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The German Army on the Western Front, 1914 – 1918.

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**THE GERMAN ARMY
ON THE WESTERN FRONT
1914 – 1918**

J A SHELDON MA

**An abstract and commentary submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Westminster for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy by Published Work.**

**Supervisors: Dr. Mark Clapson
Mr Tony Gorst**

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Abstract

This major historical project concerning the German army during the First World War will provide an original, revisionist and complete series of carefully researched books, which will equip the Anglophone audience for the first time with a detailed description from the German perspective of all the major campaigns and battles along the Western Front 1914 – 1918. Each book, five of which have so far been published, stands alone, but complements those already written and those still to be produced. The books are a synthesis of a narrative historical approach, analysis and original archival materials.

A major preoccupation since the research programme began some nine years ago, has been to devise ways of dealing with the loss of the bulk of the Prussian archives when Potsdam was bombed by the Royal Air Force in April 1945. The solution, which has permitted work of complete originality and lasting value to be produced, has been to exploit fully the resources of the surviving archives of the non-Prussian contingents of the old German army and to blend the analysis of these documents with material derived from the approximately 1,600 regimental and other histories which were written during the interwar period. In the process, maximum use has been made of predominantly Prussian published personal accounts, so as to compensate as far as possible for the absence of so much other primary documentation.

The single book and selected chapters from two other books which comprise this submission represent only a fraction of the work I have achieved to date, but they are strong exemplars of my approach, argumentation and unique revisionist version of four turbulent years on the decisive front of the war.

The German Army on the Western Front 1914 - 1918¹

Introduction

The material presented in support of this application for the award of the degree of PhD by Published Work is the result of more than nine years' intensive research and study, preceded by background reading and investigation which began many years earlier. From the start it was clear to me that almost all books in English concerning the campaigns and battles on the Western Front have been written from a strikingly Anglocentric perspective. Despite the fact that its activities account for fifty percent of the story, even if the German army is mentioned at all, it tends to be portrayed in a way which is shadowy and indistinct, or simply to be caricatured.² Exemplary pioneering work relating to the British sector of the Western Front was, however, carried out by German specialists, led by Captain G C Wynne during the compilation of the British Official History, but this work was never intended to be more than an adjunct to the primary focus of the series.

Nevertheless, the volumes of the Official History contain regular summaries, which provide a précis of the situation at particular times as it affected the German army. Formations and units are identified and, as a result, much useful information is provided. Frequently since the Second World War historians have made use of this material to provide an air of authenticity to their accounts, but examination of their work usually shows that there has been little or no direct use of German sources and that nothing has been provided beyond that which perusal of the Official History can reveal. This means in turn that, because the last relevant volume appeared in 1948, effectively nothing concerning the tactical operations of the German army had been added to the published record in English for more than fifty years until I began work.

This is an extraordinary situation, one which is in complete contrast to that which applies to Second World War historiography, where the German side of battles and campaigns has long since been researched in depth and incorporated into the published account. It is not entirely clear why German military history 1914 – 1918 has been so neglected and, with the centenaries of these events approaching rapidly, it was my view that something had to be done to fill what is

a completely unsatisfactory gap in the historical record. Fortunately my language skills and professional background meant that I was in an almost unique position to make a substantial and original contribution to the historiography of the Western Front. It would have been equally valuable to have selected the Eastern Front, the Italian Front or the campaigns further afield for study, but I chose to concentrate on the Western Front; firstly, because it was the decisive theatre of the war and, secondly, because I am fluent in German and French and have a reasonable reading knowledge of Dutch/Flemish.

In essence, the success of my work, which I have carried out virtually single handed, demonstrates that, despite significant losses of primary source material in Germany, it is entirely feasible to produce books of lasting value by exploiting that which does remain. There have been two principle strands to my programme of work. The main emphasis is on the production of a series of books, each of 150,000 – 200,000 words, which provide detailed accounts of the main battles and campaigns on the Western Front 1914 – 1918 from the German viewpoint. In addition, I have also embarked on the production of a number of guidebooks for the *Battleground Europe* series (Pen & Sword Ltd, Barnsley, 1993 – present) designed to highlight German aspects of the main battles. These are intended to enable those interested to familiarise themselves with particular battles, then to trace the course of operations on the actual battlefields involved by means of walks and car tours based on original maps and documentation. The first three of these: *The Germans at Beaumont Hamel*, *The Germans at Thiepval* and *The Battle for Vimy Ridge 1917* (Barnsley, 2006, 2006 and 2007/2010), for example, address the need for a defenders' viewpoint to be provided at locations which, respectively, receive 250,000, 300,000 and 400,000 visitors per annum and which have attracted a great deal of myth over the years.

Objective

The objective of my studies is to fill a major gap in the historiography of the First World War by researching and writing a series of original, stand alone, books which, collectively, provide the German perspective on the major battles and campaigns along the Western Front 1914 – 1918.

My Research Programme: Methodology, Problems and Successes

For many years there has been a widely held perception that little archival material relating to 1914 – 1918 survives in Germany, that any attempt to conduct meaningful research there is bound to fail and that, therefore, trying do so is a waste of time and effort. It is certainly true that the destruction by fire of the Prussian archives during a bombing raid by the Royal Air Force on Potsdam in April 1945 was a disaster which caused the loss of immense quantities of irreplaceable material. Nevertheless, to take the view that nothing of the record can be salvaged is quite wrong.

Following detailed enquires and visits to the surviving archives in Germany some nine years ago, it soon became clear to me that not everything relating to the Prussian army was burnt. The exact amount which survives is in dispute. Some items were out on loan or stored elsewhere at the time of the raid and it is still not known, for example, precisely how much the Soviet army recovered. Suffice it to mention that up to forty tons of seized documentation was returned to the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1990s and it is currently available for study at the *Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv* at Freiburg im Breisgau. In addition, a great many files, particularly those relating to the latter stages of the war, were copied by the Americans during the 1930s. They are housed in the Library of Congress and much of this material has been copied and made available in Germany once more. Captured documentation is also available at institutions such as the Imperial War Museum in London and the French *Service historique de la Défense* in Vincennes.

Furthermore, the federal nature of the German Empire meant that individual states were responsible post-war for the storage of the archives of their own contingents. Thus, material relating to these armies was held in Dresden for the Saxons, Karlsruhe for the Baden formations, Stuttgart for the army of Württemberg and Munich for the Bavarian army, which was so fiercely independent that it refused even to adopt the overall regimental numbering system used by the remainder of the German army. The *Reichsarchiv* called in large quantities of material relating to the other contingents before the Second World War but, luckily, having studied it, returned borrowed items in 1937 – 1938 and much of it survives.

There were, nevertheless, losses. Records relating to combat units and formations of the Saxon army are somewhat sparse and large quantities of potentially valuable documentation concerning the Württembergers fell victim to a Second World War waste paper drive, though my research has shown that much of value remains. The M33 series of files, concerning the operations directed by XIII (Royal Württemberg) Corps was of fundamental importance in my reconstruction of the role of Group Caudry during the Battle of Cambrai,³ for example, but, even more important, the extensive holdings relating to 26th Reserve Division and all its subordinate formations and units, which were engaged on the Somme for two years from September 1914, proved to be the key to my rewriting of the history of the campaign of 1916 and the lengthy build up to it.⁴ Firmly based on my exploitation of primary sources, I have published an unanswerable case that there was nothing fortuitous about the British disaster of 1 July 1916; that the catastrophe came about far more because of German planning, preparation and skilful execution than any British failures, though these of course contributed to the scale of the reverse. As a result and as noted in the Annex to this commentary, every author writing about the Somme since my book appeared five years ago, has had to take my analysis into consideration.

The material held at Stuttgart is extremely valuable, but I soon discovered that the survival of the bulk of the records of the Bavarian army was a stroke of luck of the highest historical importance. From the 1920s much of the material was stored in the attic spaces of a barracks in Munich which, by chance, was not bombed during the Second World War. It was possible, therefore, in the late 1940s, for these valuable records to be transferred to the *Kriegsarchiv*, where they were very roughly classified and bundled and where they remain to this day, buried under large amounts of filthy dust. During my initial research visits it was immediately obvious to me that these papers, most of which have never been consulted, are a treasure trove of information. The bundles of files may be difficult and time-consuming to study, but their very lack of detailed classification means that they are full of surprises. Frequently I have come across items such as corps orders amongst the files of independent companies.

