



THE PARAGON

Issue

88

January

2018

The Journal of the Stocksbridge & District History Society

Editor's Note

As 2018 is the 100th anniversary of the end of 'The Great War', we are going to publish some extracts from 'The Western Front' by Andrew Weist. We will highlight some of the decisions, tactics, battles that lead to the defeat of the German army and the subsequent Armistice.

We will also be dedicating our **November** meeting to the **Armistice** and how it affected our local population

The German Spring Offensives

Having won the war on the eastern front, Hindenburg and Ludendorff gambled everything on a final chance for victory in the west. Utilizing novel tactics, the Germans won a series of victories, but a lack of strategic coordination and a staunch Allied defence doomed the plan to failure. Instead of winning the war, Ludendorff had exhausted the German Army.



The strategic situation for Germany in early 1918 looked more promising than it had since the outbreak of the war. Russia, riven by revolution and civil war, was out of the conflict, as was Romania. Italy had been soundly defeated at Caporetto, while both Britain and France were mired in manpower difficulties and plainly on the defensive.

The United States, which in the words of one member of the German general staff could 'yet be able to turn the page of history', was slow in bringing its power to bear. With the initiative again on their side, German forces gathered from around Europe to launch a bid for victory on the Western Front.

The window of strategic opportunity for Germany was though, quite narrow, for the strain of a lengthy multi-front war of attrition had already begun to show on the home front. In the summer of 1917, the authorities had quashed a budding mutiny among German sailors at Wilhelmshaven, while in the winter of the same year, politics in Germany neared a breakdown with the socialist parties, who advocated peace without annexation, squaring off against parties of the right, who demanded a punitive peace. Political and social unrest came to a head in January, when a wave of strikes swept across the nation in which hundreds of thousands of workers demanded peace and more food. Although the wave of strikes subsided, the turmoil remained just below the surface, and differences were only momentarily put aside in the expectation of final and cathartic victory in the west.

Both Hindenburg and Ludendorff not only understood the vulnerable condition of the German home front but also were aware of the more closely guarded secret of the frailty of the German military. In late 1917, war-related industries had been thoroughly combed to make up for manpower losses in the west and reserves were being called up at a rate of 58,000 trained and 21,000 untrained men per month. Even such complete measures, though, only covered the projected needs of the army in the west until January 1918. The final collapse of Russia had changed the situation though, and allowed Ludendorff the option in his words 'to deliver an annihilating blow to the British before American army can become effective'.

Both militarily and socially then, the German offensive of spring 1918 was a last roll of the dice. This great gamble, which first involved a logistical miracle of moving vast numbers of men and material from Russia to the Western Front, had to achieve victory before American forces arrived in such numbers irrevocably to tip the balance of war against Germany.

The German Army, though skilled and resilient, would never be able to match the Americans in numbers, and the German home front would not be able to stand further years of war.



It was victory or defeat, all or nothing.

In his planning though, Ludendorff consigned the offensive to eventual defeat and sealed Germany's doom in a fit of greed. The German general staff initially planned to shift 45 divisions from the Eastern Front to France and Flanders. Germany, though, had taken so much land from Russia in the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, land that Russian revolutionary forces might try to retake, that Ludendorff only approved the removal of 33 divisions from the east. As German forces launched their climactic offensive in France, left behind in Russia were a total of 40 infantry and three cavalry divisions, a force that could have tipped the balance in the close-run and desperate battles of 1918.

On 11 November 1917, Ludendorff called a staff conference to weigh the various options for the coming year, at which, after discussion, he decided to attack the British forces, believing that they were more determined to fight than the French. If he could defeat the British - better yet drive them into the sea - Ludendorff believed that French morale would collapse.

The question then became where to strike. Ludendorff preferred to attack in Flanders where German forces were within reach of the critical Channel ports. He chose to attack near the old Somme battlefield - at the vulnerable juncture between the British and French armies.



Americans in training

The experiences of Verdun, the Somme and Passchendaele would seem to indicate that Ludendorff's hope that a climactic battle could drive the British into defeat was foolhardy at best. However German experiences in their own victorious offensives on the Eastern Front, as well as lessons learned by suffering through the Allied attacks in the west, indicated that technological advancements had redressed the balance of warfare and once again allowed hope for attacking forces to achieve a breakthrough.

