

**An Inter-Disciplinary Study of Learning in the 32nd Division
on the Western Front, 1916-1918**

by

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Abstract

The idea of a learning process has become broadly accepted among military historians of the First World War, but explanations for how and why this occurred remain limited. This thesis uses a number of different disciplines alongside more orthodox historical analysis of what the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) did at the divisional level to learn the lessons from combat in an uncompromising operational environment. At the beginning of 1916 the BEF was predominantly a citizen army lacking experience. This marked a low-point in the BEF's fighting capabilities. This thesis charts the development from 1916 to the Armistice in 1918 using the British 32nd Division as a case study. The division participated in a number of major operations including the Battle of the Somme, the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, the Battles of Nieuport, Passchendaele, Amiens and the Hundred Days. They experienced both success and failure ensuring they are a representative case from which to draw broader conclusions. This thesis argues that the BEF's learning process developed as structural improvement occurred, battle experience was gained and leadership improved.

Contents

	Page
Abstract	1
Contents	2
Abbreviations	4
 Introduction	 7
 Part I	 The Divisional Structure and Learning
 Chapter One: Command Structure and Learning: Edwardian and Modern	 28
1.1 <i>Ethos</i> , Command and Structure	30
1.2 Modern Frameworks	43
 Chapter Two: Structure on the Somme, A Case Study: 1-16 July 1916	 50
2.1 Planning 1 July 1916	51
2.2 Structure and Command during the Battle	61
2.3 Appraising the Battle	73
 Chapter Three: Perfecting the System	 88
3.1 Liaison with the French 1916-1918	88
3.2 Divisional Structure and Learning in 1917 and 1918	96
3.3 Conclusion	121
 Part II	 Battle Wisdom
 Chapter Four: Battle Wisdom	 125
4.1 Definitions and Theory	125
4.2 Examples of Battle Wisdom	136
4.3 Disobedience	144
4.4 An Evolutionary Process	165
4.5 Conclusion	167
 Part III	 The Role of Leadership in Learning and Fighting Performance

Chapter Five: Leadership and Learning: Theory, Context and Characteristics	170
5.1 Leadership: The Theories: Classical, Contemporary and Modern	171
5.2 A Case Study in Leadership and Learning: Cameron Shute Context and Characteristics	191
 Chapter Six: Learning and Leadership: Intellectual Understanding and Influence	209
6.1 Personal Command System	209
6.2 Aims of Leadership: Identity and Cohesion	248
6.3 Shute: a Mentor, Role Model and Peer?	255
6.4 Conclusion	265
 Conclusion	266
 Appendix 1 <i>Field Service Regulations Part I: Operations, 'Advice on Orders'</i>	271
Appendix 2 Divisional Artillery Organisation 1 July 1916	272
Appendix 3 J.N. Marshall Victoria Cross Citation	273
Appendix 4 Extract from 'Duties of an Officer'	274
Appendix 5 General Cameron Deane Shute Biographical Information	276
Appendix 6 A.P. Herbert's Poem	277
Appendix 7 32 nd Division Casualty Tables	278
 Sources and Bibliography	280

Abbreviations

2/Lt	Second Lieutenant
AA and QMG	Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General
Argylls	Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
ASC	Army Service Corps
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
Borders	The Border Regiment
CO	Commanding Officer
Col.	Colonel
Coy	Company
DAC	Divisional Ammunition Column
DHQ	Divisional Headquarters
Div.	Division
Dorsets	Dorsetshire Regiment
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
ed.	Editor
<i>FSR</i>	Field Service Regulations
Gds	Guards
Gen.	General
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
Gordons	Gordon Highlanders
GSO	General Staff Officer
HAC	Honourable Artillery Company
HLI	Highland Light Infantry
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationery Office
IWM	Imperial War Museum
JCH	Journal of Contemporary History
JSCSC	Joint Services Command and Staff College
KOYLI	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry
KRRC	King's Royal Rifle Corps
KSLI	King's Shropshire Light Infantry
LF	Lancashire Fusiliers
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives
Londons	London Regiment

Loyals	Loyal North Lancashire Regiment
Maj.	Major
Maj.-Gen.	Major-General
Manchesters	Manchester Regiment
MC	Military Cross
MGC	Machine Gun Corps
MG Coy	Machine Gun Company
MO	Medical Officer
NAM	National Army Museum
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NF	Northumberland Fusiliers
NLS	National Library of Scotland
OC	Officer Commanding
OH	Official History
PKCA	Perth and Kinross Council Archive
Queen's	The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)
RA	Royal Artillery
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RE	Royal Engineers
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
RF	Royal Fusiliers
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RGA	Royal Garrison Artillery
RIF	Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
R. Scots	Royal Scots
R. Sussex	Royal Sussex
RWR	Royal Warwickshire Regiment
RWF	Royal Welsh Fusiliers
SR	Scottish Rifles (Cameronians)
S. Lancs	South Lancashire Regiment
S. Staffs	South Staffordshire Regiment
TMB	Trench Mortar Battery
TNA	The National Archives
Vol.	Volume
VC	Victoria Cross

WO	War Office
Worcesters	Worcestershire Regiment
W. Yorks	West Yorkshire Regiment

Introduction

How did the British Army learn on the Western Front during the First World War? That is the question that lies at the heart of this work. The concept of learning has loomed large over the historiography of the Great War yet this most fundamental question of how it actually occurred has been overshadowed by other issues. Debates have raged over the competence of senior figures, the conduct of battles and the experience of the 'everyman at war'.¹ How the BEF improved has often been subsumed by these larger themes. One of the biggest impediments to the study of learning during the First World War has been the lack of common acceptance, within the Anglophone literature at least, of any development having actually taken place. Historians have often found themselves fighting on ground not of their own choosing challenging perceptions of futility, victimhood and poetic sacrifice. Since the 1980s this has begun to change and, within the academic world at least, there is a broad acceptance of what has come to be simplistically known as the 'learning curve' concept. This has opened the way for more technical studies of the BEF between 1914 and 1918 and this thesis is intended to contribute to this growing area of study.

Given the limitations of word length this work will not cover the entirety of the conflict. The changing composition of the British forces on the continent would require any broad conclusions to come with a detailed list of caveats, which might reasonably require studies unto themselves. By 1916 Britain had accepted the need for a national commitment.² The 'Military Service Act' of January 1916 marked a watershed moment: it was the last nail in the coffin of the idea that Britain could operate under the notion of 'business as usual'.³ Sir William Robertson in his new role as

¹ The literature review will cover these schools of study in more depth; for the origin of the term 'everyman at war' see Charles Purdom, *Everyman at war: sixty personal narratives of the war* (London, J.M. Dent, 1930)

² David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London, Allen Lane, 2004) pp.268-270

³ For an account of the introduction of the Military Service Act see Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of the New Armies, 1914-16* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988) pp.138-161

Chief of the Imperial General Staff began working out the manpower requirements and remarked: "The only safe basis of calculation was to assume that every man in the country would sooner or later be needed for one kind of national work or another."⁴ Summer 1915 had seen the blooding of the first divisions of the New Army at Hooge in Belgium, Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula, and later at the Battle of Loos. The commitment of these citizen formations would only increase in 1916. The character of the army in 1916 was markedly different from the one that set sail for France in August 1914. The largely citizen volunteer force had no experience of the scale of the battles that would face them, thus the start of this work picks up from this lowest ebb of practical experience.

The tactical level of war was the pivotal level for learning. The division would have frequent opportunities to gather and implement the lessons of combat and gain experience of battle. It was at the divisional level and below that many of the tactical developments occurred, yet it remains understudied. To address this gap and provide an insight into how learning functioned the BEF's 32nd Division will be the main focus of this study. This is not a divisional history. To address the complexities of how a large organisation learns the work will draw upon a number of different scholarly disciplines. Organisational learning theory, leadership and political theory have all been considered and employed to help understand why the division was a success or failure in certain situations. This approach always carries with it the danger of unfair *ex post facto* judgements, so to eliminate this possibility the prevailing Edwardian understanding of these concepts, as shown through documents, doctrine and testimony, have been considered alongside any modern theories. There are thus two different, but complementary, sets of criteria to help explain the changes that occurred in the 32nd Division 1916-1918.

This work has looked at divisional learning from three different perspectives: Structure; Battle

⁴ Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, Vol. I (London, Cassell, 1926) p.294

Wisdom and Leadership. The first three chapters cover structure, chapter four describes battle wisdom, while chapters five and six handle leadership. A number of case studies have been used throughout to explore different aspects of the learning process in greater detail. Before understanding how the division learnt it is important to ascertain how the division functioned.

Part I will assess the principles upon which the division and indeed the BEF based their development and command structure. Modern organisational learning theory has been used to explore key ideas such as canonical and non-canonical instruction and communities-of-practice. These have been considered alongside the contemporary attitudes to command structure as established through the British Army's *ethos* and doctrine. The BEF's structural principles remained broadly consistent throughout the war. There was an emphasis upon decentralisation and the feedback system, although imperfect, was fit for purpose. In 1916 the flaw in the command system and structure was a human one and this study has included a specific case study on the experiences of 1 July 1916. The balance between intervention and delegation had not been struck correctly creating a paralysis of command. This problem was largely rectified by a tremendous overhaul in the divisional leadership, but more prescriptive doctrine also helped bridge the gap between principle and practice. The BEF also showed a propensity to learn from its French allies. Inter-allied exchanges were far from ideal throughout, but liaison between the two nations was valued and supported the existing system of appraisal.

Chapter four looks at 'Battle Wisdom', a term originally coined in reference to the Second World War and combat fatigue but which also could comfortably be applied to the First World War.⁵ It embraces the idea that after a period of adjustment new soldiers become 'battle-wise' and their efficiency in combat commensurately rises. This therefore is a vehicle through which to assess the

⁵ Roy Swank and Walter Marchand, 'Combat Neuroses: the Development of Combat Exhaustion', *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, Vol.55: No.3 (March, 1946) pp. 236-247

process that enabled soldiers to gain experience and develop. In evaluating the concept of battle wisdom as it applied to the soldier of the First World War a case study of 'scrounging' has been included. This seemingly minor act was representative of the acclimatisation to army life and had manifestly positive effects upon the primary group. In contrast to the minor act of scrounging were cases of outright disobedience; there was one notable case of a refusal to attack in the 32nd Division and this has been examined in detail to assess the effects on cohesion and learning. Battle wisdom was essentially an evolutionary process. Beneficial actions and methods persevered along with the troops whose lives were improved as a result; conversely actions that might otherwise harm the individual or group died out. The importance of this learning at the lowest level has not been fully realised by historians who have generally seen aspects of battle wisdom within the broader framework of 'trench experiences'.⁶ It was much more important than that. Battle wisdom provided soldiers with a means of adapting to the changing conditions of war. If these experiences jarred with orders, soldiers at the lowest level were wont to change their implementation without authorisation, and often they were right to do so. Disobedience at its worst could have a corrosive effect on unit cohesion and reputation, but these negatives need to be weighed-up against the possibility of saving lives that might otherwise have been lost for little gain.

The role of the leader, one of the most important but little understood aspects of learning, is covered in chapters five and six. Leadership theory has offered many important insights into effective ways through which people have led, yet it has barely considered the legacy it could have on learning. The General Officer Commanding 32nd Division had the capacity to promote or hinder the learning process. To illustrate the importance a general could have on this through his leadership decisions Major-General Cameron Deane Shute has been assessed as a case study. The principles by which he commanded; the alienating aspects of martinet discipline; his understanding of tactical methods, are

⁶ John Lewis-Stempel, *Six Weeks: The short and gallant life of the British Officer in the First World War* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2010) pp.161-162

all considered to demonstrate that on the whole he was a good leader by Edwardian standards but his legacy as a leader who promoted learning was far more mixed.

These three approaches cover the main dimensions of the divisional learning process: structure, implementation and leadership. There is significant overlap between the three and in some respects they are contingent upon one another. For structural improvement to occur soldiers at the lowest levels were required to feed information about best-practices up the chain of command. The leadership then needed to be responsive to the information it was receiving; the commander needed to be aware of doctrinal and tactical change to avoid acting as an impediment or road-block to improvement. The issue of what constitutes 'improvement' is a particularly tough one for the military observer gifted with hindsight to adequately define. As Jonathan Krause has observed in a recent study of the French Army in 1915: 'It is one of the essential hurdles for students of military history to surpass: the recognition that a particular force can do everything 'right' and still suffer defeat.'⁷ Krause draws upon Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray's work *Military Effectiveness, Vol. I: The First World War* as further supporting evidence for this conclusion. All three authors are correct to point out the pitfalls of evaluating an organisation or process merely on the outcome of battle especially when facing a dynamic enemy attempting to implement their own improvements. When they wrote: 'Judgements on effectiveness should retain some sense of proportional cost and organizational process' Millett and Murray were attempting to correct a tendency to view victory and defeat as the final arbiter of organisational quality.⁸ This work accepts these conclusions and many of the points set out above are organisational or procedural. That being said, victory and defeat should not be entirely removed from any judgement. The final purpose of learning was to

⁷ Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois, May-June 1915* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013) p.1

⁸ Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, *Military Effectiveness Vol.1, The First World War* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1988) p.3. Works such as John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, Pimlico, 1994) p.313 in particular fall foul of Millett and Murray's important point regarding process and organisation. Keegan does not accept victory in the First World War was brought about by tactical or organisational improvements seeing it only as a victory of *materiel*.

effect the defeat of the Central Powers. To ignore the relationship between the process of improvement and the outcome of battle places undue emphasis on the means rather than the ends. Thus, this work has drawn conclusions regarding the process considered in light of contemporary expectations, but also analysed how changes contributed towards improving the fighting capabilities of the division, or the BEF more generally.

The 32nd Division has rarely been the source of much acclaim during the First World War, so why choose them? It is precisely because the 32nd Division were relatively unremarkable that they offer an excellent case study of the 'average' British division. They were a 'New Army' formation originally created as the 38th Division, part of Kitchener's Fifth New Army (K5), but this was later changed when K5 became K4 and the 38th became the 32nd. By the end of July 1916 the division was a fairly well balanced one incorporating seven New Army battalions, one Territorial Battalion and four Regular Army battalions.⁹ Peter Simkins in his study 'Co-stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918' does not highlight the 32nd Division for any particular mention, although his empirical approach accounts for their actions within his overall conclusion that the British divisions have been undervalued and overlooked.¹⁰ John Lee's article in the same volume confirms the difficulty of rating certain divisions, but notes that some were 'much more "famous" than others'.¹¹ The 32nd Division was not one of these. Lee questioned whether the lesser known formations' lack of a divisional history affected their acclaim.¹² It is certainly a valid hypothesis as far as the 32nd Division was concerned. No divisional history of the formation was ever produced and yet they took part in some of the war's major engagements.

⁹ New Army: Lancashire Fusiliers: 15th, 16th; Northumberland Fusiliers: 16th (17th were pioneers but have not been included in totals above); Border Regiment: 11th; Highland Light Infantry: 15th, 16th, 17th; Territorial: Royal Scots: 5/6th; Regular: King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry: 2nd; Manchester Regiment: 2nd; Dorsetshire Regiment: 1st and Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers: 2nd. Before the end of July 1916 the 19th Lancashire Fusiliers had replaced 5/6 Royal Scots. This meant that on 1 July 1916 the division had an 8/4 split of New Army to Regular battalions.

¹⁰ Peter Simkins, 'Co-stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918' in Paddy Griffith, *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, Frank Cass, 1996) pp.50-69

¹¹ John Lee, 'The SHLM Project' in Griffith, *British Fighting Methods* (1996) p.176

¹² *Ibid.*, p.176

The 32nd Division had the task of taking the village of Thiepval and Mouquet Farm on 1 July 1916. This was followed by operations around the Leipzig Salient and Ovillers until they were withdrawn for rest and refit in mid-July. They returned to the Somme in November to assault the Munich and Frankfort positions. In 1917 they picked up where they left off on the Somme near Serre north of Beaumont Hamel, then went on to hold the right of the British line next to the French during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. They were in reserve at Messines Ridge and repulsed a heavy German attack during the Battle of Nieuport but at the loss of a small section of front line trench. Localised actions were to continue in that region until they moved to the Ypres Salient where on 2 December they launched a night attack on the Passchendaele ridge. The innovative but limited attack demonstrated some interesting ideas but was ultimately a failure. The following year the 32nd Division launched two sizeable raids against the German defences south of the Houthulst Forest on 18/19 and 27/28 February 1918. When the Germans launched their Spring offensives on 21 March 1918 the division was engaged in line holding in the Houthulst positions. By the time Operation Mars launched on 28 March, and subsequently petered out a few days later, the division was brought down to support the British forces recently attacked near Arras. Fortunately for the men of the division the German focus had shifted further north and they avoided any German infantry attacks. Rather than remain placid upon arrival the division launched one of their most successful assaults of the war on the village of Alette, which had fallen to the Germans during Operation Mars. Battalions of the 97 and 96 Brigades took the village and supporting positions by surprise in a night assault and inflicted heavy losses on the German battalion and Machine Gun Company holding the position.¹³

Having escaped the worst of the German Spring offensives (but incurring significant casualties

¹³ The supporting positions could not be consolidated on the first night but were fully taken the following night.

from relentless German gassing) the division was to take a leading role in the Hundred Days. They were attached to the Canadian Corps and took part in the final two days, 10 and 11 August, of the Battle of Amiens, thereafter moving on 15 August to the Australian Corps for subsidiary operations following up the attack. On 11 September they left the Australian Corps to join IX Corps with which they stayed until the Armistice exactly two months later. Their performance during the Hundred Days was marked by a series of successes: the passage of the Somme, destruction of the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line (part of the Hindenburg Line) and the Battle of the Sambre where they forced a crossing of the Sambre-Oise canal near the village of Ors. During this last phase of the war the division captured 2700 prisoners, 80 guns and 500 machine guns and they were held in high esteem in the upper reaches of the army.¹⁴ Upon leaving IX Corps in December 1918 the corps commander, Lt-Gen. Walter Braithwaite, wrote a note of thanks to the division: 'You came with a splendid reputation, and you have kept – indeed enhanced – it.'¹⁵ The division had been involved in both offensive and defensive battles between 1916 and 1918, they had experienced periods of open and semi-open warfare during the German withdrawal and in 1918 they were at the forefront of Fourth Army's advance. That there was no divisional history written and their most famous (or infamous) commander, Cameron Deane Shute left no papers has made them an unattractive prospect for historians. Their achievements are certainly worthy of note but they were not atypical of the average British division. This makes them a particularly useful case study and one which allows broader conclusions to be drawn.

Literature Review

The idea of a learning process taking place within the British Army during the First World War is one that has developed along a number of lines of enquiry. Historians have looked in some detail at

¹⁴ TNA, WO 95/2372 32nd Division General Staff, November 1918, *G.S.1/1/1*, 12 November 1918

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, December 1918, *A.460*, Appendix 3

the capabilities of many of the BEF's highest ranking officers. French, Haig, Plumer, Rawlinson, Horne, and Gough have all been the subject of studies of one sort or another in the last thirty years.¹⁶ The corps level too has been given a scholarly assessment by Andy Simpson, in his important work *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918*.¹⁷ There have been a number of technical studies looking at the operational conception and understanding of warfare between 1914 and 1918 which have greatly driven the debates about the learning process. The first study to take this organisational and operational approach was Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham's *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons & Theories of War 1904-1945*. Published in 1982, the work looked at the integration of weapons systems in the British Army and how the intellectual development evolved with new technologies that increased the proliferation of fire-power on the battlefield. While many of their conclusions can be challenged today, not least their position on the doctrinal developments, their approach was a significant improvement upon much of the literature that had hitherto criticised the British Army's collective understanding of war.¹⁸ A number of subsequent authors built upon aspects of Bidwell and Graham's work, most notably Tim Travers whose *The Killing Ground* has been largely superseded in terms of scholarship but the ideas have remained an insightful source of debate. This work challenges a number of Travers's central ideas, but it must be noted that at the time of its publication in 1988 the move to frame the war within its pre-1914, Edwardian concepts was influential and remains so today. Indeed

¹⁶ Richard Holmes, *The Little Field-Marshal: Sir John French* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1981); Gary Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London, Aurum, 2011); Gary Mead, *The Good Soldier: A Biography of Douglas Haig* (London, Atlantic Books, 2007); Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldier's General* (London, Leo Cooper, 1990); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992); Simon Robbins, *British Generalship during the Great War: the Military Career of Sir Henry Horne (1861-1929)* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2010); Helen McCartney and Gary Sheffield, 'Hubert Gough' in Ian Beckett & Steven Corvi (eds.), *Haig's Generals*, (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2006) pp.75-96; Gary Sheffield, 'An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough' in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman, *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 2004) pp.78-80; Ian FW Beckett, 'Hubert Gough, Neill Malcolm and Command on the Western Front' in Brian Bond et al. *'Look to your Front' Studies in the First World War by the British Commission for Military History* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 1999) pp.1-12.

¹⁷ Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Stroud, Spellmount, 2006)

¹⁸ Alan Clark, *The Donkeys*, (London, Hutchinson, 1961); A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966); Basil Liddell Hart, *Liddell Hart's History of the First World War* (London, Cassell, 1970) originally published as *The Real War 1914-1918* (1930)

while his conclusions regarding the *psychological battlefield*, *cult of the offensive* and *fire-power* are challenged at length throughout this thesis Travers should be given great credit for establishing the parameters of the debate. It is a testament to his influence that this work focuses on how pre-war conceptions related to thought and practice during the Great War. This work is not the only one that recognises the validity of Travers's approach. Nikolas Gardner's idea of the 'hybrid officer' as laid out in *Trial by Fire: Command and the British Expeditionary Force in 1914* owes much to *The Killing Ground*. Hybrid officers were senior commanders and staff who combined an understanding of modern trends in warfare with traditional traits associated with regimental officers.¹⁹ Gardner's monograph fills the void of an operational study of the actions of 1914 but overstates the importance of personal connections. Spencer Jones's *From Boer War to World War* offers a necessary corrective to Gardner's work by demonstrating the changes brought about after the Boer War and their influence on the fighting in 1914.²⁰ Jones joins a growing list of recent authors who have approached the operational history of the BEF by rigorously drawing on a broad base of archival sources. Jonathan Boff's study *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the defeat of Germany in 1918* is an outstanding work of operational and international history. Drawing heavily on both British and German sources Boff demonstrates the flaws in both the British and German systems but represents excellently the dynamic that existed between the two sides. The argument that 'Third Army's application of modern warfare was less than ideal, but proved sufficient to defeat its enemy' is difficult to fault.²¹ It is with this argument in mind that many of this work's criticisms of the British structure, experience and leadership must be considered. The feedback system under Major-General T. S. Lambert, GOC 32nd Division in 1918, for example, took a step back from the advanced empirical model implemented by Major-General

¹⁹ Nikolas Gardner, *Trial By Fire: Command and the British Expeditionary Force in 1914* (Westport, CT, Praeger, 2003) *passim*. particularly p.238-239

²⁰ Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War, Tactical Reform of the British Army, 1902-1914* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2012)

²¹ Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012) p.21

C. D. Shute in 1917, but nevertheless it proved sufficient to provide substantial lessons for future operations.

The operational approach to understanding how the BEF developed between 1914 and 1918 has expanded down a number of subsidiary routes looking at specialist aspects. Works like Paddy Griffith's *Battle Tactics on the Western Front* and Sanders Marble's *British Artillery on the Western Front in the First World War* have respectively offered deep insights into the tactical evolution of the British infantry as well as the structural and technical improvements that occurred in the artillery. The issue of intelligence and its contribution to the Entente's victory has often been overlooked and Jim Beach's *Haig's Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army 1916-1918* stands alone as the best exploration to date of the developments that occurred in the 'I' branch.²² Logistical development was a pivotal aspect of the BEF's growth. To allow the higher tempo of operations in 1918 munitions and *materiel* needed to reach the front in sufficient quantities and in a timely fashion. Nevertheless studies of this aspect are still limited. Ian Malcolm Brown's book *British Logistics on the Western Front 1914-1919* remains the leading work in this field, although Keith Grieves's *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918* considers the difficult issue of manpower allocation during the war and should be considered an important adjunct piece to Brown.²³ Morale is never far away from any explanation of the Entente's victory in 1918 and the subject has finally begun to receive the level of exploration its importance demands. Alexander Watson's work *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* takes a similar international comparative approach to Jonathan Boff's *Winning and Losing*. Watson recognises the importance of good supply during the German Spring Offensives as critical to maintaining the morale of the British forces while the increasing apathy among the front line

²² Jim Beach, *Haig's Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army 1916-1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013); see also James Beach, 'British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918' (Ph.D thesis, University College London, 2004)

²³ Ian Malcolm Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front 1914-1919* (Westport, CT, Praeger, 1998); Keith Grieves, *The Politics of Manpower, 1914-1918* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988)

German soldiers led to higher rates of surrender during the Hundred Days.²⁴ The broader theme that, across nationalities, morale could be sustained throughout appalling attacks thus prolonging the war is a valuable addition to the historiography of morale.²⁵

In addition to these specialist themes there have been a number of campaign histories that have incorporated many of the above findings. The Somme has received two important treatments in the last decade. Gary Sheffield's *The Somme* succinctly captured the tactical, operational developments while recognising that the battle changed the strategic dynamic between the Entente and the Germans.²⁶ More recently William Philpott's *Bloody Victory* has set the battle more firmly within its coalition context and laid out a strong case for the remembrance of the French contributions made on the Somme in 1916.²⁷ Peter Simkins's work specifically covering the 32nd Division's assault on the Munich and Frankfort trenches on 18 November 1916 and the subsequent battle to reach isolated pockets of British troops cut off by the Germans emerging from their dugouts once the barrage had lifted, is one of the few works that looks at operational, campaign history with a direct focus on the 32nd Division.²⁸ There still remains a yawning gap in the historiography covering early 1917. The German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line has not received any recent scholarship and the Battle of Nieuport is also overshadowed by its proximity to the opening of the Third Battle of Ypres. Andrew Weist's *Passchendaele and the Royal Navy* offers some significant insights into the context of the planned combined operations on the Flanders coast. His conclusions are challenged by Mark Karau's *Germanophile: "Wielding the Dagger" The MarineKorps Flandern and the German War Effort, 1914-1918* and it is one of the few works to handle the Battle of Nieuport from

²⁴ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008) p.179

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.231-235

²⁶ Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London, Cassell, 2003)

²⁷ William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London, Little, Brown, 2009)

²⁸ Peter Simkins, 'Somme footnote: the Battle of the Ancre and the struggle for Frankfort Trench November 1916', in *The Imperial War Museum Review* No.9 (1994)

the German perspective.²⁹ The 32nd Division's attack on the Passchendaele Ridge in December 1917 has been consigned to a footnote in the historiography. Michael LoCicero's Ph.D thesis has greatly expanded our understanding of this action and its part in the broader strategic decisions taken by the British in late 1917.³⁰ The actions of the Hundred Days have begun to garner far more attention over the last decade as its importance as the culminating point of British strategy has been realised. J.P. Harris's with Niall Barr's *Amiens to the Armistice: The BEF in the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August-11 November 1918* gives an excellent narrative account of operations although the role of the dominion forces often takes precedence over the British divisions; consequently despite their important role the 32nd Division is often portrayed as the supporting cast rather than leading player.³¹ The contribution British divisions made during the Hundred Days is covered empirically by Peter Simkins's 'Co-stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918' in Paddy Griffith's *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*. This article should be read as a companion piece to Harris and Barr's effort for it redresses many of the deficiencies of the former's broadly narrative work.³²

The divisional level of war has featured heavily in nearly all of the works cited here. But, it has received scant treatment as a level of command in and of itself. John Bourne is one of the few scholars to have published an analytical piece directly addressing the command level in 'British Divisional Commanders During the Great War: First Thoughts'. His work on William Heneker's command of the 8th Division also draws some important conclusions about the quality of divisional generalship during the war.³³ There also exists a large corpus of divisional histories. These are often

²⁹ Mark Karau, "Weilding the Dagger" *The MarineKorps Flandern and the German War Effort, 1914-1918* (Westport, CT, Greenwood, 2003)

³⁰ Michael LoCicero 'Moonlight Massacre: The Night Operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2nd December 1917' (Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011)

³¹ J.P. Harris with Niall Barr, *Amiens to Armistice: The BEF in the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August-11 November 1918* (London, Brassey's, 1998)

³² Peter Simkins, 'Co-stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918' in Paddy Griffith's *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, Frank Cass, 1996) pp.50-69

³³ John Bourne, 'British Divisional Commanders During the Great War: First Thoughts' in *Gun Fire* 29, (1993) pp.22-

narrative and drawn mainly from the war diaries and experiences of a core of surviving soldiers. As a resource they are often valuable but as already noted no such divisional history exists for the 32nd Division. Nonetheless it is worth recognising that Cyril Falls's, *History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* is one of the finer efforts and couples insight and analysis well.

It is worth briefly accounting for some of the key works from different disciplines relating to learning structure, battle wisdom and leadership. Organisational learning initially drew on a range of different but related fields of study: organisational behaviour, communication, and individual personal relationships. The first true exploration of organisational learning as a stand-alone area of study was published in 1978 by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön in *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective*.³⁴ The work suggested that organisational learning was about responding to internal and external factors (what they describe as single-loop learning) and questioning the values, processes and assumptions that led an organisation to take certain decisions in the first instance (double-loop learning).³⁵ The final objective, in their view, is an organisation capable of adapting to any changing context in which it may find itself. Therefore the exploration of what constitutes the 'learning organisation' has been at the heart of much of the literature stemming from Argyris and Schön's work. While originally drawing on psychology and behavioural science, the field of business management has been the origin of much of the subsequent research with Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* and Chris Argyris's *On Organizational Learning* being two of the most important books.³⁶ These works, Senge in particular, have suggested that a learning organisation will systematically consider its own structures and experiences, tailoring them towards its ultimate goal. It will also facilitate individual learning and incorporate it into the wider organisation. Limited

31; 'Major General W.C.G. Heneker: A Divisional Commander of the Great War' in Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann, *Leadership in Conflict* (London, Leo Cooper, 2000) pp.54-67

³⁴ Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (Reading MA, Addison-Wesley, 1978)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (London, Century Business, 1992); Chris Argyris, *On Organizational Learning* (Oxford, Blackwell Business, 1999 [2nd ed.])

'mental models' will be replaced with an open culture of exchange that encourages personnel within the organisation to direct their efforts towards a communal goal, be that long term or transient. Many of these points have been picked up and developed and will be discussed later. They have also gained some traction in the field of war studies. Both John Nagl and Richard Downie in their respective studies *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* and *Learning from Conflict* have used organisational learning theories to frame and measure their conclusions about US and British militaries.³⁷ Nagl went further, claiming the British Army in Malaya was a 'learning organization' owing to its organisational culture and strong ties to the local populace.³⁸

Despite these attempts at an inter-disciplinary approach, the concept of a learning organisation is far from accepted within the social sciences and the idea itself should be challenged. As one inter-disciplinary critique from the field of education states:

[O]nly a minority of organisations would or could call themselves learning organisations. Amongst those that have so labelled themselves, there are substantial variations in practice and experience...Further, there is the question of whether learning organisations actually do any better at their business than comparable 'non-learning' organisations.³⁹

These criticisms cannot be dismissed lightly. The successful parts of a learning organisation may differ depending upon the internal and external pressures of the institution under examination and its ultimate goal. Furthermore, as Downie has noted, when the concept is applied to historical examples it can be difficult to draw the appropriate generalisations for those unfamiliar with the

³⁷ John A. Nagl *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (London, University of Chicago Press, 2005) p.11; Richard Duncan Downie, *Learning From Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport CT, Praeger Publishers, 1998) pp.30-39

³⁸ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (2005) p.11; however it should be noted that Nagl has accepted that some of the ideas were not made explicit enough, or were under-developed see Preface to the Paperback Edition: Spilling Soup on Myself pp.xi-xvi.

³⁹ Christina Hughes and Malcolm Tight, 'The Myth of the Learning Society' in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 43: No. 3 (Sep., 1995), pp. 290-304, p.299

specific cases.⁴⁰ This criticism can be taken further, the very process of attempting to draw generalisations inherently obscures the intricacies and complexities of the context and environment under study. Nonetheless, this does not completely render theory useless; it can help explain why certain structures succeeded where others failed. One such study that has managed to successfully fuse theory and history into a compelling analysis is Robert T. Foley, Stuart Griffin and Helen McCartney's "Transformation in contact": learning the lessons of modern war'.⁴¹ In linking broad ideas, historical evidence and modern relevance the three authors have managed to practically apply theory without sliding into ahistorical judgement.

There is no unified discipline dedicated to the evaluation of low-level experience or soldiers' performance. The term battle wisdom itself was coined to describe a period of top efficiency before combat exhaustion set in.⁴² This notion of adjustment is a useful one and ties to larger themes such as the utility and motivational benefits of the primary group. The concept of the primary group stems primarily from the work of the 'Chicago School' of thought, so named after the intellectual hub that formed around the University of Chicago in the early and mid-twentieth century. While the origin of the concept of the primary group can be traced to the work of Charles Cooley around the turn of the twentieth century, the first applications of it in a military setting came shortly after the Second World War.⁴³ Samuel Stouffer, Samuel Marshall as well as Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz pushed the idea of primary group cohesion in a military context.⁴⁴ They posited that it was the face-to-face bonds between small groups of soldiers, usually no larger than the company in terms of military unit level, which drove motivation, and also disintegration once these bonds were

⁴⁰ Downie, *Learning From Conflict* (1998) p.12

⁴¹ Robert T. Foley, Stuart Griffin and Helen McCartney, "Transformation in contact": learning the lessons of modern war' in *International Affairs* Vol. 87: No.2 (March, 2011) pp.253-270

⁴² Swank and Marchand, 'Combat Neuroses...', *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, Vol.55: No.3 (March, 1946) pp.236-247

⁴³ Charles Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909)

⁴⁴ Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1949); Samuel L. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York, William Morrow & Co., 1947); Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II' in *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 12: No.2 (1948) pp.280-315

destroyed. The idea has remained a compelling one to this day but has come under some scrutiny as other aspects such as training have been considered. Hew Strachan's 'Training, Morale and Modern War' is one such article that has challenged the conclusions of those early sociologists and historians. The paper questions the viability of maintaining levels of effectiveness and cohesion in periods of high attrition like those experienced during the Normandy Campaign in 1944.⁴⁵ While not discounting the value of the primary group completely, Strachan recognises the role of training as a standardising procedure that prepared the troops for war. A middle-way can be found between Strachan and the Chicago school's views. Chapter four addresses the importance of the primary group not simply as a support mechanism but an active catalyst for learning. The "mucking-in" schools where chums spread methods of survival and improved tactics or techniques among themselves show that training did not cease once the men left the parade ground.⁴⁶ Chapter three looks in more detail at training and its relationship to discipline and shows that unlike the German army which Strachan contends 'lacked any coherent system of tactics', the 32nd Division's were acutely responsive to the type of warfare they faced even if the lessons themselves were not always as up-to-date as they perhaps should have been.⁴⁷

Leadership theory has by far the biggest body of literature related to it, but can broadly be reduced to a number of key theories: transformational leadership, transactional leadership and Grint's 'arts' of leadership. James MacGregor Burns originally developed the theory of transformational leaders in his 1979 book *Leadership*.⁴⁸ The crux of his idea was that some leaders could transform institutions through force of personality and inspiration. These he set against transactional leaders who achieved their goals through incentivising co-operation. The former, Burns suggested, worked

⁴⁵ Hew Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41: No.2 (April, 2006), pp.211-227; p.212

⁴⁶ IWM, 86/86/1, C. C. Cordner used the term in his *Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders: Potted History from Nov '15 – '19* (unpublished) p.16

⁴⁷ Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War' *JCH* (2006) p.220

⁴⁸ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York, Harper, 1979)

through charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation. When the leader possessed these features they could shape and change organisational structures driving greater achievements. These ideas were taken further by Bernard M. Bass who removed the idea that leaders had to be one or the other; good leaders employed different methods depending on the circumstances.⁴⁹ This idea of contextual leadership has been picked up by Keith Grint, in *The Arts of Leadership*. His model listed four aspects of leadership: identity, strategic vision, organisational tactics and persuasive communication.⁵⁰ These criteria were designed to consider leaders at all levels of authority, but not all are relevant for this study. As such, identity and communication have been assessed in relation to the case study of Major-General C. Shute in chapters five and six while the other two areas have been ignored. One of the key developments in contextual leadership theory is the understanding that different problems required differing leadership solutions. Stemming from the work of Horst Rittel and Marvin Webber, problems have been conceptualised in different ways. 'Wicked' problems are those with no simple or immediate solution, where one problem only leads into another one, and another one; the issue of poverty is given as an example.⁵¹ In contrast 'tame' problems are those that can be worked through by applying correct management procedures.⁵² The mathematician seeking the solution to an equation is an example of a tame problem. Grint expanded the original theory with an additional criterion: 'crisis'. When a crisis strikes it would require an immediate and often autocratic style of leadership to effect an immediate response to the problem.⁵³ These are useful ways of assessing the difficulties facing leaders in the Great War and as such have been used in the case study of Shute with some slight modification in chapters five and six. By employing theory to explore organisational, practical and leadership functions without casting judgement these disparate fields can contribute to a broader level of historical understanding of learning during the Great War.

⁴⁹ Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (London, Macmillan, 1985)

⁵⁰ Keith Grint, *The Arts of Leadership* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) p.27

⁵¹ Horst Rittel & Marvin Webber, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences* Volume 4, No 2. (1973: June) pp.155-169

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Keith Grint, *Leadership Management and Command: Re-thinking D-Day* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) p.11-18

The divisional level of command then remains an obscure area of study requiring more detailed analysis of processes, structures and developments during the war. This work fills the gap and adds further weight to the growing scholarship on the operational improvements that occurred within the British Army during the First World War. This is not only a piece about what changes occurred to improve the chances of victory but also about how these changes came about. To adequately answer this a broad if traditional approach to source material has been taken. The bulk of the material has been drawn from the surviving divisional documents in the WO 95 series at The National Archives Kew. These are numerous and fairly full accounts of the war from a number of different command level perspectives. Battalions, brigades, corps, army and support arms' papers have been consulted to corroborate the divisional record or furnish greater detail where applicable. Official files only tell a partial story, so in addition private testimony has been consulted from various different archives: the Imperial War Museum, Lambeth; the Liddle Collection in Leeds and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London have provided the main bulk of these personal testimonies. The Perth and Kinross Council Archive, Scotland, has provided an untapped seam of evidence for the 32nd Division's performance during the war in the form of private letters sent to Major-General William Rycroft. These letters have produced further questions that go beyond the scope of this study. Material dealing with promotion, veteran roles in battle memorialisation and British involvement at Salonika are present in the papers but had little scope for development here.⁵⁴ Any research building on the conclusions of this piece would do well to probe further into this collection. The CAB 45 papers at the National Archives provide an interesting set of letters from serving soldiers that often directly address what is only implied in official documents. Careful use of such testimony has been made. With such sources there is a tendency to see gossip as gospel and wherever possible corroborating materials have been found to justify the inclusion. Owing to the difficulty in finding

⁵⁴ PKCA, Rycroft Papers, MS35/39 P.W. Machell to Rycroft, 8 August 1915, MS35/49 G.T. Forestier-Walker to Rycroft 11 August 1916, MS35/102 H.C.O. Plumer to Rycroft 15 October 1918.

evidence of incidences of disobedience or individuals consenting to an order but evading its implementation (henceforth consent and evade), sources outside of the 32nd Division have been consulted on occasion. The question of how relevant such acts are to the organisation as a whole should therefore be addressed while providing a far larger evidence base. Gary Sheffield's methodology as used in *Leadership in the Trenches* has therefore been followed for chapter four.⁵⁵ By consulting a wide range of memoirs a broad range of incidences of battle wisdom, scrounging, consent and evade and outright disobedience have been found. Coupling this broad approach with close textual analysis this work, like *Leadership in the Trenches*, should offer angles of insight into existing works that other histories might not have previously considered. One of the key strands of argument in this work is the consistency of principle from the pre-war *ethos* or doctrine through to the end of the war, updated only to adjust to the new context but never overhauling the central points. To demonstrate this a wide range of pre-war manuals, pamphlets, and instructional books have been consulted. These have then been compared to the doctrine published during the war to build up a picture of intellectual change. The implementation and views of the leadership have also been analysed and demonstrate that far from pointless 'brazier kindling' tactical manuals had real and lasting effects on performance.

Learning at the divisional level was a complex process of interlocking factors, which at any one time could shape different aspects of the organisation. In 1916 poor leadership hamstrung command. In 1917 structure greatly improved while battle wisdom continued to be shared around the lower levels. The final year of the war saw a decline in certain respects but overall improvement had been sufficient for this to outstrip the equivalent German learning process.

⁵⁵ G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000)

Part I: The Divisional Structure **and Learning**

Chapter One

Command, Structure and Learning : Edwardian and Modern

The structure and organisation of the division was an integral part of the learning process. The next three chapters will look at how the division changed between 1916 and 1918 in response to the experiences and pressures of battle. This first chapter will look in detail at the Edwardian approach to structure and command. This will be evaluated against the theoretical best-practices as outlined by modern learning theory which is covered in the last section. Chapter two is a detailed case study of 1 July 1916 and chapter three considers Anglo-French liaison and further lines of development in 1917-1918. Within these chapters the aspects of the organisation such as planning, communications, and appraisal will be analysed to assess how the division developed over the course of the war and whether it can rightly be considered a ‘learning organisation.’

These first three chapters make the case that the BEF, and the division in particular, was an adaptive organisation; self-reflective and open to change. Nevertheless, the changes implemented at the divisional level were often evolutionary in character and ultimately many of the principles outlined in *Field Service Regulations Part I* (1909) held true, and were reflected in structure, at the cessation of conflict in 1918. Communications proved to be problematic through the entire war. The inexperience on the Somme led to overemphasis on communication systems in the rear areas which proved less important than those between units going forward. These deficiencies were recognised and communications networks became more sophisticated but ultimately the fundamental problems would persist until the war ended. Chapters two and three will look at how leaders attempted to overcome the absence of information caused by the fundamental communications problem.

Traditionally structure has been viewed as an unchanging top-down imposition; chapters one to

three will challenge this idea and demonstrate how divisional commanders were often responding as much to pressure from the bottom up.⁵⁶ The structural organisation of the division had a strong network set up for information gathering through post-action appraisal which facilitated the process of learning at divisional headquarters (DHQ) and above. Nevertheless it would be too simplistic to paint this as a binary choice between bottom-up and top-down; it was a combination of pressure from below and interpretation of the broader lessons higher up. The consequence was that while the DHQ could often adjust its own internal structure, for example when extra brigades were temporarily detailed, there were instances where structural change was prompted from above to adjust to broader operational requirements.⁵⁷ Some historians have bucked the trend and recognised that top-down imposition was not always the case in practice. Sheffield and Todman's (eds.) *Command and Control on the Western Front* is one such volume, which greatly advanced the historiography in the area of Command, Control, Communications and intelligence (C3I) while also assessing how the inner organisation of the BEF changed to better conduct offensive operations.⁵⁸ Moreover, the wider field of war studies and international relations has, in the last twenty years, assessed the character of structural change, culture and learning within militaries, evaluating what factors maximised the effectiveness of certain armies when faced with unfamiliar circumstances such as counterinsurgency warfare or operations other than war.⁵⁹ This renewed interest is perhaps a

⁵⁶ Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, The Western Front and the emergence of Modern War, 1900-1918* (2nd ed. Barnsley, Pen and Sword, 2003; or 1987) has two conflicting 'paradigms' human and fire-power shaping high command's planning and decision-making. Where he talks about decision-making (artillery allocation, lessons from trench raids) it is only in terms of the errors forced upon the front line from the top, pp.138-140; *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (London, Routledge, 1992) maintains the dual 'paradigm' thesis but places greater emphasis on the importance of decentralised action taken at the lower echelons of the BEF, pp.108-109; see also Jeremy Black, 'Military Change in Historical Perspective' in Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology* (London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002) pp. 21-40, pp. 31-32

⁵⁷ The removal of Heavy Trench Mortars from Divisional control assigning them to Corps command for example. The decision in late 1916 to centralise command of all artillery at the Corps level is also considered.

⁵⁸ Dan Todman, 'The Grand Lamasery Revisited: General Headquarters on the Western Front, 1914-1918' pp.39-70 and John Lee 'Command and Control in Battle: British Divisions on the Menin Road Ridge, 20 September 1917' pp.119-139 in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds.) *Command and Control* (2004); see also Paddy Griffith (ed.) *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, Frank Cass, 1996)

⁵⁹ James A. Russell, *Innovation, Transformation and War: Counterinsurgency Operations in Anbar and Ninewa Provinces Iraq 2005-2007* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009), John A. Nagl *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (London, University of Chicago Press, 2005); Richard

consequence of the current military situation, which has led some such as Downie and Nagl to look at historical examples to draw contemporary lessons or suggest policy. Chapter one has no such goals, but will use the theories drawn from these works of social science to help develop a greater understanding of the history.⁶⁰

This section will first assess the intellectual influences that shaped the organisation of the division and British Army prior to and during the First World War. The second section will then look at modern models and analytical theories and put forward a set of key questions that will provide a means of evaluating the success of the 32nd Division as a 'learning organisation'.

1.1 Ethos, Command and Structure.

Doctrine and Ethos

The structure of the British Army was shaped by its culture, social make-up and intellectual values. It had a 'unifying philosophy', what Albert Palazzo has termed *ethos*.⁶¹ This obviated the need for formal doctrine in the British Army which historians have unduly focused upon, Palazzo argues:

Historians have been shortsighted in their insistence on doctrine and perhaps could have probed more deeply to determine whether it is possible for an army to base its intellectual structure on a

Duncan Downie, *Learning From Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport CT, Praeger Publishers, 1998)

⁶⁰ Some historiographical examples include: Tactics: Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918* (London, Yale University Press, 1994), Command: G. D. Sheffield (ed.) *Leadership & Command: The Anglo-American Military Experience Since 1861* (London, Brassey's, 1997) Culture: Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and Practices in Imperial Germany* (New York, Cornell University Press, 2006) Change: Farrell and Terriff (eds.), *The Sources of Military Change* (2002)

⁶¹ Albert Palazzo, *Seeking Victory on the Western Front: The British Army and Chemical Warfare in World War One* (Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press, 2000) p.9

foundation other than doctrine.⁶²

Precisely what constitutes doctrine and whether the British Army had any form of it prior to 1914 remains a point of discussion for historians. Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham defined doctrine as:

[...] the definition of the aim of military operations; the study of weapons and other resources and the lessons of history, leading to the deductions of the correct strategic and tactical principles in which to base both training and the conduct of war - “Sans doctrine les textes ne sont rien”⁶³

They concluded that the British lacked a formal doctrine, combined-arms co-operation was ignored and fire-power misunderstood.⁶⁴ Palazzo draws on Jack Snyder and John Gooch's work to flesh out the description of doctrine, leading to a definition based upon standardisation and uniformity of lessons being taught throughout the army.⁶⁵ His conclusion is that no formal doctrine existed, although he is more positive regarding the British Army's capacity to change. More recently this view has been challenged by Stephen Badsey and latterly Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly who have observed that definitions and expectations were contextually different during the Edwardian period to such an extent that historians cannot hope to find 'doctrine' in its modern form.⁶⁶ These authors avoid the binary choice of *ethos* or doctrine: 'Rather than being expressed in any formal manner, much military doctrine throughout the centuries has fallen within the wider

⁶² Ibid., p.9

⁶³ Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1982) p.2

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.3

⁶⁵ Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1984) p.27; John Gooch, 'Military Doctrine and Military History' in John Gooch (ed.), *The Origins of Contemporary Doctrine* (Camberley, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1997) p.5; Palazzo, *Seeking Victory* (2000) p.9

⁶⁶ Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry, 1880-1918* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2008) pp.2-3; Timothy Bowman and Mark Connelly, *The Edwardian Army: Recruiting, Training and Employing the British Army, 1902-1914* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012) p.76

concept of military ethos or culture'.⁶⁷ Standardised practices used for training were never likely to be present in the Edwardian army but there was an understanding that certain principles of war and command needed to be articulated. The doctrine of the Edwardian Army can be located in the publication of these principles.

One of the corrosive effects of the ambiguity, or supposed absence, of doctrine has been the flourishing of the idea that the Edwardian Army was rigid, unthinking and insular. Citing evidence from the *Army Review*, Palazzo claims: 'The British army did not encourage self-criticism, and it lacked the formal mechanism for its members to perceive and debate flaws, except at the price of their careers.'⁶⁸ Certainly some dissenting voices may have been drowned out by the chorus of traditionalists, but to extrapolate from this that the culture of the army was closed to inquiry and self-criticism is far too sweeping a generalisation; if anything the opposite was true.⁶⁹ In the years preceding the First World War forums such as the *Royal United Services Institute* saw a number of important military debates puncture the parochialism of the Victorian and early Edwardian army. The tactical organisation of the infantry battalion shifting from eight smaller companies to four larger ones was debated by officers such as Reginald Kentish and Ivor Maxse at the *RUSI* and in the pages of its journal.⁷⁰ This was not an isolated discussion. The cavalry were engaged in a debate over the very essence of their function and composition. Douglas Haig and Lord Roberts appeared on the opposite sides of the issue. Haig favoured a versatile cavalry arm proficient in both mounted and dismounted combat, while Roberts was the leading proponent of 'mounted infantry'.⁷¹ The politics, personalities and intricacies of the debate are covered well in Stephen Badsey's *Doctrine*

⁶⁷ Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform* (2008) p.4

⁶⁸ Palazzo, *Seeking Victory* (2000) p.26

⁶⁹ Captain Wetherell (1/Bedfordshire Regiment) could be identified as one such dissenter, but even he was 'congratulated for speaking out'; see Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons & Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1982) pp.30-31

⁷⁰ Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power* (1982) pp.35-37; IWM, 98/12/1, Brigadier-General R. J. Kentish Papers; Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War, Tactical Reform of the British Army, 1902-1914* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2012); Andrew Duncan has offered further evidence for this in a talk titled: 'Junior and Regular Officers Before the War' (University of Birmingham POLSIS Military History Seminar; 25/6/2013)

⁷¹ Gary Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London, Aurum, 2011) p.55

and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918 and it is not necessary to go into detail here, but it should be recognised that both the cavalry and infantry company debates were touchstone issues for the broader themes the British military were grappling with in the wake of the Boer War.⁷² They were not the only two debates either, lower level infantry tactics such as the implementation of extended order were also flashpoints for discussion and were regularly viewed through the prism of colonial and Boer War experience.⁷³ The integration of modern weaponry, the utilisation of fire-power, how infantry should array themselves in a fire-swept battlefield and the remaining utility of shock in modern war are aspects that lay at the heart of the debates. By addressing these themes through doctrinal discussion it is hard to maintain the line of argument that the British Army did not encourage self-criticism, or was an insular organisation that was out-of-touch with the realities of modern war. On the contrary, it tackled the important issues of the day head-on. The degree that these arguments correspondingly improved the army is only now beginning to be addressed by works like Bowman and Connelly's *The Edwardian Army*, Nikolas Gardner's *Trial By Fire* and Spencer Jones's *From Boer War to World War*, but it promises to be a fertile avenue of future research.⁷⁴

Field Service Regulations Part I: Operations 1909

The British Army had a doctrine of a kind, but it also had an *ethos*. Colonial experience and

⁷² Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform* (2008); Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army* (2012) pp.99-102

⁷³ Spencer Jones, 'The Thin Khaki Line: The Evolution of Infantry Attack Formations in the British Army 1899-1914' in Michael LoCicero, Ross Mahoney & Stuart Mitchell (eds.), *A Military Transformed? Adaptation and Innovation in the British Military 1792-1945* (Solihull, Helion, forthcoming 2014); Spencer Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (2012) pp.71-113

⁷⁴ While Bowman and Connelly's work is an important step towards moving the discussion on from the focus on intellectual debate towards the practical implementation, many of their criticisms are coloured by hindsight or are only a partial assessment. On the one hand they appear to accept Badsey's point regarding doctrine yet they fail to acknowledge his important observation about the development during the 1920s of list-like principles. Instead they wrote of *FSR I* (1909): 'the Regulations then failed to define those principles'. This argument is largely undermined by their own citations of the document suggesting they were indeed expecting a summary list of sorts: Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform* (2008) pp.3-4; Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army* (2012); Nikolas Gardner, *Trial By Fire: Command and the British Expeditionary Force in 1914* (London, Praeger, 2003); Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (2012)

political reform encouraged an increasing professionalism in both the structure of the armed forces and the calibre of the officer corps; significantly contributing to the broader *ethos*.⁷⁵ In turn this promoted an approach to doctrine which favoured stating broad principles over giving prescriptive directions. A firm, if occasionally operationally vague, intellectual foundation was established.⁷⁶ This section will look at *Field Service Regulations: Part I (FSR I)* as the embodiment of the British Army's *ethos* and assess how it established the army's command structure and the principles it disseminated. Moral factors and the question of handling fire-power were both prominent themes while the principle of decentralisation and sound communication were bedrocks for the command system laid out by the document.

Tim Travers has generally depicted the doctrine debate as a choice between fire-power and morale (or the human battlefield). This is not a fair reflection of the manuals at the time, nor as the cavalry and infantry tactical debates show, was it a fair reflection of the *ethos* of the army. By quoting JFC Fuller's post-war recollection of envelopment being the dominant lesson of *FSR I*, Travers advances the argument that British doctrine was typified by the human battlefield dominating over fire-power.⁷⁷ He builds the case further by citing *Infantry Training (4-Company Organization) 1914* of which he suggests the General Staff were blinkered and prone to underestimate the effects of fire-power. It is valuable to challenge these in turn. There is certainly some merit in Fuller's contention that *FSR I* 'was envelopment, more envelopment and always envelopment.'⁷⁸ Under Chapter VII - The Battle, section 103. *General Principles* (for the attack) [italics as in the original] the second point covering identification of the enemy's weak point concludes: 'The moral effect of an

⁷⁵ Simon Giles Higgens, 'How was Richard Haldane able to Reform the British Army? An Historical Assessment Using a Contemporary Change Management Model' (MPhil thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010) pp.45-48; Bryce Poe II, 'British Army Reforms 1902-1914' in *Military Affairs* Vol.31: No. 3 (1967) pp.136-137; William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen: Vol. I* (London, Cassell, 1926) pp.1-19; Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (2012) pp.67-70

⁷⁶ Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (2012) p.56

⁷⁷ Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2nd ed. 2003; or.1987) p.68

⁷⁸ LHCMA, JFC Fuller to Liddell Hart, 16 August 1926, 1/302/96; also quoted in Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2003; or.1987) p.68

envelopment which threatens an enemy's line of retreat, and enfilades his front, is always great.'⁷⁹ The wider context of advocating the application of maximum force at the decisive point does mitigate the criticism somewhat, but as shall be seen with planning, envelopment certainly was an important lesson. The question is whether this focuses on a neglect of fire-power in favour of morale and human factors? If, as Travers contends, 'the problem [...] was to convert the British army from a fundamental belief in the human battlefield, to a belief in [...] manpower and fire-power' then at least in principle *FSR I* was leading the call for change.⁸⁰ There can be no argument that the human element was there: 'The advance of the firing line must be characterized by **the determination to press forward at all costs.**' but taken in its broader context it is immediately followed-up by an emphasis upon mutual co-operation and winning the fire-fight to facilitate forward progress.⁸¹

When once the firing line comes under effective fire, its further advance will be greatly assisted by covering fire from the rear, and by the mutual support which neighbouring units in the firing line afford one another. **All leaders, down to those of the smallest units, must endeavour to apply, at all stages of the fight this principle of mutual support.** Aided in this way the infantry will fight its way forward to close range, and, in conjunction with the artillery and machine guns, will endeavour to gain superiority of fire.⁸²

The combination of artillery and small arms fire-power was understood to be a key component of the modern battlefield. In the hierarchy of importance morale elements took precedence but to contend that ignorance of fire-power pervaded the doctrine, at least as written in *FSR I*, is to read it in a very partial manner.

⁷⁹ General Staff, *Field Service Regulations Part I: Operations* (London, HMSO, 1909) p.112

⁸⁰ Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2003; or.1987) p.68

⁸¹ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) p.116

⁸² Ibid. p.116 [bold in original.]

A similar point can be made for Travers's second doctrinal citation *Infantry Training (1914)*. In attempting to support the notion of new technologies being shoe-horned into existing modes of thought Travers suggests that the machine gun was critically compared to the rifle for inaccuracy using a double standard. Yet once again the broader context is neglected. Before any drawbacks are pointed out the section establishes the strengths and general characteristics of the weapon:

A machine gun in action requires a frontage of about two yards. From this narrow front it can deliver a fire equal in volume to that of about 30 men firing rapidly, the frontage required for the latter being at least 15 times as great. It is therefore easier to find a concealed position for a machine gun than for the number of riflemen required to produce an equal volume of fire.⁸³

Further strengths are then given: its ease of use; similar effective range to that of the rifle; fire concentration comparative to standard riflemen given the same number of rounds; and ease of manoeuvre. These are impartially set against four drawbacks: its vulnerability when moving, its mechanism suffering 'temporary interruption' (jamming), the revealing noise disclosing the position of the weapon and crew as well as Travers's summarised point that errors in aiming can be compounded by its high rate of fire at long distances. The following pages go on to give further details of the strengths of the weapon and certain principles of use including defensive fire from concealed locations, all-round traverse and supporting infantry in a wide range of terrain types.⁸⁴ In one respect Travers is correct; the machine gun was integrated in a fashion consistent with ways of thinking at the time. This was not fundamentally wedded, doctrinally at least, to a human centred battlefield, rather it drew upon the principles of *FSR I* and the *ethos* of the British Army and stressed its role in fire-and-manoevre and decentralised leadership.

⁸³ General Staff, *Infantry Training (4-Company Organization) 1914* (London, HMSO, 1914) pp.198

⁸⁴ General Staff, *Infantry Training 1914* (1914) pp.199-200

A machine gun commander should be given definite orders by the commander of the body of troops to which he belongs, as to what is required of him, but he should be allowed as much freedom of action as possible in carrying out these orders, and should be kept informed of all changes and developments of the situation which may affect his action. Initiative and enterprise are essential to the effective handling of machine guns.⁸⁵

Travers's conclusions are not wholly without merit. The divergent opinions of military thinkers on how best to cross the fire-swept battlefield highlight the difficulties all the European armies faced in the build up to the First World War.⁸⁶ Rather than epitomising parochialism the doctrinal materials demonstrate an army that was taking its craft seriously and engaging with the issues of the day. Fire-power, combined-arms and the human battlefield were all seen as critical and featured far more heavily than some have given credit for. The British Army understood and was attempting to deal with the large tactical questions. Despite conflicting messages stemming from the Boer War and Russo-Japanese War, the General Staff managed to create a framework of principles into which rapid developments could be incorporated without fundamentally altering the core military principles.⁸⁷ The next section will build upon this conclusion by looking at the command system advocated in *FSR I*.

Command systems are not synonymous with leadership and, as Gary Sheffield has noted, it is helpful to differentiate between the two.⁸⁸ Command systems are the managerial structures that

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.205

⁸⁶ Michael Howard, 'Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914' in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986) pp.516-522

⁸⁷ Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (2012) pp.62-67. Jones recognises the contradictions in lessons arising out of the Boer and Russo-Japanese Wars and suggest there was a regression towards a 'cult of the offensive' at more senior levels (division and above) which never effectively percolated down to the tactical level.

⁸⁸ Gary Sheffield (ed.), 'Introduction: Command, Leadership and the Anglo-American Experience', *Leadership and Command*, (London, Brassey's, 1997) pp.1-16, pp.2-3

direct and apply military force towards the intended goal.⁸⁹ It is also useful to recognise that control is a linked concept to command. Control is the ability to direct, organise and co-ordinate military force.⁹⁰ While these terms are more modern in their origin their conceptual importance was not ignored within *FSR I*. If Sheffield's criteria for effective command are accepted, that is a clear plan, good communications and flexibility to handle Clausewitzian 'friction', then *FSR I* enshrined principles that promoted it.⁹¹ The command principles in *FSR I* do not follow a listed structure in this order, instead it follows the rough chronological outline of a campaign: first establishing the basic characteristics of force composition and capabilities; then outlining modes and methods of communications; which is followed-up by principles of movement by sea and land such as the embarkation of troops by rail; thereafter quartering and billets are dealt with.⁹² The first four chapters outline the basic preparatory information any commander would need to know before embarking on campaign: what are the forces, how should they communicate; how do they get to where they are needed and what to do once they are *in-situ*.⁹³ The final six chapters concern battle itself and are where the commanders could find the principles of attack and defence in various differing circumstances. When the document is taken as a whole there are numerous useful principles relating to planning.

The first, and arguably one of the most important, principles relating to sound planning can be found in the second part of Chapter I: **'The full power of an army can be exerted only when all its parts act in close combination,** and this is not possible unless the members of each arm understand the characteristics of the other arms.'⁹⁴ The principle of combined-arms co-operation would remain fraught with practical difficulties well into the Great War, but as an idea its

⁸⁹ This broadly accepts Dr John Pimlott's definition as quoted by Sheffield in 'Introduction' *Leadership and Command* (1997) p.1

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.3

⁹² General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) pp.11-17; 18-36; 37-56; 57-74

⁹³ This approach addresses fundamental steps important to good planning: knowing the forces and their capabilities, lines of communication, movement and housing.

⁹⁴ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) p.12 [Bold in original text]

importance was understood long before any German set foot in France or Belgium.⁹⁵ In terms of preparing and positioning forces the advice given was sensible, albeit focused upon manoeuvre, but generally became obsolete with the onset of trench warfare on the Aisne in 1914:

A force when deployed loses much of its power to manoeuvre as a whole; as a rule, therefore, the columns should not leave their march formations until the commander has formed his plan of battle, or until the action of the advanced troops shows that deployment is necessary.⁹⁶

These practical foundations were useful but commanders needed to couple these with principles for the actual plans for battle. Contrary to Bowman and Connelly's contention that the principles of war were not defined, this sort of advice based on principle runs through the entire document. Chapter VII – The Battle section 102. *Deployment for Action* provides numerous recommendations for the would-be commander; it is worth looking quoting at length on the subject of envelopment to challenge Bowman and Connelly's interpretation:

In the case of very large armies, or of an army which possess a decided superiority in power over its antagonist, the development of fire effect is usually facilitated by aiming from the outset at the envelopment of one or both of the enemy's flanks. This may be done by continuously extending the front as the enemy's dispositions are discovered until his line is overlapped, or by a converging movement of two portions of the army, so timed as to bring both simultaneously to the battlefield. Few methods are more effective than the latter, when successful, for it combines the advantages of enveloping attack on the battlefield with a convenient division of the army before the battle (Sec. 23). Converging movements however, demand the most skilful timing and complete arrangements for inter-communication, for any failure may lay the divided parts of the army open to the risk of

⁹⁵ Bowman and Connelly, *The Edwardian Army* (2012) pp.84-85; Gardner, *Trial By Fire* (2003) 1914: p.63 for cavalry co-ordination; p.92 for artillery; Sanders Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front in the First World War: World War: 'The Infantry cannot do with a gun less'* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013) 1915: p.108; 1916: pp.116-117; Jones, *From Boer War to World War* (2012) pp.52-53

⁹⁶ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) p.110

defeat in detail by an enterprising enemy.⁹⁷

It may not be in the expected format of a list but this passage provides tangible advice on the benefits and drawbacks of manoeuvring an army for envelopment. The principle of envelopment is at the centre of the recommendation reminding commanders of an effective way of bringing their force to action while also noting the drawbacks. It is difficult to really see how this principle could be further developed without the inclusion of prescriptive examples or glossary definitions. This manner of advice is built upon later in the same chapter: 'The moral effect of an envelopment which threatens an enemy's line of retreat, and enfilades his front, is always great.'⁹⁸ Envelopment is not the only principle described but serves as an adequate example that commanders facing the prospect of deploying their forces and creating a battle plan were not left without guidance.

Advice on good planning was given in stages: it was the responsibility of the commander to first understand the forces at his disposal, and then further principles relating to the expected build-up to a campaign and progression into battle were provided. In Chapter VII 'The Battle' recommendations were made on methods of bringing about decisive action, but an overlooked aspect of *FSR I* is the practical expectations for planning both offensive and defensive battles that are laid down. These were not limited to platitudes regarding the *offensive spirit* but contained clear and important points a commander must consider before action:

2. The commander of the force and subordinate commanders will be guided by the following principles in framing orders for an attack:-

- i. A definite objective or task should be assigned to each body of troops, the actual limits of frontage being specified as far as possible.
- ii. The direction of the attack to be made by each body of troops should be distinctly stated.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.111

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.112

- iii. Most careful arrangements should be made to ensure that attacks intended to be simultaneous should be so in reality.
- iv. The choice of the manner in which the task assigned to each body of troops is to be performed should be left to its commander.⁹⁹

Aside from being one of the few areas where a list approach is taken, the recommendations emphasise all the key criteria of good command and control: defined planning, clear communication and flexibility in approach. These principles are echoed in the *Preliminary Measures* for the defence, albeit with a greater emphasis on information, flexibility and shirking the list format.¹⁰⁰ If there is a criticism to be made of *FSR I* it is that important principles are often difficult to distinguish from broader points. This can be seen in the section of Chapter VII quoted above, advocating planning, communications and flexibility. These are elements considered important in their own right, but which often become subsumed within broader points. This is the case with both communications and flexibility. Chapter II *Inter-Communication and Orders* sets out the framework and methods to maintain good communications, in principle, yet within this is a regular stress upon flexibility and freedom of command for subordinates – or the man-on-the-spot principle. Part 12 *Operation Orders* is a good example of this. The section starts with a clear outline of what it is: 'Operation orders deal with all strategical and tactical operations, such as marches, protection, occupation of quarters, reconnaissance, and battle.'¹⁰¹ Shortly thereafter flexibility was doctrinally enshrined:

An operation order should contain just what the recipient requires to know and nothing more.

It should tell him nothing which he can and should arrange for himself. The general principle is that the object to be attained, with such information as affects its attainment, should be briefly but clearly

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.113

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.121-126

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.23

stated; while the method of attaining the object should be left to the utmost extent possible to the recipient, with due regard to his personal characteristics.¹⁰²

This was good advice and offers a fairly close approximation to what today would be known as 'mission command' or *Auftragstaktik*. Often the British Army has been accused of an over-centralised approach to war. Zabecki and Gudmunsson have both critically compared the British and French systems negatively against the German methods, Zabecki wrote:¹⁰³

The Allies generally tried to centralize both planning and execution at the highest levels, which in the end robbed subordinate commanders of all initiative and made it almost impossible to exploit rapidly tactical opportunities as they arose.¹⁰⁴

This criticism is not fair. Doctrinally both the British and French Armies understood the value of decentralising command; implementation was the problem.¹⁰⁵ This is not to say the British Army had a flawless system in place. While communications and flexibility were enshrined how this would actually function on the ground and at what level of command a subordinate could reasonably exercise initiative remained vague. The guidance given by *FSR I* centred on the circumstances and justifications for amending and altering orders.¹⁰⁶ This was helpful but its lack of specifics compromised its utility. While it was relevant for officers, there was no clear indication as to the level to which this freedom extended. At the heart of the issue lay the problem of reconciling the risk of inviting destruction by obeying impractical orders, irrespective of circumstance, and of countermanding them in the light of conditions on the ground which may have potentially harmed

¹⁰² Ibid., p.23

¹⁰³ Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (London, Praeger, 1989) pp.21-24, p.171; David Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2006) pp.60-63

¹⁰⁴ David Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives* (2006) p.61

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois May-June 1915* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013) p.165

¹⁰⁶ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) pp.27-28; it is transcribed in full in Appendix One.

neighbouring units who were reliant upon co-ordinated action. This conflict remained unresolved at least until 1916. Major James Jack, notably a regular officer, faced this predicament on 1 July 1916:

With evidence pointing in opposite directions the strain of deciding where one's duty lay was very great. On the one hand, was it pure madness to take my companies forward? On the other, what would be said of the 90th (2/Cameronians, Scottish Rifles) were they in any manner to desert comrades on the battlefield or evade making an effort to carry out at least part of their orders?¹⁰⁷

This conflict is essentially part of what Clausewitz called 'friction'.¹⁰⁸ In an information vacuum and deprived of reliable information the junior commanders were being asked to make impossible decisions without full knowledge of the consequences of their actions. This dilemma will be explored more thoroughly later and the evolution of decentralisation considered, but in terms of a command it is important to recognise that this was not always a case of individuals against a system but it also encompassed factors such as duty towards fellow soldiers. The system itself gave significant leeway to officers exercising initiative and significant protection from higher commanders. Question marks remained over how relevant this was at all levels of command, as Jack's experiences show, but at the most fundamental level communications and flexibility were enshrined in doctrine.

