twentieth century in Britain which cast the French in the role of an invading foreign power and they were immensely popular.<sup>119</sup> The genre of these novels would continue up to the start of the First World War but there was a change in the identity of the principle protagonists with the Germans coming to replace the French.<sup>120</sup>

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 a channel tunnel would compromise Britain's security and present a chance for the nation's oldest adversary to invade. As discussed the English Channel represents a formidable barrier protecting Great Britain from invasion. Enduring British foreign policy has dictated that European troubles are the concern of nations based upon the European mainland and has only rarely seen fit to intervene.

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<sup>118</sup> Of 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 (see p.132 and p.158) 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 nation seemed to use the flag of their ally to symbolise the men without creating a consistent personification.

<sup>119</sup> Tombs and Tombs. p.434

<sup>120</sup> Catriona Pennell, "Imagining Future Wars: Experience and Understanding of Military Conflict, 1899-1914," in *New Research in Military History* (University of Sussex 2010).

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.<sup>121</sup> The Channel Tunnel question also speaks to previously mentioned insecurities regarding relative strengths and weaknesses of the British armed forces. An attack through a tunnel would entirely nullify the Royal Navy and reduce Britain to, militarily speaking, the level of a weak continental power in the face of a larger army.

### **The preparations and perceptions of the Entente Cordiale**

In order to fully understand the relationships that emerged between British and French soldiers during the First World War we must also have a clearer understanding not just of what the Entente Cordiale actually meant and required of both sides but also of the general state of Anglo-French relations in the British public mind at the outbreak of war. It emerged at a time when there was a growing concern over the abilities and intentions of Germany, but was also built upon the foundations of tourist exchange, political bickering and Great Powers posturing that have been discussed above.

Some of the damage that had been done to relations by Fashoda *et al* 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.<sup>122</sup> However, Edward was something of a *bon vivant* who 'played effectively on his reputation as a Parisian *homme du monde*'.<sup>123</sup> Largely fluent in French and able to speak without requiring notes Edward successfully

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<sup>121</sup> A theme that will be discussed below at some length regarding Huguet's evaluation of the British character, see p.234

<sup>122</sup> Tombs and Tombs p.439

<sup>123</sup> Tombs and Tombs p.440



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’.<sup>124</sup> The result of this successful trip to France was an equally well-received visit to London by President Loubet and what Tombs and Tombs described as ‘cross-Channel reconciliation in homeopathic doses’ centred on particular interpretations of each man.

In short, the English liked Loubet for what they thought were his un-French qualities, just as the French liked Edward for his un-English ones.<sup>125</sup>

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 and enshrinement of the Entente Cordiale.

Whilst the Entente would eventually be extended to incorporate Russia and form the basis of the military organisation that would fight the Central Powers the Entente 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. The primary roots of the Anglo-French Entente lay not in Europe but rather in the management of African colonies and spheres of Imperial interest particularly with regards to French claims on Morocco and British ownership of Egypt and to avoid a similar repeat of the Fashoda incident.<sup>126</sup> The Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 would prove to have benefits concerning attempts to outmanoeuvre Germany but, at

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<sup>124</sup> Tombs and Tombs pp.440-1

<sup>125</sup> Tombs and Tombs p.441

<sup>126</sup> See Bell Chapters 2 & 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)., Particularly Chapter 7 for a history of the Moroccan dispute.

its heart, the primary British aim of this new Entente was to remove any Russian threat to India through Afghanistan.<sup>127</sup>

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]’.<sup>128</sup> Nonetheless, the British would begin to have more formative discussions with the French from this point onwards, particularly through Colonel Huguet who had been made the French Military Attaché in Britain.<sup>129</sup> The Agadir Crisis of 1911 would 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).<sup>130</sup> 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. Earlier in the year Lord Crowe had been forced to reassure Parliament that-

The Entente is not an alliance. For purposes of ultimate emergencies it *may* be found to have no substance at all. For an 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.<sup>131</sup>

The eventual discussions between Britain and France regarding the possible deployment of the B.E.F. to France evolved from General Wilson’s initially suggested

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<sup>127</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, blood and poppycock : Britain and the First World War* (London: Cassell Military, 2004). p.35

<sup>128</sup> Ferguson p.62

<sup>129</sup> Huguet would, after the war, become the author of a fairly damning testimony regarding the British High Command and this will be examined in detail in a forthcoming chapter. See p.234

<sup>130</sup> Bell pp.43-46

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Ferguson p.80

plan, floated during the Agadir crisis, of a 160,000 man deployment to France.<sup>132</sup> The result would be the Wilson-Foch plan for the deployment of the B.E.F. to France in the event of a continental war which had been largely finalised by 1913. 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?<sup>133</sup> Additionally the decision to adopt a 'with France' plan made it increasingly difficult to then plan any coordinated action with Belgium who, 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.<sup>134</sup>

Whilst it was also difficult to fully plan out 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'.<sup>135</sup> 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.<sup>136</sup> 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 the aforementioned interpretations of French nationalism and now seems an interesting portent to the eventual British move towards conscription in 1916.<sup>137</sup> This *Handbook* would also feature a rough breakdown on the political spectrum and parties of France, the material resources on

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<sup>132</sup> Bell p.45

<sup>133</sup> Greenhalgh (2008) pp.1-5

<sup>134</sup> Philpott (1996) pp.5-6

<sup>135</sup> Philpott (1996) p.6

<sup>136</sup> Philpott (1996) p.6

<sup>137</sup> *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

offer to the country and then an incredibly thorough examination of most aspects of the French military institution.<sup>138</sup>

However, because the minutiae and general logistical consideration for the planned deployment of the B.E.F. to France were undertaken in such depth it is of interest to this study to examine the provisions made for interactions between the British and French soldiers. It is striking about these plans that whilst there was a clear thought process regarding the interactions of the two staffs, understandably given the importance of accurate communication between the respective commands, little or no thought was given to preparing the way for relations between the men. Chapter Two 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.<sup>139</sup>

The actual provision of interpreters was then 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 units.<sup>140</sup> Each Infantry Battalion was to receive 2 interpreters amounting to 146 interpreters spread amongst the infantry at the outbreak of war. The simple 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. The guidance transmitted to Sir John French from Lord

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<sup>138</sup> Handbook of the French Army

<sup>139</sup> "Wilson-Foch Scheme: Expeditionary Force to France (1913)," (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 106/49A/2).

<sup>140</sup> Wilson-Foch Scheme.

Kitchener was equally vague, simply highlighting the need to ‘support, and co-operate with, the French Army against our common enemy’.<sup>141</sup> Each soldier 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-Marshal<sup>142</sup>

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.<sup>143</sup> 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

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<sup>141</sup> Herbert Lord Kitchener, 1914. It is also worth noting that this message does not differ greatly from that inscribed within the pocket bible’s of Cromwell’s Ironsides in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Kohn).

<sup>142</sup> Quoted from Gibson (1998), p.225

<sup>143</sup> This also seems reminiscent of the moves Wellington made to win over the French people at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

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.<sup>144</sup>

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.<sup>145</sup> 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’.<sup>146</sup> 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-

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.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Charles à Court Lieut.-Col Repington, *The First World War 1914-1918*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1920). p.32. Also discussed in; Greenhalgh (2008) pp.8-9

<sup>145</sup> Repington (1920) pp.20-21

<sup>146</sup> Charles a Court Repington, "Lord Kitchener's Plan," *The Times* August 15 1914.

<sup>147</sup> Repington (1914). A breakdown of the full strength of the BEF will be provided and discussed below. See pp.83-84

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’.<sup>148</sup> 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.<sup>149</sup> 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 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 their relative weaknesses in comparison to their fellows.

It was against this backdrop of practically non-existent consideration regarding how the British would interact with their French fellows, an apparent acknowledgement from the War Secretary of the limitations of the current British Expeditionary Force, a sense of discomfort and unease regarding the relationship between Britain and the continent, and, in some ways, a seeming lack of understanding about the French and France, that would see the declaration of war against Germany and the initiation of the planned deployment of the B.E.F. to France. But in the wider background profound differences regarding the relationship between the civilian populations and social institutions in both countries, and particularly the army, had 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

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<sup>148</sup> Repington (1920) p.22

<sup>149</sup> Repington (1920) pp.22-3

1916. In many ways it was this difference borne from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that would create the foundations for what was to come.



## **Chapter Two**

### **Interacting with the Allies: The B.E.F. in France 1914-15**

In regard to military movement and general strategy, 1914 stands apart from the years and the events that followed it. It would be the consequences of events such as the Battle of the Marne or the 'Race to the Sea' rather than the battles themselves that would lay the foundations of trench warfare.

Similarly interactions between British and French soldiers during the opening months of the war do not bear any great relation to those that would follow it. However, the trials, tribulations and, ultimately, casualties of the British Expeditionary Force in France during 1914 would accelerate 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. It would be wrong to say that relations during 1914 were predominantly negative because the nature of the war and the fighting at that point was so fluid and, largely, formless that there was little chance to build any form of constructive discourse between the two nations. As previously discussed the British military planners had made no particular plans to encourage co-operation and interaction between the British soldiers and their French fellows and even if they had, the speed at which the situation deteriorated in France following the arrival of the B.E.F. would likely have prevented any such plans from being collectively initiated.

Therefore, whilst there are clearly moments where relations between British and French soldiers were strained and even threatened to breakdown completely, these instances seem to be 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 is clearly not the case. The men of the B.E.F. 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 would be shaped and moulded by their own particular institutionalisation and their 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 B.E.F. of 1914 would not long survive the opening months. But to understand how and why events both for this year and the future years played out as they did we must also understand the situation facing these British soldiers at the outbreak of the war.

### **The British Expeditionary Force in 1914**

In 1914 Britain's military strength lay predominantly in its navy. The policy of ensuring the Royal Navy was larger than the combined fleets of the next two greatest naval powers had been challenged by Germany in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but Britain was still the preeminent naval force on the planet.<sup>1</sup> When it came to land-based military forces, however, Britain lagged far behind the other protagonists due in no small part to the lack of forced military service.<sup>2</sup> In 1914 the B.E.F. was comprised of six infantry divisions and one cavalry division. Within this number were the 247,432 regulars with the colours and contributing to this were the 117,707 men of the British Expeditionary Force.<sup>3</sup> This left a force that was tiny in comparison to the numbers the other countries involved would be fielding.<sup>4</sup> The B.E.F. was Britain's rapid reaction force. Stationed in Britain and made up of volunteers and professional

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<sup>1</sup> At the outbreak of war Britain had 22 dreadnought battleships in service and 13 building against Germany's 15 and 5; it had 9 battle cruisers in service and 1 building against Germany's 5 and 3. It had 40 pre-dreadnought battleships against Germany's 22, 121 cruisers in all categories against 40, 221 destroyers against 90, and 73 submarines against 31. Stevenson 2005, p.86. The politics of the Naval Arms Race have been discussed above see, p.40

<sup>2</sup> In regards to peacetime strength Russia was represented by 1,445,000 men, France by 827,000, Germany by 761,000 and Austria-Hungary by 428,000. These convert into wartime strengths of 3,400,000, 1,800,000, 2,147,000 and 1,338,000 men respectively. The populations of the principal combatants at the start of the war were as follows: Britain – 46 million, France – 36.6 million, Russia 164 million, Germany 67 million, and Austria-Hungary 51 million. Ferguson pp.92-3

<sup>3</sup> Max Arthur, *Forgotten voices of the Great War* (London: Ebury, 2002). p.6

<sup>4</sup> A full strength British infantry division in 1914 consisted of 18,073 officers and men, 76 artillery pieces, and 24 machine guns. A cavalry division at the same time consisted of 9,269 officers and men, 9,815 horses, 24 artillery pieces and 24 machine guns. Stevenson (2005) p.xvii. Also, Russia with a combined 150.5 divisions, France with 90, Germany with 98.5 and Austria-Hungary with 60.5. Ferguson p.92

soldiers the B.E.F. was an excellent fighting unit but clearly was not large enough to pose a strategic threat in the coming war.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless it was to this army that Britain turned in 1914 to both protect its own interests and to fulfil Britain's obligations to its ally France.

The B.E.F. was deployed to France in the earliest days of August with four divisions split into two corps assigned to the left of the allied front along with five brigades of cavalry (one assigned to Haig's I Corps and the remaining four operating as an independent cavalry 'division' under the command of Sir Edmund Allenby) this gave Sir John French an initial force of around 100,000 soldiers.

At this time there was no real consensus within the B.E.F.'s command over the best course of action for the British army to take. Splits already existed between competing camps of officers and ideological differences in regards to their French allies only exacerbated the situation.<sup>6</sup> These rivalries eventually manifested themselves in the disastrous build up to the Battle of Mons when the assumptions of Sir Henry Wilson (a Francophile officer who tended to disregard intelligence and information that contradicted that of the French Army) were imposed upon the B.E.F. as a whole leading to intelligence indicating a substantial German force closing on the British position at Mons being ignored.<sup>7</sup> The Battle of Mons, which took place on 23 August 1914, showed the best aspects of the B.E.F. whilst also highlighting its deficiencies. With the British having rejected the intelligence regarding the oncoming German force (and the B.E.F. having apparently evaded detection by the Germans) both sides were surprised to encounter the other. During this engagement the British soldiers were firing their rifles so quickly that German soldiers reported that they were

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<sup>5</sup> John Crawford et al., "Panel Discussion" (paper presented at the France and New Zealand during the Great War, Le Quesnoy, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Van Hartesveldt p.6

<sup>7</sup> Van Hartesveldt p.7

actually coming under almost constant heavy machine gun fire.<sup>8</sup> The German marching formations meant that the British were able to shoot down huge numbers of Germans before eventually being overwhelmed by weight of numbers and by the end of the day the B.E.F. had lost 1,638 men and was forced into what would become a long retreat.<sup>9</sup>

The retreat itself was a chaotic experience; the entire allied front was falling back towards Paris at varying rates so the B.E.F. was alternating between being ahead of the line of retreat or being left isolated with their flanks exposed. The strain of this period would cause Sir John French to fall into a period of depression and give serious consideration to pulling the B.E.F. out of the line entirely and making for the Channel Ports.<sup>10</sup> On 25 August II Corps, exhausted and struggling to stay ahead of the German army, fought a delaying action at Le Cateau, a battle which cost them 8,482 casualties, before it resumed a full retreat the following day.<sup>11</sup>

Only the intervention of Lord Kitchener now forced General French to maintain the B.E.F.'s place in the Allied line and continue the retreat in the direction of Paris.<sup>12</sup> It was because of this decision that, when the German army abandoned the original order of attack as laid out in the Schlieffen Plan and attempted to encircle Paris from the east rather than the west thus exposing their right flank, the B.E.F. and the French army were in position to take advantage of the error and win the subsequent Battle of the Marne fought between 6 and 12 September. This reversal of fortune for the Allies was followed by a swift advance as the German army was forced to retreat and the

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<sup>8</sup> Brown (2001) pp.10-13. British soldiers had been informed during their musketry training that; 'You will seldom have to fire over a greater distance than two hundred yards; and at that range British rapid fire is the most dreadful medium of destruction yet devised in warfare.' Ian Hay, *The First Hundred Thousand* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1915). p.97

<sup>9</sup> Van Hartesveldt p.7

<sup>10</sup> Van Hartesveldt p.9

<sup>11</sup> Van Hartesveldt p.9. Van Hartesveldt indicates that a definitive account of the battle at Le Cateau is yet to be realised and, as a result, the merits of II Corps stand have been debated at length.

<sup>12</sup> For a fuller explanation of French's precarious mental state at this time and the meeting between French and Kitchener see Philpott (1996) Chapter 2, and Greenhalgh (2008) Chapter 2

Entente armies passed back through countryside that they had left only days before. The final months of 1914 were spent solidifying the battle lines on the Western Front with the so-called 'Race to the Sea' stretching the frontline from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border. The B.E.F. would, by the end of the year, take up position on the far left of the allied line and would rapidly become engaged in the defence of the Ypres salient.

### **The B.E.F. in France 1914**

The deployment of the B.E.F. to France was conducted in secret under the tight censorship the War Office imposed on the press and so it was not until 18 August that the presence of British soldiers on mainland Europe became public knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Because news of the eventual departure of the B.E.F. to France was quite tightly controlled, and often seems to have taken place under cover of darkness, to avoid word spreading and also to help protect the troop ships themselves whilst in transit, the men leaving England were met with differing reactions from civilians. Whilst Gunner Butterworth recalled wives and children hugging and kissing their departing men,<sup>14</sup> and Lieutenant Helm recalls that there were cheering crowds lining Grafton Street on 14 August,<sup>15</sup> the following day Cummings wrote that:

As we marched from Aldershot to Farnboro not a cheer greeted us and I and several others promised ourselves a rare reception in France, nor were we disappointed.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas 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

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<sup>13</sup> Martin J. Farrar, *News from the front* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998). p.6. For a breakdown of names, divisions (where available) and details regarding the Imperial War Museum sourced contributors for this chapter see Appendix 1.1

<sup>14</sup> J Butterworth, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 04/37/1, 1914). 15/08/1914

<sup>15</sup> Colonel Cyril Helm DSO OBE MC, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 99/13/1, 1914-1915). 14/08/1914

<sup>16</sup> NCO E J Cummings, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 04/4/1, 1914). 15/08/1914

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.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst the arrival of the B.E.F. 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 Loyd would comment on an emerging difficulty.

Up to the time we left England we were in receipt of a constant flow of news from the front, whereas directly we reached France we became enveloped in fog and can hear no news whatever from any source, the newspapers being absolutely ignorant and filling their pages from the bounty of the editor's fruitful imagination. A copy of the "Times" sent from home would be a tremendous gift.<sup>18</sup>

The lack of accurate reporting around the front was due in no small part to the restrictions Kitchener had placed upon the press in regards to what they could print about the situation in France.<sup>19</sup> Kitchener's focus with these press controls was clearly the home front but, by obvious offshoot, it would have an effect in how news was reflected back to the men in France. At the same time whilst the French civilians were giving the men of the B.E.F. a rapturous reception, it was rapidly becoming clear that there were those amongst the French whose ability to speak English far outstripped the French language abilities of the newly arrived B.E.F.. Lieutenant Fyrth, upon his arrival on 19 August, noted that the French crowd awaiting them kept up a continual

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<sup>17</sup> See particularly; Hugh Bellew, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 91/23/1, 1914). 05/08/1914, Bellew was amongst the first British soldiers to arrive. Lieutenant Geoffrey A Loyd, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 98/2/1, 1914). 13/08/1914 - 15/08/1914. 2nd Lieutenant Douglas J McDougall MC, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 79/51/1, 1914). 14/08/1914. Butterworth 16/08/1914. And, Saville W Crowsley, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 02/6/1, 1914). 18/08/1914. Relations between British and French civilians were an undeniably important aspect of BEF's experiences in France, particularly in 1914, and I will examine and discuss them where I deem them particularly relevant.

<sup>18</sup> Loyd 14/8/1914

<sup>19</sup> For more information about these reporting restrictions see; Farrar

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.<sup>20</sup> 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 reporting, upon his arrival in France on 24 August that he witnessed,

Crowds of Frenchmen on wharves shouting “Are we down hearted?” “No!” and “It’s a long way to Tipperary”.<sup>21</sup>

The B.E.F. were receiving their assigned interpreters shortly after arrival with Fyrth hoping that they’d 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.<sup>22</sup>

The induction of the B.E.F. into a foreign situation and society was not helped by the untimely death of one of its leading Generals. The soldiers of the B.E.F. were aware of officers who would make the initial communication and operations with the French army easier and, right at the beginning of the war, the B.E.F. was robbed of one of its

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<sup>20</sup> Captain Walter Fyrth, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 97/4/1, 1914). 19/08/1914. 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 French language. These language difficulties were not the sole preserve of the infantry. Levine refers to a pilot in the Royal Flying Corp who ‘recalled that the French seemed to be shouting, Long live and tear!’ With some subsequently acquired knowledge of the French language, he decided that he must have been hearing, ‘Vive l’Angleterre!’ Joshua Levine, *On a wing and a prayer* (London: Collins, 2008). p.95

<sup>21</sup> Lieutenant Lionel Hallam Tennyson, "Manuscript Diaries - Vols 1 & 3," (IWM: DOCS - 76/21/1, 1914-1915). 24/08/1914. 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 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.

<sup>22</sup> Fyrth 20/08/1914

most competent Generals. Both Loyd and Bellew mention the death of Lieutenant General Grierson.<sup>23</sup> Grierson was an accomplished linguist who, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century had 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 and the pair of them laid the foundations for Anglo-French military cooperation.<sup>24</sup> Grierson was also a noted tactician, defeating Haig during war games in 1912 after adopting aerial reconnaissance (at the behest of his cavalry commander).<sup>25</sup> However, the day after arriving in France Grierson died of a heart attack during a train journey to Amiens on 17 August. How great a role Grierson would have had during the war is, of course, open for debate but the soldiers themselves were certainly aware of him and his reputation and had clearly hoped that he would be a suitable representative of them and their interests to the French.

The early encounters with the French army, occurring almost entirely in towns or in transit to the front, were fairly low-key and often manifested in situations involving the distribution of food.<sup>26</sup> When it came to more martial contact and conclusions the interactions seemed to be tinged with the sort of inter-national/services rivalry that you might expect.

Saw a few French troops (artillery) but did not think a very great deal of the horses they had even compared with some of ours ... The French trucks are miles ahead of our rotten cattle trucks for the transport of horses. Each truck is about ½ as big again as the usual English cattle truck ... and is capable of carrying 40 men or 8 horses.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Loyd. 18/08/1914 and Bellew. 16/08/1914

<sup>24</sup> "Sir James Moncrieff Grierson," Oxford Dictionary of National Biography <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/view/article/33574?docPos=6>.

<sup>25</sup> John Bourne, "Sir James Moncrieff Grierson," The Centre for First World War Studies: Lions Led By Donkeys, <http://www.firstworldwar.bham.ac.uk/donkey/grierson.htm> accessed.

<sup>26</sup> Loyd. 15/08/1914 & Bellew. 17/08/1914

<sup>27</sup> Fyrth. 20/08/1914



Loyd was also the recipient of stories and rumours delivered by ‘wounded from the front’ who told that ‘the French had the superiority in artillery and the use of the bayonet’.<sup>28</sup> The British seemed keen to assess the relative merits and faults of the French in comparison to their own strengths, but it was driven by a mix of curiosity and understandable national pride rather than anything more critical. Things had not gone entirely smoothly however, and Lieutenant Edward Spears 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’.<sup>29</sup> 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 and he credits Colonel Macdonough, Head of Intelligence, for achieving this ‘miracle’ before the Battle of Charleroi.<sup>30</sup>

None of these opening experiences or issues would likely have been a fatal blow to the morale of the B.E.F. upon their arrival in France. Together, however, they did create an uncomfortable situation for the British soldiers who now found themselves in a country where they were unable to speak the language, had been cut off from official news back home and had lost one of the high-ranking members of their chain of command (and a man noted for his ability to coordinate with the French). Much scholarly attention has been directed, understandably, towards the experience and reactions of soldiers to combat, both the initial contact and the aftermath, but the pre-combat scenario should also be considered for the anxiety and stress it can provoke in the individual. Research into the state of mind of soldiers deployed to Kuwait in the run up to the First Gulf War noted causes of pre-combat stress that have striking parallels with the circumstances facing the soldiers of the B.E.F., amongst others the

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<sup>28</sup> Loyd. 15/08/1914

<sup>29</sup> Edward Spears, *Liaison 1914* (London: Cassell, 2000). p.69

<sup>30</sup> Spears, E. p.69

'lack of respite', 'lack of amenities' and 'uncertainty about public support'.<sup>31</sup> Other factors, particularly in regards to emerging fears regarding spies, would become relevant during the retreat from Mons. Over time however, the soldiers in the Gulf would adapt in a way that, as shall be examined, is comparable with the experiences of British soldiers in mid-1915 to 1916.<sup>32</sup>

The British army had still not yet had any substantive contact with the French army following their arrival at the Channel Ports and their subsequent deployment further forward and so had not yet had a chance to attempt any form of coordination, cooperation or social introduction. Ideally this would have been more carefully managed but no sooner had the B.E.F. reached the front then a disaster began unfolding across the allied lines.

### **From Mons to the Marne**

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.<sup>33</sup> Elements of this can also be found in the experiences of the soldiers. On 22 August, Helm's brigade was put into danger by French intelligence when they were told that a single German corps was approaching from the direction of Brussels only for them to face four corps instead.<sup>34</sup> Two days later, in one of the most interesting entries in these diaries, Helm's growing distrust of the French army becomes more apparent:

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<sup>31</sup> Robert K. Gifford et al., "Stress and Stressors of the Early Phases of the Persian Gulf War," *Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences* 361, no. 1468 (2006). For further examinations of soldiers and their reactions to combat see; Edgar Jones, "The Psychology of Killing: The Combat Experience of British Soldiers during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006)., Joanna Bourke, *An intimate history of killing* (Granta Books, 1999)., and Ferguson, Chapter 12.

<sup>32</sup> Gifford et al., "Stress and Stressors of the Early Phases of the Persian Gulf War."

<sup>33</sup> Brown (2001) pp.10-13

<sup>34</sup> Helm. 22/08/1914

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).<sup>35</sup>

In the current absence of solid information as to the identity of Helm's French General, it would be easy to dismiss the incident as simple rumour. However, Helm saw fit to include it in his diary; he believed there to be some truth to this incident. There is no sense of surprise at this event either; he did not believe such an occurrence would be impossible, which speaks volumes as to his own assessment of the French military. It appears that Helm heard a rumour that resonated with his own opinions of the French and he took it to be true. It is equally possible and plausible that the French military, not keen for it to be known that one of their Generals was a traitor, covered up the facts. In essence however, neither of these possibilities matter. For Helm the incident was true and forms the basis of his subsequent issues with the French military. A few days after this entry his battalion is informed that two French corps are approaching to relieve them, so called a halt for the night only for their relief not to arrive.<sup>36</sup>

Events became steadily more chaotic as the B.E.F. retreated from the stand made at Le Cateau.<sup>37</sup> Helm's battalion had been devastated during the recent battles with

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<sup>35</sup> Helm. 24/08/1914. There were two French Generals, Raffanel and Rondoney, killed during August 1914 both of them on 22 August. Both of these men are listed as having been killed in action during a battle at Rossignol. Whether or not either of these Generals is in anyway connected to Helm's entry is unclear but it seems entirely reasonable to suggest that the events and circumstances of this errant French General that Helm describes may have been an unsubstantiated rumour which gathered steam amongst the BEF.

<sup>36</sup> Helm. 26/08/1914

<sup>37</sup> Bellew was amongst those who made the retreat from Le Cateau and retired south to St Quentin. Bellew. 1914

‘roughly speaking’ 18 officers and 700 men killed, wounded or missing on 25 August leaving 7 officers and about 150 men.<sup>38</sup> On 26 August, Major Brereton wrote that ‘about 10.0am [sic] a Staff Officer had told us that 35,000 French were coming up on our left. They never came and we heard later that the General Retreat had been ordered.’<sup>39</sup> In this environment it was perhaps inevitable that costly mistakes would be made and, sure enough, on the same day that Brereton wrote about the General Retreat, Lieutenant Spencer reported:

The French blew up a bridge over the river Godsall and Burton were wounded by the explosion. Godsall slightly, but Burton badly. They were taken away in a French ambulance. Later we heard that they had been captured and made prisoners of war by the Germans.<sup>40</sup>

The day after this accident French forces near Spencer retired through his position leaving the B.E.F. exposed and forcing them to retire, whilst the previous night Helm had experienced a similar situation.<sup>41</sup>

Following the retreat from Mons the B.E.F. 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 Bellew made the comment that,

things are looking pretty black we are losing 10 English to one French. They are doing simply nothing and we are getting whacked by numbers.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Helm. 25/08/1914

<sup>39</sup> Major C L Brereton, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 86/30/1, 1914). 26/08/1914

<sup>40</sup> Lieutenant Albert V Spencer DSO, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 87/26/1, 1914). 26/08/1914

<sup>41</sup> Spencer. 27/08/1914, and; Helm. 26/08/1914

<sup>42</sup> Bellew. 27/08/1914

It is incidents such as this that highlight the divergence between Bellew's personal and subjective opinion and the wider strategic view of the Western Front. Bellew clearly did not know the losses the French were taking in the early battles of the war and there was no reason why he should have known the full extent of the French dead. From his position he was simply aware of the British casualties and knew that the French army was many times larger than the B.E.F. and, logically, it should therefore be doing more to protect the British.<sup>43</sup> We know now that at roughly the same time as Bellew was writing, the British military authorities were facing a choice between protecting their own interests and withdrawing the B.E.F. to defend the channel ports, or fulfilling their obligations to the French.<sup>44</sup> In addition to this John French was rapidly descending into depression having lost trust in the French commanders on his flanks.<sup>45</sup> The eventual choice to withdraw in proximity with the French ensured that the B.E.F. would continue to be deployed to protect French interests.

Against this backdrop of confusion and, in some cases, mounting panic, personal differences and evaluations between the British and the French became apparent in the writings of some British soldiers. On 26 August Tennyson 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.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> By the end of August some 75,000 French soldiers had died already (27,000 of them on the 22<sup>nd</sup> alone) and their total killed and wounded numbered 260,000. Stevenson (2005) p.54. Anon Soldier #10539 had also noted the size of the French army and reported seeing French infantry spread out across 8 miles of countryside, on the same day as Bellew made his entry. Anon Soldier 10539, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - Misc 33 (597), 1914-1915). 27/08/1914

<sup>44</sup> Philpott (1996), pp.22-27

<sup>45</sup> Spears. pp.175-6

<sup>46</sup> Tennyson. 26/08/1914. There is of course an alternative reading to this statement where Tennyson's final sentence is not meant to be sarcastic, but instead is paying acclaim to 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.

The implication was that the French's lax attitude towards their presentation and their duty lessened their ability to fight effectively,<sup>47</sup> 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 was later 'devoured by lice and fleas' in the French NCOs' bedroom.<sup>48</sup>

The difference in presentation between the British and French is perhaps best highlighted by the national interpretations of facial hair. Bellew and 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. [Royal Horse Artillery] pass here yesterday all with beards, you would not know them.'<sup>49</sup> On 3 September he would also joke that 'you would laugh to see our troops with beards, the officers as well. It would make father envious.'<sup>50</sup>

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.'<sup>51</sup> What Tennyson and Bellew viewed as being 'unsmart' and, as an implied consequence, unfit for duty, the French soldiers, as Smith, Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker write, were

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<sup>47</sup> It should also 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'. Arthur (2002) pp.25-6. The French began the war clad in outdated 19<sup>th</sup> 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. Anthony Clayton, *Paths of glory : the French Army, 1914-1918* (London: Cassell Military, 2003). pp.27 & 73.

<sup>48</sup> Tennyson. 31/08/1914

<sup>49</sup> Bellew. 25/08/1914 & 27/08/1914.

<sup>50</sup> Bellew. 03/09/1914.

<sup>51</sup> Tennyson. 19/09/1914.

particularly proud of.<sup>52</sup> 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 the soil. 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.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst it might be simple to overly dwell on the apparent cosmetic nature of Tennyson's criticism of the French there was likely an additional motivating factor behind them that both drove the criticism and also defined its focus. There was no denying the fact that the British officer corps were principally drawn from higher social classes than the rank and file soldier.<sup>54</sup>

The impression of class was further ingrained into the British army through the nature of the uniforms. With working-class recruits being, statistically, shorter than their officer counterparts by around 5 inches they wore uniforms produced *en masse* that were often ill-fitting and baggy. Officers wore uniforms made to measure by a tailor, purchased at the recruit's expense, but when worn provided a far more authoritative image.<sup>55</sup> When considering some of Tennyson's principal complaints against the French in August and September whilst they focus on the appearance and activities of the French army, they 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 are also not appearing in the manner of a British gentleman. The inbuilt social hierarchy of the British army did not evolve well to deal with the

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<sup>52</sup> '[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.' Smith et al p.76

<sup>53</sup> 'They seem to prefer to be killed than to get dirty and don't throw themselves to the ground as we do; they remain standing; it's very fine but not very clever.' Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>54</sup> Gerard J. De Groot, *Blighty : British society in the era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p.32

<sup>55</sup> Peter Parker, *The old lie; the Great War and the public-school ethos* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p.163

introduction of French soldiers who did not appear to fit within any acknowledged class sphere. Heimburger highlights the particular issue of French interpreters who were 'at 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'.<sup>56</sup>

France was also a far more rural society than Britain during this time and the British were moving constantly amongst rural populations during the opening months of the war as well. Whilst, as we will see below, France could boast a metropolitan population just as varied as that in Britain, the men of 1914 weren't seeing it at this time. 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 makeup 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.

There was a change in the relationship with the French civilians as well. 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.<sup>57</sup> Crowsley's Division were getting accurate reports during the retreat and knew that the French government had evacuated Paris for Bordeaux, which in his opinion

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<sup>56</sup> Franziska Heimburger, "Mapping Allied Space in the Franco-British Coalition on the Western Front - The Officers' Mess," in *Other Fronts, Other Wars?* (Innsbruck, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> Bellew. 30/08/1914



pointed towards a disaster.<sup>58</sup> During this retreat encounters with the French refugees are 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.<sup>59</sup> It was Butterworth, on 26 August, who best highlights the conflicting emotions of the British soldiers at this time:

It was heart rendering (sic) to see refugees retiring along with the British army day and night out. People old and young, women carrying youngster in their arms, only to (sic) glad to get out of the German's (sic) clutches, they retired till they had no energy left. I know from my experience what these poor people suffered driven from their homes to the mercy of the world, but the British Tommy always had a soft spot for them ... I shouldn't like to see this happen in this country.<sup>60</sup>

The reaction to these French refugees is, in a fundamental way, not that dissimilar to Tennyson's negative reaction to the appearance and behaviour of French soldiers. Clearly they are not directly comparable in regards to the spirit of the emotions displayed, with Tennyson clearly critical during his writings of French soldiers whilst

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<sup>58</sup> Crowsley. 31/08/1914

<sup>59</sup> This 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 Crowsley is using the word to describe how the appearance of the refugees is not only sad to behold but also inspires emotions of fear in the British soldiers.

<sup>60</sup> Butterworth. 26/08/1914. The ending sentiment in Butterworth's entry here is particularly interesting because of its, perhaps, surprising uniqueness. During this retreat from Mons (and indeed during the other darker periods of 1914- early 1915), the soldiers of the BEF do not appear to transfer the events in France onto Britain in anyway. Butterworth and Myatt, who (during October) wrote ‘God help England if we are defeated by these devils’ (B C Myatt, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 97/4/1, 1914). 17/10/1914) are the only soldiers in my studies to date who actively consider that such events could be replicated in Britain should the retreat become a rout. Given the circumstances the BEF found itself in you might expect more of the soldiers to be considering such an issue and yet it is noticeably absent from their writings. There are several good reasons for this of course; with morale appearing to be low such thoughts could easily be seen as defeatist (even more so if written in diaries that were already restricted). It is also plausible that the soldiers would actively avoid confronting such thoughts and images of a Britain facing defeat on the mainland. Additionally Butterworth's use of ‘this country’ is flawed as he is clearly referring to Britain rather than France. The change in physical location from Britain to France does not appear to have changed his mental location and he still thinks of himself as rooted in Britain.

the reaction of the men coming into contact with French civilians fleeing the fighting is one of pronounced pity and sorrow. However, at its heart these cases still represent an ‘us and them’ scenario and, whilst the temptation in such instances is to focus purely on the ‘them’ (in this case the French) we should not neglect the ‘us’. We should be sure to draw a distinction between the writing and emotions themselves and the potential motivations and considerations behind them. The effect that the defeat at Mons and the losses at Le Cateau would have had on the psyche of the British soldiers. In both cases they had fallen into combat with the advancing Germans and despite their best efforts 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 out-numbered 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 are, 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 that Tennyson so disapproved of greatly outnumbered the British army and they all seemed to be fairing equally as badly, with suspicions being voiced by some British soldiers, that the French weren’t doing enough to protect them and, therefore, the British were actually faring worse. In such circumstances how exactly was Tennyson to reconcile his belief in the superiority of the British martial approach? These stresses would eventually manifest themselves in Tennyson taking an angry swipe at French civilians:

All the villagers wherever we go yell ‘Vive l’Angleterre, vive les anglais,’ until we are quite sick of hearing their voices when most of them ought to be fighting themselves.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Tennyson. 29/08/1914.

The ability to move beyond, or at least balance, the immediate situation with the wider strategic one often depended on a mix of personality but also position. Loyd, for example, was clearly aware of the strain the B.E.F. had been under and the need for it to regroup and recover before entering into any further engagements. He also appears to be informed enough of the Germans' current movement and numbers as well as the comparative strength of the French armies facing them.<sup>62</sup> Loyd, being in the Cyclist Company, spent a great deal of time alternating between the frontlines and the Divisional Headquarters and, as a result, is able to provide both a personal and strategic view of the war around him. More interestingly, there is no editorialising in Loyd's diary. His diary is a simple summation of events with no evidence of blame being attributed when things go wrong. Importantly, in the context of this study, Loyd records 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 or relation to the British.

During the actual Battle of the Marne itself the British soldiers do not write a great deal 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 are engaged in fighting, the soldiers seem to do 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 take them back over land they had previously passed through, and then retreated from, and beyond into areas of France and Belgium that the Germans were actively and 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 as fears of spies and confusion over the nature of some of the French

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<sup>62</sup> Loyd. 03/09/1914 – 04/09/1914

forces arrayed alongside them began to heavily blur the lines between allies and enemies.

### **Suspicious, Spies and Savages**

With the Entente nations now advancing across a wide front, accidental meetings between the French and the British became more commonplace with the two groups sharing news and rumours each time they met, as Loyd reports happening with a French Cavalry Division on 11 September.<sup>63</sup> With the Germans presenting a fighting retreat and the B.E.F. and French armies encountering each other almost at random, mistakes and accidents were almost inevitable as Loyd describes:

At Oulchy-la-ville we ran into the tail of the French Cavalry Division. One of our patrols shooting the horse of a Frenchman mistaking him for a German.<sup>64</sup>

During this period the British developed a keen understanding, and in places, appreciation for French artillery doctrine. Helm has his first encounter with the vaunted French 75mm gunss on 12 September and seems surprised that the French artillery fire constantly during the night whilst the British ceased action at dusk.<sup>65</sup> The next day Helm would again note that to the left of his position he could see hundreds of French shells bursting in comparison to the few British shrapnel shells exploding in front of him.<sup>66</sup> On the same day Loyd would write that ‘the combination of German skill and French explosives would be disastrous to any foe.’<sup>67</sup>

The 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 B.E.F. was being looked upon as ‘the saviours of France and

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<sup>63</sup> Loyd. 11/09/1914.

<sup>64</sup> Loyd. 11/09/1914.

<sup>65</sup> Helm. 12/09/1914.

<sup>66</sup> Helm. 13/09/1914

<sup>67</sup> Loyd. 13/09/1914.

