

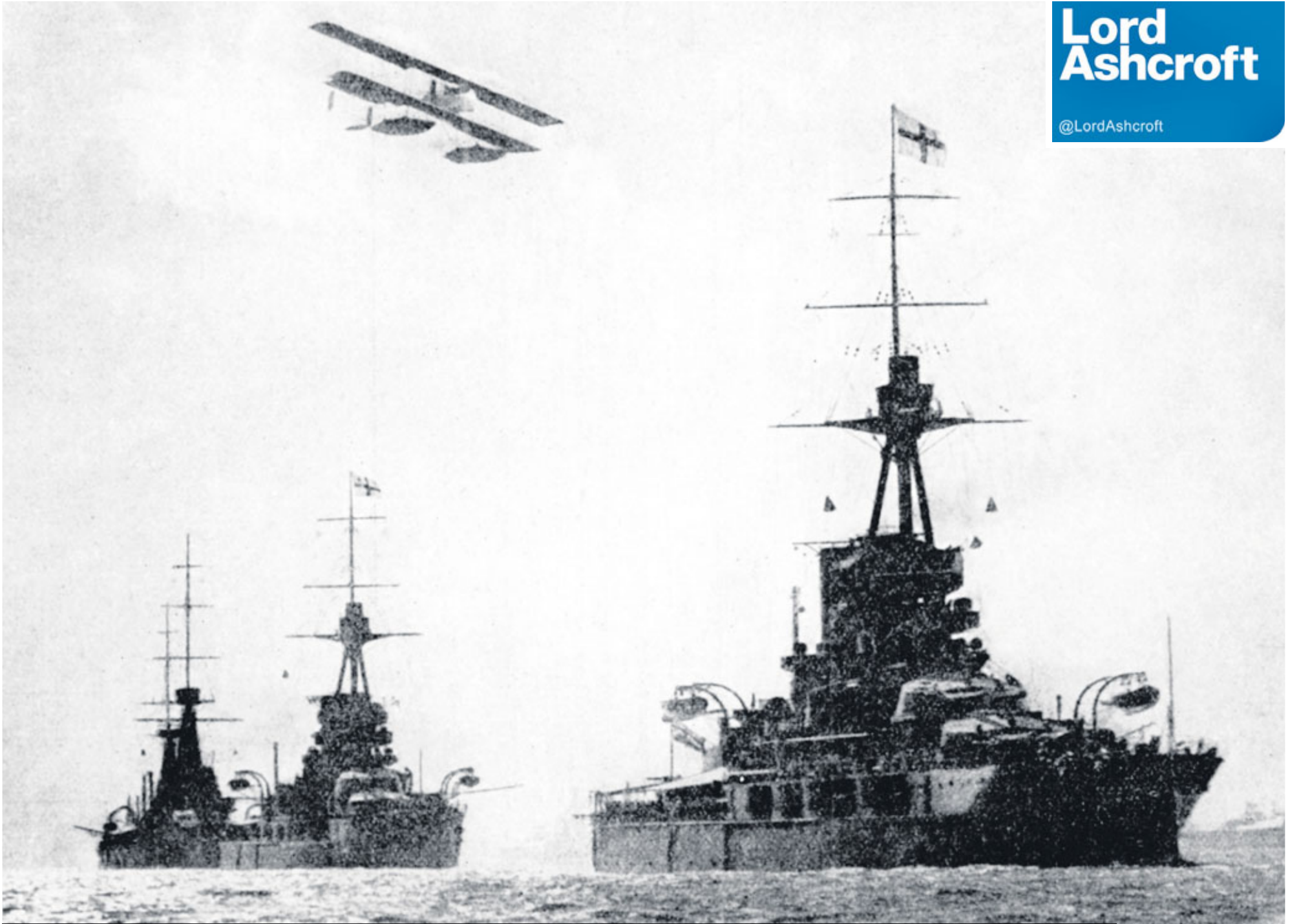
FIRST WORLD WAR

PART 11: ALL-ARMS BATTLES

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WELCOME

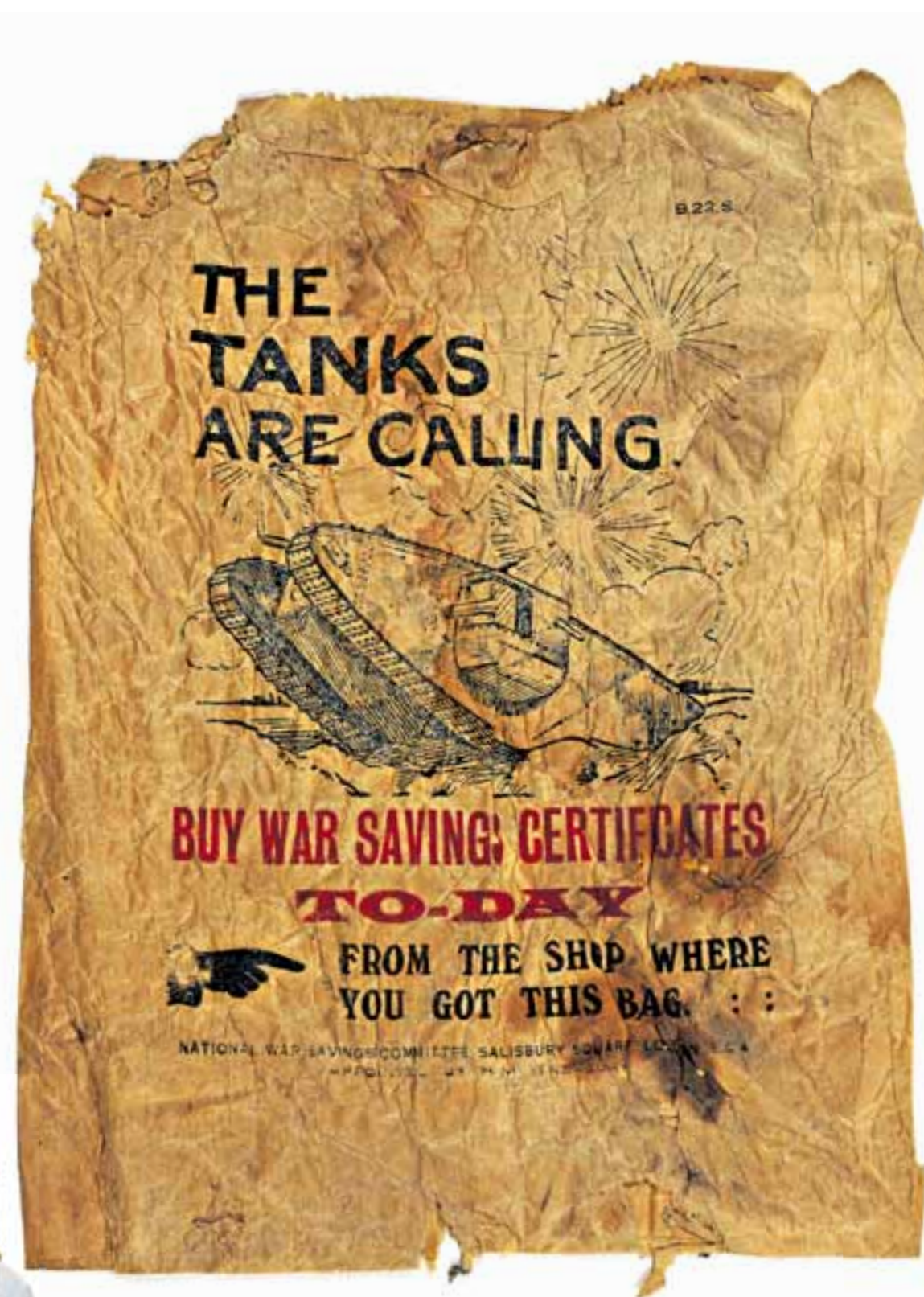
Welcome to our “All-arms Battles” issue in which we look at how the lessons learnt from the war’s past failures and triumphs, combined with new weapons and tactics, were employed to steer the Allies towards victory.

