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**The men who planned the war**  
**A study of the Staff of the British Army on the Western Front 1914-1918**

Harris, Paul Martin

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# **THE MEN WHO PLANNED THE WAR**

**A study of the Staff of the British Army  
on the Western Front 1914-1918**

Paul Harris

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2013

King's College London

# Abstract

The historiography of the First World War has produced few systematic studies of the staff officers of the British army on the Western Front. The work of the staff and their development during the war has largely been overshadowed by the debate over the quality of generalship. As a consequence the picture of the command function is incomplete. This thesis aims to fill the gap in understanding through a detailed analysis of the characteristics of the staff and their evolution over four years of war. It will evaluate changes in the profile of the staff and assess the implications for command performance. The staff will be subjected to scrutiny over several strands of analysis including training, staff duties, origins and experience, career paths and turnover and the differences evident between formations. The research will also explore how the staff addressed the considerable challenges that confronted them to emerge as part of a war-winning army. This study will refute the popular view that the staff were largely incompetent and ignorant of front-line conditions.

# Contents

	Page	
<i>List of figures</i>	4	
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	5	
<i>Abbreviations</i>	6	
Introduction	The Missing Element	8
Chapter One	Origins, Duties and Training	39
Chapter Two	The Staff go to War	76
Chapter Three	The Life of the Staff	112
Chapter Four	Wartime Learning and Experience	153
Chapter Five	The Changing Staff	191
Chapter Six	Teams and Careers	236
Conclusion	Setting the Record Straight	280
Biographical Notes		295
Appendices		300
Bibliography		331

## *List of Figures*

1.	G staff structure	28
2.	Career paths of Beddington and Braine	94
3.	Total G posts each year-end	193
4.	Total G, A & E posts each year-end	193
5.	G, A & E staff posts across Army, Corps and Division each year-end	194
6.	Total staff – all branches and all levels	196
7.	Percentage of psc officers on the G staff by year	199
8.	Number of new joiners with psc on G staff by year	200
9.	Percentage of G staff with psc by grade	208
10.	Changing G Staff – Percentage of regular officers by year	211
11.	Number of regular officers on G staff of six regular divisions	213
12.	Number of regulars on G staff of selected Territorial and New Army divisions	214
13.	G Staff by regimental type	242
14.	G staff with pre-war battle experience	244
15.	Average age of G staff by year	245
16.	‘Staff pyramid’ – total G staff that served at each grade	254

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## *Abbreviations*

A	Adjutant Staff branch
ADC	Aide de Camp
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BGGGS	Brigadier-General General Staff
BoL	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BM	Brigade Major
CCC	Churchill College, Cambridge
CDS	Central Distribution Service
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CGS	Chief of General Staff
CIGS	Chief of Imperial General Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
CRA	Commander Royal Artillery
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
FSR	Field Service Regulations
G	General Staff branch
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOCRA	General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery
GQG	Grand Quartier Général
GS	General Staff
GSO 1	General Staff Officer Grade One
GSO 2	General Staff Officer Grade Two
GSO 3	General Staff Officer Grade Three
HQ	Headquarters
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
JSCSC	Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham
LCUL	Liddle Collection, University of Leeds
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London

MC	Military Cross
MGGS	Major-General General Staff
NAM	National Army Museum, Chelsea
NLS	National Library Scotland
Psc	Passed Staff College
Q	Quartermaster Staff branch
QMG	Quartermaster General
Qs	Qualified Staff
QUC	Queen's University, Canada
RA	Royal Artillery
RE	Royal Engineers
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RMA	Royal Military Academy
SC	Staff Captain
SS	Stationary Service
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
VC	Victoria Cross



# Introduction

## The Missing Element

The work of the staff officers of the British army on the Western Front during the First World War has courted much controversy. Some commentators have held them responsible for the mismanagement of the war effort and the profligate loss of British lives in futile offensives.<sup>1</sup> In 1915, a Liberal peer remarked upon criticism levelled at the staff by the Press:

our Staff in France is larger than any Staff in the world's history, and that the Staff has been built up very largely not on account of the military records of the men put on it, but from family and other considerations. These newspapers allege that the Staff work has been bad, that over and over again victory has been stopped because of the badness of the Staff work.<sup>2</sup>

The staff have often been characterised as arrogant, remote and out of touch with the realities of the front line. Such views have developed as part of a 'cultural' rather than a military assessment of the staff. Their function and role in the war effort has been the target of much opprobrium but little systematic study. This has painted an incomplete picture of the command function. As Brian Bond observed, 'Our understanding of the quality of generalship and the performance of units and formations will be seriously flawed without systematic studies of the staff and staff work from brigade major to the chief of staff at GHQ'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some examples are: A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.93-97; T. Travers, *How the War was Won: Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front, 1917-18* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 175-182; John Keegan's quote, 'that hideously unattractive group, the British generals of the First World War' in J. Terraine, 'British Military Leadership in the First World War' in P. Liddle, *Home Fires and Foreign Fields, British Social and Military Experience in the First World War* (London: Brassey's, 1985), pp. 39-51. A good summary of the 'disillusionment' that set in after the war can be found in G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001), pp. 7-12.

<sup>2</sup> Speech by Lord St Davids, House of Lords, *Hansard* 16 November 1915 v20 p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> B. Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 96.

This research seeks to fill these gaps in current understanding by undertaking a detailed investigation of the characteristics of the staff and their evolution over the course of the war. It will refute the popular view, enshrined in Joan Littlewood's 1960s theatre production *Oh What a Lovely War* and the depiction of the staff officer Captain Darling in the 1980s television series *Blackadder Goes Forth*, which has portrayed the staff as incompetent, isolated, and indulged.<sup>4</sup> Academic criticism, voiced by scholars such as Travers and Samuels, has focused upon fundamental problems with the nature of the British command system.<sup>5</sup> They concluded that an inflexible, hierarchical structure impaired the flow of information, hindered learning and stymied initiative. These views will be critically assessed in the light of the considerable challenges that confronted the staff and their emergence as part of a war-winning army. The duties undertaken by the staff and how they operated in the field will be examined together with the career paths of selected officers.

Staff officers played a critical role in the military leadership team. Richard Holmes and Ian Beckett have highlighted the importance of the relationship between a commander and his staff officers.<sup>6</sup> They stood at the apex of the command team and could have a significant influence over the military success of a formation. The effectiveness of the staff was germane to the outcome of events in the front line but their contribution has largely been overshadowed by the debate over generalship. As

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<sup>4</sup> *Oh What a Lovely War* was a musical developed by Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop ensemble. It premiered at the Theatre Royal Stratford East in March 1963. *Blackadder Goes Forth* was a BBC Television comedy written by Richard Curtis and Ben Elton, first screened in 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Travers, *How the War was Won*, pp. 175-182; T. Travers, *The Killing Ground* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), pp. 250-262 and T. Travers, 'A particular style of command; Haig and GHQ, 1916-1918', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, 3 (1987), pp. 363-76.

<sup>6</sup> R. Holmes, *Tommy, The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 231-238; I. Beckett and S. Corvi, *Haig's Generals* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2006).

Dan Todman has pointed out, most research has focused upon the competence of commanding generals rather than the characteristics of the staff that supported them.<sup>7</sup>

Many memoirs produced by front-line troops portrayed staff officers in a less than flattering light. One junior artillery officer stated, ‘the Staff had not the remotest idea of what conditions were like in the line’ and ‘never went further than at the most Brigade HQ’.<sup>8</sup> Major-General A.J. Trythall argued, ‘The image of the pampered staff officer in World War One has coloured attitudes to the staff ever since together with class based attitudes towards those with inky fingers’.<sup>9</sup> These views have continued to shape public understanding and serve to perpetuate much of the popular mythology surrounding the First World War. This outlook has been exemplified by staff officers depicted in immaculate tailored uniforms experiencing a war ‘that had little to do with mud and blood and rain and cold’.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, a revisionist viewpoint has emerged acknowledging the formidable challenges faced by the senior command of the British army in fighting a continental war on an industrial scale.<sup>11</sup> One of the most critical issues was the shortage of experienced staff officers. As Major-General J.F.C. Fuller noted during the war, ‘our weak point is our Staffs not the men’.<sup>12</sup> He added that it was impossible to think of a General Staff inaugurated only nine years ago on the basis of six

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<sup>7</sup> D. Todman, ‘The Grand Lamasery revisited: General Headquarters on the Western Front 1914-1918’ in G. Sheffield and D. Todman (eds), *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army’s Experience 1914-18* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004), pp. 39-71.

<sup>8</sup> G.P. MacClellan to Edmonds, 15 October 1936, CAB45/136, TNA cited by S. Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-19, Defeat into Victory* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> A.J. Trythall, ‘J.F.C. Fuller: Staff Officer Extraordinary’ in D. French & B. Holden Reid (eds) *British General Staff—Reform and Innovation* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 143-158.

<sup>10</sup> A. Lambert, *Unquiet Souls; The Indian Summer of the British Aristocracy 1880-1918* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 175. For a more extreme example of the genre see Preface to B.S. Barnes, *This Righteous War* (Huddersfield: Richard Netherwood, 1990) – quoted in F. Davies & G. Maddocks, *Bloody Red Tabs, General Officer Casualties of the Great War 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> For an assessment of the challenges faced by Britain before the outbreak of war see W. Philpott, ‘The General Staff and the Paradoxes of Continental War’ in French and Holden Reid, *British General Staff*, pp. 95-111 and Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp. 75-104.

<sup>12</sup> Major-General J.F.C. Fuller to mother 27 March 1918, Fuller Papers IV/3/228, LHCMA cited by Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 34.

Divisions to provide enough Staff Officers for sixty Divisions. Fuller concluded that, ‘to talk of 25 Corps is to talk like a madman or a fool’ because it had ‘taken our German friends 40 years to make 25 Corps’.<sup>13</sup> The British army possessed insufficient trained staff officers in 1914 to deal with the demands of a large-scale conflict. There was only a limited pool of graduates from the Staff Colleges. Officers were rotated between command and staff appointments.<sup>14</sup> As the war progressed and the army expanded, the demand for staff officers grew. New recruits had to be trained on the job. With no experience in the management of a mass army, commanders and their staff struggled.

The staff function in the British army was faced with a range of disadvantages it was forced to tackle whilst fighting a war. The challenge of directing a mass army during this period should not be underestimated. As William Philpott has pointed out: ‘Operating these slow, cumbersome lethal machines, which combined the communications technology of the nineteenth century with the killing power of the twentieth, was not a simple business’.<sup>15</sup> That business grew in complexity over the course of the war. The staff faced the daunting task of working with a rapidly expanding army engaged in a war of tactical and technical innovation. This thesis will chart the evolution of the staff as it endeavoured to come to terms with these issues and achieve final victory.

There have been few detailed assessments of the role and characteristics of the staff of the British army during the First World War. Until relatively recently their work had mostly been limited to footnotes in the study of commanders or defined by

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 224.

<sup>15</sup> W. Philpott, *Bloody Victory, The Sacrifice on the Somme* (London: Little Brown, 2009), p. 606.

the view they were incompetent and isolated.<sup>16</sup> This outlook has been challenged by the work of contemporary historians such as Brian Bond, Brian Holden Reid, Ian Beckett and Simon Robbins who have examined how the staff prepared for war and their role within the command structure.<sup>17</sup> Charles Messenger and Richard Holmes have shed light on the work of the staff in the field and the conditions they faced.<sup>18</sup> James Beach has examined the work and development of British intelligence during the war, while Dan Todman reviewed the evolution of GHQ.<sup>19</sup> Recent research has examined the careers of selected senior staff officers and their role as part of a command team.<sup>20</sup> While these studies have paved the way, further work is needed to develop a better understanding of the wider staff and their contribution to military planning.

The stigma attached to the staff took hold soon after the end of the war when first-hand accounts of events on the Western Front began to appear. The majority of them depicted the staff as a detached group, blithely unaware of conditions in the trenches. Works such as Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*,<sup>21</sup> Harold Macmillan's *Winds of Change 1914-1939*,<sup>22</sup> Guy Chapman's *A Passionate*

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<sup>16</sup> Criticism of the staff can be found throughout the historiography. For some colourful examples see W.S. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* Volume II (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1923); D.L. George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George Volume II* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1938); B. Gardner, *The Big Push* (London: Cassell, 1961); A. Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961); Taylor, *The First World War*; E. Hiscock, *The Bells of Hell Go Ting-A-Ling-A-Ling* (London: Arlington Books, 1976), p. 92 and J. Laffin, *British Butchers and Bunglers of World War One* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> B. Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College 1854-1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972); French and Holden Reid, *British General Staff*; I. Beckett and S. Corvi, *Haig's Generals*; Robbins, *British Generalship*, pp. 34-50.

<sup>18</sup> Holmes, *Tommy*, pp. 224-242; C. Messenger, *Call to Arms, The British Army 1914-18* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2005), pp. 335-366.

<sup>19</sup> J. Beach, 'British Intelligence and the German Army 1914-18', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University College London, 2004); Todman, 'Grand Lamasary'.

<sup>20</sup> See Beckett and Corvi, *Haig's Generals* or D. Zabecki (ed) *Chief of Staff, the Principal Officers Behind History's Great Commanders* Volumes 1 and 2 (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> E. Blunden, *Undertones of War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1928), p. 197.

<sup>22</sup> H. Macmillan, *Winds of Change 1914-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1966).

*Prodigality*<sup>23</sup> and Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*<sup>24</sup> all took the view that staff bungling caused many unnecessary casualties. Blunden described an attack in which he took part in July 1917 as 'fixed by the staff much earlier than the infantry wanted or thought suitable'.<sup>25</sup> Antipathy towards the staff was typified by Chapman's description of the 'fierce resentment when brass hats descended from their impersonal isolation to strafe platoon and company commanders for alleged shortcomings in the line'.<sup>26</sup> Former soldiers paid little respect to the work of staff officers. The novelist Howard Spring, a GHQ clerk who worked for the staff, wrote in his memoirs, 'There is a tendency to belittle staff officers, to sneer at GHQ as an aviary of strutting birds adorned in bright useless plumage'.<sup>27</sup> One cynical battalion commander stated, 'all the shell shocked idiots of the British Empire were put to do staff work'.<sup>28</sup> Robert Cude, a battalion runner, expressed his contempt for the staff in his diary when he described the 'infantryman's lot in wartime' as being 'treated as less than nothing by big wigs in scarlet who direct operations without taking a man's share of the burden'.<sup>29</sup>

The wartime memoir of Captain J.C. Dunn graphically illustrated the perceived gulf between staff officers and front line troops.<sup>30</sup> Dunn contrasted the comfortable living conditions at Corps HQ with the spartan billets of ordinary soldiers and pointed to the difficulties of attaching staff officers to infantry battalions in the quiet winter months as half of them were away on leave. The influential journalist Philip Gibbs, who reported on the war from France, played a significant role in

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<sup>23</sup> G. Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1933).

<sup>24</sup> R. Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Cape, 1929), pp. 121-139. See also S. Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1930).

<sup>25</sup> Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality*, p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> H. Spring, *In the Meantime* (London: Constable & Co, 1942), p. 111.

<sup>28</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel A.J. Richardson to J.E. Edmonds, 24 May 1930, CAB45/137, TNA – quoted in Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Taken from the Diary of Private Robert Cude, 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Buffs (East Kent) Regiment, 18<sup>th</sup> Division, IWM – quoted in M. Brown, *The Western Front* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1993), p. 190.

<sup>30</sup> J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew* (London: Jane's, 1987).

creating a negative image of the staff. His book, *The Realities of War*, described the sense of bitterness felt by troops towards the staff, 'which made men attack impossible positions'.<sup>31</sup> Gibbs lambasted the Staff College for the inefficiency of its training which resulted in staff officers issuing conflicting or impractical orders to front-line units. Various examples of inadequate preparation or botched planning for an assault cited by those with first-hand experience of the war laid the foundations for a negative view of the staff to develop. What most of these accounts failed to mention were the operations that benefitted from competent and efficient staff work. As Brian Bond remarked, the proficient and professional work undertaken by staff officers tended to be taken for granted and went unrecorded while errors received the glare of publicity.<sup>32</sup>

This negative picture was compounded by Fuller's opinions. As a senior staff officer who dealt regularly with General Headquarters [GHQ] he was well placed to observe how the staff there went about their business.<sup>33</sup> His memoirs highlighted the isolation of GHQ with its 'monkish' atmosphere and inability to embrace change. According to Fuller, GHQ had 'little or no contact with reality'.<sup>34</sup> This view chimed with the sentiments expressed by some front-line soldiers lending further weight to the notion that staff officers were ignorant of the harsh realities of the war. Fuller may have had a point but his critical opinions were heavily influenced by frustration over what he saw as GHQ's reluctance to promote the use of tanks.

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<sup>31</sup> P. Gibbs, *The Realities of War* (London: William Heineman, 1920), p. 37. The relationship between Haig and the Press was never a happy one. See S. Badsey, *The British Army in Battle and Its Image 1914-18* (London: Continuum, 2009) which argues that GHQ failed to manage its image during the war.

<sup>32</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, pp. 304-5.

<sup>33</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1936).

<sup>34</sup> Fuller, *Unconventional Soldier*, p. 142. For more information on the way criticism of GHQ and the senior command developed see K. Simpson, 'The Reputation of Sir Douglas Haig' in B. Bond, *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp. 141-162.

One of the first historians to reinforce the theme of the incompetent staff officer was Sir Basil Liddell Hart in the *Real War*.<sup>35</sup> Both Liddell Hart and Fuller saw themselves as modernists in the military sphere in direct opposition to the conservative generals of the First World War. A former infantry officer on the Western Front, Liddell Hart became highly critical of the way the British army had fought the war. He argued that senior staff officers were unaware of front line conditions as they seldom visited, which fostered deluded optimism in the ability of troops to mount attacks.<sup>36</sup> Liddell Hart saw command as a heroic function and believed that staff organisations only served to hamper it. He failed to acknowledge the critical role played by the staff in the management of a mass army. Despite these flaws, his study set the tone for the popular understanding that the generals and their staff had proved incompetent. As one historian recently commented, ‘the shadow of the *Real War* continues to obscure the light’.<sup>37</sup>

In his publications *The Killing Ground* and *How the War was Won*, Tim Travers undertook a more considered analysis of the quality of commanders and staff officers.<sup>38</sup> Travers highlighted the inability of senior officers within the Army to come to grips with the war. Insularity combined with an outmoded hierarchical structure led to the army waging a hidden internal war and a ‘real’ external war. He pointed to a power vacuum in the command function and accused the staff of being ill informed resulting in poor planning. Other historians such as Paddy Griffith and Peter Simkins have cast serious doubts upon these conclusions since substantive evidence has been

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<sup>35</sup> B. Liddell Hart, *The Real War 1914-1918* (London: Faber, 1930).

<sup>36</sup> Liddell Hart, *Real War*, p. 343.

<sup>37</sup> H. Strachan, ‘The Real War’: Liddell Hart, Cruttwell and Falls’ in Bond, *First World War and Military History*. See also B. Bond, ‘Liddell Hart and the First World War’ in B. Bond, *Look to Your Front, Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), pp. 13-24.

<sup>38</sup> Travers, *How the War was Won*; Travers, *The Killing Ground* and Travers, ‘Haig and GHQ’.



uncovered for tactical innovation, the use of new technology and the development of a learning process within the army.<sup>39</sup>

Initially accepted at face value, historians have sought to establish the origins of the critical view of the staff that prevailed until recently. One commentator observed that the gap between the planners and participants, between the 'safe' and 'endangered' was exacerbated on the Western Front due to the supposed country-house living of those housed at headquarters.<sup>40</sup> Trythall asserted that the establishment of the general staff cut across the hierarchy of the regimental system that formed the backbone of the army.<sup>41</sup> This led to unpopularity based upon the perception that the staff enjoyed unwarranted privilege and possessed skills of little military value.

A similar view was adopted by Gordon Corrigan but he argued that such contempt was rarely directed at brigade or divisional staffs as regimental officers tended to enjoy closer relations with them.<sup>42</sup> Staff officers at Corps and GHQ were more likely to bear the brunt of regimental rancour. Distance from the staff was even more pronounced among ordinary soldiers and many memoirs reflected a keenly felt antipathy. Robbins observed that the main source of friction was young, junior staff officers who, despite their low rank, wore the red tabs of the staff and exhibited a superior manner.<sup>43</sup> Such was the divisive nature of the red tabs that in the Second World War their use was revised, permitting only full colonels and higher ranks to

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<sup>39</sup> P. Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the Hundred Days, 1918' in P. Griffith, *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), pp. 50-51 and P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 192-200.

<sup>40</sup> P. Scott, 'The Staff: The Myth? The Reality?' in *Stand To*, The Journal of the Western Front Association (15) (1985), pp. 703-751.

<sup>41</sup> Trythall, 'Fuller', p. 146.

<sup>42</sup> G. Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2003), p. 210.

<sup>43</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 46.

sport them.<sup>44</sup> Keith Simpson summed matters up neatly when he concluded, ‘Unfortunately, the country-house lifestyle of many generals and their staffs and the incestuous nature of their self-promotion did not endear them to the regimental soldier’.<sup>45</sup> Niall Barr has pointed out that heavy losses in 1914 led the British to restrict staff visits to the front line.<sup>46</sup> It was the genesis of the divide that developed between staff and soldiers. This research will question the veracity of claims that staff officers were a privileged group sheltered from the dangers of the war.

A counterpoint to this critical perception of the staff can be found in their own memoirs. During the inter-war decades, recollections of former staff officers such as Major Frank Fox, Brigadier-General John Charteris and Colonel W.N. Nicholson were published which formed a testament to the essential work undertaken at GHQ by a group of dedicated and committed staff.<sup>47</sup> These narrative accounts provided useful information about the work undertaken by the staff at GHQ but suffered from a lack of critical analysis. Accounts from former staff officers such as Sir Anthony Eden, Lord Wavell and Lord Moyne detailed the everyday work undertaken by staff officers in the lower formations.<sup>48</sup> These depictions are notable for providing an insight into the practical daily challenges faced by staff officers in the front line and represent a stark contrast to the pampered image all too frequently portrayed in the historiography.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> K. Simpson, ‘The Officers’ in I. Beckett and K. Simpson, *A Nation in Arms; A social study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 63-98.

<sup>46</sup> N. Barr, ‘Command in the Transition From Mobile to Static Warfare, August 1914 to March 1915’ in Sheffield and Todman, *Command and Control on the Western Front*, pp. 13-38.

<sup>47</sup> F. Fox, *GHQ (Montreuil-Sur-Mer)* (London: P. Allan and Co, 1920), J. Charteris, *At GHQ* (London: Cassell, 1931) and W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines, an account of the administrative staff work of the British army 1914-18* (London: Cape, 1939).

<sup>48</sup> A. Eden, *Another World 1897-1917* (London: Allen Lane, 1976); J. Connell, *Wavell, Scholar and Soldier* (London: Collins, 1964); B. Bond and S. Robbins (eds), *Staff Officer: The Diaries of Walter Guinness (First Lord Moyne) 1914-1918* (London: Leo Cooper, 1987). See also D. Fraser, *Alan Brooke* (London: Harper Collins, 1982) for a brief account of Alan Brooke’s early career as a staff officer

The significance of staff work to the troops in the field was outlined by General Charles ('Tim') Harington, regarded by many as the outstanding senior staff officer of his generation. In Harington's view, staff officers at division level and above could have a critical influence upon lower formations and the troops themselves.<sup>49</sup> He pointed to the culture fostered within his own formation, Second Army, which ensured the staff worked closely with the troops and shared a common purpose. Harington blamed the absence of 'a General Staff doctrine' for this ethos not being replicated in other formations.<sup>50</sup>

A discordant note was sounded by the memoirs of former staff officer, Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery who argued some forty years after the war that the higher staffs were out of touch with regimental officers and front line troops.<sup>51</sup> This claim suggested that Montgomery had been seduced by the myths perpetrated about the war that cast his own achievements as a general in a better light. In contrast, his letters from the Western Front struck a very different tone.<sup>52</sup> Memoirs that incorporated the hindsight of experiences in the Second World War should be viewed with caution. The later conflict tended to be seen as the epitome of 'good command' compared with the so-called errors committed in the First World War.

One of the first dissenting voices to challenge the orthodoxy of callous commanders and inept staff officers was John Terraine in the 1960s. He offered a radically different view, describing the staff as a 'remarkable fusion of the best

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<sup>49</sup> C. Harington, *Tim Harington Looks Back* (London: John Murray, 1940).

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 36 – letter from Harington to Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson 11 July 1918, Maxse Papers 69/57/11, IWM. For insight on Harington as a staff officer see J. Marshall-Cornwall, *Haig as Military Commander* (London: Batsford, 1973), pp. 230-231.

<sup>51</sup> B. Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein* (London: Collins, 1958).

<sup>52</sup> Viscount Montgomery, Correspondence 1914-18, Montgomery Papers BLM 1, IWM.

available talent'.<sup>53</sup> According to Terraine, errors and breakdowns in staff work were probably caused by fatigue due to over-work rather than the blithe incompetence for which the staffs were universally blamed.<sup>54</sup> He stressed the challenges they faced in what had become an industrial war marking a transformation of warfare. It was a departure from the previous emphasis on 'internal factors' towards an assessment of the 'external factors' that affected the staff.

Redemption for the staff has occurred in the form of contemporary scholarship arguing they experienced a 'learning curve' in the management of a mass army. In their landmark study *Fire-Power*, Sheldon Bidwell and Dominick Graham acknowledged the work of the staff and the issues they faced.<sup>55</sup> They testified to the effectiveness of the pre-war staff training and the capacity of the staff to adapt. The idea of improvement through experience subsequently outlined by Griffith amongst others has gained considerable currency and been applied to many facets of the British military effort on the Western Front.<sup>56</sup> In an article that assessed the performance of British divisions during the summer of 1918, Simkins debunked the popular image of troops being slaughtered in frontal assaults.<sup>57</sup> He maintained that after-action reports and war diaries clearly demonstrate how officers analysed and evaluated battles in order to effect future improvement.

Another prominent proponent of the learning process, Gary Sheffield, advocated that in general, staff work underwent a distinct improvement in 1917/18.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> J. Terraine, *Douglas Haig: the Educated Soldier* (London: Hutchinson, 1963). For a balanced account of the war from this period see C. Falls, *The First World War* (London: Longmans, 1960).

<sup>54</sup> J. Terraine, *The Smoke and the Fire, Myths and Anti-Myths of War 1861-1945* (London: Leo Cooper, 1980), p. 177.

<sup>55</sup> S. Bidwell and D. Graham, *Fire-Power, British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1905* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982).

<sup>56</sup> Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, pp. 192-200.

<sup>57</sup> Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast?', pp. 50-51.

<sup>58</sup> Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, pp. 258-263 and G. Sheffield, 'The Australians at Pozieres' in French and Holden Reid *British General Staff*, pp. 112-126. See also, G. Sheffield and G. Till, *The Challenges of High Command, the British Experience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 15-25.

He asserted that the Battle of the Somme in 1916 marked the start of a steep learning curve for British command and control. A comparable thesis was outlined by Robbins who maintained that the rapid expansion of the army left it woefully short of the trained staff officers needed for administration and management.<sup>59</sup> This lack of experienced staff led to many of the mistakes made between 1915 and 1917. His central argument was that the army recognised this problem and took corrective action.

Further evidence for an improvement in staff work during the last two years of the war was highlighted in Andy Simpson's work on Corps command.<sup>60</sup> He delineated the critical role played by the staff at Corps level in planning operations and traced the progression of the staff into a highly skilled function by 1918. Simpson made the case that as artillery grew to dominate the war the role of the staff in preparing these attacks assumed greater importance. This theme was perpetuated by the work of Jonathan Bailey and Todman who both emphasised the contribution of more effective staff planning to the British victories of 1918.<sup>61</sup>

Others took a very different view. In sharp contrast to this picture of a progressive staff undergoing a learning process, scholars such as Travers and Samuels saw the command structure of the British army as conservative and inflexible. Travers argued that the British staff, unlike their German counterparts, failed to learn and harness technological changes to wage a new form of warfare from 1916 onwards.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*.

<sup>60</sup> A. Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006) and A. Simpson, 'British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918' in Sheffield and Todman, *Command and Control*, pp. 97-118.

<sup>61</sup> J. Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of Modern Warfare' in M. Knox and W. Murray (eds) *The Dynamics of Military Revolution 1300-2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 132-135; Todman, 'Grand Lamasery', pp. 39-70.

<sup>62</sup> Travers, *Killing Ground*, pp. 261-2

The inflexible ‘top down’ command structure hindered innovation and prevented the free flow of information.<sup>63</sup>

Insight into pre-war staff training has been provided by the work of Brian Bond and Brian Holden Reid. They both considered the effectiveness of the Staff Colleges in preparing officers for the First World War.<sup>64</sup> Bond pointed out that Camberley was simply too small to produce more than a fraction of the trained officers required once the British army began expanding. He concluded that its most important contribution was providing a meeting place for some of the most talented officers in the army. Holden Reid argued that although staff officers excelled at administrative work they lacked leadership and inspiration. British staff work was fixated upon conforming to the regulations, a mode of instruction that produced mentally unadventurous graduates obsessed with administrative detail. In their recent study of the Edwardian army, Bowman and Connelly maintained that the Staff Colleges concentrated too much on sport and schemes unlikely to promote the skills needed for staff work.<sup>65</sup> The effectiveness of the pre-war training will be assessed and compared with that of the French and German armies.

Coverage of staff training during the war has been meagre. Messenger used the letters and diaries of former soldiers to illuminate how the ‘staff learner’ system operated.<sup>66</sup> General information on the wartime staff schools and attachment schemes can be found in the historiography but details are sparse.<sup>67</sup> Gardner has speculated that competition amongst senior officers may have played a part in the learning

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<sup>63</sup> Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 176

<sup>64</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, pp. 299-329 and B. Holden Reid, *War Studies at the Staff College 1890-1930*, *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute*, Occasional Paper No 1 (1992), pp 1-11. For a narrative history of the Staff College see A. Godwin-Austen, *The Staff and the Staff College* (London: Constable & Co, 1927).

<sup>65</sup> T. Bowman and M. Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training, and Deploying the British Army 1902-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 33-34.

<sup>66</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms*, pp. 335-366.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid* and Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, pp 303-304.

process.<sup>68</sup> This may have led to information not being passed on or ignored but there is no evidence available for this. If anything the opposite held sway. Officers were usually prepared to provide information to colleagues and a good deal of informal learning happened in this manner. This thesis will endeavour to provide a more comprehensive picture of how staff officers were trained during the war years.

Modern scholars have explored the lack of staff doctrine identified by Harington. Command teams in different formations developed on the basis of diverse staff practices. Holmes examined how the personalities of the commander and his senior staff officer played a major role in determining how the formation operated.<sup>69</sup> Beckett developed this theme in a series of studies of both senior staff officers and commanders.<sup>70</sup> His biography of Johnnie Gough provided a rare insight into the work of a Brigadier-General General Staff [BGGs] at Corps level in the early years of the war.<sup>71</sup> Beckett claimed that the success of a commander depended in no small measure upon the talent of his supporting staff team.<sup>72</sup> Studies by Beckett and John Gooch have concluded there was no established template and considerable variance in how command teams operated.<sup>73</sup> This research will explore this issue further by tracing the development of selected staff teams and their interaction with commanders.

With increasing acceptance of the view that the staff evolved over the course of the war, attention has been drawn to what little detail is available about their characteristics and development. In his analysis of the Australian staff, Roger Lee

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<sup>68</sup> N. Gardner, *Trial by Fire, Command and the British Expeditionary Force in 1914* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), p. 242.

<sup>69</sup> Holmes, *Tommy*, pp 231-238.

<sup>70</sup> Beckett and Corvi, *Haig's Generals*.

<sup>71</sup> I. Beckett, *Johnnie Gough, V.C.* (London: Donovan, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> Beckett and Corvi, *Haig's Generals*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>73</sup> I. Beckett, 'Hubert Gough, Neill Malcolm and Command on the Western Front' in Bond, *Look to Your Front*, pp. 1-10 and J. Gooch, 'The British General Staff in the Era of Two World Wars' in French and Holden-Reid, *The British General Staff*, pp 192-203.

concluded there was enough evidence to suggest they were neither ignorant nor unconcerned for their fellow soldiers in the front line.<sup>74</sup> He showed that a high proportion of staff officers within the Australian Imperial Force [AIF] possessed combat experience. A recent study by Douglas Delaney has developed the theme of examining how staffs developed through analysis of the Canadian Expeditionary Force [CEF].<sup>75</sup> He concluded that considerable mentoring from British officers was needed to develop the competent staffs that were operating in the Canadian units by 1918. These revealing essays have led the way in investigating the characteristics of staff officers within specific fighting formations. This study will seek to establish a comparable understanding of the British staff.

There has been scant recognition of the contribution made by the staff in the historiography of the operational performance of the British army. As Lee opined: ‘Among all the famous technological improvements, tactical advances and enhanced training methods referred to in the context of achieving victory in 1918, there is one vital element that rarely rates a mention – the staff’.<sup>76</sup> Mistakes in staff work have received undue attention while success has gone largely unnoticed. Soon after the end of the war the French Army Chief of Staff, General Buat noted:

The staff enjoys the unenviable privilege of never possibly being otherwise than in the wrong. If it attains perfection, nobody thinks any the better of it; and yet it is indeed the only thing in the world that is expected to reach a state of perfection, and it is severely censured if it fails to do so.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> R. Lee, ‘The Australian Staff: The Forgotten Men of the First AIF’ in P. Dennis and J. Grey (eds), *1918: Defining Victory Proceedings of the Chief of Army’s History Conference Held at the National Convention Centre, (Canberra, 29 September 1998)*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>75</sup> D. Delaney, ‘Mentoring the Canadian Corps: Imperial Officers and the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-18’ *The Journal of Military History* 77 3 (Jul 2013), pp. 931-53.

<sup>76</sup> Lee, ‘The Australian Staff’, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> General Buat, ‘The Staff’, *Army Quarterly*, 4 (1) (1922), pp. 35-45. This article was originally published in French in the *Revue de Paris* in 1921.



The literature has tended to emphasise how their isolation from the front line led to incompetent staff planning and unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved by the troops. Such a crude and simplistic picture does not begin to offer an insight into how staff officers were trained, their origins and experience, their work within the different formations of the army and their evolution during the course of the war. Considering the prominent part played by staff officers in planning operations and their work in close cooperation with commanders it is surprising that the historiography of the war has left these questions largely unanswered. As Beckett stated, ‘the army commanders cannot be seen in isolation from their immediate circle of advisors’.<sup>78</sup>

In the 1990s, Simkins, supported by other historians, called for more operational histories and studies of battlefield performance as opposed to the ‘everyman at war’ focus on the ordinary soldier.<sup>79</sup> Greater access to primary records has subsequently permitted more systematic scrutiny of operations on the Western Front, casting new light upon the role of the staff. A more balanced narrative has begun to emerge, acknowledging the challenges they faced and the learning processes that developed.

John Bourne noted in 1999, ‘There are no modern studies of communications, a fundamental problem during the war, or of that despised group of men, the staff’.<sup>80</sup> A recent study by Brian Hall has traced the development of the army’s communications system and shed new light on how it affected the conduct of British military

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<sup>78</sup> Beckett and Corvi, *Haig’s Generals*, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> P. Simkins, ‘Everyman at War’ in B. Bond (ed), *The First World War and British Military History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 289-313 cited by Beckett, ‘Gough, Malcolm and Command’, p. 1

<sup>80</sup> J.M. Bourne, ‘Haig and the Historians’ in B. Bond and N. Cave, *Haig: A Reappraisal 70 Years on* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1999), p. 8.

operations.<sup>81</sup> This research will foster new lines of enquiry into tracing the evolution of the staff through their training, duties, personal characteristics, backgrounds, career paths, the development of staff teams and differences in staff practices between formations.

The central question addressed here is how did the characteristics of the staff change during the war in the light of the rapid expansion of the army and the enormous growth in the number of staff posts. The limited group of Staff College graduates was never going to be sufficient to meet the needs of what became a mass army in the field. To meet this challenge the army was forced to train a considerable number of new staff officers while continuing to fight a war. How this was achieved and how it changed the composition of the staff forms the core of this thesis. A new breed of officer may have emerged across the wider army but was this same trend evident within the staff? Through systematic analysis of a range of personal characteristics a profile of the staff has been produced for each year of the conflict and any changes mapped. To develop a complete picture, this analysis is linked to other strands of enquiry such as staff officer training, relations between staff and commanders, selected case studies of staff work, the duties the staff undertook and how they lived in the field. Drawing together the information generated across these lines of investigation offers a deeper understanding of the staff and sheds new light upon their achievements.

A pertinent remark from General Buat outlined the role and impact of the staff:

First of all, what is the Staff? It is both everything and nothing. Nothing because it possesses no authority of its own, it has no

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<sup>81</sup> B.N. Hall, 'The British Expeditionary Force and Communications on the Western Front', (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Salford, 2009).

responsibility and its personal inspiration does not exist. It is not even free to express an idea, for it never speaks in its own name. Everything, because a whole army may be imperilled if its staff is bad.<sup>82</sup>

The staff formed an important element of the command function that has yet to be fully recognised. One of the few works to explore this topic has been David Zabecki's *Chief of Staff*, a collection of biographies that examined their role across almost two centuries of conflict.<sup>83</sup> This thesis will trace the development of the staff during the First World War and analyse how they faced the considerable challenges that arose to emerge as part of a war winning team.

The scope of the analysis covers staff officers at Division, Corps and Army levels, which represent a cross-section of the military planners of the army. The significant numbers of staff working at GHQ and Brigade level are beyond the purview of this particular study. They merit investigations of their own. Some work has already been undertaken. Todman has outlined the development of the functions and structure of GHQ while Aimée Fox-Godden has examined the role of Brigade Staff in Operations on the Western Front.<sup>84</sup> Further research in these areas will be instrumental in attaining a complete overview of the staff function. Although the boundary of this study excludes analysis of staff posts or structures at GHQ and Brigade there were many officers who served both with these formations and with Army, Corps and Division. The careers and service of these individuals will be covered for the time they spent at Army, Corps and Division. Their achievements at Brigade and GHQ are

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<sup>82</sup> Buat, 'The Staff', p. 36.

<sup>83</sup> Zabecki, *Chief of Staff*.

<sup>84</sup> Todman, 'Grand Lamasary'; A, Fox-Godden, 'One Long Loaf'? Military Administration and The Role of Brigade Staff in Operations on The Western Front, 1916–18' *Records The Douglas Haig Fellowship's Journal* v16 (November 2012), pp. 13-27.

excluded from this study. Appendix 1 provides a detailed explanation of the sample parameters.

The selection of Army and Corps for this research provides an insight into the characteristics of the staff at higher operational levels while Division offers a perspective of life on the ‘coal face’ of the conflict. Some of these officers had attended the Staff Colleges at Camberley or Quetta before the war and were designated *psc* (Passed Staff College). They were all soldiers in the regular army. The remainder consisted of officers who had been appointed during the course of the war and designated *qs* (Qualified Staff). This was attained through being ‘attached’ as part of the staff learner scheme, attendance at a wartime staff school or simply by a tour of duty as a staff officer. As the war progressed the number of non-regular officers that entered the staff, particularly at the junior levels, steadily increased.

The population under study consists of those officers who served as the principal planners of military actions. For the purposes of this research, they were defined as members of the general staff [G] group responsible for operations and intelligence.<sup>85</sup> A total of just over 1,100 officers served in this capacity at Army, Corps and Division level on the Western Front from 1914 to 1918. They comprised 925 officers from the British army, fifty-seven from the Indian Army, forty-eight ANZAC officers and seventy-two from the Canadian force. These officers were tasked with putting together the plans and orders for formations to execute in the field. Their duties led to more direct involvement with the command process than the two other staff branches; the Adjutant General [A] and Quartermaster General [Q].<sup>86</sup> The population under study consists of the staff teams that worked in concert with the

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<sup>85</sup> The General Staff branch was considered to be the most prestigious. The head of the G branch was the senior staff officer in a formation and worked most closely with the commanding officer.

<sup>86</sup> Sometimes known as the ‘holy trinity’ of the staff. ‘A’ branch handled personnel matters while ‘Q’ managed supplies, quartering, transportation and postal services.

General Officer Commanding [GOC]. Figure 1 outlines the G staff structure from brigade to GHQ.



**Figure 1: G staff structure**

The Chief of General Staff [CGS] was housed at GHQ, which represented the highest level directing body and the heads of the other staff departments. A Major-General General Staff [MGGS] led the staff team at Army level while a Brigadier-General General Staff [BGGs] was the senior officer at Corps level. One staff officer succinctly outlined the allocation of duties on a Corps:

Every staff is divided into two parts, the one G and the other A and Q. In a Corps there are four officers on the G side...This side does the fighting and the operations and the orders-for-battle part of the show. They also do the maps and the Intelligence and all the information about the enemy or anything to do with fighting comes to them.<sup>87</sup>

The number of G staff officers at Army and Corps fluctuated over the course of the war due to establishment changes. These are shown in detail in Appendix 2. There were changes in the complexion of the staff teams as the Operations and

<sup>87</sup> Major C.L.A. Ward Jackson to wife 5 February 1915, Extracts from Letters p. 161, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

Intelligence functions were split. The number of G staff at Army rose from four to nine over the course of the war. At Corps level, while total G staff remained stable at five, the composition of the staff changed with a GSO 1 replaced by a third GSO 2. Thus, the overall increase in staff posts was result of these changes in establishment combined with the growth of the number of formations in the field.

The general staff team at Division numbered three officers, headed up by a General Staff Officer Grade One [GSO 1]. The other members of the staff teams were General Staff Officers Grade Two [GSO 2] and Three [GSO 3]. The establishment at Division level stayed the same throughout the war apart from the addition of artillery staff. Down at Brigade level there were just two staff officers – a Staff Captain [SC] and Brigade Major [BM]. Major Bernard Montgomery provided a useful outline of the structure of the staff within a Division when he was serving as a GSO 2. He noted:

There are 3 General Staff Officers in a Division, GSO1, GSO2 and GSO3. The latter does all the Intelligence Work, maps, tracings etc. Ours is a territorial and has to be told a good deal. The next step up from GSO3 is Brigade Major; then GSO2. I have no fixed work like GSO3; the GSO1 and myself divide the work between us and I am now responsible that it is done and nothing is forgotten.<sup>88</sup>

Integral to the planning process and germane to this study were the artillery staff officers and engineering staff. In common with fluctuating G staff posts the establishment of artillery and engineering staff changed at various points during the war as shown in Appendix 2. There was a gradual increase in the number of posts at each formation due to these changes in establishment. By 1918 the artillery staff teams at Corps and Army level were comprised of a GSO 1 and GSO 2 Royal Artillery, a Brigade Major and Staff Captain for both Royal Artillery and Heavy

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<sup>88</sup> Montgomery to father July 1916, Montgomery papers 1/61, IWM.

Artillery together with a Reconnaissance Staff Officer. At Division level there was a Brigade Major, Staff Captain and Reconnaissance Staff Officer. These officers were artillery advisors and planners at Army, Corps and Division level respectively. The huge growth in artillery posts was due to changes in establishment based upon functional requirements and the expansion of the number of formations in the field. The inclusion of nearly 700 artillery and engineering staff produces a total population of 1800 officers under study.

The research draws upon a wide range of official sources, unit histories, war diaries and private papers. The foundation of the study has been primary data from the *Composition of the Headquarters of the British Armies in France* volumes at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London and the *Services of Military Officers* produced by the War Office. These sources have established the identity and some of the key characteristics of the officers that are the subject of this investigation. This information has been utilised as the core of a database that consists of an individual profile of each officer.<sup>89</sup> The data provided by these two key sources covers surname, initials, rank, staff grade, pre-war service details, gallantry awards, regiment, psc awards, the formations each officer served with, together with the theatre of service and service dates. These profiles have been enhanced using incremental data from diverse sources including *Who Was Who*, *Kelly's Landed Gentry*, the *Army List*, the *London and Edinburgh Gazettes*, school records, private papers, press obituaries, online records and databases.<sup>90</sup> Information on casualties amongst the staff was drawn principally from *Services of Military Officers*, *Who Was Who*, the private papers of J.E. Edmonds, John Hussey's article 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers in the

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<sup>89</sup> The Headquarters lists provide records for August & November 1914, January-July 1915 & October/November 1915, February-December 1916, January-April 1917 & August-December 1917, January-December 1918.

<sup>90</sup> I am particularly grateful to Tony Cowan for giving me access to his 'Record of Army Postings' (2009), unpublished database.

Great War' together with the subsequent qualification by Nicholas Evans.<sup>91</sup> Major A.F. Becke's *Order of Battle* proved an essential guide to categorising different types of division and their staff teams.<sup>92</sup> The army's *Stationary Service* [SS] pamphlets illustrated how the staff used their experience to improve future performance.<sup>93</sup>

Official War Office documents were used as a principal source of information for the study. WO 95 held at the National Archives, Kew [TNA] holds official communiqués and guidelines on the staff learner schemes and wartime staff schools.<sup>94</sup> The duties of the staff were outlined in two key documents: the Field Service Regulations of 1909 and the Staff Manual of 1912.<sup>95</sup> These guides formed the foundation of staff work in the field and offer considerable detail on organisation and structure. These pre-war publications represented the view of how the staff should operate before they encountered the challenge of fighting a continental war as part of a mass army. For a post-mortem on staff performance the research draws upon reports produced by the Braithwaite Committee in 1919 and the Kirke Committee in 1932.<sup>96</sup> The WO 339 and WO 374 army personnel files, held at TNA, represent a source of information for tracing the careers of individual officers although many are still retained by the Ministry of Defence.<sup>97</sup> This places significant limitations on their use as a primary source. Unit histories available from the IWM and war diaries from the WO 95 series at TNA have been used to trace the evolution of staff teams and to

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<sup>91</sup> J. Hussey, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers in the Great War: "A Generation Missing?"' *The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 75 (1997), pp. 246-259; N. Evans, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers 1914-18', *The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 78 (2000), pp. 29-37.

<sup>92</sup> A.F. Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions during the European War 1914-18* (London: 1935).

<sup>93</sup> 'SS' (Stationary Service) pamphlets were issued by the army to provide information on a wide range of topics from battle tactics to personal hygiene for soldiers.

<sup>94</sup> These documents can be found in WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>95</sup> WO 678 and WO 1674 respectively.

<sup>96</sup> The Braithwaite Committee documents can be found in WO 32/5153 and the Kirke Committee findings are held in WO 32/3116 at TNA. A copy of the Kirke report is also available in the Kirke Papers at LHCMA.

<sup>97</sup> The MOD retains the records of those staff officers that remained in the Army after the war and the permission of a relative has to be obtained in order to consult them.



compare the output of staff officers in operations from different periods of the war. The Australian and Canadian unit war diaries are available online and offer information pertaining to staff output and activity.

An important part of the study is an examination of staff officer training. This has made use of official records held at the Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC) Library. The so-called '*Camberley Reds*', held at the JSCSC Library provide details of the Staff College syllabus and teaching methods during the period from 1903 to 1914 when the College closed for the duration of the war. They indicate how staff officer training developed in the pre-war decade and illustrate the influence of different Staff College commandants. Personal recollections found in the private papers of Staff College instructors and students provide some colour of their experiences at Camberley.<sup>98</sup>

Extensive use has been made of the personal diaries, letters and memoirs of staff officers. They provide invaluable insight into their own thoughts and experiences. These sources need to be handled carefully as they represent individual opinion. The content of some memoirs written after the war may have to be read as specific reactions against accusations of incompetence. Retrospective reflections from the staff could have set out to refute criticism and they are always vulnerable to lapses of memory. As such they should be treated with caution. In the light of this issue, this study has taken particular care to ensure that memoirs have been backed up with material from a wide range of contemporary letters and diaries. The weight of evidence across these different sources has revealed information that runs counter to the accepted orthodoxy of life with the staff. A good example is the activities of staff

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<sup>98</sup> Instructors at the College who left private papers include Major-General Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, Major-General Sir Thompson Capper, Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine and Brigadier-General James Edmonds. Students include Field Marshal Archibald Wavell, Brigadier Sir Edward Beddington, General H.S. Franklyn, J.F.C. Fuller and General Sir John Burnett-Stuart.

officers in the front line. Information drawn from personal papers has also been vital in piecing together the workings of the staff ‘learner’ programme and the wartime schools. The memoirs of Major-General Charles Bonham-Carter, who led one of the schools, offer detail of how he devised the syllabus and how the school functioned under his leadership.<sup>99</sup>

These personal reflections and recollections represent the voice of the staff that has been too often overlooked. They supply essential details on issues such as staff working practices, staff organisation, command teams, appointments, patronage, and the life of the staff in the field. These documents are held at the Imperial War Museum [IWM], the National Army Museum [NAM], the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives [LHCMA] at King’s College London, Churchill College Cambridge [CCC], the Bodleian Library at Oxford [BoL] and the Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds [LCUL] together with selected regimental museums such as The Rifles Museum in Taunton, Somerset. The views of practitioners are taken into account by drawing upon journals such as the *Army Quarterly*. They represent a useful body of professional opinion on staff achievements but have to be viewed in the context of when they were written.

Findings from unpublished theses and other research are utilised as part of the study. These include doctoral studies on communications on the Western Front and the course for army officers run at the London School of Economics [LSE].<sup>100</sup>

This study analyses the considerable amount of primary data available for headquarters staff at Army, Corps and Division levels. A level of systematic analysis

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<sup>99</sup> Bonham-Carter’s papers are held at Churchill College Cambridge.

<sup>100</sup> Hall, ‘BEF and Communications on Western Front’ and P. Grant, ‘Mobilizing charity: Transforming managerial change in the UK voluntary Sector during the First World War’, Cass Business School, London (2011).

has been applied that has sought to address the critical gap in the current historiography identified by Bond. It employs both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis adopting a prosopographic approach. A prosopography has been defined as ‘a historical research technique based on the systematic analysis of biographical data of a selected group of actors’.<sup>101</sup> This makes it a particularly suitable approach to analyse a specified population of staff officers. As outlined by K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, ‘The advent of the desktop computer has had a major impact in both facilitating the choice of prosopography as a research method and ensuring that it continues to evolve’.<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, this study includes the development of a unique electronic database to enable analysis of multiple variables and the collective study of this well-defined group. The database has been used to examine the patterns of relationships and activities of this group of staff officers through analysis of their different careers within the British army. It has enabled the identification of key trends and common characteristics among the staff.

The cohort studied comprises 1,102 general staff officers. Statistically relevant quantities of biographical data have been collated and entered into the database. A core set of data has been compiled for every officer. This basic profile consists of surname and initials, the units they served with, the period of their service, their regiment, staff grade, their status as regular, Territorial, volunteer or ‘dug out’ and if they held the Staff College qualification. This has developed into a near monthly record of the general staff for the duration of the war. The names of the staff and GOC of each Division, Army and Corps on the Western Front were recorded on spreadsheets and then fed into the database. Extensive use has been made of graphs

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<sup>101</sup> K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (ed), *Prosopography Approaches and Applications, A Handbook*, (Oxford: Unit for Prosopographical Research, 2007), pp. 19 and 69.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.

and charts to present complex data in a simple form. They have often been imbedded within the text for immediacy and clarity.

The critical issue in compiling the database has been the availability of information. The primary sources employed provide details of all headquarters staff for most, but not all, months of the war. Any officers who were appointed and then left the staff within these gaps are not listed. The longest period without coverage is three months in 1917.<sup>103</sup> The total number of officers who appeared and then moved out of the staff without resurfacing elsewhere during these breaks in coverage is likely to be limited and would not impact the conclusions drawn. Several of these officers have been identified via other sources, which has further reduced their number.

Whilst every officer within the study has a basic profile, the depth of information has varied by individual. Data has been easier to obtain for the senior staff grades than the junior. A raft of additional data has been collected for the study group. Data on gallantry awards was widely available and has been recorded for seventy per cent (774) of the group. Other data such as age, date of birth, education and length of military service was only partially available and this is recorded for around sixty per cent (666) of the officers. Consequently, some of the statistical analysis has been based upon data samples. For example, the analysis of the proportion of regulars within the staff or those holding the psc qualification was based upon a 100 per cent sample whereas the age analysis was based on a lower sample size. Details of sample sizes are included in the relevant chapters. The artillery and engineering staff were restricted to basic profiles as they lie outside the prime target population.

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<sup>103</sup> The periods not covered are Sept/Oct & Dec 1914; Aug/Sep & Dec 1915; Jan 1916; May/June/July 1917.

The research has been designed to identify how the staff developed over the course of the war by comparing the profile of the staff across a number of uniform criteria. The establishment of a profile for every officer has enabled a systematic assessment of the key changes in their characteristics. A prosopographical approach has generated analysis that reveals the different types of connection between this defined group of officers and how they operated within and upon the British army. Staff officers been subjected to scrutiny across five main strands of analysis. These themes comprise background and experience, training and learning, staff duties and life in the field, career paths and command teams. Some selected units have been used to trace the development and changes in the profile of their staff officers. Particular emphasis has been placed upon the identification of staff teams, their stability and durability.

The thesis has taken a thematic approach but has been structured across a broad chronology. The opening chapter traces the origins and development of the staff function prior to the First World War to place the British system in context. The development of the British staff is reviewed and compared with those of the other protagonists on the Western Front. Their function and duties are assessed together with the views of some leading military authorities of the period. The preparation of British staff officers for war is surveyed through the process and content of training at the pre-war Staff Colleges. When the staff went to war in 1914, these credentials were put to the test. Chapter Two looks at how they performed and coped with some significant challenges. Among these were the upheaval caused by the rapid growth of staff and the establishment of new formations. The fate of the tight-knit group of staff officers who went to war and their subsequent influence within the army is explored.

The life of the staff and their duties in the field is investigated in Chapter Three from a variety of perspectives. The headquarters where they worked, their workload and the pressures of the job together with the time they spent up at the front line are scrutinised. The principal responsibilities of the staff and the duties involved are outlined. The expansion of the army created the need for many more staff officers than the cadre of Staff College graduates. The army's response in the form of attachment schemes for 'learners' and temporary wartime staff schools is considered in Chapter Four. Besides the formal methods instigated by the army, initiatives exercised by individual officers involving other units and their French allies will be reviewed. This chapter evaluates how the learning process, which has been shown to be applicable to other parts of the army, was relevant to the staff.

Chapters Five and Six focus upon the personal characteristics of the staff and how these changed over the war. The general staff is profiled with a particular focus on changes in the proportions of regular officers and Staff College graduates. The combat experience, casualty statistics and gallantry awards of staff officers are analysed for differences between them and the rest of the army. The influence of these factors over the way staff officers were viewed by other members of the army is explored. The collective biography of the staff is investigated in terms of education, regimental affiliation, age and length of military service together with the career paths of selected officers to highlight patterns of promotion and the impact of patronage. The way different command teams operated is assessed. Harington attributed variations in practice to a lack of doctrine but the picture may have been more complex involving personalities, staff capabilities and internal politics. The stability and longevity of these teams is investigated to determine if significant differences emerge across formations. Consonant with the chronological structure of the thesis,

the final chapter covers the closing stages of the war when some movement returned to operations and staff learning was reaping rewards. The impact of these changes on how the staff worked in the field is assessed. After the war, committees were convened to deliver judgment on the work of the staff. Their findings are examined and their recommendations for change considered. Finally, the careers of some influential staff officers are traced after the war to assess their potential impact on military matters in the Second World War.

# Chapter One

## Origins, Training and Duties

In the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, General Paul Bronsart von Schellendorf, a senior Prussian staff officer, produced his highly influential work *The Duties of the General Staff*.<sup>1</sup> This detailed the purpose and duties of the staff officer as a part of the command function. Von Schellendorff underlined the critical role of the General Staff within the modern army organisation when he pointed out:

The General commanding a large body of troops cannot (and least of all in war) encumber himself with minor details, though their consideration and proper arranging may be often of the highest importance. Apart from the fact that the mental and physical powers of one man are not equal to the task, the comprehensive supervision of the forces under his command would suffer. He should consequently have assistants.<sup>2</sup>

These ‘assistants’ were the officers of the General Staff who not only converted the ideas of the General into orders but also acted as his ‘devoted and confidential counsellors’.<sup>3</sup> In von Schellendorff’s opinion, the performance of the staff was keenly felt throughout a military formation. He observed: ‘Troops very soon find out, especially in war, whether the duties of the General Staff are in good hands’.<sup>4</sup> Prussia led the way in developing a modern professional staff organisation. Sir Michael Howard described the creation of the Prussian General Staff as ‘perhaps the great military innovation of the nineteenth century’.<sup>5</sup> As warfare became more complex and armies grew in size, the value of an efficient, educated and professional staff became increasingly apparent.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Bronsart von Schellendorff, *Der Dienst des Generalstabes* (Berlin: 1st ed., 1876). Translated and published in the UK as *The Duties of the General Staff* (London: HMSO, 1905).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> M. Howard, *War in European History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 100.



This chapter traces the evolution of the staff function within the British army, the duties it entailed and how officers were trained for the role. To set staff duties in context, an overview will be provided of how the staff function developed from the early nineteenth century until the outbreak of the First World War. The development of the British staff will be weighed against progress made by the French and German staffs during this period. A perspective from outside Europe is gained by an examination of staff work during the American Civil War. The pre-war training that took place in the Staff Colleges at Camberley and Quetta will be assessed in terms of the method of entry, the content of the syllabus and its effectiveness in preparing the staff for the conflict they encountered. Comparisons are drawn between the British, French and German pre-war staff training schemes. Two documents are key to understanding the British staff system. The Field Service Regulations of 1909 (Part II) and the 1912 Staff Manual laid out how staff officers were expected to operate as part of the command function. The duties outlined in these documents will be examined to determine the expectations that were placed upon the staff and the role they were intended to perform.

### *Origins of the Staff*

The origins of the modern staff organisation can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The French took the lead in introducing innovations during the Napoleonic period but failed to sustain their pioneering position. This fell to Prussia, which by the middle of the century had established the staff as a central element of military operations. Emphasis was placed upon education and a systematic approach to warfare. The contribution an effective staff could make became apparent over the succeeding decades in the successful Prussian campaigns conducted against Austria and France.

British thinking lagged behind its counterparts in continental Europe though some effective staff work was evident within the Duke of Wellington's force during the Peninsular War.<sup>6</sup> Colonel Charles Craufurd gave an indication of the parlous state of military expertise within the British army during this period:

When an [English] Army goes upon service we are so destitute of officers qualified to form the Quartermaster-General's Department and an efficient corps of aides-de-camp, and our officers in general have so little knowledge of the most essential parts of their profession that we are obliged to have recourse to foreigners for assistance or our operations are constantly liable to failure in their execution.<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to find a solution to these issues a military college was founded at High Wycombe in 1799. This was the precursor for the Staff College at Camberley, established almost sixty years later as a separate entity. Led by Colonel J. Le Marchant, the military college aimed to teach staff duties to junior officers and drew upon the army of revolutionary France as a model.<sup>8</sup>

The development of the French staff had begun in 1796 under Marshal Berthier, Napoleon Bonaparte's Chief of Staff. It was divided into four sections, each with a specific set of duties. Paul Thiebault encapsulated contemporary French military thought in his authoritative manual published in 1800.<sup>9</sup> In the view of the soldier and writer, Brigadier-General J.D. Hittle, this work established the foundation for the structure of the staff and represented the first attempt in the modern military era to combine staff theory and techniques.<sup>10</sup> The manual outlined the different staff functions, the basis of staff organisation, how work should be allocated and detailed

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<sup>6</sup> The Peninsular War lasted for six years from 1808 to 1814.

<sup>7</sup> S.G.P. Ward, *Wellington's Headquarters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> P. Thiebault, *Manuel des Adjutants Généraux et des Adjoints Employés dans les États-Majors Divisionnaires des Armées*. (1800). See J.D. Hittle, *The Military Staff, Its History and Development* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1944), p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Hittle, *The Military Staff*, p. 98.

how staff reports should be compiled. Thiebault's work may have been pioneering but regrettably it was largely discarded after the Napoleonic era.

Instead of the four section French model, Wellington split his staff into two sub-divisions: the Adjutant-General's and Quartermaster-General's. There was no General Staff branch and responsibility for issuing orders lay with the Adjutant-General. The efficient administrative and supply work undertaken by the staff played a substantial part in the success enjoyed by the British in the Peninsular campaign. Although they were housed in different headquarters, a close relationship was forged between Wellington and the staff according to the historian George Ward. He argued:

There can be no test of a staff but that of war. Mistakes were made; the weaker elements were ground out in the grim attrition, together with many of the stronger; but the residue, though perhaps small, was by all standards very good.<sup>11</sup>

Some commentators, such as Hittle, believe that Wellington made a significant contribution to the development of British staff organisation.<sup>12</sup> His personal involvement with the staff played an integral part in their success even though French ideas may have influenced the way they operated.

In common with the French, the legacy bequeathed by Wellington was sadly squandered as British staff performance regressed during the nineteenth century. Deficiencies were exposed during the Crimean War as inexperienced staff struggled to get a grip on their duties.<sup>13</sup> It marked a period when the training and education of the staff was neglected by the British army. Although the Staff College at Camberley was inaugurated in 1858, soon after the Crimean conflict, there was a dearth of literature on the subject of the staff until the end of the century. As Brian Bond asserted: the British continued to regard a general staff as expensive and largely

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>13</sup> J. Luvaas, *The Education of an Army* (London: Cassell & Co, 1964), pp. 86-7.

ornamental.<sup>14</sup> It needed the trauma of a war to jolt Britain into recognising the critical role properly trained staff could play.

A lack of trained staff officers was a malaise that affected both sides in the American Civil War. There was no staff college or staff corps. Appointments to the staff were frequently made on the basis of nepotism or political considerations.<sup>15</sup> A major problem was the absence of any formalised system. There was scant evidence here of any influence from the Prussian model.<sup>16</sup> Orders were often given verbally rather than being confirmed in writing. Inevitably, this led to misinterpretation, delay and lost opportunities. The historian Paddy Griffith noted, ‘the improvised Civil War armies suffered badly from their lack of trained staff officers’.<sup>17</sup> They were forced to gain their experience from learning on the job. A method the British army was forced to repeat during the First World War. Improvements in staff work during the course of the American Civil War were outweighed by the failings. In the latter stages of the war, when mobility was restored, the staff were taken by surprise and struggled to get to grips with the new challenges they faced.<sup>18</sup> The war failed to produce a professional staff system. That was very much in the hands of the Prussians.

The comprehensive defeat inflicted by Prussia upon the French in the war of 1870 highlighted the merits of capable staff work. It showed that a well-trained staff working with established methods and systems could make a major contribution to military success. The organisation and structure of the Prussian field staff took shape in the early nineteenth century. The *Kriegsakademie* [War College] was established in

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<sup>14</sup> Bond, *Victorian Staff College*, p. 181.

<sup>15</sup> P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the American Civil War* (Marlborough; The Crowood Press, 1987), p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> E. Hagerman *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare* (Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 1988), p. xvi.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

Berlin in 1810 and its graduates filled the posts of the General Staff. The Prussians recognised the importance of military planning and fostered an elite of specialised staff officers. They acted primarily as advisors and planners within the command team. These officers rotated between staff and command positions. The advent of the railways provided the opportunity for the rapid transportation of troops and supplies. The Prussian staff harnessed this potential to move resources swiftly to where they were needed. Detailed planning became the key to the deployment and manoeuvre of large forces in the field, which Prussia used to great advantage. As Hittle remarked, the German General Staff remained in place for over one hundred years with only minor changes and ‘possessed all the essential elements of a modern staff system’.<sup>19</sup>

Wide reaching reforms were instigated across the French staff system after their 1870 defeat. The staff college, *École Supérieure de Guerre* [ESG] was established in the following decade with the objective of developing a professional and meritocratic staff. In 1900 the structure of the French staff was changed with three bureaux taking the place of the four established during the Napoleonic period.<sup>20</sup> These initiatives indicated French recognition of the key role played by the staff officer in modern warfare.

### *The British General Staff*

After witnessing the rise of the Prussian war-machine, the British military writer and journalist, Spenser Wilkinson, championed the theme of the increasing importance of the staff in modern warfare. His 1890 essay, *The Brain of an Army*, was a guide to the workings of the Prussian staff system intended to raise awareness in Britain of how an effective military command function should be organised. He drew attention to the

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<sup>19</sup> Hittle, *The Military Staff*, p. 70.

