



THE PARAGON

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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

ALLIED DEBATE AND DEFENSIVE PLANS

While the Germans prepared for their assault, the Allies had to ready themselves for a defensive battle, having lost the initiative in the west for the first time since the onset of trench warfare. Although the situation on the Allied home fronts was not as bad as that of Germany, political tension in both France and Britain during the winter of 1917-18 rose to a fever pitch. Their military efforts and nearly four years of war had seemingly availed nothing, for despite the investment of blood and treasure, Germany seemed ascendant as all awaited the onset of the coming onslaught. Blame for the sorry situation was abundant: the military leadership had mishandled the great battles of the war, politicians had meddled in strategy too often, the Allies did not act together effectively as one and the Americans had not agreed to amalgamation. Recriminations abounded, testing the very fabric of the alliance at a crucial time.

Although their relationship was often strained and involved tumultuous debates over strategy, Petain as commander-in-chief and Foch as chief of staff had together worked miracles in revitalizing the French military after the mutinies of 1917. Utilizing a mix of discipline and reform, Petain had stabilized the situation to the extent that in June and July 1917, the Fourth, Sixth and Tenth armies, which were among the most affected by the mutinies, were able to launch limited offensives intended to draw German reserves away from the British operations at Messines and Ypres.

Although improvements within the French military were heartening for the Allies, nothing could offset the grim strategic reality that the balance of forces on the Western Front had shifted in favour of Germany. The prospect of facing a renewed German assault in the west was so dire that it finally drove the reluctant British and French toward a more unified

command.

As early as August 1917, Painleve had suggested to Lloyd George that Foch be named chief of an Allied general staff, but the British Prime Minister had refused. However, in the wake of Passchendaele, Lloyd George once again decided to seize



control over the strategic leadership of the conflict and moved to shift British power away from France and Flanders to other, hopefully more profitable, theatres of war. Realizing that the alliance formed by Haig and Robertson remained powerful, and that any overt move to oust them would endanger his government, Lloyd George chose indirect methods of achieving his goals.

In response to the devastating Italian defeat at Caporetto, in November 1917 the Allies met at the Rapallo Conference, where Lloyd George proposed the formation of a Supreme War Council to coordinate Allied efforts and guide a united strategy. Although the new advisory body, which met at Versailles, had little real power, it was the first, halting step toward a unified command. For his part, though, Lloyd George saw the Supreme War Council as a way to wrest control of the war from Haig and Robertson. By appointing his military ally, General Sir Henry Wilson, to Versailles, Lloyd George effectively had two sets of military opinion from which to choose. He, thus, hoped never again to pit his amateur strategy against a monolithic military bloc. The shift in command, however, did little to calm the political turmoil in France, and only a week after Rapallo, the French Government fell. The situation was so dire that the British ambassador had even reported that a civil war in France was possible.



As Petain had done for the army, France needed a strong leader to heal its gaping political wounds. For the difficult position, President Poincare chose Georges Clemenceau, known as 'the Tiger'. Fiery and imbued with an indomitable will, Clemenceau proved an inspired choice who immediately clamped down on dissent, declaring, 'Neither personal considerations, nor political passions will turn us from our duty No more pacifist

campaigns, no more German intrigues. Neither treason, nor half treason. War. Nothing but war.' The new French leader soon discovered that he had a kindred spirit in General Ferdinand Foch, who was a hard-charging optimist, as opposed to Petain, who was becoming increasingly pessimistic about the outcome of the war.

In Britain, a growing manpower crisis added another level of intrigue to the ongoing civil-military struggle for control of the war. With his reserves depleted, and facing an unprecedented German build up, Haig requested 800,000 new men to keep the British armies overseas up to their recommended establishments. Lloyd George was livid, for compliance with the request would have crippled the very British industrial efforts that made the war possible. In December 1917, the Prime Minister had made his frustration with Haig clear in a letter to Lord Esher: 'Now he [Haig] wrote of fresh offensives, and asked for men. He would get neither. He had eaten his cake, in spite of warnings'. Seizing control over manpower as another weapon to use in his conflict with Haig, Lloyd George approved only 100,000 new men for the military, placing the armed forces behind both shipping and agriculture in importance. The Prime Minister was playing a dangerous game, hoping to curb Haig's ability to prosecute offensive warfare by denying the military needed manpower in a time of impending crisis.

Matters came to a head at the 30 January meeting of the Supreme War Council, which focused its attention both on



Supreme War Council

easing the manpower situation and forming an Allied general reserve. Although both Haig and Petain contended that they did not have any available forces to spare for the formation of a reserve, the idea was accepted in principle with the details to be decided at a later date. In the charged political atmosphere, though, what concerned Haig, Robertson and Petain most was the decision to place control of the general reserve under the Supreme War Council, an arrangement that strengthened the hands of both Foch and Lloyd George. In frustration over his loss of power, Robertson resigned as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and was replaced in that position by Wilson. Lloyd George would never again have to face the united opinion of Haig and Robertson in strategic debates. One of the great personal alliances in British military history had come to an end.