It is possible to argue that *FSR I* was deficient because it lacked prescription leaving many without a clear idea of the best practice within a defined context. It is not reasonable to argue that it failed to explain its principles. Guidance could be found on planning: force capabilities, movements, and approaches to battle. Intertwined with these was a regular stress upon the importance of communications and flexibility in command. Sheffield's main criteria for good command can be

¹⁰⁷ John Terraine (ed.), *General Jack's Diary* (London, Cassell, 2003 or 1964) p.148

¹⁰⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (trans. Howard & Paret) (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976) pp.119-121

found in *FSR I* but imperfectly so. Doctrinally the British General Staff established a set of principles that were well-suited to the army they were to be applied to. Professional soldiers were expected to be able to exercise the initiative required for decentralised command to work in battle. *FSR I* and other manuals raised the issues of fire-power and co-ordination of arms, but usually set them alongside moral factors. There were always likely to be problems implementing principles on the ground but at its most basic level the British Army had a framework which enshrined appropriate command lessons in a system that would be vindicated by victory.

1.2 Modern Frameworks

This section will look at the debates and questions within the social sciences regarding the learning organisation idea and highlight important concepts from which to judge the structure of the Division between 1916 and 1918.

The social sciences have long recognised that to understand organisational learning a number of subsidiary questions must be explored, for example: how does individual learning feed into organisational learning? How does the 'learning curve' concept link with it? Can organisational learning benefit from unofficial methods of practice?¹⁰⁹ On the whole, historians and strategic theorists alike have ignored these questions in favour of comparing models and theoretical hypotheses.¹¹⁰ In fact, most have failed to answer the most fundamental question: What is an organisation?¹¹¹ R.E. Grice Hutchinson, a 32nd Division chaplain to the artillery, highlighted the

¹⁰⁹ Daniel H. Kim, 'The Link between Individual and Organizational Learning' in *Sloan Management Review*, Vol.35: No.1 (Fall, 1993) pp. 37-50; Dennis Epple, Linda Argote, and Rukmini Devadas, 'Organizational Learning Curves: A Method for Investigating Intra-Plant Transfer of Knowledge Acquired through Learning by Doing' in *Organization Science* Vol.2: No.1 (February, 1991) pp.58-70; John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, 'Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation' in *Organization Science* Vol.2: No.1 (February, 1991) pp. 40-57

¹¹⁰ Downie, *Learning From Conflict* (1998) pp.30-39

¹¹¹ Argyris and Schon's *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (1978) at least posed the question,

problem of homogeneity within institutions in relation to his job serving the spiritual needs of his flock: 'the nature of its organization was entirely different from an Infantry Brigade.'¹¹² This was not only meant in a structural sense, although he covers that, but also a cultural one: 'Each [battery] was entirely separate in character and far more independent of one another. The Unit [sic] to the Infantry Chaplain was the Battalion; to me it was the battery or section of the column.'¹¹³ Hutchinson went on to observe that there were different types of men serving in different capacities under his stewardship, broadly split by their jobs and work practices.¹¹⁴ This has implications for how any learning structure is considered. Whereas the social science literature has mainly concerned itself with commercial or educational fields – where sub-division is less marked – war studies has viewed organisations as homogeneous wholes. In this instance there are justified reasons to consider the overall divisional 'organisation' as consisting of smaller constituent organisations. These may each have their own culture, and could justifiably be considered singularly in their own studies. Thus, any model or set of theoretical benchmarks used to evaluate the 32nd Division has to be sensitive to the various cultures within the divisional structure. To explore the culture of each constituent arm would warrant a study unto itself, but this chapter will lay down how well the arms interacted, and evaluate how the division was able to deal with these sub-organisations.

It is now worth looking in more detail at some of the questions posited by the social sciences and noting how they affect any judgement on the divisional structure's effects on learning. One of the main problems facing any theory of organisational learning is dealing with the paradox that collective learning amounts to more than individual improvement, yet it is contingent upon the individuals' progress.¹¹⁵ The problem is essentially Aristotelian in nature: the whole (organisational

see p.9

¹¹² R. Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories 32nd Division* (Uckfield, Naval & Military Press, 2004, or. London, Unwin Brothers, 1932) p.99

¹¹³ Ibid., p.99

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.99

¹¹⁵ D. Kim, 'The Link between Individual and Organizational Learning' (Fall, 1993) pp.40-41

learning) is different from the sum of its parts (individual learning). Daniel H. Kim offers a solution to this problem, suggesting that ‘mental models’ are created by individuals and are drawn from their own acts of individual learning. He draws on the work of Senge to describe these ‘mental models’:

Mental models represent a person’s view of the world, including explicit and implicit understandings. Mental models provide the context in which to view and interpret new material, and they determine how stored information is relevant to a given situation.¹¹⁶

These ‘mental models’, it is contended, are improved by individual experience and as the mental model becomes more explicit it affects other individuals. Thus a shared model arises. Collective learning therefore stems from these individual and shared ‘mental models’. Kim’s argument has some merit; he convincingly argues that ‘mental models’ aid the formation of subjective pre-conceptions influencing behaviour and consequently learning.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, the idea is over-complex and it is unclear how it differs in any meaningful way from the idea of organisational culture, itself a disputed term, or *ethos*.

In many respects the war studies literature has been clearer with regards to ‘mental models’ and organisational cultures. Nagl’s exploration of the concept in the British and American armies is central to his notion of a learning organisation.¹¹⁸ Yet as has already been noted, when culture is analysed divisions begin to become evident. A more satisfactory answer perhaps lies in the work of John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, who have synthesised a large range of prior work to form a more cohesive theory of ‘communities-in-practice’ to explain how sub-groups and individuals can contribute to wider organisational learning. They argue that organisations often perceive the work done by their employees as ‘thin’ or ‘canonical’, that is to say they see a set of instructions devoid

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.39

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.39

¹¹⁸ Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (2005) *passim*. especially: pp.37-55

of the complexities that the practicalities of the task may entail. In reality organisations are comprised of employees who form their own ‘non-canonical’ methods of achieving their goals, which they learn through a combination of observation, experience, and collective dialogue. As groups of workers interact and tackle different problems they form a ‘community-of-practice’ operating under a shared ‘non-canonical’ method, which places collaborative discussions at its very heart.¹¹⁹ This has the key advantage over the straight-forward cultural argument; it explains how sub-groups, with markedly different cultures and practices, within an organisation, such as the 32nd Division, were able to interact; Brown and Duguid note: ‘If their [large organisations] internal communities have a reasonable degree of autonomy and independence from the dominant world view, large organizations might actually accelerate innovation.’¹²⁰ They go on to temper this by recognising that it is only possible when organisations avoid ‘swinging wholesale from one [organisational] paradigm to another.’¹²¹ As will be explored further in chapter four, the notion of disobedience and the exercise of initiative was not alien to the men of the BEF. It played an important role in bridging the gap between effective actions in real-world conditions (‘non-canonical practice’), and official doctrine, standard operating procedures (SOPs) or best practices (‘canonical practice’). Charles Douie of the 1/Dorsets was temporarily assigned to an entrenching battalion before joining his unit in the line towards the end of 1915. He remarked upon seeing the men work:

I realised that they were not digging in the manner prescribed by the Field Service Regulations, but I could not bring myself to tell a Durham miner, who had completed his task in much less than the scheduled time, that he knew nothing about digging and that I would show him the correct way.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Brown and Duguid, ‘Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice’ (Feb, 1991) *passim*.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.54

¹²¹ Ibid., p.54

¹²² Charles Douie, *The Weary Road* (London, John Murray, 1929) p.54.

Douie recognised the divergence between the official ‘canonical’ practice and the ‘non-canonical’ methods employed by those with pre-existing civilian expertise. The fact that there was never any clearly prescribed method of digging in *FSR I* or *II* does not really matter.¹²³ Douie understood that approved (canonical) methods were not binding when non-canonical practices were superior. Moreover, the principles he was inculcated with through the *ethos* of the army and *FSR I* encouraged him to use his own initiative in the matter.¹²⁴ Ultimately, when looking at both individual learning and the benefits bestowed by unofficial practice, the Brown-Duguid model of communities of practice offers a more practical framework.

The communities-of-practice idea can be elaborated upon by drawing from the literature of educational studies. Ikujiro Nonaka and Georg von Krogh have noted that knowledge does not simply equate to information, but ties firmly into a belief structure. They make an important distinction between types of knowledge, tacit and explicit, in turn adjusting the ‘canonical’ and ‘non-canonical’ distinction made by Brown and Duguid. Tacit knowledge is ‘unarticulated and tied to the senses, movement skills, physical experiences, intuition or implicit rules of thumb’ while explicit knowledge is: ‘uttered and captured in drawing and writing’.¹²⁵ While debate still exists over the validity of Nonaka and von Kogh’s theories,¹²⁶ they highlight a key problem with the historiography: many have assumed that doctrine equated to action.¹²⁷ Doctrine, although linked to the more tacit *ethos*, is still, in its most basic form, explicit knowledge: a written set of principles to guide the conduct of the military forces. This does not operate within a vacuum; it must draw-upon

¹²³ The closest General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) comes to it is p.114 and p.125 where the principles of entrenchment are covered. Further specific advice can be found in General Staff, *Infantry Training* (1914) pp.153-157. Douie was probably using *FSR* for effect and as a short-hand that was much more well-known than other manuals. General Staff, *The Manual of Military Engineering* (London, HMSO, 1905) pp.12-17 does give approved methods of digging and organising labour as does General Staff, *Manual of Field Engineering* (London, HMSO, 1911).

¹²⁴ See Chapter Four Battle Wisdom; Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Stroud, Spellmount, 2006) pp.1-24

¹²⁵ Ikujiro Nonaka and Georg von Krogh, ‘Tacit Knowledge and Knowledge Conversion: Controversy and Advancement in Organizational Knowledge Creation Theory’ in *Organization Science* Vol. 20: No.3 (May – June, 2009) pp.635-652, p.635

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 641-642

¹²⁷ Downie, *Learning From Conflict* (1998) pp.19-45

and complement the existing tacit knowledge of those serving – the *ethos*. Doctrine then cannot be divorced from *ethos* just as explicit, canonical knowledge should not be separated from tacit, non-canonical knowledge. The Stationery Service (SS) manuals and pamphlets published by GHQ over the course of the war changed the structural organisation of the platoon and division but fundamentally held true to the pre-war principles in *FSR I* and *ethos* of the army at the time.¹²⁸ The manuals were seen as providing something additional rather than overriding the existing principles.¹²⁹ If subsequent doctrine ran against the knowledge and experience of those on the ground it risked circumvention, as can be seen with Douie and later with *Fourth Army Tactical Notes*. Learning models dictate that those organisations which can best encapsulate the tacit knowledge of the communities-of-practice within the formal literature are best positioned to encourage learning and maintain high standards of practice. Ultimately a dynamic exists between what theorists have labelled non-canonical practice and what in this paper is termed battle wisdom, and the formalised canonical practices which have been explored within the Great War literature.¹³⁰ The next chapter will look at how the command structure aided or hindered learning by looking at how front line experience, both canonical and non-canonical, was analysed and fed up the organisation.

¹²⁸ Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Stroud, Spellmount, 2006) p.161

¹²⁹ SS 135, *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* (December, 1916) p.3; SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917* (February, 1917) pp.9-10. This is perhaps at its most clearest in SS 135, *The Training and Employment of Divisions, 1918* (January, 1918) p.1 which states: 'The general principles laid down in Field Service Regulations, Part I., Chapter VII., as to attack and defence in battle hold good to-day provided due allowance is made for the time and space conditions of the present war.'

¹³⁰ Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918* (London, Yale University Press, 1992) pp.179-191

Chapter Two

Structure on the Somme, A Case Study: 1 – 16 July 1916

The 32nd Division's internal bureaucratic structure in 1916 was conducive to learning but the operational environment caused a number of problems which were never fully solved. This chapter will use the case study of the division's employment during the Battle of the Somme to look at how its structure facilitated the learning process and analyse what changes were made after combat operations to improve the overall performance of the formation. It will cover three areas: preparation, execution and appraisal.

The Somme was the first major battle the 32nd Division were involved in and as such provides the analytical starting point for any evaluation of the learning structure of the formation. Nevertheless, before looking at how the structure operated during the planning, conduct and appraisal stages, it must be noted that the organisation was not new. The war had already been going for twenty four months prior to 1 July and as such developments had already taken place. It is not within the remit of this study to provide a full analysis here, but it should be noted that the experiences of 1915 were mixed. The Battles of Neuve Chapelle, Second Ypres, Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos as well the Dardanelles and Salonika expeditions had placed severe strain on the resources of the armed forces. The rapid expansion of the army and significant casualties had led to the 'de-skilling' of the BEF; rightly or wrongly there existed a perception that the quality of the pre-war army was no longer present. William Robertson felt the problem stemmed from a lack of preparation and a paucity of 'trained leaders'.¹³¹ Haig shared his views: 'I have not got an Army in France really, but a collection of divisions untrained for the field.' clarifying after the war in his typescript diary: 'The actual

¹³¹ Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*: Vol. I (1926) pp.63-64

fighting Army will be evolved from them.¹³² In May he discussed the situation with Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister at the time: 'My divisions, I told him, want much careful training before we could attack with hope of success.'¹³³ 1915 was not a wasted year. The set-backs brought about changes in high command, GHQ and the staff, artillery organisation as well as tactical methods which contributed to the overall organisational learning of the BEF.¹³⁴ Yet the Battle of the Somme was the biggest endeavour the British Army had attempted in its long history. Many of the personnel including the commander-in-chief had changed and it would be an entirely new experience for those formations who had not yet been in a major battle to date, of which the 32nd Division was one.

2.1 Planning 1 July 1916

The following section will look at the learning structure during the planning phase of the Battle of the Somme and what impact this had on learning within the division. For the 32nd Division planning for the Somme began in earnest on 7 March 1916 after an Army conference at X Corps HQ in Toutencourt.¹³⁵ Their task was to capture the village of Thiepval and the adjacent Leipzig Spur before pushing onwards towards Mouquet Farm. This was in Horace Smith-Dorrien's words 'the hardest nut to crack in the whole line'.¹³⁶ Yet despite a four month preparatory period the biggest

¹³² Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (eds.), *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918* (London, Weidenfield & Nicolson, 2005) p.183; 29 March 1916

¹³³ Ibid., p.186; 4 May 1916

¹³⁴ Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London, Headline, 2001) pp.130-132; see also Nick Lloyd, *Loos 1915* (Stroud, Tempus, 2006); Dan Todman, 'The Grand Lamasery Revisited: General Headquarters on the Western Front, 1914-1918' in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds.) *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 2004) pp.39-70; pp.46-48; For structural developments of artillery at divisional level see Sanders Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front in the First World War: 'The Infantry cannot do with a gun less'* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013) pp.71-72

¹³⁵ TNA, WO 95/2367 32nd Division: Headquarters Branches and Services: General Staff, 7 March 1916; 'Memorandum on the Front held by the 32nd Division' (undated); Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2005) p.32

¹³⁶ Perth and Kinross Council Archive (PKCA), Rycroft Papers, MS35/50 Horace Smith-Dorrien to William Rycroft, 20 August 1916. A similar statement was made by Colonel H.W. Wynter a staff officer with X Corps: TNA, CAB 45/191 Wynter to Edmonds, 6 October 1930.

criticism levelled at Major-General William Henry Rycroft, GOC 32nd Division, after 1 July was his over-working of the infantry. Major Austin Girdwood, G.S.O. II 32nd Division was to remark after the war 'The real cause of the failure of the 32nd Division is that the wretched Infantry were literally exhausted long before the day of the attack.'¹³⁷ The picture that emerges from the records is one of delegation, inexperience and over-cautious planning exacerbated by a monumental engineering task requiring significant work to be conducted by the infantry to make up the shortfall in labour. The 32nd Division was a microcosm of the wider army: overworked infantry, delegation of planning to specialists and a task too large for the available resources. While historians like Prior and Wilson have criticised the inconsistencies in planning for 1 July with some justification, the decisions become more understandable in light of the *ethos* of men like Rawlinson and Rycroft.¹³⁸ They both faced similar problems at differing levels of command and handled them in a remarkably similar fashion: by avoiding micro-management and centralised plans. They both made the same mistakes, neither was able to 'grip' their subordinates and make important decisions when it mattered. The dissemination of good ideas in the lead up to 1 July remained limited as a consequence.

If the success of the 32nd Division at the Battle of the Somme was judged by feats of engineering then there is little doubt they would be considered a success. In four months the division as a whole managed to complete 15 major works including: the digging of 19.65 miles of trench for telephone wires (of which 11.25 miles was 6 feet deep; 8.4 miles 4 feet), the re-filling of these trenches; 'the completion of a water supply system throughout the front lines'; the erection of 28 bridges for artillery tracks as well as 'numerous bridges for infantry'; and the construction of 'additional sidings on the trench tramways to Thiepval and Authuille Woods.'¹³⁹ While the division's three Royal Engineers Field Companies (206, 218, 219) would have carried much of the burden of the

¹³⁷ TNA, CAB 45/134 Girdwood to Edmonds, 30 June 1930

¹³⁸ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918* (London, Blackwell, 1992) pp.159-160; 164-165

¹³⁹ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'The Report on Operations by the General Staff 32nd Division', pp.1-2

more advanced constructions, the infantry were regularly called upon to shoulder a significant proportion of the manual labour needed.¹⁴⁰ This was in addition to the carrying parties and fatigues needed to keep the front line defences maintained. In terms of direct effects upon combat performance the over-working limited opportunities to train, and did little to improve morale amongst the soldiers. Charles Clifford Platt, describing the supervision of fatigues, was only half joking when he described the lot of the 'common or garden infantry subaltern' as the 'rottenest job in the world'.¹⁴¹ If Girdwood's account is accepted the effects of this over-work were serious: 'the men and officers lost heart and were simply worn out physically and morally.'¹⁴² This testimony warrants further scrutiny. Girdwood was removed from his position as GSO2 on 16 July 1916 to assume command of the 11/Borders according to his letter to the official historian: 'Naturally I got myself disliked and the proof is in the fact that after the disaster which I had foretold had occurred I was given command of a Battalion to get me out of the Staff Office.'¹⁴³ This has led Peter Simkins to conclude that 'all was not well in the command and staff echelons of the division.'¹⁴⁴ On the basis of Girdwood's removal and the tumult within the division this is a fair conclusion, but new archival evidence suggests that Girdwood's relationship with Rycroft was more cordial than he revealed to the official historian.

In early 1917 Rycroft sent a letter to Girdwood, then commanding the 11/Borders, 97 Brigade, 32nd Division. The letter does not appear to have survived but Girdwood's reply has. The opening line hints at a certain distance between the two men, but a certain cordiality upon reconnecting:

I was so pleased and surprised to get your letter today and to hear all your news. I often thought of

¹⁴⁰ Labour was also drafted in from the batteries of the Corps Reserve Division. TNA, WO 95/2368, 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Preparation and Action of the 32nd Divisional Artillery During Operations of July 1916', p.1

¹⁴¹ IWM, 78/72/1, Lt C.L. Platt, 15/4/1916 writing in a generally jovial tone to his enlisted letter brother Glyn, Platt urged him to become a specialist where he might avoid supervising such outings as he describes.

¹⁴² TNA, CAB 45/134 Girdwood to Edmonds, 30 June 1930

¹⁴³ Ibid., 30 June 1930

¹⁴⁴ Peter Simkins, 'Somme footnote: the Battle of the Ancre and the struggle for Frankfort Trench, November 1916', *Imperial War Museum Review* No.9, (1994) pp.84-101; p.96

writing to you but refrained as you have such numbers of friends in France and I know how busy you always are.¹⁴⁵

Girdwood proceeds to give a fairly full account of the attacks the division conducted after Rycroft's removal in November 1916 and notably asks for his help in getting a promotion: '[...] if you could put in a good word for me at G.H.Q. I should be grateful for ever.'¹⁴⁶ The possibility that Girdwood was marshalling allies for his own career advancement is a realistic one but he was not afraid to reflect fondly upon Rycroft's tenure and raise a fundamental difference of opinion regarding staff work:

All the old hands still talk of you when we meet and recall the happy days we had under your command. I often think of a conversation I had with you about only quick + rapid thinkers and writers being any good for Staff. I did not agree at the time and have watched many of the rapid type come to bitter grief through being rapid. If they have had practical experience they are all right but so many of that type have propelled themselves upward by their peers that they have not had time to see things.

As C.O. I have seen the Staff from both ends and I know quite a lot about it now. The quick fellow is always very sketchy and the results of his orders are often totally different to what he thought they would be.¹⁴⁷

If Girdwood was attempting to curry favour with Rycroft for a recommendation then one might venture there were better ways to go about it. The letter reveals that there were fundamentally different views within DHQ on what type of person made a good staff officer. As a cavalryman it is unsurprising that Rycroft would favour the quick thinking, fast-acting type, although some care

¹⁴⁵ PKCA, Rycroft Papers, Austin Girdwood to William Rycroft, 28 May 1917

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 28 May 1917

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 28 May 1917

must be taken to accept Girdwood's alternative unthinkingly. The issue of promotion was a sore one with Girdwood at this time, and he appears to be taking aim at over-promoted staff officers who haven't experienced the war first hand as much as offering a genuine alternative approach. Irrespective of their rival views on staff, the letter suggests that Rycroft and Girdwood's relationship was not as frosty as might be expected from his letter to Edmonds. There were differences but care should be taken not to read too much into these. The fact that Girdwood felt comfortable enough sharing his disagreements with Rycroft only six months after his removal indicates that DHQ might not have been quite as troubled or closed to views than later evidence has suggested. This was not the end of their correspondence and Rycroft would later write to Girdwood congratulating him on his promotion to commanding a brigade to which a gracious reply was sent on 5 December 1917.¹⁴⁸ The more cordial relationship does not invalidate the criticism of Rycroft as an inconsiderate commander so it is worthwhile looking in more detail at the validity of the claims and how culpable he really was.

Rycroft should be absolved of some responsibility for the over-working of the infantry. In March 1916 the 32nd Division faced a gargantuan task of preparing from scratch both the front line and rear areas for a major attack. There was no buried cable system, gun positions needed to be dug, bridges over the Ancre improved and supply infrastructure developed. The planning for such works was not subject to one man's oversight but the product of the consultative *ethos* enshrined in *FSR I*, which promoted delegating decisions into the hands of the respective branches of the army that were logically best placed to oversee the work. Corps and division delegated the planning for specialist systems to the specialist arms. Yet on this occasion the branches lacked experience of a battle of this magnitude and many erred on the side of caution; the consequence for the infantry was 'far too much digging and most of it was quite useless and haphazard.'¹⁴⁹ The consultative process can be

¹⁴⁸ PKCA, Rycroft Papers, Girdwood to Rycroft, 5 December 1917

¹⁴⁹ TNA, CAB 45/134, Girdwood to Edmonds, 30 June 1930

seen in the organisation through the establishment of the field artillery's communications network:

There was no system of buried cables in existence and so a suggested scheme was drawn up by Divisional Artillery and forwarded to Corps Signals for sanction. The original scheme was modified and placed under the control of an Officer of the Divisional Signal Co.¹⁵⁰

The resulting plan involved centring the communications on the Artillery Group HQs (Brigades under a new name, of which there were two) while the Observation Exchange (one per artillery group) enabled observation posts to contact the Artillery Group HQ if lines between the battery or front line were severed.¹⁵¹ The reasons for this decision were understandable. Communications were rightly prioritised, but it resulted in much more work for the artillery and infantry fatigue parties, engineers and signallers. The issue was not one of principle but of poor prioritisation. Observation Exchanges proved to be unnecessary and complicated.¹⁵² On the other hand, lines between the Artillery Group HQ and front line dugouts which remained unfinished: 'were of the greatest value and should have been first to be completed.'¹⁵³ This was not the only problem; by centring the communications on the Group HQ any shell-fire that affected this hub had a disproportionate effect on the subsidiary batteries. Both of the 32nd Division's Artillery Groups escaped this fate on 1 July, but the marshy ground of the Ancre proved problematic for a number of batteries of the 32nd Division's Left Artillery Group. The topography meant that lines could only be buried to a depth of 2ft with 4ft sandbag breastworks to offer further protection. Lt-Col Ponson J Sheppard, OC 155th Brigade Royal Field Artillery and 2nd in command of Left Group recalled the difficulty maintaining communications with some of his batteries on 1 July: 'by midday there was no communication – all the lines being cut. Communication was established during the afternoon,

¹⁵⁰ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Preparation and Action of the 32nd Divisional Artillery During Operations of July 1916', p.1

¹⁵¹ See Appendix 2. Fig 1.; For artillery groups see: Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front* (2013) p.117

¹⁵² TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Report...32nd Divisional Artillery' p.1

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.1; According to the report they remained unfinished owing to the advancement of the date of the assault.

but it was very precarious, the lines being continually cut.’¹⁵⁴ This account was corroborated by Major R. B. Warton of 155th Brigade RFA who was told by runner that ‘155th Bde H.Q. Was temporarily out of action owing to shell fire...’¹⁵⁵ Owing to limited shelling of Warton's battery communications were maintained with the front line.¹⁵⁶

Retaliatory shell-fire was not the only problem. The technical requirements of the new exchanges added a further level of complication to what was already a confusing network of lines and wires. The 32nd Division's artillery report observed:

As the system was only completed just before operations, R.A. operators did not have an opportunity of thoroughly learning the lines and test boxes. This was a great drawback when repairs became necessary.¹⁵⁷

The inexperience of building from scratch an adequate communications network in a limited time on a scale hitherto unknown by the 32nd Divisional Artillery and signals staff unquestionably led to errors. The scale, training and prioritisation proved to be an issue. The topography was out of the division's control, but it also added to the difficulties on the day. Nevertheless, despite the troubles the overall conclusion of the 32nd Division's CRA, Brigadier-General J.A. Tyler, was: ‘The system on the whole worked very well.’¹⁵⁸ This was not wholly without foundation, for aside from the 155th Brigade RFA communications largely held up, gun emplacements and dumps were adequately located and Observation Posts established. Tyler also noted the significant contribution of labour that his own batteries made in preparing for the attack. In this the 32nd Division were aided by a

¹⁵⁴ TNA, CAB 45/191 Lt-Col Ponson J. Sheppard to Edmonds, 26 May 1930

¹⁵⁵ TNA, CAB 45/191 Major R. B. Warton to Edmonds, 26 May 1930, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.3

¹⁵⁷ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Report...32nd Divisional Artillery' p.1

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.1

strong mining contingent within the 155th Brigade RFA and indeed the X Corps more widely.¹⁵⁹ Nonetheless, Tyler's report mentions nothing of the working parties that were still required for digging the cable trenches; while preparing the infantry's front line positions was a significant job on its own.¹⁶⁰ Additionally the division required 102,900 artillery and mortar shells, 2,600 boxes of small arms ammunition, 6,000 Stokes bombs and 35,000 No.6 Mills Grenades brought in to fill the ammunition dumps.¹⁶¹ Girdwood was correct to point out the difficulties facing the infantry in the preparatory phase leading up to 1 July, but to solely lay the blame at the feet of Rycroft is unfair. By following the principle of delegation to the specialists he avoided dictating on matters where he lacked personal expertise. The size of the task and the general inexperience of those within the specialist branches meant there was simply too much to do given the time and the resources.

Decentralisation was mirrored within the other branches of the Division as well as at Corps and Army level in keeping with the *ethos* of the organisation. In 1916 this did not always function as intended, as the experience of 97 Infantry Brigade demonstrates. As Andy Simpson has observed conferences were a crucial forum for the consultation process.¹⁶² During April 1916 Rycroft regularly visited his brigadiers and the basic plan was laid out.¹⁶³ The content of these conferences would largely depend upon the pressing topics of discussion at that particular time. Nevertheless they followed a general pattern as Brigadier-General J.B. Jardine (97 Infantry Brigade, 32nd Division) recognised of a conference held by Henry Rawlinson, GOC Fourth Army: 'As was the custom it took the form of the senior officer asking each brigadier in turn what he noticed worthy of

¹⁵⁹ TNA, CAB 45/191 Warton to Edmonds, 26 May 1930 p.1; CAB 45/191 Br-Gen J.A.S. Tulloch to Edmonds, 13 August 1930, p.1

¹⁶⁰ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Report...32nd Divisional Artillery', p.1; CAB 45/134 Girdwood to Edmonds, 30 June 1930

¹⁶¹ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Report...32nd Divisional Artillery', p.2. The Divisional Ammunition Column would have handled much of the heavier labour but infantry working parties were frequently used for 'carrying parties' into forward positions. For an excellent description of this chore see Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London, Hutchinson & Co., 1965) pp.104-105, p.125

¹⁶² Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2005) p.32

¹⁶³ TNA, WO 95/2367 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1916

remarks & criticism.¹⁶⁴ Meetings and conferences were part of a broader framework of discussions, and inspections and informal 'pow-wows' became a part of the everyday life of an officer within the BEF.¹⁶⁵ In February 1916, a relatively average month, the commanders or general staff officers of the 32nd Division conducted 48 discussions, inspections, or conferences that were notable enough to record in the War Diary.¹⁶⁶ Every day discussions took place regarding the running of the division. Conferences were thus a vital part of the communications infrastructure of the division.

Evaluated against modern theory the practice of consulting subordinate commanders allowed senior leaders to draw upon the 'communities of practice' and tacit knowledge of those at the lower levels of the army. In practice the utility of this was hampered by individual perceptions, biases and scepticism. In the conference with Rawlinson, that probably took place on 4 May 1916, Brigadier-General Jardine explained his views that the infantry should follow the protective barrage within 30-40 yards and expect some casualties from their own shells.¹⁶⁷ This, he recalled, was met with a degree of scepticism.¹⁶⁸ An understandable response at first glance, but Jardine's advocacy was based upon his own observations of the Japanese forces (to which he was attached) during the Russo-Japanese War.¹⁶⁹ The lessons he carried through from the Battles of Sai-Ma-Chi, Yu-shu-lin-tzu, and Mukden were reinforced by the raids conducted in the months leading up to the main attack

¹⁶⁴ TNA, CAB 45/135 Brigadier-General James Jardine to Edmonds, 13 June 1930

¹⁶⁵ This is looked at in more detail in Chapter four.

¹⁶⁶ TNA, WO 95/2367 32nd Div. General Staff, February 1916. Excluding inspections which may involve much less constructive dialogue there were still 23 occasions for discussion. Ranks considered: GSO3 upwards and brigadier upwards.

¹⁶⁷ Jardine does not recall the specific date in his letter to Edmonds but TNA, WO 95/2367 32nd Div. General Staff, 4 May 1916 noted: 'In the morning the G.O.C. Held exercise at the Div training ground in the Baizieux area – The Army Commander was present.' Cross-referencing this with the location of 97 Brigade on that date as given by WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, 4 May 1916 it is possible to confirm that the Jardine's formation was in the Warloy area with one battalion in Contay. Both neighbour Baizieux. WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, also shows it was in Divisional Reserve – possibly training. 12 June is another potential date, although there is no record of Rawlinson attending.

¹⁶⁸ TNA, CAB 45/135 Jardine to Edmonds, 13 June 1930

¹⁶⁹ General Staff, *The Russo-Japanese War. Reports from British Officers attached to the Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field* Vol.I (London, HMSO, 1908) pp.135-141; pp.210-220; pp.405-430; pp.647-668; General Staff, *The Russo-Japanese War. Reports from British Officers attached to the Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field* Vol.II (London, HMSO, 1908) pp.493-500; pp.526-541.

on the Somme. Indeed, Jardine's own report on the action at Yu-shu-lin-tzu and the Russian lines at Makura-yama offers an interesting parallel to his approach on 1 July:

In attacking the enemy's left one battalion climbed the hills north of the neck B, while the other quietly and undiscovered reached the dead ground in front of Makura-yama before dawn and lay down and waited. As dawn was breaking (just before 5 a.m.) the Japanese reached the neck and rushed the advanced trench at B, which only contained a weak piquet.

The parallels were not limited to creeping up to the Russian positions before launching an attack. With the Russians now aware of the Japanese presence a rush for the important tactical ridge line ensued:

It was a race as to who would crown the ridge first; the Japanese from B, the Russians from their camp. The Japanese did it, but only by the shortest of heads, for several of the enemy were actually within ten yards of them when they reached the top of the slope.¹⁷⁰

The result was serious for the Russians who were unprepared, had lost the high ground and were in disarray. While the circumstances on the Western Front were much less fluid and the distances greatly reduced, Jardine recognised that the principle was essentially the same. This lesson was reinforced by the experiences of raids the first of which, carried out by the 97 Brigade's 17/HLI, employed Jardine's familiar method:

For twenty minutes our shells flayed the German front line, and under this arch of shrieking explosives the battle party crawled right up to the rim of the bombardment. What wire remained uncut was blown to fragments by a torpedo, and when the barrage lifted and came down behind, the

¹⁷⁰ Jardine's report 'The Action of 32st July at Yu-shu-lin-tzu and Pien Ling' in General Staff, *The Russo-Japanese War* Vol.I (1908) p.215

raiders jumped into the enemy's trench and set to work.¹⁷¹

He understood that the best way to save the lives of his men was to win the race to the parapet. He knew that there would be loss but 'it was worth it.'¹⁷² Despite this strong foundation for his tactical choices Jardine was suspicious of the motives behind the scepticism of his tactical approach: 'I fancied – of course I may have been wrong – that there was a little bit of unconscious prejudice against my ideas, being a cavalryman.'¹⁷³ Moreover upon explaining that the method was 'what the Japanese did', he was told "“Oh, the Japanese” in rather a sneering way.'¹⁷⁴ Realistically it was unlikely that Rawlinson's view was motivated by any prejudice against a cavalryman's ideas. Major-Generals Sir Oliver Nugent, GOC 36th (Ulster) Division and Sir Ivor Maxse, GOC 18th (Eastern) Division, both employed similar tactics in assaulting the Schwaben Redoubt/Crucifix positions and the Pommiers Redoubt/Montauban Ridge positions respectively.¹⁷⁵ To his credit Jardine accepted the impression of cavalry prejudice may have been wide of the mark, but whatever the rationale behind the sneering scepticism the fact remains that Rawlinson did not alter Jardine's plans. He allowed the man-on-the-spot to use his own tactics. He did not wholly embrace and promote these alternative ideas. While he allowed a great deal of tactical variation, the *Fourth Army Tactical Notes* distributed in May 1916 only accounted for small parties of Lewis guns to be pushed forward into No Man's Land.¹⁷⁶ It is clear that in the build up to 1 July Rawlinson was employing a decentralised command structure which facilitated the application of individual experience. Tacit knowledge existed and could be employed but it was not disseminated across the wider organisation.

¹⁷¹ John W. Arthur and Ion S. Munro (eds.), *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Battalion)*, (Glasgow, David J. Clark, 1920) p.35; see also TNA, WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, April 1916 Appendix 8, 25/4/1916

¹⁷² TNA, CAB 45/135 Jardine to Edmonds, 13 June 1930

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13 June 1930

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 June 1930

¹⁷⁵ Cyril Falls, *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division*, (London, Constable, 1922) pp.51-52; Simkins, 'The War Experience of a Typical Kitchener Division: The 18th Division, 1914-1918' in Cecil and Liddle (eds.) *Facing Armageddon* (1996) p.301

¹⁷⁶ Brigadier-General James Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium 1916 vol.1 Appendices* (London, Imperial War Museum/ Battery Press, 1993 or.1932) Appendix 18; p.142 (henceforth *OH* for Official History)

2.2 Structure and Command during the Battle

The following section will assess how well the command system and structure was able to respond to the pressures of battle as it unfolded on 1 July 1916. It will be shown that fundamentally the correct principles were being employed but the execution was flawed.

At 7.30am on 1 July the two leading infantry brigades of the 32nd Division, the 96th under the command of Brigadier-General Clement Yatman, and the 97th under Brigadier-General James Jardine assaulted the village of Thiepval and the Leipzig salient. On the right of the divisional line the 17/HLI had crawled out into No Man's Land where they awaited zero close to the bombardment. Once the guns lifted they stormed the Leipzig Redoubt on the tip of the salient. This would be the division's only meaningful success on the day. Yatman's 96 Brigade was less fortunate, despite also lying in No Man's Land (although 60 yards further away than the 97 Brigade.) The leading waves of his battalions (15/LF and 16/NF) were caught in the open by the hidden machine gun emplacements in Thiepval.¹⁷⁷ Elements of the 15/LF, the left battalion, were reported to be making good progress through Thiepval but reports remained tentative and imprecise. As the day wore on this confusion would prove costly and expose the serious frailties of the decentralised command system. The 97 Brigade's early success on the right of the line could not be built upon and the situation in the Leipzig salient continued to be precarious. Enfilade fire from Thiepval on the left and the strong-point of the *Nordwerk* to the right kept the assaulting troops firmly pinned down and rendered supply difficult.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 21 June 1916, '96th Brigade Operation Order No 37' p.6; *pace* Prior and Wilson's claim in *Command on the Western Front* (1992) p.180, 96 Brigade did not employ 'conventional tactics outlined in the Fourth Army Tactical Notes.' They, like 97 Brigade, lay out in No Man's Land, although 100 yards from the barrage as opposed to 97 Brigade's 40 yards. It is unlikely the 60 yards made much difference given the strength of the positions faced and weight of fire arrayed against them. TNA, WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 1 July 1916, 7.30am.

Meanwhile the battalions of 14 Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Charles Compton, being held in reserve, were ordered to reinforce the struggling leading brigades. Even reaching the front lines proved difficult and many were killed in Authuille Wood by machine gun fire. At the end of the day, the Leipzig Redoubt was held but no further gains were made. The mixed fortunes of the various units within the 32nd Division offer an opportunity to analyse how the division's structure adapted to both crisis and defence in the confusion of battle. It will be argued that the inexperience of some front line commanders coupled with poor intelligence and an artillery organisation that lacked structure were all critical reasons for failure on 1 July. Nevertheless, some perspective should be maintained, and while this section is generally critical of the structure the performance also demonstrated that a system was in place which would adapt to new challenges quickly in future.¹⁷⁸

The biggest command problem facing the General Rycroft and his staff of the 32nd Division on 1 July was the issue of communication and once the battle was under way it became very difficult to alter owing to the size of the battlefield, unreliable forms of communication, and the confusion of conflict. The impact that poor communications could have was pointed out by Wyn Griffith (15/RWF): 'A General without a telephone was to all practical purposes impotent – a lay figure dressed in uniform, deprived of eyes, arms and ears.'¹⁷⁹ Despite the four months of preparation, and detailed communication orders, on 1 July, Rycroft could do little to stamp his mark on the battle. The problems he faced were essentially intelligence issues; how could DHQ gather accurate

¹⁷⁸ Primary narrative of events drawn from: TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 1 July 1916 and appendices, WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 1 July 1916 and appendices; WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 1 July 1916 and appendices. For a more detailed narrative of events see: William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London, Little, Brown, 2009) pp.172-208; Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London, Cassell, 2003) pp.41-74; Michael Stedman, *Salford Pals: 15th, 16th, 19th & 20th Battalions Lancashire Fusiliers A History of the Salford Brigade* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 1993) pp.87-116

¹⁷⁹ Wyn Griffith, *Up to Mametz* (London, Severn House, 1981; orig. 1931) p.185 also quoted in Griffith, 'Tactical Reform..' *British Fighting Methods* (1996) p.1

information about the battle as it unfolded? In principle the *ethos* of decentralisation should have compensated for the neutering of senior command; in practice uncertainty seeped back from brigade, poor decisions were made and co-ordinated action became almost impossible. On 1 July the command system failed. The trouble centred on the uncertainty of the fate of the 15/LF and the re-bombardment of Thiepval. By 8am reports reached Brigadier-General Yatman that the infantry of the 15/LF, 96 Brigade, had penetrated into the east of Thiepval and good progress was being made.¹⁸⁰ This was supported later by Lt McRobert reporting from the Coniston Observation Post at 9.22am that British troops were seen moving forward east of Thiepval twelve minutes earlier.¹⁸¹ Further reports from artillery, and possibly aerial observers trickled in.¹⁸² By late morning Rycroft and Yatman were faced with an uncertain number of the leading two companies of the 15/LF, in or isolated near the eastern edge of Thiepval.¹⁸³ The scattered information regarding the leading waves of the 15/LF coloured Yatman's decisions throughout the day and the results were disastrous. When plans were set to attempt to flank the village from the north he dissuaded Rycroft and Lt-Gen. Sir Thomas Morland, X Corps Commander, from re-bombarding the forward positions in the village as well as the fortified Thiepval Château. Instead the shelling focused on the strong-points to the south and east until the outcome of the proposed flanking attack was known.¹⁸⁴ This deprived the companies of the 16/LF and 2/RIF of effective artillery support and the result was a costly failure.¹⁸⁵ Thiepval remained unsuppressed throughout the day and wrought a terrible toll on the neighbouring 36th (Ulster) Division.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 1 July 1916, 8.20am; WO 95/2375 32nd Div. Commander Royal Artillery (CRA), 1 July 1916, 8.20am

¹⁸¹ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 1 July 1916, 9.22am

¹⁸² Ibid., 1 July 1916, 10.55am for aerial reconnaissance see TNA, WO 95/2397 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, 1 July 1916.

¹⁸³ The degree of certainty that there were troops in Thiepval was reflected in the 32nd Division Headquarters, 96 Brigade and 15th Lancashire Fusiliers's after-action reports: TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Report On Operations' p.4; WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade, July 1916 Appendix 4, 'Operations' p.2; WO 95/2397, 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, 1 July 1916

¹⁸⁴ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 1 July 1916, 11.45am; 11.57am; 1.50pm; Cab 45/191 R. B. Warton, 155th Brigade RFA to Edmonds 26 May 1930; Edmonds, *OH* 1916 Vol.1 (1932) pp.410-411

¹⁸⁵ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 1 July 1916, 11.55am; 'Report on Operations' p.5

¹⁸⁶ Falls, *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division*, (1922) p.54

This was not simply a case of bad leadership. The actions of Rycroft and Morland demonstrate the system of decentralisation in action. The uncertainties of battle led Yatman to make a number of important decisions which went unchallenged by the senior commanders. Decentralisation as understood according to *FSR I* privileged the decision of the man-on-the-spot, but it did not entirely promote the removal of higher command from the decision-making process. A balance needed to be struck between stifling, impractical intervention and allowing subordinates the freedom to act in the most appropriate manner according to local circumstances. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there was a paralysis of command on 1 July. A more decisive corps or divisional commander might have overruled Yatman's fears on the hard calculation that the risk of shelling two companies in trenches was better than sending at least four in to attack without sufficient artillery support. The learning system relied upon experience, and it would take more days like 1 July before commanders would understand the balance between intervention and delegation. Ultimately the flexibility of the system undermined the exercise of leadership. This was Clausewitzian friction at its most destructive.

For 96 Brigade the command system failed, but this did not mean there were no successes. The planned use of the artillery before and on 1 July was a consultative task between GHQ, army, corps and division, but in the wake of the Battle of Loos corps had become the integral level of command.¹⁸⁷ This largely made sense; corps had larger staffs, access to the aerial intelligence and could co-ordinate artillery action across divisional boundaries. The move however, has also been criticised for proving too inflexible and detached artillerymen from the troops they were tasked with

¹⁸⁷ Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front*, (2013) p.124; Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) p.32. TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Operation Order No.24' 18 June 1916 p.1 confirmed X Corps's control over the Divisional Artillery for 1 July, but this was later removed from the orders brigade sent out. Although the reasoning for this omission remains unclear it could have discouraged co-operation between infantry and field artillery at the front, if it had remained in. For example see: WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, June 1916 'Operation Order No.45' p.1

supporting.¹⁸⁸ The criticism of poor infantry-artillery liaison is not a new one nor is it unfair, but on the 32nd Division's front despite the centralising shift in organisation, the realities on the ground were not as quite as inflexible as the paper organisation would suggest.¹⁸⁹

It was generally the case that the 32nd Division's artillery resources received orders from X Corps on 1 July.¹⁹⁰ Yet, recognising the barrage was moving off ahead of his troops, Brigadier-General Jardine liaised with Lt-Col Cotton commanding 32nd Division Right Artillery Group and arranged for two batteries to be brought back to protect the gains. Some confusion remains over precisely who ordered the change in fire-plan. Edmonds in the *Official History*, suggested it was an order from Brigadier-General Jardine but prompted by Lt-Col Cotton's reports from his observation post.¹⁹¹ Jardine's post-war letter to Edmonds corroborates this suggesting a re-write to an earlier draft of the *Official History*: 'The Brigadier therefore ordered him to take two batteries out of the barrage and switch them to the defence of the Leipzig Redoubt already captured.'¹⁹² Yet the divisional records were more mixed. According to DHQ it was Lt-Col Cotton's initiative:

Lieut-Colonel Cotton, the officer commanding the Artillery Group with 97th Brigade, hearing from his O.P.s [Observation Posts] that the Infantry were unable to keep up with the Artillery lifts...rightly drew back the fire from some of his batteries from their pre-arranged objectives and thereby enabled the 97th Brigade to hold on to the captured trenches.¹⁹³

The testimony of Major E. Pease Watkins (161st Brigade, RFA) casts further doubt on Edmonds's

¹⁸⁸ See Simpson, *Directing Operations*, (2006) p.32

¹⁸⁹ Shelford Bidwell & Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons & Theories of War 1904-1945* (2nd ed. Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2004; or.1982) p.84; Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2nd ed., 2003; or.1987) pp.161-162; Jonathan Bailey 'British Artillery in the Great War' in Griffith *British Fighting Methods* (1996) pp.23-49; pp.31-33

¹⁹⁰ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 1 July 1916, 8.45am; 3.10pm. Control reverted back to Divisional Command at 8.35pm 1 July 1916.

¹⁹¹ Edmonds, *OH 1916* Vol.I, (1932) p. 401

¹⁹² TNA, CAB 45/135 Brigadier-General James Jardine to Edmonds, 13 June 1930

¹⁹³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div: 'Report on Operations' p.6

version, suggesting the observation of the front line was being carried out by Lt J.W. Buckley (161st Brigade, RFA).¹⁹⁴ This supports DHQ's account. It seems likely that Cotton first raised the issue with Jardine after getting reports from his observation posts, and should probably be given the credit for the positing the idea. Nevertheless, given that Jardine held seniority of rank and the infantry's concerns tended to take precedence over those of the artillery, the decision would have been taken on the brigadier's authority.¹⁹⁵ There appears to have been further precedence for this in the 32nd Division's Commander Royal Artillery (CRA) War Diary. At 8.20am it was recorded that: 'Infantry Brigadier informed O.C. Left Arty Group that programme could be departed from as attack was prospering elsewhere.'¹⁹⁶ It is possible that this entry was depicting the events on the right of the line involving Cotton and Jardine, although the justification for departing from the plan was different. That the entry was also amended at least once certainly brings into question its accuracy. Nonetheless, it does confirm that bold Infantry commanders could exercise that man-on-the-spot initiative with positive results. Irrespective of the intricacies of the situation, what is clear is that Jardine did not feel he had authority and sanction to take such action: 'This was of course, strictly contrary to orders but I believe, & some one [sic] later on told it me, that at G.H.Q. my action was quoted as being a case when orders should be disobeyed!'¹⁹⁷ The actions of Cotton and Jardine demonstrated that both the spirit and the letter of *FSR I* were still very much in practice. Moreover it received warm praise from Rycroft who highlighted the initiative in his report to Corps, which indicates that the system had much more flexibility and was more open to ideas than some of the historiography has supported.¹⁹⁸ Gary Sheffield's observation with regard to infantry tactics could be employed for the structural system more widely: 'The problem lay in the execution, not doctrinal

¹⁹⁴ TNA, CAB 45/138 Major E. Pease Watkins, 15 May 1930

¹⁹⁵ Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front* (2013) p.131; Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) p.32 notes the idea of attaching field artillery to brigades was mooted. There is nothing to suggest it was officially implemented in the 32nd Division on 1 July.

¹⁹⁶ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 1 July 1916, 8.20am;

¹⁹⁷ TNA, CAB 45/138 Brigadier-General James Jardine to Edmonds, 13 June 1930

¹⁹⁸ Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2003; or.1987) pp. 161-162

weakness.'¹⁹⁹

So far the examples have concerned the positive and negative sides of decentralisation at the brigade level of command, but what about lower down the chain at battalion level? As chapter four will demonstrate the lower ranks were happy to disobey orders on occasion, but under the stricter conditions of a large structured battle the opportunities to do so were limited. Those that could diverge from plans and orders tended to be the battalion commanders and despite the *ethos* and spirit of delegation these men, on the whole, tended not to break from their instructions. The supporting battalions on the right of the 32nd Division's line demonstrate this. Sometime between 8 and 8.30am, thinking all was going to plan, the 11/Borders, reserve battalion of 97 Brigade, debouched from their forming-up positions in Authuille Wood only to be caught in the open by heavy machine gun fire from the German positions.²⁰⁰ Shortly after (8.45am) the 1/Dorsets, 14 Infantry Brigade proceeded through the wood but were also hit on an artillery bridge near Dumbarton Track following in the footsteps of the Borders:

I came to a bridge over a defile which our plan of attack required us to cross, and examined it with interest. Its span was less than ten yards. A few days later the bridge, marked with unerring accuracy by the German machine-gunners, was heaped with our dead and wounded so as to be almost impassable; and a platoon forty-eight strong on one side emerged with a strength of twelve.²⁰¹

In the 'Report on Operations' the debouchment is covered without significant criticism or praise. It

¹⁹⁹ Sheffield, *The Somme* (2003) p.73

²⁰⁰ The timing is difficult to confirm: TNA, WO 95/2403 11th Battalion The Border Regiment, 1 July 1916 gives the time they moved forward from the assembly trenches as 8am. This is echoed in WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, *Appendix A*. The 32nd Division HQ War Diary, WO 95/2398 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations' p.6 gives 8.30am as does Edmonds, *OH 1916* Vol.I (1932) p.401. According to WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, July 1916, 'Report on Operations 1-3 July 1916' p.2 the 11/Borders were delayed so it was probably closer to DHQ's time than 97 Brigade's. This is noteworthy as evidence of compilation and filtering of reports at DHQ to arrive at a closer depiction of events; this will be covered in more detail later in the appraisal section.

²⁰¹ C. Douie, *The Weary Road* (1929) p.162

was an act prompted by the uncertainty of what was occurring in front of them.²⁰² Nevertheless, Rycroft was much more candid and critical of his battalion commanders in his General Diary:

The 11th Borders, which seeing that the right was held up should have been kept back in AUTHUILLE WOOD, debouched into the open about 8.40 a.m. and immediately came under heavy machine gun fire from enemy works in front of the left Brigade of 8th Division...The 1st Dorsets, the leading battalion of the 14th Brigade was held up, should have remained under cover but also debouched into the open, followed later by the 19th Lanc. Fus.²⁰³

Despite the principles of *FSR I* it is clear that some commanders did not wish to countermand the orders to advance. The 1/Dorsets did at least exercise a certain degree of initiative in the tactics they employed. Upon seeing the danger at the edge of Authuille Wood attempts were made to find an alternative route but they were prevented by 'barbed wire and other obstructions'.²⁰⁴ When they did leave the position they moved in sectional rushes; casualties were still heavy. Things got worse. The 19/LF followed up the 11/Borders and the 1/Dorsets as ordered and the first waves incurred heavy casualties until Lt-Col Graham (OC 19/LF) co-ordinated with the Trench Mortars to drop a smoke screen, then using covering fire from Vickers and Lewis guns they advanced in platoon rushes.²⁰⁵ Graham's quick thinking actions are deserving of praise, although his battalion should not have pushed forward. Communications were a major part of the problem and it would take until 10.30am before word would reach the other two reserve battalions that they were to maintain their positions in the wood. Decentralisation of command should have mitigated the communication problems. That it did not demonstrates that, in spite of strong support in doctrinal terms and through *ethos*, not

²⁰² TNA, WO 95/2398 32nd Div General Staff, 'Report on Operations' p.6; WO 95/2392 1st Battalion The Dorset Regiment, 1 July 1916

²⁰³ TNA, WO 95/2398 32nd Div General Staff, *General Rycroft*, [sic] *General Diary* 1st July 1916

²⁰⁴ TNA, WO 95/2392 1st Battalion The Dorset Regiment, 1 July 1916

²⁰⁵ TNA, WO 95/2398 32nd Div General Staff, 1 July 1916 3.25pm; the 'Report on Operations' does indicate that the rear 2 companies of the 1/Dorsets were held in the front line trenches, rather than continue the advance across to the Leipzig salient.

all felt they could break from orders without letting their fellow soldiers down.²⁰⁶

Were the orders themselves to blame then? Did they adhere to the command principles of *FSR I*? On the one hand there certainly was some emphasis placed upon co-ordinating actions between brigades, the 14 Infantry Brigade Operation Orders reading: 'Very intimate liaison will be established between the rear Battalion of the 97th Inf. Bde. and the 1st Dorset Regt.'²⁰⁷ This did not fundamentally breach *FSR I*'s guidelines on good planning, in fact the division and brigade orders both followed the central principles of outlining the task, the direction, the timing and leaving the subordinates the freedom to employ their own tactics. DHQ's Operation Order dated 18 June 1916 outlined the intention of the attack and the objectives, giving specific locations and boundaries, before covering the actions of the neighbouring divisions and artillery.²⁰⁸ None of these were particularly prescriptive, if anything they were too vague. The intention of the attack was stated simply as: 'to attack the enemy with the utmost vigour and determination.'²⁰⁹ Further into the document a hint of prescription can be found. Under point '9. The Infantry Tasks' the troop dispositions were stated clearly:

The assault of the 96th and 97th Infantry Brigades will be delivered by two assaulting columns in each Brigade, each column being composed of one Battalion formed up in depth of a front of 2 platoons.²¹⁰

Nevertheless, this is still well within the parameters set down by *FSR I* and as both Jardine and Yatman demonstrate there was still plenty of tactical latitude tolerated. This approach to Operation Orders was repeated at brigade level with subordinate units being given definite objectives but no

²⁰⁶ John Terraine (ed.), *General Jack's Diary* (London, Cassell, 2003 or 1964) p.148

²⁰⁷ TNA, WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, June 1916, 'Operation Order No. 37', 21 June 1916 p.2

²⁰⁸ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Operation Order No.24' p.1

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2

tactical approaches were explicitly laid out.²¹¹ That is not to say none were given at all. As has been shown, both Jardine and Yatman advanced into No Man's Land before zero but they did not enshrine this in their Operation Orders. Thus, if the expectations of the divisional and brigade GOCs were weighing upon the minds of battalion commanders it was not imparted through the written orders. Given the frequent conferences and discussions this is not particularly surprising, and certain lines in the after-action report hint at spoken, rather than written rationales which had the potential to influence battalion commanding officers:

As it was considered essential to the success of the operation of the 14th Brigade that there should be no delay in assaulting the German second line after the capture of the MOUQUET FARM and MOUQUET SWITCH Line by the Reserve Battalion, the 97th Inf. Bde. Orders were given that the head of the Right Column was to follow this Battalion (11th Border Regiment) at a distance of 500 yards.²¹²

Understanding that speed was of the essence and with the situation unclear in front of them the 1/Dorset's actions become more understandable, if still in error.²¹³ In the end, all three battalions (11/Borders, 1/Dorsets, 19/LF) suffered heavily and only fragments made it into the newly captured positions in the Leipzig Salient.

The fates of the three battalions contrast with that of the 2/Manchesters. They were required to advance in support of the jumbled fragments of the 97 Brigade in the Leipzig Redoubt, but rather than follow the route along Dumbarton Track they pursued an alternative. Upon reaching the bullet-swept bridge the CO of the Manchesters, Lt-Col 'Corky' Luxmoore, asked a nearby Trench Mortar

²¹¹ TNA, WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, June 1916, 'Operation Order No.37', 21 June 1916; WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, June 1916, 'Operation Order No.45' 21 June 1916

²¹² TNA, WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, July 1916, 'Report on Operations 1st-3rd July 1916' p.1

²¹³ TNA, WO 95/2392 1st Battalion Dorset Regiment, 1 July 1916 notes the fate of the 97 Brigade's attack was not known upon debouching, but 'it was apparent that matters were not progressing quite as favourably as had been anticipated.'

Battery (V.32) what was going on ahead:

“I don’t really know, Sir,” said the Sergeant, “but Jerry’s simply mowing them down at that gap at the bridge. They’re marching through in fours, Sir, and dropping as fast as they get though the gap.”

“But isn’t there any other way?” stormed Corky. [Luxmoore’s nickname on account of his cork leg]

“Yes, Sir,” said the Sergeant, “round by Rock Street,” and away stormed Colonel Corky. Later I heard that the Manchesters had attained their objective, but they had gone through our own line first and not through the gap.²¹⁴

The 2/Manchesters were further aided by Captain W.W. Smith who was with his company in Rock Street Trench and provided information about the three battalions and suggested the alternative route via Rock Street and Bury Avenue up to the front line.²¹⁵ Luxmoore ordered the route reconnoitred and once found clear it was used. While Luxmoore’s personal liaison and reconnaissance were factors in the decision to alter the route to the front line, the decision was significantly easier for him to make having both the benefit of forewarning and an opportunity to liaise with brigade. Brigadier-General Compton had at 9.30am ordered the two rear battalions of the 14 Brigade to stay in position in Authuille Wood, while the 2/Manchesters had also been in contact with elements of the 1/Dorsets and 19/LF.²¹⁶ Consequently when Luxmoore visited Compton at 10.30am and orders were given to advance in support of the 97 Brigade they were aware of the potential danger that faced them.²¹⁷ Through communication and reconnaissance the 2/Manchesters managed to avoid the heavy casualties incurred by the 11/Borders, 1/Dorsets and 19/LF. The 2/Manchesters further challenge the notion of isolated arms working alone. Integration was not

²¹⁴ J.E. Prince, ‘Reminiscences of “Tock-Emma” Days’ in Whinyates, *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories*, 32nd Division (1932) p.669

²¹⁵ TNA, WO 95/2392 2nd Battalion The Manchester Regiment, July 1916, ‘Reports on Operations’ p.2

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.1

²¹⁷ The original route was further departed from once congestion in Rock Street was found. Rapid re-organisation and usage of parallel trenches allowed the two advance companies to move northwards placing greater distance between themselves and the enfilade fire coming from the German *Nordwerk* strong-point south-east of the 32nd Division's position. Ibid., p.2

seamless, but liaison between the trench mortars showed that different branches of the army could work together. Co-operation could occur at all levels within the division be that through the contravention of the artillery fire-plan or guiding an infantry unit around a particularly dangerous part of the line.

The command system on 1 July failed. Decentralisation led to an abdication of responsibility at division and corps. At the lower levels battalion commanders stuck fairly rigidly to plan with the minor exception of the 2/Manchesters. They were given a significant degree of tactical autonomy as demonstrated by Lt-Col Graham of 19/LF's usage of trench mortar smoke screens and covering fire. The system would have supported the battalion commander who refused to push his unit forward under the conditions which the 1/Dorsets, 19/LF and 2/Manchesters faced. Yet, criticism of this level should be limited. Battalion commanders were operating in the toughest of circumstances; there was little clear information, confusion was rife and co-ordination difficult. Orders were crafted in such a way as to provide the appropriate information necessary for the subordinate formations and units to plan their attacks without undue meddling from above. That said, these were not perfect and vagaries would have done little to embolden the lower ranks. Moreover the tone was set in the conference discussions as much as the written orders. The one silver lining, where the command system worked, was in the co-ordination of the Right Artillery Group and 97 Brigade. In breaking from the planned barrage Cotton and Jardine significantly improved the situation for the troops in the captured Leipzig Salient. It would be tempting to conclude that this suggests the system and principles were wrong, but given the errors made it should be clear that it was the execution rather than the principle that failed on the day.

2.3 Appraising Battle

So far it has been shown that the command system was poorly implemented on 1 July. Did they learn from this experience? This next section will focus on how well the division handled the analysis of the actions that took place on 1 July and in the days following. The utility of modern theory helps the historian in this respect; for the structure to be considered useful to learning it must draw upon the 'non-canonical' lessons of the front line feeding them into future 'canonical' practice. The command system and leadership style employed could seriously interfere with the feedback process. This section will show that despite a fairly well designed feedback structure that drew upon the candid experiences of those at the lowest levels, the effectiveness could be seriously hampered by authoritarian command methods such as those employed by General Sir Hubert de la Poer Gough.

In the days following 1 July the 32nd Division's feedback process began. Officers and men were consulted, reports were written and questions were asked. The bureaucratic result was a series of narratives at each level of command that highlighted the sequence of events as best as could be discerned and attempted to draw out the salient lessons. Thus, battalions wrote accounts for brigade, who then analysed these and compiled a report of its own to be sent to the divisional staff, sometimes along with copies of the battalion reports.²¹⁸ The division then brought these together to form its own divisional report to be sent to corps; this continued until it reached GHQ. In principle this was a sensible and robust method of sharing the vital details of a unit or formation's actions in battle. Nevertheless there were problems which will be looked at later in this section.

The unit and formation war diaries also played an important role in the feedback process. There is little evidence that they were read at higher formation HQs, but they provided a record of what had occurred giving the reports a point of reference for timings – if diligently recorded. This was not

²¹⁸ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 'A.G. 142/167' 3 July 1916 requested brigade and battalion reports be sent to DHQ.

always the case. The contrasting accounts of the 11/Borders and 16/LF on 1 July demonstrate the variable quality of the source. The only significant narrative in the diary of the 11/Borders was: 'Zero time 7.30 am Battalion advanced from assembly trenches at 8am and came under very heavy Machine Gun Fire suffering over 500 casualties.'²¹⁹ This compares unfavourably with the 16/LF's three page narrative.²²⁰ What war diaries did do was keep a record of day-to-day events, conditions, casualties, reports, orders and often opinions for each discrete unit and formation within the BEF. The original purpose of such a move was conceived as didactic in character from the outset of the war, as *Field Service Regulations Part II: Organization and Admin* (1909) (*FSR II*) laid out:

1. War diaries are confidential documents; their object is twofold, viz. :-

- i. To furnish an accurate record of the operations from which the history of the war can subsequently be prepared.
- ii. To collect information for future reference with a view to effecting improvements in the organization, [sic] education, training, equipment and administration of the army for war.²²¹

A number of copies would be made, and once compiled on a monthly basis, they would then be sent up the chain of command. Eventually the war diaries were sent to G.H.Q., to be forwarded to the War Office at which point they became permanent records of units' movements, operations and methods.²²² Doctrinally war diaries were envisaged as an integral part of the post-war appraisal system of the British Army and their role in the formulation of both the official histories and some divisional or regimental histories has been demonstrated.²²³ But evidence suggests that they played

²¹⁹ TNA, WO 95/2403 11th Battalion The Border Regiment, 1 July 1916

²²⁰ TNA, WO 95/2397 16th Battalion The Lancashire Fusiliers, 1 July 1916

²²¹ General Staff, *Field Service Regulations Part II: Organization and Administration* (London, HMSO, 1909) pp.174-175

²²² *Ibid.*, p.175; General Staff, *Field Service Pocket Book 1914 (Reprinted with Amendments 1916)*, (London, HMSO, 1916) p.211

²²³ Andrew Green, *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmond's and the Official Histories 1915-1948* (London, Frank Cass, 2003); Falls, *The History of the 36th (Ulster) Division* (1922) p.xiii; Major John Ewing, *The Royal Scots 1914-1919 vol.1* (Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1925) p.ix; Lt-Col Shakespear, *A record of the 17th and 32nd Battalions Northumberland Fusiliers 1914-1919 (N.E.R.) Pioneers* (London, Naval and Military Press reprint, 2003, or. 1926)

a bigger role than this during the war, aiding diligent new commanders to familiarise themselves with the service history of the formation or unit they were joining. The personal papers of Major-General Thomas Stanton Lambert, held at the Imperial War Museum, include a significant collection of war diaries and official reports from the 32nd Division, a sizeable proportion dating from 1917 covering their service during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in March and April, operations on the Belgian coast near Nieuport in July and on the Passchendaele ridge in December, all of which pre-dated his service with the Division, which only began on 29 May 1918.²²⁴ Although it is possible that he received these papers after the war, their existence alongside official papers from his own time in charge suggests that they were the GOC's copy and were retained by the divisional staff and passed on to each new commander. While it is impossible to say with certainty where these files came from, their existence confirms that at the very least Lambert took an active interest in the past successes of the Division. The focus on the major engagements suggests that this was done with the aim of evaluating planning, performance and lessons. Of course, this could be a unique occurrence within the 32nd Division and may simply reflect a set of commanders who took their responsibilities seriously, but it would be entirely within the keeping of the *ethos* of the British Army and purpose of the documents themselves if this practice of handing down war diaries was more widespread; indeed it would be surprising if this did not occur.

Alongside reports and diaries were lesson learnt files.²²⁵ At various stages, generally prior to or in the wake of a notable action, formations would reflect upon the recent events and disseminate lessons learnt reports that promoted successful practices and advice for commanders.²²⁶ These

p.iii

²²⁴ IWM, 80/10/1, Major-General T.S. Lambert, For example 'Report on the Operations of the 32nd Division on April 1st & April 2nd'; '32nd Divl. Instructions for Operations XV Corps Front 31 July 1917'; 'Passchendaele 2nd December: Report on Operations' ['G.S. 1499/20' series of reports in immediate aftermath of the battle].

²²⁵ Lesson learnt files, as a term, has been used here because the files were not always in direct response to a specific battle or engagement. The more common terms of after action report or after battle report indicate a relationship and proximity to a specific event. The broader lesson learnt files encompass both after action reports and after battle reports without excluding documents reflecting upon campaigns in a wider sense.

²²⁶ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, October 1916, 'Points with regard to operations', 27 October 1916,

reports were not drawn solely from the Division's experiences. Prior to the 32nd Division's return to the Somme in October 1916, after being withdrawn to the Cuinchy and Cambrin sector in mid-June, Rycroft disseminated a memorandum to the infantry brigades and engineers. This document contained a blend of lessons from the division's experience in July and tactical developments made on the Somme while they were training, refitting and line holding between mid-July and early October. The most notable of these is recognition of the role the creeping barrage now played in offensive operations:

All ranks must be made to understand clearly that the considerable success which has been achieved in recent operations is almost entirely due to the infantry following close behind a rolling barrage.