<sup>20</sup> During the First World War the French staff structure reverted to four bureaux as noted in Hittle, *The Military Staff*, p. 123.

importance of having a thoroughly trained staff adopting a systemised approach but his warnings went unheeded for some ten years. Wilkinson noted that ‘Every general in the field requires a number of assistants, collectively forming his staff, to relieve him of matters of detail’.<sup>21</sup> He went on to explain that in warfare, ‘The duties of command are now so multifarious that some consistent distribution of function among the officers of a large staff is indispensable’.<sup>22</sup>

In Wilkinson’s view the Prussian general staff had been ‘specially trained in the art of conducting operations against an enemy, that is in the specific function of generalship, which has thus in the Prussian army received more systematic attention than in any other’.<sup>23</sup> This stood in stark contrast to the British army where, according to Wilkinson, the grouping of duties followed no principle and had arisen by chance.<sup>24</sup> He identified the development of the branches of adjutant-general and quartermaster general but criticised the absence of any rationale to determine how specific functions were allocated to these branches. Wilkinson believed the British system was flawed as it had ‘arisen by chance and been stereotyped by usage’.<sup>25</sup>

The shock administered to the British army by the poor standard of staff work during the South African War was the catalyst for a marked change in the way the staff function was regarded. The army finally began to recognise that the performance of the staff could have a direct impact on military effectiveness in the field. Several critical issues were exposed by the campaign in South Africa as Bond has argued: ‘There is abundant evidence that the lack of a properly organised staff system was a

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<sup>21</sup> S. Wilkinson, *The Brain of an Army* (London: Constable & Co; Second Edition, 1895), pp. 5-6. The First Edition was published in 1890.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

serious handicap and that incompetent staff work played a conspicuous part in many of the muddles and disasters'.<sup>26</sup>

Changes needed to be made. Some figures within the military, such as Henry Wilson, Douglas Haig and Lieutenant-General Sir William Nicholson acknowledged that the ad hoc staffing arrangements previously employed would no longer suffice.<sup>27</sup> The army needed to recognise that staff officers had a critical role to play as part of the command function. There needed to be enough trained staff to fill the available posts and commanders needed to know how to utilise them. There was a lack of standardised process and doctrine to guide staff practice. A committee led by the influential Lord Esher concluded:

The experience of South Africa has proved to demonstration [sic] that the army suffers from the want of a trained General Staff. The Japanese have created such a staff, with the result that huge forces have been handled in the field with conspicuous success. Great Britain alone of great military powers has neglected to make this vital provision.<sup>28</sup>

Their report established a basic structure for a General Staff and outlined its primary purpose as preparing the army for war. The road to the creation of such a body proved to be littered with obstacles. Further reports and memoranda were produced. Following a lengthy period of internal debate, government apathy and political wrangling, the General Staff assumed its final incarnation in the autumn of 1906.

The foundations of the British system were established by the formation of the Staff College at Camberley. This supplied the army with most of its senior commanders and provided the training for its staff officers. The most promising candidates for senior positions in the army had been trained at Camberley since the

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<sup>26</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, p.187.

<sup>27</sup> See Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84.

mid-nineteenth century. When the British belatedly formed a General Staff between 1904 and 1906, it was graduates from Camberley that filled the positions. During this period there was growing recognition that preparation needed to be made for a possible war with Germany that necessitated changes in military training. As Bond remarked: ‘at long last staff officers could be trained with a specific and realistic contingency in mind’.<sup>29</sup> The demand for trained staff officers had never been higher. In an effort to meet this demand the Indian Staff College in Quetta was established in 1907 and the capacity of Camberley was enlarged.

The principles underlying the formation of the British General Staff were outlined in Army Order 233 backed by a memorandum written by Lord Haldane, Secretary of State for War.<sup>30</sup> These established that the General Staff fell into two distinct divisions, the General Staff at Army Headquarters and the General Staff in commands and districts.<sup>31</sup> The function of the former included advising on army strategy, supervising officer education, preparing for war, and the collection of military intelligence. The Army Order stated that the responsibilities of the latter: ‘Are to assist the officers on whose staffs they are serving, especially in regard to the education of officers and the training of troops, and to aid them in carrying out the policy prescribed by Army Headquarters’.<sup>32</sup> These duties took the form of organising for war, drawing up defence schemes, staff rides and intelligence gathering, together with the preparation and execution of different operations in the field. Provision was made for the establishment of 114 staff officers in commands and fifty-seven at the War Office.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, p. 245.

<sup>30</sup> R. Haldane, *An Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), p. 199; ‘Army Order 223’, October 1906, WO 123/48, TNA.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Army Order 233’, October 1906, WO 123/48, p.17, TNA.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.



Belatedly, Britain had established a formal body to direct and supervise the development of a modern army. There was a good deal of work to be done. A significant first step in the process was a new senior posting to the General Staff. In 1906 Lord Haldane wrote, 'I also telegraphed to Douglas Haig to come home from India and take a high position on the General Staff'.<sup>34</sup> The appointment of Haig as Director of Military Training [DMT] at the War Office heralded the genesis of the Field Service Regulations of 1909 (Part II) and the Staff Manual, published three years later. The Regulations provided general principles that established the structure and duties of the staff within the British army. The Staff Manual provided more detailed guidelines for the work staff officers were expected to undertake in the field. Haig was determined to raise standards and to develop a skilled staff function within the army.

In Haldane's view 'Haig had a first-rate General Staff mind'.<sup>35</sup> Haig noted in a letter to Phillip Howell that he had been asked to 'take in hand the work of creating a General Staff: at present we have little beyond the name!'.<sup>36</sup> During manoeuvres held in the summer of 1907 Haig observed a general indifference to staff work: 'many officers on the staff seem to have forgotten the a.b.c. of their duty in the field'.<sup>37</sup> He believed that individual British generals seemed to follow different rules and principles, resulting in confusion. Haig concluded, 'The first step seems to have all our Training and Educational manuals written in the same spirit and to insist on *principles* being adhered to throughout the Army'.<sup>38</sup> He was instrumental in

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<sup>34</sup> Haldane, *An Autobiography*, p. 199.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Sir Douglas Haig to Brigadier-General Phillip Howell 3 October 1907, Howell Papers 2/18, LHCMA.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

introducing this standardisation and principles of basic military doctrine through the development of a new manual that defined a set of field regulations.

By 1907, Haig had been appointed Director of Staff Duties. Part of his new role was to supervise the formulation of the *Field Service Regulations Part II (FSR II)*. An entry in Haig's diary recorded that a draft was handed to Haldane in March 1908.<sup>39</sup> Later that year, a Staff Ride, arranged with his assistant Colonel Kiggell, put the principles outlined in the manual through their paces:

Great Conference and War Game held under C.G.S. About 50 or 60 officers present, representing all branches of the Army. Object of scheme is to arrive at decision as to our war system for Field Service Regulations.<sup>40</sup>

The participants on the Staff Ride were faced with a range of military challenges they would be likely to encounter in the field such as disembarkation, entraining, accommodation, de-training and concentration.<sup>41</sup> Although it exposed some weaknesses, the Staff Ride proved decisive in securing the adoption of FSR (II). As Haig noted triumphantly at the end of 1908: 'Proof generally agreed to. It has been over five years in the writing!'<sup>42</sup> The creation of FSR 1909 was a considerable achievement by Haig and his team at the War Office. It represented a broad military doctrine characterised by a set of guiding principles and remained in use throughout the First World War. After Haig left the War Office to return to India as Chief of Staff, he remained determined to ensure that the drive towards higher standards within the staff retained its momentum. He explained in a letter to Thompson Capper, Commandant of the Staff College at Quetta: 'I am in earnest in trying to make the

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<sup>39</sup> D. Scott, *Douglas Haig: Diaries and Letters 1861-1914* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2006), p. 273.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 274. See also J. Gooch, *Plans of War*, pp. 113-4.

<sup>41</sup> Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig 'Report on a Staff Tour held by Chief of Staff 1908' Haig Papers H77, NLS.

<sup>42</sup> Scott, *Douglas Haig*, p. 275.

General Staff [including the Staff College] of value to the Empire – in order that it may be so we must get the very best officers into it and *aim high*'.<sup>43</sup>

The Staff Manual was published in 1912 and aimed to provide staff with an authoritative guide to the execution of their duties in the field. The proposal for a field manual originated from a committee led by a colonial war veteran, Colonel John Adye.<sup>44</sup> The period immediately preceding 1914 was one of feverish activity at the War Office where a cohort of different committees was engaged in drawing up plans for deployment in the event of an outbreak of hostilities in Europe. Colonel Adrian Grant-Duff, Assistant-Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence, was enlisted by Adye to draft the Staff Manual.<sup>45</sup> It was in good hands. The industrious Grant-Duff, chiefly remembered for designing the 'War Book', was rated as 'an exceptionally able officer'.<sup>46</sup> After he was killed in the early months of the war, Grant-Duff was eulogised: 'All who knew him realised his wonderful abilities, he was selected by the authorities of his day for the most confidential posts'.<sup>47</sup>

The pocket-sized Staff Manual was distributed to all serving officers who had qualified from the Staff College in accordance with Haig's recommendation. He wrote to the War Office in early 1913:

I am of opinion [sic] that in case their services will be required for staff appointments on mobilisation, such an issue is very necessary in order to enable them to keep up-to-date in the staff duties which they will be called upon to perform in war.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Sir Douglas Haig to Major-General Sir Thompson Capper 11 November 1910, Capper Papers 2/4/12, LHCMA.

<sup>44</sup> Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 121.

<sup>45</sup> J. Adye, *Soldiers and Others I Have Known* (London: Herbert Jenkins Ltd, 1925), pp. 218-219.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 218; The 'War Book' formed the basis of coordination between various Government Departments in the eventuality of war.

<sup>47</sup> J.E. Edmonds to Mrs. Grant-Duff November 1914, Colonel Adrian Grant-Duff Papers AGDF 1/5, CCC. Grant-Duff was killed in action on the Aisne in September 1914.

<sup>48</sup> Haig to War Office 26 February 1913, 'Staff Manual (War)', WO 32/4731 TNA.

The procedures outlined in the Staff Manual were subjected to the rigours of several staff exercises in 1913 to ascertain their merits, in a similar fashion to FSR 1909. Lieutenant-Colonel Bird and Captain Ommaney produced reports that revealed some of the flaws in the new manual.<sup>49</sup> A key point was the lack of information at HQ with regard to the movement of units in the field. Staff officers needed more time in the field keeping in touch with formation movements and Ommaney suggested there should be a designated ‘situations officer’ to offer updates of the most current positions.<sup>50</sup> A change in organisation was proposed to obviate the friction that arose when the Intelligence and Operations sections of the staff tried to follow defined procedure. A number of issues were also identified in the receipt and documenting of messages. While the exercises were useful in exposing these flaws, there were no further opportunities for trial runs before the onset of the ultimate test of war.

### *The Staff College System*

The Staff College at Camberley and its Indian counterpart at Quetta functioned as the primary mechanism for educating the elite of the British army. It was a system designed to prepare the future leaders, planners and thinkers of the army for command or staff posts. The objective of the Staff Colleges was ‘affording selected officers instruction in the higher branches of the art of war and in staff duties’.<sup>51</sup> Opinions have differed as to how effective they were in achieving these aims. While the Braithwaite Committee in 1919 provided a ringing endorsement of pre-war staff training, others were less convinced. Cuthbert Headlam, a staff officer who had not attended Camberley, wrote:

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<sup>49</sup> Notes by Lieutenant-Colonel Bird and Captain Ommaney in ‘Staff Manual (War)’ WO 32/4731 and WO 106/51 ‘Staff Duties in the Field 1912-13’, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> Report by Captain Ommaney, WO 106/51 ‘Staff Duties’, TNA.

<sup>51</sup> R. Braithwaite, ‘The Staff College after the War’ *Army Quarterly* 5 (3) (1923), pp. 23-33.

I cannot think what all these men were taught at the Staff College. Soldiering on the Staff is very largely office work – and not one Staff Officer per cent out of those I have met has the vaguest idea of how an office ought to be run, or the remotest conception of what is meant by delegation of authority or division of labour.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast, former student, staff officer and historian, J.F.C. Fuller, believed that the Staff College was the most important component of the army education system.<sup>53</sup>

Immediately after the war, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig contended: ‘it was found as a general rule that the relative efficiency in Staff duties of men who had passed through the Staff Colleges, as compared with men who had not had that advantage, was unquestionably greater’.<sup>54</sup> In more recent debate, claims have been made that the training at Camberley was ‘defective in many ways’ while others have seen it as a poor relation to its German equivalent.<sup>55</sup> Other commentators have suggested that Camberley began to operate as a ‘school of thought’ in the 1890s and was instrumental in taking the initial steps in the development of a statement of military doctrine.<sup>56</sup>

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Staff College a number of issues need to be considered. These include the method of entry and the quality of candidates, the content of the syllabus and how well it prepared students for the First World War, how the British system compared with that of its ally France and main adversary, Germany, and whether the British colleges had a clear yardstick to measure success against.

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<sup>52</sup> J. Beach (ed), *The Military Papers of Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Cuthbert Headlam 1910-1942* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), p. 167.

<sup>53</sup> J.F.C. Fuller, *The Army in My Time* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1935), p. 122.

<sup>54</sup> J.H. Boraston (ed), *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches* (London: Dent, 1920), p. 344. For an account of Haig and the Staff College see G. Sheffield, *The Chief, Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Atrium Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Beckett and Corvi, *Haig's General's*, p. 2; M. Samuels *Command or Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995).

<sup>56</sup> Holden Reid, *War Studies at Staff College*, p. 7. See also, Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, pp. 244-273.

Entry to the two-year courses at Camberley and Quetta for officers of the rank of captain or above was by examination or nomination. Nominated candidates were admitted on a lower pass rate.<sup>57</sup> The examination was a gruelling affair held over a ten-day period consisting of eighteen three-hour papers. Candidates were tested across a comprehensive range of subjects including military history, mathematics, military engineering, military topography, military law, languages and tactics.<sup>58</sup> The competition for places was fierce. The standard of the papers and the demands placed upon the candidates ensured that gaining entry was an exacting process. When Sir James Edmonds, the compiler of the *Official History* of the war, was examined in 1895 he passed in first place with a total of 4,700 marks.<sup>59</sup> The future Head of Intelligence at the War Office, Sir George Macdonogh, came in second of the twenty-four candidates who gained entry by examination that year.<sup>60</sup> Their intake was supplemented by a further eight students who progressed via nomination.<sup>61</sup> While Edmonds and Macdonogh gained their places on merit, the practice of admitting a quarter of the intake based upon nomination from high authority seemed highly questionable.

In the years leading up to the outbreak of war the number of available places increased but the competition remained stiff. Alan Brooke, who eventually served as Chief of the Imperial General Staff [CIGS] in the Second World War, failed the entrance exam to Quetta in 1909.<sup>62</sup> When Brigadier Sir Edward Beddington, a senior

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<sup>57</sup> Brigadier-General J.E. Edmonds explained that in 1896 nominated candidates 'qualified' by obtaining three eighths of the marks in obligatory subjects. It had been recently reduced from half. See J. Edmonds and S.H. Franklyn, 'Four Generations of Staff College students 1896-1952', *Army Quarterly* 65 (1) (Oct 1952), p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> 'Reports of Entrance Examination Staff College 1909-1913', JSCSC Library.

<sup>59</sup> Brigadier-General J.E. Edmonds, Unpublished Memoir, Chapter XIV 'The Staff College 1896-7' p. 260, Edmonds Papers 3/2, LHCMA.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 259

<sup>61</sup> Haig was one of the candidates admitted by nomination after he failed to obtain the necessary pass mark in one of the papers.

<sup>62</sup> D. Fraser, *Alan Brooke* (London: Harper Collins), p. 21.

staff officer during the war, sat the exams in 1912 he passed out second from 184 candidates.<sup>63</sup> In 1913 there were 185 candidates competing for thirty-six places, with another fifteen, a rather higher proportion than previously, admitted by nomination. The blinkered persistence with nomination was misguided as it promoted patronage rather than a meritocracy. The opportunity to attain position through connection rather than talent was not unusual in Edwardian society but it was unlikely to make optimal use of the talent at the army's disposal. Another feature to attract criticism was the quota system that guaranteed a certain number of places for the various arms of the army. This may have affected the quality of the candidates gaining entry but there were factors that militated against this argument. It was surely a prudent idea to ensure that there were enough trained staff officers with specialised expertise. In addition, the number of candidates who achieved the pass mark each year was greater than the number of places available anyway.<sup>64</sup>

Edmonds described the Staff College at Camberley as 'a single large hotel-like looking, rectangular two-storied dirty yellow building with long corridor passages, difficult to warm, situated in fir woods, about a mile from the R.M.C. Sandhurst'.<sup>65</sup> Students spent their first year in this rather imposing sounding institution in the Junior Division, progressing to the Senior Division in their final year. They were taught by a staff of instructors augmented by occasional visiting lecturers who all fell under the supervision of the college Commandant. The Commandant was a pivotal figure in driving the syllabus and setting the atmosphere of the college. General Sir John Burnett-Stuart, a student in 1902/3, noted that 'The Staff College is very sensitive to

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<sup>63</sup> Brigadier Sir Edward Beddington, Unpublished Memoir 'My Life' (1960), Beddington Papers, LHCMA. Beddington indicates 300 candidates but the official source, 'Reports of Entrance Examination Staff College 1909-1913' JSCSC Library, shows 184. Could Beddington have exaggerated his own already formidable achievement?

<sup>64</sup> 'Reports of Entrance Examination Staff College 1909-1913', JSCSC Library.

<sup>65</sup> Edmonds, Memoir p. 261, Edmonds Papers 3/2, LHCMA. R.M.C.– Royal Military College.

the personality of its commandant'.<sup>66</sup> The roll-call of commandants from the turn of the century until 1914 consisted of individuals who were destined to play leading roles in the war. They all stamped their mark on the way Camberley went about its business. Generals Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Henry Wilson and Sir William Robertson were leaders with differing views on how the Staff College should operate.<sup>67</sup> Fuller, who studied in 1913, described them as 'live wires and men of character'.<sup>68</sup> They were highly influential in steering the content and manner of training in the decade leading up to the First World War.

When General Sir Henry Rawlinson took the helm in 1903, 'the atmosphere became less academic and more soldierly'.<sup>69</sup> The South African War had exposed considerable deficiencies in staff capabilities and served as a catalyst for change at Camberley. After the shock of its experience in South Africa, the British army recognised that it needed to create a pool of well-trained staff officers who were prepared for modern warfare. This did not just herald changes at Camberley. Work by Peter Grant has revealed details of the series of administrative and management courses for army officers run at the London School of Economics from 1907/14.<sup>70</sup> At Camberley, Rawlinson built upon the legacy of Colonel G.F.R. Henderson, an influential instructor in the 1890s. Henderson used military history as a substitute for the experience of active service and as a way to understand the function of command.<sup>71</sup> Edmonds praised the way Henderson taught: 'He did not trouble about what had happened – which we could read for ourselves – but took the circumstances

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<sup>66</sup> General Sir John Burnett-Stuart Unpublished Memoir p. 46, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3/6, LHCMA.

<sup>67</sup> Their periods in office were: Rawlinson 1903-1906; Wilson 1907-10; Robertson 1910-13; Sir Launcelot Kiggell was Commandant from 1913-14. Though he had less time to impose his influence he did not possess the same force of character as Rawlinson, Wilson or Robertson.

<sup>68</sup> Fuller, *Army in my Time*, p. 122.

<sup>69</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 46, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3/6, LHCMA.

<sup>70</sup> Grant, 'Mobilizing Charity', pp. 251-260. See also Samuels, *Command or Control*, p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> Holden Reid, *War Studies at Staff College*, p. 7.



as a framework for instruction'.<sup>72</sup> Students were encouraged to examine the principles of warfare rather than accumulating a mass of facts.

Under the tenure of Wilson and Robertson, 'who between them had revolutionised the matter and method of instruction', the Staff College became a more dynamic institution.<sup>73</sup> The annual student intake was increased from under forty to around fifty accompanied by an expansion in the number of instructors.<sup>74</sup> It underlined the army's commitment to developing the expertise of its staff. The opening of the Staff College at Quetta in India in 1907 was a further indication of the increasing emphasis upon military education. The prestige of the Staff Colleges rose accordingly so that an instructor's post was now regarded as a commendable career move within the army.<sup>75</sup> Richard Meinehertzagen, a student at Quetta declared, 'here we have abundant opportunities to study and criticise every branch of staff work and every branch of the art of war and most absorbing it is'.<sup>76</sup> There was a change in climate as the British army recognised that it might become involved in a major conflict in which trained staff officers would be at a premium.

The content of the syllabus began to reflect these new priorities. The military history studies which had focused upon the Napoleonic, American Civil War and Franco-Prussian periods were updated to include the Russo-Japanese war in Manchuria together with other more contemporary events. Analysis of the events of the South African War remained conspicuous by its absence however. The outdoor practical exercises developed from sketching terrain on horseback to more practical military applications such as billeting schemes, bivouacs on manoeuvre, night-guiding

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<sup>72</sup> Edmonds and Franklyn, 'Four Generations of Staff College', p. 44. Henderson was author of the seminal military textbook *Stonewall Jackson* (1898).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 47. For an account of Henry Wilson's tenure as Commandant see C.E. Callwell, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson* (London: Cassell, 1927).

<sup>74</sup> Camberley Reds, 'Records of the Staff College 1903-1914', JSCSC Library.

<sup>75</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, p. 278.

<sup>76</sup> R. Meinehertzagen, *Army Diary 1899-1926* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), p. 53.

operations, signals exercises and river crossings.<sup>77</sup> These were combined with ‘Staff Rides’ and war games. One of the instructors of an exercise held during the summer of 1910 commented:

The chief objective of this Staff Tour was to afford officers an opportunity of studying the problem of a Line of Communication, such as might obtain in the event of an Expeditionary Force being dispatched to take part in a Continental War.<sup>78</sup>

A testament to the effort made to update the instruction was the introduction into the 1913 syllabus of a ground reconnaissance exercise with the object of hiding troops from aircraft.<sup>79</sup> During the summer of their first year, students underwent two periods of attachment with arms of the military that differed from their own. The objective was to provide an understanding of how other parts of the army functioned. A strategic element became evident within the course with the inclusion of topics such as the principles of Imperial defence, naval strategy and bases, UK food supply, studies of foreign armies and papers such as ‘Objectives in foreign territory for British Expeditionary Forces’.<sup>80</sup> These refinements to the syllabus signalled that the possibility of war against Germany was being taken seriously. Explicit confirmation was provided in 1911 after the inclusion of a study of the carrying capacity of German troop trains!<sup>81</sup>

The fundamentals of staff work were covered in the syllabus including the routine business of an HQ such as correspondence, orders, field messages, telegraphy and signalling together with the study of routes, marches and billets.<sup>82</sup> There were

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<sup>77</sup> Camberley Reds, Records of Staff College, JSCSC Library.

<sup>78</sup> Field Marshal Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingbird, Aldershot Command Staff Tour 1910, Montgomery-Massingbird Papers 3/1 to 3/3, LHCMA.

<sup>79</sup> Camberley Reds 1913 Syllabus for Junior Division, JSCSC Library.

<sup>80</sup> Camberley Reds 1907 Syllabus for Senior Division, JSCSC Library.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 1911.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 1906.

specific exercises focused on writing orders, producing intelligence reports and maintaining staff diaries. In 1903, Rawlinson, the commandant at the time, declared, 'In writing orders students were reminded that brevity should be a characteristic of a staff officer's writings. Tropes, metaphors, sallies of wit, or rounded periods are therefore to be sternly suppressed'.<sup>83</sup> According to General H.S. Franklyn, a student at Camberley, 'The insistence on a meticulous accuracy in Staff Duties was most valuable'.<sup>84</sup> Another former student, the future Field Marshal Archibald Wavell, agreed that a good staff officer must be able to produce clear orders at very short notice but thought they had not done enough of this.<sup>85</sup> In his opinion, a serious defect of the Staff College course was the lack of attention paid to the production of clear orders and instructions under pressure. Students were usually given the luxury of several days to compose the movement orders for a formation. Franklyn concurred that not enough was done in the various schemes 'to simulate the hustle and distractions of active service; in fact they lacked realism'.<sup>86</sup> These remarks were surprising, as Henry Wilson had instigated what became known as 'Allez, Allez' operations in an effort to simulate the pressures of warfare, following his visit to the ESG in Paris.<sup>87</sup> It appeared that Wilson's initiative made little impression upon Wavell and may have been abandoned by the time Franklyn arrived in 1914.

While the syllabus evolved to recognise some contemporary developments in warfare, some of Henderson's legacy may have been lost. One commentator has argued that the less imaginative instructors that followed: 'indulged in exhaustive studies of Waterloo and the Shenandoah Valley which had no relevance to modern

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 1903.

<sup>84</sup> Edmonds and Franklyn, 'Four Generations of Staff College', p. 47.

<sup>85</sup> Connell, *Wavell*, p. 63.

<sup>86</sup> Edmonds and Franklyn, 'Four Generations of Staff College', p. 49.

<sup>87</sup> Callwell, *Wilson*, p. 79. Wilson witnessed how tactical schemes were conducted with urgency at the ESG and replicated this at Camberley.

war'.<sup>88</sup> Franklyn, a student in the final intake of 1914, believed there was 'Too much teaching of military history for its own sake and no sustained effort made to extract the lessons which might be applicable to modern war'.<sup>89</sup> He may have been an unreliable witness for the prosecution as he only completed part of the syllabus. Fuller suggested that instead of drawing lessons from the South African or Russo-Japanese wars, training in the British army was influenced by the views of those such as the German lecturer Major Hoppenstadt who stated:

We must absolutely exclude from our idea of the offensive battle the notion that the spade may be preferable to the rifle. Materially and morally, protection is best obtained by the most vigorous action. To dig oneself in diminishes the intensity of one's fire and depresses the offensive spirit.<sup>90</sup>

These criticisms have some validity but they demonstrate that the British were aware of current debate taking place on the continent. Contrary to Fuller's view, the syllabus had been updated to include lessons from the Russo-Japanese war and students from Quetta undertook a three-month trip to the Manchurian battlefields.<sup>91</sup> Philip Howell was one of those involved and he corresponded with his friend Douglas Haig about the experience. Haig wrote back, 'I hold that the study of history is of great value in bringing home the effect of ground upon tactics'.<sup>92</sup> The problem was that the teaching failed to anticipate how modern warfare was about to develop.

Staff College teaching provided students with the skills they needed for the war the British army expected. Much of the training emanated from the army's considerable experience as a colonial police force. As Bourne noted, 'Colonial campaigns of counter-insurgency provided few opportunities for large-scale

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<sup>88</sup> Holden Reid, *War Studies at Staff College*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Edmonds and Franklyn, 'Four Generations of Staff College', p. 48.

<sup>90</sup> Fuller, *Army in My Time*, p. 126.

<sup>91</sup> Capper, Account of trip to Manchuria, Capper Papers 2/1-3, LHCMA.

<sup>92</sup> Haig to Howell October 1907, Howell Papers 2/4, LHCMA.

operations'.<sup>93</sup> There was scant coverage of fighting across fixed trench lines or fortifications in the syllabus as students continued to be prepared for a war of movement and encounter. It was the type of war a small professional army would expect to fight and for the first few months of 1914 it proved to be the war they faced. The post-war Kirke Committee concluded: 'In 1914 we met a sort of war for which we were trained, and did well. As trench warfare developed we were slow to appreciate that totally different conditions required a complete change of method'.<sup>94</sup>

All the major powers were surprised by the war they ended up fighting. Staff officers in France and Germany had the advantage of being trained in the management of large formations but they were no more prepared than their British counterparts for a war of positional struggle. Recent work by Philpott has revealed that the French recognised higher formation staff work in the British army was in its infancy and tried to improve it by mentoring.<sup>95</sup> He has identified considerable cooperation between their respective army staffs during the years leading to war.

Staff officers formed a prestigious and integral part of the German army. Rather than merely serving commanders, German staff officers possessed real authority. In a report compiled for the War Office in 1900, Edmonds outlined the principal differences between the respective staff colleges: students in Germany were all under the rank of captain; the course was three years rather than two; there was no quota system by army branch; most of the instructors held senior staff appointments so teaching only formed part of their work; the college was directly controlled by the Chief of Staff of the army and graduates had to serve a year's probation on the

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<sup>93</sup> Bourne, *Britain and Great War*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>94</sup> General Sir Walter Kirke, 'Lessons from the Great War' Committee, Kirke Papers 4/4, LHCMA.

<sup>95</sup> W. Philpott, 'The Making of the Military Entente, 1904-14: France, the British Army, and the Prospect of War', *English Historical Review* Oct 2013, pp. 1-32.

General Staff before being given an appointment.<sup>96</sup> For all these differences, the content of the entry examinations and the syllabus had much in common. Both systems placed the emphasis on professional rather than academic subjects though in Germany languages were studied along with scientific subjects, especially in the initial year.

A detailed comparison of the respective syllabuses shows that German students were no more prepared for the static warfare they encountered than the British.<sup>97</sup> The *Kriegsakademie* [KA] only revised its 1888 ‘Order of Teaching’ in 1912.<sup>98</sup> This produced a greater emphasis on military rather than academic subjects that served to bring it more into line with the curriculum at Camberley. The content of the instruction in both staff colleges was broadly similar which suggested that the German army, like the British, was preparing for a short war of movement. Overall, the two systems were comparable and probably produced graduates of similar calibre. The critical issue was supply. The German system was geared to provide enough officers for a large standing army. Competition for entry may have been greater than in Britain but the well-established German staff college handled over 130 new entrants each year giving it a standing population of 400 officers at any one time. The exigencies of warfare did not place Germany in the parlous position faced by the British in 1915 when they had such a dearth of trained staff officers.

The French staff college, *École Supérieure de Guerre* [ESG], was established in Paris in 1874, soon after the Franco-Prussian war. There was an emphasis on the study of tactics and a key feature of the course was the individual moulding of each student. This was described by Ferdinand Foch, a Commandant of the College in the

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<sup>96</sup> Edmonds, ‘Systems Training of Staff Officers in German Army’ (1900) p. 31, Edmonds Papers V/5/3, LHCMA.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35; an outline of the German syllabus was provided by Edmonds.

<sup>98</sup> Samuels, *Command or Control?*, p. 23.

years leading up to the First World War, as the mental equivalent of the breaking-in and training of a remount.<sup>99</sup> When Sir Henry Wilson visited the ESG in 1909 he discovered the student to staff ratio at the ESG was less than four to one compared to Camberley's ratio of nine to one. Wilson observed:

Although I was only present at nine different lectures and conferences, I saw enough [knowing our own Staff College as I do] to realise that at the end of two years the French students are a much more finished article than our Camberley students.<sup>100</sup>

He attributed this to the high level of individual attention and instruction received by the ESG students. Entry to the ESG was by examination but unlike Camberley there was no quota system. Students were all lieutenants or captains with an average age of thirty-five which was similar to Camberley. The length of the ESG course was increased from two to three years in 1910, which brought it into line with the German system. There were ninety students in each of the first two years but only the best twenty graduated to the third year and were identified as future higher leaders.

The syllabus at the ESG bore much in common with Camberley and the *Kriegsakademie* with the exception of military history. There was no separate study of military campaigns although all the lectures were illustrated by references to examples from the past. Tactical studies formed the core of the instruction and efforts were made to include the latest technological developments especially in the third year of the course.<sup>101</sup> Following his visit to the ESG, Wilson submitted a request for ten extra instructors at Camberley. He stated 'I cannot see how we can ever hope to reach anything like the French standard unless we greatly increase the Staff'.<sup>102</sup> The

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<sup>99</sup> Report of Colonel Fairholme on 1909 visit to ESG in Paris, WO 32/8937, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Visit of Sir Henry Wilson and Colonel Fairholme to the *École Supérieure de Guerre* in Paris 1909, WO 32/8937, TNA.

<sup>101</sup> Fairholme, 1909 ESG Report, WO 32/8937, TNA.

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, Visit to ESG, WO 32/8937, TNA.

French system did not produce as many graduates as its German equivalent but there was an emphasis on individual instruction and the study of tactics. In the years leading up to 1914, the ESG focused upon educating officers not formulating doctrine.<sup>103</sup> One contemporary publication noted, ‘The École Supérieure de la guerre today is not properly speaking a ‘school of war’ but rather a special academic organisation turning out good staff officers’.<sup>104</sup> Led by the distinguished Foch from 1907/1911, the ESG was focused upon imbuing the expertise needed for effective military planning and administration. The British military attaché who accompanied Wilson on his visit was impressed and reported: ‘The system of teaching is unquestionably excellent’.<sup>105</sup>

Critics of the British Staff colleges have pointed to their lack of flexibility and preoccupation with regulations. Burnett-Stuart, who was a student and later an instructor charged:

the weakness of the instruction generally was the tendency to take the regulations and official manuals as Bibles and quote them incessantly, instead of encouraging the many quick brains to go one better and develop their own ideas.<sup>106</sup>

Those students that did develop their own ideas could often encounter problems with authority. When the mercurial J.F.C. Fuller arrived at Camberley in 1913 he adopted the unorthodox view that artillery and not infantry would be the dominant arm in any forthcoming conflict. He strayed further from conformity when he developed his own principles of war as the standard Field Service Regulations failed to define any. Fuller was a gifted student brimming with innovative ideas but it was questionable if he understood the qualities required for effective staff work. He remarked that his

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<sup>103</sup> D. Porch, *The March to the Marne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 219. This was the view of General Debeney, Professor of Infantry Tactics at the ESG.

<sup>104</sup> Porch, *March to Marne*, p. 220. A quote taken from *La Porte Voix*, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1914.

<sup>105</sup> Fairholme visit to ESG, WO 32/8937, TNA.

<sup>106</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 71, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.



teachers, who were ‘parts of a machine created to produce standardised thinking’, regarded his views as rank heresy.<sup>107</sup> In the view of one historian ‘it was symptomatic of the stultifying intellectual atmosphere of the Staff College before 1914 that these tentative steps away from official orthodoxy were stamped upon’.<sup>108</sup> Writing about this same period when he had been an instructor at Camberley, Burnett-Stuart noted an air of orthodoxy that spread down from the Commandant.<sup>109</sup>

A sense of orthodoxy and regulation may have been desirable. Standardisation and uniformity were important elements in effective staff work. If the mandate of the Staff College was to produce efficient staff officers then it would need to inculcate a different set of skills than those required by senior commanders. The issue was that the mandate represented a source of debate and opinion was divided. This dichotomy was embodied in the views of different commandants who exerted considerable influence over the philosophy of the College. Robertson’s credo demanded that attention to detail made the difference between success and failure in military terms. A good staff officer needed detailed information at his disposal relating to different aspects of his forces.<sup>110</sup> His predecessors, Rawlinson and Wilson, took the view that students should be studying strategic questions and be educated on political issues. Rawlinson believed that Staff College officers should not just be trained for staff duties but also with a view for future high command.

In 1911 Haig wrote, ‘many officers look upon the Staff College as an institution for training of staff officers only, whereas, it is really a school for the

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<sup>107</sup> Fuller, *Unconventional Soldier*, pp. 23-29.

<sup>108</sup> B. Holden Reid, *JFC Fuller; Military Thinker* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 28.

<sup>109</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 71, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.

<sup>110</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, p. 280.

training of future commanders and leaders'.<sup>111</sup> Other former students took a different view. In Wavell's opinion:

The instruction had, I fancy, greatly improved in quality in the few years before we went there and was more practical.... But it was still to my mind too academic and theoretical and aimed too high. Its main object should surely have been to turn out good staff officers and not to train commanders of corps and armies.<sup>112</sup>

According to Franklyn, Camberley succeeded in meeting this objective: 'Looking back on the few months we spent at the Staff College one appreciates that one was taught a great deal that was of immediate practical value for war'.<sup>113</sup> Beddington supported this view when he concluded, 'as the result of what I had learnt at Camberley I was well equipped to deal with any situation that arose when I was a Staff Officer'.<sup>114</sup>

The impact of Camberley and Quetta extended beyond the training they provided. It offered what Robertson described as 'a smartening friction' with other brains and the opportunity to encounter other future senior officers.<sup>115</sup> Some of the relationships formed at the Staff Colleges endured throughout the war and played a significant role in determining the formation of alliances within the senior command structure of the army. General 'Tim' Harington recollected, 'I think the greatest factor of the Staff College was the firm friendships made there'.<sup>116</sup> A Camberley instructor and former Commandant of Quetta, Major-General Sir Thompson Capper observed, 'the great value of having Staff Officers trained at the Staff College – one great value

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<sup>111</sup> Haig to Lieutenant-General Sir Launcelot Kiggell 27 April 1911, Kiggell Papers 1/11, LHCMA.

<sup>112</sup> Connell, *Wavell*, p. 62. Wavell entered Camberley in 1909 and studied under Wilson and Robertson.

<sup>113</sup> Edmonds and Franklyn, 'Four Generations of Staff College', p. 49.

<sup>114</sup> Beddington, Memoir p. 52, Beddington Papers, LHCMA.

<sup>115</sup> W. Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal* (London: Constable and Co, 1921), p. 81.

<sup>116</sup> Harington, *Harington Looks Back*, p. 33.

– is that they get this unity. Officers live together, and go through the same mill together for two years or more'.<sup>117</sup>

The feeling of unity was enhanced when students worked in syndicates on many of the papers and practical exercises. Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine, an instructor at Camberley, explained how the syndicates worked:

Generally one officer will be appropriated head of each syndicate. The duty of the head of the syndicate is to arrange the distribution of the work among all the members of the syndicate, to see that nothing which ought to be done is omitted, and to put the work together in a proper shape.<sup>118</sup>

This method brought different officers together and taught them to work in teams. Capper stated, 'I think it is one of the most valuable things done in the Staff Colleges'.<sup>119</sup> The only drawback was that too much syndicate work deprived officers of the experience of individual decision-making. Perhaps the final word should go to Edward Beddington who reflected on his experiences: 'We worked pretty hard that year, a good many lectures and a lot of tactical exercises out of doors. The teaching was remarkably good'.<sup>120</sup> With the outbreak of war that teaching came to an end as the Staff Colleges closed their doors. The British army expanded beyond its pool of trained staff and faced the dilemma of how to find officers with the requisite skills to fill the growing number of vacant posts.

### *Staff Duties*

Field Marshal Sir John Dill who served as a staff officer during the First World War reflected that, 'The aspirant for an appointment on the staff must first have a thorough

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<sup>117</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties p. 13, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCMA.

<sup>118</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Jeudwine, Introductory address to Junior Division Camberley 1913, Jeudwine Papers 72/82/7, IWM.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Beddington, Memoir p. 45, Beddington Papers, LHCMA.

knowledge of army and staff organisation and of the staff machinery and methods; that is, of what is called staff duties'.<sup>121</sup> Official military sources and opinions expressed by contemporary practitioners provide the main insights into the principles underpinning staff machinery and methods prior to the outbreak of war. The army established the official delineation within FSR 1909 and the 1912 Staff Manual. The Staff Manual outlined, 'The Staff is composed of officers specially appointed to assist superiors who are vested with executive authority on their own responsibility'.<sup>122</sup> The manuals stipulated that the staff was organised in three branches.<sup>123</sup> The responsibility for military planning lay with the G branch. It was concerned primarily with the arrangement and drafting of orders for all military operations. This was defined specifically as 'The compilation, co-ordination and issue of all orders and instructions'.<sup>124</sup>

A key duty for the senior G branch officer was to provide the formation commander with the information necessary to decide upon his plans. The Staff Manual defined this as 'all available intelligence regarding the enemy, the country and all parts and services of his own army'.<sup>125</sup> As well as planning operations, staff duties covered a range of activities from the movement and quartering of troops to inter-communication in the field and intelligence gathering. The Staff Manual stated that officers of each branch of the Staff should have a good general knowledge of the duties of other branches.<sup>126</sup> The guiding principles outlined the structure of the staff

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<sup>121</sup> Field Marshal Sir John Dill, Lecture 'The RAF Staff College and a Higher College of War', (undated), Dill Papers 1/11, LHCMA.

<sup>122</sup> General Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 2, Section 2, WO 32/4731, TNA.

<sup>123</sup> FSR 1909 Part II, WO 676, p.38, IWM. The structure and roles outlined in FSR 1909 and the 1912 Staff Manual were applied to GHQ but acted as the template for subordinate commands at Army, Corps and Division. The two other branches of the staff, A and Q handled personnel issues and logistics respectively.

<sup>124</sup> General Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 2, Principles of Organization of Staff Duties, p.15, WO 32/4731, TNA.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

and how the three different sections should interact. The head of G branch was tasked with working in close cooperation and coordinating the other staff sections to obtain this information although he was not responsible for the work they carried out. As the informal head of the staff team, the senior officer of the G branch served as the principal point of liaison with the formation commander. This arrangement provided him with unique access to the GOC and the opportunity to offer advice. The relationship between these two senior officers could have a significant influence upon the operational effectiveness of a formation. As the Staff Manual stated: ‘After a plan has been decided it is the duty of the General Staff to provide for its successful execution not just by relaying orders & information but by foreseeing and providing for difficulties that may arise’.<sup>127</sup> It placed the working relationship between the commander and the senior G branch officer at the fulcrum of the command function.

Brigadier-General Hubert Foster, a leading military writer of the period, outlined the importance of the staff to the command function. Foster emphasised the view that the function of the staff was to relieve the commander of details.<sup>128</sup> This would allow him to devote his attention to formulate how to defeat the enemy. Specifically, the staff should work out the details of the dispositions and movements of troops, their units and numbers. They should embody the commander’s plans in clear and concise orders, which should be transmitted with certainty and dispatch. Foster wrote that good staff officers ‘are eyes, ears and hands to their Chief’.<sup>129</sup> In his view:

The Staff forms the nervous system of the Command. The better trained the Staff, the more free will the General be to concentrate his attention on the

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<sup>127</sup> Staff Manual 1912 p. 29, WO 32/4731, TNA.

<sup>128</sup> H. Foster, *Organization, How Armies are Formed for War* (London; Hugh Rees Ltd, 1911), p. 57.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

situation, and his Subordinate Commanders to carry out his plans with co-operating intelligence.<sup>130</sup>

In February 1912, Major-General Sir Thompson Capper expounded upon the function of the staff when he delivered a lecture in Dublin to the Royal Military Society of Ireland.<sup>131</sup> Having recently returned from a six-year spell as Commandant of the Indian Staff College in Quetta, Capper was instrumental in educating a new generation of staff officers. He explained to his audience that the army had been slow to recognise the necessity for a highly trained staff but had now learned its lesson. The subject of his lecture was ‘Staff Duties’, in which he outlined how the general staff were organised, where they stood on the military map and their place in the process of command. According to Capper:

Whatever principles or organisation of Staff duties may be adopted in an army, the main object in view remains the same – viz., smooth and efficient co-operation of every part of the force, directed with energy and determination to the defeat of the enemy.<sup>132</sup>

To illustrate his theme of the important part played by staff officers in modern warfare he used an example from the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/5. During his recent tour of the Manchurian battlefields, Capper met a Japanese officer who remarked, ‘You have been kind enough to praise the valour of our troops, but you must remember that we attribute the success of our campaign equally to the extreme efficiency of our Staff’.<sup>133</sup>

Throughout his lecture, Capper quoted extensively from FSR 1909 and the newly published Staff Manual. He pointed out that the staff may have been split into

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties to Royal Military Society of Ireland in Dublin February 1912 pp. 1-23, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCMA. During the First World War, Capper served as GOC of 7<sup>th</sup> Division. He was killed by a German sniper at the Battle of Loos in September 1915.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 7; Capper conducted a three month tour of the battlefields of the Russo-Japanese War for twenty Quetta students in 1907.

three branches, the so-called trinity, but they were expected to work in close co-operation. As the Staff Manual stated, 'The relationship between officers serving on the staff must be close and cordial'.<sup>134</sup> The three branch heads were encouraged to meet personally in order to save time and obviate misunderstandings. G branch was responsible for providing information regarding the situation and requirements of the troops to the other two staff branches. They were expected to keep themselves 'constantly informed as to the distribution of all administrative units and the proposals of the other branches of the staff with regard to them'.<sup>135</sup> It remained to be seen how well this scheme would operate once the 'fog of war' had descended.

Capper took the view that staff work demanded practical men who were in constant touch with the troops.<sup>136</sup> The official War Office guidelines defined the role of a staff officer as follows:

An officer of the staff, as such, is vested with no military command, but he has a two-fold responsibility; first, he assists a commander in the supervision and control of the operations and requirements of the troops, and transmits his orders and instructions; secondly, it is his duty to give to the troops every assistance in his power in carrying out the instructions issued to them.<sup>137</sup>

While a staff officer had no authority over 'troops, services or departments' he should not be regarded merely as a secretary according to the Staff Manual.<sup>138</sup> It was the duty of the G branch to study the military situation and be prepared to suggest plans of operations to commanders. The Staff Manual noted that the position was 'a difficult one' as although staff possessed no military command they were empowered to act on behalf of a commander when the occasion demanded it.<sup>139</sup> This called for a

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<sup>134</sup> Staff Manual Chapter One p. 9, WO 32/4731 TNA.

<sup>135</sup> FSR 1909, Part II, Section 15: Duties of the General Staff p. 39, WO 676, IWM.

<sup>136</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties p. 17, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCMA.

<sup>137</sup> Field Service Regulations 1909, Part II, Chapter III, Section 15, Paragraph 2, WO 676, IWM.

<sup>138</sup> Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 2, Principles of Organization of Staff Duties, p.10, WO 32/4731, TNA.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

degree of judgment and knowledge of the commander's views. Such insight was gained through experience and the development of a sound working relationship. It was another reason the interaction between a GOC and his staff was central to the command process. The Staff Manual conceded,

This means that efficient performance of staff duties is far more difficult in a new organisation than one which has existed for a long time, and in which commanders and Staff know each other well and are accustomed to work together.<sup>140</sup>

Under the stress of wartime conditions this became a significant factor. As we shall see, familiarity with the working practices, temperaments and foibles of others led to a propensity for some command teams to stick together and move between formations. It caused others to implode.

The Staff Manual made it clear that in order to avoid overlap, individual staff officers should be allotted specific tasks.<sup>141</sup> An outline of these duties was delineated in some detail and allocated to defined staff officer grades. [Appendix 3] As Jeudwine pointed out, 'It is important that there should be only one well understood system of staff duties in an army. Unless this is so there is bound to be confusion'.<sup>142</sup> There was an expectation that in addition to any designated tasks, a staff officer would also be available for general duties if needed. There was a degree of flexibility in task allocation depending upon experience. The Staff Manual suggested that the GSO 2 may wish to take responsibility for drafting orders so that the senior staff officer can remain with the commander: 'keeping him updated and ascertaining his wishes'.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>142</sup> Jeudwine, Address to Junior Division, Jeudwine Papers 72/82/7, IWM.

<sup>143</sup> Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 3 p. 35, WO 32/4731, TNA.



As well as acting as an assistant to the commander a staff officer was expected to act as an assistant to the troops. The Staff Manual was unequivocal with regard to the relationship between staff and soldiers stating, ‘Staff Officers must regard themselves as the friends and servants of the troops; always unsparing in their endeavours to help them by every possible means in carrying out their difficult task’.<sup>144</sup> In his Dublin speech, Capper stressed the importance of ensuring that there were no barriers between staff and troops. The army had to promote ‘the idea of a common working for a common end – the spirit of co-operation, and the spirit of unity’.<sup>145</sup> This was the pre-war ideal but whether it would endure under combat conditions remained to be seen. The rapport the army wished to encourage was compromised by a number of factors that came to the fore after hostilities commenced. Not least were the notorious ‘red tabs’ worn by the staff. The 1909 FSR stated, ‘Staff officers wear distinctive marks on their uniform by which they may be recognised, and which are not worn by any officer not appointed to the staff’.<sup>146</sup> These marks served to highlight the separate identity of the staff from the regimental system and would become a symbol of division during the war. They militated against any feeling of unity the army wished to promote.

The Staff Manual declared it was a primary necessity for a staff officer to minimise any causes of friction.<sup>147</sup> In Capper’s opinion this was often where those officers that graduated from the Staff Colleges enjoyed an advantage as they spent two years working under the ‘syndicate’ system. This placed staff officers in teams in which they learned together even if they did not get on personally. It promulgated a sense of unity among Staff College graduates. The ‘unity’ described by Capper soon

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>145</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties p. 23, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCMA.

<sup>146</sup> FSR 1909, Part II, p.37, WO 676, IWM.

<sup>147</sup> Staff Manual, Chapter One, p. 7, WO 32/4731, TNA.

underwent a searching examination as war broke out just eighteen months after his speech.

In concluding his address, Capper emphasised the important role played by the staff: 'in those cases where a General can rely on highly trained, thoroughly sound, members of a devoted staff, whatever weakness there may be, the Staff itself – as a whole – will never fail'.<sup>148</sup> Despite Capper's optimism, the army remained concerned that staff officers did not get sufficient practice at working together in the field. As Burnett-Stuart, a Camberley instructor during this period remarked, 'Nothing is more difficult in normal times of peace than to assess the war-value of an officer'.<sup>149</sup> Working in syndicates at the Staff Colleges may have promoted a team ethos in some individuals but many of the staff suffered from inexperience at working together in the field.

A General Staff Course held in November 1913 highlighted that although the instruction at the Staff Colleges was of a high standard, staff work in the field was often poor.<sup>150</sup> This was attributed to a lack of practice especially at the higher formation levels. As Robbins has outlined, there were no army or corps staff during peacetime and a division possessed just a single general staff officer.<sup>151</sup> The objective of the course was to get officers accustomed to working together and to sharpen their staff work, particularly in the dictation or writing of orders. Major-General H.B. Williams, who later became MGGS of Second Army, stated 'Staff work in the field requires practice, just as shorthand or piano playing does'.<sup>152</sup> The dilemma faced by the staff was they ran out of time for rehearsal and when war broke out the inexperience of some was exposed.

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<sup>148</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties p. 21, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCMA.

<sup>149</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 46, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3/6, LHCMA.

<sup>150</sup> Major General H.B. Williams, 'General Staff Course 1913', Williams Papers, 77/189/4, IWM.

<sup>151</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>152</sup> Williams, 'General Staff Course 1913', Williams Papers, 77/189/4, IWM.

## *Conclusion*

The General Staff of the British army came into being less than ten years before the outbreak of the First World War. Despite the efforts of Spenser Wilkinson, it was not until the events of the South African War exposed the shortcomings of their staff work that the British belatedly took action. As Director of Military Training, Douglas Haig played a key role in the development of the staff and the introduction of some basic military doctrine. Having been a student at Camberley, as well as serving as a staff officer in the field, Haig understood the significance of the function in military operations. Crucially, he recognised the need to create standardised principles for use across the army. This led to the creation of two key documents, FSR 1909 and the 1912 Staff Manual, which provided the foundation for the way the staff were organised, their place within the army and the duties they were expected to perform. These were guides to best practice but the key question would be their practical value in war. Any defects would be exposed and the staff would discover if the framework these guides provided for the execution of their duties remained relevant. Their utility would face rigorous testing and challenges that few had foreseen.

Exacting entry requirements, a new impetus on staff training after the South African War and some inspirational college commandants raised the standard of instruction in the British Staff Colleges during the pre-war decade. Criticism can be levelled on the grounds of the contention surrounding their mandate rather than the quality of instruction. If the objective of Camberley and Quetta was to produce future leaders then they can be accused of stifling the unorthodox and being preoccupied with regulations. Alternatively, producing good staff officers required more emphasis on practical study rather than strategy and theory. Perhaps they should have produced both. Hugh Jeudwine certainly thought so when he told the intake of 1913, ‘The aim

of the course of study here is to fit you to become in time not only good staff officers but good commanders'.<sup>153</sup> The content and approach to teaching varied according to the views of the incumbent commandant. The result was a lack of consistency. Weighed against this was the unity experienced by Staff College students and the opportunities to learn from their colleagues.

The underlying ethos of the staff, as the Staff Manual declared, was to act as assistants to their commanders and as servants to the troops. The same mantra was evident at the Staff Colleges. It was deemed essential that there should be no barriers between troops and staff. The staff should be there to provide help and assistance to the fighting soldiers. The emphasis was on unity but while this may have worked during peacetime, the test of war was an entirely different matter. The way the relationship between troops and staff developed under the duress of several years of fighting will be examined in some detail later.

The quality of instruction at Camberley and Quetta was broadly comparable to that of their German and French equivalents. The German or French staff were no better prepared than the British for the changes they were about to encounter in a war which would become a positional struggle after the initial phase of movement drew to a close. They were all forced to adapt. When the staff of the British Expeditionary Force [BEF] went to war in 1914 in an atmosphere of unbridled enthusiasm, they were to face a particularly difficult baptism in the field. Many were coming together for the first time to work as a staff team. There had been little opportunity for practice and preparation. They would be tested to the full.

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<sup>153</sup> Jeurwine, Address to Junior Division, p. 10, Jeurwine Papers 72/82/7, IWM.

## Chapter Two

### The Staff Go to War

The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 witnessed a surge of patriotic fervour in Britain and a rush to join the colours. Those already serving in the military were keen to get out to France and play their part in a war that most expected would be over in a few months. The students of the Staff College at Camberley were no exception. As J.F.C. Fuller remarked in his memoirs, ‘On August 5<sup>th</sup> we students just disappeared. There was no rush or excitement; we simply melted away.’<sup>1</sup> Their instructors joined the exodus and left the Staff College to take up senior appointments with the British army. A senior staff officer observed soon after the war, ‘Far too many were allowed to go...This rush of staff officers to the front may have shown a proper spirit, but it was contrary to common sense, and it militated against the first principle of keeping strong the central directing body’.<sup>2</sup> This dramatic turn of events culminated in the closure of Camberley, which was subsequently employed in the more mundane role of providing accommodation for officers studying at Sandhurst. A similar fate befell the Indian Staff College at Quetta, which closed its doors the following year. The repercussions were soon apparent.

The early part of the war represented a turbulent period for the staff, characterised by a process of continuous change. The rapid expansion of the British army led to soaring demand for experienced officers in both command and staff roles. Closure of the Staff Colleges meant the finite pool of graduates was soon exhausted. Filling the incremental staff posts created by the growth of the British army over the first eighteen months of the war was a formidable challenge. The creation of new

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<sup>1</sup> Fuller, *Unconventional Soldier*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> G. Dawnay and C. Headlam, ‘The Staff’, *Army Quarterly* 2 (1) (1920), p. 19-35.

formations and structures needed to manage the swelling number of troops in the field created an insatiable demand for staff officers. The growth of the artillery and engineering functions exacerbated the problem. This chapter will examine the measures taken by the army to blend proven expertise with inexperience in staffing these new units for war. The period was marked by turmoil as new officers were introduced into the staff system and opportunities were created for those with experience. The careers of the officers that formed the staff at the start of hostilities have been traced as it offers an insight into their personal influence and the way the system developed. It was a period of great change that was reflected in the changing characteristics of the staff. Teams had little chance to establish themselves before their members were redeployed elsewhere. In the face of these enormous challenges the staff produced a creditable performance and demonstrated considerable flexibility.

A view has prevailed that British staff work was plagued by inexperience and incompetence with standards falling to a particularly low point in 1915. The staff had to negotiate the transition from a war of movement to the static warfare of the trenches. This was a challenge faced by the rest of the British army and by all the other combatant armies. During the initial phase, although under considerable pressure, they acquitted themselves well. In the following year, their performance attracted considerable criticism, particularly after the Battle of Loos. Staff officers came under fire in the Press and in the House of Lords.<sup>3</sup> This level of censure was unjustified. Two actions conducted in the Ypres Salient in 1915 are used in this chapter to illustrate that although mistakes were made and there was much to be learned, there was also some first-rate planning during this period.

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<sup>3</sup> Lord St Davids, House of Lords, *Hansard* 16 November 1915 v20 p. 360. He delivered a speech critical of the staff referencing fourteen different newspapers that had carried recent articles condemning the quality of staff work.

## *The staff of 1914*

In August 1914, the BEF, which comprised two corps of around 100,000 men, embarked for France. These two corps consisted of one cavalry and six infantry divisions. There were a total of thirty-one general staff posts within these formations. This number rose to forty-four with the inclusion of artillery staff.<sup>4</sup> The talented Brigadier-General Johnnie Gough of the Rifle Brigade led the general staff of I Corps, while Brigadier-General George Forrestier-Walker, an artilleryman, was the senior staff officer at II Corps. The general staff of the BEF at the outbreak of war shared two key characteristics. They were all regular officers and they had all passed through the Staff College at Camberley. Owing to the relatively small size of Britain's pre-war army only I Corps, led by Sir Douglas Haig, had been in place before the outbreak of hostilities and it had limited experience of operating in the field. The largest formation involved in field manoeuvres or staff rides was usually the division. The staff of both corps had limited experience of working together and the structure was an unfamiliar one. To compound these issues, the leadership of II Corps was in new hands as the previous incumbent, Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson, had died from illness shortly after arriving in France. The staff of II Corps had precious little opportunity to develop a working relationship with his successor, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, before they faced the German army. As Colonel W.N. Nicholson remarked, 'Our organisation and administration on the outbreak of war may therefore be said to have started from scratch; whereas Continental Powers with their large peace armies and extensive manoeuvres had a long start'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Each Corps had five general staff while each division had three general staff plus artillery Brigade-Major (BM) and Staff Captain (SC). These numbers do not include Brigade staff. There were three Brigades to each Division. Each Brigade had a BM and SC. The inclusion of Brigades gives an overall total of eighty-three general & artillery staff officers.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 195.

Each corps was established with a team of five general [G] staff while each division possessed three posts. A BGGS at corps and a GSO 1 at division level led staff teams. The remaining members were GSO 2 and the junior staff post of GSO 3. At this stage, corps had no artillery staff although this changed later in the war. In 1914, two artillery staff officers, in the form of a Brigade Major and a Staff Captain, augmented the general staff in each division. These were the teams that, together with their GOC, bore responsibility for planning, formulating, distributing and ensuring that operational orders were executed. Although the command structure was relatively new, this group of staff officers was rich in military service and experience.

The thirty-one corps and divisional general staff that landed in France in August 1914 had an average age of forty-three with an average military service of twenty-three years. [Appendix 4] Their regimental backgrounds varied. There were twenty infantrymen, three cavalrymen, five from the artillery and three engineers. Almost all of these officers had participated in the various colonial wars fought across the British Empire during the three decades that preceded the First World War. Many of them had seen action in the conflict with the Boers in South Africa. Most were familiar with combat and a number of them possessed gallantry medals. Johnnie Gough had won the Victoria Cross in a rearguard action at Daratoleh in Somaliland in 1903. Captain Bertram Lefroy, who came to France as GSO 3 of 1<sup>st</sup> Division, was awarded the DSO in the South African War for his part in the defence of two forts during which he was severely wounded. A recipient of the same award during the Boer conflict was the accomplished cricketer Herbert Studd, GSO 2 of II Corps in 1914. Studd captained Cambridge University and played some first-class cricket for Middlesex and Hampshire before he joined the Coldstream Guards in 1891.<sup>6</sup> Other

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<sup>6</sup> Obituary of H.W. Studd 1947, *Wisden Cricketing Almanac*, [www.wisden.com](http://www.wisden.com).



members of this group of staff officers won gallantry medals or merited mention in dispatches. While few of them held senior command, the majority of them had experienced war at close quarters.<sup>7</sup>

At fifty-three years old, the oldest members of the general staff at the start of the war were J.E. Edmonds of 4<sup>th</sup> Division and Frederick Gordon of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. They both began the war as GSO 1 and each had recorded thirty-three years of military service. The GSO 1 at I Corps, Hugh Jeudwine, was just a year younger. Jeudwine had served on the staff during the South African War and then worked as an instructor at Camberley. In 1918 he became the oldest divisional commander on the Western Front.<sup>8</sup> The youngest member of this group of general staff was Captain Henry Howard, GSO 3 with the Cavalry Division, who was thirty-two in 1914. Though the youngest, Howard had still notched up thirteen years service. This cadre of staff officers had virtually all received a public school education with nine of them attending Eton alone. Four of the five general staff of I Corps were former pupils at Eton. They enjoyed further connections during their time at Camberley as all five had attended as students or instructors between 1902 and 1912. Such a degree of familiarity helped them to work together as a staff team. The lengthy military experience of most of the general staff stood them in good stead as they immediately found themselves under pressure with rapidly moving events dictating a high momentum to the initial phase of fighting.

The BEF initially faced German forces far superior in number and were soon on the retreat. A successful holding action at Le Cateau allowed the BEF to continue to withdraw for a further five days. It was a period when staff work was immensely

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 8 or Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 209, provides a broad breakdown of colonial war experience for senior staff officers.

<sup>8</sup> In 1918, at the age of 56, Jeudwine was GOC of 55<sup>th</sup> Division. Thanks to Dr John Bourne for pointing this out.

difficult and the stakes extremely high. It did not take long for the strain to show. As one of the oldest staff officers, Edmonds soon discovered that life in the field exacted a heavy physical toll. The retreat from Mons proved to be an ordeal for him and after just a few weeks he broke down from exhaustion.<sup>9</sup> Another senior staff officer, Lieutenant-Colonel G.S. Barrow, described the fast pace of the fighting and the pressure on the staff during this period:

Cipher messages from GHQ giving the password and intended movement for the next day would arrive at midnight. These would have to be decoded and acknowledged in code. Sometimes, when not clear, a request would have to be made for their repetition. It might be 1 or 2 a.m. before there was a chance of lying down. Then one had to be up and on the move again at the first streak of dawn.<sup>10</sup>

While many suffered from physical fatigue there were other staff officers who found the whole experience emotionally harrowing. For Colonel F.R. Boileau, the GSO 1 of 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, the pressure became overwhelming. His colleague Frederick Maurice wrote home, 'Poor old Boileau went quite off his head with the strain and finally shot himself. A terrible end to a good soldier and a good man'.<sup>11</sup> This tragic turn of events benefitted Maurice who was promoted GSO 1 in Boileau's place. Although he went on to achieve notoriety later in the war, Maurice shared many characteristics with his fellow staff officers in 1914.<sup>12</sup> The eldest son of a Major-General, he was a regular soldier who had been with the army for over twenty years. He had served in the South African War and passed through the Staff College in 1903. After this, Maurice served under Haig in the Directorate of Staff Duties at the War Office and became an

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<sup>9</sup> Edmonds, War service, Edmonds Papers 3/6, LHCMA.

<sup>10</sup> G.S. Barrow, *The Fire of Life* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1942), p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice to wife 31 August 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/10, LHCMA.

<sup>12</sup> In the wake of the German Spring offensive in 1918, Maurice wrote a letter to the press stating that false statements had been made by the government in relation to the reduction in size of the British Army and the extended front they were forced to hold.

instructor at Camberley in 1913.<sup>13</sup> He adopted an enthusiastic attitude to his role on the staff, almost revelling in the task. Maurice informed his wife, 'I am as well as possible and as you know I love this work'.<sup>14</sup> Despite his apparent zeal, even the irrepressible Maurice was forced to concede that the retreat of the BEF had placed a considerable strain upon the staff: 'The work of organising retirements is about the most difficult job a staff can have to do and as I have been through it successfully I feel I can tackle anything I may have to do'.<sup>15</sup> Sleep deprivation exacerbated the physical and mental fatigue. A junior staff officer, Captain Llewellyn Price-Davies, wrote home regularly and a consistent theme was his lack of sleep. The frenetic pace of life was highlighted by his comment in September 1914: 'I was on duty last night and had a disturbed night but I had a wash and changed my underclothes for the second time since the war began!'<sup>16</sup>

Many accounts from this period illustrate just how difficult it was to execute detailed staff work under these circumstances. Lord Loch, who was serving as liaison officer between GHQ and II Corps, confided to his wife: 'I am afraid last night & yesterday the poor old 4<sup>th</sup> brigade had a desperate hard time, not owing to necessity but owing to bad staff work. It is astounding that people forget, once they get on service, all they are taught in peace'.<sup>17</sup> Notwithstanding Loch's misgivings, the performance of the staff was remarkably resilient given the enormous pressure they were under. The BEF was successfully extricated from difficult situations at Mons and Le Cateau. Staff work during this period and the subsequent withdrawal to the Marne continued to function reasonably well overall. This period of rapid movement

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<sup>13</sup> T. Wilson and R. Prior, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 452-455.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice to wife 20 August 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/9, LHCMA.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid 4 September 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/11, LHCMA.

<sup>16</sup> Major-General L.A.E. Price Davies to wife 22 September 1914, Price Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>17</sup> Lord Loch to wife 25 August 1914, Loch Papers, 1/1/2, IWM.

may have placed a good deal of strain on the staff but at least it was a form of warfare they were familiar with, from both direct experience and in the tuition they had received at Staff College.