I also realised at an early stage of my studies that Munich offers another crucial advantage for the researcher of events on the northern part of the Western Front. Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria initially commanded Sixth Army,

which was deployed in the north from September 1914 then, from the moment when he took over the appointment of Army Group Commander on the Somme from General der Artillerie von Gallwitz in late August 1916, the complete exchange of correspondence between the Supreme Army Headquarters and Rupprecht's headquarters is available for study, as is all the documentation exchanged with both equivalent and subordinate headquarters, often down to divisional level. Access to this material and Rupprecht's private correspondence, supplemented by reference to his diaries, Kronprinz Rupprecht *In Treue Fest: Mein Kriegstagebuch* (Munich, 1929 – three volumes) provides me with an authoritative source of information which, until I began to make use of it, had barely been tapped.

This does not end the value of the *Kriegsarchiv* to me. Personal files and records of all Bavarian formations, units and sub-units are held there – right down to company level and the utility goes further. Because of the way armies exchange information across boundaries, it is frequently the case that Bavarian units received and retained copies of assessments, orders, reports and returns of their Prussian neighbours. For example, whilst I was making a selection of almost 2,000 pages of primary source material for my book *The German Army on Vimy Ridge 1914 – 1917*, I was able to obtain the daily Situation Reports of the Prussian 79th Reserve Division for the critical period 1 March – 8 April 1917, which had been kept amongst the files of a branch of the adjacent Headquarters of 1st Bavarian Reserve Division. This enabled me to write a securely based description of the period leading up to the storming of Vimy Ridge and to demolish long-standing myths, in particular the assertion that the German army had prior knowledge of the catastrophic Canadian raid of 1 March 1917.⁵ Over the years I have also found much other relevant Prussian documentation in the files of the Headquarters of the various Bavarian corps, Sixth Army and Army Group Crown Prince Rupprecht. The traditional antipathy between Bavaria and Prussia has also been helpful to me, because I have often come across documentation critical of perceived Prussian failings and have thus been able to obtain valuable correctives to the published record.⁶

The different archives are in any case not the only sources of information. In addition to the official and semi-official publications of the *Reichsarchiv* and the various state archives, approximately 1,600 regimental and other histories

appeared during the interwar period. It was almost as if the final act of the survivors of the disbanded army was a determination to record the final chapter of their histories before the collective memory of them faded away. There is, however, in all such writing, a natural tendency to describe the actions of those under discussion as favourably as possible. The *Reichsarchiv*, staffed almost exclusively by former General Staff officers, had a vested interest in portraying a lost war in the best possible light; choosing generally to emphasise the courage and determination of the individual officer or soldier when confronted by overwhelming odds.

The regimental historians, on the other hand, often tell the story ‘warts and all’. There are references to drunkenness, lapses in discipline and other negative points which would never find a place in, say, a British regimental history.⁷ These books, although scarce, are an excellent source of factual material. They often contain useful maps and quoted documents and can generally be relied on in terms of historical accuracy. I have been able regularly to test this in the archives by comparing the published histories with the original records where available, or by noting where information provided interlocks with that of adjacent formations and units, or with the published Allied account. In addition, I have exploited the tendency of Prussian historians to incorporate extensive amounts of personal testimony, so as to reflect the reality of battle and to carry the narrative, as well as to compensate as much as possible for the loss of so much Prussian primary source material.

In summary, from personal experience in the archives and specialist military history libraries in Germany, I am able to state that the lot of the researcher of the German army during the First World War is far from easy and can be frustrating. However, to suggest that it is impossible is very wide of the mark. The work I have achieved to date has already had a considerable impact on how the old German army is perceived and its operations reflected in the literature. In future, with my books to draw on, it will no longer be possible for authors to produce purely Anglocentric accounts of battles on the Western Front and claim that they are either comprehensive or definitive.

Scope of my Work and the Specific Publications Selected for PhD Submission

All of my books break new ground. Almost nothing within them is to be found in any other book in the English language and no comparable project has ever been attempted in Germany either. As a result, the body of work I have produced amounts to a deeply researched, entirely original, contribution to historical knowledge of this critical period of the Twentieth Century. The literature pertaining to the Western Front is vast so, because of space constraints, the following survey of the campaigns and battles covered by each of the five books I have had published to date, though properly representative, is necessarily selective.

In order to ensure equivalence between this application and that of a mainstream PhD candidate, the submission comprises my book *The German Army on the Somme 1914 – 1916*, together with Chapter Six of *The German Army on Vimy Ridge 1914 – 1917* (1917: The Build up to the Assault on Vimy Ridge) and Chapter Five of *The German Army at Cambrai* (A Counter-Attack is Planned). These items have been chosen because they are strongly representative of my approach and show clearly how my exploitation of the German sources has enabled me to produce an evidence-based counter argument to the long accepted Anglocentric version of events on the Western Front.

My work on the Somme has demonstrably had a major impact on perceptions of German operations in that region and has influenced all writing on the subject during the five years since it first appeared. The Vimy and Cambrai chapters have been selected to highlight the extent to which I have been able to cast new light on two important aspects of the history of the Western Front by exploiting, respectively, the potential of the *Kriegsarchiv*, Munich and the material captured in Potsdam in 1945 and recently returned to Freiburg. In the case of Vimy Ridge, not only have I successfully countered long standing myths, I have also written the first coherent and accurate account of several turbulent weeks on a vital sector of the Western front. The Cambrai chapter, in addition to being descriptive, has considerable educational content for the Anglophone audience. High level German command and control processes and tensions between field commanders and the Great General Staff are described for the first time in print.

The Historiography of the Western Front

The Somme

There has always been a steady trickle of books on this subject, most of which have been published for the British market. Important modern contributions include AH Farrar-Hockley *The Somme* (London, 1964), Martin and Mary Middlebrook *The Somme Battlefields* (London, 1991), Malcolm Brown *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme* (London, 1996) and Gerald Gliddon *The Battle of the Somme: A Topographical History* (Stroud, 1994). Notable oral histories are Martin Middlebrook *The First Day of the Somme* (London, 1971) and Lyn Macdonald *Somme* (London, 1983). The ninetieth anniversary of the battle produced a sharp increase in their number. Recent accounts have included Gary Sheffield *The Somme* (London, 2003). This short book provides a good overview of the Battle of the Somme from the perspective of a revisionist historian who has always argued that the Kitchener army first began to become effective as a result of experience gained on the Somme. Along with a number of other historians he takes the view that the Somme saw the start of a 'learning curve' which enabled an amateur army, which expanded at extraordinary speed, to develop into the war-winning instrument that it became two years later.

Three interesting modern contributions include Peter Hart *The Somme* (London, 2005). Hart, who is the Oral Historian at the Imperial War Museum (IWM), has written several books which draw heavily on the sound and written archives of the IWM to produce vivid accounts of some of the greatest battles of the First World War. Nevertheless this book is not simply the work of the historian as copy typist. Interspersing his selection of personal accounts drawn from across the entire British army with apposite insights, Hart succeeds in producing one of the most readable and vibrant accounts of the battle currently in print. Peter Barton *The Somme* (London, 2006) represents a novel departure in the way the battle is described. Barton is in the process of producing a series of books about key battles of the First World War, whose main original feature is the use of contemporary British and German panoramic photographs printed above modern views of the same scene. This succeeds in bringing the battlefield alive to the modern visitor in a most effective way. The approach is chronological, with the

panoramas being interspersed with photographs and personal accounts drawn mainly from the collections of the IWM. The whole is held together by linking notes and commentary by the author. The book is superbly produced and a great asset to the serious student of the battle.

The same cannot be said of Martin Gilbert *Somme: The Heroism and Horror of War* (London, 2006). This book can most appropriately be described as workmanlike and readable. It will certainly not be numbered among the best of the more than sixty books written by this distinguished historian. Drawing entirely on secondary sources, Gilbert makes no claim for it other than to state, 'Every book on the Somme contributes in its own way to perpetuating the memory of those who fought and those who fell. This book seeks to make its contribution to that act of remembrance.'⁸ That is a fair judgement about a book which has a place as a general introduction to the subject, but is of little interest to the student of the battle, who will search in vain for a reference or a footnote.