Paris'.<sup>68</sup> In addition British soldiers were also now being recognised by the French military for their efforts in the early battles of the war, with Loyd being personally awarded the Légion d'Honneur and a sergeant friend of Bellew was recommended for a French decoration after laying cable under heavy fire.<sup>69</sup> 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 highest French military medal; the Médaille Militaire, after losing his leg on the Aisne.<sup>70</sup> 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.

The British also began to have more substantial contact with the French colonial forces and the results provided moments of real shock and concern for the British soldiers. Perhaps inevitably Tennyson's initial reaction was not complimentary:

Had a company of Zouaves near us here who had been all through the thickest fighting on the Marne. Both their captain and lieutenant had beards and were very unsmart to look at, as all the French troops are.<sup>71</sup>

It was, however, the practices and not the appearances of some of the French colonial soldiers that caused Bellew and Loyd the greatest alarm. On 20 September Bellew recalled how 'some Moroccan mounted troops came through here the other day. One

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<sup>68</sup> Helm reported this on 8/09/1914, and Tennyson informed a French woman 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 11/10/1914.

<sup>69</sup> Loyd. 07/09/1914. Bellew. 17/09/1914

<sup>70</sup> Tennyson. 1914.

<sup>71</sup> Tennyson. 19/09/1914.

chap had a German head in his bag, others had German hands and ears as souvenirs.’<sup>72</sup> On 23 September Loyd reported that:

There was a wagon proceeding from the firing line with twelve German prisoners captured by the French and guarded by two Turcos. On reaching Braine, blood was to be seen trickling from the back of the wagon. The little civilised guard had killed them all, one Turco being found with a German’s head in his haversack.<sup>73</sup>

This entry is, when viewed against the general tone of his other notes, the closest that Loyd ever gets to being genuinely shocked and the use of the word ‘civilised’ perhaps highlights Loyd’s assumption and expectation of a certain level of behaviour from the allied forces. On 28 September he makes a 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.<sup>74</sup> Atrocities by allied forces occupy a difficult place within this literature as the B.E.F. 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 murdering prisoners and taking souvenirs must have caused some consternation within the ranks of the B.E.F.. It also raised questions about the nature of nationality. Whilst the French were, to the British, ‘other’ there are 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’.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Bellew. 20/09/1914.

<sup>73</sup> Loyd. 23/09/1914.

<sup>74</sup> Loyd. 28/09/1914.

<sup>75</sup> 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).

Hodges suggests, using corroborating evidence from General Mangin, that the initial decision to use colonial soldiers in Europe was 'influenced by German fears' regarding such men.<sup>76</sup> Hodges also suggests that, 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' during 1857 and the British authorities were forced to launch a sustained multi-platform propaganda campaign in an attempt to correct these negative perceptions.<sup>77</sup> When it came to the way British soldiers then interacted with the colonial soldiers there were, according to Hodges, 'a number of threads that dominated British soldiers' contemporary texts'.<sup>78</sup>

First, and dominant, among these were reports of their savagery in battle, generally, of the most brutal, exotic or primitive kind. In particular, the collection of enemies' ears or heads was frequently and vividly described. Allied to this, was the commonly expressed feeling of 'thank God that they are on our side'. These views were founded on the notions of savagery of non-white warriors already referred to, but they also recognised the bravery and military efficiency of colonial troops bought to bear on the Allied side. Indeed, often British soldiers seemed intent on powerfully conveying the message that the military effectiveness and courage of colonial troops stemmed from their uncompromising methods of waging war, although sometimes this was undercut by notions of their possession of a more primeval, 'natural' or animalistic skill-set than Western troops. More subtly detectable is the sense that, in a similar way to which thoughts of the bayonet's brutish and intimidating efficiency were a helpful prop to British troops in the trenches, the thought of non-white Allied colonial troops' skill and savagery in attacking the enemy, were also acting as a comfort to Tommies.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> 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.'

<sup>77</sup> Hodges. pp.214-5

<sup>78</sup> Hodges. p.221

<sup>79</sup> Hodges. p.221. There is further evidence of this within the diary of Loyd who reports that 'Turcos of I Division bayoneted 150 Germans in their trenches' on 23/09/1914.

The result of these considerations was a mixed scenario of shock and appreciation regarding the exploits, both real and rumoured of their exotic allies.

Ear collecting, along with gore-filled accounts of beheadings, were among the most popular reports of non-white allies' behaviour made by British troops. They combined neatly pungent implications of Orientalist exoticism and savagery but also, in that the colonial troops could effect these beheadings and amass these collections of ears, military efficiency was recognised - particularly in skilful infiltration, impressive raiding and deadly hand-to-hand combat.<sup>80</sup>

There is an additional undercurrent to this. Whilst these atrocities and their perpetrators are made to seem decidedly 'other' in the writings of the British soldiers, Hodges explains that 'Indian troops often treated prisoners of war better than neighbouring British'.<sup>81</sup> Indeed his thesis as a whole 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.<sup>82</sup>

When it came to the 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. By October Colonel Eric Dillon (later Brigadier and

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<sup>80</sup> Hodges. p.224

<sup>81</sup> Hodges. p.217

<sup>82</sup> Joanna 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 practice the norm in order to highlight not just their fighting prowess but also 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. Bourke 2000, pp.37-43



Viscount) was already reflecting 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.

A letter was found from five French sisters, to the last survivor of their six brothers, who was employed as a mechanic in the French Aircraft Corps. They asked him to apply for a transfer to the infantry so that he might avenge the death of his brothers, and also his grandfather, who was killed in the 1870 war. It was the most touching document I have ever seen. I am told that Sir John French's comment upon seeing it was "Such a nation cannot be conquered" I am told that the French officers say that their troops are even keener than they were at the beginning.<sup>83</sup>

As for the French they are quite good too – I think that the French private soldier is better than the German private soldier. Our men are really grand when you think what they've been through – I don't think our officers know as much about the business as the German officers, still what they lose in knowledge they make up for in guts.<sup>84</sup>

Dillon is 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 fit into this martial hierarchy as it would become a key theme to the experience of British soldiers in 1916. He's 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 had reported that a German prisoner had informed a British officer that, whilst the British were 'very brave to come out and meet us', he'd ominously predicted that 'your chance of doing harm is useless we are out to win and we are going to win'.<sup>85</sup> Later on he'd seen '200 prisoners' passing through and declaring 'my word they are

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<sup>83</sup> Brigadier The Viscount Dillon C.M.G. D.S.O, *Memories of three Wars* (London: Allan Wingate (publishers) Ltd., 1951), p.38

<sup>84</sup> Dillon, p.40

<sup>85</sup> Bellew, 31/08/1914

big chaps, twice as big as our chaps'.<sup>86</sup> 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 and the fervent hope that 'the French will not push forward for if they do they will occupy Reims'.<sup>87</sup> It is noticeable from these instances that the general focus of the German and indeed the French armies at this point in time is on each other. The British are not so much overlooked as seemingly more viewed as a non-crucial or decisive factor, which stands in stark contrast to how the French civilians viewed the efforts and input of the British army as they passed along the front. The British soldiers appear to have realised early on that in regards to numbers and firepower they were grossly outnumbered and we can begin to see the first signs of a reframing of their role in the overall context of the Western Front.

There were other changes occurring however, and principal amongst these in regards to the effect on the B.E.F. was the emergence of a particular strain of spy fever. As the men of the B.E.F. 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.<sup>88</sup> 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

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<sup>86</sup> Bellew, 09/09/1914

<sup>87</sup> Tennyson, 24/09/1914

<sup>88</sup> Tennyson, 03/10/1914.

was found to be carrying messages between the farmer and the Germans and he was shot.<sup>89</sup>

Gibson attributes some of this emerging suspicion to a lack of understanding on behalf of the British, built upon pre-war norms, on how to react to supposedly friendly civilians.

[M]uch of the soldier's career was spent abroad, garrisoning any number of imperial outposts, where he was seen as a conqueror and occupier, not an ally, and conducted himself accordingly. Regimental tradition did little to ameliorate this trend.<sup>90</sup>

There appears then to be evidence for British soldiers behaving in accordance with a kind of institutional memory regarding civil populations. Britain's colonial experiences would not have left soldiers predisposed towards a fondness of the civilians they encountered on military deployment, and therefore when the situation in France worsened the response would be to fall back on pre-war approaches and doctrine, regardless of how informal or subconscious these influences might be. 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.

No doubt there were spies about, but certainly never as many as were reported. Perfectly absurd stories were solemnly believed and investigated, and quite unnecessary energy was expended in following up ridiculous rumours. The result was to engender a certain amount of unnecessary nervousness amongst the troops, so that every untoward or unexplained event, a sudden burst of artillery fire, for instance, or the shelling of billets, was put down to the work of spies. It is bad for morale that

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<sup>89</sup> Tennyson, 03/10/1914.

<sup>90</sup> Gibson (1998), p.39

mysterious causes should be thought to be at the root of quite normal occurrences. The men get nerves, and nerves are the forerunner of unsteadiness and panic.<sup>91</sup>

However, whilst Spears was writing on the necessity for restraint and commonsense measures were also being adopted and applied which suggested that, upon taking a village, 'a house-to-house search was to be under taken' and every house, as a result, 'had its front door forced, whereupon the police rushed in'.<sup>92</sup>

Rather than having decreased following the Battle of the Marne, this spy fever was actually increasing as the British advanced. Previously with the British retreating they had, at least, known roughly where the enemy were. Now, whilst advancing into the unknown, the fear of ambush or betrayal became more of a concern in a manner that became reminiscent of the German concerns at the outset of the war about the *francs-tireurs* that had so dogged them during the Franco-Prussian war. The process of then advancing into uncertain situations, and the cumulative effect of random bursts of combat weighed upon the soldiers of the B.E.F. If we take the following entries from Myatt, spread across a week in October, a theme emerges.

October 12:

We were creeping along one road and a French battery is going along another running parallel with us and the Germans are peppering them with shell and my word they are going at the gallop for their lives.

By dark we were in action for about 4 hours and it is getting dark. The poor devils of people women and children are flying all for their lives, terror stricken. It makes ones (sic) heart bleed to see them poor devils.

October 16:

The Germans seem to have all the ranges here. The place is over-run with spies. The French would sell their own homes. I am thinking they give us away wherever we go.

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<sup>91</sup> Spears, p.219

<sup>92</sup> Gibson (1998), p.40

October 17:

The people what had stopped there came out of their cellars after living in there for days poor devils, away from the shell and shot. The German devils had shot women and children and old people here and disgraced young girls galore. God help England if we are defeated by these devils.

October 18:

Signal from spy in town clocktower causes massive German bombardment of town.<sup>93</sup>

The first issue that is immediately obvious is that Myatt's opinion and view of the French citizens swings repeatedly over this period. It is also clear that Myatt's division was undergoing heavy artillery assault during these days, with a particularly large bombardment on 15 October that caused much damage to the town centre and numerous casualties.<sup>94</sup> We must therefore consider whether Myatt's changing opinions are really based upon an active suspicion and dislike of the French or if they are instead the manifestation of combat stress that is then focused on a more easily identifiable target; in this case the French and Belgian civilians. Certainly this wasn't a fleeting issue for the British soldiers and carried on well into 1915 at various places around the frontline.<sup>95</sup>

Reminiscent of the British reaction to acts of violence by colonial soldiers in the French army, the fact that these suspected spies are French (or Belgian in some cases) does not appear to be the source of suspicion. It is not an issue of national unreliability on the part of the French themselves; it is 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 war

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<sup>93</sup> Myatt. 12/10/1914 – 18/10/1914. Myatt occasionally alternates between the spellings 'devils' and 'divils' for use in this work I have selected the former spelling. It's also possible that Tennyson witnesses this last event as, on the same day, he writes 'caught a man signalling the German guns. He was French and had 2 sons in the French army. He was shot.' Tennyson. 1914.

<sup>94</sup> Myatt. 15/10/1914.

<sup>95</sup> Gibson (1998), pp.39-45

were fractured and disjointed in most regards for the British soldiers. Their deployment was well-planned but their induction into a European alliance was under-thought and then given no chance to take place naturally because of the fluctuating nature of the opening battles. The ‘Race to the Sea’ and the eventual settling of the armies into more recognised fortified positions would change much of this unstructured interaction between the British and the French. However, it would also herald the final months of the original B.E.F.

### **The turn of the year**

The final months of 1914 and the opening 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 and their deployment initially around Antwerp but, following the abortive attempt to defend the Belgian city, they would dig in around Ypres.<sup>96</sup>

The observation by Anon Soldier #15039 on 21 October of the proximity to the frontlines of a large British and French force, and the heavy fighting in the area does, in many ways, set the tone for the defensive action around Ypres itself.<sup>97</sup> As mentioned earlier, the B.E.F. was a well-trained and highly effective military force, lacking the size of the other armies on the Western Front, but still an extremely capable unit. These traits were clearly demonstrated during the early movement battles when they were able to use their Divisional flexibility to attack the larger German formations. It was this tactic they used at the beginning of the Battle of Mons to great effect, only for weight of German numbers to force them into a retreat. However, as the evolving circumstances led the competing armies to eschew movement and reorganise for defensive entrenchment the B.E.F. lost its greatest

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<sup>96</sup> For a further investigation of the defensive actions at Antwerp then the chapter ‘The War in the North, 2-18 October 1914’ Robin Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2004). provides a good overview. For further reading on the disagreements between the British and French regarding Antwerp then consider Greenhalgh (2008). pp.19-23, and also Philpott (1996). pp.34-46

<sup>97</sup> Anon Soldier #10539. 21/10/1914.

attribute. The subsequent move up to Ypres placed the B.E.F. in frontline trenches facing the might of the German army. Chained to a single spot and denied the room for movement the B.E.F. did not have the strength of numbers to bear the assault and was effectively destroyed as a fighting force, suffering around ninety percent casualties by the spring of 1915.<sup>98</sup>

Because the B.E.F. had largely ceased movement all together upon arriving at Ypres and with the nature of the fighting during this battle, interactions with the French became fleeting. From 23 - 30 October numerous contributors mention the activities of the French armed forces but these entries are all fairly light in details and are not notable events in themselves, merely single threads of the wider tapestry such as Loyd's notation that the 'French attacked continually throughout the night' of 27 October, or Butterworth's report three days later of 'French reserves called upon to aid the defence of Ypres.'<sup>99</sup>

The stationary nature of the front-line prevented the more impromptu encounters between French and British soldiers of the previous months. However, we must also acknowledge that the fairly constant threat of fighting would likely have distracted the minds of British soldiers from the more mundane actions of their French allies. The distraction of active combat removes the element of consideration and reflection which marks some of the criticism of the French, leaving only the opportunity for instantaneous judgement on any interactions, which as already explained had become significantly restricted. This inevitably led to reduction of encounters described within these soldiers' diaries. The casualties the B.E.F. had sustained, particularly during August and September, only exacerbated this situation.

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<sup>98</sup> See: Lyn Macdonald, *1915 : the death of innocence* (London: Headline, 1993).

<sup>99</sup> Loyd. 27/10/1914. & Butterworth. 30/10/1914.

The B.E.F. had already been gravely reduced by its exertions in France and the fighting in Belgium proved decisive; on 29 October Helm's battalion had been weakened to barely 200 men with only 5 officers remaining, with Helm and the Quartermaster the only two remaining of those who had left Dublin in August.<sup>100</sup> Other contributors to this study also began to fall victim to the ongoing fighting. Crowsley having been wounded by shrapnel on 8 September was returned to Britain for surgery.<sup>101</sup> Cummings was reported sick and returned to England on 22 November.<sup>102</sup> A sniper wounded McDougall on 29 October.<sup>103</sup> On 12 November Tennyson badly injured a knee falling into a darkened trench or ditch and was returned to Britain.<sup>104</sup> On 13 November Loyd was mortally wounded in action by a shrapnel shell and would die whilst in transit from the clearing station to hospital.<sup>105</sup> Spencer became another victim of German snipers receiving a wound to the chest on 26 November that saw him evacuated back to Britain on 4 December.<sup>106</sup> Helm was deployed to Ypres in November of 1914 where he served until April 1915 before being evacuated back to Britain after being subjected to the first gas attack of the war.

With the B.E.F. therefore incurring climbing casualties and the end of the year approaching there was an apparent attempt to reach some form of shared co-operation between the British, French and Belgian soldiers around the Ypres salient. Myatt's entries for Christmas and Boxing days, respectively, provide a very different view of the French army than any yet seen.

#### December 25:

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<sup>100</sup> Helm. 29/10/1914.

<sup>101</sup> Crowsley 1914. The personal effects within Crowsley's file however shows that he survived both the First and Second World Wars and died in the 1970s

<sup>102</sup> Cummings. 08/09/1914

<sup>103</sup> McDougall. 29/10/1914.

<sup>104</sup> Tennyson. 12/11/1914. Tennyson would return to the Western Front in 1915 and undergo a fairly dramatic change in his demeanour towards the French. See p.285

<sup>105</sup> Loyd. 13/11/1914.

<sup>106</sup> Spencer. 26/11/1914.



It came over very misty so we played the French batteries at a game of football, and beat them easy. A friendly game.

December 26:

The French and Belgian soldiers and people could not make out how our people could afford such things for us. I like the Belgian people and their soldiers are very nice and homely but they don't like the French much and I don't care for them much, they seem to think they could have done without us but I am thinking it would have been a poor day for France if it had not been for England stepping in to help them and Belgium it would have been all over by now. The French don't like the idea of fighting in Belgium, they seem to think they should be fighting in their own country.<sup>107</sup>

The 'Christmas Truce' of 1914 is an event synonymous with football matches on the western front but these matches are often referenced as taking place between the Germans and the British, so Myatt's account is a pleasing, and interesting, example of how the allies marked Christmas Day between themselves, whilst still clearly hinting at a level of friendly rivalry between the British and French players.

The Boxing Day entry however, offers a different insight into the dynamic between the main Entente armies on the western front. The historically close relationship between Britain and Belgium is in evidence and, whether or not it stems from the 'Rape of Belgium' propaganda, there is certainly affection towards the Belgian army and soldiers. This might be a sign that, through their homeliness and acceptance of the British army, the Belgians know their place in the wider narrative of the war. By contrast several issues with the French emerge from this entry, 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 are at odds with

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<sup>107</sup> Myatt. 25/12/1914 – 26/12/1914

the consensus reached by their British and Belgian allies. It's understandable that the British soldiers would feel that their efforts and sacrifices during the war would be devalued by this French attitude, whilst the British were already fighting in a foreign country so may have had little sympathy for the French soldiers fighting in Belgium. Myatt's issue here seems to be the perception of French arrogance and, in the face of it; the British soldiers form an impromptu alliance with their Belgian compatriots.

However, there is also an additional economic aspect to Myatt's diary entries as his Boxing Day entry also records the shock of the French soldiers to the apparent wealth of Britain and the British soldiers following the arrival of the Princess Mary Christmas Presents.<sup>108</sup> A private in the British Army was paid a shilling a day compared with just 6 pence a day for the equivalent rank in the French army.<sup>109</sup> 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. As we will see below, there were other accounts of French soldiers noting the way Britain appeared to be throwing money into the war.<sup>110</sup> The image of a British army that was paying double the wage to its soldiers whilst, in 1914, being much smaller than the French and seemingly doing less work was not likely to engender warm feelings between the two groups of soldiers.<sup>111</sup>

Some of these feelings would lead Myatt to raise the importance of the British army to the French at the beginning of 1915.

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<sup>108</sup> Myatt, 26/12/1914

<sup>109</sup> Ferguson, p.343 & Handbook of the French Army, pp.365-9

<sup>110</sup> See p.230

<sup>111</sup> British GDP at the start of the war was dramatically higher than that of the French. In 1913 the United Kingdom's GDP stood at \$226.4 billion whilst the French 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," in *Annual Meeting of the Economic History Association* (Toronto 2005).

The French troops have lost a lot of ground so I hear they will have to buck up if they want to win this war, or help to. As soon as the Germans make a push at them they are beaten. I think it would have been a bad day for France if England had not stepped in to assist in crushing the Germans.<sup>112</sup>

We can again see here the belief that without British support the French army would have been unable to stand against the Germans, and also the first signs that Myatt believed the British army would have to take direct control of the fighting, relegating the French to a support role, if victory was to be achieved. It would have been a military success in spite of the French rather than because of them. Subsequent events would show this belief to be a fallacy of course but it does highlight the fact that at the start of 1915 the situation around the Western Front and the relations between the British and the French were just as confused and variable as they had been in August and September.

Additionally the arrival of some men in the frontline trenches would provoke strong new emotions in them, particularly given the haphazard nature of some of the French positions.

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

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<sup>112</sup> Myatt. 20/01/1915.

for a successful 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.<sup>113</sup>

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.

The interactions between British and French soldiers in 1914 and early 1915 were, complicated both by circumstance and also by some of the previous experiences of history. Throughout this period there have been examples of suspicion, criticism and negativity towards the French. It is not, however, these instances that I believe to be important but rather the context. When all else was equal, the war was progressing well, and the British were not under attack, they appear well disposed towards the French. It is only when the situation begins to deteriorate and during the occasions where the B.E.F. is under heavy or constant attack that the relationship turns sour. Even at the darkest points in relations it is questionable whether or not the criticism is based on something intrinsically French or rather on something that is '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 chapter above. Their situation has become dangerous and difficult and automatically they reach for a suitable scapegoat, with the French being the most obvious candidate. 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

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<sup>113</sup> C R Smith, "Manuscript Journals - Vols 1 & 3," (IWM: DOCS - 99/56/1, 1914-1917). During the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September (1915).

interpretations at each hint of an issue but enjoying amicable relationships with their allies when times are 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, as previously, confused and not fully formed in a collective consciousness; the French as lazy, scruffy in appearance and lacking in the social requirements for adequate martial ability. This suggests that the British were perhaps unfairly judging the French, and, when compared with the allied relationship when times were good, 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 B.E.F. 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 that created them were killed or faded away. 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 the requirement for 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 below, not something that the British high command gave anymore thought to during the war than they had before it. The fundamental differences between Kitchener's volunteers and the B.E.F.'s professional soldiers meant that, although the primary British armed force was destroyed by 1915, the more adaptable nature of Kitchener's new armies provided a fortunate reprieve from disaster.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **'My heart softened to the French ... all at once I loved them'; Kitchener's New Armies around the Somme**

The period of Tommy-*Poilu* relations during 1916 was marked by a shift of both perspective and expectations towards the French soldiers from the British. The 'soldier' or 'civilian' method of reflection and analysis of the French that was seen in previous years would change quite fundamentally during this year based largely upon the new British soldiers' lack of military expertise and the burgeoning inferiority complex this caused in them when compared with their French allies. Previously the tendency towards a 'soldier' perspective from the original B.E.F. soldiers had created situations where the French could be praised or criticised according to how their actions effected the immediate tactical situation and could therefore produce a verdict of the French having acted either correctly or incorrectly. In contrast the lack of military experience from the men of 1916 meant that they were clearly not comfortable to judge an army which they perceived to be far more martially accomplished than their own.

The more 'civilian' approach could also produce these value judgements but 1916 saw a move to an anthropological approach to understanding the French that largely removed any urge to pass judgement and replaced it simply with a willingness to watch and learn. This would mean that events and actions in the past that might have provoked a negative response on either 'soldier' or 'civilian' grounds became far more likely to pass without comment during 1916. The results of these shifts would see the British soldiers deferring, and reaching out, to their French allies who would, in turn, extend their services as both hosts and teachers towards the British and allow relationships to form that superseded any sense of serious military rivalry. This would allow the British and French to communicate on a more personal level that would reap precious dividends for the rest of the war. However, to understand how these

grassroots relationships grew up it is important to understand how, once again, a lack of direction from the military authorities played an important formative role.

### **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.<sup>1</sup> Alongside this joint military venture was also the prospect of deploying Kitchener's New Armies to the Western Front. As discussed above the joint military plans devised by Wilson and Foch had made comprehensive arrangements for many of the matters and situations that may arise from the deployment of the B.E.F. in France but had made few plans for what would happen once the fighting began and no real consideration for allowing the British and French soldiers to interact with, and operate alongside, each other.

It is clear when examining the military documents of 1915 that no more consideration had been put towards this issue than in the years 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> For information regarding 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 the forthcoming Doctoral Thesis of Rachel Richardson, Birkbeck College, University of London.

<sup>2</sup> See; "New Armies: Organisation," (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 162/31914-1915)., and; "New Armies: Establishments and strength," (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 162/41914-1915).

smooth process of deployment and induction for the New Armies.<sup>3</sup> With the promotion of Douglas Haig to replace John French as the commander of the B.E.F. he would also receive, like French before him, a letter from Kitchener detailing his instructions and urging 'the closest co-operation of French and British as a united Army' whilst also pressing home the point that 'your command is an independent one'.<sup>4</sup> The message was one of co-operation with the French army in defeating the enemy but the impression is one of high-level military co-operation rather than a grass roots movement between the soldiers themselves. Haig's compiled war diaries also make no mention of any plans regarding soldier-to-soldier interaction and neither does the correspondence of Field-Marshal Robertson who was, by the end of 1915, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.<sup>5</sup>

There was certainly a suggestion that the French had 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 arts of trench warfare and learning to defend the line whilst undergoing extensive drilling.<sup>6</sup> There was no more consideration of the inter-troop implications of the new deployment emerging from the French than was present amongst the British.

Several important strands need to be understood. In the first instance, there is the lack of any substantive evidence to suggest that the British High Command at any point during 1915 or early 1916 considered there to be any military necessity or implications in ensuring a smooth transition for their new volunteer armies from

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Lord Kitchener, "Kitchener Collection," (War Office Records at National Archives, Kew; WO 1591914-1916).

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Lord Kitchener, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Douglas Haig, G. D. Sheffield, and J. M. Bourne, *Douglas Haig : war diaries and letters, 1914-1918* (London: Phoenix, 2006)., and, William Robertson, *The military correspondence of Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, December 1915-February 1918*, ed. David R. Woodward and Society Army Records (London: Bodley Head, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Philpott (2009) pp.50-1



training in Britain to deployment in France. There is nothing specifically focused on forming workable relations with the French army or, at the very least, avoiding any extreme form of culture shock. The immediate temptation in this situation is to suggest that this represents a form of negligence on behalf of the British generals, but I am loath to go so far. 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. This may not have been the full picture however. As evidenced by the testimony of Lieutenant Wallace 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 the British High Command began to take a far more active interest in preparing and briefing the men.<sup>7</sup> British commanders appear to be separating interactions with the French into two separate spheres: unsupervised interactions took place within the trenches, whilst the more actively guided took place once soldiers began to transfer out of the trenches and into roles of greater responsibility. Diehl, Druckman and Wall have also suggested that training and consideration for combating culture shock for military peacekeepers and ensuring they are adequately taught 'contact skills' is not universally acknowledged as a necessity even in more contemporary conflicts, so it should not be a surprise if it was not on the agenda during 1915.<sup>8</sup>

With the British High Command not devoting any time or consideration to this issue it can be said that they had abrogated their responsibilities to varying degrees, certainly by allowing the British and French soldiers to essentially work out their relationships by themselves. 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

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<sup>7</sup> Wallace's situation will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four p.185

<sup>8</sup> Paul F. Diehl, Daniel Druckman, and James Wall, "International Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution: A Taxonomic Analysis with Implications," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 1 (1998).

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'd even had 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 of its undirected nature it could just as easily have become a disaster. Whether by accident or design the British High Command did not get involved in this issue and whilst we can say that perhaps this detachment proved beneficial, we must equally declare that they also got incredibly lucky as a result.

### **Defining 'The Somme'**

Whilst the Battle of the Somme is the dominant moment for the British in 1916 it should not be the sole focus of studies revolving around that year. The actual Somme offensive ran from 1 July (although the artillery bombardment commenced seven days beforehand) and eventually wound down in the November-December period of 1916. This clearly provides a significant period of time and territory to examine, but it is not a complete image of 1916. Whilst the fighting was localised on the area inhabited by the British IV Army under General Rawlinson, this should not mean that we ignore other areas of the front or that the experiences of the key contributors should be restricted to the time they spend purely in the Somme sector.

Additionally the Somme offensive began at the mid-point of the year. As this study is an examination into any evolving trends in inter-allied relationships, the months

before 1 July are equally important in understanding the interactions during the offensive itself. Actually the months before the 1 July are crucial in providing the foundation for the later interactions between the allied soldiers. Therefore in this instance by 'around the Somme' I am also referring to the build up to, duration and aftermath of the battle. There is some existing precedence for this particular approach. The British Official History of the war was, originally, going to minimise the activities in 1916 before 1 July but eventually split the year into two volumes with the first focusing on the period 19 December 1915 – 1 July 1916 in order to,

[S]how that the British Expeditionary Force was by no means resting or merely preparing during the six months before the great battle : it was, indeed, never at rest and its casualties from the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1915 to the 30<sup>th</sup> June 1916 were more than 125,000. Secondly because the preliminary actions afforded most valuable experience and an introduction to the Somme fighting.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally whilst the British efforts in 1916 were largely focused on the Somme sector, this battle was only one aspect in the wider Allied Offensive of 1916 which incorporated the Western Front at the Somme, the Italian Front and the Eastern Front with the Russian Army. Furthermore the attritional battle at Verdun added an extra level to the year's combat operations. With this in mind I will, at times, draw on interactions between the British and the French taking place in different circumstances and context than the Battle of the Somme.

### **The B.E.F. around the Somme; early 1916**

By gently introducing the new armies to the Western Front and the French, 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 become between soldiers. Whilst there would still be contact with civilians further behind the lines, and these contacts would become increasingly fraught, the constant proximity

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<sup>9</sup> J. E. Edmonds, *Military operations* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1932), p.vi.

of French soldiers would allow British soldiers to focus far more on them and 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 first hundred thousand men deployed in 1914 it was still noticeably smaller than the French army. At the start of January 1916 the British had deployed thirty-eight infantry divisions to the Western Front totalling in the region of a million men.<sup>10</sup> Even when this then grew to 1.3 million men by October 1916 with the arrival of the first groups of conscript soldiers the British had not sufficiently closed the gap.<sup>11</sup> In the early part of 1916 the French had ninety-five infantry divisions deployed on the Western Front giving them with an army in the field of around 1.6 - 2 million men.<sup>12</sup> By the end of the year the French army on all fronts had risen to 114 infantry division and six cavalry. By January 1916 7.3 million Frenchmen had been mobilised but of these 900,000 – 1 million had already died, been severely wounded or captured.<sup>13</sup>

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 British forces there with a clear view of the French military.<sup>14</sup> At the end of January the German army attacked on the River Somme area. 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 ‘1,000 prisoners were taken and enormous losses sustained.’<sup>15</sup> There appears to have been a fair amount of initial confusion during the attack on Frise. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Kenneth Macardle (who,

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Hart, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2006). p.32 & Stevenson, 2005 p.204.

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, 2005 p.204

<sup>12</sup> Hart, 2006 p.33 & Clayton, p.98. A French infantry division numbered between 15-17,000 men during the course of the war. Handbook of the French Army pp.108-111

<sup>13</sup> Clayton, pp.120-1 & Doughty, p.316

<sup>14</sup> For a further breakdown of names, divisions (where available) and details regarding the Imperial War Museum sourced contributors for this chapter see Appendix 1.3

<sup>15</sup> Captain W H Bloor, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 99/22/1, 1915-1917), 19/01/1916

admittedly had not reached the area of the Somme by the attack and was still travelling through France in early February) wrote in mid-February that the Germans had captured Frise without a fight after cutting off 700 French soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

The loss of Frise made some of the surrounding villages dangerously exposed and untenable for further civilian occupation.<sup>17</sup> 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 the British artillery would be used to add 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. Lieutenant Bloor would write how he was able to stand atop the dug-out to watch the battles 'as one sees the stage from the stalls'.<sup>18</sup> There was however, an important element in how the British soldiers viewed this French attack and it becomes clear when reading Bloor's account of the first French assault.

At 7-30p.m. the French launched their counter-attack. It was dark, of course, but the sight was marvellous. We could see the flashes of the guns of both sides, the flashes also of the shells bursting, and, added to this, the sky was alight with flares, rockets, S.O.S. signals and the noise was deafening. We don't know exactly how we have fared, but it is thrilling to watch and it must be Hell itself to be in the middle of it.<sup>19</sup>

Bloor's use of 'we' is important within this entry as it suggests a shared commonality between the British and the French that was not present during the battles of 1914. It is particularly telling as, with the counter-assault against Frise, there were no British infantry involved. Therefore Bloor's usage of 'we' reflects an important step forwards in *Tommy-Poilu* relations as rather than two nations acting as allies there is now the

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<sup>16</sup> Kenneth C 2nd Lieutenant Macardle, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - P210, 1916). 18/02/1916

<sup>17</sup> R Cude, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C48, 1921). 17/03/1916

<sup>18</sup> Bloor. 29/01/1916 – 31/01/1916

<sup>19</sup> Bloor. 29/01/1916

suggestion of a single united allied army. Additionally Bloor's witness report seems to be almost enamoured of the French fighting rather than critically engaged with it. The battle for Frise would eventually come to an end by 13 February with the Germans retaining the village and having taken entrenched positions for about two miles.<sup>20</sup>

The Somme sector would become relatively quiet whilst the allies had to adjust to the new shape of the line. British soldiers would continue to arrive in France and begin their journey to the Somme. From this period onwards British soldiers would enter an interesting, and crucial, period of contact with French soldiers, which would see them questioning what exactly defined 'being French.' The first indicator of this comes from Macardle's diary written after he had arrived in the Somme area, within which there are various elements which need to be explored and understood as they will become recurring themes throughout the year.

When the French held this bank of the river it used to send out a patrol with French papers to meet a Bosch patrol with German papers and make an exchange. It was all very amiable and nice. Then we took over the line to the Somme and one day no French papers awaited the Bosch but when he was well on his way our fellers got up out of the grass and scuppered the party. They are not a stern people, the French. One of ours asked a French sentry on the firing line for a souvenir – a cartridge he suggested to the Frenchman looked in his pouch but there were none there. So he went to take one out of his magazine but there were none there either.<sup>21</sup>

Of particular interest in Macardle's account is his evaluation of the French as not being 'a stern people'. Macardle is attempting 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 in early 1915. The incidents Macardle references are actually quite serious in the context of military behaviour, with clear fraternisation between the

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<sup>20</sup> Bloor. 13/02/1916

<sup>21</sup> Macardle. 25/02/1916 (approximately)

French and the Germans in addition to a French sentry being entirely 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 he has simply learned a little more about the French personality.<sup>22</sup> As highlighted above there was already a precedent for the British to discover that the French had formed a comfortable arrangement with the German soldiers opposite, which would then act to the detriment of the arriving British soldiers. Such a tendency was not restricted to the Somme. In his book on Verdun Alistair Horne described how, in the months before the battle began, a French officer noted ‘the lack of communication trenches up to the front-line’ but was reassured by a soldier that ‘it doesn’t matter. One can pass very easily, the Germans don’t shoot.’<sup>23</sup> There were certain parallels between Verdun and the Somme during these periods of fraternisation; both were relatively quiet sectors and both were populated by soldiers who were, as Horne refers to them; ‘‘old sweats’ who had been too long in the calm’.<sup>24</sup>

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 B.E.F. had no other point of reference in their interactions with the French, the experiences of Belgian refugees differing little from French ones. By 1916 however, soldiers such as Private Graystone arrived in France having spent a prolonged period in Egypt and already having had a separate ‘other’ against which to evaluate the French:

It is 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

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<sup>22</sup> Certainly the 1917-1918 French Trench Warfare manual instructs that the designated watchman must ‘always keep their rifles in their hands’ and it doesn’t take a great leap of imagination that they also probably intended a bullet to be in the aforementioned rifle at the time. It’s not likely that an issue such as this will have greatly changed from 1916 to 1917. French General Staff, *French Trench Warfare 1917-1918: A Reference Manual* (London: Imperial War Museum Department of Printed Books, 2002), p.293.

<sup>23</sup> Alistair Horne, *The price of glory : Verdun 1916* (London: Penguin, 1993), pp.50-51. pp. 50-1

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

like the Arabs we have left behind. Better still to be able to buy something to eat at a reasonable price without having to go through a lot of bartering and bad language.<sup>25</sup>

Graystone's experiences in North Africa appear to have made him pre-disposed towards the French (as fellow Europeans) before he'd 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', en route to Verdun.<sup>26</sup> Graystone would leave with an appreciation for the French steel helmets that 'were quite bullet-proof and had saved many a man's life'.<sup>27</sup> Graystone's return to Europe and interactions with a people more like himself and a language he could, at least partially, converse in, appears to be a welcome development for him. Now whether his positive feelings towards the French and France are because of his opening interactions or because he is simply pleased to be amongst people he more easily understands, is difficult to answer, but either way Graystone's initial feelings on his new surroundings are far more positive than the comparable opinions of 1914.

Further to this the relationship of the British towards the French should also be understood not just in terms of respect or inferiority but also a form of deference that ran through the British social system at the time. Within the upper and middle classes Paul Thompson uses the example of the Ford family who were taught not just to defer to those wealthier or from better families than them but also to attempt to ape their behaviour and mannerisms.<sup>28</sup> 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 deferment stayed largely the same. Touching the cap as a mark of respect or holding a farmer's horse

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<sup>25</sup> J W Graystone, "Typescript Diaries," (IWM: DOCS - 91/3/1, 1916). 06/03/1916

<sup>26</sup> Graystone. 07/03/1916

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Richard Thompson, *The Edwardians: the remaking of British society* (London: Weidenfeld, 1975), p.106



were the suggested responses to encountering to ones betters.<sup>29</sup> The latter of these being offered by Fred Mills who clearly stated that he would do the same to anybody regardless of whether he really believed in any social superiority or not. 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.<sup>30</sup> 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’.<sup>31</sup>

It is from these roots that we can begin to see how deference for the French fit into the perceptions of British soldiers. With a form of deference present in most spheres of British class life the French begin to occupy a spot perhaps best described as skilled working class, but presented in a manner that would encourage deferment from those of the middle classes as well. The movement towards imitation suggested by Thompson amongst the upper and middle classes would find a natural home in the attempts of the British soldiers to replicate the behaviour and approaches of the French army and, at times, their language as well. Within the working classes the French hold a similar but slightly less threatening position than those of the British middle and upper classes. They demonstrate a clear ability and skill in their approach and waging of war but unlike within the class structures back home, the French do not hold any actual power over them. They are not in a position to punish or chastise British soldiers for any perceived incompetence or lack of class sophistication. Standish Meacham describes the manifestation of British social deference as being a hybrid of economic requirement and tradition.