The nature of the war changed as both sides dug in and the conflict became more static in nature. On the Western Front it remained this way until 1918 when the conflict would again revert to a war of limited movement. Trench warfare demanded a different set of staff skills and all the combatant forces faced a learning process that involved new ways of working. Lieutenant-Colonel John Burnett-Stuart described staff activity after the 6<sup>th</sup> Division dug in around Armentières: ‘the general staff of the division spent most of their time plodding around muddy trenches, laying out reserve lines, fixing boundaries and keeping in touch with divisions on the flanks’.<sup>18</sup> The tone adopted by Burnett-Stuart suggested that staff work was becoming more mundane as the opportunities for movement assumed a premium. The advent of trench warfare served to increase the administrative nature of staff work. There was now more time available to plan attacks and detailed orders could be formulated. Scope for more detailed preparation increased the burden upon the staff, manifested in the increasing volume of orders. Later in the conflict one staff officer complained, ‘There is a great “paper” war on, and I found a great deal of typewritten matter of all kinds which had to be waded through.’<sup>19</sup>

The dynamic pace of change within the original two corps and six divisions of the BEF during the first six months of the war was evident in the fate of its original thirty-one general staff officers. By January 1915, four of them were casualties while over three quarters of the remainder found themselves in new jobs. The average time in post for this group was just four months. The longest any of them remained in their

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<sup>18</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 73, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.

<sup>19</sup> Colonel C.J. Allanson, Diary 17 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

first post was just nine months. Four officers moved out of the staff to command brigades. The others benefitted from promotions gained within their original units or by moving to new formations. By the start of 1915 the original group of thirty-one general staff had swollen significantly to seventy-two but a similar pattern of change was evident. The average time this enlarged group spent in a first post increased by just one month to five. The clear trend was that staff moved on from their first appointments after a few months. Not only did this create instability across the organisation but individual staff had to find their feet and learn different skills in their new jobs. In the face of these issues the staff coped remarkably well during this early period of the war. They were about to encounter a potentially more serious challenge – a shortage of experienced staff officers.

By the middle of September 1914, concerns were beginning to surface about casualties among officers and their replacements. Frederick Maurice remarked, ‘The youngsters who are coming out have not the experience & knowledge of those who have gone’.<sup>20</sup> Among the general staff at corps and division there were a number of casualties with five officers killed in action by the end of the year together with another individual who was sent home due to sickness. Further losses were recorded among the staff at brigade level. Price-Davies noted the death of one of his fellow Staff College students in September 1914, ‘Poor Green, Brigade Major 17 Brigade, married that Camberley girl, was shot dead today’.<sup>21</sup> Brigade Majors were often promoted to fill GSO 2 positions in the larger formations so casualties among this group compounded the lack of experienced staff. But casualties were not the main cause of the staff shortage. This was due to the rapid expansion in the size of the British army and the growth in the overall number of staff posts.

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<sup>20</sup> Maurice to wife 19 September 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/15, LHCMA.

<sup>21</sup> Price-Davies to wife 28 September 1914, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

The creation of new corps and army formations began in 1914 and continued apace. They were needed to manage the growing number of troops in the field. A constant stream of additional divisions began arriving in France – Territorial units from Britain and soldiers from the Empire. At the same time, New Army units were being established and trained in Britain, prior to their arrival on the Western Front, which began in 1915. These measures created a huge increase in demand for experienced officers to fill both command and staff positions.

### *The growth of the staff*

The story of the staff during the course of the war was one of change and growth. The rapid expansion of the number of troops in the field necessitated a corresponding increase in staff posts as new formations arrived on the Western Front. The original BEF had a total of forty-four general and artillery staff working at corps and division. By the end of 1914 this had burgeoned to eighty-three staff positions as the original two corps and seven divisions had increased to three corps with fourteen divisions. The number of staff posts almost doubled within just five months. It was a rate of change that would have put any organisation to the test. While a detailed analysis of brigade staff is outside the scope of this study, their inclusion would only serve to exacerbate the growth rate and underline the size of the challenge. If the expansion in 1914 was considerable, it was outstripped over the following two years, which saw an exponential change in the number of staff posts and the development of an enhanced command structure.

The step-change in the number of staff from the beginning of 1915 was initiated by the creation of the First and Second Armies from the British army. This command and control function, present in the far larger French and German forces since the start of the war, introduced the new senior staff role of Major-General

General Staff. Both Gough and Forrestier-Walker were promoted from their jobs at corps to fill these influential positions. Their two armies controlled five corps with a total of sixteen divisions. As Major Charles Bonham-Carter recorded in his wartime diary, 'The greater part of the administrative work previously done by General Headquarters is now done by Armies'.<sup>22</sup> Each Army was established with four general staff rising to five by mid-year reaching a total of eight by October 1915. Artillery staff appeared at Army level for the first time in March 1915 and before the end of the year each had a total of ten general and artillery staff. By this time a Third Army had been created producing a total of thirty new staff posts at army level alone.

A comparable increase was witnessed at corps level. By January 1915, the two original corps of the BEF had grown to five. By the middle of the year there were ten! The arrival of Indian Army units in France brought in two of these, the Indian Army Corps and Indian Cavalry Corps. Many of their officers had been trained at the Staff College at Quetta, such as Captain Edward Giles and Captain Harry 'Dolly' Baird. Giles attended Quetta in 1912 and held staff positions with two Indian cavalry divisions and the Indian Cavalry Corps before he became GSO 2 with a Canadian division. Born and educated in England, he had joined the Indian Army and enjoyed a distinguished military career back in India after the war. After graduating from Quetta, Baird worked with Haig in India and then served as his ADC [Aide-de-Camp] at Aldershot before the war. He served eight months on the staff of the Indian Cavalry Corps before becoming a battalion and then a brigade commander. Like Giles, he rose to a prominent position in the Indian Army post-war.

The effectiveness of the Indian Army units on the Western Front was sometimes called into question but this may have been more about snobbery rather

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<sup>22</sup> Major-General Charles Bonham-Carter, Diary 7 February 1915, Bonham-Carter Papers 1/1, CCC.

than their military competence. Typical of this attitude was Sir Hubert Gough's description of Brigadier-General Havelock Hudson, as 'a stupid, cantankerous old Hindu'.<sup>23</sup> Hudson served as the senior staff officer of the Indian Corps and then became GOC of 8<sup>th</sup> Division. Similar sentiment was found in Bonham-Carter's observation, 'Soldiering with Indian troops has certain marked disadvantages quite apart from their inferior value as a fighting force'.<sup>24</sup> After the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in March 1915, Haig weighed in with the comment that, 'The Indian Corps suffers from too many *old* officers'.<sup>25</sup> Admittedly, the majority of the brigadiers within the Corps had been replaced on the grounds of age but among the general staff, evidence for this was unconvincing. Although Claud Jacob, the GSO 1 of the Meerut Division, was fifty-two, he enjoyed a distinguished war career and was favoured by Haig. It may be that Haig was also taking a sideswipe at Hudson. At fifty-three he was one of the oldest general staff officers on the Western Front. Nevertheless, he remained in charge of a division until the end of 1916 when he returned to India for a senior posting. Indian Army officer Kenneth Henderson disputed the view that the Indian Corps had not been a success and challenged the notion they had issues with the climate.<sup>26</sup> Judgements on the Indian units and their staffs could be too readily influenced by where they were from rather than how they performed.

The end of 1915 saw a total of fourteen corps in the British forces on the Western Front, which included the newly arrived Canadian Corps. This growth rate brought with it a concomitant increase in the number of staff officers at Corps level. The number of general staff posts per Corps may have dropped from five to four with the transfer of some authority to Army but overall the number of posts rose to forty

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<sup>23</sup> Beddington, Memoir p. 101, Beddington Papers, LHCMA.

<sup>24</sup> Bonham-Carter, Diary 6 January 1915, Bonham-Carter Papers 1/1, CCC.

<sup>25</sup> Haig to Kiggell 2 April 1915, Kiggell Papers 1/38-59, LHCMA.

<sup>26</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel K. Henderson, Memoir, p. 146, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.



general staff by August 1915. This was a fourfold increase in just twelve months. By year-end there was a further increase to seventy, a total that now included artillery staff who first appeared at Corps in December 1915. It heralded the emergence of Corps as the principal planner and coordinator of the war's predominant weapon, artillery.<sup>27</sup>

The creation of armies and the expansion in the number of corps represented the development of a command structure needed to manage the increasing number of troops in the field. The number of British army divisions on the Western Front stood at sixteen by January 1915. After this, the influx of Territorial and New Army divisions resulted in a rapid acceleration of the total which reached thirty-two in August and rose to forty-three by the end of the year. This represented a rise in the overall number of general and artillery staff posts at Division to 211 compared with forty-four at the start of the war.<sup>28</sup> Such unprecedented growth within an eighteen-month period was accompanied by continual changes in both commands and staff as the new formations took shape. In February 1915, General Henry Horne, GOC of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, bemoaned the continuous loss of experienced officers from his staff team and their replacement 'by inexperienced officers from home'.<sup>29</sup> The situation was characterised by Captain H.E. Trevor who was sent to France on the staff of 50<sup>th</sup> Division in March 1915 but wrote to his father, 'Things change very rapidly out there and I may find myself posted to some other staff before I know where I am'.<sup>30</sup>

The first Territorial units to arrive on the Western Front were the 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Divisions. Their general staffs consisted of regular officers together with some

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<sup>27</sup> For a comprehensive account of the development of Corps in this role see Simpson, *Directing Operations*.

<sup>28</sup> Each division had three general and two artillery staff, which should have produced a total of 215 except four of the five cavalry divisions, possessed a single artillery staff post.

<sup>29</sup> S. Robbins (ed), *The First World War Letters of General Lord Horne* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009), p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel H.E. Trevor to father 31 March 1915, Trevor Papers P229 HET 2, IWM.

retired soldiers who had returned to the army on the outbreak of war. One of these ‘dug-outs’ was Major Robert Livesay, GSO 2 of the 48<sup>th</sup> Division. He had left the army in 1914 after eighteen years service but was subsequently recalled. The thirty-eight year old proved an effective staff officer being promoted to GSO 1 with the New Zealand Division before going on to serve as senior staff officer with 61<sup>st</sup> Division in 1918. His work was described as ‘marked by consummate finish and qualities at once brilliant and solid’.<sup>31</sup> The other members of 48<sup>th</sup> Division’s staff team were Colonel Arthur Clarke, a regular with twenty-two years service and the GSO 3 Captain Austin Girdwood who had been present at the Battle of Khartoum. Girdwood ended the war as a successful brigade commander. The troops of these Territorial units may not have had the experience of regular units but their general staff were mostly Staff College graduates with lengthy military service records.

With new formations being established and staff being moved around it was often difficult for teams to gel. When Bonham-Carter reported for duty at the newly created First Army he met with considerable disruption, ‘I found that the Staff being only in course of formation, work was in some muddle’.<sup>32</sup> Getting to know fellow officers and how they worked made for a more effective team. This was explicitly stated in the pre-war Staff Manual and was now being demonstrated in practice.<sup>33</sup> Lord Loch complained about this issue when he moved to VI Corps in June 1915:

We want a bit of work doing up here but we cannot get it done. There is no organisation in this made up Corps. We have not been long enough together to get any way on. It is very different to a Corps that has been working as one for a long time. There is now no Corps that has been together any time.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> H. Stewart, *The New Zealand Division 1916-1919* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1921), p. 329.

<sup>32</sup> Bonham-Carter, Diary 29 December 1914, Bonham-Carter Papers 1/1, CCC.

<sup>33</sup> Staff Manual 1912 Chapter 2, Principles of Organization of Staff Duties, p.10, WO 32/4731 TNA.

<sup>34</sup> Loch to wife 16 July 1915, Loch Papers 1/3/2, IWM.

The influx of new officers was reflected in the upsurge in staff numbers. At the end of 1915, the total number of general and artillery staff at Army, Corps and Division had climbed to a total exceeding three hundred. This compared with just over forty in August 1914. Despite this considerable expansion, the staff remained the preserve of regular soldiers though there were some ‘dug-outs’ and a handful of Territorial officers. The biggest change was the number of men serving on the staff that had not passed through the Staff Colleges and had no previous staff experience. These new officers had to learn their skills on the job. As the war progressed they formed a larger proportion of the staff, which will be investigated later.

### *Rise to prominence*

The rapid growth of staff posts during this period of change may have been disruptive but it led to considerable opportunity for some. There were a total of sixty-nine general staff officers who served at Corps and Division in 1914. Their influence was felt for the rest of the war as many rose to positions of prominence within the British army. Officers who had served as general staff in the field in 1914 occupied the five senior staff posts [MGGS], outside GHQ, by early 1918. Major-General Hastings Anderson [First Army] was GSO 1 with 8<sup>th</sup> Division in 1914 and Major-General Charles ‘Tim’ Harington [Second Army] was GSO 2 at III Corps.<sup>35</sup> While Major-Generals Louis Vaughan [Third Army], A.A. Montgomery [Fourth Army] and John Percy [Fifth Army] all held GSO 2 posts with divisions in 1914.<sup>36</sup> The MGGS of Fifth Army, Neill Malcolm, dismissed in January 1918, was another who served as a GSO 2 at the start of the war.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Harington was MGGS Second Army and Anderson MGGS First Army.

<sup>36</sup> Vaughan, Montgomery and Percy (aka Baumgartner until Oct 1917) were MGGS with Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies respectively.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm was GSO 2 with I Corps in 1914.

Officers serving on Division and Corps general staffs in 1914 filled three of the nineteen available BGGs positions by the outset of 1918. Brigadier-Generals Archibald Cameron, Gwyn Hordern and Ian Stewart were all GSO 2 with divisions in 1914. They enjoyed lengthy tenures at the top of their Corps staff teams. Hordern held the distinction of serving for thirty-four months as the senior staff officer at IX Corps while Cameron was thirty-one months with X Corps. Stewart recorded the shortest spell though he still stayed twenty-three months with XIII Corps.

Other eminent figures emerged from the group of officers who served at Corps and Division in 1914 to occupy senior staff or command roles. Sir John Charteris, a GSO 2 in 1914, rose to become Head of Intelligence at GHQ and remained in this role for almost two years until his dismissal in early 1918. Another officer to serve at GHQ was 'Jock' Burnett-Stuart who completed two stints there and also held senior staff jobs at Corps and Division. The individual who became most senior in command terms was Claud Jacob, described by a fellow staff officer as 'a dark muscular man of medium height full of energy'.<sup>38</sup> He proved a most effective military leader and finished the war as GOC II Corps.

Six general staff officers from 1914 became Divisional Commanders during the course of the war. After serving as BGGs at II Corps, Bill Furse became GOC 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division in 1915. Later in the war, General Sir Cecil Romer led the 59<sup>th</sup> (London) Division from August 1917 for ten months, when another former staff officer, General Sir Robert Whigham, succeeded him. Forrestier-Walker moved from his senior staff job at Second Army in March 1915 to command 21<sup>st</sup> Division. The impression he made on Kenneth Henderson, one of his brigade staff, was far from positive: 'He was an extremely able man, but very unpleasant, and to the men

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<sup>38</sup> Bonham-Carter, Diary 1 February 1915, Bonham-Carter Papers 1/1, CCC.

positively inhuman'.<sup>39</sup> His unpopularity eventually led to Forrestier-Walker being relieved of his job by his corps commander.

The two other members of the general staff in 1914 who rose to command divisions later in the war were Sir Hugh Jeudwine and General Walter 'Bob' Greenly. In autumn 1916, Greenly was promoted from BGGs of V Corps to take command of 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division. He held this position until the German offensive of March 1918 when he was called in to command 14<sup>th</sup> Division following the dismissal of the previous incumbent. Unfortunately, Greenly only endured until the start of April when he broke down from the strain of command during the high-pressure demands of the British retreat.

A total of twenty-four officers served as GSO 3 at Division and Corps on the Western Front in 1914. Although they were the most junior staff, analysis of their careers demonstrates their subsequent influence. [Appendix 5] One of the most outstanding among them was William 'Tiny' Ironside, who joined the staff of 6th Division in November 1914. By the end of the war he had enjoyed a meteoric rise to the position of Commander of the North Russia Expeditionary Force. His promotion prospects were done no harm by his spell as senior staff officer with the well-regarded 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division: 'It was one of the best I have ever seen in any campaign', he remarked.<sup>40</sup> Another British officer who accomplished much through his association with the Canadians was Brigadier-General Norman Webber who finished the war as the senior staff officer [BGGs] with the Canadian Corps. He followed in the footsteps of 'Tim' Harington and Sir Percy Radcliffe who previously

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<sup>39</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 154, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>40</sup> Field Marshal Lord Ironside to friend in Canada 9 June 1954, Ironside Papers 92/40/1, IWM.

fulfilled the role. Throughout the war, a British officer occupied the senior staff position with the Canadian Corps.<sup>41</sup>

Three members of the group served in theatres away from the Western Front. Sir Edward Humphreys finished his war as BGGs of XXI Corps in the Middle East, Sir George Cory became BGGs of XVI Corps in Salonika and Walter Leslie went with the Indian Army to Palestine. Four of the group did not survive the war. Rupert Ommaney was killed in 1914, when a shell hit the headquarters of his Division while thirty-seven year old Bertram Lefroy died of wounds at Loos when GSO 1 of 26<sup>th</sup> Division. Basil Walcot and 'Bertie' Paget both succumbed to fatal illness in 1917.

Of the remaining fifteen staff officers, eight attained GSO 1 positions and three commanded brigades in 1918. One of these was Brigadier Robert 'Jack' Collins who held various staff positions up to GSO 1 level and worked at the Staff School in Cambridge before returning to France to run a brigade from July 1918. Nicholson extolled his virtues: 'Jack Collins was what every administrative staff officer prayed for, a man who understood Q work and wholeheartedly cooperated to get the best results'.<sup>42</sup> After serving as a GSO 3 in 1914, Colonel Lambert Jackson enjoyed a lengthy staff career. He was promoted to GSO 2 of 16<sup>th</sup> Division in March 1915 and finished the war as the senior staff officer in the same unit. A remarkable total of almost four years continuous service!

In November 1914, Captain Edmund 'Moses' Beddington was GSO 3 with the Cavalry Division while Captain Herbert Braine occupied the same position with 8<sup>th</sup> Division. The career paths of these two officers were broadly comparable and are outlined in Figure 2. They provide further illustration of how junior staff in 1914 came to occupy influential positions later in the war.

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<sup>41</sup> For a full account of British staff officers who served with the Canadians see Delaney, 'Mentoring the Canadian Corps', pp. 931-53.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 177.



**Figure 2: Career paths of Beddington and Braine**

Both men spent twelve to fifteen months on each rung of the promotion ladder. It should be noted that though experienced neither officer would have had much pre-war experience of staff work in the field. When first appointed to the staff, Braine was eight years older than the thirty-year-old Beddington with almost twenty years of military service. He spent a year as a GSO 3 before gaining promotion to GSO 2 with XIII Corps. By the end of war, Braine had risen to become GSO 1 with Third Army. Beddington also spent a year as GSO 3 interspersed with a spell as Brigade Major. He was then promoted to GSO 2 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division prior to his appointment as GSO 1 with Fifth Army.

### *Staff work*

In March 1915, Llewellyn Price-Davies had recently been promoted to a GSO 2 position with 46<sup>th</sup> Division, the first complete Territorial unit to arrive on the Western Front. His assessment of the staff work of the Division was outlined in a letter home,

‘We make mistakes of course but I dare say we shall make less as time goes on’.<sup>43</sup>

While Price-Davies conceded that his new unit would have to undergo a learning process, he believed they had made a good start: ‘In fact, our office here is much more efficient than the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and Wilson is a much better GSO 3 than I was’.<sup>44</sup> These remarks from Price-Davies encapsulate what was taking place in many of the new units of the formative and expanding army of 1915. Staffs were being formed and were learning how to work together.

Despite the army’s best efforts to stiffen these new staffs with seasoned officers, the pool of trained men from Camberley and Quetta could only stretch so far. The *Official History* framed the issue in dramatic terms when it stated, ‘The old British Army was gone past recall, leaving but a remnant to carry on the training of the New Armies’.<sup>45</sup> Certainly experience was thin on the ground and staff officers had to adapt to a new form of static warfare but many of them coped remarkably well. The Press back home in Britain saw things rather differently. Growing disquiet with the performance of the staff developed into open criticism after failure to secure victory at Loos. There were examples of good as well as poor staff work in 1915, which the following cases from two actions in the Ypres Salient illustrate.

After a German incursion into their line at Hooge on July 30<sup>th</sup>, the British were anxious to recover the ground they had lost. The 6<sup>th</sup> Division led by Major-General W.N. Congreve was selected to make the attack. As the *Official History* pointed out, ‘It was clear that nothing but a regular attack, thoroughly prepared – as

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<sup>43</sup> Price-Davies to wife 29 March 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid 23 March 1915: Captain D.D. Wilson was GSO 3 with 46<sup>th</sup> Division from March 1915 to April 1916.

<sup>45</sup> J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1914: Antwerp, La Basse, Armentières, Messines and Ypres October-November 1914* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1925), p. 465.



distinguished from a hasty counter-attack – would dislodge the enemy’.<sup>46</sup> The senior staff officer of 6<sup>th</sup> Division was Colonel ‘Gerry’ Boyd who later became BGGs of 5<sup>th</sup> Corps and ended the war as GOC 46<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>47</sup> Boyd had been commissioned through the ranks as he failed to gain admission to Sandhurst but his GSO 3 at the time, Captain T.T. Grove, highlighted his intellect: ‘yet I cannot remember to have met many, if any, men with a quicker brain than his’.<sup>48</sup> The GSO 2 at 6<sup>th</sup> Division was Captain W.E. ‘Tiny’ Ironside, another officer who achieved an equally distinguished war-record, as outlined previously. This very capable staff team was instrumental in making the 6<sup>th</sup> Division’s attack a success. The Division’s war diary stated, ‘The whole affair was thoroughly successful due to the cooperation between the arms & the excellent artillery bombardment’.<sup>49</sup> According to the *Official History*, ‘The attack was a model of its kind, took the enemy by surprise and was entirely successful: it marks further progress in the methods of minor operations’.<sup>50</sup>

The key to this operation was diligent staff work. Preparations for the attack, described as ‘particularly thorough and complete’, involved French artillery support and assistance from the Royal Flying Corps [RFC].<sup>51</sup> Subterfuge was used to mislead the Germans as to the time of the attack with short bombardments mounted at the same time over several days, ‘So, when the final and real bombardment was carried out the Germans assumed it was only the normal “hate”, to which they had become accustomed, and retired to their dug-outs’.<sup>52</sup> An officer with the staff of VII Corps paid compliment to the staff work, ‘It appears that the arrangements made by the Staff

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<sup>46</sup> J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Volume II Battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1928), p. 106.

<sup>47</sup> Boyd led 46<sup>th</sup> Division during their successful storming of the Hindenburg Line at Bellenglise in September 1918.

<sup>48</sup> Colonel T.T. Grove, Unpublished Memoir p. 35, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>49</sup> War Diary 09 August 1915, General Staff 6<sup>th</sup> Division WO 95/1581, TNA.

<sup>50</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 106.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

were so good that not once in the whole show was communication lost between Headquarters and the Units, and the Artillery and Infantry worked like one machine'.<sup>53</sup> The calibre of the staff team and the thorough preparations they undertook were both key elements in the success of this, admittedly small-scale, operation. It involved a great deal of detailed work by the staff: 'The instructions for the assault took up many typewritten sheets'.<sup>54</sup> This represented a complete change from 'the short attack orders of the first days of the war'.<sup>55</sup> Grove recalled: 'The show went off very well & the old division covered itself with a good deal of distinction. The Commander-in-chief actually described it as one of the best planned & best carried out of the smaller operations of the war'.<sup>56</sup> This attack by 6<sup>th</sup> Division demonstrated that high-quality staff work was possible in 1915 even in the face of considerable challenges. The action was described as 'skilfully planned and most gallantly and successfully carried out'.<sup>57</sup> It formed a striking contrast with another attack in the Ypres Salient conducted some three months earlier.

The action at St. Julien, towards the end of April, followed in the wake of a German gas attack mounted against Canadian forces, when the line had been broken and they were forced to fall back. It was staged in an effort to remove the Germans from the ground they had gained. Unlike the performance at Hooge, it did not go well. Captain Alistair MacDougall of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, who was involved in the operation, was explicit in his verdict: 'There were enormous losses in this attack and simply through bad staff work. Most of the staff in this salient want stellenbosching

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<sup>53</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 8 August 1915, Extracts from Letters p. 61, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>54</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Grove to wife 14 August 1915, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>57</sup> T.O. Marden, *A Short History of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division* (London: Hugh Rees, 1920), p. 16.

badly'.<sup>58</sup> The operation, which marked the final stage of the Second Battle of Ypres, included the Indian Army's Lahore Division, the British 4<sup>th</sup> Division and 2nd Cavalry Division. The key problem was the lack of preparation. According to MacDougall, the Northumberland [149<sup>th</sup>] Brigade were ordered to attack as soon as they arrived in St. Julien but were given no time to reconnoitre the ground.<sup>59</sup> Apparently, none of the Divisional staff had been to the area so no information was available with regard to the terrain or the disposition of the enemy. In his report of the action on April 24-25<sup>th</sup>, Brigadier-General C.P. Hull explained: 'As there was no opportunity for any previous reconnaissance and I did not know the ground I had to issue my orders off the map'.<sup>60</sup>

This lack of basic staff work had terrible consequences with the attackers losing over 2,000 men and seventy-five officers. Hull reported that some units of the Northumberland Brigade lost their way: 'these two battalions went forward but losing direction came up a good way to the right of my attack and so extended the line instead of thickening it'.<sup>61</sup> On the next day, units of the Northumberland Brigade attacked again. They 'moved forward with great dash' but came under very heavy shellfire and were unable to make any progress.<sup>62</sup> The conclusion drawn by the *Official History* was that the careful preparation, which characterised the successful Hooge operation, was conspicuous by its absence at St. Julien:

Nothing, however, but a carefully prepared offensive requiring much time to organise, could – as Neuve Chapelle had indicated – possibly dislodge the Germans from the ground they had gained and had been steadily fortifying for several nights.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Major-General A. MacDougall, Diary 30 April/1 May 1915, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM. MacDougall served in the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers, part of 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, Diary 4 May 1915/13 May 1915; The 149<sup>th</sup> Brigade was part of 50<sup>th</sup> Division but for this action it was placed at the disposal of 4<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>60</sup> Report of Operations 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade 24 April 1915/4 May 1915 by Brigadier-General C.P. Hull, General Staff 4<sup>th</sup> Division, WO95/1441, TNA.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> J.E. Edmonds and G.C. Wynne, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Volume I Winter 1914-15, Battle of Neuve Chapelle, Battle of Ypres* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1927), p. 271.

In his diary, MacDougall remarked bitterly, ‘On thinking over the last 10 days, it is very obvious the Staff work of the Army in the Ypres salient was very bad’.<sup>64</sup> He accused the staff of being negligent and failing to execute their basic duties:

we were told that we would relieve the Lahore Division. When we got there, we found not the Lahore Division but the Northumbrian Brigade, who had not received a single order since they had been there, a period of three days, & also they had not seen a single staff officer except the Brigade Staff.<sup>65</sup>

There was further confusion when the same Northumberland Brigade was placed at the disposal of 4<sup>th</sup> Division led by General H.F. Wilson. The war diary noted, ‘Through some error, however the Northumbrian Div was not informed and consequently two Bttns. of this Division...did not report to him until about midnight’.<sup>66</sup>

The absence of staff officers and their failure to provide intelligence about the ground may have been due to the problems encountered in moving around during daylight hours owing to the preponderance of enemy snipers and machine guns. This made it problematic for the command teams to ascertain the position of even their own troops.<sup>67</sup> As one Divisional history observed: ‘The difficulties getting instructions through to units in the front line were immense’.<sup>68</sup> These circumstances provided a degree of vindication for the staff but it was clear that some significant errors were made which contributed to the failure of the attackers. Some weeks later, MacDougall ruefully noted that his unit was inspected by Field Marshal Sir John

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<sup>64</sup> MacDougall, Diary 4 May 1915/13 May 1915, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> War Diary 13 May 1915, General Staff 4<sup>th</sup> Division WO 95/1441, TNA.

<sup>67</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Winter 1914-15*, p. 355.

<sup>68</sup> G.P. Kingston, *The History of the 4<sup>th</sup> (British) Infantry Division 1914-19* (London: London Press, 2006), p. 148.

French who gave a resume of the operations around Ypres: ‘It sounded to me like an apology for the staff’.<sup>69</sup>

When the British failed to secure a victory at the Battle of Loos in September 1915, the work of the staff was subjected to further criticism. The Liberal peer, Lord St Davids, proclaimed:

On September 25 our gallant men broke the lines, all three of them – they were clean through them. There would have been a great victory. But there was bad Staff work; there were no reinforcements, and the whole thing fell through.<sup>70</sup>

Warming to his theme, St Davids expressed broader concerns about the large number of staff officers in France, their work rate and overall competence. His outburst prompted one serving staff officer to write home: ‘Does he suggest that because Neuve Chapelle and Loos were not the successes that were expected on account of bad staff work, that we should certainly do better if we had fewer staff or none at all?’<sup>71</sup> A proliferation of staff officers was not the problem. It was the shortage of staff that led to inexperienced officers being exposed. The *Official History* blamed staff inexperience for delays in bringing up the 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Divisions, which had been kept in reserve.<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Henderson, who was with 21<sup>st</sup> Division at Loos, also condemned the staff work: ‘That we should have been ordered to advance by night over such a terrain, or over any terrain, without guides or previous reconnaissance, was a scandal’.<sup>73</sup> Not only were the troops of these New Army units fatigued by the

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<sup>69</sup> MacDougall, Diary 12 June 1915, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

<sup>70</sup> Lord St Davids, House of Lords, *Hansard* 16 November 1915 v20, p. 367.

<sup>71</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 18 November 1915, Extracts from Letters p. 120, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>72</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 294.

<sup>73</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 151, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM. Henderson was a Brigade-Major with 64<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Loos.

time they got to their positions but also a window of opportunity was missed due to their late arrival.

Other instances of staff failings at Loos cited by the *Official History* included orders arriving late, confusion among divisional artillery and misunderstandings between the staff of different units.<sup>74</sup> A periodical article published some two months after Loos posed the question, ‘Is our Staff organisation as practical and business-like as it ought to be?’ It concluded, ‘enough has been said to show that at Loos, as at Neuve Chapelle, something went wrong with the Staff direction’.<sup>75</sup> Later in the war, the problems encountered at Loos were used as case studies for staff training. This indicated that the army recognised there had been issues with staff work during this period and demonstrated their appetite to learn from the experience.

### *The new formations*

If gaining familiarity with the exigencies of staff work demanded by the Western Front was difficult for the regular formations then the new Kitchener units raised in Britain were certain to struggle. Former staff officer, Colonel Nicholson recollected, ‘New Army and Territorial divisions did not start from scratch; but from rock bottom’.<sup>76</sup> In the *Official History*, Edmonds took the view that:

The brigade and divisional staffs were formed of retired officers, convalescent wounded officers, and others available at home. Fully qualified officers to fill these posts and all the other numerous staff appointments rendered necessary by the increase in divisions at home and overseas, could not be found.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, pp. 312, 316 & 324.

<sup>75</sup> Henderson, Memoir pp. 169-171, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM. The article, entitled ‘The Truth’ was published on 15 November 1915. Henderson did not provide the title of the periodical.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 195.

<sup>77</sup> Edmonds and Wynne, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Winter 1914-15*, p. 54.

While Edmonds had a point with regard to the shortage of officers, his account did not credit the army for the measures undertaken to rectify the situation. Cognisant of the problem, selected staff officers who had already experienced the fighting in France were returned to Britain to temper these New Army divisions. The expertise gleaned by these men was seen by many as an invaluable resource to these fledgling formations. Nicholson adhered to this view and saw them as a stabilising element, remarking that ‘The Regular staff officer is a sheet anchor in a New Army formation’.<sup>78</sup>

The call for experienced staff officers went out at the start of 1915. In his memoirs, Major Kenneth Henderson recalled receiving a communication: ‘It said that Staff Officers were urgently required to complete the staffing and training of the New Armies in England’.<sup>79</sup> According to Henderson, many of the retired officers referenced by Edmonds were winnowed out of the new formations before they got to France.<sup>80</sup> Henderson was a regular soldier with the Indian Army who was serving as a Brigade Major on the Western Front at the time. He saw the chance to go as an opportunity to secure promotion to a GSO 2 post. In the event, his ambition was thwarted as he was initially given a GSO 3 role and only after registering his frustration with higher authority was he reinstated to Brigade Major.

Henderson rued his acceptance as a miscalculation. He complained that a fellow staff officer who chose to remain in France reaped the benefits, ‘for the next six months while I was at a standstill in England, he was “acquiring merit” and mounting up at the front’.<sup>81</sup> The perception that Henderson’s career aspirations were derailed was interesting but inconclusive due to a lack of corroborative evidence. If it

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<sup>78</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 183.

<sup>79</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 147, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 152.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

was the case then it proved a temporary aberration as he attained a GSO 2 position with 15<sup>th</sup> Division within the next eighteen months.

Some officers were torn between the enticing opportunity of a return to Britain and their obligation to remain at the front. In March 1915, Captain W.A.T. Bowly wrote home: 'A good pal of mine went home this morning to a job as GSO 1 of one of the New Divisions. He is going to do what he can for me but I don't suppose a job at home is really me'.<sup>82</sup> This migration of accomplished staff came to the attention of Freddie Maurice, now installed as a GSO 1. Early in 1915, he wrote to his wife: 'I think there are likely to be some changes in our staff soon as men with experience are wanted for the Kitchener staffs'.<sup>83</sup> He expected to lose G.N. Cory, his Canadian-born GSO 2, who had been at 3<sup>rd</sup> Division since the outbreak of hostilities: 'I shall be very sorry but his experience will be valuable for the new hands'.<sup>84</sup> A month later Maurice wrote, 'We are constantly making changes to our staff now...I expect some more will go until K staff are filled up'.<sup>85</sup> Maurice was partially accurate in his prognostications as Cory joined the 51<sup>st</sup> Division, a Territorial rather than a New Army unit, and returned to France as a GSO 1 in May 1915.

Price-Davies was another staff officer who recorded the transfer of experienced staff officers to the New Army units being formed in Britain. In March 1915, he described meeting with Major 'Billy' Drysdale and discovering, 'He and Mangles & Hildyard & I dare say other Brigade Majors are being sent home to staff the new divisions'.<sup>86</sup> In contrast to Henderson's experience, the three officers referenced by Price-Davies were all promoted to GSO 2 positions with new units

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<sup>82</sup> Colonel W.A.T. Bowly to wife 3 May 1915, Bowly Papers v1, IWM.

<sup>83</sup> Maurice to wife 12 January 1915, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/67, IWM.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*; Cory joined 51<sup>st</sup> Division, a territorial formation, and returned to France as a GSO 1 in May 1915.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid* 6 February 1915 – 'K' refers to the Kitchener or New Army units.

<sup>86</sup> Price-Davies to wife 4 March 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.



being raised in Britain although their subsequent experiences proved very different. Drysdale went back to France in August 1915 as GSO 2 of 37<sup>th</sup> Division. He was killed in action two months later. Mangles returned at the same time as GSO 2 with 20<sup>th</sup> Division and served six months before moving to 34<sup>th</sup> Division as GSO 1. He finished the war as BGGs of V Corps. Hildyard did not return to the Western Front but enjoyed a successful career as a staff officer in the Middle Eastern theatre.

Prior to running the first wartime school at GHQ, 'Jock' Burnett-Stuart was recalled from his post as GSO 2 with 6<sup>th</sup> Division in late spring 1915 to join the newly formed 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division at home. Forty-year old Burnett-Stuart was an experienced regular who had served in France from the start of the war. His knowledge and expertise was a prized asset to a new unit yet to see action. After several months of training, the Division arrived in France to participate in the Battle of Loos with Burnett-Stuart as GSO 1. Alongside him on the staff were E. G. Henderson and Hugh Baillie. They were practiced regular soldiers. Henderson had served with the Royal Engineers and was a Staff College graduate. This was Baillie's first staff position but he was a regular soldier with seventeen years service. He built a successful staff career, eventually becoming GSO 1 with 15<sup>th</sup> Division and finishing the war at GHQ.

Similar characteristics were evident in the staff of 12<sup>th</sup> (Eastern) Division, another New Army unit that arrived on the Western Front in mid-1915. The senior general staff officer was Charles Sackville-West, a former instructor at Camberley with twenty-five years military service. His fellow staff officers were Major J.K. Cochrane and Captain Thomas Pakenham. These may have been their first staff roles, but both were regular soldiers and Staff College graduates with twenty-one and nineteen years service respectively. Sackville-West and Cochrane went on to

command brigades while Pakenham enjoyed a successful staff career ending the war as GSO 1 at 56<sup>th</sup> Division. These teams of experienced individuals were certainly at odds with the impression imparted by Edmonds in the *Official History*.

One of the last 'Kitchener' formations to be raised was the 26<sup>th</sup> Division. In May 1915, 'Bertie' Hare was recalled to Britain from his staff job at GHQ and installed as GSO 1 of this new formation. Price-Davies remarked, 'I am sure he must be glad to be out of GHQ as he has been there so long'.<sup>87</sup> Hare was an experienced regular soldier with nineteen years service. He spent several months in Britain with 26<sup>th</sup> Division until it was sent out to France in autumn 1915. Its sojourn on the Western Front proved to be a short one as the division was despatched to Salonika before the end of the year. Unfortunately, Hare along with his GSO 2, Major G.W. Haslehurst, an Indian Army officer, both fell victim to serious illness in Salonika and played no further part in the war.

With the formation of these new Kitchener divisions came the establishment of new corps formed to manage the rapidly expanding army. In May 1915, J.F.C. Fuller expected to be posted as a GSO 3 to such a formation. He wrote to his parents: 'Probably the staff is being formed somewhere in England & I shall go to wherever the place is for a few days, possibly a couple of weeks, before going out. I am very pleased to get this billet as I think it should prove a good one'.<sup>88</sup> Fuller was posted to VII Corps and arrived in France in July 1915. He had been serving as an embarkation officer in England and had no experience of the Western Front. His fellow GSO 3, Captain Cuthbert Page, had attended Camberley with Fuller but again had no staff experience in France. It was a different story with the two senior staff officers. Major Alan Paley, who was thirty-nine, had seventeen years service when he became GSO 3

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<sup>87</sup> Price-Davies to wife 29 May 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>88</sup> Major-General J.F.C. Fuller to parents 24 May 1915, Fuller Papers IV/3/145, LHCMA.

with 6th Division in August 1914. After three months he was promoted to Brigade Major. When he joined VII Corps as GSO 2 it represented another move up the career ladder for this seasoned officer. Equally experienced was the GSO 1, the forty-seven year old Frank Lyon. He spent the first months of the war at GHQ before becoming the senior staff officer at 46<sup>th</sup> Division. It was a blend of experienced senior staff with unseasoned junior officers.

A comparable situation prevailed at VI Corps, another new formation established during this same period. The senior staff officer, Lord Loch remarked, 'I have a lot to do as none of the General Staff have been out here before except the junior. They have to be got in to the ways of the fighting which is different to most others'.<sup>89</sup> The 'junior' referred to by Loch was Captain M.O. Clarke who had been GSO 3 with 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. The other members of the staff team were Major Arthur Marindin and Captain R.J. Ingham. Loch referred to these neophytes rather disparagingly: 'Marindin and Ingham have both only just arrived from England and know nothing of what is going on here'.<sup>90</sup> Marindin may have been new to the staff and the Western Front but he was a South African war veteran with over twenty years military service. He was obviously a fast learner as within a few months he had been promoted GSO 1 in 17<sup>th</sup> Division. By 1918, he was a temporary Major-General in command of 35<sup>th</sup> Division. Ingham remained with the staff of VI Corps being promoted GSO 2 the following year. He was killed in action in July 1917.

The leavening of new units with experienced hands was an effort that extended beyond 1915. In April 1917, the long-serving Basil Sanderson recalled that he was loaned to 59<sup>th</sup> Division when they arrived in France and moved into the line:

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<sup>89</sup> Loch to wife 27 June 1915, Loch Papers 1/3/1, 71/12/1, IWM.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid 28 May 1915.

The troops, both commanders and Staffs were all entirely without experience of active service conditions in France, and it was believed that a leavening of older hands might help them in their temporary difficulties until such time as they had absorbed the atmosphere. I was one of several attachments and for my part was attached to divisional HQ for ten days, after which I was relieved by someone permanently appointed.<sup>91</sup>

Although the army aimed to introduce experienced individuals to newly arriving units on the Western Front, some formations appeared to have been overlooked. When 57<sup>th</sup> Division arrived in France in February 1917 after a considerable spell in the Middle East, Colonel C.J. Allanson, the GSO 1 and an Indian Army officer, recorded his concerns in his diary. Neither the GOC, General Broadwood nor Allanson had fought on the Western Front, which prompted him to complain ‘that it would have appeared obvious therefore to appoint an experienced junior officer from France as GSO 2’.<sup>92</sup> What they actually got was Major H.G.A. Thompson who had only a few weeks experience from Gallipoli as a GSO 3 in IX Corps. Despite these perceived shortcomings, the Division acquitted itself well during Allanson’s five months with them in France although Thompson and then Broadwood were killed in action. Allanson reflected on his time on the Western Front:

The staff of the army in France is now so big that a large proportion of it is practically untrained and have not even had sufficient training in battalions for them to appreciate all the difficulties that have to be faced by the fighting functions and to learn from actual experience what the difference between really good and really bad staff work is.<sup>93</sup>

Even though efforts were made to bolster inexperienced staffs with seasoned officers, the rapid expansion of the army made this a challenging task. Allanson’s frustration was echoed by other officers, some of whom took a dim view of the staffs

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<sup>91</sup> B. Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax* (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 56-7.

<sup>92</sup> Allanson, Diary 19 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 February 1917.

of the newly formed Kitchener units. According to Henderson, many civilians without previous military experience were appointed to staff jobs during this period; they were ‘hurriedly given commissions, an appearance of gentility being the sole requirement’.<sup>94</sup> This intended indictment appeared to have no foundation within the ranks of G branch staff at Division level or higher in 1914/15. Apart from a small number of ‘dug-outs’ or retired officers, it was not until November 1915 that the first Territorial officer took up a general staff post.<sup>95</sup> Henderson may have been alluding to Brigade appointments or staff from A or Q branches.

Other officers voiced considerable scepticism about the staff of the New Army units. Major C.L.A. Ward-Jackson was serving with VII Corps in October 1915 when a new Kitchener Division joined them for instructions: ‘They know nothing, and the Staff is hopelessly incompetent...You must have a Staff and a good one, otherwise nothing is any good’.<sup>96</sup> Lord Loch added his voice to the chorus of disapproval when he complained, ‘The more I see and hear of the new army divisions the more frightened I become’.<sup>97</sup> He viewed the new units as ‘helpless’ and challenged the idea they would develop expertise: ‘You say they will learn. They will not. They have nobody to teach them’.<sup>98</sup> Such contempt was not universal.

When Charles Grant was transferred to a ‘New Army’ unit as a measure to lend experience to the staff, he commented, ‘I find my new work very interesting and I have been impressed on the whole with the 12<sup>th</sup> Division’.<sup>99</sup> Grant boasted experience in the Dardenelles and had worked as a liaison officer with the French Sixth Army on the Western Front. He testified to the need to inject experience into the

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<sup>94</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 151, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>95</sup> This was Captain E.H. Smythe, a GSO 3 with III Corps.

<sup>96</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 7 October 1915, Extracts from Letters p. 80, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>97</sup> Loch to wife 20 August 1915, Loch Papers 1/3/3, IWM.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid 14 July 1915.

<sup>99</sup> General Sir Charles Grant to Lord Roseberry 28 December 1915, Grant Papers 2/1/18, LHCMA.

new units: ‘The difficulties of getting men to work properly are very great and especially the difficulty of getting trained officers’.<sup>100</sup> In Grant’s view, if the war went on long enough then the British would be able to train their army to appropriate standards: ‘at the moment we are an army of amateurs – not professionals’.<sup>101</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The cadre of staff officers that emerged from Camberley and Quetta in the years leading up to 1914 was trained to manage a small professional army in a war of movement. This group of well-trained and experienced specialists demonstrated resilience under difficult circumstances during the first months of the war. The rapid expansion of the British army put pressure upon resources and experienced staff were soon in great demand. Staff officers who developed their skills in the field in 1914 invariably occupied prominent positions later in the war. This was due to a combination of factors. They were tried and tested, represented the pre-war army establishment and many were personally known to Haig. With the closure of Camberley and Quetta the supply of fresh staff was cut off. The army was forced to turn to inexperienced regimental officers to cover the shortfall. Inevitably, mistakes were made during the course of their learning process, reflected in the quality of staff work.

There have been few plaudits for the work of the staff in 1915. Detractors attribute some of the flawed staff work to poor pre-war training and the failure of the staff to manage the transition to trench warfare. The *Official History* concluded that problems arose during the Second Battle of Ypres because ‘Trench or immobile warfare had only recently become the established type, and it was a type for which as a nation, and through no fault of the higher commanders the British were totally

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

unprepared'.<sup>102</sup> There was an element of truth in this explanation but it could equally apply to the French and German command teams. None of the protagonists on the Western Front were fully prepared for static warfare. The specific issue for the British was that due to the dynamic growth of the army, they were forced to bring in inexperienced regimental officers to fill the burgeoning number of staff posts. Not only did these men have to master the rudiments of staff work, they were forced to cope with a new type of warfare. Expertise had to be developed in the field within weeks without the luxury of two years at Staff College. At the same time, the British were establishing new command structures in the form of armies and corps. These embryonic teams and processes needed time to become established and efficient. Inadequacies in the staff work at Loos can be explained by this combination of adversities rather than inferior pre-war training at the Staff Colleges.

It would be inaccurate to conclude that all staff work in 1915 was flawed. Some superlative staff work was evidenced, countered by some fundamental errors. The army was not blind to the issues and introduced experienced officers into the staffs of the New Army formations. Little recognition has been given to the army for identifying this issue and taking remedial action. Admittedly, not all units benefitted but with a finite supply of experienced staff the army did what it could. Although this was a prudent way to blend novices with seasoned professionals it created its own set of problems. A well-established staff team may well find that one or more members would be pulled away to join a new unit. This was a continual source of complaint at 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in 1915 as experienced staff officers were moved to other units.<sup>103</sup> This continual churn disrupted existing teams and may have impacted upon their effectiveness. Despite these issues, this was a commendable effort that paid long-term

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<sup>102</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 355.

<sup>103</sup> Robbins, *Letters of General Horne*, pp. 83, 95, 116.

dividends, although it could not resolve the immediate dilemma. As Viscount Haldane contended:

When we are comparing our Army with Armies that have had a General Staff for a hundred years or more, as is the case with the German Army, no doubt we have been at a disadvantage, and no doubt our disadvantage has been the greater because we have had to expand our Army in France to something like five times the size at which it started.<sup>104</sup>

Inexperienced staffs struggled and mistakes were made. In the face of considerable challenges the staff performed as well as might be expected with a large influx of new officers learning their skills under wartime conditions. There was a strong appetite to learn and to experiment. An illustration of this was provided by the action at Hooze in 1915 when an unsuccessful attempt was made to use portable wireless sets to establish communications between brigade and 6<sup>th</sup> Division's headquarters.<sup>105</sup> The attack also featured the trial use of steel helmets. According to GOC Congreve's report, 'The anti-shrapnel helmets were considered effective and saved many men from nasty wounds; but they must be made more distinctive than they are at present'.<sup>106</sup> Due to their slate blue colour they attracted friendly fire!

Such details play a valuable part in helping to develop a picture of the staff and their life in the field. Central to this was the duties they carried out and their working conditions. Often the minutiae of an officer's daily routine can contribute a great deal to providing an insight into the salient themes related to staff work. The next chapter will look at the staff in the field. What they did, where they worked and how they lived.

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<sup>104</sup> Viscount Haldane speech to House of Lords, *Hansard* 16 November 1915 v20, p. 371.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>106</sup> Major-General W.N. Congreve, Report of 6<sup>th</sup> Division's operation at Hooze 9 August 1915, General Staff 6<sup>th</sup> Division WO 95/1581, TNA.



# Chapter Three

## The Life of the Staff

The 1912 Staff Manual provided a guide to the duties that a general staff officer was expected to perform in the field. The activities of the staff permeated into most aspects of the life of a military formation and their workload was demanding. A prominent feature of the lives of many staff officers was the heavy workload, long hours and considerable pressure the role entailed. The shortage of trained staff officers in the British army only served to increase that pressure. Errors in staff work could lead to serious consequences for the fighting troops. At the end of the war one staff officer wrote to his wife about the lifting of that burden:

I was saying what a relief it was to feel that if one did make a small mistake or forget some little thing no serious consequences would come of it and that the feeling, whilst we were fighting, that something dreadful might happen if one overlooked anything was a constant strain even when one didn't realize it.<sup>1</sup>

Staff duties necessitated working closely with the commander of a formation in terms of planning and drafting orders but staff officers were also out in the field gathering information. Much of this work continued unnoticed but formed an essential part of any operation.

The responsibilities detailed in the Staff Manual need to be combined with an understanding of the factors that impinged upon the staff during wartime. The headquarters of a formation housed its staff officers and represented the centre of staff activity. Its location, size, distance from the front line and the number of staff working there, varied enormously. The working conditions of the staff were largely determined by the facilities that were available locally and whether an officer served with an

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<sup>1</sup> Grove to wife November 1918, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

army, corps or division. While staff officers were not active combatants, many of them spent considerable time visiting the front line and were familiar with its dangers. An inherent part of the staff role was an awareness of the situation in the combat area, the position of the troops, the location of the enemy and respective fighting strengths.

To gain an insight into the role of the staff, it is important to consider their working hours and conditions, together with the duties they were expected to undertake in the field. This chapter will focus upon these two central aspects of the life of the staff in the field. It will explore where they worked, how they worked and the duties they performed. Personal testimony from staff officers has been used to illuminate the minutiae of staff life and to highlight some of the broader issues underpinning attitudes towards the staff. The narrative that has depicted the staff as being out of touch with conditions in the front line, insulated from danger and living lives of considerable ease well away from the fighting will be critically examined. A good starting point is to survey the place where they spent much of their time – headquarters.

### *Working conditions*

#### *Headquarters*

Staff duties were carried out from both the front line and a formation's headquarters. A headquarters ranged from a roomy château to a damp dugout. While staff officers working at Army and Corps were housed further back from the action, they were not entirely ignorant of conditions in the front line as many of them went up on visits. The staff working at Division experienced the fighting at closer quarters, particularly when an attack was being mounted. Brigadier-General Sir John Charteris, Head of Intelligence, outlined these differences from his perspective at GHQ:

Forward at Army Headquarters, one is nearer the fighting, but even they are now mostly in towns or villages several miles behind the front line. Farther forward still are the Corps Headquarters, where there is generally plenty of evidence of war.... But even Corps Headquarters are now pretty big organisations and are almost always in a village. In front of the Corps Headquarters the Divisions are mostly in farmhouses, but well in the fighting line. One can almost get one's car up to them. But that is about the limit, and visits forward of them consequently take up a good deal of time.<sup>2</sup>

The proximity of the Divisional staff to the fighting zone and their working conditions were illustrated in a letter from Charles Bonham-Carter to his mother when he was a GSO 2 with 50<sup>th</sup> Division in mid-1915:

At ordinary times we live some miles back from the front but during a fight we come closer up not within rifle range but within artillery range so we live in dug outs. These are really nothing less for a division than a series of rooms dug about three feet or more into the ground with a wall & roof of sand bags. It will keep anything out except the direct hit of high explosive shell so we are very safe.<sup>3</sup>

In April 1917, Thomas Heald recounted that the staff of 56<sup>th</sup> Division established their headquarters for an attack in 'a series of soaking wet rooms, thirty feet below ground'.<sup>4</sup> For eleven months in 1915-16, V Corps HQ was established at Abeele on the Franco-Belgian frontier. One officer described the conditions:

Our offices were established in the school rooms with cold tiled floors of a nuns' girls' school supplemented latterly by a few wooden huts, our messes were in tiny rooms of not too sanitary cottages and our billets were correspondingly bad.<sup>5</sup>

This was a very different image from the comfortable lives led by the staff portrayed in accounts penned by some regimental soldiers. Captain Charles May

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<sup>2</sup> Charteris, *At GHQ*, pp. 208-210.

<sup>3</sup> Bonham-Carter to mother 16 June 1915, Bonham-Carter Papers Correspondence 2/1, CCC; 50<sup>th</sup> Division was a first line Territorial formation.

<sup>4</sup> A. Wolff, *Subalterns of the Foot, Three World War One Diaries of Officers of the Cheshire Regiment*, (Worcester: Square One Publications, 1992), p. 226.

<sup>5</sup> B. Bond, *War Memoirs of Earl Stanhope 1914-1918* (Brighton; Tom Donovan, 2006), p. 76.

exemplified sentiment of this nature when he recorded in his diary, ‘It is easy to order men here, there and everywhere whilst you sit in an easy chair in a warm Château’.<sup>6</sup> Admittedly, there were some staff officers who enjoyed the benefit of such comforts for limited periods. In September 1914, Major John Gathorne-Hardy, GSO 2 of II Corps, remarked, ‘Luckily we had established our HQ in a most comfortable château...Really very fine & a dining room which could easily seat forty, also electric lights etc’.<sup>7</sup> Captain A.J.H. Smith wrote to his mother that his Army Headquarters were in a Louis XVI château: ‘From my window I see a park, and woods cut with alleys like Versailles’.<sup>8</sup>

These opulent surroundings contrasted with the more modest scale of the château that served as the HQ for 46<sup>th</sup> Division in early 1915. Major Llewellyn Price-Davies, the GSO 2, provided a description:

It is interestingly built & we have 3 good rooms. One would make a large billiard room & would take in 2 tables I dare say. We have it divided, the clerks being one end & we the other. Next door the dining room the smallest of the lot but we can sit about 15 with comfort. Then a large sitting room well furnished and comfy. I never go in there except for a minute or two as I sit in the office when I am not out.<sup>9</sup>

Bedrooms for the officers were located upstairs with clerical staff and servants sleeping on the upper floor of the building, though this château was no historic seat of aristocracy. Price-Davies reported, ‘The whole place is quite modern’.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the good fortune enjoyed by these officers, Allanson, the GSO 1 of 57<sup>th</sup> Division, found himself in a rather less opulent situation in early 1917: ‘We live in a small villa on the banks of the River Lys, called a château, low-lying on the banks of a big marsh

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<sup>6</sup> Captain Charles May, Diary Volume 3: 24 January 1916-8 March 1916 p. 8, May Papers 91/23/1, IWM.

<sup>7</sup> General Sir J.F. Gathorne-Hardy to wife 19 September 1914, Gathorne-Hardy Papers 1/2/10, LHCMA.

<sup>8</sup> Captain A.J.H. Smith to mother 17 July 1918, A.J.H. Smith Papers 84/22/1, IWM.

<sup>9</sup> Price-Davies to wife 10 April 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

and a singularly unattractive looking spot in winter'.<sup>11</sup> Staff made their way over a duckboard path of some 400 yards to reach the offices where they worked, which Allanson estimated were about 6,000 yards from the front line. Clearly there were significant differences between buildings that fell into the category of 'château'. While some may have offered grandeur and antiquity, others were far more modest.

If there were no buildings deemed suitable for use as headquarters available locally, the army sometimes constructed its own. When 46<sup>th</sup> Division moved location in June 1915, Price-Davies described one of these episodes of improvisation: 'There is no chateau in our new place but the general is A1 at making us comfortable and we are building huts & sinking a well much to everyone's amazement'.<sup>12</sup> On the Somme in 1916, Major Kenneth Henderson was serving as GSO 2 with 15<sup>th</sup> Division. He remarked that his new HQ was decidedly spartan: 'Improvised wooden huts had just been run up for our messes and office, just wooden frames with tarpaulin stretched over them, but for living in we all had simply bell tents, the General alone having a small collapsible canvas hut'.<sup>13</sup>

Some staff officers experienced onerous conditions in the forward areas juxtaposed with a considerably more agreeable life behind the lines. In November 1914 the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was involved in heavy fighting around Ypres. The senior staff officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Maurice wrote to his wife:

We are in quite a good house here but it is very cold as there is only one fireplace & nearly all the glass has been smashed by the concussion of the heavy gunfire. It is quite a noisy spot as we are surrounded by battalions both French and English, & the booming of guns & the warble of shells goes on day & night.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Allanson, Diary 19 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>12</sup> Price-Davies to wife 23 June 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>13</sup> Henderson, Memoir, p. 197, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice to wife, 10 November 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/35, LHCMA.

Some ten days later he found himself in rather different surroundings which he described as a very comfortable château ‘where we can hardly hear a gun’<sup>15</sup>, a marked contrast to the past two weeks that he had spent close to the fighting line at Ypres. Maurice wrote that he even had an eiderdown on his bed and ‘my servant has just promised me a hot bath & a cup of tea in the morning’.<sup>16</sup> While Maurice enjoyed these unaccustomed luxuries other officers experienced a more austere existence out of the line. When Major J.F.C. Fuller’s division was resting in a village, his new HQ was ‘a poor building with smashed windows & no working fireplaces’, despite the snow and slush that was still on the ground.<sup>17</sup> Nor did Fuller enjoy the benefits of much rest, as he was kept busy organising training for the division.

Being headquartered in a building away from the front did not provide the staff with immunity from being shelled. When he was appointed BGGS at X Corps, Philip Howell complained they were forced to move their HQ further back from the front line as ‘while I was out with the general this morning they started shelling our headquarters with one of those long range naval guns’.<sup>18</sup> A large headquarters building presented a very visible target so it was essential they were situated some way behind the fighting zone. In Howell’s view, it was inevitable that X Corps would have to re-locate: ‘I always thought they *would* shell because we were much too far forward for a corps headquarters & the Henencourt Château could be seen for miles around’.<sup>19</sup> On this occasion German shells only damaged the building. Even when a Corps HQ was located as far away as the naval harbour of Dunkirk, on the French coast, there was no guarantee it would be free from the threat of long-range shellfire.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid 22 November 1914.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 21 November 1914.

<sup>17</sup> Fuller to mother 25 March 1916, Fuller Papers IV/3/187, LHCMA.

<sup>18</sup> Howell to wife 30 August 1915, Howell Papers, 6/1/217a, LHCMA.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Major Phillip Neame, GSO 2 with XV Corps in 1917, recorded the startling impact of a German bombardment on the Dunkirk casino that served as their HQ:

They put in over eighty 15-inch shells, each weighing just a ton. About the middle of the series a shell hit the casino right in the centre and blew out the whole middle of the four-storey building, cutting Corps HQ in two from roof to ground. Fortunately for me I was billeted in a small house just across the road. My own office room was cut in two, and the steel box containing our attack plans was punctured by a lump of steel. My first thought was for these very secret plans, and I dashed across and recovered the box from the smoking ruins. A number of our clerks and orderlies sleeping over the offices were killed.<sup>20</sup>

Coming under shellfire could be a regular event for a staff officer working at a Divisional HQ. In 1916, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Grant, GSO 1 with 12<sup>th</sup> Division complained, 'We were continually shelled at our Divisional HQs which became a great nuisance but luckily the little house was never hit'.<sup>21</sup> Others were less fortunate. Lieutenant-Colonel F.E. Daniell, of 21<sup>st</sup> Division was killed by a shell exploding in the office where he was working at his HQ in Armentières.<sup>22</sup> During the First Battle of Ypres in October 1914, one of the worst incidents involving a direct hit upon a headquarters building occurred. Maurice recorded the event in a letter home:

I heard today that one unlucky German shell had pitched into a house in which the generals of the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> divisions were conferencing. Generals Lomax & Monro were both wounded. Lt Cols Freddy Kerr and Percival killed.<sup>23</sup>

The divisional history noted that two high-explosive shells hit the buildings at Hooge Château where the staffs of both these divisions were meeting.<sup>24</sup> Along with Kerr, the

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<sup>20</sup> P. Neame, *Playing with Strife* (London: George Harrap, 1947), p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> Grant to Lord Roseberry 8 September 1916, Grant Papers 2/1/26, LHCMA.

<sup>22</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 10 March 1916, Extracts from Letters pp. 183 & 185, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>23</sup> Maurice to wife 1 November 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/29, LHCMA.

<sup>24</sup> E. Wryall, *The History of the Second Division Vol 1 1914-1916* (London: Thos Nelson & Sons, 1921).

GSO 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Division lost its GSO 2, Major G. Paley. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, Captain Rupert Ommaney, the GSO 3, was killed together with Percival, the GSO 2, and several members of the artillery staff.

The key criteria for the selection of a headquarters were size and location. Châteaux were often chosen, not on the basis of comfort, but because they were large enough to accommodate the number of staff officers and clerical staff required by an army or a corps. Smaller buildings invariably proved impractical. When Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, GOC of the Cavalry Corps, decided to move his HQ from a château to a cluster of modest houses his senior staff officer was unimpressed. Howell wrote home to his wife,

There's not nearly enough room for the staff here – I have to do all my work in a tiny unfurnished bedroom & the others are all three to one room. All the houses are on the street through which, being a main road, there is an unending stream of lorries & carts & vast clouds of white chalk-dust.<sup>25</sup>

While working out of a château may have appeared to be unwarranted luxury to those in the front line, it was essential that the staff had suitable facilities to execute their duties. Quarters such as Howell's, which acted as a drag on efficiency and served to impair the quality of staff work, only exacerbated the pressures they were under.

For some officers, compensation could be found in the visitors their HQ attracted owing to its location. In early 1915, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division HQ was located in a windmill and Maurice recorded: 'it has the best view of the front of any divisional headquarters, everyone of any importance comes to it some time or other & one meets a number of interesting & distinguished people'.<sup>26</sup> Among these distinguished visitors numbered the Prince of Wales, the Duc de Vendôme, the King of the Belgians, Sir

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<sup>25</sup> Howell to wife 6 August 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/202c, LHCMA.

<sup>26</sup> Maurice to wife 7 February 1915, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/87, LHCMA.



John French, Commander-in Chief of the British army, and the commanders of I and II Corps, Sir Douglas Haig and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien: an impressive list for a single division! Other officers took a dim view of such visitors. Price-Davies complained when First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill came to his division's HQ in 1914: 'I don't hold with those people coming out and treating the war as a show, sightseeing'.<sup>27</sup>

### *Workload & pressure*

The pressure experienced by some officers due to their heavy workload could result in poor staff work as well as mental and physical exhaustion. In the first month of the war, Gathorne-Hardy commented on how this affected different individuals: 'The interesting thing to me here is the study of character. People you would have expected to be quick and determined become slow & undecided while others you did not expect much of, shine'.<sup>28</sup> On the evidence of his letters home, Maurice appeared to be one of those officers who thrived upon his early experience on the staff. He wrote, 'I flourish on an average of about four hours sleep a night & in fact all my peacetime weaknesses seem to have disappeared. I think I was meant to be a soldier'.<sup>29</sup>

During periods of intense fighting the strain exerted upon command teams was considerable. Orders needed to be drafted rapidly in response to changing situations and staff frequently worked throughout the night. Testimony to this was evident in General Sir Eric de Burgh's recollections of the 1918 German Offensive. He was serving as GSO 1 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division at the time and recalled that in the evening of the opening day of the attack he was dispatched to Corps HQ with his GSO 3 to takeover duties from the BGGs who was utterly exhausted. De Burgh noted, 'I had a

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<sup>27</sup> Price-Davies to wife 27 September 1914, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>28</sup> Gathorne-Hardy to wife 12 September 1914, Gathorne-Hardy Papers 1/2/9, LHCMA.

<sup>29</sup> Maurice to wife 11 September 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/13, LHCMA.

hectic night with the telephone never ceasing and issued many orders for blowing up bridges etc'.<sup>30</sup> Later that month he was involved in heavy fighting around Moreuil. At the end of a ten-day operation de Burgh wrote, 'Orders were received late in the afternoon that we were to be relieved that night partly by a French and partly by a British Division and I had to issue very rapid and complicated orders for all troops in the area'.<sup>31</sup> This must have been a gruelling and testing task for de Burgh who remarked that during this whole period 'I had only ten hours sleep and was pretty tired'.<sup>32</sup>

Fatigue and the capability to endure the physical vicissitudes of active service was a prominent feature of life on the staff. In Lord Loch's view, 'What tells on people coming out fresh is the physical exercise in addition to the office work'.<sup>33</sup> During the first few months of the war this exacted a heavy toll. The GSO 2 of 2nd Division, Major Arthur Percival, was reported to be so tired, 'He drops off in the middle of writing orders'.<sup>34</sup> The forty-four year old Percival was typical of many older staff officers struggling to manage a chronic lack of sleep. Brigadier-General George Barrow, who was fifty in 1914, portrayed his own fight with fatigue:

Ever since the beginning of the campaign we had been short of sleep. Deprivation of sleep is much harder to bear when one is worn out with fatigue, bodily or mental – when the effort is to keep awake – and the opportunity alone is wanting – than the deprivation when time and opportunity are there but sleep refuses to accept them.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> General Sir Eric de Burgh, Unpublished Memoir p. 14, de Burgh Papers 09/49, IWM. The BGGs of the Cavalry Corp during this period was Brigadier-General A. Home though he was back in the UK having medical treatment until 26 March 1918.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Loch to wife 22 March 1916, Loch Papers 1/3/10, IWM.