A recent influential treatment is Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson *The Somme* (London, 2005). These authors, both leading Australian military historians, have several First World War titles to their credit. These include, notably, *Passchendaele, the untold story* - of which more later - and *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914 – 1918*. A recurring theme in all their work is that the role of politicians and the British War Cabinet in particular has been constantly underestimated; that every campaign or change in strategy required a political decision and that, therefore, Lloyd George's post-war criticism of the generals was ill-founded. He and those around him bore equal responsibility. This is a useful contribution to the debate but, having made it early in the book, much of the remainder, which is quite polemical in tone, is devoted to pouring scorn on Haig, Rawlinson and Gough for being guilty, at best, of lack of singleness of purpose or clarity of thought.

Some of their interpretations of the way the battle unfolded are open to criticism and they also tend at times to make contentious assertions which lack sufficient evidence. One important instance occurs when at the end of a long condemnation of Haig's performance before and during the battle, the authors claim that, 'The Somme was planned by Haig without any relation to Verdun ... it was the decisive battle, not attrition, that lay at the heart of Haig's conception of war.'⁹ This argument is demolished by Philpott; firstly, in his *The Anglo-French*

*Victory on the Somme*¹⁰ and, secondly, in his book *Bloody Victory*, reviewed below. In summary, the book is of variable quality. Parts of it are extremely useful, but it contains flaws and should be used with caution.

The book which most closely mirrors my own approach is Christopher Duffy *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916* (London, 2006). This book is an interesting contribution to the literature and is one of the very few in which an author has made use of the resources of German archives; in his case, the *Kriegsarchiv* in Munich. Its focus is actually the British army and what the German army thought about it and its performance on the Somme in 1916. Much of the content comprises a recounting of the battle, adding little to the known record, but what is original is the use the author makes of German interrogation reports, intelligence summaries and after-action reports to build up a very useful picture of the British army as viewed from the far side of No Man's Land. The book is marred, however, by numerous careless errors of both fact and interpretation which suggest that the author does not have a total grasp either of the intricacies of the German army at the time or the overall Somme campaign.¹¹ To the general reader, none of this is of great importance. The risk, however, is that work making use of German archival material is so rare that other authors may draw on this book and so perpetuate the same mistakes.

William Philpott *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London, 2009) is an outstanding book and the culmination of several years' work by Philpott. Although he provides detailed information concerning the course of the battle and the French contribution in particular, nobody could accuse him of writing military history which, in the memorably critical remark of Professor Hew Strachan, is simply, 'mired in the trenches'.¹² Instead he deliberately steps away from that temptation and places the campaign in a far broader context, seeking to explain the significance of the battle not only as a permanent blow to the power of the German army and, therefore, an essential stepping stone to ultimate Allied victory, but also as an epochal event in twentieth century European history, whose echoes and consequences have had lasting influence.

Philpott's work has rightly been widely praised and he has been awarded prestigious prizes on both sides of the Atlantic for it. For the first time the battle's strategic underpinning and the complex ebb and flow of coalition politics and

warfare are given detailed treatment and blame for the shortcomings of both politicians and generals is apportioned. He argues, convincingly, that the campaign was anything but futile and unsuccessful from the Allied perspective; that the blows dealt out to the German army were such that from the beginning of 1917 onwards, there was no chance that it could ever recover from the damage caused to it.

Issue can be taken with some of Philpott's arguments and not all his points of detail are entirely correct. Possibly in emphasising French primacy, he sometimes underplays the significance of the British contribution to the overall joint campaign. He is also, perhaps, too kind to Falkenhayn, who conspicuously failed to respond to pleas for reinforcement or pre-emptive action when the offensive was plainly imminent and then tried to absolve himself of any blame in his memoirs.¹³ Nevertheless, these are minor points when set against the enormous value of his work, with its emphasis on what was correct about the Allied Somme campaign, rather than where it failed. It represents a major advancement in our understanding of the battle and its reliance on my *The German Army on the Somme 1914 – 1916* for much of its material relating to that army provides a welcome confirmation of the originality and value of my books to leading historians.

Histories in French and German

In terms of works in other languages, the reader has far less choice. In neither country is there much interest in the First World War. In total only about six hundred French titles concerning the war are in print. Contrast this with some ten thousand in English. For the French who contributed one third of all the forces employed astride the Somme in 1916 and who suffered 200,000 casualties during the battle, the Somme has fallen out of the national memory completely. The incredibly dry and turgid volumes of the French Official History - *Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre* - remain a valuable source of original documentation and mapping, even if they are effectively unreadable as books. *La Somme est le Verdun des Anglais*, a widely-held view, sums up the attitude entirely. 1916 means Verdun to the French. Of two recent books, the title of one, Pierre Miquel *Les Oubliés de la Somme* (Paris, 2001) reflects the prevailing

situation exactly. Even Alain Denizot *La Bataille de la Somme* (2002) was written in the wake of four previous books by that author about Verdun. Both Miquel and Denizot have produced popular accounts, but are still worth reading for the French perspective they present. Three other books about the Somme are currently available; viz. André Laurent *La bataille de la Somme 1916* (2002), René Gilabert *La bataille de la Somme* (2009) and Anne Roze & John Foley *La Somme: Paysages de la Grande Guerre* (2006), but these are largely pictorial, mixing contemporary and modern photographs with minimal text.

As far as work in German is concerned, two semi-official books in the thirty six volume *Reichsarchiv 'Schlachten des Weltkrieges'* series, Oberstleutnant Albrecht von Stosch *Somme Nord Die Brennpunkte der Schlacht im Juli 1916 Teil I* (Oldenburg, 1928) and *Teil II* (Oldenburg, 1927) only cover the story from the start of the bombardment on 24 June to the initial fighting for Delville Wood and the first attacks on Guillemont at the end of July 1916. As is usual for this series, the books, intended for a popular audience, contain plenty of accurate anecdotal material and good maps. Both these books are well-produced and it is unfortunate that resource restrictions in the *Reichsarchiv* meant that the remainder of the 1916 battle was not covered, except in Volumes 10 and 11 of the Official History *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918* (Berlin, 1936 and 1938 respectively). These two volumes are comprehensive and well written but naturally, like all such work, they seek to put the best possible national gloss on the historical record. In addition their focus is always on operations at corps level and above so, inevitably, they lack tactical detail.

Shortly before the Second World War, two general histories of the battle, which ran into several editions, were produced. Both Hans Henning Freiherr Grote *Somme* (Hamburg, 1937) and Ernst Kabisch *Somme 1916* (Berlin, 1937) suffer from the taint of Nazism; both were written with the express aim of inspiring the new generation of soldiers in the *Wehrmacht* by emphasising the courage and stoical endurance of the individual defender in the face of unspeakable conditions and overwhelming enemy superiority. Nevertheless, they succeed in telling the story well and they contain useful pointers for the modern researcher.

Since the Second World War serious study of the First World War, certainly its military aspects, has been extremely unfashionable and neglected in

Germany. The appearance of Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz (Eds) *Die Deutschen an der Somme 1914 – 1918: Krieg, Besatzung, Verbrannte Erde* (Essen, 2006) came as a surprise, therefore. These three historians had combined previously on *Keiner fühlt sich mehr als Mensch* (1999), which was a study of the effect on the individual of the experience of the First World War, based largely on personal letters and accounts. This was the most scholarly of a scattering of the ‘lost voices’ or ‘letters from the front’ type of book which has appeared recently in Germany. They also jointly edited the *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (2004). Of the three, Krumeich is the best known for his work on the First World War and the period leading up to it. He is a particular expert on French aspects of the story. Hirschfeld is more associated with work on the Nazi period, genocide and collaboration. *Die Deutschen an der Somme*, despite its limitations, is a welcome addition to the literature.

The book is not a history of the Battles of the Somme. Instead it is built up from a series of essays, supplemented by selected documents: letters, diary entries and after action reports. Subjects range from ‘The German Conduct of War 1914 – 1916’ to ‘The German Occupation of Northern France’; from ‘Retreat and Destruction 1917’ to ‘The Return to the Somme 1918’. Hirschfeld himself contributes a short introductory essay concerning the 1916 battle and has selected some interesting contemporary accounts to illustrate different aspects of it. This is far from being the definitive account of the battles from the German perspective. Nevertheless its appearance is warmly to be applauded. It has been translated into English (Barnsley, 2009) as *Scorched Earth: The Germans on the Somme 1914 – 1918*.

