

The 51st (Highland) Division During the First World War.

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List of Abbreviations Used in Text and Notes

ADC	Aide de Camp
ADMS	Assistant Director Medical Services
ADVS	Assistant Director Veterinary Services
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AOC	Army Ordnance Corps
APM	Assistant Provost Marshal
A and Q	Adjutant-General and Quartermaster-General's Branches
ARO	Army Routine Orders
ASC	Army Service Corps
Bde	Brigade
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BM	Brigade Major
Bn	Battalion
Brig Gen	Brigadier-General
CDS	Central Distribution Section
CO	Commanding Officer
Col	Colonel
Coy	Company
Cpl	Corporal
CRA	Commander Royal Artillery
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
CSM	Company Sergeant Major
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
DAC	Divisional Ammunition Column
DADOS	Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Services
DAQMG	Deputy Assistant Quartermaster General
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
FOO	Forward Observation Officer
FSR	Field Service Regulations

Gen	General
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GRO	General Routine Orders
GSO	General Staff Officer
HMSO	His Majesty's Stationery Office
HQ	Headquarters
IWM	Imperial War Museum
L/Cpl	Lance Corporal
Lt	Lieutenant
Lt Col	Lieutenant-Colonel
Lt Gen	Lieutenant-General
Maj Gen	Major-General
MC	Military Cross
MGC	Machine Gun Corps
MG Coy	Machine Gun Company
NA	National Archives
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NLS	National Library of Scotland
OC	Officer Commanding
O/R	Other Ranks
OH	Official History
Pte	Private
QMS	Quartermaster-Sergeant
RA	Royal Artillery
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RE	Royal Engineers
RFA	Royal Field Artillery
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
RGA	Royal Garrison Artillery
RHA	Royal Horse Artillery

RMO	Regimental Medical Officer
RO	Routine Orders
RSM	Regimental Sergeant-Major
Sgt	Sergeant
SS	Stationery Service
TF	Territorial Force
TM	Trench Mortar
VC	Victoria Cross
WO	War Office

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Chronology

The (Highland) Division was created by the establishment of a Territorial Force in 1908 and remained in Scotland until the outbreak of the First World War. It was mobilised in August 1914 and sent to Bedford for training for a period of eight months. Between 30 April and 3 May 1915 the division was transported to France where it was either used as a line-holding or reserve formation until 15 June 1915, when it took part in its first offensive action during the battle of Givenchy.

After Givenchy, the division was employed in line-holding duties for over a year until it was involved in an unsuccessful attack on High Wood in July 1916 during the early stages of the battle of the Somme. Over the following months the 51st was moved consistently to different sectors, carrying out a line-holding role, until November 1916, when it attacked and overwhelmed the German strongpoint at Beaumont Hamel.

During the subsequent winter period, the division remained on the Somme at Courcellette and in April 1917 the 51st took part in two successful attacks during the battle of Arras. The division also played an attacking role in the opening assault of the third battle of Ypres in July 1917 and again in the battle of Menin Road on 20 September 1917. By early November, the division had moved to the Cambrai sector and was employed in an offensive with massed tanks.

The division remained in the Cambrai area over the following few months, where it faced the German onslaughts of March 1918. Significantly weakened, the (Highland) Division was transferred to the Béthune area near the River Lys on 1 April 1918, but a second German offensive hammered the division again. Withdrawn from the line to regroup and reinforce, the 51st remained at Oppy near Arras until 11 July. The division was then rushed to support the French Army south-west of Rheims, as it was attacked in the last of the 1918 German offensives.

By August 1918 the German Army was exhausted and the allied forces began to drive it backwards. On 26 August, the 51st attacked near Arras and engaged in five days of fighting which resulted in the capture of the enemy strongpoints at Rouex and Greenland Hill. Subsequently, the division played a role in pursuing the enemy in September and October 1918, before being withdrawn from the front line on 29 October 1918.

Introduction

There has been a considerable revision in approaches towards the study of the First World War during the past twenty-five years. Andrew Simpson has divided the post-war literature into two categories, old and new.¹ He describes almost everything published before Bidwell and Graham's *Firepower*² as:

based on the Official History's narrative, with a leavening of formation histories to provide detail of operations, and a reworking of the early biographies, memoirs and published diaries of participants; the proportions of these ingredients varied according to whether the author was writing an operational account or a biography.

Green, in *Writing the Great War, Sir James Edmonds and the Official History*, has pointed out that the official histories were of, 'substantial historical, military and literary value.'³ However, no matter how thorough and well written they were, there were still limits to their objectivity, and, as Bidwell and Graham remarked of one of the authors:

Edmonds spoke for a generation of regular officers who believed that the politicians had let them down....He was torn, himself, between exposing military incompetence for the good of the British Army and in the interests of truth and protecting the reputation of the men who had done their best, although that was often not good enough.⁴

Many books published immediately after the war and for a considerable period thereafter were of debatable quality. Official (Government) requirements and a variable access to sources imposed sanctions on objectivity. However, this is not to suggest that all the works were poor, merely that many did not effectively challenge the British conduct of the war. Bailey in *The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare* states:

It is remarkable that the First World War, the most profound of military phenomena, has been so neglected by historians, and more culpably by military analysts. This neglect has not been of the First World War per se but of its critical links to and lessons for military operations since. The

¹ A. Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One' (London University College Ph.D, 2001), p. 11.

² Bidwell and Graham produced a groundbreaking work that firmly placed the evolution of the BEF through artillery development and an associated rapid and near continuous evolution of tactics and weaponry. S. Bidwell, and D. Graham, *Firepower, British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, 1982).

³ A. Green, *Writing the Great War, Sir James Edmonds and the Official History, 1915-1948* (London, 2003), p. 207.

⁴ Bidwell and Graham, *Firepower*, p. 39.

First World War remains a topic of immense literary output, but this is predominantly sentimental, of 'military antiquarian' interest, social study, or battlefield tourism.⁵

To understand the reasons for this mixed quality and lack of objectivity, at least in part, it should be noted that the Public Record Office/National Archive files were not opened to the wider research community until 1964 (for 1914, under the 50 year rule).⁶ Until that point, the official histories and published memoirs were virtually the only near primary sources available. However, with direct access to official primary records, the study of military history became not only more objective, but more diverse. As a corollary of this, the field of military history became more established and respected in academic circles.⁷

More specifically, until the early 1980s, scholars had tended to attribute the operational performance of the British Army in France and Belgium to either internal or external factors. Tim Travers in *The Killing Ground* demonstrated this academic divide by discussing differing views amongst historians. The former group (internal) examined the high command and a top-down command and control mechanism, which, it invariably posited, failed to perform effectively; the latter (external) focused more on material or strategic factors, such as equipment shortages or enemy superiority, blaming them for the problems the British Expeditionary Force suffered until the battles of mid-1918.⁸

Travers maintained that the British Army leadership did not want to abandon pre-war ideas and values, and because of this, he argued that the BEF suffered from a rigid hierarchical command structure that smothered initiative, and was significantly devoid of any progressive tactical doctrine. In *How The War Was Won*,⁹ Travers went on to examine command and technology in the BEF over the final two years of the war, and attempted to demonstrate how new systems were created and sustained in an adaptable BEF structure, concluding that it was more by luck than design that the British Army became instrumental in winning the war.

⁵ J. Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', in *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper*, No. 22, p. 35.

⁶ B. Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 55.

⁷ P. Simkins, 'Everyman at War', in B. Bond (ed), *The First World War and British Military History* (Oxford, 1991), p. 289.

⁸ T. Travers, *The Killing Ground, The British Army, the Western Front and the Experience of Mobile Warfare 1900-1918* (London, 1987), p. 1.

⁹ T. Travers, *How the War was Won* (London, 1992).

Other scholars have agreed with Travers, including Martin Samuels who studied the German Army and its tactical evolution and compared them favourably with the British Army.¹⁰ However, others have disagreed. Bill Rawling has demonstrated how units and formations (within the Canadian Corps) adapted throughout the conflict, concluding that from the battle of the Somme until the end of the war there was a gradual 'learning curve'.¹¹ Prior and Wilson have agreed with this view, asserting that from July to November 1918 the British Expeditionary Force achieved the right balance.¹² Paddy Griffith, in *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, emphasised that over the course of the war, the British Army made substantial progress through decentralisation of command and the development of tactics. He also championed the 'learning curve' theory and highlighted the significant role of GHQ in ensuring that the BEF had systems in place to enable rapid dissemination and distribution of knowledge.¹³ Griffith, in his next book, *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*,¹⁴ further developed the argument that GHQ was a 'driver' in the development of tactical and technological theory and application, and demonstrated that decentralisation and flexibility were increasingly prevalent throughout the war. More recently, Gary Sheffield's *Forgotten Victory* has also put forward the revisionist case that the British Army learned enough from its mistakes to achieve a remarkable victory in the summer and autumn of 1918.¹⁵

In truth, not enough study has been undertaken upon which to base an objective judgement on the performance of the whole Expeditionary Force. To develop fully an understanding, scholars need to examine further the integral parts of the BEF war machine. As Peter Simkins has asserted in *The First World War and British Military History*:

Although the pattern is undoubtedly changing, research on the high command, strategy, organisation, doctrine, and civil-military relations still tends to hold sway over battle studies. As a result, the great personal experience archives assembled in the past two decades are virgin territory for many postgraduates working on the First World War, and all too few military historians in this country possess intimate knowledge of the tactical and sociological factors affecting the conduct of units in battle. The study of strategy, grand tactics, and command decisions will not illuminate all the issues raised by First World War battles. Research on the experience of front-line soldiers is also crucial to any analysis of the reasons for variations in battle performance. What motivates a

¹⁰ Samuels has added particular value through the focus on foreign sources, which have been under-exploited in the English language literature. M. Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma, German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (Westport, 1982).

¹¹ B. Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare* (Toronto, 1992).

¹² R. Prior, and T. Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (Oxford, 1992).

¹³ P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (London, 1994).

¹⁴ P. Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, 1996).

¹⁵ G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory, The First World War, Myths and Realities* (London, 2001).

unit to do well, or causes it to do badly, in a particular battle? What are the effects of change or continuity at divisional, battalion, or company level? How far were other ranks briefed about their objectives or allowed to rehearse operations? What was the quality of a unit's officers and NCOs? Did the unit have good or sufficient equipment? What part did regimental tradition play in battlefield morale? Did the unit have social cohesion? If so, was this based on a shared occupational or geographical background amongst its citizen soldiers? How was the unit affected by casualties? How often did a particular battalion successfully carry out its orders? The clues may not always be found in individual letters, diaries, unpublished memoirs, or oral history recordings but rather by what Dr Paddy Griffith has called 'tactical snipping', the painstaking analysis of sometimes minute detail in a whole range of such sources. Unless scholars in Britain and elsewhere brace themselves to undertake the necessary comparative research and produce more operational histories and studies of battlefield performance, many of the current myths and half-truths about the First World War are likely to prevail.¹⁶

Simkins was correct. Although a study of all levels of military command is the ideal, a particularly utilitarian formation on which to focus is the division. John Bourne has stated that, 'a true understanding of the evolution of the British army's operational method during the Great War must be sought not only below the level of high command but also below that of army and corps, principally at the level of the division'.¹⁷ The division, as the largest tactical formation in the British Army, bridges the gap between operations and strategy.

Many scholars have tended to agree that a key focus of research should be at the operational command level. However, the division did not exist within a vacuum and the inter-relationships with other levels of command are vital, particularly as the academic argument swings towards greater integration and cohesion within the Expeditionary Force as the war progressed. There has been a growing awareness that significant insights into the nature and functions of the Army should be viewed from different levels. Indeed, it is the only objective approach as the study of history is about interpretations, and the greater the awareness of the different levels, the greater the objectivity. To this end, a number of works, such as Ian Brown's *British Logistics on the Western Front*,¹⁸ or Prior and Wilson's *Command on the Western Front*, have focused on the role of arms, or on the corps and army level of command, and the overall rewards have been substantial.

Whilst this is positive, there have been few major modern publications focusing on the role of the division, or a division, although there have been a number of useful articles and contributions to wider publications, such as Peter Simkins' chapter on the performance of

¹⁶ Simkins, 'Everyman at War', in Bond (ed), *The First World War and British Military History*, pp. 312-313.

¹⁷ J.M. Bourne, 'British Divisional Commanders During the Great War, First Thoughts', in *Gunfire*, No. 29. p. 22.

BEF and Dominion formations during the '100 Days'.¹⁹ There has been a greater concentration on the study of divisions at postgraduate and workgroup level and some excellent work has been completed or is underway. The SHLM project, established at the Imperial War Museum to create a comparative database of BEF divisions, rating them individually and against one another using a series of performance indicators, could provide a useful criterion for evaluation. As a separate, but complimentary development, the University of Birmingham has produced a number of valuable formation studies, such as Simon Peuple's 'The 46th (North Midland) Division T.F. on the Western Front, 1915-1918'.²⁰ Other essential research involves sub-formations such as brigades, battalions, and companies, and some excellent studies have been recently completed, such as Helen McCartney's thesis on the 1/6th and 1/10th battalions of the Kings (Liverpool) Regiment.²¹

It is also vital to address key questions in traditionally ignored areas. As Dominick Graham has stated:

The learning process of the armies has only comparatively recently been explored in historical work about the fighting. Records of 'tail' activities are comparatively scarce. Yet, it was military 'boffins', workshops mechanics, munition designers, logistics staffs, radio and telephone technologists, road builders, quartermasters, hospital doctors and nurses, who were conscious of progressive methods because all of them were engaged in functional activities. The platoon, company, squadron or battery soldiers because they were, all too often, short-lived, were unaware of change. It is they who, featuring mainly in the literature, have left the impression that the form of fighting was homogeneous.²²

Many of Graham's 'tail activities' have been considered implicitly in some of the works already mentioned. However, explicit study has been the exception rather than the rule. Training, in Britain in particular, has been largely neglected, which is surprising as it went 'hand in hand' with tactical evolution. Morale and *esprit de corps* have also been 'touched upon', but much of the literature is recycled and adds little value to the debate. There are

¹⁸ I.M. Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front, 1914-1919* (Westport, 1998).

¹⁹ P. Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918', in Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, p. 50.

²⁰ S. Peuple, 'The 46th (North Midland) Division T.F. on the Western Front, 1915-1918' (University of Birmingham Ph.D, 2003).

²¹ H. McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Kings (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War' (Cambridge University Ph.D, 2000).

²² D. Graham, *Against Odds, Reflections on the Experiences of the British Army, 1914-45* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 50-51.

notable exceptions, such as J. Baynes' *Morale*²³ and N. Perry's 'Maintaining Regimental Identity in the Great War, The Case of the Irish Regiments'.²⁴ It is crucial that: training; *esprit*; tactics; recruitment and reinforcement; battle performance; Regular/Territorial/New Army identity and interaction; artillery and combined arms; leadership; and organisation and administration, be dealt with systematically and comprehensively. Again, the signs are positive, recruitment and reinforcement have received considerable attention, with excellent recent works by Derek Young²⁵ and Helen McCartney²⁶ complimenting previous studies such as that undertaken by Beckett and Simpson,²⁷ although much of the work in this area has focused on the voluntary period. John Bourne's ongoing analysis of divisional commanders is important to the understanding of wider questions of recruitment, promotion, social factors, and command and control mechanisms. Whilst much work has been done on senior commanders, little has been completed at the divisional level, and there are few biographical accounts of divisional commanders.

Aims

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate the 51st (Highland) Division over the course of the First World War. Underpinning the study is an analysis of both change and continuity, at home and overseas, and the performance of the division as a fighting unit. The key themes identified for study have been training, *esprit de corps*, recruitment and reinforcement, and battle performance. Through the investigation of the key themes, other important characteristics have been analysed, such as command and control, organisation, and the level of centralisation in both the formation and in the wider Army.

Key questions in the research apply to both divisional study and to wider academic understanding of the First World War. The thesis considers a number of themes that have been neglected by historians old and new, and brings into sharp focus some areas of research that may have produced inaccurate assumptions. In addition, a substantial range and quantity of primary sources have been utilised, many unexplored until now.

²³ J. Baynes, *Morale, A Study of Men and Courage, The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915* (London, 1967).

²⁴ N. Perry, 'Maintaining Regimental Identity in the Great War, The Case of the Irish Regiments', in *Stand To*, No. 52.

²⁵ D. Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914-1916' (Glasgow University Ph.D, 2001).

²⁶ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Kings (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War'.

²⁷ I. Beckett, and K. Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms, A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985).

The selection of the 51st (Highland) Division for study was based on a number of criteria. (Highland) Division experiences were both unique and not unique. In some areas it was a very individual formation, but in other areas or at particular times of the war it was not.

The following quotations give some indication of the depth and variety of sources, and the distinctive nature of the 51st.

From J.F.C. Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*:

Presently a section of the night seemed to be advancing slowly towards us, an undistinguishable mass in the darkness; they came on at a pace which was just on the active side of standing still. As they passed, we learned that they were a Highland battalion, part of the 51st Division that fought so well and suffered so heavily on the following day. None of them spoke, and their silence, the weight and slowness of their tread, and the solemnity of their passing by, bore such an implication of fate, and were shrouded with so much mystery by the night, that one felt as if one were hailing men no longer of this world.²⁸

Major-General D. N. Wimberley:

These two opposing characters of two different types of Scots, the fire of the Highlander and the dourness of the man from the Plains, were so blended in the old Highland Division that come what might against us the Division was resolute.²⁹

From M.M. Haldane, *A History of the Fourth Battalion The Seaforth Highlanders*:

Long after the war was over a distinguished Irish General expressed the hope that if ever he had troops under him again they might be Scots. A Scotsman present expressed surprise at his preference for foreigners, to which the General replied that he held that hope because of the high standard of Scottish education, which ensured that the youngest lance-corporal would intelligently carry on his Commander's intentions even after all his officers were killed.³⁰

²⁸ J.F.C. Fuller, *Memoirs of An Unconventional Soldier* (London, 1936), pp. 203-204.

²⁹ National Library of Scotland, ACC 7380, box 9, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

³⁰ M.M. Haldane, *A History of the Fourth Battalion The Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1927), p. 58.

From J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*:

The 51st perhaps owed its pre-eminence among Scottish Divisions in part to the fact that it was, until April 1918, the only Scottish Territorial Division on the Western Front: the 52nd (Lowland) was lost in the comparative backwater of the Palestine theatre. That left only the 9th and 15th Divisions which, as Kitchener formations, could not of course match the 51st.³¹

Undoubtedly, the 51st (Highland) Division left strong impressions. How accurate were these impressions? Were they a result of something more than just consistent fighting quality? Indeed, was there a consistent fighting quality? This thesis will attempt to provide answers.

Sources

The research approach did not automatically rule out any particular type of source. Instead a judgement was applied based on the relevance of a source to a particular question or theme. When occasion dictated, and that was frequent, other sources were used to support, verify, or balance a point. The range of sources utilised was wide and diverse, and included memoirs, diaries, letters, newspapers, casualty lists, video and film evidence, official histories, formation and unit histories, academic papers, and official army documentation.

There was a reliance on official army documents to provide much of the factual information. Other primary sources, such as the diaries and memoirs in the Imperial War Museum and National Library of Scotland, have also been employed on a regular basis, although these, along with many of the secondary sources, have to be viewed with a critical eye. The questions asked of these sources should always, in the first instance, be about the source itself. Who wrote the source? Why was it written? And when? The answers can set the source in a specific context rather than see it as universally valid. Andrew Simpson stresses of his thesis:

In general, this thesis relies upon non-anecdotal primary sources, principally the reports, memoranda, conference minutes, orders and documents in Corps, Army and GHQ War Diaries (though not the diaries themselves, which have greater potential for retrospective falsification)..... Criticism of Travers is made not infrequently, because he is too often inclined to believe anecdotal evidence which suits his argument, but fails to verify it elsewhere.³²

³¹ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), p. 166.

Bidwell and Graham also advocated the use of factual sources:

It is never easy to distinguish the possible from the desirable in war and hindsight is but a mirage; for it distracts attention from the technical, tactical and administrative work that is the daily concern of soldiers and is the stuff of victory. By grasping the working methods of the soldier, the historian may lay his hands on the continuous thread of reason that was real to his subjects at the time and led them through the noise and confusion.³³

However, to balance these views, war was not all dispassionate thought, but was emotive and emotional. Bidwell and Graham themselves stated that 'noise and confusion' were the norm. When dealing with questions of emotions and ideas in some areas of this thesis (in particular with regard to *esprit de corps*), rational fact is not in itself sufficient to provide answers. War diaries contain much official army documentation, such as operational orders, routine orders, lessons learnt, memoranda, and reports and instructions, along with the day-to-day chronicling of events. These are the best sources for factual information and can be extremely accurate. However, the information they provide is still limiting and is often based on someone's interpretation of something. They are frequently of variable quality; are written by and usually focus on officers; have the potential to omit significant data; were often compiled after an event; and thus could be biased or incorrect. Peter Simkins states of Martin Middlebrook's research for *The Kaiser's Battle*, that:

he concentrates on the experiences of individuals and small units but here- to an even greater extent than in his study of the Somme- the evidence he has garnered plainly exposes the limitations of the British unit war diaries and published histories as source material. As one of several cases in point, he reminds us that the regimental history of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers describes the 2nd Battalion's action at Boadicea Redoubt on 21 March in terms of an epic last stand, in which there were 'very few of the defenders left alive and unwounded'. In reality, Middlebrook maintains, the garrison filed out of the redoubt after a negotiated surrender, at least 16 officers and 500 men of the battalion being captured. He concludes that the 'hybrid' British Army of March 1918 was indeed 'tired and war weary', and that it did collapse prematurely in many places, its 'threshold of resistance' having been eroded.³⁴

Other official material, such as the Stationery Series of papers, were intended to serve as guidelines to what should be employed, not as markers to that which was actually carried out.

³² Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 16.

³³ Bidwell and Graham, *Firepower*, p. 63.

³⁴ Simkins, 'Everyman at War, Recent Interpretations of the Front Line Experience', in Bond (ed), *The First World War and British Military History*, p. 303.

Sources such as diaries and letters are relevant, and if used in conjunction with the more factual of the official records provide a wealth of information and insights into aspects of the war that the official documents alone could not hope to furnish. Ashworth was correct when he asserted:

The reader might now comprehend, not only that the search for a single 'true' account of the war experience is misconceived, but also that the inconsistency between some interpretations of trench warfare is illusory; for each could be a valid and 'true' rendering of one distinct dimension of a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Thus the contradiction between the image of trench war as an obscenity of death and degradation, found in the poems of Wilfred Owen, and the image implied by the comment of an infantry officer: 'Could you ever have guessed how much I should enjoy the war', is to some extent resolved with the knowledge that the opposition marks two different but possible trench war situations and careers.³⁵

All accounts are subjective and, in addition, our interpretations are naturally coloured by our 21st Century perceptions. People thought differently, wrote differently, and had different values in that period. It is also accurate to state that, just as there was a different balance of international relationships, the interaction and integration between various parts of Britain was not as it is today. The researcher must bear these differences in mind.

Many of the official army records are available at the National Archives in Kew. However, large-scale destruction has occurred. War Office and GHQ papers, along with army, corps and division files, are incomplete. Many personnel records of officers and men, unit muster rolls, general orders of unit commanders, and unit orders regarding the granting of leave, postings, casualties, and movements of individuals are gone. These gaps in the record are particularly evident in the remaining documentation on training and recruitment.

Fortunately, the war diaries of the 51st Division are extensive. The main staff records, the 'G' and 'A and Q' papers are comprehensive, and although battalions diaries are more variable in quality and volume, they still provide a satisfactory chronicle. The war diaries of key supporting units, such as the Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery, are also worthy of study, as are the records of the Royal Army Medical Corps, Divisional Ammunition Column, and trench mortar units, etc. A major weakness is the lack of information concerning incidences of indiscipline, which only appear occasionally in the calendar diary. The other evidence for

³⁵ T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918, The Live and Let Live System* (London, 1980), p. 22.

misbehaviour or illegality within the division tends to be located in the routine orders, that also feature sporadically in the record.

There are a number of published divisional, regimental, and battalion histories. These accounts often focus on battles and particular individuals and are of variable quality due to the constraints placed on the authors (usually officers) who were writing for a particular audience. However, the only comprehensive Great War divisional history, written in 1921 by Major F.W. Bewsher (who served on the divisional staff), is excellent.³⁶ The author had access to the divisional war diaries after the war and as a result much of the presented evidence is factual. Another excellent divisional source, entitled, *Behind the Lines, An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18*, was written by Colonel W.N. Nicholson just before the outbreak of the Second World War.³⁷ Nicholson also served on the staff of the 51st, but his accounts are based less on combat and more on the daily activities that were crucial to the maintenance of an effective formation.

The Victorian and Edwardian Education Acts resulted in many more men being able to read and write and the Imperial War Museum is full of excellent primary source material written by officers and men who served in the 51st. Although, it was illegal to maintain a personal diary in the trenches, many did, and a considerable amount of data is contemporary, such as the diaries of Lieutenant H.A. Munro of the 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who was killed in action and whose belongings were returned to his family. However, many of the diaries were written up after an event, or even after the war, and care must be taken when using their evidence. One such source, the diary of Private A.E. Wrench, is, however, particularly enlightening on a whole range of issues. Wrench served as a brigade runner for much of the war and his diaries provide a useful viewpoint from an other rank's perspective.

The study of letters can be very rewarding, although their reliability as factual sources varies with the state of mind of the writer and the nature and status of the intended recipient. Correspondence to parents would take a different form from that written to other soldiers. Two brothers, both captains, and both in the same battalion, after having followed the same military path, had different views on the war. Their letters clearly show that one was very

³⁶ F.W. Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division, 1914-1918* (Edinburgh, 1921).

³⁷ W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines, An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18* (Stevenage, 1939).

upbeat whilst the other was in considerable distress. One brother rarely mentioned hardships and tended to provide a colourful portrayal of life around him, focusing on his experiences out of the line. The other consistently referred to the miseries of trench warfare, citing bad weather, plagues of vermin, and seas of mud.³⁸ Which can be used as a reliable source? The answer should be 'both', but the right questions have to be asked for the interpretation to be appropriately contextualised. Of particular relevance to this study are the letters of a pivotal figure in the (Highland) Division, Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, and the reflections on those letters by his close friend, Miss Whittaker.³⁹

Major-General D.N. Wimberley's unpublished autobiography, 'A Scottish Soldier', is a tremendous source. He served in the 51st Division during both world wars and commanded the formation at El Alamein in 1942. However, if the researcher was to apply the maxim that autobiographies are not particularly reliable due to the passage of time between event and writing, then the potential within a great source such as this would be diminished, as Wimberley's account was closer to the events than would automatically be assumed. He stated:

The story of the next three years I wrote for my mother in 1918, when I was at home recovering from a wound. My mother had it typed, and so I now reproduce it almost exactly as I wrote it, while the war was still going on. I added later some explanatory footnotes, but in all else it is the account of a young officer of the times, aged, at the date of writing, but twenty-one, and holding the War Rank of Major.⁴⁰

Another memoir that falls into this category is that written by a 51st Division gunner, S. Bradbury, in 1923, but copied from his original diary.

The Wimberley papers in the National Library of Scotland are also excellent and contain much official documentation. However, many of them were written during the inter-war or post-Second World War years, such as when Wimberley was a staff officer in the War Office with a responsibility for infantry schools,⁴¹ or when he gave a lecture at the Senior Officers' School on discipline and morale based on his experience with the Highland battalions in the First World War,⁴² or when he gave a talk to the Black Watch Association in 1948 focusing

³⁸ Imperial War Museum, Con Shelf, 'Account of the War Experiences of Captains G. Stewart and W. Stewart'.

³⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/134, Papers of Miss Whittaker.

⁴⁰ NLS, ACC 6119/1, D.N. Wimberley, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 25.

⁴¹ NLS, ACC 8681/51, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

⁴² NLS, ACC 8681/54, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

on the (Highland) Division.⁴³ All these sources are helpful when handled appropriately. The use of papers written after the war is all the more valid when contrasts are made between the 51st Division of the First and Second World wars,⁴⁴ and it is clear that many aspects of divisional attitudes and modes of conduct were near identical.

Similar arguments can be put forward in support of oral histories, poetry, songs, and artwork. Each has a credible role to play if employed appropriately and is substantiated adequately.

Structure

Chapter 1 considers the significance of training in Britain and overseas during the period of the war. It demonstrates that the quality and quantity of training varied dependent on circumstance, was influenced by a number of internal and external factors, broadly worked within the framework of the British Army 'learning curve', and did adhere to official training policy. It also demonstrates that the ideal training process had its limits, beyond which it was difficult to progress.

Chapter 2 considers recruitment and reinforcement within the division. Where the men were recruited from, and how that recruitment altered as casualties increased over the years is analysed and set in a context. The chapter demonstrates that, for the division, there were changes to the recruitment and reinforcement pattern as the war progressed, and that the changes were broadly similar to other BEF formations. It is also shown that Highland units were the core components of the 51st throughout the war, and, although, as time passed, increasing strains were placed on the system for reinforcing those units from local areas, the military drafting system did attempt to maintain a localised and later Scottish emphasis in the units of the division.

Chapter 3 focuses on the *esprit de corps* of the 51st and analyses its form, how it functioned and how it was maintained. It argues that the *esprit de corps* changed, but was always prominent, and that it added value to the division's performance. To determine the reasons for this, it is necessary to investigate the internal dynamics, daily routines, and internal and external relationships of the 51st.

⁴³ NLS, ACC 8681/137, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

Chapter 4 considers the performance of the division over four key battles. The selection of the battles was based on the significance of the engagement and its outcome for the 51st Division, and for the wider British Expeditionary Force. A consideration is made of battle-specific factors, such as the strength of the enemy position, objectives to be taken, and casualties incurred, and the battle set in a developmental context that considers improvements in training and tactics, command and control, and organisation and administration. The chapter demonstrates that there were significant changes to the division's performances throughout the war, and also that those performances were not necessarily consistent improvements on that which had went before.

⁴⁴ C. French, 'The 51st Highland Division from St Valery to El Alamein' (Glasgow University M.Phil, 1995).

Chapter 1 The Training of the 51st (Highland) Division

This Chapter will analyse the impact and influence of training methodologies and initiatives employed by the division and its units throughout the war. It will seek to demonstrate that training in the division varied with circumstance; was influenced by factors such as modes of command, environment, resources, and the overall military situation; by and large worked in synchronicity with the training advances in the British Army; and adhered to the application of centralised methodologies. It will also posit that training in the division was progressive, but did have its limitations.

In order to examine the impact and form of the training of the 51st Division throughout the war, it is essential that we look at: how thoroughly the division was trained upon arrival on the Western Front during May 1915; the mechanisms and methods by which the 51st Division trained on the Western Front from May 1915; the relative influences on the division of commanders within the BEF hierarchy; and other essential external and internal factors that contributed to training effectiveness. These factors include: whether the 51st adhered to centralised training programmes and methodologies; how much instruction was relayed from higher commanders outside the divisional structure; whether the (Highland) Division employed similar training methodologies to other formations; and if the training regimes of the 51st had an impact on other formations and at the centre.

Training in Britain

Prior to the outbreak of the war, collective training could hardly be described as thorough as it was prohibited by the scattering of drill halls across Scotland.¹ Individually, units were officially required to complete a prescribed number of drills over the course of the year, but these were often at the ultimate discretion of the battalion or company commanding officers. The main focus of the training was the annual training camp, which was staged over eight to fifteen days during the summer months. However, there was also a less than professional attitude to the annual camp:

¹ D. Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914-1916' (Glasgow University Ph.D, 2001), p. 90.

Yet another attraction for the members of U Company was two weeks' paid holiday at the annual summer camp, which, on 18 July 1914, was, again held in glorious weather at Tain in Ross-shire on the shores of the Dornoch Firth. There the students threw off the cares and anxieties of recent degree examinations with some rigorous military training accompanied by a good deal of student devilment.....Parades commonly finished at half past three in the afternoon and in the long northern summer evenings there was plenty of time for swimming in the sea or playing golf on the excellent Tain links course. In the second week there was a Battalion football tournament, usually won by U Company, a golf match against the members of Tain Golf Club, a Battalion sports meeting and a field-firing shooting competition.²

On the whole, British society was critical of Territorial standards in training and the use of weaponry, the level of attendance at camp, and delays in providing drill halls and ranges for units in the Force. In many cases, the pre-war learning had been counter-productive and the expectations and attitudes of the soldiers had to be changed.

During mobilisation, the common fate suffered by many of the Territorial formations was to have a debilitating long-term effect on the (Highland) Division as the Regular staff, attached in peacetime for training purposes, were removed and sent back to their Regular units. As Lieutenant-Colonel T.M. Booth stated:

The last months of 1914 and 1915 were more than filled with hectic preparations all over England for raising a huge Territorial Army, beginning with the nucleus of the original 14 Territorial Divisions. Lack of trained officers and N.C.O.s impeded progress, and the 51st Highland Division training at Bedford was no exception to the rule. Only three regular officers and a mere handful of regular N.C.O.s were all our three Brigadiers had to train the brigades of 4,000 men each.³

The divisional commander, Major-General R. Bannatine-Allason, was critical of the impact on the division in a report to First Army headquarters on 7 October 1914, when he stated that, 'The removal of the greater part of the Permanent Staff shortly after mobilisation seriously hindered the training of units'.⁴ To compound the long-term impact of the removal of these professional soldiers from the Territorial Force, the great majority of Regular officers and men that subsequently became available for training new recruits were attached to New Army units.

² J. McConachie, *The Student Soldiers* (Elgin, 1995), pp.10-11.

³ Black Watch Museum, N/A, Autobiography of Lt. Colonel T.M. Booth, p. 24.

⁴ National Archives, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 7 October 1914.

Experienced leadership was vital to the (Highland) Division at the outset of post-mobilisation training, but with the removal of the professionals, the remaining officers and non-commissioned officers in the division had to accept the full responsibility of command. Many of those officers and NCOs were unable to cope with the demands of full-time training and the divisional war diaries testify to the removal of unworthy officers: 'The disposal of officers incapable of exercising command has been a matter of urgency. These officers have been a great handicap to efficient training.'⁵ This was further emphasised at battalion level: 'The Permanent Staff appointed has been found on mobilisation to be totally inadequate to the training and administrative requirements'.⁶ Bannatine-Allason emphasised to First Army headquarters that:

One of the great difficulties in carrying out the training of territorials satisfactorily is the lack of training and teaching power of most of the officers and ncos of the Force. The men on the whole are intelligent and keen and would make rapid progress if efficient instructors were available.⁷

The gulf between the professional and the amateur soldier was marked and the officers and men of the (Highland) Division had to learn the business of soldiering without an experienced leadership. Indeed, it 'becomes a matter of plain common sense, only when you know how; and when by constant training it has become second nature'.⁸ However, problems arose because the men did not 'know how', and Colonel W.N. Nicholson concluded:

through it the men worked wonderfully. They didn't talk, they doubled as hard as they could, dripping with sweat. They extended when they were told, closed a minute later, extended thirty seconds afterwards; all without rhyme or reason; but all at the double and in the best of faith. No Regulars would have done what they did so quickly and so silently. The manner of doing it wasn't particularly good; but the intention to do their very best was obvious enough, and with good teaching anything could have been made of them. The officers, too, tried hard; but their indecision was painful to see. They wanted to be in leading strings, and from the most senior to the most junior they looked around for someone to help them.⁹

⁵ NA, WO 95 2848, Adjutant and Quartermaster (A and Q) War Diary, 8 September 1914.

⁶ NA, WO 95 2865, 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders War Diary, August 1914.

⁷ NA, WO95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 7 October 1914.

⁸ W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines, An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-1918* (Stevenage, 1939), p. 46.

⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 47.

If the lack of experienced officers was detrimental to training, so was the constant movement of men out of units. Transfers to other arms and units, or to industry, caused disruptions and interruptions to the steady development of individual and collective training. Because of this upheaval, Bannatine-Allason stated, 'The recruits of the three brigades are at various stages of the official syllabus'.¹⁰ A significant problem was that many of the men who were permitted to remain during peacetime were removed after mobilisation as they were deemed unfit for duty and that also 'considerably interfered with the progress in training'.¹¹

In 1914 and early 1915, a factor which had a detrimental impact on the smooth running of the recruitment and reinforcement process in the (Highland) Division was the option to sign the Imperial Service Pledge.¹² On 10 August 1914, it was announced that the War Office was willing to accept complete units for Imperial Service to relieve garrisons and free troops for Europe. However, by 21 August, these guidelines had changed to include units with only 80 per cent of volunteers and by 31 August this was amended to allow second-line Territorial units to be raised where at least 60 per cent of a unit had volunteered.

As Spiers points out, not all 'Scottish Territorials were eager to serve overseas; while 'practically the whole' of the 5th Battalion, The Black Watch and over 90% of the 8th Battalion, Scottish Rifles (Cameronians) volunteered, the 51st (Highland) Division

¹⁰ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, January 1915.

¹¹ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 7 October 1914.

¹² 'When in 1908 the voluntary tradition had been codified in the establishment of the Territorial Force, the formal terms and conditions constituted a compromise between the architects of the Force and its members. They conferred privileges on the pre-war Territorials, many of which were successfully defended until 1916, although they were not extended to volunteers in other formations. Crucially, the Territorial soldier was guaranteed the right to serve with the unit he joined and was not liable to serve outside the UK. This meant that Territorial battalions could not be used as feeder units for the Regular Army, nor were they required to fight abroad without a percentage of the battalion assenting. These privileges were jealously defended by County Associations. Men could enlist for home service until March 1915, and existing members were given until 2 March 1916 to submit to overseas service or be discharged, becoming subject to conscription.', H. McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War' (Cambridge University Ph.D, 2000), p. 178.

showed nothing like the same enthusiasm'.¹³ Webster stated that the option to sign the Pledge in his artillery regiment caused unrest:

No doubt their Commanding Officer had some advance warning, but to the rank and file it was a rude shock. The long delay in being dispatched had allowed a good deal of the initial martial fervour to evaporate, and now that they knew what lay ahead of them caused several to think furiously. The first evidence of this was reflected when notice was given that unless those under age volunteered for Active Service, they had to be given the option to remain for Home Defence in Britain. At a full parade the next morning, and to Webby's horror quite a proportion of the battery stepped out.¹⁴

All (Highland) Division units did take the Pledge by October 1914, but the problems in reorganising troops for Home and Imperial Service created significant difficulties which 'more or less disorganised the units.' The divisional commander goes on to state, 'In the case of this Division, in which all units have volunteered for foreign service, the formation of a Home Service Division is an urgent necessity, if Bde and Div training is to be carried out properly by the Imp. Service unit'.¹⁵

Progress was made in this reorganisation, but it took time to make satisfactory arrangements. Many Imperial Service recruits were at their peace stations and problems were experienced in sending them to Bedford. Bannatine-Allason stated that recruiting for the reserve units was not 'v. brisk. It seems doubtful if certain units will be able to raise sufficient recruits to come anywhere near their establishment'.¹⁶

The following table indicates the extent of the problem in Bedford in November 1914:

Fig. 1	Imperial Service		Home Service	
	Off	O/R	Off	O/R
Seaforth and Cameron Bde	117	4043	3	823
Gordons Bde	123	3182	-	649

¹³ E. Spiers, 'The Scottish Soldier at War', in H. Cecil, and P.H. Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London, 1996), p. 316.

¹⁴ Imperial War Museum, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 47.

¹⁵ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 7 October 1914.

¹⁶ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 7 November 1914.

A and SH Bde	116	3589	1	600
1st Scottish Horse	26	439	-	-
Div Artillery	90	2375	7	310
Div Engineers	15	352	2	140
Div Train	28	517	4	122
Div Supply Column	5	227	-	-
Field Ambulances	29	582	-	88
Total	549	15306	17	2732

Fig. 2 No of men and officers at peace stations:

	Imperial Service		Home Service	
	Off	O/R	Off	O/R
Seaforth and Cameron Bde	1	279	8	493
Gordons Bde	-	720	37	821
A and SH Bde	-	756	68	796
1st Scottish Horse	-	-	-	-
Div Artillery	-	659	-	531
Div Engineers	-	286	-	68
Div Train	-	-	14	262
Field Ambulances	9	209	5	225
Total	10	2909	132	3196

Fig. 3 The total of Reserve units (Imperial and Home Service) at Bedford and peace stations:

	Officers	Other Ranks
Seaforth and Cameron Bde	12	1595
Gordons Bde	37	2643

A and SH Bde	69	2289
1st Scottish Horse	-	-
Div Artillery	7	1500
Div Engineers	2	494
Div Train	18	384
Field Ambulances	14	522
Total	159	9427

The situation had become acute by March 1915, and Bannatine-Allason outlined the problems for the units designated for overseas duty and the second-line units that were to reinforce them. He felt that the (Highland) Division had been enormously handicapped by the prohibition of moves between Bedford and Scotland. The Home Service men who had come with the division to Bedford at the outbreak of the war were still in Bedford and the Imperial Service recruits who had enlisted since mobilisation were still in Scotland. He expressed the view that this was to the 'very great disadvantage of everyone concerned'. He felt that the necessity of bringing Imperial Service men from Scotland to Bedford had reached an acute stage, owing to the requirements of drafts for the overseas units, and unless those men were transferred, drafts could not be found. He added that not only should Imperial Service recruits be sent to Bedford as a matter of urgency, but also any officers and men who had returned from overseas and were 'fit' again. 'Their services will be of the greatest value not only for completing drafts but also for instructing the second line units, which they will join.'¹⁷

The Territorial Association in Elgin observed on 1 March 1915 that:

there was too large a proportion of Officers in the Reserve Battalion for Home Service only, and it was resolved to ask Colonel Black to put the matter before his officers and endeavour to get a larger proportion of them to undertake the Imperial Service obligation. It was also considered that it was highly desirable that a larger percentage of the Rank and File should take the Imperial Service obligation, and it was the opinion of the meeting that if the Officers

¹⁷ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 6 March 1915.

first took the obligation it would have a good effect in inducing the men to come forward to do likewise.¹⁸

The above problems on home and imperial service were still evident in a report to First Army during April 1915.

Combined with this blockage of reinforcements to first-line units, the urgent need for units to be sent to France and Belgium resulted in further disruptions as brigades were shorn of many of their best battalions and supporting troops. In early 1915, the division lost six infantry battalions to the Western Front, although they were replaced by other units.

Added to this were the many restrictions that were also placed upon training areas available to the division. Commanders were informed that when taking possession of land (under the provisions of the Defence of the Realm Act No.2 of 28 August 1914) they were to interfere as little as possible with 'the amenities of the civilian population'.¹⁹ The divisional historian, F.W. Bewsher, outlined the difficulties involved in using the land around Bedford for training and manoeuvres:

The country round Bedford can only be called a moderate training ground for the larger units. The absence of ranges, particularly obnoxious clay soil, and generally small enclosures were obstacles to overcome. Ranges, were at once commenced; but two sites, which were underwater in winter, required a lot of pumping to make them serviceable.²⁰

A report from the (Highland) Division to First Army headquarters further emphasised the poor conditions available, and the lack of flexibility in developing them, 'In addition to the wet and muddy condition of the fields, the area used by troops is getting v. restricted as the young crops are now springing up'.²¹

¹⁸ National Archives of Scotland, MD8/3, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Elgin.

¹⁹ P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Manchester, 1988), p. 237.

²⁰ F.W. Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division, 1914-1918* (Edinburgh, 1921), pp. 1-2.

²¹ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, March 1915.

Another hindrance to effective training was the billeting of the troops in various locations in and around Bedford. It was a time-consuming and convoluted process to assemble the men each morning in order for them to be marched off for training. The sessions would then have to be interrupted so that the men could return to their billets for the evening meal.²²

Equipment shortages caused serious delays and this was exacerbated by a lack of quality in the equipment that the division actually had. The War Office order that no 'Peace Training Equipment' should be taken to war stations delayed the 'Musketry Instruction' of the division considerably.²³ In particular, the artillery moved slowly in the direction of preparedness for war. They had ancient 'pieces', poor and ill-fitting harness and:

No practice blank ammunition has yet been made available for the Divisional Artillery. It is urgently required to train the horses to artillery fire. Telephone equipment is not yet supplied to the Artillery. Having regard to the experience of the Artillery at the Front the want of this equipment is a great handicap to satisfactory training. In this neighbourhood it is difficult to find Artillery positions, where telephones are not required.²⁴

However, the negative aspects of the division's training period in Bedford were at least in part offset by the positive attitudes and earnest efforts of officers and men, even if they did not fully understand what they were doing or why they were doing it. To combat this lack of knowledge, but to capitalise on the eagerness to learn, officers were made aware of the official pamphlets and instruction materials produced by the War Office and from other sources: 'The organisation of the 2nd Line Transport divisional trains under W.O. instructions and pamphlets was commenced'.²⁵ To compliment this, presentations and discussions on various subjects were arranged to disseminate knowledge, in some cases taking the form of daily lectures by commanding officers and other officers to all ranks.

²² Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 249.

²³ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, 7 October 1914.

²⁴ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, December 1914.

²⁵ NA, WO 95 2848, A and Q War Diary, 21 August 1914.

Where possible, officers and men would be sent on courses to develop their skills, and the expectation was that those officers and men would return and disseminate their knowledge:

Further parties of Officers and NCOs have been sent to the School of Instruction at Chelsea Barracks, Bisley etc. Some more officers of the Divisional Artillery have attended the course of instruction in cooperation between aircraft and artillery. On their return they have given lectures to the various batteries. Weekly lectures have been given by the Administrative Staff on the following subjects: a) Interior Economy b) Billeting c) Supply in Peace and War d) Horse Management-Shoeing.²⁶

Occasionally, the division would also receive visits from experts who would instruct the units in specialised areas, and toward the end of the March 1915 the division secured the services of six instructors from Aldershot to take classes in bayonet fighting and ‘final assault practices’.²⁷

Direction in the organisation of training programmes was channelled through an Army Council order issued on mobilisation, which laid down a syllabus of training for the infantry, the support units, and the other arms. The intention was that the training process would take six months, the first three months being devoted to individual skills, and the second three months to unit tactics. The infantry ‘basic training element’ of the syllabus covered a period of ten weeks. During the first two weeks the division received ‘preliminary instruction in musketry and elementary squad drill’ which would consist of basic military procedures such as saluting, standing to attention, parading, and marching. Extended order drill and night work were introduced in the third week, route marching in the fourth week, outpost duties in the fifth week, and entrenching and bayonet fighting in the seventh and ninth weeks respectively. Platoon drill began in the tenth week. After three months, during which the men were expected to complete the musketry course, company training commenced and lasted another five weeks. At that point, some men were selected for specialist training as machine gunners, grenade throwers, and scouts, or in signalling and transport duties:

²⁶ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, March 1915.

²⁷ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, March 1915.

By the fifth month the troops had graduated to training at battalion and brigade strength, with field days, entrenching schemes and extended route marches comprising a major part of the syllabus. The final stages of the programme included the completion of the trained soldiers' musketry course, field firing with artillery support, and divisional exercises and route marches lasting two or three days at a time.²⁸

For the artillery, the period of 'basic recruit training' was much shorter, lasting only six weeks. Like the infantry, gunners and drivers spent time performing dismounted drill and PT, but the gunners also learned gun drill and the technique of loading, laying, fuse-setting, and firing, while the drivers were taught how to ride and to look after the horses and stables. From the seventh week onwards the gunners were given special instructions in signalling and range-finding, with the drivers beginning mounted drill when they were adequate riders.

Mounted parades and manoeuvres at battery strength, as well as practice shoots on a miniature range, were to start after thirteen weeks, brigade drills and exercises in the nineteenth week and divisional artillery training in the sixth and final month. For recruits in the field companies of the Royal Engineers there was a three-month programme of basic training which, in addition to squad drill, signalling and musketry, embraced instruction in field fortifications and demolition work. In the fourth month the sappers progressed to bridging and combined training with the infantry and artillery.²⁹

The Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) followed much the same training as the infantrymen with the exception of rifle practice. At a later point, stretcher drill, and medical lectures (following a course laid down in the RAMC manual) took place. This occupied the first three months of the recruits time, after which they were drafted to a hospital to learn in practical situations. The Army Service Corps had many duties, but new recruits were not given much specialist training at all, except riding and driving. Then they were actually sent out to do the supply.³⁰

War diaries at formation and unit level testify that the (Highland) Division followed the syllabus closely and reports from the divisional commander to First Army headquarters in November 1914 stated that training progressed satisfactorily. 'The infantry have been

²⁸ Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 296.

²⁹ Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, pp. 296-7.

³⁰ E. Wallace, *Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces* (London, 1916), p. 137.

doing company training, inc company marches. A few brigade exercises were carried out. Recruits commenced their musketry course on the 7th Oct and trained soldiers on 21st Oct. The men are getting fitter and march well.’³¹ Similar progress was noted for December with the completion of company training and the commencement of battalion training. Several divisional exercises were also carried out. Musketry training was almost completed for the more experienced soldiers, whilst good progress was also made in musketry with new recruits.³²

However, poor conditions and ‘The Defence of the Realm Act’ increasingly obstructed the development of training throughout the early months of 1915. Reports to First Army headquarters stressed that weather adversely affected the ability to utilise training facilities; ‘During the whole month the training of all arms has been considerably hampered by bad weather and the wet state of the country. In the first fortnight Divisional Training was carried out. In the various exercises the troops had to be kept almost entirely to the roads’;³³ ‘The work has been much interfered with by the constant bad weather’;³⁴ and crucially, the larger formation exercises were stymied in their progress and practice due to the difficulties for troops to leave the roads and carry out manoeuvres on the surrounding land.³⁵ This was a significant setback, as this period was crucial to the evolution of the mobility, communication, co-ordination and co-operation of the whole division. Its men had learned the basics of individual training, and were physically fit, but the most difficult element of fighting as a formation, operating cohesively, was in no way clear and practised. During the practice manoeuvres that were carried out, the failings of the division were all too apparent. Nicholson observed the division’s efforts from his position on the divisional staff and stated that, ‘This shout of wolf gave overpowering proof to all concerned with its administration that our division was but a rusty, rickety, jamming machine that would quickly fall to pieces if put on the road’.³⁶ He further explained that:

³¹ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, November 1914.

³² NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, December 1914.

³³ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, January 1915.

³⁴ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, March 1915.

³⁵ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, April 1915.

³⁶ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 17.

There was one divisional field day that I attended, mainly confined to the roads on account of cultivation. Neither side attacked; the brigade on one side was scattered over miles of country and advanced some two miles in four hours; while the other brigade sat in a hole and successfully escaped notice. The unprotected mountain artillery of one force were opposed by cyclists, who ran away; while the infantry of the other kept well in rear of their own field gun.³⁷

To add further confusion for (Highland) Division troops who had been involved in company training over the previous months, orders were issued to reorganise battalions on a four-company basis, and then to carry out further courses of revised company training.³⁸ The eight-company system had been discarded by the Regular Army before 1914 (improved weaponry permitted smaller units more mobility with no loss in firepower), but was retained by the Territorial Force as a means of administering units that were often recruited from isolated areas with low population densities.

There was a great deal of effort, both within and without the division to bring it to the appropriate standard to take the field. For the War Office this state of readiness was achieved as it sanctioned the transfer to the front, however what that decision was based upon is open to debate:

They said we were one of the best divisions. We are all ready to believe pleasant things that are said about ourselves. But I do not know who it was that came and saw and flattered. No one during the months that we were in Bedford visited my branch to learn first hand the administrative value of a newly mobilised division.³⁹

In reality, it proved to be too steep a learning curve and failings in overall supervision and co-ordination of training, confusion over revising existing tactical doctrine, and the general lack of awareness of tactical developments on the battlefield, and the resultant over-dependence of commanding officers on outdated manuals and a prescribed syllabus gave training an unprofessional and unrealistic feel.

³⁷ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, pp. 46-47.

³⁸ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division Report to First Army, January 1915.

³⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 18.

During May, the division arrived in France with its training only partially completed. The official history stated that the (Highland) Division was 'practically untrained' and 'very green in all field duties' [Haig's marginal remark] as it moved up to Givenchy in June 1915.⁴⁰

Centralising training programmes

The theory that the German Army was more advanced in its training and tactical thinking than its British counterpart, and that the British often came upon new concepts more by accident than design, leaving it until 1918 before any coherent attempt was made to centralise training, has been increasingly challenged. As Simpson has asserted, the paradigm is extremely contentious as the BEF actually began the war with a single set of centralised tactics in the *Field Service Regulations (FSR)*,⁴¹ and throughout the war it attempted to codify, issue, and revise, centralised tactical and training advice.

By the end of 1915 the level of training in, and of, formations arriving on the Western Front was recognisably poor. In order to remedy this, it was considered that more definite instructions were required than had been in circulation up to that point. The *FSR* and its supporting training manuals were still considered pivotal, but the officers applying the principles in practice were simply too inexperienced to do so properly. It was deemed essential to devise a way by which potential instructors could be trained to disseminate new methods and to ensure that they were applied uniformly. Since the basic tactical unit of the Army was the division, it was at this level that new training schools were formed, and commanding officers were to continue to be 'personally responsible for the training of their divisions, "assisted, controlled and supervised by the Corps and Army"...In addition to these reforms, and to supplement the *FSR*, GHQ began to issue instructional

⁴⁰ J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915. Battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert, and Loos* (London, 1928), p. 73.

⁴¹ Continuity of thought in British Army from pre-war to end of war, expressed through the application of *Field Service Regulations* (1909), Part 1 Operations, 'FSR was a set of principles for application by trained and experienced officers, which specifically avoided going into too much detail, since those applying them should, through experience and training, know what detailed actions to perform within their framework.', in A. Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One' (London University College Ph.D, 2001), p. 8.

pamphlets for the new warfare'.⁴² The GHQ-led reforms can clearly be seen in the (Highland) Division when it opened the first of its divisional schools (Grenades) on 10 January 1916, followed by another (Infantry) on 24 January 1916,⁴³ and the syllabuses that issued followed guidelines in GHQ memoranda.

As the war progressed, GHQ produced and circulated pamphlets and manuals on a range of subjects, whilst army, corps, and division often simultaneously produced their own materials, including instructions and memoranda. This process had begun as early as August 1914, when GHQ had established an Army Printing and Stationery Depot to facilitate publication of BEF documents and pamphlets. Initially, all manuals were printed in London for the War Office Central Distribution Section (the CDS Series), and then sent to France for distribution. However, within six months of the start of the war, GHQ was sporadically issuing its own material and the designation was eventually changed from CDS to SS (Stationery Service) at the beginning of 1916.⁴⁴

As the BEF increasingly codified its own ideas, the instructions that were issued were frequently updated as lessons were learned: SS109 'Training of divisions for offensive action' of May 1916 was followed by SS119 of July 1916, which in turn was followed by SS135 which appeared in December 1916. Further revised editions were issued in both January and November 1918. These documents were clearly 'to apply specifically to training for methodical attacks on prepared positions'. They suggested appropriate training drills, and also how the division was to organise for and plan an operation. They also outlined what the respective responsibilities of corps and division were.⁴⁵ All these recommendations were very much based on the experience gained during the fighting of 1916, concentrating on counter-battery work, the employment of the machine gun barrage, and the timetabled artillery barrage throughout an operation.

⁴² Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 41.

⁴³ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary.

⁴⁴ P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (London, 1994), p. 181.

⁴⁵ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 87.

The winter of 1916/17 was one of the most important periods in the development of British infantry tactics. The most influential GHQ manual of the period was 'Instructions for the training of platoons for offensive action' (SS143), that issued in February 1917 (another development on the earlier SS135 of December 1916). This paper built on the concept introduced in SS135, that the platoon was the basic tactical unit of infantry. SS143 went one step further than SS135 by describing a platoon composed of four different specialist, mutually supporting sections, whose principal armament would be the Lewis gun, rifle, rifle grenade, and bomb.

Also during 1917, the system for co-ordinating training across the armies in France was improved and a training branch was established in GHQ under Brigadier-General A. Solly-Flood. This Branch published SS152 'Instructions for the training of the British Armies in France' in June 1917, the object of which was to co-ordinate policy and system. This was only an interim version however, and an authoritative draft did not appear until January 1918. SS152 re-emphasised the rule that commanders should train the troops they led into action, and the publication included detailed syllabuses for courses of instruction at corps and army schools across the full range of requirements. Other arms were not ignored in this increasingly centralised dissemination of information, with SS139 (Artillery Notes), and SS145 (Notes on R.E. preparations for, and the employment of, the R.E. in offensive operations), featuring amongst many others.⁴⁶

In 1918, GHQ appointed Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse as Inspector-General of Training, and although the role was an advisory one only, his office was empowered to check upon commands in France and in Britain, to suggest improvements to training, and to disseminate tactical doctrine. It should also be noted that Maxse's duties included ensuring that, 'training is carried out in accordance with Field Service Regulations, the official manuals and General Staff publications'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p.106.