<sup>34</sup> Price-Davies to wife 13 September 1914, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>35</sup> Barrow, *Fire of Life*, p. 148.

Taking their share of night duty was part of the punishing schedule maintained by the staff during the early months of the war. Price-Davies outlined the routine: 'I was on duty last night and had to take orders out; got back about 12 & lay down but at 1 had to go out again with other orders, to bed at 2.30 & up again 5.30. That is the way we live'.<sup>36</sup>

In October 1918, Walter Guinness was a GSO 2 with 66<sup>th</sup> Division. He noted in his diary that he had been out all day inspecting accommodation and assessing the progress of the fighting. Unfortunately, his work was far from over as 'On getting back to camp, Nosworthy and I had a hectic night drafting orders which we didn't get finished until after 4am'.<sup>37</sup> Having to work all day and then spend the night drafting orders was one of the principal reasons why sleep was often at a premium for the staff. After being engaged in an all day meeting Loch wrote, 'I have a scheme to work out by tomorrow morning which will take every moment of the night I am afraid'.<sup>38</sup> The lack of sleep and the often-punishing schedule led Captain P.G. Whitefoord to remark, 'When I am not overworked – I'm always groping for something I can never find to keep my mind occupied'.<sup>39</sup>

On the Somme in September 1916, Kenneth Henderson's division was relieved after a spell of forty continuous days in the line. The strain of such a lengthy period left its mark. He recollected that he felt 'utterly worn out in body and mind' and noted that, 'judging by everyone's concern on our behalf we evidently looked as if we needed rest'.<sup>40</sup> Later that year Henderson's health broke down and he was sent back to Britain. Continuous toil and pressure had a serious impact upon many of the

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<sup>36</sup> Price-Davies to wife 7 September 1914, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>37</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 230. Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Nosworthy was the Division's GSO 1.

<sup>38</sup> Loch to wife 13 January 1916, Loch Papers 1/3/8, IWM.

<sup>39</sup> Major-General P.G. Whitefoord, Diary 29 May 1918, Whitefoord Papers 77/2/1, IWM.

<sup>40</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 203, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

staff. Colonel T.T. Grove recalled that, 'Towards the end of the war when I was feeling the strain my responsibilities put on me I applied for a transfer home'.<sup>41</sup> After his corps came under sustained pressure from German attacks in April 1918, Major Lord Glyn recorded in his diary, 'I have been induced to take a rest & also two other G.S.O.s on this staff'.<sup>42</sup> Another staff officer described how the exigencies of the job could build up to reach, 'the cracking point which came to the less fortunate from a mixture of exhaustion and nerves'.<sup>43</sup> Such experiences certainly put paid to the idea that the life of the staff was 'one long loaf' as depicted in the musical halls back in Britain.<sup>44</sup>

There were periods when no major operations were in progress and the pressure was lessened but the workload could still be demanding. Many regimental officers viewed a staff job as a comfortable option but had little conception of what the work involved. Introducing some of them to the daily round of staff duties usually helped to change this perception. As Allanson noted, 'it also gives them for the first time some insight into staff work and they said they had never before had any conception that it was so continuous and so hard'.<sup>45</sup>

Long working hours often came with the job. When ANZAC Corps moved its HQ from La Motte au Bois to Henencourt in 1916, Lieutenant-Colonel S.S. Butler remarked, 'All this time I was working about 16 hours a day, going round our positions, interrogating prisoners, compiling the "Comic Cuts" as the troops call Intelligence daily reports'.<sup>46</sup> Even when a unit was out of the line, staff work did not cease although the workload usually lessened. Some officers had mixed feelings

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<sup>41</sup> Grove, Memoir p. 41, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>42</sup> Major Lord Glynn, Diary 16 April 1918, Glyn Papers PP/MCR/67, IWM.

<sup>43</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> This was a popular musical hall joke of the period: 'If bread is the staff of life, what is the life of the staff? One long loaf', Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 224.

<sup>45</sup> Allanson, Diary 18 April 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>46</sup> Major-General S.S. Butler, Memoir Part Two France 1916-18, Butler Papers PP/MCR 107-1, IWM.

about this. When Frederick Maurice was resting with his division he wrote to his wife:

so for the first time since I left you I have the queer feeling of not having enough work to do. I suppose in peacetime I would be considered to be doing a fair day's work still, but after the constant effort of the last week it seems child's play.<sup>47</sup>

Reflecting upon his own wartime experience, A.P. Wavell claimed the staff 'were worked to the bone in order to keep the regimental officer on the rails'.<sup>48</sup> The working hours of the staff were outlined in some detail by accounts from officers working at the Division and Corps level. An insight into a typical day for a GSO 2 officer working at Division was sketched out by Bonham-Carter,

My normal day begins at 7.30, when I look through any letters that have come in before breakfast at ¼ to 8. I work in my office from ¼ past 8 until nine o'clock & then go out & study the line we are holding, the fortifications & the ground & perhaps discuss with my general or one of the Brigade Commanders plans for fresh works to make our positions safer or to enable us to make ourselves a greater nuisance to the enemy. I get back sometime before four o'clock, change & then work fairly steadily till ½ past 10 or eleven.<sup>49</sup>

Similar hours were clocked up by Major J.F.C. Fuller at 37<sup>th</sup> Division who remarked, 'Generally my day's work begins at 8.30 a.m. & seldom ends until about midnight'.<sup>50</sup> The workload at Corps was no lighter. When he was serving as a GSO 3, Captain H.E. Trevor wrote with some dismay:

I have been lent to Corps Headquarters for a week, & it is just like doing hard labour down there. One generally starts work about 7 a.m. & get to bed about midnight. Only managed to get one hour off to go for a walk the whole time.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Maurice to wife 2 November 1914, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/30, LHCMA.

<sup>48</sup> A. Wavell, *Other Men's Flowers* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), p. 98. Wavell served as both a regimental and a staff officer during the war.

<sup>49</sup> Bonham-Carter to mother 14 February 1916, Bonham-Carter Papers, Correspondence 2/1: 28 August 1914 to 19 November 1916, CCC.

<sup>50</sup> Fuller to mother 20 June 1916, Fuller Papers, IV/3/196, LHCMA.

<sup>51</sup> Trevor to mother 2 June 1915, Trevor Papers, P229 HET2, IWM.

Earl Stanhope served as a staff officer at Corps level for almost three years of the war.

His diary provided a vivid picture of the daily routine:

On two or three mornings a week, therefore, I used to leave Corps Headquarters at 5 a.m. and go up to the line, getting back for late breakfast, but if doing rear lines, as I did latterly, we used to go up at noon when visibility was better and it was easier to see the German positions. On other days I used to get to the office about 9 or 9-30 a.m. and work till lunch, studying reports from divisions or orders from the Army, drafting our own orders etc. After lunch at 1p.m. I usually returned to the office and worked on till dinner (for which we changed into trousers and a clean khaki jacket) returning to the office at 9-15 p.m. and working till midnight or more often 12-30 a.m.<sup>52</sup>

All of these accounts testified to the long working hours endured by many of the staff.

In some cases staff officers were putting in fifteen or sixteen-hour days. Cuthbert Headlam complained that he was forced to write home during office hours: ‘But if one did not, one would never write letters at all – as office hours extend from 8.30 am to 11.30 pm on the Staff of the BEF’.<sup>53</sup>

### *The front line*

As these accounts have illustrated, an important feature of their quotidian round was a visit to the front line. One of the most enduring views about the life of the staff has been their lack of presence in the front line and unfamiliarity with the fighting conditions. The Third Battle of Ypres continues to be characterised in some quarters by the apocryphal exclamation, attributed to Sir Launcelot Kiggell, the Chief of General Staff, now invariably transformed into an iconic statement about the entire war, ‘Good God did we really send men to fight in that’.<sup>54</sup> The *Official History* stated, ‘Complaints that staff officers did not regularly visit junior commanders and see the

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<sup>52</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 158.

<sup>53</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 169.

<sup>54</sup> Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 56. This quotation appears to have originated from J.E. Edmonds and was publicised by Liddell Hart. Despite being debunked it still retains considerably currency and was used in publicity material for the Flanders Field Museum in Ypres in 2012.

situation for themselves are so numerous that they cannot all be unfounded'.<sup>55</sup> It may well be the case that some staff officers were derelict in performing this duty but evidence from many of their own first-hand accounts testified to a regular presence in the front line.

Staff would journey up to the front line for a variety of reasons. It is important to recognise that the forward area consisted of several lines linked by communication trenches. Being up at the 'front' could refer to being in the main firing trench, the command trench immediately behind it, the support line several hundred yards further back or the reserve line beyond this to the rear. Stanhope explained that staff needed to be up in the front line to know the state of the ground and the positions of the enemy. He added that their remit extended further than the firing lines to all parts of the fighting zone: 'It was also the duty of staff officers to examine rear lines of defence which might be required in case of retirement and also to watch roads and means of approach for an advance or the pushing up of reinforcements'.<sup>56</sup>

Junior staff officers were often asked to go forward and reconnoitre. As a GSO 3 with 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Division in 1914, Edmund Beddington was sent up to the trenches and needed to call through to Corps HQ urgently to obtain barbed wire for new trenches the division were digging.<sup>57</sup> Daily outings to the forward areas formed part of Captain Thomas Heald's duties as a GSO 3. He remembered when his division was based around Arras: 'Spent the day on the line. I had to look at a portion that has been much damaged by shellfire. They had been shelling it just before I got there but were quiet when I was there'.<sup>58</sup> These reconnaissance forays could often turn out to be hazardous. There are numerous accounts that reported a brush with hostile fire. A

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<sup>55</sup> C. Falls, *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1917 The German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line and the Battles of Arras* (McMillan & Co, London: 1940).

<sup>56</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> Beddington, Memoir p. 76, Beddington Papers, LHCMA.

<sup>58</sup> Wolff, *Subalterns of the Foot*, p. 249.

typical event was recorded in mid-1916 when a staff officer from corps accompanied by a colleague from division were spotted and shelled:

Sherlock had a narrow shave yesterday for the Boches saw him crawling down a communication trench. They put a shrapnel shell just beyond him, so he and the GSO 3 of the 56<sup>th</sup> Division scrambled back. Luckily they did, for the Boches put another about ten yards further on where they would just about have got to if they had not been wise in their generation.<sup>59</sup>

When Captain Alistair MacDougall was a GSO 3 at VI Corps he made regular tours of the trenches. In common with many other junior staff officers he was no stranger to enemy fire. He recorded several incidents when he narrowly escaped being killed or wounded. One sortie to the front line saw him come under mortar fire:

Napier who was leading made a bolt down the trench & found a dugout. I got blocked by a man going in the opposite way to what I wanted to go, so hurriedly lay flat on my face, with Ingham & our guide more or less on the top of me. Presently there was a thud & the trench mortar bomb arrived. After a few seconds, thinking it was a 'dud', I started to get up. Just then it went off & half buried us. We weren't long in getting down a dugout after that.<sup>60</sup>

Some officers believed that the level of danger could be determined by the hour of the day. Stanhope was accustomed to visiting the line about ten in the morning but later in the war he took to going up earlier if he could. He reasoned, 'the shellfire being often less at that hour and the trenches not blocked by men lying asleep'.<sup>61</sup> Dangerous though it was, an important duty of the staff was to gain information about the front line positions both friendly and hostile. Fuller remarked that the British know the

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<sup>59</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 1 June 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 243, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM. The officer from 56<sup>th</sup> Division was either Captain T. Bullock or Captain M. Stopford.

<sup>60</sup> MacDougall, Diary 8 February 1916, MacDougall Papers 11142, IWM.

<sup>61</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 158.



position and shape of the German trenches in some detail and ‘they no doubt know ours’.<sup>62</sup>

The staff harnessed aerial photography to provide pictures of the ground. These were used to supplement information gained through reconnaissance missions. The reports were vital in planning any operation, regardless of scale. When he was attached to the staff of 23<sup>rd</sup> Division, Captain Basil Sanderson, was up at the front six days out of seven. The twenty-two year old was allotted the task of visiting different parts of the front accompanied by a runner. It was a dangerous role and he was lucky to survive unscathed. Two of the runners suffered serious wounds. He explained why the job needed to be done:

There was always information required as to how far a local attack had succeeded, or how a damaged portion of the line had been repaired, and whether there was adequate cover in the forward posts and in such communication trenches as existed or were being dug. My daily task was to check all reports on such subjects and because I got to know the lie of the land intimately it was not as difficult for me to pinpoint the local position as for the occupants of a position.<sup>63</sup>

Sometimes it was only possible to visit the front at night owing to the exposed position of some trenches. Sanderson found himself restricted to such nocturnal excursions when he was in a heavily shelled sector and the only practicable way to reach the front line was to walk in the open for most of the way.<sup>64</sup>

Darkness might offer safety but the front could be an eerie place at night.

Fuller chronicled his experience:

all is very silent & one’s footsteps along the boarded trench echo out like thunder claps. Occasionally a shot sings out, more often than not

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<sup>62</sup> Fuller to mother 29 July 1915, Fuller Papers IV/3/151, LHCMA.

<sup>63</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

at nothing, occasionally we can hear men whispering, but generally all is dead still.<sup>65</sup>

The staff would frequently visit the trenches to maintain contact with the troops as well as ensuring they were in touch with the situation in the front line. Invariably this would involve all of the G branch staff going up to the front in rotation. Following his promotion to GSO 2 with 47<sup>th</sup> Division, B.L. Montgomery wrote to his father, 'There is a lot to be done but one has more time to do it than a brigade has. The GSO 1 and I take it in turns to go out and visit the trenches; he goes out one day and I the next'.<sup>66</sup> During his time as a GSO 3 with VII Corps, Fuller often visited the front line with his senior staff officer, Frank Lyon. The experienced Lyon was a regular visitor to the fighting areas and unperturbed by artillery fire. Fuller recounted an incident when they were observing a German artillery bombardment: 'As we were not much more than 500 yds away from the bursts, I, personally, considered our position rather dangerous, but General Lyon told me that when once the Germans open fire they never change their range'.<sup>67</sup>

Staff officers often accompanied senior officers on a tour of the trenches. This could be a hazardous business and it was one of the duties Allanson professed an aversion to:

I cannot say I much like going round trenches as a staff officer with one's general; if it is your own unit or you are going round on your own you have a chance of talking to the men and cheering them up, but when you are only listening to someone else doing it and the shells are flying uncomfortably close, one is inclined to pay too much attention to them.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Fuller to mother 12 October 1915, Fuller Papers IV/3/163, LHCMA.

<sup>66</sup> Montgomery to father, July 1917, Montgomery Papers, BLM 1/61, IWM.

<sup>67</sup> Fuller to mother 29 July 1915, Fuller Papers IV/3/151, LHCMA.

<sup>68</sup> Allanson, Diary 26 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

Some generals were frequent visitors to the trenches with their staff in tow. When S.S. Butler served as GSO 2 with the ANZAC Corps under General Birdwood, he commented, 'Birdie was up in the trenches most days, visiting the troops. I, also, of course had to spend a lot of my time in the front line'.<sup>69</sup> Knowledge of events at the front was as important to the staff at Army level as it was to those at Corps or Division. 'Tim' Harington, MGGS of Second Army, made great efforts to maintain the currency of his information. He maintained that a staff officer was not 'fit for his position' unless he was aware of the actual condition of the trenches and the troops.<sup>70</sup> Reputedly, Brigadier-General Ian Stewart of XIII Corps, 'knew every blade of grass on the corps front'.<sup>71</sup> Harington contested the view that senior command were unaware of what was happening in the fighting areas:

Having had thirty-three miles of front to hold, of which I was proud to know every yard, and having had junior Army Staff Officers three or four nights a week in various sectors "out to help" in every way, and keep the Army Commander in the closest touch.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the obvious dangers, many staff advocated getting out into the fighting areas rather than spending their time back at headquarters. Philip Howell highlighted this when he complained about his new formation:

The curse of this 3<sup>rd</sup> Army is the number of reports requested & meetings held. I'm on strike already! You cannot run things on War Office lines & commanders and staffs must be out & about & not tied to office stools.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Butler, *Memoir Part 2 France 1916-18*, Butler Papers PP/MCR 107-1, IWM.

<sup>70</sup> C. Harington, 'The Relations of the Staff to Commanding Officers, and Vice Versa, that of Commanding Officers to the Staff', *Notes for Commanding Officers Issued to Students at the Senior Officers' School, Aldershot, 1917* (4<sup>th</sup> course) (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Ltd, 1917), pp. 349-359.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 189.

<sup>72</sup> Harington, *Harington Looks Back*, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Howell to wife 30 August 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/218, LHCMA.

Many staff officers saw visiting the front as a fundamental part of their duties and tried to be there as much as they could. Basil Sanderson was a spirited advocate of this philosophy:

I can say from personal experience that not only senior Staff officers, but also higher commanders, found it part of their duty to visit forward troops as often as they could possibly get away from their more sedentary but essential duties. It was almost a point of honour to show to the front line that others cared for them, and the sight of a brass hat was not unusual.<sup>74</sup>

Another officer echoed these sentiments when he responded to the charge that commanders and their staff rarely went to the front line. He noted the recent deaths of three generals at the front and added:

As for the others, in the ordinary way on the Staff, it is the duty of the G.S. side to go to the fighting area and it is done in our Army far more than in any other. Everyday one member of the Corps G.S. Staff goes down to the firing trench, let alone the Divisional G.S. Staff, and as for Brigade Staffs, they are never more than a few hundred yards from the Germans and all have dugouts.<sup>75</sup>

Criticism of this nature was rife both during and after the war. In the autumn of 1915, Loch received a letter from Neville Talbot, chaplain to the Rifle Brigade. While Loch sympathised with some of Talbot's critique of the senior command he took issue with his thoughts on the staff:

he goes off the rails when he says that nobody on the higher staffs knows what is going on in front and that a conference should be held of battalion commanders and high commanders so that the latter might be told what the real state of affairs is.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 40.

<sup>75</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 4 October 1915, Extracts from Letters p. 77, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>76</sup> Loch to wife 24 August 1915, Loch Papers, 71/12/1-1/3/1, IWM.

In Loch's opinion the staff knew only too well the situation in the front line. He conceded that in the early part of the war some commanders were reluctant to let their staff get too close to the fighting but now things were very different:

In this corps every divisional commander goes to see his people every day and goes into his trenches practically everyday. One or other of the Divisional Staff and usually all the staff go in to the trenches every day. Besides this the Corps Commander and the Corps Staff go out every day to see somebody.<sup>77</sup>

When 8<sup>th</sup> Division was headquartered in the ramparts at Ypres at the end of 1917, the three general staff officers made daily visits in rotation to the whole front line.<sup>78</sup> Such journeys were physically demanding and time consuming as well as dangerous. Yet these were part of the daily duties of many staff officers in the field.

The use of junior staff as liaison officers provided GHQ with a direct link to the front line. They were stationed in the forward areas with units that were in contact with the enemy in order to provide reports back to GHQ. Instead of reports having to pass through several HQs, which could alter their tone or even change details, the liaison officer was a direct conduit. Their use permitted a faster and more accurate transmission of information back to the command centre. In Charles Bonham Carter's opinion, liaison officers brought GHQ into much closer contact with forward operations, which had important results in the final phases of the war.<sup>79</sup> George Barrow, BGGS of X Corps, maintained that the British emphasised the importance of visiting the front line in contrast to the French staff whose battlefield was in the office. According to Barrow, while French staff methods concentrated on the paper side of operations the British worked very differently:

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid 27 August 1915.

<sup>78</sup> Beddington, Memoir p. 118, Beddington Papers, LHCMA.

<sup>79</sup> Bonham-Carter, Notes for Memoir, Bonham-Carter Papers 9/2, CCC.

A staff officer would be judged as not performing one of his most important duties were he not frequently moving among the troops and visiting the headquarters of lower formations. Only by these means can mutual sympathy and confidence be maintained between those who do the fighting and those who do the planning, and only by gaining first-hand knowledge of the situation at the front can a staff officer ensure the accurate interpretation and transmission to others of his general's intentions.<sup>80</sup>

Although Barrow's conclusions on French staff methods appear to be based upon a single incident so must be regarded with some scepticism, his view on British activity accords with many others. It strikes a very different chord from the hackneyed literary image of staff officers sheltered safely in headquarters well away from the hazards of the trenches.

### *Staff duties*

A large element of routine staff work consisted of administrative duties. In a pre-war introductory address to new entrants at the Camberley Staff College, one of the senior instructors, Colonel Hugh Jeudwine informed them, 'The elementary part of staff duties is very largely a matter of detail and you must master the detail & routine of it before you can carry out staff duties without waste of time'.<sup>81</sup> Some officers found it frustrating to be stuck at headquarters engaged upon work they perceived made little contribution to defeating the enemy. This could be especially galling to officers who had seen action. Major Laurence Carr grumbled about his lot as a GSO 2:

I am thoroughly fed up with my job, which is nothing more than a glorified clerk. I have to deal with a whole lot of people who have never been in the trenches and consequently don't know what you are talking about when you talk about them.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Barrow, *Fire of Life*, p. 158.

<sup>81</sup> Jeudwine, Address to Junior Division Camberley students 1913 p. 12, Jeudwine Papers 72/82/7, IWM.

<sup>82</sup> Lieutenant-General Laurence Carr to wife 20 February 1917, Carr Papers 1/2, LHCMA.

Spending time in the trenches needed to be balanced against time at headquarters dealing with planning and administrative work. It was essential that headquarters were constantly manned in order to deal with messages and to communicate with units in the field. If the staff were continually up in the front line then chaos would have ensued. Somebody needed to manage matters when others were away, as Sanderson explained:

I was able to visit the brigades regularly, but my length of absence from headquarters was largely curtailed by the movements of General Lawford and Colonel Beck, the GSO 1, who always seemed to work 'as a pair', and when they were away I had to stay behind and hold the fort.<sup>83</sup>

Another staff officer expressed a comparable sense of chagrin: 'More office work. Getting fed up with having to stay indoors, but with Franklyn away, have a good deal to do'.<sup>84</sup> While work prevented some from getting out of the office, others were thwarted by their GOC. Lord Loch expressed his own frustration at not getting to the front line on a regular basis:

We, the staff, ought to go every day down to Brigades and battalions and the trenches. But it is the greatest difficulty for one to get him to let any of us go even to Brigade headquarters. I send the others sometimes without asking him but he will not let me go. I do not know what his reason is but it is very bad as we are not in touch in any way with the brigades.<sup>85</sup>

Wading through administrative tasks was a fundamental element of staff work but provoked complaints from many staff officers. When Charles Grant moved from a GSO 1 post at Division to the same position with Third Army he noted, 'The work is very interesting but includes a great deal of office work. Still one has the illusion of

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<sup>83</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 74.

<sup>84</sup> MacDougall, Diary 7 July 1918, MacDougall Papers 11142, IWM.

<sup>85</sup> Loch to wife 10 March 1915, Loch Papers 71/12/1, IWM. His GOC was General Edward Bulfin.

thinking one knows what is going on'.<sup>86</sup> A particular grievance voiced by Grant was the incessant telephoning which interrupted his work, much of which emanated from GHQ. Such disruption must have been especially galling when a detailed piece of staff work demanded completion. Interruptions from a different source plagued Lord Loch. He was disgruntled about having to work with staff officers who were learning on the job:

I am getting awfully behind in all my work with my two novices. I have to overlook everything they do & consequently get constantly interrupted which prevents my brain travelling along the same course for long together.<sup>87</sup>

It was understandable how such unwanted distractions hindered the mundane task of routine administration but this was the nature of a good deal of staff work. Prominent in this administrative burden was the compilation of daily strength reports and the regular production of casualty lists. In C.J. Allanson's view: 'I find, and I am sorry to see, that there is a tremendous amount of office work; the truth is in trench warfare we get into bad habits and there is a centralization that entirely destroys initiative'.<sup>88</sup>

Maintaining the unit war diary was another part of routine administration that fell to the staff. It was common for this task to be undertaken by a junior G branch officer. When he was GSO 3 at 37<sup>th</sup> Division, Whitefoord recorded in his diary, 'Hard at work all morning and afternoon finishing off the war diary'.<sup>89</sup> Many of them regarded it as a rather tiresome chore. Price-Davies complained, 'I have this beastly war diary to keep which distracts me'.<sup>90</sup> He found updating the diary to be 'rather a

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<sup>86</sup> Grant to Lord Roseberry 14 March 1917, Grant Papers 2/1/30, LHCMA.

<sup>87</sup> Loch to wife 19 January 1916, Loch Papers, 71/12/1-1/3/8, IWM.

<sup>88</sup> Allanson, Diary 27 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>89</sup> Whitefoord, Diary 1 September 1918, Whitefoord Papers 77/2/1, IWM.

<sup>90</sup> Price-Davies to wife 18 September 1914, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.



business' as he found himself being continually interrupted and sent off to tackle something else.<sup>91</sup> Although the maintenance of records such as the war diary was often seen as drudgery, some staff officers were aware of the importance of this task. Stanhope noted, 'It is from these records that the full history of the war will have to be compiled'.<sup>92</sup>

An innovative way of dealing with the official paperwork that mounted up on the desk of the staff was the subject of an amusing anecdote. An old hand on the staff explained to his subalterns:

An official communication may come to you in one of four forms. It may be printed, in which case there is so large an issue that your copy is quite unnecessary. It may be Roneoed, in which case there will be so many copies that yours can well be spared. It may be typewritten. If so your copy is not indispensable as there is certain to be at least one carbon copy. Finally, it may be in manuscript and there may be no copy. Destroy it at once.<sup>93</sup>

### *Orders*

Drafting orders was the mainstay of the staff officer's role. Clear guidelines were established as to how they should be produced and distributed. The Field Regulations stated, 'Orders, reports and messages must be as concise as possible consistent with clearness'.<sup>94</sup> The language used should be simple and the handwriting easily legible. There was no remit to question the wisdom of orders. As one staff officer remarked; 'if you are going to start asking "Why" about orders you'll soon be off the Staff or off your head'.<sup>95</sup>

Instructions were issued to staff as to the pitfalls they should avoid when

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 124.

<sup>93</sup> Grove, Memoir p. 3, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>94</sup> FSR 1909 Part I, Chapter 2 p. 22, WO 676, IWM.

<sup>95</sup> W. Griffith, *Up to Mametz* (London; Faber & Faber, 1931), p. 217.

compiling orders. ‘Tim’ Harington, MGGS of Second Army held firm convictions about how orders should be drafted, ‘It is a very great help to anybody who issues an order to put themselves in the position of the person who receives it’.<sup>96</sup> Emphasis was placed upon ensuring that orders reached their destination: ‘Important communications should be sent by more than one means and acknowledgement of receipt should be obtained’.<sup>97</sup> The role of a staff officer was to ensure that orders were written clearly and distributed efficiently. Orders could vary from routine movements in and out of the line to the planning of major offensives. During the crossing of the River Selle in October 1918, Walter Guinness commented: ‘All through the day and most of the night we were trying to co-operate with the changing phases of the attack by the 50<sup>th</sup> Division and there were masses of orders to be issued’.<sup>98</sup>

Disrupted communications and orders that went astray were issues the staff had to grapple with frequently. Often they were beyond their control. On other occasions poor staff work in the form of ambiguous or badly drafted orders could have significant operational consequences. The Staff Manual stated, ‘A verbal order is more likely to cause misunderstanding than a written one’.<sup>99</sup> This was the dilemma that faced Lord Loch when he served with the staff:

I find my position very difficult as Gen. B. gives orders verbally and they are often misunderstood. Often I do not know in the least what he has ordered and it is therefore impossible to make all the arrangements between the different people.<sup>100</sup>

If the GOC was not available to give orders then the senior staff officer was expected to step into the breach. When a special dispatch rider arrived at the HQ of 41<sup>st</sup> Division in October 1918 with orders from Corps for an advance that afternoon, the

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<sup>96</sup> Harington, ‘Relations of the Staff to Commanding Officers’, p. 356.

<sup>97</sup> FSR 1909 Part I, Chapter 2 p. 25, WO 676, IWM.

<sup>98</sup> Bond & Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 236.

<sup>99</sup> General Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 2, p.15, WO 32/4731, TNA.

<sup>100</sup> Loch to wife 18 February 1915, Loch Papers, 71/12/1-1/2/2, IWM.

GSO 2 Major Basil Sanderson was the senior staff officer present. Sanderson recalled: ‘I was at once in somewhat of a quandary. The Divisional Commander and the GSO 1 were away for best part of the day and my attempts to get hold of them by field telephone were fruitless’.<sup>101</sup> He carried on regardless and issued orders for the division to attack. However, by noon there was still no contact with his superiors and Sanderson became increasingly nervous: ‘All orders were out and everything was in train; I felt that my tactical plan was sound; but there was no commander, who after all was the man to shoulder the ultimate responsibility’.<sup>102</sup> The attack went ahead and proved successful. When the GOC finally returned his only response to Sanderson was, ‘What do you think I have a Staff for, if they can’t carry on when I’m away?’<sup>103</sup>

Some three years earlier, Lord Loch painted a very different picture. He complained bitterly that the staff officers of 28<sup>th</sup> Division were given no responsibility by their GOC, General Edward Bulfin. They were prevented from going to see anything of the line or going out to consult with the brigades. According to Loch: ‘We are not doing any general staff work only clerks work, and it is becoming a subject for laughter among the Brigades’.<sup>104</sup> While it is difficult to extrapolate from these two incidents, it may be the case that later in the war more trust was invested in the staff to take responsibility. By this point many staff were tried and tested so a GOC may have been more inclined to let them make command decisions in his absence.

### *Co-ordination*

As the 1912 Staff Manual outlined, an important role for the G branch staff was coordinating activity at headquarters. The burden of coordinating activity generally fell upon the senior ‘G’ branch officer. During the war, the GSO1 of 57<sup>th</sup> Division,

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<sup>101</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, pp. 78-78.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Loch to wife 19 March 1915, Loch Papers 1/2/3, IWM.

Colonel C.J. Allanson, remarked that these duties kept him very busy. He described the scene at his headquarters in early 1917: 'Here are constant interviews and visits from officers of all arms, and all branches as in a General Staff office largely lies the power for cooperation of all arms'.<sup>105</sup> Another illustration of this duty was provided by the future Viscount Montgomery who wrote to his mother when he was GSO 1 in 47<sup>th</sup> London Division in 1918, 'As Chief of Staff I have to work out plans in detail for the operations and see that all the branches of the staff and administrative arrangements are working in with my plans'.<sup>106</sup> Montgomery outlined that he met with the General who outlined the next day's plan to him. After working out the details and issuing the orders, Montgomery explained that:

I send for all the heads of each branch of the staff, tell them the plan and explain the orders. They tell me what they propose to do to fit in with the scheme. If I think it is bad I say so and tell them what I think is a better way to do it. There is no time to refer to the General and I take the responsibility on myself.<sup>107</sup>

Conferences played a significant part in the planning process and in the life of a staff officer. They were essential in bringing together the different actors involved so that the latest information could be distributed and any issues discussed. These meetings were generally convened under the umbrella of Army, Corps or Division. In Second Army they were held daily. Harington described the routine:

Every morning, and in the winter, every evening, the Army Commander held a conference of all the heads of departments. It always opened with an account by the Chief of the Intelligence Staff of the general situation of our own forces and those of the enemy. Then, each in turn, we gave the results of our own tours, and what various Commanders had told us and asked for, and our own suggestions. By this means the Army Commander kept in the closest touch.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Allanson, Diary 6 March 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>106</sup> Montgomery to mother 3 September 1918 BLM 1/65, IWM.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Harington, *Harington Looks Back*, p. 54.

In autumn 1918, Major Alistair MacDougall attended frequent conferences at Corps to brief divisions about attacks. On September 26<sup>th</sup> his diary recorded: 'After breakfast went with General to conference at Corps HQ about our future attacks. They are being carried out on a large scale & if successful should be the decisive battle this year'.<sup>109</sup>

Although conferences may have represented an important part of the planning process, some officers became disenchanted with attending them. Lord Loch wrote wearily, 'This morning I had to go to Army Headquarters for a conference which lasted for 3 hours. I got very bored especially as everything that was discussed meant some more work for me'.<sup>110</sup> The charms of the conference appeared to have worn equally thin for George Barrow when he was BGGs with II Corps. He remarked:

Once a week I accompanied my Chief to the Army Commander conferences, presided over by the Commander-in-Chief. These were rather dreary affairs at which each Army commander gave an account of his stewardship during the last week.<sup>111</sup>

Apart from providing information, conferences were an opportunity to meet colleagues and renew acquaintances. When Kenneth Henderson took up a post as Brigade Major he attended a conference at 21<sup>st</sup> Division and found he knew several of the staff there. He had attended Staff College at Quetta with the GSO 1, Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Daniell, while he knew Major David Forster, the GSO 2, from the Indian Army.

To execute their duties successfully the staff needed to be able to communicate with units in the field quickly and efficiently. As the army grew larger this became an increasingly important factor. Despite advances in technology,

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<sup>109</sup> MacDougall, Diary 26 September 1918, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

<sup>110</sup> Loch to wife 21 June 1916, Loch Papers 1/3/8, IWM.

<sup>111</sup> Barrow, *Fire of Life*, pp. 164-5.

communications were a problem throughout the war. This was a significant impediment to the staff. In 1915 Lord Loch complained: ‘Everything seems to go wrong with us at present. Our communications are always breaking down. Wires cut by shell or something’.<sup>112</sup> Difficulties in establishing contact were common and the cause of considerable frustration. Phillip Whitefoord recorded a typical example in 1918 when he, ‘Spent about an hour trying to telephone through to 1<sup>st</sup> French Army for GOC’.<sup>113</sup> The problems experienced with communications shaped the way battle was conducted. After the war, Eric Harrison reflected: ‘In those days without wireless artillery programmes were set-piece, because telephone lines could not be relied upon once battle was joined’.<sup>114</sup>

Earl Stanhope described the preparations for an attack by V Corps on the Bellewaarde Ridge that involved five different lines of communications wires laid through or around Ypres.<sup>115</sup> These were supplemented by wireless, visual and pigeon communications. An enormous volume of messages was generated which had to be processed and managed by the staff. Having developed the plans for an attack and distributed them to units in the field, the staff could then only wait for progress reports to come back to their HQ. Phillip Howell explained his role during an attack: ‘Once the whole thing is started there’s not much to do but to listen. And I have to keep back by the telephones in rear’.<sup>116</sup> Good communications were vital to command teams. As Field Marshal Sir William Robertson observed: ‘The complicated modern system of communication sometimes leaves commanders completely at a loss when it fails’.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Loch to wife 14 February 1915, Loch Papers 1/2/2, IWM.

<sup>113</sup> Whitefoord, Diary 7 June 1918, Whitefoord Papers 77/2/1, IWM.

<sup>114</sup> E. Harrison, *Gunners, Game and Gardens* (London: Leo Cooper, 1978), p. 50.

<sup>115</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 50.

<sup>116</sup> Howell to wife 24 May 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/99–152, LHCMA.

<sup>117</sup> Robertson to Montgomery-Massingbird 1915, Montgomery-Massingbird Papers, 5/7/2, LHCMA.

## *Intelligence and Raids*

Acting as a point of liaison between the front line and higher command was a role that fell to the staff. At XVII Corps in 1916, each of the three GSO 3 officers was allocated responsibility for providing reports for a Division. One of these officers was Captain George Roupell who recollected: ‘You were responsible for keeping the army command conversant with what was going on in that division and visiting it periodically. So you spent a lot of time going round the line and visiting the division’.<sup>118</sup> He was often dispatched to reconnoitre a section of the front line and provide a report on the state of the ground. As well as reporting on their own lines the staff were charged with compiling information on German activity.

A primary staff duty was to gather intelligence about the enemy. Gaining accurate intelligence was a crucial part of trench warfare. As Beach has identified, most information reaching GHQ about the German army came from the British frontline.<sup>119</sup> He outlined how the British used observation posts, information from prisoners and captured documents to develop a picture of enemy activity. Raids were mounted upon the German trenches or patrols sent out into no-man’s land to capture prisoners as they were a rich source of information about enemy formations and movements. From a staff perspective these activities were seen as a valuable means of obtaining knowledge about enemy plans and intentions. When raids were successful and prisoners taken, the staff interrogated them to extract information. According to S.S. Butler, during his time with the ANZAC Corps in France, ‘a very large number

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<sup>118</sup> Brigadier George Roupell to Peter Liddle, Transcript of interview April 1971, Roupell Papers GS1388, LCUL.

<sup>119</sup> Beach, ‘British Intelligence’, p. 20.

of prisoners were taken by them which kept me and my Intelligence officers very busy'.<sup>120</sup>

The staff played a vital role in compiling and distributing the information gained through raiding as Cuthbert Headlam recalled from winter 1915-16:

In the Guards Division, as in most other divisions of the British Army, all such intelligence was sent daily to divisional headquarters by the brigades in the line and also by the gunners. It was then carefully tabulated by the General Staff and circulated to troops by means of daily summaries.<sup>121</sup>

Writing this 'Daily Intelligence Summary' was a task that usually fell to the junior staff officer at Division. Captain A.F. Smith, GSO 3 with the Guards Division from late 1915, explained that this was compiled 'from reports received daily from Brigades, who in turn get their reports from Battalions, who in turn get their reports from companies'.<sup>122</sup> These intelligence reports were then tabulated into a form of logbook regularly updated by the staff.

Headlam noted that these summaries made a valuable contribution to successful trench defence.<sup>123</sup> Once the value of raids was recognized there was increased preparation and planning. It provided another opportunity for the relatively new technology of aerial photography to be deployed. Colonel T.T. Grove explained that 'It was common practice to lay out from aeroplane photographs a trace of the portion of enemy front forming the objective and to drill the raiding party over this'.<sup>124</sup> Aerial photography proved of considerable assistance in intelligence gathering. The fighting units received a constant flow of information consisting of updated trench maps and photographs from the staff. Smith outlined his part in this effort:

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<sup>120</sup> Butler, Memoir Part 2 France 1916-18, Butler Papers PP/MCR 107-1, IWM.

<sup>121</sup> C. Headlam, *The Guards Division in the Great War Vol I* (London: John Murray, 1920), p. 105.

<sup>122</sup> Lieutenant-General A.F. Smith to parents 6 December 1915, Transcript p. 148, A.F. Smith Papers 11782, IWM.

<sup>123</sup> Headlam, *Guards Division in the Great War*, p. 105.

<sup>124</sup> Grove, Memoir p. 50, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.



I am responsible for the issue of all maps to the Division, including trench maps, ordinary “tourists” maps, secret maps, and aeroplane photographs. Also for keeping all trench maps up to date and correct. I am therefore constantly up in the trenches checking trench maps which are what are used more than anything else.<sup>125</sup>

In his post-war memoir, former staff officer Grove, provided his explanation of why raids were important:

They served to foster an offensive spirit in troops otherwise reduced to inaction, they harassed the enemy and cost him casualties, and they provided identifications of use to the Intelligence branch. Great ingenuity was employed in their planning and much care devoted to their preparation.<sup>126</sup>

The troops who participated in them saw things rather differently. Infantry officer Charles May opined, ‘The chief reason for patrols is that the Staff likes them. Their value is more or less problematical’.<sup>127</sup> While the information gleaned from these forays was useful to the staff some of them were aware of their unpopularity. His service on the Western Front taught Allanson that ‘Battalions as a whole dislike raids intensely; they are looked upon as enterprises run for the kudos of the staff generally at the expense of the regimental officer and men’.<sup>128</sup> As a senior staff officer and subsequently a divisional commander, George Barrow, held a similar view. He believed that raids undertaken to promote an offensive spirit displayed a misunderstanding of the nature of the British soldier. In Barrow’s opinion, ‘the bravest men resent being ordered to risk their lives needlessly, nor does such an order increase their confidence in their leaders’.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Smith to parents 6 December 1915, Transcript p. 148, A.F. Smith Papers 11782, IWM.

<sup>126</sup> Grove, Memoir p. 50, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>127</sup> May, Diary No4 7 March 1916 to 24 April 1916 p. 14, May Papers 91/23/1, IWM.

<sup>128</sup> Allanson, Diary 19 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>129</sup> Barrow, *Fire of Life*, p. 159.

## *Reliefs*

The relief of one division in the front line by another was a complex operation that involved the production of an extensive set of orders. Reliefs were planned and supervised by the staff. They demanded great attention to detail. In August 1918, 37<sup>th</sup> Division's relief by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division took three days and consumed ten pages of orders.<sup>130</sup> Invariably, reliefs were undertaken during the hours of darkness in order to conceal the activity from the enemy, but this held its own particular set of dangers. Price-Davies related that many of the casualties suffered by the troops of his division in the trenches occurred during reliefs. Troops faced the difficulty of finding their way around in darkness and 'There are always a lot of stray bullets about at night'.<sup>131</sup> Another staff officer conveyed the challenges encountered when taking over some trenches from the French at midnight during the winter:

It is a very complicated business taking over trenches from an ally at any time but when in addition one has to move up from an area some distance away, carry up all trench equipment which grows hourly and finally convey man, stores, food, ammunition in a few hours with a salient surrounded by the enemy without attracting attention is I am afraid beyond me. Difficulties are not decreased by dealing with officers who have no experience of this kind of work.<sup>132</sup>

The relief described by Loch took place over three different nights and exerted a considerable strain. He gained very little sleep and at the conclusion of the exercise remarked, 'I want very badly to take off my clothes as I have not had them off since I put them on last Monday morning and today is Saturday'.<sup>133</sup> A successful relief was a marked achievement. Harington recognized this when he congratulated Lieutenant-Colonel John Dill, GSO 1 of 37<sup>th</sup> Division in October 1917: 'I think the way you got

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<sup>130</sup> Williams, 'Some Notes and Lessons from Recent Operations', Williams Papers 77/189/5, IWM.

<sup>131</sup> Price-Davies to wife 21 April 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>132</sup> Loch to wife 31 January 1915, Loch Papers, 71/12/1-1/2/2, IWM.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid* 6 February 1915.

your plans made and Division in at short notice is beyond all praise and a fine bit of staff work'.<sup>134</sup>

### *Marches*

Planning and drafting the orders for the movement of troops up to the fighting areas was another duty undertaken by the staff. It formed part of the pre-war syllabus at Camberley Staff College where exercises put the skills of the staff to the test in formulating movement tables. Moving troops quickly and efficiently was a critical military skill that could determine the success or failure of an operation. A well-planned march would deliver troops to where they were needed, when they were needed – ready for action. Moving increasingly large numbers of men and weapons around a countryside ravaged by war was an exacting task. It demanded foresight and experience. The staff had to contend with a range of issues that tested their abilities to the limit.

The scale of troop movements during the war dwarfed anything the staff had to contend with previously. An insight into the issues they faced can be gleaned from Philip Neame's account of the movements of a quarter of a million men from First and Second Armies in spring 1918:

I was the Staff officer responsible for ordering all these moves, and, in conjunction with Major Davies, of the QMG branch, for all the manifold arrangements in connexion with them. We two had to work night and day.<sup>135</sup>

This enormous number of troops together with artillery had to moved on three roads. It represented a daunting learning experience. Neame remarked, 'We certainly learned how to move troops quickly, and on a scale no one in the British Army had ever

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<sup>134</sup> Major-General C. Harington to Dill 3 October 1917, Dill Papers 1/2, LHCMA.

<sup>135</sup> Neame, *Playing with Strife*, p. 71.

dreamed of in Staff exercises before the War'.<sup>136</sup> The demands upon Neame and his team were unremitting:

I often had three clerks continually at work, taking dictated signal messages in turn and typing them for my signature, only interrupted by telephone calls from GHQ demanding that more and yet more troops be put on the road south. I scarcely had time to enter the moves on the move tables and graphs which I had to have as a tally on each route in use, and I had to keep a mass of times and road-spaces in my head till a spare moment gave me breathing space to enter them.<sup>137</sup>

By this stage of the war, competent staff officers such as Neame had the experience to handle such a complex operation. During the advances of the 'Hundred Days' in 1918, Montgomery described the efficient workings of the staff of 47<sup>th</sup> Division and their planning for a series of high-tempo operations.<sup>138</sup> At the Battle of Loos, three years earlier, it was a different story. Staff inexperience led to two divisions arriving late after a journey on already congested roads. Their journey was described thus: 'It was like trying to push the Lord Mayor's procession through the streets of London without clearing the route and holding up the traffic'.<sup>139</sup> The Official History's verdict was that inadequate road control and the inexperience of the staff had kept the troops longer hours on the road at night than intended and subjected them to unnecessary hardship.<sup>140</sup>

In common with other aspects of staff work, when the planning proved successful and everything ran smoothly then the achievement went unnoticed. It was when problems occurred that others were quick to criticize the staff. Indicative of this attitude was a comment made by Major T.J. Hutton, a temporary brigade commander:

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Montgomery, Letter to mother 3 September 1918, Montgomery Papers BLM 1/65, IWM.

<sup>139</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 294.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 342.

We had a fairly pleasant but long march being much delayed by bad roads and traffic blocks. It is marvellous what a lot of fatigue could be saved on these occasions if proper road reconnaissance were made by the staff beforehand.<sup>141</sup>

Hutton later served on the staff himself so he may have become aware of the problems they faced.

### *Offensives*

One area where good staff work was deemed to be paramount was in the final preparations for an attack. A report from John Dill, distributed by GHQ, observed:

The importance of careful Staff arrangements for the assembly of troops for an attack cannot be exaggerated. Immediately before a battle troops are suffering from acute nervous tension and for this reason the slightest hitch is apt to cause irritation and confusion out of all proportion.<sup>142</sup>

In such circumstances it was critical that the staff were painstaking in their planning but the realities of warfare dictated that making detailed preparations for an attack was not always possible. This account in a letter home from Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Game, a senior staff officer with 46<sup>th</sup> Division, highlighted the issue: ‘work has been very strenuous indeed for the last fortnight as they put us in to make an attack and time was all too short for the necessary preparation. So we have to work at somewhat high pressure’.<sup>143</sup> Game was describing 46<sup>th</sup> Division’s planning for the Battle of Loos during which they incurred heavy casualties in their attack on the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Staff officers were invariably fully engaged in detailed planning just before an attack was launched. The GSO 3 of 25<sup>th</sup> Division, Captain Alexander Johnston, noted in early 1916: ‘Had to stay in all day working in the office

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<sup>141</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Hutton, Memoir p. 9, Hutton Papers 1/2 LHCMA.

<sup>142</sup> Dill, ‘Some Notes and Lessons from Recent Operations’ 19 August 1918 p. 1, Dill Papers 1/11, LHCMA. Also see Williams Papers 77/189/4, IWM.

<sup>143</sup> Air Vice-Marshal P. Game to mother 17 October 1915, Game Papers PWG/6 reel 2, IWM.

and getting plans etc ready for this show. Went with the General and Birch of the Gunners [and] the G.S.O.2 to a conference at the Corps'.<sup>144</sup>

Sometimes events out of the control of the most diligent of staff officers militated against the smooth passage of troops into their positions. During August 1918 when the British were making some rapid advances, Thomas Heald had to manage a situation where 'Our troops were attacking over unknown ground and at very short notice. We only got them into their assembly positions just before zero hour'.<sup>145</sup> If an attack went in without the necessary preparation by the staff then the result could be disastrous. Without knowledge of the country or the positions of the enemy then heavy losses could be incurred. The GSO 2 of 15<sup>th</sup> Division, Major Kenneth Henderson, outlined how he prepared for an attack on the Somme in September 1916 with a visit to the front line:

From this inspection I decided on the location of the main undertakings we had to start, the alignment of the jumping off trenches, the positions of the various headquarters, dumps etc and the distribution of responsibility while we were holding the double frontage.<sup>146</sup>

The attack at St Julien in the Ypres Salient in 1915, referenced previously, was mounted with only minimal preparatory staff work. It resulted in the loss of seventy-five officers and eighty per cent of the attacking troops.<sup>147</sup> Sometimes poor staff work was the underlying cause of an unsuccessful attack but in other cases the staff were set up to fail by circumstances they were unable to influence.

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<sup>144</sup> E. Astill, *The Great War Diaries of Brigadier Alexander Johnston 1914-1917* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2007), p. 134.

<sup>145</sup> Wolff, *Subalterns of the Foot*, p. 250.

<sup>146</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 201, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>147</sup> MacDougall, Diary 4 May-13 May 1915, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

## *Conclusion*

Understanding the life of a staff officer in the field demands an examination of both their work and the conditions they worked under. Information gleaned from personal accounts suggests a degree of consistency in the duties undertaken by the staff but considerable variety in the circumstances experienced by different officers. One aspect of life in the field where this was evident was in the headquarters inhabited by staff officers.

Contrary to clichéd depictions, the staff did not all work in *châteaux* way behind the lines. Proximity to the front line and the type of building were usually determined by the formation the headquarters housed. The larger the remit of the command, the more staff, support workers and communication services were needed. While some staff may have inhabited historic *châteaux* for a time, there were many others who worked in somewhat less salubrious circumstances. Very often, dugouts close to the fighting lines sufficed as the command centre for a division. Accounts describing a headquarters as a '*château*' need to be handled with care. An extensive range of buildings appears to have fallen into this category, many of which were at odds with the opulent image of a traditional *château*.

Coming under fire was an experience that most staff officers had endured. They were frequently exposed to hostile fire during visits to the front line, a daily event for some of them. Even when working at headquarters they might experience being shelled. Long-range artillery could reach locations well away from the fighting areas. A fundamental part of the staff role was to gain familiarity with the terrain and positions in the front line. Reconnaissance missions, trench inspections and accompanying senior officers on trench tours were all part of staff duties. Junior staff were used as liaison officers in advanced positions in an effort to keep HQ in constant

touch with events in the front line. The case that staff officers were unaware of conditions at the front has been exaggerated out of all proportion. Personal accounts from staff highlight their familiarity with the danger and conditions that prevailed in the forward areas.

It may have surprised many regimental officers on the front line to know that the ‘stupor of weariness’ and ‘overwhelming fatigue’ they endured was something they had in common with the staff.<sup>148</sup> A facet of life on the staff that has received little attention was the mental and physical fatigue many officers endured. Long hours and little sleep can exact a heavy toll. Performing detailed planning and administrative tasks under these circumstances exerted a considerable strain and could lead to mistakes. The pressure became acute during intense bouts of fighting when orders have to be drafted rapidly and distributed before events overtake them. It is easy to see how some inexperienced officers foundered in such situations.

The quality of staff work invariably had an impact on the success or failure of an operation. Planning complex troop movements when trench reliefs took place was a situation when the skills of the staff were thoroughly tested. As reliefs invariably took place at night, accurate and detailed staff work was needed. The competence of the staff could prove the difference between an orderly transition and chaos. Staff skills were exercised to the full when faced with bringing troops up into the line or marching them across different sectors. They may have trained for this at Staff College but the numbers involved were far smaller. During the final year of the war the staff were organizing the mass movement of large numbers of military units.

A willingness to learn and the capacity to strive to improve was a characteristic that pervaded the army. The progress made by the staff was part of the

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<sup>148</sup> Griffith, *Up to Mametz*, p. 81.



learning process they underwent during the course of the war. Instrumental to this were the measures put in place by the army in the form of the attachment programme for new staff, wartime training schools, lectures and a wealth of published material, all aimed at developing staff expertise. Significant efforts were made to develop the proficiency of the staff, which began in 1915 but really gathered momentum during the following year. These schemes, allied with informal learning, were integral to the evolution of the staff and explain how they were able to overcome some of the considerable challenges that confronted them.

# Chapter Four

## Wartime Learning and Experience

At the beginning of the war the army had a limited pool of qualified officers from the Staff Colleges of Camberley and Quetta available for service with the staff. Initial research estimated a total of 447 men but more recent work has established that the number was considerably higher at around 930 officers.<sup>1</sup> Many of these officers were dispatched to command formations in the field. Most of the others were needed to fill the rapidly growing number of general staff jobs in a war committed British army. After the first few months of fighting, casualties began to reduce their number. The original estimate of fatalities has recently been revised downwards. According to the latest research, there was a total of just over 140 psc deaths during the war with a larger number of wounded.<sup>2</sup> The critical issue was that a disproportionate number of these casualties occurred in 1914. The rapid growth of the army combined with this initially high casualty rate resulted in an acute shortfall of trained staff officers. Long after the war was over J.E. Edmonds recollected, 'In 1914 there were very few trained staff officers, that is men who had served on the staff of a command, a division, or a brigade with troops'.<sup>3</sup>

With the Staff Colleges closed, the army was forced to think on its feet and seek alternative ways of replenishing the pool of officers with staff expertise. Initially, a system of staff 'learners' was introduced which attached untrained regimental

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<sup>1</sup> For the original estimates see B. Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 2 and J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), p. 155. More recent work has established a larger total: see Hussey, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers' and Evans, 'The Deaths of Qualified Staff Officers'.

<sup>2</sup> Bond, *Victorian Army and Staff College*, p. 324. Statistics obtained from *R.U.S.I. Journal*, 'Army Notes', (November 1938), p. 884. According to this article, 219 of the 447 pscs were killed during the war, a figure of 49.2% killed in action. Recent work by Hussey and subsequently Evans, as shown above, has revised these figures.

<sup>3</sup> Edmonds to Barclay 7 April 1950, Edmonds papers I/2B/5a, LHCMA.

officers to headquarters for a short apprenticeship. This was instituted after the first few months of fighting and developed into a more formalised system over the course of the war. The scheme proved successful in providing fresh officers for the junior positions but it fell far short of the two years of instruction offered at the Staff Colleges. The result was that many staff officers were inexperienced and lacked thorough training.

The army's answer was to establish a series of staff training schools in France and Britain that ran in tandem with the 'learner' system. These schools ran during the autumn and winter months. During the spring and summer they were closed in anticipation of large-scale offensive operations that demanded all available resources. The first school, held during the winter of 1915 at St Omer, aimed to 'train junior officers'.<sup>4</sup> In the following autumn a training school was established at Hesdin in France. The *Official History* acknowledged the measures taken by the army: 'the system of learners was introduced and in the winter short Staff College courses were held'.<sup>5</sup> Later in the war, these schools were moved back to Britain, being held at Cambridge and Camberley. As well as training novices, the wartime schools aimed to provide existing staff with the skills required for more senior posts. One of the attendees on the inaugural six week course at Hesdin was Major Walter Guinness who stated, 'It is said that only those who have been through it will in future be given Staff employment and that it is to be made a permanent feature owing to the growing shortage of men who had been through the Staff College'.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter explores how the British army met the challenge of training new staff and educating existing officers following the closure of the Staff Colleges. It

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<sup>4</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 76, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3/6, LHCMA; Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1917: Volume II 7<sup>th</sup> June- 10<sup>th</sup> November Messines and Third Ypres* (London: HMSO, 1948), p. 592.

<sup>6</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 131.

details how a series of measures were introduced to provide new officers with the necessary expertise and improve standards among those already working on the staff. The experiences of some of these staff learners are explored together with a review of how the process functioned and GHQ's efforts to establish formal guidelines for the scheme. The work of the wartime schools is evaluated in terms of the content of the teaching and their success in introducing minimum training standards. The learner system and the wartime staff schools were forced to offer a condensed version of tuition within the confines of wartime. Their effectiveness as surrogates for the pre-war Staff College training will be scrutinised together with the quality of instruction they offered.

Completing their training was only half the story. Once they secured an appointment, staff officers were expected to develop their skills under wartime conditions. In his wartime memoir, Siegfried Sassoon recalled a discussion about the staff during which one soldier remarked, 'They've got to learn their job as they go along, like the rest of us'.<sup>7</sup> The army provided assistance in the form of publications and lectures that sought to digest the lessons learned during the fighting. There were courses that offered analysis and information on new developments in warfare. Some staff officers gleaned information on how to improve their proficiency from neighbouring formations or from their French allies. The learning that occurred outside formal attachments and staff schools was another way a largely inexperienced staff was able to develop its expertise.

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<sup>7</sup> Sassoon, *Infantry Officer*, p. 63.

## *Staff Learners*

In a prophetic assertion made in 1912, Major-General Sir Thompson Capper, announced: 'I cannot imagine where all these Staff Officers are to come from. I think we shall find often in war that there will not be Staff Officers at these places'.<sup>8</sup> It was evident after the first few months of war that the British army's supply of staff officers was running dry. A high casualty rate combined with a huge expansion in the size of the army had bitten deeply into the existing pool of trained personnel. The demands on the staff rose significantly. As one senior officer recalled, 'its business grew in volume and complexity to an extent unimagined before the war'.<sup>9</sup> With the Staff Colleges closed, the senior command was forced to develop alternative methods of training to fill the burgeoning number of staff posts. It was a considerable challenge. Lord Roberts had warned just after the South African War: 'Staff officers cannot be improvised; nor can they learn their duties, like the rank and file, in a few weeks or months'.<sup>10</sup> In the midst of a war the army did not possess the luxury of time. Rapid measures were needed. Untrained regimental officers were used to fill the breach. As Brigadier Archibald Home remarked in June 1916: 'Castlerosse just arrived and reported himself as a GSO 3. He has had no previous Staff experience but that must be expected now'.<sup>11</sup> A system of 'staff learners' was established which saw regimental officers attached to headquarters from Brigade up to Army level. The *Official History* observed, 'Owing to the dearth of trained officers, the staffs of corps, division & brigades included many young Regulars & New Army officers forced to

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<sup>8</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties 1912 p. 22, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCM.A.

<sup>9</sup> Dawnay and Headlam, 'The Staff', p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 395.

<sup>11</sup> A. Home, *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* (Tunbridge Wells: Costello 1985), p. 112.

learn their skills in the heat of battle'.<sup>12</sup> The army command was painfully aware of the difficulty in filling the new posts being created with officers versed in staff skills. In May 1916, Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Maude voiced his concern over the issue: 'Our number of trained Staff Officers was even at first scarcely adequate, but now, with our large army, it is dreadful'.<sup>13</sup>

The staff learner system served as a useful expedient to start regimental officers off on the first rung of the staff ladder. It introduced them to the skills they needed to operate as a GSO 3 or Staff Captain. This form of short 'apprenticeship' dispensed with theory and provided officers with immediate exposure to the practical demands of the staff role. The drawback was the standard of instruction became contingent upon the formation to which an officer was attached. Efforts were made to address this lack of uniformity by the development of a formal procedure for attaching regimental officers to the staff together with the introduction of the wartime schools. The first evidence of efforts to introduce a standardised system can be found in a War Office letter issued in June 1915.<sup>14</sup> The process was enshrined in GHQ directives issued during 1916 and mid-1917.<sup>15</sup> The learner system continued to operate until the end of the war and even became a victim of its own success. By 1917 it had produced a surplus of trained officers awaiting staff postings and was suspended for several months. Refinements were introduced to maintain the currency of the attachment process. It was a testament to the army's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to instigate a process of continuous improvement.

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<sup>12</sup> W. Miles, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1916: 2 July to the end of the Battle of the Somme*, pp. 569-570 (London: McMillan & Co, 1938).

<sup>13</sup> Godwin-Austen, *Staff College*, p. 268.

<sup>14</sup> This is War Office letter 33/Gen. No/522 dated 2 June 1915. The document is referred to in WO 293/4-Army Council Instruction 46, 7 January 1916. The original could not be located.

<sup>15</sup> GHQ letter 23 December 1916, O.B./1329 and GHQ letter 28 July 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

A GHQ fiat confirming the guidelines for the staff learner system was distributed across the five Armies of the British army in July 1917.<sup>16</sup> It stipulated that in each Army selected officers not above the rank of captain would be attached to the staff of an infantry brigade for one month. This was the first step in the process. Learners needed to be between twenty-one and thirty-five years old. Owing to the previous success of the system, limitations were placed upon numbers with one learner per division.<sup>17</sup> Some regimental officers were reluctant to leave the camaraderie of their front-line units for an attachment to the staff. When Captain Guy Chapman moved from his regiment on the eve of a major offensive in 1916 he felt, 'It was flagrant desertion to leave at this point'.<sup>18</sup> Edmund Blunden described his 'severance from the companionship and duty which had grown preternaturally mine' upon his departure from his battalion to an attachment at Brigade headquarters.<sup>19</sup>

Some officers rejected the opportunity for attachment and elected to remain with their units. One regimental officer spurned an offer to work with the staff as he regarded fit men who stayed beyond the range of shellfire as 'gilded popinjays and quite beneath contempt'.<sup>20</sup> Captain Neville Lytton encapsulated the feelings of many when he remarked, 'The truth is we were all of us regimental officers and we had the true natural antipathy to the general officer and his staff'.<sup>21</sup> Blunden was

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<sup>16</sup> Letter 28 July 1917 from GHQ forwarded by E. Bradford to the Corps HQs (III, IV, VI, VII, XVII) of Third Army on 2 August 1917, Third Army Headquarters (Miscellaneous), WO 95/365, TNA. This reconfirmed the system of attaching learners formulated in GHQ letter O.B./1329 of 23 December 1916.

<sup>17</sup> Letter 17 August 1917 from GHQ forwarded by L. Vaughan to Corps HQ Third Army, 7 September 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>18</sup> Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality*, p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p. 172.

<sup>20</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms*, p. 365 quoting John Nettleton of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rifle Brigade.

<sup>21</sup> N. Lytton, *The Press and the General Staff* (London: W. Collins, 1921), p. 50.

unenthusiastic about his time on the staff. He regarded himself as a bureaucrat using ‘several ancient and some modern maps and archives as my weapons of war’.<sup>22</sup>

### *The attachment process*

An effort was made to attach officers to the headquarters of their own brigade. Lytton arrived in France in March 1916 and had been working as a sniping instructor before he was attached to his Brigade staff as a learner. He described Brigade HQ as occupying three dugouts: ‘The Brigadier lives in one of them, another was occupied by the Brigade major and the Staff captain and the third was inhabited by the ‘learners’. There were eight or nine of us in this last and I christened it ‘the girls school’.<sup>23</sup> During his attachment to the staff of 20<sup>th</sup> Division, Captain A.J.H. Smith declared that he spent ‘not very active days in an office learning the work. There is a good deal to do, and the other members of the staff are civil enough’.<sup>24</sup> Attached officers who proved adept at the work often proved a boon to the existing staff as they helped share the workload. As a GSO 3 at VI Corps in 1916, Captain Alistair MacDougall welcomed the arrival of Captain Inman from the Cheshire Regiment, ‘which will help a good deal in the work’.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Basil Sanderson was attached to III Corps for several months: ‘Here I learnt a good deal about the office side of many different Staff jobs, which was of considerable help to me later on’.<sup>26</sup> After the initial one-month attachment the Brigade commander identified those officers with staff potential and they were sent for a further course of instruction at Division, Corps

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<sup>22</sup> Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p. 171.

<sup>23</sup> Lytton, *Press and General Staff*, p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Smith to mother 25 February 1917, A.J.H. Smith Papers 84/22/1, IWM.

<sup>25</sup> MacDougall, Diary 6 May 1916, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

<sup>26</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 54.



or Army HQs. The GHQ directive ordained that seventy-five per cent of officers should attend further instruction providing they were suitable.<sup>27</sup>

Many officers who found themselves attached to higher formations experienced strong feelings of alienation. This was evident in Guy Chapman's description of his progression from his attachment at Brigade to a Corps HQ. He recalled, 'It was rather like being taken from lodgings in a small suburb to a mansion in Mayfair. Well, hardly Mayfair; Kensington, rather. Everything ran here on oiled wheels'.<sup>28</sup> When Captain Lancelot Spicer was attached to General Gough's Fifth Army headquarters in early 1918 he wrote to his parents:

I don't like Army HQ very much, despite the fact that one is much more comfortable. However, I have not got to be here very long – and of course one does see and hear a lot of things which one would not see otherwise, which is very interesting.<sup>29</sup>

While Chapman thought it was unfair to make fun of overworked brigade and divisional staff he believed the higher formations to be fair game, describing them as 'monstrous tumours swelling with supernumerary officers and self-importance'.<sup>30</sup> A fellow staff officer recollected that, 'Corps commanders settled into their châteaux like freeholders, not temporary tenants: their staff with them: the paperwork grew uncomfortably under the military version of Parkinson's Law'.<sup>31</sup> Some junior officers felt there were benefits in being attached to a higher formation. A.J.H. Smith's

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<sup>27</sup> Letter 17 August from GHQ forwarded by L. Vaughan to Corps HQ 3<sup>rd</sup> Army, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> W.D. Spicer, *Letters from France* (London: Robert York, 1979), p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality*, p. 141.