Work to be submitted for Examination

Jack Sheldon *The German Army on the Somme 1914 - 1916* (Barnsley, 2005; reprinted 2006 (twice), 2007; paperback edition 2007)

I chose to write this book as the first of the series because, for the Anglophone audience in general and the British in particular, the Battle of the Somme 1916 has come to epitomise what is perceived to be the greatest military tragedy in their history and, therefore, to be the period of the First World War of most interest to

the majority of those who study or read about it. Obsession with the disaster of 1 July 1916, the poignancy of the losses suffered by the 'Pals' battalions, readiness to resort to the adjective 'futile' to describe the seemingly endless attritional fighting have all combined to make 'The Somme' almost a separate phenomenon, with a life of its own completely outside the remainder of the history of the war. In this reading of history the British chain of command was composed of blundering fools, with no redeeming features, all the suffering was on one side, the French army which produced one third of the total effort and suffered one third of the Allied casualties is airbrushed out of the story and the German army, if mentioned at all, only has a walk-on role.

In recent years, revisionist historians have rightly challenged this facile interpretation but, in subscribing to the view put forward strongly by Carrington¹⁴ that the British army learned its trade the hard way in the latter stages of the battle of the Somme, some have tended to over-emphasise this so-called 'learning curve', or at least the point upon it which the British army had reached by November 1916. One of the primary objectives of *The German Army on the Somme 1914 – 1916*, therefore, was to challenge and modify this position by demonstrating that in many ways the British army was making mistakes at the end of the battle which were not much different from those which had affected its performance four months earlier and that there was no more self-critical belligerent in the field than the German army, which was simultaneously on a 'learning curve' of its own.¹⁵

The other great deficiency in Anglocentric accounts of the Battle of the Somme is the way they tend to seek to explain the many reverses suffered by the British army and, especially, the events of the first day, purely in terms of British failings. In general there is no real understanding of how the German defence was established and its chain of command is given no credit for the skill with which it was prepared and then conducted. As an essential counter and to set the record straight, considerable space is devoted for the first time in print to a detailed description of how and why the German defenders were able to establish themselves so securely and organise themselves so well that on 1 July 1916, for example, a single reinforced infantry division – the 26th Reserve from Württemberg - was able to smash completely the assault of two British corps between Serre and Ovillers on the Albert – Bapaume road.¹⁶

A crucial ground breaking section of the book, therefore, is the history of the period from September 1914 to August 1915, when French troops opposed the men of Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg, when the transition from war of manoeuvre to trench warfare was made and when lessons learned from the Battle of Serre in June 1915 and elsewhere in Artois and Champagne, were applied to the development of techniques and tactics of defence which would be used to great effect during the main Battle of the Somme. In addition, in recounting the course of the battle, due space has been given to the fighting to the south on the French front. The command difficulties of the German army are considered, as is the effect of the campaign on the morale and efficiency of the German army. The conclusion is that, though subject to immense pressure by the Allies, the German army felt that in preventing an Allied breakthrough it had prevailed. Its morale, though shaken at times, was still largely intact at the end of the battle and, man for man and despite the attrition it had suffered, at the end of 1916 it still retained a qualitative edge over the British army, as evidenced by the indifferent performance of the latter in the confused fighting on Redan Ridge north of Beaumont Hamel during the closing stages of the battle in November 1916.¹⁷

Vimy Ridge

Due to the close association of the capture of Vimy Ridge in April 1917 by the Canadian Corps with feelings of national self-worth, numerous books, almost all of them Canadian, have been published about the Battle of Vimy Ridge. However, much of this flood of material simply provides a flawed and partial account of the history of this key geographical feature of the Western Front. The majority of the titles are narrowly chauvinistic in tone and content, whilst many simply recycle inaccurate or unverifiable assertion and complete myth. The remainder of the British army barely merits a mention and the German army virtually nothing at all. Typical of this type of book are DJ Goodspeed *The Road Past Vimy* (MacMillan, Canada, 1969), Pierre Berton *Vimy* (Pierre Berton Enterprises, 1986) and, more recently, Ted Barris *Victory at Vimy: Canada Comes of Age, April 9-12, 1917* (Toronto, 2007). They are all entertaining and they tell the version of the story that their audience wishes to read, but they are not good history.¹⁸

Far more valuable is Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci and Mike Bechthold (Eds) *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo Ontario, 2007). This collection of essays seeks to provide some perspective on the Canadian achievement at Vimy and to show how earlier action by the French Army and considerable assistance and expertise from the remainder of the British Army were fundamental to success. The book and an article based on it – *Vimy Ridge: The Making of a Myth* by Michael Valpy¹⁹ written to coincide with the ninetieth anniversary of the battle, provoked a storm of blinkered protest in Canada whose echoes have still not died away. There has never been a German book covering the complete campaign, but an atmospheric account of the desperate fighting in 1914 – 1915 for the adjacent and dominating Lorette Spur west of Souchez was published by the *Reichsarchiv* as Volume 17 of the *Schlachten des Weltkrieges* series. This appeared as Werner Beumelberg *Loretto* (Oldenburg, 1927). In addition a useful summary of some aspects of the fighting of Easter 1917 appeared as Generalleutnant a.D. Dieterich *Die 79. Reserve-Division in der Schlacht auf der Vimy-Höhe/April 1917* (Magdeburg, 1917)

Jack Sheldon *The German Army on Vimy Ridge 1914 - 1917* (Barnsley, 2008)

The primary aim of this book was to place the Canadian achievement in a broader context, to show that the battle for Vimy Ridge did not just begin and end during the period when the Canadians were in the line and that the great Franco-German battles of 1914-1915 were its essential precursors. Had the French not wrested back the dominating Lorette Spur in a series of bloody, sacrificial, battles, which also squeezed the German lines back hard against the main ridge in 1915 (described for the first time in Chapters 2 and 3 on pp 45-133), there would have been no springboard from which the Canadians could have launched their successful assault in April 1917.

An equally important purpose of the book was to tackle head on - and refute - a huge body of myth and historical distortion. The fact that Bavarian headquarters and formations played the leading role on this sector of the front for a thirty month period facilitated the task and detailed work in the archives in Munich enabled me to produce a revisionist view which exploits the potential of previously untapped primary sources. In the process, numerous long-held ‘facts’

concerning operations on Vimy Ridge were subject to detailed examination and found to be false. In a further demonstration of the German capacity for critical analysis and the application of lessons learned, an epilogue explains how the experience of Arras in the spring of 1917 informed the German organisation and tactics they were to employ in Flanders later that year during the Third Battle of Ypres.

Chapter 6 (to be submitted for Examination)

Because the records in Munich concerning this sector of the Western Front are so extensive, the research for this chapter was highly ambitious in scope. It required considerable forethought and planning, followed by intensive work in the archives. It was designed to address several questions of historical importance and, in so doing, to produce the evidence necessary to counter well entrenched myth. The questions addressed included, but were not restricted to:

- Did the German army really regard the Ridge as impregnable?
- What was the effect of the Canadian Corps policy of constant raiding on the defenders and attackers respectively?
- Did the German defence have prior knowledge of the catastrophic failed Canadian raid of 1 March 1917?
- How much did the German army know about Allied offensive plans?
- What effort did the German army devote to attempts to disrupt Allied plans?
- What effect did the Allied bombardment have on the defence?

Material was obtained from files ranging from Army Group level down to individual regiments. Thorough reading of the signals traffic to and from Army Group Crown Prince Rupprecht was especially valuable, as was close examination of the files of Sixth Army interrogation reports relating to captured prisoners. This research also threw up the strange case of the Canadian deserter Otto Ludwig Dörr, who served under the false name of George McDonald and whose betrayal of his adopted country has been completely airbrushed out of the Canadian published record. As a result of my analytical work, based almost

entirely on contemporary sources, the history of these dramatic and eventful weeks has been recounted accurately for the first time.