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<sup>29</sup> Thompson, pp.126 & 147

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, pp.126-133

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, p.171

Consciously or unconsciously the players assumed their inherent superiority. Others deferred, however, not as part of a game, but out of habit and belief in their own social inferiority. Local schoolteachers and clergymen were admired as often as despised. Deference was for many a simple matter of financial necessity: "We looked up to the people that was better off than us. Because a lot of them that we met ... - mother and out family – were good to us. So we ... looked to them really for help.' For others, deference was a natural state of mind. A working-class school child, drilled to rise when visitors – invariably middle-class – entered the classroom, was astonished when the students rose for his own father.<sup>32</sup>

Again from this framework it is possible to see how the French fulfil the necessary criteria for deferment. Whilst the notion of financial security or wealth as a prerequisite for deferment in civilian life makes sense, British soldiers had already realised that relatively speaking they were paid more than French soldiers of the same rank. However, this additional wealth did not translate into a sense of superiority, as money did not mean a great deal in regarding the ability to fight effectively. Rather it is deferment as a reflection of a recognisable inferiority (in Meacham's example social but in the case of the war it would be military) that is 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 deferring. There were those British soldiers who would instinctively defer as a matter of habit and those who would defer to any who were had greater evaluable skill or social standing but the end result of deference does not dramatically change regardless of whether it was rooted in deference by mimicry or deference by ingrained subservience. The replacement of social with military in this case is not therefore a great departure and allows the overall model to remain much the same.

There appeared to be a burgeoning recognition and appreciation for the efforts of the French within certain publications at the time as well. With the outbreak of fighting at

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<sup>32</sup> S. Meacham, *A Life Apart: the English Working Class, 1870-1914* (Thames and Hudson, 1977). p.21

Verdun *Punch* Magazine was moved to herald both the bravery of the French soldiers and also the French nation as a whole.



Image 4: Punch Magazine, *To the Glory of France*, (1916)

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.



Image 5: POS - Fr .N48, no. 2, Neumont, Maurice, *On ne passé pas!* (1918), Library of Congress

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* also cast some light on the new direction that Tommy-*Poilu* relations had taken, particularly given the continuing 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.

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.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst there are no particular details given regarding the poet, it does serve as a useful example of a shift away from the 'soldier' approach to interactions to a relationship more rooted in mutual comradeship. There is also an element of cliché to the proceedings described in the poem. It presents an image of a relationship rooted in the working class origins of the two men, particularly through the attempted reproduction of their speech and idioms, which contrasts their lack of relative sophistication against their strong sense of family. 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.

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. Sapper Fowler explains in a letter to his niece on 18 March how he believes the

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<sup>33</sup>Punch, *Mr. Punch's History of the Great War* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1920)., p.69

French to be a ‘lot of b---y thieves and robbers.’<sup>34</sup> It seems that this antipathy towards the French stems from their habit of referring to him, and his fellows, as ‘angleterre’ prompting his response ‘no angleterre here, scotch.’<sup>35</sup> Fowler’s annoyance that the French have failed to recognise his nationality and labelled him simply as being English (so not even covered by the ‘British’ caveat) creates a situation where the French are an extension (albeit it likely unwitting) of his nationalistic conflict with the English.

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 accept 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!<sup>36</sup>

There are several individual elements to this story. First the French soldier’s opinions on the joy of combat are not too far away from the recognisable (although not always accurately represented) *offensive à outrance* philosophy of Lieutenant-Colonel

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<sup>34</sup> J P Fowler, "Manuscript Letter to his niece," (IWM: DOCS - 82/3/1, 1915-1916). 18/03/1916

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. In both cases the underlining is Fowler’s.

<sup>36</sup> Macardle. 15/03/1916

Grandmaison built upon the supposed *élan* of the French soldier.<sup>37</sup> It is the reaction of the British to this viewpoint however, that provides the real interest. Their initial reluctance to offer their more cautious view of war (with the man who does finally speak being referred to as ‘brave’) and then Macardle’s supposition that the French soldier would view 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.

In 1914 the men of the B.E.F. compare themselves against the French in martial terms and, often, rule themselves to be far more proficient and skilled as soldiers. For this to have changed by 1916 might, at first glance, appear to be odd. However, it is important to remember that the British Army of 1914, the professional and highly skilled original British Expeditionary Force, 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 seemed to know they weren’t soldiers. The French, by comparison, had been through a process of (at least) 2 years active military service. Therefore, it should not be overly surprising if the newly arrived British men were slightly intimidated by their French compatriots and were measuring their own efforts against the bar the French had set. Macardle clearly believed that they were coming up short in that test and he wasn’t alone in that. 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 historical battles such as ‘Minden, Albuhera, and Waterloo, and the Battle of the Pyramids’ only to find that, upon joining their battalion, they became ‘acutely conscious of how little [I] knew’.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Clayton (2003), p.25

<sup>38</sup> Parker, pp.37-8

When and where do these emotions provoked by a British inferiority complex and lack of self-assurance when compared with the French first begin to manifest themselves? Is it a case of the British feeling a lack of self-confidence and then they meet the French, or vice versa? There is a danger of falling into a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* explanation of the dynamic here. 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 I would contend 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 to both survive and triumph in France. However, how likely was all of this to fully change their self-evaluation and reflection? During their deployment, whilst still enveloped by the military institution it is only reasonable that the sorts of stressors discussed by Gifford et al, and recorded in Chapter Two, would start to come into play.<sup>39</sup> 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, as mentioned above. 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 didn't yet fully know who or what they were but, upon seeing the French soldiers, they knew they weren't yet them.

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<sup>39</sup> See p.91



The lack of composure felt by some British soldiers under fire in comparison to the French was commented upon by Lieutenant Bloor when he was given a tour of French frontline trenches across the River Somme. During this visit Bloor would also be provided with a new view of some of the dangers of life in the frontline trenches and also how the French seemed to be coping with it:

These trenches were the scene of desperate attacks and counter-attacks during the Frise battle and have been flattened out many a time. In one trench in which we were, Goidin told me that the fiercest fighting of all had taken place, and it was *full* to the parapet with dead and wounded on several occasions – it looked like it! We were shelled continually during the afternoon, and the infantry there had many casualties! It was quite the hottest corner I have been in yet, and I did not care for it a bit. The French infantry did not take the slightest notice of it – their behaviour was perfectly marvellously plucky – they are the “Zouaves” – picked Colonial troops, and I know now what is meant by “seasoned troops” and “steadiness under fire.” I spoke to one of them – a sentry standing right up on the parapet with shells pitching all round him and asked him what he thought of it. He laughed loudly and said “Ah, c’est rien ça, ici toujours comme ça” just as one might say “it’s always raining now-a-days!!” I was very distinctly pleased to get back over the river about 6p.m. after having tea with the officers of a 75 mm. battery.<sup>40</sup>

The notion of these French soldiers constituting an elite and displaying the benefits of their heightened martial ability in contrast to Bloor who is clearly unnerved by the whole experience does add to the suggestion that the British troops believed they were lacking in something, whether it was simple experience, or a more intangible military quality when compared with their French allies at this time. Alongside this however, is the apparently genuine friendliness and camaraderie exhibited by the French to their British neighbours. There is often a military logic behind it. With the above example for instance we see that the French are pointing out important areas of German

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<sup>40</sup> Bloor, 29/03/1916

trenches to Bloor, but behind that there is still a real warmth and sense of shared community. These aspects were not simply limited to Bloor's experience. Stansfield would comment that the French soldiers near him are 'A.1., splendid fellows and very anxious to be friendly.'<sup>41</sup>

Shortly before the launching of the Somme Offensive, Bloor would reflect on the apparent differences between the French and British men,

There is a complete difference between the soldiers of the two nations – the Britisher is a boy, in size, looks and manners, whilst the French are all men – bearded and manly-looking. Even their drivers are great big fellows, weighing on an average 12 stone; our little 5-ft jockeys look most amusing beside them!<sup>42</sup>

Such sentiments do once again raise the issue of the British feeling a sense of inferiority when compared to the soldiers of the other principle combatants in a way that would also strike at their very masculinity.<sup>43</sup> The French seemed distinctly more masculine than the British both through their appearance and the martial confidence in which they held themselves.<sup>44</sup> Captain Bursey would also remark that, whilst he'd heard they were on short rations, the French troops 'certainly do not look like it for they look very fit'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> F O Stansfield, "Typescript Compendium: Diary & Letters," (IWM: DOCS - 06/32/1, 1914-1916). 29/03/1916 29/03/1916

<sup>42</sup> Bloor, 23/06/1916

<sup>43</sup> Whilst there may have been some localised discrepancies in the heights of different nations combatants in general terms the British were taller than their French compatriots and possibly taller than the Germans as well. Regular British army recruits between 1910-1913 had an average height of 168.4cm if aged 20-24 and 168.9cm for those over 25. By contrast French adult men of the same age groups had an average height of around 167cm for those aged 20-24 or 166cm for those older. German men of the same age had an average height of 165cm 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 & 230-1. Additionally to help control the rush of volunteers in 1914 the British had, temporarily, raised the minimum height requirement from 5 feet 3 inches (160cm) to 5 feet 6 inches (167.6cm). De Groot, p.46

<sup>44</sup> For 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).

<sup>45</sup> Captain H F Bursey, "Manuscript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 96/48/1, 1916). 24/06/1916 24/06/1916

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 is often due to engaging on a face-to-face individual level with French soldiers. Upon his arrival in August 1915, Cude had stated that he did 'not ... care very much for France.'<sup>46</sup> 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.'<sup>47</sup> Cude related the story of one of the nearby French:

They are guided to their position by a French Soldier who knows every inch of the ground, lived here all his life. In fact his house, his wife, his mother are in the village of VAUX just opposite. I feel intensely sorry for him for although so near to the line the civilians are compelled to carry on under the Prussians, and all he cares for are there. He goes every day to a vantage point where he can see his wife and mother. He will not leave this place and as he is invaluable to the English Troops he stays attached to the English. It is now mainly through him that not a stone has been disturbed in the village by our shells.<sup>48</sup>

This is a key moment not just for Cude but also representative of the evolving nature of the British relationship with the French, which moved away from just seeing the French as a single homogenous entity (although that would remain an important and understandable factor of the inter-cultural discourse) but also recognising the individuals that 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

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<sup>46</sup> Cude 08/08/1915

<sup>47</sup> Cude, 17/03/1916. 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. It does not appear to be used as an insult either 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.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

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.

Similarly Stansfield reflected that,

I thought I knew the French Army before I came here, but now I find that I didn't. Previously I had only seen their 'Landsturm' [Territorials]. Now I find great young strapping Parisians, fond of music, football and so on. They are all as friendly as possible, and we play them every afternoon at football and in the evening we meet (British and French) at a large cafe here (quite an up-to-date affair) where there is a piano, and sing each other songs and so on.<sup>49</sup>

This acknowledgement and subsequent abandonment of previously held stereotypes was built on the back of repeated contact with a multitude of French soldiers but also following on from two important, but very different events. The above account comes from an expanded letter that Stansfield sent to his mother and, being based on his diary notes, comes several days after the actual events. This letter recounted a sudden and devastating aerial bombing attack on the village where he and his men were stationed:

The little shop next door had been literally blown inside out. The French cavalry men, their horses, the old man at the well, and others, including the girl at the cafe opposite and the little boy from the house next door but one, - well I won't describe it. ... I was proud of my men. In the midst of all the confusion and sudden grief they plunged in and attended to those who were not past needing attention, giving them water and carrying them to the Hospital. Four were already past help, three of the cavalry and the old man at the well. A fourth cavalry man died in a comrade's arms, but the

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<sup>49</sup> Stansfield, 02/04/1916

remainder, including the girl and the little boy, are, I believe, all doing well and likely to recover.<sup>50</sup>

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.’<sup>51</sup> This strengthening of bonds between British and French soldiers as a result of combat death adds to the shared experience of the two armies. Whilst they may be operating in different ways they are occupying the same front and facing the same dangers and, as such, have taken on a ‘brothers in arms’ mentality.

At the same time Stansfield would dine in the French Sergeants’ Mess at the nearby hospital. Whilst his diary presented a much shorter version of this evening, his letter home offers an expansion of several key aspects where he seeks 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.<sup>52</sup>

The description of the character of the ‘Martinique negro’ is particularly revealing here, especially as it was not included in Stansfield’s diary entry.<sup>53</sup> There is an undeniably racist element to this extract but the real question is which way is it directed? Is it Stansfield who is admitting that he was surprised at how this man

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Stansfield, 01/04/1916. This excerpt came from his diary, rather than his letter which accounts for the discrepancy in dates.

<sup>52</sup> Stansfield, 02/04/1916

<sup>53</sup> He was simply referred to as ‘a Martinique negro’ in the diary entry dated 30/03/1916

turned out to be good company, or is he attempting to pre-empt the likely reaction of his mother? In likelihood it is probably a mix of the two, but this is another stereotype that appears to be left by the wayside after a pleasant interaction.

Whilst the attempts to define their allies has 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 Macardle in mid-April during a lengthy passage of his diary:

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 sentimentalist; 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.<sup>54</sup>

There are several important elements of this complicated entry by Macardle that need to be analysed and understood. First amongst these is Macardle's admission that he

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<sup>54</sup> Macardle, 19/04/1916. 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.

had formulated a set of particular stereotypes of the French peasantry, based upon a particularly romantic concept, but that he had seen little evidence before this date to support his beliefs. That Macardle (or any other British soldiers) had such preformed views 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 is, 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 has the effect to soften 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. This reaction must clearly have been internalised by Macardle and, as a result, it is difficult to fully recognise how and when it influenced his actions. However, this 'softening' towards the French is ultimately shown to be misplaced as the three soldiers turn out to be British. Macardle is initially depressed by this realisation but this swiftly evolves into a more complicated intellectual crisis as he writes that he had been 'tricked into loving the French and finding it was only Tommy *who I had always loved, but not quite understood.*'<sup>55</sup> In his attempts to understand the French Macardle had, once again, been forced to return to his fellow Britons and attempt to decipher them. As mentioned before Macardle's diary entry, the exercise of understanding the French is two-fold. The clearest aspect is of course the obvious one; who are the French, what are they, what makes them so? The questions relating to the composition of the French also work in reverse and are 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

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<sup>55</sup> Italics added by me.

faced with further questions relating to the composition of the British Tommy, and he was as of yet in no position to answer those questions.

These attempts to further understand themselves were further complicated by the evolution the British army was also undergoing, an evolution that was beginning to exhibit similar traits to those the British had initially detected, and been perplexed by, within the French. 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!'<sup>56</sup> At the same time he reported that, whilst fixing the wire in front of his trench in no man's land, a group of German soldiers were performing exactly the same task across the way. Neither side bothered the other during this duty and when the Germans did then disappear back into their trenches they 'did a very sporting thing. They knew exactly where we were and could have blown us to eternity had they wished ... Instead they dropped flares amongst us to warn us that it was time to clear out, so we took the hint.'<sup>57</sup>

This sort of live-and-let-live relationship with the Germans does mirror 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 are 'fed up' with the war. They may not have been taking part in large-scale action during their time on the Somme but they were learning about trench warfare. An offshoot of this knowledge appears to be an appreciation of the benefits to be gained from a peaceful truce. 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.

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<sup>56</sup> Graystone. 12/05/1916

<sup>57</sup> Ibid



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 around the Somme, the largest battle was still yet to come and as June began the allied forces which would contest the Somme began to assemble and prepare their positions.<sup>58</sup> Right at the beginning of the month Bloor wrote that the valley running from Suzanne and Maricourt was being taken over by the French and ‘the valley has been covered with blue uniforms – the pioneers making their gun positions.’<sup>59</sup> Bloor was especially struck with how many guns the French were preparing to deploy; ‘they are going to bring in more than 30 batteries (some of them very heavy 10-inch) where we previously had seven field batteries!’<sup>60</sup> 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 of the war before long.’<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup>

With the preparations continuing apace and British and French forces trading defensive positions and responsibilities around the Somme it should not be surprising that this process was not always completed without incident. Having been charged with turning trenches near Maricourt over to the French, Macardle and the men with him found that, on the first morning, the French had neglected to make any mess arrangements for the British and Macardle was forced to bring this to their attention,

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<sup>58</sup> See Edmonds (1932) and Philpott (2009)

<sup>59</sup> Bloor, 1/06/1916

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Bloor, 03/06/1916

<sup>62</sup> Bloor, 11/16/1916

About one pm I rang up an interpreter and stropped very politely but firmly saying that since no arrangements had been made for my men to feed although they had agreed to ration them, I must march them into Bray and from there rejoin my battalion. I [word illegible] excitement followed; I was swept away to their mess at Dragons Wood and in twenty minutes served with a steak as tender and tasty as a [word illegible] one in Dublin, while my men were fed till they had to beg for mercy. Then the Colonel was informed I had gone unfed till 2.o.c. He rushed out, a huge man with a splendid beard, and all agog with [word illegible] and geniality pounced upon little Hughes of the R.F.A who had happened to pass that way, and seizing him by both hands begged him to come to dinner and petit dejeuner and lunch.<sup>63</sup>

As a result of this Macardle would state shortly afterwards,

So I had a very good time with the French and learnt to admire and enjoy them. They were fresh from the horrors of Verdun where they had lost 1600 men out of 3000, and they were laden with medals; but all day long they ragged each other, laughing and laughing in untiring frivolity till I grew tired of it.<sup>64</sup>

Referring back to previous incidents involving the French, and, Macardle himself, we can still see willingness of both sides to, essentially, ‘forgive and forget’ and, perhaps more importantly, apologise for any perceived wrongdoing. Within this framework we can also see distinct aspects of a French national character, particularly in regards to their attitude towards food and desire to appear to be a good host.<sup>65</sup> This particular incident could have gone either way in regards to the ultimate outcome. If Macardle had been forced to march his men back to Bray and rejoin the battalion in order to find food then this could quite easily have become a defining negative moment between him and the French. The fact that the French colonel in charge was so clearly mortified and desperate to compensate for the error has, therefore, ensured that

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<sup>63</sup> Macardle, 23/06/1916

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> The policy of socially sharing food between soldiers is discussed in greater detail by Rachel Duffet, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012). Chapter Six

Macardle came to enjoy his time with the French (at least up until the moment their light-heartedness began to annoy him). There is, of course, a question regarding how important such moments are in the overall interactions between British and French. It is, after all, a fairly restricted moment, with only a few British soldiers present. It also lacks any of the drama of a battlefield interaction. However, I feel it would be short-sighted to overlook the importance of these ‘little moments’ within inter-allied relations as they can prove especially formative for both sides in understanding the general character (by which I mean their everyday behaviour, with their actions during battle being removed from this) of their opposites during periods of quiet on the front. This ‘default’ behaviour can be viewed by the participants as far more representative of each side’s actual character than that portrayed upon the field of battle, with the inherent dangers and confusion it contains. The idea that this more general behaviour has a weight and value of its own has become more structured in recent decades with particular emphasis on the notion of the ‘good soldier’ when dealing with military courts martial. The ‘good soldier’ defence relates to the general military character of the individual, not just their performance on the field of battle but their behaviour and actions whilst under-uniform and, as a result, relates directly to the character of the soldier.<sup>66</sup> In this way we can also understand that the examples discussed above can be viewed through the framework of small actions making a ‘good soldier’.

With the moment of attack now upon the allies, some of the British soldiers on the Somme were beginning to feel their nerves and questioning their own readiness or suitability for combat with Bloor reflecting that,

The French just alongside us have not been very active yet, but *when* they shoot, one knows about it. The continual noise of the bombardment has never ceased since 5am on the 24<sup>th</sup>. We are getting used to it, but when the French fire, things are even

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<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Lutes Hillman, "The "Good Soldier" Defense: Character Evidence and Military Rank at Courts-Martial," *The Yale Law Journal* 108, no. 4 (1999).

livelier than usual. They always shoot 40 rounds at a time at a perfectly amazing rate, and the sound is like thunderclaps coming out of a machine gun.<sup>67</sup>

The implication seems to be that the French soldiers have reached a position of comfortable confidence in their own martial abilities and that, whilst they are not as active as the British, they have been well-trained and drilled to a point that, when they do fire their artillery, they are extremely proficient at it.

### **The Battle of the Somme**

With the onset of the battle, it is important to note some changes which occur within the writing practices of my selected contributors which actually mirror some of the trends seen during moments of high combat activity in 1914. At the commencement of large-scale and prolonged hostilities, understandably many of the social interactions between British and French soldiers appear to end or, at the very least, disappear from their writing. This does not mean, however, that all interactions between the two parties ceased, far from it. Rather the focus shifts more towards an appraisal of both sides' military abilities and successes.

During the early days of the Somme offensive it remained Bursey and Bloor who would contribute their thoughts and gathered rumours regarding the progress of their nearby French allies, with Bloor noting on 2 July that the British 18<sup>th</sup> Division had taken Mamet following heavy casualties and the French secured Curles and Hardecourt.<sup>68</sup> On the same day Bursey could also announce that,

We have practically surrounded Fricourt and it is only a matter of hours before it is in our hands. Hear we have 500 prisoners. The French have taken 3500. Guess it will pan out more.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Bloor, 26/06/1916

<sup>68</sup> Bloor, 02/07/1916

<sup>69</sup> Bursey, 02/07/1916

The suggestion that the British prisoner count may well, in time, even out to match the French one is an interesting, albeit brief, moment of friendly rivalry between the two sides.

Bursey would, over the next few days, make several mentions of French progress, particularly after the capture of Fricourt on 3 July, and on 7 July he wrote,

Hear the French cavalry have been out. The Hun must be very few on the French front to allow of this. They admit we have the toughest job to tackle.<sup>70</sup>

The British had by far the largest area of the front to assault and, north of the river, the German positions were particularly well defended, so it is perhaps fair to say that the British did have a greater challenge than the French to the south. However, at the same time the French tactics, particularly their practice of artillery saturation, greatly increased their own combat effectiveness and improved their chances of success.<sup>71</sup> We can also see a small measure of the rivalry between British and French soldiers, but also an attempt by Bursey to provide an independent justification for the reason why the British attack was becoming hung up in various places. By suggesting that even the French acknowledge the difficult challenge facing the British army to the north, Bursey is attempting to add an extra level of military context to the divergent incoming results for the Entente nations.

By the second week of July the British and French forces were acting in support of each other on particular areas of the Somme, although as you might expect considering the difficulties of accurate allied cooperation during military operations, there were some regrettable instances and, as discussed by Greenhalgh, mistakes made. Perhaps the clearest example of how the British and French armies were coordinating on the Somme comes from Elizabeth Greenhalgh's article on the Battle

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<sup>70</sup> Bursey, 03/07/1916 – 07/03/1916

<sup>71</sup> Philpott (2009), pp.146-7

for Falfemont Farm where she outlines some of the measures taken by the British 4<sup>th</sup> and the French 6<sup>th</sup> armies throughout the offensive on the Somme and the measures taken on the ground to attempt coordination of tactics.<sup>72</sup> These measures included a direct telephone line between the two armies and a permanent exchange of liaison officers. Whilst the preliminary attack on the Farm was a failure and cost an inordinate number of British lives, Greenhalgh explains that 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.<sup>73</sup>

The Farm would eventually be captured by the 1<sup>st</sup> Norfolks by 3am on 5 September.<sup>74</sup> Despite the initial failure on 30 July Greenhalgh suggests that 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 a fine spirit of spontaneous friendship’ (words of the French official history) to cover the left of a French attack’.<sup>75</sup> Greenhalgh, in reference to some of her earlier work, outlines that ‘French attitudes towards their British ally fluctuated according to two factors; proximity and success.’<sup>76</sup>

As has been shown at various points, proximity is a key issue in the British perception of the French. However, I would suggest, at this time 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 be a military inferiority complex amongst some of the British soldiers when they hold themselves against the French army, a French army that was formed through military service and had been fighting the Germans on a far larger scale than

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<sup>72</sup> Greenhalgh (2003)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid

<sup>74</sup> Edmonds (1932)

<sup>75</sup> Greenhalgh (2003)

<sup>76</sup> Ibid in reference to Greenhalgh (1999)

the British could match. Within this framework it seems reasonable to suggest that the British already believed the French to be more successful than them and, as a result, held them in greater esteem. They did not need to have witnessed this success with their own eyes as their own insecurity would have implied it.

As in 1914 and 1915 the fighting itself would begin to take a toll on those who had been detailing the relations between British and French troops. In particular, the battle at Montauban was particularly fierce and was witnessed and recorded in great detail by Macardle.<sup>77</sup> He provided an extraordinary account of the Somme beyond the British front-line trenches and within the, previously German held, village of Montauban, such that it has been reproduced in the work of Malcolm Brown and the website of the Imperial War Museum dedicated to the Somme.<sup>78</sup> Brown would later refer to Macardle as a 'remarkable young officer'.<sup>79</sup> Macardle's attempts to gain insight into the nature and mentality of French soldiers during his time on the Somme have proven to be invaluable in this study and I join an already existing academic audience who hold him in great admiration. His account of the fighting at Montauban from 1 to 3 July was written in his diary on 6 July and would prove 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.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the occasional stop-start nature of the Somme offensive 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Hodgkinson and his men had been able to strike up a strong relationship with their French army counterparts, and during August there was a major social gathering between the two groups:

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<sup>77</sup> Macardle. The battle was on 1 July but Macardle would not get chance to recount this until several days later.

<sup>78</sup> Brown & Seaton (1999), and, Imperial War Museum, "Somme: Personal Stories: Kenneth Macardle," <http://www.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.2205>.

<sup>79</sup> Brown & Seaton (1999)

<sup>80</sup> It is listed as Callan-Macardle, K.

Soon after we arrived the officers of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Batt. Chasseurs Alpin came to call. Their English was practically nil and only one of our officers anywhere approached fluency in French. However they asked us to go to lunch the next day and we joyfully accepted. The following morning we set off on our horses, an imposing cavalcade, and were met by some of them at the entrance to the village, conducted to the mess where we found the regimental band drawn up in the yard, and given several varieties of the French equivalent to cocktails. After this we sat down to an extraordinarily fine meal at which the wine flowed freely and everyone made a speech, regardless of the fact that no one understood what anyone else was talking about. ... When it was time to go three French officers courteously helped me on to my horse which I still maintain was totally unnecessary; anyway the imposing cavalcade of a few hours before departed more like cow boys in a wild west picture show, and the horse I was then riding, called Deadwood Dick, broke into a gallop for the first time on record and lost itself going home.<sup>81</sup>

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 moved on from the opening assaults and settled into a prolonged attrition campaign.<sup>82</sup> In fact from mid-August onwards references to the French army in the diaries of these contributors fell right off until October. Some of this can be explained by understandable factors. Macardle had been killed in action in early July, whilst J P Fowler was also killed on 23 July. Philpott describes the time period from October to December as a 'Muddy Stalemate' and, as seen in the earlier part of 1916, this type of stationary situation allows soldiers of both sides the opportunity to reacquaint.

There was also still opportunity for British soldiers to be surprised by the actions of their French ally, in a way not really seen since the opening months of 1916. At the

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<sup>81</sup> 2nd Lieutenant Guy Hodgkinson, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 99/13/1, 1915-1917). During August 1916 The exact date of this entry is unknown but the event occurs during the 'Middle of August'.

<sup>82</sup> Philpott (2009), Chapter 11



start of October, Corporal Durham witnessed a French artillery commander perform an action that staggered him. He initially recounted it in his diary of 1 October and then again in a letter home on 14 October. There are some differences between these two accounts and whilst I will only quote here from the letter I will mention some of these shortly.

#### Letter

I had occasion to pass a battery of French heavy guns, and as they were firing and my road lay ahead of them I waited for a while to see if they would stop. I noticed a curious thing. All the men were laughing, and the bearded colonel, who was directing their fire, was standing with tears of joy running down his face. I asked a gunner why they were so pleased, he told me that they had just got hold of a trench crammed with Bosches and were systematically blowing them up. Now your French soldier is a great hater of Germans so their joy was pardonable. The Colonel gave the order for a battery salvo and the guns were loaded and aimed. The men stood back and the gunners stood with trigger lines taut waiting for the word to fire – when – suddenly a covey of partridges flew over the ridge and settled twenty yards in front of the gun muzzles. The Colonel held up his hand, “attendez mes enfants” he said and sent a sergeant to chase those “oiseaux” to one side. When the birds had been driven out of the line of fire, and not till then, Fritz got his iron ration. The birds would not have been killed, but would have been deafened, for of all the bitter backs, a French 60pz has the wickedest, but the French officer was too kind to hurt them.<sup>83</sup>

One of the key differences between the diary and the letter is the elimination of some of the military information in the letter that appears within the diary. This may have been a decision based upon the interests of his audience but may also have been a conscious decision to omit information that might have been best censored. The letter also presents far more information about the French Colonel himself; with his appearance being described along with additional information regarding the French hatred of the Germans. Durham appears to be selling the French army to his family at

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<sup>83</sup> G W Durham, "Manuscript Letters," (IWM: DOCS - 90/7/1, 1914-1917). 1/10/1916 and 14/10/1916

home, highlighting their military prowess but also giving them a human face and an unexpectedly emotional and sensitive side. The French Colonel comes across as fatherly in his protection of the birds but also in how he addresses his men as ‘enfants’ and laughs alongside them. The split between diary and letter accounts is, in many ways, similar to how Stansfield had rationalised dinner with the French Martinique officer to his mother earlier in the year. Durham appears to be drawing a French persona out of any two-dimensional beliefs that may have been held by the recipients of his letter, and 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 Anglo-French relations have come a long way by the end of 1916. The B.E.F. had to all intents and purposes been destroyed as a cohesive fighting force 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.

It is clear from the evidence I have highlighted over the course of this chapter that by 1916 those circumstances have drastically changed. 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 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 with 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 with 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 is 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 taking it all onboard but simply withholding judgement at the time.

Part of this desire to understand the French appears to come from a simple cultural curiosity, but I also believe we cannot overlook the probability that, at various times in 1916, the British soldiers felt a sense of military inferiority when comparing themselves with the French army and wished to gain a greater understanding of the military force arrayed alongside them and the men who composed it. By understanding some of their nature, but also what combat situations they took seriously and how this manifested itself, would have been of great interest to the British soldiers. Further to this, as discussed above, the greater skill and assurance of the French army also played in to the culture of deferment 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 chaffing or resentment between the groups. We can see the reactions of some of the British upon finding that the French have unofficial truces with the Germans, don't fully repair

their trenches, or stand guard without loaded rifles. By themselves these events would seem fairly serious in military terms and together they should raise questions about the conduct of some French forces in the area, but they seem to receive only isolated comments of surprise or gentle disapproval for the majority of 1916 within the diaries of British soldiers. 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 arrived in France in 1914. The arrival of conscript soldiers towards the end of the year would begin to change the makeup of the British army regarding its majority of volunteers 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 served because of a government act.

The B.E.F. in 1914 was arguably one of the most skilled armies on the Western Front at that time the army of 1916 was most assuredly not and would not begin to really gain its spurs until the latter stages of the Somme Offensive. The soldiers making it up 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, learn directly from.

For their part it certainly appears that the French soldiers were more than happy to act as relaxed mentors for their British counterparts, and the diaries have been full of examples where British and French soldiers socialise together, sympathise when men are lost and support each other in battle. From each of these small moments the combined level of respect and cooperation rose to higher levels. *Punch* magazine would also provide a further response to the burgeoning relations between the British and the French later in the year following the battle at Combles. The image is probably the defining illustration of the Tommy-*Poilu* relations of 1916 as it 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. Nonetheless the message and the warm camaraderie carries across completely so as to make communication and cooperation natural.



Image 6: Punch Magazine, *Comrades in victory*, (1916)

Relationships between Britain and France were not universally good in 1916. There were moments, more often than not involving French civilians, that caused displeasure within British ranks, but these moments were few and far between when compared with the overall picture that seems to be appearing at this time. 1916 has often been thought of as a crucial year both for the Entente alliance but also in the course of the war as a whole and the research displayed within this chapter adds an extra, intriguing, element to this picture. The notion that there might be a huge breakthrough moment in the Anglo-French relationships amongst the men is probably fanciful, but that is not to say that the culmination of small moments would not create the foundation for eventual victory. I believe that this is what we see emerging in

1916. The ructions and antagonisms of the previous years have seemingly been overcome, and now the situation appears to be one where British and French troops are almost entirely comfortable in their interactions both on a social and a military level. 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, I feel that 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 would begin 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 British and French and how competing senses of humour and intellectual approaches manifested themselves.

During this short cold tour in the line ... I first met our French interpreter Macé. I do not know when he was attached to us. He was wholly a white man, quite unlike any interpreter I had met before. I have a hazy notion that he was in some way connected with the Jesuit Order, but may well be wrong. At first one thought him very naive and apparently rather simple. The better one knew him the more one liked and respected him. He was then living with Clapham at C/71's mess. I lunched with them both on the day in question. Francis Graham, who was making one of his regular visits of inspection, came in to join us. He knew quite well, which I did not know then, that Macé not only abominated risqué talk but made no bones about saying so: a fair target therefore. Graham himself took little delight in smutty stories unless they had outstanding wit; indeed, he too made no bones about calling to order anyone in his mess who overstepped his own peculiar bounds in this respect. Happening, however, to be in an exceedingly mischievous mood that morning he proceeded to turn out a series of fruity yarns. Macé rose to the bait at once and went bald-headed for him. Graham was so disabled by laughter that he allowed the little Frenchman of the lush black hair and magnificent moustache to kick him out of his own mess. He returned a moment later to ask with mock diffidence if he might come in. Macé almost spat at

him, buzzed like a bluebottle and resumed his lunch without answering. There was a brief silence, then Graham began: "And have you heard the one about ....?" Macé sprung at him. Quite suddenly Graham ceased his baiting. Our little Frenchman accepted the joke for what it was worth, and clearly he thought it was not worth much. Equally he bore no shade of ill will. This was one of his most estimable traits. He steadfastly held that the bearing of malice, be there "justification" or no, was an insidious sin which grievously warps a man's whole being.<sup>84</sup>

The term 'wholly a white man' is an interesting phrase for Gameson to use to describe Macé. The general meaning of the term is to indicate a man who is both trustworthy and decent. The term is largely rooted in British colonialism and is referred to within Rudyard Kipling's 1899 work *The White Man's Burden*. As discussed previously in regards to colonial soldiers some British soldiers did view those who were not white-European as being lacking in civilisation and Gameson may be exhibiting similar prejudices here.

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 B.E.F.<sup>85</sup> But in Gameson's example the religiosity of Macé is not a subject of bemusement but rather the opening for some British soldiers to engage in light-hearted mischief. Whilst the French interpreter is clearly not willing to fully go along with the line of conversation, there is also the suggestion that he recognises the playful nature of the jesting and is 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.

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<sup>84</sup> Captain L Gameson, "Typescript Memoir," (IWM: DOCS - PP/MCR/C47 & P395 - 396 & Con Shelf, 1922-1923). This encounter is not accurately dated but took place during January or February of 1917.

<sup>85</sup> Particularly: Graystone 07/03/1916 & 19/03/1916, and Cude 14/05/1916

It was at this time, however, that I became better acquainted with Macé our interpreter. When the guns were in action he always lived in the wagon-lines. I do not think he had lived at headquarters' mess before; not even, as far as I can remember, when we were resting at Mirvaux. This small black-haired Frenchman was at first by no means easy to fathom. I have always greatly distrusted slick attempts to type people, for there is no short cut to a true description of anyone's personality. Intrusive over-simplification of a man's character may satisfy the unwary but it has never satisfied me. In Macé's case, as I trust in most other cases, I therefore merely throw out a few hints of how he struck me. He struck me as blending real humility with downright sentimentality and the stubbornness of all the mules I had ever met or heard of. There were times when he had pardonable difficulty in following some of our strange foreign jokes and allusions. Allowing for this, he tolerated leg-pulling with a good grace, providing it did not infringe his strict principles, when his censure was not withheld. He was, moreover, very well able to bring off some extremely subtle leg-pulling on his own account. He was as hard and unbudgeable as a rock if he thought it his duty to be so. At all times he was impeccably polite.<sup>86</sup>

Gameson's general reluctance to, as he puts it, form 'slick attempts to type people' is of particular use and interest when it comes to his recorded memories of those around him. The suggestion is that Gameson is a man who reserves his judgement of those around him until he feels he has enough documented evidence to create a rounded description of them. That he has now done so for Macé therefore conveys two inter-linked aspects. Firstly that Macé was clearly a character worth consideration. If he had not interested or intrigued Gameson to such a degree it seems reasonable to suggest he would not have made the effort to try and thoroughly unpick his characteristics and rationalise them. In conjunction with this if, as he states, Gameson does not make public his evaluations until they are formalised, then his definition of Macé is a fair and definitive, albeit personal, analysis of the character of this man. We should not forget that at its heart, this is a relationship between two individuals and not between the entire people of two nations. However, it is representative of the

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<sup>86</sup> Gameson. This reflection is not specifically dated but occurred in reference to events during May and June 1917



ongoing British tendency towards consideration and evaluation of the French. The anthropological approach to understanding the French that began in 1916 is still in evidence in situations such as this during 1917.

Perhaps the clearest culmination of the spirit borne from 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.<sup>87</sup>

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.

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<sup>87</sup> Cude 25/12/1917

## **Chapter Four**

### **1918: The Entente at the end**

Obviously 1918 is hugely significant as it represents the culmination of the war itself but in regards to this study, it also represents the culmination of many of the evolving threads and trends that have been examined over previous chapters. Whilst 1918 is an important and interesting year in its own right, for reasons which will be examined and analysed shortly, it also bears very strong similarities and comparisons with specific points and instances from previous years, particularly the allied retreat in 1914 and some of the interactions around the Somme in 1916. The replication of moments of similarity from earlier in the war provide a rich opportunity to fully examine how the relations between British and French soldiers have changed over the resulting years and how both sides now react to situations which previously had produced confusion and dissent, particularly in 1914.

The British army had also grown consistently from the first year of the war and, on 1 January, was composed of 1,750,892 men an increase of around 218,000 men from the year before.<sup>1</sup> This increase however, was actually a shortfall in the potential strength Haig had anticipated requiring 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.<sup>2</sup> Over the duration of the war the British army was populated with 2.4 million volunteers and 2.5 million conscripted men.<sup>3</sup> The French army, whilst still larger than the British was also undergoing a manpower shortage. A study compiled by the French GQG (*Grand Quartier Général*) assumed that the French would lose 920,000 soldiers between 1 October 1917 and 1 October 1918.<sup>4</sup> When all combined losses were factored together in order to maintain the army and grow its artillery, engineers

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<sup>1</sup> Hart 2009, p.229

<sup>2</sup> Hart 2009, p.28

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson 2005, pp.201-2

<sup>4</sup> Doughty, p.416

and aviation units it was projected that 1,078,000 recruits would be required, a figure that was 328,000 men over the anticipated recruitment numbers for the period.<sup>5</sup> Despite these joint 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.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally we see a culmination in how the British soldiers framed their analysis of the French; specifically the 'soldier' and 'civilian' processes that were so prevalent in 1914 and 1916. In previous years the British soldiers had tended to examine the French using either military criteria or evaluating them according to personal criteria. These were generally defined by the individual and whilst there was some crossover, for the most part in 1914 British soldiers would examine the French along military lines first and personal lines second, with this tendency then reversed as Kitchener's New Armies arrived in France. By 1918 however, these two aspects have become fused into a more rounded military *and* personal model of evaluation. This development is based more upon the advances the British soldiers had made militarily, particularly in gaining self-confidence since 1916, than in any huge changes in their personal framework. This is not to say that the British soldiers were not personally invested in the French by this point; the evidence strongly suggests that they were. However, whilst their exposure to the French did give them a better understanding of the motivations behind French actions, their methods and ideology for evaluating actions they did not understand had not changed significantly.