PLANNING THE GERMAN SPRING OFFENSIVES

To gain the proposed level of tactical mastery required to undertake the Spring Offensives, the German Army trained at a fever pitch throughout the winter of 1917-18. Ludendorff ordered each of his armies to establish schools to teach the elements of Geyer's new doctrine to the officers and men of the mobile and attack divisions. The courses, which lasted four weeks each, stressed rigid discipline and physical exercise, but

were mainly concerned with combined-arms operations. Geyer's planning and storm troop theory stressed that the various arms of the German military - infantry, intelligence, communications, air assets and artillery - all had to work seamlessly both to seize and then maintain the initiative in battle.

The German planning for the coming offensive seemingly left nothing to chance. Machine-gun crews learned that the fine dust in the area of the advance could cause their barrels to malfunction and received special cleaning instructions to keep their weapons in working order. A small army of 4000 cartographers laboured to map British defences down to the last machine-gun nest. Communications specialists trained both dogs and pigeons to transport messages from the advancing troops. Amid the care for detail, though, one pivotal factor was lacking. Ludendorff, by his own design, did not engage in any operational or strategic planning. He was concentrating his energy, and that of the German military, on the tactics of how to achieve a breakthrough. Inexplicably there was no planning for what the goals of the German Army should be after a breakthrough occurred, or regarding a fail-safe plan for a scenario in which a breakthrough failed to occur. Ludendorff cut short those commanders who questioned the lack of an operational or strategic goal, stating, 'I object to the word "operation". We will punch a hole into their line. For the rest we shall see. We also did it this way in Russia!'

In substituting tactical mastery for strategic thought, Ludendorff had committed a fatal error. His overall plan, though it made use of revolutionary techniques, had no overall goal. To undertake the final offensive, dubbed Operation Michael in honour of the patron saint of Germany, Ludendorff gathered his most successful and innovative commanders. The plan called for the Seventeenth Army, under the architect of the victory at Caporetto, General Otto von Below, to attack towards Bapaume. The Second Army, under General Georg von der Marwitz who had led the German counter-attack at Cambrai, was to strike southwest toward Albert, while the Eighteenth Army, under the victor of Riga, General von Hutier, attacked from St Quentin. On the right and left flanks of the advance respectively, the German Sixth and Seventh armies stood in readiness to launch subsidiary operations, dubbed Mars and Archangel, to build on the expected successes of Michael.

If all went well, the German armies would rupture the front of the British Fifth and Third armies, severing the vital connection between the British and French forces on the Western Front. In the process, Ludendorff hoped that his attacking armies would first pin and destroy substantial British forces in the Cambrai Salient and then follow the Somme River northwest and drive the British towards the sea. The brunt of the offensive would fall to Below's Seventeenth Army, which as a result received the lion's share of supplies and reserves. Depending on where success was the greatest, additional German attacks would then fall in the north and destroy the vulnerable British position in Flanders, or in the south against the French Army Group. The follow-on attacks would thus rupture the entire Allied line, and lead to ultimate victory.

The overall balance of strength on the Western Front seemed to bode well for the Germans, who had gathered 192 divisions against only 178 Allied divisions. However, the number, which

included many seriously understrength divisions, represented a peak for the Germans, while the Allies could count on a swelling of their ranks as more and more Americans reached France.

As regards the machinery of war, the Germans were also at a growing disadvantage: the Germans had 3670 aircraft against 4500 Allied, 14,000 artillery pieces against 18,500 Allied and 10 tanks against 800 Allied. More disturbing, though, was the fact that so few of the German divisions, only 77 in total, were trained in the new style of warfare. These mobile and attack divisions, the shock forces of the German army, were irreplaceable and as such had to achieve victory quickly. Their superior tactics had to offset all of the other Allied advantages. Germany could not afford a battle that dragged on or became attritional in nature, lest the stormtroops themselves and the German hope for final victory be destroyed.