In our lead piece, we challenge whether the Battle of the Somme – whose first day was the bloodiest in the British Army’s history – was really the nadir of the First World War or the essential learning curve that turned the British Expeditionary Force into a professional and ultimately triumphant army.

We also look at the vital role that 1917’s unrestricted submarine warfare played in the outcome of the war: battles whose success came from all-arms co-ordination and a multiplicity of methods. And we weigh up the reputations of the war’s top generals – their legacies, in some cases, becoming increasingly corroded as the decades passed.

You’ll also find our regular features, including battlefield art, poetry and letters from IWM – plus more letters from readers’ loved ones who served bravely, and the story of how Winnie the Pooh’s pacifist creator turned war propagandist.

Zoe Dare Hall
Series editor



Front cover: Dreadnoughts of the British Grand Fleet, North Sea, 1914; above, paper bag backing a war savings scheme

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Inside the First World War, a 12-part series, is sponsored by Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC, an international businessman, philanthropist and military historian. Lord Ashcroft is sponsoring the monthly supplements because he wants to promote a greater understanding of the First World War and to remember those who gave their lives in the conflict.

Lord Ashcroft has established himself as a champion of bravery, building up the world’s largest collection of Victoria Crosses (VCs), Britain and the Commonwealth’s most prestigious award for courage in the face of the enemy. He has also written four books on bravery: *Victoria Cross Heroes*, *Special Forces Heroes*, *George Cross Heroes* and *Heroes of the Skies*. In each of the 12 supplements, Lord Ashcroft tells the incredible stories behind

First World War VCs from his collection.

Lord Ashcroft purchased his first VC in 1986 and currently owns more than 180 of the decorations. Three years ago, he began collecting George Crosses (GCs), Britain and the Commonwealth’s most prestigious award for courage not in the face of the enemy. He currently owns 14 GCs. Lord Ashcroft’s VC and GC collections are on display in a gallery that bears his name at IWM London, along with VCs and GCs in

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Lord Ashcroft has donated several millions of pounds to charities and good causes.

He founded Crimestoppers (then the Community Action Trust) in 1988.

He is the founder of the Ashcroft Technology Academy and Chancellor

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A GOOD CAUSE?

The Battle of the Somme took a shocking toll in lives but laid the foundations of victory.
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THE SOMME



All for a good cause: the lingering pain



MENTION OF THE SOMME STILL EVOKES VISIONS OF HORROR, YET IT WAS THE BASIS OF VICTORY, EXPLAINS **NIGEL STEEL**

In the cold, dark dawn of October 8, 1916, the 56th Division renewed its push from Lesboeufs towards Le Transloy on the Somme. As the British soldiers climbed out of their front line, the German machine guns opened up and stopped the attack dead. Among the wounded of the 1/3rd Battalion, London Regiment was L/Cpl John Shaw. He later wrote to his mother in what he felt might be his last ever letter.

"I have been shot through the hips and cannot use my right leg, properly knocked up. Pity, when one gets a Blighty one too, after so long. Well darling, I am still cheerful of getting home. If not you will receive this letter which they surely will send to know I died for my country and home like a man. I am laying writing this on the Somme Battle. It is some battle too, I can tell you. The noise of the shells and guns worry the life out of anyone. Remember me to all the girls. Dear Alice, Ada and Tina. Also Alf. Tell them I died the death of a soldier and man. Whatever you do, dear, don't worry yourself. Promise me that. All for a good cause."

John Shaw was sent to hospital in Rouen, but died of his wounds on October 18. Yet as his letter shows, he did not regard his death as a waste. He believed the war to be just and he remained philosophical about the consequences for him.

To most people today, the 1916 Battle of the Somme appears unremittably futile. Even more than Passchendaele and Gallipoli, in Britain it seems to represent the nadir of the First World War. No other moment comes so close to defining the popular

understanding of 1914-18. Britain has no clear foundation myth linked to the war. There is no Gallipoli as for Australia and New Zealand, or Vimy Ridge for Canada; just the Somme, throbbing in the side of the nation like an unhealed wound.

Britain's unbroken connection to the chalk uplands of Picardy dates back to 1914 when a powerful upsurge of enthusiasm drove a million men to enlist well before Christmas. Men started to join up together in battalions of "pals" in affirmation of their collective way of life. They shared common values and wanted to defend these against the growing threat that appeared to be coming out of Germany.

In Yorkshire, the men of Leeds, Bradford, Barnsley, Sheffield and Hull coalesced into the 31st Division of Kitchener's New Army. They trained hard and, with some interlopers accepted from outside the county – from Accrington in Lancashire and as far away as Durham – they began the long march that by summer 1916 led them to the Somme.

On July 1, the opening of the "great push", the 31st Division was on the northern edge of the battle facing strong German positions at Serre. At 7.30am, the British rose up, with the men from Leeds, Accrington and Sheffield in the lead. None made it across no-man's-land. Despite a week-long bombardment, the German defenders scythed them down. In less than an hour, the pals suffered around 1,500 casualties. As news filtered home, families, factories and sports clubs felt bereft.

This remains the received vision of July 1, 1916:

slaughter and loss, futility and sacrifice; the bloodiest day in the British Army's history, with almost 20,000 men killed and 40,000 more wounded. The scale of the disaster overshadows and obscures any deeper understanding of the day. Yet it was not all like this.

On the southern end of the British line, the 30th Division also went over the top. It too was populated by northern pals, from Manchester and Liverpool. Supported by stronger and more effective artillery, including the better-supplied French guns to their

“**FROM THE INEXPERIENCED, NAIVE FORCE OF 1914, THE BEF BECOMES A HARD-NOSED PROFESSIONAL ARMY IN 1918**

right, and propelled by more imaginative tactics, the Lancastrians surged steadily forward from Maricourt and successfully took their objective of Montauban. They showed that, given a fair chance, Kitchener's men could fight and overcome the German defences. Although achieved at considerable cost, the capture of the positions along this southern edge of the battle was the first time in the war that planned objectives had been taken and held in a major offensive.

Nothing provides a greater contrast in the



history of the war than the abject failure in the north at Serre and the stirring achievements in the south at Montauban. Few know about the successes there. July 1 is remembered solely as an unmitigated disaster. Yet for historians it represents the beginning of a process of growth and development that reaches through to the end of the war and German defeat.

In the weeks of hard, bloody fighting that followed, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on the Somme was joined by men from Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Key lessons were learnt by front-line soldiers and their generals in how to use new weapons such as the Lewis gun, trench mortar, grenade and even the impressive but still limited tank.

Artillery was employed to ever greater effect with new fuses on the shells and as a creeping barrage to offer closer support to advancing infantry. Soldiers began to fight in smaller units, with riflemen working closely with men using the new weapons. By November, when the worsening weather forced the suspension of immediate operations, it was a very different war from the one encountered on the first day. The men of the BEF had come of age.

Since the 50th anniversary of the Somme in 1966, historians have struggled to draw out and explain these lessons. Despite decades of research and writing, people find it hard to get past the bleak balance sheet of the fighting: 141 days leading to a maximum advance of seven miles. For Britain and its Empire this came at the cost of almost 420,000

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casualties including 125,000 dead. German casualties were higher, between 437,000 and 680,000.

What positive outcome could be found in that? Combined with their heavy losses against the French at Verdun, the Germans realised they could not repeat their experience on the Somme. The price had been too high. A change in German military leadership led to a new policy. A new defensive line was built some way to the rear that could be held with fewer men. Known as the Hindenburg Line, the Germans believed it to be impregnable. In mid-February, 1917, German front-line troops began to fall back towards their new positions. The ground taken from them as they withdrew was as direct a result of the Somme as the hard-won gains taken in the battle itself and only with the capture of these positions did the fighting really end.

At the same time, recognising that they would be unable to win the war that year in the west, the Germans decided to suspend their attacks there. Instead, in a clear new strategic policy, they chose to use the submarine to strike hard against Britain in an attempt to force it out of the war. Only a few weeks later, when the BEF returned to the offensive, it showed how much it had learnt on the Somme. On April 9, the opening day of the Battle of Arras, significant gains were made. Vimy Ridge was captured by the Canadians and in places the British advanced up to three and a half miles. It demonstrated the BEF's growing proficiency as a fighting force.