<sup>31</sup> O. Lyttleton, *From Peace to War, A Study in Contrast 1857-1918* (London: The Bodley Head, 1968), p. 135.

ambition was to be attached to Fifth Army HQ. He remarked, ‘the higher the formation to which one is attached the more one sees of what is really going on’.<sup>32</sup>

Those candidates selected for advanced instruction experienced at least a further two months attached as a learner. They spent the initial stages acting as a junior staff officer endeavouring, as GHQ decreed, ‘to gain a knowledge of his work both in the office and out of doors’.<sup>33</sup> This sometimes involved inspecting the front line. As a staff learner at 56<sup>th</sup> Division in January 1917, Captain Thomas Heald recorded in his diary: ‘In the evening I went out and had a look at the posts we have established in the German lines. It was quite like old times crawling about with a revolver. The mud is very bad. However, all was quiet’.<sup>34</sup> This was a far cry from the popular image of the pampered staff officer ignorant of front line conditions. Heald made regular forays from his Divisional HQ inspecting abandoned German trenches, acting as liaison officer at a forward observation post and undertaking reconnaissance missions. He welcomed the chance to train as a staff officer, stating ‘I have been attached to the Divisional Staff in General Staff Work. It sounds good. Perhaps it means that I shall get a staff job later on with red tabs’.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, Heald’s enthusiasm for exploring forward areas caught up with him when he was wounded by an enemy sniper. This brought a premature end to his time as a learner and thwarted his staff ambitions for almost a year.

Being attached as a staff learner to the headquarters of 50<sup>th</sup> Division in 1915 proved a rather frustrating experience for Captain Cuthbert Headlam. He wrote to his wife about the constant visitors and those he dubbed ‘hanging about officers’ that seemed to have little to do except pay calls. In Headlam’s view:

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<sup>32</sup> Smith to mother 5 December 1915, A.J.H. Smith Papers 84/22/1, IWM.

<sup>33</sup> GHQ Letter 28 July 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>34</sup> Wolff, *Subalterns of the Foot*, p. 223.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 211.

It has not been very exciting, but it has made a little change and I have established my position which is a great thing and learnt a little of what GSO 3 ought to do which may be of use later on. But you know I still think that the regimental work is more interesting and amusing than staff work – reading and collating reports and information is not so entertaining as dealing with men.<sup>36</sup>

Chapman expressed a similar lack of fulfillment when he became a learner at a Corps headquarters in 1917. He described his first job as ‘the colouring of seven secret maps with eight different inks for the great offensive, which should succeed the offensive after the next offensive which should follow the Arras battle now being staged’.<sup>37</sup> These comments from Chapman may be facetious or they may indicate a surprising degree of long-term planning by the army.

After two years at the front Lancelot Spicer found himself at Fifth Army HQ for the advanced portion of his attachment. His expectations were rather low as he declared, ‘I suppose I shall wait on a very low grade of Staff Officer trying to make work for himself, and sharpen his pencils for him’.<sup>38</sup> The feelings of frustration directed at the perceived menial tasks these officers had been allotted were understandable. They had all experienced conditions on the front line and were struggling with the transition to a different role. Initially, it was difficult to comprehend what value a staff post contributed to the war effort compared to the immediacy of combat. This was evident in Headlam’s observation during his attachment,

I don’t see that these GSO officers have much real work to do. They are occasionally being busy, but as a general rule, unless the troops are actually moving or engaged in a big show, there is not much for the Staff of a Division to do.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality*, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> Spicer, *Letters from France*, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 108.

Despite their misgivings, these particular officers all completed their attachments as learners. Spicer and Headlam remained working on the staff until the end of the war.

As well as understudying a junior officer, GHQ guidelines also specified that part of the attachment process was spending twenty days with two arms of the military other than the officer's own. In January 1917 Major Thomas Hutton, who was in charge of an artillery battery, recorded in his diary, 'Early in the month we had Capt Wyatt attached to us as part of a staff course he was doing and later Capt Bent who I had met before. We enjoyed having them both very much indeed. The latter subsequently became a GSO 3 at 5<sup>th</sup> Army'.<sup>40</sup> In Spicer's case it consisted of ten days with an artillery field battery and ten days with the Royal Engineers.<sup>41</sup> This mirrored the pre-war staff training at Camberley where students underwent two periods of attachment during the summer of their first year. The attachment period was intended to provide an aspiring staff officer with an insight into different facets of staff work and the functions of other parts of the army. This aspect of being a staff learner proved more rewarding to Spicer who wrote at the time,

I was not sorry to leave Army HQ – in fact I was thoroughly fed up and bored there, and much prefer this kind of life. I should not care for a job as an Army Staff Officer, at any rate not that Army. They are all far too self-satisfied and filled with their own importance.<sup>42</sup>

A core element of being a learner was working in each of the different staff branches. GHQ directed that a total of twenty days should be spent in the G [General Staff] group office and the same period in the A [Adjutant General's] and Q [Quartermaster

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<sup>40</sup> Hutton, *Diary Xmas 1916 to April 20<sup>th</sup> 1917*, Memoir p. 2, Hutton Papers 1/2, LHCMA.

<sup>41</sup> Spicer, *Letters from France*, p. 110.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

General's] office.<sup>43</sup> The aim was to ensure learners developed an understanding of the tasks undertaken by each staff branch.

The culmination of a learner's programme was to spend ten days officiating in an appointment in place of an officer on leave. After Chapman got his opportunity his GSO 2 was unexpectedly sent to hospital, which left him temporarily in charge of the Corps staff office. He reflected: 'I enjoyed that spell of theatrical authority, and, waxing fat, indicated routes to batteries congregating on Arras, told divisions to report on new and curiously coloured rockets, talked picks, shovels, huts, and water troughs with Q'.<sup>44</sup> Upon completion of the process a report was compiled for each learner and sent to the headquarters responsible for the whole course of attachment. The officer rejoined his unit while the report was reviewed and a suitable post became available. The criteria for obtaining a permanent staff post were clearly established by 1917 under the GHQ directive but in the early years of the war matters were more impromptu. Headlam's request for a staff post was initially refused but the informality of the process was illustrated by his GOC's subsequent change of mind. He noted: 'Cavan told me last night that he had sent up my name as a suitable person for a Staff job – I think some kind of form has been sent round to divisional Generals asking them for the names of men who might do to be on the Staff'.<sup>45</sup>

Later in the war it was attendance at one of the wartime schools or a formal course of staff learning that became the benchmark for obtaining a post. Oliver Lyttleton could boast of staff experience in the field but in May 1917 he was pessimistic about his prospects,

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<sup>43</sup> GHQ Letter 28<sup>th</sup> July 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>44</sup> Chapman, *Passionate Prodigality*, p. 147.

<sup>45</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 109.

At the moment I am at Brigade Headquarters and acting as staff captain, which I have been doing all the time. I don't think things look very healthy with regard to my getting the job. There is an infernal fellow who has finished his 'course' which I have had not a chance of doing as I have been acting as staff captain who I think will get in front of me.<sup>46</sup>

He was not alone. GHQ noted that a large number of officers had been attached as learners and many of them experienced long delays between being recommended for appointments and being posted. By the end of July 1917 there was a queue of 250 officers qualified as GSO 3 or Staff Captain waiting for vacancies.<sup>47</sup> Due to this embarrassment of riches GHQ decided to limit the number of attachments to nine per Army. It was clear evidence that the scheme had fulfilled its aim.

The learner system relieved the shortage of qualified staff officers that plagued the British army in the early part of the war. It succeeded in providing a steady stream of fresh officers with the expertise to operate within the lower levels of the staff. These officers could then progress to posts in the higher staff echelons via attendance at the wartime schools and by practical experience in the field. Not all learners remained on the staff. There were some regimental officers who lacked the aptitude for staff work and did not progress beyond the basic one-month attachment. Others went on to the advanced stage but opted to return to their regiments at the end of it or were simply unable to find a suitable staff post. When Spicer completed his course his pessimism at finding a post was evident: 'As far as I can make out there is practically no chance of getting a proper Staff job for about six months – so I expect I shall go back to the Battalion until then'.<sup>48</sup> His dismay turned to delight when he became a Brigade Major just a few weeks later, in April 1918. By this stage of the war the staff learner system had achieved its objective of providing a sufficient supply of trained

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<sup>46</sup> Lyttleton, *From Peace to War*, p. 182.

<sup>47</sup> GHQ Letter 28<sup>th</sup> July 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>48</sup> Spicer, *Letters from France*, p. 113.

officers. The compressed and uneven nature of the training was not ideal but served its purpose in developing new staff officers to fill the posts of an expanding mass army.

### *Staff Schools*

The staff learner scheme had been established to introduce officers to the fundamentals of staff work. For those already serving on the staff, the War Office recognised that it needed to develop a uniform programme to teach the skills required for higher-level staff posts. Talent from the existing pool of staff officers had to be identified and developed to replace the diminishing number of pre-war Staff College graduates. This was achieved through the establishment of wartime staff schools in France and back in Britain.

Under the direction of GHQ, schools were held during each winter of the war commencing in 1915. Prior to this the only option for aspiring staff officers was to learn on the job through the attachment scheme.<sup>49</sup> Recent research has revealed that one Division ran an informal junior staff school but evidence for such schemes being more widespread has yet to appear.<sup>50</sup> The formal GHQ schools offered intensive six to twelve week periods of staff training compared to the pre-war courses of two years. The formation of the schools represented an effort to impose some minimum standards in staff expertise through formal training. In tandem with the staff learner system, these wartime staff schools were intended to supply the trained officers needed to meet the exponential growth in new staff posts as the British army was transformed from a small professional force into a mass army. Writing just after the war, two senior staff officers opined, 'It is impossible to over-estimate the value of

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<sup>49</sup> For example see, Smith, Diary 5 December 1915, A.J.H. Smith Papers 84/22/1, IWM.

<sup>50</sup> Fox-Godden, forthcoming publication examining learning at Brigade level.

the many staff courses and higher schools of instruction which flourished throughout the war'.<sup>51</sup>

Issues with staff work were commonplace in 1915, as we have seen from the previous chapter. As Lord Newton pointed out in the House of Lords, 'like everybody else I am quite aware of the fact that in the Press and elsewhere there has been unfavourable criticism of the Staff'.<sup>52</sup> Plenty of examples can be found in the memoirs and diaries of officers from fighting formations such as Alistair MacDougall and Edmund Blunden.<sup>53</sup> The Battle of Loos in September placed issues with staff work firmly in the spotlight. According to the *Official History*, 'staff-work before and after Loos was far from perfect'.<sup>54</sup> One officer, Lieutenant Lancelot Spicer, wrote of that battle: 'In fact, the chief thing to be gathered was that our men fought pretty well (64<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 21<sup>st</sup> Division), though some regiments I fear did not do at all well, but that the Divisional and Brigade Staffs were absolute wash-outs'.<sup>55</sup>

The problems at Loos may well have been the catalyst for the first staff school held in France, which was instigated by GHQ during the winter of 1915. The school opened just before Haig's appointment as Commander-in-Chief. Although there is no evidence linking Haig to instigating it, he supported any efforts to improve staff expertise. A former Camberley graduate and instructor, Lieutenant-Colonel 'Jock' Burnett-Stuart, was appointed to run the school. A colleague described him as 'probably the best and quickest brain in the Army of his rank'.<sup>56</sup> Burnett-Stuart was serving as GSO 1 at 15<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division, which had suffered heavy casualties at

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<sup>51</sup> Dawnay and Headlam, 'The Staff', p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Lord Newton 16 November 1915, *Hansard* v20 p. 368.

<sup>53</sup> MacDougall, Diary 30 April 1915, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM; Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p. 197.

<sup>54</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1915: Battles of Aubers Ridge*, p. 394.

<sup>55</sup> Spicer *Letters from France*, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Connell, *Wavell*, p112. This comment was made by Wavell who served as GSO 2 under Burnett-Stuart from December 1915 to October 1916.



Loos. Although he preferred to remain with the division his memoirs recorded that he had been ordered to GHQ to train selected officers for the staff which was becoming depleted.<sup>57</sup> One of his fellow staff officers wrote, ‘Saw Jock Stuart’s furious at having to leave his Division to run the Staff Course’.<sup>58</sup> Burnett-Stuart elected to base the syllabus upon the Battle of Loos, which he believed had ‘brought out many points in the preliminary staff work, work which required further study’.<sup>59</sup> The use of a contemporary battle just a few months old was indicative of a progressive attitude within the staff and demonstrated their appetite to draw lessons from recent experiences.

The course was endorsed at the most senior command level. Sir William Robertson, who was Chief of General Staff at the time, asked one of his colleagues at GHQ, Brigadier-General Frederick Maurice, to give the opening lecture. In a letter to his wife Maurice remarked,

I don’t in the least know what I am to talk about & when I shall have time to put my thoughts to paper.... At the worst I can tell them all about the war as seen from above, I don’t suppose many of them have looked much beyond their noses.<sup>60</sup>

Another officer brought in from GHQ to instruct, Major Sidney Clive, recorded in his diary, ‘Was informed I am to lecture on the French Army. This may mean a bit of trouble putting things into shape without any books’.<sup>61</sup> These comments illustrated the difficulties encountered in running a staff course while fighting a major war. Resources and preparation time were at a premium as demonstrated by Clive’s

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<sup>57</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Unpublished Memoir p. 76, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3/6, LHCMA. Haig noted in his diary 10 December 1915 that Burnett-Stuart ‘employed on Staff Course at GHQ’ had been replaced by Colonel Knox as GSO 1 of 15<sup>th</sup> Division. Haig Diaries, WO 256/6, TNA.

<sup>58</sup> Clive, Diary 28 November 1915 p. 97, Clive Papers, II/2, LHCMA.

<sup>59</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Unpublished memoir p. 73, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.

<sup>60</sup> Maurice to wife 30 November 1915, Maurice Papers, 3/1/4/264, LHCMA.

<sup>61</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Sidney Clive, Diary Sunday 28 November 1915 p. 97, Clive Papers II/2, LHCMA.

remarks: ‘Gave my lecture to about 30 officers. I was short of preparation, but we got through somehow; I was glad when Jock told me that what I had said tallied exactly with the principles of cooperation that he had been rubbing in’.<sup>62</sup> The makeshift nature of this initial course was also hinted at in Brigadier-General Archibald Home’s reflections:

On Friday I went and gave a lecture to the Staff Course at GHQ. I think it went all right – but of course I was talking about things at the beginning of the war, which I had seen and which they had not, so I suppose it was fairly interesting to them.<sup>63</sup>

In his memoirs, Burnett-Stuart noted that one of the most promising students to attend the course was the young Lord Gort, a captain at the time, who subsequently enjoyed a distinguished career serving as a Field Marshal in the Second World War.<sup>64</sup> The first school ran from December 1915 until January 1916 when Burnett-Stuart was asked if he would run another. Instead he pleaded to be released and subsequently returned to his division. There was at least one further school held during the winter of 1915-16 as attested to by Alistair MacDougall, who was a GSO 3 at the time. MacDougall wrote that he attended the ‘Staff College’ at St. Omer in February/March: ‘The course was very interesting & I learnt a lot’.<sup>65</sup> There were visits to supply and ammunition railheads together with a trip to the principal base at Calais. The end of the course was marked by a dinner to which all the senior staff at GHQ were invited. MacDougall recorded wistfully, ‘The RA band played and it was quite like peace time’.<sup>66</sup> This was probably the last of this series of wartime schools

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<sup>62</sup> Clive, Diary Friday 31 December 1915 p. 114, Clive Papers II/2, LHCMA.

<sup>63</sup> Home, *Cavalry Officer*, p. 97.

<sup>64</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 76, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.

<sup>65</sup> MacDougall, Diary 16 February/22 March 1916, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

but it marked the start of an effort that was to improve significantly as the war developed.

Some seven months later, in October 1916, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Bonham-Carter, a forty year old senior staff officer serving with 7<sup>th</sup> Division wrote to his father:

I think I wrote to tell you that I am to be in charge of a school for the instruction of officers who have not had previous staff training before the war, but who have been holding junior positions on the staff, & who are considered likely to become fitted for more important work. This school, which has been given the high sounding name of the Senior Staff School, is to take two or three courses for 20 men each, lasting about six weeks. There is also a Junior Staff School, which is to train promising regimental soldiers for Junior Staff Appointments.<sup>67</sup>

In early 1916, the army took steps to outline a formal framework for staff selection and training. A series of Army Council Instructions laid down the criteria and the process designed ‘to supplement the supply of Staff officers to meet the increasing demand for new formations’.<sup>68</sup> This was a mandatory procedure based upon attachment in the field and wartime school attendance that qualified officers for future employment on the Staff. The initial GHQ staff school in winter 1915 may have been a couple of courses run on a rather ad hoc basis but now the army was determined to establish regular wartime schools running multiple courses. Similar schools were set up to develop expertise in other areas such as training battalion commanders or technical specialists such as grenadiers, machine-gunners and snipers.<sup>69</sup>

The staff school at Hesdin opened in November 1916 in the empty house of a prosperous doctor which Bonham Carter described as having ‘a narrow frontage on one of the main roads of this little town in the southern part of the Pas de Calais, but

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<sup>67</sup> Bonham-Carter to father 24 October 1916, Correspondence 28 August 1914 to 19 November 1916, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/1, CCC.

<sup>68</sup> Army Council Instruction 46, 1 January 1916; Army Council Instruction 786, 11 April 1916 and Army Council Instruction 1128, 4 June 1916, WO 293/4, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> For more details see Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, pp. 186-191.

stretches back from the road for some distance, & is very roomy'.<sup>70</sup> Continuity with the course of the previous winter was present in the form of Burnett-Stuart, now Head of Organisation and Training at GHQ, who selected Bonham-Carter to run the Senior Course. His remit was to provide second grade staff officers with the expertise to fill first grade appointments. Lieutenant-Colonel R.A.M. Currie, former GSO 1 of 5th Division, led the Junior Division, which aimed to equip students for the lower level staff posts. In addition to holding a senior staff post, Currie had experience of life close to the front line.<sup>71</sup> They planned to run at least two Senior Courses, each handling twenty officers, with concurrent Junior Courses of fifty men each.<sup>72</sup> One of those attending the Junior course was Captain Walter Guinness, a relatively inexperienced officer compared with his fellow students who were mostly Brigade Major, Staff Captain or GSO 3. He noted that, 'one learnt almost as much from discussing matters with them as from the lectures and exercises'.<sup>73</sup> Similar to the 'smartening friction' enjoyed by students at pre-war Camberley, the wartime staff schools gave officers the opportunity to share experiences and learn from their peers.

The teaching at Hesdin consisted of what Bonham-Carter described as lectures and schemes of various sorts. He wrote, 'I have based the syllabus for the course on the probable course of next year's campaign – in other words we are working at the duties of the staff in the attack & during marches only'.<sup>74</sup> An effort was made to provide an insight into how the army was commanded, managed and supplied. In common with the courses held at St Omer, there was a strong practical element with

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<sup>70</sup> Bonham-Carter to father 24 October 1916, Correspondence 28 August 1914 to 19 November 1916, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/1, CCC.

<sup>71</sup> Currie had been Brigade Major 13th Infantry Brigade from 14 August 1914 to 22 March 1915.

<sup>72</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir L. Kiggell to Army Commanders' conference at Rollencourt, 24 January 1917, Haig Diaries, WO 256/15, TNA.

<sup>73</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 131.

<sup>74</sup> Bonham-Carter to father 19 November 1916, Correspondence 28 August 1914 to 19 November 1916, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/1, CCC.

visits to salvage, supply, ammunition and other depots to see the systems in operation. Guinness described a visit to a division holding the line at Arras to ‘pick the brains of various Staffs and to write attack and relief orders and various other exercises based on the actual position there’.<sup>75</sup> Far from being theoretical talking shops the wartime schools tried to base their instruction upon real scenarios. Students were often supplied with actual operational orders from Armies and Corps, which were used to ‘work out our orders in syndicates in which we daily changed places and filled different posts’.<sup>76</sup>

The wartime schools had the benefit of drawing upon real examples from the current fighting but necessity demanded an intense learning experience packed into a short period. Bonham-Carter’s principal regret was the lack of time available for preparation. In a letter home he commented:

I am naturally rather anxious about the results of my efforts and although I think I could make a success of the course if I had plenty of books to refer to, & time to think over & really put into order the results of my experiences out here, it is difficult to produce sound teaching without long preparation.<sup>77</sup>

The intensity of the teaching took its toll upon both students and teachers. Walter Guinness thought that towards the end of his course there was a tendency for the students to be given more to do than they could properly assimilate.<sup>78</sup> This was echoed by Bonham-Carter who stated, ‘It becomes very difficult when one has to crowd into a short course an enormous number of subjects, in fact when every subject

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<sup>75</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 132.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p. 131.

<sup>77</sup> Bonham-Carter to father 24 October 1916, Correspondence 28 August 1914 to 19 November 1916, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/1, CCC. Bonham-Carter developed the syllabus for the Senior Division with the assistance of another divisional staff officer, Lieutenant-General H.L. Alexander, and Major Robert Haining, a gunner.

<sup>78</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 132.

has to be reduced to its most concentrated form possible'.<sup>79</sup> Despite the army's best intentions, cramming two years training into six weeks remained problematic.

The school at Hesdin ran three courses in all with the final session finishing on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1917. Over 200 officers had passed through the school. One of the most distinguished alumni of the last course at Hesdin was Captain, later to be Field Marshal, Bernard Montgomery, who Bonham-Carter recalled as 'a very studious hard-working young man devoted to his profession and modest'.<sup>80</sup> In a letter to his father upon completion of the course Montgomery wrote:

There was no exam at the end of the Course, nor at any time during the course. We just went there to learn and we all helped each other and acquired knowledge from each other. At the end of the course the Commandant reports on each officer, my report has not yet come in so I don't know what it is like.<sup>81</sup>

Guinness found his experience at the school to be 'very interesting' and declared how it was a great change 'to be among civilised human beings of wide interests'.<sup>82</sup> Another student who benefitted from the course was Major E.W.M. Grigg, a non-regular officer, who went on to become GSO 1 of the Guards Division. For Bonham-Carter the work had been arduous, exhausting but 'extraordinarily interesting'.<sup>83</sup> In his memoirs he recollected that 'Our courses were a great success, and I know that our pupils were enthusiastic in praise of what we did for them'.<sup>84</sup>

A few days before the opening attack at the Third Battle of Ypres in July 1917, a communiqué from GHQ was distributed to the five Armies of the British

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<sup>79</sup> Bonham-Carter to father 12 January 1917, Correspondence 1 January 1917 to 19 March 1936, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/2, CCC.

<sup>80</sup> Bonham-Carter, Memoir Chapter VIII p. 26, Bonham-Carter Papers 9/2, CCC.

<sup>81</sup> Montgomery to father 13 April 1917, Montgomery Papers BLM 1/58, IWM.

<sup>82</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 132.

<sup>83</sup> Bonham-Carter to sister, 1 January 1917, Correspondence 1 January 1917 to 19 March 1936, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/2, CCC.

<sup>84</sup> Bonham-Carter, Memoir Chapter VIII, p. 25, Bonham-Carter Papers 9/2, CCC.

army which detailed the proposed system of staff officer training for the forthcoming autumn and winter.<sup>85</sup> The document outlined the establishment of Junior and Senior Staff Schools in England from October 1<sup>st</sup> on a similar basis to Hesdin. In an effort to improve their structure the duration of the courses was extended.<sup>86</sup> Holding them in Britain may have permitted a wider choice of venues for teaching and accommodation but more significantly it took students away from the overweening presence of the fighting. Schools were held at several different venues including Camberley and Cambridge. One Camberley graduate regretted ‘it was found necessary to run Staff Courses at Cambridge where the facilities were mediocre in comparison with Camberley’.<sup>87</sup> The pre-war college opened for staff instruction again, running a series of schools over twelve months until September 1918.<sup>88</sup> While the learner system had succeeded in providing the army with a pipeline of officers for the lower staff posts, shortages remained at the higher levels. GHQ stated baldly, ‘The supply of trained staff officers to fill 1<sup>st</sup> Grade appointments is no longer equal to the demand’.<sup>89</sup> Commanding officers were urged to make their most suitable officers available even though it may cause temporary inconvenience.

Major Alan Brooke experienced Third Ypres at first-hand while serving as a staff officer with the Canadian Corps. Just after Christmas 1917 he attended the Senior Staff School at Cambridge, which ran until mid-March. Brooke had failed the entrance exam to the Staff College at Quetta in 1909 so he had developed his staff skills on the job. His attendance at Cambridge was intended to provide the expertise

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<sup>85</sup> Brigadier-General K. Wigram to Third Army Headquarters, GHQ OB/1329, 28 July 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

<sup>86</sup> The GHQ communiqué of July 1917 outlined a duration of eight weeks while the course attended by Alan Brooke in Cambridge appeared from his notes to begin on 29 December 1917 and end on 14 March 1918.

<sup>87</sup> Franklyn, ‘Four Generations of Staff College’, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Godwin-Austen, *Staff and Staff College*, p. 264.

<sup>89</sup> Major-General R. Butler to Third Army Headquarters, GHQ OB/1329/2, 7 September 1917, WO 95/365, TNA.

to allow him to move up the career ladder into a senior staff role. This was the second staff school held at Cambridge.<sup>90</sup> It was led by Currie who had previously run the Junior course at Hesdin and returned from a spell as a brigade commander.<sup>91</sup> His leadership offered continuity and consistency in the standard of instruction. A total of around seventy-five officers ranked captain or major formed the Junior and Senior Divisions, slightly more than Hesdin. In a letter home, Brooke stated:

Most of the lectures are very interesting. The schemes we work out in small syndicates of 2 or 3 which lead to a lot of discussion from which we learn a lot. In fact the main difficulty is to raise our power of absorbing knowledge sufficiently to soak up all the knowledge available without mixing it up.<sup>92</sup>

The syllabus included a lecture detailing how the work of the general staff of a division was organised together with studies devoted to writing orders and memoranda. Brooke noted from the course that ‘It is not possible to overestimate the importance of well written orders’.<sup>93</sup> Students were advised against the use of ‘gingering minutes’ and directed to avoid criticising orders received from superior authority. They were told to ‘be absolutely clear in your own mind what your general wants when writing an order’.<sup>94</sup> A variety of instructors taught on the course including Lieutenant-Colonel John Dill from the Operations Section of the General Staff at GHQ, Major-General A.A. Montgomery, MGGS Fourth Army, and Bonham-Carter, recently transferred to GHQ, who provided a lecture on training.

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<sup>90</sup> Captain Oliver Lyttleton of the Guards Division had attended the first course. See Lyttleton, *From War to Peace*, p. 188.

<sup>91</sup> Viscount Alanbrooke, Alanbrooke Papers 2/1/11, LHCMA and research carried out by Richard Kemp, Researcher, The Rifles, Taunton Office. I am grateful to Mr Kemp for providing this information.

<sup>92</sup> Alanbrooke to mother January 13 1918, Alanbrooke Papers 2/1/11, LHCMA.

<sup>93</sup> Alanbrooke, Notes on Senior Staff Course Cambridge p. 3-29 December 1917 to 14 March 1918, Alanbrooke Papers 3/8, LHCMA.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.



The prominent coverage given to training on the course illustrated how committed the British army had become to the learning process. The staff course was part of a wider training programme that made a vital contribution to British success in 1917/18. Brooke recorded in his lecture notes that ‘success in operations depends entirely upon training’.<sup>95</sup> Students were taught that training needed to be continuous whether in or out of the line and how schools were useful for inculcating uniformity. The formation of training schools and the production of pamphlets were critical elements in the quest for uniformity. The students at Cambridge were left in no doubt that the implementation of centrally coordinated training programmes was now seen as vital in improving battlefield performance. The course incorporated the experience of three years fighting with sessions dedicated to trench warfare, defence schemes, bombardments & barrages and the transition from trench to open warfare. A trip was mounted to France during which the students studied the old Ypres battlefield, attended gas experiments and went to a French mortar school. The military history element of the pre-war Staff College teaching remained but the content had a more contemporary flavour. Battle studies of Waterloo and Salamanca took their place alongside the East African campaign, the Battle of Cambrai that had been fought just a few weeks previously and an assessment of the position on the Western Front in March 1918.<sup>96</sup> Historical perspective was combined with modern military issues.

The wartime schools proved to be an intense experience for some of the participants. An insight was provided by Brooke’s declamation, ‘I think we have listened to close on 70 lectures and done 20 schemes in the one month!! However I know I have learnt a lot if I can only keep it all in my head’.<sup>97</sup> As a condensed version of Camberley, the wartime schools performed a vital role in providing a pipeline of

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 130.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 3/6, Index and p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Alanbrooke to mother January 20 1918, Alanbrooke Papers 2/1/11, LHCMA.

sorely needed skilled staff officers. They served the secondary function of providing a bridge between the staff and the rest of the army as regimental officers were brought in to serve within its ranks. As one officer described the staff, 'It must always be a proselytizing body seeking recruits from every branch of the Service'.<sup>98</sup> While the schools represented a drive to provide a uniform standard of staff training, attendance was not universal. Some officers slipped through the net. Captain Cuthbert Headlam was a case in point. He rose to the level of Corps GSO 2 by learning his craft in the field. When he was offered a wartime school place in January 1918 he chose not to attend, as 'I should be bored to death if I went to a Staff Course for 3 months at Cambridge'.<sup>99</sup> Another officer who evaded attendance but still managed to enhance his promotion prospects was Major Laurence Carr. He explained the circumstances in a letter to his wife:

I am not coming to Cambridge which is rather a blow because as usual I had begun to hope it would come off. The new Corps Commander apparently wants me to stay here for a bit, and in order that this can be so has arranged with the authorities for my name to be included in the list of those that have already done the course. Though most annoying not getting home to see you, actually this as regards promotion is much better than doing the course, as I have jumped over the heads of all those who have still got to do it, and also incidentally over the heads of a great many who have already done it as I am senior to a large number of these.<sup>100</sup>

The courses at Cambridge continued throughout 1918. One of Brooke's fellow staff officers in the Canadian Corps attended the school that commenced in early July. An enthusiastic advocate of his time on the course, Brooke was the beneficiary of a promotion to a GSO 1 position at First Army within a few months. Many of his

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<sup>98</sup> Dawnay and Headlam, 'The Staff', p. 30.

<sup>99</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 190.

<sup>100</sup> Carr to wife June 29 1918, Carr Papers 1/2, LHCMA.

fellow students would have found themselves in similarly important staff positions as the final months of the war played out.

### *Learning by Experience*

The staff schools and the attachment system succeeded in producing a pipeline of new staff officers who were subsequently posted to fighting formations. Once installed, they were expected to learn on the job and develop their knowledge through experience. The army provided some guidance in the form of the CDS [Central Distribution Service] and SS series of publications that included post-mortem analysis in the form of *The Experiences of Recent Fighting*.<sup>101</sup> The CDS publications first appeared at the end of 1914 but were superseded by the better-known SS pamphlets in early 1916. The first in this series of over eighty pamphlets was SS 98, *Artillery in Offensive Operations*. They covered a diverse range of topics but were focused upon tactical improvements, advice on using new technology and providing enemy intelligence. There were also courses and lectures available for staff to learn about new weapons, tactics and techniques. Some enterprising officers furthered their education by investigating the methods employed by neighbouring units. A great deal of informal learning was conducted within the British army this way. Officers would visit colleagues to discuss the lessons learned in recent operations. There were also visits to French formations to glean information about how they conducted staff work. These represented some of the different ways that inexperienced staff could broaden their knowledge and hone their skills. There was plenty of appetite to do so.

One of the general principles laid down in the 1912 Staff Manual was that staff officers should ensure that no unnecessary responsibility was thrown on to

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<sup>101</sup> For an outline of the origin and content of the SS series see Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, pp. 179-186.

subordinate commanders.<sup>102</sup> Equally, they should strive to avoid interference with them in carrying out their orders. This formed part of the staff's compact to assist the troops 'by every possible means in carrying out their difficult task'.<sup>103</sup> An experienced staff officer would be more capable of judging when intervention was needed. The inexperienced often found it challenging to strike the right balance. Their quandary was captured in the following description of the Battle of the Somme in 1916 from the *Official History*:

In some cases over-anxious staff officers "nursed" inexperienced brigade and battalion commanders too much, thereby curbing and discouraging initiative; on the other hand, proper guidance and help from the staff were not always forthcoming when most needed.<sup>104</sup>

An illustration of how staff could stymie initiative emerged from Major H.M. Dillon's account of an attack in September 1916. Following the sudden breakdown of his Colonel, Dillon assumed command of the battalion and attended a planning conference for a forthcoming attack. Being new to proceedings he was unable to grasp all the details but explained: 'I then got hold of an intelligent young staff officer and in ten minutes, with my map, chalked out the whole thing and also made him promise to send me orders at the first possible opportunity and then went to my headquarters.'<sup>105</sup> After considerable difficulty, Dillon issued these impromptu orders to his three company commanders and returned to HQ. To his dismay, 'I met a young staff officer who wanted to know what my orders were etc. Well they were not exactly the orders I had been given as far as detail was concerned, but the object

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<sup>102</sup> General Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 1, p. 7, WO 32/4731, TNA.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Miles, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1916: 2<sup>nd</sup> July to end Somme*, p. 570.

<sup>105</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel H.M. Dillon to G.F-G 20 September 1916, Transcript p. 87, Dillon Papers 4430, IWM.

arrived at was the same'.<sup>106</sup> Even though it was now 2 a.m. Dillon remarked, 'this puppy wanted to order me back' to find the company commanders and issue the formal orders.<sup>107</sup> He refused to do so. Episodes of this nature propagated the view that rather than helping the troops, staff officers were there to hinder them.

In endeavouring to follow the guiding principles laid down in the Staff Manual a lack of experience resulted in errors of judgment by some of these junior staff officers. Inevitably, this led others to question the wisdom of these appointments. Captain Charles May, who served with the Manchester Regiment on the Somme, remarked in his diary in March 1916: 'Any one who has been here any time and has met men could name dozens who would fill positions with more authority and command respect and men to a far greater degree than the majority of our Staff.'<sup>108</sup> It was a familiar complaint but it failed to recognise that many junior staff officers were trying to get to grips with an unfamiliar job in wartime conditions. The issue was summarised by Walter Guinness who experienced it first-hand: 'Staff work under present conditions is almost as new to the regular soldiers as to anyone else, whereas the organisation and machinery of a Battalion is very little changed by a war'.<sup>109</sup>

While many British staff officers were still learning, some regarded their French counterparts as the established professionals. The experienced Frank Lyon was impressed by their work, as one of his colleagues noted: 'General Lyon is always much of an admirer of the French and thinks they are doing very well'.<sup>110</sup> Learning from the French was a practice that can be traced back to the first year of the war. In late 1914, GHQ issued a report of a successful French attack at St. Menhould

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> May, *Diary of Captain Charles May*, Vol4: 7 March 1916 – 24 April 1916 pp. 16-17, May Papers, IWM.

<sup>109</sup> Bond & Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 150.

<sup>110</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 28 May 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 240, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

involving around six battalions.<sup>111</sup> The planning and tactics employed could be used as a template for a British operation of similar scale. When Lyon was GSO 1 of 46<sup>th</sup> Division in 1915, he was involved in compiling two reports that outlined French artillery organisation and methodology.<sup>112</sup> He visited the French Tenth Army in March 1915 with Major-General John Headlam of Second Army and Lieutenant-Colonel John Shea, GSO 1 of 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Their report noted: ‘The telephonic communications were admirable, the great feature being the excellence of the instruments and the use of the switch boards’.<sup>113</sup> Further detail was provided on how the French used trained telephonists and aerial observation together with flash spotting to locate enemy guns. It appeared that the French embraced such visits, as the report emphasised: ‘Nothing could have exceeded the kindness of the French officers, who spared no trouble to show and explain all we wanted to see’.<sup>114</sup>

A number of British staff officers were prepared to learn about new military methods from their senior allies. The war diary of 4<sup>th</sup> Division included a translation of a document originally issued by the French Grand Quartier Général [GQG] entitled, ‘First Lessons to be Drawn from the Recent Fighting’.<sup>115</sup> An operation north of Arras in April 1915 had apparently confirmed these principles, the most important of which was the necessity to push the reserves as far forward as possible. The staff recognised that valuable pointers could be obtained from their French ally based upon their knowledge of German tactics. The MGGS of Second Army, Forrestier-Walker, wrote to the French Eighth Army in March 1915 requesting details of the methods

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<sup>111</sup> Major-General G. Forrestier-Walker to French Eighth Army March 1915, Montgomery-Massingberd papers 5/7-2, LHCMA.

<sup>112</sup> Report on visit to French X Army 2 March 1915 and French XI Corps, Montgomery-Massingberd papers 5/7-2, LHCMA.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Document translated from the French dated 20 May 1915, General Staff 4<sup>th</sup> Division WO 95/1441, TNA.

used by the Germans in recent attacks. He was supplied with a comprehensive and detailed response.

Visits to the French continued throughout the war suggesting the appetite to learn from them was undiminished. In 1916, Earl Stanhope and a fellow GSO 3, Captain Edward Kelly, paid a visit to a French artillery observation post near the Belgian coast:

We were shown the French system of examining aeroplane photographs and the method of arriving at deductions from the information thus given, the French method of plotting enemy batteries on the map by sound re-section from three points or similarly by spotting the flashes of the German guns from several observation posts.<sup>116</sup>

After General Nivelle's attack at Verdun in late 1916, a large British party from assorted formations was taken over the ground and provided with details of the successful attacks. A report of the visit produced by Major Alan Brooke, an artillery staff officer at the time, later formed the basis of a series of lectures given to different units in the field.<sup>117</sup> Some of the British staff took the view that there was much to be gained from working closely with the French and adopting their methods. There were others who disagreed. The BGGs of X Corps, George Barrow has been mentioned earlier for his disenchantment with French staff methods. He was dismayed when informed that the Chief of Staff of a French corps, 'had never once seen the trenches, and gave me to understand that it was not part of the job'.<sup>118</sup> Oliver Lyttleton was a serving staff officer who took the view that, 'as a whole our staff is better than theirs I think, being much more highly organised and much more painstaking'.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 79.

<sup>117</sup> Alanbrooke, *Memoir* p. 57, Alanbrooke Papers 5/2/13, LHCMA.

<sup>118</sup> Barrow, *Fire of Life*, p. 158.

<sup>119</sup> Lyttleton, *Peace to War*, p. 175.

In contrast, Philip Howell the senior staff officer of II Corps, expressed his approbation for the way the French were fighting the war. He wrote to his wife in July 1916 that the French have learnt one thing, which was how to win things cheaply: ‘They’ve done just as much as we have & their losses *per division* are less than ours *per battalion!!*’<sup>120</sup> Cuthbert Headlam was explicit in his view of the French:

Their staff work is infinitely superior to ours. The work is coordinated and logical. We are groping in the dark. Our staff people are infinitely pleased with themselves – but they are not the masters of strategy that they imagine and compared to the French I cannot help feeling that we are amateurs.<sup>121</sup>

His opinion was shared by Phillip Neame, GSO 2 at XV Corps, who spent five days at the HQ of the French XX ‘Iron’ Corps. Neame recollected that, ‘Living in the French Staff mess and offices in deep dug-outs gave me a good insight into their methods’.<sup>122</sup> He was convinced that the French staff structure was superior to the British configuration:

I have always believed in their Staff system of each formation having a single Chief of Staff under the General Commanding, instead of our more cumbersome organisation of two or three co-equal principal Staff officers of the General Staff, Adjutant-General’s, and Quartermaster-General’s branches.<sup>123</sup>

Others shared this viewpoint regarding staff structure and it was to gain prominence in the post-war analysis of the staff’s performance.<sup>124</sup> For all their efforts, some officers, like Headlam, remained pessimistic about the prospects of the British staff attaining professional standards: ‘In course of time we might learn the job – but not during this war’.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Howell to wife 13 July 1916, Howell Papers 6/1/318a, LHCMA.

<sup>121</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 157.

<sup>122</sup> Neame, *Playing with Strife*, p. 67.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> This issue is covered in Chapter Six.

<sup>125</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 157.



The French may have served as a model for some; others believed they could learn from other formations in their own ranks. Visits to other units were commonplace by staff officers on routine business or for social reasons. Sometimes they became an opportunity for informal learning. As a former staff officer in VII Corps, Alan Paley returned for a reunion lunch: 'He brought the GSO 3 of his Division over to learn some Intelligence Work for a day or two under Page who is very efficient at his work'.<sup>126</sup> Captain Alexander Johnston, GSO 3 with 25<sup>th</sup> Division, noted in his diary that he had been, 'In the office all afternoon trying to show G.S. work to a Major French son of Sir John, not an easy job when there is absolutely nothing doing'.<sup>127</sup>

Learning from an experienced officer could be of enormous benefit but it need not be a formal session of tuition. As a Brigade Major with Third Army, George Roupell remembered: 'One learnt a great deal about staff work by merely sitting in the same office as Col. Hollond, the GSO 1'.<sup>128</sup> During his time at VI Corps, Captain Alistair MacDougall arranged to inspect part of the 55<sup>th</sup> Division line. This unit was part of another Corps: 'I think going round the lines of Divisions who are not in your Corps, is a very good thing, as it shows you different methods of holding the line, & also you more often than not pick up very useful hints'.<sup>129</sup> In a similar vein, notes were compiled by Burnett-Stuart when he was GSO 2 of 6<sup>th</sup> Division of attacks carried out by 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Divisions. They highlighted pitfalls to avoid and suggestions for improvement.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 20 April 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 213, Ward-Jackson papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>127</sup> Astill, *Diaries of Alexander Johnston*, p.137.

<sup>128</sup> Roupell to Liddle. Transcript of Interview 1971 p. 18, Roupell Papers GS1388, LCUL.

<sup>129</sup> MacDougall, Diary 29 April 1916, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

<sup>130</sup> J. Burnett-Stuart notes on attacks by 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Divisions 1915, Montgomery-Massingberd papers 5/7-2, LHCMA.

When he served as GSO 2 with 50<sup>th</sup> Division, Bonham-Carter was asked to tackle the issue of coordinating the defensive system of two brigades. He introduced a system that established a zone of fire from machine guns sited sufficiently far from the front line to have a chance of escaping hostile artillery fire in case of an attack. According to Bonham-Carter, this system was later adopted throughout the army and officers would visit 50<sup>th</sup> Division to learn more. He recalled in his memoirs: ‘I must confess that I was pleased when staff officers were sent from other HQs to find out what we were doing’.<sup>131</sup> The staff of more experienced units were sometimes used to tutor others. An example was recorded by Price-Davies when he was GSO 2 of 46<sup>th</sup> Division: ‘We are having the 14<sup>th</sup> Division here to instruct in trench warfare so you see we are becoming quite old hands at the game’.<sup>132</sup>

Accumulating experience and gleaning useful information from the practices of other units could be helpful but it was the development of a learning culture within each formation that Nicholson saw as the key element. Learning and teaching needed to be propagated so that a pool of officers with staff skills could be maintained. He opined, ‘It is not enough to get experience. Knowledge must strike root and multiply so that there will always be understudies to step into the shoes of casualties of all sorts’.<sup>133</sup> The army made considerable efforts to augment staff learning in the field with lectures, courses and instructional publications. Lectures often offered an analysis of recent battles and the lessons that could be learned from them. Alexander Johnston recorded a typical example in his diary in February 1916, ‘Went to an interesting lecture on the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in the morning, and to another one

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<sup>131</sup> Bonham-Carter, *Memoir* Chapter VII, p. 23, Bonham-Carter Papers, 9/1, CCC.

<sup>132</sup> Price-Davies to wife 28 May 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>133</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 184.

in the afternoon on the Gunner part of the fight, which was not so good'.<sup>134</sup> This was followed, a few days later, by a lecture on the Battle of Loos. Johnston noted, 'Our errors then and the lessons to be learnt were clear enough, but the fact that we did so well with such slender resources in guns, ammunition and men augurs well for the future when we shall be twice as well supplied'.<sup>135</sup>

It was evident that there was a sustained effort to educate the staff using analysis of recent battles. Just two months after the sessions attended by Johnson, another lecture was held dissecting the events at Loos. We know that Major Ward-Jackson together with some of the staff of VII Corps including the GSO 2, Major Sherlock, and Captain Page, the GSO 3, were in the audience. On this occasion, A.A. Montgomery, MGGS of Fourth Army, delivered the lecture and in Ward-Jackson's eyes 'It was most interesting and showed the course of the battle much better than any of the others I have heard on the same subject'.<sup>136</sup> These examples illustrate a clear appetite to draw lessons from previous engagements and provide the staff with the knowledge to obviate the mistakes of the past.

Staff officers had the opportunity to attend the regular army schools that offered them knowledge of new techniques and tactics. MacDougall attended an artillery course at St Pol in April 1916:

Course lasts five days. These courses take place every week, & are, I think, very good, as they are attended by Infantry & Staff Officers as well as Artillery. The consequence is, you get discussion, & so are able to learn a good deal about the work of the other arms.<sup>137</sup>

Akin to the 'smartening friction' of the pre-war Camberley Staff College, these schools gave officers the potential of learning from their colleagues via discussion

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<sup>134</sup> Astill, *Diaries of Alexander Johnston*, p. 138.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 11 April 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 204, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>137</sup> MacDougall, Diary 30 April 1916, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

and debate. A conversation in the mess could often prove as valuable as a lecture on the course.

Groups of officers from Britain would make the short trip over to France to attend the training schools so they could keep abreast of the latest developments. In early 1918, Major Kenneth Henderson, sent back home after his health broke down, returned to France for one of these two-day courses. He reported,

The various Army and Corps Schools at the front, or rather at the back of the front, were having all winter a continuous series of demonstrations in the latest developments of fighting and training, which were attended by parties of officers, mostly commanding and staff officers, from the formations and training establishments and units in England.<sup>138</sup>

There was plenty of printed material produced by the army that staff officers could learn from. The SS series of publications covered a diverse range of topics from battlefield communications to gas warfare that have been well documented by historians such as Paddy Griffith.<sup>139</sup> The series incorporated ‘Notes from Recent Fighting’ which offered analysis as to where improvements could be made and the lessons to be absorbed from events in the field. The April 1918 issue was entitled ‘Staff Duties’ and outlined how they should be adapted to accommodate the change from trench warfare to a war of movement. It stated,

In warfare of movement it is neither possible nor desirable for Commands and Staffs, especially those of Divisions and Brigades, to carry out their functions with the facilities and the deliberation which have come to be looked on as normal in trench warfare.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Henderson, Memoir p. 226, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>139</sup> Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 179-186.

<sup>140</sup> ‘Notes on Recent Fighting – No. 4’, Williams Papers, 77/189/4, IWM.

These publications were not regarded with enthusiasm by all of the staff. Ward-Jackson remarked that one well-respected senior staff officer thought they possessed few merits compared with the pre-war manuals:

Jock Stuart says we ought to abolish and destroy every single pamphlet that has ever been circulated during this war. All those on trench warfare and everything in connection with operations except those on Q work most of which are good. He says we ought to scrap the lot and return to our "Field Service Regulations" Parts I and II which were our vade mecum, our Bibles and our text-books before, and at the beginning of the war.<sup>141</sup>

### *Conclusion*

'War produces efficient commanders much more quickly than it produces efficient staff officers', wrote one senior staff officer in 1920.<sup>142</sup> After the first few months of war, the high casualty rate among the trained staff pool, the closure of the Staff College at Camberley and a rapidly expanding army led to an acute shortage of experienced staff officers. Regimental officers were drafted in as staff learners and served to plug the gaps initially. Adaptability and the ability to develop new skills were needed in ample measure to resolve the dilemma. While it was difficult to ensure uniformity in training standards the staff learner scheme was an effective expedient. As the war progressed, the process was refined and a formal framework introduced for the attachment of promising candidates from the regiments. The complexion of the staff began to change as opportunities were given to men from outside the regular army who filled the junior staff appointments. These measures proved remarkably successful despite the challenges encountered. They proved so effective that by 1917 there was a surplus of officers to available posts.

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<sup>141</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 6 May 1917, Extracts from Letters p. 509, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>142</sup> Dawnay and Headlam, 'The Staff', p. 28.

The establishment of the wartime training schools underlined these changes. As well as running a course to train junior officers, the schools ran senior staff courses that developed the skills needed for higher-level posts. It was an intense learning experience as they only ran for a period of weeks. Some students found there was simply too much information to assimilate but many testified to the value of the experience. The teaching was founded upon practical principles using contemporary scenarios when possible. The schools may have started life as rather ad hoc affairs but later they were incorporated into a formal training facility. A similar pattern was witnessed elsewhere in the army. Efforts to introduce a uniform approach were exemplified by the establishment of the Directorate of Training under Brigadier Arthur Solly-Flood in 1916, the publication of the SS series of training manuals and the formation of the Inspectorate of Training in 1918 under Lieutenant-General Sir Ivor Maxse.<sup>143</sup> In conjunction with these initiatives, there emerged what Griffith described as ‘an archipelago of training schools’.<sup>144</sup> These tutored all ranks in every aspect of modern warfare. For the staff, the schools together with the learner scheme became the principal route to ascending the staff career ladder. They served a critical role in providing a supply of newly trained staff officers, especially for the high-level posts.

The way staff officer training developed during the First World War highlighted some broader principles that applied to the army of the period. Although closing the Staff Colleges was a mistake, the introduction of the staff learner scheme and the wartime schools demonstrated a flexible approach. The inclusion of contemporary battles for study at the wartime schools illustrated a drive for improved performance. Efforts were made to develop and formalise the staff training process.

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<sup>143</sup> For a detailed description of the British army’s efforts in this regard see Griffith, *Battle Tactics of Western Front*, pp. 179-186.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

Certain staff officers used their own initiative to study how other units managed affairs that might then be adopted within their own formation. A critical element of the learning process within the British army was the lessons that were passed on through informal contact with colleagues. This might have taken place at a lunch, a conference or a visit to a friend in a nearby unit. French methods and ideas represented another model for staff willing to incorporate different working practices into their own work. There were some who believed the French were more effective at running the staff of a mass army and asserted that the British could learn a good deal at their hands. These developments were all part of the learning process the army underwent during the war years. The staff were far from complacent.

These measures demonstrated that the army was willing to adapt to a new situation and learn from its errors. Not only did they serve a practical purpose, they introduced officers with no formal training into the staff. The presence of men from the regiments with combat experience who were not Staff College graduates became increasingly prevalent as the war progressed. Added to the mix were Territorials and volunteer officers with professional or business experience. The influx of these officers changed the complexion of the staff and marked the transition from a relatively small professional body to the staff of a mass army. They were an integral part of the changing staff.

# Chapter Five

## The Changing Staff

In February 1917, Major-General 'Tim' Harington, the senior staff officer with Second Army, delivered an address to the Senior Officer's School at Aldershot. He outlined how the staff had changed and the difficulties they faced:

At first a Corps had as a Staff one Brigadier-General, General Staff; a first grade General Staff Officer, a second grade General Staff Officer and a Third Grade General Staff Officer. At the present moment a corps has exactly one fully qualified General Staff Officer, and an army has two. Everything else has had to be improvised since the war started, which, of course, is no mean achievement.<sup>1</sup>

Harington's comments underlined the challenges thrown up by the expansion of the British army, which resulted in the generation of a plethora of new posts. Filling these posts required an influx of new officers, leading to significant changes in the characteristics of the staff.

This chapter examines how the structure of the staff evolved over the course of the war and the changing profile of the officers who served within it. The overall growth in staff posts will be explored together with how this expansion manifested itself at Army, Corps and Division levels. These factors are key elements in understanding the distinct differences between the staff duties of 1914 and the considerably larger functions developed by 1917/8 to serve a mass army. Tracing these changes and analysing their complexion offers an insight into some of the principal challenges faced by the staff.

The staff grew up around a core group of Staff College graduates. How these officers fared and their influence upon the staff formed an important part of the

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<sup>1</sup> C. Harington, 'The Relations of the Staff to Commanding Officers, and Vice Versa, that of Commanding Officers to the Staff', *Notes for Commanding Officers Issued to Students at the Senior Officers' School, Aldershot, 1917* (4<sup>th</sup> course) (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Ltd, 1917), pp. 349-359.



process of change. Another factor was the role of regimental officers brought in to the staff system. They comprised a growing proportion of the staff as the war progressed but had to be trained on the job. The high demand for staff officers triggered the introduction of men from outside the ranks of the regular army – Territorials, retired officers and volunteers. Their numbers and influence may have been limited but they played a part in shaping the changing staff.

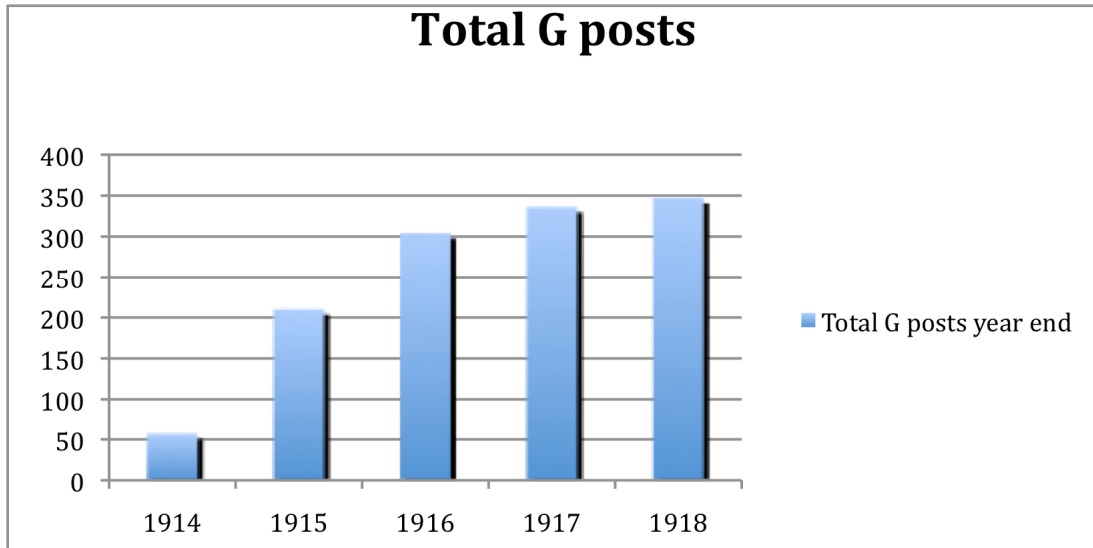
Before the war, the Staff Manual and Staff Colleges emphasised the importance of unity between staff and the troops. Unfortunately, things turned out rather differently. Instead of unity there was often division. A comment from the diary of Lieutenant-Colonel Alan Hanbury-Sparrow exemplified this: ‘Flinching at the shells, fuming at the Staff, appalled at the waste of life’.<sup>2</sup> The relationship proved to be a turbulent one and staff officers have invariably been viewed as a race apart from the fighting soldiers. This has served to obscure the nature of the staff function. Understanding how and why this attitude developed helps to explain the influential part it has played in determining the way staff officers have been depicted. This chapter aims to identify if staff officers were really so different from their regimental counterparts.

### *The staff of a mass army*

The expansion in the total number of G branch posts at Army, Corps and Division was dramatic as Figure 3, which has been based upon data in Appendix 11, shows.

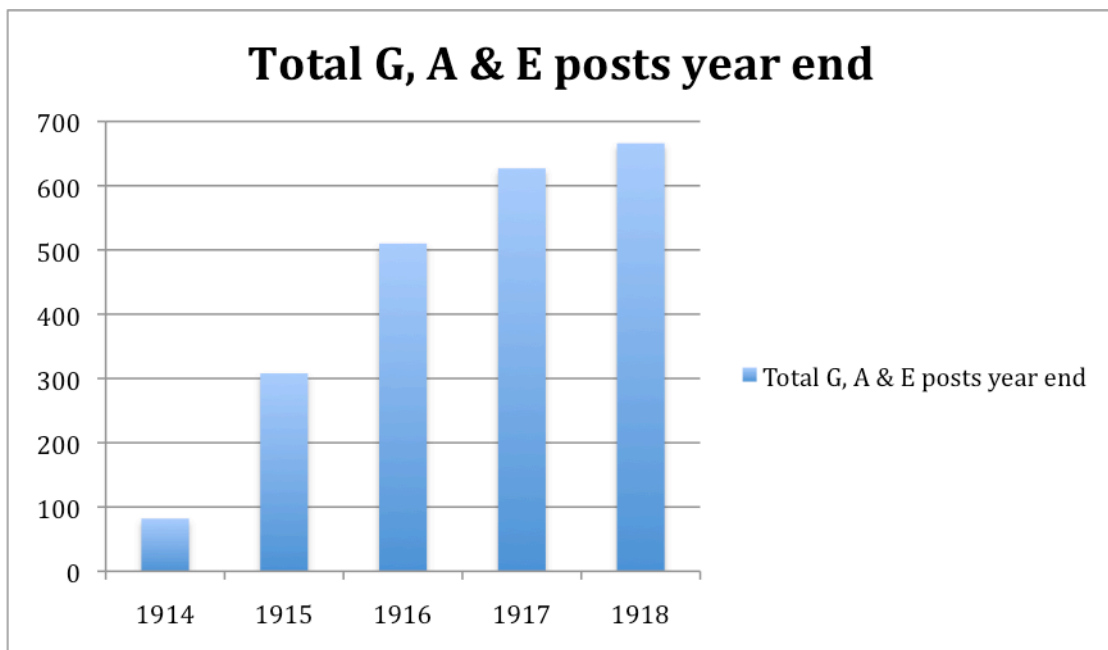
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<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Alan Hanbury-Sparrow, Diary 12/16 November 1917, ‘The Royal Berkshire Regiment Great War Project-Section Two, The Third Battle of Ypres’ (2004), p. 272.2. Available online at [www.purley.eu](http://www.purley.eu).



**Figure 3: Expansion in G posts**

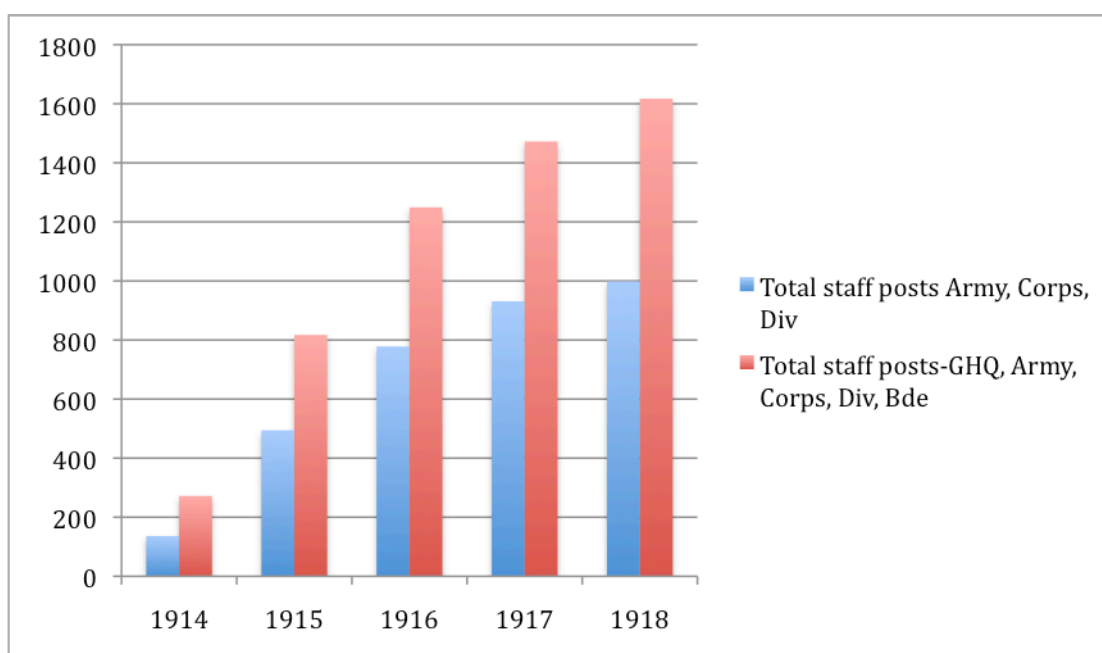
At the end of 1914 there were fifty-seven posts to fill. A year later this had increased almost fourfold to 210. The number of posts continued to rise thereafter reaching 336 at the end of 1917 and peaking at 347 by the end of hostilities. As Figure 4 illustrates, when artillery and engineering staff are included the growth was even more pronounced.



**Figure 4: Total G, A & E posts each year-end**

From eighty-two posts at the end of 1914, the total rose inexorably to 308 a year later, to 510 by the end of 1916, and attained the dizzy heights of 666 by the end of the war. The total number of artillery staff posts increased from just twenty-five at the end of 1914 to almost 300 when the war finished. This gives a clear indication of how important artillery became to the war effort.

The story of the expansion in staff numbers becomes even compelling if the growth of posts within all three branches [G, A and Q] is traced not just at Army, Corps and Division but also across GHQ and Brigade levels.<sup>3</sup> Figure 5 compares this increase in posts across the three staff branches as well as the growth in posts at Brigade and GHQ. They demonstrate just how many new staff officers the British army had to find each year to fill these positions.



**Figure 5: Total staff posts – all branches and all levels**

These statistics need to be considered in the context of the overall expansion of the British army on the Western Front during this period. The BEF began with

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 11a. Figures compiled from Composition of HQ: British Armies in France Nov 1914, Oct-Nov 1915, Jul-Dec 1916, Aug-Dec 1917, Sep-Dec 1918, IWM. For GHQ the numbers cover staff positions in the First and Third echelons.

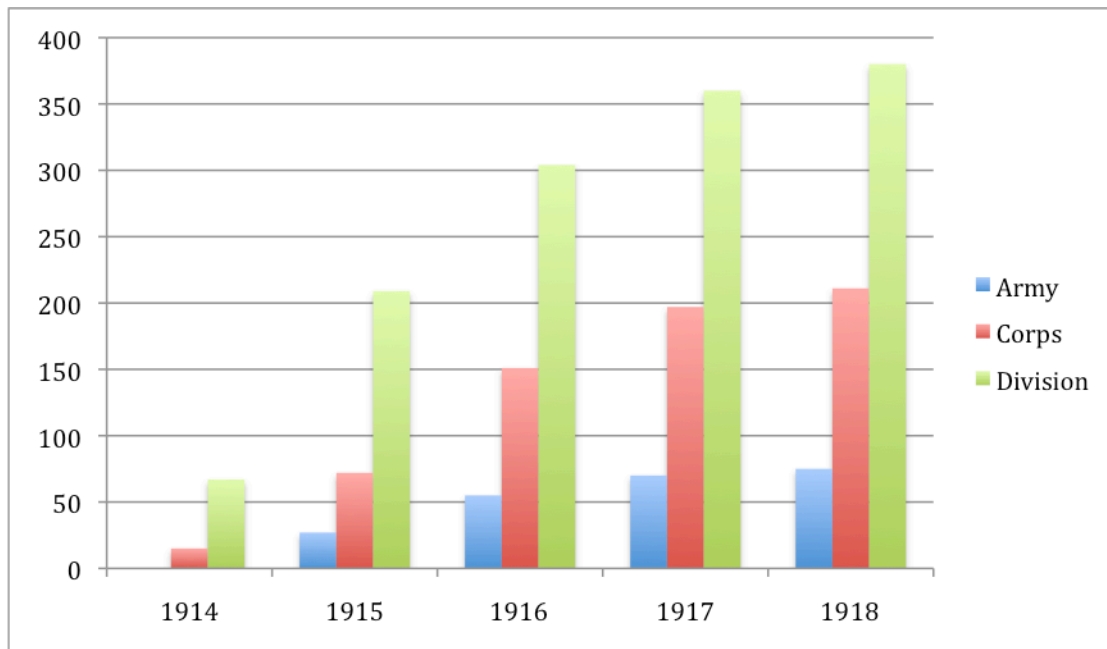
100,000 troops in the field in 1914. Three years later, a peak strength of over two million was recorded. In excess of five million men served on the Western Front throughout the war. The number of infantrymen in the field was recorded at around 1.3 million in November 1918.<sup>4</sup> By comparison, general staff posts at Army, Corps and Division numbered thirty-one at the outbreak of war and rose to a total of 347 by the end of hostilities. This eleven-fold increase was significantly lower than the twenty-fold enlargement of serving troops at peak strength but closer to the approximately fourteen-fold growth in the number of infantrymen. Nevertheless, it was a significant expansion that necessitated wholesale changes in structure and the introduction of large numbers of officers who lacked formal staff training. A total of 1,102 officers served on the general staff during the war. This represented prodigious growth when set against the original establishment of just thirty-one. This transformation was not achieved without disruption.