⁴⁷ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 181.

It is outwith the scope of this chapter to outline comprehensively the tactical deployments of the 51st Division during its battles, but operational orders and reports on engagements confirm that the (Highland) Division was, broadly, if not exclusively, adhering consistently to the suggested attack methodologies in the SS papers.

As discussed earlier, the 1914 post-mobilisation War Office Training Syllabus formed the basis of training during the division's stay in Bedford, and that was supplemented by manuals and pamphlets (both official and unofficial). However, in contrast, upon arrival in France there was little in the way of centralised information concerning training. As Ashworth states, 'In 1915, directives lacked force, being issued into something of a void where weapons and skills were neither standard nor developed and morale had to compensate for established skills and techniques'.⁴⁸ The (Highland) Division received no new general training syllabus, although it did receive notes and memoranda from General Headquarters, army, and corps, drawing the attention of the divisional commander to general principles and specialist training in such activities as bombing.⁴⁹ However, as the war progressed, there were more frequent references to the SS papers and other centralised memoranda and papers of instruction. To focus on 1918, SS papers are present in the war diaries on a regular basis; GS memo of 12 January 1918 stated that SS152 on 'Instructions for the Training of British Armies in France....will shortly be issued';⁵⁰ and in March 1918, 'Notes on Recent Fighting No.16, Use of Gas by the Enemy prior to his attack on the British on the Aisne the 27th May 1918'; No. 15 'German Attack on the British Front on the Aisne on the 27th May'; No.14 'German Method of Overcoming Machine Guns in Depth'; No.13 'German Tactics in the Attack'; and No. 9 'Tactical handling of Machine Guns in Defensive Operations' were all issued to divisions for further distribution to battalions.⁵¹ Often the documents issued would be voluminous and were intended primarily for guidance rather than for strict application. However, on occasion, senior commanders in the 51st would dictate that key elements in the SS papers must be employed: 'The importance of adhering strictly to the injunctions

⁴⁸ T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918, The Live and Let Live System* (London, 1980), p. 85.

⁴⁹ NA, WO 95 2869, 51st Division Circular Memorandum, 7 July 1915.

⁵⁰ NA, WO 95 2863, 152nd Brigade War Diary, 12 January 1918.

⁵¹ NA, WO 95 2885, 154th Brigade War Diary, March 1918.

laid down in Circular Memorandum No. SS.419.B dated 17th July 1916. cannot be exaggerated.',⁵² and Routine Order 1033 of 7 June 1918 concerning Bombing stated:

Attention is drawn to S.S. 182 'Instructions on Bombing' Nov 1917, part 2, Chapter IX. The precautions therein laid down have been adopted as a result of experience, and it is not permissible for any individual officer to introduce a practice differing therefrom, on grounds of personal opinion. Officers and other ranks who are instructing in bombing will be held responsible for any accidents which may occur through neglect of these precautions.⁵³

The awareness and use of the centrally issued ideas can be determined through a comparison of the training methods employed by Major-General G.M. Harper (51st Division GOC) and Lieutenant-General Maxse. They were remarkably similar, and Maxse was held in some esteem in this area. Maxse thought enough of Harper to recommend that he be given a corps command. Major-General Harper's 'Notes on Infantry Training and Tactics' that issued in August 1918, were also indicative of the main principles in the 1918 SS papers. When he stressed that training was 'the key factor; that the men must be aware of tactical principles; that leadership and initiative are vital; and that frontal assaults without guile are wasteful', he, not the actual compiler, the Deputy Chief of Staff at GHQ, could have been writing a memo to the Director of Military Operations at the War Office in July 1918, which stated essentially the same.⁵⁴

Another indicator of adherence to the centre can be seen through changes in operational emphasis. In 1915, a key focus for the Expeditionary Force was the use of the bomb, whilst by 1917 this had shifted to the rifle. In both these cases, the 51st Division adhered to and employed training methods that followed the trend. During 1917, the General Officer Commanding issued an order to improve skill with the rifle, and 'During this period of rest all training was centred on Musketry. It was found that few men knew how to use the rifle at all. Some improvement was made',⁵⁵ and, 'During period in TILQUES area [9-22 June 1917] great improvement was made in musketry of the Division. The area was found provided with excellent long-distance and short ranges, and much

⁵² NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary, 26 July 1916.

⁵³ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, 7 June 1918.

⁵⁴ A. Whitmarsh, 'The Development of Infantry Tactics in the 12th (Eastern) Division, 1915-1918', in *Stand To*, No. 71, p. 32.

⁵⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 1-9 May 1917.

assistance was received from the staff of the Second Army of the Second Army School of Musketry.⁵⁶

Along with a dissemination of information, the various schools that were established also taught and examined officers and men on the SS principles. Major A. Anderson, whilst at No. 2 Royal Garrison Artillery Officer Cadet School during November 1917, had to sit exams that focused on information contained in the SS papers.⁵⁷

However, the ethos which permitted a level of flexibility in command and control in formations and units could actually work against standardisation and often such guidance was not applied because the front line recipients of the advice were likely to resent any suggestions from those they perceived to be detached rear-echelon intellectuals. Some ordinary officers, who were expected to benefit from the ideas and advice 'reacted with hostility against general directives from above which seemed to limit their freedom of action or even their use of language when talking about it'.⁵⁸ To add to this, it was also often the case that papers such as the Stationery Series would be extremely difficult for many officers and men to understand fully and appropriately employ.⁵⁹

The 51st Division was no different from any other formation in the BEF in that it selectively applied elements of the centralised advice. However, it is clear that the division did employ the majority of central recommendations in the development of training. This was an ongoing process and the message often took time to filter through to become standard practice in sub-units, but such materials were seen as a way of spreading new ideas, rather than dictates that had to be obeyed. However, they did permit for a degree, a significant degree in the case of the (Highland) Division, of standardisation.

⁵⁶ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 19 June 1917.

⁵⁷ IWM, 85/23/1, The Papers of Major A. Anderson, 14 November 1917.

⁵⁸ Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ S. Bidwell, and D. Graham, *Firepower, British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, 1982), p. 127.

Higher commanders

It has been determined that centralised training methodologies did have an impact on many aspects of 51st Division training, and it has also been shown that this was not prescriptive and that there was an element of flexibility through the divisional command and control model.

The same rule can be applied to the influence of army and corps command in the direction and development of the training of the 51st (Highland) Division. There was a constant flow of information which may have involved aspects of training (such as routine orders (army, corps, division)), and memoranda focusing on specifics (such as the use of gas respirators). However, the actual direction of training was another matter. Simpson has argued convincingly that during 1916 training was split between GHQ, army, corps, and division,⁶⁰ but that by 1917 responsibility was increasingly devolved, 'staffs were now more experienced, corps were less prescriptive in their dealings with divisions, and their respective responsibilities were now clearer. Corps dealt with the general (or operational) and divisions with the local (or tactical).'⁶¹ However, it is debatable whether there was ever a period when corps presumed to dictate training methodologies to divisions. That is not to assert that they did not have an influence, as Prior and Wilson recorded of 1915: 'Unquestionably, the HD were not fit for battle at Festubert. Rawlinson felt particularly concerned about the poor staff work of the HD'. He had to send his chief of staff to help them prepare orders.⁶² However, there was no suggestion that Corps should direct training within the division.

The (Highland) Division passed through many corps during the course of the war, often only staying for short periods of time, and during the second half of 1916 were almost constantly on the move, 'Between July and December our division changed its area eighteen times'.⁶³ This did not permit corps command to impose any consistent and comprehensive training system or practices on the 51st. During July 1915, General Sir

⁶⁰ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 49.

⁶¹ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 97.

⁶² R. Prior, and T. Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (Oxford, 1992), p. 97.

⁶³ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 85.

James Willcocks, commander of the Indian Corps, stated to the brigadier-general of 153rd Brigade his 'great disappointment that he has never had an opportunity of inspecting it [153rd Infantry Brigade] before leaving'.⁶⁴ Maxse also stated at the inquiry after the battle of Cambrai that:

the main thing hampering the proper training of troops and dissemination of doctrine in the BEF was the high turnover of divisions through corps, so that the "expert supervision" of their training that could be permitted by corps commanders was largely lacking.⁶⁵

However, there were occasions, albeit rare, when the corps commander could and did impose rigid routines on the division. When the 51st joined Maxse's XVIII Corps in June 1917, it underwent a significant and comprehensive training programme, utilising methods dictated largely by the corps commander. Maxse himself realised that the influence of higher commanders should be limited. During the court of inquiry on Cambrai, he stated that 'Every Corps Commander should be held responsible for supervising without interfering with the deliberate training of his divisions. Each division has to be studied separately and treated according to its own commander's training capabilities and personal characteristics.' In making that statement, Maxse realised that corps command could not impose itself under the current command and control system:

how can a corps commander who has as many as 20 divisions passing through his hands in one year be held responsible for their training for the battle. It is not reasonable that he should be, and the conclusion seems to be that half the divisions in France will not be efficiently trained until they are permanently posted to definite corps. Books, circulars, schools, lectures all abound in profusion. But unless they are applied with knowledge of men and in a practical manner, they do not produce trained formations or handy fire units.⁶⁶

The GOC

In theory, the training of each division was carried out under the personal 'guidance' of the general officer commanding, who was assisted, and ultimately supervised by corps and army. Under this rule, the application of any centralised training principle was, by and large, at the discretion of the formation commander. However, the system that

⁶⁴ NA, WO 95 2869, 153rd Brigade War Diary.

⁶⁵ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 157.

⁶⁶ IWM, file 40, The Papers of Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse, Undated note to a member of the Court of Inquiry.

evolved within the BEF was designed to stimulate local originality through a centralised leadership. Its success rate was variable, but it was never a complete free-for-all.⁶⁷ GHQ wanted command handled systematically and regulation was increasingly apparent as the war progressed.

The general officers commanding the 51st Highland Division were ultimately responsible for the 'efficiency' of the units under their command and under that authority and guidance battalion commanding officers were responsible for the applications of 'training' for all officers, non-commissioned officers, and men in their units. This was a crucial responsibility as the way formations trained usually dictated the way they fought, in that training and tactical evolution were inextricably linked.

The 51st Division had three divisional commanders during the period it spent on the Western Front and each served with the division at significant periods in its development; Major-General R. Bannatine-Allason during the 'bleeding' of the division upon arrival in France; Major-General G.M. Harper, the longest serving GOC, who led the 51st through key events in 1916 and 1917; and Major-General G.T.C. Carter-Campbell, who had the difficult task of holding the division together after March 1918, and reforming and retraining it in order to permit its return to combat during the closing stages of the war. Each of these commanders, in different ways, had significant influence on the training methodologies of the 51st.

Major-General Bannatine-Allason took command of the 51st Division on mobilisation, prepared it for the Western Front, and took it to France in May 1915 where he commanded it on active service until September 1915. He then transferred to England and subsequently commanded the 61st (South Midland) Division and the 64th (Highland) Division. Commissioned to the Royal Artillery (trained at Woolwich), he served in Afghanistan, the Sudan, South Africa, Manchuria (with the Japanese), and the Indian frontier prior to the outbreak of the First World War.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, p. 185.

⁶⁸ With thanks to Dr J. Bourne, University of Birmingham.

All secondary accounts state that he was a thorough and reliable officer. However, his background was old army. Nicholson viewed him as:

A square shouldered, square faced man with a gift of putting the hardest and squarest of fingers on the spot; not by any reasoning power, that I was aware of, but by instinct. If he had left it there, and said nothing his vision would have seemed impressive. But he had a fatal habit of explaining.⁶⁹

His command technique was very much a product of another age. He was content to set himself apart from his subordinates and trusted in the delegation of much of the training to the official syllabus and his officers. The 51st (Highland) Division Circular Memorandum No.6 of 7 July 1915 focused on the use of hand grenades, and emphasised that the responsibility for training with these weapons lay with brigade, battalion, and company commanders:

in exactly the same manner as does the responsibility for other branches of training within their unit. The General Officer Commanding is unwilling to lay down any hard and fast system of training for the attainment of this object. He considers such matters are best left to the discretion of Brigadiers. He desires, however, to point out that the first essential is the training of the officers in order that they themselves may become efficient instructors.....The G.O.C. directs that Brigadiers shall give this matter their utmost attention, and that the training shall be pushed on with the utmost energy. He trusts that within a month from this date there will be no man in the ranks of the Infantry who is incapable of handling the hand grenade with safety and of using it with effect when the emergency arises.⁷⁰

As examined earlier in this chapter, Bannatine-Allason had a difficult task as he endeavoured to train the formation under the extremely testing conditions in and around Bedford. Moreover, the first few months that he commanded the division on the Western Front gave little opportunity to develop systems and routines that would progress training. War diaries testify that for much of the period the 51st was occupied in constant trench-holding duties. Much of the training that was carried out consisted of unit and sub-unit activity and 'learning on the job' in the trenches.

⁶⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 26.

⁷⁰ NA, WO 95 2869, 153rd Brigade War Diary.

Bannatine-Allason was an important figure in the evolution of the 51st Division, but, as Ivor Maxse pointed out, he ultimately failed⁷¹ to produce a well-trained body of men during his year in command: 'I knew the 51st Division before General Harper commanded it and then considered it ill-organised and unsoldier-like'.⁷²

On 24 September 1915, Bannatine-Allason gave up command of the division. Bewsher stated, rather discreetly, that he had been in indifferent health for some time and that:

The strain of the past four months, in which he had commanded the division in its first experiences of war, had been severe and the General therefore felt that he could not continue either with justice to himself or the Division in so responsible a position until his health was sufficiently recovered.⁷³

His successor, Major-General Harper was to prove fundamental to the development of training routines and regimens within the division. As an officer with previous experience of commanding a formation on the Western Front,⁷⁴ he brought confidence in his ability to deal with the situation at hand. Originally commissioned in the Royal Engineers, Harper went on to develop a thorough knowledge of different sectors in the Army. He saw action in South Africa, instructed at the Staff College at Camberley, served as Deputy Director of Military Operations at the War Office, and as Chief Operations Officer at GHQ in France, before assuming his field command:

'B.A.' and 'Uncle' Harper were both forceful characters but with very distinct personalities. There had been drive in 'B.A.'s' rugged methods; but he came to the war late in life to find conditions quite outside his experience and training.....Both knew all the 'Big wigs' intimately; Smith Dorrien, Haig, Wallie Robertson and Henry Wilson were constant visitors at our Divisional Headquarters in the early days; but whereas 'Uncle' treated them all with the familiarity of a man, sure of himself, 'B.A.' was on the defensive.⁷⁵

Harper immediately had an impact on the training pattern of the 51st Division. War diaries detail an increase in the personal inspections of units by the GOC and many more instructions issued from divisional headquarters. Throughout Harper's command of the

⁷¹ If we use the premise that a GOC is responsible for the efficiency of the units under his command.

⁷² IWM, 69/53/12, box No. 54, The Papers of Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse, 27 September 1917.

⁷³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 46.

⁷⁴ He commanded 17th Brigade of 6th Division from February 1915 to September 1915.

⁷⁵ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 140.

division, training was constant, and his direction of subordinates in the application of training methodologies was more obvious and progressive than that of his predecessor. Whilst maintaining an overall direction, he advocated devolving training responsibility down to section commanders, emphasised the need for basic tactical understanding through training to all, and endorsed the practice of combined arms training whenever and wherever possible:

He achieved this object to a certain extent by lectures to officers and men, but more particularly by informal discussions. He regularly visited units in the line and out, and seldom left without having discussed some tactical principle, explained his views on it, and impressed all with their soundness. What the General thought today the Division thought and practised the following week.⁷⁶

In conjunction with the evidence from the war diaries and other sources, Harper's theories on training can be further determined through his *Notes on Tactics and Training* which originally issued in August 1918, and which emphasised that 'Many of the methods proposed in this pamphlet had been already found successful by the 51st (Highland) Division.' He went on to outline his assessment of what had been lacking in the general training of the BEF, and as an extension of that, what he had found and attempted to correct in the (Highland) Division:

In the past the main efforts in training had largely been directed too much towards the training of the body and too little towards the training of the mind. It had not always been appreciated that in war it is the fittest mind which survives as much as, if not more than, the fittest body. Training has not been progressive, but has been chiefly composed of short periods out of the line recurring at varying intervals, during which, in many units, all ranks began again at the beginning, and in consequence never reached the end. When failure occurred, the cause was almost invariably that the men, not having been taught, when their leaders became casualties did not know how to act and had no confidence in their weapons.⁷⁷

Harper's recommendations, based on the principles he applied to training the 51st, rested on the continual adaptation of training patterns to suit new weaponries and on increasing and improving the tactical awareness of the infantry.⁷⁸ He stressed that initiative and

⁷⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 142.

⁷⁷ G.M. Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training* (London, 1919), pp. 9-10.

⁷⁸ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, pp. 17-18.

leadership on the part of officers and men were a key component of successful training,⁷⁹ 'When men failed, it was often due to lack of awareness of what to do'.⁸⁰ Harper's views on the importance of the inculcation of initiative through training is evident from early 1917, when, during a liaison visit before the attack at Arras, Major E. L. Spears had been impressed by Harper's use of models and a dummy battlefield to train his men. The General had told him, 'The time had come....when soldiers should use their brains again'. Spears commented, 'This principle he certainly applied'.⁸¹ A further example is provided by Major F.W. Bewsher when discussing Harper's approach to raiding:

In these raids it became clear that a blind leap into a trench was not a sound policy.....Considerable pains were therefore taken to train the men not to rush blindly at their objective.....The men were therefore constantly practised in assaulting reserve trenches.... It was after these raids, to which reference is made later, that General Harper in an increasing degree emphasised in training his troops the necessity for fighting with their wits, and not by a mere display of seeing red and brute courage.⁸²

Lieutenant-General Maxse also held Harper in some esteem as a trainer of formations.⁸³

On 27 September 1917 in a report to Fifth Army HQ, he stated:

I have the honour to furnish the following report upon Major-General G.M. Harper, C.B., D.S.O., commanding 51st Division in this Corps-

During the past three months of strenuous work in FLANDERS I have formed a high opinion of this officer. He has an intimate up-to-date knowledge of infantry tactics and is thorough in his training methods.

His division is organised from top to bottom in all departments, and he handles it in a masterly manner in active operations. It is now one of the two or three best divisions in France and its fighting record is well known. I attribute its success mainly to its present commander and recommend him for promotion to a Corps.⁸⁴

However, it is impossible to discuss Major-General Harper without mention of the incident that has had such a negative impact on his reputation as a progressive trainer and tactician. Whilst in command of the (Highland) Division at the battle of Cambrai in

⁷⁹ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, p. 19.

⁸⁰ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, p. 20.

⁸¹ W.A. Moore, *A Wood Called Broulon, The Cover-Up After Cambrai, 1917* (London, 1988), p. 51.

⁸² Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 143.

⁸³ The 51st under Harper served in Maxse's XVIII Corps in 1917.

⁸⁴ IWM, Con Shelf Volume 41, *The Papers of Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse, XVIII Corps G.S. 82.*, 27 Sept 1917.

November 1917, Harper ordered that sections detailed to follow tanks in the initial advance should do so in 'wave formation' and at a distance of not less than 100 yards. Most of the tanks were shelled as they approached a ridge on the Hindenburg support line and were destroyed. Unsurprisingly, officers of the ill-fated Tank Corps were prominent amongst those who condemned Harper for poor tactical judgment. A Tank Corps reminiscence described him as 'a man of extremely strong views', who declared the Cambrai plan to be a 'fantastic and unmilitary scheme'. It asserted that Harper would not have his men alter their regular mode of attack and that he refused to rehearse the new tank battle drill with the result that the troops did not move close enough to the tanks and both arms were not mutually supporting. It continued:

The training of (tank) battalions in co-operation with the 51st Division had not been thorough. This division had very definite ideas on what they could do and practically said 'We will do our stuff. Hope you can do yours.' They did not like the idea of moving 'worm-formation' close up behind tanks and preferred to follow in lines about 200 yards in rear.⁸⁵

Tim Travers outlined a particularly vicious account by Brigadier-General Hardress-Lloyd⁸⁶ who, in May 1918, stated that Harper had:

repudiated the new 'worm' infantry approach formation which called for single file rather than the line formation, with a rather simple argument: "Now" explained this old ass [Harper] "if you were walking down the road with a girl how would you go?" "Arm in arm" answered HL, "There you are", exclaimed old Harper..... "Well General", replied HL, "If you and the late Oscar Wilde were walking down the street together where do you think he would go?" Harper was very nearly taken out of the room in an ambulance.⁸⁷

However, the Tank Corps had not impressed during operations at Third Ypres and confidence in its effectiveness as something more than a mere arm of the infantry was fading. Field Marshal Haig wrote on 23 December 1917 that:

On our side, on the other hand, we now have the advantage of a new feeling of confidence in our tanks, which runs all through the Army. Before November 20th very few commanders believed in tanks, and the troops took little account of them. Their value is now so universally

⁸⁵ R. Woollcombe, *The First Tank Battle, Cambrai 1917* (London, 1967), p.107.

⁸⁶ Commander of the 3rd Tank Brigade.

⁸⁷ T. Travers, *How the War was Won* (London, 1992), p. 6.

recognised that any future operations with tanks will now be undertaken with a feeling of great confidence in all ranks.⁸⁸

It is clear that the Tank Corps had needed a substantial success to offset its earlier disappointments and it may have been necessary to find a scapegoat on whom to pin any potential failings.

Other sources, both primary and secondary, also contradict many of the above assertions. Tank Corps officers were present during co-ordination lectures and training and yet did not appear to question Harper's deployment of infantry behind tanks. Former officers of the 1/6th Seaforths stated:

in the early days of November the only thing worthy of note was a lecture by Brigadier-General Pelham Burn to all officers of 152nd Brigade, which was attended by many officers of the Tank Corps.... tanks were to figure largely in the scheme that was unfolded. Highland officers fraternised with officers of the Tank Corps as the plot was revealed.⁸⁹

Woollcombe added:

First the men were taught to advance behind the tanks just as they had behind barrages, but more slowly and at a greater distance. Then the tactics of the Tank Sections were explained to them. Repeated rehearsals followed, in some places with tanks, in others with tank officers in place of their ships....supplemented by frequent meetings by tank and infantry officers and N.C.O.s,⁹⁰

and Brigadier-General Beckwith reported:

the Tank Officers and N.C.O.s concerned were brought together with the Officers and N.C.O.s with whose Companies and Platoons they were to work, the former actually representing their tanks in the Battalion practices beforehand, as well as in the Brigade ones. Great camaraderie was established and all had confidence in each other and understood each others' roles and objectives.⁹¹

⁸⁸ NA, WO 158/54, Report by Haig Summarising the Operations between 20 November and 7 December.

⁸⁹ R.T. Peel, and A.H. MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences* (Elgin, 1923), p. 52.

⁹⁰ Woollcombe, *The First Tank Battle*, p. 107.

⁹¹ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Brigade Lessons Learnt, Notes on Operations between Metz and the Cantaing Line 19-24 November 1917, 20 November 1917.

51st Division instruction No.1, dated 7 November 1917 clearly stated that 'In the forthcoming operations the Tanks are the primary weapon of attack', emphasising that Harper did not consider the tanks to be merely support weapons, and that 'No infantry should follow closer than 100 yards behind the Tanks. The actual distance will be governed by the necessity for each Platoon to keep touch with, and not lose sight of, its respective section of tanks.' This was in accordance with Tank Corps instructions. The instruction also stated that the first wave of the infantry should follow in extended order to avoid potential concentrations of enemy fire on the tanks. The instruction finished with, 'In order to afford every chance of success to the operation, Tank personnel and Infantry must work constantly together and must understand thoroughly each other's methods.'⁹² Again, hardly a convincing case for strong disagreement over tactical deployment.

The conclusion is that Major-General Harper followed the prescribed Tank Corps instructions regarding the distance to be followed behind the tanks. The decision to follow in extended order was his own, but was understandable in an attempt to safeguard his infantry. Whether the infantry followed in 'wave' or 'worm' formation is largely irrelevant as it is highly doubtful that the troops would have engaged with the enemy in time to save the tanks being knocked out.

Such a misleading and biased appraisal of Harper's character should not be permitted to reflect badly on the generally positive impact that he had on progressing the training of the 51st (Highland) Division. It certainly did not appear to be a prevalent issue in March 1918 when he was promoted to the command of the IV Corps in Third Army.

He was replaced as GOC by Major-General Carter-Campbell. Commissioned in the Scottish Rifles and having served in South Africa, Carter-Campbell was the second-in-command of 1/2nd Scottish Rifles in 8th Division at the start of the war, and subsequently commanded it until September 1915 when he was appointed to the command of 94th

⁹² NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Instruction No.1, S.G. 729/7, 7 Nov 1917.

Brigade. He took over the 51st Division on the 16th day of the cataclysmic month of March 1918.

Carter-Campbell had considerable field experience within, and in command of, infantry units and formations. Much of that experience was accumulated during the campaign in France and Belgium. All accounts indicate that he was a strong and solid officer:

George Carter-Campbell was an outstanding officer, small and neat in appearance with a rather dry, incisive manner. Good, though not exceptional brains were allied to shrewd practical ability and a capacity for putting his finger on essentials. A strong, resolute character whose judgment of people and their abilities was remarkably good.....Both morally and physically he was fearless. He was a martinet but by no means unapproachable, and although he may not have enjoyed much affection there is no doubt that he inspired respect and confidence. On active service he was imperturbable under any conditions however bad, as witness his leadership at Neuve Chapelle.⁹³

That imperturbable nature would be useful as the German Army continued the advance that had begun on 21 March and the 51st (Highland) Division gradually buckled and broke under tremendous pressure. Casualties were enormous and the operating systems within the division were effectively shattered. As soon as Carter-Campbell could reform the withdrawn division, it was hit again by another huge German force. Withdrawn once again, the (Highland) Division that Carter-Campbell had taken over from Harper had almost ceased to exist.

Carter-Campbell's influence during this period was considerable. With the loss of so many officers and men, and the addition of so many inadequately trained reinforcements, his direction was vital. A conscientious and methodical soldier, he retrained the division to a standard considered necessary for it to take part in active operations once more. However, the division was never fully trained for the semi-open warfare that was a characteristic of the second half of 1918 and, when it did become involved in battle again, suffered heavy casualties.

⁹³ J. Baynes, *Morale, A Study of Men and Courage, The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915* (London, 1967), p. 22.

Officers and men

The system of command and control within the 51st Division did not radically alter during the course of the war, although there were shifts in the focus of responsibility and authority. Some officers had more or less impact on training dependent on the stage of the war and the condition of the units. However, it is accurate to state that all down to and including battalion commanders had an influence on the development of training programmes. It is also accurate to state that the more junior levels of command experienced a greater responsibility for the direct training of men as the war progressed and many more officers and men became teachers as specialisms became less specialist and more widely applied.

It has already been stated that general officers commanding throughout the British Expeditionary Force were ultimately responsible for the 'efficiency' of the units under their command. In this they were supported by the senior officers of the division, such as brigadier-generals. However, battalion commanding officers were directly responsible for the training of all officers, non-commissioned officers, and men in their units, as were the commanding officers of supporting units and other arms. 'The Divisional Commander is a trainer of men, and knowing that constant efficiency can only be maintained if a training system is deeply embedded in the hearts of the Brigadiers and Commanding Officers.'⁹⁴ The 51st (Highland) Division adhered to these principles, although there was some flexibility to the rule, which was also reflected in changes to the command and control in the Expeditionary Force as a whole as the war progressed. Divisional commanders of the 51st Division applied different command styles dependent on their own particular command preference (they were permitted this degree of flexibility) and on the particular stage in the war. In contrast to Bannatine-Allason, Harper and Carter-Campbell were more 'invasive' and 'directive', consistently issuing detailed operational and training instructions and conducting routine inspections on a regular basis.

⁹⁴ IWM, 21/2/17, The Papers of Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse, Letter from Brigadier-General Kentish, 21 February 1917.

Brigadier-generals were also important figures in the training of the (Highland) Division throughout the war. Within the flexible command and control system where senior officers could apply different levels of 'hands on' control, brigadier-generals, such as Pelham Burn, were extremely influential. Major-General D.N. Wimberley stated:

I may say they set only a standard I had expected of them, because though a Cameron, I had been well trained in my youth in 1917 in the Highland Division when I served under a certain Regular officer of your Regiment, who knew what standards meant-Brigadier H. Pelham Burn.⁹⁵

Brigadier-generals served in both a supervisory capacity, ensuring that the GOC's instructions were carried out, and as co-ordinators of battalion training within their formations.

To develop satisfactory training programmes in their brigades, brigadier-generals would discuss and agree training schemes and syllabuses at both the divisional and the battalion level of command. The brigadier-generals would also consider and co-ordinate responses to higher command initiatives to improve training and tactics. Often this would take the form of preparing and producing a report on a particular exercise or engagement. Brigadier-General Campbell requested from divisional headquarters that he be permitted to plan and execute, 'Regimental Exercises for Officers and N.C.Os. during rest period', due to 'the majority of all ranks' needing 'training for open warfare'.⁹⁶ The centralising SS papers could also be criticised by brigadier-generals, and in a memo to divisional headquarters Pelham Burn stated, 'With reference to S.S. 523 (Regulations regarding leave), I hope that I may be allowed to put forward the case of the officers and men of this Brigade'.⁹⁷

Other commanders would also direct the training actions of supporting units and other arms under their control and supervision. The war diaries from units in the Royal Army

⁹⁵ National Library of Scotland, ACC8681, Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley: Talk to the Gordon Highlanders Association 1947, Glasgow Branch.

⁹⁶ NA, WO 95 2845, Report from Brigadier-General D. Campbell to Divisional Headquarters, S.G. 34/2, 13 August 1916.

⁹⁷ NA, WO 95 2862, 152nd Brigade War Diary, memo undated.

Medical Corps or from the Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Supply contained many instances of specialist memos written, and lectures given, by senior officers outlining methods and modes of training in their sectors. Major Bewsher stated of the divisional artillery that 'General Oldfield's officers not only handled their guns with great skill, but also, as a result of his teaching, were able in emergencies to take command of disorganised detachments of men and fight equally skilfully as infantry officers'.⁹⁸

Infantry battalion commanders had the direct responsibility for training their units, which involved the preparation of training programmes which were submitted to brigade and divisional command for approval. Battalion commanding officers would subsequently carry out and supervise the application of those programmes. The training would predominantly occur when the battalion was 'at rest' and out of the line. However, during periods in the line, commanding officers had to ensure that sub-units in the battalion continued to organise and carry out individual training.

The individual units that composed the (Highland) Division could differ in their training methods, particularly in the early stages of the war when there was less direction from divisional headquarters. Battalion commanders were frequently left to their own devices. 'A thing that appeals to us all from the CO downwards is the way we are left alone. Orders come, are obeyed and then you carry on again. Over here one is not worried with silly questions and orders like you are when training at home.'⁹⁹ The variable standards in training can be seen by a comparison of five battalions in the 51st during September and October 1915. On 21 September 1915, Lord Kitchener complimented the commanding officer of the 1/5th Seaforths on his battalion, stating, 'Colonel, you have the finest body of men I have ever seen'.¹⁰⁰ By way of contrast to this glowing reference, Brigadier-General Edwards of 154th Brigade, upon inspection of the battalions under his command said of the 1/8th King's Liverpool Regiment on 8 October 1915, that 'trench discipline was faulty. Many rifles with uncharged magazines. Officers had not instructed men.' On 9 October, he stated of the 1/4th North Lancashires, that its trench discipline was good

⁹⁸ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ IWM, 78/22/1, Diary of Captain J.S. Mahon, undated.

¹⁰⁰ D. Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1920), p. 40.

and 'ncos and men were well instructed in their duties'. He went on to compare the 1/6th Scottish Rifles as being 'fairly well instructed in their duties not so clean as the N. Lancs', whilst he also recorded on 10 October, the 1/4th King's Own Lancaster Regiment's 'Trench discipline and ability to meet emergencies fairly good'. Finally, on 12 October 1915, he stated that the billets of the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers 'were very dirty and no care seemed to have been taken for the cleanliness of the billets or welfare of the men. Sanitary arrangements were bad.'¹⁰¹ Clearly there were differences between both units in separate brigades and between units in the same brigades.

Under Major-Generals Harper and Carter-Campbell, there was more direct command, control and direction, which also reflected the growing awareness of the importance of progressive training methodologies and the ongoing standardisation of training principles. However, even with this increased direction, there were still differences in the style and standard of training in each unit. There were a number of reasons for this, such as the effectiveness of the commanding officer,¹⁰² or the number of casualties sustained by the battalion and the resultant standard of reinforcements. There were also external factors, such as what type of area was occupied in the line or out of the line. However, as a general rule as the war progressed, the units of the (Highland) Division increasingly displayed similar methods of training.

Battalion commanders, as those directly responsible for the training of the units under their command, were in a prime position to upwardly influence the decisions of the higher levels of command in the division. As Lieutenant-Colonel Gemmill of the 1/8th Royal Scots (Pioneers) stated on 18 August 1916:

I think that all officers require practice in tending [to] working parties and putting them to their tasks....with regard to methods employed I am of the opinion that better results- I refer to work only- might in some cases have been obtained if an officer of the General Staff or senior

¹⁰¹ IWM, 78/42/1, Diary of Brigadier-General G.T.C. Edwards, 154th Brigade.

¹⁰² There were many changes of battalion commanding officers throughout the war. Some were killed or wounded after a short time in charge, or were transferred or sent home on health grounds. In some instances, commanding officers were sacked. All these cases would create a disruption to training.

R.E. Officer selected by the Staff, had been attached to the Brigade and made responsible for all work required by the Division or Brigade concerned.¹⁰³

For the officers below the rank of battalion commander, the consistent emphasis was placed more on understanding the principles that issued from the higher-level command and to ensure that the troops were practised in those principles. However, as the war progressed a greater onus on sub-unit training and tactics was to ensure that:

The importance of platoon commanders cannot be over exaggerated; not for their elementary military knowledge, but because they are the actual commanders of men. Higher commanders can teach, direct and inspire them; but remain dependent on their platoon commanders in action.¹⁰⁴

For the ordinary rank and file in the sub-units of the division, there was a degree of responsibility for individual training, but there was very little influence on the wider training methodologies that were employed. F.W. Webster's view of command and control in the (Highland) Division was to change dramatically as the war progressed. However, in 1914 he stated, 'it was unlikely they'd be informed as in these days there was a tremendous gulf of communication between officers and other ranks and even if any of them knew what was going on, the news would never have been leaked to the troops'.¹⁰⁵

Under Harper's command the opposite approach was advocated towards informing the troops:

The infantry commander, having learnt the principle of tactics, must also know how to train his command in a tactical exercise. The platoon commander must be responsible that the section commanders know their duties and can lead their sections intelligently. The section commander must have a knowledge of the use of ground, fire and movement, and fire and orders, and understand the role of the section and of his particular section in attack and defence. The training of the section commanders must be such that, having had the role of their platoons fully explained to them, they carry it out without further orders from their officers. The men must be taught to answer to the command of the section leaders, and also,

¹⁰³ NA, WO 95 2845, Note from Lieutenant-Colonel Gemmill to 51st Division, 18 August 1916.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 138.

¹⁰⁵ IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 28.

when necessary, to act as individuals with an individual intelligence. They must learn to become self-confident and to rely on themselves.¹⁰⁶

Various special instructors were also trained at schools in order to assist the commanding officers in the training of their units, and, to complement this, courses were organised at schools of instruction for company commanders, platoon commanders, company sergeant majors, and platoon sergeants. Lectures, on a variety of subjects, were then given by the officers and men who had recently returned from the schools.

Formation and sub-formation schools were important in the development of the training of the (Highland) Division. These schools were established by GHQ, armies, and corps, on a permanent basis with an approved establishment for the primary purpose of training instructors. Classes of instruction were also formed temporarily by divisions, brigades and battalions for the purpose of training personnel. Battalion, brigade and divisional classes were regularly in progress for training in the following as might be required: musketry, Lewis guns, signals, scouting, dug out construction, bombing and rifle bombing, and light trench mortars. Griffith states that practice differed widely from year to year and from one formation to another, although there was an attempt to standardise this in 1918. He asserts that there was already a form of school structure applicable to most of the BEF within less than a year of the war's start.¹⁰⁷

The first of many divisional schools was formed in the (Highland) Division in January 1916. It was established as a grenade school, at which 13 officers and 260 other ranks were put through a course every week.¹⁰⁸ During the course, instruction was given in the Mills bomb which had by then replaced the former types of improvised bomb. The syllabus included lectures, tactical bombing exercises, the working out of schemes, grenadier tactics, German bombing methods, and group organisation. This was immediately followed by the establishment of a divisional school of infantry under Lieutenant-Colonel D. Baird, commanding the 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

¹⁰⁶ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁸ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, 10 January 1916.

At this school 20 officers and 40 NCOs attended a series of fourteen-day courses.¹⁰⁹ The object of the school was to increase the powers of command of the senior officers and NCOs and to improve their knowledge of tactics. The syllabus included communication, discipline and *esprit de corps*, sanitation, route marching, billeting, musketry, reconnaissance, trench attacks, transport, map reading, and field engineering.

Nicholson described the usefulness of these divisional schools:

we formed instructional centres to meet all requirements. There were divisional schools in which officers learnt the rudiments, and a little bit more, of their duties. An admirable institution for the inexperienced young officers who arrived from home and for those already out who needed a little more polish. The best of our senior combatant officers acted in turn as commandants. We had brigade, divisional and army grenade schools, and trench mortar schools. We had special courses of instruction for artillery and infantry. Cadet schools for N.C.O.s who were recommended as officers; gas schools for everyone-and so on. Very good institutions in every way. They kept the whole army au fait with the latest improvements, and improved the entente between the different branches of the service and units. All these courses of instruction went on, no matter what battle was being fought. Men were taken out in the middle of an action, and sent off in a Piccadilly bus to this or that house of knowledge.¹¹⁰

Webster related his experience of the divisional gas school and his appointment as his unit's gas instructor:

He found the course most interesting and having procured himself a good notebook, he divided it into sections covering the various subjects and cut a thumb index at the edges of the pages so that he could refer quickly to any special subject. His foresight paid handsome dividends for his notes were retained by the School. On his return to his Battery, he had to secure another notebook from the Bty. Office and with the aid of some rough notes he had made in class he managed to make a fair copy of those retained by the Divisional Gas School. He discussed his plans for training the Bty. with his Sgt. Major and was given several good N.C.O.s for a start to train, and once he had them up to standard he was able to decentralise the work and go up and train all the gunners at the Gun Position.¹¹¹

The growth of the divisional training schools was also stimulated by a multiplicity of technical specialities:

¹⁰⁹ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, 10 January 1916.

¹¹⁰ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 197.

¹¹¹ IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, pp. 67-68.

At one higher remove there were subjects such as machine guns, trench-mortars and artillery cooperation; and beyond them again came such items as air-to-ground liaison, counter-battery location, combined tank-infantry tactics or-the ultimate mystery of all-‘staff writing’. Each one of them could boast its own school, its temporary course, its weekend seminar, or at least its half-day firepower demonstration. Soldiers of any rank might be assigned to almost any of the subjects at almost any time, often on an apparently random basis; although naturally officers tended to be disproportionately heavily represented. Indeed, the more senior he became, the more likely an officer was to spend time in training rather than in the trenches.¹¹²

In the latter stages of the war, these schools could disseminate new ideas which were usually issued through official manuals. However, there was still the flexibility in command and control and SS152 re-emphasised the rule that commanders should train the troops they led into action. The publication included detailed syllabuses for courses of instruction at corps and army schools across the full range of requirements, but it was at the discretion of the commander to apply the guidelines. As Travers states, GHQ, ‘did not impose tactics and ideas on the BEF, rather army, corps and divisions organised their own methods of fighting, which they were to use for the rest of the war’.¹¹³

Sport

Sport was a key element in the training of the men. The improvements in physical fitness that were derived from it were complimented by other mental and health benefits. This was recognised at all levels of command in the BEF and there were structured programmes to develop it. ‘The value of games as breeders of the fighting spirit in the soldier was a recognised principle before the war, and experience during the war confirmed this. A scheme of recreational training was therefore prepared and was launched in December, 1916’.¹¹⁴

However, before official recognition took shape in the form of structured training programmes, sport was widely played. Recreational training had also been introduced by the staff into convalescent depots long before it was officially sanctioned, but eventually it received the enthusiastic support of the Adjutant General and was carried out until the Armistice. Sports such as boxing were always popular and, when Denis Winter stated

¹¹² Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, p. 189.

¹¹³ Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 149.

¹¹⁴ E.A.L., Oldfield, *History of the Army Physical Training Corps* (Aldershot, 1954), p. 28.

that football was made compulsory in the winter of 1917 with every platoon being issued with a regulation ball, he could also have added that troops in the (Highland) Division indulged in that pastime at every given opportunity.¹¹⁵ Wauchope stated that:

The afternoons were chiefly given up to recreation of various kinds, especially in cross-country running, in which the commanding officer took the leading part. The usual inter-company and battalion football matches were played and the Division held a boxing competition at Abbeville.¹¹⁶

The French were mystified why the British played so much football and did not just train instead.¹¹⁷ However, sport was an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of Britain and it was manifest in a variety of forms.¹¹⁸ Gary Sheffield even cites examples of sports analogies in the official training manuals and instructions¹¹⁹ and (Highland) Division commanders were amongst those who indulged in using sport as military examples:

They must know the principles of war as laid down in F.S. Regulations, Part 1, and be able to apply them.

They must realise that there is only one form of warfare, which is permanently governed by the same principles, whether it is fought in a trench or above ground, and that these principles are simple axioms which they can learn by the study of their profession as easily as the rules of cricket or football.¹²⁰

Wider impact

Scholars such as Martin Samuels have been critical of the rigidity of the top-down command and control model in the BEF, but it is interesting to note that the training methodologies and tactical ideas of the (Highland) Division did have an impact on other formations in the Expeditionary Force and also upon GHQ and the War Office.

¹¹⁵ D. Winter, *Death's Men, Soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1979), p. 156.

¹¹⁶ A.G. Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Vol II.* (London, 1926), p. 278.

¹¹⁷ A. Roshwald, and R. Stites (eds), *European Culture in the Great War* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 340.

¹¹⁸ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), p. 133.

¹¹⁹ 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, 2000), p. 47.

¹²⁰ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, pp. 23-24.

A significant contributor to the improvement of tactical thinking and training methodologies took the form of comprehensive debriefs that were often completed by formations and units immediately after combat. This had become standard practice for all divisions in the BEF towards the end of the war. However, the regularity and diversity of the combat experience of the (Highland) Division throughout the 1917 and 1918 period (also a period when much of the centralising material was being codified and revised), coupled with its reputation and prestige, would have insured that views emanating from it were considered thoroughly by higher commanders.

Harper's *Notes on Tactics and Training*, which reflected the training methods used by the 51st (Highland) Division was common reading at all levels of command throughout the BEF.¹²¹ Another significant divisional contribution to BEF training methodologies was issued by Harper in January 1918, in the shape of a memorandum containing a number of principles for defence and trench construction, which at their own request was circulated to a number of Divisions, and adopted by them.¹²² It is not surprising that this occurred, as the centralised advice on defensive techniques tended to be inadequate and was often poorly interpreted.

On a more direct level, the (Highland) Division was also frequently called upon to carry out the instruction of other formations, units, support units, and individual personnel:

By August 1915 the Division had so successfully overcome its earlier difficulties that it was selected to instruct the 18th Division, newly arrived from England, in trench warfare. Subsequently, the 22nd Division, 32nd Division, and afterwards the 36th Division, were also attached to the (Highland) Division for tours of inspection in the line.¹²³

This remit to instruct also included formations from other nations, and the 78th American Division carried out a period of attachment during August 1917.¹²⁴ The type of instruction varied in form from trench familiarisation through to general training programmes, dependent on the period of the war. However, an example of a set of

¹²¹ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*.

¹²² Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 265.

¹²³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 30.

¹²⁴ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division G War Diary.

instructions that were issued for the training of 60th Division in June 1916 focused on individual, platoon, company, and battalion instruction. There was also a focus on staffwork, machine guns, artillery, supply, signals, and the work of the Royal Engineers, the Pioneers, the Royal Army Medical Corps, and the Army Service Corps.¹²⁵

In the line

Trench warfare for the (Highland) Division followed a pattern that remained essentially similar until 1918. Each infantry battalion, whilst holding a section of the line, spent a number of days in the front line, then an equal number in support and, finally, at rest.¹²⁶ The theory was that training would take place at the different rotational stages reflecting the different conditions as units moved away from the line. Obviously the form of training undertaken would reflect the type of unit or other arm, and crucially some sectors were much busier than others, impeding the opportunity to train. The 'busier' the sector, then the greater the need for flexibility in command and control, thus making training 'in the line' one of the most difficult to standardise. However, wherever possible, the 51st maintained that the 'on the job' training activities, such as patrolling, be supplemented by training in ordinary duties such as sanitation, carrying, digging, and anti-gas precautions.

The 51st Division learned many aspects of trench warfare through practical experience in the line. As Paddy Griffith points out, 'a very great deal of informal training actually did take place in the trenches, on the basis that survival itself depended upon speedy adjustment to local conditions'.¹²⁷

Poorly trained in up to-date techniques upon its arrival in France, the division was fortunate to have been used sparingly in attack until the battle at Beaumont Hamel in 1916 and the division gradually built up experience in holding and consolidating positions without incurring heavy casualties. This ensured a valuable consistency in troops and commanders. For much of 1915:

¹²⁵ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division G War Diary.

¹²⁶ The number of days would often depend on the state of the line, weather conditions, health of the troops etc.

¹²⁷ Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, p. 188.

The Division had profited considerably by their prolonged tour in the same sector, and had completed its education in trench warfare in a most thorough manner. The men had learnt trench-craft, that art which enables them to keep the enemy constantly on the alert and at the same time to protect themselves by their wits from avoidable casualties and discomforts.

They had also had time to acquire that sixth sense which a short spell of the war gave to all the fighting troops, of working, walking, and fighting in the dark. They had become good snipers, and experienced trench workers. They had learnt valuable lessons regarding such questions as the influence of the nature of the soil on trench construction, the organisation of working parties, the disposal of mine soil, etc.¹²⁸

Although the division consistently moved around in 1916, concentrating mainly on defence and line-holding, the new GOC, Harper, continually developed training in both defence practice and offence principle. After Beaumont Hamel, the regular use of the 51st in attack permitted the same experience to be built up in offence practice, although the greater loss of casualties began to interfere with the consistency of progression. In its previous battles at Givenchy in 1915 and High Wood in 1916, the (Highland) Division knew mostly failure, but through these failures it had learned from its mistakes and developed a more sophisticated system of tactics and training.

It is evident from the war diaries, and in accordance with Tony Ashworth's views on British Expeditionary Force aggression,¹²⁹ that the (Highland) Division became more offensively minded during the second half of 1916 as raiding became a more prevalent activity. This was both an opportunity and an inspiration for the development of training and tactics. Raiding was useful in training officers and men in small-scale attacks over no man's land and in the enemy line, and it also permitted improvements in co-ordination and intelligence. During raids carried out prior to the battle of Arras, 'it became clear that a blind leap into a trench was not a sound policy', and 'Considerable pains were therefore taken to train the men not to rush blindly at their objective'. The result of this development was that 'The men were therefore constantly practised in assaulting reserve trenches'. It was after these raids, to which further reference is made later, that General

¹²⁸ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 49.

¹²⁹ T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918, The Live and Let Live System*.

Harper to an increasing degree emphasised the training of his troops in fighting 'with their wits, and not by a mere display of seeing red and brute courage'.¹³⁰

Other arms and support units also 'learned on the job', as Bewsher stated of the Royal Artillery which made the most of the static warfare at the beginning of the division's period on the Western Front:

During the period in which the Division was in this sector, great progress towards efficiency was made by the Divisional artillery. By the time they had arrived in France mobile warfare was for the time being in abeyance. This was a distinct advantage to Territorial gunners, as the conditions of service in peace time afforded them few opportunities for training for warfare of movement. They had, however, devoted a considerable amount of study to technical gunnery. Consequently, they had less ground to make up than would have been the case if they had been engaged in a war of movement.¹³¹

Out of the line

It was acknowledged by the high command that collective training could only be carried out during the periods when units were out of the trenches and that these periods could be sub-divided into both short periods of rest and long periods of training. During short periods of rest, the training carried out would also have a strong element of recuperation and points for attention would include the cleaning of the men, equipment and transport; ceremonial drill; laying and fuse setting; skill at arms; gas defence; physical training; route marching; recreational training; and amusements. However, for long periods of training when out of the line, a programme had to be 'laid down' by the battalion commanding officer, which would have been divided into both individual training and collective training. To assist the unit and formation commanders in progressing this training, it was War Office policy that in forward areas all billets reserved for the use of troops resting from duty in the trenches should have connected with them a bayonet fighting course, ranges of at least 30 yards, bombing trenches, drill grounds, recreation grounds, machine gun ranges and light trench mortar practice grounds. It is interesting to see the above 'general policy' from a company officer perspective (in the (Highland) Division) immediately prior to Third Ypres:

¹³⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 143.

¹³¹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 42.

when out of the line the daily routine must be adapted to the circumstances pervading, but we aim at keeping up training, and arranging a programme of work covering almost everything that needs be known by the average soldier. However, it is impossible to carry out training in France “to the letter” as at home. It is impossible to carry continuously all the requisitions necessary for complete training, as it must be remembered that we are seldom more than two weeks in the one place; but we manage to make substitutes of our own, and devise schemes which, if not up to date, are always effective.....we have recourse to carrying out elementary training, such as saluting drill, squad drill, and so on. But all this is done to keep up a standard of efficiency and strict discipline, which tends to make men act on their own initiative and have more reliance in their own powers of endurance when up against the enemy. It must not be forgotten that only discipline will hold an army together-without discipline, we go under. Particular attention is therefore payed [sic] to the following advanced training: Platoon and Company Drill, Musketry, Bayonet fighting, Physical Drill, skirmishing, and so on. At other times, however, we find that all manner of fatigues interfere with our training. This depends greatly on the area in which we happen to be placed, and the sector in front of us.¹³²

Other arms and support units followed their own training programmes. In January 1917, the DADOS war diary stated:

During the latter half of this month, while the Division has been at rest, the whole of the guns except 2 have been overhauled....The entire gun storesof each artillery unit have been inspected in detail.... The transport of 2 out of 3 brigades has been inspected and a large number of repairs and changes made. Returns have been received showing how each battalion, mg company and TM [Trench Mortar] Battery and Field Company stood with regard to important stores and indents for all discrepancies passed.....The outstanding feature of this month has been the improvement in the supply of artillery stores.¹³³

In general, the 51st Division moved too often and fought too much to be able to develop any sustained progress in combined formation training away from the line. From March 1916 through to January 1917, the 51st, as a formation, was not out of the line ‘for more than ten days’,¹³⁴ and from that period, ‘The Division had been continually in the line since February, had fought for three days in the battle of 9th-12th April, and had only forty-eight hours’ rest before again taking over a battle front.’¹³⁵ It did have the debatable advantage of fighting often and that could be considered to be as valuable practical experience, but the casualties incurred prohibited tactical and training development beyond a certain level.

¹³² IWM, 89/7/1, Memoir of Lieutenant W. Paterson, p. 51.

¹³³ NA, WO 95 2853, 51st Division DADOS War Diary.

¹³⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 55.

¹³⁵ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 170.

Training under brigade or battalion whilst 'at rest' was also often problematic due to the nature of the sectors that the 51st inhabited. Lieutenant-Colonel M. Haldane of the 1/4th Seaforths emphasised what was to be a recurring factor, 'Training was to some extent interrupted by the chronic call for large working parties'.¹³⁶ An example of the fundamental problems and potentially disastrous consequences of this policy is evident by the amount of time the 51st Division spent on reworking its sector prior to the German March offensive in 1918 instead of training officers and men in defence in depth tactics. This was a recurrent difficulty throughout the war, as Maxse pointed out of his command in 1916:

the total casualties in my Division in the Battle of the Somme amounted to 6754. This is not a figure to boast about, because I am convinced that perhaps 30% of these casualties would have been avoided if officers and men had been trained more in open country...No Corps commander or corps staff could possibly have done more for my division to give it TIME to train, during the four months preceding 1st July. Plan after plan was made, every device thought out; all were alert to getting training accomplished. But our training programmes came to nothing; every plan was necessarily vetoed on account of our manual labour being required day and night whenever battalions were out of the trenches...No rest and no training were possible for Infantry, except during the one week.¹³⁷

Another problem, certainly in 1915 and in early 1916, was the lack of ammunition available for training purposes. Of the many examples in the (Highland) Division war diaries, the entry of 27-29 September 1915 sums up the scale of the problem, in that the 'Allowance of ammunition reduced to what is absolutely necessary for retaliation'.¹³⁸

As had been the case in Britain, the facilities for training the division were often found wanting. By the end of 1915, many formations in the BEF were beginning to adopt training in full scale replicas, often taking the form of facsimiles using tape to mark the various trench lines and strong points on similar ground to the objective. The (Highland) Division employed this technique at that time and continued to employ it until the end of

¹³⁶ M.M. Haldane, *A History of the Fourth Battalion The Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1927), p. 153.

¹³⁷ R. Bryson, 'The Once and Future Army', in B. Bond (ed), *Look to Your Front, Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst, 1999), p. 48.

¹³⁸ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, 27-29 September 1915.

the war. However, to utilise this training mechanism, units at rest needed access to training areas where they could lay out such a practice ground:

Large training areas were hired, and so that officers and men might form some impression of the German position, which they could not see, a large model was made, about the size of four tennis courts, in which hills, valleys, streams, houses, roads, woods, trenches, etc., were all accurately represented by models. Platforms were then erected at intervals round it, from which officers could point out to their men the appearance of the area which they could traverse during the operations.

In some battalions each platoon made similar models in the orchards round their billets, showing all the features in the area allotted to their companies for the attack.

An exact replica of the German trenches was also marked out with tracing-tapes on the training ground full size, in which every known trench and farm was represented. The troops were then practised on this course until they could find their way to their objectives according to plan, without any officers taking part in the exercise. The men were also carefully trained in the manner in which each post was to dig itself in during consolidation, and how to pile the earth as it was excavated, so that it at no time obscured their field of fire to the front.

The attack was not delivered until 31st July, so that the Division was given six weeks in which to make its preparations. During this period the plans for the operation, as well as the training of the troops, were perfected down to the minutest detail.¹³⁹

In theory, command areas, both in army and corps, should have had organised training areas to permit tactical exercises: in army areas, for a division; and in corps areas, for at least a brigade. F.W. Bewsher describes one such army area at Eperleques in June 1917, 'This district was a properly constituted training area, administered by the headquarters of the Second Army, in which troops were allowed full liberty of manoeuvre, and in which there were no restrictions as regards the digging of practice trenches, etc. Moreover, it contained first-class classification ranges up to 600 yards in length, with all the necessary appliances.' However, he went on to state that, 'This was the first occasion on which the Division had occupied an area in which adequate arrangements for training existed'.¹⁴⁰ Brigadier-General Pelham Burn also testified to the need for better organisation at army level:

The necessity for the provision of rifle ranges behind the lines cannot be over-estimated. Through lack of practice on the range it is still undoubtedly the fact that our men have not yet got entire confidence in their rifles. The necessity for ranges for Lewis Guns is even greater.

¹³⁹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 196-197.

¹⁴⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 192.

The large majority of Lewis Gunners go into action having never fired their weapons on ranges longer than 30 yards.¹⁴¹

The lack of organisation is also evidenced at corps level: 'Ranges in area indifferent, and it is most important that these should be made and their upkeep provided for by the Corps by means of Area Commandants with a small permanent staff of P.B. men'.¹⁴²

Casualties

The impact on the (Highland) Division of sustaining heavy casualties was substantial. The result was that training was often stymied due to the need to educate new recruits in the basic skills and tactics that were needed in order to survive on the Western Front.

The infantry battalions and their front line support units were damaged most consistently. For comparative purposes, it is interesting to view an account from divisional headquarters where casualties were far lighter and a continuity certainly sustained. Nicholson stated that, 'Our organisation in the 51st Division had been harmoniously evolved; as the war progressed so we improved'.¹⁴³ Such harmony was not possible for all units.

The 51st was fortunate that casualties were not consistently heavy in any of its units until after the battle of Beaumont Hamel in November 1916. This permitted the division to evolve and learn many of the lessons that had been developed by the BEF until that point. However, after then, the regular use of the division in attack resulted in reinforcements being needed more frequently and in greater quantity.