Ironically, since Lloyd George and Wilson had achieved their main aim of removing Robertson from power, their support for the Supreme War Council and the issue of a general reserve waned.

Although the Allies had taken a step toward true coalition warfare, the move had been more about political battles for

control over the war than about Allied unity. The failure meant that the alliance remained not only fragmented but also at odds as it awaited the German attack. Wilson remarked regarding the situation that the failure to unify the Allied command meant that Haig, 'would have to live on Petain's charity, (in case of an attack on the British lines) and he would find that very cold charity'.

While political dramas played out in London and Paris, Allied forces made ready to face the German attack. Haig correctly judged that the main weight of the German offensive would be directed against the BEF, but, misled by his own fears and German deception, he misjudged the axis of the German advance. Haig was most concerned by the prospect of a German attack in the neighbourhood of Ypres, where Allied forces had little strategic depth and any substantial retreat would place them in danger of catastrophic defeat. Haig realized that another vulnerable point was at the juncture of the British and French armies, but he reasoned that Gough's Fifth Army, which defended the area, could, at need, give ground while awaiting the reserves that Petain had promised before any German advance in the region threatened the nearest target of strategic value, the distant communications hub of Amiens. Weighing his tactical options, Haig distributed his available forces from north to south. Haig's decision had left the Fifth Army at a great disadvantage, and the official historian later remarked, 'Never before had the British line been held with so few men and so few guns to the mile; and the reserves were wholly insufficient'.

Making matters worse, for years the BEF had practised offensive warfare, and was as a result a comparative novice at defensive battle. As it became clear in the winter of 1917-18 that the initiative had slipped to the Germans, the BEF slowly shifted its lines from an offensive posture to a defensive one. Based on the experiences of Third Ypres, Haig opted to install a system of defence in depth, which required massive amounts of labour in the creation of forward redoubt systems and battle zones within the British lines. The conversion of the trench systems into true defensive networks was painfully slow, in part due to a critical manpower shortage for labour battalions. Ominously, the situation was particularly bad on the front of Fifth Army, which had only recently taken over the area from French forces and found the defences there in a state of disrepair.

The BEF also had to alter its tactical defensive doctrine away from the practice of positioning large numbers of men in forward positions. The new defensive system called for using light forces, augmented by heavy firepower, in the forward positions and giving ground while drawing attacking forces into the battle zone where they would be destroyed. At a conference of his army commanders Haig explained:

'Depth in defensive organization is of the first importance. ... The economy of forces in the front line system is most important in order that as many men as possible may be available in reserve. The front line should generally be held as an outpost line covering the main line of resistance a few hundred yards in the rear.'

In many areas, especially that of the Fifth Army, neither the construction of defences nor the doctrinal shift was complete before the German attack. In addition to being severely outnumbered, Gough failed to understand the new defensive scheme, and played into the Germans' hands by stationing too many of his men forwards. Haig warned Gough against lavish use of manpower and cautioned that Fifth Army would have to rely more on firepower and a sound defensive system. Haig even argued that it might be necessary to engage in a fighting withdrawal to the area of Peronne on the Somme while

awaiting the promised French reserves to stall the German attack. The situation was bleak as Fifth Army, outmanned, occupying substandard defences, under a commander who did not fully understand his task under this new style of warfare.

THE GERMAN STRIKE

At 4.40am on 21 March, 43 German divisions moved to the attack, as 10,000 German guns and mortars opened fire on the fronts of the British Fifth and Third armies, announcing the beginning of Operation Michael.

JOSHUA MILNES

Born at Midhope Stones in 1838 at the whitewashed cottage a few yards east of The Club Inn, lived in it 84 years and, dying there in December, 1920, only slept away from it four nights-when he went as a guest of the late William Bush, a Sheffield auctioneer, to Middleton-in-Teesdale for grouse shooting.



Joshua Milnes, a well known local character of his day, who gave 68 years service to

Samuel Fox & Co.

He retired on 31st December, 1919 after working 68 years for Samuel Fox at Stooksbridge Works, chiefly as a 'Paragon wire turner' - making flat wire into "U" shape, for umbrella frames. Never late for work but once during 68 years, he rose every working day at about 4 a.m., lit the fire and

fetched two bucketsful of water from St. James Well, at the foot of Pot House (old Midhope Pottery) Hill, by the little Don. Be it said to the shame of wealth's and town's neglect of country-now to be paid for in State, and tax subsidy-water was not laid on until 1919, despite the finishing of Langsett, Underbank and Bamsley's Midhope reservoir in 1907. This, however, is mild neglect when compared with hundreds of other villages.

Late, and Walking to Work.