While the total number of staff posts rose in each year of the war, the rate of growth was different across Army, Corps and Division as indicated in Figure 6. The growth rate at each level was contingent upon the creation of new formations and changes in the number of posts within each unit. The number of G staff with each division remained stable at three throughout the war with the exception of the Canadian formations with five – two GSO 2 and two GSO 3 officers.<sup>5</sup> These additional resources may help to explain the accomplished performances of the Canadian units on the battlefield. More officers provided the opportunity for more thorough preparation and planning.

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<sup>4</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War 1914-20* (London: HMSO, 1922), p. 91. The same source notes a strength on p. 214 of 299,000 for Infantry of the Line (Regular & Territorial units in August 1914 compared with 1,600,000 in November 1918 but this is across all theatres of operation.

<sup>5</sup> Canadian divisions also possessed an additional artillery staff officer.



**Figure 6: G, A & E staff posts across Army, Corps and Division each year-end**

Fluctuations in staff numbers at Army and Corps were determined by functional requirements. The increase in the number of artillery staff at Corps was a case in point. Towards the end of 1915, an artillery staff officer, a Brigade Major, was introduced into each Corps to work with the newly created General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery [GOCRA]. These artillery commanders led teams composed of officers with general staff skills and others with technical expertise. The following year, the team at Corps was enlarged to include a Brigade Major and Staff Captain of Heavy Artillery. By the final year of the war, another Staff Captain and a staff officer responsible for artillery reconnaissance had been added. This gave each Corps an artillery staff of five.

The increase in staff reflected the growing role of Corps as the principal planner and coordinator for artillery. Sir Martin Farndale pointed out, ‘It is interesting to note that all Gunner Staff Officers came direct from batteries and none from the

Staff College until after the war'.<sup>6</sup> This was broadly the case as only around twenty of the 700 artillery staff who served were Staff College graduates. One of them was Major Stuart Rawlins who was described by a fellow staff officer as 'Staff College trained and a more efficient, hard working officer it would be impossible to find'.<sup>7</sup> Rawlins served at 7<sup>th</sup> Division, I Corps and GHQ with the renowned artilleryman General Sir James 'Curly' Birch. Some found the burgeoning number of staff difficult to comprehend. One staff officer commented: 'It absolutely defeats me why with a shortage of officers such as is supposed to exist, they go on increasing and increasing the size of a Corps staff'.<sup>8</sup>

In common with Corps, the number of artillery staff also grew at Army level. Here an increase from one officer in early 1915 to four in 1918 was witnessed. The changing nature of the war was also illustrated by the introduction of an engineering staff officer at both Corps and Army from the middle of 1916. Drawn exclusively from the Royal Engineers, these officers possessed expertise that was increasingly relevant to an industrialised conflict. They formed part of a team headed by the Commander Royal Engineers [CRE] and applied their technical skills to the planning of many aspects of trench warfare. One senior G staff officer believed they were given too much free rein: 'One reason why our defences are so bad in many places is that everything is left to the engineers: Generals and staffs don't take enough interest in the works & are afraid of exposing their ignorance about engineering matters'.<sup>9</sup> These comments probably said more about the 'cap-badge' insularity that plagued the British army rather than the skills of the engineers. Tim Travers identified this

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<sup>6</sup> M. Farndale, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery: Western Front 1914-18* (London: Royal Artillery Institution, 1986), p. 128.

<sup>7</sup> Harrison, *Gunners*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ward Jackson to wife 2 March 1917, Extracts from Letters p. 429, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>9</sup> Howell to wife 18 July 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/99-152, LHCMA.

malaise as the cause of what he saw as systematic flaws in the command structure of the army.<sup>10</sup>

The rate of expansion in staff numbers reached a peak in 1915 and 1916. During this period the number of officers at Army level doubled, Corps saw an increase from fifteen to 150 and staff employed by Divisions rose from sixty-seven to just over 300. While the overall number of staff continued to rise at a steady rate during the last two years of the war, there was a marked slowdown from the previous rapid pace of growth. In 1917/18, total posts at Army rose by thirty-six per cent, Corps by forty per cent and Division recorded an increase of twenty-five per cent. Growth of this magnitude came at a price. Fresh teams needed to be established and had to learn to work together. A constant influx of new officers was required to fill the incremental positions. They had to be incorporated into the existing organisation, discover their place with new colleagues and generally find their feet. This caused significant disruption and militated against staff teams operating efficiently. The situation was compounded by the need to bring in officers with little or no experience.

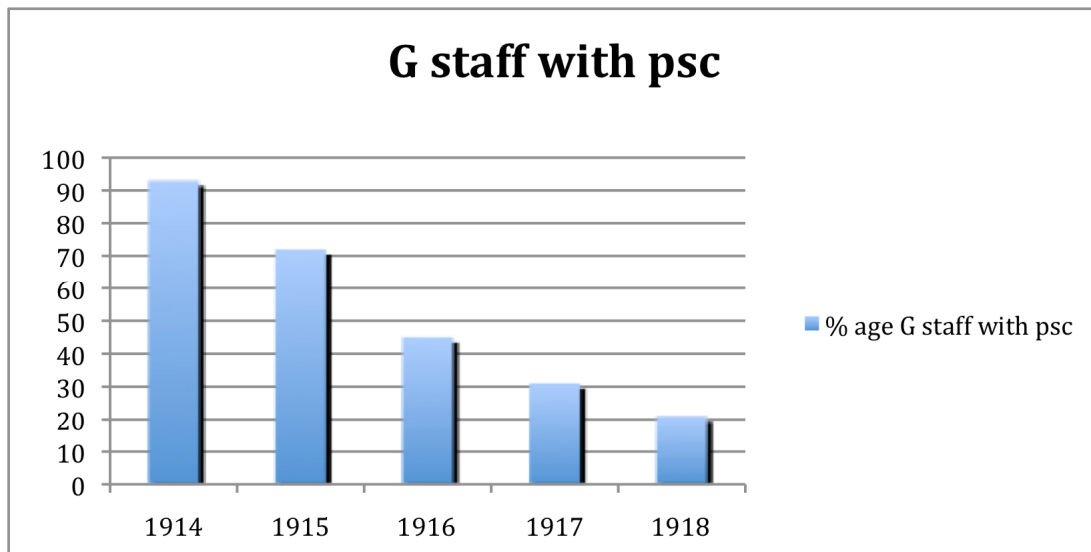
### *'For the good of the Service'*

Analysis of all G staff who served at Army, Corps and Division from 1914/18 shows that only thirty-one per cent were Staff College graduates. At the outbreak of war the situation was very different. The G staff comprised a select band of just thirty-one soldiers who were all regular officers and had all attended Staff College. This homogeneity was soon diluted. The continuous demand for new staff demanded that the net was cast beyond the limited pool of Camberley and Quetta graduates. Over the course of the war the proportion of G branch staff in possession of the psc

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<sup>10</sup> Travers, *Killing Ground*, pp. 101-118.

qualification declined. Figure 7 traces this fall from ninety-three per cent in 1914 to just twenty-one per cent in 1918.

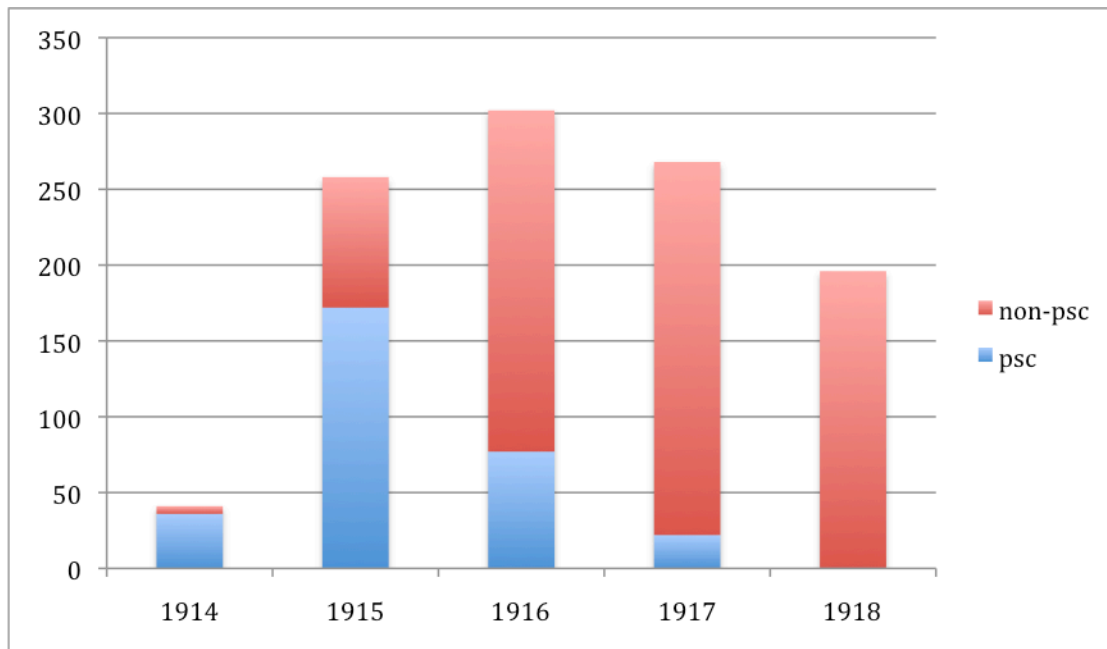


**Figure 7: Psc officers on the G staff by year**

By 1916 the majority of staff officers did not hold the psc qualification. There were two principal reasons for this change. Firstly, many qualified officers were transferred from Army, Corps and Division staffs to command positions or other roles.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, the new officers swelling the ranks of the general staff increasingly lacked pre-war Staff College training. This pattern is evident in Figure 8, which shows the declining number of officers joining the staff with the psc award.

<sup>11</sup> Analysis of 700 senior officers and commanders by Robbins has shown that 55% held the psc. A higher proportion than among the staff itself; Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 208.





**Figure 8: Number of new joiners with psc on G staff by year**

The staff was transformed into a body of officers forced to develop their skills on the job rather than through a two-year course of study at Staff College. These new officers represented a key source of change.

In 1914/15, seventy per cent of new joiners to G branch at Army, Corps and Division were psc holders but from 1916/18 the share collapsed to just sixteen per cent. By the end of 1915, the reservoir of Staff College graduates was running dry. New recruits to the staff were being drawn from the regiments. As the *Official History* observed, ‘To fill the ever-increasing number of staff appointments good regimental officers, often to the detriment of their units, were taken’.<sup>12</sup> This was a difficult dilemma as invariably many of the most intelligent officers were taken to fill the gaps in the staff. Strengthening the staff potentially weakened the fighting formations. It was a measure demanded by necessity although there was a degree of resistance to introducing these officers into the ranks of the staff. Despite the benefits regimental

<sup>12</sup> J.E. Edmonds and R. Maxwell-Hyslop, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1918: Volume V, 26<sup>th</sup> September-11<sup>th</sup> November, The Advance to Victory* (HMSO, London: 1947), pp. 592-3.

officers could bring to bear in terms of combat and command experience, some within the higher staff echelons held the opinion that only those with a psc qualification were capable of meeting the demands of the role.

Perhaps the ideal combination was a candidate who had served in the front line and knew something of staff work. Major 'Teddy' Tollemache fitted this mould. A colleague believed he was the kind of soldier needed for the staff in France:

He is jolly capable and has the advantage not only of having studied Staff work, but also of having served a long and arduous period with his Battalion in the trenches.... So he is sure to be efficient and I wish they would send him over here and make him a G.S.O. 2 in a Corps for a bit and then G.S.O. 1 in a Division.<sup>13</sup>

Like J.F.C. Fuller, Tollemache had the benefit of completing one year on the staff course at Camberley before war broke out. He had seen action in Gallipoli and the Middle East. After serving as a GSO 3 in 52<sup>nd</sup> Division, Tollemache eventually came to France in 1918. He did manage to secure a berth as a GSO 2 in a corps but was prevented from progressing further by the cessation of hostilities.

There was an expectation that two years spent at Camberley or Quetta should have bestowed a degree of competence. As one staff officer noted in late 1916 when a new GSO 2 joined II Corps: 'He rolled up to mess for the first time last night and seems quite decent. He is a regular soldier and of course has been through the Staff College, so he ought to be all right'.<sup>14</sup> The officer in question was Major Ernest Hewlett who probably was a capable performer as after serving with II Corps he was promoted GSO 1 of 19<sup>th</sup> Division the following year. Unfortunately, this was not the case for all psc holders.

Forty-four year old Leighton Hume-Spry had attended Camberley in 1903/4.

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<sup>13</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 14 February 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 166, Ward-Jackson Papers, IWM.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 30 December 1916, p. 406.

He appeared to have gained scant knowledge from the experience. Charles Bonham-Carter was in the same year as Hume-Spry: 'I knew him as the most completely brainless man of my year and I think of almost any year. It has always been a puzzle to me how he ever was employed on the staff'.<sup>15</sup> When Hume-Spry became GSO 1 of 50<sup>th</sup> Division in 1915, his junior colleague Bonham-Carter declared: 'he is far from able to fulfil his position efficiently'.<sup>16</sup> His tenure proved short-lived. Within a month Hume-Spry was dismissed. The GSO 3 at 50<sup>th</sup> Division, Captain H.E. Trevor wrote to his parents: 'You will no doubt be very glad to hear that Hume-Spry has got the boot & that we have now got an exceedingly nice fellow Major Hordern of the 60th Rifles'.<sup>17</sup> According to Trevor, Hume-Spry endured several more failures, eventually becoming a staff captain in Britain.

An officer who proved a mediocre performer whilst working on the staff but excelled as a fighter, was the Royal Marine, Brigadier-General Frederick Lumsden. He graduated from Camberley in 1908 and gained his first staff appointment in 1915 as GSO 3 First Army. It seemed he had failed to glean much from his time at Staff College. Earl Stanhope worked with him at II Corps in 1916 and thought little of his abilities:

For many months Lumsden was most trying as he knew very little about staff work although a Staff College graduate, was extremely slow and didn't like it if I drafted things out for him so that he could sign them and send them out without delay. A bad staff officer, he had no sense of fear and was a wonderful leader of men and before he was killed in 1917, he had become a brigade commander and had won the V.C. and the D.S.O. with three bars.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Bonham-Carter to mother, 27 April 1915, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/1, CCC.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Trevor to parents 12 May 1915, Trevor Papers P229 Ts, IWM.

<sup>18</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 69.

Major Frank Buzzard graduated from Camberly three years after Lumsden. In 1915, he was GSO 2 with 2<sup>nd</sup> Division but after being promoted to GSO 1 with 9<sup>th</sup> Division, led by General H.J.S. Landon, he soon came to the attention of the Corps commander, Sir Douglas Haig, for all the wrong reasons. In his diary, Haig recorded, 'Landon has also been given an indifferent GSO 1, Buzzard by name. I have told Gough to write to the CGS and have the latter changed'.<sup>19</sup> Buzzard was duly dismissed but later returned to France to serve with the artillery and redeemed himself by being awarded the DSO.

Being a Staff College graduate may have been the passport to a job on the staff but many discovered how possessing a qualification in such demand could tie them down. Once they commenced work on the staff, many officers with a psc to their name found it difficult to move away. In answer to his wife's question about when he expected to be sent to a fighting unit, Llewellyn Price-Davies replied, 'I am sure to remain on the staff they are so short of staff officers'.<sup>20</sup> During preparations for the Battle of Loos, Major Eric de Burgh offered to move out of his staff job to an infantry command. He was given command of a battalion but GHQ refused to sanction the appointment, as he was a psc. De Burgh recalled, 'my services could not be spared for regimental duty'.<sup>21</sup> A similar response was provoked by senior staff officer Charles Grant's request to lead a fighting unit: 'Alas, I was not allowed to command my own battalion and was kept on the Staff'.<sup>22</sup>

The demand for qualified staff meant they were often prevented from moving into other positions, especially if this ran the risk of them becoming casualties. The

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<sup>19</sup> G. Sheffield and J.M. Bourne, *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters, 1914-18* (London: Headline, 2001), p. 140. Major-General H.J.S. Landon was GOC 9<sup>th</sup> Division. Haig also replaced Landon a few days after this note.

<sup>20</sup> Price-Davies to wife 8 March 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>21</sup> De Burgh, Memoir p. 10, De Burgh Papers 09/49/1, IWM.

<sup>22</sup> Grant to Lord Roseberry 29 September 1915, Grant Papers 2/1/15, LHCMA.

difficulty was that many officers grew weary of staff work and wanted to get more directly involved with the fighting. In a letter home, the disconsolate Lord Loch wrote, 'I am getting rather tired of being a staff officer and want to be a commander. I suppose most do'.<sup>23</sup> Philip Howell expressed similar views when BGGs at II Corps following his return from Salonika. In letters to his wife, Howell bemoaned his lot on several occasions, professing to be fed up with his staff duties. During a spell on a quiet sector he pondered the question of requesting a transfer: 'Shall I apply for the command of an infantry brigade? I expect I could get one & should then be doing more than I'm doing now which is next to nothing & dreadfully boring'.<sup>24</sup>

After serving for a year as a GSO 3, Earl Stanhope was also keen to leave the staff and take up a command post. He had not been to Staff College but he did have crucial staff experience. Though his ambitions were modest he still found himself thwarted at every turn. He was informed that at thirty-five he was too old for a company command and was subsequently turned down for a second-in-command post in a battalion. Stanhope declared in his memoirs, 'GHQ would have none of it and merely replied that my services were still required on the staff'.<sup>25</sup> Persistence paid no dividends as he was refused again six months later. The formal response from GHQ stated that Stanhope was 'noted for advancement and will probably be required for appointment as GSO 2 in due course'.<sup>26</sup>

Towards the end of 1916, the movement of staff officers into command roles remained a controversial issue. When questioned about the appointment of senior staff officers to command posts, CGS Sir Launcelot Kiggell responded:

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<sup>23</sup> Loch to wife 14 September 1915, Loch Papers 3/1/4, IWM.

<sup>24</sup> Howell to wife 4 July 1916 & 22 July 1916, Howell Papers 6/1/311 & 6/1/325, LHCMA.

<sup>25</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

The situation of the GSOs First Grade is a matter which has my full sympathy and to which I have given a good deal of thought. We hope by degrees to be able to let some of them, at any rate, have opportunities of command, though I am doubtful whether it will be possible except, perhaps, to a very limited extent.<sup>27</sup>

To clarify the position, Kiggell sent a formal communiqué to each of the five Army heads on the Western Front on the subject of officers serving at BGGs and GSO 1 levels. This stated, ‘there can be little doubt that the majority, if not all, of them would have been selected to command a Brigade’, but they had been retained on the staff, ‘for the good of the Service’.<sup>28</sup>

The shortage of qualified staff officers was an issue that pre-occupied GHQ and proved a source of frequent correspondence. A good example was a request for promotion submitted by General G.T. Bridges, GOC 19<sup>th</sup> Division, for his GSO 1, Ronald Johnson, who had been in post for almost a year. Kiggell offered an expansive response:

The case of G.S.O.s 1 is a very difficult one and has been carefully considered, not just by me, but by the Commander-in Chief himself. There is no doubt that the great majority of them would have done very well in command, and if it had been possible to give them commands it would have been done. But I am quite sure they all realise that the needs of the Army and the Empire must take precedence of all personal considerations, and those needs make it impossible to let highly trained staff officers take up commands. It is indispensable that staff work should be efficient and it will become still more so when we get the Germans in the open.<sup>29</sup>

The return of Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Ellington, a GSO 1 at the War Office, to France in early 1917, highlighted the value of experienced senior officers with staff training. Ellington had graduated from Camberley in 1908 and served in the field as GSO 1 with Second Army in 1915. Despite CIGS Sir William Robertson’s plea to give him command of a brigade, Haig elected to appoint him BGGs VIII Corps.

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<sup>27</sup> Kiggell to Major-General R.D. Whigham 10 November 1916, Kiggell Papers 4/59, LHCMA.

<sup>28</sup> Kiggell to Army Commanders 11 November 1916, Kiggell Papers 4/61, LHCMA.

<sup>29</sup> Kiggell to General G.T. Bridges GOC 19<sup>th</sup> Div 22 November 1916, Kiggell Papers 4/63, LHCMA.

Kiggell explained: ‘Ellington is a trained staff officer and the number of these is running low. We have three BGGs to find for the present moment. There are a large number of officers who have been through the recent fighting who are well qualified to command Brigades’.<sup>30</sup> These issues with the elevation of staff officers to command positions offer further illustration of the problem of ‘careerism’ identified by Robbins.<sup>31</sup> He observed that the strong desire of many officers to use the war to ascend the career ladder in order to further their own interests became a major problem. Some officers seem to have viewed the war as a ‘professional opportunity’.<sup>32</sup> Although many officers prioritised their personal ambitions, GHQ was prepared to block requests for moves if they did not serve the needs of the army.

While some officers were having difficulty moving out of the staff, others encountered resistance to their efforts to move in. The lack of a psc qualification was often an impediment in the first two years of the war. When he was seeking to transfer across to the staff, Captain William Bowly confided to his wife: ‘I hear that Milne is not in favour of officers who have not passed the Staff College holding staff appointments’.<sup>33</sup> A regular soldier and Oxford graduate, Bowly was serving in a liaison role at GHQ and expressed the hope: ‘If I did this job all right then I might get a proper G.S.O.<sup>3rd</sup> grade of a Division, Corps or Army, but of course I am not psc’.<sup>34</sup> He eventually gained a post on the staff in July 1915 but this was only after Sir George Milne’s departure to command a division.

Three months later, Cuthbert Headlam provoked a similar reaction from Earl Cavan, GOC of the Guards Division, when he raised the issue of obtaining a staff job:

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<sup>30</sup> Kiggell to Whigham 4 January 1917, Kiggell Papers 4/74, LHCMA.

<sup>31</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Bowly to wife 8 March 1915, Bowly Papers v1, IWM. Sir George Milne was BGGs and later MGGs Second Army.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 8 May 1915.

‘As to a staff billet, he seemed to think that it was quite out of my reach! Because I had not been at the Staff College! Did you ever hear anything so absurd?’<sup>35</sup> Cavan’s instinctive initial response did not endure however, as just one week later he agreed to put Headlam forward as a candidate for a staff role. It was a change of attitude probably induced by recognition that the staff needed good officers and could no longer afford to employ only those who had been to Staff College. By 1916, that reality became more apparent as the balance swung. The majority of staff were no longer endowed with the psc qualification.

Captain John Monk had served as a company commander in the Worcestershire Regiment and been wounded at Neuve Chapelle in 1915. He was convinced that he would make a good staff officer despite his lack of formal qualification. According to Monk, ‘My experience would be valuable to the divisions & I think I might be the means of saving a lot of the unnecessary memos which come floating down’.<sup>36</sup> Although these officers were learning to master the particulars of the job and could introduce new ideas, many perceived their career paths on the staff as strictly limited. Disgruntled officers without the psc believed they were never accepted as fully-fledged members of the staff and suffered from the imposition of a ceiling upon their career development.

This perception was encapsulated by Headlam’s remarks when serving as GSO 3 at Second Army in 1916. He voiced his frustration in a missive to his wife:

I don’t imagine I shall ever rise to any superior grade on the staff – certainly not on the G-side – There are too many Staff College men left for this to be tolerated. It is a great infringement of the Trade Union principles which prevail for men “with no training” like myself to be

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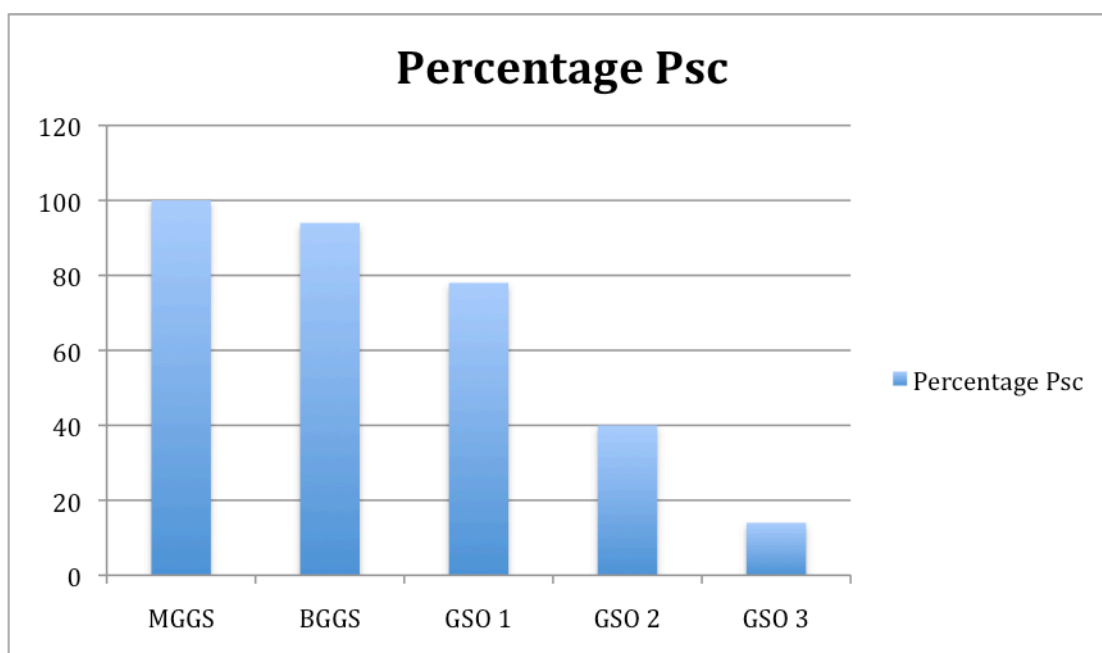
<sup>35</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 109.

<sup>36</sup> J.M. Monk to father 13 February 1916, Extracts from letters p. 12, J.M. Monk Papers 01/59/1, IWM.



on the Staff at all – and outsiders will not get very far up the ladder unless the war lasts another ten years.<sup>37</sup>

Examination of the officers who served on the G staff provides some endorsement for this view. Those who served at the highest levels of MGGS and BGGs were almost exclusively Staff College graduates.<sup>38</sup> The dominance of psc holders continued among those who served as GSO 1 as they comprised nearly eighty per cent of this group.<sup>39</sup> The picture changed radically at the lower levels of GSO 2 and GSO 3. Here Staff College graduates were very much in the minority and made up less than thirty per cent of the total. Figure 9 shows the respective proportions.



**Figure 9: Percentage of G staff with psc by grade**

<sup>37</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, pp. 117-18.

<sup>38</sup> All fifteen men who served at MGGS level were psc. Only four of the sixty-nine officers who served at BGGs level did not have the qualification. Three were from the Indian Army and one was an artilleryman.

<sup>39</sup> These percentages concur with earlier work undertaken by Robbins though the groups under study differ slightly. See Robbins, *British Generalship*, pp. 216-17.

As might be expected, officers holding the psc qualification occupied the senior roles within the Staff but more detailed examination helps to explain the underlying reasons. These soldiers usually possessed lengthy military service records and had enjoyed the benefit of two years tuition to develop their staff skills. It made sense for them to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise at higher levels. Ambitious men like Headlam were given their chance. He was promoted to GSO 2 at VIII Corps and then served at GHQ. His move up the career ladder was hardly meteoric but apart from lacking a psc, Headlam suffered from another impediment. He was a Territorial not a regular officer. It was another factor that played a part in how officers were judged and how the staff developed.

### *Regulars and Outsiders*

At the outset of hostilities the staff was composed entirely of regular officers. The rise in the number of staff posts led to a requirement for new recruits to fill the gaps. When the pool of Staff College graduates was exhausted the Army drew upon regular officers from the regiments. Regular officers dominated the staff throughout the war. Across the wider army, regulars comprised around five per cent of all serving officers.<sup>40</sup> In stark contrast, the G staff was an enclave of regulars as they filled seventy-one per cent of the posts. Former regulars were present in the form of ‘dug-outs’ – retired soldiers brought back to serve. A limited number of Territorials, and volunteers infiltrated the lower levels later in the war but the staff remained in essence a group of regular officers.

Most regimental officers who moved into the staff were seen as reliable but short on expertise. In early 1916, Lord Loch, BGGs VI Corps, recorded the arrival of two additions to his staff team. The new GSO 3 was twenty-eight year old Captain

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<sup>40</sup> There were around 12,500 regular officers compared to the total of 250,000 commissioned officers that served during the war. See *Statistics of Military Effort*, p. 235.

Alistair MacDougall, former adjutant of the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers. Loch described him as, ‘pale and lacking in energy...but I am told capable’.<sup>41</sup> The other incumbent was Captain Arthur Grasett, a Canadian-born engineer from 49<sup>th</sup> Division: ‘good, keen and plenty of ability’.<sup>42</sup> Their appointment was greeted with some trepidation: ‘Neither of them had any staff training so I have to start from the beginning. It is going to give me plenty to think about especially these days. I begin giving my first lesson tonight’.<sup>43</sup>

Both of these men rose to become GSO 2 and remained on the staff until the end of the war. They were typical of the regular officers who moved into the staff and trained on the job. Military experience on the job was a quality that allowed a handful of regular soldiers from the ranks to move into the staff. Major Charles Dowden served for fifteen years as a ranker. He saw action in the South African War before his elevation to officer status at the outbreak of war. Dowden joined the staff in 1916 as GSO 3 19<sup>th</sup> Division. Another soldier who saw service in the ranks in South Africa was Major N. Teacher, GSO 2 of 51<sup>st</sup> Division. Teacher went on to serve on the staff of Fifth Army. He had been serving as a Territorial and was part of the migration of officers outside the regular army into the staff system.

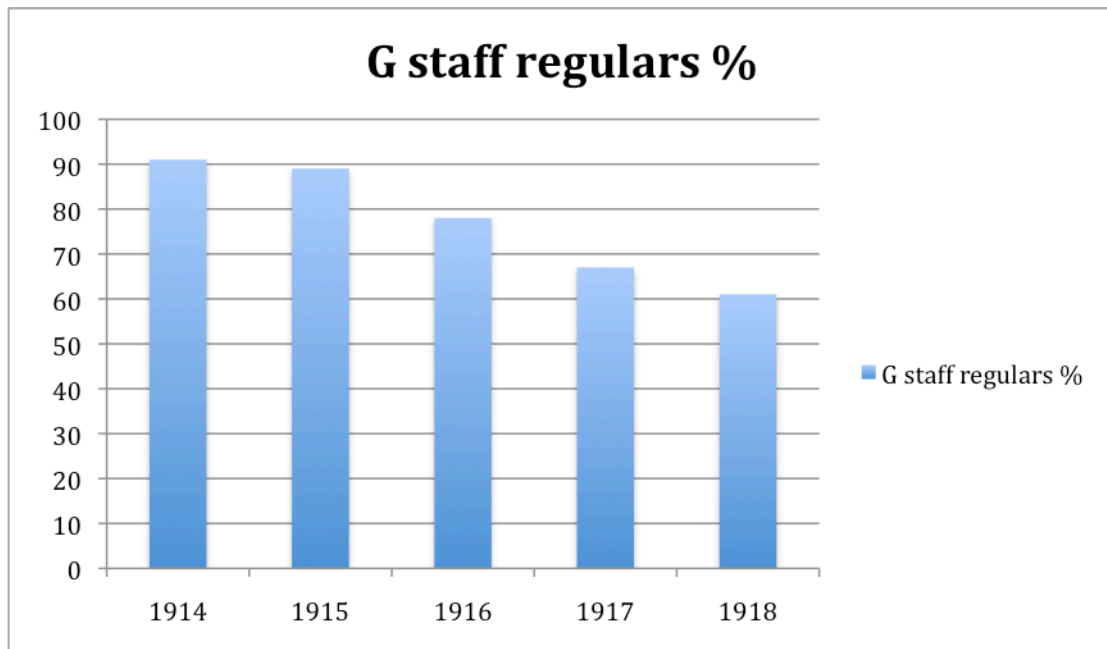
The gradual decline in the proportion of regulars is shown in Figure 10.

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<sup>41</sup> Loch to wife 17 January 1916, Loch Papers 1/3/8, IWM.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



**Figure 10: Changing G Staff – Percentage of regular officers by year**

During the first two years of the war there was a minimal influx of non-regulars. After this the pace of change accelerated. Although the total number of regular officers on the staff increased every year until 1918 owing to the expansion in the number of posts, they represented a diminishing percentage share. By 1918, only sixty-one per cent of G staff were regular officers. The gradual migration of non-regular officers into the staff was selective however. Many of them served with the Australian, Canadian and New Zealand units. Few made their way into the higher staff grades.

Just as officers who served at the highest levels of the G staff all held the psc, they were also exclusively regular soldiers. The situation was only marginally different at GSO 1 level where the proportion was ninety-five per cent regulars. A different picture emerged lower down with non-regulars taking seventeen per cent of GSO 2 posts and forty-two per cent of GSO 3 positions. These non-regulars colonised the staff owing to the growing scarcity of regular officers, but it was unusual for them to rise up the career ladder. Only a handful attained the lofty heights of GSO 1. The

majority operated at GSO 3 level though non-regulars could lay claim to a reasonable level of representation among Brigade Majors.<sup>44</sup>

This lack of career progression reflected a degree of reluctance to accept non-regulars into the staff. Doubts remained over their ability to handle anything but the most basic aspects of staff work. Parallels can be drawn with the army's attitude towards the volunteer officers of the Intelligence Corps.<sup>45</sup> These men were described as 'intelligent civilians in uniform' but despite the increase in their military significance their roles were restricted, as Beach has pointed out.<sup>46</sup> The army regarded them as assistants and their career aspirations were limited. Headlam expressed his disdain for such views:

It is rather absurd that the men of intelligence and capacity in civil life who are serving out here should be treated like children and given to understand that they are not considered capable of being employed on third rate staff billets, because they are not professional soldiers.<sup>47</sup>

The gratification felt by some non-regulars who gained a post on the staff could soon be tempered by the attitude of those who found such developments hard to swallow. Around the time Harington was addressing trainee officers at Aldershot with his call for unity, Captain Basil Sanderson was appointed GSO 3 at 1<sup>st</sup> Division:

Though I was delighted with my advancement, my reception on arrival at divisional H.Q. was far from cordial. I was immediately taken to see Major-General Strickland, who informed me in no uncertain terms that my appointment was unwelcome. 1<sup>st</sup> Division was one of the first four composing the original Expeditionary Force, and consisted entirely of regular troops. How came it, that I, a second-lieutenant in a Yeomanry regiment, should venture upon this hallowed ground?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> There are some well-known examples of non-regulars who served as Brigade Majors such as future Prime Ministers Harold Macmillan and Anthony Eden.

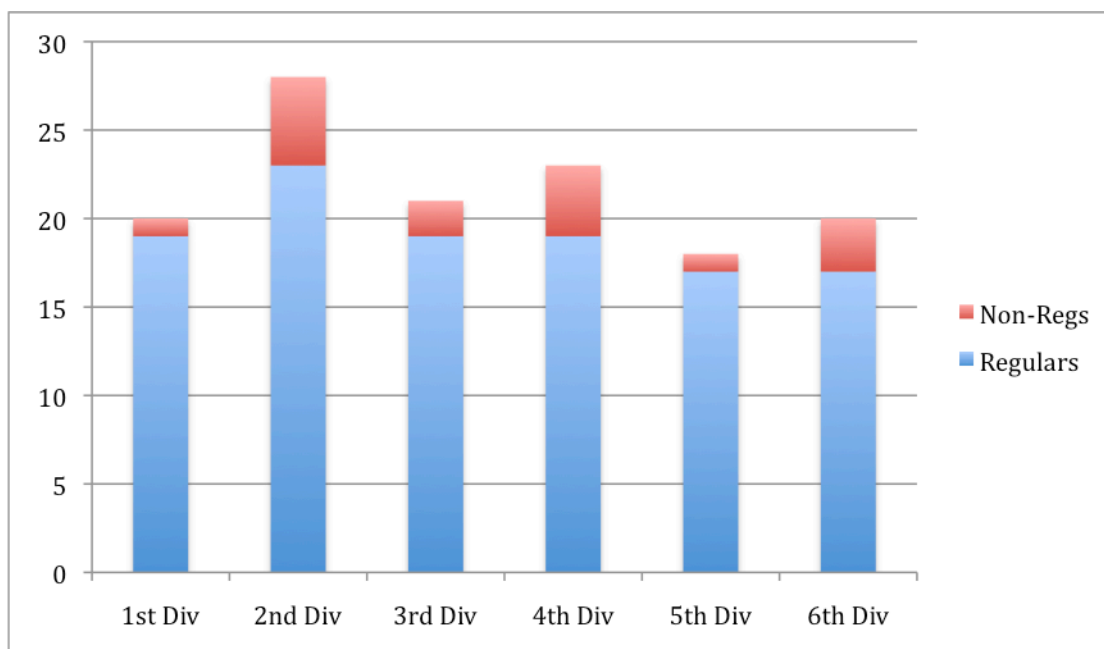
<sup>45</sup> J. Beach, 'Intelligent Civilians in Uniform: The British Expeditionary Force's Intelligence Corps Officers, 1914-1918', *War & Society*, 27 (1) (2008), pp. 1-22.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>47</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 111.

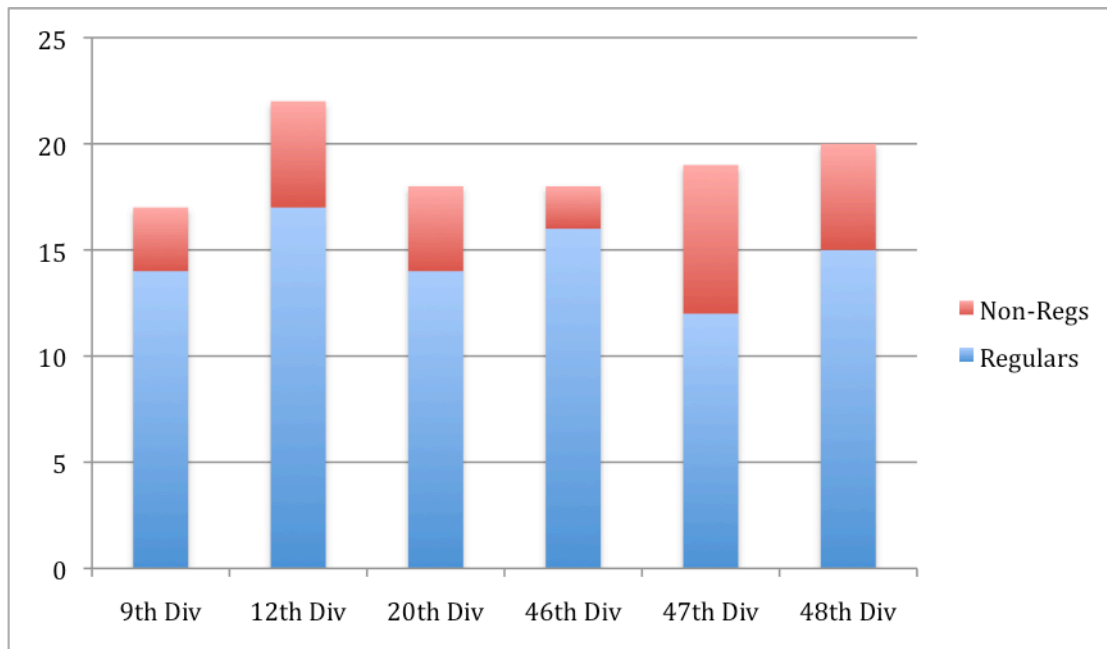
<sup>48</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 55.

Harington would surely have been appalled by such an episode but many saw the staff as being the sole province of regulars. Even though this incident occurred just eighteen months before hostilities ceased, it transpired that Sanderson was the only non-regular to serve upon the G staff at 1<sup>st</sup> Division throughout the war. A breakdown of the first six infantry divisions to arrive on the Western Front [Figure 11] shows their staffs were composed of a very high proportion of regular officers during the war.



**Figure 11: Number of regular officers on G staff of six regular divisions**

The average stood at eighty-eight per cent with 1<sup>st</sup> Division recording the highest share. A sample of three Territorial and three New Army divisions, present on the Western Front from 1915 onwards, produced a comparable average of seventy-seven, over ten per cent lower.



**Figure 12: Number of regulars on G staff of selected Territorial and New Army divisions**

There was a greater range recorded here from just sixty-three per cent of regular staff officers in 47<sup>th</sup> Division to eighty-eight per cent in 46<sup>th</sup> Division. The sample of three New Army divisions scored a marginally higher proportion of regular staff than the Territorial units.

When Charles Bonham-Carter was promoted to brevet Colonel in early 1916, he considered himself fortunate to secure a post with 7<sup>th</sup> Division:

I am lucky to get appointed to one of the old regular divisions, as although the Regular officers are pretty well spread about now, there are still a higher number of them in the original divisions than in the New Army divisions & in consequence the work of the Staff is rather less anxious.<sup>49</sup>

These comments struck a similar chord to those expressed by Strickland, reflecting a degree of prejudice displayed by some officers from within the regular army to those outside it. Doubts were expressed about both the capability and reliability of non-regulars. After attending a staff conference in 1915, Major T.H. Clayton-Nunn noted:

<sup>49</sup> Bonham-Carter to mother 8 January 1916, Correspondence 2/1 Bonham-Carter papers, CCC.

These Territorials talk a lot, we are all good at business but it takes a regular to get business that suits Army purposes. To get men who work quickly, give understandable, rapid decisions you want the poor old professional soldier.<sup>50</sup>

Walter Guinness was explicit in his description of the stigma attached to being a Territorial officer when he was decorated for twenty years service: ‘Need hardly say I shall never wear the Territorial Decoration out here where it is an invitation for ungumming and shows to all and sundry that one is a back number’.<sup>51</sup> No Territorial officer reached GSO 1 level or above on the staff at Army, Corps and Division level for the duration of the war.<sup>52</sup>

The expansion of the army saw an influx of retired officers as well as Territorials. These ‘dug-outs’ were former regular soldiers who had been recalled to the ranks to meet the growing demand for officers in staff and command roles. They made up less than five per cent of the G staff at Army, Corps and Division but were also the subject of controversy. Just like the Territorials, they failed to garner much esteem from the current crop of regular officers. Most of the criticism was directed at the older officers who had left the army some time ago. Brigadier-General Phillip Howell was caustic in his portrayal:

How can poor gentlemen with *no* imagination, or no first hand knowledge, & with minds far too “set” ever to learn these things, how can they help being foolish, poor old things? And yet out they come, one after another & just throw men’s lives away.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel T.H. Clayton-Nunn, Diary 15 May 1915, Clayton-Nunn Papers GS0327, LCUL.

<sup>51</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 225. Another example of the low esteem in which Territorials on the staff were held can be found in Beach, *Headlam*, p. 182.

<sup>52</sup> There may have been some Territorial officers who reached GSO 1 level at GHQ but this is outside the boundary of this study. One example is Cuthbert Headlam who served as GSO 2 with VIII Corps and was eventually promoted to a GSO 1 post at GHQ in 1918.

<sup>53</sup> Howell to wife 19 June 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/99-152, LHCMA.



When Colonel T.T. Grove returned to the 6<sup>th</sup> Division as GSO 1 he found it under the command of the fifty-one year old General Charles Ross who served as GOC from November 1915 to August 1917. It was surprising that Ross was appointed to a command post as he had formerly served as a staff officer. Grove's recollection of Ross was not flattering: 'He has been an instructor at the Staff College and had retired to become a writer of military history. When he rejoined for the war he had very little experience of regimental soldering or command'.<sup>54</sup> According to Grove, little attempt was made by Ross to enforce command and everything was left to his three brigadiers. As senior staff officer, Grove was relieved when Ross departed a few months later for a command back in Britain.<sup>55</sup> He remarked, 'Fortunately, during the time that I was under him our only active operation was confined to the front of one brigade'.<sup>56</sup> It was interesting that the lack of confidence in Ross did not result in dismissal but in a home command.

Career progression on the staff was difficult for 'dug-outs'. An exception to the rule was Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Lawrence who was appointed CGS in 1918.<sup>57</sup> Most others struggled. Earl Stanhope left the army in 1908 to take his seat in the House of Lords. When war broke out he rejoined and by 1915 was serving with the staff as a GSO 3. Although he had been recommended for a GSO 2 job, he was informed that no 'dug-outs' had yet reached the position of Brigade Major, which was the customary next step for a GSO 3. The discontented Stanhope, 'remained hopelessly stuck with my Corps unable to get back to my regiment and not getting any further promotions on the staff while other people, my juniors, went over my

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<sup>54</sup> Grove, *Memoir*, p. 47, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>55</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence left the army in 1903 and forged a successful career in banking before rejoining at the outbreak of war. His appointment to such a senior staff position took many by surprise.

head'.<sup>58</sup> Disillusion set in and 'my work on the Staff became extremely heavy, there being no-one else at the time to keep things going. I had very little chance of getting out'.<sup>59</sup> Stanhope served twenty months as a GSO 3 before his eventual promotion. It was an unusually long tenure for this junior role.

A mere handful of 'dug-outs' climbed the career ladder to reach GSO 1. These were all younger men who had left the army recently and two of them were Camberley graduates. Robert Livesay, who was forty years old and left the army months before the outbreak of war, was given his chance with the New Zealand Division in August 1916, while William Bertram, a former Gordon Highlander, served exclusively as a GSO 1 with several Canadian units. Bertram had relinquished his commission in 1911 when he was just twenty-three and emigrated to Canada. Ernest Gepp left the army in 1911 at the age of thirty-two but became GSO 1 of the New Army formation, 33<sup>rd</sup> Division, in 1918. The other 'dug-out' to rise to GSO 1 was Wilfred Spender who served over two years with 31<sup>st</sup> Division, another New Army unit. Spender left the army in 1913 when he was thirty-seven, owing to the issues in Ulster. The regular army divisions were conspicuous by their absence in offering opportunities at GSO 1 level to those they perceived as 'outsiders'.

For a volunteer soldier like Captain Wyn Griffith, a civil servant before the war, the idea of becoming part of the staff struck him as purely fanciful. On his way back to the front in May 1916, Griffith recollected:

There were many officers on the train who were obviously better placed than I – some wonderful difference had raised them to the Staff, but I could see no endowment of mine that could ever serve to take me across the gap that divided the brains of the army from its brawn.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 70.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Griffith, *Up from Mametz*, p. 131.

A few months later, Griffith was given the opportunity to become a staff learner at a brigade HQ. After this came another attachment at VIII Corps before he finally secured an appointment as GSO 3 in II ANZAC Corps. Griffith may have only served on the staff at the lowest level but he had managed to successfully negotiate what appeared to him as the yawning gap between the staff and the rest of the army. The officers who were selected from outside the regular ranks to join the staff were often university graduates or professional men. Those with a bent for academic work were frequently chosen for staff training in the form of attachment or attendance at one of the wartime schools.

While soldiers like Griffith managed to infiltrate the junior levels of the staff, among the British formations at Army, Corps and Division level there was only one volunteer officer whose career path took him all the way up to GSO 1.<sup>61</sup> Before the war, E.W.M. Grigg had worked on the editorial staff of *The Times*. A graduate of New College Oxford, Grigg was illustrative of the type of officer coming into the staff to work alongside the regulars. He initially served as GSO 3 in the elite Guards Division before being promoted to Brigade Major within the same formation. During his time at brigade, Grigg attended the staff school at Hesdin led by Bonham-Carter and Currie. One exercise completed by Grigg earned the comment, ‘Your orders are very good. I particularly like your order of march’.<sup>62</sup> He was clearly a diligent pupil as a couple of months after completing the course he was elevated to GSO 2. Known as ‘the Scribe’, Grigg’s skills as a journalist were utilised when he was employed as a

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<sup>61</sup> It is possible that a volunteer officer reached GSO 1 level at GHQ but this lies beyond the boundary of this study. As noted in Appendix 1, Cuthbert Headlam was a Territorial who attained a GSO 1 post at GHQ.

<sup>62</sup> E.W. M. Grigg, ‘World War One schemes 1916-18’, MS. Film 1006-reel 8 Grigg Papers, BoL Original MS held at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

doctrine writer at GHQ in 1917.<sup>63</sup> A fellow staff officer extolled his virtues when he remarked, ‘Without ever having soldiered before the War, he turned out to have very great natural genius in that direction’.<sup>64</sup> In the spring of 1918, the unprecedented step was taken to appoint Grigg GSO 1 of the Guards Division.

Undoubtedly, Grigg was a man of exceptional talent. Apart from being the only British volunteer officer to reach GSO 1, he was the first non-regular to join the staff of the Guards Division. This remained the case until Lord Edward Seymour, a ‘dug-out’, arrived in summer 1916. Grigg and Seymour were the only two non-regular officers to serve on the Guards staff during the war. The attitude towards non-regulars moving into the staff was typified by Bonham-Carter’s remarks in a letter to his sister:

I know there is a general idea that temporary officers are not given a chance on the staff out here. This is as a matter of fact quite untrue, as great efforts are made to find them. I think we shall have some more on the administrative staff soon, but I have only come across very few whose ability can compensate for the lack of grounding in military affairs – a grounding which is absolutely essential for success in the General Staff.<sup>65</sup>

There appears to be no evidence of any conscripted men becoming part of the G staff. They may have undertaken valuable service as clerks at formation HQs but seem not to have served as general staff officers.

The position in the Canadian and ANZAC formations was rather different. Three volunteer officers achieved promotion to GSO 1 positions compared to the single British equivalent. Montreal-born Duncan MacIntyre, a land agent pre-war, and land surveyor Johnston Parsons served with Canadian units while engineer Charles

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<sup>63</sup> J. Beach, ‘Issued by the General Staff: Doctrine Writing at British GHQ 1917-18’ *War in History* 19 (4) (2012), pp. 464-49.

<sup>64</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 132.

<sup>65</sup> Bonham-Carter to sister 23 March 1917, Correspondence 1 January 1917 to 19 March 1936 Bonham-Carter Papers 2/2, CCC.

Mitchell secured his post with Second Army. A far higher proportion of the officers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force [CEF] and the Australian Imperial Force [AIF] were non-regulars.<sup>66</sup> This was mirrored in the proportion found in their staff positions. Only three Canadian and four Australian general staff officers were regulars who had graduated from Camberley or Quetta.<sup>67</sup> A handful of Australian staff officers had attended the Royal Military College at Duntroon, Canberra. The twenty-three year old GSO 3 of Australian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, Captain George Wootten, trained at Duntroon. He proved a capable graduate, winning the DSO in 1917 and finishing the war as GSO 2 Australian 5<sup>th</sup> Division. In 1916, men like Wootten were in short supply.

Owing to the shortage of officers with staff training the Dominion formations needed to import officers from the British army. As the Australian *Official History* outlined when units first arrived in France in 1916:

It was unavoidable that a number of the higher staff officers, especially of the general staff, should be borrowed from the British, the trained Australian staff being very small and the number of officers to whom the actual planning of operations could be safely entrusted being still few.<sup>68</sup>

These British officers held influential positions with the staff during the initial period of Australian engagement on the Western Front but were gradually replaced as the war progressed. Brigadier-General Charles Gwyne from Dublin, a regular with over twenty-five years service, was senior staff officer with II ANZAC Corps until the end of 1917. Another British import was Winchester-educated Colonel S.S. Butler who served as GSO 2 with I ANZAC for twenty-one months before his promotion to Fifth Army in early 1918.

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<sup>66</sup> The majority had served in the local militia or were volunteers.

<sup>67</sup> These were A.H. Macdonnell, R.J.F. Hayter & A.E. Panet from Canada and T.A. Blamey, J.D. Lavarack, E.F. Harrison & C.B. White from Australia.

<sup>68</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918: Volume III–The Australian Imperial Force in France 1916* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941), Chapter Two, p. 46.

At divisional level there was similar evidence of British staff providing their expertise. Colonel Arthur Bridges, a Camberley graduate, had worked as an instructor at Duntroon before the war. He held senior staff posts with both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Divisions until early 1918 when he departed for a command position in Mesopotamia. Some Indian Army officers were also introduced into the Australian staff fold. The son of a Scottish M.P., Major L.F. Arthur, was a Staff College graduate and Indian Army officer who served for over a year as GSO 2 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Division.

The Canadian staffs were similarly leavened with British expertise. A recent study by Douglas Delaney has revealed how the British mentored the CEF with British staff officers serving in key positions.<sup>69</sup> He outlined how indigenous officers were gradually moved into staff posts within the Canadian formations over the course of the war. Most of the British staff being phased-out before the end of the war but some remained in key positions. The Canadian Corps had a British BGGs and Lieutenant-Colonel C.M. Hore-Ruthven of the Royal Highlanders was GSO 1 with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division. A similar pattern was evident in the ANZAC units with British staff being gradually replaced bar a few exceptions. The New Zealand Division had a British GSO 1, Robert Livesay in 1918, while the GSO 1 of 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Division at the end of the war was Arthur Ross, a British army regular who had been attached to the AIF. These British regulars served to bolster the Dominion staffs until they had developed their own skills and had sufficient experience of fighting on the Western Front. The blend of officers served these formations well.

Although many regulars moved from the regiments into the staff, a view prevailed in some quarters that staff officers existed as a race apart from the rest of the army. Despite the efforts of Harington and the Staff College mantra that

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<sup>69</sup> Delaney, 'Mentoring the Canadian Corps', pp. 931-53.

maintained the staff was there to help the troops, the relationship between them was strained.

### *A race apart*

In his opening address to new students at Camberley Staff College in 1913, Hugh Jeurwine cautioned, 'We must never let ourselves get into the habit – as some people do – of thinking of the staff as apart from the troops'.<sup>70</sup> Some four years later 'Tim' Harington took up the same theme in his lecture at Aldershot. He acknowledged ruefully there was a distance in the relationship between staff and regimental officers. According to Harington, the crux of the matter was, 'They ought to know each other as friends, and that in many cases is not so at present'.<sup>71</sup> Harington attributed these problems to the introduction of many 'untrained' officers into the staff necessitated by the huge expansion of the army. These officers had not benefitted from two years at Staff College and lacked an understanding of the fundamental principles of good staff work. He explained:

I don't say that our training as Staff Officers was good, but it was constantly rubbed in to us that we only existed for one purpose, viz to help the troops and that is a lesson which is not easy to rub in today to officers who have not had the same initial training.<sup>72</sup>

Colonel Cecil Allanson, GSO 1 of 57th Division, echoed these sentiments in his wartime diary: 'what is wanted is not only capable staff officers, but unselfish ones whose entire thought is for the troops'.<sup>73</sup> The problem was that while some staff may have thought their role was to serve the troops, the view from the front line seldom mirrored this as numerous critical first-hand accounts produced by soldiers

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<sup>70</sup> Jeurwine, Introductory Address to Junior Division Staff College 1913 p. 12, Jeurwine Papers 72/82/7, IWM.

<sup>71</sup> Harington, 'Relations of the Staff', p. 350.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 352.

<sup>73</sup> Allanson, Diary 19 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

testified. The staff gained few plaudits from the fighting formations. The finger of blame was frequently pointed in their direction when anything went wrong but accolades were notable by their absence when events unfolded according to plan.

The difficulties that prevailed between staff and the regiments were not unforeseen. In 1912, Thompson Capper had warned against insularity in the British army. He cited the French General Langlois: ‘The insularity of the army against which all armies have to guard was, in the English army carried to extremes’.<sup>74</sup> Capper conceded that this was a well-known trait: ‘Nobody who knows our army is unaware that the weak point is this insularity – insularity between arms, between units, and, up to a certain point, between the Staff and the troops themselves’.<sup>75</sup> Eradicating this mentality should lie at the core of staff training according to Capper:

The whole process of education should be to bear carefully in mind the abolition of this insularity, to try and get into the whole of our organisation the idea of a common working for a common end – the spirit of co-operation, and the spirit of unity.<sup>76</sup>

These were laudable aims but if anything the stresses and strains of warfare only served to compound attitudes engendered by insularity. A spirit of unity was something to aim for but staff officers needed to recognise that in the eyes of the troops it was practical measures that counted.

The 1912 Staff Manual was unequivocal as to how staff should assist the troops. It stated, ‘that the greatest possible help it is possible for staff officers to give commanders and troops lies in the efficient performance of their staff duties’.<sup>77</sup> After the war, Earl Stanhope who served for almost three years on the staff, recalled that

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<sup>74</sup> Capper, Lecture on Staff Duties 1912 p. 23, Capper Papers 2/4/4, LHCMA.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> General Staff Manual 1912, Chapter 1- General Principles for the Guidance of Staff Officers, p.8, WO 32/4731, TNA.



what troops wanted was, ‘that plans should be carefully and thoroughly thought out and that they should always be given “a good show”. This could only be achieved by much work and hard thinking based on accurate information’.<sup>78</sup> Another experienced staff officer who held a similar view was General Sir John Burnett-Stuart who observed, ‘Ensuring that staff work was of good quality was essential to maintaining good troop morale’.<sup>79</sup>

Officers such as Burnett-Stuart may have been aware of this issue but one of the manifold problems faced by the staff was the lack of tolerance towards any mistakes they made. Errors in staff work invariably had an impact upon those in fighting units. Harington summed this up neatly when he admitted, ‘It is the Regimental Officer who feels the pinch when Staff Officers make mistakes’.<sup>80</sup> The memoirs of former soldiers are littered with incidents highlighting what they saw as incompetent staff work. Lapses from the staff rarely went unnoticed. As Howard Spring, who served with the staff as a clerk, recollected:

A second lieutenant, making a bungle of a sortie, may lose the lives of half a dozen men and nothing be heard of it; but a staff blunder with its direful consequences, immediately – and rightly – raises hell. But do what you will about it; you will never have a staff of men who can make no mistakes.<sup>81</sup>

Burnett-Stuart was aware of the strain between the command team and the troops invoked by what many saw as the ‘safe’ conditions at headquarters.<sup>82</sup> The perception that the staff officer’s job was undertaken away from the fighting in comparative safety was certainly not unique to the First World War. As Lord Wavell, a former

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<sup>78</sup> Bond, *Stanhope*, p. 52.

<sup>79</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 77, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.

<sup>80</sup> Harington, ‘The Relations of the Staff’, p. 353.

<sup>81</sup> Spring, *In the Meantime*, p.112.

<sup>82</sup> Burnett-Stuart, Memoir p. 77, Burnett-Stuart Papers 3-6, LHCMA.

Brigade Major on the Western Front, later identified, 'The feeling between the regimental officer and the staff officer is as old as the history of fighting'.<sup>83</sup>

Harington was an evangelistic advocate of the credo that a staff officer was there to help the troops. In his post-war memoirs he declared that his team of staff officers were out all day visiting troops 'with the password; out to help, never to spy'.<sup>84</sup> This mantra was evident in a note distributed by Brigadier-General S.S. Hollond of XVIII Corps to his staff, 'Remember that you are the servant of the Divisions and are here to help'.<sup>85</sup> The distinctive red tabs of the uniform and the separate leave boats arranged for the staff did little to convey this idea to the troops.<sup>86</sup>

A key part of the staff role was the ability to move freely around the front lines but their visits often provoked suspicion. Captain George Roupell complained that his visits to the front line were often poorly received: 'C.O.'s etc., thought that one's whole object must be to find fault and send in an adverse report whereas our real object was to find out the real and actual conditions in the front line and help as far as possible'.<sup>87</sup> An artillery captain admonished the GSO 2 of 46th Division, Major Llewellyn Price-Davies, during an inspection of the front line in April 1915, as he did not have leave from the Colonel. This infuriated Price-Davies who remarked after the incident: 'Well a small matter you may say but it is sometimes difficult enough for a staff officer to go & see people & things without seeming to be spying on them & so a case of that kind is especially distressing'.<sup>88</sup> Despite the good intentions of Harington and others, those in the front line were often chary about visits from the staff. This

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<sup>83</sup> Wavell, *Other Men's Flowers*, p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> Harington, *Harington Looks Back*, p.54.

<sup>85</sup> Brigadier-General S.S. Hollond to Grigg 29 January 1917, MS. Film 1006 – reel 8 Grigg Papers, BoL/QUC.

<sup>86</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms*, p. 356

<sup>87</sup> Roupell to Liddle, Transcript of Interview 1971 p. 15, Roupell Papers GS1388, LCUL.

<sup>88</sup> Price-Davies to wife 17 April 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

only served to exacerbate the uneasy relationship between staff and their regimental colleagues.

Others took the view that staff visits were perfunctory affairs, conducted anonymously, which did nothing to help the troops. Wyn Griffith recalled these fleeting forays:

On rare occasions we were 'at home' to more distinguished visitors. The Divisional Commander, Staff Officers of the Division and Corps would move quietly and quickly through our trench in the early morning. We knew them not, save by their red tabs and badges of rank, but they asked no awkward questions and were easily entertained.<sup>89</sup>

Griffith's views are of particular interest as he bridged the divide, serving as both a staff and regimental officer. His description insinuates that these visits were carried out for the sake of appearance. They were of no practical value and the staff wanted to get them over with as quickly as possible. Assisting the troops was simply not part of the agenda. Accounts from the staff tell a different story. Stanhope made the point that though they were often reproached by troops for not coming into the trenches, 'staff officers often passed along unobserved'.<sup>90</sup> Staff could be forgiven for not wanting to attract unwanted enemy attention during their visits to the front line.

Some voiced considerable frustration at the attitude of the staff and what was seen as their slavish adherence to process.<sup>91</sup> There were others who took matters a stage further and questioned why staff officers were needed at all. In his memoirs, Major C.L.A. Ward-Jackson recalled the views of his friend Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Duncombe: 'Like all regimental officers he thinks it makes no difference

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<sup>89</sup> Griffith, *Up at Mametz*, p. 150.

<sup>90</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 52.

<sup>91</sup> Examples are numerous: see Griffith, *Up at Mametz*, pp. 241-244, Blunden, *Undertones of War*, p. 48 or Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 110.

whether there is any staff or not, though he is not so bigoted as some of them'.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, Captain Charles May of the Manchester Regiment had little regard for staff officers and was forthright in his criticism:

We had a young staff captain into lunch, a G.S.O.3 and another has just passed with a Brigadier. We cannot make it out – the system, if there is any system, by which these appointments are made. The chief essentials appear to be a Public School education and an ingratiating manner. Any such things such as character, military knowledge or leadership apparently do not enter into the contract at all. Influence I am afraid must play a large part also.<sup>93</sup>

It appears that May's opprobrium was largely directed at junior staff officers whose ideals he characterised as 'a determination to have as good time as possible and a bent for scandal about higher men'.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, this may have applied to a few of the staff and many of them, in common with their regimental counterparts, had attended public schools but this did not make them inefficient officers. The majority of staff officers were regulars who had served in the regiments and possessed considerable military experience. As Wyn Griffith wrote after the war: 'But it must not be forgotten that the great majority of the staff were at heart regimental officers; they were doing their best, serving in the posts wherever it was considered they would be most useful'.<sup>95</sup>

While many adopted a jaundiced view of the staff, this was not always the case. Harington's zealous approach to fostering a feeling of unity between staff and regimental officers appeared to have paid dividends if the testimony of Captain Cyril Falls, a junior staff officer in 36<sup>th</sup> Division, was anything to go by. Falls maintained: 'The sympathy and understanding which existed between the Staff of the Second Army and the man in the fighting line created a moral tone of incalculable value to

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<sup>92</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 31 August 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 330, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

<sup>93</sup> May, Diary 7 March 1916 to 24 April 1916 pp. 16-17, May Papers 91/23/4, IWM.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Griffith, *Up at Mametz*, p. 186.

the Army's efficiency as a striking force'.<sup>96</sup> Even Charles May was moved to describe his own Brigade Major, A.K. Grant, and Staff Captain, D.R. Turnbull, as 'topping officers'.<sup>97</sup>

A major bone of contention between the staff and the regiments was the issue of gallantry awards. Richard Holmes and Charles Messenger have identified some of the problems that arose from decorations awarded to the staff.<sup>98</sup> In his account of the Battle of Le Cateau in September 1914, Major Trevor of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Yorkshire Light Infantry, whose company suffered heavy casualties from enfilade fire, wrote, 'It is rather a significant fact that nobody on the Staff has yet been hit – outside the cavalry, and yet I suppose we shall see them reap all the honours while the regiments have to put up with very little recognition'.<sup>99</sup> Towards the end of 1915, the issue reared its head in a parliamentary speech by Lord St Davids who declared:

At a very early stage in the war I often heard regimental officers say that the difference between the service of an officer on the Staff and of a regimental officer was that on the Staff you got fifty per cent of the decorations and two and a-half per cent of the casualties, while the regimental officers got fifty per cent of the casualties and two and a-half per cent of the decorations. That was at a very early stage in the war. I think this state of things would be even more observable now.<sup>100</sup>

The Distinguished Service Order [DSO], awarded to many staff officers, may have been the catalyst for such comments. Although it was designated a gallantry medal for officers, it could also be received for administrative or non-combat duties.<sup>101</sup> As H.M. Dillon observed after one of his men was severely wounded during the storming of a

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<sup>96</sup> C. Falls, *The History of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division* (London: Constable, 1922), p. 87.