Even a battalion that was 'wiped out' in the field would retain a number of experienced personnel, as a cadre of men from each unit was left out during attacks to ensure a core continuity: 'A single action may reduce a unit by half; a series of actions may leave only a handful of veterans to rebuild a regiment, to train fresh troops, and to inspire them with the glories and traditions of past achievements'. MacKenzie went on to state:

¹⁴¹ NA, WO 95 2846, 152nd Brigade Report, 7 April 1918.

¹⁴² NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 1-9 May 1917.

¹⁴³ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, pp. 210-211.

In the months of April and May, the battle casualties of the 6th Battalion, excluding all cases of sickness were 632. During April, May and June 836 reinforcements were received. The losses in officers and NCOs had been particularly severe, and June and July were devoted to training and recuperating. The gallant behaviour of the Battalion in engagements later in the year is in itself the highest proof of the ability and energy shown by the training personnel-old and new-in restoring and maintaining the high spirit and resolute action which had distinguished the conduct of the battalion during the preceding two-and-a-half years.¹⁴⁴

However, new recruits meant an increased strain on the survivors, who already had busy schedules, and Sutherland stated that, in December 1916, five days were spent in training the new men in the battalion attack methods.¹⁴⁵ Bradbury concurred, 'We now received many drafts of new men, most of them raw recruits from England, and these additions caused us a great amount of extra work with the result that on the following day we had to work all night'.¹⁴⁶

In a formation like the (Highland) Division that was used consistently in attack for almost two years, the result was often that units were thrown into the fray without being able to learn and practise the lessons of the previous battle, as reported by Major-General Carter-Campbell after the March combat of 1918:

The Division having sustained 219 casualties to officers and 4646 O.Rs. in the operations concluding March 26th was, therefore, largely composed of fresh drafts, both of officers and other ranks, when it went into action on April 9th. It became evident during these operations that the officers and men were lacking in training in the elementary duties of an infantry soldier, and were unable to apply the lessons learnt. There was a conspicuous lack of confidence in the rifle and of the ability to use it effectively. The knowledge of the use of ground and cover, and of fire control, both on the part of officers and men, or small bodies of men without a leader, were devoid of initiative.¹⁴⁷

An excellent example of this lack of experience can be determined by an account from an officer of the King Edwards Horse, who with his unit was trapped by advancing German forces in April 1918:

¹⁴⁴ D. MacKenzie, *The 6th Gordons in France and Flanders* (Aberdeen, 1921), p. 121.

¹⁴⁵ Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 88.

¹⁴⁶ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 65.

¹⁴⁷ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division, Lessons Learnt from the operations from 9-15 April 1918.

I shall never forget the sight of them. The roads and the fields to the right were being heavily swept by bullets, and the grey coats were just beginning to show through the fence in our right rear; but the Scots came up the road at the double, as if nothing was happening, with their kilts swinging. It was a piece of the old decent warfare came back again. The leading platoon came right up to our parados and I shouted to them to swing over to help Ewbank. The rest dropped out in the fields forming a line at right angles to ours. Their officer, Captain Sutherland went back to look after them. I thought he was killed, but met him again in the evening. The Boche now began bombing us up the trench and were within a 100 yards of Headquarters. The Scots, raw drafts of youngsters just out from home, were like lost sheep without their officer and lay down in a lump behind the parados, and did nothing. Poor boys did not lack courage, but simply did not know what to do.¹⁴⁸

In conclusion, there is a common accord amongst scholars that there was a lack of appropriate and effective training in Britain during 1914-1915. Although relatively few studies exist that substantiate this view, the experience of the 51st (Highland) Division does indicate that it is correct. Upon its arrival in France in May 1915, the division was only partially trained in outdated techniques.

The failure to provide effective training in Britain was a result of inexperienced officers; inadequate training facilities and training conditions; poor quality (or lack of) equipment and ammunition; significant disruptions to formation and unit training caused by constant transfers of men, the Imperial Service commitment, and a redeployment of (Highland) Division units to other formations. In addition to this, the official War Office training syllabus was predominantly based on outdated pre-war training theories and programmes that Territorial officers and men of the (Highland) Division were incapable of fully understanding and employing irrespective of its value.

When the division arrived on the Western Front, there was little in the way of centrally- (GHQ, army, corps) directed training programmes and initiatives. Lessons that had been learned since the outbreak of the war had not yet been codified and circulated for adoption. However, that was as much a result of confusion over what lessons had been learned as it was an incapacity to organise and disseminate the information. The pre-war *Field Service Regulations* continued to provide a focus for training in the BEF, but it essentially took the form of a series of principles, rather than directives for practice.

¹⁴⁸ L. James (ed), *The History of King Edward's Horse* (London, 1921), pp. 287-8.

However, as the war progressed and the bureaucratisation of the BEF became more pronounced, there was an ever-increasing quantity of centrally distributed information on training and tactics (SS papers, memoranda, etc) which assisted in applying a degree of training standardisation. GHQ recognised that, by itself, the training literature was insufficient to guarantee unit and formation progress. To supplement the written material, GHQ and other tiers of the BEF command sponsored, organised, and participated in schools and courses of instruction for officers and men.

At different periods of the war (dependent on who commanded), corps and army had a greater or lesser influence over the training of divisions. However, the GOCs of divisions had the ultimate responsibility for the training of the formations under their command at all periods of the war. As a result formation training could often vary, even if there was an expectation that central guidelines (where applicable) would be applied.

The (Highland) Division GOCs certainly orchestrated the training of the 51st in different ways, but there were also similarities in some aspects of their approach. All were aware of the centralised guidelines (when they existed), all applied them, and all ensured that there was a dissemination of relevant information to at least senior commanders within the division. However, Harper was clearly more of a former and driver of training programmes than Bannatine-Allason.

Other officers within the division, such as the brigadier-generals and battalion commanders, could, and did, have significant influence over both the interpretation and application of centralised advice within the division, and the organisation of specific training programmes and training patterns.

The (Highland) Division did develop some advanced and progressive training methodologies during the war. The ability to achieve this was a result of the combination of: progressively-minded and effective senior officers; the ability of the division to focus on training for periods of time; the adherence to key principles of centrally issued advice;

a sustainable and manageable rate of casualties; and lessons learned from battles. The methodologies, such as those codified in Harper's 'Notes' were very probably copied and employed by other formations in the BEF.

Within the division, there were consistent attempts by headquarters to ensure that all units were trained to similar standards. This involved providing an equal measure of time for training both in and out of the line; organising and supporting divisional, brigade, and unit schools of instruction; and endorsing team-building pursuits such as sports competitions and tournaments.

However, casualties could, and did, have a negative impact on formation training. Even the most efficient training programme in a formation or unit was useless if the men were dead. The (Highland) Division would have been superbly trained in the arts of war from 1916-on had it sustained fewer casualties in 1917 and early 1918. The loss of so many well-trained, experienced soldiers had a negative impact on progressive training. As Nicholson wrote, 'The trouble was that for the next four years we did no more than perfect this limited knowledge; on the rare occasions when open warfare intervened we were but untrained self-opinionated soldiers'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 65.

Chapter 2 Recruitment and Reinforcement

This chapter will analyse the system of recruitment and reinforcement for the 51st (Highland) Division throughout the First World War and determine to what extent it was a significant influence on divisional performance. It will seek to demonstrate that the division was, to a large extent, originally composed of volunteers from the traditional recruiting grounds of regiments predominantly associated with the Highland region; that over the course of the war those traditional areas, as viable recruiting centres, became more and more unsustainable; that some units were affected more than others; that a high proportion of Scots was desirable, but not essential to maintain a particular (Highland) Division ethos; and that the system for reinforcing the (Highland) Division worked effectively until 1918.

In order to investigate the recruitment and reinforcement process for the 51st (Highland) Division, it is necessary to analyse: the provenance of units that served in the (Highland) Division; the proportion of men and officers who served in the formation throughout the war from areas traditionally associated with the Highlands; the drafting system and its role in the maintenance for recruitment and reinforcement; and the impact and effectiveness of the reinforcement process on the 51st whilst it served on the Western Front.

Territorial recruiting: provenance

Post-war popular sentiment, often found in secondary source materials such as regimental histories, clearly associated the units of the 51st (Highland) Division with the Highlands of Scotland. This popularised image tended to be rural and traditional, as evidenced by the lead article in *The Scotsman* from 29 September 1924, 'At the bidding of duty they forsook the quiet hills of home for the desolate fields of France and Flanders. The crofter, the fisherman, the miner, the gillie and the farm hand turned aside from the arts of peace to learn those of war'.¹ However, if the literal definition of the Highland region is taken to be the area to 'the north-west of Scotland, bordered geologically by the great fault running from Dumbarton to Stonehaven', or on an even more proscriptive basis, that which is 'ethnologically, the considerably narrower area in which Gaelic is or was recently spoken',² it is apparent that

¹ *The Scotsman*, 29 September 1924.

² *Chambers English Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 670.

many of the units that served in the (Highland) Division were formed from areas outside the Highlands.

In practice, however, the most potent factor in the formulation of the identity of the Highland units lay within.³ The regimental culture, *esprit de corps* and traditions, rooted in 18th century British military expansion, permitted the definition of 'Highland' in the case of the 51st Division to have a greater degree of flexibility. By the Great War period, it is clear that units in the division, such as the battalions of the Black Watch⁴ definitely associated themselves with the Highlands, even though some were actually recruited from Lowland areas. Major-General D.N. Wimberley, in a speech to the Black Watch Association in 1948, stated of the 1/7th Black Watch from Fife:

it is an added advantage to your Regiment that for so long you have included in your recruiting area certain territories which are predominantly Highland and Celtic and certain other territories which are and always have been Lowland, and a great strip of country between the two.⁵

Others such as 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, that recruited in Renfrewshire felt the same way. Crucially, it is no coincidence that all of those battalions that recruited in the Lowland areas actually bordered on the Highland Line, thus maintaining a clear geographical and psychological link.

Care must also be taken when attempting to define the traditional recruiting grounds of units in the 51st (Highland) Division due to a changing composition as the war progressed. The composition remained the same from the Territorial Force Act in 1908 until shortly after the post-mobilisation period in 1914 and during that time consisted of three brigades, all closely-linked Territorial units with strong Highland associations:

1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th, 1/7th Gordon Highlanders;

1/6th, 1/7th, 1/8th, and 1/9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders;

1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th Seaforths and 1/4th Cameron Highlanders.

³ E.A. Cameron, and J.M. Robertson, 'Fighting and Bleeding for the Land: The Scottish Highlands and the Great War', in C. MacDonald, and E. McFarland (eds), *Scotland and the Great War* (East Linton, 1999), p. 81.

⁴ Joined the division early in 1915.

⁵ National Library of Scotland, ACC 8681/137, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley, Speech to the Black Watch Association, 1948.

However, the composition altered a number of times during the course of the war⁶ due to the vagaries of units being posted to other formations or being amalgamated. Concomitantly, this resulted in a different combination of recruiting areas. The list of units below shows the regiments from the areas traditionally associated with the Highlands consistently predominated, whilst a high proportion were constants:

Fig. 4

1/4th Black Watch (Jan 1916-Feb 1916), 1/5th Black Watch (Jan 1916-Feb 1916), 1/6th Black Watch (April 1915-Nov 1918), 1/7th Black Watch (April 1915-Nov 1918)

1/4th Gordon Highlanders (Aug 1914-Feb 1915) (Feb 1916-Nov 1918), 1/5th Gordon Highlanders (Aug 1914-Feb 1918), 1/6th Gordon Highlanders (Aug-Nov 1914) (June 1916-amalgamation with 1/7th Gordons Oct 1918), 1/7th Gordon Highlanders (Aug 1914-amalgamation with 1/6th Gordon Highlanders Oct 1918)

1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Aug 1914-June 1916) (October 1918-Nov 1918), 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Aug-Dec 1914) (March 1916-Nov 1918), 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Aug 1914-Feb 1918), 1/9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Aug 1914- Feb 1915)

1/4th Seaforth Highlanders (Aug-Nov 1914) (Jan 1916-Nov 1918), 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders ((H) Division throughout), 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders ((H) Division throughout)

1/4th Cameron Highlanders (Aug 1914-Feb 1915) (Jan 1916-Feb 1916) disbanded and absorbed into 1st Battalion in March 1916.

1/4th Loyal North Lancaster Regiment, April 1915-Jan 1916

1/4th King's Own Lancaster Regiment, April 1915-Jan 1916

1/8th King's Liverpool Regiment, April 1915-Jan 1916

⁶ For a detailed analysis of the constitution of the division throughout the war, see Annexe 1.

2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, April 1915-July 1915

1/6th Cameronians (Scottish Rifles), June 1915-Feb 1916

1/8th Royal Scots, August 1915-Nov 1918

1/9th Royal Scots, March 1916-Feb 1918

From this composite list, a series of conclusions can be drawn. A number of units, such as the 1/9th Royal Scots or the 1/4th Gordons, were clearly not from the Highland region, but did have distinct associations with the Highland region.⁷ It is also evident that of the English units or the units not associated with the Highlands, the reasons for their inclusion were essentially pragmatic, with both the English and the Cameronian (Scottish Rifles) battalions replacing outgoing battalions due to the urgent need for the latter to fight in France and Belgium. It is also apparent from the list that as soon as possible the Territorial units with Highland associations returned. From this, we can determine that there was an official policy position for the 51st and that there were conscious efforts by the military authorities to retain a clear Territorial homogeneity for the division that was centred on the Highland region or on battalions closely associated with the Highland region.

Popular and traditional assumptions

Again, as with the composition of the formation, there was a popular assumption that certain Territorial battalions from regiments such as the Black Watch were composed and reinforced by men from a specific region. The Linklaters' view was a commonly held one:

Dundee was the home of the 4th; it was commanded by a Dundonian businessman, and the Dundee Courier reported the war through the eyes and letters of Black Watch men who before 1914 had worked in jute mills and jam factories in the city. In 1915, it was amalgamated with the 5th Battalion, which was drawn in general from Angus (Forfar) and in particular from the fishing villages on the coast and Arbroath, Montrose and Broughty Ferry..... Perthshire and the 6th Battalion were inseparately linked; unlike the others, the Jocks of the 6th Battalion were predominantly countrymen, officered in the traditional manner by landowners..... In Fife, as in Angus and Perthshire, the peacetime social and economic structure had put on khaki and the Black Watch tartan, but the 7th Battalion, which came from Fife, bore especially the imprint of just one

⁷ The 1/9th Royal Scots was known as 'The Dandy Ninth' due to it being the only kilted battalion in that regiment.

industry-coal; colliers, miners and pit managers gave it a character as distinct as each of the others, and, like them, a character that was notably close knit.⁸

Sources, whilst testifying to the camaraderie of the Territorial units, also emphasised the territorial homogeneity, suggesting that a large number of troops were familiar with one another and their local recruiting area:

From the first Volunteer Corps of the Highlands were distinguished by their emphasis on the ties of family and clan. Far more even than in England-where, in the Yeomanry regiments, leadership tended to be in the hands of the squirearchy-the volunteers paralleled in their military organisation the class pattern to which their lives as civilians conformed. Even after the Haldane Reforms, when so much had been done to prune the more excessive forms of parochialism, in recruitment the Highland Division savoured largely of the club. Even at company level units were comprised of men with similar interests, or drawn from one locality.⁹

There were many reasons for volunteering. However, a commonality in the enlistment process during the first year of the war was the feeling of loyalty felt by men, to town, county, or community. In Scotland, one obvious focus of this allegiance was the connection between regiments and geographical regions. Specific regiments were very recognisably defined as 'east coast or west coast and within this context there was always a tendency for individual counties, towns, or districts to align themselves with a particular Territorial battalion within a regimental recruiting district'. On the outbreak of war when and those Territorial forces were mobilised, family, friends, and colleagues, 'would, by preference, enlist in the local Territorial unit, reinforcing such allegiances as were already there, especially in the Highland regiments with their old clan loyalties'.¹⁰

Pre-war Territorial homogeneity

If it is accurate to state that this localism was a common trait in the units of the pre-war (Highland) Division, then it is vital to determine to what extent this was manifested in recruiting figures. By way of a contradiction to this assertion of a localised predominance, Derek Young gives statistics for the Regular units of Scottish regiments for 1891, which included the Black Watch, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the Royal Scots, the Highland Light Infantry, the Camerons, the Gordons, and the Seaforths, and the figures show

⁸ E. Linklater, and A. Linklater, *The Black Watch, History of the Royal Highland Regiment* (London, 1927), p. 143.

⁹ A.V. Sellwood, *The Saturday Night Soldiers* (London, 1966), p. 161.

¹⁰ D. Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914-1916' (Glasgow University Ph.D, 2001), p. 325.

that only 61.5% of the recruits were Scots with 32.9 % English and 4.3% Irish.¹¹ This does not outwardly support a localised recruitment focus for the regiments, but it is important to bear in mind that recruitment for the Regular Army was different from that of the Territorial Force.

However, even with this caveat in mind, the evidence for diversity in regimental recruiting is given further credence by Major-General Wimberley in a paper written after the Second World War on 'Recruiting Population in Scotland for the Scottish Infantry':

In the old days and for generations the Lowland Regiments went to England for the balance of their recruits, and the Highland Regiments who were short of men, went to the Lowlands. As is well known, there were long periods in their history when the Lowland regiments were dressed much as English infantry of the line, and almost ceased to bother whether the bulk of their ranks were filled with English, Irish or Scottish soldiers. Their percentage of Scotsmen was generally comparatively very low. Now, thanks to two great Wars, the Lowland regiments are once more closely knit to their (since 1888) [sic] recruiting areas, and as the Highland Regiments have always done, are now claiming to recruit Scottish soldiers equally with the Highland Brigade.¹²

For Regular battalions, the need to recruit in areas with a greater population base (such as Glasgow and Edinburgh) was perfectly pragmatic. Regiments with a smaller proportion of the population in their recruiting grounds, such as the Camerons, needed to be assisted by those in the better populated areas, such as the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders or the Royal Scots. The problem was not a new one and had been an issue for many years, but it had gradually become more accentuated as the population in the country areas steadily decreased, and the population in and near the towns correspondingly increased.

The population density and level of industrialisation were reflected in the nation's geography. The economy of the east coast was mainly reliant on fishing, coal, textiles and brewing, and, although it could be classed as an industrial area, east coast industrialisation was primarily light industry. The west coast was heavily industrialised. Its industry was centred on shipbuilding and heavy engineering, supported by an infrastructure of coalfields, iron and steel industries, and chemical works. As west coast industry grew and migrants travelled to the area in search of employment, peripheral and unrelated industries were attracted by the

¹¹ Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914-1916', p. 68.

¹² NLS, ACC 8681/167, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley. No specific date, but does refer to the 1951 census.

plentiful supply of available manpower. As a result, the western central belt of Scotland was the most densely populated section of the country.

Young asserts that the population density of an area directly impacted on the number of Territorial Force battalions that were created by regiments; of the thirty seven Territorial Force battalions extant at the outbreak of the war, those regiments whose recruiting area fell within an urban or industrial area provided, individually, a greater number of battalions. However, he goes on to state that Territorial recruitment in Scotland was not simply a matter of available numbers as almost 45 per cent of the Territorial infantry battalions came from rural or agricultural areas, with some seventeen battalions out of a total of thirty-seven. 'It would appear that Territorial Army recruitment, in Scotland at least, was not solely dependent on population density and distribution but also relied on cultural and social ties still firmly rooted in the old volunteer ethos.'¹³ To take this further and possibly contest Young's view, it will be essential to determine how many of the battalions that recruited from sparsely populated areas actually did so with the assistance of networks and recruiting offices outside the local area.

The population difference by region was reflected in the establishment figures for the Territorial Force in Scotland in 1911. However, in all areas the force was understrength, and the establishment figure of 54,619 had a shortfall of 9,554 (17.5 per cent) with a strength of only 45,065. By 1913 this shortfall had increased.

Fig. 5 Territorial strength in relation to regional male population in 1911:

City/town	Male Pop	TF Strength	% of male pop
Perth	58364	1379	2.36
Inverness	42440	1641	3.86
Aberdeen	147357	4152	2.81
Stirling	82335	669	0.81
Dundee	126638	2588	2.04
Ayr	130196	2339	1.79
Berwick	14192	285	2.0

¹³ Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914-1916', p. 79.

Glasgow	721369	12047	1.67
Edinburgh	235427	5314	2.25 ¹⁴

Although these are rough indicators, the evidence points to some regiments in the 51st Division having a greater number of potential recruits to choose from, whilst those in sparsely populated areas, following the pre-war trend, could still potentially supply a high proportion of recruits, but not necessarily a consistently high number over a period of time.

Reinforcement: was localism sustainable?

After mobilisation, increased stresses were placed on all regimental recruiting areas, but in particular on the areas that were less populated. For Territorial reinforcement, scholars have already questioned the assumption of the Territorial nature of recruitment for the whole British Army during the war. That the local character of units changed as a result of increased casualties, and that after the battle of the Somme in 1916 the localised identity of battalions had been all but destroyed, is now almost continually asserted by historians.¹⁵ Both Ian Beckett and Peter Simkins, in separate studies, have shown this to be the case for the Territorial units of the Buckinghamshire Regiment,¹⁶ and the 1/6th Cheshires respectively.¹⁷

For the (Highland) Division, it is essential to test the theory that recruitment predominantly originated, or otherwise, from the territorial areas of the constituent battalions and that the recruiting mechanisms continued, or otherwise, to maintain the flow of personnel during the war. To obtain a balanced result, it is necessary to take a representative sample from the battalions that served with the division.

Along with three Seaforth battalions, the 1/4th Cameron Highlanders was a part of a brigade in the division that mobilised in August 1914. The four brigaded battalions originated in traditional Highland recruiting areas, with the Camerons recruiting in Inverness. The selection of this battalion for sampling permits an investigation into a component part of the

¹⁴ Young, 'Voluntary Recruitment in Scotland, 1914-1916', pp. 76-78.

¹⁵ H. McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War' (Cambridge University Ph.D, 2000), p. 81.

¹⁶ I. Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', in I. Beckett, and K. Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms, A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), p. 147.

¹⁷ P. Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918', in P. Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 59.

51st during 1914 and early 1915. Although the battalion left the division in February 1915,¹⁸ before briefly returning in early January 1916,¹⁹ 1915 casualties would be predominantly indicative of the recruitment process whilst with the 51st. The inclusion of this battalion is also useful in that it will serve as a comparator with other units that served solely with the division and also that recruited from areas adjacent to Inverness-shire.

The 1/6th and 1/7th Black Watch will provide comparative data for the development of battalions recruited from the adjacent areas of Fife and Perthshire. These were predominantly Lowland areas that contained an agrarian/industrial mix and both operated within the 51st Division throughout its entire service on the Western Front.²⁰

The 1/4th and 1/5th Seaforths were both formed in a traditional Highland recruiting area with economies that were largely agrarian and rural. The two battalions were recruited from the adjacent areas of Ross-shire, and Caithness and Sutherland. The 1/4th Seaforths served with the division from August to November 1914, then again from January 1916 through the rest of the war,²¹ whilst the 1/5th Seaforths served with the division all the way through. Their inclusion will provide useful indicators into battalions that recruited in areas side by side, and that were closely linked to the 51st Division, but followed a slightly different military course throughout the war.

The 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders was selected to provide indicators to recruitment in the Lowland industrial region of Renfrewshire. The unit served in the 51st from mobilisation until June 1916, and again from October 1918 until the war ended.

Soldiers Died in the Great War,²² which names the soldiers who died during and immediately after the conflict, can enable us to determine the proportion of men who were born and enlisted in a particular region.

¹⁸ Joined 8th Division in Feb 1915, then 7th Division in April 1915.

¹⁹ It left again at the end of February 1916 and was absorbed into the 1st battalion.

²⁰ They served in the Black Watch brigade in Scotland prior to joining the 51st.

²¹ In November 1914, the battalion joined the 7th Division, then in November 1915 moved to the 46th Division, and in the same month moved again to the 15th Division.

²² CD-Rom, *Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919*, (Naval and Military Press Ltd).

The fact that during the First World War 557,618 Scotsmen enlisted in the British Army, accounting for 41.4% of men aged between 15 and 49, and that some 147,000 of those men sacrificed their lives, means that the sample is representative.²³

For the majority of the source, place of birth and enlistment are noted. This permits an analysis of the regional origin of the men recorded in the dataset. However, a caveat to the use of this material is that the calculated statistics reflect only those who were killed in action or died of their wounds, and do not provide evidence for every man who served in the formation.²⁴

The birthplace is representative of the regional affiliations of the men, because it accurately shows a longstanding territorial affiliation. The corroborative category of place of enlistment is also indicative of territorial familiarity as men would have had a desire to join a battalion with their friends, brothers and workmates. In most cases the men would have enlisted in the area in which they lived or in the city or region in which they were born and raised.²⁵ Webster is not an unusual subject when he indicated that he was driven to join the local Territorial Force by his peer group:

He had been with the firm about eight months and some of his workmates were already discussing arrangements for their summer holidays. He learnt that several were members of the Territorial Army and would be going to camps in July and August for a week or a fortnight and that leave to attend camp was in addition to their normal holiday period. This sounded attractive to young Webby and there and then he decided to make immediate enquiries at various drill halls to find if he could join.²⁶

Before the military service acts of 1916, each volunteer could exercise a degree of choice over the unit that they wanted to join, and most volunteers would probably have chosen to serve in a unit connected with their home district. Because of this, birth and the place of enlistment provides a reasonable indication of the number of men in each unit with close

²³ E. Spiers, 'The Scottish Soldier at War', in H. Cecil, and P. Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon* (London, 1996), p. 314.

²⁴ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War', p. 82.

²⁵ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War', p. 83.

²⁶ IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 13.

links to the local area and the interpretation of the dataset in this way constitutes a consistently reliable source of information provided in *Soldiers Died in the Great War*.²⁷

The evidence will be presented in the form of monthly tables for each year indicating whether the recruit was born or enlisted in the local recruiting area (Reg), the wider Scottish community (Scot), or from outside Scotland (Oth). A subsequent interpretation will determine what proportion of the soldiers who died were born or enlisted in the local recruiting area.

To understand and interpret the data fully, it is necessary to recognise beforehand that there were general trends that affected all Territorial battalions in the British Army. Some of those, such as the military service acts, occurred at one time and affected the whole army simultaneously, whilst others, such as battles, were specific and localised to units and formations.

The Territorial Force did get a recruiting boost in Scotland after mobilisation, a boost that continued on a decreasing curve until late 1915. Voluntary recruitment could not be sustained indefinitely and the government introduced the Derby Scheme in order to avoid implementing conscription. Recruits who participated in the Derby Scheme, which ran from October to December 1915, indicated that they would fight if called upon to do so. The adult male population was divided up according to its age, marital status and occupation, and those that joined the scheme gave their consent to serve (single men first).²⁸ By January 1916, the scheme was deemed a failure as an insufficient number of single men had come forward. As a result, Parliament passed the first Military Service Act in January 1916, which authorised the conscription of single men. By May of the same year, all men between the ages of 18 and 41 became liable for military service as conscription was extended. If Ian Beckett and Peter Simkins are correct, and as conscripts were used as reinforcements to already formed units, there should be indications of a shift in the number of soldiers recorded in the dataset for the 51st Division reflecting a wider recruiting base from mid-1916.

²⁷ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War', p. 83.

²⁸ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War 1914-1918* (London, 1989), p. 121.

Enlistment, whether voluntary or conscripted, exceeded wastage until the end of 1917 when the need for increased numbers of reinforcements proved unsustainable.

For trends specific and local to recruitment and reinforcement for battalions of the (Highland) Division, we must primarily consider the engagements that the formation was involved in as they had an impact on the numbers of recorded fatalities. The key dates for these battles were:

Fig. 6

June	1915	Givenchy
July	1916	High Wood
Nov	1916	Beaumont Hamel
April	1917	Arras, and The Scarpe
May	1917	Roeux
July	1917	Third Ypres
Sept	1917	Third Ypres
Nov	1917	Cambrai
March	1918	German Offensive
April	1918	The Lys
July	1918	The Marne
Aug	1918	The Scarpe
Sept	1918	The Scarpe
Oct	1918	Final advance from Cambrai.

Naturally, the datasets for all the battalions under analysis show increased fatalities during those months.

1/4th Cameron Highlanders

There were 262 recorded deaths in *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the 1/4th Camerons. The figure is relatively low due to the absorption of the unit into 1/1st Camerons during 1916, in itself an indicator that recruitment and reinforcement was unsustainable for this battalion. Place of enlistment is the most consistent record for the 1/4th with 248 recorded enlistments, whilst there are only 142 records for the place of birth. Both of these figures reflect the pre-absorption period (August 1914 to February 1916) and 14 additional soldiers were killed after

absorption. The overall figure for place of enlistment is 182 Regional, 18 Scottish, and 48 Other, whilst the overall figure for recorded place of birth is 100 Regional, 41 Scottish, and 1 Other.

Both records indicate that the death rate for the 1/4th Camerons grew substantially in 1915.

Births:

Both 1914 and 1915 show almost 3/4 of the soldiers recorded were recruited from Invernessshire (77.52% and 70.92%), with the remainder being from wider Scotland (22.22% and 28.99%). Only in 1916 is one soldier from an Other area.

Enlistments:

In 1914 100% of enlistments were recorded as regional. By 1915, this percentage had decreased to almost 3/4 from the regions (72.99%), with a representation of 7.24% from wider Scotland. Interestingly, for the same year almost a 1/4 of men were recruited from Other areas (19.57%) and in 1916, almost 2/3 were recruited from Other areas (66.67%).

All recruits from the Other areas actually enlisted in Middlesex. However, the statistics for births for 1915 and 1916 would indicate that Middlesex was a recruiting area for the Camerons that specifically targeted Scotsmen.

Fig. 7

1914

Born

	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	Prop
Reg	1				6	7	77.52%
Scot					2	2	22.22%
Oth						-	
						9	

1915

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	12	2	18	1	43	2			11	4			93	70.92%
Scot			4		14	7	1		10	1	1		38	28.99%
Oth													-	
													131	

1916

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg													-	
Scot		1											1	50%
Oth	1												1	50%
													2	

1914

Enlisted

	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	Prop
Reg	1		1		8	10	100%
Scot						-	
Oth						-	
						10	

1915

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	13	3	23	1	88	10	1	1	25	5	2		172	72.99%
Scot			2	1	4	3	1		6				17	7.24%
Oth			10	1	19	4		1	8	3			46	19.57%
													235	

1916

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg													-	
Scot		1											1	33.33%
Oth	1	1											2	66.67%
													3	

1/6th Black Watch

There were 954 recorded deaths in *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the 1/6th Black Watch. Place of birth and place of enlistment are almost equal in number with 953 born and 950 enlisted. The overall figure for place of enlistment was 495 Regional, 375 Scottish, and 80 Other, whilst the overall figure for recorded place of birth was 359 Regional, 471 Scottish, and 123 Other.

Both records indicate that the death rate for the 1/6th Black Watch grew year on year.

Births:

Both 1915 and 1916 show that the largest percentage of the soldiers recorded were recruited from Perthshire (61.35% and 66.67%), with large percentages also originating from wider Scotland (19.31% and 20.88%), and Other areas (19.31% and 12.5%). However, in 1917 and 1918, the largest percentages were from wider Scotland (58.48% and 66.67%) whilst the battalion still retained a significant number from Perthshire (29.24% and 21.05%). Throughout the war, there was a consistent number from Other areas (19.31%, 12.05%, 12.3%, and 12.2%).

Enlistments:

In 1915 and 1916, the largest percentage of recorded enlistments took place in the Region (90.91% and 87.82%), but by 1917 and 1918, the bulk of the recorded recruitment took place in wider Scotland (49.26% and 60.24%). There was a consistency of recruitment from Other areas throughout the war (8.77%, 6.07%, 8.46% and 9.89%).

Fig. 8

1915

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg					1	13	1	10	3	1	2	4	35	61.35%
Scot						5	1	2		1	1	1	11	19.31%
Oth					1	3	4	1	1		1		11	19.31%
													57	.

1916

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	2		4	4	2	11	78	10	14	2	37	2	166	66.67%
Scot				1		2	13	3	1		30	2	52	20.88%
Oth		1		1			19	1	3	2	4		31	12.05%
													249	

1917

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	3		2	29	4	1	24	2	2	2	5	2	76	29.24%
Scot	2		7	49	12	3	46	8	13	5	6	1	152	58.48%
Oth			2	17	2		6	1	2	2			32	12.3%
													260	

1918

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1		25	7	15	1	17	5	3	6	1		81	21.05%
Scot			62	44	10	3	70	17	8	37	5		256	66.67%
Oth			9	7	2	1	14		1	13	1		48	12.2%
													385	

1915

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg					2	20	5	13	3	2	2	5	52	90.91%
Scot													-	
Oth						1	1		1		2		5	8.77%
													57	

1916

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	2	1	4	5	2	13	99	13	17	3	56	2	217	87.72%
Scot							2				11	2	15	6.07%
Oth				1			8	1	1	1	3		15	6.07%
													247	

1917

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	3		3	43	9	2	29	4	5	4	6	2	110	42.37%
Scot	2		7	40	9	2	41	6	11	4	5	1	128	49.26%
Oth			1	12			6	1	1	1			22	8.46%
													260	

1918

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1		39	14	15	1	24	6	3	10	1		114	29.67%
Scot			49	38	10	3	68	16	8	35	5		232	60.24%
Oth			8	6	2	1	9		1	10	1		38	9.89%
													384	

1/7th Black Watch

There were 755 recorded deaths in *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the 1/7th Black Watch. The recorded number for place of enlistment and place of birth is almost equal with 752 enlistments and 746 Births. The overall figure for place of enlistment is 354 Regional, 356 Scottish, and 42 Other, whilst the overall figure for place of birth is 258 Regional, 431 Scottish, and 57 Other.

Both records indicate that there was a year on year increase in fatalities.

Births:

There was only 1 fatality in 1914, but in 1915 66.23% were born in the Region, whilst a large proportion (30.4%) was from wider Scotland. 1916 also had a large proportion from the Region (54.64%), but an increasing number of fatalities were recorded from wider Scotland (41.67%). By 1917 and 1918, there was proportionally more recruitment from wider Scotland (65.36% and 65.79%). However there was still quite a large proportion from the Region (25.19% and 24.63%).

Enlistments:

1914 and 1915 fatalities were all from the Region. In 1916, the highest proportion of enlistments were from the Region at 74.07%, but by 1917 and 1918 there were greater proportions from wider Scotland (56.18% and 62.5 %). Fatalities recorded from Other were low throughout.

Fig. 9

1914

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg										1			1	100%
Scot													-	
Oth													-	
													1	

1915

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1		1	1	6	15	6	1	3	2		1	37	66.23%
Scot						7	3	4	2	1			17	30.4%
Oth						1	1						2	3.57%
													56	

1916

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	2	1	3	3	8	9	29	2	4	7	15	6	89	54.64%
Scot	1	1		1	3	4	20	5	3	9	17	4	68	41.67%
Oth							4		1		1		6	3.68%
													163	

1917

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	3		3	39	1	2	3	1	7			1	60	25.19%
Scot	4		6	100	9	4	12	6	7	2	13	2	156	65.36%
Oth			1	15	1	1	2		1			1	22	9.24%
													238	

1918

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			33	9	4	2	10	3	2	6	2		71	24.63%
Scot		1	69	36	10	2	31	13	7	19	2		190	65.79%
Oth	1	1	14	3			2	1	1	2	2		27	9.37%
													288	

1914

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg										1			1	100%
Scot													-	
Oth													-	
													1	

1915

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1		1	1	6	23	10	5	5	3		1	56	100%
Scot													-	
Oth													-	
													56	

1916

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	3	2	3	4	9	13	44	4	4	9	18	7	120	74.07%
Scot					2		6	3	3	7	14	3	38	23.47%
Oth							2		1		1		4	2.47%
													162	

1917

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	3		4	60	2	3	5	3	8		3		91	36.9%
Scot	4		5	86	8	3	10	4	6	2	8	3	139	56.18%
Oth			1	8	1	1	2		1		2	1	17	6.88%
													247	

1918

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			40	11	4	1	13	4	2	8	3		86	30.03%
Scot	1	2	62	34	10	3	29	13	7	15	3		179	62.5%
Oth			12	3			1		1	4			21	7.34%
													286	

1/4th Seaforths

There were 994 recorded deaths in *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders.

The recorded number for place of enlistment is greater with 989 as opposed to 762 places of birth. The overall figure for place of enlistment was 253 Regional, 386 Scottish, and 350 Other, whilst the overall figure for recorded place of birth was 167 Regional, 348 Scottish, and 247 Other.

Both records indicate that the death rate varied year on year.

Births:

In 1914 there was only 1 recorded death, but in 1915 fatalities were predominantly from the Region with 62.89%. By 1916 this had significantly altered to 59.17% Others. 1917 and 1918 had the greatest proportion of wider Scotland (48.08% and 66.23%), but with a substantial amount of Others (34.72% and 28.49%).

Enlistments:

1915 had a large proportion of Others (38.61%), but recruits were predominantly from the Region (58.82%). By 1916 this had changed to 54.95% (Others) in contrast to 31.55% from the Region. 1917 and 1918 had the greatest proportion from wider Scotland (46.95% and 64.52%), with a significant proportion from Other (33.78% and 26.04%) and Region (19.16% and 9.24%).

2 died in 1919, both born in the Region but enlisting elsewhere in Scotland. Another died in May 1920, having enlisted in St Albans.

Fig. 10

1914

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg													-	
Scot												1	1	100%
Oth													-	
													1	

1915

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	2	3	35	2	28	2	1		2	1	3	1	80	62.89%
Scot			8		13			1	2		1	1	26	20.49%
Oth			7	2	10		1				1		21	16.53%
													127	

1916

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg				1		3	7	2	1		6	2	22	24.15%
Scot				1		2	3	1			4	4	15	16.47%
Oth			1		2	6	15	4	2	1	14	9	54	59.17%
													91	

1917

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			1	25	5			5	6	1	6		49	17.18%
Scot			2	36	2	1	3	13	30	2	42	6	137	48.08%
Oth	1			34	5		6	6	22	3	18	4	99	34.72%
													285	

1918

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			6	1	1		1			4	1		14	5.47%
Scot			37	42	4	6	44	4	3	24	4	1	169	66.23%
Oth			16	10	1	2	13	1	1	24	5		73	28.49%
													256	

1914

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg												1	1	100%
Scot													-	
Oth													-	
													1	

1915

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	3	3	45	2	43	2	2	2	4	2	4	2	114	58.82%
Scot		1			1	1		1		1			5	2.63%
Oth	1		13	3	49	1	1	1	2	2	2		75	38.61%
													194	

1916

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			1	2		6	14	5	1	2	8	3	42	31.55%
Scot				2		2	5	1			4	4	18	13.53%
Oth	2		2		2	11	19	5	2	1	19	10	73	54.95%
													133	

1917

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			2	32	6			11	9	1	7		68	19.16%
Scot			1	45	2	1	4	12	42	2	51	7	167	46.95%
Oth	1			44	6	1	6	6	26	6	20	5	120	33.78%
													355	

1918

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			7	3	1	1	5			6	5		28	9.24%
Scot			43	47	6	6	53	4	3	31	2	1	196	64.52%
Oth			20	9	1	5	13	2	1	27	1		79	26.04%
													303	

1/5th Seaforths

There were 872 recorded deaths in *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the 1/5th Seaforths.

The recorded number for place of enlistment was greater than place of birth by 860 to 607.

The overall recorded figure for place of enlistment was 216 Regional, 416 Scottish, and 225 Other, whilst the overall recorded figure for place of birth was 149 Regional, 353 Scottish, and 105 Other.

Both recorded figures indicate a year on year increase in fatalities.

Births:

There was only 1 fatality in 1914, but in 1915 62.89% were from the Region, with 36.9% from wider Scotland. 1916 shows a similar pattern, but with an increase from Other (up to 14.45% from 0). 1917 and 1918 showed fewer fatalities from the Region (19.27% and 10.16%), with the biggest majority from wider Scotland (63.69% and 68.03%), closely followed by Other (17.04% and 21.93%).

Enlistments:

1915 had enlistment spread fairly evenly, but with the majority in Region (46.3%) and a large proportion from Other (30.49%). A similar pattern was evident in 1916, with Other increasing to 35.21%. 1917 and 1918 had the majority from wider Scotland (58.14% and 63.69%).

3 died in 1919. 1 enlisted in Stirling; another in Middlesex, and the last was born and enlisted in Lanark.

Fig. 11

1914

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg											1		1	100%
Scot													-	
Oth													-	
													1	

1915

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	5	1				19			2			2	29	62.89%
Scot	8	1		2	2	2	2						17	36.9%
Oth													-	
													46	

1916

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			1	1	2	2	3	1	2	4	30	5	51	56.82%
Scot							1		1	1	16	7	26	28.9%
Oth	1		1				2			1	8		13	14.45%
													90	

1917

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg				22	5		2	2	7	2	2	1	43	19.27%
Scot			1	37	31		20	2	40	1	9	1	142	63.69%
Oth				11	3		9	1	9	3	2		38	17.04%
													223	

1918

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			16	3			1	3		2			25	10.16%
Scot	1	2	35	18	2	1	45	18	1	42	1	1	167	68.03%
Oth			4	5	1		8	3	2	29	2		54	21.93%
													246	

1914

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg											1		1	100%
Scot													-	
Oth													-	
													1	

1915

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	5					24	2	1	2		2	2	38	46.3%
Scot	8	2		2	3	2	1	1					19	23.15%
Oth			1		2	14	3	1	2			2	25	30.49%
													82	

1916

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			1	4	3	4	7	2	4	6	48	4	83	42.37%
Scot	1		1		1	2	2	1		1	26	9	44	22.47%
Oth	2		2	1	4	7	11	6	6	4	25	1	69	35.21%
													196	

1917

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			1	23	9		4	2	12	1	2	4	58	21.19%
Scot		1		41	32		24	3	46	3	9		159	58.14%
Oth		1		20	9		10	2	10	3	2		57	20.79%
													274	

1918

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			23	3			5	3	1	1			36	11.85
Scot	1	2	38	24	3	3	55	17	2	48		1	194	63.69
Oth		1	10	9	1	1	10	6	2	32	2		74	24.33
													304	

1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

There were 320 recorded deaths in *Soldiers Died in the Great War* for the 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

The recorded number for place of enlistment was greater than place of birth with 320 as opposed to 246. The overall figure for place of enlistment was 245 Regional, 69 Scottish, and 5 Other, whilst the overall figures for place of birth were 140 Regional, 88 Scottish, and 18 Other.

Both records indicate fairly steady death rates over the war.

Births:

The figures throughout the war showed limited change. From 1915 to 1917, there was 67.11%, 63.69%, and 61.73% from the Region, and 25.45%, 30.4%, and 31.65% from wider

Scotland. It was only in 1918 that significant changes occurred, with wider Scotland providing 55.87%.

Enlistments:

Both 1915 and 1916 showed 98.4% and 86.21% of Regional enlistment. However, through 1917 and 1918, the proportion decreased to 71.94% and 52.63%, whilst the proportion from wider Scotland rose in 1917 (25.64%) and 1918 (43.67%).

One man died in 1919 who was born and enlisted in Renfrewshire.

Fig. 12

1914

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg													-	
Scot													-	
Oth													-	

1915

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			2		3	17	6	4		4		1	37	67.11%
Scot					3	6	1	3	1				14	25.45%
Oth			1			2		1					4	7.27%
													55	

1916

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			17	4	3		10	1	5	1		2	44	63.69%
Scot			4	1			4	3	6	2		1	21	30.4%
Oth			1				1		2				4	5.8%
													69	

1917

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1		3	5	13	1		1	3	10			37	61.73%
Scot			5	1	7		1	2		3			19	31.65%
Oth			1							1	1	1	4	6.67%
													60	

1918

Born

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			1	5		1	1	1		12			21	34.48%
Scot			1	4	1	2	2	2	2	19	1		34	55.87%
Oth				1	1					4			6	9.83%
													61	

1914

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg													-	
Scot													-	
Oth													-	

1915

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			3		7	31	7	10	1	5	1	1	66	98.04%
Scot						1							1	1.49%
Oth													-	
													67	

1916

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg			33	11	3		15	3	9	2		3	79	86.21%
Scot							2	1	8	1		1	13	14.12%
Oth													-	
													92	

1917

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1	2	9	6	17	1	2	2	3	16			59	71.94%
Scot			2	1	6		2	1	1	4	3	1	21	25.64%
Oth			2										2	2.44%
													82	

1918

Enlisted

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Tot	Prop
Reg	1		1	8	1	2	3	2	2	19	2		41	52.63%
Scot			2	3	1	1	2	2	2	20	1		34	43.67%
Oth					1					2			3	3.85%
													78	

Although, there is some slight variation, the analysis of the data for place of birth for the selected battalions indicates that in 1914, 1915, and 1916, the units were composed of men predominantly, but not entirely, from the local recruiting area. However, it is also clear that on a yearly basis, the proportion of men from the local areas decreased.

The Territorial Association in Elgin minuted in March 1915 that:

with the possible exception of towns in the County, they did not think it would be possible to obtain more recruits in the district, the County being practically drained of men of serviceable age, including mechanics, tradesmen, farm servants, labourers, etc. In these circumstances it was decided that it would be advisable to recruit outside the district. The Secretary explained that he had had certain communications with the Authorities a short time ago, with a view of obtaining permission to recruit in the London area, but without success. The meeting, however, thought that a further attempt should be made to obtain the necessary consents, and the Secretary was instructed to ascertain if permission would be granted to recruit in the London area, which was considered the most desirable for the purpose.²⁹

By 23 August 1915, a letter:

was submitted from the Secretary of the County of the City of Aberdeen Territorial Force Association, dated 21st inst., intimating that his Association and the Northern Counties Association have agreed to recruit in each other's areas, and asking if the same facilities would be given to their Association in Elgin if they open the City of Aberdeen to the Elginshire Association. The meeting agreed to comply to the request.³⁰

This indicates that the widening of recruiting for many units in the (Highland) Division had started long before Beckett's assertion that the conscription phase was the root cause of the widespread changes in recruiting patterns.

Fuller was correct to maintain that:

Moreover, even the truly Highland element steadily diminished. Back home, men were scarce, agriculture could spare only a limited proportion of its labour force, and the Highlands, with few focuses of social life, had already before the war enlisted a higher proportion of the population in the Territorials than any other region. When these first battalions wasted, there were few Gaels to replenish them. The 1/4th (Ross and Cromarty) Seaforth Highlanders had started the war with at least 25 per cent of the battalion having Gaelic as their mother tongue. Already, by the end of

²⁹ National Archive of Scotland, MD8/3, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Elgin.

³⁰ NAS, MD8/3, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Elgin.

1915, 'it was less characteristically a Highland battalion and was becoming more like a Regular unit, filled with men from all parts of the country.'³¹

All of the battalions also show a marked decrease in the number of men recruited from the local areas during 1916, indicating that the system for reinforcement to the units of the (Highland) Division was undergoing a change. This could suggest that the local areas were simply running out of men to recruit, but is also an indicator that the conscription process was having a marked impact on the traditional recruiting patterns. The Seaforth and Cameron battalions in particular, due to the scarcity of men in the local areas, experienced the most striking transformation by taking in many men from outside, and this resulted in the Cameron battalion being absorbed by 1/1st Camerons due to a lack of men.

By 1917, the representative units all experienced a shift from a majority of serving soldiers recruited in the local area to a majority from wider Scotland, with the exception of the 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The disparity between the Argylls and the rest was due to the Argylls becoming a pioneer unit in 1916 and thus incurring fewer casualties, concomitantly needing less reinforcements. There were some variations in the number of recruits from outside Scotland, but considerable numbers were evident throughout.

By 1918, the shortage of manpower from specific areas, and the increasing strains on the reinforcement system led to even fewer local men serving in the local battalions of the division and it is no surprise to find that the Seaforths (that recruited from an area with a low population density) had the fewest men from the traditional recruiting areas.

The data for place of enlistment corroborates the evidence provided by place of birth and the subsequent analysis. It shows that the units from the sparsely populated areas increasingly focused on recruiting from outside the local area to maintain the battalion establishment. It also shows that the increased focus was disproportionate to that of other areas where population density was greater.

By 1917, the data indicates that the ability to enlist for a particular battalion was not physically confined to small numbers of recruiting stations, but through the general service

³¹ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 163-164.

process was opened to other potential recruits in many areas. This is even more apparent by 1918, as all the selected units had a greater proportion of enlistments from outwith the local area.

The evidence contradicts both Ian Beckett and Peter Simpkins and agrees with Helen McCartney, in that local areas were still a focus for recruitment after conscription, although there were variations in the most sparsely populated areas. Although the proportion of recruits from local areas diminished during and after 1916, the real impact of a dilution in local recruitment was not critical until 1918, but that impacted most severely on units from areas with a low density of population.

Impact of conscription

For this consistency in reinforcement to continue throughout the war, the military authorities had to have recognised the value of local, regional, and national allegiances in Scotland. An analysis of the drafting system is essential to verify that the relative consistency in the 51st Division was not a product of chance, but was, in line with McCartney,³² a result of a more systematic drafting policy. It is significant that a large percentage of the total manpower in all the battalions investigated came from specific regions of Scotland and we have seen through battalion analysis that there was a conscious attempt to keep the majority of the 51st Division Scottish.

It has been shown that during the pre-war period, recruitment in a number of regimental areas was problematic given population limitations. During the war, this was exacerbated by heavy casualties and a demand for urgent reinforcements from all areas. This placed stresses on both the voluntary and conscript systems which only increased as the war progressed and casualties mounted. As early as 22 June 1915, the Territorial Association in Aberdeen was moved to write of its concerns to the military authorities:

it was decided to intimate to the Army Council, also to the Glasgow Associations, that this Association is in sympathy with the views expressed in the communication from the Lord

³² McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War'. p. 89.

Lieutenant of the County of the City of Glasgow to the Secretary of State urging that Highland battalions should retain their identity.³³

In his article on the Irish formations, Perry stated that almost all battalions in the British Army found it difficult to maintain a localised identity as the war progressed, emphasising that the situation was particularly acute in Ireland.³⁴

By mid-1916, the 51st Division had only been involved in a limited number of engagements and had sustained manageable casualty rates. This permitted the system for recruitment and reinforcement under the voluntary system to function adequately as the stresses were containable. In early 1916, after a stay in a convalescent camp, Major Anderson returned to the front line from Etaples with a new batch of recruits. He automatically returned to his original battalion and stated that other drafts were still going to battalions that they would have expected to be sent to.³⁵ However, as the division became more active and casualties grew, the system became harder to sustain.

The evidence also indicates temporary abnormalities to the system of reinforcement for the 51st Division after a conflict. Wauchope stated of a draft, that 'for the first time in the battalion's history' other regiments were included. However, he went on to add that the system returned to normality with reinforcements issuing from the parent regiment.³⁶

It is clear that the War Office and GHQ valued Scottish homogeneity in a particular way and attempted to maintain it. Bradbury testified to the dedication of the system in ensuring that drafts from Scottish third-line battalions reached Scottish front line units. He enlisted through the Derby Scheme on 12 November 1915 and joined the 3/4th Cameron Highlanders and was included in a draft to France in mid-1916. Upon arrival at Boulogne, the draft was informed that the front line Cameron battalion was to be broken up and that:

we would be transferred to a line Regiment. We were given two or three regiments to choose from (all Scottish) and I chose the 5th Gordons and received a new number and a Gordon cap badge with

³³ NAS, MD4/2, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Aberdeen, 22 June 1915.

³⁴ N. Perry, 'Maintaining Regimental Identity in the Great War: The Case of the Irish Regiments', in *Stand To*, No. 52, p. 5.

³⁵ IWM, 85/23/1, The Journal of Major A. Anderson.

³⁶ A.G. Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Vol II* (London, 1926), p. 301.

colours but in the afternoon several of us were told that there were too many in that Regiment and so were posted to the 5th Seaforths.³⁷

The policy of channelling Scottish recruits to Scottish units did not only operate at a high command level, as the then Captain Wimberley stated when he had ‘scoured high and low for Jocks and over 50% were’³⁸ in his 232 Machine Gun Company in 1917. However, the strains on the system became acute in 1918 as the machinery for reinforcement began to break down. Wimberley stated that by March 1918, although the officers in his Machine Gun unit were mainly Scots, the other ranks were 75% English.³⁹ The following month, the system that had been created by GHQ with regards Scottish reinforcements to Scottish units did actually break down.⁴⁰ At the depot near Calais:

On 20th April armed men wearing arm-bands with S.W.C. on them (Soldiers’ and Workers’ Council) attacked the camp and herded all officers into the canteen where we were held prisoners.....all night and next day, while our guards told us it was the Communist Revolution, that the bulk of the troops had joined them and that we would be shot if the revolt was spread and successful.....On 22nd April a Cavalry division surrounded the Depot and troops of the 19th Corps surged in and quelled the mutiny disarming the mutineers, whose leaders were tried at once by summary court-martial and those convicted taken out and shot. So ended the attempted revolution. The organisers had chosen “M” Scottish Depot as their primary target as they knew that the Scottish soldiers were very angry at an order that they must in future serve with any regiment, not necessarily Scottish.⁴¹

Following on from this, Christison recorded that:

On 27th July I heard there had been trouble at “M” (Scottish) depot at Calais. Men were refusing to obey the National Service Act which made it possible to post men to any Regiment that needed reinforcements. Next day we were ordered to move back and take over 823 mutineers and 19 officers of various Highland Regiments. This we did and entrained them disembarking that night at Arneke. I was told these men had refused to entrain for the front unless they were given assurances that they would serve with their own regiments. There were many others in the protest.....Once a week a Senior Staff Officer from GHQ came and tried to persuade the men to obey orders, but they would have none of it. He said all those who obeyed would be granted a free pardon. I then had to call on those who agreed to step forward. None did, and he went sadly away. All the men were thoroughly respectful and the discipline excellent. They were loyal in every other way, and most grateful for any little thing we could do for them. After about 6 weeks the High Command gave in. Their last effort was to send the Army Commander to address them. He got no change. “Damn it”, he said to me “You and I are with them in this nonsense”. I think he saw Sir Douglas Haig

³⁷ IWM, 81/35/1, The Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 14.

³⁸ NLS, ACC 6119/1, ‘A Scottish Soldier’, Volume I, p. 59..

³⁹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, ‘A Scottish Soldier’, Volume I, p. 104.

⁴⁰ In 1917, GHQ ordered that English reinforcements could be transferred to Scots regiments if necessary. However, and crucially, Scots reinforcements could not be transferred to English units.

⁴¹ IWM, 82/15/1, The Memoir of General Sir P. Christison, p. 70.

personally. I took the Battalion back to Calais and they all got their postings to their own regiments. How foolish can the administrative "A" branch be.⁴²

This is highly significant and a number of points are evident. Until early 1918, Scottish troops did not expect the military authorities to post them to non-Scottish units, and the strength of feeling amongst Scottish soldiers at the change of posting policy was potent enough to create a focus for revolt and insurrection. In July 1918, the military authorities did actually back down in the face of mass dissent, and the system of reinforcement returned to the pre-1918 norm of Scottish troops to Scottish units.

It is worth contrasting the April 1918 revolt at Calais with its more infamous September 1917 forerunner at Etaples, where the scenes of disruption and unrest lasted almost a week before they were quelled by the military authorities. Gloden Dallas and Douglas Gill have described the incident at Etaples, which was centred around ANZAC and Scottish troops, as one which was a result of general discontent with the war, the camp and its conditions, the harsh regime in the camp, and the transitory nature of the place.⁴³ David Englander in his chapter on 'Mutinies and Military Morale' in the *Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* considers that, in general, the 1917 period was one of increasing restlessness for British (and other) troops on the Western Front (also reflected in civilian discord in Britain), and sets that as a context for the riots at Etaples.⁴⁴ That neither of these sources refer to the reinforcement process would suggest that it was indeed, as Christison stated, a 1918 issue.

Interestingly, Dallas and Gill continue their discourse referring to the troubles at 'M' Scottish Depot at Calais in July and September 1918 (whereas Christison's account refers to April and July 1918). Again, there is no mention of any issue with reinforcement, when clearly there was, and the authors seem content to conclude that the unrest was caused by general anxiety and the need for the war to end.⁴⁵

⁴² IWM, 82/15/1, The Memoir of General Sir P. Christison, p. 72.