The pace of this development rolled on throughout 1917. At Ypres along the Menin Road and at Broodseinde, and at Cambrai in the initial strike, British and Imperial forces operated with a stronger, more professional edge. At each stage the Germans showed how much they, too, were learning in parallel with the British, with the result that losses on both sides remained uncomfortably high and the ambitions of British attacks were often thwarted.

Yet, bolstered by growing numbers of newly arrived American troops, in the spring of 1918 when the Germans turned the tables with a series of massive attacks up and down the front, the BEF defended with great determination.

By the time they launched their own counter-offensive on the Somme on August 8, 1918, the British and Imperial soldiers had become ruthlessly efficient, honed by repeated battles and the careful study of their mistakes and successes. Weapons and tactics developed over months of experience were all incorporated into a new "all-arms" battle that began to wear down the increasingly exhausted Germans.

The Australian commander, Lt Gen Sir John Monash, observed that "a perfected modern battle plan is like nothing so much as a score for an orchestral composition, where the various arms and units are the instruments, and the tasks they perform are their respective musical phrases". The generals began to conduct their orchestras with considerable skill, bringing in tanks, aircraft, machine guns, artillery and infantry at the place and moment where they could have maximum effect.

The 38th Welsh Division had struggled to capture Mametz Wood in July, 1916. Now they swept over the whole of the old battleground in a matter of days. The British advance pushed on towards the Hindenburg Line. But this time the ground was not given up by the Germans. It was taken from them by force of arms, trench by trench, machine gun by machine gun. When, on September 29, the Hindenburg Line was broken open, it was ordinary soldiers from the heartland of Britain who led the way using skills they had picked up on the Somme.

For historians, this shows the steady progress and gradual improvement that sees the BEF climb a steep but rewarding learning curve. From the inexperienced, naive force of 1914 it becomes a hard-nosed professional army in 1918 that carries the Allies inexorably to the November 11 Armistice.

Yet despite all this, for ordinary people the argument fails to convince. In Accrington, Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester, they still feel the loss of their men. Along with thousands of lives, hope and innocence also seemed to die on the Somme in 1916. The battle dealt a fatal blow to the optimism and pride of the nation, as Philip Larkin articulated 50 years later in his poem *MCMXIV*.

Objectively, the 1916 Battle of the Somme did indeed lay the foundations for Britain's part in the Allied victory two years later. But even when this fact is recognised, it fails to explain why, after almost 100 years, we still feel the pain of the Somme so deeply.

● Nigel Steel is IWM's principal historian for the First World War Centenary Programme

COURAGE AT SEA

U-boats declare all-out war but the convoys triumph



DAVID STEVENSON
ON HOW ALLIED SHIPS
DEFIED THE TORPEDOES

In January 1917, the German government took what Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg called a “second decision for war”. Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered that from February 1 the waters around the British Isles and Northern France would be declared a “prohibited zone” in which any vessel would be liable to be torpedoed without warning. According to the Chief of the Admiralty Staff, Henning von Holtzendorff, this campaign of “unrestricted” submarine warfare would frighten off neutral steamers and sink up to 600,000 tons of British shipping a month. Within five months, London would be obliged to sue for peace.

The Germans had already experimented with unrestricted submarine warfare, but suspended it because of US protests. After the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915, President Woodrow Wilson had insisted that the U-boats respect passenger liners; after the torpedoing of French steamer Sussex in March 1916, he obtained a German conditional promise to follow “cruiser rules” – that is, that submarines would give warning and allow the passengers time to take to the boats.

By renegeing on the Sussex pledge, the Germans knew they were virtually certain to bring America in. But whereas in 1915 they had had 27 operational U-boats, now they had more than 100. Encouraged by 1916’s disappointing Northern Hemisphere grain harvests, they gambled on starving Britain into capitulation before the US could make a difference.

Although America did intervene, at first it seemed the gamble might pay off. The Germans committed all available U-boats to the “prohibited zone”, and during April 1917, 13 or more British ships went down each day.

But in the same month the British Admiralty agreed to experiment with North Atlantic convoys. It had not used convoys before because it believed it did not have enough escorts; doubted if merchantmen could sail in formation; if a submarine found a convoy, the result might be a massacre; and conveying would slow the flow of cargo into Britain.

Successful trials with shorter-haul convoys to the Netherlands, France and Norway began to change the picture and the number of vessels needing escort was recalculated – although pressure from the War Cabinet accelerated the change of heart. By August, North American traffic was covered and the system was extended to the South Atlantic, the Mediterranean and British coastal waters.

Convoying needed much co-ordination. The Americans loaned 35 destroyers and the Royal Navy co-operated with the merchant captains (who adapted quickly), as did the Admiralty with the Shipping Ministry, which grouped the steamers into batches of comparable speeds.

The convoy division worked with Admiralty intelligence, which had broken Germany’s naval codes, to re-route convoys away from danger. In fact most were not sighted. But if the U-boats did attack, the Allied destroyers – increasingly equipped with depth charges and depth-charge throwers – normally restricted them to one attempt before they betrayed their position and were driven off. By 1918, the RAF sometimes shadowed convoys and regularly patrolled the coast, thus adding a further deterrent.

British shipping losses fell from 545,000 tons in April 1917, to 137,000 in September 1918, the last month of the unrestricted campaign. Convoys were the most important factor – their losses averaged 0.58

per cent compared with 7.37 per cent for unescorted vessels – but not the only one. U-boat losses from all causes were 75 in 1917 and 102 in 1918.

The size of the submarine fleet stayed about the same, but the crews became demoralised and daily sinkings per boat fell by nearly 90 per cent. Blocking the Heligoland Bight and Dover Straits with new and more efficient mines was one of the most effective anti-submarine measures. A large and unjustly neglected contribution came from the British auxiliary fleet – often fisherman in drifters and trawlers – which swept the enemy mines and guarded the Dover barrage.

Britain also stepped up its merchant ship construction – and America more spectacularly so – although only from summer 1918 did new completions exceed losses. More significant was better use of existing ships, so that in spring 1918 the weight of supplies landed in Britain rose.

From 1917 the Shipping Ministry controlled almost all the merchant fleet and focused it on the top priorities, while the Allies reined in import needs, for example curtailing cotton for the Lancashire mills. Shipping was concentrated on the North Atlantic run and turnaround times in New York and Liverpool were slashed. Britain ploughed up pasture for cereals, felled more timber and introduced food rationing, which Holtzendorff doubted it could do.

The U-boats were less numerous in the First World War than in the Second, and they failed to implement the “wolf pack” tactics of surfaced night-time raids that would wreak havoc a generation later. But there was no equivalent of the Allied victory of May, 1943, when Admiral Karl Dönitz withdrew his submarines from the North Atlantic after losing 41 in a month.