<sup>97</sup> May, Diary 7 March 1916 to 24 April 1916 p. 17, May Papers 91/23/4, IWM. May's battalion was part of 91<sup>st</sup> Brigade.

<sup>98</sup> Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 587 and Messenger, *Call to Arms*, pp. 480-484.

<sup>99</sup> Major Trevor to Gathorne-Hardy 26 September 1914, Gathorne-Hardy Papers 1/11, LHCMA. See also A. Conan-Doyle, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders 1914* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916), p. 103.

<sup>100</sup> Lord St Davids, House of Lords 16 November 1915, *Hansard* v20, pp. 359-60.

<sup>101</sup> P. Duckers, *British Military Medals* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Ltd, 2009), p. 133.

heavily fortified German position in 1916: ‘It makes me a little sad to think that people at Havre and Rouen get DSO’s and this chap who was a land agent only a few months ago will probably only get the MC’.<sup>102</sup> Growing resentment towards the award of the DSO to officers operating behind the lines resulted in a change to the guidelines. From the beginning of 1917, only those who were part of ‘fighting services’ and had displayed gallant conduct ‘in the face of the enemy’ were eligible for the DSO.<sup>103</sup> Disenchantment with the awards system was also expressed from within the staff. Phillip Howell complained, ‘The Honours gazette is the excitement of the moment – it always is rather *rot*: but seems to me rather worse than usual this time with dozens decorated who’ve *never* heard a shot!’<sup>104</sup>

Some staff officers may have received awards for lengthy or meritorious service but many were decorated for bravery. Major Arthur McNamara from Cork was serving as GSO 2 with 9<sup>th</sup> Division when awarded the DSO for his conduct on the Somme in 1916. His citation stated:

When acting as liaison officer between divisional headquarters and brigades he visited all brigade and battalion headquarters under very heavy shellfire. When both his orderlies were wounded he dressed their wounds under fire. After returning with his report he went out again, and when another orderly was wounded dressed his wounds also. While doing so a piece of shrapnel went through his own clothing.<sup>105</sup>

McNamara was decorated whilst serving as a staff officer. Captain John Monk was another. He was awarded a clasp to his MC for his work on the front line. His citation

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<sup>102</sup> Dillon to G.F-G 2 October 1916, Transcript p. 97, Dillon Papers 4430, IWM.

<sup>103</sup> Duckers, *British Medals*, pp. 133-4.

<sup>104</sup> Howell to wife 24 June 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/99-152, LHCMA.

<sup>105</sup> DSO citation for A.McNamara 1916 from Cowan, ‘Army Postings’; WO 390, TNA.

stated: ‘During the action he went round several times under heavy barrages to ascertain the situation, & his advice was invaluable to the advanced troops’.<sup>106</sup>

More commonplace among the staff were officers who received gallantry awards when serving with combat units before they moved into the staff. The Military Cross was awarded to over 350 G staff officers. A substantial proportion of the officers who served on the staff knew what it was like to be under fire and were certainly aware of conditions in the fighting zone. They had tasted combat and were able to identify with the experience of men in the front line.

Twenty-two recipients of the Victoria Cross [VC] served on the G staff during the war. Ten of these officers were decorated before 1914. Most of the remainder won the award while serving in command or combat positions. In 1914, Captain Phillip Neame was serving with the Royal Engineers when he was awarded the VC for his part in defending a captured German position.<sup>107</sup> He went on to serve as a GSO 3 with 8<sup>th</sup> Division before promotion to GSO 2 with XV Corps and First Army. Neame finished the war as GSO 1 of 30<sup>th</sup> Division. While Neame won his VC as a member of a fighting formation, a select few officers were honoured during their service with the staff. One of these was Major William Congreve who served as GSO 3 in 3<sup>rd</sup> Division before being promoted to Brigade Major. He was posthumously awarded the VC on the Somme in July 1916 at the age of twenty-five.<sup>108</sup> Congreve was the first officer to win the VC, DSO and MC. The first Territorial officer to be awarded the VC was Captain Geoffrey Woolley, who was later appointed GSO 3 in Third Army. When he was serving as a regimental officer in 1915, Woolley won the VC for his part in

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<sup>106</sup> Monk 4 November 1917, Extracts from letters p. 12, Monk Papers 01/59/1, IWM.

<sup>107</sup> For his own account of the action see Neame, *Playing with Strife*, p. 44.

<sup>108</sup> M. Arthur, *Symbol of Courage, a History of the Victoria Cross* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2004), p. 248.

resisting German attacks on Hill 60 in the Ypres Salient.<sup>109</sup> During the same action, twenty-three year old Irishman, Captain George Roupell was awarded the VC. Roupell went on to serve as a GSO 3 at Corps and Army before his promotion to GSO 2 in 1918.<sup>110</sup> These men displayed exceptional courage and were indicative of the combat experience that resided within the staff.

The available evidence shows that forty-seven of the 1,102 G staff [4.3 per cent] were killed in action [KIA] during the war, and eighteen suffered serious illness.<sup>111</sup> Thirty-seven of the fatalities were serving with the staff when they were killed [3.4 per cent]. This compares with a fatality rate of around fourteen per cent for officers across all theatres and twelve per cent for all ranks on the Western Front.<sup>112</sup> Surprisingly, over half of the staff fatalities were GSO 1 and 2, rather than the junior GSO 3 officers who were frequently up in the front lines. The GSO 1 of 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Lieutenant-Colonel James Longridge, an Indian Army regular, was killed on the Somme in August 1916. Shellfire directed at often conspicuous HQ buildings accounted for several of the deaths. In March 1916, Major Francis Daniell, GSO 1 of 21<sup>st</sup> Division was killed when he rushed to telephone the front brigades about an enemy bombardment that had just started. A shell came through a large window and burst in the hallway of the house that was serving as an HQ.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 207; Woolley took charge of the remaining thirty men holding the position and this group managed to repel several enemy counterattacks.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p. 206; Roupell refused to quit his post despite suffering from multiple wounds and later made his way under heavy fire to fetch reinforcements.

<sup>111</sup> This data has been drawn from the database that forms the foundation of this research and has been compiled from a range of different sources. See Introduction for details.

<sup>112</sup> War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort*, pp. 234-323. Total officer deaths across all theatres were just under 36,000 from a total of roughly 250,000 serving. A total of 32,822 officers were killed in France.

<sup>113</sup> Henderson, *Memoir*, p. 179, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.



Information on wounds is patchy and inconsistent but a best estimate would be that a minimum of 180 [sixteen per cent] G staff were wounded.<sup>114</sup> Many of these officers were wounded prior to taking a staff position. A well-known example was B.L. Montgomery. The future Field Marshal was seriously wounded at Méteren in October 1914.<sup>115</sup> Over a year later he returned to France to serve as a staff officer. Some senior staff expressed a preference for those who had experienced the front line to join their teams. During his time with Second Army, Cuthbert Headlam observed that the MGGs, ‘Tim’ Harington, ‘seems to prefer the wounded hero type of staff officer’.<sup>116</sup> Headlam queried the wisdom of such appointments remarking, ‘Personally I don’t see why because a regimental officer has been hit in the head or leg he is necessarily fitted to become a staff officer’.<sup>117</sup> Harington recognised that the value of these officers was their experience of fighting in the front line and their empathy with the troops. It was an important asset when planning operations.

Even the most senior officers courted danger in the forward areas. Johnnie Gough, MGGs of First Army, was hit by a sniper near Aubers Ridge in 1915 and died later from his wounds. He had ventured out to a position that was exposed to hostile fire. Another risky occupation was inspecting front-line trenches. Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Hill, GSO 1 of 8<sup>th</sup> Division, was the victim of a sniper when undertaking an inspection in September 1916.<sup>118</sup> In this sector of the Somme, German snipers were particularly accurate making movement in the open dangerous up to 1,000 yards from the front line.<sup>119</sup> This exposed anyone in the forward areas to the risk of death.

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<sup>114</sup> Information on wounds has been obtained from multiple sources. The principal sources were *Services of Military Officers 1920* and *Who Was Who*. Information was also obtained from Cowan, *Army Postings*, memoirs and diaries. There may be information on wounds that has gone unrecorded.

<sup>115</sup> Montgomery, Montgomery Papers BLM 1, IWM.

<sup>116</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 147.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> J.H. Boraston and C. Bax, *The Eighth Division in War 1914-1918* (London: The Medici Society Ltd, 1926), pp. 81-2.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

When some fresh officers arrived at his section of the front, senior staff officer Philip Howell was moved to write to his wife: ‘One, a Professor of History at a London University remarked yesterday that it seemed strange “to be sitting in a rat ridden dug out within 12 hours of Charing Cross and 1 second of eternity”’.<sup>120</sup> Just over a year later, Howell was killed by a shell splinter during a visit to a forward area near the Schwaben Redoubt. The staff may not have suffered the same degree of exposure to enemy action as combat units but they were certainly not insulated from danger.

### *Conclusion*

The staff underwent a dramatic change during the course of the war in terms of both numbers and the characteristics of the officers who served with it. The prodigious expansion in the size of the army altered the nature of the staff. From a small homogenous group, many of whom were educated and trained together, it became a blend of officers with a wider range of skills. Officers imported from the regiments offered combat and command experience. Territorials and volunteers possessed business and professional expertise. ‘Dug-outs’ brought back to serve had knowledge gained through often lengthy military service.

The changing complexion of the staff mirrored developments during the war, as artillery and engineering staff were introduced into the planning teams at Army, Corps and Division. While significant change was witnessed, the staff, unlike the wider army, remained a group of predominantly regular officers. A limited number of non-regulars were introduced but for the most part they inhabited the lower staff grades. A ceiling appeared to be imposed upon their career progression. It was regimental officers without the benefit of Staff College training who formed the

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<sup>120</sup> Howell to wife 4 September 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/219a, LHCMA.

mainstay of the staff. By the end of war, although officers with the psc qualification were in a distinct minority the staff was still largely the preserve of the regular officer.

Those officers who were trained at Camberley or Quetta became a precious commodity. Preserving their skills was critical not just for efficient performance but so they could train others. GHQ considered it a priority to retain them on the staff rather than sanction a move away to a command position with a combat unit. Often to the frustration of these officers they were prevented from joining the fray. Much of the stigma attached to the staff has been based on a perception they were a race apart sheltered from many of the hardships and dangers of warfare. This narrative is undermined by those officers who sought to leave the staff for the front line but were prevented from doing so. It fails to acknowledge that many of the staff were officers who had previously experienced combat and were well aware of what it was like to be subjected to hostile fire.

The bulk of the staff consisted of regimental officers with military experience who had served in the front line. As Charles May, no advocate for their cause, remarked: 'Thank heaven that *some* of our Staff know from personal experience what it is like to have hot iron flying about their ears'.<sup>121</sup> If there was a gap between staff and regimental officers, it was narrower than has been portrayed. It was borne out of the insularity of different functions rather than any divergence in characteristics or experience. There were many common strands.

The staff of 1918 was a very different body from the tight-knit group of officers of August 1914. The magnitude of expansion and the incorporation of a large number of untrained officers forced to learn on the job presented many challenges. It

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<sup>121</sup> May, Diary 13 June 1916, Diary No4 25 April 1916 to 20 June 1916, p. 39, May Papers IWM.

was testimony to the professionalism of the staff that despite all these changes they were able to learn, adapt and remain focused on defeating the enemy.

The changing staff presented many officers with opportunities to move up the career ladder and join different formations. A staff officer with an army may have played a very different role from one with a division. Teams were established and then dismantled as their members were needed elsewhere. Some teams remained intact, others moved with their GOC. Tracing these career moves illuminates how the staff structure operated and highlights the achievements of individual officers. It was another aspect of the staff that was intrinsic to the way it evolved during the war.

# Chapter Six

## Teams and Careers

The huge increase in the number of staff posts created by the expansion of the army from 1914/18 provided opportunities for many. At the end of the war, Brigadier John Dill reflected:

During the last four years, and especially during the last two years, a large number of General Staff Officers have been promoted, transferred to Commands, found inefficient, or have become casualties from any other cause; and consequently, there have been opportunities for advancement for General Staff Officers which have not been within the reach of their contemporaries of the Administrative Staff.<sup>1</sup>

Trained staff found they were much in demand and capable performers were able to ascend the career ladder rapidly. New officers were brought in from the regiments and learned the skills needed for the staff. Other beneficiaries were the Territorials, ‘dug-outs’ and volunteers who were offered the chance to develop their expertise to swell the ranks of the staff. With such an abundance of opportunity it was hardly surprising that career moves became a pre-occupation for some officers. This led one senior figure to comment, ‘The trouble with pretty nearly all staff officers is that they cannot talk of anything at all but appointments and the War’.<sup>2</sup>

Staff needed to work in close co-operation with their GOC and the relationship between them was an important element in the planning process. The establishment of new formations in the burgeoning British army led to the creation of additional staff teams and changes of personnel as officers moved on to other jobs. Some teams proved more durable than others, some more harmonious. This chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Dill, ‘Reorganisation of Staff Work in the Field’, p. 2, Dill Papers 1/11, LHCMA.

<sup>2</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 20 July 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 291, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

will use personal testimony to delve into selected relationships between senior staff officers and their commanders. This partnership was a key element in the development of an effective command team. As Major Eric Harrison, GSO 2 with 58<sup>th</sup> Division, remarked, ‘So often I have seen in my service the value of a chief staff officer, probably with different characteristics from his General, combining to make an excellent team’.<sup>3</sup>

Differences in the stability and longevity of staff teams across formations will be reviewed with a particular focus upon the links between the GOC and his staff. This was sometimes evident in the ways their careers developed with some staff and the GOC moving together. The machinations of the appointments system are outlined to determine how they affected the movement of staff. The impartiality of the system was compromised by the influence of patronage and there were grounds to believe that some individuals may have benefitted in career terms. An analysis of how the staff evolved needs to examine how they performed on the route to victory. The final year of the war witnessed a succession of Allied victories and how the staff handled the challenges presented by the return of movement combined with set piece operations will be assessed. After victory was achieved, a post-mortem was carried out and the workings of the staff subjected to scrutiny. How their performance was rated and the recommendations for future improvement are considered. While these events lie at the end of the war, it is appropriate to begin an exploration of the profile of the staff with an examination of their collective biography. Analysis of the backgrounds of the men who served within the staff should reveal key trends and common traits. It provides another opportunity to investigate how the characteristics of the staff changed over the course of more than four years of fighting.

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<sup>3</sup> Harrison, *Gunners*, pp. 41-2.

## *Background*

The biggest challenge in analysing biographical details of the 1,102 G branch staff has been the availability of data. Caution needs to be exercised as some calculations have been based on samples of the total population. The depth of the samples has varied dependent upon the factors measured. In all cases they have been large enough to justify drawing conclusions or providing strong indications of a trend. The analysis covers four key areas; education, regimental affiliation, age and length of military service. Research by Robbins has examined some of these factors across the High Command of the British army using a sample of 700 senior officers including staff at MGGS, BGGs and GSO 1 levels.<sup>4</sup> This investigation aims to extend that work by focusing exclusively upon the staff, providing more detail on the higher grades and extending coverage down to the GSO 2 and GSO 3 levels.

A public school education was a popular choice for British army officers. During the South African War of 1899-1902 some forty-one per cent of regular army officers were drawn from what were known colloquially as the 'ten great public schools'.<sup>5</sup> Eton College alone provided eleven per cent.<sup>6</sup> Fifteen years later the picture was little changed with just over half of the senior officers of the army having attended the ten leading public schools.<sup>7</sup> It was a similar story within the G staff. A high proportion still came from public schools with the 'great ten' making an above average contribution. Again, Eton registered the largest share, providing fourteen per cent of the 1,102 G staff.<sup>8</sup> [Appendix 6] Following behind but taking less than half of

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<sup>4</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> A.H.H. Maclean, *Public Schools in the War in South Africa 1899-1902* (London: Edward Stanford, 1903). See Appendix 6.

<sup>6</sup> Eton had a higher number of pupils in each intake than other public schools and a larger proportion of them went on to serve as army officers.

<sup>7</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, pp. 205-6.

<sup>8</sup> This accords with Robbins' research that credited Eton with a 13.3% share of the top 700 officers.

Eton's share was Winchester, Wellington College, Harrow School and Cheltenham College.<sup>9</sup> It was likely that a substantial number of the general staff were educated at grammar schools but these records are more difficult to access. Among the handful represented were Bristol, Bedford and Harrogate schools. In terms of schooling, there was no significant difference between the staff and the army's regular officers.

Many officers had attended the same schools and found familiar faces on the staff of their formations. Freddie Maurice was a former pupil at St. Paul's and noted, 'I find that six of the 3<sup>rd</sup> divisional and brigade staffs were at the school'.<sup>10</sup> In mid-1916, the staff officers of the Guards Division were all Old Etonians. The GSO 1, Cecil Heywood and GSO 2, Lord Edward Seymour, were at Eton together. The GSO 3, Captain Henry Aubrey-Fletcher, was a few years younger but they would have almost certainly had acquaintances in common. Owing to the high representation from Eton this pattern was replicated in other formations. Many Old Etonians could be found on the staffs of cavalry units.<sup>11</sup> Former pupils of Winchester [Wykehamists] populated the staff of 36th Division in 1916/17. The GSO 3 G.J. Bruce worked with Major S.R. Shirley and Lieutenant-Colonel Wilfred Spender, both GSO 2 officers from his old school. The GOC at the time was Major-General Oliver Nugent, an Old Harrovian. Encountering friends from school or colleagues from Staff College was nothing unusual in the early phase of the war when the staff was still a small group of officers with similar profiles.

Another link between staff officers stemmed from their time in further education. The data sample indicates that eighty-seven officers, nearly eight per cent of the G staff, were university graduates. Here regular officers were in the minority as

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<sup>9</sup> Data for Eton and Winchester was taken from their respective War Service Rolls and applies across all 1,102 G staff whereas data for the other schools was drawn from a sample of 563 staff.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice to wife 20 January 1915, Maurice Papers 3/1/4/72, LHCMA.

<sup>11</sup> Almost 15% of the Old Etonians on the G staff served with cavalry units.



over two-thirds of these men were volunteers or Territorial soldiers. The proportion suggests that men with proven academic ability and intelligence were earmarked for the staff. The majority of these graduates hailed from Oxbridge. Closer examination shows that forty-three were from Oxford, twelve of whom were alumni of New College. Lieutenant-Colonel 'Bertie' Fisher, E.W.M. Grigg and Captain Geoffrey Gathorne-Hardy all studied there in the late 1890s. Gathorne-Hardy was the cousin of John Gathorne-Hardy who served as BGGGS XIV Corps during the war. In 1899, Geoffrey became President of the Oxford Union Society. Some ten years later, Captain the Hon Denzil Fortescue, Major G.J. Bruce and Captain the Hon Hugh Gough were all fellow New College students.

Former students of Trinity College dominated the Cambridge contingent of twenty-four officers who served with the staff. Fourteen of them were alumni of Trinity. Four of this group went up between 1903 and 1906. After graduation they pursued disparate professions but all eventually became serving staff officers. They were Major John Buchanan, lawyer; Captain Ronald Hambro, merchant banker; Major A.E. Anderson, regular soldier and Major Leonard Dent, Territorial soldier. Although none of these Oxbridge graduates served together on the same staff team they were still likely to have encountered each other in conferences, meetings or visits. They were illustrative of the common connections enjoyed by many of the staff.

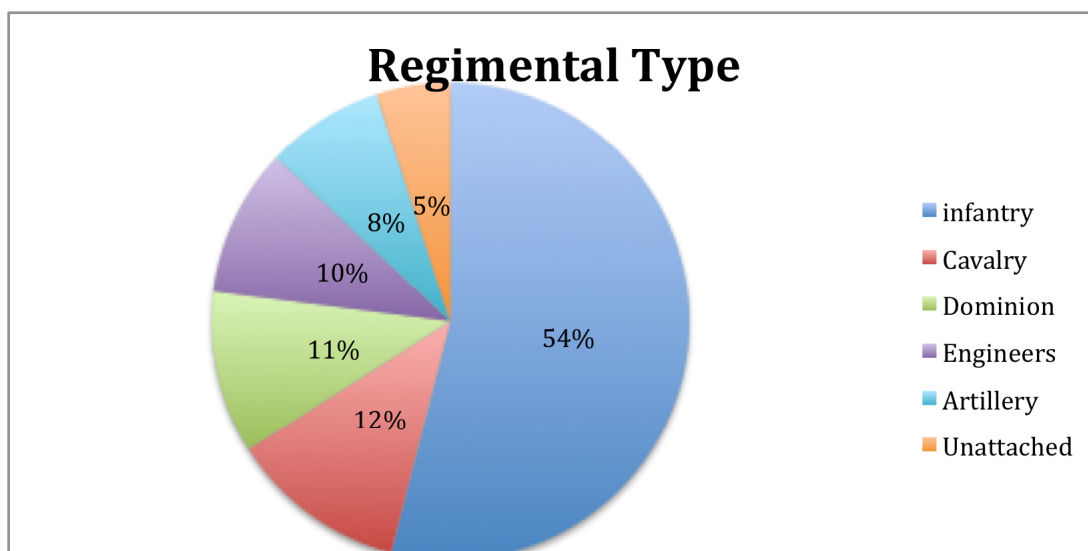
The remaining twenty graduates included former students from Dublin, Glasgow, Manchester, Melbourne, and Toronto universities. These officers consisted of regular soldiers, Territorials and volunteers. Among them was George Milne, a graduate of the University of Aberdeen, a regular artillery officer who went on to become MGGGS Second Army in 1915. Roland Thornton was a volunteer, educated at

Marlborough College and Oxford. He joined the staff in late 1916 as GSO 3 with 20<sup>th</sup> Division and the following year was promoted to GSO 2 VII Corps. A fellow staff officer described his arrival there: ‘a man called Thornton has come into the office from the 20th Division. And a very nice fellow he seems to be and very quiet as well. Fortescue tells me he is a fellow of Balliol College Oxford’.<sup>12</sup> Another Oxford graduate who joined the staff was the twenty-four year old Captain Ivan Snell. A Territorial soldier from London who was called to the Bar in 1909, Snell joined Fourth Army as GSO 3 in 1916 and finished the war as GSO 2 with 15<sup>th</sup> Division. These men may not have possessed profiles typical of a general staff officer but their promotions and lengthy service records suggested they proved themselves more than capable.

The regimental background of the general staff shows that just over half of them came from the infantry. Cavalry officers were next with a twelve per cent share. The artillery and engineers were well represented. These were technical arms that generally attracted many of the more intelligent officers. They would have been considered capable of handling the intricacies of staff work. Their presence indicated a selection process for new staff that aimed to bring in those officers judged to be best suited for the work. As the artillery staff was almost exclusively composed of gunners there are grounds for arguing that the training at R.M.A. Woolwich provided a better foundation for staff work than the officer training at Sandhurst. Figure 13 outlines the representation by type of regiment.

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<sup>12</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 26 August 1917, Extracts from Letters p. 565, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM. Captain Denzil Fortescue was GSO 3 VII Corps.



**Figure 13: G Staff by regimental type.**

Within the infantry there was a group of regiments that boasted a particularly high level of representation among the general staff. The Rifle Brigade, the King's Royal Rifle Corps [KRRC] and Royal Fusiliers were the most popular. The Grenadier and Coldstream Guards also scored highly. Some of the traits of these regiments provide indications about the type of officers that formed the staff. Before the war, regiments were particular about recruiting officers from similar social backgrounds to ensure a degree of compatibility in the mess.<sup>13</sup> The KRRC had a reputation for recruiting Old Etonians.<sup>14</sup> The elite Guards regiments were renowned for the social standing of their officers. The staff certainly had its share of aristocrats and minor nobility. The Prince of Wales, who joined the Grenadier Guards in 1914, served as GSO 3 with XIV Corps and Prince Arthur of Connaught served as a staff officer. A number of Lords and Earls served on the general staff together with a host of baronets.<sup>15</sup> Lord Loch was a member of the Grenadier Guards and Lord Glyn, who served with 57<sup>th</sup> Division and XV Corps, came from the Rifle Brigade. The future

<sup>13</sup> D. French, *Military Identities*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> These officers were an assortment of those who inherited titles and those awarded them later in life.

Prime Ministers Sir Anthony Eden and Sir Harold Macmillan both served as staff officers. Appendix 7 shows a breakdown of the general staff by regiment.

The Rifle Brigade and KRRC were seen as rather exclusive regiments. Together with the Household Brigade their ability to attract titled officers and royal patrons outstripped all other regiments.<sup>16</sup> Later they merged to become the Royal Green Jackets. They were known for their quick step, open order tactics and perceived as reluctant to conform to standard drill.<sup>17</sup> These two rifle regiments prided themselves on their marksmanship and standard of training. The unconventional green and black uniform of the Rifle Brigade was another factor that singled them out. Several members of the Rifle Brigade attained influential positions in the upper echelons of the British army during the war. Sir Henry Wilson became CIGS, J.E. Gough was BGGs I Corps, H.M. Wilson was a senior staff officer and future general, R.B. Stephens became a general while Walter Congreve was a VC winner.<sup>18</sup> The high proportion of staff officers from the Royal Fusiliers could be attributed to the sheer number of battalions the regiment raised together with their recruiting area that included the City of London. All of these regiments had a degree of elitism and exclusivity about them. Some of this was imported into the staff.

The majority of the G staff, around sixty per cent, gained their first experience of warfare on the Western Front. [Appendix 8] The average military service record in 1914 was just over twelve years based upon available data but this excluded many of the younger, junior officers introduced during the course of the war. As the war progressed the proportion of staff with pre-war military service decreased. Previous research has shown that eighty-two per cent of the senior officers of the BEF had

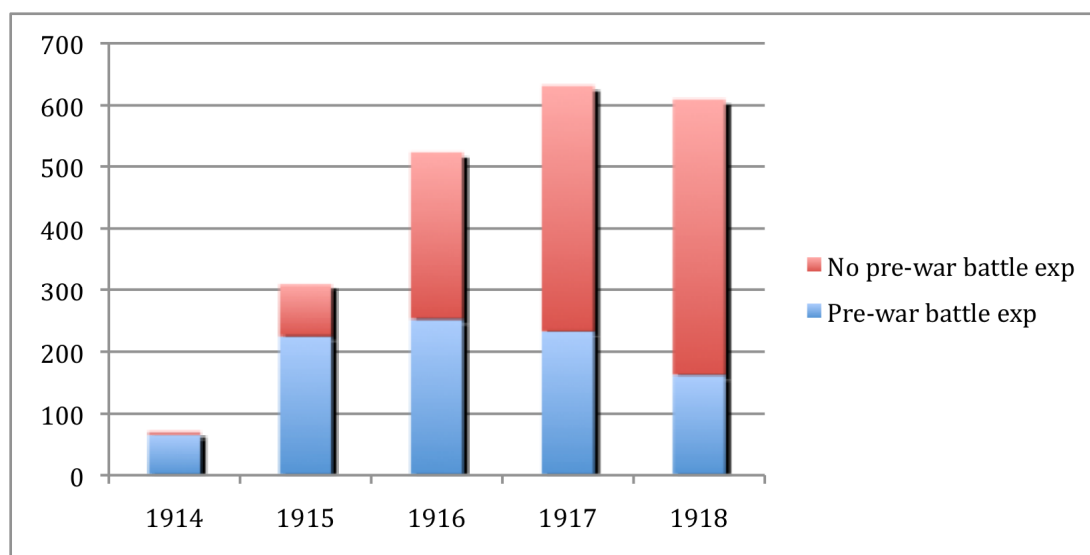
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<sup>16</sup> French, *Military Identities*, p. 166

<sup>17</sup> A. Bryant, *Jackets of Green, A Study of the History, Philosophy, and Character of the Rifle Brigade* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 181.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

battle experience prior to 1914.<sup>19</sup> Most of them gained that experience in the South African war. Within the G staff in 1914, the equivalent was ninety-one per cent. By 1918 that figure had dropped to twenty-six per cent. Figure 14 illustrates the pace of this change.



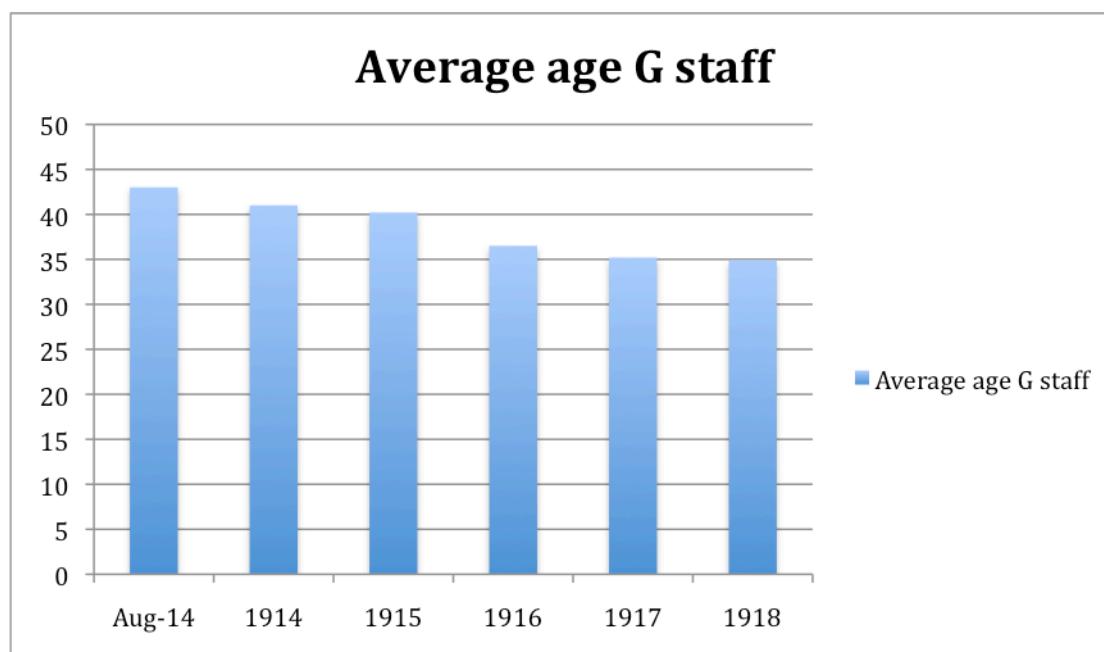
**Figure 14: G staff with pre-war battle experience**

The key caveat was that most of the young officers who moved into the staff had previously belonged to fighting formations. While they had not experienced combat before 1914 they were familiar with the war being waged on the Western Front or in other contemporary theatres such as Gallipoli. This knowledge was instrumental in developing the staff skills they needed for this current conflict.

The available data on the age demographic of the G staff points to a change over the course of the war and differences across grades. [Appendix 9] Overall, staff officers became younger though the older, more experienced men populated the senior jobs. The average age of a general staff officer during the war was around

<sup>19</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship*, p. 209.

thirty-seven.<sup>20</sup> As shown in Figure 15, average age fell progressively over each year of the conflict:



**Figure 15: Average age of G staff by year**

At the outbreak of war the average age of a staff officer was forty-three. By 1918 it was less than thirty-five.<sup>21</sup> The prime cause was the transfer of younger regular officers from the regiments who were not pre-war attendees at Staff College. This combined with the introduction of Territorials and volunteers who tended to be younger men.

Significant variations in age were evident across the different staff posts. The more senior posts tended to be occupied by the older officers. An MGGS had an average age of almost forty-five and a typical BGGs was just over forty-one. At GSO 1 level the average fell to under forty and in the most junior post of GSO 3 it was a little under thirty years old. As officers gained experience and developed their expertise they were able to climb the career ladder. The more responsible positions

<sup>20</sup> This represents the mid point between the average age of 43 in 1914 and 35 in 1918. It is an approximation however as age data is available for a diminishing number of the staff as the war progressed as shown in Appendix 9.

<sup>21</sup> The average age was probably lower than thirty-five as the sample does not include data from many of the more junior officers who were largely younger men.

tended to be held by those with the most experience and years of service. This was not always the case as behind the averages lay some significant variations in both age and military experience.

When G.S. Barrow was appointed MGGS of First Army in early 1916 he was almost fifty-two years old with over thirty years of military experience behind him. At the other end of the spectrum were C.B White and Louis Vaughan, both ten years younger with considerably shorter military records. These two officers were indicative of the meritocracy the staff had become by 1918, at least for regular officers. White had been promoted after his outstanding work as BGGs with the ANZAC Corps. Vaughan had worked his way up from GSO 2 with 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in 1914. He was known for his emphasis on developing his staff teams to operate to exacting standards. Major Phillip Currie was GSO 3 in Vaughan's team at XV Corps and testified to his insistence on intensive training, which included a 'drill' for the timely issuing of operational orders.<sup>22</sup> There were other examples of precocious talent a rung lower down the ladder, at BGGs level.

In 1918, Brigadier-General Thomas Blamey was appointed senior staff officer with the Australian Army Corps at the age of just thirty-four. He only joined the army in 1906, attending the Staff College at Quetta in 1912. Blamey's remarkable career continued to flourish after the war as he served as a General in the Second World War and was promoted to Field Marshal in 1950.<sup>23</sup> Two other officers who attained the level of BGGs in their thirties were Norman Webber with the Canadian Corps and R.H. Kearsley who served with VI Corps for sixteen months until the end of the war. Kearsley was a cavalry officer and Brigade Major with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Brigade in

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<sup>22</sup> Major P.J.R. Currie to J.E. Edmonds 23 April 1930, CAB 45/132, TNA. See Simpson, *Directing Operations*, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> For a full account of Blamey's career see D. Horner, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* v13, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

1914. His talent was palpable from these early days as his commander recalled: 'I returned to my H.Q. and got that best of Staff officers, Harvey Kearsley, to issue orders for the attack'.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to these younger men there was a clutch of officers who were over fifty when they took up a BGGS post. The oldest of these were Hugh Jeudwine at V Corps and Havelock Hudson of the Indian Corps.

At GSO 1 level the age range stretched from men who were over fifty years old down to a select band under thirty. This latter group numbered just two officers; Lieutenant-Colonel William Bertram who served as GSO 1 with two different Canadian formations and Phillip Neame VC who became GSO 1 30<sup>th</sup> Division in summer 1918. Just over the age of thirty were future Field Marshal, B.L. Montgomery, who became GSO 1 47<sup>th</sup> Division and F.P. Nosworthy, GSO 1 with 66<sup>th</sup> Division. Both men had attended the wartime staff course at Hesdin under Bonham-Carter. Nosworthy was described as having 'tremendous drive, considerable imagination and great personal courage'.<sup>25</sup> He served in the staff team led by Phillip Howell at II Corps and was highly regarded. Howell remarked, 'The worst of it is that he's too good to keep so I'm trying to push him on'.<sup>26</sup>

The junior staff positions featured some very young officers. Remarkably, Major J.W.G. Wyld became GSO 2 with 35<sup>th</sup> Division in his early twenties. Oxford graduate Major John Bevan achieved a comparable position with XI Corps at the same age. The youngest Brigade Major during the war was the well-documented case of future Prime Minister Anthony Eden. The lesser-known Captain Alexander Abercrombie held a GSO 3 post at First Army at the age of twenty making him the youngest general staff officer of the war. He was wounded at Ypres in 1915 and later

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<sup>24</sup> J. Vaughan, *Cavalry and Sporting Memories* (Bala: R. Evans & Son, 1954), p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Howell to wife 16 August 1916, Howell Papers 6/1/334, LHCMA.



that year won the DSO at Hohenzollern Redoubt. He died of wounds at the end of 1918.

### *Teams and turnover*

The relationship between the GOC and his senior general staff officer stood at the centre of each command team.<sup>27</sup> Personal testimony reveals that these ranged from the harmonious to the dysfunctional. Caution needs to be exercised with encomiums written by staff about their departing senior officers as some may have been crafted to curry favour, though the examples used here appear to be genuinely heartfelt. When Colonel S.S. Butler was promoted to a GSO 1 role with Fifth Army in early 1918 he parted company with the genial General William Birdwood. He had worked with Birdwood for almost three years and expressed his remorse at the conclusion of their work together:

This meant promotion of course, and the job was one which entailed great responsibility, but it was a great wrench having to leave my friends of the ANZAC Corps with whom I had served since 1915. Most of all, I was sad at leaving my dear chief Birdie, to whom I was devoted and who had been so wonderfully kind to me and mine.<sup>28</sup>

Butler clearly held Birdwood in high esteem and in many cases such respect was reciprocated. A capable staff was a key asset for any commander. Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng made clear his appreciation of the work undertaken by his accomplished GSO 2, Major John Dill, when he left the Canadian Corps in February 1917:

I do not like to think that you should leave my Corps without my trying to tell you how much I have appreciated your splendid work.

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<sup>27</sup> The command team is defined here as the GOC and senior formation commanders together with the G staff, artillery staff, engineers, senior A and senior Q staff officers. This group of offices would be brought together at conferences or regular briefings.

<sup>28</sup> Butler, Memoir Part Two-France 1916-18, Butler Papers PP/MCR 107-1, IWM.

The only point seems to be that you made it too easy for me, and everything you did seemed to want nothing but approval.<sup>29</sup>

The working relationship between Colonel C.J. Allanson, GSO 1 of 57<sup>th</sup> Division, and his commander, Lieutenant-General Robert Broadwood, appeared to be equally congenial. Allanson remarked, 'I had his complete confidence, we never had anything but the friendliest argument over any subject and he supported me in everything I did'.<sup>30</sup> After Broadwood was killed, together with three of his staff, crossing a railway bridge, Allanson was moved to declare, 'I lose my chief and a great personal friend'.<sup>31</sup> His despair was evident when he added, 'I now have to begin everything all over again with a new man'.<sup>32</sup>

The much-vaunted Tim Harington, senior staff officer at Second Army, developed a particularly close working relationship with his commander, General Herbert Plumer. Harington eulogised:

He was like a father to me. We had been together for two years through good and bad times, in the defence of the Ypres Salient. It was a great privilege to serve under a chief like him – so thoughtful for those under him, so human, so thorough, so determined to give himself and to get the best out of everyone under him.<sup>33</sup>

The team at Second Army benefitted from this solid foundation and attracted a good deal of admiration. Edward Beddington was GSO 1 at 8<sup>th</sup> Division when he was attached there to help plan the attack on Messines Ridge. He described his experience in glowing terms: 'I found Tim Harington delightful to work for, he never interfered and I could always go to him over anything that troubled me'.<sup>34</sup> Beddington put

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<sup>29</sup> Lieutenant-General J. Byng to Dill 1 February 1917, Dill Papers 1/2 LHCMA.

<sup>30</sup> Allanson, Diary 22 June 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Harington, *Harington Looks Back*, p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> Beddington, Memoir pp. 94-5, Beddington Papers, LHCMA.

together a plan for the attack at Messines and then presented it to Plumer and Harington.

Earl Stanhope was full of praise for the team at Second Army: ‘The staff was a very fine one and well-balanced’.<sup>35</sup> He considered Harington to be ‘extremely quick and full of initiative’ while the fifty-one year old GSO 1, Lieutenant-Colonel W. Robertson was ‘a very able man of a more cautious temperament’.<sup>36</sup> The GSO 2 was Major T.L. Soutry, a South African war veteran, who Stanhope considered to be, ‘extremely precise, methodical and hard-working’.<sup>37</sup> The team had complimentary skills and worked well together. In Stanhope’s opinion ‘All of them were easy to work with, had a very pleasant manner and were liked by subordinate staffs’.<sup>38</sup>

Achieving a good balance was critical in an effective command team. Eric Harrison observed that when the dynamic Hubert Gough was GOC at I Corps his senior staff officer acted as an effective counterbalance: ‘While General Cobbe VC was his Chief of Staff it was a powerful combination, as Cobbe acted as the brake; it was unfortunate that this happy partnership did not last long’.<sup>39</sup> The partnership was dissolved after just six months when Cobbe moved to become Director of Staff Duties in India. Later in the war, the pairing of Gough and his MGGS, Neill Malcolm, at Fifth Army proved notoriously unpopular, as they were both such headstrong characters: ‘They were not such a happy family as Second Army, nor were they as well liked by the troops’.<sup>40</sup> A similar problem was evident with the ebullient Lieutenant-General Edmund Allenby and his BGGs, Hugh Jeudwine, at V Corps in 1915. In the opinion of one staff officer, they proved a poor combination as, ‘both of

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<sup>35</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 142.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Harrison, *Gunners*, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 88.

them gingered people up with the result that at this time the Corps was extremely unpopular'.<sup>41</sup>

If one mark of a capable staff team was a blend of different skills, another was the ability to get on well with subordinate staffs. During his time as GSO 2 of 46<sup>th</sup> Division, Major Llewellyn Price-Davies noted that the senior staff officer in II Corps, Brigadier-General Bill Furse, had paid compliment to the work of the staff team. According to Price-Davies, this was due to the solid relationship they had built with the brigade staffs. He wrote, 'We have broken down all that distrust I hope & not by overlooking failure as we have always let them know it quick enough when things were not up to the mark'.<sup>42</sup> The staff team at 46<sup>th</sup> Division may have been effective but it only stayed together for around five months. The GSO 1, Frank Lyon, was promoted to serve as BGGs with VII Corps while Price-Davies eventually secured his desired move to command a fighting formation. An underlying motive for their moves may have been their relationship with the GOC.

Though Price-Davies and Lyon worked well together they appeared to have scant regard for their GOC, Major-General Edward Stuart-Wortley. He was described as someone who

never asks an intelligent question! And he is so restless. Always wanting to be on the go. Not really working but going riding or going to see some little thing. However I think he would not go against our advice. He is not pigheaded.<sup>43</sup>

Implicit was the notion that the staff held sway and managed Stuart-Wortley to prevent him causing too much damage. Lyon's successor, Phillip Game, also found himself less than enamoured with Stuart-Wortley whom he described as 'a dreadful

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Price-Davies to wife 28 April 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 21 April 1915.

whiner'.<sup>44</sup> The inference that the staff effectively marginalised the GOC was rather more explicit at III Corps. When Charles Bonham-Carter arrived there in summer 1917, he described how his predecessor, Brigadier Cecil Romer left him some instructions regarding the GOC, Sir William Pulteney. Apparently, the note from Romer stated 'Never let Putty out of your sight. If you do he will either give an order you cannot carry out, or give a promise which you cannot fulfil. I followed his advice as much as possible'.<sup>45</sup> Despite these misgivings, Pulteney remained at the helm until early 1918 – a tenure of more than three years.

As BGS of the Cavalry Corps, Phillip Howell frequently voiced his frustration with the behaviour of his GOC, Sir Julian Byng. In Howell's opinion, Byng suffered from a lack of activity and involvement. He complained, 'He is *so* slow: just potters about: never learning quite what he wants to see & do: & spending ages doing or looking at nothing'.<sup>46</sup> The situation got little better following Byng's replacement by Lieutenant-General Hew Fanshawe. Howell had served in India with Fanshawe and thought little of him: 'I was on his staff in 1909 & 1910 & even in those days he was more wholly in the hands of his staff than any general I've ever served with: never gave an order of any sort'.<sup>47</sup> Others may have shared Howell's opinion as Fanshawe was only in post for a brief period before moving to V Corps from which he was eventually dismissed.

Sometimes it was a surfeit of activity from the GOC that provoked frustration in his staff. Major Patrick Butler remarked that during his time at 7<sup>th</sup> Division, the GOC, General Thompson Capper, spent little time at his HQ. His staff complained, 'he was far too little at the end of the wire, or rather at the *centre* of all wires but miles

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<sup>44</sup> Game to mother 22 August 1915, Game Papers PWG/6 reel 2, IWM.

<sup>45</sup> Bonham-Carter, Memoir Chapter IX p. 1, Bonham-Carter Papers 9/2, CCC.

<sup>46</sup> Howell to wife 31 July 1915, Howell Papers 6/1/99-152, LHCMA.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid 16 August 1915.

away in front, practically in the firing line'.<sup>48</sup> It was difficult for staff to express any explicit disapproval. Butler recalled that when one officer had the temerity to question Capper's behaviour he provoked the rejoinder, 'I know what's wrong with my Staff. I've not had enough of them hit yet!'<sup>49</sup> Within the command team, the staff often needed to be flexible and manage the relationship with the GOC to their best advantage.

While some GOCs seemed content to let their staff operate with little supervision, others were far more hands-on. Earl Cavan, the GOC of the Guards Division, was very much the dominant force. His ADC, Cuthbert Headlam declared, 'He runs the whole thing and his staff are merely clerks and errand boys'.<sup>50</sup> Colonel T.T. Grove was GSO 1 with 6<sup>th</sup> Division when a new GOC, Major-General T.O. Marder, took up his post in 1917. Grove recollected that Marder was not easy to serve under as he was often ready with criticism but 'I was fortunate to gain his trust and we got on very well together'.<sup>51</sup> Their amicable relationship was only threatened when the issue of who was in control arose: 'That was when I had issued an order without previous submission to him. I had thought the matter too trivial to worry him about'.<sup>52</sup> Other GOCs fretted about leaving matters to their staff and would take over the work themselves. Price-Davies experienced this trait when he worked on the staff in 1915: 'The General, as normal, fussed like mad getting the corps into position. He does all the staff work on these occasions'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> P.R. Butler, *A Galloper at Ypres* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1920), pp. 118-119. The following year Capper was killed in action at Loos.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

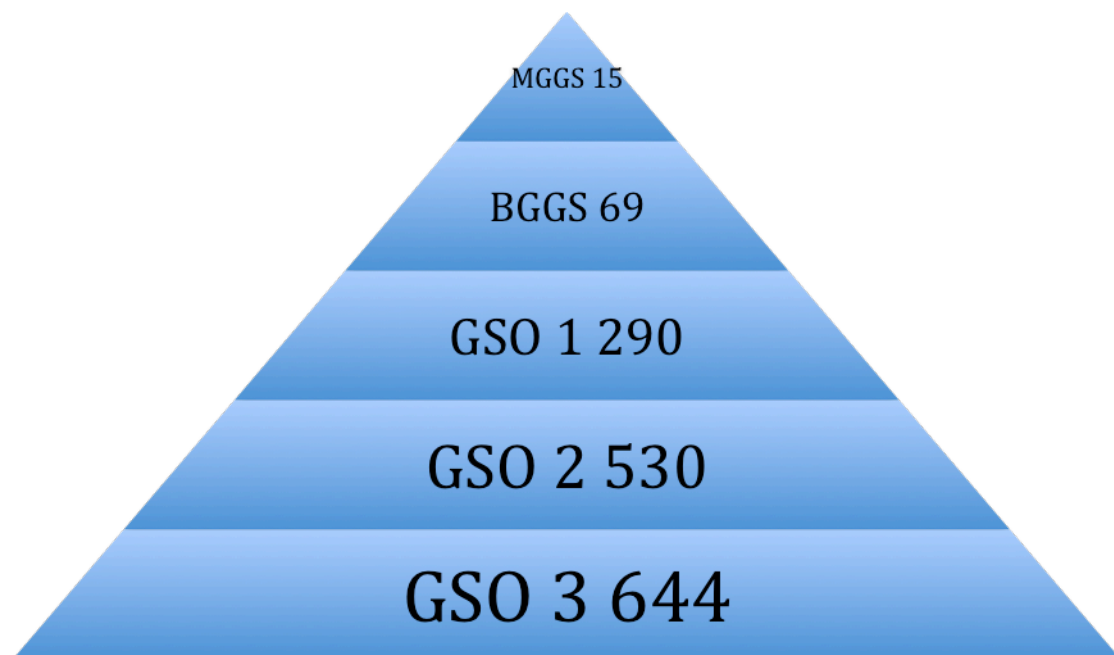
<sup>50</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Grove, *Memoir* p. 48, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Price-Davies to wife 29 March 1915, Price-Davies Papers 77/87/1, IWM. The general in question was Stuart-Wortley.

Harmony and stability generally made for a proficient staff team. Such teams were often described as a ‘happy family’. A typical example was 17<sup>th</sup> Division, which came under new leadership in 1916. The GSO 2, T.T. Grove declared, ‘General Robertson inherited a first class staff and it would be hard to imagine a happier party than we were under his benign rule’.<sup>54</sup> Phillip Game wrote to his mother that he liked his work at 46<sup>th</sup> Division as, ‘We are a very happy family here and all get on well together’.<sup>55</sup> There was considerable variance in the stability of staff teams and the length of tenure of individual officers. As a general rule, turnover was higher across the more junior grades. This can be represented in the form of a ‘staff pyramid’. Figure 16 shows the number of officers that served at each grade of the G branch staff during the war.



**Figure 16: ‘Staff pyramid’ – total G staff that served at each grade**

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<sup>54</sup> Grove, Memoir p. 43, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>55</sup> Game to mother 4 August 1915, Game papers PWG/6 reel 2, IWM.

During the war 1174 officers served in GSO 2 and GSO 3 posts compared to a total of 374 at the three senior levels.<sup>56</sup> The wide differential was due to the greater number of junior staff posts combined with the higher turnover rate.

A comparison of staff officer turnover across the five Armies on the Western Front indicates that Second Army enjoyed the most stability.<sup>57</sup> The team was built upon the enduring partnership between Harington and Plumer, which lasted almost two years. Some of the other team members were officers Harington had worked with previously and probably brought over to Second Army. Charles Mitchell was a Canadian officer who had served with Harington for about eight months in the Canadian Corps. He remained at Second Army for almost eighteen months. Indian Army officer, Major K.D.B. Murray would have been well known to Harington as he was on the staff of the 2nd Canadian Division. Murray spent ten months with Harington at Second Army. Other members of the team may not have been directly connected with Harington previously but they served in Second Army for prolonged periods, an indication the team worked well together. Old Etonian Captain M.B. Heywood was GSO 3 for more than two years, Captain C.H. Wilkinson for over a year and Lieutenant-Colonel William Robertson was there for four months as GSO 2 before serving a further twenty-one months as GSO 1.

A similar pattern was evident at First Army with the MGGS, Hastings Anderson, working with the GOC Sir Henry Horne for a prolonged spell of twenty-one months. It was an amicable partnership. Horne wrote to his wife: 'General

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<sup>56</sup> The pyramid shows the total number of officers that served at each grade over the duration of the war. Individuals will be counted multiple times as they served at different grades. Turnover was greater at the lower grades and there were more posts at these levels.

<sup>57</sup> See Appendix 10. Turnover rates have been calculated by comparing the total number of G branch, artillery and engineering staff officers who served in each formation, accounting for the time each unit was present on the Western Front. Owing to the varying number of posts within an Army, a Corps and a Division, each unit is only compared with those of corresponding type.



Anderson is splendid. I cannot speak too highly of him'.<sup>58</sup> They enjoyed the benefit of two long-serving officers at GSO 1, Lieutenant-Colonel O.H. Nicholson and Lieutenant-Colonel R.S. Ryan. A Camberley graduate with twenty years military service, Nicholson had worked with Anderson at 8<sup>th</sup> Division in 1915. Among the junior staff was a Territorial officer, Captain H. Howson, who served for over sixteen months. The familiarity gained by these officers working together for prolonged periods made for an effective team.

A total of twenty-four corps saw service on the Western Front. The longest serving GOC was Sir William Pulteney who was at III Corps for over three years. For over half that period his BGGs was the experienced Cecil Romer, an Old Etonian and Camberley graduate. Basil Sanderson was attached to III Corps for a few months and described the Staff as 'an extremely efficient and friendly lot. The Brigadier-General (G.S.), Cecil Romer, was outstanding'.<sup>59</sup> The senior command pairing at X Corps boasted greater longevity. The veteran senior staff officer Brigadier A.R. Cameron served with Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Morland in a partnership sustained over a period of thirty months. The forty-four year old Cameron was an instructor at Camberley and brought twenty-four years of military experience to bear at the outbreak of war. The team at X Corps had the lowest turnover of officers and was one of the most stable on the Western Front.

Low turnover was a feature of the team at V Corps. The senior partnership between General E.A Fanshawe and Brigadier-General 'Gerry' Boyd prevailed from July 1916 until April 1918.<sup>60</sup> The other stalwart of the team was the GSO 2, Major S.S. Hill-Dillon. Both of these officers were regulars who had worked their way up the staff ladder. Boyd had been a Major in the Royal Irish Regiment while Hill-Dillon

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<sup>58</sup> Robbins, *Letters of General Horne*, p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> E.A. Fanshawe replaced his brother Hew Fanshawe as GOC V Corps.

had served as Adjutant in the Royal Irish Rifles. Though neither possessed Staff College credentials they were both experienced officers who had served since the start of the war. They formed the solid core of this staff team.

The 1<sup>st</sup> ANZAC Corps boasted one of the most effective and enduring partnerships of the war in the shape of General Birdwood and Brigadier-General C.B. White, his senior staff officer. They worked together for just over two years at 1<sup>st</sup> ANZAC. When Birdwood was promoted to lead Fifth Army he took White over with him. The redoubtable White, a Staff College graduate with sixteen years military experience, has been lauded as one of the most effective senior staff officers of the war.<sup>61</sup> He was one of the youngest to gain an MGS position and operated on the principle: ‘Never do anything by halves: see the problem big, and plan it whole’.<sup>62</sup> According to the Australian Official History, White was known as ‘a man who could get things done’ and in late 1916 during the fighting on the Somme, ‘the most difficult period of the AIF’s existence, he wielded an influence never approached by that of any other officer of the AIF with the exception of General Monash at the end of the war’.<sup>63</sup>

The Canadian Corps was notable for its low turnover rate and the blend of officers in the staff team. Surprisingly, one of the longest-serving members of the staff team was the British aristocrat HRH Arthur Prince of Connaught with tenure of almost two years. A number of talented Canadian and British officers passed through the staff including ‘Tim’ Harington, John Dill, Charles Mitchell, Johnston Parsons,

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<sup>61</sup> E.M. Horner, *The Commanders: Australian military leadership in the twentieth century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984), pp. 26-43.

<sup>62</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *Two Men I Knew* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1957).

<sup>63</sup> Bean, *Australian Official History*, v III, p. 923.

Percy Radcliffe and Norman Webber.<sup>64</sup> The experience of these officers and their subsequent achievements underline the strength of the staff within the Canadian Corps that contributed to its effectiveness as a fighting formation. A British staff officer thought the Canadians who 'were as a whole poor in discipline and fighting power, became by 1917 one for the best Corps in France'.<sup>65</sup>

Among the divisions, one of the salient features was the low turnover of staff among the cavalry units. As shown in Appendix 10, the five British cavalry units that served on the Western Front boasted some of the most stable staffs. This was probably due to lower casualty rates and fewer opportunities for transfer to other formations. The infantry unit with the lowest staff turnover was 30<sup>th</sup> Division, which arrived in France towards the end of 1915. Despite being a New Army unit it was staffed entirely by regular officers during the war with the exception of Captain John Fitzherbert, a Territorial, and Captain H.L. Farrar, a volunteer artillery staff officer. A graduate of New College, Oxford, Fitzherbert served as GSO 3 for almost two years, winning the MC during this period. Another long serving officer with the division was Colonel William Weber, GSO 1 from the end of 1915 until August 1917.

The most stable regular unit in terms of staff was 5<sup>th</sup> Division. The staff was comprised exclusively of regular officers apart from a Canadian Territorial, Captain Seth Pepler, a clerk by trade, who served as GSO 3 in the last year of the war. Not only was it unusual to find anyone other than regular officers in the staff of the original six divisions of the BEF but a Territorial from Canada was certainly a rare commodity. The 55<sup>th</sup> Division had the lowest staff turnover of the Territorial formations. This was due in part to stability at the head of the staff team with just two

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<sup>64</sup> Harington became MGGs Second Army, Dill went on to serve as a GSO 1 at GHQ, Mitchell served with Second Army as GSO 1, Parsons became GSO 1 Canadian 1<sup>st</sup> Division, Radcliffe became DMO at the War Office and Webber rose from GSO 3 in 1914 to finish the war as BGGs Canadian Corps.

<sup>65</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 83.

officers holding the GSO 1 post for virtually the duration of its time in France. Lieutenant-Colonel James Cochrane and Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Price were both in their early forties, staff college graduates with considerable military service behind them. They were experienced officers who both commanded fighting units, and a strong pairing to steer a staff team through the war.

No consistent pattern emerges from the staff turnover figures to suggest differences in stability between regular, Territorial and New Army units. They were all represented among the formations that registered the highest and lowest turnover. There appears to be higher turnover amongst the Dominion divisions probably due to the gradual replacement of British officers by indigenous staff and the higher number of posts per unit in the Canadian formations.

### *Careers, appointments and patronage*

The starting point for many officers on the staff career ladder was a GSO 3 post. Officers transferred from their regiments were often attached to a formation HQ or attended a wartime staff school before being appointed. For some, the job had little allure as it was seen as a menial role that mainly involved the routine administration of staff work. Captain Phillip Whitefoord had been an officer with the Royal Artillery before being attached to 37<sup>th</sup> Division HQ. His opportunity arose when the GSO 3, W.B. Belcher, was promoted to Brigade Major but Whitefoord greeted this news with distinct chagrin. He recorded in his diary:

I am temporarily to do his job. I am told I shall probably be posted here as a GSO3. This doesn't suit my book at all. BW is a damned fine GOC – but a damnable person to bottle wash for as g3 – and I have no ambitions for the post.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Whitefoord, Diary 14 May 1918, Whitefoord Papers 77/2/1, IWM. 'BW' was Major-General Hugh Bruce Williams.

When Captain Alexander Johnston was appointed GSO 3 at the start of 1916 he was equally unenthused. A first-class cricketer before the war, Johnson had been serving as Signals Officer in 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and had set his sights higher:

Hear to my intense disgust that I am to be made G.S.O.3 with the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, a poor job and a come down from my present one, rather a poor reward after being out here for 17 months etc but it is of course only a stepping stone to becoming a brigade major, which is the job I had hoped to get.<sup>67</sup>

He did not have to wait long. Within a couple of months Johnston attained his coveted post and then went on to command 126<sup>th</sup> Brigade, winning the DSO in the process.

Securing a post as a Brigade Major was the next rung on the ladder from the GSO 3 role. A popular route to either job was to have served as an Adjutant. An effective Adjutant possessed some of the administrative and planning skills needed for a role with the general staff. Major John Monk served as an Adjutant with the Worcestershire Regiment after he was wounded at Neuve Chapelle. He found some aspects of the job rather taxing: 'I'm finding the adjutant's work most interesting but there is no doubt a devil of a lot too much clerk's work for a battalion on active service'.<sup>68</sup> Monk had to wait over six months before he eventually secured a post as Brigade Major with 197<sup>th</sup> Brigade. While Monk moved directly from Adjutant to Brigade Major others went initially to a GSO 3 position.

During the retreat to the Marne in 1914, Captain E.S. Chance served as Adjutant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoon Guards. His next move was to become a GSO 3 in the Cavalry Corps, a position he held for almost six months. Major D.F. Anderson, Adjutant of the 1st Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment, took a similar route into the staff. He spent four months in the post before becoming a GSO 3 with V Corps in

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<sup>67</sup> Astill, *Diaries of Alexander Johnston*, p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> Monk to father 16 January 1916, Extracts from letters p. 11, Monk Papers 01/59/1, IWM.

January 1915. Three months later he was promoted to Brigade Major. After serving as Adjutant to the 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers, Captain Alistair MacDougall, was appointed GSO 3 with VI Corps. Later he recollected, 'Of course, I was sorry to leave the Regt. with whom I had gone through it for 10 months but if one wants to get on, the Staff is quite obviously the place to do it'.<sup>69</sup> Some six months later, having attended a wartime staff school, he was informed of his impending promotion to Brigade Major. Like Johnston, he regarded the GSO 3 job as a means of securing a better appointment:

I will be very sorry to leave the Corps, but one can't remain as a G.S.O.3 forever & Bde Major is undoubtedly one of the best junior staff appointments going. As Bde Maj. you are really Chief of Staff to the Brigade, while as a G.S.O.3 to a Corps you are nothing more than a bottle-washer.<sup>70</sup>

Many staff officers echoed these sentiments and found service as a Brigade Major provided greater satisfaction than working in a larger formation. The possibility of progression to GSO 2 left some of them cold though. In April 1918, Walter Guinness recorded his thoughts at the prospect:

I hate the idea of being a GSO2, as to my mind it is nothing like such interesting work as Brigade Major. In the ordinary way of promotion, however, I shall probably be moved up in any case in about four months and I should then of course have to go to some strange Division where I should probably know nobody.<sup>71</sup>

Major Basil Sanderson had mixed feelings about his move to GSO 2 with 41<sup>st</sup> Division. He felt the post held nothing approaching the interest of his previous job and opined, 'Being No. 2 on a divisional staff may be promotion, but it has not the independence of the more junior position of No.1 on the Staff of a brigade'.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> MacDougall, Diary 15 August 1916, MacDougall Papers DS/MISC/9, IWM.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 198.

<sup>72</sup> Sanderson, *Ships and Sealing Wax*, p. 75.

A move to the more senior GSO 2 role did not necessarily entail greater responsibility. Promotion seemed to bring little satisfaction to Major Kenneth Henderson who complained, 'As to my work, I found it irksome to be second fiddle; not from pride, but simply because I missed the responsibility and interest of being top dog as I was in the brigade'.<sup>73</sup> According to Henderson, his GSO 1 retained all the interesting work, 'such as plans of operations and issues of orders in his own hands; and if I ever had a share it was merely to devil for him'.<sup>74</sup> A reluctance to delegate work within the G branch was a trait observed by Colonel W.N. Nicholson, a senior Q branch officer: 'G had ever a curious dislike of delegating responsibilities; a G.1 rarely trusted his G.2 to do anything like a fair share of the work'.<sup>75</sup> Cuthbert Headlam also identified this tendency when he grumbled, 'Ruthven, the GSO 1, is a typical soldier who has no idea of not doing everything himself instead of decentralising the work'.<sup>76</sup> These findings offer some support for Samuels' work with regard to the 'cult of rank' within the British army.<sup>77</sup> Not only did this infer that officers of higher rank possessed superior knowledge but it constrained lower ranking staff from questioning or making constructive criticism. It was a culture that discouraged delegation, making some senior staff reluctant to entrust important work to others which is reflected in much of this testimony.

Working as a staff officer at Brigade level may have offered more independence but the information available was restricted to a small section of front. Officers serving within the larger formations had a wider overview of events at their disposal. Earl Stanhope compared the different experiences:

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<sup>73</sup> Henderson, *Memoir* p. 189, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 185.

<sup>76</sup> Beach, *Headlam*, p. 107.

<sup>77</sup> Samuels, *Command or Control*, p. 58

I have no hesitation in saying that a Corps Staff was the most interesting on which to serve. Some officers who have served on the staffs of other formations preferred above all a brigade staff as being so closely in touch with troops, some preferred a divisional staff saying that a brigade had no artillery of any kind and was much too immersed in its own section of the front to know what was going on elsewhere.<sup>78</sup>

Insight and knowledge of military matters over a significant section of the front was a benefit conferred upon staff working at Army. Despite his junior grade, Captain A.J.H. Smith found his role at Fifth Army engaging. He wrote: ‘there is plenty to do and the work is interesting. An Army is a sufficiently big organisation for one really to understand a little of what is going on’.<sup>79</sup> Being able to gain a view of the bigger picture appealed to Captain Geoffrey Woolley who remarked, ‘On Third Army staff my work was again of intense interest. I soon got a general idea of the whole Army front and was doing special liaison work with the Fourth Corps in the centre’.<sup>80</sup>

The larger the formation, the further back from the front its HQ was located in order to coordinate activity across a wide area and accommodate the required personnel. An Army HQ was a substantial undertaking some distance from the fighting zone. Stanhope remarked:

Everything was on a much larger scale than with a Corps, though one was not in intimate touch with the staffs of the fighting formations or with the troops, and it was practically impossible to get up to the front line area. One therefore felt hopelessly removed from a battle.<sup>81</sup>

This was not the case at Division HQ, which was very much in touch with the action. When Lieutenant-Colonel Phillip Game was promoted from GSO 2 IV Corps to GSO 1 with 46<sup>th</sup> Division he maintained, ‘I like my present work enormously but it is much

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<sup>78</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 159.

<sup>79</sup> Smith to mother 8 May 1917, A.J.H. Smith Papers 84/22/1, IWM.

<sup>80</sup> G.H. Woolley, *Sometimes a Soldier* (London: Ernest Benn, 1963), p. 50.