⁴³ G. Dallas, and D. Gill, *The Unknown Army* (London, 1985), pp. 63-76.

⁴⁴ D. Englander, 'Mutinies and Military Morale', in H. Strachan (ed), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War* (Oxford, 1998), p. 196.

Officer recruitment and reinforcement

In order to understand fully the recruitment and reinforcement process within the 51st (Highland) Division, it is also necessary to examine the officer class and the proportion of it that was associated with Highland and wider Scottish regiments.

The pre-war Territorial divisions were commanded by professional officers from the Regular Army. Senior staff positions were also held by Regular Army officers, and infantry and artillery units usually had a Regular adjutant and Regular NCO instructors. All other officers up to the rank of battalion commanding officer held Territorial commissions and were usually figures of some local significance and standing in the community.

For a Regular Army commission, there were five pre-war routes of entry and these were through the: Indian Army; the cavalry; the infantry; through Sandhurst; and through the Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery. Many of the officer candidates went directly from universities and from Officer Training Corps. Only a small percentage of the officers from any of the above came from the ranks, and in 1914 officers were overwhelmingly from public schools.⁴⁶ There were also commissions available for Regular officers in the Special Reserve and Territorial Force. However, the Territorial Force was generally considered a second-rate option.

Infantry and cavalry officers were commissioned into a regiment, which did not necessarily have to be their local one as military families often had longstanding links with regiments away from their homes. Major-General Wimberley exhibited a classic career path as he went through a traditional Regular Army route that took him through Sandhurst from Wellington College and Cambridge University. His desire to join a Highland regiment after Sandhurst was grounded in family connections. 'I was, soon after arrival, interviewed by Gordon Ramsay, a Cameron Highlander, as a starter for the Camerons; and how I longed to get into the Highland Brigade, and into my grandfathers regiment.'⁴⁷

Along with familial links, it was also often a matter of prestige for an officer cadet to join a particular regiment, as each had a position in the military hierarchy based on history,

⁴⁵ Dallas, and Gill, *The Unknown Army*, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁶ K. Simpson, 'The Officers', in Beckett, and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁷ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 17.

tradition, royal association, ancient lineage, social exclusivity, regional affiliation, and military reputation. The Highland regiments held a high position in this hierarchy which ranked as follows: Foot Guards, Household Cavalry, four or five regiments of cavalry of the line, the Rifle Brigade, other cavalry, and then the Highland regiments below these.

On mobilisation, the 51st Division, along with the other Territorial divisions suffered the loss of many of its Regular officers who subsequently joined the British Expeditionary Force. Their departure ensured additional responsibility for the remaining Territorial officers who lacked the training and experience of professional soldiers. This not unnaturally, caused significant difficulties. This problem was not unforeseen, and as early as April 1914, a Sub-Committee of the Committee for Imperial Defence was highly critical of Territorial officers describing them as 'the weakest point' of the Force.⁴⁸

The problem of getting professional Regular or experienced officers to join the (Highland) Division was exacerbated as casualties started to mount and experienced officers became even more of a premium commodity. The New Armies tended to have priority over those that were returned to the formations at home. To combat the ever-increasing paucity of professional officers, the War Office instituted changes in age and course length for Regular commissions at Sandhurst and Woolwich. However, there were still entrance exams and healthy competition for the elite regiments.⁴⁹

Pre-war officer recruitment for the Territorials, predominantly controlled by the Territorial associations, was not rooted in progressive military values, and relied more on a system of patronage. Many of the officers were simply unfit for command and after mobilisation were sent home. The (Highland) Division itself continued to suffer from poor leadership, at both senior and junior officer level, as it took its place on the Western Front:

There is no doubt, of course, that, according to any standards (leaving those of today out of account) a great many officers of the 1/8th Argylls were too old for the severe conditions of campaigning which prevailed in 1915.....One of the casualties of age was their Colonel, John Campbell of Kilberry, who had trained and brought them to the battlefield.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army* (Manchester, 1988), p. 18.

⁴⁹ Simpson, 'The Officers', in Beckett, and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. 69.

⁵⁰ G.I. Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960* (Glasgow, 1960), p. 27.

Even the procedures, or more accurately the lack of them, for internal promotion were viewed with dismay and reflected poorly on the officer class in the 51st who were seen to use them to endorse a form of patronage. Men of 'U' Company of the 1/4th Gordons compiled a list of grievances which, as citizen soldiers in 1914 they felt they could air with their officers:

the ridiculous promotions were also discussed. I may tell you the latest promotions. The first was the Captain's servant, promoted to lance-corporal. He is a recruit and on very rare occasions parades with the Company, the consequence being that he is absolutely without training. The second was even worse. A recruit, three weeks joined, who had no right to be in the Company, for he is not a student, has been promoted. The reason for his promotion is self-evident as he is a nephew of the last Company Commander.⁵¹

Many in 'U' Company were graduates of Aberdeen University and were clearly 'officer material'; however most served in the ranks. To combat this, as early as January 1915, the military authorities began to trawl units for the many potential officers within the ranks. The chosen men were nominated by the commanding officer and proceeded to a short training course leading to a commission. However, with conscription, and in line with the increasing bureaucratisation of the Army as the war progressed, the War Office decided on a new selection process for recruiting young officers in February 1916.⁵² Officer Cadet Battalions were established, but access was only available to those who had passed through the ranks, or had some previous experience of soldiering, or had some technical expertise. War diaries stated that a, 'Great shortage of capable Commanding Officers and 2nd in Commands has shown itself....Replacement of officer casualties slow, though there is apparently a plentiful supply. Officers' now recommended for commissions from the ranks after 1 months training being ordered to join the cadet school in November next',⁵³ and:

Commissions in the MG Corps. All Candidates sent home for admission to a cadet unit with a view to appointment to temporary commissions in the MG Corps will in future be required to undergo a preliminary course at Grantham. Such candidates, therefore will only be accepted provisionally subject to their being found suitable for admission to a cadet unit, after being tested during the course at Grantham.⁵⁴

The Territorial Force associations saw these reforms as a dilution of their authority and responsibilities, and as early as August 1915 they were fighting a rearguard action against the War Office:

⁵¹ J. McConachie, *The Student Soldiers* (Elgin, 1995), p. 33.

⁵² Simpson, 'The Officers', in Beckett, and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. 79.

⁵³ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, 24-31 July 1916.

⁵⁴ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division Routine Order 735, 21 March 1917.

The Secretary read a letter addressed to the Chairman from the War Office dated 13th August 1915 with regard to the first appointment of officers to the Territorial Force and suggesting that in view of the present great shortage of officers in the Territorial Force, the Association should agree that officers should be gazetted to Territorial Force units direct provided the Association cannot provide suitable candidates. The Secretary was instructed to inform the War Office that this Association had not yet had difficulty in getting a suitable supply of officers, and ask the War Office to inform the Association as to what they would consider a reasonable number of officers to be gazetted to a battalion.⁵⁵

The debate came to a head in a meeting between the chairmen of the Territorial associations and the Secretary of State for War and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) in January 1917:

Sir William Robertson [CIGS] had pointed out that under present conditions the Territorial Officer is, so to speak, a thing apart, a dweller in a water-tight compartment, and the change suggested would actually be for his benefit. The change applied to the promotion of Territorial Officers which, to their advantage, is now to go through one channel of the War Office, whereby uniformity and equal opportunity would be secured.⁵⁶

From mid-1916 onwards this 'meritocracy' led to further changes in the officer class and the traditional differences between the Regular and Territorial officers were minimised even more.

However, the new system had its problems and merit did not always prevail. Wimberley related, that at Grantham, vested interests could take precedence over fair selection:

It was February 1917 before I actually got my company, I had quite a fright about it too. MGHQ [Machine Gun Headquarters] at GHQ France and the MGTC [Machine Gun Training Corps] Grantham did not get on over well, and the T.C. liked to give their nominees the command of the new companies, rather than the fellows sent home from France for that purpose.⁵⁷

The continual strain on the officer classes even after conscription and throughout the rest of the war is evident in Routine Order 836 of 23 August 1917 which stated that, 'It has been decided that all second lieutenants, if duly recommended, shall be eligible for promotion to the rank of lieutenant on completion of 18 months commissioned service.', and 'COs should at once submit the names of all second lieutenants who have already completed the qualifying period laid down above'. Further routine orders emphasised this need to fill vacant officer

⁵⁵ NAS, MD6/20, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Stirling, 23 August 1915.

⁵⁶ NAS, MD7/5, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Dundee.

posts; RO861 of 24 September stated that dentists serving as other ranks could apply for commissions as Dental Surgeons, and RO864 of 3 October stated that 'Applications For Commissions In The Supply Branch, ASC' were temporarily halted due to response.⁵⁸

Proportion of Scottish regimental officers.

It has been shown that the proportion of other ranks that served with the 51st (Highland) Division during the First World War was predominantly Scottish. It has also been demonstrated that this was official policy. However, the series *Officers Died in the Great War*, in contrast to *Soldiers Died in the Great War*, does not give information about birthplace and enlistment, so comparators cannot be found in that source. As an alternative research method and in order to substantiate the findings, three different levels of officer command will be analysed to determine regimental affiliations. Dr John Bourne has compiled a database of senior officers that served in the British Expeditionary Force, which covers not only birthplace and enlistment, but the regiment in which the officer was commissioned. The papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley provide a comprehensive breakdown of the regimental status of the officers on the divisional staff, and, finally, key battalion histories also provide details of battalion officers. Throughout the analysis, it should be borne in mind that officers did not necessarily choose a local regiment, as factors such as familial tradition and elite status would have been a strong influence.

Of the three divisional commanders, only Major-General Carter-Campbell was commissioned to a Scottish regiment and had Scottish familial links. However, Major-General Bannatine-Allason did have strong Scottish connections. Ironically, Harper, who is most closely associated with the division, had no such Scottish roots and had not been commissioned into a Scottish regiment.

Fig. 13

GOC	Regiment
Bannatine-Allason	Royal Artillery
Harper	Royal Engineers
Carter-Campbell	The Cameronians ⁵⁹

⁵⁷ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 55.

⁵⁸ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division Routine Orders; 836, 861, 864.

⁵⁹ With thanks to Dr J. Bourne, University of Birmingham.

Two out of the sixteen brigade commanders were from Scottish regiments, all of which were either Highland or Highland associated. There was no particular pattern in the timing of the assumption of command amongst the sixteen, but the duration of command clearly indicates a bias towards the Scottish commanders with a total of 2,966 days in command for Scottish regimental officers as opposed to 1,121 for non-Scottish regimental officers.

Fig. 14

Brigadier-General	Regiment	Days in Command
Buchanon	Seaforths	411 days
Pelham Burn	Gordons	630 days
Edwards	20 th Hussars	86 days
Hamilton	Black Watch	374 days
Hibbert	King's Own (Royal Lancaster)	165 days
Laing	Seaforths	102 days
Segrave	HLI	95 days
Spooner	Lancashire Fusiliers	7 days
Stewart	Black Watch	252 days
Thorpe	Bedfordshire Regiment	11 days
Beckwith	Hampshire Regiment	252 days
Campbell	Seaforths	802 days
Dick-Cunyngham	Gordons	6 days
Gordon	Gordons	84 days
Green	Black Watch	210 days
Ross	Durham Light Infantry	c. 600 days ⁶⁰

The data on the divisional staff officers produced a more diverse result, with only 12 out of 34 officers from Highland and Lowland Scottish regiments.

⁶⁰ With thanks to Dr J. Bourne, University of Birmingham.

Fig. 15

Staff	Regiment
ADCs to Bannatine-Allason	2 Scottish (Gordons and Argylls) and 2 Other (Guards and Indian Army)
ADCs to Harper	2 Other (North Staffs and West Yorks)
ADCs to Carter-Campbell	1 Scottish (Lothian and Border) and 2 Other (MG Corps and East Kent Yeomanry)
GSO1	3 Scottish (Royal Scots, Scottish Rifles, and Gordons) and 3 Other (Royal Engineers, 13 th Hussars, Royal Dublin Fusiliers)
GSO2	3 Scottish (Seaforths, Royal Scottish Fusiliers, Gordons) and 7 Others (Reserve, 2x Royal Artillery, Indian Army, Royal Fusiliers, London Regt, 10 th Royal Hussars)
GSO3	2 Scottish (Cameron's, Highland Light Infantry) and 6 Other (2x Royal Artillery, Royal Garrison Artillery, 6 th Inniskillen Dragoons, 7 th Dragoon Guards, 10 th Royal Hussars)
AA and QMG	1 Scottish (Royal Scots) and 6 Others (3x retired pay, ASC, Shropshire Light Infantry, Royal Irish Regiment)
DAAG	3 Others (Suffolks, N/A, 13 th Hussars)
DAQMG	3 Others (N/A, Army Service Corps, and General Service List)

The senior officers in the infantry brigades were almost all from Highland regiments or regiments associated with the Highlands, with twenty officers out of the total of twenty-eight.

Fig. 16**Senior Brigade Officers****Regiment**

152nd Bde Comm	4 Scottish plus one probable (MacFarlane, D) (2x Gordons, Seaforths, Highland Light Infantry) and 2 Others (Durham Light Infantry, and Bedfords)
Bde Maj	2 Scottish (2x Gordons) and 3 Others (London Regt, Norfolks, Liverpools)
Staff Capt	4 Scottish (3x Argylls and 1 Gordons)
153rd Bde Comm	3 Scottish (HLI, Seaforths, Gordons) and 2 Others (Hampshire, 10 th Royal Hussars)
Bde Maj	4 Scottish (3x Gordons and 1 HLI) and 1 Other (10 th Royal Hussars)
Staff Capt	4 Scottish (2x Gordons, Royal Scots, Seaforths) and 1 Other (10 th Royal Hussars)
154 Bde Comm	1 Scottish (Seaforth) and 5 Others (N/A, 2x 10 th Royal Hussars, Kings Own Lancashire, 20 th Hussars)
Bde Maj	2 Scottish (Seaforth, Argylls) and 4 Others (Suffolks, Indian Army, 2x General List)
Staff Capt	3 Scottish (2x Argylls, Gordons) and 2 Others (Liverpools and unknown)

Most of the officers in the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers were from their respective corps,⁶¹ and other positions such as Assistant Director of Medical Services, Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services, Deputy Assistant Director of Veterinary Services, and Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Services were filled by officers from specialist regiments and corps such as the Royal Army Medical Corps and Army Ordnance Corps.⁶²

Of the Battalion Commanders, evidence from primary and secondary sources indicates that battalion commanders were almost all from Highland/Scottish regiments, and many were from the regiment of the battalion that they commanded. There is a wealth of information in the regimental and battalion histories to support a consistent Highland/Scottish regimental connection. With the 1/6th Seaforths:

Colonel T.G. MacLaren trained the Battalion at Bedford, and afterwards took it to France. He had formerly been of the K.O.S.B.. He commanded the 6th Seaforths in France till, unfortunately, his health broke down. He was most popular with all ranks, who much regretted losing him. The Command was then taken up by Colonel Grant Smith, who continued in Command for over a year, earning the D.S.O. for his distinguished services during that time. Other fine officers at different times held the Command, including Colonel Sam Macdonald, of the 5th Gordon Highlanders, and Colonel Laurie, D.S.O., of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders.⁶³

A close Highland/Scottish connection in a battalion would also be perpetuated with the second-in-command taking over as commanding officer. 'We were all glad to hear that Major W. Macdonald was to succeed Colonel Grant Smith in the command, instead of a stranger from another battalion'.⁶⁴ When Major MacDonald contracted trench fever, he was replaced by his second-in-command as Colonel.⁶⁵ This type of automatic promotion was not unusual in the 51st.

Casualty/reinforcement statistics

The (Highland) Division that reached the end of the war was not the same as that which had mobilised in August 1914. The scale of the changes can, in part, be witnessed through casualty statistics for both officers and men. We know through a representative sampling of battalions that as the war progressed and the system for reinforcement altered, the 51st were sent a greater proportion of drafts from wider Scotland, but it is vital to complement this

⁶¹ NLS, ACC 7380 No. 1, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

⁶² NLS, ACC 7380 No. 1, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

⁶³ D. MacEchern, *The Sword of the North* (Inverness, 1923), p. 402.

⁶⁴ R.T. Peel, and A.H. MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences* (Elgin, 1923), p. 23.

knowledge with an analysis of the statistics for the division as a whole to determine how much the 51st was under pressure for reinforcements and during which periods. In this section, the overall casualty figures, the actual establishment, and where possible the reinforcement rate will be considered.

“The 51st Division,” said President Poincaré of France, speaking at Glasgow University in 1919, “which had won everywhere the admiration of the Allies signalled itself in 1915 at Festubert, where it lost 1500 men; in 1916 on the Somme, where it lost 8500 men; and on the Ancre, where it lost 2500 men; round Cambrai, where it took Havrincourt, Flesquières, and Fontaine-Notre-Dame, and lost 2500 men; in 1918, in the Section of Monchies-Bapaume, where it lost 5000 men and was honourably mentioned in the Despatches of the Commander-in-Chief; and lastly, in the months of July 1918, amidst the French Armies of Champagne, where it bravely attacked the Huns before Rheims, and lost again 2000 men.”⁶⁶

During 1917 and 1918, casualties suffered by the 51st were high. After Beaumont Hamel, the division was used again and again in attack, a theme that continued until the war ended.

The result of the high casualty rate was not only a strain on the home reinforcement system, but on the very nature of the division and the level of collective experience it brought to the front. Abundant evidence records the shattering of units; in October 1917, Major Willie Doig stressed that, ‘Captains Mair and Fysh, and Lieutenant Ian Robertson were the last of those officers of the Battalion who had crossed the Channel in 1915 and were at this time on the strength’,⁶⁷ and Captain MacKenzie added that:

The opening of the campaign of 1918 saw many changes, both in the Battalion and in the Brigade. In April, 1917, Lt-Col J. Rawson, D.S.O., had been severely wounded. He was one of the few officers of the original Battalion who had survived.....Death had removed many familiar figures.⁶⁸

Officer fatalities in the 1/5th and 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders over the course of the war testify to the heavy losses across battalions and verify that senior officer casualties were amongst them. The 1/6th Seaforths lost 2 majors, 10 captains, 13 lieutenants, and 20 subalterns,⁶⁹ whilst the 1/5th Seaforths lost 1 colonel, 6 captains, 10 lieutenants, and 23 subalterns.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Peel, and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ MacEchern, *The Sword of the North*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Peel, and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences*, p. 51.

⁶⁸ D. MacKenzie, *The 6th Gordons in France and Flanders* (Aberdeen, 1921), p. 138.

⁶⁹ MacEchern, *The Sword of the North*, p. 403.

⁷⁰ MacEchern, *The Sword of the North*, pp. 382-3.

To give added substance to the above, the actual casualty figures for the division by month, can be calculated from the A and Q war diaries. However, it must be noted that in some cases the record is incomplete.⁷¹

Fig. 17

War Diaries.

Casualty statistics

	Officer Killed	Officers Wounded	Officers Missing
June 1915	3	24	0
August	3	14	0
September	1	5	0
October	2	10	0
Jan 1916	1	4	0
February	0	0	0
March	3	12	1
April	0	18	0
May	3	22	0
June	5	22	0
July	20	124	5
August	3	24	0
September	5	17	0
October	6	6	0
January 1917	0	0	0
February	1	1	0
March	3	18	2
April	2	14	0
June	1	1	0
July	15	61	0
August	1	22	0

⁷¹ NA, WO 95 2848-9, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

September	14	47	4
October	4	8	0
November	20	42	6
December	3	14	0

January 1918	0	2	0
February	0	5	0
March	25	92	100
April	19	71	47
May	0	31	3
June	2	12	0
July	35	134	5
August	4	32	0
September	1	19	0
October	22	82	6
November	0	2	0

O/R Killed

O/R Wounded

O/R Missing

June 1915	78	430	12
August	49	238	3
September	24	187	0
October	30	163	2
January 1916	1	8	0
February	6	12	0
March	55	212	37
April	49	308	34
May	54	354	12
June	103	584	13
July	391	2424	313
August	74	588	7

September	37	222	3
October	42	213	3
January 1917	9	66	0
February	1	18	0
March	52	227	11
June	26	127	1
July	345	1621	126
August	87	382	15
September	327	1431	137
October	54	196	4
November	184	1174	143
December	62	381	3
January 1918	5	53	0
February	2	88	0
March	322	1679	2715
April	197	1419	1213
May	56	580	2
June	18	169	0
July	402	2949	418
August	74	938	108
September	25	274	6
October	296	2280	186
November	0	22	0

These statistics show that there was a relatively low, but steady death rate during 1915, and that a similar pattern can be determined for 1916 with the exception of July and November when the division was involved in battle. However, after Beaumont Hamel, the casualty rates increased 'across the board' as the 51st was more active, with 1918 indicating the greatest death and injury toll.

It is not possible to compare directly the casualty rates with the statistics for reinforcement as the latter would have also included replacements for the long-term sick, the transferred, or the

promoted. The number of losses due to these factors could be significant, such as occurred at Courcellette during the winter of 1916-17:

At this time the strength of the battalion [1/6th Black Watch] had dwindled to 17 officers and 426 other ranks. Officers, non-commissioned officers and men were borrowed from the two companies in support to bring the two companies in the front line to a strength of fifty each; thus one hundred men held over a thousand yards of line, the fighting strength of the battalion being under two hundred rifles.....On January 8th, 1917 the 6th bade farewell to the sector. Illness, rheumatism and trench foot, brought on by living for days under wet sodden conditions had caused more losses than were suffered by the battalion in the Battle of Beaumont Hamel.⁷²

However, it is useful to understand the general trends, such as heavy losses and numerous reinforcements.

For the reinforcement statistics, two sources were utilised. The first was the Adjutant General's office at GHQ and the second was the divisional war diaries.⁷³ The Adjutant General's record is doubly useful as it also gives figures for every other formation serving in the BEF. This is significant for comparing the level of reinforcements for the division against the general trend.

The war diaries show that the reinforcement process met the 51st's demand and the general trend in reinforcements reflected positively on the system for reinforcing the division.

Fig. 18

	Officers	Other Ranks
October 1915	5	297
December	1	370
January 1916	24	638
February	36	1018
March	49	396
April	14	408
May	66	473

⁷² Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War*, pp. 155-156.

⁷³ The former record in the National Archive only covers the 1917 period, whereas the war diaries are comprehensive throughout most of the war. However, the figures from the war diaries are based on calculations made for this study and may therefore reflect the incomplete nature of the record.

June	105	2242
July	52	1539
August	94	2795
September	69	1371
October	74	1285
January 1917	138	3225
February	56	1527
March	59	1332
April	138	3179
May	126	2131
June	51	3105
July	97	692
August	83	3091
September	44	1990
October	85	1378
December	83	1368
January 1918	57	1846
February	21	835
March	52	1055
April	241	7766
May	117	1317
June	70	873
July	58	935
August	123	2039
September	91	3010
October	77	1155
November	83	2579 ⁷⁴

⁷⁴ NA, WO 95 2846-7, 51st Division G War Diary.

The Adjutant General's records indicate that the research data from the war diaries, at least for 1917, is broadly accurate. The figures substantiate the theory that reinforcement was steady, but was in decline throughout 1917. Figures for the 9th and 15th divisions also show that the Scottish divisions were well supplied with reinforcements throughout 1917, and at the end of the year, when there were widespread shortages of reinforcements, the Scottish divisions continued to be relatively strong. This is contrary to Martin Middlebrook's assertion that 'Scotland was another area whose population could not replace its casualties, particularly those at Loos in 1915, as well as maintain all of its units. All Scottish units, Regular, New Army and Territorial, would be short of reinforcements in the second half of the war.'⁷⁵

Fig. 19.

Reinforcements

	Officers	Other Ranks
March 1917	58	1551
April	n/a	n/a
May	102	1720
June	51	3099
July	86	1279
August	83	2362
September	37	2162
October	87	1013
November	27	684
December	76	1340 ⁷⁶

The casualties and reinforcement figures would provide incomplete evidence if not based on a point of reference and that point must lie in the actual strength of the (Highland) Division throughout the war.⁷⁷ The 51st Division was close to full war establishment upon embarkation for France in April 1915 when figures for the division show a strength of 570 officers and 15,729 other ranks. At all points of reference thereafter, the division never operated at full strength as the wastage of men consistently outpaced the system for reinforcement. The

⁷⁵ M. Middlebrook, *Your Country Needs You, From Six to Sixty-Five Divisions* (Barnsley, 2000), pp. 128-129.

⁷⁶ NA, WO 95 26, Adjutant General War Diary.

fighting strength of the division on 17 July 1915 was 483 officers and 13,626 other ranks and this strength dropped in just one week to 476 officers and 13,415 other ranks.⁷⁸ However, these figures show a decline in a period when the 51st did not receive any reinforcements as troops from the second-line units were not sufficiently well trained, and by October 1915, the drafts began to arrive on a regular basis. Evidence indicates that throughout the war the 51st was supported relatively well by the system for replacing casualties.

The Adjutant General's records for 1917 show that the war establishment of the division declined consistently. However, it is interesting to note that this was more evident in other ranks than in officers. In fact, officer strength remained relatively constant, even with the high officer casualty rates of 1917. This may give substance to the theory that there were more promotions from the lower echelons, thus contributing to the difficulty in providing and sustaining the overall number of other ranks. The general decline in other ranks followed a trend throughout the British Expeditionary Force that ultimately provided the justification for the infantry reorganisation of 1918. Although the 51st followed the overall trend of having increasingly understrength units during 1917, it was relatively better supplied with reinforcements and existed at a relatively greater establishment than most of the other divisions on the Western Front. It is interesting that other divisions that were also favoured in this way were the Guards and the remaining Scottish formations.

Fig. 20

Statement of Strength

	Officers	Other Ranks
31 March 1917	578	13324
30 April	406	10573
31 May	469	10124
30 June	494	12782
31 July	548	12578
31 August	521	12843
30 September	499	12789
31 October	555	13237

⁷⁷ There is no record of the war establishment of the 51st Division by month in any of the sources investigated. However, there is evidence for isolated months, or whole series of months.

⁷⁸ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

30 November	500	11661
31 December	539	11758 ⁷⁹

Amalgamations

Pre-conscription reinforcements to units of the (Highland) Division were kept within the same regiment where possible. It has also been shown that this was the case, with less of a success ratio, for the post-conscription phase. However, amalgamation of Scottish battalions was another measure that could be employed when direct reinforcements were not available. This would further indicate that the military authorities, wherever possible, attempted to retain a healthy proportion of Scottish troops in Scottish units.

In October 1918, the losses in all units that had been closely engaged with the enemy had been heavy, and battalions were often reduced to little more than half their strength. The 1/6th and 1/7th Gordons were in this situation, and, to ensure one strong battalion, the two units were amalgamated from midnight on 5-6 October. From then, the battalion was called the 6/7th Gordon Highlanders. MacKenzie stated:

The change meant less to the 6th than to the 7th Gordons, as Headquarters and the administrative services of the Banffshire and Donside Battalion remained substantially unchanged and took over the same duties in the new unit. Fortunately the change did not create dissention or jealousy in the ranks.⁸⁰

The impact of amalgamation was definitely lessened if a unit merged with another from the same regiment. When the Adjutant General interviewed the commanding officers of the 1/4th and 1/5th Black Watch, the 1/9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and the 1/4th Camerons, with a view to amalgamating the two former battalions and employing the latter two for drafts for the Regular battalions (considered necessary owing to their weak strength (about 500 each) and the unlikelihood that drafts would be sent out to make them up to full strength in the future), the commanding officers thought there would be no great objections on the part of the men to the proposal being carried out.⁸¹

⁷⁹ NA, WO 95 26, Adjutant General War Diary.

⁸⁰ MacKenzie, *The 6th Gordons in France and Flanders*, p. 177.

⁸¹ NA, WO 95 26, Adjutant General War Diary, 14 February 1918.

The amalgamation of units caused quite an upheaval. However, this would be dependent on the state of the unit and many units that were amalgamated were low in numbers and short on morale. It was also true that variations in the number of battalions within each regiment impacted on their ability to retain a local focus. The Territorial Association of Elgin on 22 November 1915 minuted:

in consequence of the 3rd Line units not being able to furnish sufficient reinforcements, the 2nd Line Regiments were to be reorganised, and that for this purpose the 2/5th and 2/6th Seaforths were to be reorganised, and that for this purpose the 2/5th and 2/6th Seaforths were to be amalgamated. The establishment of the 2nd Line Regiment, as reconstituted, is 29 Officers and 600 men, and the strength above this number will pass to the 3rd Line. In the case of the 2/6th Seaforths there would be 21 Officers and 231 men available to pass to the 3rd Line unit. In the information sent to the Association, it was explained that the main object of the reorganisation is to obtain at as early a date as possible all available Non-Commissioned Officers and men as reinforcements for the Front.⁸²

The 2/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were also broken up during 1916 and used as drafts. Some of the men went to the (Highland) Division:

When the process of turning the drafts into four squads was completed, they were led away in different directions. It was not a very pleasant moment nor was the process of separation completed. The squads were again broken up among platoons: thus it was that Private Finlay Mackenzie, Sandbank and the writer found themselves being led down into a dug-out, to be numbered herewith as 11 platoon, C Company of the 6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.⁸³

Quality

The quality of reinforcements: the level of training, the physical standards, and the morale of the troops impacted on (Highland) Division performance. It was a commonly held belief that the quality of reinforcements to the British Army as a whole grew poorer as the war progressed⁸⁴ and there is clear evidence that this decline included the (Highland) Division. Nicholson stated that by the end of 1917, the new drafts were not as good as the year before and those that were left in the division were exhausted.⁸⁵ Haldane of the 1/4th Seaforths supported this view, pointing out that, 'The appearance of the Battalion had changed greatly, for most of the new recruits were undersized men'.⁸⁶ This notion of decline was consistently

⁸² NAS, MD8/3, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Elgin.

⁸³ J. McLean, *Active Service with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders*, (Edinburgh, 1927), p. 17.

⁸⁴ S. Bidwell, and D. Graham, *Firepower, British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, 1982), p. 118.

⁸⁵ W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines, An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18* (Stevenage, 1939), p. 129.

⁸⁶ M.M. Haldane, *A History of the Fourth Battalion The Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1927), p. 264.

reinforced by those who had volunteered to fight who thought they were superior to conscripts and Wimberley, whilst back in training at Grantham, stated:

The men, passing through the ranks of the unit to be trained, were by now nearly all conscripts, who had failed to volunteer for Kitchener's volunteer armies earlier in the war, and the officers seemed to me to be of poor quality; and for the first time, in all my soldiering, I felt unhappy and depressed.⁸⁷

The necessity to replace heavy losses at key stress points, particularly in the latter stages of the war exacerbated this problem as drafts were rushed through the system. In April 1918, as the reinforcement process struggled to meet the demands of an understrength Expeditionary Force, units of the 51st began to break down:

Colonel Scott and the O.C. King Edward's Horse had little rest from their responsibilities that night. So heavy had been the casualties in the Somme fighting in the 5th Seaforths that Colonel Scott only had one other officer, besides himself, in the battalion who had seen recent fighting in France. His men, for the most part were just raw recruits rushed up to the unit from the base.⁸⁸

The result was that the line broke as they were outflanked: "there is a proper beat on" reported a messenger on horseback to the Commanding Officer of the King Edwards Horse, "Who" asked the CO "The Boche?" "No, the Jocks!" was the reply'.⁸⁹ Experience was lacking and many of those who would have served as an example were dead.

Even when crisis points passed and the division had time to train and reorganise, there were still huge difficulties to be overcome and units had to largely reconstruct themselves. After the division suffered crushing blows in March and April 1918:

The whole of May was spent on ordinary trench warfare and the battalion had time to recover from the effects of the recent fighting. The 7th was now practically a new battalion; the gaps caused by the recent losses were filled by young and inexperienced men, and few of the original non-commissioned officers had survived the two battles of March and April. Only six officers had come through the two battles unwounded, and many of those who now joined as reinforcements had never seen each other before.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 126.

⁸⁸ L. James (ed), *The History of King Edwards Horse* (London, 1921), p. 303.

⁸⁹ James (ed), *The History of King Edwards Horse*, p. 321.

⁹⁰ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War*, p. 306.

Second-line

Although it is not within the scope of this study to undertake in-depth research into units and formations not of the 51st Division, it is important to give some consideration to the mechanisms that were in place to supply drafts to it. Second-line line units were, in effect, crucial to the maintenance of regional and regimental homogeneity through the reinforcement system, but they did need to function effectively for the first-line battalion to benefit from well-trained troops when they were required.

The War Office issued an order on 21 August 1914, which it re-issued in an amended form on 31 August and 21 September, that gave county associations the authority to form a second-line unit for every battalion that had accepted the Imperial Service Pledge.⁹¹ G.I. Malcolm stated:

It is a fact that, on mobilisation, many of those on the strength were found to be medically unfit by Army standards (as, you will remember, they were in the Boer War). Therefore a Depot was opened at Dunoon, and a 2/8th Battalion raised there to which the unfit were posted. This later became a drafting battalion for the 1/8th, and to it were sent drafts recruited by the 1st Battalion in Bedford, Manchester and even Ireland. These men evidently completed their initial training early, because by the time (22nd October) that H.M. King George V reviewed the Highland Division at Bedford, the Battalion's Strength was 28 officers and 990 men.⁹²

This system allowed the second-line units, still under the control of the Territorial associations, to recruit in local areas and send reinforcements to the first-line.

The units of the 51st Division were initially raised and administered by local county associations, although overall command lay with the War Office and the Army Council. The county associations themselves were composed of representatives from the local community and members of the military who were supported by a small staff. The responsibility of the associations lay predominantly in housing, equipping, recruiting, and clothing the troops of the division:

An Association would be entrusted with the organisation and administration of the Territorial units in its area, at all times except when they were called out for training, embodied or required for actual military service, but it would be responsible for the recruitment of local Territorial formations, both in peace and in war. The associations were empowered to provide and maintain

⁹¹ In November 1914, further instructions issued from the War Office stating that if one battalion was sent overseas the second-line unit should form a third-line.

⁹² Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 21.

rifle ranges, buildings, camp sites and magazines; to secure the use of special areas for manoeuvres; to establish and help rifle clubs and cadet corps; to negotiate with employers so that men could be given time off for training; to pay separation allowances to the families of territorials when the need arose; and to supply all the horses, arms and equipment required by their units on mobilisation.⁹³

Beckett asserts that, in 1914 and 1915, Kitchener diverted resources of manpower away from the Territorial Force to ensure priority was given to the New Armies, and because he was convinced that the Territorial associations were too slow in raising reserves.⁹⁴ It is clear that some associations did not function as effectively as others, either as a result of inefficiency or through material shortages in the Territorial area, and Major-General Bannatine-Allason was critical on 31 October 1914:

There is still a very great delay in getting recruits from Scotland to Bedford due apparently to the apathy of county associations in clothing and equipping them. Every endeavour has been made to induce these bodies to obtain clothing and equipment with as little delay as possible, but without much success.⁹⁵

However, many associations did function well, such as in Aberdeen, where:

it made arrangements for mobilisation, and raised fifteen units with first, second, third, and sometimes fourth, lines---a total of 8,380 recruits, besides providing their clothing and accoutrements. When these figures are considered, and when it is remembered that the Gordon Highlanders had four Territorial battalions in the 51st Division, these forming a third part of the whole division, the significance of the work of the Aberdeen Territorial Association and its Secretary will appear.Schools were also secured and maintained as hospitals; and a Territorial Force Nursing Association, and a Ladies Needlework Guild were organised. A Volunteer Corps was also organised.⁹⁶

The War Office, whilst increasingly moving towards centralisation as the war progressed, often respected and appreciated the work carried out by the associations. A War Office policy paper entitled 'The Territorial Force During The Great War' stated that:

The work of the Territorial Force County Associations in providing men and material for the war is so largely carried on beneath the surface that it is in danger of being overlooked altogether. It has, however, entailed an immense amount of labour on many people throughout the Country, chiefly voluntary and therefore unpaid, in connection with the raising, equipping and administering of the Territorial Force. All the labour is in danger of being unrecognised, and at the same time recognition, however slight, would greatly gratify those who have performed it for the public good.

⁹³ Simkins, *Kitchener's Army*, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Beckett, in Beckett, and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. viii.

⁹⁵ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

⁹⁶ MacEchern, *The Sword of the North*, p. 109.

One way of securing such recognition is by creating and printing a record of the work done. Such a record would take the form of a history of the Territorial Force in the War.....

One of the main sources of strength of the Force is its high degree of localisation. The County units tap all the best County material, and the system under which the Territorial Force County Associations, on which all important County interests are generally represented, stand in loco parentis to the Units which they administer, tends to promote pride of County and to create the esprit de corps which is so vital to the efficiency of the Armies. It is probably true that in this country the local patriotism which leads a man to place his own County, Town or even Village or Hamlet with its special feelings on a platform above the rest is generally a stronger bond than that Imperial or National patriotism that inspires Continental people.⁹⁷

The introduction of conscription swept away many of the powers formally held by the associations, although they still existed in a neutered form. However, they did not relinquish their hold on the responsibilities for the Territorial Force without a fight:

The Secretary reported that the meeting had been specially called to consider the position of the Territorial Force in view of the fact that after the 11th December all soldiers must be attested to the General Attestation form and that the Territorial Force will in future be dispensed with. The meeting was unanimously of the opinion that this was most undesirable and would have the most adverse effect on voluntary recruiting, and the Secretary was instructed to write to the Right Honourable The Earl of Derby, and Lieutenant-General Sir E. Bethune, Director-General of the Territorial Force at the War Office protesting against this alteration.⁹⁸

The General Council of Territorial Associations in Scotland met to discuss and form a common reaction to this state of affairs. However, the course could not be altered.

After February 1916, the direct reinforcement principle stopped from second to first lines, the second lines being used as viable units in their own right, first to guard areas of import, then to go to a theatre. The responsibility for the provision of drafts for both the first and second-lines passed to the third-line battalion. With conscription, the responsibility for the posting of drafts fell to the General Reserve and the relevance of the associations increasingly diminished throughout the remainder of the war.⁹⁹

As demonstrated elsewhere in this chapter, reinforcements were not always available to join the units of the (Highland) Division in sufficient numbers, at a specific time, but on the whole the authorities did attempt to restrict admission to men of Scottish origin. As the Army Council Instructions explained:

⁹⁷ NA, WO 161/110, Note from Captain A Williams to Mr King at the War Office.

⁹⁸ NAS, MD6/20, Minutes of the Territorial Force Association of the County of Stirling, 6 November 1915.

⁹⁹ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War'. p. 91.

All general service recruits raised in an area and allotted to infantry will be appointed to the regiment affiliated to that area, and posted to a reserve battalion, Regular or TF, of that regiment so long as there are vacancies in the establishment of the regimental reserves; surplus recruits in any area will then be allotted to other regiments of the same Command which have insufficient recruits in their area to fill the regimental reserves.¹⁰⁰

Whilst highly localised recruitment for individual battalions was unsustainable, the general posting policy for new recruits continued to be based on the regimental system. Therefore, the regimental reserves for the units of the 51st were likely to be composed of either men from the region or wider Scotland.

In Conclusion, the recruitment and reinforcement process in all formations that served in the BEF evolved and adapted as the war progressed and the demands on Britain's manpower increased. However, the degree of variation within each formation was often dependent on particular divisional circumstances.

For the (Highland) Division, it is evident that all units, apart from the small number that had served within the formation early in the war, were from Highland regiments or regiments associated with the Highlands. It is also clear, that, until at least the conscription period, the majority of recruits were from the local regimental recruitment areas.

However, increasing strains were placed on the system for reinforcing (Highland) Division units and analysis has demonstrated that there was a proportional dilution of local men to local battalions as the war progressed. This was particularly evident in units that traditionally recruited in areas with low population density. The most marked change for the 51st Division was not with conscription in 1916, but in 1917 and 1918 when almost all units had more serving soldiers (born or enlisted) from wider Scotland than from local battalion recruiting areas. However, it is important to note that the 51st did not sustain particularly heavy casualties during 1916. If the casualty rates had been higher and demands on reinforcements from local areas had been greater, then a higher proportional dilution of men from local areas might have occurred earlier than it did. It has been demonstrated that in the case of the (Highland) Division, the drafting system (at War Office and GHQ level) recognised the value of local, regional, and national allegiances, and perhaps also the obligations of the Territorial

Force Act, and did attempt to maintain, where possible, during both the voluntary and conscription phases of the war, a local and wider Scottish emphasis in recruiting and reinforcing.

Over the course of the war, the (Highland) Division did suffer many casualties and that made it difficult to consistently supply Highland/Scottish reinforcements. However, the provision of a steady stream of reinforcements from Highland/Scottish areas was marked, particularly when contrasted with other non-Scottish formations. As all Scottish formations were 'relatively' well supplied with, at worst, national reinforcements (as opposed to local), it would appear that the reinforcement system was biased towards Scottish units and formations.

Significantly, throughout the war, the senior and middle-ranking officers in the division were predominantly from Highland/Scottish regiments.

It was notable that the quality of recruit to the (Highland) Division declined as the war progressed, and was most acute in 1918, but this was reflective of widespread manpower shortages.

¹⁰⁰ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War', p. 95.

Chapter 3 The *Esprit de Corps* of the 51st (Highland) Division

This chapter will analyse the importance of *esprit de corps*¹ in the 51st (Highland) Division and define the essential elements of its nature. It will seek to demonstrate that over the course of the war, (Highland) Division *esprit de corps* evolved and adapted; that an *esprit de corps* was always a prominent factor within the division, but became more defined as the war progressed; that the *esprit de corps* was vital to the divisional way of being and way of thinking; and that a significant contribution to the successes of the (Highland) Division during the war was through its *esprit de corps*.

For the (Highland) Division, *esprit de corps* was a complex and inter-related affair. In order to examine the impact and form of that *esprit de corps*, it is essential that we look at: the internal identity of the division; the dynamics throughout the chain of command; the nature of life in the division; how the (Highland) Division interacted with other formations and national groups; and how *esprit de corps* changed and evolved over time.

Internal identity

Identity was an extremely powerful factor in defining conduct, approach, and attitude. Any study of (Highland) Division *esprit de corps* must establish how officers and men perceived themselves and their place in the formation, what loyalties tied them together, to what they owed allegiance, what outward form that allegiance took, and how much of an impact external factors had on their internal identity.

Formation and sub-formation loyalty

Divisional loyalty, although subject to change in emphasis, was a prominent feature within the (Highland) Division from mobilisation until the end of the war.

Prior to mobilisation in August 1914, the (Highland) Division existed as a disparate collection of units that grouped together in various locations in Scotland. It functioned as a formation on a once-a-year basis at the annual camp. As a new Territorial formation,

¹ Spirit of fellowship, or feeling of mutual support or team spirit among the members of a group.

the (Highland) Division had no historical tradition to reflect on and upon which to focus a collective belief. However, at mobilisation the division came together with the common focus of fighting a war and over the coming months developed a corporate identity.

Shortly after arrival in Bedford, the officers and men of the units were identified by the local populace as men of the (Highland) Division and they took that association to heart, proud of the collective image that this conveyed. This public recognition, combined with the realities of unit interaction and integration in a confined area, both during official and unofficial activities, over the course of time contributed to an increased divisional loyalty. That the officers and men were far from home, surrounded by an unfamiliar culture, in a country at war, had a major impact on stimulating a sense of unity.

The move to France in April 1915 further increased this sense of corporate unity as the division became, even more than in south-east England, one of many military formations in a world where identity was established by formation and unit. For officers and men alike, as it moved, fought and rested, the division became their world.

Shortly after arriving on the Western Front, the division was quick to realise that it was to be employed largely as a 'holding formation'. The inferiority complex that this generated was compounded by military failures at Givenchy in 1915 and High Wood in 1916, as a result of which the division became known as 'Harper's Duds'. During this period, however, the regularity of trench warfare, a gradual building of experience, a growing familiarity between the units, and a strong central leadership during 1915 and much of 1916 assisted in forging a more focused formation spirit.

After the divisional success at the battle of Beaumont Hamel in November 1916, the 51st rapidly developed a strong self-belief which was sustained throughout the war, and by late 1917 the division had also significantly enhanced its external reputation.

In early 1917, upon arrival in France, Captain D.N. Wimberley and the machine gun company under his command received an order to attach itself to 51st Division. A number

of his men complained that they wished to be sent to a Regular formation. However, Wimberley stated that within 'three months they wouldn't swap the Highland Division for the Guards'.² This shows as much about anti-Territorial bias as it does about the reputation of the 51st Division, but it clearly indicates that the strength of feeling within the division after the victory at Beaumont Hamel was not yet supported by the rest of the military world. However, it also indicates the strength of divisional loyalty in the 51st by this time.

An example of the extent of this loyalty by 1918 can be determined from the writings of the journalist, Alexander Catto, who, whilst attached to the (Highland) Division in the front line wrote:

in conversations with officers, non-coms, and privates-the only means I had of getting information-their talk of all the fighting that had taken place since the birth of the new army centred on the division, and not the battalion. It was not that the Gordons did that, or the Seaforths did this, but the division.³

This loyalty and sense of unity was further emphasised by F.W. Bewsher when he claimed that after suffering heavy losses in April 1918:

it was particularly noticeable to the officers who were sorting the men into different Divisions and units in the dark, that when a group of men were asked who they were, the Jocks almost invariably replied, not by giving the name of their battalion, but "51st Division", strong evidence that the Divisional esprit, in spite of the last five days, was still unimpaired.⁴

The strength of feeling for the division was not confined merely to the combat units, but was also evident amongst divisional troops. Nicholson, a staff officer, on being promoted from the (Highland) Division to the divisional headquarters of 17th Division in 1917, stated, 'All the way down I forgot the country and the sun and the showers, and only

² National Library of Scotland, ACC6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley, p. 59.

³ A. Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France* (Aberdeen, 1918), p. 24.

⁴ F.W. Bewsher, *History of the 51st (Highland) Division, 1914-1918* (Edinburgh, 1921), p. 294.

thought what a fool a man is to wish to “get on”-and thereby lose much happiness’.⁵ The happiness he referred to was inspired by a loyalty to the 51st.

It is also clear that post-war accounts largely associated divisional loyalty in the (Highland) Division as the key loyalty. After the Second World War, Eric Linklater, who served in the famed ‘U’ Company of the 1/4th Gordons, wrote that:

to the Highland Territorials who composed the Fifty First Division in the earlier German War, a strange thing happened: regimental loyalty-the normal sentiment of a soldier-was to a large extent replaced by their greater pride in the Division. Like other divisions with a consistently good record, it became corporate, and in a few years time it acquired such a tradition as many a regiment has hardly won by a century of fortunate campaigning.⁶

A strong formation loyalty and a strong sub-formation loyalty were not mutually exclusive properties in the (Highland) Division. Both loyalties worked in synchronicity and the interactive network of associations and allegiances forged very potent bonds.

Although sub-formation loyalties were a prominent feature of *esprit de corps* in the 51st Division, the three brigades of the 51st never commanded anything like the same level of loyalty from officers and men as that which was bestowed on the division. However, that is not to say that the brigade did not provide a focus for *esprit de corps*. Brigades of the 51st did establish their own traditions over the course of the war, largely through a particular combination of battalions or following one or more attacks, and strong brigade commanders also assisted in focusing recognition of a particular brigade amongst the troops. Essentially, the main function of the brigade was to act as a level of administration, and was crucially viewed as such by (Highland) Division officers and men.

Battalions operated as part of brigades, and battalion *esprit de corps* was very strong in the (Highland) Division. It is clear that *esprit* could differ from unit to unit and was subject to change over time, much in the way that Nicholson referred to the 17th Division

⁵ W.N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines, An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18* (Stevenage, 1939), p. 168.

⁶ E. Linklater, *The Highland Division* (London, 1942), p. 7.

shortly after transferring from the 51st: ‘only one or two of the battalions of the 17th Division kept throughout this magnificent esprit de corps as units. The remainder varied appreciably as successive officers commanded them, and as reinforcements filled their ranks’.⁷ S. Bradbury also emphasised differences between units when, upon transferring from his (Highland) Division battalion to a newly-formed machine gun unit also within the 51st, he stated that he ‘felt like a fish out of water and wished with all my heart I was back with the old battalion’.⁸

Regimental and battalion histories for the 51st invariably refer to unit *esprit de corps* in a similar way, as A.G. Wauchope stated of the 1/7th Black Watch: ‘officers and men were therefore in good trim and conscious of the fine spirit that, from the start to the end of the war, had animated the battalion,’⁹ or G.I. Malcolm when he referred to the 1/8th Argylls regarding itself as ‘*unique*’.¹⁰ In effect, this form of promotion emphasised the strength and individual nature of the units.

Of greater interest are the contemporary or personal accounts of both officers and men who served with the (Highland) Division. These also emphasise the importance of a strong battalion ethos and identity within the 51st. Private A.E. Wrench, a Seaforth, was evidently proud of the martial traditions of his unit when he wrote, ‘there was a rumour that we were going back to the line to rest, a real rest this time, but the Seaforth’s don’t point that way’.¹¹

As a result of the individually distinctive *esprit de corps* of many (Highland) Division units, there was often an intense rivalry between different battalions. These rivalries could be either inter-regimental or not. The reasons for these rivalries were manifold; some trivial, some territorial, some traditional.

⁷ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 152.

⁸ Imperial War Museum, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 59.

⁹ A.G. Wauchope, *The Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II, Territorial Forces* (London, 1926), p. 311.

¹⁰ G.I. Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960* (Glasgow, 1960), p. 27.

¹¹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 173.

Of inter-regimental rivalry, Malcolm wrote with some feeling that the 1/8th Argylls were 'the only true Highland battalion in the Regiment'.¹² This distinction between the 1/8th Battalion and the others in the regiment was essentially to set apart the 1/8th as a purer body of fighting men in the proper martial traditions of the Highland clansmen. This elitism and rivalry could lead to bitter feuds within the division:

No one recalled the origins of the feud between the 6th and 8th Battalions of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders but, after several estaminets had been wrecked in the course of wild rumpuses for which the Army was obliged to foot the bill, it had been generally recognised that, when the Division was out at rest, those in charge of the billeting arrangements of the three Brigades would be well advised to make sure that the 6th and 8th Argylls were separated by a considerable distance. The 8th Argylls, who came from Argyllshire itself, were largely Gaelic speaking, and sneered at the idea that the 6th, who hailed from Paisley in Renfrewshire, should pass as Highlanders at all.¹³

However, a very interesting contrast to this view of the two battalions is given by a soldier, who belonged to the 1/8th Argylls but was attached to the 1/6th Argylls for a period of time. He stated that, 'All of us belonging to Argyllshire now attached to the heroic "Fighting Sixth" are well' and 'We are getting on splendidly with the 6th, and quite happy in all respects. Our own county unit is not far from us.'¹⁴ This would suggest that rivalries would break down when battalion barriers were breached. Captain J.C. Dunn in his book, *The War the Infantry Knew*, stated that battalion rivalry was not confined merely to the (Highland) Division, but was widespread amongst all Scottish units, 'A Scotch vendetta, inter-regimental or inter-battalion of the same regiment, is a terrible thing when seen out here... Three weeks ago the xxxx [sic] let an officer of the xxxx [sic] lie in their midst, an offence, rather than bury him.'¹⁵

Relations between battalions from different Scottish regiments in the (Highland) Division could be equally strained. Nicholson said of the division when it was stationed in Bedford, 'there was a soldier scrap between two neighbouring battalions, such as occasionally happens in Regular military circles. They attacked each other, first with

¹² Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 13.

¹³ L. MacDonald, *Somme* (London, 1983), p. 341.

¹⁴ J. McLean, *On Active Service with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders*, (Edinburgh, 1927), p. 69.

¹⁵ J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1918* (London, 1989), p. 343.

fists, and then with entrenching helves.’¹⁶ Rivalry could take a more benign and productive form where ‘each battalion vied with its neighbours in an effort to show that it was the pick of a first-class lot’.¹⁷ Particularly ‘inspiring was the news that the 2nd Gordons had attacked that morning with signal success. The spirit of emulation was aroused’.¹⁸

In many instances a good camaraderie existed between units of the same regiment and also between units of different regiments. Captain R.B. Ross explained:

we were relieved by the 5th Seaforths, with whom we were soon to have very intimate relations in the routine matter of relieving, when confidence in the efficiency of both parties meant a heartier co-operation. If, for example, one battalion regarded its successor in the line with disfavour, if there existed any petty rivalry (for this was not unknown), or if reliance could not be placed on the undertaking of the incoming unit to continue the work in progress, then there was not the same incentive to honest labour. But the greatest cordiality marked our relations with the 5th Seaforths.¹⁹

Spiers argues that *esprit de corps* existed and was sustained not only at battalion, but also at company level.²⁰ Inter-unit relationships, both positive and negative developed (similar to those at battalion level). Private A.E. Wrench testified that this existed within the (Highland) Division and across the British Army, ‘and so I was treated to a thousand eulogisms on this company’s merits over the others, and had to agree even when they said that “Number one company’s no worth a damn”. I wouldn’t argue in any case, for it’s the same old story all over the army.’²¹ It is logical to posit that a variation of this form of *esprit de corps* would also be evident at section level.

These forms of positive and negative relationships did not solely exist between infantry units. There were also rivalries and perceived differences between the various arms and branches in divisional formations. The (Highland) Division was no different from any

¹⁶ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 43.

¹⁷ NLS, ACC 11595, Papers relating to the service of James Laing Henderson.

¹⁸ R.B. Ross, *The Fifty-First in France* (London, 1918), p. 220.

¹⁹ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 135.

²⁰ E. Spiers, ‘The Scottish Soldier at War’, in I. Beckett, and K. Simpson (eds), *A Nation In Arms, A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), p. 55.

²¹ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 93.

other formation in this respect and each arm had something to say about the other. There are many accounts in (Highland) Division sources of the infantry soldier's animosity towards trench mortar units for avoiding fatigues and risking lives, and the staff and administration branches are repeatedly accused of incompetence or risk-avoidance. A.E. Wrench wrote in his diary of an argument between orderlies and engineers: 'the R.E's think they are so much superior and are entitled to rule the roost whereas the orderlies object'.²² F.W. Webster stated that he was happy to serve in a (Highland) Division Royal Artillery battery as all were aware that the infantry battalions bore the brunt of the fighting.²³ References are legion, and animosities could be one-sided or mutually enforced affairs. Ultimately, as an integrated body, the units of the 51st Division functioned within a world of interactive relationships. Certain elements in the Royal Artillery would be thankful that they were not in the infantry and certain elements in the infantry could feel resentment against the RA for fighting the war 'behind the lines', but as the divisional historian explained 'all the Highland Division trusted the divisional artillery'.²⁴ They trusted them because they had to. There was no other option.

There was also a friction and distrust between regimental and staff officers. This was a traditional animosity in the British Army and the 51st was no different. However, animosity against the staff is understandable as there were certainly benefits to holding a staff post. Bradbury tells of how his living conditions improved when given a staff post,²⁵ and he further commented on the occasion when staff slept soundly whilst the division attacked.²⁶ Regimental officers thought the staff was safe from harm and prone to making mistakes, but the majority actually worked extremely hard and often felt harshly treated. Colonel Nicholson pointed out, 'that the great majority of the staff were at heart regimental officers; they were doing their best, serving in the posts wherever it was considered they would be useful'.²⁷

²² IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 83.

²³ IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 103.

²⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 71.

²⁵ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury p. 58.

²⁶ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury p. 83.

²⁷ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 186.

Regimental traditions

Regimental traditions, although not as pivotal in the Territorial Force as they were in the Regular Army, were still very relevant to the units constituting the (Highland) Division and did contribute to the divisional *esprit de corps*. They were also part of the interactive mechanism within the division creating and maintaining bonds and allegiances, and providing links to wider army traditions.

Hew Strachan in *The Politics of the British Army*, whilst describing the nature of regimental traditions, posited that the Cardwell reforms of 1881 solidly entrenched the regimental ethos across the British Army.²⁸ Field Marshal Earl Wavell, in writing of the Black Watch stressed, 'Nowhere is this regimental spirit stronger than in Highland regiments'.²⁹ Lieutenant-General B. Horrocks stated of the Black Watch, 'All Regiments develop their own esprit de corps but it was impossible to live with the Black Watch and not realise that every officer and man whether Highlander or Lowlander belonged to one family, or rather to one clan'. He qualified this by further stating that 'the clan pride of the Black Watch is still handed down as a form of spiritual inheritance'.³⁰

Many of the senior officers in the 51st (Highland) Division were career soldiers and they set much store by regimental tradition. However, it is vital to understand that for many 'temporary' officers and men the regiment was viewed in a different way. For the career soldier, the regiment meant defining a place of belonging within an established military system and the bonds that developed within it were strong and permanent. Often there was a connection between the soldier and the regiment before joining. As D.N. Wimberley pointed out, 'I badly wanted my grandfather's regiment, and the regiment of the county in which I had been born, and so I was much relieved to find, on checking the list myself, that I was now a Cameron Highlander'.³¹ He later tells of lunching with an officer whom he had never previously met merely because he was also a Cameron³² and

²⁸ H. Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997).