This means that when the fighting of 1918 reaches its most fraught and dangerous point during the Spring, the British evaluations of the French that emerge are far more rounded than those seen during comparable periods in 1914. With many of these

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<sup>5</sup> Doughty, p.416

<sup>6</sup> Hart 2009, pp.26 & 33

contributors having written for several years by this point we can see the benefit of the years of acclimatisation and integration alongside the French army and how it enabled the British to stay in contact as the Germans closed in.<sup>7</sup> With the eventual promotion of Marshal Foch to supreme commander of the allied armies in March 1918 pronounced improvements came in coordination between the Entente forces. From this however, there would also be increased opportunity for interactions between the British and some of the other nations fighting alongside them particularly the Americans. These relationships would prove so uniformly negative as to throw greater contrast on the evolution undergone by the British and French soldiers.

However, 1918 was not a resounding success for Tommy-*Poilu* relations. For whilst there were strong bonds formed and still forming between the British and the French soldiers, they were still very different people with different outlooks, demands and expectations and it is from this perspective that we must also consider 1917. For it was also the year of breakdown within the allied armies, particularly amongst the French. The French mutinies of 1917 were the representation of deeply held beliefs and frustrations that manifested themselves in wide scale dissent. This trend was not, however, mirrored in the British ranks although the British army would have its own mutiny of sorts. This therefore inspires an important question that must be examined to fully understand why Tommy-*Poilu* relations plummeted in 1918; why did dissent and resistance differ so greatly within the ranks of the two armies?

### **Mutiny and Dissent**

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 B.E.F. was actually following the rough

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<sup>7</sup> For a further breakdown of names, divisions (where available) and details regarding the Imperial War Museum sourced contributors for this chapter see Appendix 1.4

plan laid out by Kitchener and hinted at by Repington in 1914 of getting to a situation where the British were a dominant force so would have a strong presence at the peace table. However, as David French explains, 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.<sup>8</sup>

In response to their mutinies the French High Command became, in the words of Sir Frederick Maurice, 'somewhat chary of imparting precise information' regarding the extent of the trouble.<sup>9</sup> In response the British High Command would have to surreptitiously investigate for themselves to uncover the current state of the French army.<sup>10</sup> Instead the 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 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'.<sup>11</sup> 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. The Intelligence Bureau would begin to tear itself apart with internal fighting as the various departments withheld information from each other.<sup>12</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> David French, "Watching the Allies: British Intelligence and the French mutinies in 1917," *Intelligence and National Security* 6, no. 3 (1991).

<sup>9</sup> French

<sup>10</sup> There 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

<sup>11</sup> French

<sup>12</sup> French

and the analysis made. Haig's primary aim was to secure the backing for his long-wished attack in Flanders and Ypres, a move he was successful in.<sup>13</sup>

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 continue 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 differences between the men who made up the two armies. It is Hartley who first elucidates some of these differing approaches.

I have often wondered whether the French Government could not dispense with the services of the English and American sections and, if so, whether the reason they do not do so is from a feeling of delicacy? Certainly in the early part of the war they required all the assistance they could get, but as the hospitals and French motor ambulances are so much better organised than they were, it is just a question whether they could not carry on without this outside help. In any case the ordinary 'Poilu' seldom gives an Englishman the impression that the latter's services are fully appreciated and to a large extent I can, by putting myself in his place, hardly blame him. A Frenchman can never understand the 'voluntary' spirit – our Voluntary Army as an instance. 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, is ever a puzzle!<sup>14</sup>

As a rule it appears that British soldiers do not display any great interest or understanding of French politics or the ideological motivations of contemporary republican France and its citizen soldiers. In fact, by way of a curious coincidence, the soldiers featured in this study who write about the French did not show interest in any

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<sup>13</sup> French

<sup>14</sup> C A Hartley, "Typescript Diary," (IWM: DOCS - 87/54/1, 1916-1917). 02/07/1917.

form of political discourse or discussion. Now whilst the French do have far more interest and curiosity regarding the politics of their British ally, as will be examined further below, Hartley is clearly suggesting that the French have a fundamental difficulty in understanding the motivation of a supposedly volunteer army during war time. 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, as discussed above, by the conclusion of the war roughly half of the British soldiers who served had not volunteered for duty.<sup>15</sup> 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 still was 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.

As discussed the British soldiers had no clear information regarding a mutiny within the French army, so they would not have been able to follow their lead even if they'd had the opportunity. The British did, however, have 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.<sup>16</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a thorough re-examination of the Etaples incident and the French Mutinies in 1917, but there is both room and a necessity to examine these two events alongside each other for common themes and contradictions.

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<sup>15</sup> De Groot, pp.92-6

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Gill and Gloden Dallas, "Mutiny at Etaples Base in 1917," *Past & Present*, no. 69 (1975).

Those soldiers who had passed through it remembered the Etaples Base as being particularly oppressive.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

What makes the Etaples mutiny relevant to this study is the way it highlighted the role of morale and discipline in the British army following the arrival of the New Armies and the conscripts and furthermore, how the dissent broke down along national lines. The British army, and indeed the other armies of the war, had placed a high value on the importance of aggression and an offensive mentality as indicators of strong morale and discipline. The arrival of new volunteer and conscripted soldiers raised problems and concerns in regards to how best to manage and instil this mindset.

The New Armies were to be fashioned in the image of the Old. Nothing innovatory in respect of morale and discipline was anticipated. The old methods had lost none of their relevance. 'Discipline', wrote Sir Douglas Haig, 'has never had such a vindication in any war as in the present one, and it is their discipline which most distinguishes our New Armies from all similarly created armies of the past'. Haig and his commanders were equally traditional in respect of morale management.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gill & Dallas.

<sup>18</sup> Gill & Dallas.

<sup>19</sup> Gill & Dallas.

<sup>20</sup> Englander, David. 'Discipline and morale in the British Army' in John Horne (ed.), *State, society and mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), p.127



Whilst the High Command were determined to make use of the methods they had seemingly perfected, there was also an acknowledgement that the men who would be processed through the military system had changed dramatically as the war went on.

The offensive spirit, however, was more than a matter of strategy. It also expressed the military's self-image as the vanguard of a virile, manly, martial and racially effective nation. Professionally, socially and politically senior officers were ill-prepared for the enlistment of the citizen-soldier. Pessimist in outlook, corporative in spirit, with an exalted respect for the hierarchy and the elevation of obedience into the supreme virtue, the regular officer, drawn from the privileged classes, viewed the town-bred individualist working-class recruit with less than enthusiasm. The perfect soldier, according to this way of thinking, was the long-service professional for whom the regiment was his home, the flag his symbol of the faith and military honour his religion. 'The merit of the old soldier', wrote one right-thinking critic, 'was that his government could trust him. He was not the kind of man who was likely to be found sitting on a soldiers' and workmen's soviet'.<sup>21</sup>

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 B.E.F. and as a result were seen as less politically reliable. At the same time they were still products of an existing British social system, so whilst there might be fears of an innate bolshevism in the working class recruits, it wasn't really manifesting itself within the ranks. 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, which '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'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Englander. p.126

<sup>22</sup> Englander. pp.138-9

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.

The part played by Anzac soldiers on the opening Sunday at Etaples forms but one instance of the difficulties which arose between the British army, with its "traditions of duty and long-suffering" and its fixed gulf between officers and men, on the one hand, and a band of adventurers, all volunteers, who had travelled across the world to fight in someone else's war, on the other. Anzac troops were contemptuous of the narrow discipline to which British troops sub-scribed, and were led by officers who had invariably first shown their qualities as privates in the ranks. Social distinctions between officers and men, so characteristic of the British army, were therefore less pronounced; Australian-born soldiers could not, for instance, be induced to serve as officers' servants, while the British system of superior messing arrangements for officers, universal even in the trenches, was not found in Anzac front-line units. Inevitably, Anzac soldiers were in constant trouble with the British authorities responsible for discipline and order. ... Discipline in the Scottish regiments was as fierce and narrow as it was easy-going among the Anzacs, and social differences were also very marked. Nonetheless, Scotsmen and Anzacs got on well together, and one historian has emphasized "the quite remarkable friendship which ripened between the soldiers of the two nations" in the First World War.<sup>23</sup>

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 the Anzac nations and the Scottish who seemed far less compliant when confronted with the institutional disciplinary machinery of the 'British' army. This disciplinary process itself was fairly rigid at the time and has become more politicised in the years since the war particularly in relation to the emergence of the 'shot at dawn' campaign. There were various methods of preventing breakdowns of morale

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<sup>23</sup> Gill & Dallas.

and discipline. General Gough 'in his attempts to boost morale, addressed the men as citizens and soldiers'.<sup>24</sup>

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 were not successful then the British army were not averse to imposing discipline upon them, quite the opposite in fact.

The lash had gone but not its rationale. Many, including the commander-in-chief himself, seemed scarcely reconciled to its abolition. Its absence, he felt, made the retention of brutal, degrading and, for the most part, highly visible field punishments essential. 'I am quite certain', he wrote, 'that it would not have been possible to maintain the high standard of discipline in the British Army in France if Field Punishment No. 1 had been non-existent.'<sup>25</sup>

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 of 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

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<sup>24</sup> Gill & Dallas.

<sup>25</sup> Englander. 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

forever' but this does not tally with the evidence of the remaining years of the war and the actions of the British soldiers.<sup>26</sup> The success of this method shouldn't necessarily be seen as a compliment either. Writing in the libertarian-socialist publishers *Solidarity* Lamb suggested that the success of the British military at maintaining order speaks volumes about the inner workings of power within Britain's strongest social structures.<sup>27</sup>

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 morale collapse or widespread despair during 1917.

The same cannot be said of the French army. However, the disorder that emerged within its ranks during 1917 was more complicated than that in the British and rapidly became far more politically directed. 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'.<sup>28</sup> His planned attack around the Chemin des Dames and the Aisne was to be a moment of French *blitzkrieg*.

Nivelle's confidence in victory communicated down to the front line. Despite the misery of the cold winter, morale rose, with a belief that this time the offensive would really succeed and achieve a breakthrough. '*On les a*' ('We have them') became a

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<sup>26</sup> Taylor, p.140

<sup>27</sup> Lamb, p.3

<sup>28</sup> J. Williams, *Mutiny 1917* (London: Heinemann, 1962), p.6

front-line catchword formula. The failure, when it came, was more than disillusion; it was seen as betrayal.<sup>29</sup>

Because of the embargo placed upon the records of 1917 by French authorities it was not until the 1960s that it became possible to begin to fully analyse the mutinies and begin to dispel some of the myths surrounding them.

Historians have tended to explain the mutinies in terms of ineffective state mobilization, whether at the governmental or military level. Early interpretations were 'political' in that they faulted the civilian authorities for allowing defeatism and pacifism from the interior to infect the army. But after the publication in 1967 of Guy Pedroncini's landmark study *Les Mutineries de 1917*, the first to be based on the archival record, historians have agreed that the mutinies were essentially 'military'. The French High Command nearly ruined the army through its blind devotion to its doctrine of the offensive, which reached its nadir along the Chemin des Dames. The new French supreme commander General Philippe Pétain repaired the damage through a cautious but effective combination of repression and reform.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup>

Soldiers, for their part, decided to play the game as set up by their commanders, when no external use of power could have compelled them to do so. Nothing about the mutinies is more striking than the contrast between the depth of soldiers' anger at what the war had wrought and their continued adherence to what were essentially their commanders' war aims. Soldiers' self-remobilization was inextricably linked to

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<sup>29</sup> Clayton, p.136

<sup>30</sup> Smith, Leonard V, 'Remobilizing the citizen-soldier through the French army mutinies of 1917' in; Horne (ed.), *State, society and mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, p.144

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed examination of the events and specific failures of Nivelle's offensive see; Clayton Chapter 7, and, Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic victory : French strategy and operations in the Great War* (London: Belknap, 2005), Chapter 7. 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.

their sense of who they were politically. The mutinies resurrected one of the oldest tensions within French democratic identity – direct democracy versus representative government. Direct democracy led soldiers to express an array of anguished grievances as citizens rather than as soldiers; representative government led them to express these grievances to their deputies, and in the end to obey their commanders, the instruments of state power authorized by that government. As Frenchmen, they found unacceptable a scenario in which France would lose the war – certainly what would have happened had they failed to return to the trenches.<sup>32</sup>

As Smith explains, ‘from the moment soldiers successfully refused to obey orders, the mutinies became ‘political’’.<sup>33</sup> The mutineers were also particularly streetwise about their interactions with officers during their dissent, which further complicated attempts to disable the movement.

Nearly everywhere, officers (the most immediate instruments of state authority) were treated with respect, even when they were openly disobeyed. Most importantly soldiers did not cross the line into violent resistance, which could well have turned the mutinies into another French Revolution.<sup>34</sup>

There were often suggestions that the French mutineers themselves were drunk during the height of the dissent, but this was also not universally the case and many French soldiers purposefully eschewed alcohol so as not to lose sight of the overall aim of the movement.<sup>35</sup> This put the French military in a difficult position when it eventually came to the re-imposition 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’.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, Leonard (2002). p.158

<sup>33</sup> Smith, Leonard (2002). p.146

<sup>34</sup> Smith, Leonard (2002). p.144

<sup>35</sup> Adam Zientek, "‘Surtout que personne ne boive: The Curiously Sober Mutiny of the 129th Regiment of Infantry’," in *Violence in French History* (Trinity College Dublin 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Smith, Leonard (2002). p.150

The British uprising at Etaples was not as widespread as the mutinies that gripped the French in 1917 but neither were they so thoroughly politically rationalised. The British dissent was very much focused on the conditions at Etaples and the contempt in which trainers, officers and police whom the soldiers did not respect held them.<sup>37</sup> 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.

And as Richard Challener put it, conscript service for the Frenchman constituted 'both the badge and moral consequence of citizenship'. Citizens served the army as a representation of the state, and the state as a representation of the sovereign people. Military service thus carried to its conclusion Jean-Jacques Rousseau's logic of the social contract, in that obedience to military authority made the citizen-soldier as free as before, in the sense that he obeyed a source of authority originating in himself and his compatriots.<sup>38</sup>

That these two mutinies would eventually see both armed forces returning to the frontline 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 the grassroots entente relations and these would be particularly evident within the French ranks. Having undergone the trauma of the Nivelle Offensive and the mutiny

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<sup>37</sup> Gill & Dallas.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, Leonard (2002). pp.152-3

that then resulted the French soldier had been, in the words of Smith, 're-mobilized' both for military action but also politically. The French had undergone an intensive re-evaluation of the war, its methods and its costs. The French had paid the highest price of the allied armies and they 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. 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.

This may not seem to have been much of a concern or a threat to relations between the British and the French at this time but the German offensive of 1918 and the perceived failure of the British infantry in holding the line would be met by fury and scorn by their French compatriots and the esteem which the British had worked so hard to achieve was almost cast aside during the Spring months. The French view of their closest ally would plummet and Tommy-*Poilu* relations were almost fatally wounded.

### **The Entente on the edge**

It was becoming increasingly 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 revolution and the signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, in March 1918 the German army began the process of redeploying their forces from Eastern to Western Front.<sup>39</sup> Whilst the Germans were strengthening their own position on the Western Front, the Entente were doing likewise, with the eventual arrival of the reinforcements from America. Only 77,000 American soldiers had arrived in France

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<sup>39</sup> Stevenson (2005) p. 399



by November of 1917.<sup>40</sup> However, by spring and summer 1918 this number would begin to rise dramatically.<sup>41</sup>

1918 began slowly for the British forces in France. It was in March, with the onset of the German's Spring Offensives that substantive inter-allied interactions really begin. In many ways the chief comparison for soldiers' writing during this period is 1914. The German offensive sought to force the allied armies back across a wide front and keeping in contact with the French became a key objective for the B.E.F.. During the Battle of the Marne the moments of fierce combat often saw fewer recollections within the primary sources of the relationship between French and British. In this sense, these experiences appear to be going full circle and afford us a useful measure of how far the alliance has come since the (often) confused and acrimonious interactions between British and French soldiers during the retreat of 1914. These relationships had then been largely repaired in 1915 and evolved into, at the very least, a workable co-operation on the Somme but, more often, into a genuine friendliness and level of respect. At heart, this was borne out of the willingness from either side to welcome the other, whilst the British took the opportunity to learn and mature as an army and as soldiers alongside the seemingly more accomplished and assured French army.

This may be the moment where those experiences during 1915 and 1916 pay off for the Entente as the German army attempted to drive a wedge between the British and French armies and, in a repeat of 1914, the front is pushed back towards the Marne. Where previously the B.E.F. of 1914 had had no opportunity to acclimatise or adjust to their new circumstances and no opportunity to interact substantially with their new French allies and, as a result, had endured a fractured relationship with them, the British army of 1918 had the benefit of persistent interaction with the French and a

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<sup>40</sup> Stevenson (2005), p. 368

<sup>41</sup> Stevenson (2005), p. 441

long-term immersion in France. As a consequence whilst tempers often become strained during this new offensive, there was a new form of proximity between the armies of the Entente.

To begin with though, it is Cude who provides the best coverage of the confused and frantic final days of March as the Germans launched their assault and the British and French armies attempted to halt the advance. In the evening of 23 March, two days after the opening of the offensive, Cude reported that 'after holding him up all day in REAY WOOD, French storm battalions attack through us'. 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'.<sup>42</sup> 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'.<sup>43</sup> 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'.<sup>44</sup> As the British leave 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'.<sup>45</sup> On the same line his description of the French attack shows that the forces gathered against the allies were clearly substantial, and the British and French soldiers were struggling to cope with them.

By 24 March Cude reported that his Division had been 'cut off from the British and so we rely upon the French for food and everything'.<sup>46</sup> The next day they arrived at another village (of which Cude cannot remember the name) and 'find trenches

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<sup>42</sup> Cude, 23/03/1918

<sup>43</sup> Cude, Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Cude, Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Cude, Ibid. 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.

<sup>46</sup> Cude, 24/03/1918

prepared for us by the Froggies'.<sup>47</sup> Cude later described these new trenches as 'a splendid position' from which they could 'hold him up for years if necessary'.<sup>48</sup> There were however, serious problems emerging in an area around the new British position and Cude would make several entries regarding the battle on 25 March. These entries are often fairly lengthy, but need to be examined in their entirety to get a full view of the fighting and interactions at this section of the front. Already the British were 'none too easy in our minds' as they began to evaluate the battlefront.<sup>49</sup>

[f]or over on our left is a great range of woods, and the gunfire from that direction is increasing in violence, and incidentally getting much nearer. It is perfectly obvious that the trouble is going to come from that direction, and we are not appeased by the action of French troops, who are retiring across our line. If this is a true position, Jerry must have broken right through, and is changing direction. This will mean that unless we are decidedly lucky, we shall all finish up inside Germany. We have another thing to put up with, for he begins shelling us from both the front and the rear. A few minutes of this and a French Staff Officer gallops up to General WOOD, with orders to retire immediately a distance of 3 or 4 miles back, as rapidly as possible, as he is at the back of us. Can we get back in time? Gen Wood is in doubt, but he means to give Fritz as heavy a casualty roll as is possible. Always with a front to Jerry, we retire lap over lap, and one circumstance saved the whole Div. Just as Jerry appeared on the heights around GRANDRU a village through which we must pass – a dozen armoured cars arrive on the scene. They are French, and they hang Jerry up for an hour, just necessary for us to get clear. ...

No quarter was given, and even the wounded was finished off, as it should be too, for we are without food ourselves, and if prisoners are taken, it means that they have to be fed. ... During the progress of the battle, one of our chaps had to make a very speedy decision. A French civilian was mixed up in the scrap, and he had a rifle. He was shot dead, but, of course, it may have been for self-preservation, or yet again, to get one back on Jerry, or yet again, he may have been in sympathy with Jerry. The fact remains, he possessed a rifle, and rendered himself liable to be shot, which he

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<sup>47</sup> Cude, 25/03/1918

<sup>48</sup> Cude, Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Cude, Ibid

was. We expect trouble over this incident, with the French, for although fighting with them, we cannot get any assistance from them. They run at the least thing, and are constantly leaving our flanks exposed, however, except for an occasional murmur, very little was said, so the incident ended. ...

At 8pm, we receive the news that advance parties of Germans are in the eastern suburbs of NOYON, and French troops are rushed to the scene to delay him, or to stop him permanently if possible. This necessitates our retirement earlier than was due to start, so we push off, immediately upon relief by the French, and before midnight, we are safely over the canal. All our artillery had preceded us, and parties of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Fd Coy R.E.s are told off to blow the bridges up, as soon as Jerry arrives. The French are retiring another way, so there is nothing to stop Jerry getting along soon.<sup>50</sup>

Cude's account outlines a level of detail about British and French co-operation during combat that is, at the very least, comparable with some of the accounts of the fighting around the Somme in 1916. There is however, a conflict between the details of Cude's entries and his evaluation of the French activities during this day. There are repeated references to the French military and yet Cude also maintains that 'although fighting with them, we cannot get any assistance from them'. However, even earlier in the day Cude had reported that a French Staff Officer had approached General Wood with orders to retire to a new position ahead of German attackers, but that a dozen French armoured cars had delayed the enemy advance in order for the British to retreat to safety. Without wanting to dwell too much on what constitutes 'assistance' in Cude's mind, I do think it is interesting how this scenario and Cude's writings mirror those of Hugh Bellew in 1914 during the retreat from Mons.<sup>51</sup>

In both cases the B.E.F. were being forced back in the face of a significant German assault whilst attempting to stay in contact with the nearby French. There is a clear

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<sup>50</sup> Cude, Ibid

<sup>51</sup> See p.93

similarity in Cude and Bellew's experiences and also in their reaction that the British were being sacrificed or unsupported by their French allies. With Cude's division already having been cut off from the British, there would likely have been an even greater sense of isolation and Cude is pretty honest with his fear that they are all likely to be captured. The fighting certainly sounds brutal, with Cude relating that even the wounded had been killed to avoid taking prisoners.

However, more interesting at this point are the differences between Bellew in 1914 and Cude in 1918. Whereas Bellew and the B.E.F. had just fought the delaying action at Le Cateau in 1914 and were once again falling back roughly towards the Marne, often lacking communication with their own high command and the French allies on either side of their position, Cude and his division found themselves fully integrated with the French army and in fairly constant contact with them.

There are obviously moments when this system broke down, with Cude reporting that the French had 'retired through' their lines and that they 'run at the least thing, and are constantly leaving our flanks exposed'. Nonetheless, this is a clear improvement on the chaotic retreat of August 1914, especially as Cude also reiterated that the French attempted to delay the German advance through Noyon and relieve the British, so they could begin the next stage of the withdrawal. This only ceased when the French and British were forced to retire in different directions. The French also seemed remarkably reserved following the shooting of one of their civilians during the fighting. Cude makes a good argument that, by taking up a rifle in a combat area, the man had opened himself to the danger of being shot but, at the same time, the shooting of a civilian would not likely have been welcome news within the French army. Perhaps the 'occasional murmur' that Cude heard is a sign of collective French annoyance that he was unable to fully pick up on, or perhaps the French understood that in urban fighting such things could happen and were unwilling to make an issue of it.

Of particular interest though should be the earlier related events involving the French staff officer and the armoured cars. This is a clear indication of the French army assisting the British and informing them of their intentions and then supporting their withdrawal. Obviously, the military situation had come a long way since the opening days of the war in 1914 when Generals French and Joffre struggled to see eye-to-eye to begin with and the B.E.F.'s role was often confused at best. This new coordination of 1918 can likely be ascribed to the improved organisation between the commands of British and French armies but, just as rationally, it can perhaps also be a result of the evolution in relations between the soldiers of the two armies. These men had had the chance for fairly continuous contact with their allies, the opportunity to learn more about them, both simply as men but also as 'British' or 'French' men. Rationalising any improved coordination between the Entente armies as simply a result of changes made at command level doesn't take into account the fact that the reality on the ground is not a reflection of the general staff but a world of its own, with its own levels of responsibility and interaction. There is also little point in examining how well the relationships between British and French soldiers are progressing only when the war is taking a positive course. It is when the Entente is under attack and facing difficult times and the relationships built up during the easier times are really put under strain that we can see how durable and useful they may have become.

The details that Cude gives of the fighting on March 25 may be the clearest indication of how far the relations between British and French soldiers had come since 1914. It was clearly not a perfect relationship and had moments where it fell down, but it had perhaps reached the point of being *good enough* to withstand the German assault and launch the counterattacks masterminded by Foch later in the year. The British and French were clearly aware of the circumstances surrounding the other: Cude had constantly expressed his compassion for some Frenchmen and French soldiers as well as his being impressed with the French army. He may have criticised the French

army's decisions at times, but he did not view them in the same way that he did the other allies or enemies. If his approach to the French army is representative of wider trends in the British army then this may be an indication of how the British and French soldiers had come together to now be capable of winning the war. This was not a flawless military union; but then did it need to be?

The next day (26 March), Cude mentioned that they 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'.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> The ferocity of the German assault at the end of March had obviously shaken Cude and left him looking for positive signs, be it the success of a French counterattack or the survival of the British army. The German attempt to drive a wedge between the two countries had stretched them but had not yet succeeded.

For an additional insight into how the British and French armies had managed to maintain contact and a degree of coordination at the end of March and beginning of April, the writings of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant W G Wallace and his role during this time period provide some further explanation.

One day was sent for to Headquarters. I saw a Major Floyd, a good chap whom I remembered from early Bedford days and he asked me if I could speak French. I said I could make myself understood, whereupon he informed me that I was to relieve a Jock officer as British Signals Liaison Officer with the XIVth French Army Corps at Waton just behind Poperinghe. The pressure on the British Army in the March and April fighting had been so terrific that the French had been compelled to provide

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<sup>52</sup> Cude, 26/03/1918

<sup>53</sup> Cude, 29/03/1918

reinforcements and take over sections of the line so as to shorten the front held by each British Division. One such was around Mount Kemmel and the Scherpenberg – where three French Army Corps known as D.A.N. (Division d'Armée du Nord) found itself sandwiched between two British Corps and under the control of the British Second Army Commander Plumer. It can be imagined that the curse of the Tower of Babel lay pretty heavily on such an arrangement – hence the creation of "Liaison" Officers. 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.<sup>54</sup>

There are several areas of interest here. Firstly the necessity of Liaison Officers between the two armies is clear to see especially with French and British divisions and corps becoming intermingled. The situation of the Division d'Armée du Nord in many ways mirrored that of Cude and "The Buffs" who found themselves essentially seconded to the French during the German attack. However, of more interest is Major Floyd's view of the French as being both 'happy go lucky' and 'a sticky lot'. 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 protection of British signal routes and by extension its wider interests, does produce a picture of the British and French military commands still being somewhat at odds with each other. It also reveals that national personality traits were proving troublesome in the task of working together.

It is clear from this entry that Wallace was not looking forward to his new duty with the French. However, the situation he encountered on his arrival differed quite profoundly from his expectations.

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<sup>54</sup>Captain W Graham Wallace, "Typescript - 'Memoirs of 1914-1918'," (IWM: DOCS - 86/9/1, 1935). This period of Wallace's diary is not accurately dated beyond the rough time period of end of March and beginning of April



However, as is often the case what looked like a sticky business turned out to be a very happy time for me. I received from the outset an extraordinarily warm welcome from the French XIVth Corps. Signals Mess. The Corps. Signalling Officer was a charming Captain called Clement. The Lines Officer was a cheerful rascal – Denert and the Wireless Officer a most amazing little Gascon called Penard. As the Mess Cook had been a Chef at the Ritz in pre-war days there was nothing to complain of in the cookery. All that defeated me was the necessity of doing a full mornings work on the regulation French breakfast – a roll-and-butter and coffee. I also found having the main meal of the day at 12 noon very difficult to get used to. The whole French Army used to go into a sort of sacred trance about 12 noon, from which they resolutely refused to emerge until about 2 p.m. Nothing short of a mass attack by the Germans would be allowed to interfere with the regime which made liaison between an energetic British Officer eating bread and cheese out of his haversack and a well wined and fed Frenchman a little difficult.<sup>55</sup>

The welcome that Wallace receives is in many ways reminiscent of those we have examined in 1916 and is clearly at odds with what he had been expecting both in regards to a general welcome but also to the personalities of the Frenchmen he encountered. This sort of reaction to the French eating habits has been noted by previous soldiers and in its own way is probably one of the most striking (and yet low-key) social differences between the two countries. Many of the interactions between the B.E.F.'s New Armies and the French in 1916 had been based around food, with the French often playing host to visiting British soldiers. Such an arrangement does conjure up an image of the French as represented through their cuisine, but willing to welcome others into their temporary 'homes'. More importantly though is the clear divergence between the experience suggested and expected by Major Floyd and that which Wallace actually encountered.

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<sup>55</sup> Wallace. Ibid

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 is 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, is likely describing the French derived from his experiences with them and the experiences of other higher-ranking officers. However, it doesn't 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 also do not seem to feed back up the spheres into influencing 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.

There is an additional level of interest and importance in these competing dynamics because, as highlighted in 1914 and 1915, the British High Command had no real plan or interest in assisting the relationships between British and French soldiers and were, to all intents and purposes, either content to just let them play out naturally or were just ignoring that aspect of the war altogether. However, we can see here that as Wallace begins to cross from the 'soldier' sphere to a position of more authority and responsibility that this lack of interest in preparing relations with the French evaporates and commanding officers begin to intervene. This is of course just a single

example but there is the suggestion that the British army was primarily concerned with influencing relations higher up the command structure than they were at the grassroots level.

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. Mulliss was able to report on how an element of competitiveness introduced higher up the command scale, had dramatic consequences on the relationships between British and French soldiers.

We had been in the line since April 1918 and were now a little in the rear for a short rest. The usual programme had been laid on – training, marching, and above all the customary Divisional Transport Show. For this event every vehicle, from the guns to the little Lewis Gun carts, passing by the Transport, was scrubbed and painted; every scrap of brass and steel was polished or burnished; the harness was scrubbed until every little stitch gleamed white, while the horses and mules were groomed as they had never been groomed before, at least not since the last Divisional Transport Show five months earlier. All was ready for the great day and then came the order for the division to go south, artillery and transport by train while the infantry were to travel in lorries provided by the French Army. The move was urgent and the ride through the night was hair-raising, it being our first experience of French drivers. In the new areas in the French Zone, British Soldiers were very rare and when our artillery and transport drove in from railhead, the villagers were enchanted with their gleaming turnout; the buzz went round that we were a new Division fresh from England, an idea which did not enchant our hardened warriors. Everything was fine for a couple of days – French and British fraternised and all was merry and bright. Then all at once everything went sour. French soldiers disappeared from the streets and our men were no longer welcome in their canteens. From all around [sic] came the busy sounds of polishing, burnishing and a grand clean up. We were all very relieved, especially the French soldiers, when we moved to another village nearer the front, where we

were able to resume friendly relations with the French soldiers in the area, especially as their Division bore the same number as ours, the 37<sup>th</sup>.<sup>56</sup>

The influence of the British 'Divisional Transport Show' caused the French military to force their men into an aesthetic competition with their allies. Mulliss certainly doesn't seem to have shown any interest in a direct competition with the French and his diary transmits disappointment at the collapse in relations followed by his relief that 'we were able to resume friendly relations' with French soldiers in the new deployment area. Whereas the fact that both Divisions in the new area bore the moniker 37<sup>th</sup> could have been a cause for a new friendly rivalry between the two, it instead seems to have acted as a further bonding point. We also cannot overlook the role of the 1917 mutinies in creating a mindset between the two allied armies that viewed competition as a largely pointless exercise. As discussed above, one of the primary results of the French army retaking the trenches after the mutinies was their 're-mobilization' both as soldiers but also as political entities. They were committed to winning the war, but they were no longer willing to waste time on pointless offensives nor, it seems, were they overly keen on being forced into pointless competitions with their allies.

The effects of the upper level discussions could be seen in the trenches however, and would cause Wallace to wonder which of the two national systems was the most advantageous.

Other comparisons outside the Signal Office were equally interesting. One would see a British battery of artillery harness beautifully supple, served with lambs wool wherever there was chafing, metal work burnished, drivers all riding at attention and every animal with an obvious full day's ration in his tummy. Against them you would see a French battery, slovenly-looking drivers lolling in their saddle, harness patched with rope, horses with every rib in their body showing, galled and rusty chain work

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<sup>56</sup> F Mulliss, "Typescript Diary - *Recollections 1914-1918*," (IWM: DOCS - 98/33/1, 1914-1918). Around May-June 1918

and the famous “75” looking about as half as efficient as our 18 pndr. The same with the lorries – and yet it was nothing for a whole divisional relief to take place in a night and for me to be quite ignorant of any abnormal movements of troops. They were in their queer way amazingly efficient. Indeed I often wondered whether the very simplicity of their methods made them more truly efficient than our super elaboration of organisation.<sup>57</sup>

The differences between the detailed planning of the British military set against an apparently more *laissez-faire* French approach could only really be seen at ground-level. Whilst there have been numerous complaints, particularly in 1914, from British soldiers regarding the slack nature of French troop deployment or relief there was also praise similar to Wallace’s about how this system could work with one episode being recounted by Lieutenant Tennyson, who was not given to glowing praise of the French army.<sup>58</sup>

During the fighting of April and May 1918 mentions of the French in the combatants diaries drop away in a manner reminiscent of what we have seen during moments of high combat in both 1914 and 1916. However, there are still some contributions of interest during this period, predominantly from Group Captain Gillman serving with the French ambulance *Service Sanitaire Anglaise* 19. He was able to report that in certain locales, the Royal Army Medical Corps had seemingly collapsed completely under the pressure of the German advance and as a result, the French cars were ‘repeatedly called on to carry the British wounded’.<sup>59</sup> His section would be kept busy at various points in April because of attempted French counterattacks against German positions.<sup>60</sup> The *Service Sanitaire Anglaise* 19 would also receive a Divisional

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<sup>57</sup> Wallace. Dated in late March as in the previous Wallace quotations.

<sup>58</sup> Tennyson 06/10/1914

<sup>59</sup> Gillman, 08/04/1918

<sup>60</sup> Gillman, 06/04/1918 & 15/04/1918

Citation from the French Army at the end of April which represented the 'esteem and appreciation of the convoy's services' over the previous two years of the war.<sup>61</sup>

It certainly appears that the British and French working together on the convoy had grown fairly close during their time together. When the section's French Lieutenant was to depart for a new position, the section organised a leaving party complete with a benediction from the local aumônier and the presentation of a watch and a photograph of the convoy taken in 1916.<sup>62</sup> Lieutenant Gégout responded by expressing 'his great regret at leaving the convoy' and 'asked all to join his toast to its future welfare'.<sup>63</sup> Gégout's replacement, Lieutenant Boucheny, then 'acknowledged in graceful terms the welcome that was offered to him'.<sup>64</sup> This type of ceremony appears to have been reasonably common within Gillman's convoy as, a few weeks later, there was another one held to welcome another new Lieutenant, Laverne, and also to present the citations for the Croix de Guerre to several of the section members.<sup>65</sup> Lieutenant Laverne, in a similar move to both Gégout and Boucheny addressed the men and 'expressed (in English) his pleasure at being appointed to the convoy'.<sup>66</sup> This type of gathering seems to have served a purpose beyond the simple spreading of information. They were clearly an opportunity for trans-national bonding and, given the apparently strong and harmonious relations between the British and French men, seem to have been successful.

The Entente had managed to largely weather this storm of early 1918 and Foch was now prepared to launch his own assaults against the Germans, the assault that would eventually win the war. However, whilst the British and the French remained the primary allied nations on the Western Front, the continual arrival of the American

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<sup>61</sup> Gillman, 30/04/1918

<sup>62</sup> Gillman, 01/05/1918

<sup>63</sup> Gillman, Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Gillman, Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Gillman, 16/05/1918

<sup>66</sup> Gillman, Ibid

soldiers and the ongoing exploits of the assorted colonial and dominion nations would continue to play an important role in inter-allied relations.

### **The other armies**

Issues with American and colonial soldiers did not originate in 1917. 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.<sup>67</sup> 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 British were proving to themselves that they were capable and this was a feeling that was beginning to be fully reflected by the French. 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 American 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.<sup>68</sup> 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

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<sup>67</sup> Cude. Roughly dated to 03/08/1917 and 01/09/1917. Also as Ferguson, 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).

<sup>68</sup> Bloor 26/07/1917

did not sit well with the British soldiers who for their part, were not looked upon warmly by the Americans either.

Although all British soldiers did not necessarily harbour feelings of animosity toward the Americans, they did adopt a certain attitude of superiority over their allies that both exacerbated and confirmed the Americans' hostility to them. The actions and attitudes of the British ... revealed a prevalent feeling of superiority over a former subject people.<sup>69</sup>

In January of 1918 Cude would firstly greet news that 'the Yanks are attached to 8<sup>th</sup> 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.'<sup>70</sup>

Such pronouncements from Cude should perhaps be expected given his writings over previous years, but we can now also view them in comparison to his espoused view at the end of 1917 at his preference if given a choice for being a French rather than an Englishman. Cude's diatribes against assorted nationalities might appear to be fairly untargeted and designed to take in all those who are, essentially, not English, but there is a clear exception made for the French at times and especially for the French army. Whilst he is often scathing in his estimation of the American, Australian or Canadian armed forces there is always an extra level to his relationship and interpretation of the French. This seems to be particularly built upon his experiences alongside the French army in 1916 and 1917 and the evolution of a relationship alongside them.

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

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<sup>69</sup> Robert B. Bruce, *A fraternity of arms; America and France in the Great War* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003). pp.168-9

<sup>70</sup> Cude, 23/01/1918



typical judgement on them earlier in the year and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Wallace was of a similar mind.

The working parties, however, were a very different pair of shoes as they brought me into contact with the Americans; the 27<sup>th</sup> New York Division to be precise. 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 (from the names written in indelible pencil on their gas masks) 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, but what amazed me most was that this great nation of business experts failed in the simple essential of feeding their own men in the field. I had one working party who assured me they had had nothing to eat for 24 hours except a slice of bread and a third of a tin of pork and beans. However, I heard afterwards from a very well informed source that I had struck about the worst division in the whole American army and that their other troops were a very different proposition. I certainly struck one decent, modest, friendly American later, but only one.<sup>71</sup>

There are various aspects to Wallace's allegations here. First amongst them is the tying of these American soldiers with 'middle Europe and Russia'. By 'middle Europe' he is clearly referring to Germany and the other Central Powers and, with this in mind, we can see an attempt to understand the Americans along traditional European lines. Wallace's suggestion that these men might have some form of German or Russian heritage is not unusual in itself: there was certainly a large German population within the United States at the time and they had been particularly vociferous in campaigning against joining the war.

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<sup>71</sup> Wallace, August-September 1918

Of additional interest is the judgement that these Americans were not behaving in the proper martial manner and the way that Wallace links this to American politics. 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 that had led to disorder, a sense of entitlement and a lack of respect for the natural military order of the army. It's hard not to view some of these accusations as coming from the perspective of social class. The Americans, and the Australians at earlier parts of the war, seem to represent the fears expressed by a military institution marked and organised by social class, of an enfranchised mass of civilians who have taken their rights and powers to the extreme. Churchill certainly hints at the alien nature of American democratic and constitutional politics from the British perspective and intimates how the outcome of these proceedings could be an empowering and yet cut-throat business that had left America and Woodrow Wilson as essentially unknown quantities around the world.<sup>72</sup> The accusations are slightly different but the manner of some of the criticism is reminiscent of those levelled by the B.E.F. towards the French soldiers in 1914, particularly by Tennyson.