The Battle of Cambrai

Because the Battle of Cambrai saw the first mass use of tanks in history, most of the early literature relating to this battle tended to emphasise the role of the tanks, almost to the exclusion of any other aspect of the battle. Military theorists during the interwar period, such as Basil Liddell Hart (who wrote the history of the Tank Corps) and JFC Fuller, had a keen interest in promoting the view that an understanding of the battle began and ended with the role of the tanks. This idea soon predominated and stifled wider discussion. In German the only book devoted exclusively to the battle is Hauptmann a.D. Dr. Georg Strutz *Die Tankschlacht bei Cambrai: 20.-29. November 1917* (Berlin, 1929). As the title implies, this covers only the initial British attack and the battle for Bourlon Ridge and, because it has nothing to say about the preparation and conduct of the German counter-attack and focuses primarily on deficiencies in the Allied all arms offensive tactics and the successful aspects of the German defence, it cannot be regarded as in any way definitive.

Captain Wilfrid Miles *Military Operations France and Belgium 1917: The Battle of Cambrai* (London, 1948) was one of the final sections of the British Official History to appear. This is one of the best written and most balanced of all the volumes of the Official History and it contains the usual useful, if brief, notes on the German experience. For some time it provided one of the most trustworthy accounts of the battle then, two decades later, came Brian Cooper *The Ironclads of Cambrai* (London, 1967). Despite the obvious slant implied by the title, this is a well researched, readable account. Cooper made good use of sources, including some German secondary sources, but at that time important documents, which have since become available for study in the archive at Freiburg, were still in Russian hands and unknown.

More recently the battle has been subjected to close scrutiny by Bryn Hammond, whose doctoral thesis was converted, most successfully, into a very effective account of the battle from the British point of view *Cambrai 1917: The Myth of the First Great Tank Battle* (London, 2008). Hammond argues,

convincingly – and this is borne out by my research – that the advent of advances in gunnery, which permitted predicted fire to replace lengthy ranging in and so restored surprise to the battlefield was fundamental to the initial British success, whilst mishandling of the all arms battle later cost the British any hope of gaining the Bournal Ridge and turning Cambrai from the north.

Jack Sheldon *The German Army at Cambrai* (Barnsley, 2009)

In addition to providing the first complete account in English of this landmark battle from the German perspective, this book also explains why the hopes of both sides in turn were raised, only to be dashed. In addition it was designed to highlight the German manpower crisis which began to bite in late 1916 and to provide proof of the tension which built up during the second part of the war between the field commanders and the Great General Staff. In describing the dynamic planning and reinforcement process which underpinned the German counter-attack of 30 November 1917 the operational planning methodology and the relationship between the different levels of command is explained to the Anglophone audience for the first time and the consequences for the German army as it prepared for large scale offensive action along the Western Front in 1918 are also given full treatment. Read in tandem, Hammond's book and mine provide the best overview of the Battle of Cambrai currently available.

Chapter 5 (to be submitted for Examination)

The material presented in this chapter is unique in the historiography of the Battle of Cambrai. Up until recently, it could not have been written, because it draws extensively on files returned to Germany by Russia in the 1990s and currently held by the *Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv* in Freiburg. Its focus is on the extraordinary flexibility and improvisational capability of the German army as it attempted to carry out that most difficult of operational tasks, the transition from defence under pressure to decisive counter-offensive. It provides a detailed account of how the staffs, particularly at Army Group, Army and Corps (Group) levels interacted as they struggled to come to terms with the pressures of the contact battle and the need to plan for the secret assembly and deployment of a

very large striking force at breakneck speed. No comparable account of the workings of the Great General Staff in the field and the tensions which existed between it and the commanders has ever been written.²⁰

Overview of the Remainder of My Work to Date

The Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele)

The literature relating to the Third Battle of Ypres is dwarfed by that devoted to the Somme. However, until it was supplanted in the popular imagination by the Somme as the archetypal example of collective suffering and hopelessness of the First World War, the name Passchendaele was synonymous with everything that was perceived to be wrong about the conduct of that conflict. To this day this lengthy campaign retains a grim and shocking reputation. Indeed it can be argued that it was the appearance of Leon Wolff *In Flanders Fields* (London, 1959) which sparked off the modern condemnation of generals who were allegedly out of touch with their men and the conditions in which they fought. Wolff, who condemned the generalship of 1917 out of hand, was gentler in his treatment of politicians who in fact bore joint responsibility for the conduct of the war. At the time his work clearly struck a chord, being followed by the controversial, but extremely successful, Alan Clark *The Donkeys* (London, 1961) and AJP Taylor *The First World War: An Illustrated History* by (London, 1963), as well as being used by the writers of *Oh What a Lovely War* as a source of information for their stage production.

John Terraine, in his many books, notably *Douglas Haig: The Educated Soldier* (London, 1963) and *The Road to Passchendaele: A Study in Inevitability* (London, 1977), worked hard to restore the reputation of Haig and, although the popular cause remains lost, those who have studied the battle objectively during the past twenty years have tended to be able to take the positives out of this campaign, which most certainly hurt the German army badly and to see Flanders 1917 in a less negative light. Recent contributions include Lyn MacDonald *They Called it Passchendaele* (London, 1978). This compilation of personal accounts of the Flanders experience is arguably her best oral history of the First World War. It paints a vivid, if one-sided, view of the battle, but leaves any detailed

consideration of the conduct of the campaign or mention of the German experience untouched. There are numerous personal accounts of the battle in print and some straightforward introductory accounts, including Philip Warner *Passchendaele* (London, 1987). This book, though somewhat dated, provides a good overview of the campaign, with particular emphasis on the British build up, whilst Peter Liddle *Passchendaele in Perspective* (Barnsley, 1997) was written to coincide with the eightieth anniversary.

Martin Marix Evans *Passchendaele: The Hollow Victory* (London, 2005) contains a number of useful insights. The main battles of the campaign are covered competently and the role of ‘bite and hold’ tactics from the end of September 1917 is described, as is the German change of tactics towards the end of the battle, though little detail is provided. A further modern account, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson *Passchendaele: the untold story* (London, 1996) is an exasperating book; one for which its authors make exaggerated claims. At the time of its appearance it generally received good reviews and it is perfectly true that it contains, for example, a useful discussion of the responsibility of British politicians for the shape of the campaign and for its continuation into November 1917, long past the point where there was any realistic hope of strategic advantage accruing to the Allies.

However the authors make great play that this book is intended as a definitive account of the campaign, which it is not. Indeed, due to its many and varied deficiencies, it could be said that the sub-title is particularly appropriate. The generally successful French contribution on the northern flank barely features. Despite its mention in the introduction, the word ‘logistics’, fundamental to any understanding of how major battles were conducted, appears nowhere in the index. More important, however, in a book which sets out to be ‘comprehensive’ is that the German army, its trials, tribulations and the problems the campaign posed its commanders barely merits a mention. Indeed it is extremely doubtful if the authors are more than dimly aware of what they might have been. Small wonder then that the introduction contains the preposterous remark, ‘Outside the English language, only one contribution of note has been made to the debate over Third Ypres. This comes from Germany, in the form of the memoirs of General Ludendorff ...’²¹

Quite apart from the fact that much of what Ludendorff wrote needs to be handled with extreme caution, it is worth mentioning that fewer than five pages of *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* (Berlin, 1919) concern what the Germans referred to as the *Flandernschlacht*. Prior and Wilson totally ignore important published coverage of the campaign, such as that provided by the Chief of Staff of Army Group Crown Prince Rupprecht, General der Infanterie Hermann von Kuhl, in *Der Weltkrieg 1914/18* (Berlin, 1929), *In Treue Fest*, the War Diary of Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria (Munich, 1929) and *Meine Tätigkeit im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918* (Berlin, 1939) by General der Infanterie Fritz von Loßberg, then Chief of Staff, Fourth Army, which was responsible for the defence of the Flanders battlefield.