<sup>81</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 143.



more exacting than a place with a Corps'.<sup>82</sup> A factor that contributed to this was the constant shuffling of Divisions from one Corps to another. This entailed having to adjust to work under different regimes. As C.J. Allanson, explained:

The division is the fighting unit of France and they are changed from Corps to Corps as required; this has one great disadvantage to the GOC and staff and that is that it means the constant changing of our immediate superiors and practically a fresh inspection every time.<sup>83</sup>

Moving from his position in 6<sup>th</sup> Division to become GSO 2 with the Cavalry Corps was a promotion for T.T. Grove but one tinged with remorse. In Grove's opinion, the staff of a Division was more in touch with the front line and possessed a sense of camaraderie that a larger formation could not. He proclaimed:

I am going back into a position of complete safety & shall feel entirely out of the war. I wish my appointment could have been to G.S.O. 2 of a division but one ought I suppose to be glad of the promotion even if it is not just to the job one would have liked. I wish however I could back to a division; I shall hate to feel so out of it.<sup>84</sup>

Grove's wish was soon fulfilled as he only stayed with the Cavalry Corps for four months before being appointed GSO 2 with 17<sup>th</sup> Division. A preference for working with a Division was echoed by Eric Harrison. After the GSO 2 with 58<sup>th</sup> Division fell ill, Harrison replaced him and declared, 'This I was very glad to do as a Divisional HQ is by far the most interesting HQ staff in battle and as a Training GSO II at Corps I should have seen little of the fighting'.<sup>85</sup> Major John Evetts was another officer who

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<sup>82</sup> Game to mother 4 August 1915, Game Papers PWG/6 reel 2, IWM.

<sup>83</sup> Allanson, Diary 12 May 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>84</sup> Grove to wife 14 August 1915, Grove Papers 1963-08-14, NAM.

<sup>85</sup> Harrison, *Gunners*, p. 49.

expressed his dislike for working at Corps. After his transfer to 11<sup>th</sup> Division he recalled, 'There I was extremely happy. It was much more like fighting the war'.<sup>86</sup>

If there was a divide between Division and Corps then it was captured by Nicholson who commented:

There were not many popular corps staff in the eyes of their divisions. Perhaps if the divisions had needed more help, and the corps had known how to assist, the relationships would have been friendlier. But the divisions had learnt from practical experience, and, as far as knowledge was concerned, it was the tail that wagged the dog.<sup>87</sup>

Staff appointments were handled by the Military Secretary's Office at GHQ though junior positions were dealt with at Army level.<sup>88</sup> The precise nature of the process remains unclear but there appeared to be a 'roster' and some form of waiting list. The subject aroused considerable debate and controversy. Patronage was not uncommon and accusations of favouritism abounded. A GOC could assist in securing a post for one of his staff. Apparently, General Broadwood was eager to help his GSO 1, C.J. Allanson who reported, 'His one anxiety was to get me a brigade or Brigadier-General General Staff, but I often told him that I was happy with the division'.<sup>89</sup>

In 1916, one staff officer protested that General Sir Hubert Gough exercised undue influence over appointments: 'His staff is a personal staff all full of 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers and old friends. It is not right and the rest of the BEF don't like it. I think all staff officers should be treated alike'.<sup>90</sup> This claim was not without substance. There were two members of the 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers serving with Gough at the time, the GSO 2, Edward Beddington and a GSO 3, Captain A.C. Pym. A relative, Captain Hugh

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<sup>86</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir John Evetts to Peter Liddle. Transcript of interview July 1978, Evetts Papers GS0533, LCUL.

<sup>87</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 192.

<sup>88</sup> Kiggell to Lieutenant-Colonel H.N. Hilliard 6 March 1917, Kiggell Papers 4/88, LHCMA. Corroboration of this can be found in Bond and Robbins, *Staff Officer*, p. 199.

<sup>89</sup> Allanson, Diary 22 June 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>90</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 10 August 1916, Extracts from Letters p. 307, Ward-Jackson Papers, IWM.

Gough, was also a GSO 3. Other members of the team could well have been personal friends. The careers of Beddington and Gough were intertwined. Gough's hand was evident during several of Beddington's appointments and they served together for a considerable period in different formations. In three and a half years Beddington rose from subaltern to Lieutenant-Colonel and he was only thirty-three years old.

The meteoric rise of Brigadier-General Phillip Howell attracted attention from some who thought it was not based wholly on merit. According to a fellow staff officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth Henderson, his rapid ascent demonstrated 'what friends in high places could do'.<sup>91</sup> He was referring to Howell's association with Haig. In Henderson's eyes Howell 'was by no means so exceptional or so brilliant as to justify the extraordinary way he was pushed up'.<sup>92</sup> Due to their pre-war friendship, Howell had unusual access to Haig. His letters record several lunches and meetings with the Commander-in-Chief.<sup>93</sup> Following Howell's death in 1916, Henderson claimed, 'Had he lived his very rapid promotion and his very close connection with Haig could not have failed to take him far'.<sup>94</sup> Though the case was hardly conclusive, Howell may well have benefitted from his friendship with Haig and he did enjoy an accelerated ascent within the staff.

The process of staff appointments became the subject of some pointed criticism. Towards the end of 1915, Lord St. Davids pronounced:

If I were challenged to go through the list of Staffs with a soldier, I believe I could point to the names of one or two who had been put on for the most absurd reason you could think of – because they are men who could give you a good tip and give you a winner if you were racing.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Henderson, Memoir, p. 198, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Howell to wife 30 May, 31 July, 19 August 1915, 18 & 29 July 1916, Howell Papers 6/1/99-216, LHCMA.

<sup>94</sup> Henderson, Memoir, p. 198, Henderson Papers DS/MISC/2, IWM.

<sup>95</sup> Lord St Davids, House of Lords 16 November 1915, *Hansard* v20, pp. 359-60.

Senior staff officer, C.J. Allanson, was more general in his condemnation when he complained, 'The whole question of appointments and their immense value has not been well handled and shows an unfortunate lack of touch between England and France'.<sup>96</sup> The issue of appointments generated considerable correspondence with GHQ and this offers some insight into how these matters were handled. The office of the Military Secretary customarily managed staff postings but sometimes intervention from a higher level occurred. This was invariably the case when requests for the appointment of protégés were received.

In October 1916, the BGGs post at XI Corps became vacant. The preferred candidate of the GOC, Lieutenant-General Richard Haking, was Brigadier Herbert Studd. This was a blatant violation of the process that allocated positions on a rotational basis. Next in the queue was Lieutenant-Colonel Adolphe Symons, GSO 1 with 33<sup>rd</sup> Division. After discussing the matter with the Military Secretary, CGS Sir Launcelot Kiggell delivered his judgment. In a letter to Haking he explained why he could not arrange a transfer between Symons and Studd:

In the circumstances, Symons being next for BGGs on his service and reports, I fear there is no solution but to leave him with you unless you consider him unsuitable for the appointment. In the latter case he would have to go back to his original position as First Grade GSO and the next on the roster for promotion to BGGs would be sent to you in his place. As the vacancy for BGGs now exists we want to fill it at once and I should be obliged if you will let me know as soon as possible what course you recommend.<sup>97</sup>

The result of this exchange was that Studd got the job and the presumably 'unsuitable' Symons was moved elsewhere. When the long serving Colonel Samuel

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<sup>96</sup> Allanson, Diary 17 February 1917, Allanson Papers DS/MISC/69, IWM.

<sup>97</sup> Kiggell to Lieutenant-General R. Haking 19 October 1916, Kiggell Papers 4/54, LHCMA.

‘Gammy’ Wilson left his post as GSO 1 of First Army, GHQ had already scheduled his replacement but this did not meet with the approval of the MGGS, George Barrow.<sup>98</sup> He insisted on having Lieutenant-Colonel John Brind, his former GSO 2 from X Corps. Barrow eventually got his way and Brind was appointed. These examples illustrate the influence of patronage and how it was possible to circumvent the established process. It appears that a GOC had the power of veto over a staff appointment if he chose to exercise it.

Testimony to this capacity and the existence of an appointments ‘roster’ was evident from a disclosure made by Bonham-Carter in 1916. He revealed that the next two BGGs vacancies had been earmarked for himself and his colleague R.A.M. Currie. Securing the first post ‘will probably depend in some measure upon which of us they consider most suited to the General in whose corps the first vacancy occurs’.<sup>99</sup> It appeared that the senior staff officer also wielded influence. A request made by Brigadier-General G.V. Hordern of I Corps with regard to a staff posting met with a receptive response from Kiggell who wrote:

I have spoken to Butler, who arranges these postings, and he tells me there will be no difficulty in complying with your application. I am of course, delighted to hear that you want the boy back – a good sign of him which is naturally pleasant for me.<sup>100</sup>

This discussion was of particular interest to Kiggell as it concerned his son who had served as GSO 3 in Hordern’s staff team at I Corps.

As the British army grew, the volume of staff appointments and transfers grew with it. In 1917, Kiggell wrote to General Plumer on the subject of Major A.F. Smith’s transfer from 38<sup>th</sup> Division: ‘During the last month over 50 transfers and

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<sup>98</sup> Barrow, *Fire of Life*, p. 164.

<sup>99</sup> Bonham-Carter to sister 23 March 1917, Correspondence 1 January 1917 to 19 March 1936, Bonham-Carter Papers 2/2, CCC.

<sup>100</sup> Kiggell to Brigadier G.V. Hordern 11 September 1916, Kiggell Papers 4/42, LHCMA. Kiggell was probably referring to Sir Richard Butler, Deputy CGS.

appointments of G.S.O. 1's and G.S.O. 2's have been carried out, and, as you can readily understand, it is a matter of no small difficulty to adjust all these staffs'.<sup>101</sup> He added, 'the numbers of transfers and appointments which have to be carried out has got so great owing to the size of the Army'.<sup>102</sup> In the face of these issues, Kiggell elected to block Smith's transfer and another officer was moved. The affair highlighted the growing complexity of managing appointments and identifying candidates to fill positions. Kiggell repined:

Divisional commanders, especially those who have not got much staff experience, do not always realise our difficulties, and there is, of course, always the natural tendency to protest if they are called upon to part with a good man.<sup>103</sup>

The influence of patronage was even evident in the selection process for attendance at the wartime staff courses in the view of one young officer. Phillip Whitefoord cavilled at perceived injustice when the candidates for a course were announced: 'Cambridge results out – MacGregor IV Corps is going which amazes me no end. He has 1 year less service than I as a G3 – & was put in after me by the Corps – but was chosen as he had friends at Army'.<sup>104</sup> Whitefoord's observations about respective service lengths were accurate but his assertion about the role of Army cannot be proved. Another officer complained that he expected to be turned down for a post 'as I was sure it would be reserved for one of the GHQ "pets"'.<sup>105</sup> These comments reflect the view of many on the staff that nepotism was endemic and the value of friends in high places could not be underestimated.

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<sup>101</sup> Kiggell to Sir H. Plumer 24 February 1917, Kiggell Papers 4/87, LHCMA.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Whitefoord, Diary 14 October 1918, Whitefoord Papers 77/2/1, IWM.

<sup>105</sup> Bond, *Earl Stanhope*, p. 103.

## *Staff work and post mortem*

During the summer of 1918, Captain Geoffrey Woolley served as a GSO 3 with Third Army. Following a short leave in Britain, during which he was married, he returned to Third Army HQ. What he encountered there provoked him to remark, 'The British attacks seemed to work out almost exactly to plan and I was greatly struck by what seemed a vast improvement in the co-ordination and efficiency of our staff work.'<sup>106</sup>

The period known as 'the Hundred Days', from the Battle of Amiens in August 1918 until the end of the war, saw the Allied forces mount a series of major attacks in quick succession. Major Eric Harrison, GSO 2 with 58<sup>th</sup> Division, commented that instead of the voluminous sets of detailed orders required previously: 'Divisional orders on a message pad were brief, just objectives, boundary lines between Brigades, barrage, start line, and the pace the artillery barrage would move to the objective'.<sup>107</sup> In September, future Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery became GSO 1 with 47<sup>th</sup> Division and wrote to his mother:

One is gaining wonderful experience in this advance. As Chief of Staff I have to work out a plan in detail for the operations and see that all the branches of the staff and administrative arrangements, are working in with my plans'.<sup>108</sup>

The pace of operations in 1918 meant that time for preparing plans was at a premium. In August, Major Alistair MacDougall noted, 'After lunch, conferences with the Brigadiers ref. operations to take place on the 21<sup>st</sup>. No much time to prepare'.<sup>109</sup> Orders for the attack were issued the following day. During the Battle of the Selle in October, Captain Phillip Whitefoord, GSO 3 with 37<sup>th</sup> Division, found

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<sup>106</sup> Woolley, *Sometimes a Soldier*, p. 52.

<sup>107</sup> Harrison, *Gunners*, p. 50.

<sup>108</sup> Montgomery to mother 3 September 1918 Montgomery Papers BLM 1-65, IWM.

<sup>109</sup> MacDougall, Diary 19 August 1918, MacDougall papers DS/MISC/92, IWM.

himself equally hard-pressed. He recorded in his diary: ‘Full of work today – orders for the next attack. In office all day. Very late night 22/23 checking operation order maps’.<sup>110</sup> Montgomery described how each day began with an ‘organised attack’, then the troops advanced during the rest of the day.<sup>111</sup> The following day the process was repeated. He explained, ‘It means little sleep and continuous work, at night guns have to be moved forward, communications arranged, food and ammunition got up etc.’.<sup>112</sup> Time may have been short but the staff proved they were up to the task. Their abilities were put to the test in the semi-open warfare of 1918, which was new to most of them. As the *Official History* observed, ‘The staffs of all formations great and small, had been trained in the trench warfare period and, except for a very few old hands, had no experience of the difficulties of communication in, and the speed of open warfare’.<sup>113</sup> It made their achievements all the more impressive. Only towards the end of this period of relentless fighting did the strain begin to take its toll. As Jonathan Boff has pointed out, ‘increasingly exhausted commanders and staff were less able to plan creatively and to organise effective liaison’.<sup>114</sup>

Learning and experience had paid dividends. In 1918, plans were produced at short notice with sufficient information for operations to be executed successfully. Brevity was recognised as a critical element of effective orders. This was in contrast to the copious and intricate sets of orders produced earlier during the years of static warfare. The post-war Kirke Committee acknowledged the importance of an efficient staff issuing brief and timely directives:

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<sup>110</sup> Whitefoord, Diary 21 October 1918, Whitefoord Papers 77/2/1, IWM.

<sup>111</sup> Montgomery to mother 3 September 1918 Montgomery Papers BLM 1-65, IWM.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium 1918: Volume IV, 8 August-26 September* (London: HMSO, 1947), p. 157.

<sup>114</sup> J. Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: the British Third Army and the defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 246.



It is generally understood that orders must be issued in good time. It is perhaps not so clearly appreciated that this is only possible if orders are short. The complication of modern war has led not only to an increase in the length of operation orders, but also to the issue of innumerable, lengthy operation instructions.<sup>115</sup>

The Committee cited the emphasis placed upon issuing timely orders in FSR 1909. The failings identified at Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos were blamed upon the violation of these precepts. The report produced by the Committee pulled no punches when it declared, 'We may lose the battle while we are writing orders'.<sup>116</sup> Earlier in the war instructions needed to be comprehensive, as the *Official History* explained: 'Orders had to contain more details and subordinates required more supervision; for initiative was uncommon in the new regimental officers and little was done by subordinates without definite instructions'.<sup>117</sup> Shorter orders demanded an efficient and professional staff coupled with troops in the field who had the ability to carry them out successfully. By 1918 the British army had both.

The Kirke Committee, led by Lieutenant-General Sir Walter Kirke, published its report in 1932. Together with the Braithwaite Committee of 1919, it formed the vanguard of a concerted effort to conduct a post-mortem on staff performance during the war. The Braithwaite Committee had an objective 'to establish how far the existing system of Staff organisation has met the requirements of war'.<sup>118</sup> Chaired by Lieutenant-General Sir Walter Braithwaite, a former commandant of the Staff College at Quetta, it took evidence from eighty-four officers, both commanders and staff. In the report of its findings the Committee announced, 'The outstanding feature of the

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<sup>115</sup> Kirke, *Lessons of the Great War – Committee 1932*, p. 10, Kirke Papers 4/9, LHCMA.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations 1918: Advance to Victory*, p. 593.

<sup>118</sup> Report of the Committee on Staff Organization 1919 [Braithwaite Committee], p. 7, WO 32/5153, TNA.

evidence brought before us has been the success of the Staff throughout the war'.<sup>119</sup> A key aspect of successful performance was judged to be achieving unity among the three staff branches. According to the Committee:

We have been much impressed by the fact, established by the evidence given, that in the Formations where these principles have been adhered to, the Staff work has had the happiest results particularly in the latter phases where the conditions of a war of movement once more obtained.<sup>120</sup>

The view from the officers canvassed by the Committee was, 'almost unanimous in advocating the principle of one Staff'.<sup>121</sup> The definition of what this meant in practical terms was open to interpretation. The staff trinity of G, A and Q, established in FSR 1909, was deemed by some to be dysfunctional as the three branches had become mutually exclusive. This resulted in friction between them. Brigadier J.E. Edmonds asserted; 'Part of the time and energy of junior staff officers of different branches is spent in obstructing and pulling against each other; unconsciously they sometimes put their department before the good of the Army as a whole'.<sup>122</sup> Major-General W.H. Anderson, MGGS First Army, was another critic. He had favoured the one-staff system under a Chief of Staff from the start of the war and remarked; 'My experience on the staff in France has done nothing to alter this opinion but has confirmed it'.<sup>123</sup> In Anderson's view, the staff system had worked best 'where Commanders in fact employed their senior General Staff Officer as Chief of Staff'.<sup>124</sup> Brigadier John Dill shared this opinion and advocated that the high standard attained was the result of:

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. Also, D. French, 'Doctrine and Organization in the British Army, 1919-1932', *The Historical Journal*, 44, 2 (2001), pp. 497-515.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> J.E. Edmonds remarks in 'Annexure E', General Lord Horne Papers 71/7, IWM.

<sup>123</sup> W.H. Anderson, 'Views in Regard to Organisation of the Staff' 1 February 1919 Horne Papers 72, IWM.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

compromise in the manner of carrying out our Staff work; that in every formation the G.O.C. has in practice looked upon his Senior General Staff officer as his Chief Staff Officer, and that in consequence there has been, in fact if not in theory, a Chief of Staff.<sup>125</sup>

The reality was that in some formations this proved to be the most pragmatic and efficient arrangement. When put to the test, the staff structure established in FSR 1909 had fallen short for them. Anderson concluded, 'I hold therefore that staff work during the War has succeeded rather in spite of the system laid down than because of it'.<sup>126</sup>

There were others who concurred with this credo. Colonel W.N. Nicholson, a Q branch officer, observed, 'It would have been far better during the war if the general staff had combined the duties of 'G' and 'Q' branches of the staff'.<sup>127</sup> Another adherent was Edmonds who believed; 'Such a system makes for efficiency, unity of effort, economy of numbers and time, reduction of correspondence and absence of friction'.<sup>128</sup> The consensus from the officers consulted saw the G staff as the predominant partner of the three branches, which had grown in prestige during the war. The Committee agreed that the GOC, 'exercises his functions of command' through the senior General Staff Officer.<sup>129</sup> They did not however, believe that this and other arguments justified creating the new role of a Chief of Staff.

The issue was that a Chief of Staff was a potential bottleneck, barring other officers from direct access to the GOC. Anderson was quick to dismiss such claims:

In my opinion the danger of a Chief of Staff debarring a Commander from knowledge of what is going on in his command, and becoming too autocratic, are not so great as those of over-lapping, friction, and pulling apart, which are offered by the present system of "Trinity" staff

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<sup>125</sup> Dill, 'Reorganisation of Staff Work in the Field' p2, Dill Papers 1/11, LHCMA.

<sup>126</sup> Anderson, Organisation of the Staff, Horne Papers 72, IWM.

<sup>127</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 171.

<sup>128</sup> Edmonds, Remarks in Annexure E, Horne papers 71/7, IWM.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

organisation.<sup>130</sup>

The Committee disagreed and took the view that the creation of the Chief of Staff role was a retrograde measure. Not only could it lead to access issues but he may become overloaded with work and ‘develop into very much of an office man’.<sup>131</sup> The recommendation of the Braithwaite Committee was that the existing arrangement be retained with the head of the G branch acting as coordinator. It did concede that the head of the Operations or G branch should be one grade higher than the other two branch heads.<sup>132</sup> In response to how the staff might be unified, the report advocated changing the field regulations from ‘The Staff is organised in three branches’ to ‘The work of the staff is organised in three branches’.<sup>133</sup>

The Braithwaite Committee took the view that the distribution of staff duties had worked well with the exception of the Military Secretary’s branch. Here change was recommended: ‘There appears to be a lack of confidence in the existing system of Staff patronage which, in our opinion, requires a radical revision’.<sup>134</sup> This decision was probably based upon the undercurrents of nepotism and apparent lack of transparency that had tainted the appointments system throughout the war. It seemed that some officers had progressed due to their ability to influence those in high places rather than their military prowess.

These issues were compounded by the shortage of trained staff. This was the cause of considerable frustration, as many officers felt shackled to their jobs as requests for moves were blocked. One officer lamented: ‘But if the general staff had started from the outset to build up a staff reserve they would not in the later months

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<sup>130</sup> Anderson, Organization of the Staff, Horne Papers 72, IWM.

<sup>131</sup> Braithwaite Committee, p. 12, WO 32/5153, TNA.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

have found themselves so desperately short of personnel'.<sup>135</sup> To prevent the recurrence of staff shortages, the Committee advised that the staff colleges should remain open during the war and the 'learner' system should continue in peacetime.

During the inter-war years when the Braithwaite and Kirke Committees were delivering their verdicts, some of the officers who had served on the staff were rising to positions of prominence in the army. The best known was probably Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery who served as a GSO 2 with 33<sup>rd</sup> Division and IX Corps before he was promoted to GSO 1 47<sup>th</sup> Division at the age of thirty-one. Another former staff officer who played a significant part in the Allied victory in the Second World War was Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke who became Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He had served as an artillery staff officer with 18<sup>th</sup> Division and the Canadian Corps. Thomas Blamey, who was BGGGS 1<sup>st</sup> ANZAC Corps, was the only Australian to attain the rank of Field Marshal in the Second World War. The GOC of the BEF in 1940 was Field Marshal Lord Gort who had served as a GSO 3 with I Corps and then became a Brigade Major with the Guards Division.

Other former general staff officers who rose to positions of considerable military influence post-war were Edmund 'Tiny' Ironside, Lord Wavell, Sir John Dill, Bernard Paget and HM 'Jumbo' Wilson. Two of the chief proponents of mechanised warfare in Britain between the wars were ex-staff officers J.F.C. Fuller and General Sir 'Jock' Burnett-Stuart. Many staff made their way into command positions in the Second World War. Lieutenant-General Gerard Bucknall was a typical example. He was a GSO 3 with XIV Corps in 1916. In the next conflict, he led the 5<sup>th</sup> Division in Italy and then became GOC XXX Corps in Normandy. These officers and many more among the ranks of the staff made their influence felt in the Second World War. It is

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<sup>135</sup> Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 185.

interesting that the historiography has viewed their performances in each of the two wars so differently.

### *Conclusion*

The staff officers who planned the succession of attacks that culminated in Allied victory were younger and less experienced than their counterparts of 1914. They remained however, a group of officers drawn largely from the public school system that traditionally supplied the army and from regiments tinged with a shade of elitism. The senior ranks of the staff remained a reflection of the pre-war army, populated by older officers with considerable military experience. Change was largely evident among the junior levels where younger regimental officers brought their understanding of the current war to bear. This led to a blend of seasoned professionals and novices with combat experience.

The type of officer imported into the staff system indicated a selection process that sought out soldiers with intelligence. Those with university backgrounds or from the ranks of the engineers and artillery were well represented. The creation of a proficient staff team depended on achieving a good balance of skills and a strong pairing at the top. The senior staff officer and GOC needed to work closely together, often in fraught circumstances. Examples drawn from personal testimony show how this relationship could flourish or foster discontent. A frequent source of dispute was the issue of control. It is difficult to ascertain if there was a widespread reluctance to delegate responsibility within the G staff but there is some evidence to suggest it was an issue. It may explain why many staff officers looked fondly upon their time as a Brigade Major rather than serving in a larger formation where they were landed with more mundane work.

Staff turnover was greater within the larger formations and across the junior staff levels. This could be expected due to the larger number of posts and the lower

length of tenure. Higher levels of stability were evident among some of those units with reputations for effectiveness in the field such as Second Army and the Canadian Corps. No clear pattern emerges to link stability with certain types of unit or with performance in the field. Cavalry units have a distinctly low staff turnover though the Cavalry Corps is just a little better than average. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division had a comparatively high staff turnover but was generally regarded as an effective fighting formation. The division recording the lowest turnover was a New Army unit staffed largely by regular officers. Although stability appeared to be desirable, low turnover could detract from performance if weak or inefficient officers were not removed.

The appointments system provided fertile ground for complaint. While the Military Secretary appeared to manage a formal process, senior officers could override it to install their preferred candidate. Accusations of favouritism were rife though these need to be seen in context. It was hardly surprising that some officers would resent their lack of progress up the career ladder and accuse others of nepotism. There was sufficient discontent to prompt a post-war recommendation for revision of the appointments system. The formation of the Kirke and Braithwaite Committees after the war was representative of the army's appetite to continue learning even after victory had been achieved. The staff together with the fighting units in the field demonstrated during the final months of the war how they put their previous learning and experience to good use. The coordination and planning undertaken during the all-arms warfare of the 'Hundred Days' demonstrated how far the skills of the staff had developed since the start of the war. Once hostilities ceased the army set out to analyse what could have been improved and the lessons to be drawn from the performance of the staff. This was indicative of an organisation with vision and the flexibility to accommodate change. These were factors that had proved vital in the

development and adaption of the staff to plan the operations of a mass army fighting an industrial war.



# Conclusion

## Setting the record straight

During the Allied victory celebrations in 1918 there were few who chose to raise a glass to the staff. The high level of casualties endured by the British army had tarnished their reputation. It has yet to recover. As part of the command team, the men who planned the war were blamed for the blunders, for the failures, but mostly for the loss of life. Their successes were overlooked. Some senior staff officers were dismayed by this lack of recognition and tried to set the record straight. Soon after the war one of them remarked:

It is a curious fact that, even during the war, when the skilled work of our professional Staff in the field earned and succeeded in keeping the admiration and respect both of our allies and of our enemies, it was never appreciated by the mass of our own people.<sup>1</sup>

Staff officers were an easy scapegoat. They were perceived as an elite who did not share the dangers of war with the troops. Their plans were made in safety and relative comfort, removed from the fighting. If an action failed, blame the staff. They have been characterised as incompetent, isolated and indulged.

This enduring narrative has been endorsed by many of the memoirs generated by the war. The voices of the staff have been drowned out by the cacophony of condemnation. In one of the most popular accounts of the war, Siegfried Sassoon wrote, 'Let the Staff write their own books about the Great War, say I. The Infantry were biased against them, and their authentic story will be read with interest'.<sup>2</sup> This research set out to reveal the story of the general staff in their own words and through systematic analysis of the group of officers who served at Army, Corps and Division

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<sup>1</sup> Dawnay and Headlam 'The Staff', p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Sassoon, *Infantry Officer*, p. 228.

level. Despite recent studies that have provided some redemption for the staff, their contribution has yet to be fully acknowledged. This chapter will draw together the findings of this study to throw new light on the work of the staff and call for a reassessment of their role given the challenges they faced.

The two salient challenges the staff had to overcome were the vast expansion of the British army and having to fight a continental war of attrition. In 1914, the British army was relatively small and accustomed to fighting colonial wars. By 1918, it had metamorphosed into a mass army waging industrial war on a vast scale. Unprecedented growth triggered dramatic change. The creation of a legion of additional staff posts meant that demand for trained officers outstripped supply. New formations were established to manage the burgeoning number of troops in the field. The influx of inexperienced officers generated significant change in the characteristics of the staff. There was a reduction in average age and officers outside the regular army infiltrated the staff system. As has been shown, only thirty-one per cent of the general staff that served possessed a Staff College qualification.<sup>3</sup> The remainder had to develop their expertise on the job.

In tandem with the transformation of the army, the staff faced a transformation in the nature of warfare. They were forced to undergo an exacting learning process. The mobile conflict of 1914 was followed by almost four years of static warfare until movement, combined with set-piece operations, returned in 1918. Events unfolded in a way that few had foreseen. Over fifty years later one staff officer recollected:

Nobody ever dreamt of a trench war like we had from 1914 to 1918 and that in itself is surely justification for being kinder to the senior officers who were doing their best in the most difficult conditions and I reckon doing extremely well.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter Five – ‘Regulars and Outsiders’.

<sup>4</sup> Roupell to Liddle, Transcript of Interview April 1971, Roupell papers GS1388, LCUL.

Managing this evolution to emerge, as a war-winning team was a painful, difficult and disruptive process but stands as a remarkable achievement.

The staff officers who arrived in France in 1914 were the product of the Camberley and Quetta Staff Colleges. The two-year course at the Staff Colleges has been criticised by historians such as Bowman and Connelly and Martin Samuels as an inadequate preparation for this particular war. They believed the training at Camberley and Quetta compared poorly with the teaching in France and Germany. This research takes a different view. It has found there was significant improvement in the curriculum and level of instruction during the decade prior to the outbreak of war. This raised the teaching at Camberley and Quetta to a standard that matched, and in some aspects outstripped, the French and German staff colleges. Admittedly, some of the senior staff that served during the war would have passed through the Staff Colleges before these changes but around 450 officers benefitted from the advances in tuition.

There was however, an issue with the purpose of the British system. Should it aim to produce good staff officers, good commanders or both? The objective tended to vary contingent upon the credo of the College Commandant. After the war, Brigadier-General John Dill, who became a leading light in the army, questioned the value of the Staff College system. He asserted that ‘it would be better to deal with Staff duties and the conduct of the battle at our Staff College, and instruct more senior and experienced officers in the higher branches of war at a War College’.<sup>5</sup> Dill’s suggestion made eminent sense, as the skills needed to succeed on the staff were very different from those demanded in command. Unfortunately, the idea was not adopted

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<sup>5</sup> Dill, Proposal for War College 5 December 1918, Dill Papers 1/11, LHCMA.

at the time though in 1927 the Imperial Defence College was established which could be viewed as a comparable institution.

The British staff failings witnessed during the middle years of the war should not be blamed upon inadequacies in their tuition at the Staff Colleges. The staff had been prepared for a war of movement. After a few months they found themselves immersed in something very different. The French and German staffs were in a similar position. As J.F.C. Fuller argued:

after every war, preparation for the next war falls into the hands of those who have come least into contact with reality – the Generals and Staff Officers who directed the war from a distance....This was the tragedy of the years 1903-13.<sup>6</sup>

These remarks, made with the benefit of hindsight, may well have captured the essence of military thinking in the pre-war decade. During the post-war period, despite the influence of some senior staff officers who were not divorced from reality, problems again emerged in Britain's preparation for the Second World War. The political landscape invariably plays a significant role in determining military developments, which cannot be viewed in isolation.

While all the protagonists on the Western Front had to cope with a new form of warfare, the British were poorly positioned to manage the change. It was a question of supply. The problem with the British Staff College system was not so much quality but quantity. There were nowhere near enough trained staff officers. Filling the necessary staff posts presented problems for all three armies but they were most acute for the British. The statistics are compelling. As this research has revealed, from just thirty-one general staff posts in August 1914 the total grew to 347 by the end of the war. If artillery and engineering staff are included, this tenfold increase became even

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<sup>6</sup> Fuller, *Army in My Time* pp. 104-5.

larger.<sup>7</sup> The industrial nature of the war was reflected in the exponential growth of artillery and engineering staff.

This study has emphasised that following the closure of the Staff Colleges the limited pool of qualified officers was much in demand. Many were needed for command posts, some were deployed in other theatres such as the Middle East or Salonika while the two other staff branches [A and Q] required their own consignment. The army was forced to call upon officers with no staff training to fill the gaps. The proportion of the general staff holding the psc fell dramatically over the course of the war as this study has outlined. By 1916 the majority of the general staff at Army, Corps and Division had not been trained at the Staff Colleges. Instead they had to be trained in the field.

Lack of experience and a shortage of trained officers was an issue that plagued the staff for a large part of the war. Following the principles in the Staff Manual was sound practice but experience usually proved to be the most reliable judge in difficult situations. What has been viewed as poor staff work was often due to inexperienced junior officers having to gain expertise in the field. A challenge made more arduous by the heavy workload many staff had to manage. Working hours were long, especially during periods of heavy fighting. Even when the pressure slackened off there were still the considerable demands of routine administration to be met. Criticism of staff work from the front line seldom took these factors into account.

The remedy for the lack of qualified staff was the introduction of wartime training schemes. What began as an informal expedient developed into a standardised programme. The attachment system and the wartime schools proved fairly successful despite having to cram two years teaching into as many months. They introduced the

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<sup>7</sup> The total of G, artillery and engineering staff posts grew from 44 in August 1914 to 666 by the end of the war.

fundamentals of staff work to novices and enhanced the skills of existing staff. These formal learning schemes established by the army were augmented by knowledge gleaned on an informal basis, such as visits to French formations or neighbouring units. Officers new to the staff and more seasoned practitioners reaped considerable benefits from these ventures. The army should be credited with displaying considerable vision and enterprise in instigating these schemes for the staff. They formed part of a wider set of initiatives, identified by historians such as Sheffield and Simkins, which drove the army's learning process.

Despite the influx of unqualified officers, the staff, unlike the wider army, remained an enclave of regular soldiers. They represented the traditional officer class of the pre-war army. In common with the senior command, a high proportion of them were educated at public school. Many were from elite regiments. Regulars comprised seventy-one per cent of the officers who served on the staff.<sup>8</sup> Most of these men had experienced combat, either pre-war or during the current conflict. Many had been wounded and a high proportion commanded small units up to battalion level. No new breed of officer revolutionized the staff. Regulars with military experience formed the mainstay. These officers brought their skills into the staff and were instrumental in its evolution. Admittedly, there was an influx of Territorials and volunteers, especially in the last two years of the war. They infiltrated the junior ranks but few progressed far up the staff career ladder so their influence was limited.

The influence of Staff College trained officers persisted throughout the war. They certainly played their part in the development of the effective and professional planning seen in the final year of the conflict. Even though the proportion of psc holders among the G staff fell to a low of twenty-one per cent in 1918, they held

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Five – 'Regulars and Outsiders'.

virtually all the senior positions.<sup>9</sup> This research has demonstrated that Staff College graduates and regular officers almost exclusively occupied the MGGS, BGGS and GSO 1 posts. It was a pattern that suggested an artificial career ceiling was imposed for those outside the regular army. This finding is in line with the view promulgated by Travers regarding the insularity of the British army. It was evident elsewhere, in the attitude of front-line troops to the staff and in the way that engineering and artillery staff officers were viewed.

The process of appointing staff was impaired by a degree of opacity. Suspicions of patronage were prevalent and GOCs appeared to hold the right of veto. Despite the presence of a roster administered by the Military Secretary's office, appeals and interventions appeared to be commonplace. Insufficient evidence is available to conclude that nepotism was rife but its absence would have been unusual given the period and the size of the institution. These findings demonstrate some support for the work of Travers who argued that the appointments system was ad hoc and personalised, reflecting the British Army's amateur, traditional ideal of war. Whilst his conclusions carry some weight it can be argued that as the war progressed the system succeeded in bringing talented staff officers into positions where they made a difference. For example, Harington, Dill and B.L. Montgomery amongst others. This evolution into a more professional and meritocratic system occurred as a process of incremental change over four years of war. The careerism displayed by army officers, highlighted by Robbins, was certainly evident within the staff. This placed the army in a dilemma. Many requests from trained staff officers to move into command positions met with refusal, as they could not be spared. Disgruntled staff continued to lobby for a move. If they were eventually successful this would result in

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

a reshuffle and disruption to the team. Exposure to instability of this sort was another challenge faced by the staff.

A GOC wielded considerable influence and would often take staff along when moving to another unit. Previous links were generally evident between the members of command teams. The relationship between the senior staff officer and the GOC of a formation was a crucial element in running a team. Staff practice could differ between units, contingent upon how this partnership operated. In some formations the senior staff officer effectively became a chief of staff. In others, responsibilities were jealously guarded and delegation was minimal. After the war, several practitioners advocated that the chief of staff model, used in the French and German armies, should be formally introduced but after some debate this proposal was rejected.

Great store was laid upon the principle that staff officers should assist and help the troops in the fighting areas. Effective staff work in planning and preparation was the most direct way to achieve this goal. In Tim Harington's view the lesson of the war was that; 'the majority of operations well prepared succeeded – the majority of operations ill-prepared failed'.<sup>10</sup> Many staff attested to the efforts they made to promote a sense of unity with the fighting soldiers. The view from the men in the front line was rather different and gave rise to the popular view of the staff enshrined in much of the literature of the war. Though this may have been partially discredited, the legacy still lingers. The evidence points in a different direction. Frequent visits to the front line and a good awareness of what took place there feature prominently in the personal accounts of the vast majority of staff officers. The accusation that the staff knew little of conditions in the fighting zone was not borne out in their own accounts. Junior staff officers recorded frequent visits to the front line to gather

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<sup>10</sup> Harington, *Harington Looks Back*, p. 61.



intelligence and report back with their findings. This was part of their job. Senior staff would visit to liaise with a unit they were about to relieve or to accompany their GOC on a tour of the trench lines.

Several issues surrounding staff and the front line require clarification. Perhaps the most fundamental is how the 'front line' was defined. Staff officers were most likely to visit forward HQs located in the support lines. What the staff referred to as a 'front line' visit may not necessarily refer to the firing line. The staff went to the places that their duties required they should go. Sometimes this might be the firing line, more often the support line or reserve area. Another point to emphasise is that they often chose not to advertise their visits. There could be a variety of reasons for this. A desire not to attract enemy fire was paramount or they may have wanted to inspect the condition of a unit unobserved. Finally, staff officers were often prevented from journeying up to the forward areas. There was a shortage of trained staff and the army could ill afford casualties. Staff officers did frequent the forward areas but it must be remembered that most of their role consisted of planning, liaising and reporting. These were tasks best undertaken at HQ.

The duties of the staff, based upon two key pre-war documents produced between 1909 and 1912, permeated most aspects of the activities of a formation. The orders and plans drawn up by the staff were integral to military activity. A skilled staff contributed a great deal to the effectiveness of a unit. Poor staff work could result in serious repercussions for the fighting troops. While all the good work behind the scenes went unnoticed, errors were excoriated. Even a small number would earn a staff a poor reputation. Poor communications frequently hindered the timely distribution of orders – a key component of good staff work. Staff officers were expected to run fault free. Like the electronic systems of the Internet age any

‘downtime’ resulted in furore. In common with many other administrative functions, the work of the staff was usually taken for granted. Lapses not only resulted in criticism but also led to a distorted perception that mistakes were constantly occurring.

The notion that all HQs consisted of opulent châteaux where staff officers lived in sumptuous surroundings should be discarded. The prime consideration in selecting a building to serve as headquarters was size and location. The large houses employed for the purpose were invariably classified as ‘châteaux’ but were more likely to be somewhat humbler abodes. The terminology used can be misleading, akin to the ambiguities in the usage of ‘front line’. The working conditions of the staff varied enormously from fetid dugouts to handsome châteaux. Pragmatism dictated there was sufficient space to accommodate the necessary staff and supporting functions. A damp cellar might suffice for a Divisional HQ whereas Corps and Army required much larger facilities. Those staff officers fortunate enough to work in a château were unlikely to be resident for long before their duties took them elsewhere.

The supposed ‘safety’ enjoyed by the staff is another facet of their lives in the field that does not stand up to closer inspection. Staff officers were often exposed to danger and were not immune to shelling even if their HQ was located some way behind the line. Large buildings often presented easy targets for enemy artillery. The casualty figures for general staff officers reveal that at least 220 [20 per cent] were killed or wounded in action. Although a high proportion of these casualties were recorded during service outside the staff system, they demonstrated that many staff officers had experienced coming under fire. They were vulnerable during their forays into the forward areas and when working back at their HQs. The staff may not have

endured the sustained exposure of units in the firing line but their duties entailed a degree of risk that meant they were far from 'safe'.

The pressure and relentless nature of staff work has received scant recognition. Personal diaries and letters reveal the strain experienced by many officers. While the values of the time militated against such confessions, some staff officers referred to mental and physical exhaustion. A lengthy stint on the staff could lead to a break down in health and a move back to Britain to recuperate. Lack of sleep was commonplace due to the demands of the role. Drafting detailed orders under such duress, knowing that any mistakes could have serious consequences, was a testing and stressful experience. For many inexperienced staff, feeling out of their depth, the strain was even worse. The communications issues that led to delays in distributing orders and getting plans dispatched only compounded the pressure. For most, life on the staff was far from the musical hall caricature of 'one long loaf'.

Assessing how the staff affected the military performance of the British army during the war is problematic. A brief synopsis of their achievements might state that they performed fairly well during the first few months, struggled during the middle years and evolved into a highly competent organization by the end of hostilities. This evaluation is consonant with some of the key events that affected the staff and fits the broader parameters of the 'learning curve'. In 1914 they were a small but highly experienced group, familiar with waging a war of movement who acquitted themselves reasonably well under considerable pressure. Mistakes were made during the middle years of the war when the staff suffered from tremendous upheaval due to expansion in the number of posts, the influx of inexperienced officers and the adjustment to unfamiliar static warfare. The final phase of the war witnessed an experienced staff that had undergone a learning process, had successfully integrated

officers from fighting units, was seasoned in the new form of warfare, were managing accomplished troops and had developed a streamlined planning process which allowed operations to be mounted in quick succession.

The chief difficulty in tackling the question of staff performance at different points during the war is the number of variables involved. This makes it hard to isolate the specific impact of the staff when comparing military events. Judging the staff work of an operation mounted in 1915 against one staged in 1918 has to account for differences in tactics, technology, terrain, the units involved and the strength of the opposition. The engagements fought in 1918 were radically different in nature from those in the early years of the war. For these reasons this study has focused instead on the changes experienced by the staff and the challenges they had to overcome. This does not diminish their contribution. It is an alternative route to highlighting their achievements. The expertise of the staff played a critical role in the performance of military units in the field. As one senior officer remarked in 1917, ‘Well, their staff has been splendid. I never realized even after all this long time that I have been at a Corps Headquarters how much depends on a staff’.<sup>11</sup>

A good deal more research remains to be done before a comprehensive understanding of staff officers and their work is reached. The German staff has received some attention and important work is in progress but there has yet to be any detailed coverage of the French system. On the Eastern Front, little is known about the workings of the Russian or Austro-Hungarian staff. Similarly, the staff officers of other combatant nations such as the Italian or Turkish armies are virtually unknown. Comparative studies of the staffs of different armies would add considerably to our understanding and complement Zabecki’s work on chiefs of staff.

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<sup>11</sup> Ward-Jackson to wife 24 April 1917, Extracts from Letters p. 494, Ward-Jackson Papers 78/22, IWM.

A valuable companion to this systematic analysis of the G staff would be an equivalent investigation into the soldiers of the A and Q branches. Were these branches also bastions of regular officers? What percentage of their officers was drawn from the Staff Colleges and how did their staff evolve during the war? This research has focused upon the Western Front but the British army was active in the Middle East, Salonika and other theatres. Relatively little is known about the work of the staff in these areas.

Just over twenty years after the conclusion of the First World War the staff of the British army were put to the test once more. What lessons had been learned? Many of the staff featured in this study rose to positions of considerable influence in the command teams of the Second World War. How had their earlier experiences shaped their outlook for the next conflict? A systematic study of the general staff of this later conflict would not only answer these questions but would allow direct comparisons with their First World War counterparts. There was no shortage of suggestions for how the staff should develop during the inter-war years. The post-mortems carried out by the Kirke and Braithwaite Committees put forward a number of recommendations about the future shape of the staff and the way it should operate. They had little impact. As David French has concluded, between the wars the staff were 'inadequately manned and trained, and poorly organised'.<sup>12</sup> It seems that some of the lessons learned during the First World War were quickly forgotten.

The achievements of the general staff of the British army have been consistently underrated. Insufficient consideration has been given to the factors they had to overcome during the course of the war. The evidence revealed here shows that the hackneyed depictions of the staff that have prevailed for far too long should be

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<sup>12</sup> D. French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 164.

firmly put to rest. Staff officers were very much aware of conditions in the front line and were no strangers to combat or hostile fire. Most HQs were rather more commonplace and considerably less opulent dwellings than the châteaux supposedly inhabited by the staff. They were not all living in comfort, sheltered from the realities of the war. These findings confirm the work of Holmes, Messenger and Robbins. They should serve as a foundation to build a better understanding of the staff.

This study has established that the staff had to face tremendous changes in a short space of time. Inexperience led to mistakes, sometimes with tragic consequences for those in the front line. Successful staff planning garnered few accolades but errors attracted considerable criticism. When an operation failed to reach its objectives or high casualties were incurred, the finger of blame was invariably pointed at the staff. In common with the wider army, they had to go through a learning process to overcome the enormous challenges the war presented. By undertaking an in-depth analysis of the staff this research has complemented the body of work established by Bond, Bourne, Sheffield, Simkins, Simpson and others that has thrown light upon a critical function of the army. The British army during the First World War underwent a military transformation from a professional colonial force to a mass army able to effectively prosecute all-arms warfare. It embraced changes in technology, tactics and structure to emerge as a potent force that achieved victory together with its French ally against a redoubtable foe. This systematic examination of the staff and their duties throws light upon an aspect of the development of the army that has received far less attention than battlefield performance. The key role played by the staff was an indispensable part of the journey to victory. The difficulties they overcame an equally important part of the broader learning process experienced throughout the British army. In highlighting their achievements this study has developed a greater awareness

of the contribution made by the staff. They successfully managed enormous changes in organisation and personnel to become a highly efficient function within a very capable fighting force.

The majority of the staff were regular officers, specialists who needed to develop considerable expertise to succeed at their duties. There were few volunteer heroes amongst them but they were far from a race apart. Perhaps their accomplishments were best captured by one of their number who remarked after the war:

The expansion of our Staffs from a peace to a war footing was carried out smoothly and easily, and after over four years of war, and including the great increase of the Army, it cannot be said that the Staff work has fallen away in any respect, but on the contrary, it has reached a standard which has not been attained by any other of the Allied Armies.<sup>13</sup>

The work undertaken by the staff played a vital part in the Allied victory. They surmounted considerable adversity to emerge as part of a war winning army. Their contribution has yet to receive the appreciation it warrants. The men who planned the war should be seen in a different light and accorded the recognition for their efforts that has been long overdue.

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<sup>13</sup> Dill, 'Reorganisation of Staff Work in the Field' p. 1, Dill Papers 1/11, LHCMA.

# Biographical Notes

**Allanson, Colonel C.J.:** [1877–1943] Indian Army Joined army 1897. Psc Quetta. Served as GSO 2 in Gallipoli. Arrived France Feb 1917 as GSO 1, 57<sup>th</sup> Div. In August 1917 moved to Middle East as Bde Commander. Wounded three times. DSO 1915.

**Barrow, General Sir George de Symons:** [1864–1959] Indian Army Joined army 1884. Psc 1895. DAAG, Camberley 1908. GSO 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Div then BGGs, Cav Corps 1914. Bde Cmndr then BGGs X Corps from Aug 1915. Promoted MGGS First Army from early 1916. Moved to Middle East in Mar 1917 as GOC Cav Div.

**Beddington, Brigadier Sir Edward Henry ‘Moses’:** [1884–1966] 16<sup>th</sup> Lancers Joined army 1902. Psc 1913. GSO 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Div late 1914. Bde Major Jan–Aug 1915. GSO 3, Indian Cavalry Corps to Feb 1916. GSO 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Div to mid 1916. Moved to GSO 2 post with Fifth Army until Jan 1917. Promoted GSO 1, 8<sup>th</sup> Div. After 11 months became GSO 1 Fifth Army until end of war. MC, DSO.

**Bonham-Carter, General Sir Charles:** [1876–1955] Royal W. Kent Regt Joined army 1896. Served as regimental officer. Wounded Sep 1914. Bde Major subsequently promoted GSO 2 50<sup>th</sup> Div in Apr 1915. Raised to GSO 1 7<sup>th</sup> Div Feb 1916. Ran several wartime training schools at Hesdin. BGGs III Corps Aug–Nov 1917. Moved to GHQ as BGGs until Sep 1918 when became BGGs VIII & subsequently VII Corps. DSO.

**Bowly, Colonel W.A.:** [1880–1957] Dorset Regt. Joined army 1901. ADC to General H. Smith-Dorrien. GSO 3, IV Corps from Jul 1915. Promoted GSO 2, IV Corps Apr 1916. Moved to 37<sup>th</sup> Div as GSO 2 Apr 1917. Promoted GSO 1 at GHQ Apr 1918. MC 1915.

**Burnett-Stuart, Major-General Sir John ‘Jock’:** [1875–1958] Rifle Bde. Joined army 1895. Psc 1902. GSO 2, 6<sup>th</sup> Div 1914. Moved to 15<sup>th</sup> Div as GSO 2 Mar 1915. Promoted GSO 1, 15<sup>th</sup> Div Aug 1915. Moved to GHQ end 1915. Promoted BGGs VII Corps Mar 1917. Returned to GHQ as DAG start 1918. DSO. Proponent of mechanized warfare.

**Butler, Major-General S.S.:** [1880–1964] South Staffs Regt. Served Middle East and Gallipoli. In April 1916 arrived France as GSO 2 I, ANZAC. Promoted GSO 1, Fifth Army Feb 1918. Moved to GHQ in Apr 1918. DSO.

**Capper, Major-General Sir Thompson:** [1863–1915] East Lancs Regt. Joined army 1882. Commandant Staff College Quetta 1906–11. GOC 7<sup>th</sup> Div 1914. Wounded Apr 1915. KIA Battle of Loos Sept 1915. DSO.

**De Burgh, General Sir Eric:** [1881–1973] Indian Army. Joined army 1901. Psc Quetta 1912. Bde Major. Promoted GSO 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cav Div Jun 1916. GSO 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav Div Aug 1917. Recalled India Jun 1918. DSO 1916.



**Dill, Field Marshal Sir John Greer:** [1881–1944] Leinster Regt. Joined army 1901. Psc 1914. Served as Bde Major from late 1914 before promotion to GSO 2, 55<sup>th</sup> Div in Feb 1916. From Jul 1916 to Mar 1917, GSO 2, Canadian Corps then promoted GSO 1, 37<sup>th</sup> Div. Remained until Nov 1917 when moved to GHQ. Served WW2 and attained rank of Field Marshal. Wounded. DSO 1915.

**Evetts, Lieutenant-General Sir John Fullerton:** [1891–1988] Cameronians Joined army 1911. Machine Gun Corps. GSO 3 XVII Corps Sept 1917. Bde Major Mar 17–Jul 18. Promoted GSO 2 11<sup>th</sup> Div then moved to GHQ. MC. GOC 6<sup>th</sup> Div in WW2.

**Fuller, Major-General J.F.C. ‘Boney’:** [1878–1966] Ox & Bucks L.I. Joined army 1898. Psc 1914\*. Served embarkation officer UK. GSO 3 VII Corps July 1915. Promoted GSO 2, 37<sup>th</sup> Div early 1916. Became GSO 2, Third Army July 1916 before moving as GSO 2, Tank Corps in 1917. DSO 1917. Influential military strategist and historian.

**Game, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Phillip:** [1876–1961] RA Joined army 1895. Psc 1909. GSO 2, IV Corps Jan 1915. Promoted GSO 1, 46<sup>th</sup> Div Aug 1915. Moved to RFC Apr 1916. DSO 1915.

**Glyn, Major the Lord:** [1885-1960] Rifle Bde Rejoined army 1914. Served on staff at Gallipoli. GSO 3, 17<sup>th</sup> Div from Feb 1917. After 12 months moved to XV Corps as GSO 2. Attached to American Army GHQ as liaison. Post-war resumed political career. Elected MP for Abingdon and served as Private Sec to PM Ramsay MacDonald from 1931-35.

**Grant, General Sir Charles John Cecil:** [1877–1950] Coldstream Guards Joined army 1897. Psc 1904. Bde Major then served as GSO 2 in Gallipoli campaign. Returned to France as liaison officer with French Sixth Army. GSO 1, 12<sup>th</sup> Div end 1915 to early 1917. Became GSO 1 Third Army until end 1917. GOC 1<sup>st</sup> Bde, 1<sup>st</sup> Div, subsequently reverted to liaison work with Foch and Haig. Wounded. DSO 1915.

**Griffith, Lieutenant Llewellyn Wyn:** [1890-1977] Welch Fusiliers Joined army 1914. Occupation: Civil servant. Private then promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieut. Became GSO 3, II ANZAC until end war. Returned to Inland Revenue.

**Grove, Colonel T.T. Grove:** [1879–1975] RE Joined army 1897. GSO 3 6<sup>th</sup> Div Mar 1915–Oct. Promoted GSO 2, Cav Corps. Joined 17<sup>th</sup> Div in Feb 1916 as GSO 2. Moved to 41<sup>st</sup> Div start 1917. Promoted GSO 1, 6<sup>th</sup> Div Apr 1917. DSO & clasp 1917.

**Guinness, Walter Lord Moyne:** [1880–1944] Suffolk Yeomanry Occupation: MP from 1907. Joined army 1914. Served Gallipoli & Egypt. Arrived France 1916 as second-in-command 11<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Btln. Became Bde Major to 74<sup>th</sup> Bde in 1917 & briefly Bde Major to 198 Bde. Promoted GSO 2 66<sup>th</sup> Div in Jun 1918 where he finished war. DSO & clasp.

**Grigg, E.W.M. ‘The Scribe’:** [1879–1955] Grenadier Guards Joined army 1914. Occupation: journalist. GSO 3 Guards Div Feb 1916. Promoted Bde Major Jul 1916. In Mar 1917 raised to GSO 2, XVIII Corps & served XVIII Corps before brief spell

as doctrine writer at GHQ. In Apr 1918 became GSO 1, Guards Div. Only British volunteer soldier to attain this grade.

**Harington, Major-General Charles 'Tim':** [1870–1940] Liverpool Regt. Joined army 1892. Psc 1908. GSO 2 III Corps to May 1915. Promoted GSO 1, 49<sup>th</sup> Div then served as BGGs Canadian Corps Oct 1915–June 1916. MGGs, Second Army for 24 months until moving to War Office in mid-1918. DSO.

**Harrison, Major-General E.F.:** [1893–1987] RA Joined army 1913. Artillery officer 7<sup>th</sup> Div. ADC to General Sir Hubert Gough. GSO 2, 58<sup>th</sup> Div from Oct 1918. MC 1915. Served WW2.

**Headlam, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Cuthbert:** [1876–1964] Bedfordshire Yeomanry Joined army 1914. Occupation: House of Lords clerk. Arrived France Jun 1915. ADC to Earl of Cavan. GSO 3, Second Army Jan 1916. Promoted GSO 2, VIII Corps Nov 1916. Moved to GHQ Apr 1918 as doctrine writer. DSO 1918.

**Henderson, Lieutenant-Colonel Kenneth:** 1875–? Indian Army Joined army 1895. Psc Quetta 1906. Bde Major. Promoted GSO 2, 15<sup>th</sup> Div May 1916. Left France in Sept 1916 due to sickness. Served as GSO1 with 73<sup>rd</sup> & 69<sup>th</sup> Divs in UK.

**Howell, Brigadier-General Phillip,** [1877–1916] 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars Joined army 1897. Psc Quetta 1907. GOC 4<sup>th</sup> Hussars 1914. BGGs Cav Corps Ma 1915. Moved to GHQ Salonika Nov 1915. Returned France Jun 1916 as BGGs II Corps. KIA Oct 1916.

**Jeudwine, Major-General Hugh Sandham:** [1862–1942] RA Joined army 1882. Instructor at Camberley. GSO 1, I Corps Aug–Nov 1914. Moved to 1<sup>st</sup> Div as GSO 1 then promoted to BGGs V Corps in early 1915. In Oct 1915 became Bde commander and subsequently GOC 55<sup>th</sup> Div.

**Johnston, Brigadier Alexander Colin:** [1884–1952] Worcs. Regt. Joined army 1903. Signals officer for 7 Bde. in 1914 then moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> Div. in same capacity. Became GSO 3 25<sup>th</sup> Div in Jan 1916. Promoted Bde Major Mar 1916 & then CO 10<sup>th</sup> Bttn Cheshire Regt. Ended war as commander 126 Bde. Wounded three times. MC.

**Kiggell, Lieutenant-General Sir Launcelot Edward:** [1862–1954] Royal Warks Regt. Joined army 1882. Commandant Camberley Staff College 1913. Served as Chief General Staff at GHQ from late 1915 to January 1918 when succeeded by Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Lawrence.

**Loch, Major-General Lord:** [1873–1942] Grenadier Guards Joined army 1897. Psc 1909. GSO 2 liaison officer Aug–Dec 1914. GSO 1, 28<sup>th</sup> Div Jan 1915. Promoted BGGs VI Corps Jun 1915. CO 110 Bde from Aug 1917. Resigned command due to sickness Jan 1918 & returned to UK. DSO.

**MacDougall, Major-General Alistair Ian:** [1888–1972] 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers Joined army 1906. Adjutant 5<sup>th</sup> Lancers in 1914. GSO 3, VI Corps Feb 1916. Promoted Bde Major 44<sup>th</sup> Bde Sep 1916. Raised to GSO 1, 21<sup>st</sup> Div Apr 1918. MC 1915, DSO. Served on War Office staff in WW2.

**Maurice, Major-General Sir Frederick Barton:** [1871–1951] Notts & Derby Regt. Joined army 1892. Psc 1903. GSO 2, 3<sup>rd</sup> Div 1914. Promoted GSO 1, 3<sup>rd</sup> Div Nov 1914. Moved to GHQ Mar 1915 & subsequently to War Office. Resigned in 1918 following his allegations over the manpower crisis in the army.

**May, Captain Charles Campbell:** [1889–1916] Manchester Regt. Joined army 1914. Occupation: journalist. Arrived France Dec 1915. KIA 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, Battle of the Somme.

**Monk, Major John Magrath:** [1888–1920] Worcs Regt. Joined army 1908. Fought 1<sup>st</sup> Ypres. Wounded Neuve Chapelle 1915. Returned to France as Adjutant then Bde Major 197 Bde. Promoted GSO 2, 16<sup>th</sup> Div Apr 1918. Moved to II Corps as GSO2 Oct 1918. MC 1916, clasped 1917. KIA, Sudan 1920.

**Montgomery, Viscount Bernard Law:** [1887–1976] Royal Warks Joined army 1908. Fought Le Cateau & Meteren in 1914 where he was seriously wounded. In early 1915 became Bde Major, 112<sup>th</sup> Bde & subsequently 104 Bde. Promoted GSO 2, 33<sup>rd</sup> Div Feb 1917. Moved as GSO 2 to IX Corps in Aug 1917. Rose to GSO 1, 47<sup>th</sup> Div Sep 1918. DSO 1914. Distinguished military career in WW2 attaining rank of Field Marshal.

**Price-Davies, Major-General L.A.E. 'Jane':** [1878–1965] KRRC Joined army 1898. Psc 1909. GSO 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> Div 1914. Promoted GSO 2 end 1914 & moved to GHQ. In Mar 1915 GSO 2, 46<sup>th</sup> Div. Commander 113 Bde from Nov 1915–Nov 1917. Move back to UK until Apr 1918 when he returned to France. Sent to Italy for rest of war with temp rank of Major-General. VC 1901, DSO.

**Roupell, Brigadier G.R.:** [1892–1974] Royal West Surrey Regt. Joined army 1912. Fought 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres. GSO 3, XVII Corps Jun–Sep 1916. GSO 3, Third Army until end 1916. Bde Major, 105 Bde to June 1918. Promoted GSO 2, 8<sup>th</sup> Div. Wounded twice. VC 1915.

**Smith, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Francis:** [1890–1977] Coldstream Guards Joined army 1909. Adjutant, Coldstream Guards until end 1915. GSO 3, Guards Div then GSO 3, XI Corps from Feb–Jul 1916. Promoted GSO 2 38<sup>th</sup> Div before moving to GSO 2, XIV Corps. Returned to UK after being severely wounded at 3<sup>rd</sup> Ypres in Aug 1917. DSO, MC. After the war enjoyed distinguished military career becoming Chief of Staff Middle East in WW2.

**Stanhope, Lieutenant-Colonel Earl:** [1880–1967] Grenadier Guards Dug out who rejoined army 1914. Served 1<sup>st</sup> Bttn Grenadier Guards until March 1915 when appointed GSO 3, V Corps. Promoted GSO 2, II Corps Dec 1916. Moved to War Office in Jan 1918. DSO 1917, MC. Distinguished political career post-war.

**Ward-Jackson, Major C.L.A.:** [1869–1930] Yorkshire Hussars. Dug out who rejoined army 1914. Camp commandant VII Corps, Jul 1915–Feb 1918. Conservative MP post-war.

**Whitefoord, Major-General Phillip Geoffrey:** [1894–1975] RA Joined army 1913. Battery Captain RA until appointed GSO 3 at GHQ Feb 1917. Moved to GSO 3, 37<sup>th</sup> Division in May 1917 where he finished war.

**Woolley, Captain Geoffrey:** [1892–1968] London Regiment Joined army 1914. Occupation: student. Won VC at 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres 1915. Wounded. GSO 3, Third Army Aug 1916. Served as instructor at infantry school from Oct 1917–May 1918 then became GSO 3 Third Army. First Territorial officer to be awarded VC.

# Appendices

## **Appendix 1: Sample group parameters**

### **Research boundaries**

The study covers 1,102 officers who served as the principal planners of military actions at Army, Corps and Division level. For the purposes of this research these are specifically defined as members of the general staff [G] group, responsible for operations and intelligence

Officers who served at GHQ and Brigade level are not included in this study for reasons of scale. The other two staff branches Adjutant General [A] and Quartermaster General [Q] also lie beyond the boundary of the research, as these functions were mainly responsible for personnel and logistics.

### **Movement of staff**

The study cohort comprised officers for the period they served on the G staff at Army, Corps and Division levels. Aspects of their careers outside these roles do not form part of this research. During the course of the war many officers in the study cohort moved into or out of the sample group as they joined the staff, transferred between formation levels, staff branches, or left the staff altogether.

### **Examples**

Cuthbert Headlam is included in the sample group for the period from early 1916 when he became GSO 3 at Second Army through to spring 1918. From this point he falls outside the study as he moved to GHQ. Consequently, his promotion to GSO 1 at GHQ as a Territorial is not included in the thesis – as GHQ posts fall outside the study boundary. Two further examples are provided below to illustrate the study boundaries.

Lieutenant-Colonel B.F. Burnett-Hitchcock became part of the sample group when appointed GSO 2 with 4<sup>th</sup> Division in November 1914. He left the group in June 1916 when he joined Q branch and his subsequent career is not covered as he moved outside the study boundary.

Walter Guinness became part of the sample group in June 1918 when he became GSO 2 with 66<sup>th</sup> Division. Prior to this he had served as a Brigade Major.

## Appendix 2: Changes in establishment

Source: Data compiled from 'Composition of HQ: British Armies in France', IWM; WO 24/399-322, TNA

Over the course of the war there were changes in structure at Army, Corps and Division that led to fluctuations in the number of G staff posts. Similarly, there were changes in the establishment of A and Q branches. The key changes are outlined below and shown in the accompanying tables.

Four G staff posts were initially established at Army level. This increased during 1915 as artillery posts were added. In October 1915, three additional GSO 3 posts were introduced increasing the establishment to ten. In July of the following year the Operations and Intelligence functions were split at GSO 1 level. An additional GSO 1 post was added but a GSO 2 position removed leaving the establishment at ten. A third GSO 1 was added in March 1917. A GSO 1 RA was added in January 1917. Overall, the establishment per army increased from four to fourteen.

Corps had an establishment of five in 1914 but some duties were transferred to Army level at the start of 1915. The GSO 1 position was removed and GSO 2 posts cut to one. An additional GSO 3 was added in March 1915 bringing the establishment back up to three. Artillery staff first appeared in November 1915. Operations and Intelligence were split at the GSO 2 level in September 1916, artillery posts increased and an engineering officer appeared. This pushed the establishment up to nine. A month later, a GSO 3 post was removed. In March 1917, a third GSO 2 was added. At the start of 1917, a GSO 2 RA was introduced increasing the number of GSO 2 posts in a Corps to three. Total Corps posts rose from five to ten over the course of the war.

The number of G staff posts at Division level remained stable at three. A Brigade Major and Staff Captain RA were introduced in September 1914. The addition of a third artillery staff post at Division pushed the establishment up to a total of six by November 1918. Cavalry Divisions saw changes in 1915 but then reverted to their original establishment level of three G staff.