Shipping losses by 1918 had returned to pre-unrestricted warfare levels, but they remained

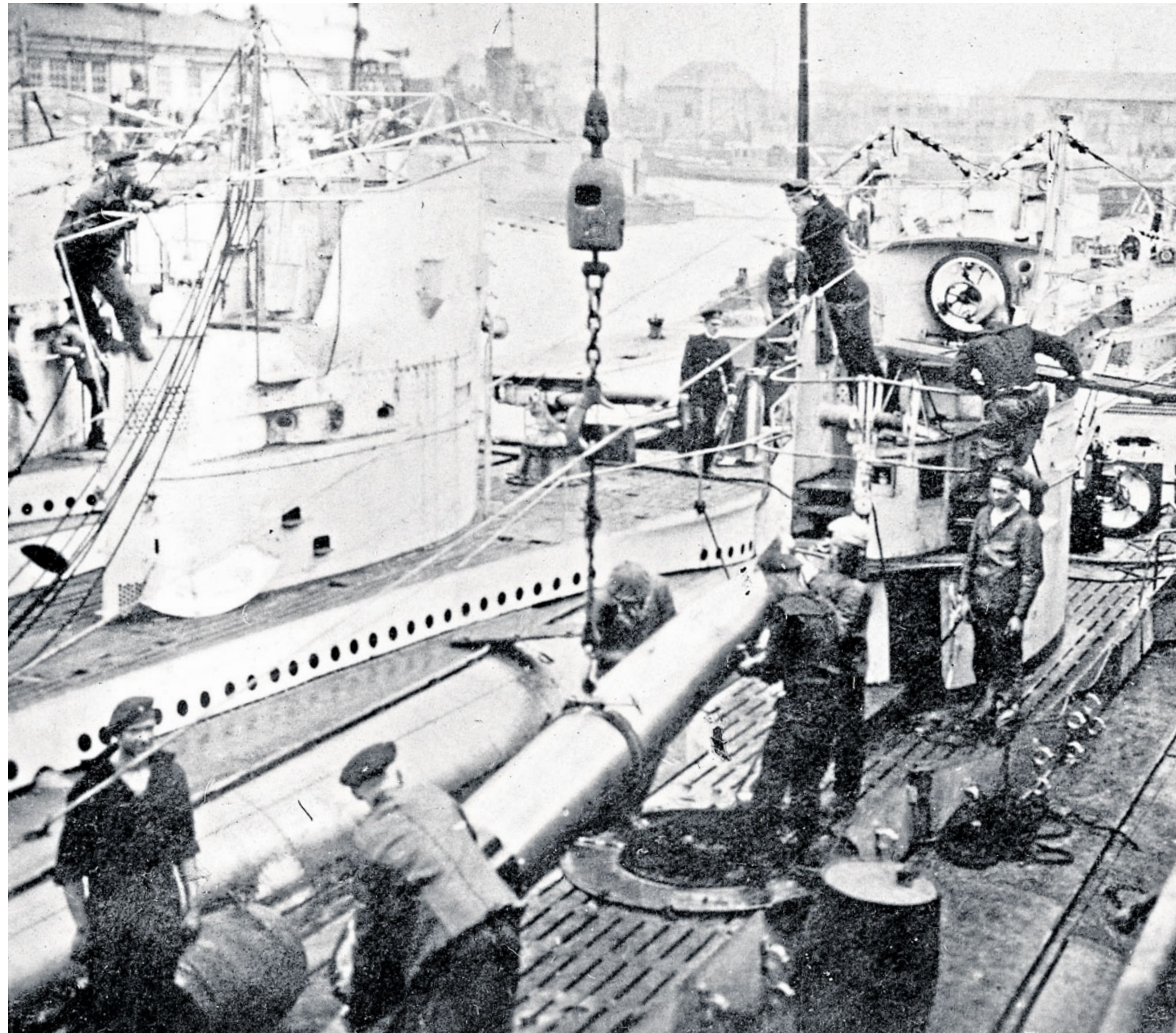
“**MEN CONTINUED TO COME FORWARD AND NO MERCHANT SAILING WAS ABANDONED FOR LACK OF PERSONNEL**

considerable until the final weeks. The threat subsided only gradually, but that it did so was crucial. Following the emergency created by the March 1918 Ludendorff offensive, the British sent 32,000 troops across the Channel each day, while the Americans stepped up their trans-Atlantic troop shipments to more than 200,000 men a month, not one outbound troopship being lost. American and Canadian oil, steel and wheat underpinned the Allies’ war effort, as did British coal supplies to France and Italy. All of this depended on command of the seas.

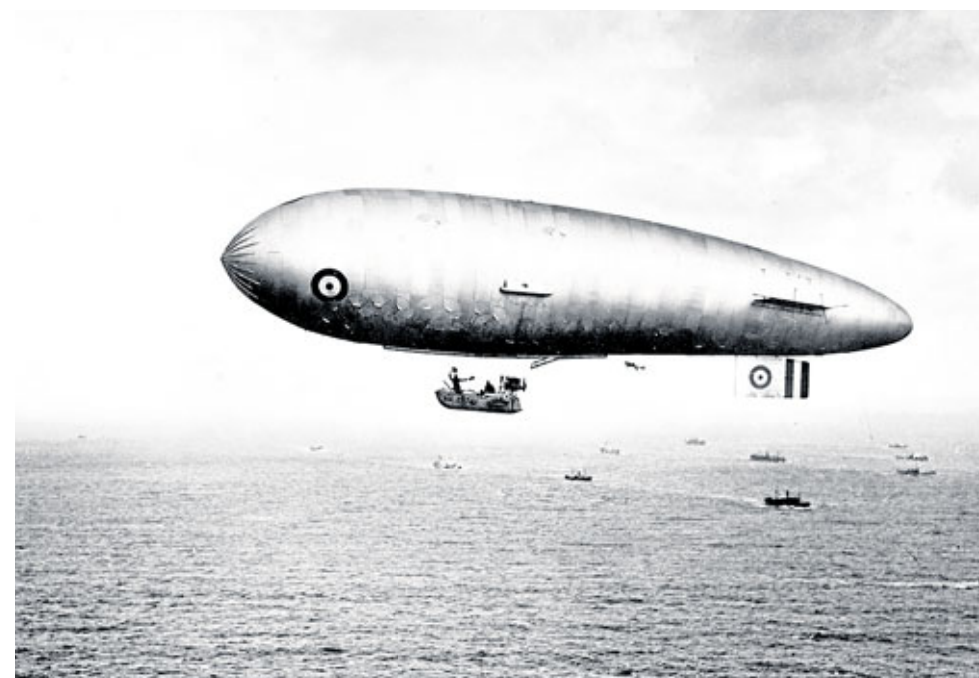
At the heart of the battle was a struggle between small groups of men. When U-boats foundered, it was usually with all hands, and nearly a third who served in them died. Neutral shipping continued (after a pause) to supply Britain in 1917-18, and 2,000 Norwegian seamen died. So too did 14,000 British merchant crew, 40 per cent of whom did not come from the British Isles (many were Indian).

Yet even sailors who had been “submarined” continued to come forward, and no British merchant sailing was abandoned for lack of personnel. This type of service required a different kind of courage from that needed on the Western Front, though it was no less vital for the outcome of the war.

● David Stevenson is a professor of international history at the London School of Economics



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BATTLE OF THE CONVOYS

Clockwise from main picture: loading torpedoes on a U-boat in Bruges in 1917; signalling from a US destroyer to a convoy ship; an airship escort; a message to the home front



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FROM IWM'S ARCHIVE – LETTERS HOME

Last days of a Lusitania victim are revealed

Following his father's early death in 1904, Richard Preston Prichard travelled to Canada to find a job. In the following decade he worked as a farmer, lumberjack and property dealer before enrolling at McGill University in Montreal to study medicine.

On May 1, 1915, aged 29, Mr Prichard embarked as a second-class passenger on the Cunard liner RMS Lusitania, bound from New York for Liverpool. On May 7, the liner was approaching southern Ireland when she was sighted by U-20, which fired a torpedo. The impact caused a secondary explosion in the ship's hold, probably due to coal dust being ignited. Within 20 minutes the Lusitania disappeared beneath the waves and 1,192 men, women and children had lost their lives.

Richard's body was not found. His mother and brother Mostyn began to investigate his fate, writing many letters to passengers and crew who had survived the sinking in the hope that they might be able to offer information. This letter to Richard's mother dated September 10, 1915 was written by Miss Grace Hope French, a fellow second-class passenger.

“Received your letter this morning and on opening the leaflet I recognised your son in a moment. I can see his face so clearly in my mind so sunburnt and full of life and ambition. He kept us in good spirits relating different experiences he had during his travels and was very nice to everybody. I appreciated his efforts as I was very sick during the whole journey and he was especially nice to me.

Well the eventful Friday arrived and in the course of conversation Mr Prichard remarked that I had a double on board and that he had spoken to this girl mistaking her for me. One or two of the other men at the table it seems did the same thing, so Mr Prichard volunteered to point her out to me after lunch. We went up on deck and were looking around when the awful crash came. The ship listed so much that we all scrambled down the deck and for a moment everything was in confusion. When I came to myself again I glanced around but could find no trace of Mr Prichard. He seemed to have disappeared.