John Holling Memoires

Part 11 - Learning at Samuel Fox's

I will now return to "Fox's". I remember the old Drawing Office situated on the left of the present time "office gates", and Mr. W.H. Robinson having a responsible position there. He was also a notable Male Voice Choir Conductor.

Farther on, working back to Smithy Hill viaduct was the Sheet Steel Dept. Mr J.T.Elliott was the Manager here. He was our choirmaster at the Chapel, and a lifelong friend of my mother and father, indeed, he was a friend of all our family, and my mother had a great influence on Jim. I always thought my mother was Jim's guiding star. I remember the whole structure of this long building come crashing down in flames and the beautiful stone walls being knocked down, and a new brick building rise in its place. Stone from this building was carted to different places in the district, and such houses as Jimmy Stafford's, Deepcar, Mr. Farnie's bungalow, and other bungalows at "Holly Bush" were built out of this building. There are still many tons laid on the east portion of Garden Village, on a derelict site. These are mainly cornered dressed stonework, up to 7 cwt each in some instances.

Next to the old Sheet Steel Mill was the Works manager's office. I saw Mr. B. Butcher here when I was errand running. Bert has now semi-retired and is a director. He was a close friend of my brother George Ernest, also their wives were old friends at Oughtbridge.

Bert married Harriett Halstead, daughter of the Manager of the "Oughtbridge Silica and Firebrick Company". He is at the moment, Chairman of the Magistrates of the "Hallamshire Petty Sessional Court" of which I am also a Magistrate. Bertie's wife Harriett has undergone another serious operation two weeks ago, but is improving.(1959)

The offices spoken of (works offices) are now used as Band Room and Gymnasium (The Green). In those days, no building was in front of the "Fox's general office", this space was a large open one, and the boundary wall of Fox's was right up to the edge of the road, parallel with the wall now over the river culvert

against the drawing office. (Old Mr. Mossman's House). The boundary wall was surmounted by wrought ironwork, and the large gateway, at the bottom of Smithy Hill, was huge and of beautiful workmanship. When Fox's bought the building site from "Oxley" of Oxley Farm, they had these stone gate pillars transported to the west end of the site (top corner), and rebuilt them there as an entrance to Oxley Park, which they presented to the Local Council along with the park land. Also an Annual Free gift of £200 per year towards the upkeep of this park. This gateway has never been any use, but does not take away from the givers their good intentional thoughts at that time.

I remember the Crinoline Department, and a Mr.Elsan as overman. This department was just past the lift of the Umbrella department. It was approached by narrow stairways, dimly lit by flickering gas brackets, and was more like the depicted dens of Oliver Twist and Fagin's alleyways. All around this Department was the smell of tallow-salts-brine and vinegar, and fumes got in your eyes and throat. The drawing of gun wire and annealing and pickling of same, was all done in this area.

On the eastern side of Smithy Hill road, or Fox Bottom, was a building called "Japan Shop". This building was used for the repair of Motor Vehicles of S. Fox and Co. This was the only building or department of Fox's on the eastern side as stated.

A Mr. Withers, with a horse in chain harness to pull a ¾ size covered railway box wagon, at different periods of the day, from the umbrella department (lift) down the railway track, and across the road against the "Monte", and through the swing gates, and stopping his horse in front of the Japan shop door, he blocked the wagon wheels with a four inch tapered bar of wood. Girls then unloaded the crinoline and umbrella ribs onto four wheeled little push barrows, where they were then taken inside the shop or department to be Japanned (lacquered).

I remember the strong sweet smell as of pear drops this department had. Mrs. Martha Lewis seemed to be the overman here. It is singular that yesterday I removed her a three piece suite from her home, which is one of the "Jubilee" cottages owned by "Fox's Trust" for their aged retired employees.

Mrs. Martha Lewis and her husband I remember, when I was a boy. They lived up Johnson Street, at the top portion. Her husband's father Bill Lewis also was a horseman and drove wagonettes etc. The forty odd houses of Johnson Street were demolished as slums as soon as the "Spink Hall Estate" was built. I remember collecting the monies for coal delivered by me in this street one Christmas Eve and wishing a lady a Merry Christmas as I was leaving. This was Mrs. Hirst, wife of one of the finest masons in the district. He worked for D.Brearley (builders). Mrs. Hirst said it would not be merry at their house, her newly born baby was dead in the house. This upset me greatly and it was constantly recurring to me all that Christmas period. Several of her young family now married with children, are my customers. My wife Ellen I told when I returned home, and she was also sorry, for our firstborn son John Hedley was only 5 months old and we should not have known what to do had we been in so sad a situation.