Details of the barrage to be made for this Division will be communicated as soon as possible. Meanwhile troops should be trained to work up close to a barrage rolling at the rate of 50 yards in the minute across the open. It has been proved by experience that in the case of villages the barrage should roll right through and should not halt in the village. The pace of the rolling barrage barrage [sic] passing through a village will probably be 25 yards per minute; troops detailed to proceed through to the immediate objective on the distant side of the village must follow this barrage closely, the clearing up of houses and cellars being left to the special mopping up parties.²²⁷

While the Division was away they did not conduct any major attack and raids carried out, such as that by the 16/LF on 11 September 1916, used an intense bombardment followed by a box barrage.²²⁸ The lesson then had to be one that had progressed up the chain of command to GHQ and then been disseminated down to Division, or transferred laterally through formation channels. The rest of the report is realistic about the difficulties in maintaining forward communications and

Appendix 28; November 1916, 'Lessons derived from experiences of 32nd Division in Recent Operations', [undated] November, Appendix 26a

²²⁷ Ibid., 27 October 1916, 'Points with regard to operations', Appendix 28

²²⁸ TNA, WO 95/2397 16th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, September 1916, 'Raid night of 10th/11th Sept. 1916, carried out by 16th (s) Bn. Lancashire Fusiliers'. The 2/Manchesters launched an aborted raid on 29 September 1916 that also shunned a creeping barrage. WO 95/2392 2nd Battalion The Manchester Regiment, 'Details of Raid as carried out on night 28/29th September 1916.', Appendices.

emphasises an organised system of runners to address the issue. The idea of 'Moppers up', that is troops specially detailed to clear enemy dugouts and isolated posts after the first wave had pushed further forward, are also highlighted as important. This is notably three months prior to the publication of SS 135 *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* (December, 1916) which enshrined the practice in doctrine.²²⁹ At the formation level, lesson learnt reports were the first word on the evolution of tactical methods within the army. The BEF was responsive to the experiences of battle and demonstrate that even when formations were deprived of it lessons could be taught and disseminated effectively. At its most basic level lesson learnt reports demonstrate that the BEF was able to draw upon the non-canonical practices of the front line and react accordingly bringing them into its prescribed methods.

It is worth looking now in more detail at the process of formulating post-action reports and the broader system of appraisal. Before the war *FSR II* laid out eleven points a good report should cover. These included relative strength of the opposing forces, time of action, orders issued and received, context of the important phases of battle, the movements of neighbouring units, follow-up actions and casualties sustained.²³⁰ In reality the reports very rarely hit all eleven criteria, casualties were not easy to gauge in the immediate aftermath of battle and rarely were the 'names of the superior officers of the enemy engaged' known to those on the front line and nor were they particularly relevant at the lower levels.²³¹ Instead reports generally consisted of a narrative of events interspersed with important features of note. For example, the opening up the Sanda sap close to the Leipzig Redoubt was highlighted in the report from the 97 Brigade to the divisional staff describing it as a 'godsend' benefiting both supply and communications.²³² Consequently the overall divisional report reflected the sap's benefit but added further detail on the unit responsible

²²⁹ SS 135, *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* (December, 1916) pp.16-17

²³⁰ General Staff, *FSR II* (1909) p.174

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.174

²³² TNA, WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, July 1916, 'Report on the Operations of the 97 Infantry Brigade 1st/2nd July 1916'

and the work's completion time: 'By 4.30 p.m. a trench connecting the Russian Sap which had been driven from our lines to within 40 yards of the enemy front trench was sufficiently completed by the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers to give cover. This proved of inestimable value.'²³³ The procedure for reports may have been set down prior to the war but fundamental workings of the system were developed during the conflict. Prior to the outbreak of the Somme numerous raids were carried out on the German positions opposite the 32nd Division. After each of these the officers involved were tasked with writing up their experiences and drawing out the important lessons. This provided vital experience working with the bureaucratic system. On the night of the 5/6 May, for example, the 15/LF carried out a raid on the German positions. In the after-action report, feedback was given on the enemy's tactics. It also identified how well new equipment worked in battle:

b. The enemy counter bombardment which did not start until 12.45 a.m. was placed on our trenches opposite our point of entry into their trenches...

e. The protection afforded by the steel helmet was exemplified in several instances.²³⁴

The narrative also offers a valuable insight into the feedback process at brigade level and above. The original report stated: 'In one dug out which was entered all the occupants were wounded and as the British Army is not composed of low class Huns no bombs were thrown.'²³⁵ Although, the 96 Brigade's report has not survived it is possible to tell from the account in the war diary and the divisional intelligence summary that such commentary was removed from any further reports.²³⁶ All that was subsequently mentioned was that dug-outs were bombed. The process was there to filter out unnecessary information as much as it was to promote valuable lessons.²³⁷

²³³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations', 1 July 1916.

²³⁴ TNA, WO 95/2397 15th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, 'Raid Carried out 5/6th May 1916'

²³⁵ Ibid., 'Raid Carried out 5/6th May 1916', Narrative.

²³⁶ TNA, WO95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade, 6 May 1916; WO 95/2367: 32nd Div. General Staff, May 1916, 'Daily Intelligence Summary: From 12 Noon May 5th to 12 noon May 6th', Operations.

²³⁷ One interpretation could be that this was intentionally excised by 96 Brigade because it showed a lack of offensive spirit, although this can be nothing more than speculation.

The after-action reports in the wake of 1 July varied in character depending upon which arm produced them. The reports by the CRA, Brigadier-General Tyler, and the Trench Mortar Batteries followed a template which did not include any substantial narrative; rather, it focused on the technical aspects of the guns, reliability and planning.²³⁸ The Trench Mortar report noted: ‘The general design of the Heavy T.M. Emplacement brought out by the 4th Army School of Mortars was adhered to and found quite satisfactory. Several minor changes however were found to be necessary.’²³⁹ The report goes on to list the minor changes, building upon some of the findings of the Medium Trench Mortar Batteries. This is significant for two reasons: much of the feedback on the effects of the artillery on the day was given in the infantry brigade reports, and second the technicality of the feedback demonstrates an open dialogue between those teaching best-practice and those implementing it on the ground. There clearly existed a willingness within the BEF as a whole to adapt ‘canonical practice’ (i.e. that which was taught in the Fourth Army School of Mortars) to what effective, non-canonical practices were being carried out on the ground. Both the artillery and the trench mortar reports demonstrate a much greater emphasis on practical adjustments to improve the quality of the shooting and minimise the workload for the Divisional Ammunition Column, Royal Engineer Companies and the assigned work parties.²⁴⁰

On 2 July the X Corps was transferred to Sir Hubert Gough’s Reserve Army along with the VIII Corps.²⁴¹ This had immediate ramifications for the 32nd Division. 75 Brigade were attached to the 32nd Division, transferred temporarily from the 25th Division. The purpose was to launch an attack with 14 Brigade to expand on the lodgement made into the Leipzig Salient early in the morning on

²³⁸ Information on shell usage, and tasks were included, for example the 18 pdr batteries of the 32nd Division RFA were targeting the wire on the German second line. TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, ‘Report on Operations...Divisional Artillery July 1916’.

²³⁹ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, ‘Report on work of V.32 Heavy Trench Mortar Battery During Bombardment and Subsequent Operations: 24/7/16 [sic] to 3/7/16’.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.; TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div: ‘Report on Operations...Divisional Artillery July 1916’.

²⁴¹ TNA, WO 95/431 Fourth Army Headquarters, July 1916, ‘Operation Order No.3’, 1 July 1916

3 July. The attack made very limited early gains but these were unsustainable and it ended in complete failure with severe losses.²⁴² It was a classic case of order, counter-order, disorder as plans were changed four hours prior to the originally planned zero and two before the preliminary bombardment.²⁴³ In the immediate aftermath of the failure an inquisition began, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of the feedback system. The guns had barely stopped firing when Gough demanded answers. A memorandum from 32nd Division to 75 Brigade was sent the same day:

1. The Army Commander wishes to be informed on the following points:-
 - a. Where did units incur their losses?
 - b. How were units driven back? Was it by bombers or by enemy attack across the open?
 - c. Once the troops were in the German trenches, how was it that the enemy machine-guns did any execution?²⁴⁴

The reports produced demonstrate the real drawbacks of the system. They relied upon the honest and straight-forward appraisal at each level, and this was not always forthcoming. Rycroft's account of the 3 July was one such report although not his first. As has been shown already the 32nd Division's 'Report on Operations' refused to criticise the 11/Borders and 1/Dorsets for their debouching from Authuille Wood on 1 July despite Rycroft's personal unhappiness with the decision.²⁴⁵ His report on 3 July differed in approach. Rather than avoid criticism, Rycroft offered a critique on the conduct and employment of 75 Brigade, without overtly attributing any blame.

²⁴² More information on the attack can be found in Gary Sheffield, 'An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough' in Sheffield and Todman, *Command on the Western Front* (2004) pp.78-80

²⁴³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 2 July 1916 11.15pm; WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 2 July 1916 shows updated order to artillery was not received until 12 midnight; an hour and a half before the preparatory barrage was to begin. See 'Report on Operations called for by CRA on operations on night 2/3 July + morning 3rd' by Right Group Commander A.S. Cotton and 'Report on 32nd Divisional Artillery Work. 2nd/3rd July'. Both convey the utter confusion of the situation.

²⁴⁴ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916: A.G. 142/167

²⁴⁵ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'General Rycroft's [sic] General Diary; Report on Operations General Staff'

Where errors are pointed out Rycroft emphasised the mitigating factors facing 75 Brigade and its battalions. The usage by 2/S.Lancs and 8/S.Lancs of a trench reserved for evacuation which caused significant confusion and delay was tempered by recognition that:

The desire to use HARLEY STREET may have been due to it being mentioned at my Hd.Qrs. That it might be possible for the 75th Brigade to arrange for its use, as although told off as an evacuation trench it has been at times used for troops moving up into the line.²⁴⁶

This was a fair and honest appraisal that attempted to play-down the errors made by the subordinates and it is particularly noteworthy that no one individual was picked out as having suggested the trench could be used. This lack of specifics continued when Rycroft attempted to shield Brigadier-General Jenkins, the 75 Brigade commander, from some of the criticism he faced after the débâcle.

There can be no doubt that Brigadier-General Jenkins [commanding 75 Brigade] was confronted with many difficulties, as the trenches which he had to take over from troops of the 97th and 96th Brigades were unknown to him and his Officers. His difficulties were augmented by the fact that the trenches, including communications trenches, had been very severely damaged and in places blocked by heavy enemy artillery fire.²⁴⁷

The defence extended to his own staff. Once again Rycroft chose to use vague language even when accepting that some of the blame lay with the 32nd Division:

I believe that every possible assistance was given by my Staff and that of my Brigades but without doubt mistakes and delays did occur, to such an extent that even if orders had not been modified the

²⁴⁶ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'S.G. 142/169: Statement of Facts' pp.3-4

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.4

75th Brigade would not have been in a position to carry out its original orders.²⁴⁸

In truth Rycroft was far from happy with the performance of all his staff. On 15 July 1916, reflecting on the period of action, the war diarist remarked: 'The value of an untrained GSO3 in active operations of this kind is very small.'²⁴⁹ This was initialled by the GSO1, Lt-Col Wace. In an ironic twist the GSO3 Major C.C. Wallace remained in his position longer than Rycroft, lasting until 15 December 1916 when he was invalided home.²⁵⁰ Change did occur, and as previously noted, GSO2 Major Austin Girdwood was promoted out to command 11/Border regiment and was replaced on the same day by the 32nd Division's former GSO3 Major P.S. Rowan.²⁵¹

Reading between the lines of the report, it becomes clear that Rycroft saw the utter impracticality of the last minute change in plans and the disorganisation it caused to the artillery, infantry and ailing communications network. He reserved his last comment to hint at this:

Presuming that it [75 Brigade] had got into its allotted positions in sufficient time to carry out the original attack, I am of opinion [sic] that under the conditions existing it would have been impossible to get the change of objective communicated to the lower formations of the units, namely company, platoon and section commanders.²⁵²

In the post-war era the 32nd Division's GSO1 Lt-Col Wace was more candid about the true feelings of the staff: 'it was another of Gough's mad ideas. Gough was furious then with our Divn, and with Rycroft + me in particular. He 'threw' the unfortunate Jenkins, but couldn't fix blame on us.'²⁵³ Wace was not alone, Lt-Col Cotton's report observed that grave apprehension clearly existed prior

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 15 July 1916

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 15 December 1916; The order for Rycroft's removal from command arrived at DHQ on 21 November 1916.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 16 July 1916

²⁵² TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'S.G. 142/169: Statement of Facts' p.5

²⁵³ TNA, CAB 45/138 Lt-Col E.G. Wace to Edmonds, 30 October 1936

to the attack: '[...] late at night a strong representation was made to 32 Div GSO as to the extreme improbability of a successful attack under the conditions then existing'.²⁵⁴ Cotton went on to recognise that any reservations mattered little; given the chaos of the situation any cancellation orders were unlikely to reach their recipients in time.²⁵⁵

The vagaries, concealed criticisms and caveats were aimed at indicating the pervading feeling of where the blame lay, while also seeking to minimise the damage done to commanders like Brigadier-General Jenkins but this protection did not wholly stem from a sense of self-preservation. Rycroft was willing to honestly accept blame when he felt he was responsible for it. In a separate report to X Corps of the artillery action taken on 3 July he took responsibility for the change of plans which led to the cessation of the intense bombardment between 3am and 3.15am by the Right Artillery Group:

I reproach myself for having authorised any modification of the intense period 3.a.m. to 3.15.a.m. But wish to put on record that I should under no circumstances have sanctioned any change had I known my Artillery was to cease firing at 3.15.a.m.

The command of the artillery had essentially decentralised to the divisional level owing to poor communications and late orders from X Corps. Rycroft in this instance was a victim of miscommunication between DHQ and Right Artillery Brigade. Nevertheless, no action was taken against him and realistically it was not a major contributing factor to failure in light of the many other problems. Importantly it demonstrated that Rycroft was willing to accept responsibility in the reporting process; a crucial benefit to the overall system but perhaps less so for his own career. Within the wider organisation this was not always repeated and obfuscations, half-truths, and

²⁵⁴ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, July 1916, 'Report on Operations Called for by CRA', 4 July 1916

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 'Report on Operations Called for by CRA', 4 July 1916

outright lies were occasionally woven into reports.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the 32nd Division's reporting process here suggests that this tended to be at the lower end of the spectrum with caveats and veiled criticism as opposed to half-truths and outright fabrication.

Behind the act of reporting was the relationship between officers. The relationship between Rycroft and Gough soured after the action of 3 July. Lt-Col Wace wrote after the war that 'He was terrified of Gough.'²⁵⁷ The impact of this was lasting:

[...] Rycroft knew he'd "got it in for us", + when at Bethune we got orders to go back to the Somme in October he turned to me + said wryly that this would be his undoing unless we went to Rawly's Army! So he just hadn't the kick in him to stand up to Gough, when all initiative was taken out of his hands.²⁵⁸

Rycroft was right to feel a sense of foreboding at the return of the 32nd Division to Gough's Reserve Army. Three days after the fighting near Beaumont Hamel he was removed from his command. He was not the only commander to have suffered under Gough's command, and by the 10 September 1917 Haig realised there was a problem, writing in his diary:

General Kiggell reported that he is afraid that some of Gough's subordinates do not always tell Gough their true opinion as regards their ability to carry out an operation. I therefore decided to go tomorrow to see the GOC V Corps (General Fanshawe) with reference to the small attacks prepared for the 13th.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ The most famous example of such deception was Rawlinson's scapegoating of Major-General Francis John 'Joey' Davies, GOC 8 Division, after the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. Prior & Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (1992) pp.70-73; Ian F. W. Beckett 'Henry Rawlinson' Gough' in Ian Beckett & Steven Corvi, *Haig's Generals*, (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2006) pp.169-170

²⁵⁷ TNA, CAB 45/138 Lt-Col E.G. Wace to Edmonds, 30 October 1936.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 30 October 1936

²⁵⁹ Sheffield and Bourne (eds.), *Douglas Haig War Diaries and Letters 1914-1918* (2005) p.323; 10 September 1917

Neill Malcolm, Gough's Major-General, General Staff, had recognised the problem shortly after Rycroft's removal in November 1916: 'I am afraid that Hubert is inspiring rather an atmosphere of fear in his subordinates, making them shy of expressing their opinions & perhaps forcing them into acts against their better judgement.'²⁶⁰ At the centre of the issue lay Gough's autocratic command style. This has been well covered in the literature and the evidence from the 32nd Division does not challenge this pervading view.²⁶¹ There was a silver lining to this inquisitorial top-down approach; 32nd Division were pushed into establishing in detail how they were using certain infantry support weapons.

On 3 July 1916 Gough requested details on the use of Stokes mortars and urged their full use in the defence of the Leipzig Salient. DHQ got a reply from 14 Brigade the same day answering the Army Commander's request.²⁶² Rycroft was not satisfied with the response thus bringing to his attention an area for immediate improvement.²⁶³ Similarly Gough saw that successful tactical employment of weapons like rifle grenades used in conjunction with bombing parties were inconsistently applied amongst his two corps. A memorandum forwarded through VIII and X corps, dated 8 July 1916, referenced the successful employment of rifle grenades in the capture of Mametz and Fricourt. The document went on to advocate firing over the heads of bombing parties to effect a 'barrage' of sorts, pre-empting by seven months the advice to use rifle grenades to 'open a hurricane bombardment on the point of resistance' distributed through SS 143 *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for*

²⁶⁰ Malcolm Diary, 21-22 November 1916 quoted in Ian FW Beckett, 'Hubert Gough, Neill Malcolm and Command on the Western Front' in Brian Bond et al. *'Look to your Front' Studies in the First World War by the British Commission for Military History* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 1999) p.3

²⁶¹ Helen McCartney and Gary Sheffield, 'Hubert Gough' in Ian Beckett & Steven Corvi, *Haig's Generals*, (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2006) pp.75-96; Gary Sheffield, 'An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough' in Sheffield and Todman, *Command on the Western Front* (2004) pp.78-80; Ian FW Beckett, 'Hubert Gough, Neill Malcolm and Command on the Western Front' in Brian Bond et al. *'Look to your Front' Studies in the First World War by the British Commission for Military History* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 1999) pp.1-12; Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) pp.38-39, 42-43.

²⁶² TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'A.G. 142/166', 3 July 1916; reply: WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, July 1916, 'Handwritten note and sketch appendices', 3 July 1916

²⁶³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'A.G. 140/170', 4 July 1916

Offensive Action, 1917.²⁶⁴ Rycroft accepted the memorandum's recommendations adding the note on 9 July 1916: 'This must be exploited make sure rifle grenades are available + in hands of troops'.²⁶⁵ The realities of the Leipzig salient rendered this tactic impossible owing to a lack of accuracy and too great a range for the close quarters fighting. This information was passed back up to DHQ within four days of the recommendation in a note written by Captain L.W. Kentish, Brigade Major of 14 Brigade.²⁶⁶ DHQ took this feedback seriously; the note was read and initialled by the G.S.O. II Major A. Girdwood, G.S.O. I Lt-Col E.G. Wace and G.O.C. W. H. Rycroft himself. In the early days of Gough's command his hands-on style produced a flurry of reports and paperwork looking into what went wrong and how best to improve the situation in the Leipzig Salient. However flawed this may have been, at the most basic level it produced lessons. Yet it did so at the expense of the established command system, depriving subordinates of the autonomy to act independently by fostering an environment where orders could not be easily challenged.

To summarise, it has been suggested by a number of authors that the Somme was a landmark moment in the development of the learning process of the BEF.²⁶⁷ The experiences of the 32nd Division do little to challenge those conclusions, but the Somme was not the start of it, the fundamental principles were already enshrined within the army. Those principles were not perfect, but the flaw lay mainly in their faulty employment rather than the core values themselves. The feedback system drew lessons up from the front lines although the type of content, reliability and accuracy of reports largely depended upon the context and service arm writing. They were subject to the frailty and idiosyncrasies of human interaction, this being exacerbated by the autocratic leadership style of Gough who must shoulder much of the blame for the failures after the first day.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., July 1916, S.G. 142/1938 July 1916; SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917* (February, 1917) p.8

²⁶⁵ Ibid., July 1916, 'S.G. 142/1938' July 1916.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., July 1916, 'GI 8', 13 July 1916

²⁶⁷ See Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (2005), *The Somme* (2003); Philpott, *Bloody Victory* (2009), Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front* (1994); Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British & The Somme 1916* (London, Orion Books, 2006)

Gough's micro-management did have a positive effect driving the integration and appreciation of new tactical methods. These would find their way into army-wide doctrine by February 1917 but prior to that formations were reflecting on their own and other's experiences and disseminating the lessons back down the chain of command through memoranda and lesson learnt reports. The following chapter will assess how this developed and explore Anglo-French liaison.

Chapter Three

Perfecting the System

This chapter will show how the 32nd Division developed their command system and learning structure after their experiences in July 1916. It will cover two key areas: liaison with the French between 1916 and 1918 and the structural improvements made in the last two years of the war. It will be indicated that while liaison was far from perfect there is evidence that the British were willing to evaluate and learn from their allies. Furthermore in 1917 and 1918 the 32nd Division developed their doctrine, sought to improve training, and effectively decentralised command. Appraisal structures improved throughout 1917 but declined in late 1918 with a change in leadership and evolving battlefield conditions.

3.1 Liaison with the French 1916-1918

The issue of tactical liaison between the French and the British Armies has been generally overlooked in the historiography. The political, strategic and operational aspects of co-ordinating with the French have had far more coverage than the tactical level.²⁶⁸ This is in part owing to the relative paucity of source material and its unconnected, disparate spread across various low-level files. There has been some scattered analysis. William Philpott's *Bloody Victory* remarked of Britain's post-Somme codification of offensive methods: 'While rarely acknowledged, the new tactics owed much to France's methods, as well as to Germany's defensive tactics.'²⁶⁹ This position is supported in places by Paddy Griffith's *Battle Tactics on the Western Front* particularly in the

²⁶⁸ William Philpott, *Bloody Victory* (2009); Sheffield, *The Somme* (2003); David Stevenson, *1914-1918* (London, Allen Lane, 2004); Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army* (2013) pp.33-36

²⁶⁹ Philpott, *Bloody Victory* (2009) p.440

discussions relating to Leffargue's influence on British tactical thought.²⁷⁰ A complete study of Anglo-French liaison is impossible here, instead this section will offer some initial insights into the relationship at the tactical levels of the respective armies. The BEF and indeed the 32nd Division were not wholly opposed to learning from the experiences of their allies; the relationship would remain fractious and easily undermined by the difficulties of communicating via intermediary liaison officers.

The contrasting fortunes of 1 July for the British and the French armies prompted analysis of the differing operational and tactical methods employed. The main driver for this was Captain Edward Spiers, the liaison officer for Rawlinson's Fourth Army attached to Marie-Émile Fayolle's Sixth Army, who on 2 July wrote a report dissecting the reasons for the French success.²⁷¹ Spiers sent this report straight to Lt-Gen. Sir Launcelot Kiggell, Chief of the General Staff at GHQ who subsequently disseminated it down the chain of command to the brigade level. This all happened within four days and on 6 July it reached DHQ 32nd Division where it was passed around all three infantry brigades, the CRE and the CRA. By 8 July all five subordinate commanders in the 32nd Division had read it.²⁷² The report itself reflected the greater emphasis the French Sixth Army had placed on methodical, overwhelming artillery preparation and counter-battery fire. The role of liaison between levels of command, successful mopping-up, and well-handled reserves were also regarded as pivotal to the success of the French.²⁷³ Many of these principles were already well accepted within the BEF and the major criticism that can be levelled at Spiers is the lack of detail beyond the general precepts that the report contained. For example Spiers wrote:

²⁷⁰ Griffith, *Battle Tactics* (1994) pp.55-56; 230-231n; see also Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma: German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (New York, Greenwood, 1992) pp.53-54

²⁷¹ Edward Spiers changed the spelling of his name to Edward Spears in 1918. To avoid anachronism his original spelling has been used here. He was later knighted for his liaison work during the Second World War.

²⁷² TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'S.G. 142/177', 6 July 1916

²⁷³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'L.S. 98', 2 July 1916

The value of the thorough bombardment of villages is exemplified by the example of the XXth Corps. They insisted on only bombarding the edges of CURLU, with the result that it was only taken in the evening and that out of a total casualty list of 700 for the Corps, 400 were suffered in the village.²⁷⁴

This was hardly a revelation to the 32nd Division, or X Corps's artillery, who had expended significant resources attempting to subdue Thiepval during the preparatory bombardment phase.²⁷⁵ The issue was one of artillery density and not simply sustained targeting. The report did provide some insights that did more than confirm existing lessons. The emphasis on counter-battery fire as the first of the French successes listed drew attention to what was a certain failing of the X Corps preliminary plan. The corps had devised a counter-battery plan for Z day but there were very limited resources assigned in the preparatory phase; the priority fell below that of harassing fire and wire cutting.²⁷⁶ The BEF on the Somme would gradually develop more refined counter-battery methods, although this document was only one of many sources arguing for its increased role.²⁷⁷ This was not the most important point taken out of the report by Rycroft. His annotations demonstrated that Spiers's report focused his thoughts on his own actions on 1 July: 'Our lifts were on experience strong [sic] much too quick.' The idea of the tempo and pace of the advance was evidently at the forefront of his mind; he underlined Spiers's observation that the French Sixth Army 'made itself especially felt in preventing a headlong advance...' The lesson on French liaison between formations and artillery would later find an echo in Rycroft's lesson learnt report of the 27 October 1916, and while this is hardly conclusive proof of an open exchange of ideas, what the report clearly did do

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 'L.S. 98', 2 July 1916

²⁷⁵ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, June 1916, 'Artillery and Trench Mortar Programme for U,V,X,Y Days', Appendix V; see especially V and X days.

²⁷⁶ TNA, WO 95/862 X Corps Commander Heavy Artillery (CHA) 18 June 1916; TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, June 1916, 'Artillery and Trench Mortar Programme for U,V,X,Y Days', Appendix V. There was only one day of dedicated counter-battery work by the Heavy Artillery although it was listed as one of the jobs V day onwards. See also Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front* (2013) pp.145-146

²⁷⁷ Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front* (2013) pp. 147-148

was promote reflection on important principles within the division.²⁷⁸

In the winter of 1916/1917 there was an active attempt made to learn more about the French tactical methods. The 32nd Division, now in the V Corps and out of the line near Canaples, sent 27 officers; 8 from each brigade plus the three Brigadier-Generals, to Corps HQ on 14 December 1916 to hear Major-General John Shea deliver a lecture entitled: 'French system of attack from trenches'. The content of the lecture has not survived but Shea commanded the 30th Division on the immediate left flank of the French on 1 July. The division achieved notable success through an effective preliminary bombardment, counter-battery fire and infantry waiting in advanced positions at zero.²⁷⁹ Shea was also present in a party of British officers who visited Chalons near Verdun in November 1916 and so was well placed to comment on their methods.²⁸⁰ It is unlikely that Shea's fundamental lessons differed significantly from Spiers's, in August he wrote to A.A. Montgomery, Major-General, General Staff Fourth Army, outlining that the tactical principles in attack were 'battering of his trenches, shattering of his moral, the most detailed orders well understood, simple assembly, good direction, and a short distance over which to assault.'²⁸¹ However, the focus of the British party that had visited the French line in winter had centred on the increasing specialisation of French platoons.²⁸² It seems reasonable to suggest the infantry's ability to get forward under its own fire-power would have formed an important strand of Shea's talk to V Corps. Once again it is unlikely there was much disagreement with such commonly held principles; the difficulty was in the execution. The inter-allied co-operation was not limited to lectures. On 4 January 1917 Lt-Col Arthur McNamara, 32nd Division's GSO1, spent four days with the French Army at Verdun.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, October 1916, 'Points with regard to operations', 27 October 1916, Appendix 28

²⁷⁹ Philpott, *Bloody Victory* (2009) pp.178-180

²⁸⁰ Alistair Geddes, 'Solly-Flood, GHQ and the Tactical Training in the BEF, 1916-1918' (MA Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2007) pp.30-31

²⁸¹ LHCMA, Montgomery-Massingberd Papers, 7/3, J. Shea to Montgomery, 2 August 1916, also quoted in Philpott, *Bloody Victory* (2009) p.265

²⁸² Geddes, 'Solly-Flood, GHQ and the Tactical Training in the BEF, 1916-1918' (MA Thesis, 2007) pp.30-31

²⁸³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 4 January 1917; 9 January 1917

Alistair Geddes has identified that a number of British officers wanted to see the tactical developments that were being mooted by Major-General Shea and others in the winter of 1916.²⁸⁴ It is likely that McNamara can be added to the list of officers sent to the French sector to see how their infantry companies were organised and employed. When this is considered alongside the doctrinal developments that were taking place at this time, such as the authoring of *SS 143*, it is clear that French tactics used in 1916 were highly influential upon the BEF's development.

This interest and co-ordination between the 32nd Division and the French would become important between February and June 1917. After launching a successful attack on Ten Tree Alley near Serre on the Somme on 10 February 1917 the 32nd Division was moved to the far right of the British line in the Domart - Le Quesnel sector. They were taking over from the French 29 *Division d'Infanterie* (DI). Rather than effect the relief in one swoop and endanger the line through unfamiliarity with the new positions and key defensive points, the 32nd Division first sent advance reconnoitring parties.²⁸⁵ These generally went in 24 hours ahead of their units and were met by the commandant of 29 DI.²⁸⁶ Furthermore, the relief was not carried out in one day. The 32nd Division's leading brigades initially went in under the command of the 29 DI for two days: 24-26 February. This gave 14 Brigade and 96 Brigade an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the front line and its notable topographical features, strong-points as well as any existing defence schemes. The upshot was a hassle free extension of the British line southwards. Nevertheless, this was not done without complaint. 14 Brigade noted in their war diary that the: 'Condition of trenches very bad.'²⁸⁷ These sentiments were shared by Austin Girdwood, at this time commanding 11/Borders, 97 Brigade, who wrote: 'We had a tricky time after taking over from the French. It was very wet + cold and the trenches were blown

²⁸⁴ Geddes, 'Solly-Flood, GHQ and the Tactical Training in the BEF, 1916-1918' (MA Thesis, 2007) pp.32

²⁸⁵ Ibid., February 1917, 'G.S. 977/2/15' Appendix 34, 16 February 1917

²⁸⁶ TNA, WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 'S.G.101/3', Appendix 13, a & b, 21 February 1917

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 25 February 1917

to bits and full of mud.²⁸⁸ Despite this, until the Germans began their withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line positions on 14 March 1917, the co-operation between the French left and British right operated in much the same fashion as an internal boundary line between formations. On 12 March 1917 the divisional artillery co-operated with a French raid, firing 527 18 pdr shells and 210 rounds from the 4.5inch howitzers. A machine-gun barrage of the roads and communication lines also took place. Four days later orders were issued for the 32nd Division's artillery to co-operate with the neighbouring French 62 DI.²⁸⁹

It did not always go as smoothly as 12 and 16 March. With the withdrawal under way and IV Corps in pursuit accidents occurred. On 20 March 1917, the 32nd Division received a 'Report that one of our cyclist patrols had been shot by a French patrol in DOUILLY'.²⁹⁰ This was the exception rather than the rule. Despite cancelling their co-ordinated attack on l'Épine de Dallon, originally scheduled for 1 April in tandem with the 32nd Division's attack on Savy, the French assisted with an artillery barrage and the establishment of liaison posts.²⁹¹ Through a combination of liaison reports, aerial observation and unit to unit contact the co-ordination between the French and British during the German withdrawal remained strong.²⁹²

The effective co-ordination between the 32nd Division and the various DI on the French left did not always go quite as smoothly later in the war. On 11 August 1918, the last day of the Battle of Amiens, a report was sent by Captain C.B. Falls to the Chief Liaison Officer of French First Army. The report criticised the 32nd Division for supposedly arranging an attack on the German positions at Damery at 7am which did not go in until 9.30am; delays which led the neighbouring 126 DI to

²⁸⁸ PKCA, Girdwood to Rycroft, 28 May 1917

²⁸⁹ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, '32nd Divisional Artillery Instructions No.1', Appendix II; WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 16 March 1917

²⁹⁰ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 20 March 1917 11.30am

²⁹¹ Ibid., 31 March 1917; April 1917, 'Outline Scheme of Attack 32nd Division. II Attack on Savy Village', Appendix B

²⁹² Ibid., 16-31 March 1917

suffer significant casualties from shellfire after holding their first objective positions for two hours in their co-ordinated attack.²⁹³ This report found its way onto the desk of A.A. Montgomery, CGS Fourth Army the following day and he immediately wrote to 32nd Division's Commander, Major-General Thomas Stanton Lambert. The letter highlights Montgomery's tactful and diplomatic approach to the issue. He recognised the potential political problems that could be caused if Falls's accusations proved to have foundation, so rather than handle it using official channels he kept it hidden from Rawlinson and instead attempted to rectify the situation himself. The letter is worth quoting at length:

If correct this report is disquieting, as such failure in liaison between the flank Divn of our army + the French will cause hard feeling.

Could you enquire into it + find out why the French were not informed that your attack was postponed.

If the fault did lie with your staff could you go personally + see the French about it.

I have not said anything about it to army commander, but I know he will be very upset if the liaison is not good + the French have cause for complaint for any failure on our part.²⁹⁴

Despite this secretive approach, Lambert ended up discussing the issue with Rawlinson on the morning of 13 August where the events were explained. In addition to this discussion Lambert wrote to Montgomery later that day:

I was as much distressed as any one could be when I heard that it was thought by Genl. MATHIEU that there had been any failure as a result of lack of proper liaison, especially as I have been in action so many times now alongside the French Army, though I have not met Genl. MATHIEU personally.

²⁹³ IWM, 80/10/2, Major-General T.S. Lambert, 'Report on Action of 32nd Division on 10th + 11th "18"', Falls Letter, 11 August 1918

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 'Report on Action of 32nd Division on 10th + 11th "18"', Montgomery Letter, 12 August 1918

The facts however are not at all as stated by FALLS. I enclose a statement of what occurred.²⁹⁵

The accompanying report gave a full and frank account of events relating to the liaison. In planning the attack on 11 August, Lambert indicated he expected the zero for the next day's attacks on Damery and Parvillers to be between 8am and 9am. Initial discussions with the 32nd Division's brigadiers led to an earlier 4.20am start time being set and sent out in 'Operation Order 189'. Owing to delays it was found to be impossible for 14 and 97 Brigades to be in position and ready to launch the attack at the original start time. Owing to a change in the location of the French 129 DI's HQ neither the original 'Operation Order No.189' nor the news that the start time was to be delayed reached them before they had issued their own orders. The French orders made no mention of their action being in anyway contingent upon those of the 32nd Division.²⁹⁶ Lambert argued that their start time of 5am was likely based on his verbal communication that the 32nd Division's attack would be delivered between 8am and 9am. At the heart of the problem lay the issue of what indication Lambert gave before the orders were published, and this was never recorded. Nevertheless the surviving documentation, the 'Operation Order No 189' and the French '*Ordre Particulier* No 8/OP' and '9/OP' do support Lambert's version over Falls's. What is more certain is that Falls was unaware of the heavy fighting the 32nd Division were engaged in on 11 August. His letter called into question the determination of the 32nd to carry out its attack.²⁹⁷ Lambert rightly pointed out the heavy casualties 14 and 97 Brigades had sustained and that he had effectively committed his remaining force to improve the position at the front.²⁹⁸ Lambert was understandably aggrieved:

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 'Report on Action of 32nd Division on 10th + 11th "18"', Lambert Letter, 13 August 1918

²⁹⁶ Ibid., '*Ordre Particulier* No. 8/OP; No.9/OP'. The orders do cover the boundary lines between the two formations and they emphasise that liaison with the 32nd Division on the left is maintained. For 'Operation Order No.189' see TNA, WO 95/2372 32nd Div. General Staff, August 1918, 'Operation Order No.189', Appendix 6.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 'Report on Action of 32nd Division on 10th + 11th "18"', Falls Letter, 11 August 1918

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 'Report on Action of 32nd Division on 10th + 11th "18"', Lambert Letter, 13 August 1918

After you have read what I have written I hope you will agree that FALLS owes an explanation to my Division. No one has seen this correspondence but McNAMARA and myself. No one else need see what he writes, but I cannot think that it is the duty of a liaison officer to allow such ideas to get into the head of a French Commander (and apparently almost to encourage them) behind my back.²⁹⁹

The 32nd Division's GOC concluded his letter by informing Montgomery that he had visited General Mathieu and explained his side of events. Beyond this letter there was no further correspondence preserved.

The incident demonstrates that liaison even in 1918 was a fractious and difficult task. What was perhaps an honest mistake or miscommunication had ramifications that prompted Montgomery and Lambert to bury the paperwork relating to the event. Rawlinson was evidently brought into the loop in a conference but the issue itself was handled between Montgomery, Lambert and Mathieu. The file containing the letters depicting the event had a note on the front: 'Private correspondence to be kept in case the subject should ever crop up again – Not to be referred to in any history unless absolutely necessary. TSL.'³⁰⁰ There were clearly some matters that were knowingly withheld from the historical record by their omission from the war diaries, and no hint of this breakdown in liaison can be found in any of the 32nd Division's official documents held at the National Archives. Did this weaken the system of appraisal? In this instance it is difficult to see how open discussion would have benefited anyone. A French General casting doubts upon the sacrifices made by a British division and a liaison officer who was, perhaps unknowingly, overstepping his remit would have only increased the already uneasy working relationship. Despite this temporary breakdown, liaison was generally functional, but mutual suspicion existed within the two armies well into the last year of the war. Tactical appraisal of French methods certainly occurred, and brought with it some

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 'Report on Action of 32nd Division on 10th + 11th "18"', handwritten note initialled TSL.

significant benefits, yet this was generally a complementary influence that reinforced existing British lines of thought. The liaison in 1917 worked effectively during a period of rapid forward movement, but it was a fragile system which could easily be strained by fratricide or a single officer with the wrong idea.

3.2 Divisional Structure and Learning in 1917 and 1918

After 1916 change in the divisional command and learning structure was one of refinement not overhaul. The principles of decentralisation to the man-on-the-spot had been right in theory but poorly implemented in practice. 1917 would mark a significant improvement in this respect. A large part of this improvement can be attributed to new personnel who were more willing to make decisions when necessary.³⁰¹ Artillery which had hitherto focused on destructive bombardments, wire-cutting and interdiction greatly improved its counter-battery focus.³⁰² The challenges of positional and semi-open warfare in 1918 placed strains upon the system, but ultimately it held together. This section will first look at the doctrinal changes that occurred in the winter of 1916/1917 and assess how well these were implemented, while considering the issue of training alongside it, before looking more broadly at whether the decentralised command system was improved. The effects of structural change in 1917 and 1918 will be assessed, after which the artillery's improvements and the feedback system's refinement will be scrutinised.

Doctrine and Training

In December 1916 SS 135 was published and disseminated throughout the BEF. This later went

³⁰¹ This aspect is considered in greater detail in chapters five and six.

³⁰² As a development mainly at the corps level this is not covered here, but the best account of this development can be found in: Albert Palazzo, 'The British Army's Counter-Battery Staff Office and Control of the Enemy in World War I' in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 63: No. 1 (Jan, 1999), pp.55-74

through one amendment in August 1917 and two significant re-writes in January 1918 and November 1918. As has already been shown in the previous chapter, many of the lessons inculcated in SS 135 were already being advocated by the formations on the ground. Nevertheless it is worth looking at the evolution of this document as evidence of the BEF incorporating the non-canonical lessons from the front into its broader doctrine. As stated earlier, the more prescriptive doctrine published in the form of manuals and pamphlets was not intended to supersede *FSR I*, rather it gave more firmly prescriptive guidelines on how best to prepare and train a division for offensive action. That the essence of *FSR I* was preserved can be seen in the guidelines given for the employment of reserves:

The man on the spot is the best man to judge when the situation is favourable for pushing on, and higher Commanders in rear must be prepared to support the man on the spot to the fullest extent by adjusting the movements of the Artillery barrage and bombardment and by continually pushing forward Reserves.³⁰³

Furthermore, the manual went on to address the rushed renewal of offensives which had little chance of succeeding without adequate preparation; a major issue on the Somme:

In the case of a total failure, where pressure from the flanks has failed to improve the situation, it is a waste of men to put in fresh troops, hurriedly, to make another assault without any further Artillery preparation, or to attempt a second attack with troops who have already failed. Where an attack has failed after the most careful preparations have been made, it is not reasonable to expect that a second attack launched without any further preparation is likely to succeed.³⁰⁴

The ill-co-ordinated attacks such as those conducted by the 16/LF on Thiepval on 1 July were now

³⁰³ SS 135, *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* (December, 1916) p.22

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.22

opposed in doctrine. Where there was partial success the manual emphasised reinforcement and attacking on the flanks.³⁰⁵ This advice remained in place throughout the various war-time iterations of SS 135 and was highlighted in the Kirke Report in 1932.³⁰⁶ Another key area where British doctrine rapidly caught up with practice was on the issue of infantry-artillery liaison. Brigadier-General Jardine's method of the infantry waiting closely behind the curtain of shell fire became a tenet for the BEF:

Success in recent operations has been due, more than to anything else, to the Infantry keeping close up to the Artillery barrage, and entering the enemy's trenches immediately the barrage lifts from these trenches, and before the hostile garrison have time to man their defences.³⁰⁷

This policy suited 1917; 'the zenith of destruction' as Jonathan Bailey memorably described it.³⁰⁸ Nevertheless at the end of the year the section was expanded to add greater emphasis on the infantry's ability to progress using its own fire-power:

It can never be possible to guarantee that every machine gun emplacement shall have been destroyed prior to the assault, however thorough the work of reconnaissance may have been, and however accurate the artillery fire.

At the same time, the barrage may fail, and the infantry must at once resort to their own weapons to continue the attack.³⁰⁹

This advice tallied well with the increasingly sophisticated guidance being given to commanders at

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.22

³⁰⁶ TNA, WO 33/1297, *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War (The Kirke Report)* p.19; in recent years this report has gone missing from The National Archives. Thankfully it has been published in *The British Army Review*, Special Edition (April, 2001) and a copy exists in the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Library.

³⁰⁷ SS 135, *Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* (December, 1916) p.4

³⁰⁸ Jonathan Bailey, 'British Artillery in the Great War' in Paddy Griffith, *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, Frank Cass, 1996) p.35

³⁰⁹ SS 135, *The Training and Employment of Divisions, 1918*, (January, 1918) p.8

the lowest tactical levels. As shown in the Somme case study, the BEF were making concerted efforts to incorporate and utilise new forms of infantry fire-power. Rifle grenades, Stokes mortars and Lewis guns were seen even in 1916 as pivotal to the infantry's ability to push on against an entrenched enemy. This was increasingly enshrined in doctrine. SS 143 *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917*, published in February 1917, reorganised infantry sections into rifle, bomb, Lewis gun and rifle grenade specialisms reflecting the added fire power available to the infantry.³¹⁰

It has been shown that the recognition of the utility of the bomb, Lewis gun and rifle grenade predated 1917, but when it came to the actual implementation of the new organisation within the 32nd Division there was a significant delay. The manual was published and distributed on 7 February 1917 but it would be 21 April before the 32nd Division had a chance to fully implement it across their three brigades.³¹¹ The division's involvement in renewed attacks on the Somme in early February, line holding in late February and in the pursuit of the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line gave them little time to switch to the new organisation. The division did attempt to bring in aspects that did not require a period out of the line to train new specialists. The new attack formation was laid down in a divisional order on 26 February along with instructions that it was 'to be practised by companies, and by Battalions, and thoroughly understood by all officers and N.C.Os.'³¹² Thus, when it was implemented differed between brigades. In 14 Brigade, 5/6/R.Scots's records suggest that they began at least preparing for the process of reorganisation once they were relieved on 6 April 1917. Three days of training followed on 9, 10, and 11 April. During this time the battalion focused on the training of specialists, close order drill under platoon commanders and conducted a practice attack.³¹³ On 23 April, 5/6/R.Scots began a further period of training focusing

³¹⁰ SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917*, (February, 1917) p.6

³¹¹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 21-30 April 1917

³¹² Ibid., April 1917, 'Training', Appendix 38, p.3

³¹³ TNA, WO 95/2392 5/6 Battalion Royal Scots, 9-11 April 1917

on the organisation of companies, platoon drill and 'standard form of attack'. The training of specialists was also continued.³¹⁴ This latter period was specifically earmarked by the division to implement SS 143's prescribed organisation. The divisional order instructing the collective training of specialists in line with the manual's principles was sent on 18 April 1917.³¹⁵ 14 Brigade's war diary confirms this was carried out: 'The [training] scheme adopted insured that all ranks were with their Coys until 11am when specialist training commenced. Units had to reorganise and train in accordance with O.B. 1919'³¹⁶ The other two brigades also implemented the new organisation at the end of April with 96 Brigade beginning on 23 April and 97 Brigade starting their training period on 20 April.³¹⁷ It is easy to see doctrine like the SS pamphlets as marking immediate watershed points when processes were changed, but in practice this was not wholly accurate. It took nearly two months for the 32nd Division to implement the new platoon structure in its entirety. Specialists needed training and enough time had to be found to suitably equip and practice in the new organisation. The new attack formations were distributed sooner and would play a part in the capture of the guns near Francilly-Selency by 2/Manchesters on 2 April 1917.³¹⁸ That the implementation was delayed testifies to the division's heavy involvement in operations in early 1917, but also that central doctrine was implemented on the ground. It took time but it did shape operations.

Training was a central component of implementing doctrine, so it is worth looking at what the division focused on when it trained. Despite manuals like SS 135 and SS 143 promoting new methods and tactical approaches the fundamental principles of training remained generally

³¹⁴ Ibid., 23 April 1917

³¹⁵ Ibid., April 1917, 'Training', Appendix 38, pp.2-3

³¹⁶ TNA, WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 22 April 1917: the full programme of training can be found in TNA, WO 95/2392 2 Battalion Manchester Regiment, Appendices

³¹⁷ TNA, WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 20 April 1917; WO 95/2399 97 Brigade Headquarters, 23 April 1917

³¹⁸ TNA, WO 95/2392 2 Battalion The Manchester Regiment, 'Handwritten Report', p.2 The report gives details of rushes and flanking movements entirely consistent with SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917* (February, 1917) pp.8-9

consistent. The 32nd Division and its brigades have left a record of a number of their training schemes, conference discussions and memoranda. From these it is possible to see certain changes and consistencies. Training altered at key moments to address the operational changes but the building blocks upon which these changes were made remained fundamentally the same. The pre-war principles along which training was organised were laid down in *Infantry Training, 1914*. The general principles laid out in this manual can be split into three different parts:

- i. The development of the soldierly spirit.
- ii. The training of the body.
- iii. Training in the use of rifle, bayonet and spade.³¹⁹

By developing the 'soldierly spirit' the British Army could rely on its troops to be able to 'bear fatigue, privation, and danger cheerfully'.³²⁰ It was also expected to 'imbue him with a sense of honour; to give him confidence in his superiors and comrades; to increase his powers of initiative, of self-confidence, and of self-restraint'.³²¹ It was pointless developing these alone, so pre-war doctrine demanded that physical training be conducted to 'develop in the soldier a capacity for resisting fatigue and privation.' In much the same fashion as *FSR I*, it is easy to see this as supporting Travers's idea of the 'psychological battlefield' yet the importance of fire-power remained as integrally tied to the soldierly spirit and physical capacity as in other military manuals:

The soldier should be made to understand at all periods of his training how the various parts of his course of instruction fit him for his duties in war. In particular, the close connection between musketry and manoeuvre must be emphasised.³²²

³¹⁹ General Staff, *Infantry Training, 1914 (4-Company Organization)* (London, HMSO, 1914) p.1

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p.2

³²² *Ibid.*, p.3

This was greatly developed later in the manual where fire control discipline and formations were discussed.³²³ These basic principles of training emphasising mind, body and skill were fleshed out through practical discussion of how training was overseen in peace and in war. The latter half of the manual covers a number of the principles required in war, very much akin to *FSR I's* approach. In the first half of the manual the process of splitting the year between individual and collective training was set forth.³²⁴ Upon the outbreak of war circumstances demanded that this be replaced by a rapid system of training over ten weeks that developed basic skills and building up towards unit and formation training.³²⁵ This still reflected the fundamental split between the individual and the collective but in a much more condensed time frame. The dual approach would be the basis for much of the divisional training between 1916 and 1918 in 32nd Division, although the distinction became blurred. During the April 1917 training period that implemented the SS 143 organisation, a period of intense collective training, an hour and a half each morning was spent developing individual skills either through physical training, musketry or bayonet fighting.³²⁶ In terms of collective training a far greater emphasis on tactical understanding was made. In 1916 tactical schemes were used to test officers on their tactical understanding.³²⁷ These continued to be an important method of tactical development but in 1917 a greater emphasis was placed on confronting officers with unexpected situations.³²⁸ With the BEF switching to a defensive stance in the winter of 1917-1918 the 32nd Division found itself having to rapidly familiarise itself with defensive methods. DHQ laid out the principles that the formation was to train along: interlocking strong-points, defence-in-depth, no retirement under any circumstances from strong-points, and local counter-

³²³ Ibid., pp.122-130

³²⁴ Ibid., pp.7-8

³²⁵ Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising and Training of the New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1988) p.296

³²⁶ TNA, WO 95/2392 2 Battalion The Manchester Regiment, April 1917, '14th Brigade Training Programme (from 23rd to 25th April inclusive)'; WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917, 'Training', Appendix 38 shows these 'new' forms of training were incorporated into 'collective training' which followed the same principles as established in General Staff, *Infantry Training, 1914* (1914). It was different in name only.

³²⁷ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 6 September 1916

³²⁸ TNA, WO 95/2397 2nd Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 24 April 1917; WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1917, 'Notes on a Conference Held at 32nd Division Headquarters on 27th, July 1917', Appendix 35

attacks once the enemy had been checked.³²⁹ The lack of understanding of 'elastic defence in depth' will be covered later, but here it is worthwhile noting that tactical training was closely mirroring the operational realities the army found itself in, and as a result increased in significance.

Despite more closely defined tactical advice as the conduct of the war evolved, the fundamental principles were never truly eclipsed. In January 1918, the 32nd Division commander, Major-General Cameron Shute, sent a training memorandum to his brigades. It read:

On different parts of the front, officers and men have latterly in some cases failed to grasp the enormous stopping power of the Rifle and the Machine Gun in the hands of determined men. Positions have been abandoned and the garrisons have surrendered when they could perfectly well have held out till relieved by the counter-attack.

The traditions and exploits of British Infantry must be explained to all ranks.

It is want of confidence in themselves and in their weapons – not want of courage – which is the trouble.³³⁰

The idea that tradition and 'soldierly spirit' would bolster the fighting performance of the men in battle was never discarded; it remained a core principle in doctrine and practice.³³¹ The building blocks of the training system for the 32nd Division were the three general principles as laid out in *Infantry Training, 1914*. These did not remain in isolation. In the same fashion as *FSR I*'s principles, they were built upon using the practical experience of combat. As the tactics, weaponry and operational conditions changed so too did the aspects stressed in training. After the experiences on the Somme in 1916 the 32nd Division established a temporary divisional training 'school' at Ferfay

³²⁹ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, 'Defensive Training'

³³⁰ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, 'Defensive Training', Appendix, p.2

³³¹ SS 143 *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917*, (February, 1917) p.11; SS 143 *Platoon Training, 1918* (1918) p.20

providing courses of instruction for men and officers away from their units.³³² This was one method of circumventing the lack of time to train when the formation was required to do front line duty. The courses varied but 'musketry' and 'physical training + bayonet fighting' were regular, short duration options. In addition to these: Lewis gunnery, cookery, bombing, Stokes mortars, anti-gas, sniping, field engineering and an 'Officers [sic] Course, General Instruction' were available.³³³

The mix of specialist and practical tutelage reflected an increasing need to make training more practical and tailored to the weapons that were being used. It is difficult to track what specific guidance was given on these 32nd Division courses but surviving field pocket books of soldiers suggests mnemonics played a large role in the more technical courses of instruction. Clifford Platt, 19/LF was taught fire-control with the mnemonic ROARS:- 'Range (always first), Object, Aim (point of), Rounds (number of), Speed (rapid or "fire")'³³⁴ Similar methods were used outside of the 32nd Division, Captain G. A. Potts (11/LF, 75 Brigade, 25 Division) used a lettering system to remember key concepts 'Appreciation of the Situation' under initials: OMFWRITECP he had object, orders, military situation, factors bearing on the situation, weather – ground; rivers roads affected, Relative strength – guns, machine guns, rifles, initiative, and information including sources and what is not known, terrain and time of year; crops and open or closed country, enemy object, courses available, and plan.³³⁵ While it lacked the punch of ROARS it was a similar method of remembering key pieces of information. For other technical courses such as the Lewis gun or musketry the weight of the gun (both loaded and empty) were given as well as the sustained fire

³³² School is how DHQ described it, but it is a confusing term. While DHQ set-up the training area along the lines of a school they differed significantly in one key respect: GHQ, Army or Corps schools ran through active operations while divisional areas closed once the formation moved. They ran classes/courses of instruction which generally focused on improving personnel while the higher formations trained instructors. See SS 152, *Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France* (June, 1917) pp.4-5

³³³ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 22 July 1916 – 14 October 1916; see particularly: 12, 14 and 20 September 1916

³³⁴ IWM, 78/62/1, Lt C. L. Platt, *Pocket Book*, July 1915

³³⁵ IWM, 94/23/1, Captain G.A. Potts, *Pocket Book*, 13 November 1917

capabilities, field of fire at 1000 yards, and most effective employment.³³⁶ The courses set had an overall outcome. For the musketry course the aim was to 'make a war shot' which required obedience to fire orders, without reloading, fire at all set targets and kill on command, all done at the range of 350 yards.³³⁷ This was a sensible system that melded practical and technical experience, while the setting of a desired outcome gave the training a defined benchmark for success or failure. At the other end of the spectrum were courses such as the visual observation course. The programme of tuition has survived for 11-17 January 1918 course, and was constructed in a sensible fashion blending lectures and practical experience. It began with an introductory lecture on observation, with lectures later on the first day covering telescopes and protractors. This was broken up by two hours practice in the construction of observation posts. As the course continued the range of skills were broadened bringing in lectures on taking bearings, the use of the prismatic compass, report writing, map making and contours. These were coupled with practical exercises on testing and using compasses, night work, sketching maps, and observation practice. The course was concluded with a revision lecture and a final observation practice.³³⁸ This sensible mix of practical and theoretical helped to avoid boredom which was increasingly becoming a concern. In February 1918 the detailed report on a raid carried out on the night of the 18th/19th February south of the Houthulst Forest concluded: 'In the above connection it may be mentioned that drill and practice out of the line for attacks is apt to be overdone and that men get stale and their enthusiasm wanes if kept waiting too long for the day.'³³⁹ While the specific effects of anticipation and planning were different the fears stemmed from the same problem of apathy towards training. Courses and preparation needed to be engaging lest they fail to bring about any noticeable improvements. Nonetheless, the amount of training that needed to be done meant some courses

³³⁶ Ibid., *Pocket Book*, 13 November 1917

³³⁷ Ibid., *Pocket Book*, 13 November 1917

³³⁸ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, 'Programme of Divisional Observation Course 11th - 17th January 1918', Appendix 12.

³³⁹ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, February 1918, 'Report on Raids South of Houthulst Forest, carried out by 32nd Division February 18th/19th 1918', p.9

would not be a success.

The results of these training courses were not always as positive as would have been hoped for by DHQ. James Murray, an instructor for the HLI reserve units who would later serve with 17 and 15/HLI in 32nd Division, wrote after the war: 'Many a time, after I became an instructor, I was greatly puzzled at how difficult it was to teach seemingly intelligent men.'³⁴⁰ He was not overly impressed by the quality of marksmanship on the Western Front either. When discussing the reason he never used his talents in the front line he commented that fire-orders had to be given otherwise positions were given away, but he suspected an ulterior motive:

There was a great deal of truth in the reason proffered, but my own conclusion is the authorities knew ammunition would only have been wasted. The vast majority of men could not have hit a barn door at fifty yards, far less hit a man.³⁴¹

The issue of musketry was raised in a divisional conference in January 1918, suggesting Murray's conclusions probably had some merit:

Musketry. Men must have confidence in their rifles not only at 50 or 100 but at 400 yards.

Men must be taught Rapid Fire.

Men must realise the power of the rifle and that a few determined men can hold up any attack.

The first duty of a soldier is to shoot at a target that he can see, and not call for Vickers and Lewis

³⁴⁰ IWM, P457, J Murray, *To Passchendaele and Back* [unpublished, undated] p.57

³⁴¹ Ibid., p.150

Guns that have their allotted tasks.³⁴²

This problem had deeper origins. On 20 July 1917 DHQ sent a memorandum out to all brigades pushing for better musketry results. Tedium was a significant enemy: 'During all musketry instruction whether it takes place on the range or parade ground the mens [sic] interest must be stimulated.'³⁴³ The memo went on to discuss basic principles and set a standard of expectation for the division: 'a good shot can kill a man at 1,000 yards a fair shot at 500 yards.'³⁴⁴ The solution to boredom was imagination and competition, in January 1918 DHQ recommended: 'Training must be made more interesting. More imagination and enterprise required. Construction of Strong Points in the snow. Snow-ball battles.'³⁴⁵ Additionally platoon competitions were practised.³⁴⁶ The idea of competition as a means of motivation has been considered more fully, and in its most extreme form, in chapter six.

Irrespective of the success or failure of musketry standards, marksmanship, physical drill and bayonet use remained core components of divisional training throughout the war. They were no longer the central aspect, as the war progressed so too did the methods. Specialisms gained greater prominence, especially after April 1917 while the practical aspects of training took on a far larger role than the moral based principles that existed pre-war. Doctrine in the BEF between 1916 and 1918 filled the gap between practised methods tested on the ground by experience and standardised methods to be employed across the Army. These often took time to implement owing to practical factors but they show the BEF to be an organisation that reacted to the experience of its soldiers.

³⁴² TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, *Conference held at Divisional Headquarters. January 8th, 1918* Appendix 8.

³⁴³ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1917 'G.S. 1246/7/3' Appendix 25

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁴⁵ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, 'Conference held at Divisional Headquarters. January 8th, 1918', Appendix 8.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 'Conference held at Divisional Headquarters. January 8th 1918' Appendix 8. These had been practised at points earlier in the war but were generally left *ad hoc* for battalions to implement, see TNA, WO 95/2397 2nd Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, 31 April 1917 note.

Training followed a similar pattern to doctrine in that it was initially drawn along principled lines which were developed throughout the war to incorporate new methods. Moral aspects retained their importance throughout the war but were supplemented by increased emphasis on tactics and specialisms in both a collective and individual sense. The overall effectiveness of training is difficult to discern but the evidence suggests that the 32nd Division's musketry never hit the expected level required by its commanders. Training courses were sensibly constructed, while officers employed a number of intelligent methods of learning the materials both inside and outside of 32nd Division. The issue of boredom remained a concern, but there was an increasing emphasis on finding imaginative and interesting methods to puncture it. Overall, doctrine and training fits broadly into the wider pattern of doctrine and organisation. Pre-war principles remained at the heart of recommendations but as lessons were learnt new, more prescriptive aspects were taught alongside the core ideals.

Improvements in Decentralisation

The command system on 1 July 1916 was paralysed by the inability of the senior commanders to make a timely decision in a dispassionate fashion. Swayed by the opinions of Brigadier-General Yatman, and the scraps of supporting evidence, repeat assaults were attempted that stood little chance of success. A few isolated commanders felt comfortable exercising their initiative and altering pre-set plans but on the whole most did what they could within the boundaries of the orders received. Under Gough the 32nd Division was subjected to a commander of a completely different disposition. Rawlinson's delegation was replaced by Gough's micro-management, which led Lt-Col E.G. Wace, GSO1, to conclude 'Rycroft did not in effect command the 32nd Div that day!' He was referring to the 32nd Division's attack on the Munich and Frankfort trenches on 18 November 1916, which was conducted using all four battalions of 97 Brigade. The principle of delegation to the

man-on-the-spot evaporated for the 32nd Division under Gough. Some gains were made but the attack ended in the costly isolation of British troops in advanced positions in the German lines cut off from supply and rescue.³⁴⁷ Brigadier-General Jardine was under no illusions what had led to the failure to achieve at least one of the objectives set: 'I am of opinion [sic] that the important objective of the 2nd K.O.Y.L.I. Would have been taken and held had I possessed a reserve in BEAUCOURT trench, but my orders were to put my whole Brigade into the attack.'³⁴⁸ After the failure of 18 November the leadership of the division was gutted: Major-General Rycroft was removed and replaced by Major-General R.W.R. Barnes on 21 November, Brigadier-General Compton 14 Infantry Brigade was transferred to 111 Infantry Brigade, being replaced by Brigadier-General Seymour on 22 November 1916; Brigadier-General Yatman was relieved of his command on 24 November being replaced by Lt-Col A.E. Glasgow (8/R Sussex) and E.G. Wace was replaced as GSO1 on 27 November 1916 by Lt-Col A.E.McNamara (Queen's), formerly GSO2 9th Division. Glasgow's appointment was temporary and on 4 December 1917 he was replaced by Brigadier-General L.F. Ashburner, while Major-General Barnes returned to Britain sick to be replaced by Major-General C.D. Shute on 19 February 1917.³⁴⁹ It was an inauspicious end to what had been an *annus horribilis* for the 32nd Division, but in spite of the wholesale changes the division did make significant improvements in which decentralised command played an increasingly important role.

It is not necessary to go through each engagement that the 32nd Division undertook after the personnel changes, but there were a number of occasions that demonstrate the increased ability of the 32nd Division to handle and utilise the decentralised command structure. When the German *MarineKorps Flandern* launched the spoiling attack, Operation *Strandfest*, near Nieuport on 10 July

³⁴⁷ For a full narrative see Simkins, 'Somme footnote: the Battle of the Ancre and the struggle for Frankfort Trench, November 1916' in *Imperial War Museum Review*, No.9 (1994) pp.84-101

³⁴⁸ WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, November 1916, 'Report on Operations of 97th Infantry Brigade 18th November, 1918' p.3

³⁴⁹ Lt Col Glasgow went on to command 58 Infantry Brigade in the 19th (Western) Division. Barnes did not command the 32nd Division's one major attack on 10 February 1917 either, he was away from the division leaving CRA Brigadier-General J.A. Tyler (R.A.) in temporary command.

1917 97 Brigade came under heavy attack. The artillery fire and sandy terrain meant that communications were quickly severed. Rather than attempt to control the flow of battle directly authority quickly passed down the chain of command. Shute delegated command over the use of one battalion of the division's reserve brigade to 97 Brigade's Brigadier-General Cyril Aubrey Blacklock.³⁵⁰ He called upon this reserve but actions in the front line were largely being co-ordinated by Lt-Col Girdwood, CO 11/Borders. It was Girdwood who heard first at 7.45pm that the Germans had launched an attack. Rather than delay and gain confirmation from brigade he immediately ordered two companies of 17/HLI who had been sent up in support earlier to prepare a counter-attack.³⁵¹ The 11/Borders launched local counter-attacks with some initial success but they were steadily driven back to the third line positions thereafter. Meanwhile the third company of 17/HLI was delayed moving up to the front but once it arrived attacks were made through the night until the 11/Borders had regained the second line.³⁵² The 32nd Division 'Report on the Operations' reserved special praise for the actions of Girdwood and his troops:

The troops which carried out this attack had been exposed to intense shell fire all day. The reinforcing company had lost over half its numbers in moving up through the enemy's barrage, and the organisation of a counter-attack in the turmoil of the bombardment and necessary confusion of the battle was not easy.

Despite these conditions the troops advanced from NASAL TRENCH [third line] towards NOSE SUPPORT [second line] with great determination and considerable skill. They advanced methodically under their own covering fire, and the enemy encountered between NOSE SUPPORT

³⁵⁰ This is covered in greater detail in chapter six. For delegation down to brigade see TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Record of Telegraph and Telephone Messages - 10th and 11th July 1917', message 52, 4.30.p.m., to 96th & 97th Bdes. The battalion in question, from the division's reserve brigade, was the 16/NF.

³⁵¹ TNA, WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, July 1917 'Report on Operations in Nieuport Area 8/11th July 1917'.

³⁵² John W. Arthur and Ion S. Munro, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Battalion): Record of War Service 1914-1918* (Glasgow, David J. Clark, 1920) p.63

and NASAL TRENCH fell back before them carrying their wounded away with them.³⁵³

The battalion managed to hold the third line, Nasal Trench, but could only establish posts in the second line.³⁵⁴ The actions were a marked contrast to 1 July 1916. With only a defence scheme to guide his actions Girdwood managed to co-ordinate a number of counter-attacks that stabilised an incredibly difficult situation. The use of covering fire from Lewis guns and Stokes mortars allowed the infantry of the 11/Borders and later the 17/HLI to advance using their own fire-power. The doctrine of SS 143 was being put into practice.

The improving trend towards decentralisation would continue into 1918. At 2 am on 3 April 1918 two battalions of 14 Brigade and one of 96 Brigade launched an attack on the village of Ayette south of Arras. At zero the 31st and 34th Division's artillery, under the command of Brigadier-General J.A. Tyler - 32nd Division CRA, fired a 'slow' creeping barrage on the village of Ayette.³⁵⁵ There was no preparatory bombardment; the maintenance of surprise was considered vital. Meanwhile the heavy artillery of both IV Corps and VI Corps co-operated, bombarding the rear areas for the duration of the attack with both HE and gas. Additionally machine gun barrages were organised. At zero the attacking companies swept through the village while the rear waves 'mopped up'. The attack on the village was a complete success. Ayette was garrisoned by a battalion of German infantry and a machine gun company and it had been captured by 5 Companies with an average strength of 85 men. The success came at the cost of 126 men but it paled in comparison to the German losses which were approximately triple that total.³⁵⁶ Many of the Germans were initially caught unprepared in their cellars and dug-outs, but quickly rallied to provide significant

³⁵³ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on the Operations on the 32nd Division front on July 10th 1917', Part IV p.10

³⁵⁴ TNA, WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, July 1917 'Report on Operations in Nieuport Area 8/11th July 1917'.