I ran around the deck looking for a lifebelt but could not get one. I then ran along to the first class deck to try the lifeboats there when the second torpedo struck [sic]. I felt all hope was gone as she was sinking so rapidly, so took off my heavy coat and climbed over the rail and jumped into the water with the hope of catching hold of a piece of wreckage. The suction pulled me down and I felt that I was going to my death but fortune came my way and I rose to the surface, this time caught a small piece of wood and floated with it until I was picked up by a collapsible lifeboat and eight hours after was landed at Queenstown.

On Saturday morning I made inquiries regarding Mr Prichard but could not gain any news of him at all. I had the hope that perhaps he had been saved and brought to some other place. You have my heartfelt sympathy in your sorrow... those who had loved ones on board the Lusitania will never forget it. Time alone will efface the horror of the cruel deed.”

● Commentary by Anthony Richards, IWM head of documents

WAR POEM

'The Watchers' by Edmund Blunden (1928): the gruff sentry's spirit gazes yet

The poet, critic and literary scholar Edmund Blunden (1896–1974) was troubled by his experiences in France and Belgium for the rest of his life. From Christ's Hospital school in Horsham, Sussex, Blunden won a scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford, as the war began but became an officer in the Royal Sussex Regiment, serving with the 11th Battalion in Flanders, the Somme and at Ypres. He was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry at Beaumont Hamel in November 1916. Blunden spent more time in the front line than any of the other "soldier poets", from his arrival in May 1916, until he was sent home to be an instructor in March 1918. He missed the German spring offensive days later and always felt guilty about this good fortune.

Having spent his formative years in rural Kent and Sussex, Blunden's vision was coloured by a deep love of the countryside. He drew comfort from the permanence of the landscape and the sympathetic texture of its buildings. This intimate connection with the environment gave him the strength to emerge changed but not broken from his wartime experiences. He is today perhaps best known as the author of the lyrical and reflective wartime memoir *Undertones of War* (1928). The book is marked by the warm and sympathetic portraits he drew of those men he encountered in a world from which he felt sadly distanced and divorced only a decade later.

By the time Blunden and the 11th Royal Sussex arrived at Ypres in December, 1916, he was battalion intelligence officer. This meant regular patrols in no-man's-land. In *Undertones of War* he describes how, as he and his batman approached the British wire, he told his sergeant it was just the two of them going out. "Only me, Worley. He lays a gloved hand on my sleeve, puts his head close, and says, 'God bless you, sir - don't stay out too long.'"

This poem was the last of 32 poems in *Undertones of War*. It captures the sense of regret at being separated from his comrades that characterises much of his post-war poetry and his prose memoir. Blunden felt removed from his wartime life, but had not yet found a new one. His biographer, Barry Webb, said: "He felt a kind of schizophrenia, as though one identity was left in the war, and a second peacetime identity had to be discovered."

THE WATCHERS ←←

I HEARD THE CHALLENGE 'WHO GOES THERE?'
CLOSE KEPT BUT MINE THROUGH MIDNIGHT AIR;
→ I ANSWERED AND WAS RECOGNISED.
AND PASSED, AND KINDLY THUS ADVISED:
'THERE'S SOMEONE CRAWLIN' THROUGH THE GRASS
BY THE RED RUIN, OR THERE WAS,
AND THEM MACHINE GUNS BEEN A FIRIN'
ALL THE TIME THE CHAPS WAS WIRIN',
SO SIR IF YOU'RE GOIN' OUT
→ YOU'LL KEEP YOUR 'EAD WELL DOWN NO DOUBT.'

WHEN WILL THE STERN FINE 'WHO GOES THERE?'
MEET ME AGAIN IN MIDNIGHT AIR? ←←
→ AND THE GRUFF SENTRY'S KINDNESS, WHEN
→ WILL KINDNESS HAVE SUCH POWER AGAIN?
IT SEEMS, AS NOW I WAKE AND BROOD,
AND KNOW MY HOUR'S DECREPITUDE,
THAT ON SOME DEWY PARAPET
THE SENTRY'S SPIRIT GAZES YET,
WHO WILL NOT SPEAK WITH ALTERED TONE
WHEN I AT LAST AM SEEN AND KNOWN. ←←

Blunden became lifelong friends with his sergeant, Frank Worley, DCM, whose implacable character inspired Blunden and his men. Early in Blunden's service he and Worley were drinking cocoa when a rifle grenade exploded behind them. "Worley's courtesy and warm feeling went on, undiverted as though a butterfly or two had settled on a flower. A kinder heart there never was; a gentler spirit never... Where now, Frank Worley? I should like an answer."

Fifty years after war and 40 years after this poem was first published, Blunden wrote: "I have wondered when the effect of the Old War would lose its imprisoning power. Since 1918 hardly a day or night passed without my losing the present and living in a ghost story... Yet, even as I think of that incredible war work, it stops any question of forgetting. I know, now I am an old man, that I take with me something that will never yield to the restoratives of time."

ART OF WAR

JOHN NASH: 'OVER THE TOP: 1ST ARTISTS' RIFLES AT MARCOING, DECEMBER 30, 1917' (1918), OIL ON CANVAS

"It was in fact pure murder and I was lucky to escape untouched." This was how the artist John Nash recalled a disastrous counter-attack made by his regiment, the 1st Artists' Rifles, during the Battle of Cambrai in late 1917. Nash, a sergeant, saw the death and wounding of almost his entire company by the advancing Germans, an indelible memory that inspired his most famous painting of the First World War, *Over the Top*.

Despite its visceral power, the painting was executed far from the battlefield in rural Buckinghamshire. It formed part of Nash's contribution to the British War Memorials Committee (BWMC) scheme, an ambitious project established in March 1918, to form an artistic national memorial to the First World War.

His commission had mainly been at the instigation of his elder brother, Paul, an official war artist since 1917.

Desperate to remove John from harm's way, Paul had lobbied the committee's members to secure his release from the front line. The endeavour successful, John joined Paul in his studio, a converted herb-drying shed near the family home at Iver Heath.

Although sibling concern provided the impetus for Nash's official appointment, the artist was nevertheless an ideal choice for the BWMC scheme. Its

insistence that all paintings should be based on actual experience ensured that Nash, with his combat record, was well-chosen to focus on battle scenes. But as *Over the Top* testifies, the paintings he created recalled no heroic feats of arms, capturing instead the routines of trench life, the long marches to the front line and the futility of tactics such as "going over the top"; pitching men against

deadly artillery and machine-gun fire. In committing such memories to canvas, Nash undoubtedly attained a certain catharsis, to which he alluded in his description of *Over the Top*: "I think the vivid memory of the occasion helped me when I painted the picture and provoked whatever intensity of feeling may be found in it."
● Richard Slocombe, senior art curator, IWM

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● *Over the Top* will feature in IWM's Truth and Memory: First World War Art exhibition, which will open on July 19 along with the new First World War Galleries. www.iwm.org.uk



VC BRAVERY

BEATING THE ODDS

Main picture, a 1916 postcard portrait of Capt Angus Buchanan; facing page, Capt Buchanan after receiving his VC and MC from King George V in Bristol in 1917



HE IS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF WHAT CAN BE DONE IN TRIUMPHING OVER AFFLICTION AND MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO LIFE



HEROIC STORIES

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a Tory peer, businessman, philanthropist and author. Lord Ashcroft's VC and GC collection is on public display at IWM, London. For more information, visit iwm.org.uk/heroes. For details about his VC collection, visit lordashcroftmedals.com. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit lordashcroft.com. You can also follow him on Twitter @LordAshcroft

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An inspiration in war and peace: the blind VC



ANGUS BUCHANAN SAVED TWO MEN IN BATTLE THEN LED AN ACTIVE LIFE DESPITE HIS DISABILITY, SAYS **MICHAEL ASHCROFT**

November 8, 1917: Durdham Down, Bristol. Thousands had gathered for the investiture by King George V of 127 recipients of gallantry medals and other honours. Each man was clapped as he approached the royal dais, which was draped in imperial purple and bore gilded lions' heads. However, the loudest round of applause, from soldiers and civilians alike, was reserved for a uniformed officer who was led to and from the dais by a chaperone who kept a firm grip on the man's left arm.