²⁹ B. Fergusson, *The Black Watch and the King's Enemies*, (London, 1950), p. 13.

³⁰ P. Howard, *The Black Watch* (London, 1968), p. 7.

³¹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 19.

³² NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 108.

further pointed out that Brigadier-General Pelham Burn of 152nd Brigade was 'very thick' with officers from his own regiment.³³

The traditions of the Scottish regiments were held in high esteem in the British Army. When at a theatre, Wimberley and a friend attempted to take two of the stage girls out to dinner by sending down calling cards with regimental names engraved on them. However, they were shocked to find that this was unsuccessful:

I did not then know much about women, for it seemed to me perfectly extraordinary that when this giel [sic] had two officers of the Highland Brigade, she could possibly have the bad taste to go off with a mere Lowland officer, when all the world knew, I thought, that all Scotsmen then tried, from Sandhurst, for Highland Regiments and the Lowland Regiments, I considered, took those for whom we had no vacancies.³⁴

However, at the outset of the war, many of the Territorial soldiers within the Territorial units of the (Highland) Division were only vaguely aware of the distinctive regimental ethos. 'The Territorial and New Army mobilised and trained with none of these class distinctions and with practically none of the tradition of the Regular units to which they were affiliated.'³⁵ But, if the Territorial soldier in the (Highland) Division had not been indoctrinated in regimental traditions to the same extent as pre-war Regular soldiers, the onset of war provided the opportunity for officers and men to develop their knowledge and understanding. Many 'temporary gentlemen' would readily endorse these traditions to cement their positions as officers. Once established, it became one of the self-perpetuating factors that maintained a divisional *esprit de corps*. In the vast number of primary and secondary accounts, reference is made to regimental tradition. Of the 1/6th and 1/7th battalions of the Gordon Highlanders, it was written, 'Both battalions had fought together for two-and-a-half years in the 51st Division, and both had proudly cherished and gallantly upheld the honourable traditions of the regiment'.³⁶

³³ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 100.

³⁴ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 23.

³⁵ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 139.

³⁶ D. MacKenzie, *The 6th Gordons In France and Flanders* (Aberdeen, 1921), pp. 177-8.

National identity

A common view of the (Highland) Division is that it was made up solely of officers and men from the Highlands, and A.V. Sellwood has stated that the division 'was originally dependent for its strength on the pride of the clan spirit or the ties of local interest. They were to be replaced, or maybe sublimated, by a sense of unity as Highlanders'. However, he goes on to break down the popular model, 'as the battle exerted an even greater toll, and reserves were drafted in from the more populous areas, even this was to be replaced by the broader pride of being Scots, and especially Scots of the 51st'.³⁷

Sellwood is correct in his summary, but one point must be stressed. At the beginning of the war, the 51st Division was already essentially a Lowland division that happened to have a large number of Highlanders in it. Of the 143 active list battalions in Scotland at one stage in the war, 86 held the appellation 'Highland', 'even though the population north of the Highland Line was only about 8 per cent of the whole'.³⁸ Specifically, of the nineteen battalions that constituted the Scottish infantry component of the (Highland) Division during the war, twelve were based south of the Highland Line and many of the supporting troops were also from Lowland areas (three brigades of artillery and most of the engineers, etc, from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Dundee). As the war progressed and the men of the original units were replaced by reinforcements from across Scotland and elsewhere, that Highland proportion grew even smaller, as the Highland recruitment areas simply did not have the men to reinforce the 51st Division (as well as the 9th and 15th divisions, and the Regular battalions).³⁹ A similar situation occurred during the Second World War and Scottish Command wrote to the GOC of the 51st Division in 1943 emphasising that all of Scotland had a vested interest in the (Highland) Division because many of the men hailed from the Lowland areas, just as they had done over 25 years before: 'They predominate, as indeed they have predominated in all arms of the 51st Division in the last Great War'.⁴⁰

³⁷ A.V. Sellwood, *The Saturday Night Soldiers* (London, 1966), p. 163.

³⁸ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), p. 164.

³⁹ A.F. Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A* (London, 1936), pp. 104-105.

⁴⁰ NLS, ACC 7380, box 2 File 32, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

The division was full of men who were not from the Highlands or hold the traditions of the region through birth. Why did the image of the Highlander prove to be such an alluring one if the men were not true Highlanders? It was because the iconic image of a Highland identity was not evocative of Highlanders alone. The sole ownership of Highland symbols belonged to a bygone age. The patronage of Sir Walter Scott, amongst others, had seen to that. The Highland imagery had assumed the status of a wider Scottish imagery, evidenced by the adoption of the Highland 'trappings' by Lowland units to form their own military identities.⁴¹

The officers and men of the division assumed this common identity and it was all the more accessible because of the almost mythical martial status of the Highland regiments. This was greatly assisted by the early impact of Scottish units and formations in 1914 and 1915 when they were commonly held to have fought heroically. For those who became associated with (Highland) Division identity, the rewards were evident; they wore the traditional garb, they soldiered in a historic regiment, they could be called Highlander. Non-Highlanders felt privileged to fight in such esteemed company. Genuine Highlanders did not object as they ultimately achieved battle success and widespread fame.

There are a great many references in the sources to the symbiosis of Highland with Scottish identity. Scottish soldiers were commonly referred to as 'Jocks'. But what did this identify? Fuller has qualified it by looking at the 'Jock' through the eyes of the Australians:⁴²

The Australians did not define precisely whom they subsumed under the heading 'Jocks', but it is tempting to suppose that the most conspicuous of Scots, the distinctly uniformed, renowned, and lionised Highlanders, played a disproportionate part in establishing the image of their nationality in the Dominion troops' minds.⁴³

⁴¹ T. Devine, *The Scottish Nation* (London, 1999), p. 231.

⁴² Many of the Dominion regiments were associated with Scotland, and wore much of the traditional attire.

⁴³ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, p. 162.

Again, the martial tradition of the Highlander and the Scot were mixed and became fused in the (Highland) Division legend:

A French officer who witnessed the charge of the Highlanders [9th Division] at Loos said, "I don't know what effect it had on the Boche, but it made my blood run cold". Many a time since Beaumont Hamel our kilted lads, Regulars and Territorials, have made the Boche blood run cold. The virtue in which our Scottish soldiers perhaps excel any other is fortitude.⁴⁴

The blurring of the lines between what was Highland and what was more broadly Scottish in the division was further endorsed through official communications. On 14 July 1915, the General Officer Commanding read out the following order to all units of the 51st Division:

In passing to the offensive the G.O.C. is confident that the men of the Highland Division will maintain the traditions of Scotland, and will show the same superb spirit in attack as they have done in defence. Remember the honour of your country, and remember the tartan you wear.⁴⁵

Along with Lowland Scots, the 51st integrated non-Scots into the division and they became honorary 'Heilanders'. It was not essential to be a Highlander or Scottish to serve in the (Highland) Division. In fact Major-General Harper was an Englishman, but it was essential to believe in the Highland idea and accept the trappings. If these were accepted, 'Even the Englishmen loved the Balmoral eventually'.⁴⁶

Indeed, many Englishmen were attracted to the Scottish regiments. A story from one history recalls one Lancashire soldier telling another, 'Ah've been a Jock longer than thee'.⁴⁷ Officers were as influenced as the men:

I had the satisfaction, being a Scot, of dancing down my partner, the Colonel-who is as near Scottish as it is possible to be. He is a Northumbrian, but Scottish by many associations, and no Aberdeen man could be more perfervid in upholding the traditions and good fame of the Gordon Highlanders. He is proud of his battalion, as he has every right to be, and his battalion is proud of him.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 69.

⁴⁷ M. Chappell, *Scottish Units in the World Wars* (London, 1994), p. 5.

⁴⁸ Catto, *With the Scottish Troops*, p. 55.

The Colonel in question was Colonel McTaggart, who according to Nicholson:

came to us from the 5th Lancers.....The change in the unit was extraordinary; they caught his enthusiasm, stuck out their chests and rightly regarded themselves as a very fine body of men. How pernicky the little man was about the set of his kilt, the size of his Glengarry; I fancy he had never worn either before in his life.⁴⁹

There was occasionally an anti-outsider (particularly English) bias, though, and it could be difficult for the individual who did not integrate. The divisional history stated that two new brigadiers were appointed to command (Highland) Division brigades, but one was removed because he was not Scottish.⁵⁰ Four English battalions also served for a period of time under the banner of the 51st Division, but remained together in 154th Brigade. The non-Scottish bias is clear when, after the war, a 51st (Highland) Division Old Comrades Association was formed and amongst the early papers on its formation was a section on 'membership'. It was stated that 'all units who have served with the Division since mobilisation, except the four English Battalions who formed 154th Brigade for a short period, should be admitted to the Association'. This proposal was vetoed by the GOC of the 51st Division and the English battalions were included.⁵¹

To an extent Scottish identity was maintained in part because it was not English. 'Hands up Englishman' ordered a party of surrounding Germans. 'I'm a Scotsman' replied the enraged Flynn and hurled his grenade with all his force, putting them to flight.'⁵²

Territorial identity

A factor that fundamentally influenced the evolution of the *esprit de corps* of the 51st Division was the established negative perception of the Territorial Force. Immediately before the First World War, the Territorial Force was referred to, amongst other disparaging remarks, as the 'Dog-shooters', 'Haldane's Horse', and the 'Featherbed

⁴⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 148.

⁵⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 321.

⁵¹ NLS, ACC 7380, No.1, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley.

⁵² Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 143.

Heroes'. Jibes at its expense were public and plentiful, and often ill-natured.⁵³ Certainly many within, and without, the British Army were critical of the force for what were considered to be poor standards of training and low levels of recruitment, but 'this cannot excuse the superior manner the army adopted towards the Militia, Territorials and other organisations that formed its natural reserves'.⁵⁴

The Territorial Force continued to suffer during the early months of the First World War, with priority being given to the New Armies. Paddy Griffith has postulated that over the course of the war, based on the regularity of attack and strategic positioning of formations, the military authorities were not entirely convinced of the trustworthiness of the Territorial divisions in battle on the Western Front.⁵⁵ However, overall the Territorial Force did have a solid record of achievement during the war. Seventy one Territorial soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross, and the force fought in all theatres of war eventually winning praise from many quarters. Long before New Army units were ready for battle, the Territorial Force had been in action, and had suffered heavy casualties. Lyn MacDonald relates that 'on the door of a broken-down barn a little way behind the front, some wag with nothing better to do had chalked a notice: 'LOST, STOLEN OR STRAYED. KITCHENERS ARMY. £5 REWARD TO FINDER.'⁵⁶ This was considered to be a good joke and similar notices appeared in numerous villages behind the line.

It was in this context that the (Highland) Division arrived in France. The division was aware of its Territorial status and was also militarily insecure, but the men did consider themselves more extensively trained in tactics and the use of equipment than the New Armies. However, the bulk of public and media focus was directed at the Kitchener constructs. This perceived favour towards the New Armies at the expense of the Territorial Force caused friction, and the divisional history stated of 1915 that 'Throughout this period the rivalry between the Territorial and New Army Divisions was

⁵³ Sellwood, *Saturday Night Soldiers*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 138.

⁵⁵ P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front, The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (London, 1994), p. 82.

⁵⁶ L. MacDonald, *1915, The Death of Innocence* (London, 1997), p. 169.

acute'.⁵⁷ Captain Ross also chronicled that 'the times were anxious, because there were entrusted to our hands to be moulded to the necessities of the trenches the first drafts of K1. Proud, indeed, did we feel in our office of instructors. It was a rare compliment to a Territorial Division.'⁵⁸

During the war, and particularly in the early years, the Regular units of the British Army were considered to be militarily the most efficient and effective, and Regular officers and men expected, and were often accorded, that seniority by the volunteer and later the conscript. Nicholson stated that the 'Regular soldier made his voice heard the loudest on strategy and tactics, and the Civilian was apt to defer to his opinion'.⁵⁹ The superior status of the Regular soldier is evidenced by D.N. Wimberley, who wrote of a visit to London:

we were all in uniform, and were immensely proud that we were now in the Regular and not the Territorial or Kitchener Army. We took considerable delight in 'throwing' our smartest salutes. Right across a London street, if we saw an officer in uniform with medals, that we considered to belong, also, to the Regular Army. Then if we saw a callow young man, dressed as a subaltern in Kitchener's Army, or the Territorials, we merely gave him a supercilious look.⁶⁰

However, as the war progressed the differences in experience and battle-worthiness were less obvious, and new reputations overcame the old prejudices. Simpson endorsed this view when examining the officer class, positing that many of the professional and social differences between Regular, temporary, and Territorial officers disappeared or seemed less important on active service.⁶¹ The 51st had direct experience of the initial indifference of the Regulars and the subsequent breaking down of barriers at Givenchy in May 1915. Before the battle, the Regular battalions couldn't believe they were being relieved by mere Territorials of the (Highland) Division. However, after the battle they

⁵⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 30.

⁵⁸ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 141.

⁵⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 118.

⁶⁰ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 17.

⁶¹ K. Simpson, 'The Officers', in Beckett, and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. 79.

had changed their opinion. Webster stated that the Regulars were impressed by 'the Terriers' and invitations to fraternise soon followed.⁶²

The Territorials of the 51st never considered themselves professional soldiers. Even after news that the German Army thought it the finest of the British divisions, the men still thought of themselves as 'only territorials' and that they were 'soldiers for the time-being and would much rather not be soldiers at all'.⁶³ However, it was still a matter of pride to the (Highland) Division and its constituent units that it earned the respect and recognition of the Regulars. The 1/6th Gordons, on leaving the 7th Division, proudly stated that it had succeeded in gaining that respect and recognition:

For fourteen months the battalion had been a unit in one of the greatest of fighting divisions. From the regular soldiers it had learned much-discipline, comradeship, and battle wisdom. By its native *courage*, endurance and tenacity it had won the highest tribute the old soldier could give, a frank admiration and admission of equality.⁶⁴

Symbolism

The use of symbols can be a potent and powerful mechanism to assist in the creation and maintenance of a common belief, and symbolism was important to the 51st Division. The visible symbols included identification badges, the allocation of honours, signs and clothing, but also invisible symbolism such as the use of names. These symbols were increasingly recognised and recognisable as the self-belief and the fame of the (Highland) Division grew.

After the defeat at Culloden in 1746, Highland symbols such as the kilt, the pipes, and the Gaelic language, were banned in an attempt to suppress distinctive aspects of Highland culture. However, as Highland regiments took their place within the British Army, symbols of Highlandism were again used for a military purpose. This ensured a continuity with the pre-Culloden Highland culture, and, with the widespread cultural

⁶² IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, pp. 58-59.

⁶³ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 155.

⁶⁴ D.M. MacKenzie, *The Sixth Gordons in France and Flanders* (Aberdeen, 1921), p. 81.

symbiosis of a Highland into a Scottish identity during the 19th Century, the symbols further developed their significance.

During 1915 and 1916, the two Scottish divisions of the New Army (the 9th and the 15th) were both better known and more respected as fighting formations than the 51st. Nevertheless the (Highland) Division possessed an advantage over the other two. For it was the only division in the whole British Army of which, for long periods, all the infantry wore kilts, and it was the only one to which the name Highland was attached. This was tremendously significant in reinforcing the divisional identity of the 51st, as other all-Scottish divisions did not have the benefit of this emotive and distinctive title.

The wholesale wearing of the kilt was a defining characteristic for the officers and men of the division, and assisted in promoting its corporate image to the world outside the formation. Sellwood has emphasised the former by stating that an oft repeated boast of the 51st was, 'A Highlander in his kilt is a man and a half'.⁶⁵ Captain Dunn, a Glaswegian, offered a more backhanded compliment when referring to the latter, 'we passed the 51st Division going up [to High Wood]. They were a fine body of men, although the kilt is a costume that flatters'.⁶⁶

However, although it had an undoubted impact as a visible symbol, the kilt was not universally popular with officers and men of the division because of its impracticality on the Western Front. For many, the advantages of being the only division to have all its infantry battalions in the kilt were outweighed by this fact. Major-General Harper was one of them and he:

entirely agreed with the wish of the division to abolish the kilt. It was in fact inconceivable that in such a war a kilt should be worn. With water up to the waist in some parts of the trenches, the kilt got soaked and caked with mud, and the man became exhausted by the weight of the dress. There is no uniform more conspicuous than a kilt; or easier to identify by an enemy; none more expensive, or took up more space in ordnance trains and wagons. It was

⁶⁵ Sellwood, *The Saturday Night Soldiers*, p. 129.

⁶⁶ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914-1918*, p. 244.

beloved of lice. The kilt had been adapted by us to meet war necessities by stripping off all national characteristics such as sporran and tartan.⁶⁷

Wimberley, a future GOC of the 51st and a general advocate of the use of the kilt as a tool for maintaining *esprit de corps* in the (Highland) Division, when considering the specific conditions under which the men of the division existed in France and Belgium, stated:

As a dress, however, particularly suited for freedom of movement and activity, it came under plenty of adverse criticism by many of those who wore it, during static warfare, in the dank muddy water logged trenches in winter, on the grounds of its coldness, particularly when sleeping. It was also criticised as aiding the harbouring of lice in the pleats, which the filthy dugouts and billets of that campaign had bred in plenty, and again sometimes for flicking the back of the knee when wet. Later in 1917, came the use of mustard gas, and with it the much more serious criticism against an unnecessary exposure of naked flesh to burns.⁶⁸

Private Wrench offered a rather more candid appraisal of the view at the other end of the chain of command when he was horrified to discover that, as a battalion runner, he was expected to cycle 'bare arsed' in the winter.⁶⁹ In his opinion the kilt was only useful if a man was stricken with diahorrea.⁷⁰

But if it was attacked, in some quarters, as an unsuitable dress for the trenches, it was also robustly defended by others. There was an under-pinning fear that, if the kilt was withdrawn from use on the Western Front, it would never be returned. As a form of insurance against this extinction, 'we never covered our knees without having some guarantee for the return of the kilt- and we were never disappointed'.⁷¹ The fear that the kilt would not be returned was very real as evidenced by its removal from service during the Second World War.

To prevent the German Army discovering that the 51st Division had extended its front, units of the 152nd Brigade had their kilts and Balmoral bonnets taken from them and were

⁶⁷ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 145.

⁶⁸ NLS, ACC 8681/171, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley. A paper on the value of the kilt, p. 1.

⁶⁹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 164.

⁷⁰ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 238.

⁷¹ NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 2 of 'The Highland Division', pp. 10-11.

kitted out with Khaki trousers and field service caps, 'much to the disgust of the men, who, suspicious of some Sassenach plot to strip them forever of the kilt, grumbled very much and protested to the officers'.⁷² Again the strength of feeling on this occasion can be detected from an account by an officer of the 1/6th Gordons:

For some reason which satisfied Higher Command, the kilt was discarded in the trenches in this area, and all the ranks wore the ordinary service dress-khaki trousers and square caps. The fondness for the Highland uniform was seen in rest billets, when the tartan reappeared on the slightest of excuses.⁷³

Of course, kilts were not the only form of dress that could be distinctive and add to the sense of corporate identity. The Balmoral hat was another iconic symbol and Wimberley explained that it was essential for the officers and men to adopt this symbol to become fully a member of the (Highland) Division:

All around us were bivouacs, the yellow kilt of the Gordons mingling with the dark green of the Argylls, and the white red of the Seaforths; near us too were the 154 M.G. Company, the O.C. of the Company, so soon to be shot by a sniper, poor fellow, who very kindly helped me with his local knowledge and offered us a meal. One of the first things he said to me was how glad he was that we had arrived in flat hats, as his was the only other Company in the Highland Division that wore them, and that we would keep him company; I soon enlightened him, however, by vowing that we too should be in Balmorals and at the first instant my C.Q.M.S. should obtain them.⁷⁴

Military piping was another signifier of Scottish culture and was very prominent in the 51st Division during the First World War. The sight of the piper and the sound of the pipes often affected officers and men in a highly emotional way, conjuring up an array of images that inspired them to 'do their duty'.

The pipers were responsible for creating panegyrics to celebrate and commemorate unit and division exploits. Formation and unit parades, marches, and other events, such as the divisional sporting occasions, fully involved the pipe band. Harper exhibited the type of approach that was common within the 51st:

⁷² D. Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1920), p. 69.

⁷³ MacKenzie, *The Sixth Gordons in France and Flanders*, p. 91.

⁷⁴ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 60.

he was decidedly the right man for this somewhat feudal gathering of the clans. Moreover, he knew how to stimulate this feeling. For state and other occasions he massed the pipers of his three infantry brigades—a retreat played by a hundred and more pipers was worth coming some distance to hear. Once heard and seen it was not easily forgotten.⁷⁵

During the cacophony that surrounded a battle, the pipes were often inaudible, but as a visual symbol that stimulated motivation, they were invaluable. However, the manpower costs were disproportionately high as pipers made attractive targets.

The naming of persons and of things was another contributor to the *esprit de corps* of the (Highland) Division. They could sustain common mechanisms of recognition and assist in creating and maintaining a common cultural heritage.

The divisional history asserted that the division's own troops were the originators of the less than flattering nickname 'Harper's Duds' after the initials 'H.D.' in (Highland) Division.⁷⁶ This was substantiated by Captains Peel and MacDonald⁷⁷ and Major-General D.N. Wimberley,⁷⁸ although other sources refer to that nickname being allocated by other British Army troops. Whatever the explanation, the application of the nickname abruptly ceased after the battle of Beaumont Hamel, when an infantryman of the 51st stated that, 'they winna ca' us Hairper's Duds noo'.⁷⁹ In fact, after that battle, the division then began to create and circulate altogether more charismatic and martial nicknames for itself, such as 'the Ladies from Hell'.⁸⁰

Individual units within the division collected nicknames also. The 1/6th Seaforths were referred to as the 'Moray Loons',⁸¹ the 1/6th Argylls were known as the 'Fighting Sixth',⁸² and the 1/9th Royal Scots were known as the 'Dandy Ninth' or 'Edinburgh's

⁷⁵ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 143.

⁷⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ R.T. Peel, and A.H. MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences* (Elgin, 1923), p. 31.

⁷⁸ NLS, ACC 7380, Book 2 of 'The Highland Division', p. 6.

⁷⁹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 126.

⁸⁰ Howard, *The Black Watch*, p. 92.

⁸¹ IWM, 82/15/1, Papers of General Sir Philip Christison, p. 73.

⁸² McLean, *Active Service with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Volumes 1 and 2*, p. 69.

Highland Unit'.⁸³ Prominent individuals such as Major-General 'Uncle' Harper, Brigadier-General 'Bogie' Bogart, or Major-General Bannatine-Allason, who was known as the 'Nurse', were frequently addressed by nickname. Another example of a common recognition in the division was through appellations for other formations such as 'the Market Gardeners', which the 51st named a Lancashire Division.⁸⁴

In a landscape as harsh and brutal as that on the Western Front, it is understandable that the men would attempt to recreate a familiar landscape through the common application of names, and Captain Ross noted that the 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with 'a singular disregard for the appropriateness of the original titles, altered them [trenches] to Sauchiehall Street, Greenock Avenue, Buchanan Avenue, Paisley Avenue and so on'.⁸⁵

In many instances, units would be associated with an event, and many of those associations could become identifying symbols which when employed by the whole division assisted in developing common reference points. When the 1/7th Gordons experienced heavy trench mortar fire in the line, 'windiness' was evident: 'the story quickly went round the Division, but the battalion soon lived it down'. However, 'Fa shot the cheese' was oft shouted at the men of the 1/7th Gordons 'and is still shouted 25 years on'.⁸⁶ Often, individuals could also be common reference points if they were known to all within the division and to others without. Some men achieved legendary status, such as 'Sniper Sandy' of the 1/5th Seaforths who was reputed to have killed 97 German soldiers.⁸⁷

As a central element in the creation and maintenance of the (Highland) Divisional 'legend', a potent act of symbolism was the establishment of 'Beaumont Hamel Day'. Major-General Harper inaugurated an annual divisional holiday on 13 November and ensured that commemorative events marked the occasion. The GOCs that followed also observed this tradition. This event was frequently mentioned in primary and secondary

⁸³ D, MacEchern, *The Sword of the North* (Inverness, 1923), p. 8.

⁸⁴ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 82.

⁸⁵ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 154.

⁸⁶ NLS, ACC 7380, Book 2 of 'The Highland Division', p. 6.

⁸⁷ Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 62.

records and was a continuing validation to the 51st and to others of an outstanding achievement that reflected the martial power of the (Highland) Division.

Other visible symbols were common in the 51st Division and also assisted in the creation of a common bond and identity. Officers and men were issued with a divisional badge embodying the letters 'H.D.' with a square of tartan below identifying the battalion.⁸⁸ Billets, divisional transport, and headquarters were stamped with the initials 'H.D.',⁸⁹ and where appropriate units would also often add their own battalion symbols.⁹⁰

Medals were also visible symbols of prestige. These were not so prominent in 1915, but as the war progressed became increasingly prevalent, sponsored by the higher echelons of command and recognised throughout the military hierarchy. Officers at different stages in the command chain could authorise the receipt of medals dependent on the medal type. The Military Medal, which was awarded to non-commissioned officers and other ranks, and the Military Cross, which was awarded to officers, could be authorised at divisional level, the 51st accumulating 1633 and 313 respectively over the course of the war, whereas an award such as the Victoria Cross, of which the 51st received 4, or the DSO, of which it received 54, had to be authorised at a higher command level.⁹¹ Divisional and unit war diaries and divisional routine orders regularly mentioned medal ceremonies and the routine orders in particular promoted medal winners. The presentations of medals were elaborately staged ceremonies, often held as composite parts of larger events where maximum impact could be derived. Major-General Harper was a firm advocate of this type of event:

The parade was a central function held on a piece of grass ground, sloping away from the Haute-Avesnes Hill, where we formed up the three battalions in a hollow square, with the recipients in line in the middle. The General and staff rode on to parade; the General made a speech, saying that the Huns made use of blackguard tricks; but our turn would come when we attacked them. Then he dismounted; and each man advanced in turn, received his medal ribbon and shook hands with the General. Finally the three battalions marched past in fours. All went perfectly, even to my mind the questionable 'See the Conquering Hero comes' which

⁸⁸ IWM, 85/23/1, The Papers of Major A. Anderson, undated (c. mid-1916).

⁸⁹ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 86.

⁹⁰ Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 23.

⁹¹ NLS, ACC 7380, No. 4, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley. Divisional honours.

the General insisted should be played while he presented the medals. Afterwards at the theatre the ten medal winners, seated in the front row, were received with a tremendous cheer as they entered.⁹²

Many of the men were more terrified about the medal-giving ceremonies than they had been when they were earning the right to receive one!⁹³ An indication of the prominence of these medal-giving ceremonies in the 51st is evidenced by the attendance of very senior army officers such as Field Marshal Haig and General Byng.

However, the allocation of military awards to particular individuals was not always understood. On congratulating another soldier on his award, Private Wrench was informed 'that I was the only one who had done so, and not even his own particular pals. Everybody is wondering why he is the chosen one, and some even say it should have been me. But what did I do at the Somme more than anyone else'.⁹⁴ From the officer's perspective, Captain Lusk tells of how he was ashamed to accept a French decoration when so many others deserved it more.⁹⁵

As a formation, the (Highland) Division was also awarded a number of very prestigious foreign honours such as the French Chevalier of the Légion d' Honneur and the Croix de Guerre, the Italian Order of St. Maurice and St. Lazarus, the Belgian Chevalier of the Order of Leopold, and the Montenegrin Order of St. Daniele.⁹⁶ The latter of these awards was actually presented to an officer of the division by the King of Montenegro.⁹⁷

The home front

The home front was important to the officers and men of the 51st Division for the principal reason that they were in the trenches fighting to defend it, in both the abstract

⁹² Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 144.

⁹³ IWM, N/A, *Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 176.

⁹⁴ IWM, *The Diary of A.E. Wrench*, Volume I, 27 August 1916.

⁹⁵ J. Lusk, *Letters and Memories*, (Oxford, 1916), p. 101.

⁹⁶ NLS, ACC 7380, No. 4, *The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley*. Divisional honours.

⁹⁷ National Archive, WO 95/2849, 51st Division A and Q General Routine Order 683.

and the real sense. In this context, it is hardly surprising that it widely influenced *esprit de corps*.

McCartney asserts that, 'Whether actively subscribing to the ideas of alienation from home or not, most historians have concentrated on factors internal to the military unit, to the exclusion of those related to the home front and political ideology'.⁹⁸ External influences were powerful levers in shaping (Highland) Division *esprit de corps* and the traditional view that there was little contact between the home and the Western Front has increasingly been challenged. In reality, officers and men at the front employed every means of communication at their disposal to maintain contact with family and community.

News from Britain was routed to the front through an interactive communication system. National and regional newspapers were received within days of publication. Unofficial news also travelled swiftly, as evidenced in a letter to Lieutenant J.N. Dandie from his brother dated 22 May 1915, which referred to the rail collision at Gretna the night before.⁹⁹ Notable events were also communicated to the troops through routine orders and parades. A large quantity of correspondence was published at home, such as the letters from U Company which appeared in Aberdeen University's *Alma Mater*. In some instances relatives were permitted to visit, and parcels could be sent from the home area, via the Red Cross, to behind the German lines for (Highland) Division prisoners of war.¹⁰⁰ This interchange of information and views played a vital role in maintaining the morale of the men in the trenches. It permitted recognition of the men's sacrifice, and created and sustained a mutual understanding of the common hardships at home and at the front.

Censorship was enforced but could not always be rigorously applied. Many officers in the division had vast amounts of mail to censor whilst carrying out their other duties and

⁹⁸ H. McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War' (Cambridge University Ph.D, 2000), p. 5.

⁹⁹ NLS, ACC 9530, No 2, Papers of James Naughton Dandie.

¹⁰⁰ IWM, 97/41/1, Papers of Captain I. Cumming. Various letters post March 1918.

thorough censorship meant checking that there was no mention of casualty details, armament figures, place and unit names, and poor morale. It is perhaps understandable that there were lapses. Captain Ross typified this by stating that there was a laxness in the division when it first arrived in France, 'Nowhere was this more so than in the letters which we were forced to censor'.¹⁰¹ Letters could also bypass the censor entirely by going 'down the line' with the wounded or with those departing on leave. Green envelopes, of which there was 'nothing more important to an active soldier',¹⁰² could also ensure that, even when censorship was rigorously applied, the men would find a way to get news out. Bradbury related:

On this day we were informed that we would not be allowed to send any more letters owing to a breach of the censorship regulations by one of the men. We got over this difficulty, however, by inducing the men of a neighbouring battalion to pass our letters in with theirs and in order not to get caught we signed fictitious names. These letters I learnt later got through alright.¹⁰³

Soldiers on leave would help to disseminate information to families of those serving in the trenches and on return to the front could impart the latest news from the home. However, in the early stages of the war, the system for leave was not without problems. Men from the north of Scotland or the islands of the west found that their seven days leave passed almost entirely in travelling to and from their destination:

It took them fifty hours to get to Aberdeen, and Aberdeen was a very long way short of Wick. We had a case of a man who got as far as the opposite shore to his island-and then it was time for him to return. Not much rest this from the trenches. That was before leave was extended to suit such cases.¹⁰⁴

By 1916 the system was more efficient and by 1918 there was even a form of substitution leave. There were occasions though, when the (Highland) Division was under stress, when leave was refused 'even on news that a man's mother was dying'.¹⁰⁵ However, for some, leave was a strange and uneasy experience when adjustment could be difficult. Webster found it bizarre that, whilst on a trip to the cinema in London, no-one seemed

¹⁰¹ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 66-67.

¹⁰² IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 85.

¹⁰³ IWM, 81/35/1, *Memoir of S. Bradbury*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 260.

¹⁰⁵ NA, WO 95 2849 51st Division A and Q Routine Order, May 1918.

interested in footage of the opening day of the battle of the Somme.¹⁰⁶ To add to this feeling of unease, civilians on the home front could often make the soldier angry:

still meeting lots of folks who are a damned nuisance asking so many things about the war as if I could really know, or as if I had no right to forget about it for the time being. After all, they all seem to know more about the business than any of us do, so it is they who should tell me all about it.¹⁰⁷

There were strong bonds between young men who left home for the first time and their families, and these bonds could be very emotional. Webster served with a soldier who refused to give up his tunic that had a photograph of his mother in the pocket even though an unexploded bomb had landed on it.¹⁰⁸

Soldiers did get the sense that they were in the thoughts of their communities as they received parcels from local committees and fundraisers. Gifts sent out for the 1/7th Black Watch by the Committee of the Battalion's Comfort Fund organised by the Ladies of Fife 'proved of incalculable value to the battalion throughout the war',¹⁰⁹ and items were sent from the Territorial recruiting area of the 1/6th Seaforths for which the troops were very grateful.¹¹⁰

Perceptions of the home front about what went on in France and Belgium were often out of touch and did irritate the troops of the division. For many, there was a marked contrast in the 'idealism' that was prevalent at home and the 'realism' that they experienced at the front. Private A.E. Wrench stated that 'the two are as far apart as the poles'.¹¹¹ This was further emphasised late in the war by a sergeant-major of the 51st Division's artillery who recalled of 1914 that, 'A lot has happened since that time. A lot has happened, far more than the people at home have any idea of.'¹¹² Public attitudes to the war did change

¹⁰⁶ IWM, N/A, The Memoir of Major F.W. Webster, p. 139.

¹⁰⁷ IWM, 85/51/5, Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, 16 December 1916.

¹⁰⁸ IWM, N/A, The Memoir of Major F.W. Webster, p. 115.

¹⁰⁹ Wauchope, *The Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II, Territorial Forces*, p. 249.

¹¹⁰ Peel and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 50.

¹¹¹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 132.

¹¹² Catto, *With the Scottish Troops*, p. 46.

though, as the war effort demanded increased rationing, substantial casualties figures became the norm, and its duration extended almost indefinitely.¹¹³

Newspaper reporting often incensed the division either by its jingoism or for what were perceived as untruths, a typical entry in private accounts being, 'your [sic] not to believe half the lies you read in the papers'.¹¹⁴ In support of this, Fuller has posited that the troops held a disdain for the press and argued that, although newspapers continued to be read, they were read with scepticism.¹¹⁵ Beckett has further substantiated the view of media bias, stating that the press was not completely free to publish what it liked and that both national and provincial newspapers remained patriotic, and therefore not wholly objective, for most of the war.¹¹⁶ An example of the type of journalism that irritated the troops of the 51st can be seen in the following:

and tonight newspapers reach us containing the accounts of the Glasgow and Edinburgh Provosts' experiences 'IN THE TRENCHES'. My God, they should be shot. They tell all the folks at home we are spoiled and get more than we can eat, and advise them not to send us so much food stuff. Also that we are all well and happy. Well, we are happy just because it is our will to be so, as otherwise this awful life would soon drive us all crazy. After all we are human beings, and we are not just out here for the visit. So, we say to hell with you, and wish you were here IN the trenches some night when a mine is being put up. Then perhaps they would understand what it is to be HAPPY.¹¹⁷

However, the troops themselves, often putting on 'a brave face' to protect their loved ones at home, increased the erroneous perception on the home front. Captain J. Lusk, in sending two letters immediately after a battle, permits a contrast. One of these letters was to his mother and the other was to his commanding officer. The tone and style of those letters differs dramatically as his mother is spared any of the horrors of the battle, whilst the commanding officer is given a full and bloody account.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ D. Winter, *Death's Men, Soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1979), pp. 27-28.

¹¹⁴ IWM, P374, Diary of Lieutenant H.A. Munro, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, pp. 158-159.

¹¹⁶ I. Beckett, and K. Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, pp. 17-18.

¹¹⁷ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 28.

¹¹⁸ Lusk, *Letters and Memoirs*, pp. 69-88.

Soldiers were often incensed by what they perceived to be wide-scale incidences of profiteering on the home front. In many cases concerns were genuine, Bradbury stated that:

Whilst overseas, we read with disgust in the papers the constant troubles with the Labour section at home; of the Engineers, Miners, Railwaymen and Co, threatening to strike for increases in their wages, whilst we in the Army had not even the option of lodging a complaint and in addition to existing on very meagre rations and experiencing the hardships of a bitter campaign were daily risking our lives for a mere pittance. And yet these men, who were willing to sacrifice the lives of their fellow countrymen for their own personal gain, have on many occasions had the audacity to say it was through their superhuman efforts that the war was won- I admit that their work was an essential part of the campaign, but it must not be overlooked that they got well paid for their labours, had good food and plenty (compared with the quality and quantity meted out to the British Tommy) and always had a comfortable billet to return to after their days [sic] labour. Therefore, they, least of anyone, had cause to complain.¹¹⁹

As Fuller pointed out, troop journals also pointed towards a mistrust of politicians and officers and men of the (Highland) Division held a similar opinion.¹²⁰ Wrench asserted: 'To hell with all the rotten selfish politicians who make war. Such creatures cannot be in their right senses, or half civilised only.'¹²¹

These feelings of negativity towards the home front were not only to be found in British soldiers. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau has stated that many in the French Army felt disenfranchised from civilian life: 'It included a definite feeling of rupture between the rear and the front, and the breach was so painful to the French troops, that it threatened the cohesion of French society faced with the four-year ordeal of war.'¹²² However, he goes on to explain that: 'thanks to the ties created and sustained between the soldiers and their families, the trauma of separation between the rear and the front had only limited consequences.'¹²³ Audoin-Rouzeau's conclusions could very well apply to the troops of the 51st Division.

¹¹⁹ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, preface.

¹²⁰ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, p. 158.

¹²¹ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, 27 August 1916.

¹²² S. Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War 1914-1918, National Sentiment and Trench Journalism during the First World War* (Oxford, 1992), p. 92.

¹²³ Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War 1914-1918, National Sentiment and Trench Journalism during the First World War*, p. 186.

Press attention

By the onset of the First World War, daily and weekly newspapers and magazines, both with local and national circulations, were becoming more popular with an increasingly educated society. We have seen that news did flow from the home to the western fronts, albeit with some restrictions (the Press Bureau, editorial and newspaper owner interference, and self-censorship by some correspondents). However, these restrictions did not impact on local newspapers in the same way as they often had a different emphasis and tended to operate under minimal censorship. Local newspapers carrying stories of local battalions were a constant, and officers and men could interact more readily with the local media. On 27 February 1915, a request from the *Lennox Herald* read as follows:

The 9th (Dumbartonshire) Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders being now with the Expeditionary Force in France, the record of their doings there will be extremely interesting to county people, and can only be preserved from the letters sent home by officers and men. We will be glad to publish descriptive excerpts from such letters, if those receiving them forward them to us.¹²⁴

Through the press, a crucial link was maintained between home and front and the media focus often helped troops to maintain a self-belief, lifted their morale and contributed to enhancing *esprit de corps*.

In Scotland, public perception and media opinion changed as the war progressed. In 1914-1915, the press very much backed the patriotic line, but by mid-1915 this position began to shift. The significant Scottish losses at the battle of Loos brought about a further profound change in the attitude of the press to the war. However, the commitment of the soldier was never in doubt.

The local press in Scotland, and also in Bedford, provided the most consistent coverage of the 51st during 1914 and 1915. However, not all of the coverage was positive and constructive, with, in early 1915, the Scottish local press questioning why the division

¹²⁴ 'The Great War, Impact on Dumbarton' (Jordanhill College, 1978), p. 41.

was not yet in action.¹²⁵ The officers and men of the 51st were aware of this press criticism and were also worried that they didn't get enough home coverage due to a focus on the New Armies.¹²⁶ However, press interest in Bedford was very positive and raised the divisional profile and generated a sense of unity and pride.¹²⁷ During much of 1916, press coverage was again confined to the Scottish media, and it was only after Beaumont Hamel that national and other regional newspapers took a more active interest in the fortunes of the division. A divisional history records a typical post-1916 journalistic comment; 'wherever the battle rages hottest, there is the Fifty-first.....the French now talk of it with almost religious fervour'. A further sensationalist account was written by this particular journalist, who was an Englishman, in July of 1918, 'it walked across a valley swept by a thousand machine guns, stormed Marfaux, and clinched the German defeat'. This correspondent further promoted the (Highland) Division as a premier formation by testifying to hearing officers from other divisions say, 'Thank God, the Fifty-first is next to us'.¹²⁸ *The Times* provided a national view on 30 August 1918 with an article entitled 'Famous Highland Division', where the copy read:

I have already told of the advance of the Scottish 51st Division. The 51st (Highland) Division is already so famous that even its recent performances can add little to the splendour of its record. Last year, it had already established such a reputation that the Germans placed it first in formidableness on the list of hard-fighting British Divisions.¹²⁹

The *Yorkshire Evening Post* published another panegyric in March 1918 entitled 'the Gallant Fifty First', which stated that:

Once again the 51st Division is singled out in the Headquarters report for dogged and successful fighting. This Highland Territorial Division, in which are relics of some of the old regular regiments, was the division which fought its way nearest to Cambrai on that offensive. It was commended for "a very gallant fight" in defending the Bapaume-Cambrai road on March 22, when the German losses were especially heavy. They must have been fighting continuously there for about ten days, and yet now we find them at another part of the line, in another army, fighting like the best of the French troops.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 30.

¹²⁶ IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 33.

¹²⁷ McConachie, *The Student Soldiers*, p. 35.

¹²⁸ Salmond, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. xvi.

¹²⁹ IWM, 81/25/1, *The Memoir of S. Bradbury*, p. 95.

¹³⁰ IWM, 81/25/1, *The Memoir of S. Bradbury*, p. 93.

The *Yorkshire Post* article gives an extremely important example of the bolstering of the reputation of the (Highland) Division even when it had suffered a reverse.

Positive press material was circulated to units to improve or sustain morale and enhance *esprit de corps*. A document issued by the staff of divisional headquarters on 25 February 1918 ensured that 'the following extracts from the *Evening Standard* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* are forwarded for distribution down to Companies, Batteries, etc',¹³¹ and other references to press articles can be found throughout the series of routine orders.

The 51st Division was not universally popular with the press however. Some journalists felt that 'the Scottish troops got too much credit for their work'.¹³² Beach Thomas who wrote for the *Daily Mail*, was one, and he pointedly ignored the (Highland) Division. The 51st was only too aware of this and commonly despised him.¹³³ Another hate-figure was Horatio Bottomley. When he was attached to the 51st in September 1917, he was not a favourite and did not impress: 'we all kowtowed to the little brute, yet despised him intensely-all save the cinema sergeant, who on hearing it was Bottomley, said, 'Shall I get my gun?''.¹³⁴

The *Evening Standard* on 23 February 1918 stated:

The Germans, as is well known, are a plodding race and make up some lengthy statistics on every conceivable subject, some useful, some purely pedantic. Amongst others, according to a German prisoner, statistics have been compiled from all fronts showing what enemy troops kill most Germans. It will be gratifying to our brethren across the Tweed to hear that at the head of all nations and all troops is placed a certain Scottish Division. An American officer, on hearing this, remarked "wal that's bully, and now its up to us to go one better." Which is an excellent sentiment from the Allie's [sic] point of view, for killing power on the moral [sic] of an enemy is a very potent factor. But one wonders at this form of German home propaganda; for it adds 50 per cent to the fighting value of the said Scots, while it gingers up other Divisions to terrify the foe still more.¹³⁵

¹³¹ IWM, Con Shelf, 'Account of the War Experiences of Captains G. Stewart and W. Stewart', p. 43.

¹³² IWM, 82/15/1, The Papers of General Sir Philip Christison, p. 58.

¹³³ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 239.

¹³⁴ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 132.

¹³⁵ IWM, CON Shelf, 'Account of the War Experiences of Captains G. Stewart and W. Stewart', p. 43.

The relationships between officers and men

As Simkins has stressed in his chapter in *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, relationships between officers and men fluctuated over the course of the war as the army developed and altered.¹³⁶ However, it is clear that there were constants in these relationships and certain key expectations remained. Command depended not only on the commander but also on the commanded, and officers needed to understand the nature of the men and the men needed to respect their officers. Each had an idea of what the other should be.

Gary Sheffield posits that the British Army was a structured hierarchy within which officers bestowed a form of paternalism on other ranks in exchange for deference.¹³⁷ He further asserts that both officers and men in the pre-war Regular Army: 'recognised that their relationship was governed by certain unwritten rules, the relationship, although devoid of intimacy, was nonetheless effective.'¹³⁸

Within the Territorial formations of the Great War, variants of the paternal-deferential exchange existed which were dependent on the social make-up of the constituent units. However, the basic principles of exchange and the frameworks for its operation were constants. McCartney posits that:

Unlike the Regulars, Territorial soldiers retained a stake in civilian society. They had families, jobs and interests that were unconnected with the military....and maintained their connections to the home front throughout their service. Alternative interests gave the Territorials different attitudes towards the war compared with the Regular soldier.¹³⁹

The Territorial units had to take these civilian ties into account when operating in the field, enforcing discipline and commanding in a different manner.

¹³⁶ P. Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918' in P. Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods In the Great War*, p. 61.

¹³⁷ G. Sheffield, 'Officer-Man Relations, Discipline and Morale in the British Army of the Great War', in H. Cecil, and P.Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon* (London, 1996), p. 419.

¹³⁸ G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches* (London, 2000), p. 12.

¹³⁹ McCartney, 'The 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool) Regiment in the Period of the First World War', pp. 200-201.

Many of the characteristics that motivated the Regular Army paternalistic relationship were also inherent in Territorial paternalistic relationships. After the Second World War, Major-General Wimberley lectured at Sheerness Officers School on his theories of leadership. These theories were based on his experience with the battalions of the 51st during the First World War. He stated that officers must be: strict with private soldiers, but allow no-one else to interfere with them; be loyal to each man and fight for his rights and comforts; explain the reasons for every unpopular action; praise him when he does well; and be proud of him and always appeal to that which is best in him.¹⁴⁰ These principles required an understanding of the Territorial soldiers and provided protection for them within the military system. One example of an officer fulfilling a fairly typical paternalistic role in the (Highland) Division is evident in the remedy for the abuse of a soldier by a non-commissioned officer. The Sergeant:

detailed him for duty as a mess orderly one day, which was quite wrong, he being a member of the battery staff.....Whilst thus engaged he was spotted by one of his officers who stopped in astonishment and said "what the hell are you doing in the cookhouse Webster?" Webby said he had been detailed by his Sgt. The officer departed in fury and rooted out the Sgt, who was enjoying a nap in his billet, gave him a severe rocket and told him to go to the cookhouse and get Webster off that duty instantly and not interfere with his staff again.¹⁴¹

Another example which exhibits the clear difference between the Regular and volunteer paternalistic-deferential relationship, concerned a dispute between officers and men in an artillery brigade of the 51st. The dispute developed over the name of a mule that had been killed and was to be duly buried with ceremony. A conflict arose over the name to be carved on the cross. Officers ordered that one name be carved. 'This did not please the gunners at all and a meeting was held to discuss ways and means to have the name altered'. A written request was made to the officers and the men were granted their wish. 'This was a real sporting gesture by their officers and if the men had admired them before, they did so even more after this. No unit in the British Army could have had a finer set of officers than 'A' Battery and one and all would have done anything for

¹⁴⁰ NLS, ACC 8681/54, The Papers of Major-General D.N. Wimberley, 1926.

¹⁴¹ IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 37.

them.’¹⁴² This shows a form of negotiation and compromise prevalent in the command and control system of the (Highland) Division.

Major-General Harper set an example as the most senior officer in the division:

There were strong feelings towards the General which animated the Division other than those of confidence in his command, and the deep respect for his qualities as a soldier. General Harper’s personality was one which won for him the genuine affection of all ranks with whom he came in contact. In constant touch with his troops, both in and out of the line, he was known personally to many of them. He never confined his conversation with them to matters of military interest alone, and in consequence they appreciated that he regarded them in the light of normal sympathies, and not merely as units in a fighting machine. It can safely be said that the Jocks regarded “Uncle” or “Daddie”, as the General was known to them, not merely as a commander in whom lay the origin of their success, but as a friend who had their constant welfare in mind.¹⁴³

As part of the paternalist-deferential exchange in the (Highland) Division, officers were expected to exhibit characteristics such as leadership, bravery, and efficiency. Only then could they earn the respect of the men. Failure to act ‘appropriately’ would lead to a lack of respect. Officers were not expected to rob prisoners of war, but ‘Our own officer then did a thing which I did not approve of; he covered each man with his revolver whilst he searched him and removed everything of value’.¹⁴⁴ In another instance, Private Wrench ‘Met an officer from Corps HQ at Anzin Church at 11am and conducted him round the line. Was with him till 6pm and the wretch never thought that I ought to have anything to eat, though he was suitably treated at the different H.Qrs’.¹⁴⁵

For inexperienced officers, the harsh conditions and the expectations of the men could pose significant problems. Officers were regularly ridiculed or even ignored if considered less than able. Webster gave an account of a subaltern ‘straight from cadet school’ who attempted to ensure that everything was done ‘by the book’. The result was that, ‘The men think he is a pain and they know better, so they play practical jokes on him’.¹⁴⁶ Rank was no barrier, as the commanding officer of the 3/6th Seaforth Highlanders discovered

¹⁴² IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁴³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 273.

¹⁴⁴ IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ IWM, 85/51/5, *The Diary of A.E. Wrench*, Volume I, 6 April 1916.

¹⁴⁶ IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 83.

when he arrived in France and visited the 1/6th Seaforths. The officers of the 1/6th wrote that he did not have a clue, but was trying to convince them that he did.¹⁴⁷ Cowardice was inexcusable and S. Bradbury tells of a divisional officer who became a laughing stock because he panicked.¹⁴⁸

The strains on the officers could be significant. Many worked extremely hard to ensure that their duties were carried out and the men were taken care of:

I envy the men at these particular times: they parade when they are told, take the few articles given them, and break off. Each of these parades may mean hours of previous work to their 'superiors'. I'm afraid I drift into rather a drivelling whine, but the fact is that most of the officers are feeling the strain physically.¹⁴⁹

Young officers, exposed to the rigours of war and carrying the expectations of their men, could often question their own abilities. On visiting a friend, an officer in the 1/7th Seaforths, Private Wrench explained:

I saw Bob, and officer or not, like everyone else, he had that disease common to us all at times, 'Wind Up'.....at first I thought he was inclined to be stand-offish, it was just his nervousness on realising how inexperienced he was, and yet he was an officer there to lead men, experienced ones too, into what and where he had no idea. Told me he thought it wasn't fair that he should feel responsible for these mens' lives, nor right that he should be an officer and all the time he was showing this lack of confidence in himself and feeling of incompetency and added, "Why, they should be leading me." Well I feel I must agree with him for secretly, I believe it is just thus why so many young men have gone west, because of weak, or sometimes headstrong young officers. It worries him too that his men know he is inexperienced. But you cannot hide that fact from those here any more than you can hide yourself from the sight of God. He hates to be saluted so often; it gives him the feeling of inferiority to his men, and he is obsessed with the idea that his men resent him, don't want him and don't trust him.¹⁵⁰

Another strong link in the chain of command were non-commissioned officers. NCOs could be very influential and John Keith Forbes of 'U' Company of the 1/4th Gordon

¹⁴⁷ IWM, Con Shelf, 'An Account of the Service of Captains G. Stewart and W. Stewart'.

¹⁴⁸ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 66.

¹⁴⁹ NLS, ACC 9530, Papers of James Naughton Dandie, 1 May 1915.

¹⁵⁰ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, pp. 152-153.

Highlanders was happy to remain an NCO because 'he would be able to exercise a greater moral influence on his men'.¹⁵¹

Partnership was the secret to a successful relationship between officer and NCO. The non-commissioned officers were frequently more experienced than the subalterns and it was important that officers treated the non-commissioned officers with a degree of wariness. Upon assuming command of a machine gun unit, Captain Wimberley and his subaltern had to work with a Sergeant Souter DCM, the senior sergeant:

We had both got on well with Souter, but I had some trouble with him at first, as with some of the other ncos. The section had been for some weeks without an officer and so had got, as is always the case, rather slack. I being young and inexperienced started by being very strict, and this coupled with my knowledge of my inexperience was probably very galling for them. I remember on one occasion ordering Sergeant Souter to rub his feet in front of me, as by the letter of the law an officer was supposed to see the feet of all his command rubbed with anti-frostbite grease every 24 hours-that annoyed him very much. I would never think of giving an order like that now, but young subalterns are often very strict when they should stretch a point and slack when they should be firm.¹⁵²

Edgar Wallace in his book on the New Armies and the Territorial Force, emphasised that care must be taken in the officer-NCO relationship. He stated that a junior officer should:

Remember that he knows a great deal more about the business of soldiering than you do or you will for a very long time. He will salute you and pay you every mark of respect, but for quite a while his mental attitude towards you will be one of derision and pity. Remember that if you catch a non-commissioned officer napping once, you must keep the fact to yourself. The joyous impulse to correct the N.C.O. before his men, if given way, will induce him at some future occasion to correct you by inference, because you may be sure that for every mistake he makes you will make twenty. Do not be familiar with a non-commissioned officer in order to gain his approval, because the result will be the reverse of what you desire.¹⁵³

Officers and non-commissioned officers were very influential and the relationships that were formed with the men assisted in the creation and maintenance of formation and unit identities and loyalties. The code of understanding that was established between them was based on shared beliefs and mutual expectations.

¹⁵¹ McConachie, *The Student Soldiers*, p. 23.

¹⁵² NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 31.

¹⁵³ E. Wallace, *Kitchener's Army and the Territorial Forces* (London, 1916), p. 183-194.

General officer commanding and senior officers

In the 51st, the General Officer Commanding, brigadier-generals and battalion commanders, along with other senior officers, were key iconic figures that had a substantial influence over the divisional *esprit de corps*. As an integral part of the decision-making process through the recognised chain of command, their positions were prominent and the postholders were known by most, if not all, of the officers and men in the division, and are frequently mentioned in regimental histories and private accounts. Crucially, those officers balanced their need to employ their own style within the confines of the command and control system of the 51st. That balance altered during the war, but continued to function for the most part effectively and efficiently.

GOCs were crucial actors: as John Bourne has stated the ‘men who were chosen to command these divisions are key figures in any understanding of the British Army’s performance during the war’.¹⁵⁴ At the top of the command pyramid, GOCs could and did have direct influence on brigadiers and other officers and across the whole range of divisional activities from combat to supplies. The extreme contrasts of the range of this influence can be determined by the two following official communications, the first being a personal message from Carter-Campbell to the officers and men of the (Highland) Division during March 1918 urging them to ‘hold’ against sustained German attacks,¹⁵⁵ whilst another from the same GOC considers that not enough dripping was being returned to stores.¹⁵⁶

Major-General Bannatine-Allason had a particular role in the division. His tenure of command through the early months of the war until 24 September 1915 elicited a distinct type of leadership. He was, according to one of his staff officers, ‘a General of the old school; relying on force of character rather than knowledge. A man with the Khandahar

¹⁵⁴ J. Bourne, ‘British Divisional Commanders During the Great War: First Thoughts’, in *Gunfire*, No. 29, p. 23.

¹⁵⁵ NA, WO 95 2847, 51st Division G War Diary, August 1918.

¹⁵⁶ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, General Routine Order 1021, May 1918.

Star for Lord Roberts march in Afghanistan.’¹⁵⁷ This is not an altogether positive descriptor as the inference is that he was out of his depth in modern war. However, leadership he did provide.

His successor, Major-General Harper was certainly influential in the development of the division. Accompanied by his ‘enormous dog’, Rip, and described as ‘lordly’,¹⁵⁸ he presided over the 51st for much of the war. Further accounts stated that ‘The magnificent esprit de corps of the 51st Division was largely due to Uncle’s personality. There was no happier selection than the choice of General Harper for the 51st Highland Division. They exactly suited one another.’¹⁵⁹ General Harper:

inspired all ranks with such confidence that it is difficult to express the high regard in which he was held in the Division. The success and consequent reputation gained by the Highland Division can be attributed to the happy combination of the particular qualities of the commander and his troops, and to the brilliant manner in which the directing genius of the former was seconded by the genius for fighting of the latter.¹⁶⁰

Major-General G.T.C. Carter-Campbell was in command from March 1918 until after the Armistice. He took over command of the division at a significant time as within a few days of his arrival tremendous losses were sustained in the German offensive in March 1918, only to be followed by a further engagement in April with a similar number of casualties. The losses were such, particularly in senior officers, that the old division virtually disappeared. ‘In spite of these misfortunes under General Carter-Campbell’s command, the efficiency of the Division continued. It became as heavily engaged as ever, yet in spite of its losses fully maintained its reputation to the end.’¹⁶¹

A full analysis of the impact of every senior officer that served in the 51st is outwith the scope of this study. However, the following examples of influential figures are suggestive enough to demonstrate that the GOCs were assisted in creating and maintaining an *esprit de corps* in the division by a number of prominent senior officers.