³⁵⁵ TNA, WO 95/2393 15th Battalion Highland Light Infantry, April 1918, 'Report on Operations carried out by the 15th Batt HLI on night of 2nd/3rd April 1918'

³⁵⁶ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1918, 'Capture of Ayette Report on Operations. Night. 2nd/3rd April 1918. 32nd Division'. p.10

resistance in places. At two levels the brigade played a key role in the organisation and conduct of the attack. Primarily the job of co-ordinating the preparations fell on Brigadier-Generals F.W. Lumsden V.C., commanding 14 Brigade and A.C. Girdwood, commanding 96 Brigade.³⁵⁷ As 15/HLI's war diary made clear: 'The arrangements for artillery and M.G. Support were most carefully made by 14th Inf Bde and these arrangements made known to all ranks.'³⁵⁸ Moreover, Lumsden consulted Lt-Col V.B. Ramsden commanding 15/HLI who had a significant say in the methods employed on the day.³⁵⁹ On the ground the troops also exercised considerable initiative. When a machine gun held up the final consolidation of the village, 15/HLI committed their reserve company and with the extra weight of fire were able to flank and rush the position.³⁶⁰ The role the junior officers and NCOs played in the battle was highlighted by both Lumsden and Shute in their reports:

The success of the operation was, in my opinion, entirely due to the dash, determination and fine fighting qualities displayed by the three attacking Companies of the 15th H.L.I., and especially to the way in which the leading platoons of these Companies carried out the role allotted them, namely to push right on to the final objective, close under the barrage, dealing only with machine guns or enemy posts directly obstructing their advance, and leaving all mopping up to be carried out by the rear platoons.³⁶¹

This was a classic example of 'infiltration' tactics. It is not just the tactical sophistication that is worthy of remark. The lower level leaders on the ground proved able to handle unexpected complications in a rapid and successful fashion. The quality of leadership by officers is alluded to in

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p.11

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 3 April 1918

³⁵⁹ IWM, 95/16/1, Captain J.G. Stephen; WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1918, 'Capture of Alette...' p.11

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 'Report on Operations: 2nd/3rd April 1918'

³⁶¹ Ibid., 'Capture of Alette by 14th Infantry Brigade on night 2/3rd April, 1918'. This comment was lifted directly and placed in Shute's report, see TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1918, 'Capture of Alette Report on Operations. Night. 2nd/3rd April 1918. 32nd Division'. p.10

the account of Captain J.G. Stephen who recalled the Ayette attack after the war:

On his return [from Brigade] Colonel Ramsden reported this interview [with Lumsden] in detail at a meeting of all his officers and invited suggestions starting with the most junior officer who proposed 2.15am as zero hour as he had never heard of an attack starting near that time, and it seemed to be about the greatest difficulty in keeping alert and therefore the best time to effect surprise. Also the light that morning would have been very suitable at that hour. This met with universal approval.³⁶²

While the accuracy of the source can be brought into question, the consultative process depicted is suggestive of the greater degree of competence found at the lower levels by 1918. Irrespective of whether Stephen gave the junior officers too much credit for coming up with the planning ideas, the very act of remembering demonstrates the greater confidence in their capabilities at this stage of the war.

It would be too easy to depict this development as the cause of the more consistent successes, but 1918 saw a general decline in quality at these lower levels as the attrition of the Hundred Days took hold.³⁶³ Nonetheless consultation became a method of encouraging good practices and promoting initiative among the junior officers and NCOs. After the 32nd Division was engaged in the last two days of the Battle of Amiens and later in subsequent Fourth Army operations near Péronne and Mont St.Quentin, Major-General Lambert, then commanding the division after Shute's promotion to V Corps, reflected upon the lessons learnt:

The greatest service that junior Officers and N.C.Os. can give is to be constantly on the look-out for chances of pushing on, of marking down enemy Machine Guns, etc, of rounding them up and of

³⁶² IWM, 95/16/1, Captain J.G. Stephen

³⁶³ For an in-depth analysis of this see Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012) *passim*.

putting forward suggestions for future action or for improving their position. We want to avoid “set-piece” attacks with barrages, or at least to keep them till we have definitely located a really strong line of resistance, something beyond a few Machine guns and a few hundred infantry.³⁶⁴

Decentralisation had reached a point where subordinates felt involved with the decision making process. The pre-war ideal of fulfilling the obligation and duty of the order only in the circumstances where it was actually applicable and correct to do so were being realised. The decline in troop quality in 1918 did pose a problem at the tactical level, which was addressed in lesson learnt reports. Yet even with this decline, in the final major engagement of the war 96 Brigade was content to radically change its orders to cross the Sambre-Oise canal using the neighbouring 14 Brigade's bridges instead of attempting to force the crossing at a much greater cost of life.³⁶⁵ It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a core part of the problem with the command system in 1916 was the personnel. Decentralisation of command and control when used later in the war was much more effective. Even as the quality of troops declined in summer-autumn 1918 the inclusiveness and consultation made the likelihood of subordinates exercising their initiative far greater.

Structure and Assessment

This final section will look at how the 32nd Division attempted to improve its feedback procedures and adapted to structural issues. The division proved to be able to rapidly adjust its structure in a limited manner without too much disruption, yet when larger reorganisations occurred problems did arise. The feedback system remained largely intact and subject to the same problems as in 1916. Nonetheless, measures were taken to furnish more accurate specific information and the calibre of

³⁶⁴ TNA, WO 95/2372 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Some Lessons from Recent Fighting 8th to 11th Aug. 18th Aug. to 12th Sept., 1918', Appendix 36

³⁶⁵ TNA, WO 95/2373 32nd Div. General Staff, November 1918, 'Narrative of Battle of 4th November and Events leading up to it' pp.4-5

analysis saw a marked improvement in the subsequent years.

In April 1917 the 32nd Division were without a Pioneer battalion. 17/NF were railway specialists created out of volunteers from the North-Eastern Railway and as part of a stuttering trend towards a more rational approach to labour allocation they became a Railway Construction Battalion in October 1916. They were briefly replaced by the 1/12 Loyals between November 1916 and January 1917 but by the time the German withdrawal occurred in mid-March the division was faced by an advance over desolated terrain and no pioneer battalion to handle any of the repairs. The solution reached by division was the creation of a 'Labour Company' for each infantry brigade. DHQ laid out specific criteria for the furnishing of these companies:

The Officers chosen should be Officers who have shewn little aptitude in a fight, but must be capable of commanding the Company and superintending work.

The men selected should be those who for one cause or another are no use in the front line, and who would welcome employment further back.

These men will be made to understand that any failure on their part to work hard will entail their returning to the front line.³⁶⁶

This was a sensible move responding to a deficiency in capability by withdrawing the worst men from the front lines. The rationale was clearly stated to all three brigades and the CRE:

In order to economise the energies of the fighting troops and to save Brigades as much as possible from being required to detail large working parties from their best fighting men, it has been decided to form a Labour Company in each Brigade composed of men of little value in the front line.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917, 'G.S. 939/0/5' Appendix 23

³⁶⁷ Ibid., Appendix 23

Structurally the labour companies fell under the auspices of DHQ who would then allot them to the CRE. If the infantry brigades wanted their labour for any specific task in their area they would need to apply to DHQ for their use. Moreover, these new labour companies had the benefit of being tied to both the infantry and the Royal Engineers, each new one being linked to an existing Field Company of Royal Engineers. 96 Brigade was supplied rations by 218th Field Company RE, 97 Brigade the 219th Field Company RE and 14 Brigade were linked to the 206th Field Company RE. In principle this organisation was an *ad hoc* response to a structural problem posed by the reorganisation of labour resources inside the army. Nonetheless, the solution reflected the willingness to adapt to circumstantial issues and as such should not be condemned. The idea reflected the thinking of officers who understood that the quality of fighting men was broad and certain men could be employed better in the rear. Lt-Col James Jack, then commanding 2/W. Yorks, implemented a similar system when ordered to create 'battle patrol platoons' which were units detailed to push beyond the battalion's final objective and seize points of tactical importance. Recognising the impracticality he filled the new units with men only suitable for fatigue work and so avoided lowering the quality of his existing platoons. In theoretical terms, Jack was using non-canonical methods to improve the overall efficiency within the battalion.³⁶⁸ Shute and DHQ were doing the same although through official channels. Somewhat unknowingly the division had incorporated non-canonical practice into canonical orders. The labour companies only lasted until September 1917 when the 17/NF briefly returned for a month but as a stop-gap measure it demonstrated how reactive the internal organisation of the division could be to its own needs.

This was not the only occasion the division implemented new structures as the circumstances demanded. The resumption of semi-open and open warfare during the Hundred Days saw the revival of the use of Brigade Groups. The basic structure of the brigade remained the same, but a

³⁶⁸ Terraine (ed.), *General Jack's Diary* (1964) pp.219-220

field ambulance, a company of 32nd Division's Machine Gun Battalion, a company of the Army Service Corps and a field company were attached making the formation more self-sustaining.³⁶⁹ The uptake of Brigade Groups coincided with 32nd Division's move to the IX Corps under Lt-Gen. Sir Walter Braithwaite on 11 September, yet prior to this delegation of command was already happening between the infantry and artillery. Batteries of the 32nd Division's RFA were pushed up to provide close support to the infantry; on 5 September 1918 for example, B battery of 168th Brigade RFA gave close support to the infantry crossing the Somme: 'They worked with the Infantry and by shelling a Copse which was full of the enemy they were instrumental to the capture of 20 of the enemy.' 32nd Division was still under the command of the Australian Corps to which they had been attached since 15 August 1918. The increased responsibility and units attached at brigade level was largely a product of recognition at the higher levels of command that they were passing between different phases of war. On 5 September 1918 the Australian Corps declared that 'open warfare conditions' prevailed and delegated command of the 21st Brigade Royal Garrison Artillery down to divisional level. This was a marked departure from corps control of the artillery which had prevailed since the winter of 1915.³⁷⁰ There is little evidence that in practical terms this delegation and decentralisation caused the 32nd Division any great administrative hardship.³⁷¹ Delegation and forward attachment of different arms was not a new phenomenon to the 32nd Division nor the BEF. In April 1917 batteries were again pushed forward rapidly to engage the enemy with direct fire during the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, while the general principle itself hearkened back to 1914.³⁷² This was not a prescriptive organisation thrust upon the division by a progressive thinking corps but a more general trend within higher command that recognised that particular circumstances required different approaches. Later during the Hundred Days the division would use more

³⁶⁹ TNA, WO 95/2372 32nd Div. General Staff, September 1918, Appendices *passim*.; for specific administrative orders associated with the new structure see WO 95/2391 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, September 1918, 'Administrative Orders for move of 14th Infantry Brigade to Athies Road', Appendix D

³⁷⁰ TNA, WO 95/2376 32nd Div. CRA, 5 September 1918

³⁷¹ Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front* (2013) p.208

³⁷² TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917, 'Report on Operations of the 32nd Division April 1st & April 2nd', p.17; Marble, *British Artillery on the Western Front* (2013) pp.231-232

traditional means of overcoming more substantial resistance, showing a remarkable level of organisational flexibility. 97 Brigade on 1 and 2 October employed creeping barrages in their assault on the Chataignies Wood position on the Beaurevoir – Fonsomme Line.³⁷³ The attacks themselves suffered from German counter-attacks from troops rapidly brought up by motor lorry forcing the brigade back. Irrespective of this, the speed with which the formations of the 32nd Division were able to switch between operational methods was noteworthy. By 1918 32nd Division and indeed the BEF was able to shift its organisation according to the operational needs at the time. This did not always guarantee victory, and there were failures. But in spite of that it remains an impressive achievement that such development could take place. This development owes much to the increased experience of the personnel within the division itself, but it is worth observing that *ad hoc* organisational change had occurred at points previously. The effects of these earlier shifts have been touched upon here, but are worthy of a study in their own right.³⁷⁴

The feedback system of the 32nd Division remained relatively static between 1916 and 1918. Reports remained of pivotal importance to the evaluation process. The 32nd Division did make some amendments to improve the quality of these reports and more effectively analyse what occurred once the troops had left the British lines. In 1917 more definite quantitative data was sought regarding the effects of the division's actions. After the attack on Savy the effects of the machine gun barrage were measured. The German dead were counted and the cause of death assessed. This was then conveyed in the division's final report: 'This attack was supported by 36 Machine Guns and a large number of Lewis guns. Of the 70 German dead counted in SAVY after the operation about 70% had been killed by machine gun fire.'³⁷⁵ This was no guarantee of consistent effectiveness but it was a definite progression from unsupported opinion from the front line. This

³⁷³ TNA, WO 95/2401 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 1 and 2 October 1918; see also Appendices

³⁷⁴ The lessons learnt from the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line would be an especially fruitful future area of research.

³⁷⁵ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917, 'Report on Operations of the 32nd Division April 1st & April 2nd', p.16

process was sustained where possible throughout Shute's tenure as GOC 32nd Division. This reached its apogee in February 1918 where the effects of the raid on 18/19 February were listed in detail. The German losses were divided into prisoners, bombed in dugouts and seen dead or wounded, lying dead or wounded by Artillery or rifle fire, and Germans killed by individuals.³⁷⁶ This was then broken down by the two brigades taking part and the disparities explored:

The difference in the casualties from artillery fire seen in the 96th and 97th Brigade areas may be accounted for by the facts:-

- (a) That there were many concrete Pill-boxes for the Germans to take shelter in from our bombardment in the 97th Brigade area but few in the 96th Brigade area.
- (b) That the area round RENARD FARM is a centre of much activity while the area round SURCOUFF FARM is lightly held.

These figures were then contrasted with the 32nd Division's own casualties. This more methodical approach was not so much a divisional improvement as it was linked to the style of leadership of Cameron Shute. While figures on the German dead were analysed under Lambert's tenure as GOC in 1918, they did not form the same bedrock of evidence as they did under Shute.³⁷⁷ That the improvement was forged as a result of Shute's personality can be seen in a letter he wrote to Edmonds after the war:

I am sending a return of casualties for 6 months which I had most carefully compiled day-by-day in 32nd Div. The proportion of wounds from arty fire to those by rifle & MG fire make one think. I don't know of any similar return. Please don't lose it and return when done with[,] as I have no copy.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, February 1918, 'Report on Raids South of Houthulst Forest, carried out by 32nd Division February 18th/19th, 1918', p.7

³⁷⁷ TNA, WO 95/2401 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 2 October 1918. This was probably as much to do with the remarkable circumstances as any lasting bureaucratic procedure.

³⁷⁸ TNA, CAB 45/187 Shute to Edmonds, 10 December 1930.

This record does not appear to have survived but its existence is demonstrative of the analytical approach the 32nd Division took under his command.

Interviews and information gathering became a key aspect of the feedback system under Shute's direction. Staff officers were pushed forward to aid the work of the brigade staffs during the German withdrawal. Shute concluded that:

This was found to work well, and having the additional Staff Officer at Brigade H.Q. enabled the Brigadier to send his Brigade Major to the Advanced Report Centre or to carry out any other reconnaissance or forward work which he might require him to do. It was also an effective method of liaison between Divisional and Brigade H.Q. As the G.S.O.2 was fully aware of the Divisional Commander's intentions and was able to keep Divisional H.Q. fully informed of the course of events...³⁷⁹

These added responsibilities shored up the communications system to a degree, although this was never fully solved, while also providing DHQ with reliable information about events at lower levels. This approach was complemented by a rigorous attitude to interviews. After the 32nd Division's night attack on the Passchendaele ridge on the night of the 2 December 1917 the events of the front line were confused and difficult to discern for the 32nd Division's commander. Consequently Shute drew on a number of sources of information. During the assault itself information was sent about the progress of the attack from interviews with injured soldiers conducted at the II Corps's dressing station. The information was of varying utility and sometimes contradictory but it was an active attempt to address the communication difficulties and gather a clearer picture of events more quickly.³⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the battle Shute attempted to

³⁷⁹ TNA, WO 95/69 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917, 'Report on Operations of the 32nd Division April 1st & April 2nd', p.17

³⁸⁰ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Telephone and Telegraph Messages 2nd December

disentangle the conflicting messages by collating reports and conducting interviews with officers involved in the attack.³⁸¹ This was not an easy task and the clarity of events remained somewhat obscure when Shute came to produce his own report.³⁸² This would be easier when repeated in other actions. After the Houthulst Forest raid on the night of 18 and 19 February 1918, Shute conducted interviews personally to gauge the loss to the division:

In order to get at a fair estimate of the total losses inflicted on the enemy the Divisional Commander personally interviewed all the Officers and men of all the raiding parties and after close investigation of their statements the following figures seem a fair estimate of the enemy's total losses.³⁸³

This was a time consuming process but the methodical approach provided the 32nd Division with a greater idea of how well they had done in the attack, where it went particularly well or badly and why. Once Shute was promoted this level of investigation ceased, returning to the original consultative style of feedback. Given the tempo of operations during the Hundred Days, it is unlikely that this empirical approach to evaluation would have been sustainable irrespective of who commanded 32nd Division.

Overall the feedback system was improved although this owed as much to Shute's leadership style than it did any broader institutional changes in method. Once he was promoted to V Corps the consultative approach returned drawing upon the experiences of DHQ's subordinate formations and units. This was perfectly functional and not inherently wrong, for it had the benefit of being a less time-consuming process and was almost certainly more suited to the faster tempo of operations in

1917', 7.08 am & 7.10 am

³⁸¹ IWM, 80/10/2, Major-General T. S. Lambert, 'Statement by Lieut. Kerr R.E.; Narrative of Operations 2nd/3rd December 1917: 15th. (S) Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers', Appendix questions to H.K. Utterson (commanding 15/LF)

³⁸² For example the question of whether the 32nd Division had achieved surprise against the German strong-points remained uncertain.

³⁸³ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, February 1918, 'Report on Raids South of Houthulst Forest, carried out by 32nd Division February 18th/19th 1918', p.6

1918. Without those constraints in 1917 Shute's empirical method was decidedly superior if idiosyncratic and atypical of the wider organisation. The final conclusion should rest with the simple fact that in both 1917 and 1918 the feedback system was very well suited to the type of warfare being fought.

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the British structural system remained largely consistent with the pre-war principles. These were not fundamentally incorrect but the misapplication in 1916 was a contributing factor in the division's struggles on both 1 July and in later engagements. The lack of experience was a significant issue as were the two extremes of leadership. The overhaul in personnel at the end of the year, while risking gutting the division of its collective experience, did reap dividends as the new GOC Cameron Shute implemented systems that would yield improvements in combat performance. Doctrine evolved but did not usurp the pre-war principles. If SS 135 told divisions what to do, the pre-war principles instructed them how to think. Training played an important role in implementing doctrine but it never quite hit the standards the GOCs 32nd Division expected of it. At the lower level core skills like musketry and physical drill remained at the heart of training and efforts were increasingly made to make it enjoyable for the men taking part. Tactical schemes were an important tool of educating the newer leaders of the army and as the attrition of 1917 and 1918 took its toll the consultative approach became an important strand of decentralisation. *FSR* *I*'s principle of decentralisation was upheld in structural terms throughout 1917 and 1918. Many of the battles of the Hundred Days were 'soldier's battles' but they could never have been fought as effectively without the co-ordination of resources at the higher levels of command. Structural adaptation was a core component of this co-ordination and by 1918 the 32nd Division and the BEF as a whole were able to adjust their administration to differing requirements in battle. This was not always a success

but external factors should not be allowed to undermine the broader judgement that structure had reached a level of sophistication that was unthinkable in 1916. Reports were the capillaries that fed the analysis of battle from the unit level up to the brain of the army, GHQ. As a means of analysis it was a flawed system in 1916, prone to all the flaws of the human condition. These problems were never truly conquered but the investigative and empirical approach of Shute mitigated many of the drawbacks that reports alone would suffer. The feedback system thus became more expansive at a time when it was most useful. In 1918 this system regressed, but the change in tempo would have precluded the more rigorous approach anyway.

How good was the divisional command system? By contemporary definitions the command system never strayed particularly far from the pre-war principles. On an individual basis there were attacks when planning was deficient, communications broke down regularly and flexibility was not implemented. Yet in all three areas 32nd Division and the BEF responded to the challenges. Was the divisional system conducive to learning? Liaison with the French could be strained at times, but there was a willingness to learn from them. Both the French and British were reaching similar conclusions about what was needed to ensure success in the attack, and despite the failures of 1 July 1916 the British were able to rectify many of the problems they faced. Doctrine drew upon the lessons originating on the front lines, and while far from perfect it did standardise low-level infantry tactics and provide the BEF with a formula for success on most occasions in positional or open warfare. Modern theory has vaunted the organisation that can respond to the methods its experienced workers apply efficiently on the ground. If the 32nd Division is assessed along these lines it could be considered a model institution for its speed in drawing non-canonical lessons and disseminating them across the army. At the structural level the organisation was flexible and experienced enough to rapidly adjust to differing administrative arrangements and training ensured the *ethos* remained broadly consistent with the most valued pre-war principles. Scholars are right to

question the notion of a learning organisation, but what the 32nd Division and the BEF did have was a well co-ordinated, effective structure that facilitated learning.

Part II: Battle Wisdom

Chapter Four

Battle Wisdom

This chapter will look at the concept of battle wisdom and how it affected the learning process. This will be done by first exploring what the concept is and how soldiers across the BEF understood it. With the theoretical boundaries of the term established, the second section will assess some key examples of battle wisdom and the practical implications for learning at the divisional level.

4.1 Definitions and Theory

The term battle wisdom is an ambiguous one. It was originally coined by Roy Swank and Walter Marchand in their 1946 article 'Combat Neuroses: the Development of Combat Exhaustion'.³⁸⁴ The article considered the effects of combat upon U.S. Army soldiers fighting in the 1944 Normandy campaign during the Second World War and observed that for the first ten days the men adjusted to the sights, sounds and their own physical reactions to battle. This was the development of “battle wiseness” without which the soldier does not survive to become efficient in combat.³⁸⁵ Following this period, the men reached their maximum efficiency after which combat exhaustion lead to a decline in effectiveness. While some of the specifics such as the time-frame of the phases cannot be retrospectively applied from the Second World War to the First, the basic concept of a period of acclimatisation remains a useful one. Despite this the term has remained relatively little-used and is generally considered a component of the wider scholarship on combat exhaustion.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Roy Swank and Walter Marchand, 'Combat Neuroses: the Development of Combat Exhaustion', *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry*, Vol.55: No.3 (March, 1946) pp. 236-247

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p.238

³⁸⁶ Richard Holmes, *Firing Line [aka Acts of War]* (London, Cassell, 2nd ed. 2003; or.1985) pp.214-215

A more recent study by Luchow, Gompert and Perkins used the concept of acclimatisation and battle wisdom analysing its application to the modern combat environment. They have defined it as the soldier's ability to: 'move between formal reasoning and intuitive decision making quickly and seamlessly'.³⁸⁷ This definition is too narrow and the work ignores the potential for subversion created by battle-wise soldiers. This chapter will argue that battle wisdom is more than the ability to make the correct decision in the most appropriate fashion. Rather it draws upon the natural process of adaptation to new environments and the drive to improve the individual's or the group's actual or perceived chances of survival. This was not always a positive factor and this chapter will look at how battle-wise soldiers could undermine the wishes of higher command albeit with the aim of preserving the effectiveness of the individual or primary group. This seemingly runs contrary to the values ideally inculcated in training: the rejection of certain individual instincts and the fostering of a group identity, or a 'collective soul' as J.F.C. Fuller described it.³⁸⁸ But, as will be explored later, this did not always lead to inefficiency or failure. In the case of misguided orders battle wisdom mitigated some of the potentially negative effects. The dividing line between battle wisdom inspiring positive acts of initiative and dangerously subverting the hierarchy and discipline of the army is a blurry one where judgement even in an historical sense still largely depends upon an individual's values. Battle wisdom straddles the theoretical boundaries of a number of other concepts: initiative, experience, self-preservation and anti-authoritarian sentiments. Moreover there does not appear to have been any contemporary understanding of battle wisdom as a general phenomenon; soldiers seemingly developed it without ever really thinking about it.

Thus there is a need for a more satisfactory definition. Luchow et al. give one in their endnotes,

³⁸⁷ Irv Lachow, David Gompert, Justin Perkins, 'Battle-Wisdom Improving Cognitive Performance in Network Centric Warfare', *The Future of Command and Control 10th ICCRTS* (2005)
http://www.dodccrp.org/events/10th_ICCRTS/CD/track01.htm (Accessed 21 May 2010, 18:47). p.2

³⁸⁸ JFC Fuller, *Training Soldiers for War* (London, Hugh Rees, 1914) p.11; also quoted in Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (London, Granta Publishing, 1999) p.74; for a detailed exploration of Fuller's theories see Brian Holden Reid, *J.F.C. Fuller: Military Thinker* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1987)

vastly improving on that given in the body of the text:

This notion is the military equivalent of “street-wise.” It implies an intrinsic quality – some people will naturally be more battle-wise than others – but like most (if not all) cognitive abilities, it can be improved via proper training.³⁸⁹

To be 'street-wise' is an excellent conceptual equivalent. The adaptation, and interaction with other individuals and local lessons being laterally transferred is both common to street wisdom and battle wisdom. What is street wisdom? It is the ability to adapt and prosper in a range of challenging environments. The word conveys more than mere adaptability, it suggests a kind of shrewdness and necessity to understand and adhere to the rules of the local environment as opposed to ill-suited general orders imposed by a government or central authority. The former may contradict or compete with the latter, but where a central authority's rules may be aimed at preserving a moral code or maintaining stability, local environments may demand a flexible or pragmatic approach to such impositions to ensure survival. If this definition of street wisdom is accepted, then further comparisons can be made with battle wisdom. Both, may be characterised by the feeling that the general rules are impractical or out-of-touch with the realities on the ground. Furthermore, a familiarity with the environment and how it functions is necessary in both instances. The conflict between the central authority of GHQ and conditions in the front line, while not ubiquitous, was at least fairly common amongst the men of the BEF.³⁹⁰

Social scientists have been ahead of historians in exploring the idea of discord between top-down

³⁸⁹ Luchow et al., 'Battle-Wisdom...', (2005) p.20n

³⁹⁰ See Dan Todman, 'The Grand Lamasery Revisited: General Headquarters on the Western Front, 1914-1918' in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds.) *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 2004) pp.39-70, p.59; Sidney Rogerson, *Twelve Days on the Somme: A Memoir of the Trenches, 1916* (London, Greenhill Books, 2006; or.1933) pp.29-30

policies and lower level implementation.³⁹¹ The work of Steven Maynard-Moody, Michael Musheno and Dennis Palumbo, built upon the findings of earlier studies and sought to explore the implementation of public and social policy at ground level and how best to ensure it was carried out as intended.³⁹² By looking at how central governmental policies translated from policy to practice Maynard-Moody et al. observed the difficulty of implementing top-down policies and the conflict that can occur with local practices. They note that: 'Street-level workers are an important source of innovation, yet most have little formal authority to make programmatic decisions. Their good ideas are often ignored by those higher up.'³⁹³ The nature of the job ensures soldiers and workers may never be completely analogous but the similarities are significant:

Many street-level workers use their influence over policy implementation to serve their own interests; they change policy to make their work easier and safer or to thwart policy with which they do not agree rather than to serve the needs of clients or the public.³⁹⁴

While the circumstances and potential repercussions are evidently different between the two, battle wisdom and street-level influence stem from the same set of factors. They are linked by an unease at systematic orders or policies and the multitude of motivations underlying human action, be they self-preservation, pre-war experience, cynicism of authority, or obstinacy.

Tony Ashworth has explored the disparities between the intent of higher command and the realities

³⁹¹ See Joel Handler *The Conditions of Discretion: Autonomy, Community, Bureaucracy*. (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1986); Brian Hogwood, and Lewis Gunn, *Policy Analysis for the Real World*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984); Michael Lipsky, 'Towards a Theory of Street-level Bureaucracy' in W. Hawley and M. Lipsky, (eds) *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics*, (New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1977) and *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*, (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1980)

³⁹² Steven Maynard-Moody, Michael Musheno, Dennis Palumbo, 'Street-Wise Social Policy: Resolving the Dilemma of Street-Level Influence and Successful Implementation' in *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 43: No. 4 (Dec., 1990)

³⁹³ Ibid., pp. 833-848, p.833

³⁹⁴ Ibid.,

of its implementation on the ground through his live and let live thesis.³⁹⁵ It is worth briefly summarising his ideas to highlight the shared relevance to battle wisdom. Ashworth applied sociological approaches to the history of the live and let live system that arose in quiet sectors of the line. He explored how and why fraternisation, ritualisation and inertia became normalised on both the sides of the front line in certain sectors of the Western Front. This was generally forbidden by the High Commands on all sides and ran contrary to the 'offensive spirit'.³⁹⁶ In effect a conflict arose with self-preservation and the relative comfort of inertia on one side, and the dangers inherent in a soldier doing his duty on the other side. While not necessarily pacifistic, it was circumstantial and highly dependent on the personnel involved, something it shares in common with battle wisdom.³⁹⁷ A critical aspect of the live and let live system was the element of disobedience. Elements of live and let live like the ritualisation of fire (targeting the same areas at set times) required wilful neglect of the 'offensive spirit' expected of them by their superiors.³⁹⁸ The willingness to operate outside of official channels was common to both battle wisdom and the live and let live system. One key difference existed; disobedience was not a necessary pre-requisite for an action to be considered battle-wise, as will be demonstrated later.

Ashworth gives suggestions on how these informal systems came into being: 'The basic premise of this argument is that the more frequently persons interact with each other, the greater will be their sentiments of mutual friendship'.³⁹⁹ The contention, heavily drawing on J. Glenn Gray, is that the reciprocal exchange of peace through ritualised shooting, inertia or outright fraternisation

³⁹⁵ Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918* (London, Macmillan, 1980); Tony Ashworth, 'The Sociology of Trench Warfare 1914-1918' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 19: No. 4 (Dec., 1968). It is notable that Ashworth had a background in social science.

³⁹⁶ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918* (1980) p.43; Gary Sheffield has recognised in rare cases senior commanders assented to informal truces such as 2nd Division at Souchez where conditions were so bad on both sides the front line trenches were evacuated. G.D. Sheffield, 'The Effect of War Service on the 22nd Royal Fusiliers (Kensington) 1914-1918, with Special Reference to Morale, Discipline and the Officer/Man Relationship' (MA (By Research), University of Leeds, 1984) p.79

³⁹⁷ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare* (1980) p.105

³⁹⁸ Ibid., pp.119-122

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p.135

contributed to the erosion of the abstract idea of the Germans as enemies in the Manichaeian mould.⁴⁰⁰ This was replaced by the 'concrete' notions of similarity which consequently provided further stimulus for reciprocity.⁴⁰¹ There is little doubt that attitudes to the enemy were not as black and white as some commanders may have hoped but they were equally subject to change depending on their proximity to the enemy and combat experience.⁴⁰² Given the range of opinions the supposed ubiquity of the live and let live system is difficult to reconcile with the harsh realities of war. Ashworth gets around this by suggesting that it was maintained by pressure from within the primary group (often the section, but could also include the platoon and company).⁴⁰³ Both the notion of the primary group and the variability of opinion towards the enemy are integral when explaining why live and let live and battle wisdom existed and spread amongst the troops.

The primary group provided a fertile ground for the exchange of ideas and concepts as Charles Carrington noted amongst the signallers: '...privileged people, have a secret life of their own and maintain endless conversations full of technicalities and private jokes, with an occupational hazard of no small seriousness'.⁴⁰⁴ Here Carrington's description of 'talking shop' highlights a critical part of how battle wisdom was transferred within the primary group. Although the technical world of the signallers made it seem alien to the infantryman, the latter had their own private jokes and jargon and went through an identical process. Guy Chapman, an officer in 13/RF, recognised that this 'talking shop' occurred within cliques before the battlefield had been reached:

The ten months' training, which the battalion went through before it reached France, was therefore a compound of enthusiasm and empiricism on the part of the junior subalterns and the other ranks.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1965)

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp.132-138

⁴⁰² Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* (1999) p.147

⁴⁰³ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare* (1980) p.155; see Introduction for further a more detailed explanation of the primary group concept.

⁴⁰⁴ Charles Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (London, Hutchinson & Co, 1965) p.105; this depiction is supported by IWM, 83/23/1, Major E. F. Churchill pp.9-10

Even now I am amazed at the zeal which induced some of us after dinner to push matches representing platoons about the table, uttering words of command in hoarse whispers...⁴⁰⁵

Chapman later recalled how underpinning this 'enthusiasm and empiricism' lay a rooted desire to match the professionals' level. Moreover the use of 'some of us' suggests that a clique formed around this binding desire. This is rather speculative but as Brian Bond has observed he revered many of his peers and superiors throughout his wartime experience and their ability and professionalism played a large role in stimulating his respect.⁴⁰⁶ 'Talking shop' was not confined to specialists or the training fields of Britain. Sidney Rogerson wrote of a young Irish officer under his command in B Company, 2/W. Yorks after he had requested permission to look for a missing fellow officer of C Company: 'I knew they were friends and that it was their habit to forgather for a talk and a smoke when work was slack.'⁴⁰⁷ 'Informal trench conferences', to borrow a phrase from Rogerson, were a facet of life within the army. When men bonded and cliques formed it was only natural that they frequently discussed the shared experience of soldiering.

There are problems with the idea of the primary group as a means of dissemination of information. As Hew Strachan has pointed out, when the turnover rate was high the opportunities to form cohesive small-groups was diminished:

Thus the small-group argument, which by definition becomes of increasing importance the more sustained and vicious the fighting, rests on a paradox: such operations erode the very basis on which the unit's morale is said to rest.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality* (Glasgow, Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd., 1933) p.5

⁴⁰⁶ Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind* (London, Continuum, 2008) pp.30-31; Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality*, (1933) *passim*.

⁴⁰⁷ Sidney Rogerson, *Twelve Days on the Somme* (2006; orig. 1933) p.42

⁴⁰⁸ Hew Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War' in *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41: No. 2 (April, 2006) p.213

Strachan's point is relevant to battle wisdom. If it solely relied upon intimate relationships within the primary group it would be absent from units with a high turnover of men or for those who spent large periods divorced from their close comrades, such as those on secondments. This does not appear to have been the case, as later examples will show.⁴⁰⁹ Moreover the primary group is not an innately beneficial force, as one Brigadier-General observed: 'Many a bad old captain ruins his subalterns in the company mess, and in clubs, by his example, conversation, behaviour with women, and drinking habits generally'.⁴¹⁰ The primary group could be a bad influence as well as good. Nevertheless, the positive benefits and manner of transfer suggest that it contributed advantageously on the whole. The paradox between the primary group's importance as a catalyst for battle wisdom and its absence in certain instances can be resolved when learning theory is brought in. Two forms of learning occurred: individual and organisational. Battle wisdom drew upon both. Sociological literature has shown that individual proficiency could provide broader benefits for the group while communities-of-practice fed into the development of non-canonical methods.⁴¹¹ Battle wisdom and the changes to effectiveness it prompted should not be seen as a simple group based process but a complex one whereby the individual and shared group experiences facilitated one another, but were not always co-dependent.

If the idea of battle wisdom stems from certain innate human traits, these have to be identified and examined briefly. Nineteenth century and Edwardian military theory often promoted key traits amongst their leaders and led. Carl von Clausewitz, looking at military genius, highlighted some of the valued attributes in a soldier.⁴¹² He suggested sound judgement based on probabilities, balance

⁴⁰⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/386, Captain W.N. Child, 30th October 1916; John Terraine (ed.) *General Jack's Diary: War on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London, Cassell, 1964) p.220; IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.52

⁴¹⁰ Frank Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1930) p.90

⁴¹¹ Ray Reagan, Linda Argote, Daria Brooks, 'Individual Experience and Experience Working Together: Predicting Learning Rates from Knowing Who Knows What and Knowing How to Work Together' in *Management Science* Vol. 51: No. 6, (June, 2005) p.871, p.877; John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, 'Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation' in *Organization Science* Vol.2: No.1 (February, 1991) pp.48-50

⁴¹² Although focused on genius, Clausewitz suggested that there were also necessary qualities at lower levels: 'Since in

of thought – preserving 'judgement and principle' in spite of the 'violence of emotion' (or more broadly 'strength of character'), and determination coupled with a willingness to accept responsibility.⁴¹³ While draped in nineteenth century terminology, these requirements would not be alien to any soldier on the Western Front. A rough parallel can be seen in *FSR I* stating the principles of 'warfare in uncivilized countries':

Self-reliance, vigilance, and judgement are the chief requisites for overcoming the difficulties inherent in savage warfare. Discipline and organization are powerful aids; but unless both officers and men are well trained, capable of adapting their action to unexpected conditions, and of beating the enemy at his own tactics the campaign will be needlessly long and costly.⁴¹⁴

In attempting to convey the differences between warfare in 'civilized' states and 'uncivilized' the passage highlights which 'civilized' traits were perceived as valuable in a certain type of warfare. Yet it remains surprising that these attributes were not advocated as clearly in a more general sense as they were here. Nonetheless by *FSR I*'s broad definition, many officers would find themselves embroiled in a certain kind of unfamiliar, 'uncivilized warfare' on the Western Front. Even when commenting on general battle *FSR I* rings a Clausewitzian note: '...skill determination in all ranks to conquer at any cost, are the chief factors of success...**Half-hearted measures never attain success in war, and lack of determination is the most fruitful source of defeat** [bold in original]'.⁴¹⁵ While an emphasis on moral factors increased in the years leading up to the First World War, the ideal characteristics of good soldiers and commanders remained very similar.⁴¹⁶

our view even junior positions of command require outstanding intellectual qualities for outstanding achievement, and since the standard rises with every step, it follows that we recognize the abilities that are needed if the second positions in an army are to be filled with distinction' Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976) p.111

⁴¹³ Ibid., pp.100-112

⁴¹⁴ General Staff, *Field Service Regulations Part I* (London, War Office, 1909) p.171

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p.107

⁴¹⁶ Michael Howard 'Men against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914' in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986) pp.521-522; Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2nd ed. 2003, or.1987) pp.62-82; see also chapters one and five of this work.

This theoretical ideal provides a partial explanation for the propagation of battle wisdom; by emphasising individual judgement, and determination to achieve victory, the army created a fertile ground for individualised thought. Cultural and circumstantial factors shaped this. Discipline, duty and the expectations of fellow officers and peers could temper the opportunities to act in a certain fashion, as has been shown in chapter two's case study of the 32nd Division on the Somme. This dynamic was recognised by the novelist Frederic Manning (7/KSLI, 8 Infantry Brigade, 3rd Division) who observed that a seasoned Sergeant could 'handle' most officers – manipulating them into allowing the lower ranks the freedom to avoid anything too risky.⁴¹⁷ Nevertheless there were always 'reg'lar pot 'unters' who 'wouldn't be told'.⁴¹⁸ The Sergeant's action had its basis in battle wisdom, drawing upon the very same attributes the army instilled, the difference lay in what ends those characteristics were used for. Gary Sheffield has further demonstrated how complicated this process could be, yet notes that the 'army pragmatically moulded such men, by a process of education, training and socialisation, into passable replicas of the pre-war Regular officer.'⁴¹⁹ Discipline often varied from unit to unit depending on the class background of the men, the type of battalion – Regular, Territorial or New Army – and the specific personnel. Between 1914 and 1918 a blend of autocratic 'imposed' discipline and auxiliary discipline was carried over from the pre-war regular and territorial systems respectively.⁴²⁰ There is evidence to suggest that the 32nd Division generally tended to employ the latter territorial model of auxiliary discipline. One RFA driver who served in both the 32nd Division and 31st Division commented:

The Sergeant-Major of my previous battery [B Battery ,164th Brigade RFA, 32nd Division] was first-

⁴¹⁷ Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* (First published unexpurgated as *The Middle Parts of Fortune*), (London, Serpent's Tail, 1999, or.1929) p.235

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.235

⁴¹⁹ G.D. Sheffield, 'Officer-Man Relations: Morale and Discipline in the British Army, 1902-22' (Ph.D thesis, King's College, London, 1994) p.96; this is developed in G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000) p.44

⁴²⁰ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp.27-28,

class; I never heard him use bad language on parade, but the discipline was far better than in the present mob [A Battery, 170th Brigade RFA, 31st Division].⁴²¹

This was not confined to the RFA. Charles Cordner a company runner in the 2/Argylls, 33rd Division, and later 10/Argylls, 32nd Division noted the strict discipline in his former battalion contrasted sharply with his new one: 'I found the discipline was not so strict, and many of my own company were interested in my experience in another battalion in France'.⁴²² Nevertheless, the time-frame and personnel played an important part in dictating the model of discipline employed within the battalions of the 32nd Division. In late 1915 and early 1916 the 2/Manchesters temporarily exchanged a number of officers with 19/LF to improve the quality of leadership in the latter.⁴²³ One officer attached to the 2/Manchesters wrote home to his parents:

The platoon commander, to whom I am attached is really a top-hole man. He is an ex-sergeant of the Guards, + the way he makes those men "jump to it" is really wonderful. The word of command is nearly deafening + his "ticking off" masterful in the extreme. Also of course his platoon is an absolute model, so I'm very lucky indeed.⁴²⁴

The lesson he took from this short secondment with a regular battalion was that there should be shorter hours spent drilling but greater strictness during that time.⁴²⁵ Thus while a degree of disciplinary conformity existed between pre-war methods and those within the much expanded citizen army, the dynamics of interaction between officer, NCO and ranker varied according to circumstance and unit.⁴²⁶ Battle wisdom did not directly depend upon one specific disciplinary model but it will be shown that it modified the opportunities for different forms such as consent and

⁴²¹ IWM, 76/225/1, R.L. Venables, p.95

⁴²² IWM, 86/86/1, C Cordner, p.16, for earlier 'imposed' discipline see pp.2-4

⁴²³ IWM, 78/72/1, Lt C.L. Platt, 31 December 1916

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 9 January 1916

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 9 January 1916

⁴²⁶ See G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, (2000) pp.66-68, 73-78

evade to arise.

The BEF prized initiative. *FSR I*'s stress on principles rather than prescription was designed to avoid stifling initiative in an army that needed to be as versatile as possible.⁴²⁷ The upshot was that soldiers found themselves in positions where they could mould military policy in the same fashion as Maynard-Moody et al.'s civil servants, police officers and teachers. It is possible that a move towards auxiliary discipline contributed to the promulgation of battle wisdom amongst the troops, although this remains difficult to verify and gauging the impacts of the threat of severe punishment is beyond the scope of this chapter.

So what is battle wisdom? Battle wisdom was the body of knowledge based around experience of wartime conditions which was drawn upon when undertaking actions, officially approved or not, which could jeopardise the safety of the individual or primary unit (such as the section) in a given circumstance. It thus draws upon a number of characteristics and concepts; individual attitudes to initiative and experience are pivotal factors while the live and let live system can be considered an extreme manifestation of battle wisdom.⁴²⁸ The aspects will be explored more fully later in the chapter, but to further define the boundaries of battle wisdom and how it affected learning practical examples need to be looked at. Owing to the paucity of sources within the 32nd Division depicting transgressions a broader range of materials has been consulted for the first two sections of this chapter. The final section on insubordination focuses more directly on the 32nd Division.

4.2 Examples of Battle Wisdom

⁴²⁷ See chapter one; Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918*, (Stroud, Spellmount, 2006) pp.1-24

⁴²⁸ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare* (1980) *passim*.

A wet hole is better than a dry surface when shells are coming over.⁴²⁹

The words of Captain Alexander Stewart's (1/SR, 19 Infantry Brigade, 33rd Division), written while reflecting on his experiences of the Battle of the Somme, capture the spirit of battle wisdom. Common sense it may be, but phrases like this underline the effects of experience on the front line soldier; in this case self-preservation trumps comfort. To the common infantryman it would likely have been self-evident but these small pieces of 'trench wisdom' contributed to the successful adaptation to conditions in the front line. Battle wisdom was influenced by a variety of experiences ranging from the trivial – scrounging for souvenirs, cookers and combustibles – to examples of outright insubordination. A highly circumstantial picture emerges from the battle wisdom model, the changes to combat effectiveness (the overall goal of improvement and thus learning) were varied and often dependent on individual personnel, yet broad observations can be made. This section will attempt to outline some of the different examples of battle wisdom ranging from the trivial to the more severe and offer some conclusions regarding the effects.

Case Study: Scrounging

Many published and unpublished accounts of the Great War have the common theme of scrounging. It was not uncommon for soldiers to attempt to pilfer from his local surroundings, neighbouring battalions or the bodies of the dead. Perhaps the finest of these accounts can be found in Charles Carrington's (1/5 R. Warwicks, 143 Infantry Brigade, 48th Division) *Soldier from the Wars Returning*, who dedicated a small subsection of his book to the *Ethics of Scrounging*. Direct to the point he wrote: 'To be a soldier on active service means to reject the sanctity of life and property.'⁴³⁰ And this many did, but Carrington was quick to differentiate between its different forms. It was

⁴²⁹ Cameron Stewart (ed.), *A Very Unimportant Officer: My Grandfather's Great War* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009) p.88

⁴³⁰ Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1964) p.204

morally just to 'live on enemy rations, make free with their comforts, and seize badges, crests, helmets as trophies.'⁴³¹ Weapons were sought after, as was alcohol. Stewart recalled how one soldier climbed over a trench stop to collect a German helmet, while another found a 'jar full of rum' which he drank resulting in him 'wandering about all over the place regardless of whether he was shot at or not.'⁴³² Carrington sought after a German officer's pistol, while a fellow officer seized a German Mauser rifle when he went into action.⁴³³

Where prisoners were concerned 'souvenir hunting' could be more direct. When leading a patrol in May 1918 Captain E.B. Lord, (15th LF, 96 Infantry Brigade, 32nd Division) captured two German prisoners. After sending them back to the British lines with an escort, the sentries reportedly heard a brief exchange: "Kamerad"! "Kamerad be buggered, have you got any blinking souvenirs[?]"⁴³⁴ When Lord's prisoners arrived back in the British lines they'd been stripped of all portables save their 'clothes, waterbottles and watches'. According to Carrington this sort of 'frisking' was more common behind the lines: 'we should have scorned to behave so in the front line.'⁴³⁵ On the surface it is a tenuous link between battle wisdom and these acts of glorified theft, but the parallels become clearer when the social element of scrounging is considered. Carrington described the 'local code of ethics' that governed such acts. He recognised to scrounge was: '...a meritorious form of conduct, but only on condition that it was socially directed. A man who stole rations of rum, or – worst of all – the contents of a private food parcel – from his own section was lucky if not severely beaten up.'⁴³⁶

Scrounging was thus an act stemming from the pressures felt within the primary group, and

⁴³¹ Ibid., p.204

⁴³² Stewart, *Unimportant Officer* (2009) p.88

⁴³³ Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning*, (1964) p.204

⁴³⁴ IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.61

⁴³⁵ Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning*, (1964) p.205

⁴³⁶ Ibid., p.206

inherently social in character. Moreover there was a tacit acceptance amongst the troops that they would, at some point, become the victims of 'scrounging'. J.A. Whitehead was a driver in 168th RFA, 32nd Division, and was quickly introduced to the realities of 'scrounging'. When awaiting his troop ship in Southampton he was ordered to pack all his extra items in a bag and label it so it could be sent home: 'This showed what green-horns we were, as, after our departure, those bags were raided by those who had been left behind for home service.'⁴³⁷ This would not be the last time that Whitehead was the victim of scrounging, for even in 1918 the situation was much the same. He received orders to prepare for a Field Service Marching Order parade and given instructions on what items could be taken with him. This required all the extra 'scrounged' luxuries and kit to be left behind. With some resignation Whitehead wrote: 'We reckoned that it was a dirty trick, but we had, as usual, to stand it. Some other soldiers would enjoy rummaging amongst it all.'⁴³⁸ There was at least some solace in knowing other soldiers would benefit from their scrounged materials.

From troop ship to Armistice scrounging was a fact of life within the BEF on the Western Front. Through experience, men would learn to avoid hanging on to precious 'souvenirs' they had collected from prisoners or the dead: 'I sent home all my old souvenirs last week...nice to have them.'⁴³⁹ one officer wrote. This was not always possible and often relied on a trustworthy friend taking the items with them when he went on leave, but as George Coppard (6/Queen's, 37 Infantry Brigade, 12th Division and later MGC) recognised, this was only a small problem: '[m]any Mauser rifles and other weapons must have been smuggled back to England'.⁴⁴⁰

So far scrounging has been looked at as a general term but to assess the effects it needs to be more specifically divided. Scrounging for souvenirs while potentially dangerous to the individual,

⁴³⁷ IWM, 79/23/1, J.A. Whitehead, pp.24-25

⁴³⁸ Ibid., pp.126-127

⁴³⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/386, Captain W. N. Child, 25 September 1916

⁴⁴⁰ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* (London, Imperial War Museum, 1980) p.90

continued as a practice owing to the exotic gains that could be made.⁴⁴¹ Nevertheless, it was not just about souvenirs. The hunt for extra resources, rations and luxuries played a pivotal role in fostering primary group cohesion, while making conditions more bearable. George Ashurst observed the social element of scrounging in both its positive and negative guises. Ashurst was an NCO in the 16/LF, 96 Infantry Brigade, during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in March 1917 and described how a number of rankers of the 32nd Division had discovered 'a well filled wine cellar that had escaped the eyes of the Germans from the start of the war.' Needless to say a number of the intrepid explorers who'd discovered the wine were found 'about the village absolutely drunk', while a number of others had retreated to billets in a similar state.⁴⁴² The fact that this was not good for unit efficiency was acknowledged by the officers who posted two guards at the entrance to the cellar. Alcohol, as in civilian life, was a social lubricant and its scrounging tightened the bonds of the primary group. This is evident throughout Frederic Manning's fictionalised account of his wartime service, where alcohol and its illicit acquisition is a recurring theme. Manning's main protagonist, Bourne, fosters cordial relations with his superiors over scrounged rum rations. While the characters of Shem, Martlow and Weeper Smart form his primary group and form bonds under in similar conditions.⁴⁴³ Alcohol was a double-edged sword. It could seriously impair combat effectiveness within a unit as Ashurst's account suggests, nevertheless it could also strengthen the bonds of comradeship and steel the resolve of the men during stressful periods. Manning, who experienced troubles with alcohol during his military career, reflected unrepentantly through Bourne's descriptions of its effects: 'It has set my blood alight, it has warmed all five senses simultaneously. I feel like a human again.'⁴⁴⁴ The scrounging of alcohol had a dual function,

⁴⁴¹ Joanna Bourke has suggested that the collection of trophies could act as a status symbol among soldiers. The conclusion is an interesting one and well-supported with evidence of body part collection in Vietnam, but it is hard to see this as a primary motivation for the BEF where materialistic desire for exotic militaria seems much more likely. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, pp. 25-31; see also Joanna Bourke 'New Military History' in Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott (eds) *Modern Military History* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.258-280, p.263

⁴⁴² George Ashurst, *My Bit* (Marlborough, The Crowood Press, 1987) p.114

⁴⁴³ Manning, *Her Privates We* (1999) pp.34-35, p.83, p.235

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.84

facilitating relations amongst the primary group for those who partook, while temporarily easing some of the stress of wartime conditions albeit at the expense of absolute efficiency.

The châteaux, villages and towns of northern France and Belgium provided a rich hunting ground for scrounging soldiers. A mystique developed around the search for valuables in particular. Ashurst wrote: 'More and more treasure was found – household treasures that had been buried and hidden...Buried treasure was the whole topic of conversation.'⁴⁴⁵ Yet this was little more than an exotic break from the everyday search for various items that would ease the discomfort of front line or billeted life. The uncertainties of war occasionally made scrounging a necessity. Sidney Rogerson was faced with a shortfall in accommodation and noted that: 'we were reduced to looting, or in the more picturesque language of the ranks, “scrounging” additional cover.'⁴⁴⁶ While the benefits of the officers' mess may have removed the need for officers to scrounge luxuries, they were aware – and often sympathised with – the plight of the ranker. Moreover they understood that experienced soldiers, more 'battle-wise', would be the better at scrounging:

With the grim determination of the British soldier, bedraggled men set off with the hearty approval, if not the verbal permission, of their officers to see what they could find. I am not ashamed to confess that, unofficially, I strongly encouraged the more experienced soldiers – who were therefore less likely to be caught! – to scour the dripping countryside for anything likely to improve the company's accommodation, and even gave them permission to leave the camp “to visit the canteen, sir.” Needless to say, that canteen was never discovered, but other valuable things were.⁴⁴⁷

Mirroring the magnanimity of Whitehead's loss, Rogerson's Colonel complemented his young batman Briggs on his failed attempt to pilfer the battalion headquarters's cooker: “A good boy that.

⁴⁴⁵ Ashurst, *My Bit* (1987), p.118; Ashurst spends the next four pages recalling an elaborate but successful 'raid' on a French château's crypt in March 1917.

⁴⁴⁶ Rogerson, *Twelve Days on the Somme* (2006, or.1929) p.13

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.13-14

But I'm sorry I could not spare the stove!"⁴⁴⁸. Charles Carrington's defence of the ethics of scrounging offers further evidence that officers were sympathetic to the plight of the ranker when the comfort of their men was at stake:

You seize a château to 'put it in a state of defence' by knocking holes in walls...When you are hungry and thirsty, are you to leave the food in the pantry and the wine in the cellar? When the order comes to retire are you to relinquish Milord's cash-box and Milady's jewels for the Germans who will be there in half an hour?⁴⁴⁹

Any potential moral reluctance to scrounge from the dead was removed when the wounded needed aid. Upon being hit in the arm and ankle when attacking Savy Wood with the 15/LF on 1 April 1917 Captain E.B. Lord's batman, Hopwood, 'borrowed' blankets from two dead Germans. Tellingly Hopwood also found time to put some souvenirs in a sandbag for Lord and himself.⁴⁵⁰ Moreover the collection of German munitions and supplies could be used to help put a newly captured trench into a state of defence and tend to the wounded.⁴⁵¹

Materials and items to keep the troops warm were naturally prized commodities. If blankets could not be found then combustibles were. Even in covered billets soldiers sought flammable materials, often with the hope of drying their clothes near the fire.⁴⁵² Local supplies were not always the first to be targeted by the soldiers. Supply dumps were a rich source of materials if a section or platoon were lucky enough to be billeted close to one. Whitehead recalled: 'I might say that we were near a

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p.14

⁴⁴⁹ Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1984) p.205

⁴⁵⁰ IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.55; Lord does not explicitly date the attack although by cross-referencing the locations, day and times with TNA, WO 95/2397 15th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, 1 April 1917, it is possible to confirm with strong degree of certainty.

⁴⁵¹ Perhaps the most notable example of this is Wilfred Owen's capture and use of a German machine gun. Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London, Hambledon, 2005) p.161. There are a number of examples within the 32nd Division, see Peter Simkins, 'Somme footnote: the Battle of the Ancre and the struggle for Frankfort Trench November 1916' in *Imperial War Museum Review*, No.9, (1994) p.98; IWM, 79/23/1, J.A. Whitehead p.133

⁴⁵² IWM, 79/23/1, J.A. Whitehead, p.66

coal dump, which was just off the railway lines, and, although guards were on duty there continually, we found it quite easy to dodge them, and “borrow” some coal.⁴⁵³ Scrounging for temporary comforts was a ubiquitous part of army life in the lower ranks, while the officers' sympathies and occasional encouragement fit the paternalism that underpinned officer-man relations. The pragmatic necessities of front line life justified the minor looting while any stigma was removed by the approval that could be gained within the primary group for a successful coup, as long as the victim was distant enough. Expectations existed, sharing was central to the experience and stealing within the unit was heavily frowned upon. When someone broke these expectations the rest of the primary group could in most cases rely upon a sympathetic ear of an officer. Yet often it would be sorted out within the group itself, as in the case of this NCO within the 168th Battery RFA, 32nd Division:

It was in Villevesque [sic] Wood that our N.C.O. was nobbling us of some of our rations. One day, when he was away from our bivouac, we, who had suspected him for a few days, raided his blankets, and found enough jam, bully beef, and biscuits to last him many a day. We threw all his kit and blankets outside, and shared out the eatables. When he returned, we gave him the option of reporting us, or owning up to us, and promising to share out openly in the future. Of course, he chose the latter, as he would have been in serious trouble if the C.O. had heard about it.⁴⁵⁴

This was not an isolated incident and the same group was later involved in the 'education' of a new draftee who refused to share his food parcels (but was happy to receive handouts from others).⁴⁵⁵ Thus, existing alongside social expectation was a code of discipline that quickly moulded men to conform with the rest of the primary group.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., pp.68-69

⁴⁵⁴ IWM, 79/23/1, J.A. Whitehead, p.81

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p.125

How did this affect learning? It is difficult to precisely attribute the effect on combat efficiency. Yet it is possible to posit a number of areas where the existence of strong ties between the primary group, social expectation and scrounging could affect the ability of a unit to perform well in combat. Scrounging is an example of a much larger effort on the part of soldiers, Regular, Territorial or New Army, to adapt to the changing particulars of the Great War. The scrounging case study demonstrates that the primary group provided a forum for ideas and set many of the moral and ethical standards. NCOs and 'old sweats' were pivotal in moulding newer drafts into useful soldiers through the lateral transfer of ideas and methods. Scrounging, as trivial as it may now seem, played a ubiquitous role in the lives of the front line soldier and officers were often fully aware of this. Thus, comfort with all its links to mood (as distinct from spirit) could alter the short term morale of a unit.⁴⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in the longer term scrounging fostered cohesion within the primary group and encouraged adherence to an agreed set of ethics. This aided the individual soldier's environmental adaptation by providing a group of peers who could empathise and advise when unfamiliar circumstances arose.

4.3 Disobedience.

The hierarchical structure of the army coupled with the image of draconian discipline has obscured the reality that soldiers did not always follow orders to the letter.⁴⁵⁷ They were individuals with varying backgrounds, skills and opinions and the army's preference for principles over prescriptive instructions did little to stifle independent action. This section makes a distinction between two different types of disobedience: consent and evade and more serious insubordination. The distinction is artificial; both could be considered insubordination, but by splitting them up the

⁴⁵⁶ Clausewitz, *On War* (1976) pp.187-189; Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.180

⁴⁵⁷ The image of Haig as a 'brutal disciplinarian' has been discussed by John Peaty, 'Haig and Military Discipline' in Brian Bond & Nigel Cave (eds) *Haig A Re-Appraisal 80 Years On* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 1999) pp.196-222. For hierarchical discipline in the army see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp.61-78; 150-155

severity and consequences can be better seen and assessed. Both drew upon an individual's experience, and were affected by his attitudes towards the army as an institution while also modified by their relationship with their superiors. Furthermore both consent and evade and outright insubordination stem from the same circumstance: an order was given that the perpetrator disagreed with either in method or goal. Not all acts of disobedience were done to subvert a specific superior, and many – if not most – were carried out to circumvent impractical general orders. A further distinction must be made, it was not always an individual, but could involve collective action. This was driven by prevailing opinions within the primary group. In the case of consent and evade the subordinate party, rather than pointlessly arguing, consented but avoided carrying an impractical order out fully or changed how it was implemented. Insubordination rejected the order and goal outright. Given its severity this was rarer within the army. The section will look at a case study of the insubordination of the 11/Borders on the night of 9/10 July 1916 and assess its impacts on the learning process.

The difficulty of enforcing orders on the ground has been acknowledged in civilian life but there remains considerable scope for a detailed historical analysis. The sources make this difficult. Consent and evade almost exclusively occurred at the battalion level and below, where officers and rankers could change the implementation of orders on the ground. The subversive nature and potential punishments for such actions greatly diminished the likelihood of anyone documenting them. Furthermore in the case of letters from the front there was always the possibility of the unit censor reading any incriminating admissions. Thus, there existed a natural disinclination to reveal any information that could endanger the perpetrator. One 32nd Division officer highlighted the issue when he was forced to use a cryptic fictional analogy to complain about Major-General Shute.⁴⁵⁸ He later remarked, when complaining about shirking on the Home Front: 'I could tell you explicitly

⁴⁵⁸ IWM, 88/39/1, Lt-Col I.H. MacDonell 22 May 1917

what I mean but for the Censor [sic] who will read this.'⁴⁵⁹ Nevertheless some took the risk in letters, and other evidence can be gleaned from post-war memoirs where there was little risk of recrimination. It is impossible to accurately gauge the full extent to which disobedience existed but this section will outline the circumstances in which it could arise and note the complexities, and benefits, of its existence.

Consent and Evade

In May 1917 Lt-Col James Jack (then commanding 2/W. Yorks, 23 Infantry Brigade, 8th Division) found himself in a position where he was forced to engage in 'hateful subterfuge'.⁴⁶⁰ He faced the prospect of losing the best men within the weak companies in his battalion to a 'battle patrol platoon.' His response was to ensure that '30 backward privates who might be improved under the eye of the Regimental-Sergeant-Major and Provost-Sergeant and who would be useful for fatigues' were sent to the reorganised unit.⁴⁶¹ As John Terraine has noted, these battle patrol platoons were 'a 'recrudescence' of the *corps d'elite* argument', the intention being that the best within the battalion would be fresh to follow-up the attack and probe ahead to take advantage of the disorganisation of the enemy after the initial assault had reached its objective.⁴⁶² The idea was good in principle but infeasible in practice, as Jack noted: 'After faithfully trying the idea, we found that by the time this gallant band could reach the leading troops in action and decide on the best course to pursue[,] companies on the spot had already taken all possible measures – as was their clear duty – to further their gains.'⁴⁶³ As with any order passed down from a higher authority some manipulation was needed before it appeared to be fulfilled. Before the battle patrol platoon was paraded in front of his

⁴⁵⁹ IWM, 88/39/1 I.H. MacDonell 4 June 1917. For further opinion on censorship see Carrington, *Soldier from the Wars Returning* (1965) pp.176-178

⁴⁶⁰ John Terraine (ed.) *General Jack's Diary: War on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London, Cassell, 1964) p.220

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., pp.219-220

superiors Jack pulled '12 of the finest looking soldiers in each company...to head the march, after which they handed back their armbands and rejoined their platoons.'⁴⁶⁴ His actions indicate that consent and evade was not strictly limited by rank or personality. Sidney Rogerson described Jack as having an 'almost exasperating punctiliousness' and was '[s]omething of a martinet' which makes Jack's decision to subvert the official organisation even more surprising.⁴⁶⁵ When the goal is considered, the decision seems less a case of overt disobedience than of professional initiative. Jack had initially carried out the order, and once it became obvious that it had not achieved the desired results, but would not be overturned, he acted. This highlights the important role individual initiative, experience and wisdom could play within the learning process.

Chapter one has shown that the BEF was quick to analyse the results of battle, but there could still be a significant time lag between practices on the ground and formal dissemination through major doctrinal publications such as SS 135. Consent and evade could mitigate the effects of out-dated bureaucratic instructions. Moreover if a senior commander's understanding slipped out of step with the front line realities, it provided a means for subordinates to preserve the effectiveness of their units or primary group. When theory was converted into practice but found to be impractical in reality consent and evade preserved efficiency. Conversely it also had the potential to slow the learning process down if a true report of the impracticalities of the order were not forthcoming from below. It would take the official abolition of battle patrol platoons in early 1917 before Jack admitted his actions to his superiors.⁴⁶⁶ However, as the following examples demonstrate, consent and evade occurred almost exclusively outside of major set-piece battles limiting the obfuscation to more common front line matters. Furthermore, as chapter two has demonstrated there were significant opportunities for subordinates to raise concerns in the build-up to major offensives

⁴⁶⁴ Terraine (ed.) *General Jack's Diary* (2003, or.1964) p.220

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p.13; Rogerson, *Twelve Days on the Somme* (2006, or.1933) p.22. Despite the description Rogerson held General Jack in high regard, which is evident in Rogerson, *Twelve Days on the Somme* (2006, or.1964) p.22, p.58. The word 'punctilious' needs to be considered relative to Rogerson's own standards; these were not slack.

⁴⁶⁶ Terraine (ed.) *General Jack's Diary* (2003, or.1964) p.220; Jack received no punishment.

coupled with a significant degree of tactical autonomy that largely obviated the need to consent and evade in such circumstances.

Professional experience and understanding was a pivotal part of contravening unrealistic orders. In October 1916 Captain W. N. Child, M.O. to the 17/NF, received orders from 32nd Division Staff to quarantine any of his patients showing signs of diphtheria. Writing in a letter home to his wife:

[T]hey wanted all contacts isolated + any amount of fuss to be made but of course I knew my business + did nothing and the result is – NIL. Today again an alarm of dysentery – telegrams flying around however it will calm down by Wednesday or so. They really have nothing else to do and must appear busy to keep their job.⁴⁶⁷

To Child this was a case of professional pride. As a medical officer he felt that he was in a better position to judge than the divisional staff. By consenting and evading he ensured that it was his decision to quarantine, based on his knowledge rather than a blanket order from division. It is worth considering Child's circumstances briefly, before observing the effects of his action. Having been recently moved from battalion HQ to a company, Child was detached from his primary group, thus this decision was an individual one.⁴⁶⁸ The primary group then, was a catalyst rather than a pre-requisite for forms of constructive disobedience. Furthermore his actions can be directly tied to his views on the divisional staff whom he saw as wasting his time with pointless 'wind alarms'.⁴⁶⁹ This draws direct comparisons to Jack; both were essentially operating against orders that were out-of-step with realities on the ground, but they markedly differ in effect. Both improved the internal efficiency of their units; in Child's case, by avoiding quarantine, his and the sick soldier's time was saved. Yet the repercussions if the MO had got it wrong would have been far more damaging. In this

⁴⁶⁷ IWM, PP/MCR/386, Captain W. N. Child, 30 October 1916

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 22-30 October 1916

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 30 October 1916

case the 32nd Division had, only six months before, experienced a whole battalion taken out of the line owing to an outbreak of rubella.⁴⁷⁰ Their caution was understandable and perhaps warranted. It is difficult to look back on this and conclude that Child's actions were wholly beneficial. This emphasises the inherent problems that consent and evade, and battle wisdom in general brought; it had the potential to improve efficiency and mitigate delays in implementing official changes, but when applied incorrectly or inconsiderately it could harm the combat effectiveness, or discipline within a unit or formation.

One unit that encountered an issue with the improper execution of orders was the 1/5 S. Staffs, a Territorial unit:

28th/29th: Patrols very poor. 2/lieut: DARE crossed the front line. Another Officer out for the first time "on his own" has not gained sufficient confidence, but will probably do better. The third patrol was distinctly bad. Some men have no aptitude for leadership in independent command.⁴⁷¹

Lt-Col Lamond, C.O. of the 1/5 S. Staffs, had encountered consent and evade aimed at preserving the live and let live system.⁴⁷² The soldiers were not carrying out their patrols in any meaningful capacity to protect the inertia on the front lines. This was essentially self-preservation, and in theory, bad for the learning process. Experience was essential to effective learning yet there was a feeling that the British Army's 'active front' policy was self-defeating and cost more in lives than the benefit it gave in 'blooding' troops.⁴⁷³ There was an understanding during the war that the potential benefits

⁴⁷⁰ TNA, WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 16 April-10 May 1916

⁴⁷¹ TNA, WO 95/2686 1/5 Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, 28-29 October 1917

⁴⁷² He was not the only CO to have difficulty with his getting his subordinates to effectively patrol, see: Crozier, A *Brass Hat in No Man's Land*, (1930) p.157; Ashworth *Trench Warfare 1914-1918*, (1980) pp.106-107

⁴⁷³ Linda Argote, *Organizational Learning: Creating, Retaining, and Transferring Knowledge* (London, Kluwer Academic, 1999) *passim*.; J. Bradley Morrison, 'Implementation as Learning: An Extension of Learning Curve Theory' available at <http://www.systemdynamics.org/conferences/2005/proceed/papers/MORRI462.pdf> (accessed 24 September 2010, 05:31); Reagan et al. 'Individual Experience and Experience Working Together' in *Management Science* Vol. 51, No. 6 (Jun., 2005), pp. 869-881 *passim*. For discussion on the utility of raiding and the active front

of raiding could only be felt if they were conducted successfully. In June 1917 a 32nd Division conference reached three conclusions regarding raids. It concluded raids: 'keep up offensive spirit of our troops'; could be harmful unless successful, and that the prevailing opinion had become defensive.⁴⁷⁴ Many of the criticisms were fair, but the 'active front' policy's positive effects should not be dismissed wholesale; there was a complicated balance to be struck.⁴⁷⁵ Measuring the full effects of the policy is problematic, with key benefits such as experience and *esprit de corps* being largely intangible and unquantifiable. Some sources do suggest that the policy, when supported, could be a useful source of pride.⁴⁷⁶ For battle wisdom however, the 'active front' policy offered opportunity to build a body of experience which could be applied to circumvent outdated standard procedure. Lt-Col Lamond, responding to the poor patrolling and reliance upon the grenade, employed his own initiative to encourage greater vigour and the use of the rifle by banning those going out into No Man's Land from taking grenades.⁴⁷⁷ While official doctrine recognised 'the cult of the bomb' as a problem to be overcome, it is doubtful whether GHQ would have approved of limiting soldiers' options in such a way.⁴⁷⁸ Moreover, whether Lamond actually observed an improvement in his unit's patrolling or his subordinates merely became more adept at concocting 'eye-wash' is impossible to discern.⁴⁷⁹ What can be deduced however is that, primary groups and kinship played a large part in encouraging consent and evade within a unit.