By the beginning of September events began to move quickly and the French, British and American 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.<sup>73</sup> Cude wrote that 'a total of 6 German Armies are in full retreat' whilst also noticing that 'the French are back in RUAY WOOD'.<sup>74</sup> Cude would then hear the 'startling news' that

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<sup>72</sup> Winston Churchill and Martin Gilbert, *The world crisis, 1911-1918* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp.692-7

<sup>73</sup> Gillman, 07/09/1918

<sup>74</sup> Cude, 08/09/1918

suggested that the Americans had been of great use during an allied assault.<sup>75</sup> Cude's appreciation of any action by the Americans wouldn't last however, and twelve days later he would again declare that 'after all this time of inactivity, it is up to the yanks to do something or other to justify their presence over here'.<sup>76</sup> 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 further.

You see Jerry can't be allowed to sit down and enjoy himself in the "beautiful" country that doesn't belong to him, as a matter of fact the Americans seem to have a very obstinate idea that not even Germany belongs to him, that is the idea we lost sight of a long time ago [n'est pas?]<sup>77</sup>

This suggestion that the Americans are focused on conquering Germany whilst the British apparently had long since lost interest or belief in such a notion is probably indicative of a '1914 effect' in how the Americans initially approached and fought the war.<sup>78</sup>

The AEF's initial battles of the war strongly mirrored those that the French and British had endured in 1914 and 1915 both in approach and in the eventual casualties. The on-coming British soldiers seemed to take these attempts, alongside the espoused belief by the Americans that they could capture Germany, with a certain amount of world-weariness. In some ways this dynamic of the now accomplished B.E.F. watching the faltering steps of the newly arrived Americans mirrors the situation that greeted Kitchener's New Armies and the French in 1915 and 1916. The British in 1918 seem to be far less accommodating and flexible than the French were at that point, probably for the reasons discussed above, but perhaps also as a representation

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<sup>75</sup> Cude, 13/09/1918

<sup>76</sup> Cude, 25/09/1918

<sup>77</sup> D D Dunnet, "Manuscript Letters," (IWM: DOCS - 78/59/1, 1918). 26/09/1918. 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.

<sup>78</sup> Hart (2009). p.405.

of the ongoing effect of 1917 with the allied mindset turned completely to winning the war in as expeditious a fashion as possible.

The British Army of 1918 was never particularly impressed by or enamoured of the other allied nations except the French.<sup>79</sup> This is probably understandable given the evolution of this relationship examined over previous chapters, but it does mean that the British rather tied themselves to the French whilst shunning the other allies. These two countries had been fighting longer and harder than the others so this is understandable, and this narrowing of the British view would not change their determination to win the war. The British soldiers who had contact with the Germans during this year did not seem to lose any of their wish or desire for them to be defeated either. With the Allies throwing back the German offensive the time had arrived for the counter-attack that would win the war and, with the British turning away from their other allies, they would stand firmly alongside the French at this time.

### **Entente victorious**

By the mid point of July the changes resulting from Foch's appointment and his preparations began to be noted in the trenches, as can be evidenced by Lieutenant Harrison's later evaluation.

Two British Divisions the 51<sup>st</sup> Division and the 62<sup>nd</sup> were ordered down to Rheims, & the 15<sup>th</sup> (Sam's Division) & another were sent to Soisson to assist the French. This was the turning point of the war, of that there is no question. It was the enemy's last throw & if we could hold them and thrust them back the beginning of the end was in

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<sup>79</sup> There were other Allied armies arrayed around the front for which these simple goals were not so easily accomplished, as can be highlighted by the British evaluation of the Portuguese Expeditionary Force (CEP) at this point in the war. The CEP represented something of an anomaly on the Western Front and, due to its lack of literacy in its own language was almost entirely unable to communicate with any of its fellow allied soldiers. 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 (2000). The British would soon treat the Portuguese with varying degrees of contempt and mockery and measures had to be taken to prevent further abuse. Harry Gore, "Transcript Memoir," (IWM: Docs - 01/36/1, 1930s). 04/1918, and; Gameson, 09/1918.

sight. It turned out to be the last offensive the Germans ever made. Ever after he was on the defensive. We had a very fine reception from the French people both in Paris and farther south. They brought us flowers, food & wine. The reason for this outburst of feeling was due to the fact that the French had not seen many English troops in the Southern area since the beginning of the war. They knew that we were being rushed to their front to provide assistance. By 11 a.m. on the 16<sup>th</sup> July our long & tiring journey was at an end. We marched through Arsi & here again the people seemed pleased to see us. Soon we "embussed" in French buses & travelled at a heavy speed (for the French people love speed).<sup>80</sup>

Harrison's division was shortly 'attached to the 5<sup>th</sup> French Army under General Berthelot' a man whom he describes as being 'a most capable officer'.<sup>81</sup> 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 was clear to all the combatants.

Now followed one of the greatest battles of the war if not the greatest. Had the Germans been successful in the Rheims-Soisson salient, as Hindenburg says in his memoirs, Paris would have been doomed, & the whole line would have been rolled up. Most of the officers & [word illegible] realised the desperate position, & everyone realised we were in for a sticky show.<sup>82</sup>

Group Captain Gillman reported numerous British and French attacks over the following days with 'many wounded' being delivered by the ambulances.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Lieutenant Ivan R S Harrison, "Manuscript Memoir," (IWM: DOCS - P323, 1920-1925), Mid-July 1918

<sup>81</sup> Harrison, Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Harrison, 18/07/1918

<sup>83</sup> Gillman, 20/07/1918 – 23/07/1918

<sup>84</sup> Harrison, 24/07/1918

However, such had been the success of the relationship between the British divisions and the French 5<sup>th</sup> Army, that, around 27 July, Harrison reported that the English General Braithwait and the French General Berthelot ‘had watched the advance from the rear and went wild with delight over it’.<sup>85</sup>

Of course these advances were not without losses and Lieutenant Gameson was given to query the methods of the advance and the seemingly discriminatory selection of shock troops.

The French command was mercilessly using the Jocks – and French troops as well – to effect a breakthrough. It is a fact that operations did end in accordance with hopes, if not always precisely according to plans. Throughout the long two weeks, the plans appeared to include the slaughter of all our Scotsmen.<sup>86</sup>

On a similar line, Gillman had also noticed that ‘the 51<sup>st</sup> (Highland) and 62<sup>nd</sup> British divisions’ had been brought up into the frontlines at the onset of the offensive.<sup>87</sup> Suggestions that certain nationalities were being used as disposable fodder are not unusual in regards 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 aspects of the two armies might find themselves unjustly forced forward into the frontlines. However, later in August Gameson would report that the French soldiers did take notice of the sacrifices endured by the Scottish.

When the 15<sup>th</sup> Division had left the line the 17<sup>th</sup> (French) Division erected a monument to the Scottish troops. They built it upon the spot where the farthestmost Scotsman had fallen; where they found his body lying unburied since the second Buzancy assault on July 28<sup>th</sup>. That the Jocks of all people, who had earlier buried

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<sup>85</sup> Harrison, 27/07/1918

<sup>86</sup> Gameson. End of July – Beginning of August 1918

<sup>87</sup> Gillman, 20/07/1918

many Americans, should have left their own dead in the open is more eloquent of their trials than all the writing of Stewart and Buchan. Needless to say, all dead were identified and ultimately buried. The monument built by the French was of stone blocks from the damaged Buzancy chateau. The rough stones and the crudeness of the chiselled letters suggest the spontaneous haste of the builders. On the face of the memorial they carved:

ICI FLEURIRA TOUJOURS  
LE GLOURIEUX (sic) CHARDON D'ECOSSE  
PARMI LES ROSES DE FRANCE

The monument is said to be historically unique. I visited it, alone, in the summer of 1919. No one was in sight. The monument stood solitary.<sup>88</sup>

The erecting of a monument by French soldiers to commemorate the actions of their allies is a significant act and a clear indication of the strength of relations between those soldiers. It is almost impossible to imagine such an event happening in 1914 but now, with the war approaching its end we can see just how far things have come. Such actions were not restricted to the French. The British would also take the opportunity to show their respect for their allies.

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.<sup>89</sup> 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

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<sup>88</sup> Gameson, 03/08/1918

<sup>89</sup> Percy Arthur Glock, "Typescript Memoir - 'Notes from 1914-1919'," (IWM: DOCS - 99/84/1). August – September 1918 – With post 1918 notation added.

towns and then keep them liberated. The British soldiers were becoming increasingly convinced that the German collapse was on.<sup>90</sup>

Such was the state of the allied advance at this stage that the British, French and American 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, Alan Johnson reported that the British saw the chance to perform a service to France.

It was here that I erected a statue. It was a statue of a French soldier wrapped in the French flag, and was to commemorate those lost in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Jerry had pulled it down, and it now lay in a backyard. ... The G.O.C. of the Division, Major-General Jendwine, thought it would be a nice gesture and appreciated by the local inhabitants if the British Army re-erected the statue. During the next two days my section and I with the [words illegible] from the German dump, ropes, chain [word illegible], and lots of sweating and swearing managed to get the statue, which weighed half a ton, back onto its pedestal. ... The ceremony turned out to be hideously funny and I had the misfortune to be on parade in front of my section trying to keep a straight face. Opposite me, were all the town's schoolchildren with their Professeur in front, complete with baggy umbrella, just like a cartoon Professeur. Behind the school-children in a first floor window, right in line of vision, were the rest of the officers of the company, laughing and enjoying everything, especially my discomfiture. The unveiling started with the usual hitch on such occasions. It did not unveil at the first jerk. The C.R.G. who was with the General looked "daggers" at me, but fortunately it unveiled on the third jerk. The General then, nobly I thought, made a speech in French. And then a small girl in a frock so starched that it stuck almost straight all round, showing her panties, presented the General with a bouquet, and did a most eloquent curtsy. It was now the turn of the Maire of Cysoing to make a

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<sup>90</sup> Cude, 27/09/1918



speech. ... When the Maire had finished speaking, during which I don't know how I refrained from laughing, there was even worse to follow. The town's school-children suddenly burst into the "Marseillaise", ably conducted by the Professeur with his baggy umbrella. This was about too much for me, especially when confronted by all my brother officers holding their sides with mirth in the first floor window opposite.<sup>91</sup>

It is probably necessary to look past the surreal unveiling ceremony and instead focus on the spirit of the gesture. Although this was a monument to the Franco-Prussian War there is evidence here of a reverence 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 is also likely an element of reinforcement when it came to pre-war ideas of power and structure in Europe. Germany was the upstart nation that had borne itself out of war in 1870-1. 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 represent the pinnacle of relations between the British and French soldiers with a clear line of respect drawn between the two. However, ceremonies and interactions like this can also be seen as the starting point of a change in the status of the soldiers. With the end of the war now firmly in sight these men would not have much longer left in uniform. During their service they had had a clear sense of purpose; defeat the enemy and win the war. Civilian ceremonies, whilst a part of their military duty did not have the same sense of gravitas and, when coupled with the fact that the soldiers were beginning to move out of the 'soldier' sphere of self-identification and back towards the civilian world, is likely a source for their amused reaction.

By 13 October Cude was reporting the rumours 'that Jerry is ready for our Peace Terms, so war is practically over' and declaring the Germans to be a 'a nation of

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<sup>91</sup> Johnson, October 1918

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'.<sup>92</sup>

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 proclaiming "Bienvenu aux Libérateurs" as the British moved into previously German-held French villages.<sup>93</sup> Upon reaching a 'a fairly large sized town which the 54<sup>th</sup> had taken' Cude wrote that the inhabitants 'judging by their look, had not had much to eat for years' declaring 'I have seldom seen a worse sight. The poor beggars cry at the sight of our chaps, however, it is joy in their deliverance.'<sup>94</sup> Tinsley was welcomed into a newly liberated town by cheering civilians flying the French flag.<sup>95</sup> These expressions of joy were not only reserved for the French areas of occupation. Wallace reported the arrival of General Watts and the 19<sup>th</sup> Corps into a Belgian town was greeted 'with due pomp and circumstance by the City Fathers'.<sup>96</sup> Wallace declared that 'the whole affair reached great heights of splendour and Anglo-Belgian Entente'.<sup>97</sup>

### **Armistice day and beyond**

Whilst Mulliss received the news of the Armistice in complete silence, his claim that this was 'a common reaction amongst the forward troops' seems erroneous.<sup>98</sup> The diaries of the other contributors 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.

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<sup>92</sup> Cude, 13/10/1918

<sup>93</sup> Godefroy Skelton, "Typescript Memoirs," (IWM: DOCS - 06/46/1). Shortly after 13/10/1918

<sup>94</sup> Cude, 18/10/1918. The Town in question was likely to be Pommereuil, east of Le Cateau, France

<sup>95</sup> Hugh Tinsley, "Manuscript Letters," (IWM: DOCS - 99/15/1, 1918). 18/10/1918

<sup>96</sup> Wallace, November 1918

<sup>97</sup> Wallace, Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Mulliss, 11/11/1918

Wallace declared that 'I shall never as long as I live forget that morning – the memorable November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918'.<sup>99</sup> 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'.<sup>100</sup> There was an emerging sinister side to the jubilation though as Wallace reached Nederbakel to see women who had allegedly collaborated with the Germans having their hair cut before deportation.<sup>101</sup>

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' when 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'.<sup>102</sup>

There were some exceptions to this more generalised revelry. The reaction of Glock and his fellows to the announcement was not overwhelming excitement.

We didn't care a button if the war was over all we wanted was a sleep, but we were called up again at 6 o/c and had to stand in readiness in case old Jerry didn't sign the terms. My word we were fed up that day I don't really know why it was, perhaps we were not quite satisfied with the way it ended.<sup>103</sup>

Harrison 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 [being] able to

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<sup>99</sup> Wallace, 11/11/1918

<sup>100</sup> Wallace, Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Wallace, Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Lance Corporal A J Abraham, "'1914-1918: Memoirs of a Non-Hero'," (IWM: DOCS - P191, 1973ca), 11/11/1918

<sup>103</sup> Glock. 11/11/1918

realise that all was over'.<sup>104</sup> He found the sudden cease of activity and movement to be 'very quiet & strange'.<sup>105</sup>

Cunliffe and Gore were witnesses to the collapse of Germany from within their P.O.W. camps and then, further, the beginnings of a collapse in Tommy-*Poilu* relations at the same time. The military infrastructure at Cunliffe's prisoner of war camp seemed to disintegrate almost immediately.<sup>106</sup>

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 came in and excitingly brought news that an Armistice was to be signed at 11:00 a.m. the following morning. Forgotten were pictures and without waiting for any more news we all made for the billets occupied by the French.

The news received was not altogether unexpected as we had been able to obtain news for some time, although severely censored, but the fact that the Allied Armies were advancing through Belgium, also the revolt of the German Army, through defeat, starvation and other causes, could not be kept from the ears of the Allied prisoners in Ruhla. The prisoners could no longer repress their feelings and at the billet assigned to the French there was great rejoicing. The English and French vowing eternal friendships, hands were shaken, one another's health drunk, the singing of "Tipperary." "Marsellaise" and war time songs, do you wonder that for once all restraint was thrown on one side, but there was no drunkenness. An immediate strike was declared against their employers, the Germans, at the factory where they worked from Monday to Saturday noon. After that the English left for their own billets marching through the main street of Ruhla singing the "Glory Song" and at billets the German Guard was serenaded until lights out and after. The principal song being

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<sup>104</sup> Harrison, 11/11/1918

<sup>105</sup> Harrison, Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Cunliffe, 09/11/1918

"Who Killed Bill Kaiser," I said "Lloyd George," to the tune of "Who Killed Cock Robin," with apologies to Robin Redbreast.<sup>107</sup>

The immediate joining of British and French soldiers in celebration is interesting but may not be representative of this moment being a unifying allied victory. The allies had won the war and the French and English came together to celebrate the armistice and a French soldier had even brought news of it to the cinema. 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 is an entirely natural response and should be expected but, at the same time, it is also an abnormality in regards to the wider relations between the two at the end of 1918. There may have been a thawing of relations since the disaster in Spring but they had not yet recovered to a position comparable with the genuine friendliness displayed in 1916 where the celebrations provoked by the armistice would not have seemed unusual. Additionally, as we shall see, in many ways this was probably the last moment that could really be described as 'unified' between the British and French soldiers in the camp and relations would begin to dissolve in fairly short order with eventual tragic consequences.

The routes of Cunliffe and Gore would deviate immediately after the armistice, with Cunliffe and the men within his prison camp making their way out of captivity towards freedom.

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<sup>107</sup> Gore, 10/11/1918

On the 13<sup>th</sup> Nov. We set off on our march to the French frontier. We were told it was only a two day's march. ... What a march it was. It was pitiful to see some of the fellows coming along, some scarcely with any boots to their feet, clothing worn and thin. ... It was just the hope of getting home that kept most of the men up. We had to cross all the lines and barbed wire, the Germans had evacuated. How pleased we were when we came to the French trenches. The French soldiers were all ready to give us a helping hand and anything they could do for us they did. We arrived at a French town called Nancy where we were received by our own men. We were well cared for, given excellent food and good baths. Every article of clothing new. How splendid it felt to be free from vermin again. I must tell you that many men died after arriving at this place from weakness and exhaustion after trying to march and also men died on the road. It was very hard just after receiving their liberty.<sup>108</sup>

The allied prisoners making their way back along the battlefields and frontlines in an attempt to reach their own trenches is a fairly moving case and they are in turn greeted by French soldiers who do not appear to care about nationality at all. These were returning men of their armies and they were treated as such.

However, at Ruhla further cracks began to show in the allied relationship. As mentioned previously a general strike had been called by the British and French soldiers in regards to working within German factories, but 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'.<sup>109</sup> The next day the British temporarily returned to work but, alongside some American 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.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Albert Cunliffe, "Typescript Memoir - 'My Experience as a Soldier and Prisoner'," (IWM: DOCS - 94/11/1, 1919)., 13/11/1918

<sup>109</sup> Gore, 12/11/1918

<sup>110</sup> Gore, 13/11/1918

Within the main POW camp, Gore reported that a degree of segregation had also become apparent where 'each nationality kept to their own huts'.<sup>111</sup> It was, perhaps, this segregation along national lines which led to the events of 27 November 1918.

During the last few days of November there was a storm brewing between the French and the Germans over the concert hut that had been used by the French. They claimed 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 said no, it was required for the sheltering of prisoners and they were in the right. The French were sadly lacking in common sense over the matter, they nearly always seemed to be and it led to serious trouble breaking out on the afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> November. I was in the hut at the time and well out of it ... Suddenly there was the sound of whistling bullets, a sound one can't forget, and the stampeding of men into the hut and on looking up I found myself looking at a German guard with loaded rifle and fixed bayonet. There I and the German stood gazing at one another for a few minutes, what he thought and I thought cannot be put into words, but as quickly as the trouble started so it ceased. There was a death like stillness about the huts and then I heard what happened.

It seems the French in force had tried to get into this hut with the sole purpose of breaking it down. The German Guard had turned out in full strength. Even then the affair might have quietened down but the French mad with excitement attacked the guard and unfortunately one of the guard lost his head and opened fire into the mob. Well, panic is catching and the Germans advancing in open order, firing as they advanced, drove the French back on to the open space where the English were playing a game of football, being watched by a crowd of spectators, mostly English and Russian. Across this open space the Germans fired driving the French back, not ceasing until everybody had dispersed into the huts. The casualties were about 17 killed and double that number wounded. The next day, 28<sup>th</sup>, was a sad day for the camp when the killed were buried. All of the prisoners lining the paths with heads bared as the sad procession slowly wended its way towards the entrance and to the burial ground. No flowers, no flags just plain bare coffins but not a man failed to turn out to pay their last respects and if the bitterness was in their hearts who could blame

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<sup>111</sup> Gore, Ibid

them. There were three English among the killed, a few Frenchmen and the rest Russians.

Of course the Germans had to take full responsibility at the enquiry afterwards. The mistake the guard made was to fire ball cartridge into the French instead of over their heads, but morally the French must take some of the blame for the catastrophe.<sup>112</sup>

Gore's late insertion suggesting this event only caused 'a certain amount of ill feeling' seems slightly understated as he himself describes the event as a 'catastrophe', which must have made relations within the camp difficult and fraught. The French do not appear again within Gore's diary, and he would eventually be repatriated back to Britain, but this is probably the clearest instance of relations between British and French soldiers suffering a significant rupture, which is all the more damaging as it comes after the war has finished.

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 co-operation 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. Inevitably it is Cude who gives the clearest indication of this as relations with the Americans began to collapse.

Whilst visiting a cafe 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

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<sup>112</sup> Gore, 27/11/1918. In Gore's post-war memoirs he also adds in 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 100s of prisoners coming into the camp from surroundings parts and the Germans were finding it very difficult to find room for them.



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.<sup>113</sup>

There was a follow up to this in Cude's diary with the report that a British soldier was stabbed in the neck by an American (but survived) 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.<sup>114</sup> Cude and other British soldiers had mentioned issues with the Americans and it appears, with the war won, any semblance of civility between some of the men was being eroded. We can again see from Cude's description the suggestion that the Americans shared a racial heritage with the Germans and were as a result to be viewed with suspicion.

The final encounters with the French proved to be a mixed bag for the British men left in France. Shortly after taking on the French in a football match,<sup>115</sup> Gillman reported that, on the early disbanding of his Division, his section took part in a "march past" before celebrating with the section staff.

In the evening Lieut. Laverne and the French staff dined with us, and at the close the lieut. made a complimentary speech, to which the Sous-Chef replied. A lively "sing-song" followed.<sup>116</sup>

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 gave me an

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<sup>113</sup> Cude, 21/11/1918

<sup>114</sup> Cude, Ibid

<sup>115</sup> Gillman. 05/01/1919

<sup>116</sup> Gillman, 10/01/1919

even greater one to go aboard that lovely ship and bid a soldier's farewell to France, a country I had come to detest'.<sup>117</sup> Abraham's feelings towards the French would prove enduring long beyond the war and would play a major part in informing his opinions of them for the rest of his life.<sup>118</sup>

It is Cude who, justifiably, gets the last word. Cude, who had shown such dislike of almost every nation and race he had come into contact with, who had wished the Germans exterminated and the Americans, Australians and Canadians to be roundly drubbed in battle; Cude who, despite all this, had still announced in 1917 his preference, if given a choice, towards being French. Cude may provide the clearest single example of the benefits of long-term exposure and interaction. He 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".<sup>119</sup>

1918 doesn't just represent the culmination of the war. In many ways it also represents the culmination of the evolution of the British Army and its relationship with the French. Across the duration of the war the B.E.F. often appeared to be in possession of some of the necessary elements to form a lasting and durable relationship with the French. However, this is not the full story of 1918, nor in fact the full story of Tommy-*Poilu* relations across the war. The French aspect must also be examined and analysed for there are moments of clear divergence in the experiences and judgements of the two armies. This is particularly clear in instances like the German Spring Offensive of 1918: where the British saw it as a danger to themselves and a threat to be overcome, the French saw their allies' retreat as a betrayal. The moments during the war that were formative and crucial for the British were not always so for the French, because they were created by and derived from the

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<sup>117</sup> Abraham, 18/01/1919

<sup>118</sup> See p.287

<sup>119</sup> Cude, 21/01/1919

particular context of the British army at that point. The French army and its development were different and so was its experience of fighting with allies.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The *Poilu* perspective: French responses to the British**

This chapter will provide an alternative view to those that preceded it and focus on the interactions, evaluations and responses of the French soldiers to their British counterparts across the duration of the war. From the British research we can see that the period of mid-1915 to the last months of 1916 was crucial for allowing the newly arriving British soldiers to acclimatise to their new surroundings and to their French allies. The French experience, however, appears to be far more complex than this. Whilst 1916 is still a crucial moment in the evolution of Tommy-*Poilu* relations it was not as formative for the French, as it was for the British. Similarly whilst the setbacks from the German offensive in the spring of 1918 did cause the British to take issue with the French, this was not a serious breakdown in relations from the former's point of view. For the French however, the evidence suggests that, in particular, the British retreat from Saint-Quentin in March 1918 was greeted with fury and dismay, and deeply soured the French view of their allies.

This chapter will, through an extended examination of selected personal diaries, memoirs and accounts written by French soldiers and military representatives during the war, be covering a far longer chronological period than any single one of the British chapters. By their nature these accounts cover assorted periods of the war and by themselves only represent the individual's experience but, when brought together, they grant a wider picture of personal interaction.

Nonetheless there are aspects of these records that need to be carefully considered and placed in context. Firstly it needs to be recognised that, in a similar manner to some of the British records drawn from the Imperial War Museum, some of these sources were written or, fully reconstructed, after the end of the war. The diaries that follow by Fernand Laurent, Joseph Aulneau, Henri Desagneaux, Georges Connes, Paul Tuffrau

and Etienne Tanty were all created during the conflict itself. However, some would not be released in that time or in its immediate aftermath. Tanty's diary was transcribed and released in 2002 after work by Annette Becker and Claude Tanty. Similarly Desageneaux's diaries would be re-worked for release by his son and Godfrey Adams in the 1970s. Other French soldiers such as Georges Connes, Marc Bloch and Paul Maze would create more sculpted memoirs based upon their war experience, which in the case of Maze he would later release after the war and with Bloc and Connes would be released posthumously. With those diaries where a great deal of time has passed between creation and release or where they have been re-edited into a memoir from previous diaries or recollections, we must acknowledge the possibility of a form of divergence or departure from the events they describe.

This is not to suggest that they become automatically unreliable but that they must be considered using the methodological framework laid out in the introduction. Additionally however, there is also a political consideration attached to some of these accounts and, in particular, the post-war account of General Huguet who had been attached to the British Army during 1914 and 1915. Greenhalgh has described this account as 'bitter' and 'provoked by post-war hostility and failure of the Anglo-French military guarantee'.<sup>1</sup> Because of the context and potential for controversy surrounding Huguet's work, it will be considered in relative isolation so as to properly frame and discuss both its content and its construction.

The initial benefit of these personal accounts however, is not one of content but one of coverage. As shall be examined in the next chapter, the French postal censor records only cover the war from 1916 onwards, leaving the first two years of fighting blank. Fortunately the recorded and published diaries and memoirs of French soldiers do provide information that can fill this vacuum and help understand the formative years of the alliance from their perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Greenhalgh (2008), p.292

What emerges from these selected records and memoirs is quite a complicated picture of the British seen through French eyes. The presence and arrival of the British is seen as a triumph in itself and there are plenty of moments where the British soldiers impress their French allies. However, this is often set against a backdrop where British failures cause increasing levels of exasperation and frustration.

### **Initial meetings**

One of the most complete accounts of these years, and in fact the war in general, comes from Paul Maze, a Frenchman who joined up to serve as a liaison and interpreter for the British in the earliest days of the conflict. His service and reputation in his task were so esteemed that his published memoir features an introduction by Winston Churchill espousing his virtues.<sup>2</sup>

Maze is a curious case as he began the war by joining up with the B.E.F. at Le Havre, before eventually being sent to the French army headquarters to be registered and then sent back to serve amongst the British. In his role with the British he served 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 as best illustrated in 1917.

I was neither a General nor an officer, but I, too, puzzled them, for I wore no stripes; at the same time my accoutrement had a distinction of its own; but sentries and men who saw me going in and out of the General's office on friendly terms with everyone, were puzzled about my position. ... One day, however, as I was entering the Army Commander's house, I heard the sentry slap his rifle firmly in salute and then heard the voice of a staff servant saying: "Don't bother about him, he's only a private." As it

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki* (Eastbourne: Naval and Military Press, 2004 (1934; new edition)).

happened the guard that week was supplied by a battalion well known to me, and the man recognised me. "I salute whom I bloody well please," he retorted.<sup>3</sup>

The interaction between the sentry and Maze is interesting by itself but it also highlights one of the central conflicts at the heart of the British army regarding rank, structure and class. Maze doesn't appear to fit into any form of recognised role or structure that the sentries and, more importantly, the 'staff servants' understand and they therefore struggle to adequately frame his position in regards to what they know. The staff servant in particular is a curious position and there is no mention of an equivalently named French position of what is probably a lower ranking staff officer. When the British private takes the decision to break this chain and salute a man he already recognises and respects, he then creates a division between the concerns of the officers regarding a recognisable structure and the concerns of the men who are more moved to recognise that which they know.

The earliest interactions amongst different nationalities seem to be tinged with a degree of the confusion which is evidenced above in Chapter Two on 1914. There were certainly plenty of examples of confusion amongst the British ranks during the earliest days of the war, particularly surrounding the stand at Le Cateau, but at the same time there also seems to have been equal misunderstandings and mistakes amongst their allies and enemies, with Henri Desagneaux writing on 2 September that he 'spent the night waiting for orders that fail to come' and encountering 'convoys of wounded ... some German prisoners state that they don't know that England, Russia and Japan are at war with Germany'.<sup>4</sup> Charles-Henri Poizot commented how rumours had circulated from August 1914 onwards of 'an intervention from Portugal in the

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<sup>3</sup> Maze. p.236

<sup>4</sup> , Jean Desagneaux, and Godfrey J. Adams, *A French soldier's war diary, 1914-1918* (Morley: Elmfield Press, 1975). p.8

war' but that 'England refused the proposals of a country that seemed low because of its economic problems, which she preferred to utilise strategic colonies'.<sup>5</sup>

Whilst 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.<sup>6</sup> Even when the British were making a direct effort with the French it didn't necessarily mean communications would be simple. In 1915 Eugène de Caux, deployed with the British near a French territorial division, watched with some bemusement as British soldiers and officers would pass by and exchange 'a "bong jour (sic)" or a "Boche no (sic) bôn" with a sentry and retire with a great feeling of superiority.' By the time of de Caux's testimony there was very little interaction between the soldiers of the two nations.<sup>7</sup>

Further to this the definition of 'British' or 'Tommy' by the French was much wider 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'. Fernand Laurent, a French interpreter assigned to the British, recognised the importance of accurate national distinction when dealing with the British army.

Moreover, when we speak of the British army, it is important not to forget that this is an assemblage of various diverse elements: English, Scots, Welsh, Irish, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans are similarly dressed in khaki and present a uniform exterior. All are called by the general term of Britishers. However, scratch the color and you will see that the particularity, nationalism and provincialism of each body who fights thus under the banner of the Empire remain extremely

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<sup>5</sup> Charles-Henri Poizot and Dominique Bussillet, *Histoire d'un poilu : carnets de Charles-Henri Poizot, du 67e R.I* (Paris: Anovi, 2003). p.16

<sup>6</sup> Maze. pp.39-46

<sup>7</sup> Eugène de Caux, "Typescript Memoir: 'In France with the Post Office Rifles,'" (IWM: DOCS - 564, 1923)., p.9



powerful. It is therefore necessary that the interpreter recognizes these distinctions and regulates his words and actions accordingly.<sup>8</sup>

Aulneau's approach to the Australians is of great interest to this study 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' and how the two nations differed in their approaches to life and the war.

The taste for energetic and efficient action has taken in the Anglo-Saxon, the tenacity of a hereditary instinct, the scope of a national character. Therefore, in the great struggle for life in which only the strong, the hardworking and the active survive; on the contrary the idle, the inert and the timid are eliminated by a kind of natural selection. Such is the dominant character of each Englishman and which explains all his sterling qualities.<sup>9</sup>

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!<sup>10</sup>

This sort of consideration of British (and Australian) national character and traits is reminiscent of the writings of men like Macardle during 1916 as they attempted to understand the French soldiers they met. In fact the act of meeting their first British soldier appears to have been a source of some excitement for some French soldiers as described by Laurent.

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<sup>8</sup> Fernand Laurent, *Chez nos Allies Britanniques* (Paris: Boivin and Ce Editeurs, 1917). p.XV. See Appendix 2.1

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Aulneau, *Au Front Britannique* (Paris: Renaissance du Livre, 1919). p.7. See Appendix 2.2

<sup>10</sup> Aulneau p.8. See Appendix 2.3

*August 8.* - The first British soldier we finally got to see up close! The true, authentic Tommy, in the flesh, that we have been able to interrogate, examine and feel at our leisure!

...

We inspected his uniform in every detail: the forrage-cap, a flat cap with hard visor; the short tunic with a wide collar, providing ample freedom around the neck; breeches; puttees of soft cloth; the boots with robust treads. All in khaki color, extremely simple, but top quality.

Tommy lent himself to this inspection with a good-natured smile, but there was perhaps in his clear eyes a little twinkle of malice.

Then we brought him to our bar (in first class, in the artillery) to offer him round after round. ...

With his admirable British phlegm, Tommy imbibed without hesitation the first ten rounds, with each glass solemnly drinking our health. But on the tenth glass, he rose calmly and declared in a firm tone:

-Thanks very much. This will do ...

In fact, it was high time for him to go.<sup>11</sup>

However, whilst the arrival of the British was certainly a moment of note for the French one of the similarities between the British and French soldiers during these earliest days of the war also highlights the greatest departure between the experiences and situations of the two armies. As noted previously, the British soldiers were deeply moved at times by observing the plight of the French and Belgian civilians fleeing from the advancing German armies. However, even when they were expressing their sympathy towards these refugees, there was always an insurmountable divide; they weren't British, they were French. The British soldiers on several occasions lamented the possibility of watching British civilians in a similar predicament, but there is no national connection between the soldiers and the refugees. For the French, as illustrated by Marc Bloch, this was clearly not the case.

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<sup>11</sup> Laurent p.20. See Appendix 2.4

On the way we saw people abandoning their village in haste. Men, women, children, furniture, bundles of linen (and often the most disparate objects!) were piled on their wagons. These French peasants fleeing before an enemy against whom we could not protect them left a bitter impression, possibly the most maddening that the war has inflicted on us.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that the French were fighting directly for their own land and their own people whilst the British were not may seem like a simple reality, but we cannot underestimate the importance of this difference and the very real impact it had on their approaches to the conflict and their evaluations of their allies. Whilst both sides would have been focused on winning the war, 'victory' itself could have different appearances to the two nations and achieving it meant very different things. There was, realistically, no plausible way that the British could 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. However, the repercussions of this are far from simple and need to be understood and examined at this early stage in order to make the best understanding of the events in later years. 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.<sup>13</sup> If the British were not viewing the war in the same manner as this it should not be surprising, but it does dramatically change the eventual relationships between the two nations.

This difference in perspective would at times lead to pointed criticisms of the British even in the earliest days of the war for the way they were acting upon arrival in France. In October 1914 Etienne Tanty was already writing about their activities in Le Havre.

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<sup>12</sup> Marc Léopold Benjamin Bloch, *Memoirs of war, 1914-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). p.84

<sup>13</sup> See: Smith et al, (2003). p.58, and: Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18, Understanding the Great War*, 1st American ed. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002)., p.116

I've heard a lot from the men of the Le Havre Depot where, they say, the British have carried out some very British pranks during their stay. In the Buville camp, among others, they consoled rather too well a number of female citizens of Le Havre on the departure of the French and the police had to intervene to end a rather disgusting scandal, more believable on the part of old men than among the young and healthy. All that is very English.<sup>14</sup>

By June 1917 Tanty had begun to largely write off the British entirely.

As for Britain, well! there is no longer any confidence in it, "they are lazy, say the *poilus*, who are only good to walk the streets of Le Havre, chasing women and eating. It is they who will benefit from all this!"<sup>15</sup>

As Tanty's disillusionment with the British deepened his memoirs began to reflect a change in whom he considered to be the true and lasting enemy of France.

Instead of being the workhorse of England, who couldn't care less about us and is brazenly lacking in its commitments, our interest is to arrange with the Germans who are wonderful people and no more scum-like than the only real and old hereditary enemies.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen in previous chapters, after the destruction of the original BEF the British army took time to acclimatise and train itself up to a competent level of skill in warfare and in doing so put themselves on an equal footing with their French allies. For the French any delay in achieving victory was a small failure for their army and for their soldiers. The criticisms that were directed towards the British often seem to be centred on their inability to learn quickly enough, particularly in 1916.<sup>17</sup> This criticism is not as prevalent at the beginning of the war largely because the British

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<sup>14</sup> Etienne Tanty, Annette Becker, and Claude Tanty, : *lettres d'un poilu qui n'aimait pas la guerre* ([Triel-sur-Seine]: Editions Italiques, 2002). pp.122-3. See Appendix 2.5

<sup>15</sup> Tanty, p.454. See Appendix 2.6

<sup>16</sup> Tanty, p.468. See Appendix 2.7

<sup>17</sup> See p.255

army weren't doing anything the French weren't doing themselves. Both nations found themselves outmatched and outmanoeuvred in the opening weeks and both began a semi-organised withdrawal in the direction of Paris.

Whilst Tanty would despair of the British during periods like this Laurent, by now well amongst the British soldiers was rather more impressed by their military strengths and organisation in 1914.

What a retreat! We know that it is admirably led by the Commander in Chief, Field-Marshal Sir John French, by his two brilliant seconds-in-command, Sir Douglas Haig and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and, closer to us, by General Gough, commanding our cavalry brigade. But in our humble eye-witness experience, it is a terrible nightmare, a horrible kind of kaleidoscope. Every day, new villages traversed hurriedly, every day a new falling back!<sup>18</sup>

In a similar way to Aulneau, Fernand Laurent would also use his memoir to both provide 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 upper class officers played in forming contemporary Britain and his conclusions highlight the very different foundations of British and French military-civil societies as discussed in Chapter One.<sup>19</sup>

## OFFICERS

BEFORE the war, all the officers of the British Army had a single origin: the school of gentlemen-cadets. Sandhurst School, for the infantry, and for the cavalry, the Woolwich school, ... for artillery and engineering.

These officers were, for the most part, the younger sons of the great aristocratic families in which it is traditional to give a child to the army. The people, admittedly, loved them, and they were sincerely grateful to them for taking on from generation to

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<sup>18</sup> Laurent, pp.29-30. See Appendix 2.8

<sup>19</sup> See p.42

generation, the thankless task of command. The great mass of the nation, it must be confessed, however, remained unaware of things military. By tradition, it was interested in the navy and sought to know it, but it remained distant from the army in which it wrongly saw only an accessory cog in the great national machine.<sup>20</sup>

During his time amongst the British, Maze found the higher-ranking British generals and officers he met to be warm and friendly. This may be an indication that the staff officers existed in a particularly politicised or ambitious environment where long-term promotion prospects could depend on evaluations of peers. Achieving the rank of General brought with it a fair degree of security when interacting with those lower in the ranks, although the interactions between generals could be as political and brutal as the war itself. Not all lower to mid ranked officers of course were competitively minded. Maze's memoir itself is dedicated to the memory of Major Swetenham who was killed in action during August 1914. By contrast, however, the French officers he meets in the field all seem to be far more brusque and demanding than their British counterparts.<sup>21</sup> Maze doesn't extend his recording of these events into any explicit criticism of his own but it is noticeable how his representation of the two groups of commanding officers differs. In many senses Maze's writing style closely resembles that of the 1914 British soldier Loyd. There is the same eye for detail and relevant minutiae whilst also including a subtle editorial voice that highlights important instances without resorting to direct criticism.