The day when 'Josh' was late was one foggy morning when, to "cut off the corner," instead of crossing Midhopestones Bridge, on the Mortimer Road to Penistone (1771 Act), he went down Milnes Lane, opposite the Club Inn, to the Dyke Side Stepping Stones, original Midhope Stones river crossing, where the cattle went to drink, and, slipping-off into the river, he had to change his breeches. Think of it, ye mass of workers who, to-day, seldom need to walk ten minutes of your two to four miles from home to factory at 7-30 or 8 am., for 'Josh,' in his 5 miles for 300 days a year, in 68 years, walked the equivalent of about four times round the world to his work.

Some folks only walked when they "courted," but, to-day we have "progressed," and some "court" chiefly in a car and, often, are police-unchecked nuisances when "parking" on our moorside roads.

"Josh" had a large stone trough, 4 feet deep, to catch the rain-water from the stone-slatted roof and when he had saved enough money and re-slatted it with the best Welsh slates, thought he had done one of the greatest things during his life.

No Overcoat.

In his earliest period from 6 years to 15 years of age 'Josh' did odd jobs at Midhope Potteries, farm and quarry work. He was as "tough as leather," and never wore an overcoat, saying that overcoats took too much carrying when they were wet, that a "velvet coat was the thing," and when he had that on he was "landed" for dress.

Slippery Stones Watercress

'Josh' could if records had been kept, have told the late John Dransfield, the Penistone historian or any rambler, hidden facts about the moors. Walking was his hobby, and a favourite tramp was to Slippery Stones to gather watercress, and to call at "Will" Tagg's at Ronskley Farm, for eggs, then at "more than 12 for a bob."

But where is that watercress to-day? - for the navvies at Langsett and Midhope reservoirs discovered it, and they, and the later Derwent and Howden navvies, regularly walked across Cut Gate brideway, and beside the then very necessary line of stakes I knew from the summit down to Cranberry and Bull Clough confluence, and then to Slippery Stones and beyond.

He had a wonderful knowledge of herbs and where they grew, but used them little, as medicinal, for he did not require a doctor until a fortnight before he died. He would walk to and from Bamsley for a "pigeon shoot," or knur and spell match-about 18 miles and was a good stumper for Midhope cricket club who wore "M.C.C." on their caps. One day they drove to play Baslow for a cricket ball, and lost the game and, 50 years later he recognised the headlands beyond Beauchief Abbey, and told how they walked up hill from Totley Rise to Cross Scythes and the last rise to Ower Bar to give the horses a respite.

Hard Times and "Hello Pie."

He had a good "grounding" in early life. His mother became a widow shortly after his birth, and "bringing up" six girls and a boy, her chief income was from the baking of oatcakes. Things were not prosperous after his own marriage where there were three sons and four daughters. Memory goes back to the years when they married and attended happy family gatherings "under the home roof-tree," particularly on Midhope Feast Sunday, 40 to 50 years ago, when it was then "open house" to relatives and friends in every village. The youngsters sometimes had to wait for the fourth sitting down and 30 to 40 folk were served. The stories of old days were told, but not recorded.

Thus ends part of the limited records of this hardy moorside man, representing a section of Little Don Valley. If spending the greater part of his conscious hours in the then-called "Fox's Bottom" of Stooks-bridge, and living around the more pastoral part of this now half-drowned valley bottom, was never so happy as when his feet were on the heather and trespassing manfully in this still not-so-free England of ours.

Ed's Note. Extract from Fox Magazine Summer 1950

Local Street & Place Names

The Society is hoping to compile a small handbook this year of Street names & Local Place names and we have noted some names from reports in the old Penistone Almanacs. We would like any information please on location or naming.

Rock Place-Deepcar; Rocher View-Stocksbridge.
 The Manse-Stocksbridge; Church Villas -Deepcar.
 Wood Lynn - Stocksbridge; Stone Row - Deepcar.
 Stable Row - Deepcar; Thorn Back- Deepcar.
 Ashen Row - Stocksbridge; Brick Row - Deepcar.



SDHS has been privileged to receive a copy of Claire Pearson's research paper of the history of Bramhall Lane, Hunshelf. This important study will be archived and available on our Website, in our Museum and Stocksbridge Library

About Man & His Money

About Man

- Man comes into the world without his consent and leaves it against his will
- While he's a baby everyone tries to kiss him; when he grows up everyone tries to kick him.
- If he remains a bachelor, he's dull and uninteresting; if he's always in the company of women, he's a philanderer.
- If he goes to the local pub he's a drunkard; if he stays outside he's miserly and a bad mixer.
- If he's got a rotten job, it's only what he deserves; if he's got a good one he's a 'yes' man.
- If he goes to church he's a hypocrite; if he stays away he's an atheist.

About Money

- If a man gets money, he's a grafter; if he keeps it, he's a capitalist.
- If he spends it, he's a playboy; if he doesn't get it, he's a ne'er do well;
- If he doesn't try to get it, he lacks ambition.
- If he tries to get it without working for it, he's a parasite;
- And if he accumulates it after a lifetime of hard work, he's a sucker.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS FOR 2018

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

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