The relationship between commander and subordinate affected the likelihood of a soldier

policy see TNA, WO 33/1297, *Report of the Committee on the Lessons of the Great War (The Kirke Report)* pp.55-56; Ashworth, *Trench Warfare* (1980) pp.186-189; 198-199

⁴⁷⁴ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, June 1917, '32nd Division, Conference 26th June 1917', p.2

⁴⁷⁵ For an example of a failed raid doing harm see TNA, WO 95/2400 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 4-5 July 1917

⁴⁷⁶ IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.41; see also Chapter Six

⁴⁷⁷ TNA, WO 95/2686, 1/5 Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment, 10 January 1918

⁴⁷⁸ See Stuart Mitchell, 'The Training and Preparation at Battalion level, 1914-1918' (MA thesis, King's College, London, 2007) p.16; Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (London, Yale University Press, 1996) pp.65-74

⁴⁷⁹ Eye-wash was a colloquial term used within the BEF to describe instances where appearances were artificially formed to obscure the realities of the situation. Patrol reports for example could be laced with eye-wash to give them the air of official respectability whereas the action itself may never have taken place. See Ashworth, *Trench Warfare*, (1980) pp.106-107; Crozier, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land*, (1930) p.157

consenting but changing the methods used to fulfil a task. Captain E.B. Lord was ordered by his commanding officer, Lt-Col H.G. Harrison, 15/LF, to begin constructing the main line of defence after the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line in March 1917.⁴⁸⁰ Upon seeing the proposed trench lines, Lord was unimpressed: 'I did not like mine at all, but one in particular seemed bad, so I altered it without saying anything.'⁴⁸¹ During the six day period of work the lines were inspected by Major-General Shute and Lt-Col Harrison. Shute rebuked Harrison for the position of his defensive lines, consequently changes were ordered with the notable exception of Lord's unofficially adjusted one.⁴⁸² The beneficial impact of Lord's decision on the general effectiveness of the unit should be clear, in amending the plan in one minor way he reduced the labour that was needed on the new defences while presumably giving the men a stronger defensive position. While military principles underpinned the professional disagreement in the positioning of the new trenches it was the poor relationship and lack of faith in his superior that acted as a catalyst for action. Lord described Harrison as: 'a regular from the Manchesters, [and] disliked by all.'⁴⁸³ It is easy to read too much into the fact that Harrison was a regular and that this fact was mentioned; a soldier's background was never far from conversation. Nonetheless, the implication that Harrison was not 'one of them' nor up to the expected standards is clear. Lord's opinion was further influenced by his strong ties to the unit's second-in-command, Major A. Stone, who would later assume command of the 16/LF.⁴⁸⁴ Be it motivated by a sense of allegiance to Stone, a lack of professional respect, or a natural dislike for Harrison, consent and evade was encouraged by Lord's individual relationships.

How did consent and evade stemming from an individual relationship differ from that caused by 'faceless' staff orders sent from a superior authority? The biggest difference arose in the dangers if

⁴⁸⁰ This occurred between 22 and 28 March 1917 in the Canizy and Montigny. area for 15/LF, but started on 16 March 1917 for the 32nd Division. TNA, WO 95/2397 15th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, 22-28 March 1917.

⁴⁸¹ IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.52

⁴⁸² Ibid., p.52

⁴⁸³ Ibid., p.52

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., p.57; Lt-Col A. Stone; joined 15/LF, 6 December 1914; promoted to 2nd in command 16 April 1915

caught. No further action was taken against James Jack after he admitted to his subterfuge once the 'battle patrol platoons' order had been rescinded.⁴⁸⁵ On the other hand, if caught directly contravening an order given by a known superior, court martial was a likely result. Nevertheless, Lord was left exasperated rather than fearful:

I felt pretty annoyed, as I had worked like a Trojan and done, I thought, a conscientious job as a company commander, and all I got for a solid fortnight's slavery, was a cursing. I immediately wrote out an application for the Flying Corps, but Major Stone persuaded me to withdraw it.⁴⁸⁶

He was not the only one to risk serious censure over disregarding a senior's order. George Ashurst serving in 16/LF, 32nd Division, was tasked with rushing his men to the defensive positions in the front lines while they were occupying the active Nieuport salient between June and November 1917.⁴⁸⁷ Rather than travel the agreed route, Ashurst took a detour after seeing the barrage they would have had to navigate through to reach the front line positions. This alternative route was much safer, but took longer to reach.⁴⁸⁸ Although Ashurst's detachment arrived in the front line with only minor casualties, the acting commanding officer of the company heavily criticised the NCO for the time it took him. Ashurst quoted him as saying: 'I want you to understand that that delay might have cost us our position in the line and to disobey orders like that can only be put down to cowardice, and I have a good mind to send you to the colonel.'⁴⁸⁹ Ashurst, an old regular, was not one to mince his words and his apparent reply did little to endear him to his superior:

"You, you call me a coward! What a brave officer you are! What a lot of swank you've got when you are miles behind the line! ...Why weren't you leading us the way to go? ...Yes, take me to the colonel

⁴⁸⁵ Terraine (ed.), *General Jack's Diary* (2003, or.1964), p.220

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., p.52

⁴⁸⁷ It is likely this incident occurred in early July 1917, around the time of the Battle of Nieuport, 10 July 1917, when the German artillery dominance was at its peak and the fighting was at its most intense.

⁴⁸⁸ George Ashurst, *My Bit*, (1987) pp.133-134

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., p.134

and I'll tell him how you have crouched in my dug-out while I and the boys have done your patrols for you, and enjoyed the stimulating effect of your whisky flask while we were doing them.”⁴⁹⁰

This should be treated with a healthy degree of scepticism. Written after the war, a degree of *post-facto* bravado has almost certainly crept into the anecdote and it is improbable he was so scathing in his response. It is clear that Ashurst viewed his course of action as the correct thing to do, although his comment to his men at the time: “The fellow who ordered us must come and take us” suggests he knew he was taking a risk with the diversion.⁴⁹¹ Despite the disrespectful reply Ashurst was not disciplined. It is impossible to establish a balanced picture from the available sources, but if Ashurst's account is accepted it seems appropriate to conclude that he escaped court martial on the grounds that it would cause a stink. From the junior officer's perspective, his new but tenuous position as an acting company commander coupled with the potentially damaging accusations of a senior NCO and the men of his platoon would have made reporting the incident counter-productive for all parties. This mutually assured destruction of sorts was a key limiting factor in cases where individuals challenged authority.⁴⁹²

The likelihood of report and punishment for consent and evade was part of a broader approach to discipline which could vary from one unit to the next depending upon their type. Gary Sheffield has demonstrated that discipline within the Regulars, Territorials and New Army units was affected by the idiosyncrasies of the officers and their relationship with the rankers, the background of the unit's soldiers, and the internal cohesion. Discipline styles changed as the soldiers who comprised it did so. Their relationships, paternalism, and understanding of regimental or battalion traditions moulded

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., pp.134-135

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p.133

⁴⁹² The previously quoted example of Whitehead's ration stealing NCO offers further corroboration to this idea. IWM, 79/23/1, J.A. Whitehead, p.81

the prevailing attitudes to insubordination.⁴⁹³ This directly affected learning and efficiency of the unit. The knowledge of how to effectively circumvent a poor order saved time and fostered individual initiative. Ashurst's improvised route to the front line did not merely challenge his superior's authority but set an example for his men, all of whom supported him when the situation with the company commander was explained to them.⁴⁹⁴ If the poor order was a push factor, urging soldiers such as Ashurst, Lord or Jack to evade carrying it out in the manner intended then the primary group was a pull factor.⁴⁹⁵ Their safety and expectations provided a framework within which decisions were made. Strong bonds and primary group loyalty provided a smokescreen for minor disobedience and could add further encouragement for the individual contemplating subversion.⁴⁹⁶ However, when it required the complicity of those within the primary group any action often had to meet their approval. This was not always forthcoming. One second-in-command in 32nd Division, held back from travelling with his unit to the front, wrote to his commanding officer requesting he 'invent an excuse to get me up the line' and was refused.⁴⁹⁷ Ashworth contends that those who shunned peer-approval were ostracised and given unflattering labels such as fireater. This process reinforced the live and let live system.⁴⁹⁸ This is a problematic idea. A negative label to one was a source of pride to another. The case of Major JN Marshall, an Irish Guardsman attached to 2/Manchesters and later 16/LF, is illuminating. It is covered in greater detail in chapter five but here it is enough to recognise that his sobriquet of the 'Mad Major' was not considered pejorative.⁴⁹⁹ Kinship among men of varying ranks, fostered through paternalism and sympathy, meant that minor acts of disobedience could be hidden when required. This played a pivotal role in facilitating consent and evade and battle wisdom.

⁴⁹³ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.164

⁴⁹⁴ Ashurst, *My Bit*, (1987) p.135

⁴⁹⁵ See also IWM, 79/23/1, J.A. Whitehead, p.81; the action taken against the NCO 'nobbling' the primary group of rations should also be seen within this framework.

⁴⁹⁶ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918*, pp.155-156

⁴⁹⁷ IWM, 88/39/1, Lt-Col I.H. MacDonell 2-7 August 1917; For a similar incident with the opposite outcome see Frank Hawkings, *From Ypres to Cambrai* (Morley, The Elmfield Press, 1974) page 95; 28 June 1916.

⁴⁹⁸ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918*, p.159

⁴⁹⁹ IWM, 79/12/1, Capt. E.B. Lord, pp.76-77

The general widespread effects of consent and evade are impossible to gauge, each must be considered in their own circumstance and context. Jack's action for example can clearly be considered beneficial, he had tested both methods and only used disobedience and subterfuge to implement the superior method. Ashurst's action on the other hand, is debatable. Had he taken the direct route he would have almost certainly suffered heavy casualties; the 32nd Division were heavily out-gunned in the Nieuport sector of the line at that time and heavy bombardments were a regular occurrence.⁵⁰⁰ His decision to take an alternative route was within keeping of his responsibility to ensure the welfare of his men. Thus, the safety of his primary group had a direct effect on his actions. Nevertheless, the officer was not entirely unjustified in his complaints.⁵⁰¹ The what-ifs are less important than the actual repercussions; men's lives were saved by his actions, the platoon – his primary group – was stronger for the experience. Ashurst would later be granted a commission.

To what extent was consent and evade widespread? The examples of Lord and Ashurst suggest that consent and evade was more common during periods of upheaval such as the pursuit of the Germans to the Hindenburg Line, or at Nieuport. This is understandable; during these times more opportunities appeared to exercise individual initiative, even when this could be considered insubordinate. There is little evidence of it occurring during the major set-piece battles. As chapter two has shown the exercise of initiative was still possible but when lives might depend on actions being taken in accordance to a plan there was a powerful reason to avoid subversion. Yet as Child, Lamond and Jack show, it was in no way confined to these periods and could occur in any part of

⁵⁰⁰ Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium 1917 Volume II 7th June - 10th November: Messines and Third Ypres (Passchendaele)* (London, Imperial War Museum/Battery Press, 1991; or.1948) pp.118-119

⁵⁰¹ Avoiding casualties was not always perceived to be an adequate measure of success. Both William Balck and F.N. Maude criticised this line of thinking stressing practical and moral problems respectively. Whether Ashurst's officer understood these intellectual arguments is highly debatable. See Michael Howard, 'Men against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914' in Peter Paret (ed.) *The Makers of Modern Strategy* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1986) pp.510-526, pp.521-522

the line when an individual felt that his initiative could improve efficiency – be that reducing workload, or improving chances of survival. Consent and evade must not be seen in isolation. While usually carried out by an individual it was a social action influenced by the primary group, prevailing standards of expectation, and likelihood of recrimination. The effect of the disciplinary style of a unit, be it auxiliary or regular, is difficult to quantify.⁵⁰² The evidence of discipline factoring into decisions is sparse but Ashurst and Lord suggest that they viewed their actions as generally beneficial and this would be recognised if reproached.⁵⁰³ The ubiquity of consent and evade and its effects within the primary group and wider unit modified the learning process. It could preserve unit strength, efficiency and combat effectiveness but at the cost of withdrawing valuable negative feedback from the system. The live and let live phenomenon further complicates the picture. The avoidance of patrols deprived the unit of valuable experience which would aid them in future combat. Thus inertia preserved what experience had already been gained but did little to develop it. Ultimately, consent and evade at its most useful acted to mitigate the effects of infeasible or poor orders and reduced any potential damage caused by the time lag between front line practices and standardised procedures, but could, when left unchecked, encourage lethargy and inertia as was the case in the 1/5 S. Staffs. The complexity of the issues makes it necessary to view consent and evade on a circumstantial basis. Broadly it appears that the process was beneficial for the 32nd Division, but this was not the case for more serious forms of insubordination.

Insubordination

Cases of outright insubordination within the BEF were rare. Morale within the army ebbed at times but it was never broken. Learning theory has indicated that stable environments where individuals

⁵⁰² Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp. 8-9, 16-23

⁵⁰³ For discipline and crime see: Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War* (London, Cassell, 2001) pp.39-43; 449-450; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* pp.159-202; 197

have a valuable, discrete role within established groups are the most conducive to learning.⁵⁰⁴ Under such conditions individual improvements can best be harnessed to yield results for the organisation as a whole. While this ideal was rarely fulfilled under the conditions of war where turnover within front line units could be high during periods of battle it, it provides a good benchmark for analysing insubordination. If disobedience damaged stability and cohesion what effect did this have upon development? This section will look at the insubordination of the 11/Borders on 9/10 July 1916 as a case study. It will first set out a brief narrative of events, then look at how battle wisdom influenced the night's actions, finally looking at how cohesion was affected.

On 1 July 1916 the 32nd Division were badly cut up on the opening day of the Battle of the Somme attempting to take the village of Thiepval and the Leipzig Salient. The 11/Borders, 97 Brigade, suffered particularly badly during the divisional assault, losing 516 officers and rankers as casualties.⁵⁰⁵ Only eight days later, on the evening of 9/10 July, the acting CO of the 11/Borders, Captain G.H.C. Palmer, was instructed by Brigadier-General Jardine to conduct an attack on 200 yards of German trench with his reserve company.⁵⁰⁶ The operation was to take place at 12.30am on 10 July and was to be carried out by two officers and 100 other ranks; 40% of the fighting strength of the battalion at this time. The first indication of a problem came when Captain Palmer was only able to raise 90 men, and they had been used to furnish carrying parties earlier in the day. Soon men began reporting in sick to the two officers tasked with leading the assault, 2/Lts Ross and

⁵⁰⁴ Reagans et al. 'Individual Experience and Experience Working Together' in *Management Science* Vol. 51: No. 6 (June, 2005) pp.879-880

⁵⁰⁵ Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme* (London, Penguin, 1984, or.1971) pp.330-331 Appendix 5; of the 516, 182 would die on 1 July 1916, 98 are listed on the Thiepval Memorial to the missing; Commonwealth War Graves Commission database, searched via: <http://www.hut-six.co.uk/cgi-bin/search1421.php> (accessed 9/10/2010; 04:35am); TNA, WO 95/2399, 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters gives slightly higher figures on 2 July 1916: 5 officers, 88 other ranks dead, 15 officers, 326 other ranks wounded, 5 officers and 105 other rank missing giving a total 544.

⁵⁰⁶ Captain Geoffrey H.C. Palmer, commissioned 2 November 1914 – 1924 (retired); 2/KOYLI; 8 July 1916 joined 11/Borders; moved c.16 July 1916 to become Assistant Town Major Beuvy; 19 September 1916 moved to command Prisoner of War Battalion. After this he filled various positions in labour and was mentioned in dispatches in 1919; he retired in 1924. Brigadier-General James B. Jardine *DSO CMG DL*, 1870-1955, commissioned 5/Lancers.

Twynam.⁵⁰⁷ Initially Twynam sent the first three soldiers to the Medical Officer, Lt G. N. Kirkwood, however it soon became apparent that the problem was more widespread and he refused to refer anyone further.⁵⁰⁸ 2/Lt Ross did the same on the grounds that all the men's nerves were in the same condition. Rather than leaving it at that, Ross informed his superior, G.H.C. Palmer. The situation becomes unclear at this point, with testimonies clashing on important details. Ross and Palmer's statements to the subsequent Court of Enquiry suggest that they then instructed Kirkwood to judge the state of the men tasked with the attack. Captain Palmer's adjutant, 2/Lt Lowthian cast doubt over this series of events.⁵⁰⁹ His testimony to the Court of Enquiry suggests that Palmer was initially aware of the battalion's poor condition and visited Brigade to effect a cancellation, this being done at approximately the same time as when the rankers were reporting sick to Ross and Twynam. This plea was refused and only then did he order Kirkwood to give a judgement the condition of the men. What can be deduced with a degree of certainty is that Lowthian made the call to Kirkwood to instruct him to inspect the body of men. What is less clear is where Palmer was when this call was made, Lowthian suggests he made a return trip to brigade but was struck prostrate by shell fire. Palmer on the other hand, makes no mention of his visits to the brigade. The picture that presents itself is one where a vacuum of command was created which delegated responsibility onto the shoulders of the battalion MO, Kirkwood. He found the men incapable of carrying out the attack. His certificate was sent directly to the brigade via 2/Lt Ross who had instructed 2/Lt Lowthian that the attack was now uncertain. Preparation was halted. By 11.45pm, 9 July, Brigadier-General Jardine had wired back to Palmer instructing him that the attack must continue, and this information was given to 2/Lt Ross.

⁵⁰⁷ 2/Lt J. Ross, joined 11/Borders 5 April 1915;. 2/Lt Twynam, joined 11/Borders 12 August 1915.

⁵⁰⁸ Captain George Notman Kirkwood, RAMC, relinquished commission 5 October 1916; re-commissioned Lt 4 June 1917; RAMC. For further biographical information see Brigadier-General Timothy P. Finnegan 'Failure of 11th Bn The Border Regiment to Carry Out an Attack on 10 July 1916' in *The British Army Review* No.144 (Spring, 2008) pp.92-95

⁵⁰⁹ 2/Lt J. B. Lowthian, joined 11/Borders 15 January 1915

If the first act of insubordination was the men reporting sick *en masse* then the second was through avoidance of duty. The attack would never take place. Initially the men did not pick up all of their grenades which meant the redistribution of 30 sacks of bombs had to take place. This delayed the start further. According to 2/Lt Twynam the blame for this must firmly rest on the shoulders of the Sergeants: 'All the NCOs knew this [that bombs were to be distributed *en route*] but notwithstanding about a third of the party did not supply themselves with them.'⁵¹⁰ Furthermore a number of the men took the wrong turning when moving to the front from the reserve positions, while the order became extended when traversing a particularly poor section of trench. The officers attempted to close the ranks, with both 2/Lt Twynam and 2/Lt Ross moving from the rear and front respectively in an attempt to see what was happening and receive any message sent to them. Nevertheless, by 1.30am they had only got about half-way and consequently 2/Lt Ross decided to countermand the order. The division had operated around this area for seven months, and while the trenches were dark and in a poor condition the guides and NCOs should have had a functional knowledge of the sector on which they were operating. This idea is compounded by 30 of the men leaving their allocation of grenades behind. These two factors strongly suggest that reserve company were pro-actively attempting to subvert their orders and halt the attack. 2/Lt Ross clearly harboured doubts over the men's motivation: 'I knew that there was a great lack of the offensive spirit in the party'.⁵¹¹ 2/Lt Twynam's identification of the NCOs being aware of the bomb distribution plan highlights both his desire not to be implicated in the error and his own suspicions of their culpability. They were not alone. Brigadier-General Jardine, after 2/Lt Ross had been forced to cancel the attack, placed the four NCOs tasked with guiding the troops to the front line under arrest. General Gough also gave his opinion: 'Conduct such as theirs' [sic] merits the extreme penalty and it is in every way regrettable that examples are not able to be made.'⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ TNA, WO 32/17700 'Report on the insubordination of the 11th Borders', testimony of 2/Lt Twynam to the Court of Enquiry. [undated]

⁵¹¹ Ibid., Testimony of 2/Lt Ross to the Court of Enquiry [undated]

⁵¹² Ibid., Letter to X Corps from J.M. Sargent, DA & QMG Reserve Army stating the thoughts of General Gough. 14

In the resulting enquiries Kirkwood, the MO, was singled out for blame. His case reached Haig at GHQ and the Director General of Medical Services, Surgeon General A. Sloggett.⁵¹³ They intervened in defence of the MO who they adjudged to have been treated unfairly, made a 'scapegoat', and given responsibility beyond reasonable expectations.⁵¹⁴ The NCOs fared better. Evidence was not forthcoming and consequently they were released. Captain Palmer did not remain with the battalion. He was replaced by Major Austin Girdwood on 16 July 1916 and sent to Beuvy where he took up the role of assistant to the town major until 19 September when he assumed command of a prisoner of war battalion. This episode highlights the negative effect the unchecked application of battle wisdom could have. It is certain that the men of the reserve company did not feel equal to their task, they were exhausted both emotionally and physically, but it is equally likely that the initial reports of sickness were partly motivated by one another, consciously or otherwise. 2/Lt Ross saw this as a possibility at the time: 'if I allowed these men to see the MO all the other men in the party would wish to do the same.'⁵¹⁵ This was not without precedent. 2/Lt Twynam initially granted 3 men permission to see the MO and was subsequently visited within ten minutes by between 6-12 men.⁵¹⁶ It would be surprising if there had not been a degree of influence, if not quite outright collusion, among those reporting sick; although with the evidence sparse and occasionally contradictory this is difficult to definitively prove. Indeed, this was a problem the authorities were struggling with at the time. In an annotated note (originally from an unspecified source), Colonel J B Wroughton, the Assistant Adjutant General at GHQ remarked:

Reading between the lines it is evident that if Palmer didn't aid and abet this croaking (the fact of his going to the Bde if he did is evidence against him – points to his having done so) Instead of going

July 1916

⁵¹³ Sir Arthur Thomas Sloggett *KCB CMG*, Born 24 November 1857; commissioned 11 February 1881 RAMC

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., Letter to A.G. GHQ from Surgeon General A. Sloggett D.M.S. 29 July 1916

⁵¹⁵ TNA, WO 32/17700 Testimony of 2/Lt Ross to the Court of Enquiry [undated]

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., Testimony of 2/Lt Twynam Court of Enquiry [undated]

back to the Bde he should have gone forward to his Coy – just as the Bde should have gone or sent his staff to the Battalion⁵¹⁷

It is clear from Colonel Wroughton's annotations that he firmly believed that the men of the reserve company 11/Borders were intentionally avoiding their duty and they were being aided in this regard by Captain Palmer. The unspecified original author of the note wrote: 'The latter [Lt Lowthian] says that Capt Palmer himself thought that the men were not fit for the operations and went to the brigade office and was told to carry on with the scheme'. Colonel Wroughton underlined 'thought' and wrote 'of course he did!' - a strong but cynical position and one firmly denied by Captain Palmer who testified to the company commanders not communicating the state of their units. Nevertheless, while avoiding the strong language of Wroughton, Haig agreed that Captain Palmer was 'directly responsible for this lamentable incident'.⁵¹⁸ Their judgements were correct and it is difficult to look favourably upon Palmer's role which was either negligent of his duty of care to his men, or actively aiding and abetting their insubordination. It would be easy to suggest that this case boiled down to a friction between the safety and sanity of the men and the danger of the orders, but given the performance of the battalion in battle before and after, this conclusion is difficult to uphold. Rather the bond of reasonable expectation had been broken, and the men were asked to do too much, their bodies and minds being at stake for what must have appeared at the time as meagre potential gains (200 yards of front line). Moreover in their condition, the chances of success were slim and this was recognised by GHQ: 'for whatever may have been the cause of the battalion getting into that state it would seem very unlikely that after it had got into that state the attack would succeed without help of some kind.'⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., Annotated note signed JBW [undated]

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., Letter from GH Fowke, Adjutant General, to Headquarters Reserve Army "A" detailing Douglas Haig's thoughts 6 August 1916

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., Annotated note signed JBW (quotation from the original author not Colonel J.B.Wroughton's annotations)

Lt Kirkwood's role in this case also bears consideration. Did Kirkwood knowingly grant exception to all contrary to the wishes of high command and without valid medical grounds? Or was his action justified by the state of the men within the company? His testimony makes a strong case for the latter. Kirkwood gave six reasons for his decisions to the Court of Enquiry, based on both physical and psychological factors. The men had lost all their officers; their rest was spent organising their dead comrades' belongings; they had furnished ration parties under shell-fire all day; they had been disinterring the dead in the trenches and had been subjected to an 'atmosphere of decomposed bodies'. His final reason, that twenty men had already been sent to the advanced dressing station suffering from shell shock, was perhaps aimed at justifying his group decision. While certain individuals at the time, most notably the divisional GOC Major-General Rycroft, felt that Kirkwood 'showed undue sympathy with the men on the occasion', it is difficult to now conclude that Kirkwood did anything other than his duty.⁵²⁰

If a critical factor in the successful improvement of unit cohesion is the understanding of individual roles then the 11/Borders failed in this regard. Owing to a command vacuum created by Captain Palmer at Battalion HQ, uncertainty spread to those tasked with implementing the orders. This uncertainty was exacerbated by the lack of familiarity and experience the officers had with one another; Palmer was new and Lowthian was only a temporary adjutant. It is unsurprising that when faced with a perceived medical problem they logically consulted and deferred to the medical officer. In principle this was consistent with the wider consultative approach employed by the BEF at this time.⁵²¹ On this occasion they expected too much of their specialist and he was asked to go beyond his remit as MO and make a command decision. By carrying out his orders unchallenged Kirkwood became the architect of his own downfall. His name was cleared but he would never again serve with a front line unit.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., Letter to X Corps from Major-General W. Rycroft dated 13 July 1916

⁵²¹ See chapter two.

How did battle wisdom affect learning and performance? The Court of Enquiry and subsequent discussions among the higher ranks paints a clear picture of the reluctance of the reserve company to go into battle. There are strong indications that the men were actively attempting to subvert their orders using a number of methods. One in isolation could be considered unfortunate coincidence, but the sick reports, delay in bomb distribution, getting lost and losing touch during the forward march all strongly indicate passive resistance to the orders given. The application of these tactics may have avoided casualties and further demoralisation, but they also destroyed what fledgling cohesion existed at the unit's headquarters and ensured the whole battalion suffered the indignity of parading without arms and experiencing reproach in front of the other units of the brigade. The incident highlights some key factors for learning: cohesion, communication, and morale of both the officers, NCOs and men were pivotal in ensuring that orders were carried out in an appropriate fashion. When a break-down occurred the boundaries of responsibility were removed and as organizational learning theorists have observed in surgeons, performance suffered when individuals were initially given responsibilities beyond their level of experience or applied their experience incorrectly.⁵²² Had the officers more experience with each other the situation may have been more like what Guy Chapman described as: 'curiously democratic control'. He faced a similar circumstance of poor command creating a vacuum but observed that the co-operation of junior officers: 'had effected a more complete harmony, confidence, and loyalty than was often to be found in units more capably led.'⁵²³ When the orders were insensitive to the local conditions and abilities of the men tasked with carrying them out the possibility of consent and evade dramatically increased. 9/10 July 1916 was a rare case where consent and evade was taken to such a degree that it constituted outright insubordination. The difference between constructive disobedience and destructive insubordination was slight. What the task was and who was affected by any

⁵²² Reagans et al. 'Individual Experience and Experience Working Together' in *Management Science* Vol. 51: No. 6 (June, 2005) p.879

⁵²³ Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality* (1933) p.127

unauthorised change in conduct dictated the latitude that was given to the perpetrators. But perhaps the most important factor was simply whether they were caught or not. It is difficult to see Jack, Child or Lord's acts of consent and evade as outright insubordination, although they could easily be treated as such. The actions of the NCOs and men of the reserve company of the 11/Borders combined to directly halt an attack and were consequently much more serious. The effects should shape our judgement. The examples of consent and evade given in this chapter all had the effect of improving performance, organisation or cohesion. In this instance the reserve company's actions did no such thing, but it must be recognised that this was as much down to being caught as to their subversive actions. Had there not been an inquiry their actions could sit more comfortably alongside the other examples of beneficial consent and evade.

The learning process relied upon experience being accrued, disseminated and applied, but this took time and prevailing inexperience could lead to impractical impositions. Consequently, individuals or groups applied lessons that contradicted the letter but often not the spirit of senior command's orders. How the affected soldiers viewed their actions played a crucial role in what effects the disobedience had. Often they could unite and improve cohesion when recognised as the correct course of action, while at other times they could spark discord and division. The immediate effects of the insubordination of 11/Borders were surprisingly muted. Change occurred at the top with Major Austin Girdwood assuming command and the MO being removed but the notion of any lasting stigma being attached to the battalion is undermined by its continued usage in offensive action.⁵²⁴ Within days 32nd Division was moved north to the area of Béthune for rest and recuperation where the battalions received drafts from home, but by November they were back in line on the Somme. The 11/Borders had the opportunity for atonement on 18 November 1916 when the division assaulted Munich and Frankfort trenches near Beaumont Hamel. The specifics of the

⁵²⁴ For the selection of Austin Girdwood as Battalion commander see chapter two; TNA, Cab 45/134 Girdwood to Edmonds, 30 June 1930. Lt Kirkwood RAMC was removed on 12 July 1916; TNA, WO 95/2403 11 Battalion Border Regiment 12 July 1916.

attack have been dealt with elsewhere, but the usage of the Lonsdales in the first large attack the division was to make after 9/10 July is suggestive of no lasting stigma.⁵²⁵ It is difficult to be more definitive on this issue; 97 Brigade was ordered by II Corps to use all four of its battalions against the German positions, so Brigadier-General Jardine was compelled to use 11/Borders. Furthermore, some within the division felt that General Gough harboured ill-feelings towards the formation after the failure to take Thiepval on 1 July. The further insubordination would have done little to endear them to Gough.⁵²⁶ At the very least it is possible to say that the selection of 97 Brigade to form the main thrust of the attack is indicative of trust remaining within the division. Despite the problems caused in the immediate aftermath of 9/10 July, the lack of cohesion and morale was remedied by their time spent out of the line, and thus the potential damage to performance and learning environment was mitigated. Insubordination then, had a surprisingly limited effect on the battalion, damaging cohesion but leaving no obvious stigma.

Disobedience within the BEF was not necessarily a divisive and damaging force. The effects could often be positive and facilitate a more efficient operation, although the very existence of consent and evade implicitly suggest problems with inexperienced or poor leadership and impractical bureaucratic obligations. The extent to which disobedience affected the army is inherently difficult to quantify but the evidence suggests that it was highly dependent upon circumstances, opportunities, individual goals and morale of the individual or unit. Problems with the existing systems and orders were just part of a larger framework of causes. These existed within a wider framework of dynamic military change as the BEF struggled to respond to the German defensive adaptations such as elastic defence in depth, new conditions and developing tactics. Thus, selective disobedience operating on a foundation of battle wisdom played a role in the overall development of the army at low-levels.

⁵²⁵ Peter Simkins, 'Somme footnote: the Battle of the Ancre and the struggle for Frankfort Trench, November 1916' in *Imperial War Museum Review*, No.9, 1994

⁵²⁶ TNA, CAB 45/138 Colonel E. G. Wace to Edmonds, 30 October 1936

4.4 An Evolutionary Process?

So far the importance of the primary group, individual and collective experience, circumstance, communication and observation have been emphasised when suggesting how battle wisdom spread. Yet certain lessons became accepted and some methods became more prevalent than others, ignoring the confines of the primary group. This can be accounted for by a process of evolutionary selection. Those ideas that had lasting value and merit or aided survival flourished. A couple of examples illustrate this. The initial antipathy towards the Brodie steel helmet has been commented on in a number of places.⁵²⁷ It was not initially popular, but once its utility began to be recognised its reputation very quickly improved with one soldier remarking: 'After a time I liked mine so much that, when in the trenches, I never took it off for days on end and always slept in it...They saved many lives.'⁵²⁸ Through shared recognition and observation the Brodie became a treasured item. Moreover this was an overt recognition, for within a number of months of their widespread use officers began commenting on the life-saving qualities of the helmet in reports and diaries.⁵²⁹ Despite the success soldiers attempted to adjust the helmet in certain ways. One sick soldier wore a woolly hat under his Brodie to keep warm, while another officer ordered his men to regularly clean and oil their helmets – this only lasted for a couple of trips up to the front: 'the shiny surface was like a mirror in the brilliant sunshine' thus giving away their positions.⁵³⁰ Those adjustments and innovations that improved the chances of survival or made men's lives more comfortable were consequently more likely to take root in the army.

⁵²⁷ IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.7; Cameron Stewart (ed.) *A Very Unimportant Officer* (2009) p.76; 6 July 1916

⁵²⁸ Cameron Stewart (ed.) *A Very Unimportant Officer* (2009) p.76; 6 July 1916. A similar point was made in a report by Captain A.A. Mercer (Lucknow Machine Gun Sqdn) IWM, 92/52/1, 'Report to Staff Captain', 16 November 1916; see also: TNA, WO 95/2397 15th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, 'Raid Carried out 5/6th May 1916'

⁵²⁹ TNA, WO 95/2397 15th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers, 'Report on the raid carried out on 5/6 May 1916' Note e.; IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.4

⁵³⁰ IWM, 79/23/1 J.A. Whitehead, p.89

The second example of evolutionary selection further highlights the continued necessity of observation and communication to the development of battle wisdom. John F. Tucker, 1/London, was walking along a regularly shelled road when one of his group lit up a cigarette. He was quickly told to extinguish it otherwise it would attract the attention of German snipers; it duly did and the cigarette was put out.⁵³¹ Bad ideas were quickly recognised by those who had experienced them or their effects, and the lessons spread locally. If they were not taken on board death or injury was a risk. Tucker noted this himself, linking it to a deficiency in training: 'In those days we were not trained so strictly as in the last War in the necessity for concealment and track discipline, being left to learn by experience often too late.'⁵³² On other occasions the inquisitiveness of the soldiers could encourage dangerous experimentation. Lt E F Churchill, RE of 32 Division Signals Company, recalled one man of a nearby Trench Mortar Battery testing his ammunition by dropping it out of a first floor window. He was passing by at the time and fortunate that the shell did not explode.⁵³³ As the Somme Case Study in chapter two demonstrated, good ideas were quickly drawn up the chain of command and disseminated, although it took time for them to be incorporated into the training manuals. To avoid risking a similar situation to that faced by Tucker's unit, 14 Infantry Brigade issued orders on 12 June 1916 stating: 'Smoking along BOUZINCOURT – AVELUY road is forbidden.'⁵³⁴ Conversely dangerous practices were discouraged by more experienced peers or those who recognised the harm that could arise.

Death or wounding would not only stop the action attempted but dissuade others from doing it. Consequently recommendations or warnings would spread outward from that moment with soldiers' 'chats' and 'trench conferences' promoting the spread of lessons. Sniping was one area where the importance of communications to the process of evolutionary selection can be seen. For Alexander

⁵³¹ John F. Tucker, *Johnny Get Your Gun: A Personal Narrative of the Somme Ypres and Arras* (London, William Kimber, 1978) p.114

⁵³² Ibid., p.114

⁵³³ IWM, 83/23/1, Major EF Churchill, p.13

⁵³⁴ TNA, WO 95/2390 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, 12 June 1916, Appendices.

Stewart and his men, (1/SR, 19 Infantry Brigade, 33rd Division), the lessons very quickly emerged, if not through personal experience then through reflection upon the experiences of others: 'It was not very safe to fire many shots from the same place, and we had several men killed or wounded who were careless in that respect. A very important point was to make no movement [when in position or for a period after firing].'⁵³⁵ Sniping was largely an individual endeavour, and while Stewart does recall doing it in a small group, the bulk of the lessons will have been disseminated by those who could successfully communicate their experiences with others who had not been there to observe. And as Stewart suggests those who did not learn their own lessons quickly when sniping and were 'careless' did not survive to disseminate their practices.

The concept of learning through a process of natural evolutionary selection is somewhat complicated by the problematic application of lessons. Circumstances and the dynamics of war meant that general principles could be successfully learnt and certain practices adhered to but there could never be a fully effective prescription for success. Merely recognising appropriate battle-wise practices was not always enough, and certainly no guarantee of success. The correct application of lessons also needed to occur and this relied much more heavily upon circumstances, personnel, official chain of command and resources.

4.5 Conclusion

Battle wisdom was the knowledge gained on the ground either through personal experience, observation of others, or through a dialogue with those who had been through similar circumstances. The examples given here demonstrate that it was not necessarily in tune with official orders. It could be damaging to unit cohesion and undermine the authority of the higher echelons.

⁵³⁵ Cameron Stewart (ed.) *A Very Unimportant Officer* (2009) pp. 33-34; 26 March 1916

However, on the whole it did not, the results often being beneficial even when they went against the wishes of higher levels of command. Battle wisdom was not synonymous with disobedience however, scrounging was an accepted part of front line life and further examples demonstrate that men on the ground adapted to localised conditions through personal experience, observation and communication. Indeed these three aspects explain why considering battle wisdom merely as accumulated experience is insufficient in explaining the complex process of learning. Considered in tandem with the unauthorised applications of battle wisdom, such as when it informed the process of consent and evade, we may conclude that it played a central role in the adaptation of units to the challenges of the Western Front. It is naturally difficult to quantify the success of such an amorphous concept when success itself could stem from a vast array of factors. It should however, be recognised as one of the key components in the learning process.

Part III: The Role of Leadership in

Learning and Fighting

Performance.

Chapter Five

Leadership and Learning: Theory, Context and Characteristics

This chapter will establish the theoretical framework for analysing leadership's effects on learning. It will assess how classical and Edwardian leadership traits shaped the conduct and opinions of the men of 32nd Division. Modern leadership theories will be considered and the link between leadership and learning explored. A case study of Major General Cameron Deane Shute will be used in both this and the following chapter to assess how a senior commander's characteristics and understanding shaped the way the division fought and learnt. As GOC 32nd Division, Shute faced a range of diffuse challenges in incredibly difficult operational environments. It will be argued that Shute's characteristics were consistent with valued Edwardian leadership traits and these often coloured his command performance.

32nd Division, while on the Western Front, was commanded by a total of nine different men (although only four commanded for longer than one month); Shute provides the most balanced case study of leadership commanding for the longest period in offensive, defensive, semi-open and trench warfare environments.⁵³⁶ Furthermore, Shute offers a useful companion study to John Bourne's account of William Heneker as a divisional commander.⁵³⁷ Both men were the products of an Edwardian culture that promoted similar attitudes to leadership and they shared a number of common features: rigorous standards, thorough preparation and decisive action.⁵³⁸ Although idiosyncratic, Shute is a good example of a divisional general that embodied many Edwardian leadership values. There is no shortage of material relating to Shute's time with the division. By

⁵³⁶ Commanders of the 32nd Division: W.H. Rycroft, R.W.R. Barnes, C.D. Shute, A.R. Montagu-Stuart-Wortley, R.J. Bridgford, T.S. Lambert; the following held command temporarily: J.A. Tyler, J. Campbell, F.W. Lumsden. The relative tenures of these men in command of the Division is given in Appendix Eight.

⁵³⁷ J.M. Bourne, 'Major General W.C.G. Heneker: A Divisional Commander of the Great War' in Matthew Hughes and Matthew Seligmann (eds.), *Leadership in Conflict 1914-1918* (London, Leo Cooper, 2000) pp. 54-67

⁵³⁸ Ibid., pp.60-63

using a range of private papers, letters, official divisional files and a critical surviving set of his post-war lecture notes it is possible to build up a comprehensive picture of the man and his command. This will be used to explore how his leadership characteristics moulded the fortunes of the division and shaped the learning process.

5.1 Leadership: The Theories: Classical, Contemporary and Modern

This section will look at how classical ideas of leadership developed and evolved to inform Edwardian expectations of the function of good leaders. It will be shown that leadership during the Great War was fundamentally rooted to a 'character' or 'trait' based approach.⁵³⁹ Attitudes towards leadership were subjective and did not remain static. How a leader was regarded during the Great War often depended as much upon the perceptions of the commentator than on the actions of the commander. These perceptions nonetheless, were generally rooted in classical ideas of good leadership, and rank modified opinion by exposing officers to some of the responsibilities of those in command higher up. This variability of opinion means that any analysis cannot be solely reliant upon first-person primary testimony, but has to also include a *post-facto* appraisal using contemporary documents to understand the pressures the commander was experiencing at the time; pressures which first-hand accounts may not have fully understood. It is in this regard that more recent developments in leadership theory will become useful. Theorists such as Horst Rittel working with Melvin Webber, and Keith Grint have developed important frameworks to understand the roles and functions of leaders. These will be explored in the third part of this section and later used to analyse the problems and leadership solutions applied by Cameron Shute, the 32nd Division's General Officer Commanding (GOC). Nevertheless, care must be taken to avoid passing unfair judgement upon the past based on modern criteria that would have been alien to an

⁵³⁹ For more on trait or characteristic based leadership see James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership*, (London, Atlantic Books, 2003) pp.10-12

Edwardian general; modern theory therefore, will be used with extreme caution. This section will close by establishing a simple model through which the impact of leadership upon learning can be explored. Three ideal roles will be established against which Shute can be analysed in this and the following chapter. These roles are the mentor, the role model and the peer. As shall be shown the three facets are keenly tied together, and the best 'learning leaders' were those who could excel to some degree in all three roles.

Classical

The classics, alongside sporting prowess, mathematics, geometry, sciences and language formed the bulk of the curriculum for the Edwardian boy.⁵⁴⁰ Gary Sheffield, has persuasively argued that the values of the classics permeated the *Weltanschauung* of the Edwardian public school system underscoring the values of the officer class.⁵⁴¹ The classical themes, of integrity, judgement, knowledge and oratory intersected with chivalric values and meshed to influence the 'standards expected of gentlemen placed in command of men' among the generation of public school boys who would form the bulk of the officer class.⁵⁴² Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when drawing a straight line of causality between the public school and the battlefield; these attitudes needed the wider reinforcement of higher Edwardian society to become so ingrained. Captain Charles Miller (2/RIF), writing an autobiographical letter to his daughters in 1938, reflecting on his time at Rugby Public School, demonstrates that in spite of classical predominance and firm interest, the teaching was not always effective:

⁵⁴⁰ J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The emergence and consolidation of an educational ideology* (2nd ed. London, Frank Cass, 2000; or.1981) p.112

⁵⁴¹ G.D Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* pp.48-50

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, p.48; for classical themes see Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (London, Penguin Books, 2nd ed. 1972) pp.163-4 the funeral oration encapsulates many persistent leadership traits. For a case against sophistry and for an enquiring mind see: Plato, *The dialogues of Plato / translated with analysis by R.E. Allen. Vol.I, Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Gorgias, Menexenus.* (London, Yale University Press, 1984) in particular *Gorgias* [516 a&b]; Plato, *The Republic* (trans. Allan Bloom) (New York, Basic Books, 2nd Edition: 1991) Book VI pp.163-192 [484 a-d]

So far as education was concerned I don't think it was very good. In my then state of mind I very much doubt if anyone in the world [sic] could have got me very much interested in such subjects as Mathematics, Euclid, Geometry, Science, French or German, but on the other hand I had a very real interest and liking for English, both poetry and drama, and I believe that a good patient classical master could have developed me a great deal in Latin and Greek. However I am bound to admit that so far as school prestige was concerned learning counted for very little, supremacy at games was everything.⁵⁴³

Miller's experience would have been familiar to his fellow school boys. It is clear that classics and literature played an important role in the development of children within the public school system, but to what extent they engaged with the material directly was highly contingent upon the individual, his fellow classmates and the schoolmaster. James Murray (17/HLI; 3/HLI; 15/HLI) came from a working class family in Glasgow. He attended a government funded board school and shows why drawing conclusions from classroom teaching alone is problematic: '...by this time the boys had learned to cheat, and, of course, I could not draw the teacher's attention to that.'⁵⁴⁴ Despite this Murray was aware of the enduring themes in literature and poetry beyond the lurid tales of the penny dreadfuls (although he admits he amassed quite a library of those too): 'This thing called Love has been written about by poets and authors for a few thousand years but cannot be truly explained.'⁵⁴⁵ It is one thing to know what authors have written about and another thing to have read it, but the point does not require Murray to have done so; it is enough that he even considered it when explaining his own emotional experiences.⁵⁴⁶ The classrooms of public and board schools did not create a generation capable of reciting the works of Homer or Herodotus, Plutarch or Plato in

⁵⁴³ IWM, 83/3/1, C.C. Miller, p.8

⁵⁴⁴ IWM, P457, J. Murray, p.14; See chapter four for how cheating and its accompanying 'honour code' laid the groundwork for the expression of initiative and expectations within primary group bonds.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., p.82

⁵⁴⁶ Murray often reflects with pride his own self-education, so it is probable that he at least came in contact with some classical and contemporary literature.

their entirety.⁵⁴⁷ On the contrary those who could, appear to have been viewed as charmingly archaic; nostalgic survivors of a past age.⁵⁴⁸ The classics, rather, provided an articulation of what were treasured core societal values; each fundamentally supported the other. So even if the students paid no attention in class, the classical values were impossible to escape, forming an omnipresent part of the cultural *ethos*. This then, does not overturn Sheffield's view, but rather supports his contention that the values of leadership and officer-man relations owed much to the classical, heroic legacy enshrined by the 'public school ethos'. That legacy was extended by its broad societal appeal.

Contemporary

This section will set out how leadership was viewed in different ways depending upon rank and circumstance, yet stress that despite some notable differences the conception was still fundamentally 'classical' along the whole hierarchy. The core Edwardian principles of leadership were implicitly laid down through military publications; most notably *FSR I*. Concepts of leadership in the British Army by 1916 were based upon a mix of Edwardian mores, classical traits and practical lessons of command. This blend however, differed at the individual level and consequently contemporary judgement of leadership proved to be greatly subjective.

For many soldiers the first written official guidance on military leadership would have been the British Army's *FSR I*. The manual opens with a short but relevant section entitled: '*Application of General Principles to the Leading of Troops*' and, in language reminiscent of Clausewitz's characteristics of military genius, expounds the virtues of certain traits: 'Skill cannot compensate for want of courage, energy, and determination; but even high moral qualities may not avail without

⁵⁴⁷ Although many would explain contemporary events using references to the classics: Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.49

⁵⁴⁸ J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1919* pp.125-126; see Capt. A. Attwater's description of 2/Lt W.G. Fletcher [2/RWF] as 'truly Elizabethan' for being able to recite Aristophanes. Fletcher was nicknamed 'the Don'.

careful preparation and skilful direction.⁵⁴⁹ Continuing with the moral theme, *FSR I* in effect ranked traits by importance:

The development of the necessary moral qualities is therefore the first of the objects to be attained the next are organization and discipline, which enable those qualities to be controlled and used when required. A further essential is skill in applying the power which the attainment of these objects confers on the troops.⁵⁵⁰

The very first page, of the pre-eminent military guide to the British Army covered both firm leadership advice and did so in a Clausewitzian, trait-orientated fashion.⁵⁵¹ This is later augmented by practical principles of command and the duties of certain specific command positions such as the sections *Advanced Guard Commander*, *Personal Reconnaissance by a Commander*, and *Considerations which Influence a Commander in offering Battle*.⁵⁵² Despite the more specific examples, the manual never strays far from the formula of stating broad principles instead of prescriptive rules. That these principles were wholly traditional can be seen in the emphasis upon courage, determination, intellect, and communication. Furthermore that *FSR I* should mirror the language used by Clausewitz is not surprising. While it is highly doubtful *On War* was widely read in its original form by the pre-war officer corps, it is clear that the Prussian theorist's ideas had influenced the leading military minds of the pre-war British Army, albeit in relation to the

⁵⁴⁹ General Staff, *Field Service Regulations Part I* (HMSO, 1909 with 1914 amendments) p.11; For important aspects of Clausewitz's military genius see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (1976) pp.100-112, 138-140, 145-147, 177-178, 184-193; for a detailed account of Clausewitz's intellectual understanding of military genius see: Ulrike Kleemeier, 'Moral Forces in War' in Strachan and Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* pp.107-121; and for more on his intellectual approach Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War: A Biography*, p.89; p.93

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., p11

⁵⁵¹ For Clausewitz's influence see Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001); for influence on the British, French and Germans in particular see Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994) ch.10; accessible at <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/CIE/Chapter10.htm>; Hew Strachan and Andreas Herberg-Rothe, *Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007); Hew Strachan, *Clausewitz's On War: A Biography* (New York, Grove Press, 2007); John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (London, Hutchinson, 1994) pp.354-355

⁵⁵² Ibid., p.79, p.102; p.107

contemporary debates; morale, policy and strategy for example.⁵⁵³ Furthermore, writers such as Spenser Wilkinson, Major Stewart Lygon Murray, and Colmar von der Goltz had popularised aspects of Clausewitz's ideas, and these were then brought to the important, but proportionally small, section of the army who passed through the Staff College at Camberley under the tutorship of G.F.R. Henderson.⁵⁵⁴ Shute as a graduate of Staff College was one of this small select band.⁵⁵⁵ Douglas Haig was another who engaged with Clausewitz's principles. He owned a signed copy of Thomas Miller Maguire's annotated and abridged version of *On War* as well as books by Rudolph von Caemmerer, Colmar von der Goltz and Walter Haweis James, all of whom had written accounts of modern war heavily influenced by the writings of Clausewitz.⁵⁵⁶ He annotated these works underlining passages relating to Clausewitz's use of theory, the importance of the overthrow of the enemy, and morale factors in war.⁵⁵⁷ Through a combination of his own reading, cogitation and interaction with his peers it is clear Haig held these 'Clausewitzian' principles central to his military thought; he revealed as much writing to Launcelot Kiggell on 14 July 1910 complaining of the: 'many talkers at the War Office – aldershot [sic] – Camberley x [&] Elsewhere Who know not What

⁵⁵³ For morale see G.F.R. Henderson, *The Science of War: A Collection of Essays and Lectures 1891-1903* (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1912) 'Lessons from the past for the present' p.173; research by Paul M. Ramsey has suggested Spenser Wilkinson, a Clausewitz enthusiast, was influenced by the Prussian's ideas on strategy and policy: 'The British Way in Warfare and the Complexity of Strategy: From Spenser Wilkinson and Julian Corbett to Liddell Hart', paper delivered to the Institute of Historical Research Military History Seminar, London, 6 December 2011; for Clausewitz's further influence on policy see Walter Haweis James, *Modern Strategy: An Outline of the Principles which guide the Conduct of Campaigns* (London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1908) p.10; see also Hew Strachan, 'Clausewitz and the First World War', *The Journal of Military History* Vol.75, (April 2011) pp.367-391, p.374.

⁵⁵⁴ Spenser Wilkinson, *The Brain of an Army* (Westminster, Archibald Constable & Co, 1895); Major Stewart L Murray, *The Reality of War: An Introduction to Clausewitz* (London, Hugh Rees, 1909) later republished in edited form as *The Reality of War: A Companion to Clausewitz* (London, Hugh Rees, 1914); Colmar von der Goltz, *The Nation in Arms* (London, W.H. Allen and Co., 1887; trans. Philip A. Ashworth): For ubiquity and popularity of the works here and in n.40 see Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815-1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994) ch.10 passim.

⁵⁵⁵ Shute attended 1893-1894; the other 32nd Division commander to have passed staff college was Rycroft who attended 1891-92.

⁵⁵⁶ NLS, Haig library collection, Haig.18: Thomas Miller Maguire, *General Carl von Clausewitz On War* (London, William Clowes & Sons, Limited, 1909); Haig.17: Rudolph von Caemmerer, *Development of Strategical Science During the Nineteenth Century*, (London, Hugh Rees, 1905; trans. Karl von Donat); Haig.28 Colmar von der Goltz, *The Conduct of War: A short treatise on its most important branches and guiding rules* (London, Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1908; trans. G.F.Leverson); Haig.47 James, *Modern Strategy* (1908)

⁵⁵⁷ NLS, Haig library collection, Haig.17, von Caemmerer, *Development of Strategical Science...* (1905) pp.76-78; pp.87-88; Haig.18, Maguire, *On War* (1909) p.6; thanks to Andrew Duncan for his help with these sources.

War [sic] really is, nor Clausewitz's fundamentals.⁵⁵⁸ This is further supported by Sir William Robertson, a reader of Clausewitz, who wrote about his experiences at Staff College and the common ideals inculcated there with Haig and other peers: 'There was never, so far as I know, any material difference of opinion between us in regard to the main principles to be observed in order to win the war.'⁵⁵⁹ Recently historians have shed more light on the pivotal part Haig played in the writing and dissemination of *FSR I* offering an explanation for how such influences were introduced, but as Robertson suggests, these were ideas that were already in circulation through various means of dissemination.⁵⁶⁰ Consequently the classical, and Clausewitzian ideas of leadership found articulation through the main manual of the British Army, which itself was reflective of the wider understanding of the principles of war at this time.

FSR I was not a purely Clausewitzian document, it owed as much to the Edwardian society as it did to the nineteenth century Prussian. Christopher Bassford has suggested that Haig's reading of Clausewitz may have been limited by 'a psychology that insists on a clear hierarchy of values'.⁵⁶¹ Rather than being solely confined to Haig's psychology it is much more reflective of a society that placed higher value upon certain traits, namely courage to act 'gentlemanly' in the face of adversity.⁵⁶² Nevertheless, it would be unfair to categorise any hierarchy laid down in *FSR I* as strict. This was not a departure from Clausewitz's holistic approach but rather an order of preference. While moral factors were indeed the priority, a wider reading of the manual reveals the importance of other factors such as communication, organisation and inter-arm co-operation.⁵⁶³ The

⁵⁵⁸ Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA): Kiggell Papers 1/7; Haig to Kiggell 14 July 1910. Sir Launcelot Kiggell (1862-1954) commissioned into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment 1882 and was Haig's Chief of Staff between December 1915 and January 1918.

⁵⁵⁹ Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (London, Constable & Company, 1921) p.98

⁵⁶⁰ Gary Sheffield, *The Chief* (2011) p.60

⁵⁶¹ Christopher Bassford, *Clausewitz in English* (1994) ch.10

<http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/CIE/Chapter10.htm> (accessed: 2/2/ 2012: 11:05am)

⁵⁶² Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.48-49

⁵⁶³ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) for Communications see p.111: 'Converging movements, however, demand the most skilful timing and complete arrangements for inter-communication, for any failure may lay the divided parts of the army open to risk of defeat in detail by an enterprising enemy'; for organisational advice, of particular pertinence to

intellectual minds of the British Army recognised the importance of moral traits such as courage, vigour and a determination to overcome the enemy, but it would be a blinkered reading of the text to suggest that this was emphasised at the expense of practical factors; it was not an 'either-or' choice.⁵⁶⁴

Did officers read the manuals? The dissemination of *FSR I*'s principles through the lectures and advice given to officers and rankers throughout the war ensured that they came into contact with the ideas whether they read the manuals or not. Surviving note-books indicate that lectures given in basic training and while on refresher courses often drew verbatim upon the principles and distinctions laid down in *FSR I* furnishing these with further specifics and practical advice.⁵⁶⁵ So, at the very least soldiers and officers were exposed to these ideas. Moreover, *FSR I*'s moral principles were consistent with broader Edwardian values of chivalry and sacrifice; whether the soldiers were exposed to *FSR I* or not, many of the generation of citizen officers would have implicitly understood the societal benchmarks for good leadership. To demonstrate this, a case study example of Lt-Col James Neville Marshall will be used.⁵⁶⁶

Marshall's actions, although remarkable in their own right, are less important than what the words of his contemporaries tell us about the expectations of leadership at the lower levels of the British Army. Through testimony of his peers and subordinates it is clear that the characteristics lauded in a leader were still inherently classical, irrespective of level of command.

the later trench warfare developments see *The Defence* chapter 108. *Preliminary Measures* specifically pp.122-126; for support see p.116: '**All leaders down to those of the smallest units, must endeavour to apply, at all stages of the fight, this principle of mutual support.**' [Bold in original]

⁵⁶⁴ Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2003; or.1987) p.48

⁵⁶⁵ IWM, 94/23/1, Captain G.A. Potts, Potts's surviving pocket books contain notes showing copies of the distinctions and strengths of the various arms, this too can be seen in *FSR II* pp.11-17

⁵⁶⁶ Marshall appears to have used both John, and James as forenames, he is buried under the forename James. <http://www.cwgc.org/search-for-war-dead/casualty/336413/MARSHALL,%20JAMES%20NEVILLE> His nickname at school was 'Bogey'.

Lt-Col James Neville Marshall VC was killed seven days before the Armistice leading 16/LF across the Sambre-Oise canal. His parent Regiment was the Irish Guards, but at the time of his death he was attached to the Lancashire battalion. Between September 1914 and January 1915 he fought in the Belgian Army which led to him being awarded the Croix de Guerre (Belgian) and Chevalier de l'ordre Leopold. Born in Acock's Green, Birmingham, Marshall attended King Edward's Grammar School, Camp Hill, between January 1899 and March 1902. It is notable that during this time he was singled out as 'a very useful forward in the Rugger Team', demonstrating the value placed on sporting achievement in the grammar and public school system.⁵⁶⁷ After leaving school he worked as a clerk at the Midland Institute and later in the medical faculty at the University of Birmingham, before moving to Essex to become a veterinary worker.⁵⁶⁸ It is clear from the citation for his Victoria Cross, that leadership by example was both a critical factor in his decoration and a valued attribute for a front line commander:

Under intense fire and with complete disregard of his own safety, he stood on the bank encouraging his men and assisting in the work, and when the bridge was repaired, attempted to rush across at the head of his battalion and was killed while doing so.

The passage of the canal was of vital importance, and the gallantry displayed by all ranks was largely due to the inspiring example set by Lt.-Col. Marshall.⁵⁶⁹

The original citation was penned by Marshall's second in command, Captain G. A. Potts (11/LF, later 16/LF), and demonstrates clearly that both courage and leadership by example were the successful cornerstones of Marshall's reputation as a good leader.⁵⁷⁰ Moreover, Marshall was

⁵⁶⁷ IWM, Misc. 3 Item 42, Biography of Lieutenant – Colonel J.N. Marshall V.C. M.C., Misc. 3 Item 42; this is not a straight-forward biography but a collection of papers relating to his service from which a patchwork of biographical detail can be found.

⁵⁶⁸ There is no evidence to suggest he ever professionally qualified as a vet.

⁵⁶⁹ IWM, Misc. 3 Item 42, J. N. Marshall V.C. M.C.; *London Gazette*, 13 February, 1919 pp.2249-2250; see Appendix 3 for full citation.

⁵⁷⁰ IWM, 94/23/1, G. A. Potts, letter from Stanley F. Witherick.

regarded as both a disciplinarian and somewhat of a 'fire-eater'. A letter from Private S. Hudson (16/LF) to G.A. Potts is illuminating for the rankers' perspective of their 'Colonel':

Before Col. Stone was killed I went out with Major Marshall one night in search of a German M.G. And he got it... We all called him the "Mad Major" (a great compliment) and he was utterly fearless.

By the way, this is not a morbid story, but a Token of my esteem for a very brave man.⁵⁷¹

Potts, writing in 1970, would support Hudson's appraisal of Marshall: 'He was a character of guts and determination, he didn't fear any-body or anything, it was a complete tragedy that a man of his quality should have been lost at the end of the War.'⁵⁷² Time and again, the notion of 'fearlessness' arose in descriptions of leadership within the 32nd Division, and indeed the wider army.⁵⁷³ Captain Charles Cecil Miller (2/RIF) described his C.O., Colonel Jack Crawford, as: 'I think one of the stupidest men I ever met, and one of the bravest; nothing shook him from his lethargy and least of all shell blasts in his immediate vicinity. He was easy going and we all liked him...'⁵⁷⁴ Another soldier, Albert Elshaw (17/HLI) wrote of how an officer's coolness under fire coupled with a sarcastic wit could amuse his fellow soldiers; a transport officer who was shortly to return home: 'distinguished himself...by standing at the door of his hut – face leathered [sic], razor poised for action – and in reply to a yell that shells were falling on the camp quietly commented: "Shelling the camp, are they? Strange."⁵⁷⁵ Fearlessness was not simply elevated as a blind act of bravado, but suggested to the men that their leaders could stay calm enough to make decisions under difficult circumstances; it was an obvious example of the sorts of moral qualities vaunted by *FSR I* and had been enshrined through the classics.

⁵⁷¹ IWM, 94/23/1, G. A. Potts, letter from Private S Hudson, 5/1/1971

⁵⁷² IWM, Misc. 3 Item 42, J. N. Marshall V.C. M.C.,

⁵⁷³ See Ernest Shephard, *A Sergeant-Major's War* (Marlborough, Crowood Press, 1987) p.82, p.97; also quoted in Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.108; Sheffield has linked the portrayal of fearlessness to Hankey's 'Beloved Captains' and identified the conflicting amalgam of characteristics praised among the officer class, Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp.108-111

⁵⁷⁴ IWM, 83/3/1, Captain C. C. Miller, p.20

⁵⁷⁵ IWM, PP/MCR/49, Albert Elshaw, p.61

The Edwardian ideals of stoicism placed high value upon those who acted in a gentlemanly fashion when exposed to extreme danger. Charles Douie recalled the complexities that this created among young subalterns, one of whom (a fellow alumnus of Rugby): 'cared very little for whether he lived or died.' Despite the expectation that this subaltern keep up appearances, Douie saw that he: '...had not previously realised how much of unhappiness the laughter of a brave man may conceal.'⁵⁷⁶ But despite the emotional trauma that may have prompted fearlessness in some officers, Douie still concluded that it was a privilege to have served with: 'so gallant a body of men, of a company which merited the proud title of "gentlemen unafraid".'⁵⁷⁷ Marshall was not unique in being praiseworthy for his fearlessness. He was merely one of many respected officers. Conversely, many officers did not act in such a fashion and were held in esteem for different reasons, while some others were simply denounced for not being up to the expected standards.⁵⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the ability to lead was time and again linked to overt acts of courage under fire. This shaped the way the lower ranks evaluated the overall leadership of their division.

In contrast to the dynamic and fearless leadership at the front, the divisional command and staffs could seem distant and irrelevant to some. Miller, in 1938, criticised the brigadier and divisional GOC for seizing: 'the opportunity to make an infernal nuisance of themselves in the way of parades and inspections and Lord knows what.' In terms reflecting the paternalism of the front line officers, he expected them to spend: 'their energy on seeing that the billets were in decent order, arranging good bath houses in the neighbourhood and so forth, how much it would have been appreciated.'⁵⁷⁹ The paternalism within the army mirrored that which existed in society, thus it should be no surprise that officers and men expected their generals to have their best interests at heart. Nevertheless, we

⁵⁷⁶ Charles Douie, *The Weary Road*, (1929) pp.84-85

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.85

⁵⁷⁸ IWM, 83/3/1, Captain C. C. Miller, p.20: Miller described the second in command as: 'a silly little ass of a man...He was voluble and nervous, and Jock's complete insouciance under fire used to try him pretty severely.'

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.22

should be mindful of reading too much into *post-facto* recollections of individuals, especially among the literate and poetic public school officer class. It is evident that a mixture of attitudes existed towards the generalship of divisions. Frederic Manning, (7/KSLI, 3rd Division) in his semi-autobiographical, fictionalised account depicted the range of opinion that co-existed when looking at the generals' jobs. After a number of condemnatory remarks from the characters of Weeper, Shem and Glazier, the main protagonist, Bourne, speaks up in defence of the generals: 'He's not thinking of you or of me or of any individual man, or of any particular battalion or division. Men, to him are only part of the material he has got to work with; and if he felt as you or I feel, he couldn't carry on with his job. It's not fair to think he's inhuman.'⁵⁸⁰ Although written as a novel, this section, built upon Manning's own experiences, perfectly demonstrates the difficulty of generalising. The expectation that paternalism should be a priority and that leaders should lead by example influenced the opinions of some who drew their ideas from classically influenced Edwardian attitudes prevalent in both the military and wider society. This, coupled with the value placed upon personal courage led many subordinates to evaluate their senior leaders on terms other than tactical or operational planning.

Returning to the case study of Marshall, one final area of critical importance relevant to all levels of command is that of inspiration. In recent years the notion of a 'transformational' leader has given the idea of an inspirational leader a strong theoretical backbone, but it was nonetheless recognised as an important attribute of leadership during the Great War.⁵⁸¹ Marshall's citation (quoted above) highlights his 'inspiring example' while Potts praised him for his attempts to 'instill [sic] a sense of discipline and smartness' into the disorganised battalion, according him: 'some success' but recognising that 'the lack of experienced officers is something which is almost impossible to

⁵⁸⁰ Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* [originally *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, 1929] p.155

⁵⁸¹ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (London, Harper Row, 1978)

overcome in a short space of time.'⁵⁸² Private Hudson, too, proudly told his son of Marshall's feats, but perhaps the highest praise was accorded to Marshall while he was still alive.⁵⁸³ On 31 August 1918 a short piece was published in the *Oldham Standard* entitled: '*An Irish Guardsman Attached to Lancs. Fusiliers*' in which a soldier of the Lancashire Fusiliers described Marshall's relations with the men, adding: 'He is the bravest and best leader of men I have ever known and had the honour to fight under, he now is the most beloved of men in the Battalion.' The piece concluded with: 'I'll gladly follow him anywhere, he has the Regiment with him and we are all proud of him.'⁵⁸⁴ While other depictions of Marshall may suffer from the veneration bestowed by hindsight, this article strongly suggests that he did manage to instil a strong sense of loyalty among his subordinates in a very short space of time. Furthermore, to prompt such strong praise shows that during his time with 16/LF he certainly had an inspirational effect upon at least one of his subordinates. Although, inspiration was easier to achieve as a battalion C.O., where a leader could strike up personal relationships with many of those under their command, it will be seen, in the case of Cameron Shute that inspiration of subordinates played a pivotal role in achieving results. The case of Marshall demonstrates that inter-personal relationships, the role of the leaders in setting an example, and a 'disciplined' professionalism were the key factors in promoting the improvement within the battalion. These factors remained relevant to the divisional commanders, and while the jobs of a battalion C.O. and Major-General fundamentally differed, the example provides a viable benchmark for evaluation of the latter's capacity to inspire.

There were some within the army that saw the changing character of war as something which would modify the way leaders interacted with their men, William Robertson was one such figure. He understood the difficulties posed by the great expansion of army size for leaders relating on a personal level with their troops, yet still stressed the importance of leaders making: 'additional

⁵⁸² IWM, Misc. 3 Item 42, J. N. Marshall V.C. M.C.