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 began to look identical.

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<sup>20</sup> Laurent, p.51. See Appendix 2.9

<sup>21</sup> Maze. p.33

When we look at many British officers together we can not fail to be struck by their extraordinary similarity in appearance. Our allies resemble each other like brothers. They do not just look like each other in the strict regularity of the uniform ; this resemblance is found even in the faces.

Take two French lieutenants: one wears a jacket of the lightest sky-line blue, the other (from the rear services ), the old dark blue coat; one wears a belt of tan English leather, the other is content with the old black regulation belt; one has the so-called Saumur flat cap, the other the high cap encircled by two new stripes; one is bearded, the other has on his upper lip only the lightest shade of a small, "American style" moustache. Among our allies, there is nothing comparable: the "Kitchener", whether at the front or rear, is an invariable type repeated without significant difference, thousands and thousands of times. Khaki tunics, cut to exactly the same model and produced for the most part by the same tailor, do not lend themselves to any variation of color and are consistently done up with the "Sam Brown" belt; the forrage cap or flat cap is no less resistant to the imagination ... And finally it seems that in order to put the finishing touches to this ensemble, that even the faces of our friends should be formed from a single mould: the same strong features, often very regular, the same impeccably shaved chins... A few years ago, while the Prince of Wales himself was beardless, British officers were entitled to shave completely. Today they have to keep the mustache and the prince-captain is very proud of the power, thanks to his down of a twenty year-old to comply with the order. Moreover, our Allies wear only the bare minimum of hair, and this light shadow, carefully measured, adds to the uniformity of their appearance. The result of this resemblance gives an impression of sharpness, of correctness, and elegance, of which one can not deny the excellent effect.<sup>22</sup>

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 *Poilu* elicited from the British soldiers in 1914. Laurent would go so far as to say that the British were almost unnaturally preoccupied with maintaining their appearance.

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<sup>22</sup> Laurent, pp.55-6. See Appendix 2.10

Our brave Allies, as everyone knows, have two main concerns: making their tea and shaving. No danger can distract them from these two preoccupations.<sup>23</sup>

This determination to maintain their soldierly appearance may initially have proven amusing to the French soldiers but as will be described further below it would eventually become a source of great frustration and bafflement during the Battle of the Somme.<sup>24</sup>

### **The aims and abilities of Britain**

With the success of the Battle of the Marne and as the allied counterattack evolved into the Race for the Sea and trench warfare some French soldiers began to wonder, apparently under the influence of the writings of Bertrand Russell, about the future make up of Europe. 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'.<sup>25</sup> Russell's view does seem to have struck a chord with Tuffrau and both suggest that Britain was an exceptional case balancing against the Russians but also with the assumption that the restoration of balance would see England largely untouched and presumably victorious, while the French themselves are not mentioned except for their probable inclusion in 'Western Europe'. Regardless of whether this is simply based on a perceived geographical rather than ideological difference between France and Britain, there is an acknowledgement here of an existing divergence between Britain and France and how the war's outcome will likely affect the two.<sup>26</sup> Tuffrau's belief that Britain would somehow prosper from the conclusion of the war was not without some rationale

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<sup>23</sup> Laurent, p.45. See Appendix 2.11. This observation, drawn from a wider statement on the British, by Laurent was picked up by both The Times and The Daily Mirror in September 1914. The Daily Mirror September 17 1914, p.3 & The Times September 17 1914, p.7

<sup>24</sup> See p.255

<sup>25</sup> Paul Tuffrau, *1914-1918, quatre années sur le front: carnets d'un combattant* (Paris: Imago, 1998). p.54. See Appendix 2.12

<sup>26</sup> 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 power would absorb her. Dillon, pp.100-1



either for as we have seen, Kitchener and other British leaders as early as 1914 had begun to lay out the framework for the war and the peace with an eye to ensuring that Britain would be the predominant power at the table.

As discussed in previous chapters, the fighting around Ypres from the end of 1914 to the Easter of 1915 essentially destroyed the original B.E.F., greatly reducing the effectiveness of the British force and requiring a new program of recruitment. For the French however, this move towards the more static trench warfare would lead to a series of disastrous tactical decisions that would cost the lives of thousands of men.<sup>27</sup> With the French struggling to make the breakthrough, there were signs that they started to disapprove of some of their allies' efforts. Paul Tuffrau reported in January of 1915 that 'the column' found the English bridge on the Chateau-Thierry Road to be 'quite messy'. Hardly scathing criticism admittedly, but it does offer the first example of French soldiers finding their ally to be falling short. There are two elements of interest here. The first is the apparent tendency of Tuffrau and his comrades to use the term 'English' rather than 'British' to describe their allies. There is some precedence for this in previous chapters particular in regards to the Scottish soldier Fowler's testimony in 1916.<sup>28</sup> The French weren't alone in this either with the Germans also finding it simpler to just refer to all aspects of the British army and empire as being simply 'English'.<sup>29</sup> The French use of 'English' suggests they didn't think of the disparate elements that made up the B.E.F., and eventually the British army as a whole, to be distinct from the English themselves.

There is also an interesting reversal regarding the French assessment of the bridge as 'messy', as it is reminiscent of some of the complaints directed at the French by British soldiers of the time, particularly men like Tennyson. The British criticisms of

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<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed examination of the French approach to 1915 see; Doughty Chapters Three & Four, and Clayton Chapter Four.

<sup>28</sup> Fowler

<sup>29</sup> Matthias Strohn, "The German Army at Le Quesnoy," in *France and New Zealand during the Great War* (Le Quesnoy 2008).

the French often centred on their apparently unkempt appearance and slack attitude towards duty. That the French were criticising the British for much the same thing is an interesting departure from the stereotypes the British had built up, but at the same time it can be said to fit in with some understandings of the French mentality; specifically that their supposed lax attitude only applied to things they deemed not to matter. There is evidence for this in the chapter above on 1916, with certain military pursuits taking higher priority than others. The explanation offered that some French trenches weren't up to scratch is that, because of the tactics at the time, French soldiers weren't expected to be in them for very long.<sup>30</sup> In a similar vein therefore it can be supposed that, at this period of the war, with large-scale movement of forces to the frontline required, the French viewed the requirement for effective bridging technique to be utmost and the British weren't up to it.

In relation to the apparent tendency of French soldiers to leave their trenches in a poor state of repair and the corresponding British criticism that this would incur, Maze was given to illuminate this issue further in 1917 whilst exposing the tendency of the British to do much the same thing.

A tenant who knows that his lease is up does not bother to repaint his house or install new bathrooms, and so the French Third Army had left the line with little evidence of defensive preparations for their successors – all the work remained for the Fifth Army to do. This must, however, not be taken as a criticism of the French or the British Third Army. Every division and battalion were apt to do exactly the same thing to each other when they were going to be relieved although they would not care to admit it.<sup>31</sup>

This is one of the benefits of Maze's position as a Frenchman amongst the British. He is first of all not given to wild and unconsidered criticism but he is more than willing

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<sup>30</sup> Crawford et al. Also see; Smith et al (2003) p.79 for a further discussion on how 'The *poilus* created their own world, with its own rules and strategies of survival'.

<sup>31</sup> Maze. p.265

to provide analysis and conclusions drawn from his own observances. As previously seen, the British have a certain sense of superiority when it comes to matters of martial presentation, be it uniforms or trenches. That Maze says that the British were just as liable to leave a trench in a poor state as the French but were far too proud to admit it does have a definite ring of plausibility to it and neatly punctures the tendency of some British towards pomposity.

There were also signs that some French soldiers believed the British to be doing better militarily towards the end of 1915, with Paul Tuffrau describing how the news that the British had ‘broken through the German first line and taken Loos’ in October 1915 was ‘worth a drink’.<sup>32</sup> This news was later expanded into a suggestion that the British had seized eight heavy guns and the fighting was going well in Champagne.<sup>33</sup> As seen above, the B.E.F., including the newly deployed battalions raised from volunteers, had begun to take over the trenches in and around the Somme by this point in 1915 with the aim of becoming more accustomed to the intricacies of trench warfare and undertaking a more manageable learning curve. The Battle of the Somme would provide these new soldiers with their first grand test and would also provide the French with the opportunity to observe the abilities of their allies in large-scale battle.

Already, the lightning advance of the first days had come to an end. Our friends the English were hanging in at Thiepval and we were stubbornly dug in Maurepas and Barleux. This sudden stop was a bad omen.<sup>34</sup>

Maze himself would serve amongst the Australians during the Somme in 1916 and would go over the top alongside them near Pozières on 22 July. His account of the attack is comparable in its detail to that produced by Macardle and paints a gripping

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<sup>32</sup> Tuffrau, p.95. See Appendix 2.13

<sup>33</sup> Tuffrau, p.99. See Appendix 2.14

<sup>34</sup> Paul Dubrulle and Henry Camille Bordeaux, *bataille de la Somme. Impressions de guerre d'un pretre soldat*. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1917). p.174. See Appendix 2.15

and disturbing picture of combat.<sup>35</sup> Of additional interest, however, are Maze's evaluations of the Australians. We have already seen that the British did not take to their Dominion soldiers with anything resembling warmth, and yet the French seemed far more disposed to these Anzac men with Maze finding them 'genial and ready to help' whilst declaring how much he liked them.<sup>36</sup>

Laurent also continued to be impressed by the endurance and general outlook of the British soldiers that he encountered.

That this war lasts three, four or five years, is somehow now become for him a matter of detail ... The Englishman does only one thing at a time, but he does it well. Before the war he was employed in trade, a shopkeeper, laborer or farmhand. It would take him a long time, a lot of reflection to decide to change careers. Today it's done: he is a soldier and he is completely a soldier. How long before he reverts to being a civilian? In truth, he does not even think to ask. Time will tell ... If he had served in the French army, Tommy would not have been one of those who, having barely arrived at the barracks, start counting "730 days from tomorrow morning!" This stolid patience, a traditional quality of his race, this imperturbable assurance of the ultimate success of the undertaking is one of the best strengths of the Tommy. Another strength, no less important, is his admirable fitness in the exercises of war. Seeing one hundred Tommies, or a thousand, you will be struck by the youthfulness of their faces, the air of freshness and health that all they have. And, on the whole, what beautifully made fellows they are!<sup>37</sup>

Whilst, before long, 1916 would, for the French, come to be dominated primarily by the Battle of Verdun and then later, 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 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the trench newspaper *L'Echo Des Gourbis* under the headline 'NOS AMIS

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<sup>35</sup> Maze. pp.159-171

<sup>36</sup> Maze. p.156

<sup>37</sup> Laurent, pp.71-2. See Appendix 2.16

ANGLAIS'.<sup>38</sup> 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'.<sup>39</sup> This man was initially struck by 'the indomitable courage and tenacity of the British troops' but also with the money the British were 'spending lavishly on its fighters'.<sup>40</sup>

I would say they were throwing their money away, if that term did not indicate a sense of disorder and intelligence, whereas the prodigious spending by England on behalf of its soldiers indicates, on the contrary, a true method and an intelligent awareness of the necessities of war. Our friends and allies have done things well, with all their might and all their wealth.<sup>41</sup>

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.<sup>42</sup> 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 is 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'.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Pierre Turbergue, *Les journaux de tranchées, 1914-1918* (Paris: Le Grand livre du mois, 1999). p.78.

<sup>39</sup> Turbergue, p.78

<sup>40</sup> Turbergue, p.78

<sup>41</sup> Turbergue, p.78. See Appendix 2.17

<sup>42</sup> See p.115

<sup>43</sup> Turbergue, p.78. See Appendix 2.18

Of the British soldiers themselves, the French soldier seems less convinced in regards to their martial ability, but he was particularly taken with the work of General Monroe and described him in a manner not altogether different to how Maze had found the British generals.

I was at the headquarters of General Monroe, who, after commanding the British forces in the East, is currently in France, at the head of the English First Army.

General Monroe is a wonderful leader. He was one of the best workers in the Battle of the Marne. [...]

General Monroe is representative of the type of stoic bravery of the British army. [...] Near Verneuil, he was writing some orders behind some large hay bales when some shells exploded next to him ... injuring some men, destroying some cars and upsetting the English soldiers a little. The impassive General straightened: "Remember that you are soldiers," he said to them simply, but firmly. Calm was restored immediately. [...]<sup>44</sup>

This article was placed alongside an illustration (see below) 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 regular British soldiers themselves are not labelled in the way that the other nations are and whilst this may be because their uniforms would have been fairly recognisable to the French soldiers by this point in the war, the previously recorded testimony of Edward Spears suggests that even well into 1916 the French soldiers didn't know what the British uniforms and men looked like. With this in mind the portrayal of the British soldier may play more to popular stereotypes than recognised iconography. The British appear as fairly stern whilst their uniforms suggest the two figures in the

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<sup>44</sup> Tubergue, p.78. See Appendix 2.19. The French soldier has likely made an, understandable, spelling error in naming the British General and is almost certainly referring to Sir Charles Monro. Michael Duffy, "Who's Who - Sir Charles Monro," <http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/monro.htm>. Given the description of General Monroe in this piece it is possible that the 'young parliamentarian' quoted as the source could in fact be Paul Maze but I have no specific evidence to substantiate this suspicion.

top left of the illustration are officers, who are certainly lacking in the more relaxed approach of the Scottish soldiers, one of whom has been depicted with his kilt blowing upwards in the breeze. This representation of the Scottish soldier does remind us that these drawings may be leaning slightly more towards caricature and if this is so, then the depiction of the stern Englishman remains interesting as this may be the most recognisable side of his personality in the eyes of the French.



Image 7: 'Nos Amis Anglais' Image appears in Tubergue, p.78

The notion of the British soldier and particularly their 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.

The presence of foreign uniforms in one's own country and the noise of weapons mixed with the sound of foreign voices are the most blatant forms of evil that the simplest of souls can understand and react to. It is the first evil that must be destroyed. Let the English stay in England, said Joan of Arc. I would add, let the Germans stay in Germany, and the French in France. At least, let's not go into the neighbouring country with swords and guns.<sup>45</sup>

During his time at Mainz, Connes would come to form a negative impression of the British officers sharing the POW camp.

The British officers ... seem to come directly from their Piccadilly Square tailors and seem not to notice anybody. They would walk right over you without blinking. Throughout the hallways, always impeccable, they pass by you or prepare their meals without looking at anyone. It's by seeing them that one understands the difference between the verbs *ignorer* in French (simply not to know) and *to ignore* in English (to voluntarily pay no attention to someone or something).<sup>46</sup>

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'.<sup>47</sup> 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.

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<sup>45</sup> G. A. Connes and Lois Vines, *A POW's memoir of the First World War : the other ordeal*, English ed. ed. (Oxford: Berg, 2004). p.24

<sup>46</sup> Connes. p.41

<sup>47</sup> Connes .p.41



The French patriotic press in 1925, hardly talks about France's fraternity with Russia and England anymore. On this June 11, 1916, I am aware of these deep differences.<sup>48</sup>

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 'remnant from Sadowa'<sup>49</sup> approaches, stops in front of the first officer and salutes. The Brit looks at him without flinching. The interpreter officer tells him in English that he is supposed to salute the colonel, who then salutes him again. The British officer remains impassive and looks him straight in the eye, making no movement. The colonel salutes the second British officer with the same result, makes an about-face and, livid, returns to his office. Several of us ... react in a curious way: the patriot in us approves the insult to the enemy; the soldier disapproves the offence to the man who, according to military conventions, is undeniably our chief. Pride of the English facing the foreigner ... [W]hat is a Prussian colonel next to a lieutenant in His Majesty's Navy! As for me, in this scene I will never forget, I see the clash between two forms of evil, two inflexible castes, two brands of human pride, which must disappear if the world is ever to improve, and which will disappear, leaving room for others! One of the two is dead already or almost.<sup>50</sup>

Connes paints a fairly chilling image of the British-Prussian interaction here. He sees the two men as representing opposing forces and ideologies that, whilst in conflict, are equally dangerous and destructive not only to France but also to the world as a whole.

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<sup>48</sup> Connes, p.41. This is a slightly odd moment where Connes is reflecting his post-war experiences back into his wartime memories.

<sup>49</sup> A term Connes uses to describe the 'Prussian' camp commanders.

<sup>50</sup> Connes, p.42

### **Huguet's memoir**

This movement towards a more formed hostility demands consideration. The majority of these personal excerpts used above have been snippets of how certain French soldiers viewed the British at points across the war. There is, however, an additional memoir that is directly aimed at investigating and recording the author's experiences and evaluations of the British. As it raises certain political issues that need to be properly considered I have isolated it to a degree from the rest of the records in this chapter. The account of General Huguet was released originally in France with the title; *L'intervention Militaire Britannique En 1914*, which is not particularly suggestive of controversy. In its English edition however, the title was changed and as a result gives a greater indication as to the contents: *Britain and the War: A French Indictment*. Greenhalgh has noted that Huguet was a recognised Anglophile and consequently the tone of his memoir is surprising. It was produced in English in 1928 at a time when, as shall become clear, diplomatic relations between France and Britain were at a low point and this means that Huguet's evaluations and criticisms have to be considered in relation to the climate in which they were created.<sup>51</sup>

Whilst my primary focus is on relationships between common soldiers, and Huguet is clearly removed from direct experience of them, his account is relevant to this study for several reasons. Of primary importance is the fact that this is a French account focused purely on evaluating the British involvement during the first two years of the war. The presence of the word 'indictment' in the English title does suggest that the evaluation will not be positive, but Huguet's work is far more nuanced and sympathetic in some aspects than might otherwise be suspected. There is a clear contrast in his opinions of some of the British Generals, in particular Sir John French, and of the work of the British soldiers themselves. He also writes at length in places about what he perceives to be British national characteristics and how these motivate and inspire their actions, all of which is relevant to this study. In many ways his

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<sup>51</sup> See Tombs & Tombs Chapter 11

definitions of Britain mirror some of those discussed in the introduction to this thesis when it came to how Burke viewed England as set apart from the rest of the continent. Additionally it is really only in the epilogue that Huguet unleashes his fiercest criticism towards Britain as a whole, rather than just the Generals, and this is, as Greenhalgh noted earlier, primarily focused on Britain's post-war actions. Finally, Huguet is a useful source for considered stereotypes and evaluations of British characteristics that, if perhaps not fully widespread or recognised amongst the French soldiers, were probably still lurking in the background of French consciousness.

The policy discussions concerning the deployment of the B.E.F. to France have been discussed elsewhere, so there is no need to go over them again. However, whilst in Chapter One evidence was presented that the British soldiers had a vaguely formed notion of what to expect from the French, the uncertainty of their opening exchanges on French soil suggests that there were plenty of blind spots regarding French behaviour and customs. By comparison it seems that at least some of the French had a very clear set of expectations regarding British national traits. Huguet's analysis of what it means to be British was fairly sophisticated and is worth quoting at length.

Every Frenchman on visiting England is struck with the deep differences between the English and not only his own countrymen but all Continental peoples. Once across the Channel he finds himself – not gradually but with a jerk – faced with morals, customs and a mentality not only differing from his own but sometimes directly opposed. The Englishman, having grown up without intercourse or contact with other nations, has remained deeply insular; he mistrusts instinctively anything foreign and admires unaffectedly and simply everything at home, becomes devoted to it and as a result is slow to change or alter.

With little imagination or personality, slow to move and a creature of habit, imbued with a few ideas which have become part of him as a result of time, the Englishman drifts from day to day without looking beyond the needs of the moment. Difficulties nearly always surprise him and more often than not it is only whilst he is up against

them that he brings himself to reflect and tries to come to a decision; but then his practical good sense awakens and with it the virile qualities of his character. His decision is not always the best or the fairest, but since he follows it in a spirit of continuity, together with indomitable courage and tenacity, he has always up to now emerged victorious from the trials he has had to face, and as a result has become very proud and has complete confidence in himself.<sup>52</sup>

Huguet's definition of what makes up British national identity and spirit is based upon several interwoven aspects. Principal amongst these is the perception of a Britain existing within a self-imposed isolation from the rest of Europe. As a result of this distance from mainland Europe, Britain has not been exposed to the same cosmopolitan elements and ideas as its near-neighbours. The channel has formed a gulf across which the more modern and enlightened ideas of Europe are unable to pass. Huguet is painting a picture of the British afflicted by an almost cultural slovenliness; content and comfortable in their own environment and focused on their own insular world rather than the affairs of those beyond their borders. However, when threatened the British are able to shake off their malaise and act decisively for better or for worse and it is here that the undercurrent of Huguet's criticism becomes apparent. By suggesting that the British have become too far removed from the norms of Europe, he is also suggesting that Britain has not had to learn the same hard lessons, particularly involving conflict, as the other European nations and it is only in recent times that Britain has become aware that its sense of security may not be firmly based in reality.

This sublime assurance was a little shaken at the beginning of the last century when the camp at Boulogne frightened his soul so well, that even for years after the spectre of invasion never failed to trouble his repose and to stir up uneasiness. But once the Napoleonic era had definitely ceased to be and Europe's destiny ordered to his own

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<sup>52</sup> Victor Jacques Marie Huguet, *Britain and the War : A French indictment* (London: Cassell, 1928). p.10

satisfaction, he did not wait long before sinking once more into his utter complaisance.

The Indian mutiny, the Crimean War – although they revealed a state of military unpreparedness which was almost complete – did not move him, nor was the 1870 war – despite M. Thiers' warnings – any more successful in disturbing his sleep or shaking his serenity; and up to the Boer War, thinking he had no danger to dread, he delighted in what he himself called his splendid isolation.

The Boer War was to him a hard awakening and the cause for keen humiliation. For the first time he was conscious of his military inferiority, and it was not without a feeling of retrospective terror that he learnt that at one time there was left at home not a single combatant unit and that he had been at the mercy of any happy stroke directed at his shores.<sup>53</sup>

That Britain was chronically unprepared for a large-scale land war is not a huge revelation as has already been discussed in previous chapters. The French, perhaps unsurprisingly, were fully aware of this vulnerability and Huguet seems fairly despairing of 'the papers even most in favour of the Entente' who felt that the Royal Navy would be enough to swing the conflict in their favour and that deploying a land army would be an unnecessary sacrifice.<sup>54</sup> Arguments to the contrary, in Huguet's opinion, 'barely influenced the great mass of the indifferent public'. Huguet did, however, make sure to explain that in his experience not all of Britain was blinding itself to the conflict about to come.

Throughout his writing he paid high acclaim to the intelligence and foresight of General Henry Wilson and, indeed, the entire memoir is dedicated to his memory with the inscription attesting to him as the man 'who thought out and prepared the way for the British Expeditionary Force of 1914. One of the most loyal and devoted

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<sup>53</sup> Huguet, p.11

<sup>54</sup> Huguet, p.11

colleagues of Marshal Foch during the Great War.’<sup>55</sup> Furthermore governmental figures such as Lord Haldane, Edward Grey and Lord Esher all play a role in Huguet’s memory of strengthening the bonds between Britain and France.

Whilst there does not seem to have been a fully concerted effort by the French military to roll out a red carpet for the British (although, as discussed in previous chapters the French civilians certainly gave them a warm welcome) there does appear to have been a desire within the French military to ensure that, at the very least, the British soldiers recognised the good treatment they were being given. Huguet explains how the transportation of British soldiers along French railways was carried out in accordance to carefully laid pre-war plans and how it was designed to ensure the British soldiers were aware of the ‘care and foresight which had gone to their proper transport’.<sup>56</sup> Huguet has hit upon an important element of welcoming the B.E.F. to France in the earliest months of the war. He draws on the writings of Field-Marshal Sir John French to illustrate the need to impress upon the British firstly that they were not simply lending France a hand, but also serving their own crucial interests, whilst at the same time ensuring that they still felt gratitude to France in the aforementioned manner.

Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> August, at 2 p.m., Field-Marshal Sir John French and his Staff left London for France. He was received at Boulogne with the enthusiasm of the whole population. It is interesting to read in his *Memoirs* his reflections on setting foot on French soil:

“Every one knows the curious and interesting old town, with its picturesque citadel, situated on a lofty hill.... Over all towered the monument to the greatest world-soldier – the warrior Emperor who, more than a hundred years before, had from that spot contemplated the invasion of England. Could he have now revisited ‘the glimpses of the moon’ would he not have rejoiced at this friendly invasion of France by England’s

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<sup>55</sup> Huguet, p.v. Wilson was assassinated by IRA members in 1922 an event which Huguet notes in his memoir.

<sup>56</sup> Huguet, p.23

'good yeomen' who were now offering their lives to save France from destruction as a Power of the First Class?"

This explains exactly the feelings of the great majority of the English. They did not understand yet that the help they were bringing us was in actual fact the best possible insurance for them and was the best proof of their own security. Surely this curious mentality, coupled with the character of the Field-Marshal himself and with the spirit of the instructions he had received on leaving England, had something to do with the unpleasant incidents of the early months of the war?<sup>57</sup>

There certainly seems to be a real frustration within some of the French army at having to essentially deal with two different British allies; the one the French believed to be the reality and the one the British did. The 'unpleasant incidents' to which he refers are, by and large, the difficulties arising from Field-Marshal French's questionable mental state during the earliest months of fighting, but Huguet also laments General Joffre's inability to fully offer appreciation of the British effort.<sup>58</sup>

As the first weeks of the war unfolded however, it rapidly became clear that the B.E.F. was playing a role more important than its size would otherwise suggest, with Huguet crediting it with 'saving the French V Army from being enveloped and in such an overwhelming manner that it might not have been restored on the Marne'.<sup>59</sup> Indeed the initial fighting prowess of the B.E.F. was the subject of praise. Huguet himself was effusive in his praise of the ability and skill of the soldiers who had made the desperate stand at Le Cateau and declared that their action had in no small part ensured the safety of the nearby allied armies.<sup>60</sup>

The Battle of the Marne itself obviously prevented an allied disaster and elevated Joffre to a position of heroism in the eyes of the French, though the government would only leave him there for a further two years. It also, however, gives a clear

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<sup>57</sup> Huguet, pp. 48-9

<sup>58</sup> Huguet, p.66

<sup>59</sup> Huguet, p.24

<sup>60</sup> Huguet, p.65

indication of the competing perspectives that made up Huguet's interactions and evaluations of the British; the generals on the one hand and the men on the other. Having already noted that 'fortune had put the British Army, with the French Cavalry Corps ... in touch with the V Army, in the most favourable point of the battlefield' he also noted that 'the troops fought finely as ever'.<sup>61</sup> He does then however, draw a clear line between the skills of the British soldier and the British commander.

The slowness of the advance which in five days, from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup>, did not exceed 50 kilometres, can only be imputed to the Higher Command and not to the men.

These last had proved themselves worthy fighters already at Mons and Le Cateau; so they were on the Marne and still more brilliantly again at Ypres a few weeks later.

But if, in defence, the bravery of the soldier is the more important, since each then fights for himself and the Higher Command can only rarely intervene, it is not so in the attack, when the Higher Command is all important, becoming the supreme machine which alone has the power to conceive, combine, direct, and alone has the means to extend the scope of initial orders or to modify them.

It is permissible to believe that if a Foch or a Gallieni had been so placed, or even an energetic leader understanding the situation and willing to hustle his troops, the result would have been even more decisive. "The I German Army," as has been recognised by von Bulow himself, "could have been cloven and annihilated, and the right wing of the II Army enveloped."<sup>62</sup>

The seeming inability of John French to make the most of the forces at his disposal is not a unique accusation and Huguet criticises him numerous times through his memoir. However, juxtaposing the skill of the British soldiers against French's perceived shortcomings does raise some interesting points that Huguet may not have originally intended. Without going fully down the 'lions led by donkeys' road, Huguet was clearly bemoaning the fact that the British were not led by more competent

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<sup>61</sup> Huguet, p.107

<sup>62</sup> Huguet, p.108



generals and ponders the possibilities if only the British had been led by a strong French general like Foch or Gallieni.

There is an additional element here that needs consideration. As has been shown Huguet was not afraid of praising the abilities and courage of the British soldier. His criticisms were reserved for the British command and the culture of 'Britishness' which he found to be set apart from the norms of Europe. However, at this point in his memoirs Huguet very rarely mentions or discusses the French soldier, although he would do so by the end of 1914. This is perhaps understandable; the topic of the book is the British after all and Huguet was not in a direct field command position within the French military. It is unlikely that Huguet thought the French soldier had performed any less valiantly than the British. But there is an interesting sub current to this episode with Huguet elevating certain elements of the B.E.F. and denigrating others: he does leave an opening to wonder why certain aspects of the French army are used for comparison whilst others are not.

The opening chapters of Huguet's work do not seem overly deserving of the 'bitter' tag that Greenhalgh applied to it.<sup>63</sup> This, however, is borne of a division that essentially splits his memoir into two separate pieces; the studies of 1914 and 1915 on the one hand, and his epilogue on the other. It is in the epilogue that Huguet makes his most strident attacks on Britain and its conduct but these complaints are focused primarily on the fallout from the Versailles negotiations. But even those disputes had their foundations in the events of 1918 and the British reaction to the German offensives of the period.

### **The road to 1918**

Whilst Connes' earlier evaluations that British attitudes were endangering France largely followed political and ideological lines, in military terms this notion became

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<sup>63</sup> Greenhalgh 2008, p.292

far more prevalent during the German attacks in 1918. However, whilst there are some mentions of this crucial period in the diaries and memoirs of the soldiers utilised here the full depth of the French anger at perceived British failure can only be seen by taking a look at wider evidence. This topic will, therefore, be examined in much greater detail in the next chapter. In this sense this examination of the memoirs and records of French soldiers should be viewed as one half of a more comprehensive evaluation of the French perceptions of Britain.

Maze's report on the British army during the Spring Offensive of 1918 however, does paint an early 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.<sup>64</sup> 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 throughout the army.

#### 7 April

We start to learn what happened during the attack; the civilians who fled from this zone, claim that the English gave way and that, in several places, for distances of 10 kilometres there was absolutely nothing to stop the enemy. If the Germans didn't pass, it's because they didn't dare take the risk, fearing an ambush.<sup>65</sup>

#### 13 April

Arrival at Raincheval at midday, where we are quartered. The inhabitants are glad to see the French again. They have no confidence in the English any more. During the last Boche attack they lost 25 kilometres; on the first day, regiments – at Amiens – threw down their weapons and fled with the civilians. It is said that they have lost 70,000 men and 1,100 guns.<sup>66</sup>

#### 14 April

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<sup>64</sup> Maze. pp.293-319

<sup>65</sup> Desagneaux. p.52

<sup>66</sup> Desagneaux. p.57

At 7 a.m. we arrive at Pas-en-Artois where we are quartered. The inhabitants are glad to see the French again, they have lost confidence in the English. During the last attack, they saw them arriving panic-stricken, having fled 15 kilometres, shouting 'Run for it, run for it', dumping their weapons and ammunition, creating thus a stampede among the civilians ... Everyone says the same: the English are hopeless, it's the Scots, the Australians, and Canadians who do all the work.<sup>67</sup>

Under these circumstances the fear and annoyance in the French ranks would, as we shall now see, begin to blossom into full-blown hostility. The personal experiences of Tommy-*Poilu* relations described above provide a highly valuable insight into the truly grassroots individual interactions between these men, but they do not represent the totality of experience. To achieve the wider view it is necessary to examine a resource particular to the French that shows the greater extremes of feeling towards British soldiers within French ranks.

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<sup>67</sup> Desagneaux. p.58

## Chapter Six

### 'The English are threatened with a careless disaster': The records of the

#### *Commissions de contrôle postal*

For the wider view of how the French soldiers viewed their British fellows we must examine the *Commissions de contrôle postal* located at the *Archives de l'armée de terre* (from hereon the AAT). However, whilst the information contained within these reports is extremely valuable for this study the actual basis, structure and history of the *Commission* itself is equally revealing and needs to be examined before considering the data. Jean-Noël Jeanneney has written the definitive explanation of the *Commission*'s history and founding, as well as some of the issues surrounding its study, particularly relating to the objectivity of the censors themselves as well as the necessary anonymity of the authors.<sup>1</sup> Additionally there have been further studies utilising these reports, most prominent amongst these being Greenhalgh with her previously discussed articles and Gibson.<sup>2</sup>

The first elements of the *Commission* weren't introduced until early in 1915 with the fairly limited scope of ensuring that soldiers were adhering to the ban on naming their location in letters home.<sup>3</sup> From this fairly modest, but important starting point, the system was gradually expanded over 1915 and into 1916.

Each army organised its own postal control commission run by the Service de Renseignement to make spot checks. In July the system was extended to provide for three commissions for each army, and by year's end this service was functioning efficiently. During 1916 its role evolved from the supervision of security to the provision of information to the high command on the state of morale. This information

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> Craig Gibson, "Through French Eyes: The British Expeditionary Force and the Records of the French Postal Censor, 1916-18," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 55 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Jeanneney.

became so valuable that responsibility for the service was transferred in September 1916 from the 1er bureau (with responsibility for men and matériel) to the 2e Bureau, which dealt with intelligence matters.

The "controllers," chosen from relevant civilian occupation categories such as lawyers' clerks, teachers, or archivists, read 280 letters a day, on average. By the end of 1916 each regiment was checked at least once a month by reading at least 500 letters. The reports, revealing "manifest intelligence," were based on a questionnaire applied to all the censored letters. This covered the question of relations with the Allies, amongst other more pressing items such as food, the state of the trenches, leave, and so on. To support the "strictly objective" conclusions of the postal control commission reports, numerous "characteristic" (and anonymous) extracts from the letters themselves were to be quoted.<sup>4</sup>

The reports themselves were ordered into a number of set categories, namely; A) Hygiene, B) War, B2) External Affairs and C) Relations with Civilians. These headings were not always a logical portrayal of their contents however, with 'Hygiene' covering topics such as the receipt of letters and parcels, and the influence of the general state of affairs on the morale and 'mental hygiene' of the troops.<sup>5</sup> These categories were also not fully set in stone and would evolve to include further sub-categories as the war would progress.

The section of interest for this study was *B2) Affaires Extérieures* and the (eventual) sub-heading *Rapports avec les Alliés*. The sub-section regarding *Rapports avec les Alliés* would, as the war progressed become more sophisticated in its division of allies and opinions with entries for each nation becoming further sub-divided within the largest reports for ease of consumption. However, these sections were open to being re-labelled based upon the prevailing opinions of the soldiers at the time. For example Greenhalgh explains that before the full outbreak of the 1917 mutinies, the

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<sup>4</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>5</sup> Jeanneney

information contained within the morale reports ‘reflects a lack of faith in anything that the British or any other ally might do to bring about victory’.<sup>6</sup> This move towards negativity would then, over time, be manifested within the construction of the censor reports as a new heading emerged by May 1918 for complaints about the British. This new heading was built upon the dissatisfaction of 1917 and the equal parts fury and despair with which the French greeted the British retreats in 1918.

The reports would collect and collate selected opinions from soldiers in order to inform and sculpt generalisations about the current state of morale. However, the very process of doing so needs to also be fully considered and understood. Greenhalgh’s ‘proximity and success’ framework is not simply a method for theorising the nature of interactions, but also a comment on how the soldiers themselves viewed the war and the wider world.

It is in this context, therefore, that the extracts from French soldiers’ letters must be considered: a relative lack of interest in the wider picture, and concentration on the possibility that a particular operation would bring a more rapid end to the war.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the occasionally limited focus of the French soldier, the controllers themselves were at times tasked with what Jeanneney has termed an impossible job when considering the sheer volume of letters and reports they would have to tackle.<sup>8</sup> The instructions to the censors were fairly clear in giving them the scope of their responsibilities in finding excerpts that were as ‘numerous or significant’ as possible and that they shouldn’t hesitate to quote letters in whole or large portions.<sup>9</sup> The controllers were also given to using redaction in both senses of the word; firstly to combine similar entries but also to remove sections from letters and communications they viewed as breaching the censorship rules. However, it is not always explicitly

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<sup>6</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>7</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>8</sup> Jeanneney.

<sup>9</sup> Jeanneney.

clear when viewing a redacted entry whether it forms a representative collection or if it has been removed from an author's letter. There are entries which are clearly marked as having been 'seized' by the censor and others which, at the bottom, are marked as being representative of numerous similar entries, but the 'redacted' label itself is not always fully explained.

From these postal censorship records, I have focused on the reports relating to the French V and VI Armies, with particular emphasis on the months around the Battle of the Somme in 1916, as well as the months of the German Offensive and then the 100 Days March in 1918. The selection of these particular armies is based upon the same criteria and rationale as used for selecting the British subjects; extended contact with and proximity to the British at repeated points of the war. In 1914 the V and VI armies flanked the smaller B.E.F. on the left flank of the French positions with the V army to the B.E.F.'s right and the VI on its left during the Battle of the Marne. During the Battle of the Somme in 1916 the VI Army was deployed alongside the B.E.F. on the right hand bank of the river. In spring 1918 the German attacks fell heaviest on the British V and French VI armies that were lined up alongside each other around the Somme and the Aisne whilst some British units would find themselves under the command of the French V army during the spring retreat. Whilst the censor records only run from 1916-18 the purpose of this study is to examine any evolution in relations over the duration of the war and, therefore, these extended periods of contact throughout the conflict made the V and VI armies prime choices.

The expansion of the *Commissions de contrôle postal* in 1916 would allow the French to begin a more focused collection and collation of the correspondence issuing both from and to the trenches within their spheres of control. However, as might be expected with the implementation of such an institution, there are some quirks in the system. One of the more unfortunate ones is that the records of this first year for the French VI army, which was in the closest proximity to the British along the Somme

river, consist of forty-four reports for the entire year and these are much less extensive than for the V army which was deployed elsewhere.

### **The Battle of the Somme**

These 1916 reports do have strong echoes of the trends identified by Greenhalgh in her study but, at the same time, they also provide a slight challenge to some interpretations of the 'proximity and success' approach. Accordingly, whilst I will not restate the conclusions of Greenhalgh or provide further unnecessary evidence concerning it, I will examine some of the issues and questions that exist at the edge of both the battle and her investigations. The VI army that 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 nations.

We are still talking a great deal about a general Allied offensive, in their own time. It won't be much longer I think. And so much the better!

16 May 1916 Soldier of the 76<sup>th</sup> Territorial

We're still waiting patiently. The Russians are doing a good job and we are holding well.

11 June 1916, Driver in 9<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment

Russia has started to move, and England will find itself in a position of strength. So we all hope for victory.

9 June 1916, Soldier of 89<sup>th</sup> Territorial<sup>10</sup>

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 was active in France during this period the number of French soldiers who had interacted with it was fairly small. Additionally

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<sup>10</sup> All reports for VI Army of 1916 are from AAT, "Rapport," in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la VIe armée*. - 16 N 1417 (1916). See Appendix 3.1



the references in these letters do not speak of the R.E.F., but rather 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.

As a result a 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 VI army.