For Capt Angus Buchanan was "the blind VC", one of the most remarkable recipients ever of Britain and the Commonwealth's most prestigious gallantry award for bravery in the face of the enemy.

At the investiture, Buchanan, then 23, had both the Victoria Cross (VC) and the Military Cross (MC) pinned on his chest by the King, as a result of two separate acts of bravery during the early years of the Great War. After shaking the King's hand and saluting him, Buchanan was led down the steps away from the royal dais by his guide, again to loud cheering from the crowd.

Buchanan was born in Coleford, Gloucestershire, on August 11, 1894. His father, Peter, a doctor, served as a major and company commander in the Glosters. Educated at St John's Boys School in Coleford and Monmouth Grammar School in Gwent, Angus Buchanan was a talented sportsman and captained his school rugby team.

He won a classical scholarship to Jesus College, Oxford, and played for the university's A team during the 1913-14 season. However, after the outbreak of the First World War, he was commissioned as a temporary second lieutenant in the South Wales Borderers 4th Battalion on November 25, 1914.

Buchanan left for Gallipoli on June 28, 1915, and was promoted to lieutenant the same day. But he was wounded soon after B Company landed at Suvla Bay on August 7 and sent to a hospital in Cairo, Egypt.

In early December 1915, as temporary captain, he returned to the peninsula with 72 sick or wounded comrades and was soon back in action. After taking part in the evacuation of the peninsula he was twice mentioned in dispatches. Furthermore, Buchanan was awarded the MC for bravery at Helles on January 7, 1916, when in command of B Company in trenches east of Gully Ravine.

Buchanan arrived in Mesopotamia on March 4, 1916, and it was there, on April 5, that he took part in an action for which he received the VC, saving two wounded comrades from no-man's land.

However, Buchanan was wounded in the arm while fighting against the Turks later on April 5, the very day of his VC action. Buchanan's commanding officer wrote a letter to his father saying: "I regret to say that your son was wounded in the arm on the evening of 5 April, when we were attacking and driving back the Turks, but I am glad to say the wound was only a slight one."

"The real reason for my letter is a far more pleasant one. During our advance in the morning we came under very heavy machine-gun fire, and suffered rather heavily. One of our officers, Lt Hemingway, was badly wounded, and lying in the open about 150yds from cover. Your son, seeing his condition, and that the effort on the part of two men to carry him had ended in one of them being shot, himself left his trench, and with the help of the unwounded man, brought Hemingway into the trench under a heavy fire."

"During the journey the man with him was wounded in the foot, but got into the trench. Angus then went back and fetched in the other man who had been wounded. I have forwarded a recommendation in his case for the Victoria Cross, and the brigadier has sent in one and supported it. We sincerely hope he may be awarded it, but there is always a chance that he may only be awarded an honour of lesser degree. I should like to tell you that I have previously brought his name to the notice of the general for gallant conduct at Helles on 7 January."

Once again, Buchanan made a good recovery from his injuries, this time in India, only to be wounded a third time during fighting on September 24, 1916.

This wound came two days before the announcement of his VC in *The London Gazette* when the citation for his decoration read: "For most conspicuous bravery. During an attack an officer was lying out in the open severely wounded about 150 yards from cover. Two men went to his assistance and one of them was hit at once. Captain Buchanan, on seeing this, immediately went out and, with the help of the other man, carried the wounded officer to cover under heavy machine-gun fire. He then returned and brought in the wounded man, again under heavy fire."

The news was warmly received in his home town, Coleford: the bell in the church tower rang out in tribute and the announcement relating to his VC was also flashed up on the screen of his local cinema during a screening of the recently released film of the Battle of the Somme.

However, on February 14, 1917, Buchanan was wounded for a fourth time – on this occasion far more seriously than previously. A sniper's bullet hit his head and he lost the sight in both his eyes. On September 2, 1917, as a result of his serious injuries, he relinquished his commission but retained his rank of captain and, as already detailed, he was presented with his VC two months later.

After returning from the war, Buchanan attended St Dunstan's hospital, supported by the charity Blind Veterans UK, where he learnt Braille and typewriting, and where a fund-raising postcard, costing 1d and bearing a drawing of him sporting his VC, was issued in his honour.

Next, Buchanan returned to Oxford where he studied for a degree in law and became a member of his college rowing eight. In those days, textbooks were not in Braille so they were read to him by tutors and fellow students.

After qualifying as a solicitor, he started a practice in his home town with another solicitor though eventually he ran it on his own. Because of his disability, he did not accept criminal cases and instead specialised in conveyancing and estate work. He also enjoyed accompanied walking holidays throughout the UK, Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and was vice-chairman of Coleford British Legion.

Buchanan's friends said that he never complained about his disability and remained both cheerful and determined to lead as normal a life as possible. He was considered to be the best salmon fisherman in the area and had a detailed knowledge of the River Wye. He also played bridge.

He was feted nationally as a hero long after the First World War ended. For example, in 1929 he attended the Prince of Wales's dinner in the Royal Gallery of the House of Lords.

Buchanan died in Gloucester Royal Infirmary on March 1, 1944, aged 49. He was buried, with full military honours, at Coleford Church. His gravestone said he "died of old wounds", having never recovered from his wartime injuries.

Two days after his death, an "obituary letter" appeared in *The Times* which began: "Few men have faced adversity with greater cheerfulness and patience than Angus Buchanan, the 'blind VC'."

The letter, which also praised the soldier's "fortitude", ended: "To have set up in practice as a country solicitor, after taking his degree in law at Oxford, was the sort of thing one would expect Angus Buchanan to do; for him there was no such thing as an obstacle in his path."

Furthermore, a colleague of Buchanan's who had worked as a clerk in his solicitor's office, said: "He is a shining example to the people of Coleford as to what can be done in triumphing over affliction, and making a positive contribution to life and the district and his country." This quote and other material in this article comes from a splendid tribute to Buchanan in Gerald Gliddon's book, *VCs of the First World War: The Sideshows*.

Buchanan is commemorated at several locations in Britain: his name is listed at Harvard Chapel, Brecon Cathedral, Wales; there is a memorial tablet in his home town at St John's Church, Coleford; the Buchanan Memorial recreation ground, purchased in 1919 as a tribute to the town's hero, is named after him; as is Buchanan Close in Monmouth, Gwent.

I purchased Buchanan's medals as recently as last year. I feel privileged to be the owner of the decorations belonging to such a courageous and spirited man. Buchanan's medal group will soon go on display, along with the rest of my VCs, in a gallery bearing my name at the Imperial War Museums, London.

I was particularly delighted to become the owner of the Buchanan medal group because, as a philanthropist and for personal reasons, I have long supported charities for blind and partly-sighted people. My own mother, Rene, who has macular degeneration, has formed a local group for people with sight loss to help each other through this difficult period in their lives.

Recently, I discovered that there is not only a wonderful photograph of Buchanan receiving his medals from the King at his November 1917 investiture, but the event was also filmed.

The recording can be viewed on the internet on the British Pathé website. In the footage, Buchanan can be seen receiving his medals from George V, saluting the King and then being led down the steps from the royal dais by his chaperone.

One eyewitness said of the moving event: "The investiture was that of a hero who has been sorely stricken in performing deeds of the utmost gallantry... Unhappily, Capt Buchanan is now blind, and had to be led to the dais. After decorating him, His Majesty kept him for some time in sympathetic conversation. The huge assembly also showed their sympathy with the gallant officer, according him a special ovation."

YOUR LETTERS

POST BOX

We have received a magnificent postbag and inbox of letters, documents and stories in response to our request for readers' First World War memories. Here are just a few of the many we would like to share with you.