⁵⁸³ IWM, 94/23/1, G. A. Potts, Letter from Private S. Hudson

⁵⁸⁴ IWM, Misc. 3 Item 42, J. N. Marshall V.C. M.C.

efforts to meet these new conditions, for the human factor remains unchanged and the men are as sensitive as ever to the human touch.⁵⁸⁵ Despite showing an awareness of the changing context within which leaders in the British Army operated, Robertson was not advocating tailoring the leadership style in any real sense; a process which modern theorists would recognise as understanding leadership as a broad discipline.⁵⁸⁶ Rather, his advice should be seen as promoting the continued importance of strong relations between leader and led in whatever new environment may arise. This was not the only attempt to inculcate and promote the valued leadership qualities. On 1 April 1916, *The Times* published the lecture given by a 'senior officer' at a school for junior officers, entitled: 'The Duties of an Officer', later to be reproduced as SS 415.⁵⁸⁷ Prior to that however, it was compiled alongside other useful articles of advice and published in a short booklet which was distributed around 74 Infantry Brigade (25th Division), and other formations, including 32nd Division.⁵⁸⁸ The address itself further demonstrates the fusion of classical, Clausewitzian and Edwardian ideals that had blended to shape the expectations of leadership for the British Army: character, discipline, and knowledge provide the major themes interspersed with the language of paternalism, patriotism and self-sacrifice.⁵⁸⁹ The speech was as much about developing beneficial leadership qualities in a classical fashion, while the interest and dissemination demonstrate an overt desire within the British Army (and indeed wider society) to attempt to understand what made good leaders. Thought was given to leadership but the onus was on continuity of existing principles and centred on the leaders' characteristics.

Command was a different matter. As chapter one has set out, command is not simply a synonym for leadership, but a sister concept, concerning the systems in place to ensure the right decisions are

⁵⁸⁵ Robertson, *Private to Field-Marshal* (1921) p.108

⁵⁸⁶ Keith Grint, *Leadership Management and Command: Re-thinking D-Day* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) pp.11-18

⁵⁸⁷ *The Times* Saturday 1 April 1916; S.S. 415 *The Duties of an Officer Knowledge and Character* (October, 1917); Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp.186-187

⁵⁸⁸ IWM, 94/23/1 G.A. Potts; IWM, 78/72/1, Lt C. L. Platt

⁵⁸⁹ IWM, 78/72/1, Lt C. L. Platt.; *The Times* Saturday 1 April 1916; see Appendix 4 for an extract of the article.

made by the right people in the right place at the right time. In *FSR I* the BEF had enshrined important command principles such as good planning, clear communications, decentralisation and flexibility to handle 'friction'.⁵⁹⁰ General Gough's conduct in July and November 1916 has demonstrated that delegation was inconsistent and highly contingent upon leadership style. Shute's leadership and influence on command will be shown to largely adhere to *FSR I*'s principles but stop somewhere short of a fully decentralised system.⁵⁹¹ Contemporary thoughts about command offer evidence that the British Army was looking at how best to approach battle. They recognised the principles behind command, even if as John Bourne has noted: 'Existing notions of command and existing command structures were presented with a fundamental challenge by the massive and rapid expansion of the Army.'⁵⁹² Yet, the application of command principles as part of the solution to this problem remained inconsistent even at an individual level.

Overall, this section has demonstrated that the British Army taught and promoted a combination of classical, Edwardian social and military leadership principles through *FSR I* and the Staff College, Camberley. These were inculcated in the officer class, who were already primed with many of the notions via the public school system. The values themselves were not equally emphasised; moral factors such as courage and determination took priority in development over organisation etc., nonetheless this did not mean other factors were wholly ignored. At the lower levels these prominent characteristics shaped the effects a leader could have upon his men, while also influencing subordinates' views of senior officers. There was still a divergent range of opinion, which could be highly subjective; yet the principles themselves remained consistent with the broader themes. The British Army attempted to understand leadership, by identifying what made

⁵⁹⁰ See chapter one.

⁵⁹¹ For current scholarship regarding decentralised command see: Bryan Watters, 'Mission Command: *Auftragstaktik*', Leadership Symposium, RAF Cranwell. 13 May 2004; David Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2006) pp.60-63; Keith Grint, *Leadership Management and Command: Re-thinking D-Day* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) p.349; although not mentioning *Auftragstaktik* Bruce Gudmundsson does acknowledge the underlying concept in: *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (London, Praeger, 1989) p.171

⁵⁹² John Bourne, 'British Generals in the First World War' in Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership & Command*, pp.93-116, p.94

leaders successful. This next section will look at how this characteristic based understanding of leadership has been superseded by approaches drawing upon psychology and the social sciences, while offering a new interpretation on how leadership could mould learning.

Modern

This section will do two things: it will first establish the modern leadership theories that will be used to evaluate the 32nd Division's GOC in this and the following chapter; the second part will look at leadership's relationship with learning and explain how the two are intimately connected. The aim of both these parts is to set out new ways of analysing and interpreting the decisions, and effects of Major-General Shute's leadership of 32nd Division. To avoid unfair or ahistorical analysis modern theory will only be considered alongside the established contemporary criteria.

Over the last thirty years the literature relating to leadership has grown dramatically. Peter Gray has observed that four key areas have contributed to this rise in publication: 'the works of the successful businessmen [in which he also includes "business school literature"]'; the psychology field (including occupational and organisational); the social scientists; and the broad historical church.⁵⁹³ From these four fields perhaps the most influential and theoretical work has stemmed from the social sciences. Authors such as James MacGregor Burns and Bernard Bass have strongly influenced writers in the other three fields and established leadership ideas that challenged existing trait or character based approaches.⁵⁹⁴ The idea of transactional and transforming leaders has arisen from this. There was little scope for a GOC, 32nd Division, to 'cause a metamorphosis in form or structure' of the extent that would meet Burns's definition of transforming leadership.⁵⁹⁵ The

⁵⁹³ Peter Gray, 'The Strategic leadership and direction of the Royal Air Force strategic air offensive against Germany from inception to 1945' (Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010) p.

⁵⁹⁴ A summary of their ideas is given in the literature review.

⁵⁹⁵ Burns, *Transforming Leadership* (2003) p.24; *Leadership* (1974) p.20

motivation of subordinates through incentive, threat of punishment and bargaining, core aspects of transactional leadership, were employed albeit unknowingly.

The contextual approach to understanding leadership problems offered by Keith Grint and heavily drawing on the work of Horst Rittel and Marvin Webber, is more useful for this study. The categorisation of problems as 'tame', 'wicked' and 'critical' reinserts context as an important factor in deciding the appropriate leadership methods.⁵⁹⁶ Management solutions can be effective for tame problems, but wicked ones require a leader to be consultative and ask the correct questions. Critical problems create the conditions where authoritarian styles are best suited. This type of leadership style allows for a rapid response to the crisis as it unfolds.⁵⁹⁷ Like all typologies there is a degree of artificiality about both Grint, Rittel and Webber's tame, wicked and critical problems, and the corresponding leadership solutions given. The emphasis on direct decision-making in a crises is muddled by the circumstances of poor communications which shrouded the self-evident character of a critical problem. In this command vacuum Shute had very little scope to influence events. Consequently, identity and communication formed important parts of leadership's 'ensemble of arts' and Shute's employment of these will be analysed alongside his responses to contextual leadership problems.⁵⁹⁸

Assessing how leadership affected the fighting performance of 32nd Division is only part of the answer to how the formation learnt. Through their actions, leaders could directly shape the capacity of their subordinates to learn. To adequately assess this it is necessary to set out a brief and simple way of gauging how leaders can affect their followers and shape the pace and speed of learning. The literature has not ignored the overlap between leadership and learning. Both the business and

⁵⁹⁶ Horst Rittel & Marvin Webber, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences* Vol 4: No 2 (June, 1973) pp.155-169

⁵⁹⁷ Grint, *Leadership Management and Command: Re-thinking D-Day* (2008) p.11

⁵⁹⁸ Keith Grint, *The Arts of Leadership* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) p.27

social science schools have looked at how 'transformational' leadership can infuse and promote organisational learning.⁵⁹⁹ These approaches are much less convincing in a historical context where transformational leadership cannot be artificially implanted. Other fields have been slower to evaluate learning and leadership as inter-related aspects of performance. In the 'historical church', and more specifically the First World War literature, progress has been made in both fields but rarely have they overlapped. One exception is John Bourne's account of 'British Generals in the First World War' which offers a firm defence of leadership within the broader context of the 'learning curve' idea.⁶⁰⁰ Nevertheless, there is no attempt to explain how leadership affected learning beyond the general improvement in the conduct of operations as experience grew. To rectify this three areas where leaders directly affect learning can be considered:

1. As a mentor: Direct advice and guidance is given by the leader to subordinates, in a similar fashion as a teacher does for a student.
2. As a role model: The leader is exemplary in both conduct and attitude. This differs from a mentor in that it does not require direct interaction. Application, consideration and thoughtful study of war and its conduct may create an environment which promotes good learning practices.⁶⁰¹
3. Through discussion and appraisal: By either informal conversation or direct appraisal the leader can mould subordinates (or peers) in how they develop.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ Meredith Atwood, Jordan Mora, and Abram Kaplan, 'Learning to lead: evaluating leadership and organizational learning' *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, Vol. 31: No.7 (2010) pp.576-595; Lillas Brown and Barry Posner, 'Exploring the relationship between learning and leadership' *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal* Vol. 22: No.5/6 (2001) pp.274-280

⁶⁰⁰ Bourne, 'British Generals in the First World War' in Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership & Command*, pp.93-116; for a similarly important study of command within the broader framework of the 'learning curve' see articles in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds.) *Command and Control on the Western Front* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 2004)

⁶⁰¹ Clausewitz recognised the need for a thoughtful approach to war: 'A specialist who has spent half his life trying to master every aspect of some obscure subject is surely more likely to make headway than a man who is trying to master it in a short time.' *On War* (1976), p.141

⁶⁰² The formulation of these three aspects has been greatly aided by conversations with Peter Gray about the importance, influence and consequences of leadership in relation to learning. He has my sincerest thanks.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but a way to introduce an analytical component to and help understand the effects a leader can have upon peer and subordinate improvement. It must be recognised that this was not a one-way relationship nor was leadership and learning confined to those in positions of authority, discussions amongst peers took place and lessons went up as well as down. Consideration also needs to be given to the circumstances within which leaders were operating, communications, pressure from superiors and enemy actions modified a leader's capacity to act in a manner that benefited learning.

Summary

Although sometimes implied by the proponents of an approach, no leadership theory can rightfully claim comprehensive treatment of the entire domain of leadership phenomena. Because at least some empirical support is available for each perspective, leadership appears to be a far more complex set of cause-and-effect relationship than suggested by any one of the comparatively simple theoretical models offered to date.⁶⁰³

This section will briefly summarise the notable aspects of the contemporary and modern models to offer a loose set of parameters for evaluation. As Arthur Jago (quoted above) recognised, leadership theory should not be thought of as a set of conflicting, contradictory ideas but a set of interpretive tools which can enable us to explore the complexity of the causal relationship between leadership and other concepts; structure, efficiency, and learning for example. While written in 1982 Jago's observation remains true today, and for this reason these parameters should only be considered an outline for evaluation. The *contemporary* section showed that Edwardian leadership values drew heavily on classical ideas. This was fundamentally a trait based approach, which remained

⁶⁰³ Arthur G. Jago, 'Leadership Perspectives in Theory and Research', *Management Science*, Vol.28: No.3 (1982) pp.315-336, p.330

consistent at all levels and in differing contexts, but could be divided into moral and organisational strands. The latter encompassed much of what today would be considered 'command structure' and has been assessed in chapters one, two and three. Organisational qualities will instead be considered in relation to the leaders' personal abilities. The key 'traits' sought by contemporaries in the leaders of 32nd Division were:

The Moral:

- Courage (into which go gallantry and fearlessness)
- Energy
- Determination
- Inspiration (through example, and paternalism)

The Organisational:

- Command Skill – Individual planning, communication and flexibility of direction
- Professional knowledge
- Discipline (and control)

No single modern model of leadership will be used to unite the disparate ideas of Bass, Grint, Rittel and Webber but where appropriate their theories will be used to explore the difficulties and decisions made by the leaders of 32nd Division.

An explanation needs to be given for what the fundamental aim of leadership is and how this can be brought together with learning. Sheffield, drawing on the works of W.D. Henderson, has identified two aims: 'the achievement of cohesion, when the formal military unit becomes for its members a substitute for family' and 'to mould the cohesive group so that their goals are congruent with those

of the greater organisation, the army.⁶⁰⁴ This is reasonable at the tactical level of command but as a leader's focus shifts to operational and strategic factors the means of achieving these aims necessarily change.⁶⁰⁵ For a divisional GOC fostering a culture of cohesion and unity of purpose was as important as ensuring specific units conformed to this ideal. One issue with this definition of the aims of leadership is that it does not accommodate a leader's responsibility to ensure improvement in fighting performance. Cohesion and congruency may ensure men will follow orders willingly but it does not account for them knowing what they are doing when they do so. Therefore the aim of leadership should be:

To achieve cohesion within the unit or constituent units of the formation so that the strongest possible bonds exist between members. They must also ensure that the goals of the organisation are shared by the smaller groups being commanded. Leaders must seek to improve the ability of the led to prosecute war successfully.

This added component brings leadership and learning much closer together and highlights the true purpose of both, within the military context, that is, the maintenance of fighting efficiency and improvement of combat performance. The following section will establish the case study of Cameron Deane Shute, GOC 32nd Division from February 1917 until April 1918. His characteristics and conformity with Edwardian standards will be analysed. Chapter six will build upon this to explore his understanding of war and success as a 'learning leader'.

5.2 A Case Study in Leadership and Learning: Cameron Shute Context and

⁶⁰⁴ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.43; W.D. Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* (Washington DC, National Defence University, 1985) pp.11-16; see also Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (originally published as *Firing Line*) (2nd Ed. London, Cassell, 2003; 1985) pp.340-353

⁶⁰⁵ Chapter four has shown that congruency with the aims of the organisation are pivotal at all levels within a division, but this does not necessarily require strict adherence to orders. Orders can be broken with the aim of preserving or improving general efficiency.

Characteristics

This case study will assess Shute's command during his time with the 32nd Division.⁶⁰⁶ It will not be a chronological study of his time with the division but will assess using examples to build a picture of his leadership style. This first chapter will focus on the moral elements of Shute's leadership and demonstrate that by contemporary definitions he was a strong leader, embodying many of the principles valued by the British Army at the time. This had some problematic ramifications: Shute was liable to be too aggressive when the circumstances demanded reserve; his manner with subordinates was often brusque when he felt standards were not being maintained; and he divided opinion through his punctiliousness, inspiring fear in some, and deep admiration in others. The following chapter will build on this by exploring his organisational and tactical understanding as a leader as well as his influence on learning within the division.

Shute is a curious figure in the historiography of the First World War. The bawdy poem by A.P. Herbert lent the General an immortality few other divisional, or corps commanders have received.⁶⁰⁷ Yet this has tended to focus historical attention on Shute for his four months in charge of 63rd (Royal Naval) Division.⁶⁰⁸ Those historians that have looked at Shute's other commands be that of a brigade, division or his later time as V Corps commander have furnished interesting, but limited conclusions.⁶⁰⁹ Outside of his role as a figure of satire, Shute makes the occasional cameo appearance but has never been the lead actor. To an extent this is unsurprising; the largest period of

⁶⁰⁶ For a short biography see Appendix 5.

⁶⁰⁷ For A. P. Herbert's poem see Appendix 6.

⁶⁰⁸ Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London, Cassell, 2003) pp.87-88; Leonard Sellers, *The Hood Battalion* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 1995)

⁶⁰⁹ Brigade: Bourne, 'British Generals in the First World War' in Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership & Command*, pp.93-116, pp.102-103; Corps: Peter Simkins, 'Somme Reprise' in Bond (ed.) *'Look to your Front' Studies in The First World War* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 1999) p.151; Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 2006) pp. 163-169; Michael LoCicero's thesis 'Moonlight Massacre: The night Operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2nd December 1917' (Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011) is a worthy exception. Although only relating to one engagement, it covers Shute's leadership style and personality in an even-handed fashion. The continuity of Shute's operational method from Brigade to V Corps is outside the remit of this study but would provide a fertile avenue of future research.

time he spent in one post was as GOC 32nd Division, a formation without a divisional history to advertise its exploits.

Context of Leadership

To truly understand Shute's performance as GOC 32nd Division, the context in which he joined the division needs to be covered. After Major-General Rycroft was replaced on 21 November 1916 by Major-General Barnes, the 32nd Division experienced a small renaissance in reputation. 1 July and the bloody localised battles on the Ancre between 18-23 November had soured the reputation of the division in the eyes of some. This was down to the former GOC, William Rycroft, who according to Lord Stanhope: '[He] did not act happily with either his staff or his brigadiers.'⁶¹⁰ As far as General Gough was concerned, the 32nd Division had bungled his attack on 3 July, had an insubordinate unit – 11/Borders – and failed to carry its objectives in the Ancre attacks.⁶¹¹ Despite research suggesting Gough's abrasive and assertive command style meant he had to shoulder some of the blame, it is not difficult to see why he may have had concerns about the 32nd Division.⁶¹² Irrespective of Gough's opinion, the relationship between Rycroft and his superior had broken down irreparably.⁶¹³ Once Rycroft was replaced things started to improve. This culminated on 10 February 1917 with the

⁶¹⁰ Lord Stanhope quoted in Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London, Harper Collins, 2004) p.222

⁶¹¹ For 3 July 1916 see: TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 'S.G. 142/169' 4th July 1916, report in response to X Corps's G.178, which itself very probably prompted by Reserve Army's 'G.S. 406/49' 3 July 1916 see TNA, WO 95/851 X Corps General Staff. For more on 3 July 1916 see Gary Sheffield, 'An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough' in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds.), *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918* (Staplehurst, Spellmount, 2004) pp.71-95; p.78; p.80; Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) pp.38-39. For insubordination of 11/Borders see chapter four; TNA, WO 32/17700 'Report on the insubordination of the 11th Borders'; Brigadier-General Timothy P. Finnegan 'Failure of 11th Bn The Border Regiment to Carry Out an Attack on 10 July 1916' in *The British Army Review* Num.144 (Spring 2008) pp.92-95. For the Ancre: TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 17-23 November 1916; 'Narrative of Operations Carried out by the 32nd Division - 18th November 1916'

⁶¹² See chapters two and three; Ian F. Beckett, 'Hubert Gough, Neill Malcolm and Command on the Western Front' in Bond (ed.) *Look to Your Front* (1999) pp.1-12; pp.2-3 suggests a climate of fear had arisen; Helen McCartney and Gary Sheffield, 'Hubert Gough' in Ian Beckett & Steven Corvi, *Haig's Generals*, (Barnsley, Pen & Sword, 2006) pp.75-96; p.91 and Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) pp.38-39, have pointed to Gough's 'assertive' and 'hands-on' command style.

⁶¹³ TNA, Cab 45/138 E.G. Wace to J.E. Edmonds, 30 October 1936.

successful attack on Ten Tree Alley, conducted by 97 Brigade, adjacent to the site of the previous year's vicious fighting.⁶¹⁴ This brought warm praise from Gough who on the 20 February sent the following message:

On leaving the command please convey to the whole division my best wishes for the future and in particular to the G.O.C. 97th Brigade and to his officers and men my appreciation of their very successful attack on TEN TREE ALLEY on 10th/11th February and the fine offensive spirit displayed. I am sure this is only the beginning of many and greater successes.

(Signed). General Gough.⁶¹⁵

It is possible that Gough sent this simply as a standard morale-boosting token of gratitude. Yet his previous conduct suggests this was not the case. When 32nd Division began the move north on 16 July 1916 to the Cambrin, Cuinchy and Bethune area, Gough sent no similar thanks.⁶¹⁶ Even if this was simply a formality, it had the effect that there was no lingering animosity, on the surface at least. When Shute arrived, the division essentially had a clean slate.

There is little evidence to suggest that the men themselves worried too much about the intrigues of the commanders. Instead they reflected upon the losses and what it would take to be victorious. Albert Elshaw, 17/HLI, observed after the war that the mood amongst the men had subtly changed by those early months of 1917:

The determination to “see it through” was still there, but the gay adventurous spirit of the early days

⁶¹⁴ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, 10th February 1917. Notably the 11/Borders played a leading role in overcoming the German positions.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 20th February 1917

⁶¹⁶ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916; Haig notes that Gough was 'very pleased' by the appointment of R.W.R. Barnes to replace W.H. Rycroft. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, *The First World War Political, Social and Military Manuscript Sources: Series One: The Haig Papers from the National Library of Scotland, Part I Haig's Autograph Great War Diary* (Brighton: Harvester Press Microfilm Publications LTD, 1987) 21 November 1916

gave way to a desire to “get it over”. Whilst the sense of humour was by no means quenched, the attitude to war became less of a game played to set rules and conduct – the realization had dawned that this was a savage fight to a finish.⁶¹⁷

This feeling of determination and apprehension was shared by the others within the division. Shortly before the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line the men of 16/HLI were sombre but determined, as the battalion history recorded:

The black mood was on the men at the eve of a remarkable phase of the war. But they carried on with grim cheerfulness and a profound fatalism, knowing that if their own lot was miserable, their enemy's was infinitely worse, and that endurance now stood for a quicker finish to the ghastly business.⁶¹⁸

The actions on the Somme, at Thiepval and Beaumont Hamel, had left their mark upon the division and their shadow hung across the minds of those in the battalion who survived:

The expressed intention of the French to advance to a depth of several miles was, to put it no higher, regarded as far too sanguine by troops on whom were scarcely healed the scars of former battles that had been announced with a like flourish of trumpets. The deeply-bitten lessons of yesterday and the lately-ended purgatory wiped the lustre from any hopes that this was to be different from the others.⁶¹⁹

Despite the change in mood the attacking intent was far from subdued and events were to quickly provide Shute with the opportunity to improve morale, impose his own leadership style upon the

⁶¹⁷ IWM, PP/MCR/49, A. Elshaw, *Mudlarks and Sandbags: A Troglodyte's Tales of Nieuport, Passchendaele and the Somme During the Critical days of 1917* [unpublished memoir] p.31

⁶¹⁸ Thomas Chalmers (ed.), *A Saga of Scotland: History of the 16th Battalion Highland Light Infantry (City of Glasgow Regiment)* (Glasgow, John M'Callum & Co, 1930) p.79

⁶¹⁹ Chalmers (ed.), *History of the 16th Battalion HLI* (1930) p.78

formation and score an important victory against the enemy. On 16 March 1917 the Germans in the trenches opposite the 32nd Division, now on the extreme right of the British line at Le Quesnel, began their withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line. This presented the GOC with a fundamentally 'wicked' problem of how he would co-ordinate the follow up. He had to surmount supply, communications and engineering challenges while maintaining a steady advance. Furthermore Shute was still new to the division and the majority of its personnel. He joined on 19 February 1917 but only spent ten days with the division before the German withdrawal; 15 days were spent on leave in Britain (between 1-15 March).⁶²⁰ Shute was for all intents and purposes, a new commander entering the division on the eve of the German withdrawal. Under Shute's command the 32nd Division was able to rapidly close with the Germans and on 1 and 2 April 1917 they engaged the enemy's advanced positions in and around the villages of Savy and Holnon. The attacks were carefully planned and swiftly executed but came at a high cost in casualties. This aggressive style favouring the attack wherever possible would typify Shute's command of 32nd Division. During 1917 the division faced two more major challenges: the Battle of Nieuport 10 July 1917 and the attack in the Ypres salient, 2 December 1917. These posed different challenges for Shute: at Nieuport the division was attacked by the Germans and faced a crisis, at Passchendaele it was the 'wicked' problem of how to conduct an attack against an entrenched enemy, over broken terrain and with only limited artillery support. The manpower shortage of 1918 limited the scale of attacks made by the division to two major raids in February on the German positions in the Houthulst Forest and an assault on the village of Alette by three battalions on 5 April. Similar problems of planning and co-ordination were faced. The division's responses shared many common features with previous assaults; wicked problems were beginning to be 'tamed'. The following section will look at how Shute's personal leadership characteristics contributed to solving the challenges faced by the division. When Shute took over command of the division it had an improving reputation; the

⁶²⁰ TNA, WO 95/2373 32nd Division Headquarters Branches and Services: AA & QMG, 19-28 February 1917; 1 and 15 March 1917.

troops were cautious and cynical but determined to see it through; and the coming months of 1917 and early 1918 would bring a range of wicked problems and one crisis.

Characteristics

The value of a formation, no matter what its size, depends on the character and personality of its commander, whether he be a colonel or a lieutenant. A company can be what its commander makes it; the men will catch his fire and enthusiasm.⁶²¹

As the size of the force under a leader's command expanded, so too did the difficulty of impressing the individual character upon that body of troops. Identity and the cohesion forged by it, was not easily changed, but over time the character of the leader shaped the outlook of the subordinates. This was understood by Shute who in a lecture delivered at the Staff College, Camberley spoke of 'COMMAND. Efficiency of every Formation or Unit from Div. downwards is a reflection of PERSONALITY OF COMMANDER.'⁶²² Shute strove to create an aggressive ethos within the division. To understand this his personality, principles and character need to be explored. It would be easy to view Shute as an archetypal over-aggressive commander, whose 'offensive spirit' led to an unreasonably strict code of discipline and needless loss of life. His time with 63rd (Royal Naval) Division has led John Bourne to view him as insensitive to the backgrounds of the troops he was commanding, while Gordon Corrigan has taken a more forgiving approach by defending the principles underlying the punctiliousness.⁶²³ These opinions and approaches are useful, but paint too simplistic a picture of the General's attitude to leadership and war. Shute was not simply

⁶²¹ W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1939) p.48

⁶²² Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC) library, A.H. Marindin Papers, 'Lecture delivered by Major General Sir C.D. Shute, KCB, KCMG, November 1920' p.8; Thanks to Gary Sheffield and Michael LoCicero for alerting me to this document.

⁶²³ For views differing views of Shute's approach to the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division see Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (2003) pp.87-88 and Bourne, 'British Generals in the First World War' in Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership & Command*, p.103; Michael LoCicero, 'Moonlight Massacre: The night Operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2nd December 1917' (2011) pp.353-362

aggressive owing to ego or a desire to act with the appropriate measure of 'offensive spirit' but an optimist with confidence in his own and his subordinates' ability to plan and launch attacks. He emphasised discipline, and 'spit-and-polish' which in certain circumstances did not go down well, but he also adhered to the Edwardian ideal of personal bravery and cared for his charges. It is these elements that will now be considered.

Courage and Discipline

Shute possessed two characteristics which made him a strong leader by contemporary measures. He was physically courageous and a disciplined soldier who expected the same standards from his men. Yet, despite meeting contemporary definitions and expectations, in a practical capacity these traits could have unforeseen negative effects. His courage in reconnaissance and front line inspections could lead to subordinates feeling stifled and under-appreciated, while his discipline manifesting in 'spit-and-polish' could seem excessive and pointless to the front line soldier.

In a physical sense Shute was certainly a courageous commander going forward to inspect the lines and undertaking personal reconnaissances. While commanding 59 Infantry Brigade, 20th (Light) Division, in front of Guillemont, September 1916, he conducted a personal reconnaissance of the front line. One Staff Officer recalled how: 'He stood up on the parapet, eighty yards from the Germans approximately, and gazed through his glasses for five or six minutes'.⁶²⁴ This had a profound effect on some of his subordinates, Sergeant A. K. Paterson served under Shute during this time:

General Shute was the finest offensive officer I've ever come across. He was a man who wanted to be

⁶²⁴ Major H.G. Parkyn, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle* (London, The Rifle Brigade Club and Association, 1937) p.330. Thanks to Michael LoCicero for bringing this source to my attention.

in the line and to know exactly what was going on...[He] was no milksop, no remote, godlike figure so detached from his men that he saw them as pawns or statistics.⁶²⁵

Not everyone was as impressed by the visits. When one 'Top Brass' (more than likely Shute or one of the Brigadiers) was given a tour of the lines in the Nieuport sector, the following conversation was recorded by Albert Elshaw:

“We get a fair amount of shelling hereabouts, the men call it 'Whizz Bang corner!’”

“Quite. Quite. Did you say, Captain, that there is an alternative way back? I think we'll take it!”

One of war's horror “stories” - maybe!

Nevertheless, no man would go out of his way to traverse a shelled area except strictly on duty.⁶²⁶

As John Bourne has correctly pointed out, this personal approach came with risks: 'Getting up to the trenches and back was a long and exhausting business, much of it necessarily on foot. During that period, in effect, he commanded nothing.'⁶²⁷ Moreover the very presence of such an authority could have a destabilising effect on the subordinate commanders and troops. Lt-Col. Ian MacDonell, who at the time was in temporary command of the 1/Dorsets, had one such experience:

One evening after the trenches had been knocked about by bombardment during the night – Gen Chute [sic] came round – He only looked at a little piece of the line + was very nervous of shell fire '+from start to finish he damned me'⁶²⁸

Shute went on to question him about the defensive posture of the trenches, why they were in a bad

⁶²⁵ Quoted in Lyn MacDonald, *The Somme* (London, Michael Joseph, 1983) pp.230-231

⁶²⁶ IWM, PP/MCR/49, Albert Elshaw, p.65

⁶²⁷ John Bourne, 'British Generals in the First World War' in Sheffield (ed.), *Leadership & Command*, pp.93-116, p.105

⁶²⁸ IWM, 88/39/1, Lt-Col I H MacDonell, 24 June 1917; see also Liddle Collection, University of Leeds Ian H MacDonnell GS 1009 [The discrepancy in spellings exists between the archives. His name according to his Medal Index Record, TNA, WO 372/12/218121, was Ian Harrison MacDonell, this spelling has consequently been preferred.]

state and whether a fatigue system had been put into place. When MacDonell informed him of what had been done, the situation became heated:

We had [a fatigue system] but he would not listen to what it was – he swore - + jumped – If I could not do better he would.

If a shell had come + killed me, I would have welcomed it, if it had also killed him.

He went away growling and cursing.

He is said to be a very good General - + it may be – I don't know that – But he is hated by everyone but his jackals.⁶²⁹

This incident demonstrates two facets of Shute's command: his occasional personal reconnaissance and an interrogatory approach to his subordinate's actions. In this case his actions did little to endear him to MacDonell but as will be argued in the next chapter, there were benefits. Shute understood that timing was important when going forward. In his Staff College lecture he advised his students: 'Unit Commanders should not be in too great a hurry to advance their H.Qs. They lose touch whilst doing so. "Better to drive from the box than sit on the necks of the leaders."' ⁶³⁰ As chapter three has shown, the staff played an important role in the information gathering process during 1917. By promoting the collection of information in this manner Shute was able to keep abreast of the circumstances in the front line without undue exposure himself.⁶³¹ Shute was courageous enough to visit the front, and he generally conducted personal reconnaissance of new areas but regular visits became increasingly difficult to reconcile with the pressures of divisional command. Still, Shute's visits fulfilled the expectations that an Edwardian leader be physically unperturbed by danger, yet it brought limited benefits and could destabilise command of subordinate units. His attitude to discipline offers some explanation for Shute's front line involvement.

⁶²⁹ IWM, 88/39/1, Lt-Col I H MacDonell, 24 June 1917

⁶³⁰ JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.5

⁶³¹ See also A.B. Scott, 'The Diary of Lieutenant A.B. Scott, M.C.' in Whinyates, *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) December 18th and 19th 1917, p.86

Shute was a strict disciplinarian. At the heart of this was his belief that 'weak and passive command results in discontent, slackness behind the lines, want of resolution in battle and failure (with inevitable corollary of failure i.e. Discontent and loss of moral).'⁶³² Slackness for Shute was a manifestation of poor command and the only way to stop this from happening was to be decisive and proactive. This meant the men, both infantry, supporting and specialist arms were subjected to regular inspections when out of the line. This 'spit-and-polish' was understandable given the values of the day but in much the same way as regular forward forays could disrupt the troops, so too could inspections. Rev. Rowan Earnest Grice-Hutchinson, chaplain to the 32nd Divisional Artillery, observed Shute's exacting standards:

The Divisional General, Shute, inspected the D.A.C. to-day, Headquarters and B échelon here at 10 o'clock, and 1 and 2 Sections at 12. I rode up to the latter and viewed it from afar. I thought the Column looked splendid, but I heard afterwards that, though he praised the animals, yet he had a lot to say about the harness and tidiness of the men.⁶³³

Lt Ludovic Heathcoat-Amory, Staff Captain Divisional Artillery, was a little less diplomatic when he bemoaned the cleaning required for inspections: 'Round 168 lines. Mud bad. Damn this burnishing steel – enough to do without it.' Only four days earlier he had observed that 'All-Highest [Shute] back on war-path!'⁶³⁴ While a persuasive case can be made for the importance of maintaining strict discipline, Shute went too far. On 21 May 1917 Shute sent a 16 point memorandum to his brigades, specialist headquarters and divisional troops bemoaning the current

⁶³² JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.8

⁶³³ Grice-Hutchinson, M.C., 'The Diary...' in Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories 32nd Division* (1932) 4 May 1917; pp.205-206

⁶³⁴ Lt Ludovic Heathcoat-Amory, 'The Diary of the Late Major L. Heathcoat-Amory' in Whinyates (ed.) *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 4 and 2 February 1918, pp.640-641

state of 'March Discipline'. Some points were fair: '(e) Packs were not always well fitted and in many cases were evidently over-loaded.' This could unnecessarily tire men out and cause injuries. '(a) Unpunctuality of units at the starting point resulting in gaps in the column' had the potential to cause much greater problems if units were late arriving at their destination. Conversely some criticisms could only have drawn the ire of the officers and NCOs forced to implement them: 'In some cases men broke their sections of fours to avoid puddles bad places in the road, etc., Officers and N.C.Os did not check this.'⁶³⁵ Nor could the divisional cyclists have appreciated being instructed to push their bikes in file behind the columns either.⁶³⁶ Adding to the discomfort of the men by applying the 'regular army' code of discipline was not always the most prudent method of winning their trust.⁶³⁷ Discipline played an important role in maintaining standards and efficiency, but when taken to extremes it invited the employment of 'consent and evade'.⁶³⁸ Nevertheless, Shute's martinet discipline did not constitute an abrogation of his paternalistic responsibilities to his men. The welfare of those under his command remained important to him throughout his career. His obituary recognised this neglected side of his character: 'his voice would often break in talking over their [the regimental soldiers'] hardships and their casualties; a trait in his character not always realized.'⁶³⁹ This is developed further in the following chapter, but it is enough to observe here that despite his strict code of discipline he held to the same paternalistic duty of care for his subordinates as other Edwardian officers. Shute's approach to both courage and discipline, while in line with contemporary pre-war attitudes to strong leadership, was not wholly appropriate to practicalities of both the situation and the changed composition of the army. While he recognised the problems with

⁶³⁵ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, May 1917, Appendix 8.

⁶³⁶ By instructing cyclists to push their bicycles it was possible to keep a standard pace and set timing which would be more difficult if mounted. It could also reduce wear on the bicycles. It is unlikely these rationales would have made the instruction any more tolerable to the men.

⁶³⁷ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp.1-12

⁶³⁸ This is covered in chapter four. IWM, 11/6/2, Lt A. Knight, 5 November 1916 letter describes how his company was able to 'win' (steal) a wheel-barrow that was then attached to the Battalion (17/HLI) establishment. The company was loath to leave it so it was given to Knight to transport during route marches. He was more than happy to use it to avoid the usual chafing of his rucksack.

⁶³⁹ Major H.G. Parkyn, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle* (London, The Rifle Brigade Club and Association, 1937) p.335 see also p.329

going forward as a divisional commander, his strict discipline remained a permanent feature of his command.

Aggression, Determination and Optimism

Shute was an aggressive leader. On 27 March 1918 with the German offensives in full swing the commander and his GSO1 reconnoitred the line they were going to join in the Third Army area South of Arras. Upon returning Lt Ludovic Heathcoat-Amory observed: 'General Shute, is quite happy about situation – says French are waiting their time to counter-attack. We shall probably join in from Arras.'⁶⁴⁰ This was not an isolated incident; earlier in the year Heathcoat-Amory had again noted in his diary that they would be out of the line for 24 hours but followed it up with: 'I wonder! General Shute wants to go south to St. Quentin for a battle.'⁶⁴¹ The yearning for combat was not a deplorable characteristic in a commander and Shute's understated response to the German offensives can be partially explained by the fact that the line he reconnoitred in March had not yet become the focal point of the German offensives. Yet it was his natural optimism and risk taking that underpinned his perceived aggression. In his 1920 Staff College lecture he argued: 'The strong man in war is an OPTIMIST. He won't allow himself that he is going to fail. You will always find plenty of people who try to persuade you to take the line of least resistance. Pay no attention to them once you have made up your mind.'⁶⁴² He followed this up by saying:

Don't hesitate to take risks. Don't dread defeat. Feel sure of victory. Your optimism will communicate itself to those under you. Remember that the man who takes no risks will never get great results and

⁶⁴⁰ Lt Ludovic Heathcoat-Amory, 'The Diary of the Late Major L. Heathcoat-Amory' in Whinyates (ed.) *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) March 27th 1918, p.642

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., January 2nd 1918 p.639

⁶⁴² JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.5

does not deserve them. Fortune favours the bold.⁶⁴³

These views were in line with the contemporary understanding of what made a good commander and his emphasis upon acting with resolution drew heavily upon the pre-war principles espoused in *FSR I*.⁶⁴⁴ Furthermore, looking at the intellectual development of the pre-war Edwardian Army, Tim Travers described the twin ideas of 'the psychological battlefield' and 'the cult of the offensive'. While these overstate the division between an emphasis on fire-power and morale, the work does throw light on the pre-eminence of the offensive in military thought.⁶⁴⁵ It was from this environment that Shute's views developed. He was not a maverick. His attitudes adhered to the traditional perspective regarding how a commander should lead. Shute's views on leaders reaching a rapid decision are relevant to understanding his actions during the conflict:

Any fool can solve a military problem in several days or hours. It will then be too late. Must be decided at once. Then, if only nearly right, if carried through with determination overcoming all obstacles, all will be well.

“Look before you leap but if you're going to leap don't look too long.”⁶⁴⁶

It is possible to see the echoes of the contemporary leadership values of energy, courage and determination in the characteristics Shute was advocating. It is through these that Shute's aggressive approach must be viewed. How these characteristics and aggression shaped Shute's command decisions will now be analysed.

One of the most telling indications of Shute's optimism and aggression came in the wake of the

⁶⁴³ Ibid., p.6

⁶⁴⁴ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909), p.107

⁶⁴⁵ Travers, *The Killing Ground* (2003; or.1987) pp.47-49; see also General Staff, War Office, *FSR I* (1909) Chap. VII – The Battle, section 100. *The Offensive and Defensive in Battle* pp.108-109 for further primary evidence of the strong emphasis on the attack.

⁶⁴⁶ JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.6

German attack on the British positions at Nieuport 10 July 1917. Although he was satisfied by the way his division had reacted during the defence of the bridgehead over the Yser, he wished to turn the tables on the Germans and launch his own counter-attack. Operating under the impression that 97 Brigade's local attempts to regain the lost front line trenches were progressing successfully, he issued orders at 11.30pm on 11 July for a deliberate counter-offensive on the town of Lombartzyde to be conducted by 14 Brigade at a later unspecified date.⁶⁴⁷ It soon became clear that the British positions were worse than initially thought and 97 Brigade had failed in its immediate efforts to completely recapture the ground lost to the Germans. The Lombartzyde attack was temporarily shelved [until early August] and the target was changed; plans were re-drawn to attempt an organised counter-attack to reclaim the lost positions.⁶⁴⁸ These were issued on 13 July 1917, and the operation took place on 15 July at 1.15am. Initially it was successful regaining portions of the front line trench, but the men had to withdraw on 16 July under the pressure of German counter-attack, bombardment and fire from the opposing lines.⁶⁴⁹ That 32nd Division lost a small portion of line to the Germans reportedly irritated Shute: 'This attack [on Lombartzyde; 7 August] specially commended itself to the GOC of the 32nd Division to whom the events of July 10 – and notably the first loss of trenches ever admitted by the Division – were not palatable.'⁶⁵⁰ The contemporary opinions on counter-attacking help to explain Shute's desire for a riposte. He viewed counter-attacks as the: 'Essence of Defence', while recognising they could be executed in two forms: 'Immediate

⁶⁴⁷ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 10 July 1917 'Record of Telegraph and Telephone Messages – 11th July 1917'; Wire message 19, timed 5.55am reached DHQ at 8.17am, distributed to XV Corps and 96 Brigade at 9.58am and read that '97th Bde. holding original line with defensive flank thrown back facing GELEIDE BROOK.' At 11.25am DHQ would be informed verbally that: 'You are holding NOSE TRENCH up to NOSE ALLEY and the Hun is holding the remainder of it. The Bosche is in the front line from NOSE ALLEY northwards.' DHQ's response was unequivocal: 'The General says he must have that front bit of NOSE TRENCH taken at once.' The reply was: 'It is being done now.' It is evident from the ambitious plans for a counter-attack that Shute was planning under the impression he held or would shortly be holding all of his original front line positions. The order can be found in TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 11 July 1917 'Operation Order 105'.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 32nd Div. General Staff, 13 July 1917 'Operation Order 106'; the initial plans would form the basis of the proposed attack on 7 August 1917 to improve the position and take Lombartzyde. Rawlinson noted that GOC XV Corps General John Philip Du Cane (Royal Artillery; 1865 – 1947) stopped the initially proposed attack from going ahead. See Churchill Archives Centre: GBR/0014/RWLN 1/7: Rawlinson Diary, 11 July 1917

⁶⁴⁹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 14 July 1917; see also Appendix 15.

⁶⁵⁰ Chalmers (ed.), *History of the 16th Battalion HLI* (1930) pp.104-105; Rawlinson also observed GOC XV Corps

[conducted by] Local Commanders' and 'deliberate' which should 'Take time.'⁶⁵¹ Like his views on the characteristics of a good commander, this was consistent with the prevailing views and found an echo in *FSR I*.⁶⁵² On 10 July and in the days following both immediate and deliberate counter-attacks were made. There were a number of reasons for this: the prevailing expectation that losses should be counter-attacked; the objectives set by Shute and given to the division; the GOC's understanding of war; and the independent initiative from subordinate commanders.⁶⁵³ The G.O.C.'s attitude has to also be factored in as part of this: aggression, optimism and risk-taking all encouraged a positive, offensive response when faced with a crisis.

This aggressive intent was not confined to the German Nieuport attack. On 1 April 1917, during 32nd Division's assault on Savy, Shute recognised that there was a possibility of taking the follow-up, secondary objectives of Bois de Savy and Point 138 which lay beyond the village. Rather than pausing to consolidate, and thus allow the enemy a chance to strengthen their own defensive positions, Shute ordered 32nd Division's artillery into advanced positions upon taking the village of Savy and proceeded to launch a second attack.⁶⁵⁴ The attack was partially successful with 96 Brigade advancing, exposed, across 5000 yards in daylight to effect a strong lodgement in Bois de Savy. Despite efforts to manoeuvre the German defenders off Point 138 during the night, attempts to take this position failed. The following day Shute brought up 14 Brigade for an attack on Holnon; with further effort the guns were pushed forward again and the attack launched in conjunction with renewed efforts on Point 138 by their reserve battalion. The result this time was a complete success, and by the evening 97 Brigade had provided one battalion to exploit the success by taking Bois de Holnon, which lay beyond the village and was holding up unifying the line with the neighbouring

⁶⁵¹ JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.3

⁶⁵² General Staff, *FSR I* (1909), pp.128-129

⁶⁵³ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on the Operations on the 32nd Division front on 10th July 1917', Part IV, p.8; the aspects of command and delegation are dealt with in much more detail in the following section.

⁶⁵⁴ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff: April: 'Report on the Operations...1st & 2nd April'. Shute planned the zero on 1 April 1917 in-part to allow the longest preparation time for exploitation: Part II Plan of Attack on Savy Village; point 8. For awareness of the dangers to the division of pausing and artillery manoeuvre see: Part III: The Attack on Savy and the Events leading up to the Attack on Bois de Savy and Point 138; point 14 & 17.

61st Division.⁶⁵⁵ The division surpassed all expectations, taking, within two days, positions that were expected to hold out until 8 April. This was achieved at the cost of 973 casualties, including 174 killed – a high price to pay against enemy forces which Prior and Wilson have described as 'strong rear guards.'⁶⁵⁶ Such a dismissive view is to ignore the positive effect the attacks had on morale:

The road from Nesle to St. Quentin is a long and cruel one, but in these early days of 1917, it was to the 17th H.L.I. the pathway to glory. They were sweeping onwards in the track of the retreating enemy, with the glow of victory to strengthen their hearts and the blessings of a delivered people in their ears. The echoing trumpets of romance called to them from the Cathedral City, and their blood stirred to the call. These were the impressions that led them, in common with the rest of the Division, to surmount appalling obstacles, natural and devilish. They soaked in the snow, and froze in the keen blast; they starved and toiled on the way, but "stuck it," and their reward was the fall of Savy village. There was fighting all along the 50 mile front just then, and Savy did not loom very large in the chronicles of the time, but those who took part in its capture, and in the taking of the wood a mile beyond, knew that they had achieved the heroic.⁶⁵⁷

Rev. R. E. Grice-Hutchinson was more reserved, but nonetheless concurred with the sentiments: 'Everyone seems delighted at the success of our attack, as we are supposed to have completed three or four days' work in two.'⁶⁵⁸ Shute was in no doubt what the great lesson was: 'the importance of

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid., April: 'Report on Operations 1st & 2nd April': Part VII: Plan of Attack on the HOLNON and SELENCY Positions. Part VIII: The attack of the 14th Infantry Brigade on the HOLNON and SELENCY positions.

⁶⁵⁶ Robin Prior & Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-1918* (London, Blackwell Publishers, 1992) p.266 At the risk of straying into counter-factual history, rather than simply dismissing the German lines as rear guards it seems likely that had IV Corps allowed the Germans time to dig in they would have held a formidable outpost line for longer, inflicting much more significant casualties upon the attacking divisions.

⁶⁵⁷ John W. Arthur and Ion S. Munro, *The Seventeenth Highland Light Infantry (Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Battalion): Record of War Service 1914-1918* (Glasgow, David J. Clark, 1920) p.57

⁶⁵⁸ Grice-Hutchinson, M.C., 'The Diary...' in Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 2 April 1917; p.193; see also 17 March 1917; p.184 and IWM, PP/MCR/49, A. Elshaw, p.33 for further evidence of the tangible improvement in the division's morale.

striking quick and striking hard when an advance is once undertaken.⁶⁵⁹ During the German withdrawal the GOC's aggression played a decisive part in scoring a tangible success in the eyes of the men of 32nd Division; it resonated throughout the ranks, while it built on the improving reputation of the division in the eyes of the senior leadership. Upon transfer out of Fourth Army, General Rawlinson, wrote to the division praising:

The gallantry and dash displayed by the Division during the advance in March and April, especially in the actions resulting in the capture of SAVY, BOIS de SAVY, FRANCILLY, HOLNON, SELENCY, FAYET and CEPY FARM, reflect the highest credit on all concerned.⁶⁶⁰

He went on to say: 'heartily congratulate the Division on the successes they have achieved.' concluding with: 'I much regret that the Division is now leaving the Fourth Army, but I shall hope that at some future date I may again have the good fortune to find them under my Command.'⁶⁶¹ Aggression was not a deplorable characteristic in a commander; it was required to win. But it had to be channelled towards the overall goals of the Army and drawing on Clausewitz's idea of military leadership, the 'violence of emotion' had to be balanced by 'judgement and principle'.⁶⁶² It is clear from Nieuport's requested raid, and follow-up Lombartzyde attack that Shute on two occasions pushed for offensive actions that were impractical; a combination of his subordinates, seniors and circumstance saw to it that these attacks did not take place.⁶⁶³ Later in the aftermath of the failed night attack on the Passchendaele ridge, 2 December 1917, Shute would again propose further attacks, planned for the following night, that were unlikely to yield results; on this occasion Haig

⁶⁵⁹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April: 'Report on Operations...1st & 2nd April': Part IX: General remarks on Lessons of the above Operations; Point 1.

⁶⁶⁰ IWM, 80/10/1, T.S. Lambert, 'Fourth Army No. G.S.702'

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Clausewitz, *On War* (1976) p.107

⁶⁶³ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Record of Telegraph and Telephone messages - 10th July 1917': 6.10pm; WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, '11 July 1917 Operation Order 105'; the initial Lombartzyde attack was folded into a larger XV Corps operation to re-secure the bridgehead: WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'G.S. 1310/2/38 29th July 1917'; Appendix 39; see also IWM, 80/10/1, T.S. Lambert, 'XV Corps Order No.126', 27th July 1917

ordered a halt in operations.⁶⁶⁴ Shute's optimism, risk-taking and rapidity of action heavily inclined the commander towards the offensive. This could, and did, push him into making rash and hasty attacks; nevertheless, it is difficult to wholly condemn him for this. Ultimately these attacks did not take place, while circumstance played a large role (German attack and poor positioning at Nieuport, and the manpower considerations facing Haig) so too did Shute's command style. His consultative approach encouraged frank discussion with his subordinates and stopped ill-advised offensives occurring. This command system, and his wider understanding of war shall now be considered.

⁶⁶⁴ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, '32nd Division Telephone and Telegraph Messages. 2nd December 1917': 9.10am Verbal to 14th Bde.; 7.55pm Verbal to 14th Bde.; Haig's rejection of attacks can be found in WO 158/209 Second Army Operations with Maps, 'Brigadier-General J.H. Davidson Note', 3 December 1917.

Chapter Six

Learning and Leadership: Intellectual Understanding and Influence

The Case Study of Cameron Shute Expanded

This chapter will develop the case study of Cameron Deane Shute, GOC 32nd Division, by analysing his understanding of war and his influence on his subordinates. It will evaluate his personal command system, his approach to planning, the evolution of his tactical understanding and the fostering of a communal identity to improve cohesion. The chapter will conclude by revisiting the three roles a leader can fill to foster an environment conducive to learning. It will be shown that his divisive characteristics undermined his ability to be a 'learning leader' by the criteria established in chapter five.

6.1 Personal Command System

Shute's approach to command had its basis in the pre-war principle of delegation to the man-on-the-spot. He was an assertive commander, who co-ordinated the actions of his subordinate formations and the supporting arms during battle, while consciously collecting as much information as possible from the front to inform his command decisions. This part of the case study will first establish the principles by which Shute sought to command and then compare this to his actions commanding the 32nd Division.

In the lecture Shute delivered to officers at the Staff College, Camberley in 1920, he gave perhaps his clearest explanation of his own command philosophy. By articulating his principles, he described what today would be considered pre-requisites of a decentralised or 'mission command' system, but were then essentially the orthodox pre-war view: subordinate initiative, orders detailing

intention rather than prescribing details and the importance of the staff and broader command relationships. On subordinate initiative he argued, under the heading: 'QUALITIES REQUIRED IN COMMANDERS': 'If you accomplish the task set, don't sit down and be content, but immediately say to yourself "Can I do more, can I better this position? What will be the next step? How do I think I shall do it?"' Later he added: 'Cultivate initiative. Think quickly and act strongly.'⁶⁶⁵ This did not just apply to the infantry. Shute emphasised the relevance of this principle to the artillery as well, observing: 'Battery and Brigade Commanders were sometimes inclined to wait for orders. They must know the plan and act on own initiative.'⁶⁶⁶ The argument for initiative in command was strengthened towards the end of his lecture when speaking about the importance of acting according to circumstance. In this section he described the pitfalls of commanders being unable to adapt to new events once a plan had failed, backing it up with examples from the Western Front and offering further evidence that he was essentially in agreement with the pre-war military view: 'Vary your methods according to circumstances. Don't misapply principles and apply lessons to situations to which they have no reference.'⁶⁶⁷ Shute's approach to decentralised command hinged upon subordinates understanding the broad aims of the attack: 'Make sure [sic] understand the wishes and intention of your superior. Not only know his orders but think what is the idea behind those orders.'⁶⁶⁸ To facilitate this, good orders were a pre-requisite but the General warned: 'Many orders are spoiled by the attempt to make them short. The real essence is that they shall be clear.' To ensure everyone knew their role Shute advocated conferences on receipt of both warning and written orders.⁶⁶⁹ For his system of command to be effective, the General recognised the importance of both information and opinion flowing back up the chain of command: 'All unit commanders of all arms must realize the importance of getting information back. Requires careful preparation.'⁶⁷⁰ Later in

⁶⁶⁵ JSCSC library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.6

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p.4

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p.7

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., p.6

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p.4

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p.5

the lecture he stressed the importance of constructive discussions between commander and subordinate: 'Have an opinion and don't hesitate to give it. Don't sit still and grouse and make destructive criticisms. That helps no one and destroys morale.'⁶⁷¹ The role of staff was not neglected: 'every commander must know the work of the Staff. Administration is a necessity for operations. All branches must know the commander's wishes and work together. Conferences.'⁶⁷² Shute's lecture provides a clear articulation of his command philosophy, demonstrating that his principles remained essentially in line with those espoused in *FSR I* before the war. Above all else, the General recognised that flexibility was one of the most valuable assets for any command system, leader and army. He concluded his address reflecting on the international spread of training manuals and how quickly their contents would be invalidated: 'If this is so then does it not follow that the next great war, as in the last, we shall have to alter our tactics in the commencement of War? Hence the best Army will be that which is most fluid and adaptable.'⁶⁷³

Were Shute's post-war views, simply the culmination of his Great War experience or were they a reflection of the enduring relevance of the British Army's pre-war approach? The actions of the 32nd Division's commander suggest that he adhered to these principles, for the most part, throughout his tenure as GOC, but his command in practice was not quite as flexible and 'mission led' as theory would suggest. In his first major engagement commanding 32nd Division, the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, Shute's command was an *ad hoc* mixture of decentralised and direct command. In planning the GOC allowed his subordinates a fairly free hand to organise the attack so that it achieved the objectives set. At 9.55 a.m. on 1 April 1917 Shute spoke to Brigadier-General Ashburner, 96 Brigade, and specifically gave him the freedom to act according to his own judgement: 'Your objective is that laid down in the paper, that is the Eastern edge of both woods. When you have occupied them and established yourself, you will report that you have done so, but

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., p.6

⁶⁷² Ibid., p.5

⁶⁷³ Ibid., p.9

if it seems desirable to you to occupy Point 138 at once do so without further orders.'⁶⁷⁴ This approach was repeated on 2 April 1917 with 14 Brigade who had captured a German field battery but were struggling to bring the guns back. Shute stressed at 11.35 am that he was keen to get the guns out, but accepted General Seymour's earlier argument (10.35 am) that: 'I do not think it could be done by daylight, but I will get them back as soon as I can.' After reconnoitring was conducted by 14 Brigade and gunners from the divisional artillery, Shute was told: 'Nothing can be done in daylight.' Following that, the message went on to record that they had arranged to bring them in that night and that they 'have made all arrangements.'⁶⁷⁵ The plans for withdrawing the contested guns were drawn up by brigade and despite Shute's preference for extracting them as soon as possible, he allowed his subordinates the freedom to organise their own operation.⁶⁷⁶ In the end the action was carried out and all but one of the guns were recovered. In the process, Major F.W. Lumsden, then Shute's GSO2, won the Victoria Cross for his part in leading the teams of gunners and infantry through the German barrage to bring back the guns while driving off the enemy's attempts to recapture them.⁶⁷⁷ This decentralisation of tactical command to the brigade level was not limited to 1 and 2 April 1917. At 11.31am on 14 April 1917, during the attack on Fayet, 96 Brigade was disposed according to 97 Brigade's suggestion.⁶⁷⁸ Three hours later at 2.35pm Brigadier-General Blacklock, commanding 97 Brigade, independently moved two battalions of 96 Brigade in support of the line and shortly thereafter the decision to withdraw the remaining battalions of 96 Brigade to the Divisional Reserve was vetted by Blacklock: 'The two Battalions of the 96th Brigade not under your command are being withdrawn to Divl: Reserve further back. Does the situation permit of this? Yes.'⁶⁷⁹ There can be little doubt that this was an intentional method of governing his

⁶⁷⁴ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Telephone Messages on 1st/2nd April' Appendix 1; Out, message 9.55 a.m., 'To 96th Brigade Gen. Ashburner'

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., 2nd April 1917; Out, messages 10.35 a.m., 11.35a.m., 5-55p.m. To 14th Bde.

⁶⁷⁶ Shute felt that if the guns were withdrawn sooner they would cease to be a focal point for both shelling and counter-attacks. TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917, 'Telephone Messages on 1st/2nd April' Appendix 1, 2nd April 1917; Out, message 11.35 p.m.

⁶⁷⁷ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 3 April 1917; WO 95/2373 32nd Div. AA & QMG, 8 June 1917.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 14th April 1917, From 96th Brigade 11.31 a.m.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., From 97th Brigade 2.35 p.m.; To 97th Brigade 3.15 p.m.

subordinate troops used by Shute. At 3pm IV Corps issued a statement to all units congratulating them on their success, the divisional commander adding to this: 'The Divisional Commander wishes all ranks informed that the success of the Division is entirely due to the careful plans of Brigade Commanders coupled with the Intelligence, rapid movement and great dash of the troops.'⁶⁸⁰ On 1, 2, and 14 April 1917 the bulk of the planning and a number of decisions were delegated down to the brigade level, but Shute was not removed from the decision-making process entirely.

On a number of occasions on 1 and 2 April 1917 during the attacks on Savy, Holnon and the surrounding positions Shute directly instructed the brigades on tactical matters. At 7.10am on 1 April Shute spoke to Blacklock, their conversation being recorded in the Telephone Messages file: 'There are some Bosches in a crater in the road leading to Bois de SAVY from SAVY, and some in the cemetery. Get up your Stokes they are the things to deal with them.'⁶⁸¹ While it is unclear who initially pointed out the position of the Germans in the crater and cemetery, the authoritative language indicates that it is Shute who ordered the use of the mortars. Later in the same message the GOC again asserted control over tactical plans: 'Patrols to be very light in front. If there is no fire the patrols will gradually occupy the Wood and push forward. Put another company on that ridge: it forms an escort to the guns. Push one forward to the ridge and keep two with you. I dont [sic] think there will be any counter-attack.'⁶⁸² It was not simply 97 Brigade that was affected by this direct tactical control. At 7.47pm 96 Brigade received a call from an irate Shute, who was angered by the lack of progress in capturing the German positions at Point 138: 'They have to take 138; there is nothing against them. When do they propose to take it. Tell him to put three battalions at it if he cannot take it. Tell the General that he must go and carry out his job, and hurry up about it too.' He was a little more cordial the following day, when at 9.20am his instructions were passed to 97 Brigade: 'The General wants you to put one Battalion to fill the gap between the 96th Bde and SAVY

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., To all Units., 3 p.m.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 'Telephone Messages on 1st/2nd April' Appendix 1, 1st April 1917, Out, message 19, 7.10am To 97th Brigade.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

joining up with the French on that spur. It is rather an awkward place that.'⁶⁸³ This direct approach was not limited to 96 and 97 Brigades. On 14 April, under similar circumstances to the attacks of the 1 and 2 April, Shute repeatedly pushed 14 Brigade to: 'occupy Spurs in S.6.central at once, and to send strong patrols to CEPY FARM and to try and bomb up German trench to 97th Brigade.'⁶⁸⁴ Evidently, at times, Shute gave direct tactical commands seemingly at odds with his philosophy in 1920, but why? How could Shute both delegate important command decisions on one occasion but not at other times?

Context and circumstance play a big part in explaining Shute's seemingly inconsistent command style. The most marked occasions of direct involvement in the tactical decisions occurred at moments when Shute perceived time to be a factor and an early attack to be favourable, a case in point being his irritation with 96 Brigade over their occupation of Point 138 and urging 14 Brigade to push on to Cepy Farm. At the other extreme, Shute used the decentralisation to surmount the 'wicked' problems posed by closely following a retreating enemy over fractured ground, such as how best to prioritise limited artillery, labour resources and supplies.⁶⁸⁵ The priority targets for the artillery were driven by the requests from the front line. On 14 April Shute spoke to the CRA, Brigadier-General Tyler and told him: 'Genl BLACKLOCK is very insistent that the two copses should be done in, and also the copse in M.30.c. as there is a machine gun there.'⁶⁸⁶ Context only provides a partial explanation. Shute's attitude to his subordinates carrying out his wishes should also be taken into account. The GOC sought input from his subordinate commanders and expected them to discuss the viability of the orders if there were any problems. This offers a much more nuanced way of accounting for the discordance between Shute's later ideas and his actions in 1917.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 2nd April 1917, Out: 9.20 a.m. To 97th Brigade.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 14th April 1917 6-0 a.m. To 14th Brigade. See also: 6.30 a.m. and 7.40a.m.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 1st April 1917, In, message 13, 9.25 a.m. Shows the needs of the Artillery dictating the immediate priorities of the Royal Engineers. For supply difficulties and consultative approach see 2nd April 1917 To 4th Corps. B.G.G.S. 10.30 p.m.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid., 12.2 p.m. To CRA

He expected any impracticalities to be discussed if the front line conditions merited it. The proposed attack of 97 Brigade on the Twin Copses, 14 April 1917, offers an insight into this process of discussion. After the brigade's early success capturing the village of Fayet, the Twin Copses became the focus of exploitation; the specifics of the attack were established at 9.21am:

Does the Divisional commander want a night or a daylight attack? The Divisional Commander wants you to attack by day as soon as you can organise it. It is an attack for one Battalion. Another Battalion of the 96th Brigade is being sent up, and you can use them as you think fit, and also the 96th M.G.Coy. ...G.O.C., 97th Brigade said he would attack about 12 noon.⁶⁸⁷

Notably it was 97 Brigade that were left to organise the specifics of the attack going so far as to set their own zero time. Despite this agreement with Shute, Blacklock by 10.06am had unilaterally delayed this action: '97th Brigade intend taking the TWIN COPSES at 1 o'clock if hostile machine gun is knocked out.'⁶⁸⁸ This was confirmed at 10.15am in a message outlining the brigade's plan of attack: 'The COPSES will be attacked at 1.0 p.m. by 3 Companies of the Borders.'⁶⁸⁹ There was no argument from Shute, quite the opposite. Five minutes after the call to 97 Brigade he spoke to the CRA, Brigadier-General Tyler, to inform him: '97th Brigade are attacking the COPSES at 1 o'clock. You had better arrange about the Artillery. 97th Brigade want the Heavies to bombard the Copses from now to 1 p.m. 97th Brigade are 150 yards short of their objective and want the trench running East of the road done in.'⁶⁹⁰ It is possible Shute's acquiescence was down to the plan stemming from 97 Brigade originally, as opposed to his own firm orders. Even so it demonstrates that he was not simply a commander who dictated to his subordinates, but one who was happy to adapt to front line conditions.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid., 9.21 a.m. To 97th Brigade.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid., 10.5 a.m. From 97th Brigade.

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid., 10.15 a.m. To 97th Brigade.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.20 a.m. To C.R.A.

One occasion on 1 April 1917 indicates that Shute was responsive to front line reports if his plans could not be practically implemented. At 4.33 pm Shute proposed that Blacklock push his brigade through 96 Brigade and advance on the Vermand-St Quentin road, saying: 'I can give you artillery support up to the road and Heavies also, It [sic] is extreme range but I can give you a protective barrage, and I will have as many guns as I can in the time moved up to the Bois de SAVY.'⁶⁹¹ Blacklock's reply was straight to the point: 'He thinks he cannot get them along.' Within 15 minutes Shute was back in contact with Blacklock, and the messages log records: 'The General has decided not to do that to-night with your Brigade.'⁶⁹² There was continuity in this approach; on 7 November 1916 while Shute was in charge of 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, 7/RF and 1/HAC attempted a joint raid on a German strong point in Mound Trench near Hamel. The raid ended in failure when the two parties encountered newly laid German wire and an alert enemy holding their front line in strength. Captain John Forster, who was leading the raid, decided to retire while under heavy fire and crawling through the newly laid wire. Rather than incurring rebuke or opprobrium for his decision the corps, divisional and brigade commanders all sent remarks indicating their appreciation: 'of his leading and of the sound common sense which actuated him when under trying conditions'.⁶⁹³ In this instance Shute was complimentary towards the exercise of individual initiative even when it led to the abortion of the attack. It would be easy to see the instances of Shute's strong centralised direction as evidence that he was an over-bearing commander who imposed impractical orders upon his subordinates. But this overlooks the context of his interventions and the consultative aspects of his command style. He did pass down direct orders but he also invited criticism, encouraged discussion and modified or shelved plans accordingly.

So far the analysis of Shute's command style in practice has focused upon his early engagements during the German withdrawal where the conditions of open and semi-open warfare posed a

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., Appendix 1 Telephone Messages on 1st/2nd April; Out, 1st April, 4-33 p.m. To 97th Brigade.

⁶⁹² Ibid., Out 1st April 1917, 4-47 p.m. To 97th Brigade.

⁶⁹³ TNA, WO 95/3119 7th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, 7th November 1916

'wicked' problem, but one which was not particularly indicative of the prevailing circumstances he faced during the rest of his time in charge of the division. It is worth looking at whether the conclusions drawn for the German withdrawal apply in different circumstances. At Nieuport, 10 July 1917, Shute faced a crisis. The division was being heavily shelled, lines of communication were knocked out, bridges were demolished and at 7.45pm they came under attack by the German infantry. The command response was broadly consistent with that of the earlier pursuit to the Hindenburg Line. Shute gave the brigades a large amount of freedom but also intervened at points to give direct orders. As the German shelling intensified leading up to the attack all telephone lines to the front were cut and Shute found himself increasingly detached from the battle. Recognising the difficulties in communication the commander took the pre-emptive step of actively delegating authority: 'As communications with Divisional H.Q. At present so bad 97th Brigade will in case of emergency have a direct call on No.3 Battalion of 96th Brigade which is in Divisional Reserve at NIEUPORT.'⁶⁹⁴ Once the attack had begun and the Germans had forced a lodgement in the British lines the driving forces behind the British response became the brigade and battalion, not the division. At 8.55 p.m. (1 hour 10 minutes after the German infantry attack began) 97 Brigade wired the division, it reached DHQ at 10.p.m. and read:

Enemy reported in NOSE SUPPORT in M.22.b. am counter-attacking with two companies 17th H.L.I. Reinforcing 11th Borders with two companies 16th H.L.I. with one. Have fired S.O.S. am in telephonic communication with Group. Front line troops badly done in with bombardment. Have only one Battalion Divl. Reserve in hand. Bridges practically destroyed. Borders are in NASAL SUPPORT and are going to counter-attack as soon as two Companies of 17th H.L.I. and K.O.Y.L.I. are ready.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁴ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, Record of Telegraph and Telephone Messages - 10th and 11th July 1917, message 52, 4.30.p.m., to 96th & 97th Bdes. This was the 16th Northumberland Fusiliers.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., Wire timed 8.55.p.m. Arrived 10.p.m. From 97th Brigade.

97 Brigade's report also indicates that counter-attacks were organised and made locally by the commander of 11/Borders, Lt-Col Girdwood; a move entirely in-keeping with Shute's emphasis on acting within the intentions of an order.⁶⁹⁶ The communications delay had effectively removed the divisional commander from directly affecting the action, but his delegation had promoted the desired response, in-keeping with his wishes, at the lower levels of command. Grint has suggested that in a crisis a commander is required to act as soon as possible and with the required leadership response.⁶⁹⁷ In the case of the divisional commander on 10 July 1917, the delegation of authority in the wake of the communications failure made it the only effective decision he could take. That it was done before the attack fell against 32nd Division's lines gave 97 Brigade a greater freedom to act decisively to limit the German gains.⁶⁹⁸ Despite the impediments of communication Shute did still attempt to give direct orders when he saw them as necessary. These were generally aimed at establishing the requirements for his subordinates as opposed to directing their movements and tactics. On two occasions he sent definite instructions, at 8.35pm: 'The 32nd Division will hold its positions at all costs.' This order also strengthened the decentralisation of command by placing the other reserve battalion of 96 Brigade, 15/LF under 97 Brigade's control in addition to 16/NF who had been placed under Blacklock's command by the earlier order. Two hours and twenty minutes later Shute again reminded his charges: 'The Divisional Commander relies on 97th Brigade not giving up an inch of ground and gaining any they can.'⁶⁹⁹ The GOC's interventions were almost exclusively conducted with aim of emphasising this point: no territory loss would be acceptable. Yet, in spite of the central importance of this one driving goal, Shute still accepted that his orders could and should be modified if the circumstances on the front line required it. At 11.30am on 10

⁶⁹⁶ TNA, WO 95/2400 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, July 1917 Appendix D, 'Report on Operations in Nieuport Area 8/11th July 1917'.