In attempting to justify the absence of German material in the book, the authors betray their lack of knowledge by stating, ‘As for the German official history, *Der Weltkrieg*, it was written entirely during the Nazi period and is the work of ex-soldiers who were trying to explain away their own responsibility for Germany’s defeat ...’²² In making this dubious point they quite overlook the fact that Volumes 1-9 were completed before 1933 and that only a few later volumes and the supplementary ones concerning the use of railways and other support matters, were published under the auspices of the *Reichskriegsministerium* or the *Oberkommando des Heeres*. In all the lengthy bibliography, only one published German language item appears: the strikingly poor W. Beumelberg *Flandern 1917* (Oldenburg, 1928). Despite the plethora of English language archival material listed, no German primary sources are even hinted at. Can it be that these authors cannot work in German? Is that why they write, ‘There is no doubt, nevertheless, that the German sources are thin compared to [*sic.*] the British. But it is our conviction that this has not proved a bar to a comprehensive account of the Third Ypres campaign’.²³ That might be their conviction, but it is not one I share.

Nigel Steel and Peter Hart *Passchendaele: The Sacrificial Ground* (London, 2000) is a very useful addition to the literature. Its authors, the first named an archivist in the Department of Documents at the Imperial War Museum and the other its Oral Historian, have individually and together produced several excellent books about the First World War. On this occasion, they have combined to produce a book which draws heavily on the records held in that museum, but is

more than just an oral history. One particular merit is that the authors allow the facts to speak for themselves and do not indulge in cheap jibes at those responsible for the campaign.

Their conclusion is that the campaign was fundamentally a tragedy, that the Allied command structure, 'had closely argued reasons, many of which were partially satisfied, for most of the actions they took ... but overall, although their reasoning was valid, they can now be seen to be wrong ... the whole Flanders offensive was based on a faulty premise – namely that Germany would collapse in 1917'.²⁴ This seems as reasonable a viewpoint as their further one that much of the criticism of the campaign would have been avoided if it had been suspended after the failure of the Battle of Poelkapelle on 12 October 1917. By then it was too late in the year for the Germans to have launched a significant counter-offensive anywhere in the west and possession of the higher and (relatively) dryer ground on the Passchendaele Ridge came at too high a human cost.

Jack Sheldon *The German Army at Passchendaele* (Barnsley, 2007)

In addition to providing a detailed account of the Third Battle of Ypres and its precursor, the Battle of Messines Ridge, this book was designed to bring to the notice of the Anglophone audience how the emerging German concept of flexible defence was organised and applied on the Flanders battlefield, with particular reference to the evolution of low level organisations and tactics, a dramatic increase in firepower at battalion level and the methodology of devolved command. None of these subjects had ever appeared in print, nor had the exaggeration of the German casualty figures by the British Official Historian been subject to critical examination previously. I show on pp 313-315 and in a detailed footnote that, in asserting German casualty figures approaching 400,000 and only acknowledging in his bibliography Volumes I and II of the German Official Medical History - the *Sanitätsbericht*, published in 1934, he was guilty of apparently suppressing the existence of Volume III which contained exact figures and distorting the real situation to such an extent that he almost doubled the true number.²⁵ As well as being of use to the specialists, this book quickly reached a wide general audience when it was made book choice of the month by the British Military and Aviation Book Society in autumn 2007.

The First Battle of Ypres, 1914

Strange to relate and bearing in mind that the stalemated battles around Ypres in late autumn 1914 finally put paid to all German hopes of forcing a decision on the Western Front, relatively few books devoted specifically to this campaign have ever been written. The relevant volume of the British Official History, *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1914: Antwerp, La Bassée, Armentières, Messines and Ypres October-November 1914* (London, 1925) provides a great deal of detail, but was also responsible for introducing several myths into the historiography of the battle. At the time it was written, little German material was available to the compilers, with the exception of the unsatisfactory monograph, Hauptmann Otto Schwink *Der Große Krieg in Einzeldarstellungen: Die Schlacht an der Yser und bei Ypern im Herbst 1914*. (Oldenburg, 1918), so coverage of German aspects of the story is not especially good. However Werner Beumelburg *Ypern 1914* (Oldenburg, 1925) and the German official history *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918 Fünfter Band* (Berlin, 1929) provided more detail and better coverage of the broader German aspects of the campaign. During the interwar period a flurry of eminently forgettable titles concerning the myth of the so-called *Kindermord* [Massacre of the Innocents] at Langemark also appeared in Germany. These included *Langemarck: Ein Vermächtnis* (Munich, 1932), Hermann Thimmermann *Der Sturm auf Langemarck* (Munich, 1933) and Wilhelm Dreysse *Langemarck 1914* (Minden, 1934), all of which tell us more about the Nazi exploitation of myth than the battle itself.²⁶ A useful corrective became available later. This was Karl Unruh *Langemarck: Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Koblenz, 1986).

AH Farrar-Hockley *Death of an Army* (London, 1967) was the first significant post Second World War account of the battle. It is a well written book, but its focus is very much on the campaign from a British perspective. A more recent treatment is Ian FW Beckett *Ypres: The First Battle 1914* (Harlow, 2004). This book, though relatively short, is much more balanced and succeeds in placing the campaign firmly in its strategic and historical context. Worthy of note also is Paul van Pul *In Flanders Flooded Fields: Before Ypres there was Yser* (Barnsley, 2006). This book, translated from the Dutch, provides a wealth of information about the part played by the Belgian and French armies north of Ypres in the

period leading up to the full British deployment around the town. It is especially strong on the subject of the inundation of the polders west of the Yser/Ijzer, but it is extremely difficult to read. The English translation is so poor that much of the book is almost impenetrable, which is a disservice to the obvious depth of knowledge of the author.

Jack Sheldon *The German Army at Ypres 1914* (Barnsley, 2010)

The scope of this book is much broader than any other written about this campaign. It covers preliminary cavalry operations between Ypres and Lille in October 1914 and gives due weight to the contributions of the Belgian and French armies along the Yser/Ijzer river. In so doing it makes clear, for the first time in print, the extent to which the successful defensive operations in west Flanders were due to Allied cooperation. It explicitly tackles myths such as the Germans allegedly mistaking British rifle fire for that of machine guns and the so-called *Kindermord* around Langemark and also demonstrates the falsity of British accounts which speak of the German Fourth Army which it faced at Ypres as though it was the equivalent of the First Army which it fought at Mons and Le Cateau the previous August. Above all, the book provides severe criticism of much of the work of the German command structure and Falkenhayn's flawed thinking when he gambled and sent the raw soldiery of his new third rate reserve corps to confront battle hardened Allied troops with little more than their own high courage to sustain them – and expected them to prevail.

Annex

Impact, Peer Review and Dissemination of my Work

A short time after my research project began, the value of my work was already being recognised and I was appointed an honorary researcher, responsible for German aspects of the displays in the new British Visitor Centre at The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval which opened in 2004. The outcome of this work is on full public display.²⁷ Then, within months of the publication of my first full length study *The German Army on the Somme 1914 - 1916* and in the wake of positive reviews, I was invited to speak to the conference, 'Battle of the Somme: 90 Years On' held at the University of Kent in July 2006. This was quickly followed by a presentation to the 2007 annual conference of the British-German Officers Association and an invitation to become a member of the British Commission for Military History (BCMh).

Since that time and as the acknowledged Anglophone expert on the German Army of 1914 – 1918, I have been in constant demand to provide information and advice to other historians, to address seminars and conferences in UK and abroad and to guide tours of the Western Front. I was recently invited to become a member of the Douglas Haig Fellowship and I am also a major contributor to the internet Great War Forum, on which I have posted over 2,000 times during the past six years. My recent lectures have included a contribution to the 2010 Beaumont Hamel series, held on the Somme in spring 2010. My diary already contains bookings through to 2018 and my 2011 lectures include the History Group at King's College, London, the Norfolk Branch of the Western Front Association and the annual conference of the Great War Forum in Birmingham.