¹⁵⁷ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁸ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 140-141.

¹⁶⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 47.

¹⁶¹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 273-274.

Brigadier-generals had a significant influence within the divisional formation. Again they were prominent figures, Bradbury (a gunner) referring to the division's brigadier-generals as 'awe inspiring'.¹⁶² The brigadier-general would be visible to troops through various channels, such as communiqués to men through unit commanding officers: 'the Brigadier General Commanding wishes to congratulate the Commanding Officer and all ranks of the 5th Seaforth Hrs on the very creditable appearance of the Battalion on parade today'.¹⁶³ However, their influence was not just top-down command and control. Regular meetings were held with the GOC and other senior officers to discuss a range of issues, and formal submissions could be made to the GOC on tactics, such as Brigadier-General Pelham Burn's paper on 'the best way of dealing with the defensive organisation laid down by the German Fourth Army'.¹⁶⁴ Pelham Burn, commanding the 152nd Brigade, even attempted to influence higher command procedure by complaining to divisional headquarters about the leave system for the Scots troops who lived too far away for the standard leave period.¹⁶⁵

Bewsher stated:

Just prior to the arrival of the Division on the Somme, two officers joined it who, second only to General Harper, were most responsible for the high standard of efficiency which it attained. These were Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, D.S.O., R.A. and Brigadier-General H. Pelham Burn, D.S.O., Gordon Highlanders.¹⁶⁶

Brigadier-General Oldfield, the youngest CRA [Commander Royal Artillery] in the British Army at the time of his promotion,¹⁶⁷ had the respect of his men as he 'set a very high standard to his officers, to which they admirably responded', and of other officers, 'all infantry commanders had complete confidence both in the artillery and in the artillery arrangements'.¹⁶⁸ The men of the 51st also had a great respect for General Oldfield and he

¹⁶² IWM, 81/35/1, The Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 56.

¹⁶³ NA, WO 95 2866, 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders War Diary, 24 December 1917.

¹⁶⁴ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary, 21 August 1917.

¹⁶⁵ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary, 18 August 1917.

¹⁶⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶⁷ IWM, PP/MCR/134, The Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 112.

¹⁶⁸ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 70-71.

for them. 'His Highlanders were not like Englishmen, good housekeepers by nature, and continued training and vigilance were needed. That, and the unsuitability of the kilt for wire and mud, were about the only criticism he ever made of them.'¹⁶⁹ Oldfield commanded the (Highland) Division in the absence of the GOC and was in command when the divisional flag was brought down for the last time before the division 'broke-up' in 1919.¹⁷⁰

Brigadier-General Pelham Burn was the youngest brigadier in the British Army at the time of his appointment (34):

He is best described by a Jock, who said, in speaking of him, "They a' have their fads, and his fad is effeciency".....In every direction, even in the smallest points, he accepted only one standard-namely the highest; nothing less was tolerated. He spared himself no pains to attain this standard. Holding these principles as strongly as he did, it is natural that he found it frequently necessary to check officers and N.C.O.'s. They, however, bore him no ill-will for this, and officers were frequently heard to say, "You can't argue with P.B. when he strafes, because he's always right."¹⁷¹

It is doubtful that many would question the brigadier-general as Wimberley stated that he ordered his 'very different types' of battalion commander around as company commanders would order their platoons.¹⁷² Pelham Burn, for health reasons, gave up command of the 152nd Brigade in April 1918 and the divisional history stated that 'it was difficult to estimate the loss which not only his brigade but the whole Division sustained at his departure'.¹⁷³

The latter assumed command of the 152nd Infantry Brigade in place of Brigadier-General W.C. Ross, C.B., who took up an appointment at home, and later commanded a brigade in Salonika. Bewsher stated that:

General Ross's departure from the 152nd Brigade caused the deepest regret to all ranks. He had been intimately known in peace time to many of the officers, N.C.O.s, and men whom he now

¹⁶⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/134, The Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 133.

¹⁷⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 408.

¹⁷¹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 71.

¹⁷² NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 99.

¹⁷³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 297.

commanded in war. He was secretary of the Territorial Force Association for his county, and he had commanded his Brigade since November 1914. General Ross had a personality which won for him the friendship of all who came into contact with him. The Highland soldier had become one of his great interests, and he possessed a great knowledge and understanding of him. Further, no one could fail to admire his natural courage.

General Ross spent so much of his time amongst his men that he was a familiar figure to them all, while he knew numbers of them by name, and in many cases knew also their parents, families, homes, and employers.¹⁷⁴ Colonel Nicholson added:

Wattie Ross had a high spirit of adventure, a love of danger. The little man with the straggling grey beard that hid his lower jaw, was the life and soul of the trench line; his whole brigade caught his enthusiasm. If there had been more like Wattie Ross the war would have ended sooner.¹⁷⁵

However, the GOC's authority was unquestioned, as even the most popular and effective senior officers found to their cost. Brigadier General Ross actually left the division because of a disagreement with Major-General Harper.¹⁷⁶

Some other senior officers that are frequently mentioned as being influential are Lieutenant-Colonel L.M. Dyson, Lieutenant-Colonel Fleming, and Lieutenant-Colonel D. Rorie. Dyson:

who had commanded the 255th Brigade, R.F.A., for some years, very reluctantly gave up command of his brigade, ill-health and two severe wounds compelling him to do so. He may be said to represent the best type of modern gunner lieutenant-colonel. Always willing, cheerful, and untiring, he was the best possible companion to the infantry brigade with which he worked. At the same time, he kept well abreast of modern developments in artillery. It is difficult to estimate the debt the Division owed to colonels like Dyson, Dawson and Rorie.¹⁷⁷

Lieutenant-Colonel Rorie succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Fleming as Assistant Director Medical Services when the latter was killed in action. Fleming had been ADMS of the (Highland) Division for over two years and had been with it through all its chief

¹⁷⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁷⁵ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 146-147.

¹⁷⁶ Peel and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 23.

¹⁷⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 327.

engagements. Colonel Rorie was at the time commanding a field ambulance in the 51st and he 'was one of the best known and most popular officers in the division.'¹⁷⁸

It is no accident that these senior officers, and others which space precludes mentioning, had similar influential qualities. Strong character, longevity of command, a particular style of leadership, personal renown amongst the men, and a belief in the traits of the (Highland) Division, were common features.

Life in the division

The day-to-day conduct of the officers and men in the (Highland) Division reflected the balance between artificial construct and pre-war environment. The balance, which combined official military practice with the expectations from civilian life, permitted a further expression of divisional character and positively contributed to a strong *esprit de corps*.

Social factors

The divisional social system was very important in improving and sustaining morale, assisting in the maintenance of discipline, and creating bonds between individuals and units. It was also a key component of the development of *esprit de corps*. Social elements are particularly interesting as a gauge of *esprit* as they were not dictated by GHQ or the War Office, although, as the war progressed, there were more directives on recreation.

The social system was frequently mentioned in both official and non-official documents at various levels in the divisional hierarchy. Routine orders tell of cinema attractions, canteen offers, and sporting events, whilst unofficial diary entries highlight events such as the 1/8th Argylls losing 4-0 to the 1/6th Argylls at football.¹⁷⁹ These accounts signal an endorsement and promotion at official levels whilst emphasising the personal significance.

¹⁷⁸ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 270.

¹⁷⁹ IWM, P374, The Diary of Lieutenant H.A. Munro, 10 September 1915.

Support for a formation or unit team, or individual, was beneficial to the creation and reflection of *esprit de corps*. The officers and men of the 51st Division, as one, were proud to support the 'Highlander' who faced the legendary 'Bombardier Billy Wells' in a boxing bout. As in civilian life, sport relieved boredom, improved fitness and provided an affirmation of community. It was also crucially an area away from the rigid obedience of military existence which permitted a degree of creativity and relieved anxiety.

Concert parties provided similar avenues of expression. Frequently, a great deal of effort went into the building of theatres and concert halls, and the division would often pay for it. All four of the Scottish divisions had an official troupe and each was very popular. The concert party of the 51st was named 'the Balmorals' and it had a top reputation, so much so that Major A. Anderson of the 1/9th Royal Scots tells that his whole company went to see them.¹⁸⁰ Bonding was prevalent at a Balmorals' show, with all attendees joining in with the words and music of the divisional song, 'the Heilan Division'.¹⁸¹ The shows would also frequently endorse the virtues of the division, and not unsurprisingly could be rather unrefined.¹⁸² These shows were very much a link to the home front for the officers and men, with the Balmorals' production of 'Turnip Tops' being described as 'a very laughable music hall farce'.¹⁸³

The (Highland) Division also had a cinema, but this had a more limited popularity. By April 1916, the cinema drew an average of only 250 troops.¹⁸⁴ There was also a theatre, at which, Brigadier-General G.T.C. Edwards wrote in his diary, he saw 'a very good performance',¹⁸⁵ and this was also popular with the troops, the 'great' success of the opening night at Senlis being the norm.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ IWM, 85/23/1, Journal of Major A. Anderson. undated.

¹⁸¹ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, Routine Order 1093.

¹⁸² IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 166.

¹⁸³ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 69.

¹⁸⁴ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, 29 April 1916.

¹⁸⁵ IWM, 78/42/1, Diary of Brigadier-General G.T.C. Edwards, 3 December 1915.

¹⁸⁶ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, 30 November 1915.

Rather surprisingly, the 51st did not have a trench journal but individual units did produce publications and Webster tells of a battery news sheet produced in the spring of 1916.¹⁸⁷

The Regular divisions often led the way in establishing or improving practical systems of recreation and it was from the 4th Division that the 51st copied the divisional canteen. It in turn passed on this knowledge to 17th Division. Of course, there was nothing new in the canteen idea¹⁸⁸ and divisions readily adopted them. Canteens were occasionally sponsored by religious organisations from the home front, such as the YMCA and the Church Army, and operated at both divisional and unit level. Under certain circumstances they made a profit, which was reinvested in the division and was spent on sports events.¹⁸⁹ They also served as common meeting places for the men where interaction and bonding took place.

Mess life for officers was very important also and could be a relative luxury. 'It is the nerve centre of the army. In the circle of officers gathered round the camp fire or in the farm-house kitchen, victory, stalemate or defeat is brewed with the tea.'¹⁹⁰

Social attitudes

It may be true that the harsh realities of war may drive men to drink, and drunkenness was not unusual and remained relatively high in the British Army throughout the war.¹⁹¹ Nerves were constantly under great strain and it was natural that the majority drank more than in peacetime. However, the excessive consumption was usually confined to such periods as units were out of the line.

Hard drinking was already common in pre-war Scotland, even more so in the inner cities where life could be particularly harsh.¹⁹² Captain Dunn gave an account of a Cameronian who was found to be drunk on duty, whilst at the front, by an officer from another unit.

¹⁸⁷ IWM, N/A, *The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁸ The canteen system was established in the 19th Century to counteract the high incidences of drunkenness when troops went outside the formation or unit to eat and drink.

¹⁸⁹ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 110.

¹⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 102.

¹⁹¹ I. Beckett, *A Nation in Arms*, p. 23

¹⁹² T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People* (London, 1986), p. 136.

When he was reported to his commanding officer, the response was that he was not 'drunk' as the term was used in Scotland.¹⁹³ Any man who did not participate in heavy drinking was suspected of being odd. On being offered a drink by an officer, Wrench refused and the shocked officer expressed doubts as to his Scottish origins:

Captain Maxwell of the T.M.B. was sitting in his pyjamas as were the other officers there. And when I entered his tent he turned and said, "Just the man we're waiting for. Here, have a drink." "No, thanks you, sir." I replied "I don't drink." "Have a cigarette then," he said then, offering his case. "Sorry, sir, I don't smoke either," I told him, when he looked surprised, and remarked, "What? You neither smoke nor drink? Then my God, what the Hell DO you do?"¹⁹⁴

However, real dangers arose with those who needed excessive alcohol before battle. A 'nip' before battle (the rum ration for 'Dutch courage') or being drunk when out of the line was one thing, but it was viewed as a serious offence if officers or men were found to be drunk on duty. Wimberley tells of some men being drunk on duty whilst at Cambrai in 1917, resulting in a man losing his stripes and another four undergoing Field Punishment No. 2.¹⁹⁵ However, many men got away with it. Bradbury tells of a sergeant-major, 'dead drunk' taking orders from his commanding officer, then issuing those orders to his men before collapsing.¹⁹⁶ Discipline could break down when too much alcohol was involved. On one occasion, units of the division were ordered to stay out of a village to avoid looting, but nonetheless some men disobeyed and returned from the village laden with alcohol, and 'it was rumoured that one of the 6th Seaforths had bayoneted a French civilian who had tried to stop the Highlander obtaining wine'.¹⁹⁷ During the battle of the Lys in April 1918, when front line units of the division were fighting a rearguard action, some units were conducting other manoeuvres:

We discovered the cellar of the chateau was full of bottles of wine etc., therefore, we brought as many as we could carry up into the daylight and later at night our regimental quartermaster Sergeant (whom I was very friendly with) and his assistant arrived and the four of us (those two, the Corporal, and myself) had a rollicking night which ended in oblivion.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, p. 114.

¹⁹⁴ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 46.

¹⁹⁵ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 98.

¹⁹⁶ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 72.

¹⁹⁷ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 75

¹⁹⁸ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 67

As part of the culture, swearing was also extremely prominent in the division:

With all the swearing that goes on among the soldiers, sometimes even yet the fact that I never swear is occasionally commented upon. They are all used to it by now, yet it might be strange in such a diverse masculine community where so much happens to make you swear. So I am reminded of the time away back at Montanvillers when one of the Black Watch orderlies suddenly turned to me and said, "Here, they tell me you never swear, but by Christ I'll never believe it." "Why?" I replied, "I think if a man can control his tongue there won't be any need for him to swear". So he just laughed and said it was impossible for anybody to be out here and not to swear.¹⁹⁹

Religion and superstition

At the official level, religion was fully endorsed within the 51st Division and there were constant references to it in the war diaries. There were regular church parades and the services were often attended by senior officers of the division.²⁰⁰ The provision of religious services was inter-denominational, and Routine Order No. 736 referred to seven Presbyterian, three Roman Catholic, and two Church of England services on the same day.²⁰¹ Routine Order No. 821 also referred to a Jewish service.²⁰² The promotion of further religious services was also endorsed by external organisations such as the Scottish Church Guild which supplied tents for worship.²⁰³

However, on a personal level many troops, including officers, had mixed feelings towards religion given the war context. It seemed scarcely appropriate to a soldier's life of killing, profanity, drinking, swearing and gambling.²⁰⁴ The letters of Captain Stewart of the 1/6th Seaforths to his family in Scotland showed a marked disregard for religion.²⁰⁵ Wrench also stressed that, 'The general impression of church parades in times like the present when religion seems to be a mockery, is that they are a farce. When you try to discover just how the mercy of God applies here, or raise the subject as a matter of

¹⁹⁹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 131.

²⁰⁰ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 143.

²⁰¹ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division A and Q Routine Order 736.

²⁰² NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division A and Q Routine Order 821.

²⁰³ NA, WO 95 2849, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, 27-28 May 1916.

²⁰⁴ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, pp. 155-156.

²⁰⁵ IWM, Con Shelf, 'An Account of the Service of Captains G. Stewart and W. Stewart in the 6th Seaforth Highlanders', p. 53.

discussion, you are only laughed at.’²⁰⁶ But this view is balanced by others such as Lieutenant W. Paterson who believed that a genuine religious spirit pervaded the (Highland) Division.²⁰⁷

However, belief as distinct from organised religion became more marked prior to battle. ‘The voluntary communion service before battle was a more sincere and more intense affair than compulsory church parade.’²⁰⁸ Even the very typical style of officer account found in Captain Ross’ book cannot hide the oddity of official religion in such an environment:

Before the operation was carried out, the men were addressed by the Right Rev. Sir G.A. Smith, Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and simultaneously a massed Presbyterian service was held in Forceville in the presence of the G.O.C. in C. Above the strains of the psalms, so grandly sung, the guns never ceased to growl. Listening to those solemn words, whose syllables were punctuated by the distant bark of the field pieces, and sometimes drowned by the earth-shaking roar of howitzers, an intense appreciation of the divine message could not fail to impress the spectator. The scene was so utterly incongruous; the persons so seemingly mistranslated: ministers from the quiet Scottish pulpits to the riot of the battlefield, mud-stained fighters from the hell of the trenches to the heaven of a new congregation. Never was Assembly, even in the sanctuaries of Edinburgh, more solemn and impressive than this.²⁰⁹

The differences in faiths were evident when men of one religious denomination visited the place of worship of another, ‘Two of us poked our noses into St. Peter’s church here today (Corbie). It is quite nice inside, but why so many cheap looking painted statues of ‘upteen’ saints? There are plenty offering boxes too, but we weren’t offering.’²¹⁰

The organised churches were often viewed with suspicion by the men and this is hardly surprising when churchmen visited field hospitals in search of their ‘flock’, checking hospital bedcards for the relevant denomination. If the injured soldier was of another denomination, then they would move on:²¹¹ further evidence that the established churches were detached from the officers and men at the front.

²⁰⁶ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, 30 July 1916.

²⁰⁷ IWM, 89/7/1, The Papers of Lieutenant William Paterson, p. 50.

²⁰⁸ Winter, *Death’s Men, Soldiers of the Great War*, p. 172.

²⁰⁹ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, pp. 297-298.

²¹⁰ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, 9 February 1916.

²¹¹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, ‘A Scottish Soldier’, Volume I, p. 121.

In many cases, religion gave ground to the proliferation of superstitions. Mascots and charms were abundant, for a 'soldier's superstitions are the most trivial things possible, in fact childish. Any little keepsake he cherishes becomes a fetish and some will almost stake their lives on it.' It was not uncommon for there to be a juxtaposition of superstition and religion:

There are many men who carry a new testament in their breast pockets just because such has stopped a bullet from entering a soldier's heart. And it has to be a bible even if its only other use is for a convenient piece of paper to light a cigarette. Then there are little woolly gollywogs by the hundreds worn beneath the cap badge, and lord knows what else as tokens of good luck with which the soldier's wouldn't part for a pension.²¹²

Webster tells of the arrival of a signaller called Tom Davidson to his artillery battery, and this fellow happened to have the same name as the battery commanding officer:

Some superstitious lads in the Bty attached some significance to this, feeling that it was a bit unlucky. Their fears were confirmed when soon after the lad appeared at the gun position and went on duty in the signal hut he was killed..... It certainly cast a gloom over every one for several days. That there was something in the men's theory about the T.D. business, was confirmed later for during their long sojourn in France no less than two other Tom Davidsons came to the Battery and none lasted long.²¹³

Wrench himself believed that he had more 'good fortune' than others,²¹⁴ and tells of an occasion when a sergeant assured him that he would come safely through the war:

When he enquired how he knew this, the sergeant replied that he had dreamt it. "But don't forget, Sergeant, that dreams always turn out the reverse." "Yes I know," he replied "And I was dreaming that you were killed." He was as serious about it as he could be, for no more superstitious a creature ever lived.²¹⁵

²¹² IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 132

²¹³ IWM, N/A The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 79.

²¹⁴ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 45.

²¹⁵ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 82.

Interaction with other formations and national groups

The way that the division interacted and engaged with other formations and national groups was crucial in shaping the internal *esprit de corps*. What others thought and said of the 51st was important, and what it thought of itself was in part a reflection of this.

Interaction with allied forces

Its distinctive appearance, attitudes, and cultural associations made the (Highland) Division stand out amongst other British Army formations, and Wauchope related how ‘The arrival of the Highland soldiers for the first time in the neighbourhood created immense excitement among the inhabitants and the French troops’.²¹⁶ As the fame of the division spread, exchange and interaction were not just localised, ‘The 152 Vladicaucasian Regiment sent a parcel of picture postcards to the 152 Brigade so General Pelham Burn retaliated with a case of whisky and some haggises. Nothing more was heard of the Russians.’²¹⁷

It can be stated confidently, and this was particularly true after Beaumont Hamel, that the officers and men of the (Highland) Division had an ‘implicit belief in their own superiority over every other country in the world. This was the one great factor in their make-up as soldiers.’²¹⁸ However, no matter how much it believed in its own invincibility, it:

has a profound respect for other Divisions, and especially the 15th, also Scottish, and the Guards. The Highlanders may ask themselves, even aloud and in mixed company, ‘Wha’s like us?’ but in justice to them it should be mentioned that from one end of the line to the other I heard the praises of the 51st Division sounded, so that they have credit enough to spare, even should it be true that self-praise is no honour.²¹⁹

The 51st interacted positively with other Scots divisions, many of the men being from the same background and from the same regiments. F.W. Bewsher tells of many Scottish

²¹⁶ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Vol II.*, p. 132.

²¹⁷ NLS, ACC 7380, Book 3 of ‘The Highland Division’, p. 9.

²¹⁸ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, p. 36.

²¹⁹ Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France*, p. 24.

units being stationed around Arras in 1917 and getting on well.²²⁰ This was amplified by Malcolm who thought it a great social sector.²²¹ The cultural familiarisation was also apparent with other Celtic formations and, when the 36th (Ulster) Division was threatened with amalgamation in 1917, there was a strong view that if the (Ulster) Division had to be amalgamated, it should be with the 51st (Highland) Division.²²² However, the troops of the 51st did not always mix well with counterparts from English units. There was a general impression, not unjustified, amongst English units that the ‘Highlanders’ were outrageous self-propagandists. The arrogance that accompanied this promotion often led to friction with attached units, such as the 61st²²³ or 32nd Divisions.²²⁴

If the (Highland) Division was humbled by any other formation in the British Army, then it was the Guards. Their reputation was well established and second to none. F.W. Webster emphasised the martial prowess of the Guards, when he stated that it was wonderful to know that they were between the 51st Division and the German Army,²²⁵ and S. Bradbury referred to them as ‘those wonderful Guards’.²²⁶ The 51st held the Guards in great respect and aspired to achieve a similar standing. This aspiration did not function without rivalry, aptly defined in an account of a regimental dinner held by the officers of a Gordon battalion in the 51st for the officers of a Guards battalion. A huge and impressive menu²²⁷ was laid on, and pomp and circumstance, (Highland) Division style, was evident throughout in order to impress the visitors. An officer of the Gordons explained that ‘This is a gey special affair, I’m tellin’ ye’.²²⁸

²²⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 160.

²²¹ Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 38.

²²² N. Perry, ‘Maintaining Regimental Identity in the Great War: The Case for the Irish Infantry Regiments’, in *Stand To*, No. 52, p. 7.

²²³ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 37.

²²⁴ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 207.

²²⁵ IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F W. Webster, p. 174.

²²⁶ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 51.

²²⁷ The menu included Hors d’Oeuvres Varies, Crème de Celere, Bouillon Ecossoise, Filets de Plie (Sauce Tartare), Fricasse de Veau a l’Anglaise, Poulet Roti (Sauce au pain), Aloyau de Boeuf au Jus, Choufleur (Pommes Puree), Choex de Bruxelles (Pommes Chateau), Asperges au beurre fondu, Trifle Ecossoise, Crème au Mille Fruits, Diables a Chevale, Dessert, Café. in Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France*, p. 54.

²²⁸ Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France*, p. 54.

This rivalry with the Guards was particularly evident as the stature of the (Highland) Division grew. In the summer of 1917, the division joined Lieutenant-General Ivor Maxse's XVIII Corps. Maxse held up the Guards Division as a model for imitation, especially in march discipline and:

The effect of the Corps Commanders speech-especially as he had never seen the Division-was to arouse a certain soreness. This was particularly the case as regards march discipline, on which it prided itself...The battalion soon had the opportunity to see the model held up to it-two battalions of the Guards marching through its area, one up to the front line and the other back to billets. The immediate effect was the unprecedented demand on the canteen for that useful article, 'Soldier's Friend'. Men could be seen polishing every bit of brass in their equipment during their spare time. This was not the end. The Adjutant, who, like all good adjutants, knew what was afoot among the men and was well aware of the general desire to show the Guards how the Seaforth Highlanders could march, suggested somewhat diffidently that the battalion would like a route march. The Commanding Officer, after some demur, assented to the proposition, insisting, however, that full marching order must be worn, and a distance of no less than ten miles covered. On the day selected, in spite of the sultriness of the weather, the battalion did a voluntary march of 15 miles. They were careful to go through all the villages occupied by the Guards Division and came back without anyone having fallen out, entirely satisfied with their performance. So did the battalion reply to the Corps Commander's address.²²⁹

Other sections in this thesis discuss the relationship of the 51st Division with the New Army, Regular units, and attached troops. However, in general terms, rear units of the British Army were looked upon with a mild contempt, as Lieutenant Paterson emphasised when he wrote that most 'cushy' jobs were behind the line.²³⁰ A.E. Wrench gave another example when he told of an occasion when his companion got drunk and lost control in front of a regimental sergeant major and criticised him for receiving a medal whilst serving behind the front line.²³¹

The division interacted well with other allied units throughout the war, particularly the French, the Canadians and the ANZACS, and there was a mutual respect between formations. G.I. Malcolm referred to the traditional co-operation and mutual understanding of the 'Auld Alliance', but rather diluted this by adding that the men of the

²²⁹ M.M. Haldane, *A History of the Fourth Battalion The Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1927), pp. 216-217.

²³⁰ IWM, 89/7/1, Memoir of Lieutenant W. Paterson, p. 67.

²³¹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A. E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 123.

51st found Frenchmen rather 'smelly'.²³² However, odour notwithstanding, upon arriving in Picardy in 1915, the French officers and men did their utmost to help the 51st and 'their hospitality was unbounded'.²³³ When the division finally marched from Picardy, French soldiers were there to cheer them on.²³⁴ This positive relationship continued throughout the war, and, after the second battle of the Marne in 1918, when the (Highland) Division fought alongside the French, a memorial was raised at Durango which was inscribed 'Here will the thistle of Scotland forever mingle with the roses of France'.²³⁵

Peter Simkins has stated that many ANZAC troops were disparaging about the British soldier.²³⁶ However, this appears to have been centred on the English soldier and not the Scot. With the ANZACs, the 51st Division seemed to find much in common. On relieving a New Zealand unit in the line, the 'Kiwis' are referred to as a 'gay and gallant crowd'.²³⁷ Fuller has written of the affinities between the 'Jock' and the 'Aussie', and stated that

'Evidence is more plentiful for the rather more numerous Scots, not least in the comments of the Dominion troops. Whereas the Anzacs were contemptuous and pitying towards the 'Tommy', they admired the 'Jocks' and recognized a 'kinship' with them.'²³⁸

As with the Dominion troops, the (Highland) Division got on with the Americans well enough and 'the more we saw of them, the better we liked them'.²³⁹ However, they were certainly perceived of as being different,²⁴⁰ and there were suspicions over their battle-readiness. When American soldiers were attached to the 51st for instruction during 1917, questions were asked as to why they were not fighting and when they would contribute to the combat.²⁴¹ Another account tells of an American general asking odd questions whilst

²³² Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 25.

²³³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 31.

²³⁴ Peel and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 13.

²³⁵ IWM 77/133/1, The Papers of J. W. Comber, undated.

²³⁶ Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918', in Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, p. 54.

²³⁷ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A. E. Wrench, Volume I, 15 August 1916.

²³⁸ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, p. 161.

²³⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 133.

²⁴⁰ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 263.

²⁴¹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 164.

inspecting a battalion of the 51st, intimating that he did not have sufficient insight into the practical side of war.²⁴²

On the whole, the division fostered positive relationships. However, it was also guilty of taking negative relationships to excess. In 1918, a general routine order issued within the (Highland) Division commanding the men to stop belittling the Portuguese Division.²⁴³ Bradbury wrote of retreating Portuguese being bayoneted by Gordon Highlanders during the battle on the Lys in April 1918.²⁴⁴ Subsequently, some fleeing Portuguese troops were killed by the British Army as 'having seized bicycles belonging to the signallers, were mistaken for Germans by British reinforcements hurrying up, and were mown down'.²⁴⁵

Other than the expected steady series of visits and inspections from higher command, the (Highland) Division also experienced a significant number of high profile visitors which raised its profile amongst other formations and on the home front. The visits also gave the men a sense of importance and their significance was typified by the number of references in official and non-official primary sources. The 51st was inspected by the King in October 1914,²⁴⁶ and the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, in October 1915.²⁴⁷ Also in October 1915, the King, the Prince of Wales, and President Poincaré inspected the division as part of an Army Group visit.²⁴⁸ However, as the stature of the division grew and its public fame spread, a more tailored series of visits and tributes is evident. King George, visiting the division in March 1918, stated, 'we all know the Fifty-First' and proceeded to pay the division many compliments,²⁴⁹ and the Prime Minister said of it, 'Its deeds will be memorable in the history, not only of the war, but of the world'.²⁵⁰

²⁴² Peel and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 51.

²⁴³ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 83.

²⁴⁴ IWM, 81/35/1, The Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 66.

²⁴⁵ IWM, N/A, Memoir of Major F.W. Webster, p. 177.

²⁴⁶ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

²⁴⁷ Sutherland, *War Diary of The 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 40.

²⁴⁸ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 158.

²⁴⁹ Salmond, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p.xxvii.

²⁵⁰ Salmond, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. xxvii.

Visits from VIPs that had a specific interest in the division were also common, including the Scottish Lord Provosts.²⁵¹ The Duke of Argyll visited the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders,²⁵² and the Principal of the University of Aberdeen visited a company of the 1/4th Gordons.²⁵³ A regular visitor was Field Marshal Haig, who stated:

If it were possible for the General, who for three years commanded all the British Divisions in France, and was served with great gallantry, devotion, and success by each, to admit a predilection for any of them, my affection would naturally turn to the Division that drew so many of its recruits from the same part of Scotland where my boyhood was spent, and my own people lived.²⁵⁴

These VIP visits also allowed the (Highland) Division the opportunity to show off. Wauchope wrote of the 1/6th Battalion of the Black Watch that:

the battalion furnished a Guard of Honour of three officers and 100 men for General Plumer when he visited the town of Bailleul in 1915 in order to present medals to Belgian troops. On this parade the massed pipe bands of the Division, numbering 90 pipers and 70 drummers were present. The people of Bailleul had never seen or heard anything like this mighty band before, nor, in fact, had many men of the Division.²⁵⁵

However, the visits could be exacting for the troops. Inspections could be time consuming and testing for the men,²⁵⁶ and extra activity, if visited in the line, could cause increased enemy activity and lead to casualties. Even officers were known to complain of the downside as Lieutenant Munro emphasised when he wrote that he was not too enthusiastic about lining the roadside as Prime Minister Asquith was due to pass, 'probably another lengthy wait'.²⁵⁷

Interaction with national groups

When the 51st arrived in Bedford in August 1914, patriotism ran high and the townspeople were extremely welcoming. There was an initial period of 'settling in' when

²⁵¹ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 25.

²⁵² Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1869-1960*, p. 32.

²⁵³ McConachie, *Student Soldiers*, p. 36.

²⁵⁴ Salmond, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p.xxviii.

²⁵⁵ Wauchope, *Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 142.

²⁵⁶ IWM, 85/23/1, The Journal of Major A. Anderson, undated.

²⁵⁷ IWM, P374, The Diary of Lieutenant H A. Munro, p. 17.

the mass of soldiers learned to live together, many away from home for the first time, and the local people became used to having them around. McConachie states that the people of Bedford looked upon the (Highland) Division as 'kids',²⁵⁸ and, in order to keep the 'kids' entertained, the authorities and townspeople formed Entertainment Committees²⁵⁹ and organised dances.²⁶⁰ The overwhelming patriotic spirit in Britain ensured that the colourful 'Highlanders' with their marching and their pipers became a source of civic pride.²⁶¹ On leaving Bedford, F.W. Webster tells of tears and silence as crowds lined the streets to see the division march to war.²⁶²

Craig Gibson maintains that by 1915, there was little evidence of the feelings of *camaraderie* that had existed in late 1914 between French and Belgian civilians and the resident 'allied' armies, and asserts: 'relations during the years of trench warfare were fundamentally different from those characterizing the war's opening months.'²⁶³ This may explain why every British soldier crossing the Channel to France in 1915 received a message from the Secretary of State, Lord Kitchener, to maintain cordial relations with the French and Belgian citizenry. They had to be courteous, considerate and kind and were not to do anything to injure or destroy property. The message contained an explicit warning to resist wine and women.²⁶⁴

However, in August 1915, the 51st Division seemed to enjoy a good rapport with many French nationals who, 'were welcoming, denying themselves a multitude of comforts in the hope that the troops of the 51st would not endure hardship or want'.²⁶⁵ Another kindness that occurred near Armentières as late as July 1916 led to the conclusion that, 'in some of these country places the folks are alright and very decent'.²⁶⁶ The (Highland)

²⁵⁸ McConachie, *The Student Soldiers*, p. 26.

²⁵⁹ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, August 1914.

²⁶⁰ McConachie, *The Student Soldiers*, p. 48.

²⁶¹ Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 19.

²⁶² IWM, NA, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 48.

²⁶³ C. Gibson, 'My Chief Source of Worry: An Assistant Provost Marshal's View of Relations Between 2nd Canadian Division and local inhabitants on the Western Front, 1915-1917', in *War in History*, No. 4, 2000.

²⁶⁴ P. Simkins, 'Soldiers and civilians: billeting in Britain and France', in Beckett, and Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. 181.

²⁶⁵ Ross, *The Fifty First in France*, p. 138.

²⁶⁶ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, 14 July 1916.

Division for its part assisted the local populace not merely through fighting, but in other ways such as bringing money to cash-strapped areas and assisting the local populace with medical facilities.²⁶⁷ A glowing tribute to the formation was paid by a disgruntled French baron whose chateau and estate lands had been commandeered by the 51st. Initially, he begrudged its presence, but his views gradually changed and he finally 'said to, all who listened' that the 51st 'were the finest body of men he had ever met'.²⁶⁸

However, there is evidence that relations did become increasingly strained and many French and Belgian citizens had to put up with a lot of bad behaviour, such as theft,²⁶⁹ drunkenness, and fighting.²⁷⁰ There were tales of the pipes being played in residential areas in the early hours of the morning,²⁷¹ and bicycle bells being rung at dawn to awaken the locals.²⁷² There was also the necessary and sometimes unnecessary use of land and property, and there are many accounts in the sources of land being seized as training grounds and trees being cut down for building and firewood.²⁷³

There were many official attempts to ensure that men stayed in line and that relations with the local populations remained cordial. Routine orders abounded. Unnecessary damage to property was to be reported to the owner;²⁷⁴ there be no woodcutting without authorization;²⁷⁵ care should be taken that football did not destroy grass;²⁷⁶ there should be no grazing of animals without permission;²⁷⁷ and troops should avoid damaging crops.²⁷⁸

²⁶⁷ Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France*, p. 50.

²⁶⁸ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 80.

²⁶⁹ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 51.

²⁷⁰ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 13.

²⁷¹ Ross, *The Fifty First in France*, p. 273.

²⁷² IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, pp. 123.

²⁷³ Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 7.

²⁷⁴ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary, April 1916.

²⁷⁵ NA, WO 95 2849, A and Q Routine Order No. 874.

²⁷⁶ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G Routine Order No. 764.

²⁷⁷ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G Routine Order No. 770.

²⁷⁸ NA, WO 95 2848, A and Q Routine Order 253.

Many of the French populace saw an opportunity for financial exploitation which resulted in a degree of bad feeling, 'the French charge such exorbitant prices for everything'.²⁷⁹ And in the opinion of the (Highland) Division, and it was not alone in the BEF in having this view, the Belgians were worse than the French.²⁸⁰ This may explain a degree of bad behaviour by troops of the 51st as it was considered to be retribution for being 'fleeced'.

Language

Language differences could cause serious difficulties in liaising with the French. On one occasion a Scots officer was asked by a French counterpart to speak English.²⁸¹ Although many French soldiers actually spoke English, war diaries still testify that many Scots, both officers and men, did not speak French. This had the potential to cause serious problems when the division moved into a previously-held French area or when the division was holding the front or advancing alongside a French unit.²⁸²

The pronunciation of French words was a problem for the majority of the (Highland) Division. On taking over a sector from French troops, trenches had to be renamed as much for the inability to say the French words as for any other reason. 'Jean Bart they could manage, though they assumed that the trench was named after some female celebrity. Du Guesclin and Vercingetorix in particular were, however, a sore trial to them.'²⁸³ However, on the whole, given their limited knowledge of the French vocabulary, the troops managed to communicate quite well and their adaptations were often quite amusing. Most names were anglicised, but some had no English equivalent. Naours was one such place and played havoc with directions. Nicholson explained that hardly anyone pronounced it the same way. There were greater successes with other less tortuous placenames, when Mutton Villas was substituted for Mouton Villers; Frizzles for Flesselles; and Villas Bokage for Villers Bocage. Many of the Scots did learn some

²⁷⁹ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A. E. Wrench, Volume I, 21 August 1916.

²⁸⁰ Gibson, in *War in History*, No. 4, 2000, p. 430.

²⁸¹ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 13.

²⁸² NA, WO 95 2847, 51st Division G War Diary, 'Lessons Learned and Difficulties Experienced: Divisional Artillery', 12 August 1918.

²⁸³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 99.

French and Nicholson asserted that ‘the men in the 51st Highland Division were much more proficient in the language than the 17th Northern Division’.²⁸⁴

The troops of the (Highland) Division experienced similar problems whilst billeted in and around Bedford. A Scot approached a refreshment stall and asked for ‘tuppence worth of snaps’ and was given a pack of 20 woodbine. When he finally explained what he wanted, the vendor apologised and said that she hadn’t understood him and just took a guess.²⁸⁵

Gaelic was another issue altogether and some units of the (Highland) Division had more Gaelic speakers than others. The 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders had started the war with at least 25 per cent of the battalion having Gaelic as their mother tongue.²⁸⁶ As the war progressed and fewer recruits were drawn from the home region, there was naturally less Gaelic spoken in the battalion. An English officer visiting the line thought that the Gaelic was German and anticipated an ‘attack’,²⁸⁷ whilst another commented that the Gaelic speakers were worse than Indians.²⁸⁸

The German impression

It is a testimony to the division that in a war, where German regimental histories and official pamphlets frequently noted the superiority of the German Army over its British counterpart,²⁸⁹ the (Highland) Division was held in some esteem. A divisional historian summarised the popular impression, ‘Even the enemy seemed impressed by the Fifty-first’s ubiquity and stubbornness; their aviators one time dropped a message over it “Good old Fifty-first! Still sticking it!”’.²⁹⁰ Its prowess was reputed to have reached such a level that a German prisoner of war asked if there were 51 (Highland) Divisions.²⁹¹

²⁸⁴ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 92.

²⁸⁵ McConachie, *The Student Soldiers*, pp. 44-45.

²⁸⁶ Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918*, p. 163.

²⁸⁷ NLS, ACC 6991/1, ‘A Scottish Soldier’, Volume I, p. 108.

²⁸⁸ IWM, P374, The Diary of Lieutenant H.A. Munro, p. 24.

²⁸⁹ M. Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma, German and British Army Tactics in the First World War*, (Westport, 1992), p. 168.

²⁹⁰ Salmond, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. xvi.

²⁹¹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 218.

The officers and men of the division did not possess a widespread and continually all-consuming hatred of their German opponents. It is telling that Nicholson stated that 'they were fighting for what they knew not', and he qualified this by saying that one country was an ally and the other a foe, and for neither did the 51st 'care a straw'.²⁹² Private soldiers often held the same view:

coming through, I saw a wounded Kilty walking arm in arm with a wounded German and passing the coffee stall there, one man ran out with a cup of coffee which he handed to the Argyll. He in turn handed it to his stricken companion after which they limped on their way together smiling. Enemies an hour ago, but friends in their common troubles. After all, this war is not a personal affair. Else there would be no war.²⁹³

Some German units and individuals earned respect from the (Highland) Division. When pitted against the 2nd Guards Reserve Division, the 51st thought them worthy opponents. This martial respect increased when, after a skirmish, a number of undetonated rifle grenades were fired into the divisional lines that carried a message in English that a 'gallant Private Robertson, Seaforth Highlanders, had died of his wounds and had been buried with full military honours in the cemetery at Rouvroy'.²⁹⁴

However, instances of enemy treachery or brutality 'roused the fiercest antagonisms in some units, who in revenge gave no quarter during the fight or subsequent battles'. Revenge was the motivation for a soldier of the division who, on seeing the ruins at the Rue de Bois near Festubert in 1915, said 'Fa'd ha' thocht it? Man, we'll hae to pey the devils back for't'.²⁹⁵ Miss Whittaker observed:

The Highlanders had never forgotten the Germans deliberate destruction of all life, buildings, roads, railway tracks, woods, fruit trees, and wells in a belt ten kilometres wide before their withdrawal a year earlier to the Hindenburg line. The Jocks attitude was such as to cause Louis [Brigadier-General Oldfield] to write, 'I hope to keep my command in hand and make them behave like gentlemen in Germany, but I shall have to use an iron hand to do it I can see'.²⁹⁶

²⁹² Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 147.

²⁹³ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 69

²⁹⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 67.

²⁹⁵ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 122.

²⁹⁶ IWM, PP/MCR/134, The Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 140.

The (Highland) Division was greatly feared by the German soldier. This seemed to have been as much for the threat of executions as for the 51st's battle-readiness. Prisoners of war expected to be executed.²⁹⁷ Ferguson has argued in 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War' that this fear of summary execution was not uncommon amongst German troops about British formations.²⁹⁸ No less a person than Brigadier-General Oldfield, during a hospital visit, wrote of overhearing a (Highland) Division soldier stating of German injured prisoners of war, 'if those blokes had been opposite our part of the line there wouldn't have been any prisoners for you to nurse'.²⁹⁹ During the attack on Flesquières there appeared to be evidence of unarmed German soldiers having been bayoneted.³⁰⁰ However, summary executions were not officially sanctioned, and a General Staff note of July 1917 reiterated this fact.³⁰¹

It is little wonder that the (Highland) Division's fierce reputation in battle, coupled with the harsh way in which the Germans were dealt, contributed to its much debated placement on the German list of 'Most to be Feared' British divisions.³⁰² This document has never been found, but the 51st Division officially endorsed its existence. A letter signed by Major F.W. Bewsher of the (Highland) Division on 25 February 1918 stated that:

The War Office has, I hear, just come into possession of a document of extraordinary interest, some day a thrilling story may be told of how and where it was secured. The document is one recently prepared by the Germans' Headquarters' Staff and placed in the hands of the Divisional Commanders in the field for their guidance. It is a list of British Divisions in their order of "Furchtbarkeit" which may be translated "Much to be Feared".³⁰³

²⁹⁷ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 258.

²⁹⁸ N. Ferguson, 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War', in *War in History*, No. 2, 2004

²⁹⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/134, The Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 127.

³⁰⁰ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume 1, p. 89.

³⁰¹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, SG 279/15.

³⁰² IWM, Con Shelf, 'Account of the War Experiences of Captains G. Stewart and W. Stewart', p. 43.

The Pall Mall Gazette Wednesday 6 February 1918, "FRIGHTFUL" to the Hun. The War Office has, I hear, just come into possession of a document of extraordinary interest. Some day a thrilling story may be told of how and where it was secured. The document is only recently prepared by the German Headquarters Staff, and placed in the hands of Divisional Commanders in the field for their guidance. It is a list of British Divisions in the order of 'FURCHTBARKEIT', which may be translated 'much to be fearedness'. FURCHTBARKEIT is frightfulness, but not SCHIRECKLICHKEIT, the frightfulness as practiced in Belgium and elsewhere. In this historic list, pride of place is given to the following:- 1. 51 (Highland) Division. 2. 29th Division (reformed). 3. Guards Division.'

³⁰³ IWM, 81/25/1, The Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 94.

Change over time

Over the course of the war, the 51st Division perceived itself and was perceived differently. Whether influenced by the natural environment, opposing forces, the season of the year, a style of leadership, or the relations with the home front, internal and external factors combined and reacted to fuse *esprit de corps*. These changes were reflected in a number of ways.

Reputation

The reputation of the 51st was extremely important and was one of the essential pillars in the shaping of the (Highland) Division *esprit*. It substantiated a self-belief and assisted in sustaining the divisional performance. This reputation was maintained by internal and external actors and factors. The outside world was only too keen to latch onto the (Highland) Division as much needed icons, whether it was fully worthy or not.

Self-belief was key. The 51st came to think of itself as the best. The divisional history stated, amongst many understandable boasts, that the division was said to be the most formidable of all allied formations. That is a proud boast indeed when the 51st is compared with some of the other 'elite' formations. However, it was the self-belief that was important. Wimberley believed that the (Highland) Division had the battle half won before it started because of its self-belief.³⁰⁴ The division was convinced that the victory at Beaumont Hamel had caused the German Army to retreat to the Hindenburg Line,³⁰⁵ and indeed 'the capture of Beaumont Hamel had 'roused the whole nation to enthusiasm'.³⁰⁶ Hammond quite rightly points out that the (Highland) Division was renowned for boasting,³⁰⁷ but the point is that it felt it had something to boast about.

The 51st owed some of its prominence to the fact that it was, by April 1918, the only Scottish Territorial division on the Western Front. This was not enough in itself. There was criticism within and without the division during 1915 and 1916 that it was merely a

³⁰⁴ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume II, p. 3.

³⁰⁵ Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 135.

³⁰⁶ S. Gillon, *The Story of the 29th Division* (Edinburgh, 1925), p. 90.

³⁰⁷ B. Hammond, 'General Harper and the Failure of 51st (Highland) Division at Cambrai, 20 November 1917', in *IWM Review*, No. 10.

holding formation, its two attempts at attack having failed. They were 'Harper's Duds' when other Scottish divisions were covered in glory. Beaumont Hamel made the difference. It wasn't necessarily that the other Scottish divisions got worse, but Beaumont Hamel placed the (Highland) Division on another level. By late 1917, it was held in such high regard that it was expected to be able to do anything.

In 1918, the division's external status and reputation were stronger than ever. A gauge of this can be measured during eight days in November 1918, when the division participated in a major celebration in honour of the President of the United States; acted as guard of honour to Marshal Foch; paraded before Field Marshal Haig; was visited by Prince Albert; and the GOC was presented to the King of the Belgians.³⁰⁸ Plaudits from notable figures and tributes were legion, and this added to the divisional self-belief. Marshal Foch, in an article entitled 'Humanity is Your Debtor' published in *The People's Friend* called men of the 51st 'supermen'.³⁰⁹

Certainly, its reputation was founded on attack rather than defence. When outlining how the division stormed forward, MacDonald wrote that it was 'in keeping with their reputation'.³¹⁰ Post-Beaumont Hamel perceptions within the division were that it was always fighting, and a frequent statement within the official documents was 'the division, as usual, had taken all its objectives'.

Morale

The officers and men of the (Highland) Division had much to contend with. For long periods of time there was constant patrolling, raiding, incessant noise, shelling, insects and vermin, and dreadful weather. These were among the many factors that affected the morale of the troops. Morale was vital as it made the soldier able, or less able, to carry out the duties of soldiering, and more or less enthusiastic about enduring future conflict and privations. This was a crucial element in maintaining a strong *esprit de corps* as spirit was harder to maintain if morale was low.

³⁰⁸ WO 95 2847 51st Division G War Diary, November 1918.

³⁰⁹ IWM, 78/2, Papers of Lieutenant-Colonel A.R. Bain.

³¹⁰ MacDonald, *They Called It Passchendale* (London, 1993), p. 102.

At an official level, outside of basic monitoring through the censorship of mail, morale was not dealt with in any systemised fashion and the British Army did not address the issue of morale in an institutional way throughout the war. Indeed, it would take a second world war to impress upon the military hierarchy that morale was worthy of substantive monitoring and evaluation. Divisional morale could be affected by one factor or a series of contributory factors, some of which reflected the morale of the British Army as a whole. These factors could range from poor location to high casualties and battle fatigue.

Morale could also be influenced by the division's perception of itself. Whilst in Bedford, many of the 51st felt that they were being kept away from the war because they were considered to be of poor quality.³¹¹ Captain Ross accounts for the boost in morale as the division arrived in France when he stated, 'all were ready for the fray even when they hear the guns for the first time'.³¹² Equally, the morale of the division was affected when it felt that it was perceived to be unfit for battle and was merely a holding formation. The self-application of the title 'Harper's Duds' does not suggest high morale.

Morale could suffer due to horrific environmental conditions. In early 1917, in her memoirs, Miss Whittaker wrote of Brigadier-General Oldfield: 'Louis had another leave and returned just before Christmas to find the Division exhausted and wretched in the miseries of Courcellette'. Oldfield had observed that 'the limits of human endurance all but reached' and 'a hard fighting spell without a rest and hideous weather and ground conditions act more on highlanders than on Englishmen'.³¹³

The incessant nature of life on the Western Front could also affect spirits. Captain Ross complained about the endless rain,³¹⁴ and Lieutenant Munro tells of new recruits going mad just because of constant shelling.³¹⁵

³¹¹ McConachie, *The Student Soldiers*, p. 31.

³¹² Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 32.

³¹³ IWM, PP/MCR/134, The Papers of Miss Whittaker.

³¹⁴ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 302.

³¹⁵ IWM, P374, Diary of Lieutenant H.A. Munro, p. 5.

Battle fatigue was a factor for the 51st by 1917. The division was either in action or holding a dangerous section of the line for much of that year, and the battering could become overwhelming. In May 1917, Private Wrench wrote that:

there are awful reports from the Roeux sector though, and what a bloody battle it is there as we hear that the chemical works have been retaken and lost again. Well, why should we worry? We've had our bellies full of it already, and probably more than our fair share.³¹⁶

However, Simkins argues that there is strong evidence from censorship reports that the British Army throughout remained committed to fighting the war.³¹⁷ The 51st (Highland) Division prided itself on its tenacity and stolid nature. A medical officer in the Gordons talks of how the mud, 'has been pretty bad lately. In one sector we were in the men frequently got so hopelessly bogged down they had to be dragged out with ropes or dug out! They stuck it jolly well.'³¹⁸ The grousing of the Scots had a sustained and positive effect in relieving pressures, and if the men were occasionally drunk or indulged in seemingly irrational immature behaviour, it should be perceived as a form of escapism and of staying young in a world of premature ageing.

The morale of the (Highland) Division was still strong during a difficult period for the British Army in late 1917 and early 1918 when corporate morale was at a low ebb. Wimberley stated that some officers in the division even cancelled their leave when they discovered they might miss out on the battle of Cambrai in November 1917,³¹⁹ and Private Webster stated that on the eve of the German assault in March 1918, when all were aware that something was coming, the men were 'in good heart'.³²⁰

Collective morale was boosted by external factors such as a retreating German Army and the surrender of Bulgaria in 1918.

³¹⁶ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, 1 May 1917.

³¹⁷ Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days', 1918', in Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, p. 60.

³¹⁸ IWM, 96/37/1, The letters of Miss D. Daubeny, undated.

³¹⁹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 82.

³²⁰ IWM, NA, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 164.

It is clear that the longer men served at the front, the more probable that a change in morale would occur. Many primary source accounts when viewed over months and years show a decline and change in personal attitude and morale. Private R. Pake of the 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who joined the division in October 1915, actually physically altered the way he wrote his diary. He stopped putting dates in the margins, explaining this by stating that 'dates are a thing of the past now'.³²¹ Brigadier-General Oldfield, a stalwart of the division and a man respected by all, was no exception. Miss Whittaker wrote in her journal that, 'The tone of his letters changes now. Jestings ceases, and there is no more gentle teasing. Increasingly though seldom explicitly weariness and sadness are apparent.' Oldfield himself wrote 'everything seems more squalid than before and the war more hateful than ever' and 'a hideous business I shall bear its scars on my soul forever'.³²²

Officers needed to be aware of the effect that conditions and decisions could have on their men. Captain Wimberley ensured that his men avoided the body of a dead man in Flesquières in 1917, the sight of which may have affected their morale.³²³ However, if officers did not gauge the mood of the men correctly, this process could backfire, and F. W. Webster tells of an incident when an officer attempted to raise the morale in his unit, with the result being that the men blew raspberries and morale was indeed improved.³²⁴

Aggression

The First World War had a number of interlinked phases of aggression. At the beginning of the conflict, aggression could be short, sharp and bloody, with pauses in between. However, as Tony Ashworth has argued, during the war aggression became a more constant affair as techniques of trench war, which evolved through 1915, were eventually codified and bureaucratically imposed throughout the British Army. Aggression was then managed more by an impersonal than personal control system.³²⁵

³²¹IWM, 94/46/1, The Diary of R. McPake.

³²² IWM, PP/MCR/134, The Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 140.

³²³ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 90.

³²⁴ IWM, N/A, The Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 89.

³²⁵ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918, The Live and Let Live System* (London, 1980), p. 72.

The (Highland) Division followed this path. Its evolution on the Western Front in 1915 was slow and methodical. Its pace was measured not by constant battles, but by constant trench-holding, a fact not missed by the 51st as officers and men ‘cursed our bad luck as we sat behind the trenches at La Boisselle and Roelincourt where we heard of the deeds of the other Scottish divisions’.³²⁶ The raw formation learned its trade by a staged process that did not involve constant, proactive aggression. Major-General Bannatine-Allason did not push the division to overt displays of aggression. The 51st Division Intelligence Report of 14 August 1915 stated:

On our left sector, the enemy pinned 2 copies of the Frankfurter Zeitung of 8th and 9th August to a stick midway between the trenches on the night of 13/14 with a request in writing in English to exchange newspapers “as before”. The stick was brought in by a private of A Company of the 6th Seaforths. Later on in the day, the Btn Interpreter, without permission from an officer induced a lance Corporal of the 6th Seaforths to accompany him with the intention of placing papers midway between the line. When they had got some distance two German soldiers came up in front of their barbed wire and beckoned them to come closer when two English newspapers were handed to the Germans.³²⁷

That the 51st Division gradually built up its readiness for combat in 1915 without being overly aggressive is evidenced by the stop-start entries in the war diaries. Nicholson pointed out that the trench line was ‘fairly safe’ during this period.³²⁸ Ross further emphasised the lack of aggression by stating that ‘the fighting in this quarter had not attained the same infuriate heat as elsewhere’.³²⁹

As Tony Ashworth points out, this form of live and let live where enemies stopped fighting for a short time and indulged in reciprocal exchange was not uncommon during the period.³³⁰ Truces were usually tacit, but always unofficial and unauthorised. The agreement between antagonists was unspoken and carried out through certain actions or non-actions. A sector was quiet or active not as a rule, but as a result of the units that

³²⁶ NLS, ACC 7300, Book 2 of ‘The Highland Division’, p. 11.

³²⁷ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, August 1915

³²⁸ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 111.

³²⁹ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 101.

³³⁰ T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918, The Live and Let Live System*.

occupied it. However, the high command wanted constant aggression, and by Christmas 1915, 'strict orders had been issued against any form of truce on the trench line'.³³¹

The arrival of Major-General Harper in September 1915, coupled with a more centralised scrutiny of aggression and the increased supply of ordnance and ammunition, saw a more aggressive approach in the (Highland) Division. The change was noted by officers and men:

When the Division entered this sector it was a quiet one [early 1915]. By the time it left it was far from tranquil. The infantry had established superiority despite shortage of guns and ammunition. By the time we left, the Highlander had learnt that it pays to be the top dog in this kind of war and the Division had begun to establish a tradition.³³²

By the latter stages of 1916, that tradition was growing and this is evidenced by the accounts in war diaries.

However, aggression could also be ritualised, so that units could appear to be constantly active, but where activity was expected on both sides at certain times and in certain places. There is evidence to show that ritualisation did occur with the (Highland) Division in 1916. During August 1916:

it was now fine weather, and both sides were enjoying an unofficial armistice. Headquarters sat under a willow tree in the open, busily preparing defence schemes. The men were cheerfully executing their appointed tasks without suffering the slightest interruption. But this display of inertness was quite un-natural. At 5 o'clock we resumed activity with our trench mortars, provoking a prompt retaliation.³³³

Immediately prior to the attack on High Wood in July 1916, Major A. Anderson further emphasised a form of ritualisation when he explained that:

on practically our last night in the line eight of us were out in No Mans Land repairing the wire, when we almost walked right into a German patrol. It is doubtful who got the bigger surprise, but there was a general dive for cover in shell-holes, all of which were half full of

³³¹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 74.