⁶⁹⁷ Grint, *Leadership, Management and Command* (2008) p.427

⁶⁹⁸ Only one company of 96 Brigade's reserve battalion, 16/NF, were initially brought up by 97 Brigade at 9.25pm on 10 July. But at 1am the following day, with the 11/Borders severely weakened, the whole battalion was brought up to relieve them. TNA, WO 95/2400 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, July 1917 Appendix D, 'Report on Operations 8/11th July 1917.'

⁶⁹⁹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Record of Telegraph and Telephone Messages - 10th and 11th July 1917', message 98, 8.35.p.m., to 96th & 97th Bdes, 15th Lancs. Fus. C.R.A.; message 121, 10.55.p.m. To 96th & 97th Bdes. & C.R.E.

July, just over eight hours before the Germans launched their infantry attack and with the bombardment having demolished the front line trenches, the Right Battalion (16/HLI) retired to their second line.⁷⁰⁰ Upon receiving this information at 12.40pm Shute gave an unequivocal reply five minutes later: 'Front line must be held whether demolished or not. Please report if your front trenches still being heavily shelled and if you anticipate infantry attack.'⁷⁰¹ This was not ordered out of a sense of pride, ignorance or stubbornness, but the recognition that holding the ground was of:

vital importance to our offensive plans... Our position North of the YSER had only a depth of about 3,000 yards. The enemy's artillery had all the bridges over the Canals registered, and at the first signs of an offensive would render the passage of troops over the river a precarious operation. In an attack on the LOMBARTZYDE and WESTENDE positions all assaulting troops would have to form up North of the Canals. If ground were lost assembly would be difficult.⁷⁰²

The ground was not reoccupied with a complete garrison. Instead, recognising the difficulties of occupation with little cover and heavy shelling, 97 Brigade only sent battle patrols forward to hold it as an outpost line.⁷⁰³ Shute was satisfied with this modification and considered the front line re-occupied. While not carrying out Shute's orders to the letter, the brigade's actions were the best approach given the circumstances. By pushing out small parties they adhered to the greater purpose of offering as much resistance as was possible without incurring wasteful casualties from shell-fire, which may otherwise have undermined 16/HLI's ability to resist any infantry attack. Looking at the crises facing 32nd Division at Nieuport, Shute's command response was consistent with his broader

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., message 27, 12.40.p.m., From 97th Brigade; 'Report on the Operations on the 32nd Division front on July 10th 1917'. Part III, point 5, p.5

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., message 28, 12.45 p.m., To 97th Brigade.

⁷⁰² Ibid., 'Report on the Operations on the 32nd Division front on July 10th 1917'. Part I, Point 4, pp.1-2

⁷⁰³ Ibid., message 55. 5.p.m. From 97th Brigade. [message sent at 1.50.p.m.]; 'Report on the Operations 10th July', Part III, point 9, p.6; For 32nd Division 'battle patrols' were small parties of soldiers: 'ordered to push forward and open rapid fire on any counter-attack forcing it to 'deploy' buying time for main line.' IWM, 80/10/1, Major-General T.S. Lambert, 'Notes to Accompany Operation Orders. 32nd Div No G.S. 1337/Q/1', July 1917. These 'battle patrols' are not to be confused with the short-lived 'battle patrol platoons' which were specially tasked groups for exploiting success.

approach. He was happy to delegate authority to the man-on-the-spot, but still gave direct commands on occasion. These could be modified and interpreted by subordinates to suit the local conditions while leaving little room for uncertainty over the GOC's intentions.

Was Shute's approach the same for a planned set-piece attack? On 2 December 1917 32nd Division assaulted a series of German positions on the Passchendaele Ridge. Despite the notorious conditions, communications during the attack held up surprisingly well between Shute and his brigadiers. As always, getting information back from the attacking battalions was a more difficult endeavour. Nevertheless, with improved communications it would be fair to expect Shute to take a more direct role, but this was not the case. Throughout the day Shute consulted and deferred judgement to his subordinates on a range of matters: at 3.55am his staff spoke to those at the Divisional Artillery headquarters asking: 'The General wants you to ginger things up in Square 22 and would like a couple of 6" on it if it can be done.'⁷⁰⁴ Notably this request came as a result of a 97 Brigade wire which reported that a machine gun was causing problems in that location.⁷⁰⁵ The capability of the artillery dictated the final decision. Shortly thereafter events overtook Shute's request; 97 Brigade had liaised with the Divisional Artillery and organised the S.O.S. shoot on square V.22.d to deal with the hostile machine guns and counter-attack.⁷⁰⁶ This was then stopped by order of 97 Brigade at 4am.⁷⁰⁷ Later in the morning a similar decision was deferred to 97 Brigade's Brigadier-General Blacklock, contact was established and the question posed: 'Are you being bothered from VALUATION HOUSES or MALLET WOOD.[sic] The Divisional Commander wants to know if Genl. BLACKLOCK would like an artillery concentration on either or both.' Recognising that in principle Blacklock would have more up-to-date information about the progress of the attack he deferred the decision to his subordinate. The 97 Brigade Staff replied: 'Genl.

⁷⁰⁴ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Record of Telephone and Telegraph Messages 2nd December 1917', message 32, 3.55 a.m. To Div. Arty.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., message 27, 3.43 a.m. (wire timed 3.18 a.m.) From 97th Bde.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., message 39, 4.15 a.m. (wire timed 4.8 a.m.) From Div. Arty.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., message 36, 4.3 a.m. To C.R.A.

BLACKLOCK would like to wait until he gets more news before he decides that question.⁷⁰⁸ Shute did not sit idly by, he continued to gather information, and when he established that the divisional artillery were not firing he ordered the shoot on Valuation Houses and Mallet Wood.⁷⁰⁹ These targets lay beyond the final objective and so the bombardment posed little chance of hitting the troops of 97 Brigade.

As was the case at Nieuport the driving decision-making level was that of brigade. Division organised and set the parameters and Shute suggested methods to achieve the objectives he set, but ultimately the action was decided upon lower down the chain of command. Perhaps one of the most clear cut examples of this system is shown by the dialogue between DHQ and 97 Brigade between 7.45am and 8.15 am on 2 December 1917. 97 Brigade contacted DHQ at 7.45am to inform them that their troops had been driven out of Teall Cottage and Hill 52. Shute responded:

Absolutely necessary that TEALL COTTAGE and WEAL and HILL 52 should be regained. Do this with your reserve Battalion assisted if safety permits, by fire from your special battery and Stokes Mortars. Any more considerable barrage is impossible owing to your uncertainty as to the position of your troops.⁷¹⁰

Eleven minutes later 97 Brigade responded with a plan:

At 9-20.am. The 16th Northd.Fus. Will push up and attack Hill 52 and two other Battalions will push ahead. Nos 1,2 and 3 Battalions will push ahead. A M.G. Barrage will be put down and a little artillery as close as possible. Position on right is not known and so barrage cannot be put down.

Commanding Officers are up there now and Capt. LAURIE and two other Brigade Officers are

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., message 80, 7.10 a.m., To 97th Bde.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., message 83, 7.20 a.m., To Div. Arty.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., message 87, 7.45 a.m., To 97th Bde.

organising for the push at 9-20.a.m.⁷¹¹

Division was recommending a course of action; Shute was establishing the parameters and objectives of the attack but the specifics were organised at the brigade level by Blacklock. They were thinking along similar lines. At 8.15am Shute sent a message to 97 Brigade saying: 'The Divisional Commander thinks that Stokes Mortar barrage would be a good thing.'⁷¹² Blacklock replied informing division that this had already been arranged. Could this have been a consequence of the strong working relationship between Blacklock and Shute? The evidence indicates not. By 9am Shute had recognised that the attack had only been a limited success and if he was to achieve his initial goals he was going to have to launch a secondary attack using Brigadier-General Lumsden's 14 Brigade. With his plans still at an early stage Shute contacted his subordinate and read out the proposed draft orders. These required two of Lumsden's battalions to form up at 10pm behind the two battalions on the right of 97 Brigade's line. They then were to pass through them pushing on to new objectives. The orders themselves are less important than the record of the closing moments of the conversation between Shute and Lumsden. After reading the order the divisional commander said:

I want you to think over that and let me know your ideas. You have got to relieve and it is better to attack straight through them than to relieve and attack again. What is necessary to know is whether you consider the task too difficult for you to carry on.⁷¹³

An hour and a half later, with the situation on 97 Brigade front even more precarious, Shute spoke again to Lumsden asking: 'Do you consider it is more advisable for you to relieve the line and then to attack or to form up behind the troops who are there and go through them.' Lumsden preferred to

⁷¹¹ Ibid., message 90, 7.56.a.m. From 97th Bde.

⁷¹² Ibid., message 95, 8.15.a.m., To 97th Bde.

⁷¹³ Ibid., message 106, 9-10.a.m. To 14th Bde.

relieve the line and attack the following day, 'but in the event of having to do both on one night he would rather attack through them.'⁷¹⁴ Shute's consultative command philosophy was evidently not limited to any particular subordinate. The outcome of this was an open and frank dialogue between leader and led. The results of this are not always easy to discern. Generals were attempting to form both accurate idea of what was going on in front of them as well as judgements on the best course of action. Nevertheless the evening of 2 December 1917 provides two clear instances of the command system avoiding orders which may otherwise have compounded failure. At 6.55pm Shute heard that 97 Brigade had been seriously counter-attacked losing the vast majority of the ground occupied. This effectively ended the chance of Blacklock delivering further attacks, as Shute recognised in his after-action report: 'G.O.C., 97th Infantry Brigade at the same time [as reporting the counter-attack] reported that his troops were very much disorganised and that he had few Officers left and he considered it impracticable to carry out a further offensive with the troops at his disposal.'⁷¹⁵ Shute was not happy about the latest turn of events but Blacklock's beleaguered brigade was struggling to even hold its original front line.⁷¹⁶ Rather than force further attacks upon his tired, disorganised and scattered troops, Shute: 'decided that it was impracticable to resume the offensive with the 97th Infantry Brigade.'⁷¹⁷ He had not given up the idea of launching an attack using 14 Brigade. The new front line situation had forced a rethink and Lumsden and Shute both agreed that an attack that evening was: 'not offering the necessary chances of success.'⁷¹⁸ While the idea of attacking the following night had not been discounted, that is once reconnaissance had been conducted and adequate assembly positions organised, the consultative approach had led to the

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., message 119, 10.40 a.m. From 14th Bde.

⁷¹⁵ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Operations of the 32nd Division on 2nd December', Part III, p.14; The telegraph and telephone records suggest that Blacklock may have dropped the idea of further attacks earlier, before news of the counter-attack reached him. At 6.15 p.m. it was communicated to Shute: 'General BLACKLOCK will push out where he can but cannot take on minor operation.' WO 95/2370, 32nd Div. General Staff, December, December 1917, 'Record of Telephone and Telegraph Messages', message 167, 6.15.p.m. From 97th Brigade.

⁷¹⁶ TNA, WO 95/2370, 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Record of Telephone and Telegraph Messages', message 174, 7.20.p.m. To 97th Brigade documents a stern interrogation by a clearly irate Shute on his subordinate.

⁷¹⁷ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Operations 2nd December', Part III, p.14

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., p.14; TNA, WO 158/209: Second Army Operations with Maps

termination of two potentially disastrous further attacks. In the end no more attacks were to be made, while planning for follow-up operations by 14 Brigade was done and division submitted proposals to Corps, but higher up the chain of command there were deep misgivings. The decision fell to Haig who halted operations. Brigadier-General Davidson, Director of Military Operations, GHQ, communicated the C-in-C's wishes to Rawlinson, who commanded Second Army: 'I said that the C in C wished to economise troops & did not want to get involved in any more unnecessary fighting. Sir HR said he would stop anything further being done.'⁷¹⁹

32nd Division successfully achieved its objectives during the pursuit to the Hindenburg Line and in stopping the Germans from gaining the bridgehead across the Yser on 10 July 1917, but failed badly on 2 December 1917. Was Shute's command style inappropriate for a limited set-piece attack in late 1917? The communications difficulties that plagued divisional commanders until the end of the war meant that direct intervention was often based upon partial or limited reports gathered from the front. Shute's attempts to overcome the communications gap are dealt with in chapter three, but it should be recognised here that the circumstances effectively limited the effect the GOC could have upon the battle. His approach remained broadly consistent throughout his time in charge of the division irrespective of the problem facing him; Shute was a consultative commander who would delegate authority down the chain of command if it was necessary. Yet he was prone to flurries of direct commands. These have to be seen within the wider context of his approach and the circumstances the orders were given. At Nieuport the order to retain and recapture all ground was given with the wider potential for future operations in mind. This set the objective but allowed the subordinate 97 Brigade enough room to carry it out as they saw fit. Furthermore, despite dressing down 96 Brigade on 1 April and 97 Brigade on 2 December, Shute was generally accommodating and accepting of modifications to orders so long as they could be justified and remained within the

⁷¹⁹ TNA, WO 158/209 Second Army Operations, with Maps, 'Davidson Note', 3 December 1917.

spirit.

Shute's aggression, underscored by an optimism and confidence in what his division could achieve, are likely to have encouraged his interventions. It is difficult to conclude that Shute's command style was an unequivocal success. It curbed the more unrealistic excesses thrown up by his optimism and determination; it allowed the subordinates room to tailor their tactics to the conditions and through his occasional direct intervention he reminded his subordinates of the wider objectives and possible tactical methods for achieving them. Shute's command style may not have been pure *Auftragstaktik* or 'mission command' as it would be understood today, but it was a flexible and sensible approach given the conditions in which the division was fighting.

Careful Planning

The decentralised approach rested upon the foundations of well-planned actions. Without that the GOC could not rely upon his subordinates to have access to the necessary materials, be in the best position for success or have the requisite artillery cover. This section will assess whether Shute recognised the importance of careful planning and effectively managed his responsibilities leading up to his battles. It should be recognised that the 32nd Division's GOC was not alone in his responsibilities for planning: corps command set many of the broader objectives and parameters within which Shute and his subordinates in the specialist branches had to work. Chapter two has analysed the command structure which emphasised delegation during the planning stage; thus, this section will predominantly consider what Shute's effects were.⁷²⁰

⁷²⁰ Good planning is considered to be taking the necessary steps to maximise the chance of an operation's success in accordance with the circumstances at the time. It does not just take into account enemy actions, but also the internal condition of the commander's own forces; morale of troops, supply, communications and possible gains made as a result of action.

Simon Robbins has suggested that 'some sections of the high command were resistant to demands for more preparation' and that certain generals, of which Shute was identified as one: 'were quite prepared to browbeat and bully doubtful subordinates into carrying out their wishes and making sure that at lower levels of the command structure officers obeyed and implemented the approved policy.'⁷²¹ It will be shown later that Shute was prone to outbursts towards his subordinates who he felt failed to meet his exacting requirements, but the charge of resisting preparation is one that is much more difficult to accept. The first step towards a successful movement, attack or defensive scheme was reconnaissance. In the days leading up to the division's assault on Savy Wood during the German withdrawal, Shute emphasised this. On 25 March 1917 his GSO1, Lt-Col A.E. McNamara joined Shute in reconnoitring the front line.⁷²² This was followed up on 27 March 1917 when his Brigadiers and Battalion commanders did the same thing.⁷²³ Prior to the attack DHQ collated plans from the subsidiary branches which had been tasked with organising administration and supply, communications and the artillery barrage as well as distributing the orders. While this was not unusual, the attention to detail in the trying circumstances was impressive.⁷²⁴ A fine example of this was the division's food arrangements, recognising the difficulties the inclement weather and exposed positions were causing the infantry: 'Cookers were pushed right up close to the front line, and the risks taken in this direction were well repaid by the additional comfort given to the men.'⁷²⁵ This should not be seen solely as a pragmatic means of conserving the fighting capacity of his men; it also fitted firmly into the broader paternalism of the army. Arrangements, while hasty, worked: multiple lines of communications were established including wire, runner relay, wireless and contact aeroplane, along with line extensions to keep up with the proposed advance.⁷²⁶ Supply was established by using forward dumps which were advanced as the infantry progressed. Transport

⁷²¹ Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London, Frank Cass, 2005) p.32

⁷²² TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 25 March 1917

⁷²³ Ibid., 27 March 1917; 'Report on Operations...1st & 2nd April', Part II, point 7.

⁷²⁴ For more on planning and command structure see chapter three.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., Part IX, point 59.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., Part II, Communications schematic; for contact aeroplane system see Appendix F; Extensions see Proposed Communications by midnight 1st/2nd April Appendix K.

at this time was not easy but the system provided enough ammunition for the artillery to provide a protective barrage on both 1 and 2 April 1917, and later a full creeping barrage on 14 April when the German positions in Fayet were attacked.⁷²⁷ So that there was a minimum of delay between attacks being conducted and guns moved forward, batteries were prepared to advance to new positions on the first day of operations, maintaining the tempo.⁷²⁸

A few months later, after a brief spell as 19th (Western) Division's GOC at the Battle of Messines Ridge, Shute returned to 32nd Division in the Nieuport sector and called a conference on 26 June 1917. The first third of the meeting was spent outlining the direction of future operations, but the second and third parts concerned the state of the division and methods for strengthening the readiness and fighting capacity of the troops. Perhaps the most notable point raised indicated both Shute's understanding of warfare and the importance of planning to his outlook:

Retaliation Schemes 6. (a) One scheme for each section

(b) The essence of retaliation is that it should be immediate and severe

(c) All arms must combine. Guns, Heavy Trench Mortars, Medium Trench Mortars, Stokes Mortars, Machine Guns, Lewis Guns and rifle fire. Discuss the best method of combining these.

This formed the essence of the defensive scheme which Shute picked out as being of vital importance in limiting the German gains on 10 July 1917.⁷²⁹ In emphasising the value of co-ordinating retaliation at the lowest level a degree of tactical flexibility was instilled, while also

⁷²⁷ Ibid., Part II, Administrative Instructions, Appendix B, and 'Administrative Instructions for Operations 2nd April 1917' Appendix K; IWM, 76/225/1, R. L. Venables pp.40-42; TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, Part V, Point 30; '32nd Divisional Artillery Operation Order No.32', Appendix D; '32nd Divisional Artillery Operation Order No.35', Appendix J; Fayet: '32nd Division Operation Order No.91', Appendix 14, 7 April 1917; '97th Infantry Brigade Operation Order No.127'; WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 'Artillery Instructions No. 4', Appendix 5, 9 April 1917; Map A.

⁷²⁸ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 1 April 1917

⁷²⁹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on the Operations...10th July 1917', Part IV, point 2.

developing and reinforcing *FSR I*'s principle of all-arms co-ordination.

On 2 December 1917, 32nd Division launched a night attack seeking to improve the British lines along the Passchendaele ridge. The infamous conditions, limited battery positions, insufficient forward supply dumps, and enemy shelling posed serious problems for the division's planners. To use Grint's modified Rittel & Webber typology, Shute faced a 'wicked' problem: how to organise a surprise assault given the difficulties of the local environment? One problem had a direct influence on another: German observation limited the places and the time the infantry could form up for an attack to the hours of darkness; the narrow duck-board tracks leading to the front assembly positions were searched by shell fire and only permitted single-file passage, which necessitated the proposed jumping off time to avoid the heavy periods between 6pm – 8pm; signals needed to be extended to co-ordinate the movement of troops; and all of these issues needed to be solved without giving the Germans fore-warning of the proposed attack.⁷³⁰ The GOC 32nd Division was not alone in planning the Passchendaele attack. As chapter two has shown for the Somme, the BEF's command structure ensured that specialist tasks were dealt with by the appropriate specialist branches. The RE improved tracks to the front line providing vital supply lines, the signallers dealt with communications and the RFA maintained surprise by maintaining 'usual' sporadic fire.⁷³¹ Nevertheless, it was still up to Shute to co-ordinate the implementation of the specialists' plans, albeit through a dialogue and liaison with Corps.⁷³² These aspects all proved satisfactory in the attack and as Michael LoCicero has concluded: 'It is remarkable, given the dreadful conditions and almost impossible task of subduing active German battery concentrations ringing the salient that

⁷³⁰ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Operations of the 32nd Division on the 2nd December 1917': Part II, points 4 & 7.

⁷³¹ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Operation...2nd December 1917'; '32nd Division Offensive Instructions No. 2'; 'Scheme of Communications for Operations near Goudberg'; TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. CRA: '32nd Divisional Artillery Group Instructions No.5', Appendix VII.

⁷³² General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery at Corps co-ordinated the preliminary scheme for the heavy and field artillery. This was subordinated to suit the divisional, tactical needs and consequently Shute shaped the parameters of the artillery requirements through dialogue with the GOCRA who then issued the requisite orders. Shute's role would be to make recommendations that would 'make success more likely'. See Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) p.64

necessary preparation for, and consequent execution of any sort of coherent attack occurred.'⁷³³

In 1918 Shute's principles of planning remained broadly consistent. The division's first major actions were two large raids on the German *Vorfeldzonelinie*, outpost line, near Houthulst Forest on the night of 18/19 February 1918 and 27/28 February 1918. The raid on 18/19 February involved elements of four battalions from 96 and 97 Brigades, and amounted to 21 officers and 395 other ranks. Prior to the attack Shute and his brigadiers meticulously compiled and collated reconnaissance reports from officer patrols.⁷³⁴ These were conducted by the battalions to be used in the raid and the aim was to plot an accurate map of the German strong points in the outpost line. Soon Shute had built up: '...a fairly accurate map of the enemy's Pill-boxes, posts and wire by February 15th.' It was not only the infantry officers of the proposed battalions who sallied out into No Man's Land to assess the enemy positions, Shute insisted the artillery officers also went out to reconnoitre the lines.⁷³⁵ The success of the artillery which 'could not have been improved on' was to be attributed, according to Shute, to the care taken by the officers in scouting the enemy lines.⁷³⁶ While the raids were part of the larger Corps policy of reconnoitring the strength of German forces in the area, it was unusual for a division to launch a raid on such a broad front.⁷³⁷ Shute's reasons for doing so suggests that during the planning phase of operations the GOC attempted to anticipate the impact the raids would have upon the enemy. He reasoned that: 'no raid had been carried out on the divisional front for many weeks' and that the: 'Artillery had been quiet and our attitude generally unaggressive.'⁷³⁸ The consequence of this was that any action would come as a surprise to the Germans. Moreover, by attacking on the front of two brigades there was a chance the enemy would mistake the action: 'for a more important operation' and his barrage would end up 'scattered and

⁷³³ Michael LoCicero 'Moonlight Massacre: The night Operation on the Passchendaele Ridge, 2nd December 1917' (Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011) p.152

⁷³⁴ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Raids South of Houthulst Forest, carried out by the 32nd Division, February 18th/19th, 1918'. Section I, point 2.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., Section IV, point 21.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., Section IV, point 21.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., Section I, point 1.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., Section I, point 3a.

unequal.' As befitted a commander well versed in *FSR I* the impact on the German's morale was also a factor in Shute's justification for a broad fronted attack: 'The enemy is mystified and uncertain as to the scope of the attack, does not know where to apply his artillery, and probably orders up reserves from their rest billets thus upsetting the rest of his men.'⁷³⁹ The tactics employed for the raid were delegated to the brigades and approved by Shute, a move very much in keeping with the decentralised command style.⁷⁴⁰ Finally, as had become standard operating procedure the troops were given a hot meal and rum ration before leaving the British lines. The raid was a local success for 32nd Division. Only 4 men were killed and 8 seriously wounded, with the German losses approximated at 226 of whom 28 were prisoners.⁷⁴¹

Nine days later, 32nd Division conducted another attack on a two brigade front. This time 14 Brigade furnished the majority of the troops with 96 Brigade also playing a smaller part. The operation involved 807 men in a two pronged attack. The primary aim was to penetrate the German lines to probe the 'main line of resistance'.⁷⁴² On the surface this may seem like an unimaginative attempt to recreate the success of the first assault; Shute certainly employed much the same preparatory methods as for the attack on 18/19 February: reconnaissance was conducted and collated at division, the likely German response was considered and the tactical plans were delegated to those in the best position to formulate them. Nevertheless, the decision to attack was influenced by a number of factors: the original raid had provided further information about the German's strong points, the enemy response was weak and the tactical position allowed for the assailing of the front line posts from an unexpected direction.⁷⁴³ The attack of 28/29 February 1918

⁷³⁹ Ibid., Section IV, point 30.

⁷⁴⁰ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, '96th Infantry Brigade Order 526', Appendix B; '97th Infantry Brigade Operation Order No.203', Appendix C; see also TNA, WO 95/2396 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, February 1918; WO 95/2400 97 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, February 1918

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., Section III, points 17 and 18.

⁷⁴² TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Raids carried out by the 32nd Division, February 27th/28th, 1918', Section I

⁷⁴³ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Raids carried out by the 32nd Division, February 27th/28th, 1918', Section I and II.; WO 95/2391 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters, February 1918, 14th Infantry Brigade

did not yield the same clear cut results. The attack was pressed forward to a depth of 1200 yards into the German *Vorfeldzone* but, rather than hold their positions, many of the outpost garrison retreated to the main line of resistance. The division incurred 137 casualties of which approximately 50% were very slight wounds; 23 men were killed. The German casualties were 169 of which 15 were taken prisoner.⁷⁴⁴ The raids on the Houthulst Forest positions, as well as Shute's other engagements at Passchendaele, Nieuport, Savy, Holnon and Fayet all conclusively demonstrate that while he was willing to hastily attack he rarely did so insufficiently prepared.

Tactical Development

Provided a General was successful GHQ never questioned, so far as my experience went, the casualties which the operation had entailed and General Shute then, as on other occasions, earned the reputation of being a good General because he always attained his objectives though he did so by using more troops than were necessary and so never risked the possibility of failure.⁷⁴⁵

The question of Shute's capacity as a general is one that is intricately tied to his tactical understanding. This section will look at how Shute's tactical methods developed as a commander and assess whether Stanhope's criticism of his approach was fair. It will argue that Shute's principles in the attack remained, to a certain degree, fixed; nevertheless, they were sound principles to begin with. His tactical ideas on the defensive were slower to change and did not do so while he commanded 32nd Division.

One method of assessing Stanhope's claims about Shute is through statistics. The table below shows the monthly break down of casualties by 32nd Division's main commanders compiled from the 32nd

Operation Order No.191

⁷⁴⁴ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report...February 27th/28th, 1918', Section III, points 35 and 36.

⁷⁴⁵ Brian Bond (ed.), *The War Memoirs of Earl Stanhope: General Staff Officer in France 1914-1918* (Brighton, Tom Donovan Editions, 2006) p.115; James Richard Stanhope, 7th Earl Stanhope and GSO2, V Corps.

A cursory glance would suggest that Shute was slightly more profligate than Rycroft but less so than Lambert. Shute during his time in charge lost an average of 1069 men per month while Rycroft 1000 exactly and Lambert 1383. While these hint at some interesting conclusions, such as the difficulties and costs faced by Major-General T.S. Lambert in the final months of open warfare, they still only paint a very partial picture. The statistics, for example, do not differentiate how the casualties occurred. This is particularly important for Shute who was the only general who had to deal with a concerted and prepared German attack in July 1917.⁷⁴⁷

Furthermore his statistics are greatly inflated by the 2658 casualties inflicted mainly through periodically intensive German mustard gas and explosive shelling which took place in April 1918 while the division was line holding south of Arras.⁷⁴⁸ It is difficult to definitively tell how many of

⁷⁴⁶ TNA, WO 95/2373; WO 95/2374 32nd Div. AA & QMG, Nov 1915-December 1918. The statistics were compiled using the monthly totals wherever possible, or when this was not available; the accumulated totals of the day-by-day statistics given in the AA & QMG files in graph form. These day-by-day graph figures do on occasion differ from the figures given daily in the War Diary, which tend to be lower: April 1918 War Diary day-by-day statistics give Killed 146: Wounded 2191: Missing 53; whereas the graph figures give Killed 186, Wounded: 2410, Missing 62. The latter graph figures likely include casualties from divisional troops, RFA, officers not counted in war diary, and those reported at a later date but were included and compiled at the end of the month. Neither figures accurately account for the proportion of men with slight wounds that returned to their unit promptly. This can be seen in the wounded figures for 18/19 February 1918: WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Raids 18/19 Feb', Section III, p.7 reports all but 8 of the 32 wounded were slight and quickly returned; while the graph figures for wounded and evacuated in the AA&QMG file show 39 of 40 were sent to Casualty Clearing Station. Therefore the figures given will be at the higher end of the likely range, and a variable proportion will be slight wounds that returned swiftly to their unit.

⁷⁴⁷ The 32nd Division's monthly casualties are given in Appendix 6.

⁷⁴⁸ No infantry attack was forthcoming; the German focus having shifted northwards to the Ypres salient before 32nd Division could be engaged. The casualties listed in the war diary give a lower figure of 2390. These statistics also include 293 casualties from the Division's attack on the village of Alette, 2 April 1918, as well as nine additional casualties from 16/LF's follow-up attack on 3 April 1918 – TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on

these men returned to action quickly but the strength returns indicate that approximately 1569 men were added to the infantry, pioneer and machine gun units during this time. From these the vast majority, 82% or 1288 men, were listed as reinforcements.⁷⁴⁹ These figures are not perfect. The war diary gives a lower overall figure of 1464; this does not include officers joining the units. In addition to this, the larger strength return figure includes some duplicate numbers; these can be explained by soldiers moving internally between battalions. One such soldier was Major W.P. Bradley-Williams who was cross-posted from 2/KOYI to 11/Borders on 21 April 1918.⁷⁵⁰ The reinforcement figures are somewhat dubious. This is indicated by a number of batches of reinforcements arriving shortly after gas attacks. For example 2/KOYLI other ranks suffered 305 gas casualties in the week ending 13 April 1918 but received 98 other ranks the following day.⁷⁵¹ Perhaps this was a coincidence but it is a pattern repeated throughout the month: 15/HLI for the week ending 20 April 1918 suffered 206 gas casualties to the other ranks but received 147 reinforcements. The 1/Dorsets in the same week suffered 158 gas casualties but had 67 reinforcements.⁷⁵² If the War Diary is used to ascertain specifically when the reinforcements arrive they follow days where large casualties were incurred, strongly indicating that many of these reinforcements were men returning to their units after receiving treatment; were they to be casualties brought up from the rear a lag of at least a few days would be expected on account of travel time from rear to the front. These reinforcement figures also sit much closer to the wider statistics for the British Army in France which suggests 55% of the wounded returned to service either at home or abroad.⁷⁵³ The strength return forms for the infantry and machine gun battalion give a better indication of the loss suffered by the division; this amounted to a reduction of 1023

Operations Night, 2nd/3rd April, 1918 32nd Division'; WO 95/2397 16th Lancashire Fusiliers 2-3 April 1918.

⁷⁴⁹ TNA, WO 95/2374 32nd Div. AA & QMG, April 1918.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., '32nd Division: Explanation of Increase and Decrease for week ending 27th April, 1918' p.3

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., 'Explanation of Increase and Decrease for week ending 13th April, 1918' p.3; AA & QMG War Diary 14 April 1918; 'Explanation of Increase and Decrease for week ending 20th April, 1918'.

⁷⁵² Ibid., 'Explanation of Increase and Decrease for week ending 20th April, 1918'

⁷⁵³ War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War: 1914-1920* (London, H.M. Stationery Office, 1922) p.246 (source gives the figure as 1 in 1.8, but the author has converted this into a percentage for ease of understanding)

men.⁷⁵⁴ If the casualties for the RFA (57 men) are included this gives a total loss during the month of April of 1080 men.⁷⁵⁵ This statistical exploration highlights two important points: owing to the vagaries of definitions and no clear explanation of how the AA & QMG figures were compiled any surface statistical argument, without cross-referencing, is a weak one.⁷⁵⁶ Yet, in conjunction with data taken from other sources it is possible to build up a picture suggesting that April 1918 was not quite as bad as the overall casualty figures would suggest. In relation to the command performance of Shute the broad statistics show that at the very least he was no worse with his men than his fellow commanders and if the months where the division suffered heavily at the hands of the Germans are factored in, he was comparatively the most sparing of his men. April 1918 provides a good example of the dangers of looking at divisional statistics on the surface. Shute's attack on Ayette and the defence of it and the Adinfer Wood area seemingly cost the division heavily but when those figures are explored in more depth, they are not quite as damning as would appear at first. Ultimately from a statistical perspective, given the engagements he was involved in, the duration of time spent in charge, and the circumstances, Stanhope's criticisms cannot be considered fair. The next section will look at how Shute's tactical understanding developed during his time with 32nd Division.

Shute's central tactical principles did not radically change during his time with 32nd Division. In some respects he was a forward looking commander who understood the importance of using all

⁷⁵⁴ TNA, WO 95/2374 32nd Div. AA & QMG, April 1918, 'Casualty Returns', Appendix A. This figure is drawn from the 'Column A' figure from 6 April 1918 412 officers and 9940 other ranks deducted from 412 officers and 8917 other ranks in the 27 April 1918 return: the deficit of 1023 other ranks amounts to the tangible loss of strength. To further muddy the waters the final list strength also needed to take into account men who were sick, attached to other units or on training courses etc. This figure dropped over the course of the month, leaving the final deficit at 779 men.

⁷⁵⁵ TNA, WO 95/2376 32nd Div. CRA, 30th April 1918 of which 6 were killed, 14 wounded, and 37 gassed.

⁷⁵⁶ A good example of such a superficial exploration can be found in Brigadier-General James Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium 1918 Vol.II March-April Continuation of the German Offensives*, (London, Imperial War Museum/Battery Press, 1995, or 1937) p.492 which lists a much inflated casualty figure of 2826 as occurring during the German Spring Offensive 21 March – 6 April 1918; a quick glance at TNA, WO 95/2371, WO 95/2374 32nd Div. AA & QMG, should make clear that the casualties were not incurred during this period, and the figure itself is too high by any measure used by the divisional staffs.

available weapons to maximise the chances of victory. Yet in a more profound sense he did not understand the attritional character that the war had taken on and the maintenance of ground was a preoccupation he remained wedded to until the summer of 1918. This lack of appreciation did not affect the 32nd Division in any meaningful sense but it does highlight the important role that experience played for a commander on the Western Front. 32nd Division's lack of substantial involvement with the German Spring offensives meant that there was no contrary evidence to suggest the flaws in their defensive methods.

A number of principles lay at the heart of Shute's tactical understanding. These included variety when attacking so as to avoid predictability, attacking the soft-points in the enemy's defence and reinforcing success rather than failure. He emphasised all these strongly in his Staff College lecture, arguing very early on that: 'I got very sick of frontal attacks at Dawn. Hours must be varied... The principle, or what I fear became the principle from continual practice, of always going straight ahead baldheaded is like a novice boxer who has no science and simply hits without guarding.'⁷⁵⁷ Later in the lecture he argued: 'Never make a frontal attack if you can work round a flank. Don't reinforce where checked but where successful.'⁷⁵⁸ Perhaps the most important point was the centrality of combined arms to achieving victory; concluding his lecture he stressed: 'Lastly, remember that unless all arms, and all weapons are combined to gain the one result we shall never succeed.'⁷⁵⁹ As has been demonstrated with Shute's other principles, he stuck by them for the most part but did occasionally waver. While there was a definite preference for night attacks, the zero times for 32nd Division were varied. On 1 April 97 Brigade attacked Savy at 5am, 96 Brigade started their attack on Bois de Savy and Point 138 at 2.30pm that same day. The following day's attacks by 14 Brigade on Holnon and Francilly also began at 5am, but the attack on Fayet carried

⁷⁵⁷ JSCSC library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.1

⁷⁵⁸ JSCSC library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.3

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid., p.8

out by 97 Brigade on 14 April began at 4.30am.⁷⁶⁰ In December the division launched its attack on the German positions on the Passchendaele ridge at 1.55am and in 1918 the February raids took place at 11pm for the night of 18/19 and 7.32pm for the second on 27/28.⁷⁶¹ On the night of 2/3 April 1918 32nd Division's capture of Alette began at 2am, demonstrating that Shute very rarely attacked at one specific time.⁷⁶² It is not so simple to map out whether he avoided reinforcing failure. The importance of the objective must be weighed against the action taken by the commander. In the face of earlier failure Shute's instruction to 96 Brigade to take Point 138 on 1 April 1917 using three battalions, certainly appears as if he was throwing troops at the problem and reinforcing failure.⁷⁶³ But given the central importance of the location to the planned follow-up attacks on Holnon and Selency, themselves part of a larger attempt by IV Corps to flank Holnon Wood, it was an understandable course of action.⁷⁶⁴ The wider context of the attack was also important; 96 Brigade had that day passed through 97 Brigade and were carrying out attacks to exploit the German defensive instability. Furthermore, by 8.30am on 2 April 1917, 97 Brigade had joined up with flank of 61st Division and completely encircled and occupied Bois d'Holnon achieving the corps commander's wish to 'turn the strong enemy position of Holnon Wood from the North and South without attacking it.'⁷⁶⁵ In this specific instance a strong defence can be argued that Shute was insistent upon maximising the potential success gained rather than reinforcing failure. No such defence can be mounted of the proposed repeat attack by 14 Brigade on the German defences on the Passchendaele ridge after the earlier failed attack by 97 Brigade on 2 December 1917. This

⁷⁶⁰ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations 1st & 2nd April 1917', p.4; p.10, 'Report on Operations 13th & 14th April 1917', p.6. This clustering of attacks at dawn can be explained by the rapid forward movement in which the hours of darkness were required to prepare the day's operations by bringing batteries and supplies forward, reorganising the defensive line and assembly of the attacking infantry. The follow-up attacks during the day and only one shared zero hour, ensured there was no one set predictable time of attack.

⁷⁶¹ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations 2nd December 1917', p.9; WO 95/2371, 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Raids...February 18th/19th 1918', p.4; 'Report on Raids...February 27th/28th 1918', p.6

⁷⁶² TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations, Night 2nd/3rd April 1918', p.4

⁷⁶³ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 1 April 1917 'Telephone Messages, To 96th Bde.', 7-47 p.m.

⁷⁶⁴ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations...1st and 2nd April 1917', Part I, p.1

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., p.14; p.1; The Germans recognising the impending danger had completely evacuated the wood on the night of the 1/2 April 1917. Lieut. A.B. Scott suggests that this flanking action was Shute's idea, but the divisional report notes that this decision was reached at a conference indicating a decision reached by discussion. A. B. Scott, 'The Diary of Lieutenant A.B. Scott, M.C.' in Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 2 April 1917 p.70

has been dealt with earlier, but the only reasonable conclusion is Shute was attempting to throw good money after bad.

Shute was more consistent in his approach to all-arms warfare. This was not confined to his time with 32nd Division. While Shute commanded 59 Brigade, 20th (Light) Division, a raid by the 11/KRRC took place on his front. One battalion war diary noted: 'gas, smoke, Stokes mortars, R.F.A. + Heavies all take part in the attack.'⁷⁶⁶ The importance of utilising all available arms continued to be a marked feature of Shute's time as a divisional commander. Organising 63rd (Royal Naval) Division's attack on River and Puisieux Trenches on 3 February 1917, Shute orchestrated a well co-ordinated artillery plan which saw the division capture the two strong trench lines and lead to the German evacuation of Grandcourt on 6 February. Douglas Haig wrote of the attack in his third Despatch: 'In this operation, in which the excellence of our artillery co-operation was very marked, we took 176 prisoners and four machine guns.'⁷⁶⁷ Even Shute's fierce critic Stanhope was moved to say that Haig's comments were true: 'and fortunately resulted in our casualties being less severe than General Shute's plan would have otherwise entailed.'⁷⁶⁸ Shute was not the architect of the artillery plan, but having stepped up to temporarily command of II Corps in Claud Jacob's absence, he effectively oversaw much of the planning at both the divisional and corps level.⁷⁶⁹ There were certain hallmarks in Shute's approach that remained consistent from the River and Puisieux Trench attack through to his time in command of 32nd Division. One such hallmark was the machine gun barrage, of which he remained a firm proponent. In the River and Puisieux Trench attack Shute allotted sections of 189/MG Coy and the whole of 190/MG Coy to barrage duty while

⁷⁶⁶ TNA, WO 95/2116 11 Battalion The Rifle Brigade, 13 June 1916.

⁷⁶⁷ J.H. Boraston, *Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1919) p.67

⁷⁶⁸ Bond (ed.), *The War Memoirs of Earl Stanhope* (2006) p.115

⁷⁶⁹ Lt-Gen. Sir Claud William Jacob, (21 November 1863 – 2 June 1948), commissioned the Worcestershire Regiment 1882 he transferred to the Indian Army 1884. He was absent from some of the planning for the attack owing to a family bereavement during which time Shute acted as temporary commander of II Corps. Jacob returned a day before the attack.

ten guns of 189/MG Coy were pushed forward with the infantry attack.⁷⁷⁰ This division of machine guns into those allotted to support the attack and those concentrated for indirect fire reflected Shute's enduring belief that: 'It is useless to keep machine guns in reserve. Every possible machine gun should be collected and brought to bear on the enemy at the decisive moment.'⁷⁷¹ In practice this meant those guns not employed supporting the attack should be used in an indirect support role. The value of the machine gun barrage was categorically proven to Shute after the division's attacks on 1 and 2 April 1917. In the after-action report on operations Shute observed in his second point:

The value of an effective Machine Gun and Lewis Gun barrage was strikingly proved in the attack on SAVY Village. This attack was supported by 36 Machine Guns and a large number of Lewis Guns. Of the 70 German dead counted in SAVY after the operation about 70% had been killed by machine gun fire.⁷⁷²

The implications of Shute having a staff officer forward to analyse the attack have been considered in more detail in chapter three, but here the evidence should be treated with caution. It is impossible to know whether the staff officer analysed the angle of impact the bullets made. This would be the only method of distinguishing the effects of the machine gun barrage from that of the effects of the small arms fire of the attacking infantry. Moreover the fluidity of the front lowered the intensity of the shelling on both sides leading to a commensurate increase in the proportion of deaths from small arms comparative to artillery fire.⁷⁷³ Whether the analysis was conducted that thoroughly is beside the point; it was enough to convince the commander that the approach he was taking to machine gun barrages was correct. With hindsight it is possible to conclude that Shute's 'forward and back' approach was a well-considered and sensible use of a weapon that would otherwise have been

⁷⁷⁰ TNA, WO 95/3119 190th Machine Gun Company War Diary, 3 February 1917.

⁷⁷¹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on Operations...13th and 14th April 1917', p.14

⁷⁷² Ibid., 'Report on Operations...1st and 2nd April 1917', Part IX, p.16

⁷⁷³ IWM, PP/MCR/49 Albert Elshaw, p.41 observed and described the battlefield during this time: 'Shell and Machine-gun-fire may not have had the intensity of the old break-through attempts of the Somme, but there was sufficient of it to fill us with admiration at the cool way this well-conceived and expedited attack was executed.'

wasted held in reserve.

It was not only machine guns Shute that viewed as pivotal to the combined arms approach. The GOC recognised the great importance of the artillery and trench mortars. Early in the advance Shute pushed his artillery within 1000 yards of the front line and later urged batteries of the field artillery be advanced at the earliest opportunity, entailing some to fire over open-sights.⁷⁷⁴ He was less successful on 2 December 1917. With the space and topography of 32nd Division's sector only allowing for the gun pits to be dug in enfilade of the line being attacked, Shute was deprived of the chance to use a creeping barrage.⁷⁷⁵ This, he felt, was a direct contributing factor to the ultimate failure of the attack: 'Had it been possible for the Infantry to follow close up to a creeping barrage formed by guns placed directly behind them, it is possible that the enemy machine guns might have been kept under till captured.'⁷⁷⁶ Nevertheless, Shute's comments do firmly indicate that he saw the artillery's role as that of neutralisation rather than destruction. It is likely that he recognised the importance of the neutralising capacity of artillery much earlier than this late reference suggests; in the 'Notes to Accompany Operation Orders' dated 31 July 1917 the importance of the infantry co-ordinating their rush with the lifting of the barrage was stressed: 'Failure to dash into the enemy's position the instant the barrage lifts enables the enemy to come out of his shelters & mow down the attackers with Machine gun & rifle fire.'⁷⁷⁷ These notes were signed by Lt-Col A.E. McNamara who joined the division shortly after the failure at Munich and Frankfort Trenches on the Ancre in 1916, factoring this into account even if Shute had been unaware of the important shift his GSO1 would not have been. Furthermore, given the importance Shute ascribed to machine-gun barrages and his

⁷⁷⁴ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 16 March 1917, 9.20am; April 1917: 'Report on Operations...1st and 2nd April 1917', Part IX, p.17; the movement of batteries in the open is also referred to in Lt-Col H. M. Davson, *The History of the 35th Division in the Great War* (London, Sifton Praed & Co., Ltd., 1926) pp.97-99

⁷⁷⁵ An enfilade creeping barrage, it was reasoned: 'is difficult to manipulate, is inaccurate, and tends to mislead the Infantry as to their direction.' TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Report on Operations 2nd December 1917', Part V, p.18

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., p.18

⁷⁷⁷ IWM, 80/10/1 Major-General T.S. Lambert, 'Notes to Accompany Operation Orders. 32nd Div. No. G.S. 1337/Q/1', 31 July 1917

approach to utilising artillery in his first attack with 32nd Division, it can be concluded with some certainty that his thinking revolved around neutralising rather than destructive fire.⁷⁷⁸ By 1918 artillery played a much bigger role in Shute's battle system. This was largely a result of the broader developments within the BEF's battle system, but nonetheless it should be noted that the GOC was a firm proponent of these developments. In his report on the large raid carried out by the division on the night of 18/19 February 1918, Shute praised the counter-battery, and sound ranging and survey section both for discovering six new active German batteries shortly before the attack and keeping them 'completely in hand throughout.'⁷⁷⁹ To achieve this gas shells were used, a feature that Shute also took time to praise in his report.⁷⁸⁰

The use of trench mortars was an integral aspect of Shute's all-arms approach. Their co-ordination, especially the more portable Stokes mortars, remained difficult to fully integrate with the infantry until 1918. During the German withdrawal in 1917 the difficulty in getting Stokes mortars to the sites where they were needed led Shute to conclude: 'In planning all attacks arrangements should be made to push at least two Stokes Mortars close up behind the attacking troops to deal with any strong points which temporarily hold up the advance.'⁷⁸¹ The confusion of battle made co-ordination challenging. Despite ordering two Stokes mortars of 14 Brigade to move forward to Tournant Farm on 2 December 1917, the men and guns remained unused. Shortly after the attack Shute conducted a series of interviews and collated reports, as part of a wider investigation into the failure of the division. By 4 December 1917 he had cause to suspect that the Stokes mortars never arrived. Shute sent a series of questions to Major H.K. Utterson, commanding 15/LF and asked: 'Where were the

⁷⁷⁸ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1917: 'Report on Operations...1st and 2nd April 1917', Part IV, p.2 recognised: 'From Zero onwards the Corps Heavy Artillery also neutralised enemy machine guns at the South-east corner of BOIS d'HOLNON'

⁷⁷⁹ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, February 1917, 'Report on Raids...February 18th/19th, 1918'. Section IV, p.8

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., p.8

⁷⁸¹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report... 1st & 2nd April', Part IX, point 56

Tournant Farm Stokes Mortars of 14th Brigade? Did they report to Col. Utterson?'⁷⁸² Shute received the reply that they did not report to him on 2 December.⁷⁸³ A.E. McNamara, on behalf of Shute, then contacted 14 Brigade on 5 December and demanded an explanation of the situation as it appeared:

14th Infantry Brigade will please report why the instructions conveyed in para. 2 of 32nd Division Offensive Instructions No.11, as to the O.C. STOKES MORTARS reporting to the O.C., No.5 Battalion at his Headquarters at V.28.c.7.8. were not complied with.⁷⁸⁴

The subsequent response sent on 8 December gave an account of the testimony of Lt Howard, the officer in charge of the Stokes mortar battery. It confirmed the officer had visited the headquarters of the No.5 battalion (15/LF) at 4.30am, after which he returned to his battery at Tournant Farm.⁷⁸⁵ Shute forwarded the response to 96 Brigade on 10 December adding that he was reported to personally by the commander of 15/LF, Major Utterson. This is where the paper trail ends; given the losses and confusion of the battle there are a number of possible explanations for the absence of the trench mortar battery. Lt Howard could have reported to the wrong person, gone to the wrong location or been misunderstood, while Major Utterson, already struggling to hold the ground gained may have simply forgotten about them. The incident demonstrates the real problem facing the BEF and its leaders. Shute may well have wanted to incorporate all-arms in unison to overcome the increasingly dynamic German defences, but in the confusion and *mélange* of battle this was not always possible. Within a few weeks things had rapidly improved. After the attack by 32nd Division on 18/19 February 1918 Shute concluded: 'The action of the Stokes Mortars was extraordinarily successful in the case of both Brigades, and all the men now say they have implicit faith in the

⁷⁸² IWM, 80/10/2, Major-General T.S. Lambert, G.174/1/3

⁷⁸³ Ibid., '32nd.Div No. G.S. 1499/20/1', the reply was seemingly made in person but was recorded in 'G.S. 1499/20/1'

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., '32nd.Div.No. G.S. 1499/20/1'

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., '14th Inf. Bde. G. 230/0/5: GS1499/20/4'

Stokes Mortars. (a [sic] rare admission on their part).⁷⁸⁶ The integration of Stokes mortars was certainly not a smooth upward progression; on occasion such as July 1916 they worked well, while at other times when the circumstances were more confused or preparation rushed – as was the case during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line and the Passchendaele night attack – they had less of an effect.

The extra dimension of air power contributed to the First World War subsequently being seen as a 'revolution in military affairs' (RMA).⁷⁸⁷ While Shute had little comprehension of such concepts, he certainly understood the value of air power. This was at its most marked when it was taken away. On 10 July 1917 the Germans had near-complete air superiority over the 32nd and 1st Divisions' lines. A number of sorties were flown over the British lines to inspect the damage the shelling was achieving. The effects of this were crucial in Shute's eyes:

The command of the air is the first necessity to success.

When enemy planes can reconnoitre our lines and “spot” our batteries there is a great loss of morale and success is most difficult to obtain.⁷⁸⁸

When air support in the form of observation or communication was available Shute pushed for its usage. On both 1 April 1917 and 2 December 1917 Shute used air support to gather intelligence and communicate with his forward units. On 1 April he contacted both IV Corps and 7th Squadron RFC directly requesting help: 'I am not getting any satisfaction out of these aeroplanes. They have been over but I am getting shelled and I have got heavies and I Must [sic] find out where the batteries are that are shelling me.' He added: 'If our aeroplanes cannot do all this cannot we get some aeroplanes

⁷⁸⁶ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Report on the Raids...February 18th/19th, 1918', p.8

⁷⁸⁷ Jonathan Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute*, The Occasional Number 22, (1996) p.4

⁷⁸⁸ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1917, 'Report on Operations...10th July 1917', Part V, p.13

from the French Corps to find out where these guns are and then they can fire at them with their Heavies.⁷⁸⁹ Later that morning he contacted 7th Squadron RFC asking for help tackling a German observation balloon in St. Quentin. Shute was not content to simply use Corps as a go-between for the utilisation of aerial assets; at 3.58pm on 1 April 1917 he called 7th Squadron again: 'Can somebody come and see us about to-morrows [sic] operations.'⁷⁹⁰ The division utilised air power in a number of ways. For example on the first two days of April 1917, air power was used to spot enemy barrages and co-ordinate counter-battery work, communicate with soldiers on the ground and tackle enemy observation balloons.⁷⁹¹ This approach was later planned for the aborted attack on Lombartzyde and repeated at Passchendaele on 2 December 1917.⁷⁹² While air-power was under corps command and not within Shute's purview, that he embraced it so fervently and was willing to directly liaise when necessary, demonstrates the important role he saw for it in the broader all-arms tactical approach. Gas was similarly not within the remit of division, but when it was employed care was taken to maximise its impacts. During August and September 1917 a tug-of-war began between the British Special Brigade and German artillery. The Special Brigade launched four sizeable gas attacks on the 32nd Division front: 9 and 16 August and 7 and 12 September.⁷⁹³ The Germans continued to engage in periodic gas bombardments from their artillery, conducting four attacks on 4, 7 and 10 August and 27 September. They also fired lachrymatory rounds into 32nd Division's lines on 6 September.⁷⁹⁴ While Shute was not the architect of the attacks, which would have involved the

⁷⁸⁹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 1 April 1917, 'Telephone Messages Out': IV Corps G. 10-40.a.m.; 7th Sqdn R.F.C., 11.10.a.m.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., 7th Squadron, 3-58 p.m.

⁷⁹¹ For communications role see Ibid., 'Report on Operations, 1st and 2nd April 1917', Appendix F. Instructions regarding Communication between Infantry and the Contact Patrol Aeroplane. 31 March 1917.

⁷⁹² TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1917, '32nd Division Operation Order No.106' Appendix 15, p.2; Addendum No.2 14th July 1917; WO 95/2370, 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, '32nd Division Operation Order No.138', Appendix C, 27 November 1917, p.6; interestingly they were again covered by 7th Squadron RFC although on 2 December there's far less evidence of divisional involvement in the organisation of aerial resources. This was in part down to poor weather conditions which restricted flights and that II Corps took a stronger hand in direction. David John Jordan, 'The Army Co-operation Missions of the Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force 1914-1918' (Ph.D thesis, University of Birmingham, 1997)

⁷⁹³ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, 9, 16 August and 7, 12 September: '32nd Division Operation Order No. 115' Appendix 12; '32nd Division Operation Order No.117' Appendix 21; September: '32nd Division Operation Order No.119' Appendix 4.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 9 and 16 August; 7 and 12 September.

assent of Corps, Army and ultimately Major-General Charles Foulkes, Director of Gas Services, he did oversee that the division gave what support it could.⁷⁹⁵ In the attack on 9 August 1917 the divisional artillery were given instructions that: 'No shells to fall nearer the objectives than the limits above laid down before Zero plus 10, as they break up the gas clouds.'⁷⁹⁶ Instead the artillery peppered the communications and rear trenches in an effort to hit Germans moving from or to the focal points of the gas attack (Lombartzyde and Groot Bamburgh Farm). This was augmented with a machine gun barrage of the main objective, and direct enfilade fire on the approaches and communication lines.⁷⁹⁷ Direct control of all the constituent arms may not have been possible for Shute, but it was necessary to co-ordinate the actions of the arms over which he did have control. In this respect Shute recognised the importance of the 'weapons system' beyond the division's capacity; the moral aspects were equally well understood.

The consistency in Shute's principles regarding all-arms warfare, surprising the enemy and manoeuvring for the soft-spots remained relevant until the end of the war. They were sound principles which were an important aspect of final victory. The difficulty came in co-ordinating and managing these resources and when errors occurred they proved costly. It is not fair to say that the flaw in his approach was simply to throw men at any given objective until it fell. This did a disservice to Shute's planning and broader tactical views of how best to command his division. There were valid criticisms of Shute's tactics to be made. Throughout his time with 32nd Division Shute's defensive tactics emphasised the maintenance of territory and position more than attrition. The GOC partially understood the principles of defence-in-depth and adhered to them but ignored the elasticity required of those in the forward zone leading to a static uncompromising implementation. On 27 December 1917 Shute issued his guidelines to defensive training. This emphasised the importance of SS 621 *Translation of a German Document. Manual of Position*

⁷⁹⁵ Major-General Charles Howard Foulkes (1875-1969) commissioned RE 1894.

⁷⁹⁶ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, August 1917, Appendix 12, '32nd Division Operation Order No. 115', p.2

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 'Artillery' p.2; 'Machine Guns' p.3

Warfare for all Arms and he stressed that part 1A in particular: 'should be carefully and thoroughly studied by all Officers'.⁷⁹⁸ Despite arguing that: 'The most difficult defensive system to attack has been found to be one which consists of a series of strong points and short lengths of trench, arranged in depth' Shute undermined this through his insistence upon defence to the last man: 'The one main point that must be impressed on all is that the garrison of no strong point must retire or surrender even if surrounded.'⁷⁹⁹ The GOC's conception of defence-in-depth was one designed to make concentrated artillery fire difficult, by spreading his forces more thinly along a deeper front. 'The enemy cannot shell everywhere.' he succinctly and correctly reasoned.⁸⁰⁰ There were attritional points within this. By stressing the use of hidden obstacles and well-sited strong points he argued: 'it will be easy for half a Battalion of determined British infantry to hold up the advance of vast numbers of Germans and to destroy them at short range.'⁸⁰¹ Perhaps the biggest fault lay in the lack of flexibility or elasticity, especially in the holding of the Forward Zone. This had not been a consideration at the turn of the new year and would take, by his own admission, until summer 1918 to be realised: 'In June 1918 most formations realised that the principle of holding the front line at all costs was unsound in DEFENCE. Hence defence in depth and artillery well back to defend the battle zone.'⁸⁰² 32nd Division's evidence bears this out. The defensive scheme distributed in April 1918 gave the Principles of Defence as:

(a) The 32nd Division will fight where it now stands.

(b) All lines of defence will be held to the last whether their flanks are turned or not.

If troops holding any line of defence are driven in they are to contest every inch of ground and regain any ground lost as soon as possible.

(c) The defence will be active, raids and minor operations will be undertaken to prevent the enemy

⁷⁹⁸ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1917, 'Defensive Training' dated 27/12/1917, Appendix 6, p.1; The importance of this approach will be considered in the final section of this analysis.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., p.2

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid., p.2

⁸⁰¹ Ibid., p1.

⁸⁰² JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.8

from organising strong positions or withdrawing troops to fight elsewhere.⁸⁰³

The final realisation that depth was not enough, but needed to be married with a degree of flexibility came at a time when Shute was promoted to corps command and thus was exposed to the views of his subordinates who had a broader range of defensive experience. Two things lay at the heart of 32nd Division's persistence with absolute rigidity: experience and culture. When the Germans began their Spring Offensives on 21 March 1918 32nd Division were holding the line south of Houlthulst Forest in the Ypres Sector. There they remained until 29 March at which point they were transferred to GHQ Reserve and shortly thereafter joined VI Corps, commanded by Lt-Gen. J.A.L. Haldane in the Third Army sector.⁸⁰⁴ Here they held the line but were not attacked. By the time 32nd Division reached the endangered front the German attacks were petering out to be resumed further north at Ypres. While the division certainly incurred significant casualties these were not caused by the German offensives but a combination of their own attack and enemy shelling. This left lateral transfer of knowledge between divisions and central doctrine as the only two realistic mechanisms for lessons to be picked up. To a certain degree this was possible; upon entering VI Corps's area Shute issued orders that: 'All Defence Schemes, defensive arrangements, information as to the various lines of defence must be carefully taken over and made known to all.' He went on to impress that: 'officers know all details of the defences they take over, and that the flanks of units are in touch.'⁸⁰⁵ Nevertheless, as the April defensive schemes demonstrate this did not radically alter the core principles of defence. Indeed, even by June 1918, with Major-General Lambert in command of the division, only marginal concessions were given to making the defensive scheme more elastic: any withdrawal from a defensive line was only to be ordered by DHQ; the men were still expected to fight to the last man; counter-attacks were to be organised locally but the main line of resistance

⁸⁰³ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, April 1918, '32nd Division Defence Scheme, Right Sector VI Corps Front April 1918.' p.4

⁸⁰⁴ Lt-Gen. James Aylmer Lowthorpe Haldane, (1872-1950) commissioned 1882 Gordons.

⁸⁰⁵ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, March 1918, '32nd Division Order No. 168', 29 March 1918 p.2

was only to provide help if division approved.⁸⁰⁶ Ultimately the depth of front defended may have increased but the principles remained firmly consistent and decidedly rooted to the notion of holding important defensive features to the last man. Another explanation for this can be found in the cultural traditions of the British Army: there was a certain degree of regimental pride to fighting to the end and not yielding any ground to the enemy. Captain Charles Miller, 2/RIF, summed the broader concept up:

The British Army incidentally has certain shibboleths, one of which, and it has cost the lives of scores of thousands of soldiers, is that when you are attacked in overwhelming force you mustn't run away. The French, who are much more logical than we, and who consider results not prestige, invariably run away under such circumstances, and when the right moment comes run back again and deliver a counter attack.⁸⁰⁷

Martin Middlebrook has persuasively demonstrated that in reality whole units fighting to the death was a great rarity. Soldiers fought long enough to satisfy their personal honour and once that 'threshold of resistance' had been eclipsed they surrendered.⁸⁰⁸ The underlying historical and cultural factors that slowed Shute's, adoption of a truly elastic defence were summed up by one NCO quoted in the official history: 'It don't suit us. The British Army fights in line and won't do any good in these bird cages.'⁸⁰⁹ A degree of caution should be taken ascribing too much weight to this view. It would be easy to over-simplify or reduce the issue down to one of a simple national preference for line tactics binding the Army to a hybrid system of depth and rigidity. But heritage and tradition were certainly factors in Shute's thinking and a means used to encourage stiff resistance, as he explained in December 1917: 'The traditions and exploits of British Infantry must

⁸⁰⁶ TNA, WO 95/2372 32nd Div. General Staff, June 1918, '32nd Division Defence Scheme', pp.6-7; pp.9-11

⁸⁰⁷ IWM, 33/3/1, Captain C.C. Miller p.29

⁸⁰⁸ Martin Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle* (London, Allen Lane, 1978) pp.332-339; particularly p.336

⁸⁰⁹ Edmonds, *OH 1918* vol.2 p.258

be explained to all ranks. It is want of confidence in themselves and in their weapons – not want of courage – which is the trouble.'⁸¹⁰ While heritage, culture and preference encouraged the maintenance of a rigid form of defence-in-depth in real terms the enduring view of the importance of territory, and the practical problems engendered by a truly elastic, flexible system of defence-in-depth combined to impress this hybrid system of sorts.⁸¹¹

Shute's tactical understanding, approach and development was generally well suited to command on the Western Front. His fundamental principles were sound and he constantly pushed for the integration of all-arms to overcome the challenges posed by the Germans both on the attack and the defence. He did have flaws, for he was at best inconsistent in his attempts to employ 'soft-spot' tactics and defensively he argued for a rigid system which left bleak prospects for the troops holding the forward zone. Nevertheless, he was far from alone in his views on defence and he did change when experience was gained and reflection was possible. As a tactical leader there was a high degree of consistency, in principle, with pre-war ideas. This should not be seen as a negative quality; many of those principles remained relevant throughout the war. The difficulty was in its implementation, and in this respect Shute actively sought improvement; chapter three has explored the systems used to facilitate this: active enquiry, usage of staff officers and consultation with subordinates. Yet, it still required the leader to recognise improvements, and implement them. His position may not have varied much, but the consistency in approach ultimately led to a series of successes in April and July 1917 and once again in February and April the following year. The December Passchendaele attack remains a blemish on his otherwise impressive record but irrespective of this tactically he must be considered a success, albeit a qualified one.

⁸¹⁰ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, 'Defensive Training', p.2

⁸¹¹ An elastic defence relies on a strong communications network in the forward zones and a strong, decentralised command system. Knowing when to withdraw the forward zone troops and when to lay down the barrage was critical. The rigid defence-in-depth obviated these challenges and the responsibilities of all ranks were abundantly clear, but it came with great risk for troops holding strong points who could be easily isolated and defeated.

6.2 Aims of Leadership: Identity and Cohesion

How successful was Shute at developing cohesion within the formation and congruency with the purpose of the army? The evidence is suggestive of both developing in early 1917, prior to Shute taking charge, but firmly established after the successes during the German withdrawal. Captain E.B. Lord described 32nd Division as: 'the Mad Division because of our propensity for patrolling and raids.'⁸¹² He did so specifically referring to the relief of the French lines near Le Quesnel at the end of February 1917. Shute was in charge by this point, but his limited involvement and period of leave make it highly unlikely he could have instilled such an offensive spirit in so short a time. Lord was writing after the war however, and it remains a possibility that he transposed the idea of the 'attacking division' or *corps d'elite* backwards upon a time when the identity was less assured. Writing in a general sense, R.L. Venables a driver for B Battery, 164 Brigade RFA, described different divisions functioning in different capacities within the British Army, of 32nd Division he wrote: 'Our Division was usually moved to where a battle was planned to take place, so that if they captured a gun or vehicle of ours and know to which Division it belonged they would be prepared.'⁸¹³ More specifically, Albert Elshaw, after arriving at Nieuport in mid-June 1917, wrote: 'It seemed neither side had aggressive intentions – garrison duty had been the order of the day. That is until two “striking” British divisions took over front-line duties.'⁸¹⁴ He was referring to the 1st and 32nd Divisions. Furthermore after the successes during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, he wryly and somewhat hyperbolically observed the problems success could bestow:

This was to bring forth at a later date a pat on the back followed by what we looked upon as a 'kick in the pants' from the High Ones. The pat on the back was on the occasion of a spit-and-polish

⁸¹² IWM, 79/12/1, Captain E.B. Lord p.41

⁸¹³ IWM, 76/225/1, R.L. Venables p.13

⁸¹⁴ IWM, PP/MCR/49, A. Elshaw, p.57

review. "The division has done wonderful work and is now considered to be one of the best attacking formations – blah! blah!" Then followed the pant dusting (This sort of thing will be familiar to any "old sweat" of the time.)

"In consequence of this magnificent record you will be very proud to learn that you have been selected for and will have the privilege of participating in the biggest and bloodiest battle of the whole war!"⁸¹⁵

On both occasions Elshaw was referring to the proposed inter-service coastal action to be conducted in conjunction with the Dover Patrol (Operation Hush).⁸¹⁶ He would not be the only one to comment on the division's selection. After the war Charles Douie gave a short account of the episode, which he began with: 'Certain divisions were chosen to carry out an attack of a particularly hazardous character on the Belgian coast.'⁸¹⁷ This notion was not confined to the Belgian operation. In May 1917 the division was informed that it would be in reserve at Messines, under the command of Lord Cavan's XIV Corps.⁸¹⁸ Lt Heathcoat-Amory, wrote in his diary on 12 May 1917, the same day as a divisional conference was held by Shute: 'we go to rest and train for two or three weeks, then in an honoured post!' ⁸¹⁹ Word of this clearly travelled amongst the gunners. The Rev. Grice-Hutchinson, wrote in his diary on 14 May 1917: 'I heard to-day that our Division together with the Guards and the 1st Division are to form a kind of *corps d'élite*, which sounds pretty lively. Whether

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., p.42

⁸¹⁶ Operation Hush proposed an amphibious landing of British troops behind the German lines south of Ostend. It was heavily championed by Rear Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, commanding the Dover Patrol and had the support of Douglas Haig. The landings were to be combined with a concurrent push northwards on land from Nieuport. This is what the 32nd Division were ear-marked for. The attack was seriously hampered by the German spoiling action *Operation Strandfest* (the Battle of Nieuport, 10 July 1917) and later cancelled on 14 October 1917 after the Third Battle of Ypres failed to achieve its intended operational objectives.