In addition to the endorsement of my work in the shape of Forewords contributed by leading academic figures in the field of Military History, each of my books has been subject to peer review in *Mars & Clio*, the house journal of the British Commission for Military History,²⁸ whilst *The German Army on the Somme* and *The German Army at Passchendaele* were reviewed very positively in *War in History*, the world's foremost military history publication, by Brigadier

General Robert A Doughty, former Professor of Military History at West Point, and Dr Bruce Gudmundsson of the United States Marine Corps University respectively. Doughty summed up the Somme book by concluding his review, ‘In the final analysis this is one of the best books written recently about World War 1’.²⁹

The German Army at Passchendaele was also reviewed by Professor Gary Sheffield in *Military History Today* Issue 234. ‘Most – perhaps all – of the German language material’, he wrote, ‘has never appeared before in English. This is one of the most valuable books on the German army in the Great War ever written by an Anglophone author and it will be absolutely indispensable for any future studies of the battle’. Reviews of my books have also appeared regularly in the specialist journals such as the *British Army Review* and *Stand To!* the journal of the Western Front Association. These reviews have been universally favourable, acknowledging the unique contribution made by my work. David Filsell, writing in *Stand To!* No 87, summed up the impact of my work by stating (p 59), ‘The books are already influencing British writing about the Great War as evinced in William Philpott’s new evaluation of the Battle of the Somme, *Bloody Victory*, in which Sheldon’s work is much quoted’; whilst Michael Orr of BCMH, writing in *Mars & Clio* No. 19, summer 2007 (p 61), makes the point, ‘In the last couple of years, British historians such as Jack Sheldon ... have re-calibrated our views of the Western Front by exploiting German documentary sources’.

Internet sites which quote my work as authoritative

Articles

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Front *The German Army on the Somme* appears amongst the references.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stahlhelm> *The German Army on the Somme* is quoted regarding head protection afforded by German steel helmets.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Albert\(1916\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Albert(1916)) *The German Army on the Somme* is referenced twice in an article concerning the first phase of the Battle of the Somme 1916.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Guillemont *The German Army on the Somme* is referenced in this article concerning British Fourth Army operations on the Somme August – September 1916.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaumont-Hamel_Newfoundland_Memorial *The Germans at Beaumont Hamel* is referenced in this article and the book appears in the bibliography.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_DelvilleWood *The German Army on the Somme* is referenced four times in this article concerning the battle for this key Somme feature July – August 1916.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Vimy_Ridge *The German Army on Vimy Ridge* is quoted thirty seven times in this article.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Passchendaele *The German Army at Passchendaele* is cited seven times in this article.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8th_Division/\(German_Empire\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8th_Division/(German_Empire)) *The German Army on the Somme* is referenced in this article concerning the activities of the British 8th Division on the Western front.

www.thefullwiki.org/Vimy_Memorial *The German Army on Vimy Ridge* is quoted twice under the heading ‘Vimy Memorial: Articles’.

http://www.enotes.com/topic/Battle_of_Passchendaele There are five references to *The German Army at Passchendaele* in this article.

Academic Citations

http://muir.massey.ac.nz/bitstream/10179/1040/3/90YearsOn_MasterpiecetoMassacre.pdf Glyn Harper, Associate Professor, Massey University, New Zealand quotes *The German Army at Passchendaele* three times in this presentation concerning the operations of New Zealand troops during the third Battle of Ypres 1917.

www.edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/fasse-alexander-2007-06-21/PDF/fasse.pdf Dr. Alex Fasse cited *The German Army on the Somme* and *The Germans at Thiepval* in his 2007 doctoral thesis *Im Zeichen des ‘Tankdrachens’*, submitted to Humboldt University, Berlin.

University Reading Lists and Bibliographies

www.history.ox.ac.uk/currentunder/bibliographies/.../fhs_fs_ww1.pdf Oxford Final Honour School of History. Further Subject: A Comparative History of the First World War. The reading list includes *The German Army on the Somme*, *The German Army at Passchendaele* and *The German Army on Vimy Ridge*.

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/undergraduate/modules/hi136/seminars/foreignpol/> Warwick Department of History: History of Germany 1862 to the Present (HI136). The reading list includes *The German Army on the Somme*.

<http://www.warstudies.bham.ac.uk/firstworldwar> The Centre for First World War Studies has incorporated all my books on publication in its expanding bibliography and, in addition, at the invitation of its first director, Dr John Bourne, I submitted title suggestions for the German section.

Other

http://conservapedia.com/World_War_I *The German Army on the Somme* appears on the recommended reading list.

www.awm.gov.au/blog/tag/literature The Australian War Memorial bibliography recommends *The German Army at Passchendaele* as, ‘an excellent source of knowledge on the German experience of Passchendaele during 1917’.

http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/World_War_I/Bibliography *The German Army on the Somme* is included in a list entitled, ‘A List of Key Readings about World War 1’.

www.8thkurassier.com *The German Army on the Somme* is included in a list of recommended reading and my other books are also mentioned.

<http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf.enwiki651880> This academic dictionary contains an article concerning the Battle of Guillemont. *The German Army on the Somme* is quoted.

www.nicholasefstathiou.com/freikorpsbibliography.html *The German Army on the Somme* is included in a list of work consulted.

<http://www.trenchfighter.homepage.t-online.de/40029/40802.html> The website ‘The Soldier’s Burden’ features a piece on patrolling methods by the author from *The German Army on the Somme*, which is described as ‘excellent’.

www.meuse-argonne.com/Randys%20Webpages/bibliography_German.htm This bibliography lists *The German Army on the Somme* and *The German Army at Passchendaele*.

Published Citations of My Books

N.B. An asterisk in bold indicates multiple citations of my work.

The German Army on the Somme 1914 – 1916

Because of the unique, authoritative, contribution it makes to the historiography of the Somme, every title of significance on the subject published since 2005 makes reference to it. These include:

Barton Peter *The Somme* (London, 2006)*.

Duffy Christopher *Through German Eyes The British and the Somme 1916* (London, 2006).

Gilbert Martin *Somme The Heroism and Horror of War* (London, 2006)* In his introduction (p xviii) Gilbert writes, ‘In each decade since 1916 substantial works of research and narrative have been published. The first decade of the twenty-first century is no exception. Among the important books published in the single year 2005 were Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme*; Gary Sheffield and John Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters* and Jack Sheldon *The German Army on the Somme 1914 – 1916*.’

Hirschfeld Gerhard, Krumeich Gerd and Renz Irena (Eds) *Die Deutschen an der Somme 1914 – 1918 Krieg, Besatzung, Verbrannte Erde* (Essen, 2006).

MacDonald Alan *Pro Patria Mori The 56th (1st London) Division at Gommecourt, 1st July 1916* (Exposure Publishing, 2006).

MacDonald Alan *A Lack of Offensive Spirit? The 46th (North Midland) Division at Gommecourt, 1st July 1916* (Iona Books, 2008).

Philpott William *The Anglo-French Victory on the Somme (Diplomacy and Statecraft 17:4 731-751, December 2006)**.

Philpott William *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London, 2009)*. Philpott, in his award-winning account, draws heavily on my book, quoting it thirty times in all and describing it (p 698) as, ‘the key English language text for following the German side of the 1916 battle’.

Philpott William *The Last Day of the Somme (Historically Speaking Vol 11, Number 4, September 2010 pp 29-31)**. This article quotes *The German Army on the Somme* three times.

Riddich Andrew and Kemp John *When the Whistle Blows: The History of the Footballers’ Battalion in the Great War* (Yeovil, 2008).

Robertshaw Andrew *Somme 1 July 1916 Tragedy and Triumph* (Osprey, 2006).

Stachelbeck Christian *Militärische Effektivität im Ersten Weltkrieg: Die 11. Bayerische Infanteriedivision 1915 bis 1918* (Paderborn, 2010). This is the published version of Stachelbeck’s doctoral thesis, submitted to Humboldt University, Berlin, in 2009.

Wilkinson Roni *Pals on the Somme 1916* (Barnsley, 2006)*.

The German Army at Passchendaele

The literature concerning the Third Battle of Ypres is far less extensive than that of the Somme. However, one author has already drawn extensively on my book; *viz.*

Turner Alexander *Messines 1917: The Zenith of Siege Warfare* (Oxford, 2010)*

The German Army at Cambrai

The following book was published shortly before my account of the same battle appeared, but I provided the author in advance with material drawn from my own researches and it was incorporated and acknowledged.