³³² NLS, ACC 7300, Book 2 of 'The Highland Division', p. 5.

³³³ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 250.

water, and both sides commenced firing blindly at each other. After a while, however, we decided to call it quits and crawled on our stomachs back to the line.³³⁴

Attempts to stimulate aggression did upset the ritualised approach, and on Thursday 14 September 1916:

News came that General Stewart has been killed by a shell near the Gordon H.Q....It seemed to happen so suddenly that no one yet realises it. But it appears a strange occurrence that only yesterday the O/C., T.M.B. was here and the General was asking him questions relative to his front. He replied, "Oh, things are very quite sir, the Boche don't trouble us much so we leave him alone too for a change." Then the General got mad and said, "Look here, Maxwell, please remember this is a war and not a game. You will therefore, strafe tonight at eight o'clock and every night thereafter, and send in reports." So the war was resumed on our front, and for what purpose I do not know, but it means many more men to die, and of whom the general is the first.³³⁵

After the battle of Beaumont Hamel and throughout 1917, the division was involved in a steady series of battles and aggression was a constant. Incentives were provided for the men to 'double their efforts' with rewards of special leave for outstanding effort.³³⁶

By 1918, the (Highland) Division experienced a series of hammer blows which changed its approach and effectively reduced its capacity to perform. A change of GOC, massive changes in personnel, and a breakdown of the type of trench war that had been the norm for the division since 1915 resulted in fewer overt acts of aggression. Simkins did not even mention the name of the 51st Division amongst the best performers in the British Army during 'the 100 days'. He states that ten British divisions performed as well as or better than the leading dominion formations, and that of those only the Guards and the 66th (TF) Division were non-New Army.³³⁷

The change of emphasis in aggressive tactics and applied techniques can be shown through the prism of patrolling and raiding. Patrolling could be for reconnaissance or fighting, although often the two were fused. The intelligence summaries of the

³³⁴ IWM, 85/23/1, The Papers of Major A. Anderson.

³³⁵ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 56.

³³⁶ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume II, p. 70.

³³⁷ Simkins, 'Co-Stars or Supporting Cast? British Divisions in the 'Hundred Days'', in Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, p. 57.

(Highland) Division stressed a frequency of patrolling very soon after the division arrived in France, and that continued throughout the war, with peaks occurring at particular times, such as in March 1918 when literally dozens of patrols could be sent out a night. Raiding evolved from patrolling and was an active policy in the division, but often a raid was viewed as unproductive in terms of ground gained and expensive in casualties. With some justification the men viewed raiding as the high command's way of keeping up the offensive spirit. Whatever the justification, raids could give valuable experience and bring useful intelligence to a sector.³³⁸ Whether raids inspired aggression is unclear, but they certainly broke up the live and let live system.

Stimulating action and reaction, raiding became a semi-regular occurrence for the division after the battle of High Wood. The first recorded raid on enemy trenches mentioned in the war diaries occurred in January 1916 with 'a small bombing attack on enemy trenches'³³⁹ and 152nd Brigade war diaries also testified to an increase in aggressiveness, more sniping, and bombing during 1916.³⁴⁰ In line with a general increase in aggression throughout the Western Front during 1916, the (Highland) Division participated in nine raids (1 in January, 2 in May, 1 in June, 1 in July, 2 in September, and 2 in November), whilst in 1917 only four (3 in March and 1 in September).³⁴¹ In 1918, there are no recorded raids in the war diaries.

The decrease in raids in 1917 reflected the near constant activity of the (Highland) Division over much of the year. It is clear that it simply did not have the capacity for staging large-scale raids unless they were deemed essential. There was also no need during 1917 to provide any stimulants to sustain aggression. In 1918, with the relative weakness of the division, compared to a year before, and the change in the nature of war, raids would have been considered unnecessary and wasteful of men.

³³⁸ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 61.

³³⁹ NA WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, January 1916.

³⁴⁰ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary.

³⁴¹ NA, WO 95 2844/2845/2846/2847, 51st Division G War Diary.

In conclusion, the analysis has demonstrated the importance of *esprit de corps* in the 51st (Highland) Division and that the *esprit de corps* evolved over the course of the war and was influenced by a multitude of internal and external factors. Every formation in the British Army underwent changes dependent on its circumstance, but a particular combination of elements defining (Highland) Division *esprit de corps* made it distinctive.

The internal identity was a fusion of strong formation and sub-formation loyalties, a pride in and endorsement of regimental traditions, an awareness of what it was to be a Territorial, and a stake in Scottish culture and civilian society. These elements were blended together to create a unified body of men, loyal to the idea of the (Highland) Division, proud of it, valuing its traditions, and keen to promote its image.

The dynamics between officers and men in the 51st were essential for the creation and maintenance of the *esprit de corps* of the division because the officers and men were the division and to a large degree controlled the belief system within. Key senior figures within the division were pivotal in setting examples of leadership. That the leaders and the led forged a productive partnership within the division was central to the creation of a sense of identity and a promulgation of loyalty, to the establishment of expectations and the generation of a common belief.

Daily life in the 51st Division was hard and unyielding. Its rigours could have a serious negative impact on the formation's view of the world and its place in it. However, in an attempt to minimise this effect, the (Highland) Division organised a system underpinned by a divisional infrastructure geared towards maintaining the connection with the pre-war environment, sustaining morale, relieving pressures, and contributing to *esprit*.

Interaction and engagement with other formations and national groups ultimately helped define the 51st's sense of being. What others thought of it and how it promoted itself were central to its *esprit de corps*. That the division was respected by its allies and feared by its opponents accurately reflects this.

The *esprit de corps* of the 51st changed over the course of the First World War influenced by a multitude of internal and external pressures and opportunities. The divisional spirit was a construct not only of a disparate collection of units that operated under the title of 1st (Highland) Division in 1914, but of a formation with a cohesive and coherent set of values and attitudes, stabilised by a strong morale, and bolstered by a fine reputation based on aggression and attack, immortalised under the name of 51st (Highland) Division.

Chapter 4 Battle Performance of the 51st (Highland) Division at: Givenchy 1915; Beaumont Hamel 1916; Cambrai 1917; March 1918

This chapter will concentrate on four battles over different and quite pivotal periods involving the 51st Division during the course of the war. The (Highland) Division at the end of the war was a different formation from that which mobilised in 1914 and each engagement has been selected in an effort to demonstrate an overall military evolution for the division whilst also focusing on key thematic criteria.

In order to develop each interpretation, it is necessary to establish briefly the overall strategic build-up to the attack; the divisional objectives; the nature of the terrain and the enemy forces; the strength of the (Highland) Division; divisional preparations immediately prior to conflict; and the outcome of the engagement.

A further analysis will determine: the divisional achievements in the engagement; the performance of the leadership in the formation; the extent to which the organisation and administration functioned satisfactorily; the strength and nature of *esprit de corps*; the extent and impact of divisional casualties; how well trained the division was; and the level of co-ordination and co-operation between all arms in the 51st.

Givenchy 1915

Narrative

1915 was important to the British Expeditionary Force as tactics and technology adapted to the vagaries of modern war. Prior to the First World War, well-organised attacks had frequently been successful and had often overwhelmed robust defences, but during the early months of the Great War advances in weapons technology had changed that. The impact of machine guns and rapid rifle fire hampered the mobility of the attacker and insufficient artillery firepower could not create and sustain an infantry breakthrough against entrenched positions. The pre-war tactical emphasis on outflanking and envelopment, based on infantry attack and cavalry exploitation, and supported by directly firing artillery¹ was to prove far less successful in the face of the new conditions.

¹ With few aircraft and basic communications, there was no means of identifying unsighted positions or locating targets in depth.

Since November 1914, the German Army had predominantly maintained a defensive strategy. In contrast, the French and British armies both carried out a number of offensives which consistently attempted to breakthrough the enemy lines. One of the key battles of 1915 was at Neuve Chapelle in April, which taught the British that enemy defences could be breached but also indicated to the Germans that they should strengthen their defences. It also exemplified problems for the attacker in that a preliminary bombardment permitted the Germans to bring reserves up and poor communications denied the British the option of a swift advance after the first stage break-in. There were similar problems during the attack on Aubers Ridge the following month.²

Between 17 and 25 May 1915, the 51st, as a reserve division in the Indian Corps, participated in its first action as the BEF launched a series of attacks near Festubert to coincide with a simultaneous French Army offensive. The attacks were characterised by a series of small battles against strong and well-organised enemy defences that were protected by barbed wire and machine guns. The tactical dilemma of the breakthrough continued to dominate.

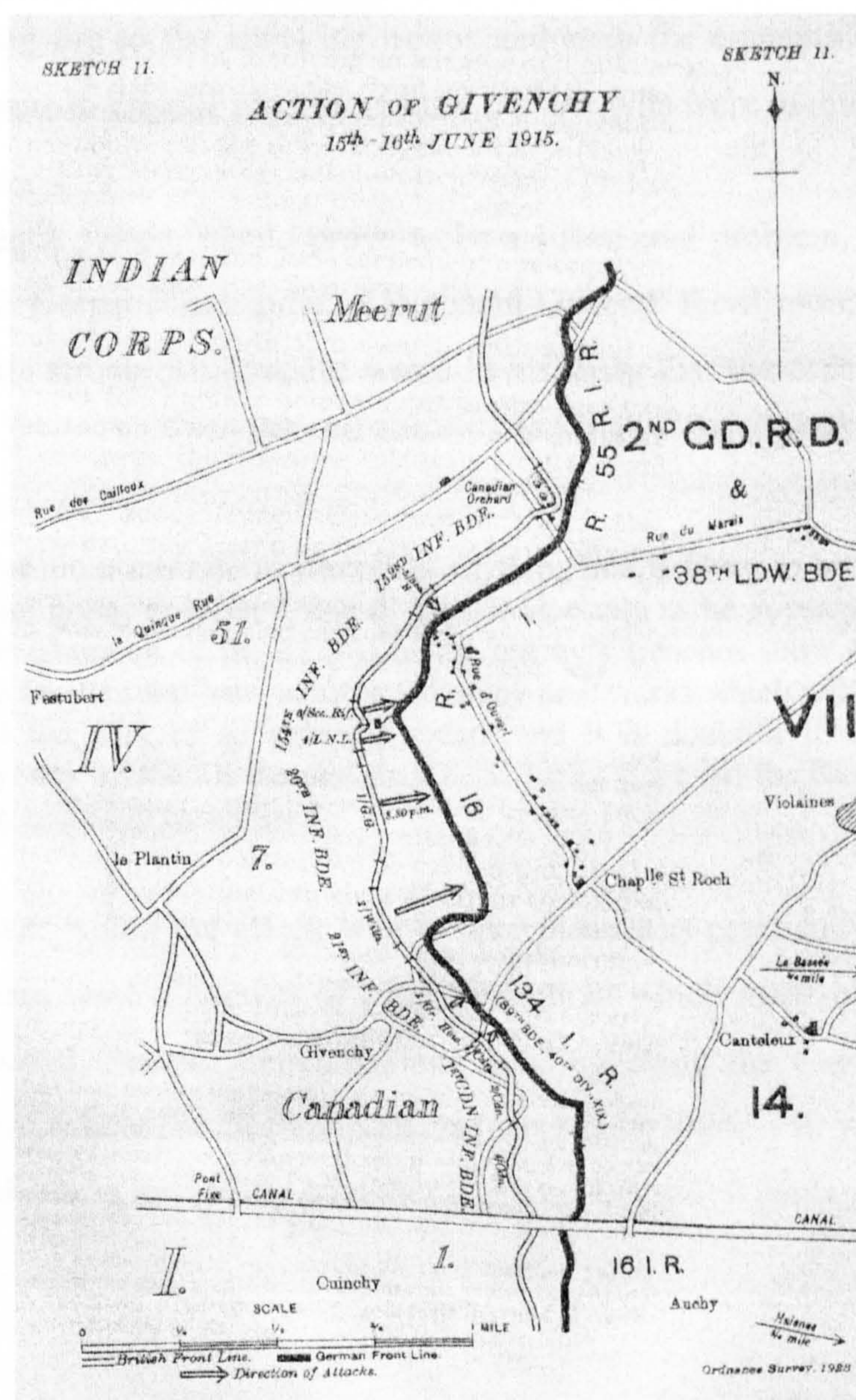
When the battle of Festubert ended, the British First Army was ordered by GHQ to carry out further offensives to assist French armies still engaged in the second battle of Artois. As French attacks were planned for June, the BEF was scheduled to carry out assaults on the left of the French armies. First Army was to concentrate on gaining ground from Givenchy to Violaines, and in order to do this, Haig (the Army Commander) reorganised his front into 'one defensive and two offensive sectors'. The latter were allotted to the I Corps (47th, 1st and 2nd Divisions), and the IV Corps (Canadian, 7th, and 51st Divisions), with the Indian Corps being given a defensive role. On 30 May, First Army headquarters ordered IV Corps, containing the 51st Division, to attack the enemy line between Chapelle St. Roch and Rue d'Ouvert and advance over a limited distance. 'The amount of ammunition available at this time permitted only an assault-and that on a very narrow front-by the IV. Corps, but the I. and Indian Corps, and the Second Army, were directed to give such assistance as they could in subsidiary attacks.'³

² T. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918, The Live and Let Live System* (London, 1980), p. 50.

³ J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915. Battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert, and Loos* (London, 1928), p. 93.

On 7 June, orders were issued from IVth Corps to its divisions to attack the enemy positions on the morning of 11 June, but this was subsequently postponed until 15 June. On 12 June, the operation order for the attack was issued to brigades from 51st divisional headquarters, with brigade orders being issued on 14 June.⁴ The Canadian Division was to attack on the right and form a defensive flank, with the 7th Division in the centre and the 51st Division at the extreme end.⁵

Map 1. 15-16 June 1915, Givenchy⁶



⁴ National Archives, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, 'Attack of the 51st Highland Division on the Rue D'Ouvert on 15th and 16th June', 7 June 1915.

⁵ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary, 154th Brigade Operation Order No. 10, 14 June 1915.

The 152nd and 154th brigades were ordered by divisional headquarters to carry out the assault. The 1/4th Loyal North Lancashires and the 1/6th Scottish Rifles of 154th Brigade were to deliver the main attack on the right, whilst the other two battalions of the 154th Brigade, the 1/4th King's Own Royal Lancasters and the 1/8th Liverpool Regiment, were held in brigade reserve. The 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders of 152nd Brigade was to make a subsidiary attack on the left if the attack of the 154th Brigade was successful. The 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders occupied the front line trenches, 'and the Battalion's job on the left of the 5th Seaforths was to man the parapet with every available man and open rapid fire on the enemy's trenches so as to give covering fire to the attacking troops and keep the enemy's head down',⁷ whilst the 1/6th Argylls were in brigade reserve and the 1/8th Argylls were in divisional reserve.

The enemy trench system would prove to be a substantial problem. Two weeks prior to the attack, the IV Corps commander, Lieutenant-General Rawlinson, was pessimistic about attacking such a strong position. He wrote in his diary that the orders he produced for Haig were:

in the form of pious aspiration rather than anything that is likely to be actually carried into effect for we are not going to capture Rue d' Oouvert as easily as he appears to think. The new photos taken on the afternoon of the 12 [th] of the enemy's trenches show that the Boches have been working like beavers and have constructed many new works which will give us trouble- they have strengthened the wire to an alarming extent and it is doubtful if we shall be able to cut it satisfactorily. My opinion is that we shall be v. lucky if we get the Rue d'Oouvert after three days hard fighting and 5000 casualties.⁸

The ground over which the attack was to take place was practically flat. It was intercut by ditches and there were a number of trees throughout which made observation very difficult. The heavily-wired German trench system, running along the edge of the Rue d' Oouvert, formed a salient, where the German trenches were only 100 to 150 yards from the (Highland) Division, the distance increasing on either flank to 200 or 250 yards.

⁶ After Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915. Battles of Aubers Ridge, Festubert, and Loos*, pp. 92-93.

⁷ R.T. Peel, and A.H. MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences* (Elgin, 1923), p. 9.

⁸ R. Prior, and T. Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (Oxford, 1992), p. 97.

Captains Peel and MacDonald also recorded that the British trenches were in very poor condition,⁹ and war diaries emphasised that the whole sector proved to be a difficult section of the line to hold as it was subject to constant mining, sniping and trench mortar activity.

In an attempt to break down these formidable enemy defences, the divisional preparations before the assault included a forty-eight hour slow bombardment in order to destroy the trenches and cut the wire. The artillery began the wire-cutting on 13 June, continued on 15 June and became intensive between 5.30 p.m. and 6 p.m.. Mountain guns and trench mortars also participated in the bombardment.¹⁰ The bombardment continued up to the moment of the infantry assault and at 6 p.m., the actual hour of the assault, the guns firing on the enemy front line began to lift. At 6.15 p.m. there was a further lift on to the Rue d'Orient.

At the end of the bombardment, after the detonation at 5.58 p.m. of a mine near the junction of the Canadian and the 7th Division fronts, opposite Chapelle St. Roch, the infantry went forward. However, German infantry were in position and opened fire with rifle and machine gun.

The assault delivered by 1/4th Loyal North Lancashires and 1/6th Scottish Rifles of 154th Brigade at 6 p.m., was at first successful. The west end of the German salient was punctured and the attack pushed on towards the main enemy line near Rue d'Ouvert, and three companies of the 1/4th King's Own Royal Lancashires were sent up as reinforcements. However, in the early hours of the morning the Germans counter-attacked and forced back the troops to their own front line trenches. Captain Mahon of 154th Brigade related:

The artillery, however, prevented us getting adequate reinforcements, sandbags, etc, forward, whilst the enemy made a strong counter-attack, headed by bombers and took the small party of our men on a flank, with the result that they had to retire and finished away over to the right in the Guards trenches.¹¹

The 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders, of 152nd Brigade, attacking the northern section of the salient at 6.45 p.m., were met with heavy machine gun fire and uncut wire. The report from Brigadier-General Ross of 152nd Brigade to the divisional commander on 16 June stated, 'Immediately these infantry advanced they came under an intense machine-gun and rifle fire

⁹ Peel and MacDonald, *6th Seaforth Highlanders, Campaign Reminiscences*, p. 8.

¹⁰ F.W. Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division, 1914-1918* (Edinburgh, 1921), p. 18.

which practically mowed down the first two platoons and parties of bomb throwers who accompanied the second platoon'.¹² A second attack ordered for before dawn was subsequently cancelled by corps headquarters.

Neither of the two attacking brigades were able to link up with flanking units from the Canadian and 7th divisions.

Throughout the night of 15/16 June, the 1/6th Scottish Rifles and 1/4th Loyal North Lancashires were withdrawn and replaced by the 1/8th Liverpools in the front line, and the 1/7th Black Watch of 153rd Brigade was sent up to the reserve trenches. In the morning, orders were received from IV Corps to renew the attack at 4.45 p.m. after a preliminary artillery bombardment. The 1/5th and 1/7th Gordons of 153rd Brigade were temporarily attached to 154th Brigade to replace battalions that had been withdrawn. The assault was delivered by the 1/8th Liverpools, with 1/7th Black Watch in support at 4.45 p.m., and the 1/8th Liverpools managed to advance in small parties past the western end of the salient. The 7th Division, on the right, was, however, unable to get forward and at about 8 p.m., the 1/8th Liverpools were forced back to the British front line trenches. The 152nd Brigade was to have attacked at 9 p.m. but, after the 154th Brigade was driven back, the attack was cancelled.

The relief of the 154th Brigade in the right section by the 153rd Brigade was completed during the early morning of 17 June. Further orders were received at 5 p.m. to assault the German salient again at 3 a.m. the next morning after a short and intense artillery bombardment. Captain Ross outlined the development of the attack:

On the night of the 17th the attack was resumed on the right with redoubled fury. The 2nd Gordons were ordered to attack, their first objective being a T-trench jutting out from the German lines. "D" Company of the Gordons, linking up with the sister battalion, went over the parapet and advanced to the enemy's position to make a feint demonstration and distract his attention from the real assault. But it was a labour in vain. The 2nd Gordons hammered ineffectual blows, and melting before the sleet of lead, collapsed at the wire. A gallant remnant, however, succeeded in gaining a precarious footing in the T-trench. Meanwhile, "D" Company, miraculously preserved from heavy casualties, had returned to the original line.¹³

¹¹ Imperial War Museum, 78/22/1, Diary of Captain J.S. Mahon, June 1915.

¹² N/A, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary.

¹³ B. Ross, *The Fifty-First in France* (London, 1918), p. 91.

As a result, at 2.30 a.m. on 18 June, further attacks were postponed and later cancelled by order of the IV Corps commander.

Analysis

The battle was a failure in operational terms as the divisional objectives were not met. However, it did play a part in supporting the French armies during their simultaneous attacks¹⁴ and also introduced the 51st Division to an organised assault against enemy positions. The learning experience was to impact upon the development of its training and tactics over the course of the war, and through this and subsequent assaults there developed a system of tactics more sophisticated than those acquired whilst training in Britain.

The following extract from the IV Corps report referring to the attack of the 1/8th Liverpools on 16 June summed up much that went wrong for the division during the battle:

the Regiment went out gallantly and came at once under a heavy artillery fire. They pressed on in small parties and gained the salient but did not get much further. The fire of the German artillery, added to machine gun fire stopped them altogether, and they retired to our fire trench. The situation, owing to the difficulty of communication, was unknown to the Brigadier, and in my opinion, had reinforcements been sent up they would not have reached the firing line. The supporting battalion had been severely knocked about by artillery, and it is evident that the Germans had made all preparations for this attack.¹⁵

This account clearly showed that the objectives were not met; heavy casualties were sustained; leadership and organisation were confused and disrupted; planning was inadequate; training had not been progressive; the co-ordination and weaponry were inadequate; the artillery bombardment did not do its job and the element of surprise was lost; but through this an *esprit de corps* remained solid. The 51st Division was not yet ready for the kind of war that had been thrust upon it and the simple, linear tactics that were employed by its units were inappropriate against a prepared enemy armed with machine guns.

It was a limited objective attack undertaken by battalion or brigade sized units which chiefly employed the rifle as the infantry's primary weapon. The infantry detachments detailed for

¹⁴ This was nothing new and was to be a common factor throughout the course of the war, and it frequently made an assault more difficult as the ground was often chosen because of the need to support the French rather than for its own strategic value.

¹⁵ NA, WO 95 710, IV Corps Report on Givenchy operation, June 1915.

the assault were expected to leave their trenches simultaneously and reach their objectives together. 154th Operation Order No.10 of 14 June stated:

As soon as the leading platoons have cleared the parapet, the next platoons in succession will double inwards along the fire trench and as soon as their flanks meet at the marked spot will scale the parapet and follow the leading platoons.¹⁶

However, in practice, platoons crossed no man's land in alternate rushes but failed to support one another with firepower:

At 6pm, the firing ceased, and the infantry went over in open order, to cross the four or five hundred yards between them and the enemy. In the light of later warfare one can visualise the scene, a grassy plain on a beautiful summer afternoon, no artillery barrage, no proper cutting of the enemy's wire, no firing on his batteries after the infantry started, the infantry advancing absolutely unprotected except by the rifle and machine-gun fire of their comrades, and machine-guns were few and far between in those days, and one can wonder that, in spite of heroic efforts the attack was a failure.¹⁷

The loss of the captured enemy trenches by the 154th Brigade on the night of the 15/16 June was pivotal. The IV Corps report to First Army headquarters stated, 'Had the 7th Division been able to advance and join up with the 51st Division the ground won during daylight could probably have been made good during the night'.¹⁸ Although the attack on the front of the 51st could be considered a failure, account must also be taken of the advances to the left and the right of the division during key stages of the assault. Bewsher stated, 'There is little doubt but that, had the operations on their flanks been successful, they would have had every prospect of holding their gains'.¹⁹ Ultimately, Bewsher's conclusion is speculative, although it would have clearly been of benefit to the units of the division to have had secure flanks.

A more appropriate conclusion is found in the personal diary of Rawlinson, the corps commander, 'It is a thousand pities that we were allowed to attack the Rue d' Ouvert for any sensible person would have known that we should not take it'.²⁰

¹⁶ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary.

¹⁷ D. Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders* (London, 1920), p. 20.

¹⁸ NA, WO 95 710, IV Corps Report to First Army, June 1915.

¹⁹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division, 1914-1918*, p. 21.

²⁰ R. Prior, and T. Wilson, *Command on the Western Front* (Oxford, 1992), p. 99.

Artillery

In many ways, the artillery was the most important factor in the battle, as it was for much of the rest of the war. However, the 51st Division had no control over much of its activity during the engagement as Brigadier-General J.F.N. Birch of the 7th Division was in overall charge of IV Corps artillery,²¹ which included both heavy and field artillery. This meant corps set the timings for the fireplan and set divisional rates of advance, although the (Highland) Division did have responsibility for selecting its own gun positions and carrying out the centralised instructions through its own artillery brigades.²² Throughout the corps, running contrary to the prevailing tactical thought for concentrating artillery firepower over a narrow front, there was an overall paucity of guns and ammunition, which worked against the application of the theory in practice. This did not contrast well against the strength of the German positions.

Through a series of engagements prior to the attack at Givenchy, such as at Neuve Chapelle and the Aubers Ridge, the BEF artillery experimented with different forms of bombardment and supporting fire. Neuve Chapelle was particularly successful in establishing the guns to ground ratio and also in applying indirect fire. However, the advances at Neuve Chapelle were almost completely absent from the divisional preparations at Givenchy. Nicholson stated that it faced:

Such a matted network of wire that no man during an assault could possibly penetrate it, though armed with the best wire cutters. A prolonged artillery bombardment was therefore essential, not only to pound the enemy's trenches and prevent reinforcements coming forward, but, an even more vital need, to cut lanes through this wire.²³

However, as there were less guns in relation to length of front, to compensate, there was a longer barrage. The IV Corps scheme of attack, stated that the objective of the heavy howitzers and field guns should be to attempt to 'destroy the enemy's trenches and strongholds and to kill him if he moves out from under cover'; 'To prevent him from repairing his fortifications'; 'To forbid him food, rest, or reinforcements by day or night'; and 'To complete the wire cutting'.²⁴ However, in order to do this, the CRA Order No.1 by Brigadier-General H.A. Brendon of 7 June 1915 (to be carried out on the 8th), which set out guidelines for (Highland) Division field batteries to cut wire stated that the 'Rate of fire is to

²¹ NA, WO 95 2844, IV Corps Operation Order No.18, 30 May 1915.

²² NA, WO 95 2844, IV Corps Preliminary Instructions, 29 May 1915.

²³ W.M. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines, An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-1918* (Stevenage, 1939), p. 226.

be governed by accurate observation, it should not exceed 60 rounds per battery per hour'.²⁵ This logic was flawed. The barrages were for the most part ineffective, for the artillery was not accurate enough to shell individual strongpoints and systematically destroy the enemy's defences, high explosive shells for the fifteen-pounders made little impact on defensive works, and shrapnel was only effective in eradicating the enemy exposed in some part of the trenchworks. Wauchope stated that:

The failure of this attack may be put down to the lack of sufficient artillery preparation and to uncut wire. At that time the number of guns and the allowance of ammunition required to give infantry a reasonable chance of success had not been fully appreciated.²⁶

After the preliminary bombardment, the corps artillery and divisional artillery were to provide a lifting barrage to enable to troops to advance.²⁷ However, neither the preliminary nor the lifting barrage managed to destroy the wire adequately, forcing the Highlanders physically to cut their way through. The bombardment did not destroy the enemy defensive structures either. Rawlinson pointed out:

the deep dug-outs were so well constructed that they were almost impossible to destroy..... it was a pretty stiff nut for us to crack. It will cost many thousands of lives before we are in possession of it unless we get an unlimited amount of ammunition to smash the place to pieces before we go in.²⁸

The IV Corps report reinforced this by stating:

I much doubt if any kind of artillery fire however accurate and well sustained will have the desired effect unless it is sufficient to bury the garrisons in the deep dug-outs they have now constructed, and this is a matter of chance.²⁹

To diminish further the possibility of success, the artillery units of the division were not brought up to full strength until May 1916 and at Givenchy the guns at their disposal were under the prescribed war establishment, and those guns they had were outdated (15 pounders were still being used instead of 18 pounders).³⁰ Bidwell and Graham have pointed out that the

²⁴ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division CRA War Diary, June 1915.

²⁵ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division CRA War Diary, June 1915.

²⁶ A.G. Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II* (London, 1926), p. 253.

²⁷ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division CRA Operation Order No. 5, 15 June 1915.

²⁸ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 96.

²⁹ NA, WO 95 710, IV Corps Report on operations at Givenchy.

³⁰ See Annexe 2 for the development of the 51st Division artillery capability throughout the war.

Territorial formations were undergunned as there had been no expectation of overseas service.³¹

In addition, on 28 May, Sir John French had been forced to order the First Army to limit its operation to “small aggressive threats which will not require much ammunition or many troops”.³² For the troops of the (Highland) Division this proved almost criminal in its application. Captain Ross stressed that ‘Towards morning the struggle quietened down. Our guns were silent. *They had no more shells to fire*’.³³

However, even the ammunition that the division did have at its disposal was not of a good quality:

In addition to the inadequacy in the number of guns, the 15-pounders again proved themselves highly unsatisfactory. As evidence of the unreliability of their ammunition, it is worth recording that Captain Duncan of the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had an eye knocked out by a shrapnel bullet half a mile behind the British front line.³⁴

Combined arms

There were a number of developments which showed some promise in the field of combined arms, and these were generated by lessons learned through battles fought. By early 1915 the infantryman at the front already had a wide variety of weapons at his disposal, although these were often limited in number or quality, or improvised in form, and included bombs and machine guns.

The official history stated that ‘in February 1915, the number of machine guns per infantry battalion and cavalry regiment had been raised from two to four’.³⁵ However, the 51st’s machine gun establishment was still below strength in July 1915 as the war diary made clear, ‘One Vickers Gun complete with mounting re for each of the following units on allotment by GHQ. 1/6th Scottish Rifles and 1/4th Loyal North Lancs Regt. Necessary transport also indented for. This will complete these units to 3 machine guns per battalion’.³⁶ This situation

³¹ S. Bidwell, and D. Graham, *Firepower, British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, 1982), p. 97.

³² Edmonds, *Military Operations*, p. 92.

³³ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 92.

³⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 23.

³⁵ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, p. 64.

³⁶ NA, WO 95 2853, 51st Division DADOS War Diary, 31 July 1915.

was still not corrected until six months after the official establishment had changed. The division had spent almost four months on the Western Front, when in August 1915 twelve Vickers machine guns arrived to complete the establishment to four per battalion.³⁷ However, at Givenchy there were not enough machine guns and some of those were old model Maxims, and the use of the Maxims was limited because of their weight. It might have made a difference to the outcome of the battle if the division had been allocated more machine guns (as Lewis guns were also scarce at this time), not to take part in the initial advance but to be ready to move up swiftly in support.

Bombing parties from brigade grenadier companies were instructed to closely support the attack.³⁸ However, there were not enough bombs or bombers, and many of those were killed by enemy machine guns. More use could also have been made of trench mortars, and those that were available were used piecemeal. 'The contest now became one of hand-grenades and trench weapons, and for this the British were still ill-equipped.'³⁹ It is no surprise to find that after the battle a divisional circular memorandum of 7 July 1915 from Bannatine-Allason emphasised more practice on bombing.⁴⁰

Training, and command and control

The command and control methodologies employed by army and corps were flexible and delegated much authority to divisional commanders and their staff. Prior and Wilson have stated that Rawlinson set about devising a plan and training divisions for the attack at Givenchy. Devise a plan he did, but there is no evidence in (Highland) Division war diaries or other primary sources to support the statement on training. Certainly, Rawlinson was concerned about the poor staff work of the division and did send his chief of staff to help them prepare operational orders,⁴¹ but this does not constitute training a division.

The training of the 51st Division in Britain had certainly not been progressive or comprehensive enough to transform the division into a formation capable of operating coherently and cohesively in the field. War diaries added that, since its arrival in France, the division had been either 'on the move', involved in the clearing and consolidation of

³⁷ NA, WO 95 2853, 51st Division DADOS War Diary, 25 August 1915.

³⁸ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary, Operation Order No. 11.

³⁹ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ NA, WO 95 2869, 153rd Brigade War Diary.

⁴¹ Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 97.

trenches, or placed in reserve. Outside the useful experience gained of 'on the job' training, the 51st had no opportunity to train for the new conditions on the Western Front. It was usual for a new division arriving at the front to receive a period of instruction from a more seasoned formation. However, the 51st Division did not have the benefit of any such instruction. These factors were clearly detrimental to the capacity of the division to engage successfully in an assault.

Despite a lack of centralised training advice in early 1915, there was information in circulation and discussion was taking place throughout the Expeditionary Force chain of command. After the battle of Festubert reports of lessons learned, especially concerning the artillery, were circulated to formations and units. Although the 51st Division was unable to progress a great deal during the short time it was in France from the standard that it had set in Britain, it did employ some new ideas encouraged by tactics prevalent throughout the BEF, such as the opening of a bomb school for the active encouragement of the training of bombers, and by June 1915 the bombing squads 'had been evolved into a fairly workable unit'.⁴² Significantly, there had been very little training on this weapon and its application before the division arrived in France.

The plans for the attack had to be simple to enable the troops to deploy and advance accordingly, but poor training resulted in a lack of cohesion and of mutual support amongst and within units. Nicholson stated:

I saw a Regular afterwards, a man I knew well, who was commanding a trench mortar battery, in the front line. He told me that when the assault was ordered, our men went over the parapet magnificently. They could not have been finer, he said. Then he added, 'But the wickedness of it, they didn't know what they had to do when they got to the other side; so that they were hopelessly sacrificed before they started'. This must not be taken too literally. Every endeavour had been made to make a plan for the other side sufficiently simple for our men to carry out; but what is as important as a good plan, is a good leader who instinctively knows what is the only thing to be done; and does it.⁴³

Of course, experience is a powerful force for development and practise can produce greater consistency in results, but the 51st could at least have been trained to expect what was to come. That was not the case and the accountability for this resides within the whole command structure. Wimberley concluded, 'The Division therefore, owing to its enthusiasm

⁴² Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, pp. 80-81.

and lack of training in this type of war, suffered casualties that, at a later stage, would have been considered as criminal'.⁴⁴

The troops had been trained to follow the commands of junior officers, and the junior officers waited on instructions from higher commanders to tell them what to do. As an untested formation with a relatively short operational history, the divisional leadership was extremely important during its first engagement.

On 4 June, Rawlinson called on his divisional commanders to propose assault plans for their formations in the coming attack.⁴⁵ The detailed planning fell on the divisional commander and his staff. Bannatine-Allason conferred with his brigade commanders and as a result a draft scheme of attack was submitted to corps headquarters on 5 June and a corps operation order was issued for a combined attack on 7 June.⁴⁶

However, the ultimate failure of the divisional attack, and the confusion and disorder that characterised it, does not reflect positively on the planners of the scheme. It is perhaps not surprising that Bannatine-Allason gave up command of the division two months after Givenchy, and one of the key brigade commanders involved in the attack, Brigadier-General Hibbert of the 154th Brigade, followed him in October 1915. The GSO1 was also replaced in June 1915 and the CRA in July 1915. Battalion commanders did not escape criticism and there were also changes in unit command immediately after the battle. Malcolm stated that his commanding officer was confused and made mistakes, and that only decisions made by the adjutant saved the day.⁴⁷ That commanding officer was later sent home.

Junior officers in the division also lacked experience and many essential qualities of leadership. In Rawlinson's view, 'their officers are not good, too few gentlemen amongst them'.⁴⁸ His conclusion supported earlier reports that Major-General Bannatine-Allason sent to First Army headquarters criticising the quality of officers. However, it was a difficult transition for any officer newly arrived at the front, and Captain J.L. Weston stated 'it was the

⁴³ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 228.

⁴⁴ NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 1 of 'The Highland Division', p. 11.

⁴⁵ NA, WO 95 2844, '154th Brigade Report on the Attack on 15th and 16th June 1915'.

⁴⁶ NA, WO 95 2844, '154th Brigade Report on the Attack on 15th and 16th June 1915'.

⁴⁷ G.I. Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960* (Glasgow, 1960), p. 23.

⁴⁸ Prior, and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front*, p. 97.

greatest strain he had ever experienced'.⁴⁹ Nicholson further explained that the staff were 'terribly anxious at the lack of experience of our battalion officers'.⁵⁰ After the battle Bannatine-Allason wrote to Rawlinson that 'Brig. General Hibbert, his staff and Brigade generally did all they could under circumstances of considerable difficulty. I much regret the loss of so many gallant officers and men.'⁵¹ This was an accurate summation of the performance of the whole division. However, unfortunately, many of the 'circumstances' referred to by the divisional commander could have been avoided.

Organisation and administration

The organisation and administration of the division also developed serious flaws during the engagement, including a lack of intelligence, poor staff work, and communication failures. These were understandable given the circumstances, but again could have been avoided if the division had been better prepared.

Ideally, the simplistic approach to the attack was intended to have permitted the officers and men of the division to gain their objectives through a staged process, and the operational order for 15 June was extremely detailed. However, after the initial assault and its setbacks, the ability of the formation to respond with any degree of flexibility and mobility deteriorated. In his report to IV Corps, Bannatine-Allason stated of the attack on 16 June, that 'I do not think there was time to properly organise this attack and I know that the Colonel and Adjutant had to run round the companies and give very hasty instructions'.⁵² The lack of time to prepare and organise properly was the rule rather than the exception once the battle was underway, and this applied to all levels of command. At brigade level, Brigadier-General Hibbert stated that 'Owing to the short time at my disposal, it was not possible to issue very detailed orders or to make alteration of the dispositions of the troops in the trenches'. Battalion and junior officers were equally affected:

About 3.30 p.m. the C.O. (Major Johnson) said he wanted to see all Officers in the Firing Line..... At this meeting he told us that he had orders to make an attack on the German position at 4.45 p.m. about an hour after. Orders are orders and although we had to hurry to get our men in position, etc, at 4.45 prompt our boys scaled the parapet.⁵³

⁴⁹ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 227.

⁵⁰ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 228.

⁵¹ NA, WO 95 710, Major-General Bannatine-Allason to IV Corps, 26 June 1915.

⁵² NA, WO 95 710, 51st Division Report on operations at Givenchy.

This reflected badly on the divisional staff. It has already been noted that Rawlinson was not impressed by this aspect of the division's work, and there are a number of instances where the infantry units could have been better assisted by more able staff work. Captain Lusk complained of the staff that, 'I got my column to the point indicated in the map reference, and found the field I was to occupy in possession of another unit's transport. This is what is known in the army as 'bad staff work'.'⁵⁴ Another incident involving a failure to notify troops of an attack was a more serious lapse, and Captain Ross stated:

At 3 a.m. a company of Guardsmen, armed with Hale grenades, suddenly appeared in the trench. One of their officers, noticing me standing near, approached and said: "Hullo! When are you going over?" "Going over? I don't understand." "What! Do you mean to say you don't know you're attacking this morning?" "Well, it's the first time I've heard of it".⁵⁵

The problem with communications accentuated any failings in planning and in the execution of orders:

When one compares the elaborate signalling arrangements made prior to an attack in 1917 or 1918, and thinks of the numerous telephone cables buried 6 feet deep, with elaborate dug-outs at cableheads, and all the numerous switchboards, ring telephones, etc., used, the very rudimentary apparatus and cable used in this attack provoke a smile. There were no buried cables, simply thinly insulated wires laid along the top of the communication trench, with one or two alternate routes laid across the fields and carried across roads, on trees, or ruined houses, with the result that, as soon as the German artillery retaliated, all communication between the front line and battalion headquarters was cut, the line in many places blown to pieces.⁵⁶

In many instances, the only way to understand what was taking place was to be in the right place at the right time, such as the adjutant and commanding officer who arrived 'and took up a point of vantage in the trench where a view of the 6th Scottish Rifles could be got during their advance. It was only by this means that the C.O. could judge as to the failure or success of the Scottish Rifles.'⁵⁷ If this was not possible, then commanders, particularly at brigade level and above, and their staff were often unsighted: 'The situation, owing to the difficulty of communication, was unknown to the Brigadier'.⁵⁸

⁵³ IWM, 78/22/1, Diary of Captain J.S. Mahon.

⁵⁴ J. Lusk, *Letters and Memoirs* (Oxford, 1916), p. 65.

⁵⁵ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division, 1914-1918*, p. 19.

⁵⁸ NA, WO 95 710, 51st Division Report on operations at Givenchy.

Confusion was a natural result. Captain Lusk recorded, 'At last an order came to withdraw; it came from the right, but from whom no one knows. Then they all came back-all that was left of them.'⁵⁹ War diaries also stated that at 12 a.m. on 15 June, 152nd Brigade:

Ascertained that fresh advance ordered by Bde. Commander had not started. Orders were accordingly given for the advance at 1.45 a.m. in accordance with instructions received from 51st Divn..... A few minutes later message was received by Bde. Maj. that the 154th Bde. had withdrawn. Instructions were accordingly given to carry out the withdrawal onto the front parapet.⁶⁰

The communications from reserve trenches to the front line were very bad and movement had predominantly to be carried out in the open under direct German observation. This inability to conceal the intentions of the formation resulted in heavy losses. The official history stated that 'The enemy, indeed, seemed to know not only the exact frontage but the very moment of attack',⁶¹ and Wimberley stated, 'The Boches rose early, having apparently known of our plans and cried 'Come along Jocks, we are waiting for you'.⁶² The situation did not improve on 16 June and once more the enemy were ready, as the official history testified: 'The results, however, were even more disappointing than at the first attempt, the enemy again being fully prepared'.⁶³ The official history was supported in that statement by Bannatine-Allason himself: 'it is evident that the Germans had made all preparations for this attack'.⁶⁴

By contrast, the 51st lacked intelligence as to the strength and intentions of the enemy. Bannatine-Allason stated to IV Corps:

From various reports it seems clear that the Germans had been reinforced, as there is evidence that those against us on the 16th were dressed differently to those seen the day before. They were dressed in darker blue uniform and had evidently been brought up during the night.⁶⁵

However, by the time this was evident, it was too late.

⁵⁹ Lusk, *Letters and Memories*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ NA, WO 95 2861.

⁶¹ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, p. 94.

⁶² NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 1 of 'The Highland Division', pp. 11-12.

⁶³ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ NA, WO 95 710, 51st Division Report on operations at Givenchy.

⁶⁵ NA, WO 95 710, 51st Division Report on operations at Givenchy.

Strength and casualties

The division had been considered by higher commanders to be strong enough to take the field. The recorded war establishment of the (Highland) Division at embarkation on 28 April 1915 was 570 officers and 15,729 other ranks.⁶⁶ However, in the period since its arrival in France, casualties had been heavy. Prior to the attack, on 10 June 1915, war diaries record, 'The very high proportion of losses in the 51st Division as compared with casualties in the 7th Div and Canadian Div was commented on by the IV Corps Commander'.⁶⁷ During the battle itself, it is no surprise that the casualties were also high in the attacking battalions.

Fig. 21 Casualties for battle⁶⁸

Officers	Killed	Wounded	Missing
	16	46	5
Other ranks	Killed	Wounded	Missing
	187	1040	386

Captain Lusk of the 1/6th Scottish Rifles wrote of the impact on his battalion, 'before noonday the Companies held their roll-call. Out of the total number of Officers and men who went into the trenches on Sunday night, 13/14th June, exactly half answered their names.'⁶⁹ Wauchope gave another example of the loss in attacking units, 'During the fighting the machine gun section in the front line suffered severely; Lieutenant Westwood was killed and 15 out of a total of 25 men were either killed or wounded'.⁷⁰

The heavy casualty rates were due to the nature of the attack with an ineffective barrage and an advance in wave formation against enemy machine guns:

Machine guns swept over the parapet..... At 6.45 P.M. the order came 'Advance!' The place was a perfect hell. Just one solid sheet of bullets. Over we went. Many were hit on the top of the

⁶⁶ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

⁶⁷ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division, A and Q War Diary.

⁶⁸ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division, A and Q War Diary.

⁶⁹ Lusk, *Letters and Memories*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ A.G. Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II* (London, 1926), p. 252.

parapet; before a distance of thirty yards was traversed all the officers of our company were hit, as well as the brigade bombing officer..... On we went; but men were falling in all directions, and by the time we were within reach of the German wire, not more than fifteen of the company were still on the move. The outlook was hopeless, the wire was an insurmountable obstacle, and the few who remained had to take cover in the nearest shell-hole until darkness allowed us to make our own lines again- a sad dejected remnant of a company.⁷¹

This form of attack took a heavy toll on leaders who were in the forefront of the advance and Captain Lusk recorded that, 'A Company who went over the parapet first have had the heaviest losses. Murray, Macdonald and Kennedy all killed, McLean's nerves completely shattered, and every sergeant gone save Dowie'.⁷²

Esprit de corps

The (Highland) Division that took up position at Givenchy, like many other formations new to the front, maintained high levels of morale, possibly dampened but not extinguished by the many months of training in Britain. The division now considered itself to be a combat formation. However, that six weeks' experience had not consisted of actual combat and Captain Ross recorded that many in the division had not come to terms with the reality of the situation:

the thought that some of the fine fellows, giants in frame and physique, would be as helpless as pygmies before those devouring guns, did not unduly disturb the serenity of our minds. At that moment everybody was imbued with an overmastering desire, to meet the enemy and put him to confusion.⁷³

Involvement in battle had both a positive and negative impact on *esprit de corps*. The division did grow closer together as a formation through the act of engagement, and although casualties were high in numerical terms (in the attacking units) and in prominent figures, the conduct of the division was considered by its troops to have been exemplary. General Ross, commanding 152nd Infantry Brigade, stated in his report of the operations: 'I am glad to say that both officers and men behaved very well indeed, and all went into the attack with the full intention of getting through'.⁷⁴ Captain Mahon, conjuring up images of clan charges and glorious defeat stated:

⁷¹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Division*, pp. 19-20.

⁷² Lusk, *Letters and Memories*, p. 74.

⁷³ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 32.

⁷⁴ NA, WO 95 2844, 152nd Brigade Report on operations at Givenchy, 16 June 1915.

All this sounds like a defeat and I suppose that so far as capturing trenches was concerned it was, but we only had an hour and a half notice and it took the C.O. half an hour to bring the news up to the front. Anyhow all the Generals patted us on the back and some day or two later we had a message direct from the G.O.C. (General Sir John French) thanking us for our fine work.⁷⁵

However, morale did suffer as the reality of combat became apparent. The loss of friends and the shock of the brutality of war swiftly eradicated notions of childhood wargames. Captain Mahon related:

A very sad sight five minutes after the first lot went over, wounded men coming back by the dozen, full of grit most of them, but many dazed and wounded so badly that they cared for little but to be carried back. I care not to recall individual cases in writing, they are to be seen but one cannot read about them.⁷⁶

Bewsher summed up the elation of leaving the sector:

All ranks experienced a sense of relief on leaving the Festubert area. Not only on account of the serious casualties suffered in many units during the attacks and the retaliation provoked by them, but also for other reasons, it was rightly regarded as an unpleasant sector.⁷⁷

Beaumont Hamel 1916

Narrative

After Givenchy, allied offensives continued with the French campaigns in Artois and Champagne which made little progress. A supporting British attack at Loos failed due to, amongst other things, poor communication which permitted the enemy to bring up reserves and machine guns and halt any further attempts at exploitation. During this period, artillery continued to predominate with the aim of restoring mobility by winning the firefight at the expense of any element of surprise. However, the quantity of artillery and ammunition available usually determined the scale of attack, and the tactics employed were simplistic and usually materialised over three phases: preliminary bombardment, the barrage, and exploitation and consolidation.

However, by 1916, with more centrally-driven aggression and simultaneous pressure on all fronts,⁷⁸ the allied high commands planned big offensives, and following the prevailing

⁷⁵ IWM, 78/22/1, Diary of Captain J.S. Mahon, undated.

⁷⁶ IWM, 78/22/1, Diary of Captain J.S. Mahon, undated.

⁷⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 23-24.

⁷⁸ Ashworth, *Trench Warfare*, p. 53.

tactical thought aimed to employ an overwhelming amount of weaponry, shells and ammunition. Success was to be achieved simply by the unrelenting use of artillery. It had become a straightforward matter to destroy trenches and it was considered feasible that attacks might proceed without prohibitive loss. In the summer and autumn of 1916 when the British and French attacked on the Somme using waves of troops as the tactical deployment for the advance, massive preliminary bombardments were employed to wear down the enemy defences and destroy troops. Fresh issues arose for the BEF as the battle of the Somme wore on. The British high command became committed to a battle of attrition in a series of offensives with limited objectives. However, the German high command countered by deploying its forces in greater depth. This necessitated constant revisions and adaptation of tactical application.

Within this context, the post-Givenchy period had not been one of excessive activity for the 51st Division, with much of its routine being taken up with trench-holding. The division's only experience of assault before Beaumont Hamel was at High Wood during July 1916, and this attack was not a success. 'The Germans were strong in both numbers and in position; their trenches were well wired and heavily manned by machine gunners and, in addition, they had an excellent field of fire.'⁷⁹

The attack on Beaumont Hamel four months later was partly undertaken in support of a simultaneous French offensive, but also because GHQ needed a success at the end of a gruelling campaign.⁸⁰ The general attack scheme issued on 10 November 1916 read:

On "Z" day the Fifth Army will attack and establish itself on the line (BEAUCOURT-FRANKFURT TRENCH-SERRE.) The II Corps will attack south of the ANCRE and the V Corps north of the ANCRE. The V Corps will attack with 5 Divisions; 63rd Division (on the right), 51st Division, 2nd Division and 3rd Division (on the left), the 37th Division being in reserve.⁸¹

The cavalry were to be held in readiness to exploit their attack.

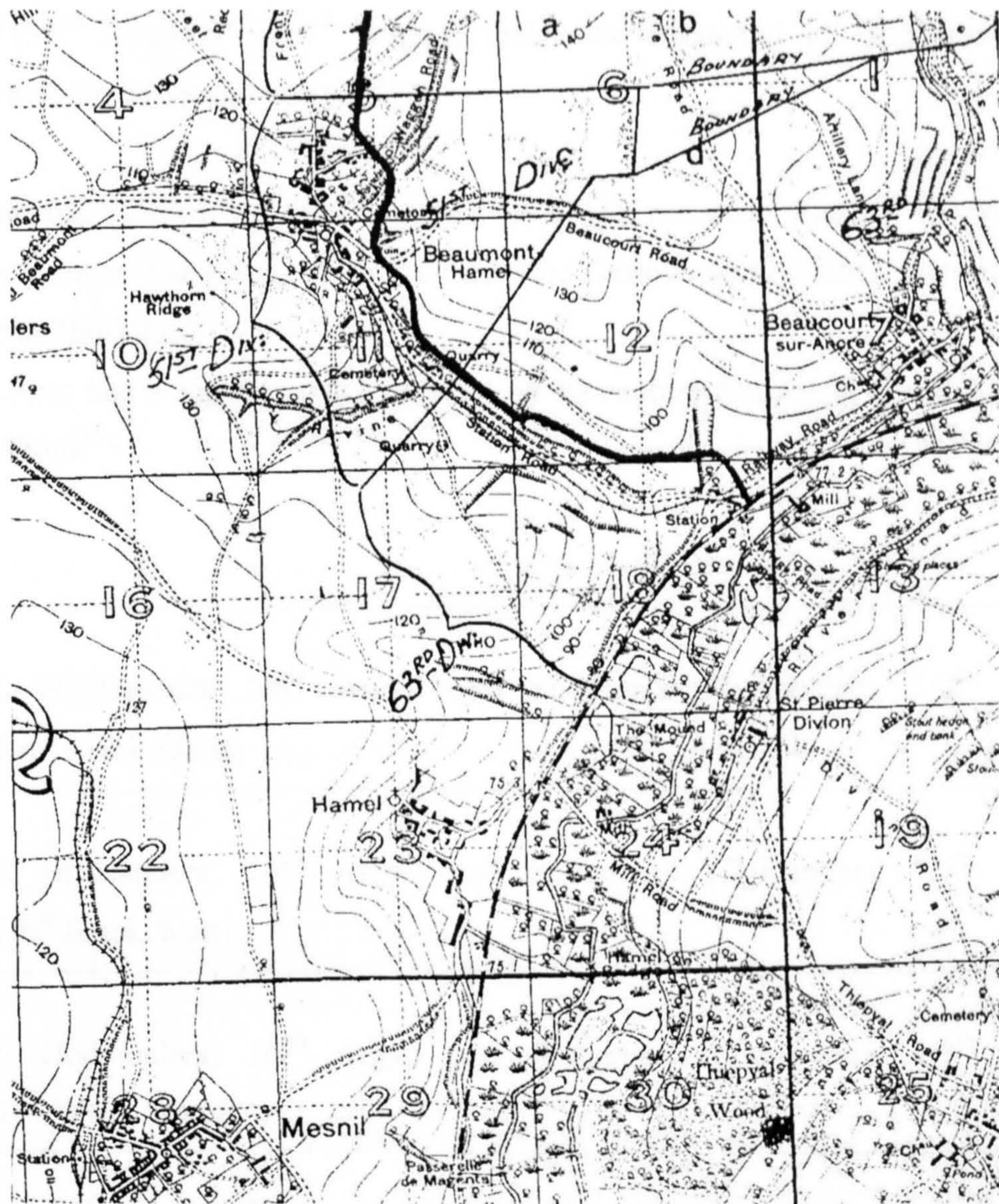
⁷⁹ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 141.

⁸⁰ T. Travers, *The Killing Ground, The British Army, the Western Front and the experience of Mobile Warfare 1900-1918* (London, 1987), pp. 186-187.

⁸¹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Operation Order No. 109.

Within this scheme, the specific objectives for the 51st Division were to capture the village of Beaumont Hamel (Green Line) and push forward between the converging flanks of the 63rd and 2nd Divisions as far as the strong point at Frankfurt Trench (Yellow Line).⁸²

Map 2. The Beaumont Hamel sector prior to attack⁸³



Brigadier-General Campbell's 153rd Brigade deployed 1/7th Gordon Highlanders and 1/6th Black Watch on the right. These units were positioned in the first line, with the 1/5th Gordon

⁸² Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 103.

⁸³ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary.

Highlanders in support. On the left, the 152nd Brigade under the command of Brigadier-General Pelham Burn adopted a similar formation, with the 1/5th Seaforths and the 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in front and the 1/6th Seaforths in support. However, the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders were kept in reserve. In each brigade the leading battalions were to proceed to the first objective, whilst ‘the advance to the narrow second objective was to be made by two companies of the 1/5th Gordons (153rd Brigade) and two of the 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders (152nd Brigade)’. 154th Brigade under the command of Brigadier-General Hamilton was held in divisional reserve.⁸⁴

In the attack on the Green Line, three intermediate objectives were selected, known as the Pink Line (the German front line), the Blue Line (the German second line), and the Purple Line (the German third line).

Each of these lines had a separate wave detailed for its capture composed of units from the following battalions⁸⁵:-

Fig. 22

<p>Pink Line: 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders, 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 1/7th Gordon Highlanders, 1/6th Black Watch</p>
<p>Blue Line: 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders, 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 1/7th Gordon Highlanders, 1/6th Black Watch</p>
<p>Purple Line: 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders, 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 1/7th Gordon highlanders, 1/6th Black Watch</p>
<p>Green Line: 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders (in two waves), 1/7th Gordon Highlanders, 1/6th Black Watch</p>

The objectives were ambitious. The 51st Division faced an enemy position which had developed into a formidable stronghold over a two year period. The area was well situated defensively, as Beaumont Hamel village lay on low ground surrounded by slopes and small

⁸⁴ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), p. 491.

hills which made British reconnaissance difficult. The main points of resistance lay in the village itself and in the heavily fortified 'Y' Ravine. The 'Y' Ravine was deep with almost precipitous sides:

It lay with its two arms pointing like antennae towards the British lines, some 300-500 yards south of the village. It was honeycombed with dug-outs, crossed by numerous trenches, and its garrison could readily be reinforced. The village was also strengthened by means of reinforced concrete backings to its ruined walls, forming powerful machine-gun posts, by subterranean passages between its cellars and caves, and by trenches dug in its streets, which formed a further system even more difficult to master than the powerful trenches in front. In addition, the whole German position was heavily protected by strong wire entanglements throughout.⁸⁶

By contrast, on arrival in the sector the 51st found the British trench system in appalling condition:

The line was found in bad order. Communication trenches narrow, unrevetted and in bad repair, and almost entirely deficient of trench boards. The cross trenches narrow, muddy and, to a great extent, unrevetted. Dug-outs insufficient- a good many started but not completed.⁸⁷

In dreadful weather conditions, this was to prove wearisome on the troops.