A LUCKY ESCAPE AT SEA

Peter Myers from Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire, remembers his grandfather Joseph Myers, a seafarer who served throughout the war.

"He was bosun of the cargo steamer Ajax of Alfred Holt's Blue Funnel Line of Liverpool, one of 19 transports and five store ships which sailed from Britain to Alexandria, Egypt, early in 1915 in support of the Dardanelles expedition. In grandfather's discharge book, this period at sea from March 15, 1915 until January 14, 1916 is merely described as: 'On His Majesty's Service'.

"The Ajax was among the merchant ships

carrying supplies for the Army's operations at Cape Helles at the southern tip of the Gallipoli peninsula. My grandfather recalled that early on May 27, while anchored off W Beach, he and his shipmates were startled by the sound of two explosions and were shocked to see the old



battleship Majestic listing heavily after she had been hit by torpedoes. He said orders were immediately given to lower the lifeboats to go to the aid of the Majestic's crew.

"To their immense credit, sailors from the Ajax and other merchantmen helped naval trawlers rescue 737 survivors from the ill-fated warship, which lost 49 of her complement.

"The Ajax came under fire from Turkish artillery soon afterwards, and my grandfather said he had a lucky escape when a shell landed near his cabin but failed to explode. Some of his crewmates were killed in the attack, during which the ship was damaged. Grandfather brought home the casing from the dud shell and it served as a poker stand at the family home in Birkenhead."

FROM PREFECT TO POW

Richard Bateman from south-west London writes about his father Wilfrid, "who would occasionally mention his time in a PoW camp or his time in Holland, but only once talked about the battle and my mother kept on trying to stop him. He slept badly and this was

always put down to his war experiences."

Mr Bateman writes: "On August 4, 1914, he was just 18 and still at school in Marlborough, due to be head of house in that autumn term. Home was Mexborough, a coal-mining town in Yorkshire. My father joined the local regiment, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, where many of the men were miners.

"The Army seemed to forget about him for a couple of months until suddenly things began to happen very quickly. Having been in the Officers' Training Corps at school, he was commissioned. On April 24, 1915, my father was posted as a 2nd Lieutenant to D Company of the 1st Battalion of his regiment who were dug in, in the front line at the apex of the salient around Ypres. The second battle of Ypres started two days before my father's arrival and in the first two weeks, the battalion lost about 150 officers and men, killed, missing and wounded.

"The big day in the battle was May 8, when a further 450 or so casualties occurred... The next thing my father remembered was waking up, lying on his own in a shell hole,



FIGHTING ON

Left, survivors from the Majestic – along with men from other sunk battleships Triumph and Goliath – at the Dardanelles in 1915. Below right, Wilfrid Bateman, sitting on floor, centre, who was taken prisoner after being wounded at Ypres

“

JERRY WAS QUICKER OFF THE MARK AND CLUBBED MY FATHER WITH HIS RIFLE BUTT

wounded in the leg. All around him was carnage. My father realised he must try to find any of his men who might still be alive. On rounding a bend in the trench, he came face to face with a Jerry soldier. They both fired and they both missed. But Jerry was quicker off the mark and clubbed my father over the head with the butt of his rifle. So that was the end of my father's active war.

"He was sent to a Germany military hospital and then a PoW camp at Gütersloh. In 1917, there was an exchange of prisoners and my father was sent to neutral Holland and billeted with a family at Scheveningen.

"My father was of course affected by his wartime experiences and

he had a couple of nervous bouts in later life that I knew about. But what I did not know until a year or two before he died was that all his life he had been burdened by the thought that he had made a mess of things in the battle.

"Once, when my father was in his old age, we watched a programme about the Great War. I turned to him and remarked that I really felt that I had led a rather sheltered life in that not only had I never known great poverty or hunger or hardship, but above all I had never fought in any wars.

"My father thought for a moment then replied in his dry way, 'Oh well, Richard, I shouldn't worry about it.'"



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THE TRAGIC STORY OF TWO BROTHERS

Mrs M Gauntlett from Lancing, West Sussex, writes of her uncles, Harold "Tertius" Halle Last and Lionel Robert "Leo" Last. Tertius died of injuries in 1915 and Leo on his 20th birthday at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

"These two war 'heroes' – though not recognised as such – were older brothers of my father born into a family of 10 children. One other son, Geoffrey, also went to war and gave a false age as he was too young. He was a sergeant in the 6th Battalion Tank Corps and survived gas attacks by soaking his puttees in urine and using them as a face mask. He had lung trouble for the rest of his life.

"The family was hit by double tragedy. It took weeks for my family to be told of the loss of my Uncle Leo when he went missing on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. His sister Dorothy continued

writing to him for his 20th birthday on July 1, 1915, but he was already dead.

"Two nights before he died, he wrote a letter. He already had some idea of what lay before him and asked for her prayers. As he said, his 'mind was in a muddle'. He was already beyond writing much. The same applies to Tertius's diary, seeming somewhat detached and matter of fact when the horror and fear lay too deep for words.

"Leo's name is on the Thiepval Memorial. Tertius was paralysed when a piece of shrapnel entered his spine and he died of septicaemia in the London Hospital. His mother and other family members were with him. His mother told others that Tertius started to sing 'I know that my Redeemer liveth' and the whole ward joined in, all dying soldiers...

"It is wonderful to be able to remember these men and what they did for the family descendants. 'These wars will never happen again', it was said, but they still do and there will continue to be 'heroes', with or without name."

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THE COMMANDERS

In December 1918, the National Portrait Gallery, through the generosity of the South African millionaire Sir Abraham Bailey, commissioned the American artist John Singer Sargent to paint one of three conversation pieces depicting distinguished political, naval and military figures of the Empire as a commemoration of their services during the First World War. Sargent's subject was "Some General Officers".

The list of those to be included was drawn up by the gallery's trustees and initially comprised 25 names. But Bailey immediately rejected three of the sitters, including Sir Ian Hamilton, who carried the can for the failure at Gallipoli (though his stock has risen in later years with a reassessment of the campaign) and, later, two more, including Sir Hubert Gough, whose Fifth Army had buckled before the weight of the Kaiserschlacht, the great German offensive of March, 1918.

Sargent's painting was the first, most public, rough draft of reputational history of generalship in the Great War. Standing square in its centre are the two field marshals, Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig, commanders-in-chief of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) respectively from August 1914 to December 1915, and thence to the Armistice.

Today French is largely regarded as having been out of his depth. His chaotic command of the BEF during the retreat from Mons to the Marne, and the costly offensives of 1915, weigh heavily against him – as does the spiteful treatment of some of his more able subordinates. His memoir, *1914*, was described in the *Quarterly Review* by Sir John Fortescue, the great historian of the Army, as "one of the most unfortunate books ever written". Haig wrote in his diary before the BEF left for France that he doubted French's "temper was sufficiently even or his military knowledge sufficiently thorough".

Yet "the little field marshal" (he was 5ft 6in) cannot be written off simply as a cavalryman at home only in the saddle (or the bed of another's wife). He grasped the essentials of the peril he was placed in at Mons and that the aeroplane was key to operational intelligence. To that extent he saved the BEF and buoyed morale in the subsequent dog-fighting at Ypres, the place name he chose for his earldom.

The reputation of the man who replaced him, Haig, depends on what exactly is being weighed in the balance. The slaughter on the Somme in 1916 and the equally futile losses of the following year stand as stark testimony to a want of generalship. And yet his handling of the counter-offensive after the final defeat of the Kaiserschlacht in August 1918 – the "Hundred Days", a continuous campaign of all-arms manoeuvre that brought the German army to its knees – could hardly have been bettered.

The weight on his shoulders during the middle years, even if he laboured in part under the burden of his own limitations, was enormous. He bore it stoically and saw things through – to the very end, when the bugles blew a victorious ceasefire on the Western Front on November 11. Resilience in a general is a prime quality, probably (with his post-war work for service charities) that which was most admired by the 200,000 ex-servicemen who filed past Earl Haig of Bernersyde's coffin in 1928.