⁸¹⁷ Charles Douie, *The Weary Road*, (1929) pp.185-188

⁸¹⁸ XIV Corps: Guards Division, 1st Division, 8th Division and 32nd Division. Lt-Gen. Frederick Rudolph Lambart Earl of Cavan (16 October 1865 – 28 August 1946), commissioned Grenadier Guards 29 August 1865; took over command of XIV Corps 11 January 1916. The infantry of the reserve Corps at Messines remained unused in the attack, while the artillery was attached to divisions in the attacking formations. 32nd Divisional Artillery was attached to 36th (Ulster) Division, X Corps: TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 1-9 June 1917.

⁸¹⁹ Lt Ludovic Heathcoat-Amory, 'The Diary of the Late Major L. Heathcoat-Amory' in Whinyates (ed.) *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 12 May 1917; p.618

as a corps of attack or of pursuit I do not know.⁸²⁰ It is interesting to note that the Reverend did not comment on the possibility of two to three weeks of rest, but instead chose to focus on the future role. There was clearly talk of the division's reputation circulating at this time.

32nd Division's selection for Operation Hush was promoted by Shute as a badge of honour for the formation. At 3pm on 21 May 1917, the GOC organised a large conference at DHQ which brought together all infantry officers down to company level as well as the specialist MG Coy and Trench Mortar Battery commanders. Shute's second point (out of 17) was: 'Composition of Corps. Division specially selected. Warn all ranks to keep up to reputation they have gained.'⁸²¹ The only issue he valued higher was warning all ranks not to talk about operations.⁸²² Furthermore this was the second time he had explained such a point in conferences. As the war diary of the CRA, 32nd Division and Heathcoat-Amory's testimony quoted above show, the GOC had first revealed the plans to his some of his subordinates on 12 May 1917.⁸²³ Even in 1918 he would impress upon the troops: 'The reputation of the 32nd Division, of the Brigade and Regiment must be upheld.'⁸²⁴ Thus, there was a conscious drive by Shute to instil the division with the shared *esprit de corps* based around their reputation in combat. This drive fitted in with his own and the contemporary understanding of a formation or unit being: 'a reflection of PERSONALITY OF COMMANDER.'⁸²⁵ In this he can be considered a success; a divisional identity clearly existed. Nevertheless, this does not mean 32nd Division was a *corps d'elite* in practice and it is difficult to disentangle the bravado one would expect to find within any formation from a consciously developed identity predicated upon being an attacking formation. To do this it is necessary to look

⁸²⁰ Grice-Hutchinson, M.C., 'The Diary...' in Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories 32nd Division* (1932) 24 May 1917; p.210

⁸²¹ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff: May 1917, 'Conference held at Beaucourt 3pm 21/5/17', Appendix 11.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ TNA, WO 95/2375 32nd Div. CRA, 12 May 1917; Lt Heathcoat-Amory, 'The Diary of the Late Major L. Heathcoat-Amory' in Whinyates (ed.) *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 12 May 1917; p.618

⁸²⁴ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1918, 'Notes on Conference held at Divisional Headquarters January 8th, 1918', Appendix 8.

⁸²⁵ JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.8

at whether the identity persisted after set-backs such as at Nieuport on 10 July 1917 or after Operation Hush was cancelled.

The best indication that Shute as a leader played an important role in sustaining the idea of an 'attacking division' can be seen in the maintenance of the idea throughout 1917. In light of attacks at Nieuport and the loss of trenches the division's attitude remained fairly constant. Rev. Grice-Hutchinson, returning from leave, wrote in a moment of understatement: 'The Germans have attacked at Nieuport and carried all the trenches between there and the sea as far as the Yser canal, which would be, I should say, on the 1st Division front. Rather an upset for our plans.'⁸²⁶ Heathcoat-Amory on the other hand merely noted that: 'Bosches got 1st Division line, but we got back practically all in the end.'⁸²⁷ On the front line, the focus was not on identity but on the combat they had just experienced, Charles Rooke, 11/Borders, wrote after the war:

I shall always remember the 10th July 1917. On this day, the Germans start their twenty-four hours' intense bombardment with high explosive and gas shells, and, during this terrible time, we had, I regret, many, many casualties. You were safe nowhere.⁸²⁸

Others were more reflective and recognised there had been a set-back, albeit on the 1st Division's front. Lt Eric N. Platt, 1/Dorsets looking back in 1919 wrote: 'This was an important turn, but events like these must be expected sometimes. We cannot always be winners.'⁸²⁹ While the Germans had inflicted a heavy blow on the 32nd Division the soldiers still viewed the repulse of the main attack as a success, in the circumstances; neither of 97 Brigade's two front line battalions were

⁸²⁶ Grice-Hutchinson, M.C., 'The Diary...' in Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 11 July 1917; p.229

⁸²⁷ Lt Heathcoat-Amory, 'Diary' in Whinyates (ed.) *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 11 July 1917; p.626

⁸²⁸ Charles Rooke, *A Few of My Experiences Whilst on "Active Service"*, (accessed 6/2/2012: 7.15pm) <http://www.nigelduffin.co.uk/family/rooke.htm>

⁸²⁹ IWM, 78/72/1, C.L. Platt, *Jumbo in the Great War: A Record of War Services Rendered by the staff of Carter, Platt & Co., Old Change Buildings, London, E.C. 1919*; Lt E. N. Platt pp.184-185

forced back across the Passchendaele canal.⁸³⁰ Shute, in spite of the heavy casualties to 97 Brigade, also viewed the action as a German failure. His second lesson from the attack was titled: 'Reason for his failure' and he wrote:

...his attack failed to develop in sufficient depth owing:

(a) To the effectiveness of our counter preparation.

(b) The tenacity of the garrison of the front trenches, and the prompt action of local reserves.⁸³¹

In light of this interpretation of the battle being a success, there was simply nothing to challenge the established notions of identity.

A further factor to consider in the division's identity was how it sat alongside the regimental cap-badge loyalty. As the specialist unit and regimental histories published after the war demonstrate there was no shortage of this.⁸³² Paddy Griffith suggested that it 'was a vital and highly constructive force which enhanced the cohesion and fighting will-power of even a mediocre battalion' but '...was also a seriously damaging obstacle to all-arms co-operation'.⁸³³ This argument can be taken too far, while rivalry, competition and occasionally hostility could flare up within 32nd Division, so too did co-operation, and cordiality. Trench mortars had a troublesome relationship with the infantry. As Griffith noted, they were often brought into action for a bombardment, but would swiftly retreat while the infantry were left to suffer the subsequent retaliation.⁸³⁴ That complaints occurred as a consequence of this was to be expected, but a sense of common purpose and interest did occur:

⁸³⁰ Chalmers (ed.), *History of the 16th Battalion HLI* (1930) pp.101-102

⁸³¹ TNA, WO95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1917, 'Report on Operations...10th July 1917': Part V Lessons and Comments.

⁸³² Some notable examples from the 32nd Division include: Whinyates (ed.) *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932); Chalmers (ed.), *History of the 16th Battalion HLI* (1930); Lt-Col Shakespear, *17th and 32nd Service Battalions Northumberland Fusiliers (N.E.R.) Pioneers 1914-1919* (London, Naval and Military Press reprint, 2003, or. 1926); Major General J.C. Latter, *The History of the Lancashire Fusiliers 1914-1918 in Two Volumes* (Aldershot, Gale & Polden Ltd., 1949)

⁸³³ Paddy Griffith, 'The Extent of Tactical Reform in the British Army' in Paddy Griffith (ed.), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, Frank Cass, 1996) p.6

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7

'...the Infantry, especially the H.L.I. and the Inniskilling Fusiliers, always lined the trench, and we [the gunners] felt somewhat compensated by their cheery remarks when a good hit was made.'⁸³⁵

The hardships of the infantryman were numerous and their complaints many, but to look back and accept them as firm evidence for serious issues of cohesion would be a step too far. Without question, it took time for all arms to learn their places in the greater order of battle, but that did not stop them from holding the identity of the larger group as well as that of the specialist.⁸³⁶ This is not to argue that Griffith's point is without merit. His case is well made for infantry observing difference between themselves and the specialists. That these differences led to limited integration in combat is not wholly borne out by 32nd Division's experience. Under Rycroft, 19/LF used a Trench Mortar smoke barrage to cover their movements on 1 July 1916.⁸³⁷ During Shute's tenure, Brigadier-General Cyril Blacklock, 97 Brigade, placed eight Lewis gun teams of 16/HLI under the command of the 97/MG Coy to take part in the machine gun barrage on 1 April 1917. During the same attack two sections of the 97/MG Coy came under the orders of 17/HLI.⁸³⁸ Differences in demeanour and self-identity existed but it is too great a generalisation to argue that this equated to a lack of co-operation and cohesion across the Army.⁸³⁹ Identities should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but more like Russian Dolls; individuals could strongly associate with their section, then their platoon, company or regiment; outside of which they could also feel an affinity for their brigade, and division, all the while recognising their role as a part within the British Army. Bonds at the lowest level may have been strongest, but that did not preclude co-operation. Cap-badge loyalty co-existed with identification with the division. Scepticism of specialists and 'grousing' occurred but

⁸³⁵ A. B. Scott, 'The Diary of Lieutenant A.B. Scott, M.C.' in Whinyates (ed.), *Artillery and Trench Mortar Memories* (1932) 12 August 1916 p.26

⁸³⁶ For the mixed performance in 1916-1917 see chapters two, three and the previous section of this chapter.

⁸³⁷ TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1916, 'Report on Operations by General Staff 32nd Division', p.6

⁸³⁸ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, '97th Brigade Order No.126', Appendix G; close co-operation between 97th Bde MGC and 2/KOYLI, 16/HLI was also a feature of the attack on Fayet, 14 April 1917: see WO 95/2399 97 Infantry Brigade, April 1917, '97th Brigade Operation Order No.127'; Ibid., Battalion reports, Appendix H, '2nd KOYLI Report', p.6; Ibid., Battalion reports, Appendix H, 'Report of the commanding officer of 16th High.L.I. on attack of FAYET on 14th April 1917' p.13

⁸³⁹ See IWM, 95/16/1, Captain F. D. Hislop, 'Memo on Employment of Lewis Gunners on Fatigue' pp.1-2 for distinct Lewis gun identity within 5/6 R.Scots.

there is nothing to suggest that they negatively affected performance in battle.

The divisional identity had the important effect of promoting the wider aims of the organisation. By emphasising the attack the division were meeting the guidelines laid down by *FSR I* which firmly stated: **'Decisive success in battle can be gained only by a vigorous offensive'** [bold in original].⁸⁴⁰ Yet as the concept of 'consent and evade' in chapter four has demonstrated, the promotion of these principles did not guarantee they were carried out in the manner that was intended. Nevertheless, a key dividing aspect between 'consent and evade' and insubordination was congruency with the army's objectives. Soldiers were willing to bend orders to suit the local circumstances but very few disobeyed with the outright intent of self-preservation. Shute did not approve of such manipulations and interpretations, but his flexible command system gave his troops greater latitude to execute their orders in battle. The men responded by applying 'consent and evade' to deal with the strict discipline, but used their initiative in battle. When 17/HLI were inspected by Shute in the summer of 1917 he was suitably impressed to exclaim: "Ah...The division that shines in the mud." Hours later, after a downpour, the shine was gone and one soldier glibly remarked: 'It was later found possible to maintain esprit de corps on a smaller ration of "brasso"!'⁸⁴¹ The implication was that the full clean and polish was only done when inspections were due, while at other times it proved highly impractical. In battle, Shute recognised that his information was often partial and problematic. On 10 July 1917 after a brief lull in the German bombardment he recommended 97 Brigade: 'carry out one or if possible two strong raids during the night.' This was both to ascertain the situation and 'preserve the offensive spirit'. Yet he left the ultimate decision to Brigadier-General Blacklock adding: 'you should not do anything which you consider inadvisable, or beyond the powers of your men.'⁸⁴² In using this approach Shute empowered his subordinate and

⁸⁴⁰ General Staff, *FSR I* (1909) p.107

⁸⁴¹ IWM, PP/MCR/49, A. Elshaw, pp.42-43

⁸⁴² TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, July 1917, 'Record of Telegraph and Telephone messages - 10th July 1917', 6.10pm.

avoided what would have been a costly raid against an enemy that was amassing to launch an attack of their own. Shute's approach to personal command and discipline mirrored that which was recommended by *FSR I*. The leadership was not always obeyed to the letter, but this did not preclude the formation from operating in line with the efforts of the broader army.

The difficulties of tracking the causal effects of identity mean that any conclusions must necessarily be tentative. Shute clearly attempted to build a positive divisional identity based upon his own preference for the offensive and there is evidence that the men subscribed to this. The second criterion, that of congruency with the broader institutional aims, was achieved by the formation and promoted through Shute's leadership style which mirrored that of *FSR I*. It did not stop soldiers from employing consent and evade when they felt it necessary, but this was generally conducted in line with the greater aims of the army.

6.3 Shute: a Mentor, Role Model and Peer?

This final section will assess whether Shute fulfilled the requirements of a 'learning leader'. It will examine how he fared interacting with his subordinates and peers, questioning whether he aided the development of those around him. The previous sections have demonstrated that Shute was a capable commander who faced a series of challenges which were generally successfully overcome. Nevertheless, it is possible to be a successful leader but leave no lasting legacy of learning and development. Shute's ability to mentor his subordinates, act as a role model and engage in discussions with those around him will be used as the criteria for assessment.⁸⁴³ It will be argued that aspects of his character such as his discipline and aggression made him a divisive leader who inspired fear as much as admiration. This left certain subordinates and peers doubting the wisdom

⁸⁴³ See chapter five for a more detailed explanation of these criteria.

of his decisions. This did have some beneficial effects which will be analysed, but overall it will shown that Shute was much too divisive to truly be considered a 'learning leader'.

Shute's best claim to being a 'learning leader' stems from his actions as a mentor. The importance of the 1920 Staff College, Camberley lecture in providing an insight into his command philosophy and leadership style has been demonstrated throughout this case study, but it also provides tacit evidence that he actively sought to pass on his knowledge and opinions. His relationship with his brigadiers and staff reinforces the point. In a letter to Edmonds mainly concerning the ignominious dismissal of Rycroft, Austin Girdwood wrote:⁸⁴⁴

I had a Battn [sic] and afterwards a Brigade in the 32nd Div. and so I know what the same units could do when the Division was commanded by a man like "Tiger" Shute who worked us hard but sensibly and who damned us all to heaps but whom we all adored all the same because he understood infantry and their funny ways as none of the others did. He had McNamara and Lumsden to back him up and this is why the Division did so brilliantly afterwards.⁸⁴⁵

While many letters to Edmonds in the Cab 45 series have a certain air of gossip about them this was not a hollow sentiment expressed by Girdwood. In a much earlier letter to his former GOC, Rycroft, sent on 28 May 1917 during the period Shute was parachuted into 19th (Western) Division, Girdwood wrote: 'He [Shute] is known as the Tiger. He is a fine soldier and we are sorry to lose him. He has been sent to apply a little ginger to another Division + Gen Stuart Wortley reigns in his stead.'⁸⁴⁶ This letter indicates that Girdwood's favour was won as a consequence of Shute's leadership rather than any patronage; it pre-dates his rise to brigadier, which did not occur until 21 August 1917. Shute and Girdwood's relationship sheds light on the process of promotion. The letter

⁸⁴⁴ See chapter two.

⁸⁴⁵ TNA, CAB 45/134, Girdwood to Edmonds 30 June 1930

⁸⁴⁶ PKCA, Rycroft Papers, MS35/99 Austin Girdwood to William Rycroft, 28 May 1917

to Rycroft includes exasperated comments indicating that in Spring 1917 Girdwood felt he had little chance of being promoted to command of a brigade:

I fear that without influence I can not hope to get much out of this war. It is a little bit hard sometimes to sit still and see fellows, like my own young brother who have never commanded a battn [sic] or even a company in action and who has not got P.S.C. or as much service; get on without an effort.⁸⁴⁷

Earlier in the letter he had pointed out to Rycroft that: 'General Shute made a special application for a Brigade for me but nothing has happened so far tho' that is the 3rd time it has gone in.' Within two months of Shute rejoining 32nd Division in June 1917 Girdwood had been promoted to command of 96 Brigade. To echo the sentiments of A.D. Thorburn, and subsequently Gary Sheffield, the well-being of an army (and by extension a division) depends on the interplay of human relationships.⁸⁴⁸ The success Girdwood had achieved during the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line was not quickly forgotten by Shute, nor the men of 11/Borders who nominated their battalion commander for an honour.⁸⁴⁹ Despite the difficulties the battalion had at Nieuport, Girdwood was swiftly promoted when a brigade became available in August 1917. Where talent was seen, Shute groomed it and developed it.⁸⁵⁰ The impact of such promotions had a positive effect on the atmosphere amongst senior commanders and staff within the division. In a later letter to Rycroft after he had taken over command of 96 Brigade, Girdwood observed the harmony of the staff within the division: 'The whole Division is greatly changed but I am glad to say that all the Staff are very nice & easy to work with.'⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.,

⁸⁴⁸ A.D. Thorburn, *Amateur Gunners* (Liverpool, Potter, c.1933) p.5; Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) p.xxi

⁸⁴⁹ PKCA, Rycroft Papers, MS35/99 Girdwood to Rycroft, 28 May 1917: He was awarded a bar to his DSO.

⁸⁵⁰ A similar case can be made for F.W. Lumsden who rose from GSO2 to Brigadier-General in six days. He ascended via a short stint in command of 17/HLI and also earned a VC in those hectic few days. TNA, WO 95/2373 32nd Div. AA & QMG: 6 and 12 April 1917

⁸⁵¹ Ibid., MS35/144, Rycroft Papers, Girdwood to Rycroft, 5 December 1917

Shute's personality could alienate subordinates at the lower levels of command, but he instilled strong admiration in those around him; perhaps none more so than Cyril Blacklock, 97 Brigade. When Shute joined 32nd Division Blacklock swiftly followed him, as Girdwood noted: 'He brought in a pal of his own (Blacklock) to command the Bde.'⁸⁵² If Shute was a mentor to anyone, it was Blacklock. To paint this as a simple case of nepotism or cronyism would do a disservice to the working relationship the pair had. An illuminating insight is given by Captain R.C.J. Chichester-Constable's letter to Captain Cyril Falls who was then compiling the first volume of the Official History for 1917. In the letter Chichester-Constable gives a short account of the situation which led up to 97 Brigade's attack on Fayet:

The three Brigadiers and Brigade Majors were hurriedly [sic] summoned to a conference at D.H.Q. Two of the Brigadiers stressed the impossibility of carrying out the operation in the time available, but Bg.Gen.Blacklock volunteered to undertake the job, although in the ordinary rotation it would have been the job of one of the other two Brigades.⁸⁵³

The working relationship between Shute and Blacklock was a strong and mutually beneficial one. As has been shown already Blacklock, once assigned the task, knew he would get the freedom to carry it out as he saw fit, while conversely Shute knew he had a reliable and trustworthy subordinate who would be able to give him honest appraisals. The evidence for their personal relationship is scant, but their careers both followed an intertwined upward trajectory culminating in a wonderful symmetry when Blacklock was given command of Shute's old charges, 63rd (Royal Naval) Division. For subordinates like Girdwood and Blacklock, Shute filled the criteria as a mentor. He offered advice, set out principles and promoted talent when he saw it. This was a symbiotic relationship and

⁸⁵² Ibid., MS35/99, Rycroft Papers, Girdwood to Rycroft 28 May 1917.

⁸⁵³ TNA, CAB 45/116 R.Chichester-Constable to C. Falls , 28 February 1939

consequently Shute created a strong team of brigade commanders whose opinions he could trust and performances he could rely on.

This case study has shown that Shute was in most respects an ideal example of the pre-war leader: he was courageous, a firm disciplinarian, a determined optimist and aggressive character. This established him as an ideal role model by the standards of the Edwardian Regular army, but in practice aspects such as punctilious discipline, and his curt manner led to a sharp polarisation of attitudes both inside and outside the division. Earl Stanhope and Lt I. A. MacDonell were both scathing of Shute's approach, and William Heneker, GOC 8th Division, who had previously served under him briefly in 63rd (Royal Naval) Division, had deep misgivings about Shute's tactical planning for the attack of 2 December 1917.⁸⁵⁴ He also had his supporters, not least his superiors who saw fit to promote him to command V Corps in 1918, where he continued to be a divisive leader.⁸⁵⁵ In practice, Shute was too polarising to be considered a positive role model in the citizen army of 1916-1918.

There are objective actions Shute took to encourage and foster a positive learning environment. It has already been demonstrated that Shute essentially 'talent spotted' his subordinates and this extended down the ranks as well. The conference agenda from 21 May 1917 demonstrate that Shute discussed the issue of promotions with his subordinates and stressed: '(Not by Seniority – this will encourage energy in junior ranks).'⁸⁵⁶ At both the top and the bottom Shute was establishing a precedent for performance-based promotion. Shute also adhered firmly to the principles of paternalism for his charges. In his lecture to the Staff College in 1920 he argued that to earn the

⁸⁵⁴ Bond (ed.), *The War Memoirs of Earl Stanhope* (2006) p.114; IWM, 88/39/1, Lt-Col I A MacDonell, 24 June 1917; For Heneker's reservations see: LoCicero 'Moonlight Massacre' (2011) p.69; p. 316

⁸⁵⁵ IWM, 66/257/1, Sir Reginald Pinney, 29 September 1918; see also Boff, *Winning and Losing* (2012) p.208. His approach to command as a corps commander remained fundamentally the same as it was at division, see Simpson, *Directing Operations* (2006) pp.164-168; Parkyn, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle* (1937) p.335

⁸⁵⁶ TNA, WO 95/2369 32nd Div. General Staff, May 1917, Appendix 11, point 14.

trust of men you had to take care of them.⁸⁵⁷ His strict insistence upon Regular discipline stifled this, but he also took great steps to look after the physical fitness of the men. In the divisional instructions distributed at the end of December 1917, alongside the importance of training the men in defensive tactics, the issue of care in training was raised:

Officers must take the greatest care that their men have the maximum of comfort, are housed as well as possible and that their meals are as comfortable as possible. Recreation, games, competitions should be arranged and encouraged to keep the men amused and happy.⁸⁵⁸

This followed a reminder of the mental and physical strain the men had faced over the final few months of 1917 and urged the brigadiers to ensure their first priority be 'to restore vitality. They require rest both physically and mentally and amusements to divert their thoughts from the discomforts and the shell fire in which they have been living.'⁸⁵⁹ This was not a measure taken in a period of abnormal stress. Throughout his time with the division Shute laid his plans with the condition of his men in mind. Forming up spots were chosen according to distance and convenience for the men, and hot food was brought up before battle.⁸⁶⁰ Shute understood the role of recreation and throughout his tenure sporting competitions were arranged. One such competition was organised by Lt-Col. I. H. MacDonell on behalf of Brigadier-General Ashburner in May 1917. MacDonell's views show the importance sport played in the well-being of the men:

Of course sports [sic] is not war but you must have them in order to keep these great bodies of men fit + content. The Brigadier was out to make a 'splash' + eclipse all other Brigades in their Divn.[sic]

I was set to organise + run it much against my will. However it was a roaring success – This of

⁸⁵⁷ JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.8

⁸⁵⁸ TNA, WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, January 1917, '32nd Division Instructions No.17', Appendix 6, point 5.

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁰ Assembly: TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, December 1917, 'Report on Operations, 2 December', pp.8-9; Hot Food: WO 95/2371 32nd Div. General Staff, February 1918, 'Report on Raids, 18th/19th February 1918', point 29, p.10; Ibid., 'Report on Operations...1st & 2nd April', Point 59, p.17

course wont [sic] 'do you any harm' because you can run one thing one can run another.⁸⁶¹

At the heart of Shute's appreciation for sport lay his understanding that competition could be used to foster enthusiasm for offensive action amongst the troops. In February 1918 Shute created a 'Divisional Cup' to promote aggressive patrolling and raiding. This was a monthly competition between the battalions of 32nd Division. Points were awarded for capturing prisoners, securing identification and capturing machine guns or trench mortars. The claims had to be verified at brigade level with the winning battalion being awarded a trophy and leave vacancies. A 100 franc prize was also given to 'men who specifically distinguish themselves and show enterprise initiative and gallantry in patrolling, raiding and front line work generally.'⁸⁶² This tournament proved to be a success and was continued until the Armistice, the battalion with the most wins being the 15/LF.⁸⁶³ This provides further support for Sheffield's conclusions that sport played an important role in both leadership and officer-man relations.⁸⁶⁴ In establishing such tournaments Shute was doing more than providing a slightly modified version of coercion. He was establishing circumstances in which positive behaviour - in tune with the aims of the army - was rewarded. He was using transactional leadership techniques to promote behaviour that improved performance and learning. This had the further benefit of encouraging soldiers to be proactive on the front line, and gain experience.⁸⁶⁵ Shute objectively set two key examples: paternalism and innovative thinking, although, it is doubtful whether those who took a natural dislike to him could ever fully appreciate these measures. Despite these efforts Shute's divisive character placed a ceiling on who he could reach as a role

⁸⁶¹ IWM, 88/39/1 29, Lt-Col I A MacDonell, May 1917

⁸⁶² IWM, 80/10/2, Major-General T.S. Lambert, 'Divisional Monthly Cup General File'; so that the specialists were not excluded a certain proportion of leaves were assigned to the various branches each month for distribution to individuals whom the commander of that branch deemed worthy.

⁸⁶³ Ibid., On aggregate points 15/LF fell some way behind 15/HLI who comfortably outscored all with a grand total of 1851 points. To place that in context, the maximum points any one item could score a battalion was 3 for a machine gun or trench mortar.

⁸⁶⁴ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (2000) pp.44-48

⁸⁶⁵ For the impact sports had on the average soldier see IWM, PP/MCR/49, A. Elshaw, pp.15-16; for evidence of the Divisional Cup's success see IWM, 80/10/2, T.S. Lambert dispute over 1/Dorsets total in November and Brigadier-General Girdwood's account which was included for the purpose of tallying points. Contests are not made around competitions people do not care for.

model.

The final area worth assessing is Shute's ability to promote improvement through his actions, discussions and appraisals. Despite the abundance of reports the effects of his advice upon his subordinates is difficult to trace. Unlike the impact of training and after-action reports which have left a sizeable paper trail, no subordinate has left an account of how Shute directly influenced their thinking. Nevertheless some general points remain to be made. Shute's approach when interviewing could evidently get heated. During the 2 December 1917 attack his barrage of questions to Blacklock demonstrated that no one was safe from his occasional but fierce inquisitions.⁸⁶⁶ Under such duress it was little wonder subordinates such as MacDonell felt their jobs were under threat. While this possibly prompted an awareness and a desire to improve it could easily have had the inverse reaction; bringing on a sense of inevitability. The GOC had certainly built up a reputation for clearing out subordinates he felt were not up to the job. Girdwood remarked to Rycroft that: 'General Shute sacked 8 C.Os out of 12 + 2 Brigadiers.'⁸⁶⁷ While MacDonell also noted his ruthless reputation: 'The man has consistently sacked one Commanding Officer after another. It is only a question of time.'⁸⁶⁸ There was certainly a degree of justification for that reputation. Within six months of joining the division all three brigadiers commanding before Shute had arrived had been replaced.⁸⁶⁹ For battalion commanders it was not necessarily Shute who was the problem. In the aftermath of the Passchendaele attack, Blacklock removed Lt-Col Tweed, the commanding officer of 11/Borders, from his position. In February 1918 Tweed, having recovered from a nervous breakdown on the front (a contributing factor in his removal) contacted the Brigadier-General, Director of Personal Services requesting reassignment: 'I would be in the best service in being

⁸⁶⁶ TNA, WO 95/2370 32nd Div. General Staff, 2 December 1917 'Telephone Messages', To 97th Bde. 7.20.p.m

⁸⁶⁷ PKCA, Rycroft Papers, MS35/99 Austin Girdwood to William Rycroft, 28 May 1917

⁸⁶⁸ IWM, 88/39/1, Lt-Col I A MacDonell, 24 June 1917

⁸⁶⁹ Not all were removed by Shute. Brigadier-General L. Ashburner for example left for an unknown reason and his replacement by Girdwood was not reported either in the 32nd AA & QMG file nor the General Staff file.

appointed to duties of an instructional character.⁸⁷⁰ Tweed noted:

The covering report of the Divisional Commander Major-General Shute is sufficient to exonerate me of incapacity. As you know, General Shute has a very high standard & his adverse reports can be of a very different nature than that of which he was good enough to give me.⁸⁷¹

This letter did not get the desired result and so he appealed to the Military Secretary at the War Office and once again pointed out in his letter that: 'I was given command of the XI Border Reg in Aug 1917 & was frequently praised by both Brigade & Divisional commander Major-General C.D. Shute CB for my work with that unit.'⁸⁷² Tweed's appeal ultimately failed and he left the army. Blacklock in this instance was following Shute's example, which he later set out in his 1920 lecture.⁸⁷³ Shute recognised that to gain the trust of the men a leader had to: '(c) Get rid of inefficients.'⁸⁷⁴ Irrespective of its accuracy Shute acquired a reputation during spring and summer 1917 for removing subordinates. The situation was more complex than that. Shute, despite his rebuke, kept MacDonell in place and after Girdwood was promoted to Brigadier-General in August 1917 the command team would remain in position until Cyril Blacklock was promoted to command 9th (Scottish) Division on 13 March 1918. There was no evidence of a climate of fear arising which would stifle discussion; the opposite was true. Major E. N. Eveleigh, O.C. Signals 32nd Division complained to Shute 'that he has been refused everything.' An exasperated A.E. McNamara, GSO1, sent a short note to the GSO2 that he would be receiving the complaint: 'I asked him to put it in writing, as I could not make head or tail of his incoherent statements. What about dug outs? What

⁸⁷⁰ TNA, WO 339/21553 Lt-Col. Thomas Frederic Tweed, The Lancashire Fusiliers.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Blacklock was not alone in tackling subordinates he deemed were not up to standard. On 14 March 1918 Brigadier-General J. A. Tyler, standing in for Shute who was away on leave, interviewed Lt-Col V.B. Ramsden M.C. (15/HLI) The AA & QMG War Diary recorded that it was regarding a 'report made by Brigadier-General F.W. Lumsden V.C. D.S.O. of [a] lack of energy.' It also noted he 'interviewed Lieut A.F. Dale 2nd Manchester Regt at 97th Brigade Hd Qrs.' WO 95/2374 32nd Div. AA & QMG, 14 March 1918

⁸⁷⁴ JSCSC Library, A.H. Marindin Papers, Shute Lecture, November 1920 p.8

about R.A. Communications – We have to finish these.'⁸⁷⁵ Shute's actions promoted the removal of officers who were deemed unable to continue to adequately fulfil their role. This willingness was demonstrably shared by at least two of his three brigadiers. Despite this there was no evidence that the removals stifled discussion, appraisal or even informal conversation. Shute himself was less involved with the sacking of battalion commanders, and in the case of Lt-Col Tweed, attempted to soften the blow of being sent home. There is not however, enough evidence to make a case that Shute positively infused the formation with his knowledge.

Was Shute a leader who could encourage learning? He certainly had a profound impact on those subordinates closest to him. The sources demonstrate that he had a strong working relationship with his brigadiers and GSO1. His relationship with Blacklock was of mutual benefit to both commanders and remained an integral aspect of Shute's leadership of the division. Further down the chain of command it becomes much more difficult to trace a direct effect. His personal characteristics deeply divided opinion both within the division and outside of it, yet Shute was able to offset this through a successful, if under-appreciated, approach to soldier care. This was largely motivated by classical ideas of paternalism and trust, yet Shute infused it with a touch of innovation in establishing the Divisional Monthly cup, which proved an enduring success until the Armistice. The GOC's careful approach to assigning his troops work and the care taken in the preparation for battle took some of the sting out of the hardships for the men. The innovative cup rewarded soldiers with tangible prizes for success in working positively towards their collective goals, gathering experience as they went. This was transactional leadership applied to encourage learning. Shute's stern questioning and short temper coupled with a reputation for removing subordinates theoretically should have stifled much of the discourse within the division. That it did not indicates a more nuanced picture. Shute certainly did remove subordinates but not as often as had been

⁸⁷⁵ IWM, 80/10/1, Major-General T.S. Lambert, handwritten note GSO1 to GSO2, undated.

claimed. His brigadiers must shoulder some of the blame for later removals. It is worth noting that fear could be an effective motivational tool. In this respect the best that could be said is that he did not hamper peer discussion.

6.4 Conclusion

Shute was a traditional Edwardian commander in nearly every respect. By the contemporary criteria he was a strong leader: courageous and comfortable in the front line, determined and knowledgeable in his craft. He epitomised both the moral and organisational aspects promoted in manuals such as *FSR I*. Yet in doing so he failed to adapt to the changing character of his subordinate soldiers. Shute's strict code of discipline jarred with the citizen soldier, more used to an 'auxiliary' approach to conduct. He had an aggressive streak propelled by his own optimism and confidence which led to victories in April 1917 and again the following year. Conversely this also encouraged Shute to push for further attacks, which a combination of circumstance and command structure halted. Under the leadership of Shute the division's identity developed further, and persevered through set-backs. Through his offensive actions the commander ensured that the division's actions were in line with the broader goals of the army. Nevertheless, this was subject to consent and evade as had been the case with the other commanders of the division. This was simply a part of life within a large organisation. The true arbiter of whether the leadership within the 32nd Division was successful must ultimately rest on the combat performance. This was generally positive, although the black spot of the 2 December 1917 lingers over a record which included impressive victories at Savy, Selency, Holnon, Fayet, Nieuport, Houthulst Forest and Ayette. The final conclusion must rest that Shute was an impressive, capable but flawed leader.

Conclusion

On 21 March 1919 Haig published his *Final Dispatch*. Exactly a year earlier the BEF had been plunged into crisis as the Germans launched Operation *Michael*, their opening gambit in their attempt to win the war in 1918. The fortunes of war had changed drastically, and yet despite the rapid ebb and flow in that final year, Haig argued the causes of victory lay in the long term strategy. He laid out the case that the principles of war that he fought along had been vindicated.⁸⁷⁶ Leaving aside the valid criticisms of Haig's *ex post facto* justification, this work has shown that, on this fundamental point at least, he was correct.⁸⁷⁷

The learning process at the divisional level was forged well before the first shots were fired in August 1914. The *ethos* and doctrine of the army established a firm foundation of principles that would remain relevant throughout the conflict. Delegation to the man-on-the-spot, the importance of moral factors in war, and the initiative granted by offensive action were all vindicated in 1918. The problems that occurred lay not with the principles but with the practice. At the start of 1916 the BEF was essentially an enthusiastic but unskilled army. It would take the experience of battle for improvements to be forthcoming. The command structure remained essentially consistent in principle but required far greater doctrinal development, improved training and decisive leadership than it had in 1916. The 32nd Division was well-led in the Edwardian sense by Cameron Shute, but his divisiveness limited his value as a leader who could inspire learning amongst his subordinates. In many ways battle wisdom was the keystone to the whole process. It is also the most difficult to analyse. Soldiers adapted to the conditions of warfare through a process of evolutionary selection. Actions that brought benefit to the primary group or efficiency in an allotted task generally proliferated while those that brought reprisal or injury fell away. Battle wisdom was the process of

⁸⁷⁶ Sheffield and Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters* (2005) pp.517-523 Appendix 4

⁸⁷⁷ Sheffield, *The Chief* (2011) p.363-364

learning the danger spots in the line, testing the effectiveness of steel helmets, of digging trenches in the most efficient fashion and of 'scrounging' or 'winning' things that could improve the quality of life on the front line for the soldier and his chums. Battle wisdom was a process that had the potential to undermine the cohesion of the formation and army. What defined whether it did or did not do so was whether the soldiers' actions were congruent with those of the broader army. On most occasions they were. The negative aspects of scrounging, while potentially reducing the effectiveness of the supply chain, were more than compensated for by the paternalism fostered among officers and rankers and the comfort of the troops and camaraderie instilled at the primary group level. Many officers understood this implicitly and, despite orders to the contrary, allowed scrounging to proliferate without check. At the more serious end of the scale, as men became battle-wise and accrued their own body of knowledge – what theorists would consider non-canonical practice – they would often employ measures such as consent and evade to circumvent inefficient or impractical orders handed down by their seniors. If something was done without explicit consent when one's superiors nevertheless believed it had been conducted in the prescribed manner, then the system had the immediate benefit of improving efficiency or lightening the burden of bureaucratic processes. In principle this could undermine the feedback process. If consent was not given by the superiors the likelihood of reporting a better method was slim and reduced the possibility of broader dissemination. In practice this was not the case. As the chapters two and six demonstrated, the principle of decentralisation meant that when it mattered – that is in battle – freedom to act according to situation was often decentralised to the lowest levels. By the time the Hundred Days began the 32nd Division had urged its NCOs to recommend targets and methods of advancing the front line.⁸⁷⁸ The system of decentralisation prevented consent and evade becoming a counter-productive force.

⁸⁷⁸ TNA, WO 95/2372 32nd Div. General Staff, 'Some Lessons from Recent Fighting 8th to 11th Aug. 18th Aug. to 12th Sept., 1918', Appendix 36

When consent and evade operated explicitly against the broader goals of the army it slid into outright insubordination. This occurred for understandable reasons on the night of 10/11 July 1916. Under Gough, decentralisation had been replaced by micro-management, rushed localised attacks and an inquisitorial approach to feedback. The men of 11/Borders employed the methods they had at their disposal to subvert an order which threatened to cause further damage to their skeletal battalion. The Court of Enquiry was given its scapegoat in the form of the medical officer Captain George Kirkwood, and the process demonstrated how destabilising such actions could be if they were pursued by authority. It is difficult to fully condemn the men of 11/Borders who under the circumstances knew they should never have been ordered to undertake such a bombing attack in their condition. Situations like this were rare. Under new leadership and outside Gough's army the 32nd Division's decentralised command structure did not punish junior leaders who exercised their own judgement.

This is best seen in Major-General Shute's leadership. Shute was a proponent of decentralised command and used a consultative approach not often associated with the martinet reputation he gained after his short time in charge of 63rd (Royal Naval) Division. This reputation for punctiliousness was not unfounded and was perhaps his weakest characteristic. It undermined his relationships with some junior subordinates. Nonetheless, if assessed by performance his tenure was a positive one. Edwardian standards of leadership prized paternalism, leading by example and individual initiative. These moral traits were promoted through training, doctrine and the actions of their commanders. Alongside this, organisational characteristics of a commander such as thorough planning, an understanding of combined arms and the delegation of responsibility remained critically important. The identification of lessons stemmed from reflection on front line and combat experience. After-action reports drove this process and were funnelled up the chain of command through the feedback system. The process of collation took time, but on the ground new methods

were being attempted and, coupled with a strong *ethos* of decentralisation, the benefits of battle wisdom could be harnessed and exploited. This triumvirate system of learning was not hermetically sealed from the rest of the BEF or from their French allies. Liaison between the French and British yielded benefits when evaluating the British performance on the Somme and the army took the relationship and co-ordination with the neighbouring army very seriously. Often this simply added support to the existing experiences and perspectives but that should not diminish the fact that it was another source of information regarding how to overcome the manifest difficulties posed by the industrial battlefield.

Like pre-war doctrine itself, there can be no one set of prescribed bullet points for the BEF's learning process. It was a complex interplay between effective structure, battle-wise lower ranks, and good leadership that allowed the whole system to flourish. A flaw in any one of these could hamper the system as a whole. On the Somme the learning system responded to the flaws in structure and leadership. The changes were external and thrust upon the division by senior command, but they worked. Wholesale changes to the division's leadership and personnel led to significant improvements. From summer 1917 individuals would move on and be replaced but the system continued to work with a generally high degree of efficiency. By 1918 external factors limited the combat capabilities of the division but it was still able to take part in some of Fourth Army's key actions during the Hundred Days. 32nd Division was a typical British division, and its experiences are representative of the broader whole. Some questions are worthy of further exploration. How did differing corps systems assist or inhibit the upward flow of lessons? How did the staff and leaders at GHQ assist the doctrinal development of the army as a whole? Did units or formations with experience in other theatres carry lessons across with them? There is more work required on the personnel at the divisional level: the commanders, the staffs and the supporting technical specialists. This work is only an initial step towards a greater understanding of how the

BEF's learning process functioned.

How then, did the British Army learn on the Western Front during the First World War? It adhered throughout to its pre-war principles which remained relevant but insufficient alone. Experience in battle provided important lessons that refined the command structure, tactical methods, planning and organisation. This produced a system that was well suited to the rigours of the modern battlefield. This structure drew lessons from the lower echelons of the organisation whose battle wisdom could often improve the overall efficiency of the army. Leadership played a large role in fostering the right atmosphere for learning, and providing subordinate commanders with the freedom to exercise initiative. The learning process varied in effectiveness as circumstances changed, but throughout it worked along three pillars: command, effective applied experience and leadership.

Appendix 1

Field Service Regulations: Part I Operations

Advice on Orders

Notwithstanding the greatest care and skill in framing orders, unexpected local circumstances may render the precise execution of the orders given to a subordinate unsuitable or impracticable. Under such circumstances the following principles should guide an officer in deciding on his course of action:-

- i. A formal order should never be departed from, either in letter or spirit – (a) so long as the officer who issued it is present; (b) if the officer who issued the order is not present, provided that there is time to report to him and await a reply without losing an opportunity or endangering the command.
- ii. A departure from either the spirit or the letter of an order is justified if the subordinate who assumes the responsibility bases his decision on some fact which could not be known to the officer who issued the order, and if he is conscientiously satisfied that he is acting as his superior, if present, would order him to act.
- iii. If a subordinate, in the absence of a superior, neglects to depart from the letter of his orders, when such departure is clearly demanded by circumstances, and failure ensues, he will be held responsible for such failure.
- iv. Should a subordinate find it necessary to depart from an order, he should at once inform the issuer of it, and the commanders of any neighbouring units likely to be affected.

Source: General Staff, *Field Service Regulations Part I: Operations* (London, HMSO, 1909)

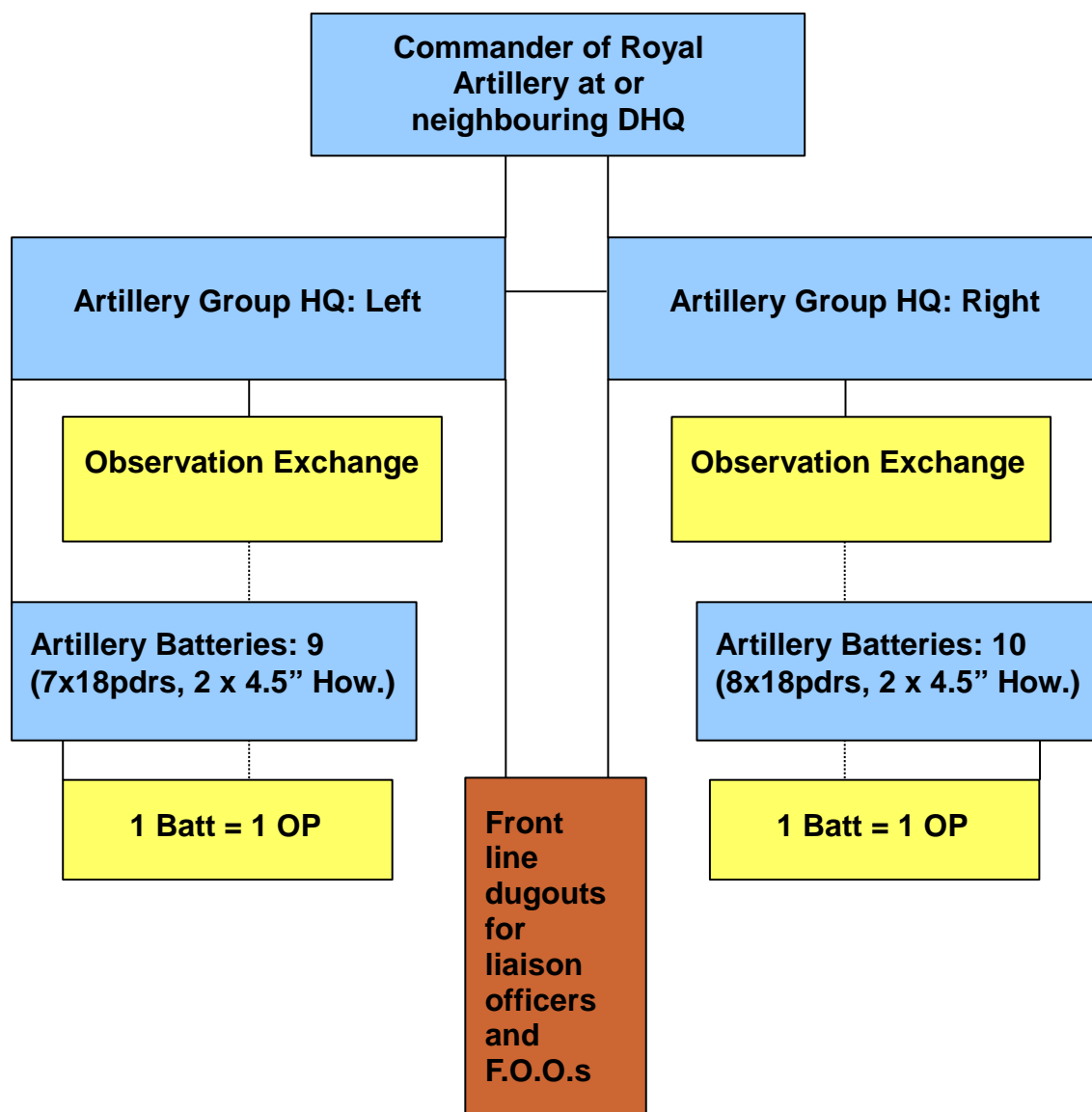
pp.27-28

Appendix 2

Divisional Artillery Organisation 1 July 1916

Fig.1

Source: TNA, WO 95/2368 32nd Div General Staff, *Report on Preparation and Action of the 32nd Divisional Artillery During Operations of July 1916*; WO 95/2375 32nd Div CRA, June and July 1916



Appendix 3

J.N. Marshall Victoria Cross Citation

For most conspicuous bravery, determination and leadership in the attack on the Sambre-Oise Canal, near Catillon on the 4th November, 1918, when a partly constructed bridge came under concentrated fire and was broken before the advanced troops of his Battalion could cross.

Lt.-Col. Marshall at once went forward and organised parties to repair the bridge. The first party were soon killed or wounded, but by personal example he inspired his command, and volunteers were instantly forthcoming.

Under intense fire and with complete disregard of his own safety, he stood on the bank encouraging his men and assisting in the work, and when the bridge was repaired, attempted to rush across at the head of his battalion and was killed while doing so.

The passage of the canal was of vital importance, and the gallantry displayed by all ranks was largely due to the inspiring example set by Lt.-Col. Marshall.

Source: IWM, J. N. Marshall V.C. M.C., Misc. 3 Item 42; *London Gazette*, 13 February, 1919 pp.2249-2250

Appendix 4

Extract from 'The Duties of an Officer'

The Times, Saturday 1 April 1916; S.S. 415 *The Duties of an Officer*

Knowledge and Character (October, 1917)

I would begin by impressing on you the great importance of your work. You must realize that, however good and skilful the disposition may be, battles must be won by *fighting*; the heroism, skill and firmness of the most junior officers will have the most far-reaching results.

You are responsible for the successful leading of your men in battle; you are responsible for their health, for their comfort, for their good behaviour and discipline. Finally, and not least, you are responsible for maintaining the honour of England, for doing all you can to ensure the security of England, and of our women and children after us.

To bear all these responsibilities successfully you must acquire, first, KNOWLEDGE. You must know what to do and how to do it, in order to lead your men with success and honour, and protect them from destruction or loss, which will be suffered if you are ignorant of your work and of your profession...Secondly, you must acquire CHARACTER – that is, resolution, self-confidence, self-sacrifice – in order to inspire your men by your example, sustain their courage in danger by your example, and their endurance in hardship by your example...

The men must have confidence in their officer. They must feel not only that he knows his job, but also that he will set the example of courage, self-sacrifice, and cheerfulness, and that he will look after their welfare and comfort...

The creation of Discipline and the maintenance of Discipline are among your most important duties. Your orders, and the orders given by your N.C.O.'s must always be obeyed without hesitation, with energy and with cheerfulness. Never pass any lapse from duty, however, trivial, without taking notice of it. Drop hard on to slackness, disobedience, slovenliness. Never stand any rot or nonsense. Insist on great cleanliness, on great alertness, quickness and cheerfulness.

I don't want you to go away, however, with the idea that the men must be treated like dogs – very far from it. You don't want to curse or damn every time you notice things wrong. Sometimes a word of encouragement, or a patient listening to an explanation, or a smile when pointing out the fault will go a long way. Remember that, though we are officers and the men are privates, still *we are all comrades* in the great dangers and the great struggle; make the men feel that you realize this comradeship *and love it...*

Keep up your own energy and that of your men, and maintain the offensive spirit most carefully... To do this, don't overlook that fact that one of your chief duties is to be always thinking. You have got brains; don't forget to use them. That is what you are an officer for.

Appendix 5

General Cameron Deane Shute Biographical Information

Cameron Deane Shute was born in Dorking, Surrey on 15 March 1866 and was commissioned as a Lieutenant into the Welsh Regiment 29 August 1885, before being given a captaincy in the Rifle Brigade on 18 September 1895. Shute's next three promotions were within the Rifle Brigade: Major 4 June 1904; Lieutenant-Colonel 24 March 1910; Colonel 2 June 1913. The First World War provided Shute with ample opportunity for career advancement and shortly after the outbreak of war he was given a number of administration positions first becoming General Staff Officer First Grade of the Aldershot Training Centre on 23 August 1914, before moving out to France as Brigadier-General General Staff on 25 November 1914. After six months service with the General Staff Shute was given command of the 59 Infantry Brigade on 6 July 1915, here he stayed before being promoted to temporary Major-General and given command of The Royal Naval Division in 17 October 1916. Here Shute would only last four months before being transferred to command of the 32nd Division, replacing Major-General Reginald Walter Ralph Barnes on 19 February 1917. Aside from a brief sojourn in temporary command of the 19th Division at Messines (24 May 1917 – 19 June 1917) Shute remained in command until his promotion to command of V Corps, on 26 April 1918, where he would remain for the rest of the war. After the armistice was signed, Shute went on to command 4th Division, and finished his career as General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Northern Command. He retired in 1931 and died in 1936.

His nickname was 'Tiger', a play on the term 'tiger shoot'.

Appendix 6

A.P. Herbert's Poem

The General inspecting the trenches,
Exclaimed with a horrified shout
'I refuse to command a division
Which leaves its excreta about.'

But nobody took any notice
No one was prepared to refute,
The the presence of shit was congenial
Compared to the presence of Shute.

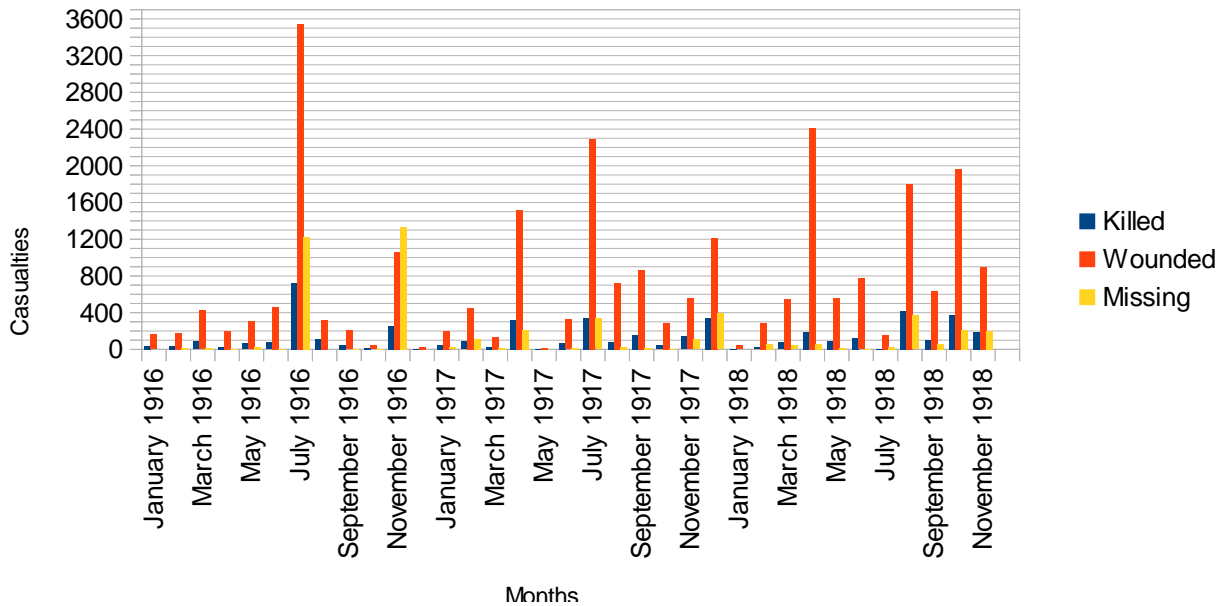
And certain responsible critics
Made haste to reply to his words
Observing that his staff advisors
Consisted entirely of turds.

For shit may be shot at off corners
And paper supplied there to suit,
But a shit would be shot without mourners
If somebody shot that shit Shute.

Appendix 7

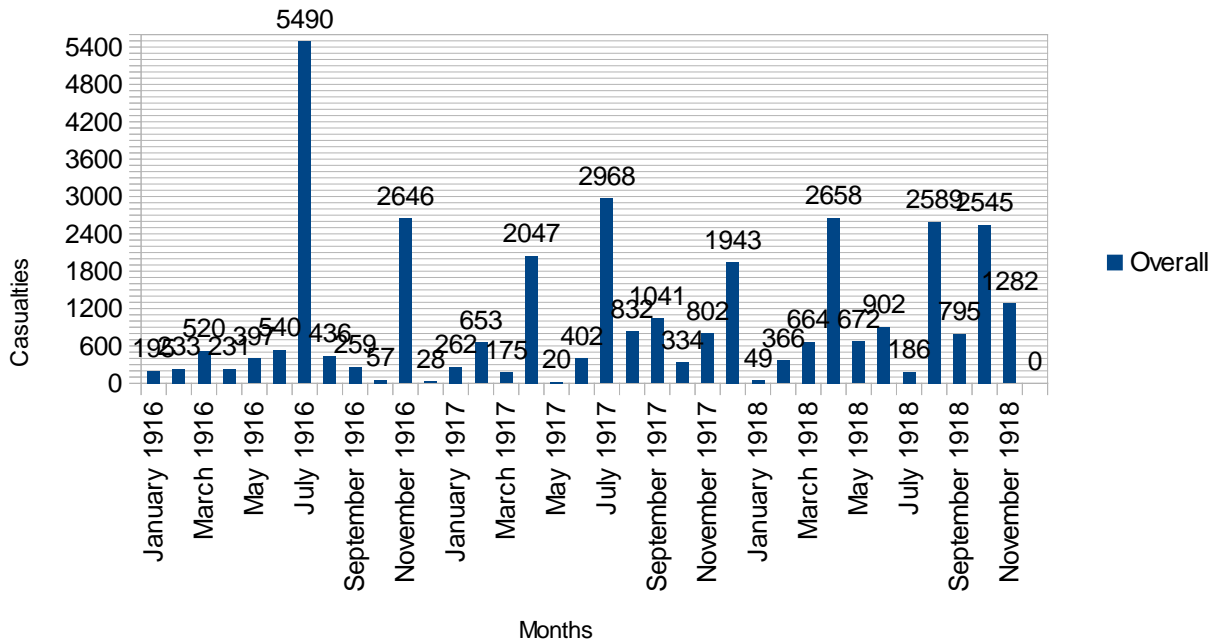
32nd Division Casualty Tables

32nd Division Monthly Casualties



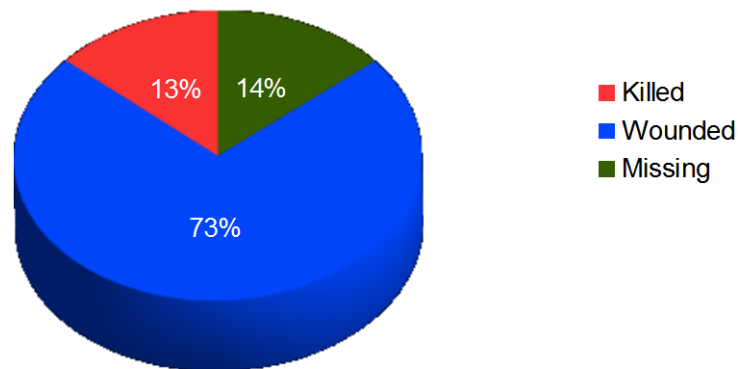
32nd Division Casualties

Combined: Killed, Wounded and Missing



32nd Division Killed, Wounded and Missing

By Percentage



Deaths by Commander

Commander	Casualties	Months	Average (Mean)	As % of Overall
Rycroft: Nov 15 – Nov 16	1474	11	134	31.308411215
Barnes: Dec 16 – Feb 17	135	3	45	2.8674596432
Shute:* Mar 17 – Apr 18	1735	13	133.4615384615	36.8521665251
M.Stuart-Wortley:** Jun 17	66	1	66	1.4018691589
Lambert: Jun 18 – Nov 18	1204	6	200.6666666667	25.5734919286

*Does not include June 17

Rounded to the month

**Temporary Command

Wounded by Commander

Commander	Casualties	Months	Average (Mean)	As % of Overall
Rycroft: Nov 15 – Nov 16	6906	11	627.8181818182	26.99132338
Barnes: Dec 16 – Feb 17	675	3	225	2.6381614946
Shute:* Mar 17 – Apr 18	10885	13	837.3076923077	42.542796842
M.Stuart-Wortley:** Jun 17	325	1	325	1.2702259048
Lambert: Jun 18 – Nov 18	6233	6	1038.8333333333	24.3609786602

*Does not include June 17

Rounded to the month

**Temporary Command

Missing by Commander

Commander	Casualties	Months	Average (Mean)	As % of Overall
Rycroft: Nov 15 – Nov 16	2624	11	238.5454545455	53.2791878173
Barnes: Dec 16 – Feb 17	133	3	44.3333333333	2.7005076142
Shute:* Mar 17 – Apr 18	1279	13	98.3846153846	25.9695431472
M.Stuart-Wortley:** Jun 17	11	1	11	0.2233502538
Lambert: Jun 18 – Nov 18	862	6	143.6666666667	17.5025380711

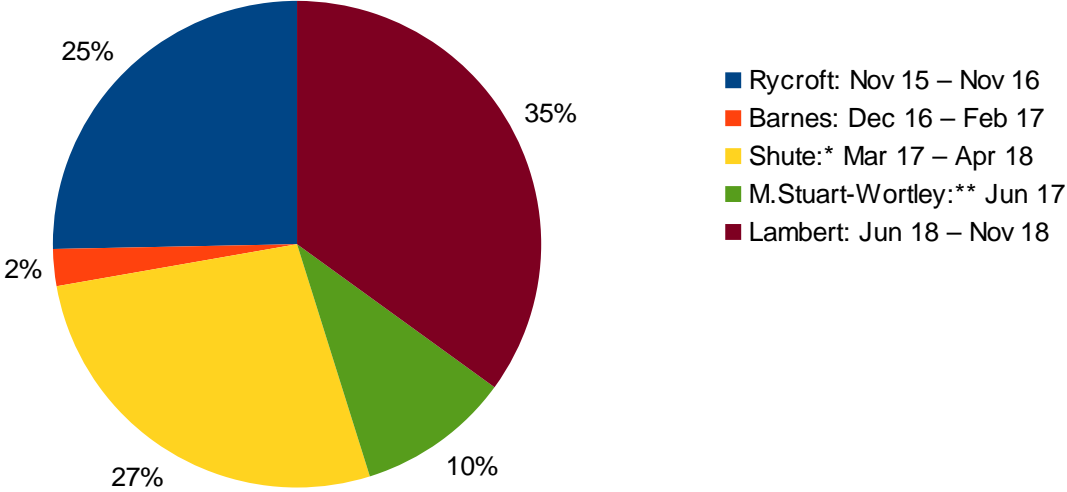
*Does not include June 17

Rounded to the month

**Temporary Command

Average Monthly (Mean)
Casualties by Commander

Taken by Month



Appendix 8

32nd Division Order of Battle

Source: Major A.F. Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions Part 3b: New Army Divisions (30-41) and 63rd (R.N.) Division* (London, HMSO, 1945)

Dates	Infantry	
	Brigades	Battalions and attached Units
May 1915	95	14/RWR, 15/RWR, 16/RWR, 12/Glouc.
	96	16/NF, 15/LF, 16/LF, 19/LF
	97	11/Borders, 15/HLI, 16/HLI, 17/HLI
December 1916	95	14/RWR, 15/RWR, 16/RWR, 12/Glouc.
	96	16/NF, 15/LF, 16/LF, 19/LF
	97	11/Borders, 15/HLI, 16/HLI, 17/HLI
June 1916	14	5/6 R.Scots, 1/Dorsets, 2/Manc, 15/HLI, 14 Bde MG Coy, 14 TM Bty
	96	16/NF, 15/LF, 16/LF, 2/RIF, 96 Bde MG Coy, 96 TM Bty
	97	11/Borders, 2/KOYLI, 16/HLI, 17/HLI, 97 Bde MG Coy, 97 TM Bty
June 1917	14	5/6 R.Scots, 1/Dorsets, 2/Manc, 15/HLI, 14 Bde MG Coy, 14 TM Bty
	96	16/NF, 15/LF, 16/LF, 2/RIF, 96 Bde MG Coy, 96 TM Bty
	97	11/Borders, 2/KOYLI, 16/HLI, 17/HLI, 97 Bde MG Coy, 97 TM Bty
March 1918	14	5/6 R.Scots, 1/Dorsets, 15/HLI, 14 TM Bty
	96	15/LF, 16/LF, 2/Manc, 96 TM Bty
	97	11/Borders, 2/KOYLI, 10/A&SH, 97 TM Bty
May 1918	14	5/6 R.Scots, 1/Dorsets, 15/HLI, 14 TM Bty
	96	15/LF, 16/LF, 2/Manc, 96 TM Bty
	97	1/5 Borders, 2/KOYLI, 10/A&SH, 97 TM Bty

Divisional Artillery

155th Brigade, RFA [joined New Year 1916, left 20 January 1917]

161st Brigade RFA [joined New Year 1916]

164th (H) Brigade RFA [joined New Year 1916, broken up September 1916]

168th Brigade RFA [joined New Year 1916]

V.32, W.32 Heavy Trench Mortar Batteries RFA [formed June 1916; W.32 broken up 28 Dec 1916;

V.32 redesignated X on 12 February 1918]

X.32, Y.32 and Z.32 Medium Mortar Batteries RFA [formed May 1916, on 12 February 1918 Z broken up and batteries reorganised to have 6x6" weapons each]

Divisional Engineers

206th, 218th, 219th (Glasgow) Field Companies [joined June 1915]

32nd Divisional Signal Company [joined June 1915]

Divisional Troops

Pioneers:

17th (Service) Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers [joined June 1915, left October 1916, returned September 1917, left November 1917]

1/12th Battalion (Pioneers) Loyal North Lancashire Regiment [joined November 1916, left January 1917]

16th (Service) Battalion (2nd Glasgow) Highland Light Infantry [February 1918]

Machine Gun Units:

219th Machine Gun Company [25 March 1917 moved into 32 MG Battalion 21 February 1918]

No 32 Machine Gun Battalion [created 21 February 1918]

Divisional Mounted Troops:

B Squadron, South Irish Horse [left May 1916 to join XV Corps Cav. Regt.]

F Squadron, North Irish Horse [attached briefly between April and June 1916]

32nd Divisional Cyclist Company [10 August 1915, left 31 May 1916]

Field Ambulances:

90th, 91st, 92nd Field Ambulance. [November 1915]

[96th, 97th, 98th Field Ambulance left the Division in November 1915]

32nd Divisional Train Army Service Corps [ASC]

202,203,204, 205 Companies ASC.

229th Divisional Employment Company [joined 25 March 1917]

42nd Mobile Veterinary Section

72nd Sanitary Section [left 17th April 1917]

32nd Divisional Motor Ambulance Workshop [joined 20 November 1915, disbanded 6 April 1916]

Divisional Commanders, GSO1s and the Dates Appointed

All of rank Major-General unless otherwise stated.

<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>GOC</u>
29 June 1916	W.H. Rycroft
22 November 1916	R.W.R. Barnes (sick 9/1/1917)
9 January 1917	Brig.-General J.A. Tyler (acting)
16 January 1917	R.W.R. Barnes (sick 29/1/17)
29 January 1917	Brig.-General J.A. Tyler
19 February 1917	C.D. Shute
24 May 1917	Hon. A. R. Montagu-Stuart Wortley (temp.)
20 June 1917	C.D. Shute

27 April 1918	Brig.-General J.A. Tyler (acting)
27 April 1918	J. Campbell
6 May 1918	Brig.-General F.W. Lumsden, V.C. (acting)
7 May 1918	R.J. Bridgford
31 May 1918	T.S. Lambert

<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>GSO1</u>
30 June 1915	Major F.W. Gosset (acting)
24 August 1915	Lt-Col. F.W. Gosset
28 April 1916	Major A.C. Girdwood (acting)
2 May 1916	Lt-Col. E.G. Wace
28 November 1916	Lt-Col A.E. McNamara
2 September 1918	E. FitzG. Dillon

<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>95 Brigade</u>
22 December 1914	Brig.-General J.T. Evatt
17 August 1915	Brig.-General C.R. Ballard
<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>14 Brigade</u>
10 Septemeber 1915	Brig.-General C.W. Compton
24 November 1916	Brig.-General W.W. Seymour (sick 12/4/1917)
12 April 1917	Brig.-General F.W. Lumsden (V.C. 8/6/1917; killed 4/6/1918)
4 June 1918	Lt-Col. V.B. Ramsden (acting)
10 June 1918	Brig.-General L.P. Evans
<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>96 Brigade</u>
21 December 1914	Brig.-General J.G. Hunter
20 May 1915	Brig.-General W. Thuillier
28 August 1915	Brig.-General C. Yatman
24 November 1916	Lt-Col. A.E. Glasgow (acting)
4 December 1916	Brig.-General L.F. Ashburner
20 August 1917	Brig.-General A.C. Girdwood
<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>97 Brigade</u>
5 January 1915	Brig.-General F. Hacket-Thompson
1 September 1915	Brig.-General J.B. Jardine (sick 21/2/17)
22 February 1917	Lt-Col. C.R.I. Brooke (acting)
8 March 1917	Brig.-General C.A. Blacklock
17 March 1918	Brig.-General J.R.M. Minshull-Ford (sick 1/10/18)
1 October 1918	Brig.-General J.A. Tyler (temporary)
6 October 1918	Brig.-General G.A. Armytage

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WO 95/2391 14 Infantry Brigade Headquarters

WO 95/2392 1st Battalion The Dorset Regiment

WO 95/2392 2nd Battalion The Manchester Regiment

WO 95/2392 5/6th Battalion The Royal Scots

WO 95/2393 15th Battalion Highland Light Infantry

WO 95/2394 19th Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers

WO 95/2394 14 Brigade Machine Gun Company

WO 95/2394 Brigade Trench Mortar Battery

WO 95/2395 96 Infantry Brigade Headquarters

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WO 95/2397 15th Battalion The Lancashire Fusiliers

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