Hammond Bryn *Cambrai 1917: The Myth of the First Great Tank Battle* (London, 2008)*

Endnotes

- ¹ Unlike the German navy which was unified and imperial, the armies of the various contingents which fought on the Western Front retained their separate identities, reporting channels and allegiances. Strictly speaking, therefore, one should refer to German armies in the plural, but army in the singular is used throughout this commentary because that has become the accepted usage in English.
- ² Two recent examples of baseless, nonsensical, caricature are Ted Barris *Victory at Vimy* Toronto 2007 p 28 and Stanley Weintraub *Silent Night* London 2001 pp 8-9. In the first, Barris alleges stereotypical Prussian arrogance in an unreferenced (and very probably invented) quotation attributed to a man of 79th Reserve Division, said to have been captured in the days prior to the storming of Vimy Ridge at Easter 1917, 'You might get to the top of Vimy Ridge', the German POW said. 'But I'll tell you this. You'll be able to take all the Canadians back to Canada in a rowboat who get there'. Weintraub, describing the situation prior to the truces of Christmas 1914 writes, '... a shift in mood was quietly creeping over the desolation, in part because a disproportionate number of German units were now undertrained and unenthusiastic Bavarian, Saxon, Hessian and Westphalian reservists, rather than elite Prussian professionals, many of whom were deployed on the Eastern Front to keep their own homelands from the Russians ...'
- ³ See Sheldon *The German Army at Cambrai* 'Cambrai' pp 35-36, 92, 160, 216-217, 249, 273-274 and 308-309
- ⁴ See Sheldon *The German Army on the Somme 1914 – 1916* 'Somme' *passim* but, especially, Chapters 2: pp 56-91, 3: pp 93-135 and, 4: pp 138-176, which could not have been written so authoritatively without the use of the Stuttgart records. It should be noted, however, that the first full description of the critical recapture of Schwaben Redoubt on 1 July 1916 which appears on pp 150-155, was made possible only because of my discovery of a large cache of relevant documentation, including several Württemberg items concerning the Recruit Companies of Infantry Regiment 180, in amongst the records of Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment 8 in Munich.
- ⁵ See Sheldon *The German Army on Vimy Ridge 1914 – 1917* 'Vimy Ridge' Chapter 6: pp 229-276, with particular reference to pp 238-244, which demonstrate the falsity of this long-held view.
- ⁶ I cite an interesting example of this practice, which relates to the battles around Sailly-Saillisel in mid October 1916, in 'Somme', pp 346-349.
- ⁷ A typical instance, involving an entire infantry company moving into the line drunk after plundering a French wine cellar, appears in 'Somme', pp 44-46.
- ⁸ Martin Gilbert *Somme: The Heroism and Horror of War* (London, 2006) p xix
- ⁹ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson *The Somme* (London, 2005) pp 305-306
- ¹⁰ Diplomacy and Statecraft 17:4 pp 731-751 December 2006
- ¹¹ An exhaustive list of these errors would be wearisome. Significant typical instances include stating (p 122) that 2nd Guards Reserve Division was responsible for the defence of Serre from 14 May 1916. In fact this had long been the sector of 52nd Infantry Division; claiming (p150) that the 180th Infantry Regiment defended Thiepval on 1 July 1916, when this was the mission of Reserve Infantry Regiment 99, reinforced by elements of Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment 8; stating (p 151) that the 36th (Ulster) Division captured and lost Goat Redoubt on 1 July, a day when no member of that division got within 1,200 metres of that strongpoint. On p 172 Duffy invents a change of command, stating that "Major General Burkhardt, the new commander of the 26th Reserve Division, reported on the 7th [July] that, 'the crisis has been overcome *for the time being*' ..." In fact Burkhardt was the commander of 10th Bavarian Infantry Division. Generalleutnant Freiherr von Soden continued to command 26th Reserve Division until 20

December 1916, when he departed, to command VII Reserve Corps and Generalleutnant Fritsch took over the division.

¹² Hew Strachan *Back to the Trenches: Why can't British historians be less insular about the First World War?* TLS 5 November 2008

¹³ I discuss this issue in 'Somme' pp 115-116

¹⁴ Charles Carrington *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London, 1965) p 120

¹⁵ During the entire war, technical, operational and after-action reporting was standard throughout the German army and treated with the utmost seriousness. All sub-units, major units and formations, for example, reported on all aspects of tours of duty once out of the line. These reports were passed up the chain of command, evaluated at every level, provided with analytical comment and distributed on a very wide scale throughout the Western Front. Directives and reports based on this information, even as high as army level, were often made available within days of the end of a particular battle or campaign, especially if the lessons learned were considered to have wide application. 'Somme' contains numerous examples of the process at work from collection through to dissemination, *viz.*

pp 70-71 Battle of Serre. Note, in particular, the explicit connection made by Soden, the divisional commander, between lessons learned and his preparations for the major 1916 battle and also the speed with which the Commander Second Army was able to issue a revised directive concerning deep dugouts.

pp 86-88 Artillery lessons learned within 26th Reserve Division.

pp 100-106 Patrolling and raiding within XIV Reserve Corps.

pp 225-228 Battle performance of Allied troops.

pp 304-305 Technical reporting concerning the British Mk I tanks deployed at Thiepval September 1916.

pp 393-395 Deteriorating health of forward troops December 1916.

¹⁶ The detailed account of how events unfurled and this division achieved an astonishing defensive victory along this critical sector of the front from Serre to the Albert – Bapaume road appears in 'Somme', pp 138-158. The specific defensive preparations are described on pp 110-120.

¹⁷ See 'Somme' pp 377-388 for the battles on Redan Ridge between Beaumont Hamel/Grandcourt and Serre and pp 398-399 for the German view of the outcome of the long campaign.

¹⁸ Of the three, Berton *Vimy* has been the most influential over the years – and the source of much of the myth concerning Vimy Ridge. Barris *Victory at Vimy*, frequently exploiting material collected by Berton, is cast in the same mould, whilst Goodspeed *The Road Past Vimy* resorts repeatedly to the recounting of improbable anecdotes. Berton, the myth maker, writing on p 15, takes as his starting point, 'The Germans had strengthened this fortress for more than two years and believed it to be impregnable'. I produce evidence in 'Vimy Ridge' pp 252-253 to show that this is simply untrue. He states further, on p 129, in relation to the failed 1 March 1917 raid, 'The Germans knew everything [in advance]'. Despite the fact that not one shred of evidence is adduced in support of this assertion, his was the version of events which was regarded as correct, until I proved it to be totally wrong in 'Vimy Ridge' pp 238-244. Far from the raid being well planned and prepared (Berton p 129), subsequent prisoner interrogation revealed the opposite to be the case. See 'Vimy Ridge' p 244.

¹⁹ The article in question was published in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper, Toronto, on 9 April 2007.

²⁰ I examine the question of General Staff manoeuvring and tension between staff and commanders at greater length on pp 19-21 and 25-29, highlighting in particular the extraordinary case of General der Infanterie Sixt von Armin, Commander Fourth Army, in June 1917 on p 20.

²¹ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson *Passchendaele: the untold story* (London, 1996) p xiv

²² *ibid.* p 219

²³ *ibid.* p 219

²⁴ Nigel Steel and Peter Hart *Passchendaele: The Sacrificial Ground* (London, 2000) p 308

²⁵ Interesting to note, Brigadier General Edmonds' handling of German casualties during the Battle of the Somme, 1916, was subject to devastating critical review by MJ Williams in an article for the Journal of the Royal United Services Institute (London, 1966) *The Treatment of the German Losses on the Somme in the British Official History: 'Military Operations France and Belgium 1916' Volume II*. Williams' conclusion was that Edmonds', '... treatment of German losses on the Somme is unscholarly and unreliable' – this after stating that, 'General Edmonds's methods in using German casualty figures here and throughout his Preface to '1916' Vol II have a strong resemblance to Humpty Dumpty's use of words in 'Through the Looking Glass''. There is a view that Williams in his work was merely acting as a proxy for Liddell Hart in his long running and, ultimately, posthumous, dispute with Edmonds. Having examined Edmonds' work on casualty figures in respect of the Third Battle of Ypres, I can only state that whatever influence Liddell Hart may or may not have had on the matter, I concur with Williams.

²⁶ Just to underline this point, the frontispiece of Dreyse's book is a watercolour by Adolf Hitler and the date of publication is stated to be, 'Year 2 of the New Germany'.

²⁷ See www.thiepval.org.uk/philosophy.htm

²⁸ See www.bcmh.org.uk/reviews.php

²⁹ Gudmundsson's review appears in full at: <http://wih.sagepub.com/content/16/3/363.full.pdf>