When you see the French Territorials occupying the trenches, mixed together with the French on active service and working along the British front, it gives you a chill and fills you with doubts about the sincerity of Albion already colonizing the north, Artois, Normandy to the sole profit of the United Kingdom.

Letter extract

I am increasingly skeptical of all the Anglo-Italo-Serbo-Montenegrotesques cooperations which all combined are not worth a squad of French.

Letter extract

When my letter reaches you in a few weeks you will probably hear news about the operation being prepared in tandem with the British. Will it succeed according to our desires? It would be unwise to build unreasonable expectations on it, but what is certain is that we will kill a lot of Huns, and as it all comes down to killing another 600-700 000 - this progresses things

Artillery Lieutenant<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> AAT, "Rapport," in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la Ve armée*. - 16 N 1412 (1916). All from the report dated 5 June. Underlining of words reproduced from original. See Appendix 3.2

The idea of Britain colonising France was not simply restricted to soldiers of the V army, with some civilians writing that ‘Everything is theirs; housing, cafes... In short, the country, men and women, are completely anglicised’.<sup>12</sup> As Gibson summarises,

By 1918, French soldiers considered the Somme to be ‘almost in England’. 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.<sup>13</sup>

These entries also hint at the extra level of political interest within the French army as opposed to the British. 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.<sup>14</sup> 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 in regards to curiosity about political matters. Likewise, the death of Lord Kitchener had produced ‘a great effect’ amongst the French soldiers.<sup>15</sup>

The French also appeared to be particularly reasonable in separating the activities of soldiers from those of officers, with the emphasis on British courage or bravery constituting something of a running theme in these reports: examples such as ‘with respect to our English friends, our men have great admiration for their tenacity and the efficiency of their artillery’ occur frequently throughout the reports for the early

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<sup>12</sup> Gibson (1998) p.63. This ‘Tommification’ of areas of the Western Front was more to provide the British soldiers with something more recognisable and understandable amongst 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 (2011).

<sup>13</sup> Gibson (1998), pp.63–4

<sup>14</sup> AAT 16 N 1412. 8 May 1916 & 23 May 1916 respectively. See Appendix 3.3

<sup>15</sup> AAT 16 N 1412. 19 June. See Appendix 3.4

months of the battle.<sup>16</sup> 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 probably also reflects one of the consistent elements that the French can judge the British on. Generally on the Somme, the British and French assess each other on the activities they can see and adequately judge for themselves. Both armies mention, in positive terms, the artillery skill of the other.<sup>17</sup> Artillery being largely fixed in position and easily observable, soldiers of both armies could watch its progress and attacks with relative ease. Likewise, whilst both countries would be able to watch and judge some of the infantry preparations before an attack and perhaps observe them going over the top, they would not easily be able to view and then rate the actual tactics and abilities of those men during any attacks or whilst defending against counterattack.

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 would desire, 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 counterattack if any ground or territory had been lost.<sup>18</sup> This praising of the courage of the British army should not, however, necessarily be seen as an indication that the French believed the British to be 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.

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<sup>16</sup> AAT 16 N 1417. Report for week of 23 July – 29 July. See Appendix 3.5

<sup>17</sup> The French would still be praising the British artillery into August. See: AAT 16 N 1417. Report for week of 6 August – 12 August.

<sup>18</sup> For a rundown of the German defensive doctrine on the Somme see: Philpott (2009) pp.165-6

Our success on the Somme as well as that achieved by the Russians and the British has revived spirits, so we hope that the peace so ardently desired by all will be achieved before the end of the year, perhaps even before winter.<sup>19</sup>

The news continues to be good, but we are also the best students in the class of the Allies: it is always us who come in ahead.

French Soldier to a girl in Barcelona<sup>20</sup>

However, this movement towards understanding and analysing the worth of the British 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 to focus along particular lines of complaint.

If they didn't have their unfortunate colonial troops to get bayoneted, if they had spent twenty-two months like us getting bandaged and returned to the front, they would have given the whole thing up long ago.

(26 May 1916, Third Army)

What is disgusting is that the British don't give a damn, they claim to have a very large army, marvellous and very strong and instead of giving us a hand, they watch arms folded.

(11 June 1916, Fourth Army)<sup>21</sup>

These accounts offer varying approaches to the same central theme, namely that the British weren't doing enough by 1916 and the French were suffering for it as a result, be it through the use of colonial troops as fodder (highlighting Britain's imperial status), or simply by sitting back and watching French casualties mount. Here the

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<sup>19</sup> AAT 16 N 1412. Taken from the section 'Guerre' where the censor has summarized some of the letters and feelings of the soldiers. Report from 17 June 1916. See Appendix 3.6

<sup>20</sup> AAT 16 N 1412. 3 July 1916. See Appendix 3.7. For further examples of soldiers in other French armies being somewhat grudging in their appreciation of the British army, Greenhalgh provides a group of 6 from across July as well as further evidence that the French rated themselves as better soldiers: Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>21</sup> Greenhalgh (1999).

distance of the French soldiers recording these sentiments are married to the perceived distance of the British army from active fighting and the manipulative and cynical means they have produced to maintain this distance.

To further reinforce the belief that close contact between the two armies provides plentiful opportunity for bonding and mutual appreciation, Greenhalgh highlights how the French Sixth Army moved from Verdun in May to the Somme, and how they quickly came to embrace the British.

The report on the week to 1 July recorded a "a very marked resurgence of the spirit of the offensive" and "absolute confidence" because of the Russian success and the "manifestation of British power." The extracts cited do reveal a degree of excitement: "no worries here: we're having a great time with our British friends" (25 June, from a legionnaire); "The Franco-British show will be very soon" (26 June, soldier of 156 Regiment d'Infanterie [R.I.]); "Victory soon" (21 June, soldier of 164 R.I.). Other writers had obviously been impressed by the artillery preparation: "The most formidable artillery preparation that has ever taken place" (26 June, soldier of 156 R.I.); "admirable preparation" (23 June, soldier of 35 Corps). The Sixth Army was expecting great things: "The British seem to be determined to strike a blow" (26 June, soldier of 418 R.I.).<sup>22</sup>

As has been suggested previously; proximity can be an important aspect in opinion forming. However, proximity also brought French soldiers into a position to witness failures as well as successes. The British attacks around the Somme at times left French troops both bemused and dispirited as they struggled to rationalise the British behaviour.

Criticism of British "foolhardiness" invited comparisons which are always, as is well known, invidious. One French career artillery officer implied that excessive British bravery was the result of pride. His introduction to service in the Somme sector gave

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<sup>22</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)

proof of the British commitment as he found himself surrounded by the British, both living and dead. He wrote to his wife on 30 September:

The British are astonishingly brave and calm; they take no precautions at all, are very nice, and seem to admire us. They seem to prefer to be killed than to get dirty and don't throw themselves to the ground as we do; they remain standing; it's very fine but not very clever. No doubt lying flat on the ground seems to them to be cowardice.<sup>23</sup>

In many ways this is as close as the French soldiers seem to come in defining British behaviour or British-ness. Whereas there are numerous episodes recorded in previous chapters of British soldiers adopting an anthropological approach to understanding the French, this is not a trend widely repeated on the other side. Furthermore, particularly in the early years of the war, whereas the British soldiers seemed to split their responses to the French along either 'soldier' or 'civilian' lines the French analysis follows predominantly military lines. The French seem far less concerned about who or what the British may be and more interested in how able they are in a martial sense. This is not universally the case and does not include the French interest in British and European politics but, certainly within Greenhalgh's articles, there is a clear trend of assessment of military prowess above all else, based on the 'proximity and success' model.

With the slowing of operations in August the postal records, as noted by Greenhalgh, begin to produce common comments regarding the decreasing pace of the advance and yet, as noted in Chapter Four on the Somme, delays such as this gave the soldiers greater opportunity to continue their interactions and further strengthen relations.<sup>24</sup>

We are well supported by the brave English, who now have a large army, well organized, and no shortage of equipment and ammunition.

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<sup>23</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>24</sup> See p.153

Gunner in the 83<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, 28 August

The brotherhood of arms with the British army is still at its fullest  
Summation of 'Relations with allies'

Here, everything is going well. The English are wonderful, the organization superb, the aviation services wonderful.

Corporal in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Regiment RI, 29 August<sup>25</sup>

Men (English & French) socialise together: and many of our ranks who have the least knowledge of English, seek to become acquainted. This proves once again the entente cordiale & the harmony of these two peoples.

Soldier in the 94<sup>th</sup> Regiment, RI, 17 September<sup>26</sup>

This shift towards extended comradely spirit was not simply restricted to those soldiers in the VI army who were in contact with the British. It had begun to spread out to the other armies by the end of July and was producing similar reactions.

Our men, a little wary of the English, are struck by their persistence and lend themselves now to more sympathetic reflections which will only become more widespread.

Summation from 'External Affairs'

The war is going well on the Russian side, faster than on our side, but I hope that French and English will resume their forward march stopped for a moment by the unpredictable weather. What glory for England are the submission and the dedication of all its colonies in this crisis.

A resident from the Aisne to his daughter, 23 July<sup>27</sup>

These burgeoning relations were not simply reserved for the trenches; news of allied interactions on the home fronts was also delivered to soldiers in the trenches via mail,

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<sup>25</sup> AAT 16 N 1417. All from report 27 August – 3 September. See Appendix 3.8

<sup>26</sup> AAT 16 N 1417. Report of 17 September – 23 September. See Appendix 3.9

<sup>27</sup> AAT 16 N 1412. Both from report dated 5 August. See Appendix 3.10

with the postal censors recording the following letter sent from England at the end of August.

All the English are unanimous in recognizing the high value of the French people. Yesterday, I was again told, your country is admirable! I think especially since Verdun, the French have gone up in the estimation of foreigners, and the English who have seen our soldiers fight are full of admiration; I also believe that the English have gained much esteem in French minds lately, and it is true, they realize now what war is and they go to the front, not for sport, but to do their duty.<sup>28</sup>

Many of these inter-allied relations have marked similarities that cross into the activities of both the British and the French and, under consideration, these speak of a commonality of hopes and expectations, typically centring around how each side wants to be perceived in context of how it perceives itself. During 1916 when the British army felt inferior compared to the French, it wanted its efforts to be noted and acknowledged; it wanted to feel useful and to gain some respect from the French. During this period the French army is secure in its superiority over the British but superiority itself is largely worthless if it isn't acknowledged by those perceived to be inferior. With this in mind the excerpt above does fulfil several important criteria for the French soldier in receipt of the letter. There is fairly glowing praise directed towards the French from the British public, based upon several key acknowledgements; firstly the difficult fighting the French had undertaken at Verdun, secondly the corroboration from those who have seen the French in action, an acknowledgement of the French spirit, and, finally, the announcement that the British have started to approach the war in a far more French manner, with duty overriding their misplaced sense of war as sport.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> AAT 16 N 1412. From report 28 August. See Appendix 3.11

<sup>29</sup> Set against this wider backdrop of emerging fraternity whilst the battle slowed down are some specific instances of battlefield cooperation, such as the assault on Falfemont Farm as described by Greenhalgh.



The role that Verdun plays in the French experience of 1916 is also important in understanding not just some of the 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 the French fighting at Verdun. Firstly it was a purely French battle and during General Petain'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 divisions from being decimated.<sup>30</sup> 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 the third tour at Verdun.<sup>31</sup> Further to this the French soldiers at Verdun were not fighting to secure victory. Instead they were fighting to secure survival. Falkenhayn's memorandum to the Kaiser in 1915 outlining his plans to bleed the French army to death is well established and exposed by this point and does not need further examination.<sup>32</sup> But the situation it created; a long-running and manpower intensive attritional battle to which the French were committed to maintain the defense is of relevance to this study as Greenhalgh explains.

There was thus a long period following the decision for the Somme and the start of the Verdun offensive during which the British and French pursued their independent preparations for the summer battle. ... First of all it must be said that the situation at Verdun did indeed deteriorate to the extent that breakdowns in morale and refusal to obey orders became manifest. French attitudes to the forthcoming British contribution

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<sup>30</sup> Horne, Alistair (1993), p.228

<sup>31</sup> Horne, Alistair (1993), p.269

<sup>32</sup> Horne, Alistair (1993), pp.34-6

to the joint offensive must, therefore, be considered through the prism of Verdun, because of that battle's all-embracing nature.<sup>33</sup>

The fiercest examples of criticism sourced by Greenhalgh for her *Parade Ground Soldiers* article are from French soldiers stationed around Verdun who decry 'the perceived lack of will' of the British army;

"The British boast of having 5 million men but what have they done, except for their lamentable Dardanelles expedition or their surrender at Kut-el-Amara, it's true that they occupy solidly a portion of our territory and hardly ever leave the boulevards of the capital."<sup>34</sup>

It is in this situation that we can see effects of distance from the British army 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 understandably construct their evaluations based on their understandings of their own situation and what little they have heard from elsewhere. In this case the French were in a brutal fight for their very survival and certainly before July 1916 there was no particular movement to report from the British.

Additionally the French experience on the defensive at Verdun would also lead to the consolidation of General Petain's reputation as an officer that cared for his men. When, during the mutinies of 1917, the French soldiers needed someone in command whom they could trust it would be in Petain that they would place their faith. With such a clear example of a 'good leader' of their own from which to draw strength from this would only highlight the apparent deficiencies with the British military leaders and exacerbate the failings of the men.

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<sup>33</sup> Greenhalgh (1999)

<sup>34</sup> Greenhalgh (1999). This extract is from a letter dated 2 June 1916.

The impression that emerges from the 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 'bravery' or '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.

This division of focus would become far more pronounced when the French soldiers mutinied in 1917 in protest at their own treatment by the French High Command. It would not however, fully extend to the British soldiers during the German attacks of 1918. Whereas 1916 is probably the crucial moment for the British in their interactions with the French, and was generally beneficial for the French, 1918 represents a significant moment of fracture in their relationship

### **The trials of 1918**

The postal censor reports for the start of 1918 were already hinting at some of the travails between the British and French that would rise to the fore in the coming

months. Whilst some soldiers wrote that Britain would resolutely wage war on their line,<sup>35</sup> another soldier was noting how the 'British Socialist Party seems to want to impose conditions on their government'.<sup>36</sup> Another postal censor was noting a recurring trend in letters from Britain.

Almost all letters (75%) from England and Scotland, portray the economic situation in the darkest colours.<sup>37</sup>

Further concerns were being raised during February and March by the possible reaction of the British to the negotiations regarding the creation of the Supreme War Council during the allied conference at Versailles.<sup>38</sup>

Any particular concerns about the morale or general emotional wellbeing of the British soldiers on behalf of the French would not however, exist for long in their current form. The opening of Germany's Michael Offensive on 21 March would see a huge blow fall upon the British trenches, particularly around St Quentin. The British soldiers attempting to hold the position were rendered 'virtually impotent' by heavy fog that 'reduced visibility to a matter of yards' and by the ferocity of the German offensive which had destroyed most forms of communication. Brown describes this as 'the unimaginable ... happening. A Western Front line was being seriously breached, and in an incredibly short time.'<sup>39</sup> After trying to hold the German assault for several days, the British eventually gave way and were overrun and forced onto the retreat. At first, the French response was one of hope regarding their British allies, mixed with a mild concern.

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<sup>35</sup> AAT, "Rapport," in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la VIe armée. - 16 N 1421* (1918). Report for 31 January 1918.

<sup>36</sup> AAT 16 N 1421. Report for 12 January 1918. See Appendix 3.12

<sup>37</sup> AAT 16 N 1421. Report for 1 February 1918. See Appendix 3.13. Similar concerns were being noted in the report for 11 January 1918.

<sup>38</sup> AAT 16 N 1421. Report for the week 2 February – 8 February 1918. See Appendix 3.14. For further background and context for the thought process behind, and eventual failings of, the Supreme War Council see: Greenhalgh (2008), Chapter 7.

<sup>39</sup> Brown (1999) p.50

Almost all men speak of the German offensive triggered against the British. We are unanimous that the shock was severe; we do not despair that the British will come to hold them.<sup>40</sup>

Morale excellent. Some discouraged notes and some few malcontents on the limited resistance of the English.<sup>41</sup>

The Germans took the offensive to the British and the battle is terrible; our friends were forced to retreat under the weight of numbers but our area is sending reinforcements and we are very confident here that we will stop it.<sup>42</sup>

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. This is the war in open country, man-to-man fighting with knives is becoming frequent.

A French soldier, RI

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.

A 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. The

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<sup>40</sup> AAT 16 N 1421. Section entitled: 'Impressions of the Commission' 26 March 1918. See Appendix 3.15

<sup>41</sup> AAT 16 N 1421. Section entitled: 'Impressions of the Commission' 28 March 1918. See Appendix 3.16

<sup>42</sup> AAT 16 N 1421. 28 March 1918. See Appendix 3.17

battle takes place in open country, no more entrenched defenses ... and it is all down to the bravery and initiative of the French, if the Boche is now stopped.

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.

A soldier to his wife.<sup>43</sup>

Summations by the postal censors began to speak of 'rather severe' criticism of 'the British concerning their retreat in the face of the Boche offensive',<sup>44</sup> 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',<sup>45</sup> in itself beginning to be viewed simply as 'a mark of disparagement for the English'.<sup>46</sup> 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 redacted)<sup>47</sup>

Whilst there was still some praise being directed towards the British, occasionally being generalised such as 'the Allied Armies are marvellous',<sup>48</sup> 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'.<sup>49</sup> It would shortly become the case that with the British being 'sometimes quite strongly criticised' letters were

<sup>43</sup> AAT, "Rapport," in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la VI<sup>e</sup> armée*. - 16 N 1422 (1918). All from reports dated 7 April 1918. See Appendix 3.18

<sup>44</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Report dated 7 April 1918. See Appendix 3.19

<sup>45</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Report 13 April 1918. See Appendix 3.20

<sup>46</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Report 12 April 1918. See Appendix 3.21

<sup>47</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. 11 April 1918. See Appendix 3.22

<sup>48</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Section 'England and Dominions' from report dated 14 April 1918.

<sup>49</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Section 'Relations with allies' from report dated 20 April 1918. See Appendix 3.23

seized and provided to the commission for being ‘defeatist and depressing’.<sup>50</sup> Some reports began to break down the issues with the British by infantry regiment.<sup>51</sup>

The British themselves recognised the problem they were now beginning to face as Colonel Eric Dillon, who was serving as a liaison to Foch at the time, recalled in his memoirs.

April 13

The feeling that the French haven't done their fair share of this battle is very prevalent. On the other hand, I have no doubt that the French say that our troops ran away from St Quentin.<sup>52</sup>

Although there were still some positive comments emerging from French soldiers in V Army, there were still those suggesting that ‘without the French, the allies would now be in big trouble’,<sup>53</sup> whilst soldiers in VI Army continued to believe that ‘the retreat of the British in the North’ was ‘disgusting’ and newspapers spread rumours of ‘the abandonment of Ypres, Dunkirk and Calais’ and that ‘the English are threatened with a careless disaster’.<sup>54</sup> These trends would largely continue within the French armies during April and into May.

The elevation of Foch to Generalissimo of the allied armies proved a popular decision, 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’ whilst demanding that ‘the British increase their divisions and sacrifice themselves as we have been doing since the beginning’.<sup>55</sup> Other French soldiers were

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<sup>50</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Report dated 20 April 1918.

<sup>51</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Section ‘Relations with allies’ report dated 21 April 1918.

<sup>52</sup> Dillon, p.113

<sup>53</sup> AAT, “Rapport,” in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la Ve armée. - 16 N 1415* (1918). Report dated 27 April – 3 May 1918. See Appendix 3.24

<sup>54</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. 17 April 1918. . See Appendix 3.25

<sup>55</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. 27 April 1918. See Appendix 3.26

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.

What a pity that the English who are so brave should be so poorly led. If they were not so arrogant, if they were willing to be amalgamated into our divisions, victory would be ours tomorrow.<sup>56</sup>

To the minds of the French, it appeared that any questions of who were the better soldiers, British or French, had now been settled with one soldier writing in a letter that had to be redacted that 'there is no doubt, the Tommies are not comparable to the *Poilu*'.<sup>57</sup> 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 subheading for 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. Redacted.<sup>58</sup>

C- External Affairs

UK -

The British received a good purge!

A Soldier to his brother

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.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. 30 April 1918. See Appendix 3.27

<sup>57</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. 1 May 1918. See Appendix 3.28

<sup>58</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. See Appendix 3.29



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 England<sup>60</sup>

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 American soldiers.<sup>61</sup>

We have the English here. They are not as good as the Americans

From a soldier to a parent. Letter redacted.<sup>62</sup>

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. It will be convenient to make a mix of their troops with ours, because except for the rifles they have the same gun which simplifies resupplying.<sup>63</sup>

As we have already seen the British soldiers did not hold much love for their American counterparts or indeed for any of their own dominion soldiers either.

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<sup>59</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. Both from report dated 1 May 1918. See Appendix 3.30

<sup>60</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. From report dated 25 May 1918. See Appendix 3.31

<sup>61</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. From report dated 6 May 1918. Letter redacted.

<sup>62</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. Report dated 15 May 1918. See Appendix 3.32

<sup>63</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. Both from report dated 17 May 1918. See Appendix 3.33

However, such was the catastrophic collapse in esteem for the British within French ranks during the spring of 1918, the increasing numbers of American soldiers and the necessity to get them forward in 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 an, at best, flawed ally and, at worse, useless and/or dangerous to be alongside.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the rise of the Americans in the eyes of the French was purely a result of the collapse of the British. The framework for cooperation between the two nations had been constructed much earlier in the war, beginning with the initial American volunteers who had joined the French army, continuing with the *Escadrille Lafayette* fighter squadron and culminating in the decision in 1917 to send Marshal Joffre to America to rally further support for France and the war effort.<sup>64</sup> Additionally ‘in sharp contrast to England, where Pershing and the Americans had “attracted little attention”’ the arrival of the AEF in France was greeted by wild scenes of celebration and mutual appreciation.<sup>65</sup> Such festivities extended to the French announcement that they wished to stage a ‘massive celebration in honor [sic] of American independence’ on 4 July.<sup>66</sup> As the AEF arrived in France it was decided following heated debates involving the Americans, British and French that ‘American battalions and regiments’ would ‘be placed temporarily with French divisions for training purposes’ and ‘in a limited fashion’ with the British.<sup>67</sup> The Americans had been warmly welcomed into France at almost every level with strong references being made by both sides to their joint revolutionary heritage. The fallout of the ‘amalgamation’ crisis regarding how the American soldiers would be used resulted in most American soldiers being, at least temporarily, integrated with the

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<sup>64</sup> See: Bruce (2003) Chapters 1 & 2. and, Robert 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).

<sup>65</sup> Bruce (2003), pp.69 & 90.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce (2003), p.91

<sup>67</sup> Bruce (2003), p.170

French army. These Americans achieved a level of proximity and interaction with the French in a remarkably short space of time that the British never really matched. By the time the French and Americans were operating together on the battlefield they were already forging strong relationships that were only enhanced by the perceived turmoil of the B.E.F.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore by undergoing a period of integration with the French before being reconstituted into their own national army the arriving Americans were the beneficiaries of a system that would have been ideal for the British during their arrival in 1914. Whilst this disagreement over how best to utilise the Americans can be looked at as a matter of national sovereignty it is also possible to see it as the result of evolving allied strategies. Whilst both Britain and France wanted the American reinforcements to bolster their own armed forces and replace their own losses, they both also recognised that simply unleashing an unprepared American army onto the Western Front would be wasteful both in terms of time and lives.

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 whilst, as the weeks would go on, the Americans would gain their own sub-section within the postal censor reports.

Our English and American allies are wonderful they have exceeded our expectations.  
(26 extracts of the same kind)<sup>69</sup>

September 2

Impressions of the commission

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<sup>68</sup> There is an additional suggestion from Tombs and Tombs that at times relations between the French and Americans could be 'horribly violent' and that there were 'serious Franco-American brawls in Paris'. Tombs & Tombs p.479. As will be discussed in the conclusion to this study below, the role of the Americans in regard to Anglo-French relations in 1917 and 1918 is the logical next step in regards to future research.

<sup>69</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. Report dated 10 September 1918. See Appendix 3.34. There are also numerous similar examples in the reports for VI Army.

Praise for Americans.

The brilliant success achieved in our last offensive and the valor of American troops allows hope for an end to the war soon with the victory of our arms.<sup>70</sup>

British soldiers almost drop out of these postal reports completely during September and October. Part of this can probably be explained by the new war of movement that was breaking out over the Western Front. As we have seen in previous chapters, there is often a lull in descriptions of allied armies during periods of excessive movement. The new shape of the Western Front also meant that with the advance of the allied armies particular nationalities were coming into and out of contact with each other fairly regularly and the placement of American troops would often divide armed forces that had previously been alongside each other. For a time it appears as though the British soldiers would simply fade away in the postal reports, 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.

However, as has been previously noted, the French soldiers maintain a fair degree of political interest in events going on around the war and 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

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<sup>70</sup> AAT 16 N 1415. Report dated 2 September 1918. See Appendix 3.35.

would be disappointed ... if the war were not carried onto German soil. Germany must pay for its crimes.<sup>71</sup>

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.<sup>72</sup>

C - State of mind

1 - Opinions of the allied troops -

Slightly less praise for the American soldier. The English are doing well.<sup>73</sup>

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 do not fall so far as the British 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 heals in the last weeks of the war, but there is 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

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<sup>71</sup> AAT, "Rapport," in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la Ve armée. - 16 N 1416* (1918). Report dated 12 October 1918. See Appendix 3.36.

<sup>72</sup> AAT 16 N 1422. Report dated 26 September – 2 October 1918. See Appendix 3.37.

<sup>73</sup> AAT 16 N 1416. Report dated 1 October 1918. See Appendix 3.38

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 have now made up this victory.

There are reports of ‘great camaraderie with the English’ and discussions of marching alongside ‘brave Tommies’ by French soldiers currently under the command of the British,<sup>74</sup> and perhaps most indicatively, talk of how the British actions have ‘redeemed’ them after their ‘dark hours of failure’.<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup>

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!’<sup>77</sup> However, alongside this there is something more. There is a fair degree of triumphalism of course but accompanying the normal praise being offered to their allies is an extra level of appreciation for the British. This is 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.

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<sup>74</sup> AAT, "Rapport," in *Commissions de contrôle postal de la VI<sup>e</sup> armée*. - 16 N 1423 (1918). Both from report dated 11 October 1918. See Appendix 3.39

<sup>75</sup> AAT 16 N 1416. Report dated 1 October 1916. See Appendix 3.40

<sup>76</sup> AAT 16 N 1423. Examples appear in the reports for 17 October and the report dated 18 October – 23 October 1918.

<sup>77</sup> AAT 16 N 1416. 14 November 1918.

From a Soldier to a friend in the US

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<sup>78</sup>

In fairness the Germans probably weren't 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 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.

### **An alliance of complicated convenience**

It would be a mistake to think that the view of the British soldiers amongst the French directly mirrors the reverse relations examined in earlier chapters. There are certainly common trends and themes and it is important to acknowledge these before seeking to explain some of the fundamental differences.

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<sup>78</sup> AAT 16 N 1416. Both from report dated 26 October 1918. See Appendix 3.42

As with the British, geographical placement was a factor in defining relations with the foreign allies. Those French armies deployed closest to the British were often the ones that had the most sympathetic viewpoint of them, for they saw the men both at rest and at war. They had the opportunity to build a relationship that had both social and martial benefits. The French armies that were further away from the British were often given to wondering what exactly Britain was doing with the large army it had raised from its civilians to much trumpeting and self-congratulation. However, it was still the successes both seen and those reported that would often provide the deciding factor. During particularly low moments of the war such as the fighting at Verdun before the Somme offensive, those French soldiers caught up in the battle had no reference point with regards to the British and simply knew that, whilst they fought and died, the British were not succeeding in a way that was noticeable to them.

The French, like the British before them, also showed a measure of interest in the national traits and quirks of their allies and as with the British, they found these to be a mixture of charming and bewildering. During 1914 and 1916 the British were repeatedly referred to as being brave and strong in spirit but, at the same time, lacking in the European cosmopolitan nature of the French and the other major powers, and also lacking in some of the traditional European martial abilities.

Whilst it would be a mistake to suggest that there is a clear and direct homogeneity in relations between British and French soldiers, it would also be a mistake to view the French experiences as either entirely positive or entirely negative. There were triumphs and disasters. As we have seen during the opening battles of the war, General Huguet was often effusive in his support and appreciation of the British soldier and reserved his criticism for John French. During the Somme offensive scepticism about the worth and ability of the British soldier turned to a keener appreciation of their spirit and determination to wage war in the face of stubborn German resistance. The disaster of 1918 deeply affected these relationships, but did



not fully undo the good work done previously, or as it would eventually prove, fully leave the British soldiers in a situation of negative 'balance'. However, the main thing to be taken from the collapse in appreciation of the British in 1918 and indeed even the highpoints in 1914 and 1916, is the key difference between how the British viewed the French and vice versa; the war and the alliance meant different things to the soldiers of both nations.

First and foremost is that the war was fought on French soil. The British were there alongside them but were not fighting on 'home turf'. When in 1914 the British soldier saw French refugees and felt sad for them, the French soldier saw his own countrymen whom he was powerless to protect. When in 1916 the British saw the French waging war in a manner they could not fully understand they sought to learn from them. For the French, they saw an army that in their eyes was not yet fit for purpose and could not help them properly liberate their homeland. And when in 1918, as the German offensive pushed them back, some of the British soldiers felt irked that the French were not riding to their rescue, the French saw that, after years of war and struggle, the Germans are suddenly on the offensive and the British were giving way. These differences are not influenced predominantly by national understandings or stereotypes by the French, although there are obvious elements of this present, but rather a form of desperate pragmatism. The British in their own way lashed out at the French when things were going badly, but it was always in the knowledge, even sub-consciously, that if things became dire they could still retreat back to England. For the French there could be no retreat and so their anger and their feelings during tactical or strategic reversals were that much stronger. There must be success for anything else would be a failure and a disaster and not just for the men in the trenches but for France as a whole.

On a similar line, whilst the British looked down on their own dominion forces and treated the Americans with scarcely concealed contempt, looking only on the French

as equals and during the uncertain periods of 1916 as their betters, for the French the situation was more complicated. Primarily the British were just one of their allies and whilst they were a great power and an historic enemy turned friend, in many ways they were not always treated as a special case. The French had high hopes for the Russians only to be betrayed by them. They welcomed the Americans with open arms during 1918 and only pushed them back to some distance when they feared that Woodrow Wilson might seek to rob France of its victory and its revenge. At various times it almost appears as if the French were going to very great lengths to ensure that Britain was not treated any differently from their other allies, as if they did not wish to give the British room to dominate or dictate proceedings.

But there is also something profoundly different in how the French viewed the British. There have featured plenty of records that highlight the welcoming, host-like nature of the French soldier for those who have come to his country to fight as allies. In 1916 there is a clear desire for the British to do well and to be better, likely emanating from the reasonable wish for the war to be won. The British soldiers of the time took their cue from the French behaviour and practices so there is a clear transfer of skills. But underneath all of this, apparent in 1916 and again in 1918 in the postal censor records and at other times during the personal accounts, there is another, competing, view of the British. It is a complicated view that does marginally separate the British soldiers from 'Britain', but views them both with an uneasy suspicion seemingly born from particular political ideologies. The image persists of the 'perfidious Albion' that is colonising Northern France, that appears to be holding back its true strength to grasp the benefits of victory at the right moment, that stands for a political system that they do not subscribe to. It is an image of Britain that is unsettling and vaguely sinister. Whilst it is possible to conclude that there are plenty of examples that suggest that the French soldier did generally like his British counterpart, it is far more difficult to conclude that France as a whole *trusted* her British ally.

However, as the war drew to a close and the French soldiers began to enter a reflective mood there is a suggestion that, even if it is a touch grudging, they not only accepted the British but they accepted the importance of the role they played. During the darkest moments, even when both the British and the French were hard pushed, they really only had each other. In the last days of the war the French seemed to content themselves with that knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

### **Britain, France 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.<sup>1</sup>

The end to fighting on the Western Front began a change in the dynamic of relations between the allied armies. The end of hostilities meant that the primary uniting factor between the British and the French; their required co-operation in fighting the Germans, was not long in existence. As we have already seen relations between British and French soldiers in P.O.W. camps began to deteriorate as soon as the armistice had been announced. The men who had made the physical and psychological journey from civilians to soldiers were now beginning to make the same journey again in reverse; returning their thoughts and their focus to the civilian lives that awaited them back at home. Having lost their primary purpose for being in France in the first place the British soldiers were eager to return to their homes and families. With the French *patrie* defended the French soldiers were equally eager to return to their own lives.

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 hardnosed national pragmatism that would divide the former allies. However, this was not the final result of Anglo-French relations from the war. Once

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<sup>1</sup> Huguet, p.211

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.

### **Versailles and the ‘betrayal’ of France**

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.

Relations between the French and the Americans were especially poor. French diplomats blamed Wilson for 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 them for their accommodation in Paris and for the expenses of their army. In the cinemas, French audiences, which had once cheered every appearance of Wilson on the screen, now stayed silent.<sup>2</sup>

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.

“Our relations with the British, who are the only people here who are not playing chauvinistic politics (a fact that it took Wilson about a week to discover),” said Seymour, the American expert, “are so close that we are exchanging views with absolute frankness on the territorial settlement of Europe.”<sup>3</sup>

It is not difficult to see how this change of positions came about hinging, as it did, on the fact that the British and Americans desires were compatible and the French found

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (New York: Random House, 2003). p.144

<sup>3</sup> MacMillan p.144

that their's were not. Further to this the re-emergence of traditional British pragmatism in their own international relations was causing a change in how they viewed both France and Germany.

As passions cooled, the British remembered both their old rivalry with France and the potential for friendship between Germany and Britain. British industries needed markets; there were 70 million Germans. Britain wanted stability on the Continent, not the sort of chaos that could so clearly be seen farther east; a solid Germany at Europe's center [sic] could provide that.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>

The culmination of these debates, discussions and arguments was the Treaty of Versailles that we know today. There is little to be gained from re-analysing it for faults, failures or misunderstood benefits. However, the view of this treaty in France is of interest and the conclusion to Huguet's previously examined memoirs clearly highlights the anger and frustration at the negotiation process and how that anger was refocused onto Britain. Huguet presents an image of France robbed not once but twice. Of 'France, the principal worker for victory and the one who emerged most bruised' and been left 'with bitterness that she alone will not obtain from it the just reparations on which she believed she could count'.<sup>7</sup> There is little doubt within

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<sup>4</sup> MacMillan p.198

<sup>5</sup> MacMillan p.374

<sup>6</sup> MacMillan p.395

<sup>7</sup> Huguet, p.205

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.

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 selfsame 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.<sup>8</sup>

Huguet's epilogue is a testimony to his anger and his anguish at what he perceives 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.

One, and most important of all, the character of the race;  
Two, the social conditions of the English people; and  
Three, the special situation of Great Britain as a result of her insularity.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas previously he had suggested that Britain's lack of cosmopolitan forward thinking was almost a charming quirk, now he accuses Britain of maintaining an

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<sup>8</sup> Huguet, p.207

<sup>9</sup> Huguet, p.213

almost slothful self-imposed ignorance.<sup>10</sup> Even the lives of those lost in service to Britain cannot stand in the face of British self-serving pragmatism.

There is not a country in the world where the dead are so quickly forgotten. Funerals take place without ceremony, pomp or oration. Only near relatives are present; in a few carriages they hurry along behind the deceased; a few short prayers are delivered, and that is all. Generally only a few months pass before his place is filled in the family, and life continues without there being any further question of him.<sup>11</sup>

Huguet paints 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'. Huguet looks upon the current states of France and Britain following the armistice and despairs.

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 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!<sup>12</sup>

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

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<sup>10</sup> Huguet, p.215

<sup>11</sup> Huguet, p.218

<sup>12</sup> Huguet, pp.235-6



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.

### **The endurance of Tommy-Poilu relations**

An argument repeated at times throughout this study has been that the positions and concerns of the government or military commanders do not often translate down into the lives and emotions of the soldiers. As this was true during the war there is also a continuation of this in the post-war period. Whilst the likes of Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Wilson, Foch, Haig and Huguet would advance their own feelings regarding the Armistice and eventual Treaty of Versailles it would not prove to have the same affect 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 and strongly recommended ‘the need to improve the teaching of ‘the most important European language’ for Britain, namely French’.<sup>13</sup> The echoes of the previous Tommy-Poilu relationship would continue to be noticeable.

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.

Then, faintly at first, came the distant strains of ‘Tipperary’ ... The Parisians cheered, perhaps not quite as loudly as they had cheered the Americans but loud enough, and

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<sup>13</sup> Greenhalgh (2008), p.284

some waved paper Union flags along with their tricolours and Stars and Stripes, while girls in the costume of newly liberated Alsace threw rose petals and the Tommies smiled and tried to keep step.

Sadly the Senior soldiers and statesmen of Britain and France had not emerged from their hard-won victory over Germany with anything like the mutual affection on display in Paris that Bastille Day. Between the principal Allies the conflict had ended on a high note of bickering which characterized the six months of treaty negotiations with Germany that followed and went on to sour Anglo-French relations for the next twenty years.<sup>14</sup>

Regardless of the divisions that had split the Entente around the negotiating table there were still definite warm spirits and feelings amongst those inhabiting the civilian and soldier spheres. 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 and the *Poilu* 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 does bear 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 the British soldiers as the French commander refused to 'receive 'instructions' from foreign commanders, however, described, of smaller bodies of troops'. The French soldiers however, seemingly take it upon

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<sup>14</sup> Colin Smith, *England's last war against France: Fighting Vichy 1940-1942* (London: Phoenix, 2010). pp.23-4

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.<sup>15</sup> 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 took a shine to them.

Of course this large Englishman was mad ... Truly an insane race, and yet he had fought in the brigade next to them near Montauban in July '16 – and he had liked them – those mad Tommies.<sup>16</sup>

Again the enduring legacy of the warm relations between the British and the French soldiers is conjured up in a fictional post-war account, but the key thing here is that it was a plausible proposition that the audience would not have had difficulty believing. 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.

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<sup>15</sup> C. 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).

<sup>16</sup> Sapper, *Bulldog Drummond: The Carl Peterson Quintet* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), p.134

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 didn't 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 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 in September 1915 continues his tale, and there were some important changes in his reaction to the French army. We should remember how Tennyson stated on numerous occasions, some of which were quoted earlier on, his disregard for stories of military success, particularly involving Britain's allies. By 1915 this tendency is no longer present and Tennyson often makes positive reference to gains made by the French army particularly during the battles around Champagne.<sup>17</sup>

There was a definite shift in his mentality towards the French here in 1915 but there doesn't appear to be any single event referenced in the available diaries to account for this shift. It is possible that the eventual destruction of the B.E.F. and the British attempts to rebuild its armed forces highlighted to Tennyson the great strain being placed upon the French army. Perhaps the continued French attempts to break the deadlock on the Western Front were viewed as impressive bravery by the British.