To return now to my errand running at Fox's. The Stocksbridge railway company operated in all the rest of the industrial land on the east side of Smithy Hill. They had railway marshalling yards right down to Wood Willows, ending behind the first house at Wood Willows where the river runs under the railway lines. Stocksbridge Railway Company, by agreement with S.Fox & Co. brought all incoming railway traffic from Deepcar station on their private railway lines and also the outgoings. Stocksbridge Railway also had a passenger service operating daily for Fox's employees at appropriate times during the day. The station and platform was on the immediate right of the right hand entrance gate at the bottom of Smithy Hill. This service to Deepcar station was called the "Paddy" train, comprising of three railway carriages and an engine. About 150 could be seated, and no payment was asked for from the Fox's employees.

It was my job as errand boy, to take the outgoing letters of Fox's in a strong leather case, like a portmanteau, to this train, which was then transferred at Deepcar to the Main Line train, and thence to Sheffield Post Office. On many occasions the officials and clerks in the general offices had not completed their correspondence in time for the tea-time "Paddy", and poor John had to walk with the bag, hail, snow or blow, to Deepcar station to catch the next main line train. I used to walk down the entire railway track to the station and it was very weird going over the railway bridge on the north side of Armitage's Works. Mr. Cyril Saunders was at that time the driver of Fox's car. He used to take this post bag to Deepcar if the "Paddy" had gone, but he was not always available, because Fox's had only one car then, and he may have taken someone important to some destination.

Local Surnames

SCHOFIELD

A Lancashire name, but the 1871 Census tells us that **Albert Schofield** came from Hathersage and was living at Hauve Hall, Green (now called Half Hall). However, all his children were born in Stocksbridge. His son **Albert Ernest** began as an umbrella worker, then engine fitter, but by 1901 had become a Mineral Water manufacturer. His address was Westbourne Villas, Victoria St. The building still stands with the archway designed to accommodate horse and cart. He became involved in public life with the formation of the Urban District Council in 1908. A younger son **Percy** followed in his brother's footsteps into

Public life 1921. In 1901 he was a gas fitter, but the UDC booklet in the Archive lists him as Fish and Game Dealer. [photo book 1 page 75]. In 1922 when the public room in Edward St. closed as a cinema Percy built the Palace Cinema, one of our iconic buildings. Also he had built the arcade on the opposite side of Manchester Road which comprises three shops. The right hand one perhaps began as an outlet for his Fish and Game, and the central one, of course, the Butcher's. I am told that the original paving, incorporating his name, still survives underneath a later surface.

The tenant recently retired, Richard **Smith**, traces his family back to Carlecootes, near Hazelhead, but the Smiths will require another chapter, as would **Shaw**, not to mention **Spooner**.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR 2018

January 11th	Winter recess—No Meeting	
February 8th	Introduction to The Great War	SDHS Presentation
March 8th	Sheffield Hospitals in WW1	Michael Collins
April 12th	The English Language—Place names & Surnames	Ray Battye
May 10th	Annual General Meeting - Presentation	SDHS
June 14th	Further Wonders Of The Ancient World	Pat McLaughlin
July 12th	Grand Day Out — Piece Hall Halifax	SDHS
August 9th	The Rise & Fall Of The Local High Street	Susanne Bingham
September 11th Tues	Pie & Pea Supper & Entertainment - Members Only	SDHS
October 11th	The History Of The Pub	Susan Deal
November 8th	The Armistice & Tribute to Local Heroes	Society Presentation
December 13th	Christmas Celebrations - Members Only	SDHS

Why not visit our Website at - www.stocksbridgehs.co.uk

The "Fox under Umbrella" and "Paragon" label are registered trademarks of Hoyland Fox & Company Ltd, whose permission to use them in this Newsletter has been given. This publication has no connection with Hoyland Fox & Company Ltd.