One name not shortlisted for Sargent's painting has steadily gained in reputation: Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, whom Sir John French sacked from command of the Second Army in May, 1915. His stand at Le Cateau during the retreat from Mons pulled the BEF's fat from the fire, but in doing so, perversely, animated the vindictive streak in French's nature.

Smith-Dorrien, an infantryman, would almost certainly have exercised a better tactical grip in the BEF's first 12 months than French, who in his heart probably knew it. Indeed, "Smith-Doreen", as he was sometimes derided by his cavalry rivals, might have made a better commander-in-chief than Haig, who was first and foremost a staff officer, with talents best suited to London (especially with such a difficult Secretary of State for War as Lord Kitchener).

But if admiration for Haig's ultimate victory was always qualified by the appalling slaughter of what went before, in November 1918, the reputation of one general verged on the glittering: Field Marshal Viscount Allenby of Megiddo. In Sargent's painting he stands just to Haig's left, slightly forward of him and in defiant profile. Haig had in effect sacked Edmund Allenby from command of the Third Army in June 1917, but Lloyd George, who had replaced Asquith as Prime Minister in December, 1916, thought well of him – a cavalryman with thought as well as thrust – and appointed him to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force with the injunction to take Jerusalem from the Turks by Christmas.

This he did with a force of British, Indian, Australian and New Zealand troops, many mounted. After occupying the Jordan Valley the following summer he went on to take Damascus, forcing a surrender on October 30. Allenby's campaigns showed what could be achieved away from the blind offensive-mindedness of the Western Front, and where a million Germans were not strongly entrenched.

There is no equivalent of Sargent's painting in the Nationalgalerie in Berlin. By definition, an army defeated after a prolonged war can boast few successful



MEN OF WAR

Far left, Kaiser Wilhelm II with General Helmuth von Moltke at manoeuvres in 1914; left, General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, hero of East Africa, leads some of his troops through the Brandenburg Gate

COMMANDING PRESENCE

Below, John Singer Sargent's *General Officers of World War I*



Generals in the frame

A PAINTING BY JOHN SINGER SARGENT REVEALS THE WINNERS AND LOSERS AMONG BRITAIN'S MILITARY HIERARCHY, EXPLAINS **ALLAN MALLINSON**

generals. Helmuth von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff in August, 1914, was the first to lose his name. He was blamed for the faulty execution of the so-called Schlieffen Plan and replaced after a month's fighting by Erich von Falkenhayn, whose reputation stood high in Berlin, where he had been War Minister. But Falkenhayn himself would survive only until August, 1916, when the failure of his attritional plan to bring the French army to its knees at Verdun – to "bleed them white" – proved a costly miscalculation.

Thereafter he recovered his name – like Allenby – by success in a different theatre, against the Romanians, who had just entered the war. By Christmas he, too, had entered an enemy capital – Bucharest; and Romania pressed for peace. His rehabilitation was only temporary... he was put in command of the Ottoman forces in Palestine, and in turn defeated by Allenby, and was recalled in February, 1918.

His place in Berlin had been taken by two men whose names are inseparably linked: Paul von Hindenburg and his deputy Erich Ludendorff – fleshy, unattractive

Junkers who had inflicted a number of tactical defeats on the Russians. From 1916 "the silent dictatorship", as they were known, oversaw the transformation of Germany into a military-industrial machine.

Russia's collapse in autumn 1917 and plea for terms in March the following year were its first fruits. But when Ludendorff's supposed knock-out offensive (Kaiserschlacht) in the west in March 1918 failed, he and Hindenburg began considering an armistice, eventually persuading the Kaiser to abdicate for the good of Germany. They then began to rewrite their own reputations, at least within Germany, with the notion that the army had not been defeated in the field but "stabbed in the back" by revolutionaries in Berlin. In due course, Hindenburg, his reputation resting principally on his victory at Tannenberg in 1914, would become President of Germany, and in so doing allow the rise of Hitler.

If in 1919 a German Sargent had sought a subject for the brush, a general for posterity, a man to admire who had defeated his enemy – or at least not himself been defeated – he would in truth have had to travel to East Africa. There, for more than four years, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck pursued a war of cat and mouse with the object of tying down as many British and Imperial troops as possible, including the former Boer commando leader and later Prime Minister of South Africa, General Jan Smuts, one of the subjects of the Sargent painting.

Lettow-Vorbeck finally surrendered only after learning of the armistice of November 11, and returned to Germany in March 1919, to a rare hero's welcome, leading 120 of his officers in their tattered tropical uniforms on a victory parade through the Brandenburg Gate decorated in their honour – the only German commander to invade British territory successfully during the First World War.

This, however, was a small crumb of comfort to a nation whose spiritual and economic heart, the Rhineland, was then in the hands of so many allied generals.

• *Allan Mallinson is an author and a former officer in the British Army*

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WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR?

From secret propagandist to Winnie the Pooh

Winnie the Pooh has lifted the spirits of generations of children ever since its author, Alan Alexander Milne, first began writing the tales of this philosophical bear and his animal friends for his son Christopher Robin in the Twenties. But what came to light only recently is that AA Milne had an official morale-boosting role during the First World War, with the little-known military intelligence unit MI7b.

Born in Hampstead in 1882 and taught by HG Wells at a public school run by his father before becoming a Cambridge scholar, Milne – a pacifist at the time – responded to Lord Kitchener's call to join the British Army.

After training as a signalling officer, 2nd Lt Milne was sent with the Royal Warwickshire Regiment to the Western Front during the Somme offensive. His best friend, Ernest Pusch, was killed almost immediately by a shell, and in August, 1916, Milne's infantry platoon left the trenches and was bombed by German fire, with 60 killed, more than 100 wounded and all five officers either killed or severely injured.

Milne later said this attack changed his view of the war: "It makes me almost physically sick of that nightmare of mental and moral degradation." In November, he was moved to quieter trenches near Loos, but was invalided out with trench fever and returned to England. Here, along with 20 or so other authors considered the best British literary talent, including Cecil Street and Roger Pocock, Milne was recruited by the secret propaganda unit to sustain support for the conflict when anti-war movements were rising across Europe.

Milne was vociferous in his denunciation of war, as expressed in his pacifist essay *Peace with Honour*, in which he wrote: "Because I want everybody to think (as I do) that war is poison, and not (as so many think) an over-strong, extremely unpleasant medicine." Yet, secretly, the professional playwright and author was masquerading as a very different character, writing articles about heroism and sanitised accounts of life in the trenches to present a positive view of war to those at home.

This internal conflict of a reluctant propagandist was revealed only last year when documents were discovered by a relative of one of Milne's co-MI7b authors, Capt James Lloyd, while emptying an old trunk. In it was *The Green Book*, which included verses of Milne's such as the Shakespearean-style



“MILNE WAS WRITING SANITISED ACCOUNTS ABOUT LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

"In MI7b/who loves to lie with me/About atrocities/And Hun Corpse Factories/Come hither, come hither, come hither/Here shall we see/No enemy/But sit all day and blather."

The unit was disbanded in 1918 and six years later Milne became a celebrated children's author, publishing his poetry collections *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six* before writing his two Winnie the Pooh novels.

His early pacifism took a further turn when, during the Second World War, he accused his old friend PG Wodehouse of near-treason for collaborating with the Germans. In Milne's 1940 essay *War With Honour*, he asserted: "War is something of man's own fostering, and if all mankind renounces it, then it is no longer there."

Milne relished changing direction professionally and was annoyed at being associated primarily with Pooh. He would surely have enjoyed the fact that his most dramatic career change remained secret for nearly 100 years.

Zoe Dare Hall

AUGUST'S ISSUE

Understanding history: in our final issue of the series, we look at the greatest myths of the First World War and the political legacy of a conflict which led to the bloodiest century in British history.

BACK ISSUES

Inside the First World War is a compelling 12-part series which is running monthly up to the centenary of the war's outbreak. To catch up with any of the 10 previous parts, visit telegraph.co.uk/insidethewar



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