However, I think it equally likely that Tennyson became gradually more at ease in France as the war progressed. The outbreak of war and the arrival on the Western Front could easily have been a disconcerting experience for Tennyson and, whilst it is not clearly portrayed as such in his diaries, perhaps his feelings about the French were

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<sup>17</sup> Tennyson 28/09/1915 – 30/09/1915

masking deeper anxieties about the way the deployment had gone. Had Tennyson been given the time and space that those of the 1915 cohort received he, perhaps, would have mellowed quicker. There's no doubting that some of his dislike for the French appears to have been ingrained from before the war and he was criticising them along particular lines before he'd even encountered any fighting. But this change of temperament towards the French does coincide with a prolonged period of less demanding combat.

This change is not only restricted to Tennyson's diary. Having survived the war, but receiving three wounds, Tennyson would write his memoir *From Verse to Worse* in 1933 and this account of his wartime service based upon his diaries. However, his criticisms of the French military, specifically during 1914, are all but absent from this account.<sup>18</sup> 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 Tennyson's 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 B.E.F.

Whilst Tennyson's published memoir does not take the full step of recasting the French in a positive light it does tell us something important about the nature of the

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<sup>18</sup> Lionel Hallam Baron Tennyson Tennyson, *From Verse To Worse. [An autobiography.] With eight plates [including portraits]* (pp. 277. Cassell & Co.: London, 1933).

Tommy-*Poilu* relationship over time. It is the more relaxed, possibly less interested, relationship that Tennyson has with the French that endures beyond the end of the war. He did not feel it necessary to praise the French but equally he did not return to his previous position. The war had changed his viewpoint and that change had proved enduring.

Understandably not all enduring legacies of the relations during the war were positive but even the negative ones further prove that there was no cut-off date in 1918 for the soldiers, as there seemed to be for the high commands. 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.

As a franc at that time was equivalent to ten pence she had got herself a dissatisfied customer and he called out to her, “Here, what about my change?”. This sweet little girl replied “Garn you fuckin long bastid” and galloped off to another part of the column. She must have known that no British soldier would leave the ranks to chase her and there seemed little doubt that she had made a practise of this trick. I was quite startled to hear this sort of thing from a little girl. Of course, she was only repeating words she had heard our troops use but the whole incident was not a very happy first contact with the people we thought we were coming to help. Unfortunately we only met the blood-suckers, but I soon learnt not to trust any French man, woman or child, and I fear this must have left a lasting impression on my mind that may account for my lack of enthusiasm at the thought of teaming up with these people as fellow members of the common market.<sup>20</sup>

Abraham was writing his memoirs in the early 1970s and his admission that he still held lasting negative memories and feelings towards the French because of his

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<sup>19</sup> Abraham 01/04/1918

<sup>20</sup> Abraham, Ibid

experiences during the war is fascinating. First of all it shows that whilst in broad terms, 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 and that such was the power of wartime interaction, they could still affect the views of individuals over half a century after the event. One of the central arguments of this thesis has been that the relations, good or bad, between the British and French soldiers had long-term consequences in regards to the conduct and outcome of the war.

### **The future and the past**

Throughout this study I have forwarded several key arguments; that the psychological distinction between being a soldier or a civilian was crucial in the formation of relations firstly in 1914 and then, more importantly, from 1915-1916 onwards regarding to the British army. That the differing requirements and views of the war and soldiering both aided and obstructed Tommy-*Poilu* relations with British soldiers gripped by a sense of inferiority is only one aspect. The French soldiers were, on the one hand, willing to welcome them and serve almost as congenial mentors whilst, at the same time, desperately required the British to find their feet quicker and aid in the defence of France. These interactions played out at grassroots level with no real interest or direction shown from those higher up the rank organisation and as a result took on a co-operative, if occasionally fractious, life of their own. Tommy-*Poilu* relations were an organic representation of two collectives of ordinary people coping with an extraordinary situation. The disaster of 1918 came very close to mortally breaking the relationship between the British and French but even if it had it would not nullify that which had come before.

The role of Foch and Haig is of clear and undeniable importance in winning the war, but so too was the ability, specifically in 1918, of the British and French soldiers to interact with each other and to trust one another, at the very least, to maintain the

ability to fight. The involvement of the Americans at the specific moment of rupture in 1918 probably exacerbated the damage done to Tommy-*Poilu* relations and showed how these relations could be disrupted by third party involvement. The consequence of American involvement and the lack of substantial research into the relations between Anglo-Franco-American soldiers means that it is with the Americans that the next step of this study should lie. As discussed above there were quite marked ideological differences and similarities between the upper echelons of British, French and American government and military command. Just as it was important to study Tommy-*Poilu* relations the Doughboys also now require understanding and examination.

However, beyond the role of the Americans, with the final advance underway the relations between the British and French would go some way to being repaired with the decision to build (or rebuild in the case of the British) monuments to their respective allies commemorating past sacrifices. Some of the traditional divisions and rivalries between British and French seem to have broken down completely even to the stage where, when competition was introduced from the outside, neither side felt comfortable. This may well be the true impact of the previous years culminating in 1918; the moment when the French and British viewed each other as allies, often friends and not rivals. The clear longevity of some of these relations, as mentioned above, means that there could also be firm consequences regarding relations between British and French soldiers during the Second World War. Whether there was a second surge of the Tommy-*Poilu* spirit amongst these men or similar obstacles to those examined in this thesis are questions that may also need future study. As the relationships of those in command positions did not make their way down into the trenches but did have an influence on 'official' relations there is now the distinct possibility that the enduring elements of Tommy-*Poilu* relations may have played an important role in 1939 and 1940.



Beyond this I have shown above how at the very least a spectre of the Tommy-*Poilu* relationship had survived the war and this was true even in the treatment of those who had lost their lives for the two countries. 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 memorial to those who died in the battle. But it is not simply a British cemetery, for behind the huge monument itself lay six hundred soldiers; three hundred British headstones bearing the inscription 'A Soldier of the Great War known unto God' and, alongside them a further three hundred French crosses marked with the word '*Inconnu*'.<sup>21</sup> Six hundred Tommies and *Poilus* lay next to each other as the eternal reminder of what they had done and sacrificed together.

However, the statement from Huguot that opened this conclusion does have a large element of truth to it.<sup>22</sup> For whilst the vestige of Tommy-*Poilu* relations did survive for a time in the inter-war years the relationship was then further changed by the Second World War and the rebuilding of Europe afterwards. Many histories of the First World War that emerged after the 1960s focused on particular national experiences. The wider contexts and roles of the various other countries, be they allied or enemy, were downplayed. For a 'World War' the conflict had become remarkably national in its approach. This is a process which is being reversed now through new inter-national studies of the wider interactions and consequences of the fighting. It is my belief that this study has added to this emerging historiography.

The relations of British and French soldiers throughout the war were rarely understood or even acknowledged by those above them and in the years since have become steadily ignored. In both instances this should not have been the case. The organic and self-directed nature of these Tommy-*Poilu* interactions was probably their greatest strength as it allowed the men to form an understanding on their own terms

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<sup>21</sup> Gavin Stamp, *The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme* (London: Profile Books, 2006)..p.97

<sup>22</sup> See Tombs & Tombs pp.498-9

and at their own speed. In a war of strange and difficult situations the essential success of the Tommy-*Poilu* entente is perhaps the most reassuring. That two nations of people with a history of rivalry and little substantive time to build an understanding could come to form a relationship that worked not only socially but also militarily is a clear triumph. Considering how badly this situation could have gone and how much it could have cost the allies, the fact that it worked in a manner that eventually benefited the war effort is great testament to those men who, through their own efforts, reached out to those strangers stood next to them.

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## Appendix One

### British Soldiers

#### 1.1 1914-1915

**Farrier Quarter-master Sergeant John Andrews** of the 20<sup>th</sup> Hussars, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division.

**Hugh W J Bellew** L Signal Company, Royal Engineers and attached to GHQ.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Henry Bloor** of the Royal Field Artillery. Called up August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Volunteered for service abroad. Gazetted 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt., R.F.A April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1915

**Major Cedrie Lindsay Brereton** of the 68<sup>th</sup> Battery, 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade Royal Field Artillery, 4<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Gunner Joseph Butterworth** of the Royal Garrison Artillery. Would be Killed in Action 17 October 1917.

**Saville W Crowsley** of 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, Royal Horse Artillery.

**Runner R Cude** of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion "The Buffs" (East Kent) Regiment, 55<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 18<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>23</sup>

**NCO E J Cummings** with J Battery, Royal Horse Artillery.

**Corporal Garnet W Durham** of Scottish/Canadian descent serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Canadian Corps, Cyclist 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

**Captain Walter Fyrth** of the Army Veterinary Corps attached to 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, 5<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Percy Arthur Glock** who served with an unidentified Royal Artillery unit during the First World War attached to 36th Division (October – December 1915)

**Harry Gore** serving in the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade (60<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 20<sup>th</sup> Division) (July 1915 – February 1916)

**Lieutenant Cyril Helm**, Royal Army Medical Corps, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Kings own Yorkshire Light Infantry, 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Helm was later promoted to the rank of Captain on 30 March 1915.<sup>24</sup>

**Lieutenant Geoffrey Archibald Loyd**, Scots Guards commanding No.1 Platoon in the Cyclist Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, I Corps.

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<sup>23</sup> Diaries retyped 'word for word' in November 1921. At outbreak of war attempted to join Navy but was turned away because of his 'inability to stomach orders'. Joined the army as a Private on Sept 8<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Helm's diary has, at some point, been transcribed from the original source and as a result it has become difficult to pinpoint entries to exact dates. With this in mind some dates given will be approximate.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Douglas James McDougall**, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of The Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment), 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

**F Mulliss** serving with 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion The Duke of Cambridge's Own, Middlesex Regiment, 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division (until November 1915) followed by 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>25</sup>

**B C Myatt** of 109<sup>th</sup> Battery, 23<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the Royal Field Artillery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

**C R Smith** from 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion "The Buffs", East Kent Regiment, 55<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 18<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Lieutenant Albert V Spencer** (Platoon and Company Commander) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

**Lieutenant F O Stansfield** serving in 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion Liverpool King's Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> City Battalion of the Liverpool Pals, 89<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 30<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>26</sup>

**Lieutenant Lionel Hallam Tennyson (Hon)** of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Rifle Brigade, 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Division. Would later serve as Staff Captain 60<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (20<sup>th</sup> Division).

**Captain W Graham Wallace** Subaltern in the 2/3rd Battalion London Regiment under training in London and South Eastern England (October - December 1914), on garrison duty in Malta (January - April 1915) and the Sudan (April - September 1915) and then on active service as the pioneer battalion of the 29th Division at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli (September - December 1915)

**Anon Soldier #10539**<sup>27</sup> from the 35<sup>th</sup> (Heavy) Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

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<sup>25</sup> Information drawn from his compendium diary *Recollections 1914-18* Chapter 3.

<sup>26</sup> Stansfield collected his diaries and some of his letters home and collated them into a single document. This means events are often repeated (written once for his diaries and then reproduced in his letters) but there are some important differences and expanded elements in each of the two mediums which will be highlighted where necessary.

<sup>27</sup> Number relates to the IDNO from the Imperial War Museum Database

## 1.2 1916

**R Blewitt** who served with the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), 185<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 40<sup>th</sup> Division until August 1916 and then transferred to the 181<sup>st</sup> Brigade RFA, 40<sup>th</sup> Division. Throughout the rest of the war he would serve as Artillery Instructor at Army School at Vaux (until October 1917), then Staff Officer at 42<sup>nd</sup> Divisional HQ (until February 1918), and then finally 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigade RFA, 12<sup>th</sup> Division.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Henry Bloor** of the Royal Field Artillery. He would be gazetted to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant on May 1 1916.

**Captain H F Bursey** of the 18<sup>th</sup> Divisional Ammunition Column.

**Runner R Cude** of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion “The Buffs” (East Kent) Regiment, 55<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 18<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Corporal Garnet W Durham** of Scottish/Canadian descent serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Canadian Corps, Cyclist 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Division until April of 1916 when he then transferred into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisional Cyclist Company.

**Sapper James Phillip Fowler** of the 205<sup>th</sup> (Dundee) Field Company Royal Engineers, 35<sup>th</sup> Division. He would be Killed in Action 23 July 1916.

**1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant L Gameson** was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1916. Served as a Medical Officer throughout the year with the 15<sup>th</sup> Division notably the 45<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance (May - September 1916), the 73<sup>rd</sup> Brigade RFA (September - October 1916), the 71<sup>st</sup> Brigade RFA (October 1916 - October 1918).<sup>28</sup>

**Percy Arthur Glock** who served with an unidentified Royal Artillery unit and was attached to 1<sup>st</sup> Division in January 1916.

**Private J W Graystone** served in the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, East Yorkshire Regiment, 92<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion, 31<sup>st</sup> Division.

**C A Hartley** a Motor Ambulance Driver with the Section Sanitaire Anglaise (SSA)  
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**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Guy Hodgkinson** of the 105<sup>th</sup> Company Machine Gun Corps, 105<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 35<sup>th</sup> Division.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Kenneth C Macardle** serving in the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion Manchester Regiment, 90<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 30<sup>th</sup> Division. Was Killed in Action 9 July 1916.

**F Mulliss** of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion “The Duke of Cambridge’s Own” Middlesex Regiment, 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division.

**C R Smith** from 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion “The Buffs”, East Kent Regiment, 55<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 18<sup>th</sup> Division.

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<sup>28</sup> Gameson’s diaries were first drafted in 1922-23 and then typed up in 1960

**Lieutenant F O Stansfield** serving in 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion Liverpool King's Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> City Battalion of the Liverpool Pals, 89<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 30<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Lieutenant/Captain O P Taylor** Z Heavy Trench Mortar Battery, 40<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Captain W Graham Wallace** serving with the 1/3rd Londons (56th Division) on the Western Front (July 1916 - April 1917).

### **1.3 1917-1918**

**Lance Corporal A J Abraham** of the 8th Battalion, Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment (17th Infantry Brigade, 24th Division)<sup>29</sup>

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant William Henry Bloor** would be Killed in Action on 3 January 1918

**Runner R Cude** of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion "The Buffs" (East Kent) Regiment, 55<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 18<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Albert Cunliffe** who was a member of the R.A.M.C Field Ambulance<sup>30</sup>

**D D Dunnet** who served as a signaller with the 1/17th Battalion (Poplar and Stepney Rifles) London Regiment (140th Brigade, 47th Division) and then with the 2/17th Battalion (89th Brigade, 30th Division) from July - November 1918.

**1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant L Gameson** who spent most of the year in the 71st Brigade RFA before transferring to the 10th Battalion Scottish Rifles from October - December 1918.

**F C Gillman** who served in the Service Sanitaire Anglaise 19.<sup>31</sup>

**Percy Arthur Glock** who served with an unidentified Royal Artillery unit during the First World War attached 1st Division since January 1916

**Harry Gore** who served with the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (100<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 33<sup>rd</sup> Division).

**Lieutenant Ivan R S Harrison** of the 2/8<sup>th</sup> West Yorkshires (62<sup>nd</sup> Division) from 21 January 1918.

**C A Hartley** a Motor Ambulance Driver with the Section Sanitaire Anglaise (SSA) 10

**Alan Johnson** of the 419 Field Company RE (55th Division).<sup>32</sup>

**F Mulliss** of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion "The Duke of Cambridge's Own" Middlesex Regiment, 63<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division.

**Lieutenant Godefroy Skelton** with the 205th Field Company RE (105th Brigade, 35th Division) since November 1917 but would also serve as a Liaison Officer to the 201st Regiment of French Infantry.

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<sup>29</sup> Abraham's records were entitled "1914-1918: Memoirs of a Non-Hero" and were written ca 1973

<sup>30</sup> Cunliffe re-typed his original records in 1919. Records now titled 'My experience as a Soldier and Prisoner'

<sup>31</sup> Gillman is recorded as having the rank 'Group Captain' but this is probably from his service in the RAF during the Second World War.

<sup>32</sup> Like Gillman, the Imperial War Museum records a rank of 'Major' for Johnson but this is probably a result of service in the Second World War.

**Lieutenant/Captain O P Taylor** Z Heavy Trench Mortar Battery, 40<sup>th</sup> Division.

**Hugh Tinsley** whose division and rank are currently unknown.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant W Graham Wallace** who having been wounded in April 1917 was returned to the Western Front in February 1918 with the 9<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Records entitled 'Memoirs of 1914/1918'. The Foreword of which was written in 1935



## Appendix Two

### Chapter Five: French translations

1) D'ailleurs, quand on parle de l'armée britannique, il importe de ne pas oublier qu'elle est un assemblage d'éléments fort divers: Anglais, Ecossais, Gallois, Irlandais, Canadiens, Australiens, Néo-Zélandais, Sud-Africains sont semblablement revêtus de khaki et présentent un extérieur uniforme. Tous sont désignés par le terme général de Britishers. Cependant, grattez la couleur, et vous verrez que le particularisme, le nationalisme, le provincialisme de chacun des corps qui combattent ainsi sous les étendards de l'Empire demeurent extrêmement vivaces. Il faut donc que l'interprète tienne compte de ces distinctions et qu'il règle ses paroles et ses gestes en conséquence.

2) Le goût de l'action énergique, efficace, a pris, chez l'Anglo-Saxon, la ténacité d'un instinct héréditaire, l'étendue d'un caractère national. Aussi, dans le grand combat pour la vie ne subsistent que les forts, les laborieux; les actifs; au contraire les oisifs, les inertes, les timorés, sont éliminés par une sorte de sélection naturelle. Tel est le caractère dominant de tout Anglais et qui explique ses qualités solides.

3) L'Australien est du reste fort discipliné. Il met quelque pointe d'orgueil à dire qu'il l'est même plus que l'Anglais. Est-ce certain? Ce n'est pas le lieu d'apprécier. Il y a toutes les raisons de croire qu'il l'est davantage que le « poilu » français. La différence est des plus grandes : la façon de saluer le chef, de le regarder, de se présenter à lui, de lui adresser la parole. Tous ses gestes indiquent l'obéissance, mais une obéissance consentie librement, réfléchie si l'on peut dire. Ce n'est plus l'obéissance craintive de l'Allemand qui a peur du coup de poing ou des étrivières !

4) 8 août. -Le premier soldat britannique que nous avons enfin pu voir de tout près! Le vrai, l'authentique Tommy, en chair et en os, que nous avons pu tout à notre aise interroger, examiner, palper!

C'était, hier matin, un sergent du corps des « *signallers* », venu pour établir entre notre dépôt d'interprètes et le quartier général britannique au Havre un fil téléphonique direct. Le pauvre bougre! Les innombrables *hand-shakes* qu'il a dû subir! Comment ne l'avons-nous pas rendu fou?

Nous avons inspecté son uniforme dans les moindres détails: la forrage-cap, casquette plate à visière rigide; la courte tunique à col ample, assurant largement la liberté du cou; la culotte; les bandes molletières en drap souple; les robustes chaussures ferrées. Le tout en teinte khaki, d'une extrême simplicité, mais de toute première qualité.

Tommy s'est prêté à cette inspection avec une bonhomie souriante; mais peut-être y avait-il dans ses yeux clairs une petite lueur de malice.

Puis, nous l'avons entraîné vers notre buvette (dans les premières classes, chez les artilleurs) pour lui offrir tournée sur tournée. Quel honneur disputé!

Avec son joli flegme britannique, Tommy a encaissé sans broncher les dix premières tournées, portant à chaque verre, solennellement, notre santé. Mais au dixième verre, il s'est levé tranquillement et a déclaré d'un ton définitif :

-Thanks very much. This will do (Merci beaucoup. ça suffira).

De fait, il était temps qu'il s'en allât

5) J'en ai beaucoup entendu parler par les hommes du Dépôt du Havre où, dit-on, ils ont fait certaines fredaines assez britanniques pendant leur séjour. Au camp de Buville, entre autres, ils consolèrent trop bien pas mal de Havraises du départ des Français et la police dut intervenir pour mettre fin à un scandale assez dégoûtant, plus vraisemblable chez des vieillards que chez des hommes jeunes et sains. Tout ça est bien anglais.

6) Quant à l'Angleterre, eh bien ! on n'y a plus aucune confiance : « ce sont des fainéants, disent les poilus, qui ne sont bons qu'à se promener dans les rues du Havre, courir après les femmes et à manger. Ce sont eux qui profiteront de tout cela !

7) Au lieu de faire la bête de somme de l'Angleterre, qui se fout de nous et manque effrontément à ses engagements, notre intérêt est de s'arranger avec les Boches qui sont des gens merveilleux et pas plus canailles que les vieux ennemis héréditaires et les seuls véritables.

8) Quelle retraite ! Nous savons qu'elle est admirablement conduite par le commandant en chef, le Field-Marshal, Sir John French, par ses deux brillants seconds, Sir Douglas Haig et Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien et, plus près de nous, par le général Gough, commandant notre brigade de cavalerie. Mais à nos yeux d'humbles témoins, c'est un cauchemar terrible, une sorte d'effroyable kaléidoscope. Chaque jour, de nouveaux villages traversés en hâte, chaque jour, un nouveau recul !

9) AVANT cette guerre, tous les officiers de l'armée britannique avaient une origine unique : l'école des gentlemen-cadets. Ecole de Sandhurst, pour l'infanterie et la cavalerie, école de Woolwich, surnommée populairement « la Boutique », pour l'artillerie et le génie.

Ces officiers étaient, pour la plupart, les fils cadets des grandes familles aristocratiques dans lesquelles il est de tradition de donner un enfant à l'armée. Le peuple, certes, les aimait ; et il leur était sincèrement reconnaissant d'assumer ainsi de génération en génération, la tâche ingrate du commandement. La grande masse de la nation, il faut l'avouer, demeurait cependant étrangère aux choses militaires. Par tradition, elle s'intéressait à la marine et cherchait à la connaître ; mais elle restait éloignée de l'armée dans laquelle elle ne voyait, à tort qu'un rouage accessoire de la grande machine nationale.

10) Quand on observe en nombre les officiers britanniques on ne peut manquer d'être frappé de leur extraordinaire similitude d'aspect. Nos Alliés se ressemblent comme des frères. Ils ne se ressemblent pas seulement par la stricte régularité de l'uniforme ; cette ressemblance se retrouve jusque dans les physionomies.

Voyez deux lieutenants français : l'un porte une vareuse du hleu horizon le plus tendre, l'autre (service de l'arrière), l'ancienne tunique de teinte foncée ; l'un arbore le ceinturon anglais en cuir fauve, l'autre se contente du vieux ceinturon noir réglementaire ; l'un a le képi plat dit Saumur couvert du cache, l'autre le képi de forme haute cerclé de deux galons neufs ; l'un est barbu, l'autre n'a sur la lèvre supérieure que l'ombre légère d'une petite moustache « à l'américaine ». Chez nos Alliés, rien de pareil : le « Kitchener », qu'il soit au front ou à l'arrière, est un type invariable répété, sans différence sensible, des milliers et des milliers de fois. Les tuniques khaki, coupées exactement sur le même modèle et sorties pour la plupart de chez le même tailleur, ne se prêtent à aucune nuance de teinte et sont uniformément barrées par la

courroie de la ceinture « Sam Brown » ; la lorrage cap ou casquette plate est non moins réfractaire à la fantaisie ... Et il semble enfin que pour parfaire ce bel ensemble, les visages mêmes de nos Amis soient moulés sur un modèle unique: mêmes traits énergiques, le plus souvent fort réguliers, mêmes mentons impeccablement rasés ... Il y a quelques années, alors que le prince de Galles était lui-même imberbe, les officiers britanniques avaient droit de se raser complètement. Aujourd'hui ils doivent garder la moustache et le prince-capitaine est très fiel de pouvoir, grâce à son duvet de vingt ans, satisfaire à l'ordonnance. Nos Alliés ne portent d'ailleurs que le strict minimum de poil, et cette ombre légère, soigneusement mesurée, ajoute encore à l'uniformité de leur aspect. Il résulte de cette ressemblance une impression de netteté, de correction et d'élégance dont on ne saurait nier l'excellent effet.

11) Nos braves Alliés, chacun le sait, ont deux préoccupations dominantes: faire leur thé et se raser. De ces deux préoccupations, nul danger ne saurait les distraire.

12) Bertrand, qui s'y trouve, prévoit une ère de guerres, avant que l'équilibre ne se rétablisse entre Anglais et Russes, puis entre l'Europe occidentale et les Russes.

13) A ce moment, je reçois un pli : *Les Anglais ont attaqué ce matin. Ils ont enfoncé la première ligne allemande et pris Loos.* La nouvelle court de bouche en bouche, ça vaut un verre d'alcool.

14) Très flegmatique : « Ah, il y a un pli secret qui est arrivé tout à l'heure. De La Morinière a passé par-dessus la tranchée pour le porter au sergent Petit, à côté de moi. Il l'a ouvert, parce qu'on vous croyait tombé. Paraît que les Anglais ont pris huit pièces lourdes et que ça va bien en Champagne. »

15) Déjà, l'avance foudroyante des premiers jours avait pris fin. Nos amis les Anglais étaient accrochés à Thiepval et nous étions butés à Maurepas et à Barleux. Cet arrêt brusque était d'un mauvais augure.

16) Que cette guerre dure trois, quatre ou cinq ans, c'est en quelque sorte devenu maintenant pour lui une question de détail... L'Anglais ne fait qu'une chose à la fois, mais il la fait bien. Avant le conflit il était employé de commerce, boutiquier, ouvrier ou garçon de ferme. Il lui a fallu bien du temps, bien de la réflexion pour se décider à changer de métier. Aujourd'hui c'est fait: il est soldat et il l'est complètement. Dans combien de temps redeviendra-t-il civil? En vérité, il ne pense même pas à poser la question. Qui vivra verra ... S'il avait servi dans l'armée française, Tommy n'aurait certainement pas été de ceux qui, à peine arrivés à la caserne commencent à compter « 730 demain matin! »: Cette flegmatique patience, qualité traditionnelle de sa race, cette imperturbable assurance du succès final de ce qu'il entreprend, est une des meilleures forces de Tommy. Une autre force, non moins importante, est son admirable aptitude physique aux exercices de la guerre. Voyez cent Tommies, voyez-en mille, vous serez frappé de la jeunesse de leur visage, de l'air de fraîcheur et de santé que tous ils présentent. Et, dans l'ensemble, quels gaillards admirablement taillés!

17) Je dirais qu'elle jetait l'argent par les fenêtres, si cette expression n'indiquait pas une idée de désordre et d'intelligence, tandis que les prodigieuses dépenses de l'Angleterre pour ses soldats indiquent, au contraire, une méthode profonde et une

intelligente prévision des nécessités de la guerre. Nos amis et allies ont bien fait les choses, de toutes leurs forces et de toutes leurs richesses.

18) Il n'en reste pas moins que les Anglais sont de braves gars et que si leur couleur kaki est si épatante, nous ferions pas mal de l'adopter.

19) J'étais à l'état-major du général Monroe qui, après avoir commandé les forces anglaises en Orient, est en ce moment en France, à la tête de la première armée anglaise.

Le général Monroe est un chef admirable. Il a été un des bons ouvriers de la bataille de la Marne. [...]

Le général Monroe est bien un type représentatif de la stoïque bravoure de l'armée anglaise. [...] Prés de Verneuil, il rédigeait quelques ordres derrière de grosses meules de paille, quand des obus éclatèrent à côté de lui, couvrant de terre une table improvisée ou étaient étendues des cartes, blessant quelques hommes, démolissant des voitures et mettant un peu d'émotion parmi les soldats anglais. Le général, impassible brusquement se redresse : « Remember you, you are soldiers. Rappelez-vous que vous êtes des soldats », leur dit-il simplement, mais fermement. Le calme se rétablit aussitôt. [...]

### **Appendix Three**

#### **Chapter Six: French translations**

1) « Ici, on parle toujours tres fort d'une offensive generale des Allies, a leur temps et heure. Ce ne sera plus, je crois, bien long. Et tant mieux ! »

« On attend toujours patiemment. Les Russes font de la bonne besogne ; nous, on tient bon. Le mot est : « on les aura. » »

« La Russie commence a bien marcher ; l'Angleterre vu se trouver tres forte. Aussi nous esperons tous on la victoire. »

2) Quand on voit les Territoriaux Francais occuper la tranchee, fondus avec de l'Active Francaise et cela dans le front a britannique, cela vous donne froid et vous emplit de doutes sur la sincerite d'Albion qui colonise deja le Nord, l'Artois, la Normandie a son entier profit Royaume Uni !!!

Je suis de plus en plus sceptique sur toutes les cooperations Anglo-Italo-Serbo-Montenegrotesques dont l'ensemble ne vaut pas une escouade de Français.

Quand ma lettre t'arrivera, dans quelques semaines tu auras sans doute des nouvelles de l'operation qui se prepare de concert avec les Anglais. Reussira-t-elle au gré de nos desires ? Il serait imprudent de fonder dessus des espoires demsurés, mais ce qu'il y a de sur c'est que nous tuerons beaucoup de boches, et comme tout se resume a en massacrer encore 600 a 700 mille – cela avanceras les choses.

3) A ce point de vas, le mouvement irlandais semble avoir eu un effect que ses auteurs n'avient certainement pas prévu.

4) La mort de la LORD KITCHENER a produit une grande impression.

5) Du côté de nos amis les Anglais, ca va bien egalemt. Nous admirons leur tenacité, et l'efficacité de leur artillerie

6) Nos succes sur la Somme ainsi que ceux remportes par les Russes et les Anglais ont ranimé tous les courages, aussi esperet-on que la paix ardemment desiree par tous sera concle avant la fin de l'annee, peut-etre meme avant l'hiver.

7) Les nouvelles continuent d'être bonnes, mais nous sommes aussi les meilleurs eleves de la classe des Allies : c'est toujours nous qui arrivons en tête

8) Nous sommes bien secondés par les Anglais, courageux, qui ont maintenant une armée nombreuse, bien organisée, & ne manquent pas de matériel ni de munitions.

La fraternité d'armes avec l'armée britannique reste toujours complet

Ici, tout marche bien. Les Anglais sont admirables, l'organisation superbe, les services d'aviation splendides.

9) Les hommes (Anglais & Français) fraternisent entre eux ; & beaucoup parmi nos grades qui ont la moindre connaissance de la langue anglaise, cherchent à lier connaissance. Ce qui prouve une fois de plus l'entente cordiale & la bonne harmonie de ces deux peuples.

10) Nos hommes, un peu prevenus contre les Anglais, sont frappés par leur persistance et se livrent maintenant à des réflexions sympathiques qui vont s'accroissant.

La guerre va bien du côté russe, plus vite que chez nous, mais j'espère que Français et Anglais vont reprendre leur marche en avant arrêtée un instant par les intempéries atmosphériques. Quelle gloire pour l'Angleterre, la soumission, le dévouement de toutes ses colonies dans cette crise.

11) Tous les Anglais sont unanimes à reconnaître la haute valeur du peuple français. Hier encore, on me disait ; votre pays est admirable ! Je crois que depuis Verdun surtout, les Français ont beaucoup gagné dans l'admiration des étrangers, et les Anglais qui ont vu nos soldats au feu sont remplis d'admiration pour eux ; je crois aussi que les Anglais ont beaucoup gagné en estime dans l'esprit des Français depuis ces derniers temps, et il est vrai, qu'ils se rendent compte maintenant de ce qu'est la guerre et ils partent au front, non pas pour faire du sport, mais pour y accomplir leur devoir.

12) Le parti socialiste anglais paraît vouloir imposer des conditions à son gouvernement, la solution est peut-être de ce côté.

13) Presque toutes les lettres (environ 75%) venant d'Angleterre, et d'Ecosse, dépeignent la situation économique sous les plus sombres couleurs.

14) La conférence de Versailles diversement interprétée d'outre-mer, aurait eu pour résultat d'affaiblir le moral des Anglais.

15) Presque tous les hommes parlent de l'offensive allemande déclenchée devant les Anglais. On est unanime à déclarer que le choc a été rude ; on ne désespère pas que les Anglais arriveront à les tenir.

16) Quelques notes découragées, et quelques rares mécontentes du peu de résistance des Anglais

17) Les boches ont pris l'offensive sur les Anglais et la bataille est terrible ; nos amis ont été obligés de reculer sous le nombre mais chez nous envoie des renforts et ici on a bien confiance que nous allons les arrêter.

18) Nous avons relevé les Anglais, depuis hier nous ne connaissons pas le repos. C'est la guerre plus terrible que jamais il faut à tout prix arrêter les Boches. Ici chacun est à la hauteur de son devoir, nous nous battons jusqu'au dernier s'il le faut. C'est la guerre en rase campagne, les corps à corps à l'arme blanche deviennent fréquents.

Nous avons été la première Division chargée de protéger la retraite Anglaise, et entre nous, il était temps que les Français arrivent ! Maintenant cela va mieux, mais je

t'avoue que j'ai eu peur que cela tourne mal ! J'ai revécu les heures terribles de 1914 pendant 8 jours, sans dormir, à peine manger.

En ce moment nous sommes sur le champ de Bataille de la Somme ou l'incapacité des Anglais nous a appelés. Nous retablirons certainement la situation, pour nous cela ne fait aucun doute, mais je t'assure qu'il était grand temps que les Français arrivent car les Anglais étaient tout à fait hors de combat. La bataille se déroule en rase campagne ; plus de retranchements ni de défenses accessoires et c'est bien à la bravoure et à l'initiative des Français, si le Boche est aujourd'hui arrêté.

Contrairement à ce que je croyais, (les journaux abusant de ma crédulité) les soldats Anglais que nous remplaçons sont absolument des dégoutants, sales, ivrognes et abandonnant bien plus de matériel et de munitions que nous hommes

19) Quelques critiques un peu sévères à l'adresse des Anglais au sujet de leur recul devant l'offensive Boche.

20) A propos du recul des Anglais, quelques hommes constatent avec amertume que la résistance Française est toujours nécessaire et coûteuse

21) Une marque de dénigrement pour les Anglais.

22) mais il ne faut pas nous plaindre, à côté de ces malheureux qui sont dans la Somme, ou ces salauds d'Anglais n'ont pas été capables de les arrêter sans notre intervention. C'est comme les Américains ça veut faire la guerre, mais ce n'est pas pour se faire tuer. Donc, c'est toujours le Français qui est la meilleure chair à canon. Paraît-il. Il faudra bien tout de même que ça finisse un jour.

23) Les Anglais sont braves, mais leurs états-majors ne semblent pas encore au point

24) Je crois que sans les Français, les alliés seraient maintenant dans de beaux draps. On ne saura jamais trop, ni même exactement ce que nous avons fait.

25) Ce qui est dégoûtant c'est le recul des Anglais dans le Nord. Tu ne dis que les boches sont arrêtés ! Ah bien oui, les journaux d'hier font pressentir l'abandon d'Ypres, Dunkerque et peut-être Calais, les Anglais sont menacés d'un désastre incurie.

26) Nous avons le commandement unique, mais il reste encore beaucoup à faire, il faut que les Anglais augmentent leurs divisions et se sacrifient comme nous l'avons fait et le début

27) Quel dommage que les Anglais qui si sont braves soient si mal commandés, s'ils n'étaient pas si orgueilleux, s'ils voulaient bien s'amalgamer dans nos Divisions, la victoire serait à nous demain

28) Il n'y a pas de doute, les Tommies ne sont pas comparables aux poilus.

29) Si nous sommes ici, c'est la faute des Anglais, ils se sont sauvés sans rien, même pas leur fusil, ni canon, rien.

30) Les Anglais ont reçu une bonne purge !

Nous sommes sur le point de repousser les vrais Anglais puisqu'ils ne veulent plus rien faire et dire que l'on fait la guerre à cause d'eux, si je ne les estimais pas avant, je les deteste maintenant et je crois que beaucoup sont comme moi

31) J'ai remarqué que le soldat anglais n'est pas très prudent quand il est sur le champ de bataille ; il est trop téméraire et risqué, et il se fait tuer ainsi souvent sans nécessité. C'est une remarque que je fis au début de la guerre. Il n'en est pas de même de soldat français, qui est téméraire le cas échéant, mais très prudent ; je vous donnerai un exemple : un soldat français n'allumera jamais un grand feu pour préparer son café ou thé quand il se trouve en vue des boches ; c'est le contraire dans l'armée anglaise, aussi sont-ils marmites

32) Nous avons les Anglais ici. Ils ne valent pas les Américains.

33) L'armée américaine commence à compter – depuis la retraite de St.Quentin, la sympathie entre Français et Britanniques a faibli.

Les Américains commencent à faire figure ; leur nombre augmente chaque jour. Il sera commode de faire un mélange de leurs troupes avec les nôtres ; car à part le fusil, ils ont le même canon ce qui simplifie la revitaillement.

34) Nos alliés Anglais et Américains sont merveilleux ils ont dépassé nos espérances.  
(26 extraits du même genre)

35) Eloges des Américains.

Les brillants succès obtenus au cours de notre dernière offensive la vaillance des troupes américaines laissent espérer une fin prochaine de la guerre par la victoire de nos armes.

36) « La demande adressée par l'Allemagne au Président Wilson est une pure insulte à l'Angleterre et à la France. L'effort américain est immense, mais il n'est pas toute la guerre. Tandis que la France et l'Angleterre souhaitent la paix, on voit le sourire du Kaiser envoyant sa note à Wilson. Les Français et les Anglais vont répondre par les canons du maréchal Foch. »

« Les Américains aussi veulent la fin de la guerre ; nous souhaitons rentrer dans nos foyers, mais nous serions tout-à-fait déçus si la guerre n'était pas portée sur le sol allemand. L'Allemagne doit payer ses crimes. »

37) Que pensez-vous des Américains ? Leurs succès sont très bons mais je pense qu'après la guerre ils se vanteront de tout ce qu'ils ont accompli, oubliant la très grande part des Français et des Anglais faits depuis longtemps avant eux. Les Américains ne pensaient jamais entrer dans cette guerre. Ils prennent tous les honneurs.

38) Eloges du soldat américain un peu moins nombreux. Les Anglais marchent bien

39) Grande camaraderie avec les Anglais



Nous marchons sous les ordres d'une armée anglaise, aussi faut-il en faire des gestes pour se faire comprendre de ces braves Tommies; mais en general ce sont de bons camarades, ils savent rendre services

40) L'Angleterre doit vibrer d'enthousiasme à la lecture des succes de ses enfants et les sombres heures de defaillances qu'elle a connues sont rachetées maintenant pour elle.

41) Les Anglais ont été tres chics à Cambrai. Ils sont entrés avec les drapeaux francais et non Anglais et à Lille. Ils ont contourné la ville pour laisser le temps à un régiment Lillois d'entrer le 1<sup>er</sup>. C'est faire la guerre en gentlemen.

42) Que chose nous a particulièrement touchés : c'est le très delicate attention des troupes anglaises qui pour autres dans Cambrai ont déployé le drapeau français. La geste a son dans et a une double signification ; mieux que n'importe quel discours, il dit que nous sommes tous les soldats d'une même cause et d'une même armee. Puis aussi il dit que les Anglais ont repris Louai au nom des Français et c'est de cela surtout que je les remerois, car nous sommes tous frères non seulement d'armes, mais de sentiments. Ce sont la des choses que les Allemands ne saurient comprendre.