24 October was the planned date for the attack, but adverse weather conditions postponed it a number of times.⁸⁸ These postponements were often at short notice and preliminary artillery bombardments were continually carried out:

Wire-cutting was begun by the artillery and the 2" trench-mortars on 20th October, and was carried on continuously until the day of the attack. Every precaution was taken to ensure that this was successful. Patrols, often accompanied by artillery officers, inspected the wire protecting the enemy front lines every night.⁸⁹

During the postponements, work was carried out on the trench system. However, as 152nd and 153rd brigades assembled to attack on the morning of 13 November, it was apparent that too much had needed rectifying: 'Owing to the state of the trenches movement was carried out

⁸⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Operation Order No. 109, 10 November 1916.

⁸⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 100-101.

⁸⁷ NA, WO 95 2845, Report of the CRE, 24 November 1916.

⁸⁸ On 25 October a postponement of forty-eight hours was ordered. On 29 October the date of the attack was changed to 5 November. Later, it was again postponed to 9 November, and again to 10 November. On 10 November it was ordered to take place on 13 November. On 11 November the hour for zero was selected at 5.45 a.m., in Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 104.

⁸⁹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 102.

almost entirely over the open'. However, and fortunately, 'the attention of the enemy was not attracted and there was little hostile artillery fire before zero hour'.⁹⁰

The assembly was accomplished without any serious delays or setbacks, and six minutes before zero hour the leading battalions moved forward to clear the British wire. At 5.45 a.m., coinciding with the detonation of a mine at Hawthorn Ridge, the British artillery opened a heavy barrage on the German front line. Simultaneously, the infantry advanced, trained to move up behind a lifting barrage,⁹¹ 'not doubling, not even walking, but wading knee-deep and sometimes waist-deep through the morass of sticky mud and water and neck-deep shell holes which constituted no-man's land'.⁹²

The official history confirmed that both brigades started well:

On the extreme right two companies of the 1/7th Gordon Highlanders took the German front line with little trouble. Still following the barrage closely, they broke through the German front system, passed the eastern end of Y ravine and reached the first objective at 6.45 A.M., with a small party of marines (63rd Division) on their right.⁹³

Harper recorded that shortly after that point 'considerable resistance was encountered'.⁹⁴

The 1/7th Gordon Highlanders were held up by machine guns and snipers and the 1/6th Black Watch encountered the Y Ravine salient. The 1/5th Gordon Highlanders advanced to assist in the attack soon after 7 a.m., 'Some of the 1/6th Black Watch [employing advanced tactics] skirted the northern side of the ravine and pushed on'.⁹⁵ By '10.30 A.M. Major-General Harper was aware that the right of the attack had reached the first objective. He had already ordered up the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders (from the 154th Brigade, in reserve) for the purpose of isolating Y ravine by bombing attacks from north and south'.⁹⁶ However, before this started, the much vaunted 'Y' Ravine fell without any substantial resistance. Major-General Harper confirmed that at:

⁹⁰ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

⁹¹ NA, WO 95 2845, Operation Order No. 109, 10 November 1916.

⁹² Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 83.

⁹³ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), p. 492.

⁹⁴ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

⁹⁵ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), p. 492.

⁹⁶ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), pp. 492-493.

12-40 p.m. it was reported that the enemy in the salient and "Y" RAVINE had surrendered to two parties of the 6th Black Watch who, under the personal leadership of the Officer Commanding the Battalion, had effected an entrance into the western end of the "Y" RAVINE. This operation was assisted by bombing parties of the 5th and 7th Gordon Highlanders who had pushed into unoccupied portions of the line and taken the enemy in flank.⁹⁷

By the early afternoon of 13 November, the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders entered Beaumont Hamel village, assisted by the 1/5th Gordon Highlanders and the 1/6th Black Watch, and consolidated. By late afternoon:

Consolidation of the first objective proceeded assisted by a party of the 1/8th Royal Scots (pioneers), and some reorganisation was carried out. The new front was then held by the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders (154th Brigade), the 1/6th Black Watch (153rd Brigade), two companies of the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders, and the 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland (both 152nd Brigade), in touch on the left with the 2nd Division. The 1/7th Gordon Highlanders (153rd Brigade) and 1/5th and 1/6th Seaforth (152nd Brigade) were withdrawn to the reserve line of the German front system, where they were reinforced by two companies of the 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland (from the 154th Brigade, in reserve) about 9 P.M. The 1/5th Gordon Highlanders (153rd Brigade), having no knowledge of the extent of the advance of the 63rd Division, formed a defensive flank to connect with the left of that division in the German front line system.⁹⁸

On the morning of 14 November, the advance was continued. Corps artillery had kept up a barrage throughout the night and although German retaliation was growing in some areas at 6am, the heavy artillery bombardment opened on the first objective-Beaucourt Trench on the front of 63rd Division, and Munich Trench, opposite the 51st and 2nd Divisions. Twelve minutes later, just before dawn, the field artillery barrage came down, and at 6.20 A.M. the infantry advanced to the assault.⁹⁹

The 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had been ordered to capture Munich Trench and this objective was achieved. However, there was little cover and heavy enemy fire, and the battalion was withdrawn to a new line called 'New Munich Trench' 150 yards away.

On the evening of 14 November, the 152nd Brigade was ordered by the divisional commander to attack the second objective, Frankfurt Trench, the following morning at 9 a.m. with units of the 1/7th Argylls and 1/9th Royal Scots:

These troops were formed up in NEW MUNICH TRENCH.... The attack of the 51st Division started according to time table, and the waves successfully crossed MUNICH TRENCH, when they ran into the barrage and suffered severe losses, sufficient totally to disorganise the attack.

⁹⁷ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

⁹⁸ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), pp. 494.

⁹⁹ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), pp. 505.

Only a few individuals reached FRANKFURT TRENCH..... In these circumstances it was decided not to renew the attack without further preparation.¹⁰⁰

Analysis

In purely operational terms, the attack could only be classed as a limited success because the division did not secure all its objectives at a time when the German forces at Beaumont Hamel were overconfident and largely taken by surprise. This failure to exploit the advantage is further compounded by the substantial amount of time that the division had to prepare. However, the final check at Frankfurt Trench was predominantly a result of the battle continuing longer than it should have, permitting the enemy to mobilise its reserves. Ultimately, the divisional momentum was stymied by poor communications and inadequate preparations which intensified as each hour passed.

In its defence, the 51st Division did succeed in taking most of its objectives against an incredibly strong position when it did not have significant experience in attack. It employed sound tactics on the day although perhaps it was fortunate that other factors assisted the progress of the attack. However, the key significance of the attack by the 51st on Beaumont Hamel lay in its enormous strategic implications, as its loss contributed to the enemy decision to withdraw in early 1917. It was also crucial to Haig that he gained a victory and created heroes at the end of a year of hard fighting.

On 13 November, Harper noted that:

The attack had been completely successful. Some 2,000 prisoners had been taken. The modified objective (the GREEN LINE) had been gained at every point, and an advance to the YELLOW LINE (the original objective) could have been undertaken had the positions of the Division on either flank been less obscure.¹⁰¹

However, the division did not get as far as it had hoped and on 14 November progress was even less marked, as enemy resistance had increased as reserves and extra guns were brought into play leading to German counter-attacks on 'Y' Ravine. Significantly though, by the end of 14 November, the flanks were more secure: 'I hear the right division has done very well too. That is the 62nd (Naval) div, and they have captured Beaucourt. The left got on

¹⁰⁰ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

¹⁰¹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

indifferently at first but made better progress afterwards.’¹⁰² However, on the third day the attack ultimately petered out as it failed to reach its objective, halted due to the British tactical and logistical failings rather than the enemy defence, the men advancing too rapidly and being caught in the barrage. Brigadier-General Pelham Burn added that mistakes were also made by other divisions as ‘The troops of the 2nd Division on our left lost direction in the mist and swung to the Right [sic] across our rear in a very disorganised state’.¹⁰³

That the enemy was largely taken by surprise on the day of the attack is undoubted. This appears to be outwardly surprising as the British military build-up had been ongoing for over a month. The artillery barrages repeatedly signalled that an attack was imminent, and the German position was well situated for reconnaissance over the surrounding landscape. It is true that the 51st Division did carry out much work by stealth, and on the night prior to the attack a ‘covering screen of troops, who were not detailed to take part in the first phase of the attack, lay out in No Man’s Land to prevent German patrols from approaching our trenches and discovering that assembly for an attack was in progress’.¹⁰⁴ However, due to the poor state of the British trench system and the need to carry out work in the open, the Germans should have been able to detect divisional preparations. Despite this, the assembly went undetected and the 153rd Brigade ‘was in its positions of assembly by 3 a.m. without any signs of the enemy being aware of the movement as, up to Zero, hostile shell fire was normal and there was practically no Machine gun [sic] activity’.¹⁰⁵

However, the key factor in surprising the enemy lay not in any (Highland) Division action, but in the enemy forces being too overconfident. ‘Certainly the Germans never expected that such a position as Beaumont-Hamel would ever have been taken away from them and thus their seeming laxity in its defence’.¹⁰⁶ Also, Pelham Burn stated that:

continued bombardments over a long period undoubtedly deceived the enemy and he had given up expecting an attack. This is confirmed by prisoners who volunteered the statement that there would be no counter-attack as reserves were brought up into the trenches about a week ago because it was thought our intention to attack had been abandoned. Prisoners agreed that a gradual relief was in progress.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² NA, WO 95 2845, 152nd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 24 November 1916.

¹⁰³ NA, WO 95 2845, 152nd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 24 November 1916.

¹⁰⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, 153rd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel.

¹⁰⁶ IWM, 85/51/5, *The Diary of A.E. Wrench*, Volume I, p. 71.

¹⁰⁷ NA, WO 95 2845, 153rd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel.

Another vital factor to the success of the attack lay in the poor quality of the enemy garrison:

They are poor, miserable, dejected looking creatures and appeared to be either older men or boys and not the usual sort of German soldier. It is really pitiful to see them, they are as scared looking as can be, and ragged. The 51st took over a thousand prisoners, the fog covering the attack in which the Huns were absolutely surprised, many of them still in bed at the time..... Good job for us, for this fact alone has decided the fate of Beaumont-Hamel.¹⁰⁸

The guns had done the damage according to the journalist, Alexander Catto, who reported an officer overlooking the ruins of Beaumont Hamel asserting:

“Its all very well”, the officer said, “to take as an instance of the German’s fighting capacity what happened down there in that gully, honeycombed with Boche dugouts. Beaumont Hamel was a hard nut to crack, even after the awful pounding it got from our guns. It is true the Boches surrendered in hundreds, and that comparatively small bodies of our troops took prisoners ten times their own number. But what like were the prisoners? Stunned, bewildered, demoralised, and nerve shaken; beaten dispirited and hopeless. For nineteen days they had been kept down in their dark, evil smelling holes by the awful battering of our guns; they had been living in an inferno.” “It was more than human flesh and blood could stand” the officer added, “and Germans are flesh and blood like ourselves, not iron. They were hands up that day, and, “Kamerad” and no wonder. But, meet the Boche when he is at his best: it is hammer and tongs all the time, and he fights hard, no troops in the world better, not even our own”.¹⁰⁹

It has already been stated that poor weather conditions over the weeks prior to the attack resulted in numerous postponements and a near continuous bombardment, but another factor that played a crucial part in the success of the attack was the weather on the first day of the assault. At 5.45 a.m. on 13 November there was, ‘a fog, similar to a typical London November fog, which did not lift throughout the day. This fog was a definite asset to the attack, although it made the maintenance of direction more difficult.’¹¹⁰ Harper concluded that the fog, ‘while concealing the movement of the attacking troops, prevented the enemy artillery from seeing the S.O.S. signal if any were put up. At all events the hostile barrage on our front line and NO MAN’S LAND was light and did not open until 6-15 a.m.’¹¹¹

However, as a partial corrective to the potential loss of direction to the infantry, the British artillery barrage could actually assist orientation through the fog, as Dominick Graham has explained: ‘When they were correctly paced and placed and the infantry had learned to ‘lean’

¹⁰⁸ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ A. Catto, *With the Scottish Troops in France* (Aberdeen, 1918), p. 21.

¹¹⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 113.

on them, they were consistently effective in both wars. In a terrain in which most features had been erased by shelling they gave the infantry direction.’¹¹² Apart from the potential for loss of direction amongst the attacking troops, conditions on the ground were troublesome. Excessive rain had caused waterlogging and continual mists, and the absence of wind prevented the rain from being absorbed into the atmosphere. War diaries relate that the state of the ground had become so bad that a small raid which took place on 11 November failed because the raiding party found it a physical impossibility to keep up with a very slow-moving barrage. Bewsher used a sporting metaphor to describe the state of the ground on 13 November, ‘Let two teams dressed in battle order play football in the dark on a ploughed field in a clay soil after three weeks’ steady rain, and the difficulties of the attacking troops might then in some measure be appreciated’.¹¹³

Two brigades were deployed for the main attack on 13 November, with two battalions in the line, and this was to become the standard attack format for the 51st Division, dependent on the width of line to be assaulted.¹¹⁴ This deployment was found by the 51st to be most conducive to the ‘leapfrogging’ method of advance which various sources attribute to Harper. ‘General Harper’s leap-frog system of attack had been proved; his attack with two brigades instead of three had been fully justified, and an experience had been gained from which the future training of the Division was evolved.’¹¹⁵ The mode of attack for the division was to assault in four ‘waves’, each with a definite objective. Each wave was held responsible for the taking and ‘cleaning up’ of the portion of the enemy line allotted to it, and for ‘bombing up’ the communication trenches towards the next line. The second wave would then pass through the first and so on. Undoubtedly, this action proved effective.

Beaumont Hamel had been attacked on 1 July 1916 with disastrous consequences. On that occasion, the plan was for a frontal assault employing a heavy preliminary bombardment and an advance using linear wave formations. Since then, the system at Beaumont Hamel had been strengthened. As Graham stated, they:

¹¹¹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

¹¹² D. Graham, *Against Odds, Reflections on the Experiences of the British Army, 1914-45* (Basingstoke, 1999), p. 37.

¹¹³ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 114.

¹¹⁴ Over narrower fronts during the next few days, companies were employed instead of battalions.

¹¹⁵ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 120.

were now deeper and looser knit, depended on infantry fire-power and the counter-attacks of formed bodies up to a division in strength, initially placed beyond field gun range. The front was no longer held by men in a trench line but rather by skirmishers in well-concealed posts with a high proportion of machine guns. Such a line was not markedly vulnerable to heavy bombardment or a creeping barrage: nor were companies advancing in waves an appropriate formation in which to approach it.¹¹⁶

The tactics of the (Highland) Division focused not on a frontal attack, but predominantly on outflanking manoeuvres:

The futility of making a frontal assault on the ravine and its defences had been proved in the July offensive, and on this occasion the idea was to effect an entry at the north end of the salient, and by bombing, work southwards along it, making the task of its capture easier, and on these lines the operation was carefully rehearsed beforehand.¹¹⁷

The attack methodology still utilised the linear wave formation, but employed something new:

In the event of the portion of any wave being held up succeeding waves should not attempt to push forward immediately behind the troops which are checked. They should swing to the right or left, push through gaps already cleared by preceding waves, and then close inwards and attack the defenders from the flanks and rear.¹¹⁸

The 51st was mixing the old wave formation with newer ideas of small unit mobility. As Griffith has stated, the principles of fire and movement were being thought out again as Lewis guns were made available to each platoon and hand grenades and rifle grenades were increasingly available to non-specialist infantrymen. By the end of the battle of the Somme, platoons had more firepower and this allowed an evolution in tactical development.¹¹⁹

Artillery

It was disingenuous of Brigadier-General Oldfield when he stated that 'The Artillery can only claim to have cut the wire and escorted the Infantry into BEAUMONT HAMEL. The taking of the strongly fortified village appears to have been entirely an Infantry soldier's battle.'¹²⁰

The artillery's role in the battle was a crucial factor in its success. By the opening of the Somme campaign on 1 July 1916, the BEF had come to rely on artillery firepower to a huge

¹¹⁶ Graham, *Against Odds, Reflections on the Experiences of the British Army, 1914-45*, p. 37.

¹¹⁷ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 146.

¹¹⁸ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division, G, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22 October 1916.

¹¹⁹ P. Griffiths (ed), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 18.

¹²⁰ NA, WO 95 2845, Report by Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, 20 November 1916.

extent. However, the Expeditionary Force that took the field early in the summer campaign was inexperienced and lacked the ability to utilise small unit firepower, and the rationale was to deploy it using simplistic linear tactics after the artillery had cleared a path. Ironically, the artillery was the solution and the problem. Indirect fire was still inaccurate due to the inability of batteries to locate targets and to inconsistencies in ballistic calibration. This meant registration and a sustained and heavy fire were essential, which compromised surprise and demanded enormous logistical efforts and consumed huge quantities of materials. The long duration of a bombardment also allowed the enemy to strengthen his defences. However, during the months of the Somme campaign, although results in the field were variable, advances, such as the development of the creeping barrage, were made in artillery/infantry co-ordination.

Graham also pointed out that, 'In the summer of 1916, artillery equipment and ammunition were still unreliable. Almost half the shells did not explode. The sensitive fuse 106,¹²¹ which destroyed wire and was lethal against infantry in the open, was a year away from service.'¹²² However, during Beaumont Hamel, the artillery brigades of the 51st Division were at full strength with up-to-date artillery pieces,¹²³ better quality ordnance, and were supplied with substantial amounts of ammunition.

Experience had shown that it was essential to improve artillery co-ordination and one solution was to create a corps-level artillery commander with the rank of brigadier-general.¹²⁴ At Beaumont Hamel command centred on the CRA of V Corps and it was he who set the times of fireplans and allocated observers to batteries throughout the corps. Oldfield stated of the system that he was 'Impressed by the Heavy Art-liaison officer within 51st HD HQ' during this time.¹²⁵

The prolonged bombardment by the heavy artillery had been successful. Harper said of it that, 'There is scarcely a square yard in BEAUMONT HAMEL which is not torn up by shell fire. The deep dugouts alone have escaped destruction, and even in their case many entrances

¹²¹ However, the 101 fuse was 'very effective when used in wire cutting.' NA, WO 95 2845, Report by Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, 20 November 1916.

¹²² Graham, *Against Odds, Reflections on the Experiences of the British Army, 1914-45*, p. 36.

¹²³ Brought up to full strength in May 1916.

¹²⁴ J. Bailey, 'British Artillery in the Great War', in Paddy Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods*, p. 32.

¹²⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, Report by Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, 20 November 1916.

have been blown in.’¹²⁶ Oldfield confirmed this and recorded that ‘The wire was the most formidable I have ever seen. It was more thoroughly destroyed than in any previous case that I know of.’¹²⁷

The fireplan became progressively more complex immediately prior to the attack as six batteries of heavy artillery operated over the divisional front:

They will open at ZERO on the 2nd German line (LIGHT BLUE) and they will move back approximately 200 yards beyond the 18-pdr. Barrage. Six guns of the above Batteries have been allotted special tasks and will maintain their fire on certain dangerous points in the BEAUMONT HAMEL Valley, and on the western slopes of the opposite hill.....The 4.5” Hows. will similarly maintain a barrage 100 yards beyond the 18-pdr. barrage, their special task being to deal with all communication trenches running eastwards by enfilade fire.¹²⁸

The lack of a bombardment immediately before the advance assisted in achieving the aim of maximising surprise without compromising the efficacy of the destruction and neutralisation of the enemy system.¹²⁹ Pelham Burn noted that it was significant that there was ‘the SURPRISE EFFECT which was brought about by the Infantry advancing at the same moment as the Artillery opened fire, there being no preliminary bombardment immediately before the assault’.¹³⁰

The creeping barrage worked well alongside the heavy artillery bombardment with the 18 pounder barrage commencing at Zero hour on the first day, and moving forward at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes. ‘The 18-pdr. barrage will commence at ZERO with 25% of the guns firing 50 yards short of, and the remainder on, the German front line.’¹³¹ Bewsher stated:

Both the destruction of the wire and the accuracy of the barrage further strengthened the great confidence of the infantry in the Divisional artillery. It was the first occasion on which most of the troops had followed an artillery barrage. Those who were able to keep up with it could not speak too highly of its accuracy.¹³²

¹²⁶ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

¹²⁷ NA, WO 95 2845, Report by Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, 20 November 1916.

¹²⁸ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Operation Order No. 109, 10 November 1916.

¹²⁹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

¹³⁰ NA, WO 95 2845, 152nd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 24 November 1916.

¹³¹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Operation Order No. 109, 10 November 1916.

¹³² Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 121.

However, many of the troops did fail to keep up, but this was in the main due to the terrain and the poor visibility.

Another creeping barrage was employed on 14 November at 5.50 a.m., 'lifting approximately 100 yards in 5 mins'.¹³³ However:

following the barrage closely was, in this case a difficult operation, as in few cases were the trench lines parallel. Thus the keeping of direction was certain to require skilful leading. The elaboration of the trench system also entailed a very careful detailing of objectives to the different bodies of troops, and an exact knowledge of what these objectives were.¹³⁴

On 15 November, infantry/artillery co-operation actually failed and the barrage caused many casualties in the attacking battalions of the division. 'After passing Munich Trench, the attackers ran into our own barrage, and suffered severe losses sufficient to disorganise the whole attack. This unfortunate incident was due to the impetuosity of the men.'¹³⁵ There is some truth in this as the (Highland) Division had never employed a creeping barrage prior to Beaumont Hamel and training for it was of a different order than anything it had previously been used to. As the battle stretched into the third day, the preparation became less effective. In these circumstances it was decided not to renew the attack without further artillery preparation.

Combined arms

The tactical employment of combined arms in the division had progressed since Givenchy. By January 1916, each infantry brigade had received a dedicated machine gun company,¹³⁶ and late in the Somme battles the scale of Lewis guns in each battalion increased from eight to sixteen (at least on paper), sufficient for one gun to a platoon.¹³⁷ In theory, more advanced technology permitted a greater firepower that focused more on smaller units. However, the division had only been fully equipped with Vickers guns in July 1916 and was still under establishment in Lewis guns at Beaumont Hamel.¹³⁸

¹³³ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Operation Order No. 111, 14 November 1916.

¹³⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 102.

¹³⁵ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 119.

¹³⁶ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division, A and Q War Diary, 15-16 January 1916.

¹³⁷ Graham, *Against Odds, Reflections on the Experiences of the British Army, 1914-45*, p. 37.

¹³⁸ On 22 October 1915, an Army Order was issued bringing into existence a Machine Gun Corps to operate Vickers and Maxim machine guns, leaving each infantry battalion with an establishment of eight Lewis guns. The Official History stated, 'The reorganisation depended upon the output of Lewis guns, and was ordered to take place in brigades by rotation. It was completed before the Somme'. It further stated that, 'Further proposals

As early as August 1915, the (Highland) Division had been experimenting with indirect machine gun fire.¹³⁹ At Beaumont Hamel, the divisional artillery and machine guns jointly attempted to neutralise enemy machine guns and the early experiments paid dividends as, 'This was the first occasion on which the Division had employed machine-guns to fire an overhead barrage during the attack'.¹⁴⁰ Brigadier-General Hamilton testified to its success, 'The excellent effect of machine gun barrage when the ground admits of it'.¹⁴¹

Machine guns were fully integrated in the attack. 'Vickers guns were in position in the German front line within half an hour of zero.... Vickers guns were assigned definite roles in the consolidation and were placed in depth throughout the captured area.'¹⁴² Small unit firepower was further maximised as:

Lewis Guns will be used boldly and pushed forward into the enemy trenches as soon as they are entered. They must come into action at once and seize every opportunity to assist succeeding waves by enfilade fire on communication trenches or on the fire trenches on their flanks.¹⁴³

The (Highland) Division also exploited the opportunities presented by the use of mines and this resulted in, 'the destruction of Machine Gun emplacements from which a devastating enfilade fire could have been directed on the attacking infantry'.¹⁴⁴ It attempted to work with tanks to clear the village, but the technology let them down. 'By the time they had travelled this distance they had built up great mounds of mud under their bellies, which prevented their further advance'.¹⁴⁵

were made by G.H.Q. to give each division a fourth or divisional machine-gun company (or each battalion a heavy machine-gun section), and to increase the number of Lewis guns per battalion from 8 to 16'. This was not the case with the 51st Division. The process to create the units of the Machine Gun Corps and the progress in re-arming the battalions with eight Lewis guns can be determined by the war diary accounts. On 15–16 January 1916, 55 Lewis guns were received and 152nd, 153rd and 154th Machine Gun Companies were formed. By 5 March 1916, two extra Lewis machine guns were supplied to each battalion totaling only six per battalion, and even by 23 December 1916 the maximum establishment had amounted to merely twelve Lewis guns per battalion.

¹³⁹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 44.

¹⁴⁰ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 104.

¹⁴¹ NA, WO 95 2845, Lessons Learnt by Brigadier-General Hamilton of 154th Brigade, 21 November 1916.

¹⁴² Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 122.

¹⁴³ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division, G, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22nd October 1916.

¹⁴⁴ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

¹⁴⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, Report by Brigadier-General L. Oldfield, 20 November 1916.

The Stokes mortars were much better understood, and more integrated, than they had been the year before. Each brigade had been supplied with a dedicated battery in March 1916, and a second battery was added in May 1916. These batteries were amalgamated in July 1916.¹⁴⁶ However, they were still under-employed, being mainly sited in the front line and used predominantly to cut wire.¹⁴⁷ Divisional orders did attempt to underline the importance of advancing with trench mortars:

The value of Stokes Guns both [sic] to support a bombing attack or to defend the flanks of the portion of captured trench against the attacks of hostile bombers must be borne in mind, and every effort must be made to get a proportion of guns and ammunition into the German trenches.¹⁴⁸

Grenades grew less important as enemy defences and British and German tactics changed, but they were still vital as an arm of combined firepower. 'Bombing parties will be invariably accompanied by two rifle grenade men, and will be followed up by the infantry who will consolidate the ground gained.'¹⁴⁹ Many more infantrymen could now use them and they were better constructed, and they were often used in the clearing of trenches and in consolidation.

Training

The battle of Beaumont Hamel demonstrated that the (Highland) Division had trained progressively and learned lessons from others. The time that the division had to prepare for the attack was very useful and doubtlessly contributed to the overall performance of the formation.

Since Givenchy, the division had experienced a slow, staged evolution of training progression. With a BEF emphasis in 1915 on localised attacks which predominantly involved limited objectives and battalion/brigade sized units, tactics employed were relatively simplistic. Moreover, any rapid development for the 51st through unit and formation training was hampered by long periods spent in the line. Musketry and bombing were training priorities during 1915, along with trench work and route marches, at a time when there was limited centralised training advice.

¹⁴⁶ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division, A and Q War Diary.

¹⁴⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁸ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division, G, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22nd October 1916.

Harper's arrival brought significant positive changes to the divisional approach to training with a vigorous emphasis being placed on assault practice. Tactical principles were still basic, with the infantry trained to attack in waves, but each battalion carried out practise attacks on specially constructed areas, and often these would focus on the company as the principal unit.¹⁵⁰ According to Bewsher, Harper trained men at the beginning of 1916 in leapfrogging tactics. 'This form of attack became the sealed pattern for all attacks carried out by the Highland Division.....its value became apparent, and it eventually became the stereotyped form of attack in the majority of Divisions in France.'¹⁵¹ Specialist weapons such as trench mortars and machine guns were incorporated into the practise attacks to improve support to the infantry. However, no artillery practise was possible due to lack of ordnance, and there were also shortages in other ammunition and weapons, leading the 152nd Brigade war diary to refer to 'Highlanders pelting enemy with French grenades' on 14 March 1916.¹⁵²

No amount of training would substitute for actual experience gained through battle. Although the 51st was not to blame for much of the planning of the attack on the German strongpoint at High Wood, the futile assaults clearly emphasised that the division needed to improve, a fact recognised by Wauchope in his analysis of the build-up to Beaumont Hamel as he explained that much had been learned by the 51st Division since its reversal at High Wood.¹⁵³

During the second half of 1916, the divisional focus (although formation training was still irregular) was set on continuing to develop attack practice, whilst increasingly combining it with activities such as trench raiding.

Combined arms training was a priority. Battalions co-operated with artillery¹⁵⁴ and the Royal Flying Corps,¹⁵⁵ and many more troops were trained in the use of specialist weapons, and the 1/5th Seaforth war diaries referred to 'specialist' training alongside bombing classes and Lewis gun instruction.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁹ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division, G, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22nd October 1916.

¹⁵⁰ NA, WO 95 2865, 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders War Diary.

¹⁵¹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵² NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary.

¹⁵³ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 144.

¹⁵⁴ NA, WO 95 2883, 154th Brigade War Diary, 13 September 1916.

¹⁵⁵ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary, 21-22 September 1916.

¹⁵⁶ NA, WO 95 2866, 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders War Diary, August 1916.

Analysis of the war diaries of the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders and of the 152nd Brigade indicates the nature and form of training in the run-up to Beaumont Hamel. Much of the activity was carried out on areas similar to that which was to be attacked.¹⁵⁷

Fig. 23

1/4th Gordon Highlanders

October 1916

- 3rd Company at bombing practice. Lewis gunners to range.
- 9th Brigadier lectured all officers and NCOs on 'the attack'. Brigade practised attack over a marked course.
- 10th Brigade practised attack over a marked course, then company training.
- 13th Battalion in attack practice. Revolver practice.
- 14th Companies and demo on Stokes in attack.
- 16th Battalion attack practice
- 22nd Battalion practising attack formation by Company in forenoon. In afternoon, the attack by Battalion was practised.¹⁵⁸

152nd Infantry Brigade

October 1916

- ? The Brigade practised the attack on the practice course. An aeroplane from No.5 Squadron cooperated. 'The aeroplane in this instruction was invaluable and all ranks received every opportunity of learning what was required of them to denote to the observer the position of their front line.'
- 11th Units at the disposal of their commanders practise the attack.
- 12th The Brigade practises attack on the practice ground, both in the morning and again in the afternoon.¹⁵⁹

More centralised advice and input was increasingly evident in the later stages of 1916. This information was often devolved through Harper and his senior officers to the rest of the

¹⁵⁷ Ross, *The Fifty-First In France*, p. 281.

¹⁵⁸ NA, WO 95 2886, 1/4th Gordon Highlanders War Diary.

¹⁵⁹ NA, WO 95 2861, 152nd Brigade War Diary.

troops (to various degrees). SS papers and GHQ, army and corps memoranda were frequent. Harper even referred to the pre-war *Field Service Regulations*:

This has been termed the leapfrog attack, but it is no new form of attack. It is an attack in accordance with Field Service Regulations, where an advanced guard is detailed to attack the enemy's foremost positions and then act defensively while the main body is deployed and passes through it to capture the enemy's main positions, a further attack if necessary being carried out by the Reserve.¹⁶⁰

In partnership with his senior officers and battalion commanders, Harper increasingly encouraged initiative amongst his men, in contrast to the focus earlier in the war on ensuring compliance and conformity with training programmes that had been issued from above. By the time of Beaumont Hamel, training in these methods had advanced to a satisfactory level and evidence can be seen in divisional instructions:

This principle will be assiduously impressed on all ranks both by lectures and in practice attacks, so that every man thoroughly understands that his safety lies in getting close to the barrage and that he must wait for no [sic] orders to advance the moment the barrage lifts.¹⁶¹

Command and control

The divisional commander was a strong leader with a markedly different style from that practiced by his predecessor. He brought a more progressive attitude and well-rounded experience to the (Highland) Division, and Wauchope stated of him that he 'immediately began working on retraining his men, drawing upon what he perceived as the lessons from Loos: clearer definition of objectives, fewer successive objectives for the same troops, bounds, leapfrogging, consolidation against counter-attacks, a better flank protection'.¹⁶² By November 1916, he had been in command for over a year and Wimberley stated that the conditions at Beaumont Hamel, 'suited Uncle Harper down to the ground'.¹⁶³

At Beaumont Hamel, Harper exercised considerable independent responsibility for tactical planning within the command structure of army and corps. 'General Harper was urged to attack with his three infantry brigades in line. He did not, however, consider that an attack launched in such strength and unsupported by a complete unit of reserve was justified. He

¹⁶⁰ G.M. Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training* (London, 1919), p. 39.

¹⁶¹ NA, WO 95 2845, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22 October 1916.

¹⁶² Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 246.

therefore decided to attack with two brigades in line.'¹⁶⁴ This strategy was a gamble, as the commander of 153rd Brigade pointed out: 'It is thought that the front of our attack was too extended for the numbers available. The waves were consequently too thin and if the element of surprise had been lacking the attack might easily have fallen.'¹⁶⁵

Corps still held the greater power and, for the attack on 15 November, Harper ordered 152nd Brigade to prepare for an attack, 'pending definite orders from the V Corps'.¹⁶⁶ All had a place in the hierarchy, no matter how influential.

As a general rule of thumb in late 1916, the planning and implementation of an attack would take the following form. GHQ would issue an attack order through army, and corps would co-ordinate and plan the attack at a tactical level; but division, a participant in the planning with corps, had the key responsibility for implementation. The level of divisional input into the corps plan was dependent on the relationship between the corps GOC and his divisional commanders, and Harper was never one to withhold his views. When the attack of 15 November failed, divisions were asked to provide details of how they had carried it out, and the response is interesting. Harper blamed his division's failure on the men being caught in their own barrage, and asserted that this was due to their own impetuosity and that they were used to a faster moving 'creeper' than that used on the day. However, he was also critical of the corps commander, Fanshawe, saying that 'the chances of success would have been greatly increased if the attack had been carried out by a formation under one command',¹⁶⁷ and GOC 2nd Division also complained that his formation had not been given enough time to co-ordinate the attack. Not surprisingly, Fanshawe disagreed and expressed his belief that the divisions should have been familiar with the ground. Significantly, Gough (the army commander) was less than complimentary about the corps co-ordination:

V Corps G.267 of 15th November. This order puts too much on the divisional commanders and does not exercise sufficient control over the operation. The want of strict Corps control is evident in several respects No mention made of capture of Munich Trench... should have been clear and co-ordinated..... artillery orders not clear for attack on Munich Trench.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 3 of 'The Highland Division', p. 12.

¹⁶⁴ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, 153rd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel.

¹⁶⁶ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

¹⁶⁷ A. Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One' (University College London Ph.D, 2001), p. 76.

¹⁶⁸ NA, WO 95 2845, Army Response to V Corps Report, 25 November 1916.

Harper did firmly command in the (Highland) Division, but a strong cadre of brigadier-generals and senior officers worked with him in a progressive partnership. One of those partners was the CRA, Oldfield, and Miss Whittaker recorded in her diary, 'Louis was at that time preparing for, and then enduring, the horrors of the attack on Beaumont Hamel, in which he and General Harper established the values of new tactics they had evolved together, and the 51st vindicated itself forever'.¹⁶⁹ To a lesser degree, this partnership applied to battalion commanders also. The interconnected relationships were assisted by a continuity of officers in key positions throughout 1916. There were some significant changes, although they all occurred well before Beaumont Hamel.¹⁷⁰ When Wimberley stated that 'it is the tradition of the Highland Division that we never make the same mistake twice',¹⁷¹ it was a reflection on an institutional memory promulgated by the continuity of leadership.

An ethos within the division, derived from Harper and reinforced by the partnership within the command hierarchy, was increasingly centred on devolution of knowledge and an inculcation of personal responsibility relative to position. This was not radical and the troops were not given a huge degree of autonomy, but there was a more thorough awareness of an individual and collective role:

Notes of the concerted movements were taken with scrupulous care, in order that everybody, from colonel to cook, might be thoroughly acquainted with the intended plan and thus provide for a more complete victory by the assurance of individual initiative if it would be required. Suggestions were invited. The Colonel gave each suggestion its just consideration.¹⁷²

This decentralisation and devolution of responsibilities can be detected against a background of tactical and technological advance complimentary with increased aggression. The growth of raiding assisted in ensuring that its development became commonplace. Wimberley stated:

In the first place the Highland Division did not achieve the impossible. We did what others thought was impossible, but what our commanders, knowing their job and their men and being given their own head, knew we could tackle with success. The limited objective, 'Uncle Harper's speciality. It worked well because we had been trained for it and every man knew his job.'¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/134, Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 113.

¹⁷⁰ The major changes being the departures of Brigadier-General Ross from 152nd Brigade in July 1916, Brigadier-Generals Edwards and Stewart from 154th Brigade in January 1916 and September 1916 respectively, the CRA McCarthy in July 1916, and the CRE Weekes in January 1916.

¹⁷¹ NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 2 of 'The Highland Division', p. 17.

¹⁷² Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 307.

¹⁷³ NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 3 of 'The Highland Division', p. 21.

Organisation and administration

Organisation and administration in the division had improved dramatically since Givenchy, assisted by experience gained, staff continuity, generic developments throughout the BEF, and a clear and incisive leadership in the 51st.

Every effort was made to ensure that both the most up-to-date and traditional methods were used to provide adequate communications during the engagement. Telegraph, telephone, visual signalling, pigeons, despatch riders and runners, and contact aeroplanes were used.¹⁷⁴ Prior to the battle, it was reinforced to officers and men that communications were vital to success:

The necessity for sending back information from front to rear is not sufficiently realised. The difficulty of ascertaining positions of troops during an action is undoubtedly due to the fact that platoon and company commanders are not trained to send back frequent reports to their superiors. The vital importance of transmission of information must be impressed on every officer in the Division.¹⁷⁵

The Royal Engineers worked tirelessly before the battle to ensure that communications were maintained during it, but after-battle reports indicate how the most meticulous preparation could still fail. 'Signal wires should not be laid under trench boards, as traffic is dislocated and the trench put into bad order by the boards being frequently lifted.'¹⁷⁶ The official history stated that in the early stages of the battle:

communication by runner and telephone was tolerably well maintained, although here, as elsewhere, the action after dawn was fought in the half-light of a heavy fog which made observation impossible from the usual ground stations and from the air. Reports were therefore fragmentary and apt to mislead.¹⁷⁷

Communications were in part a success, but the problems encountered where they failed were significant. 'The difficulty of communication was again most marked. Up to 12.40 p.m. there was a complete lack of information owing to so many runners being killed by snipers left in portions of the German front line.'¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 'Instructions for Signal Communications', 24 October 1916.

¹⁷⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22 October 1916.

¹⁷⁶ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, CRE Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel.

¹⁷⁷ W. Miles, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1916* (London, 1938), p. 492.

¹⁷⁸ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 153rd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel.

The gathering and use of intelligence by the 51st Division had also benefited from experience and a heightened state of aggression during 1916. War diaries emphasised the number of patrols and raids and their value in determining the layout of the terrain, the state of the wire, and the identification of the enemy units.

The staffwork, which had been such a concern to Rawlinson at Givenchy, was considerably more efficient and thorough, although the poor weather conditions and vast quantities of mud made the task in planning such matters as supply all the harder, and 'The inconvenience caused to "Q" by this unavoidable restriction was immense, but the ingenuity of the Quartermaster's staff, as usual, overcame the difficulty with marked success'.¹⁷⁹

Meticulous preparation was not always sufficient to guarantee success for a division still inexperienced in the attack, as Brigadier-General Hamilton observed:

Not enough time is allowed for movements, especially movement to a flank down trenches. Not enough time was also allowed for messages to reach their destination. The length of time it takes for a message to go from Brigade to Battalion and Battalion to Companies and for the information to be circulated from the Company downwards does not appear to be realised at all.¹⁸⁰

Although problems in organisation and administration were still evident, there was significantly less confusion in and between units during much of the battle. However, at key points there were failures, either when dealing with the poor weather and ground conditions or in the latter stages of the three-day attack. One example can be demonstrated by the problems thrown up by fog on the first day of the attack: 'all units became mere disintegrated masses, sections quitting the side of neighbouring sections, platoons splitting up into leaderless knots of wandering men, all detached and fighting with the supreme courage of isolation'.¹⁸¹ However, when the fog lifted, the organisation returned and units pressed forward with more cohesion.

¹⁷⁹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 105.

¹⁸⁰ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, Lessons Learnt by Brigadier-General Hamilton of 154th Brigade, 21 November 1916.

¹⁸¹ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, p. 311.

Strength and casualties

The recruitment process had considerably altered since Givenchy. During October to December 1915, the Derby Scheme had failed to produce sufficient recruits to stave off the introduction of the Military Service Acts of 1916, and by mid-1916 reforms to officer selection meant that the officer base was more diverse and was increasingly based on merit. However, conscription did not have an immediate impact on the recruiting pattern of the 51st Division, as throughout 1916 reinforcements from local areas continued to predominate, although there was a consistent decline throughout the year.

The division was still under war strength for much of 1916. One example of this can be seen prior to the battle at Beaumont Hamel, 'As the 1/6th Black Watch were somewhat weak this battalion was reinforced prior to the attack by 2 platoons of the 1/7th Black Watch'.¹⁸² However, in relative terms, in contrast to other BEF formations, the division was still reinforced fairly well. The monthly sanitary report from the ADMS certified that on the whole troops were in good health: 'The Division has now been in the line for 9 months without any period of rest. Considering these circumstances the health of the troops has been good.'¹⁸³ However, by Beaumont Hamel, it became apparent that the standard of recruits was less than it had been. This was due to the huge numbers of reinforcements needed throughout the British Army: 'New drafts arriving from the base, though perhaps not up to original standard of the Division are fairly good'.¹⁸⁴

There had been many changes in the divisional composition also, but the last of those took place in June 1916, and many of the units that joined had brought combat experience with them. By Beaumont Hamel, the division was composed solely of Scottish units, and the only significant movements of the 51st prior to the attack were through various corps commands.

For a battle of this significance, the overall number of casualties was quite low. War diaries record that the actual casualty figures for the battle were:

¹⁸² NA, WO 95 2845, 153rd Brigade Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel.

¹⁸³ NA, WO 95 2851, 51st Division ADMS War Diary, Monthly Sanitary Report, 26 November 1916.

¹⁸⁴ NA, WO 95 2851, 51st Division ADMS War Diary, Monthly Sanitary Report, 26 November 1916.

Fig. 24 Casualties for the battle¹⁸⁵

Officers	Killed 30	Wounded 78	Missing 3
Other ranks	Killed 494	Wounded 1881	Missing 194

However, it must be borne in mind that at the time of the battle the battalions were extremely weak in numbers. 'The casualties during the action represented 45 per cent of those who took part in the attack.'¹⁸⁶

There had been a number of casualties during the initial advance due to the terrain and fog. 'Casualties had been unduly heavy, as the state of the ground had proved in places so bad that the troops had been unable to keep up with the barrage',¹⁸⁷ but, overall, the casualty rate rose as the enemy resistance toughened after the initial advance. Wrench stated of the latter stages of the attack:

The whole place is again battered out of all recognition and never looks twice the same except that it is always one shocking scene of desolation and destruction, and while they were all German dead that lay about, now they are all killed men, ever being removed yet even more and more to take their places in the mud.¹⁸⁸

The toll on officers in the attacking units was heavy. Eric and Andro Linklater pointed out that 'There were so few officers left in the 6th Battalion, that the 7th sent up replacements together with bombers and two platoons'.¹⁸⁹ The men still followed the leader, although it is interesting to note that this was gradually being superceded in training with greater emphasis being placed on the use of initiative amongst the troops.

¹⁸⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, War Diary for the period 13-17 November 1916.

¹⁸⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 123.

¹⁸⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 115.

¹⁸⁸ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 73.

¹⁸⁹ E. Linklater, and A. Linklater, *The Black Watch, History of the Royal Highland Regiment* (London, 1924), p. 154.

Esprit de corps

Between July and the end of November 1916, the (Highland) Division moved to different areas in the line 18 times and although 'Mobility replaced stagnation' the 'welfare of the troops suffered in consequence'.¹⁹⁰ However, Harper and his officers continued to train the men, and the men were still proud to be part of the division, although morale deteriorated as the days passed and Beaumont Hamel drew closer. This was due to poor weather, sub-standard billets and waterlogged trench systems:

We were accustomed to wander about like nomads, sleeping at night in our great-coats, heavy with damp, and freezing to the clammy waterproof sheets, or clinging to each other for warmth in the huts whose porous roofs admitted the rain and earthen flooring chilled and made us miserable.¹⁹¹

The troops blamed the high command:

Here they failed most damnably; and here we were most dependent on them. We returned late in 1916 to the Somme battlefield and sank into the bottomless mud of this devastated country unaided by those who alone could have saved us. On our third entry into the battle in the Autumn of 1916 we were allotted imaginary tented camps prior to attacking. The rain was continuous, the tents did not exist, the slopes on which it was said they once stood had dissolved in mud. The winter had seemingly surprised the Army Commander as decisively as any general could ever hope to surprise the enemy.¹⁹²

By November, the men were glad to have the opportunity to act after a number of attack postponements. It was also viewed by the troops as an opportunity to improve the reputation of the division after previous failures at Givenchy and High Wood. Morale was boosted and *esprit* firmed up through personal appearances by such as the Moderator of the Church of Scotland who appealed to Scottish pride, courage and spirit. After the battle, Harper testified to the spirit of his men and of their need to succeed: 'The resolution and gallantry of the men, who in spite of heavy losses and the heavier going, pressed on to their objectives with the greatest determination, and overcame the resistance at each successive trench'.¹⁹³

The results of these efforts were that the capture of Beaumont Hamel revolutionised the external view of the (Highland) Division and turned it into an elite formation in the minds of the military and the public. Lieutenant-General E.A. Fanshawe of V Corps stated, 'It is

¹⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 85.

¹⁹¹ Ross, *The Fifty-First in France*, pp. 283-284.

¹⁹² Nicholson, *Behind the Lines*, p. 86.

¹⁹³ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division Report on the operation at Beaumont Hamel, 18 December 1916.

evident that all the world looks upon the capture of Beaumont Hamel as one of the greatest feats of arms in the war, and to those who know the ground and its defences it must ever be a marvellously fine performance'.¹⁹⁴ It was integral to creating an internal self-belief which was vitally important in maintaining and enhancing the existing divisional *esprit de corps*. Private Wrench stated:

It was the key position to the whole of the Somme where after the disaster we suffered last July, this capture now is sure a feather in the cap of the Fifty-First. We feel proud of it anyhow, even if we don't know whether we are dead or alive..... We are wondering what the papers will say about it.¹⁹⁵

This was a crucial moment, for without an element of good fortune in the attack, the famous (Highland) Division might never have been.

Cambrai 1917

Narrative

The British Army continued to evolve and adapt throughout 1917, developing what has been classified by Jonathan Bailey as the 'modern style of warfare', characterised by 'three dimensional artillery indirect fire as the foundation of planning at tactical, operational and strategic levels of war'.¹⁹⁶ Bidwell and Graham recognised that it was a gradual developmental process with troops often having similar combat experiences in 1916 and 1917:

although [in 1917] the firepower in the hands of his [the infantryman's] battalion and that employed by the artillery of both sides was much greater. In 1916, he would have walked forward in lines and waves following a creeping barrage which he would have practised with men on horses carrying flags to denote the line of shell bursts. The distance between the lines and between individuals would increase in 1916 and still more in 1917 and, if he were in a follow-up wave, he might have moved in a platoon or section column rather than in line. The appearance of the objective, too, would have changed. Instead of the regular continuous trench line of 1915, with its thick barbed wire entanglements, he would have found scattered groups of battered trenches, a quarry or mine crater, the entrance to a mined dug-out or cellar, or, in 1917, a concrete pill box; and the wire, except in front of the Hindenburg Line, was less systematic.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ NLS, ACC 7380, box 9, Book 3 of 'The Highland Division', p.2.

¹⁹⁵ IWM, 85/51/5, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume I, p. 73.

¹⁹⁶ This takes place over an extended 3D area, employing: a rapid tempo which destroys the enemy ability to respond effectively; informed and accurate intelligence central to targeting; measured and accurate application of firepower; and the effective ability to command and control. J. Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', in *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper*, No. 22, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ Bidwell, and Graham, *Firepower*, p. 119.

The 51st Division, in the latter stages of 1916 had been utilising progressive tactics, but had been obstructed by problems in such fundamentals as command and control and timely supply during an advance. However, throughout 1917, the division was consistently employed in aggressive activity in the line or was involved in offensive action, and through experience gained made substantial progress towards remedying earlier problems.

When the British attacked at Arras on 9 April in support of the French offensive at Chemin des Dames, the (Highland) Division was involved in a limited objective attack against a strong enemy position. Objectives were all achieved, although heavy casualties were sustained. In another attack during the battle of Arras, against wooded positions, villages, and trenches situated deep in the German battle zone, tanks assisted the 51st in an attempt to cross five lines of objectives. This attack ultimately failed because of superior enemy artillery fire and effectively executed German counter-attacks during which the Germans employed infiltration and outflanking tactics. However, the 51st did stop the enemy counter-attacks from breaking-through, using machine guns and engaging with a series of counter-attacks of its own.

During the second half of 1917, Third Ypres was marked by, amongst other things, attacks on positions that could not be seen. During its first attack in that campaign, the 51st had four lines of objectives, and employing its (by then) standard two brigade- two battalion frontage with artillery and machine guns firing indirectly, the division employed small unit tactics such as 'dribbling' and the bypassing of strongholds. During its second attack over a narrow front, the division used one brigade combined with a variety of barrages (standing, combing, creeping) and its objectives were reached, but once again the enemy counter-attack drove the 51st back.

By the end of 1917, circumstances were ripe for a major change in artillery and all-arms tactics. The nature of the changes was determined by the tactical experience gained earlier in the year and Bailey has posited that the resulting modern style of war was, 'tested by the British Army at Cambrai'.¹⁹⁸

Haig stated:

The general object of the operations south-west of CAMBRAI was by means of a surprise attack acting in combination with a large number of Tanks to pierce the HINDENBURG system between the CANAL de L'ESCAUT and the CANAL du NORD, and thus compel the enemy to withdraw from the salient between the CANAL du NORD and the SCARPE. With this in view, arrangements were made for rapidly exploiting the initial success by Cavalry and a force of all arms so as to occupy the quadrilateral marked by the CANAL du NORD, the SENSEE River, and CANAL de L'ESCAUT. It was hoped that the town of CAMBRAI might be surrounded and isolated by the Cavalry before the enemy could bring reinforcements of any serious strength to the threatened position..... The first main objective, however, was the high ground at BOURLON Wood, and careful arrangements were made for its early capture.¹⁹⁹

The (Highland) Division was a key formation in the offensive, and 'The main attack of the IV Corps will be carried out by the 51st Division on the right with the 62nd Division on the left'. The 36th and 56th Divisions were to the north (left) of the 62nd Division and the 6th Division (of III Corps) was situated to the south of the 51st.²⁰⁰

The divisional assembly trenches were situated on a downward slope which ran a distance of 2200 yards to a position known as the Grand Ravine, from which the ground rose for another 1200 yards to the Flesquières Ridge. Over the ridge lay Flesquières village and from there Cantaing, La Folie Wood, and Cambrai to the right, and Bourslon Wood and Fontaine-Notre-Dame to the left. Between Bourslon and La Folie woods, the land was largely open. Within this area, the enemy outpost line (600 to 900 yards from the 51st) was lightly held with saps and crater posts, but the Hindenburg front line (1400 yards from the 51st) behind it was comprehensively wired with well constructed trenches. Triangle support trench, 120-200 yards to the rear of it, was similarly stoutly constructed and defended. Between it and the Grand Ravine was a series of sunken roads and light trenches. There was also a trench at Grand Ravine and behind it another, better defended, called Chapel Trench. In front of Flesquières village, but behind Flesquières Ridge, was situated the Hindenburg support line, which was again a strongpoint, with the Flesquières trench 150-200 yards to its rear:

Between FLESQUIÈRES and FONTAINE-NOTRE-DAME, there was only one trench system, the CANTAING LINE, running across the front line from NINE WOOD to BOURLON WOOD. It was incomplete, with the greater part of its double lines merely marked out and trenches dug for a

¹⁹⁸ Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', in *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper*, No. 22., p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ NA, WO 158 54, Report from Haig summarising the operations between 20 November and 7 December 1917, 23 December 1917.

²⁰⁰ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division Artillery Instructions No. 3, 16 November 1917.

few yards on either side of the numerous dug-outs; it had a double belt of wire and was linked in the right centre with a strong well-wired trench round three sides of CANTAING Village. Over the ground between FLESQUIÈRES and FONTAINE, however, were sunken roads running in all directions, and providing in many parts good positions for defensive stands.²⁰¹

Reports of the enemy strength are inconsistent. Hussey records that four German divisions were known to be covering the sector on 20 November 1917 (the 9th reserve, 54th, 20th Landwehr, and 20th). It is significant that Hussey points out that a specially trained anti-tank unit was with the 54th.²⁰² Woollcombe states that there were only three German divisions facing the IV Corps front:- 20th Landwehr 'which was not of high fighting quality', and the 54th and 9th Reserve divisions.²⁰³ However, Harper recounted that only two divisions were in the line opposite the 51st, including the division with the anti-tank regiment mentioned by Hussey, and the other mentioned by Woollcombe to be of poor quality:

On the enemy side, facing the 51st Division on November 20th, were regiments of the 54th Division and the 20th Landwehr Division, side by side. Both had two regiments in the line, each regiment with two battalions in the front system and one well back.²⁰⁴

The aim of the (Highland) Division attack was the capture of the front and support positions of the Hindenburg line approximately 5000 yards behind the enemy front line. The area was divided into three objectives: the "blue," "brown" and "red" lines. The first included the Hindenburg front trenches and Chapel Trench, the second the village of Flesquières and the German support system, while the third was a sunken road running from Marcoing to Graincourt.

The 51st Division was to attack on its standard two-brigade front, with the 152nd on the right and the 153rd on the left, each with two battalions in the front line. The 153rd Brigade was to attack with the 1/6th Black Watch on the right and the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders on the left. The 1/7th Black Watch supported the 1/6th, whilst the 1/7th Gordon Highlanders supported their own 6th Battalion.²⁰⁵ 'The task of the leading battalions was the capture of the German front trenches (the blue line) and after those had been taken, supporting battalions were to pass through and capture the "brown" and "red" lines'.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²⁰² J. Hussey, 'Uncle Harper at Cambrai, A Reconsideration', in *British Army Review*, No. 117, p. 18.

²⁰³ R. Woollcombe, *The First Tank Battle, Cambrai 1917* (London, 1967), p. 60.

²⁰⁴ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²⁰⁵ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division Artillery Instructions No. 3, 16 November 1917.

²⁰⁶ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Instructions No.2, Plan of Operations, 13 November 1917.

To advance against such a strong position, the element of surprise was key. To ensure that the enemy did not reinforce prior to the attack, no preliminary artillery registration was carried out prior to the heavy bombardment that began immediately before the advance. To compensate for the lack of a sustained period of artillery bombardment on the enemy defences, a large number of tanks were to be utilised to crush the wire and spearhead the advance of the infantry. In order to do this, 'seventy-two tanks were allotted to the Divisional front. These were allotted on a basis of three for every 150 yards and were to advance from 200 yards in front of the infantry.'²⁰⁷

Secrecy was paramount. The assembly took place between 17 and 19 November, with the artillery moving into position by 17 November, tanks moving forward on the 18/19 November (hidden in Havrincourt Wood until 20 November), and infantry advancing to assembly positions from 18 November. The tanks formed up for the initial assault behind a taped line slightly forward of the infantry assembly trenches. Harper described how his troops took up their positions on the 19 November:

The platoons to form the first two waves in the attack took over the line on the morning of the 19th, and thus had an opportunity to view the ground in front. At midnight the remainder of the four battalions to go in first came up; and before Zero the four battalions for the later stage of the opening attack were assembled in rear of our trenches with their front on the CHARING CROSS-TRESCAULT Road. Those in first were busy as soon as it grew dark in making ways for the Tanks across the trenches; those who came in during the night were spared confusion and fatigue by the use of red lamps, flags, boards and night markers to show route and positions of platoons. Before Zero all the men had a hot meal; they had rested in excellent close billets on the preceding night and were in high spirits.²⁰⁸

The divisional report stated that the artillery barrage fell on the enemy front line at zero hour, in addition to a smoke screen deposited on the Flesquières Ridge. To coincide with the barrage, wire-crushing tanks moved forward with small groups of infantry following. At 9.30 a.m., the leading wave of infantry moved forward, following a second and third wave of tanks.

The first phase of the attack to the lower slopes of the Flesquières Ridge was achieved with little impediment. However, during a second phase (up to noon), when the advance centred

²⁰⁷ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Instructions No.2, Plan of Operations, 13 November 1917.

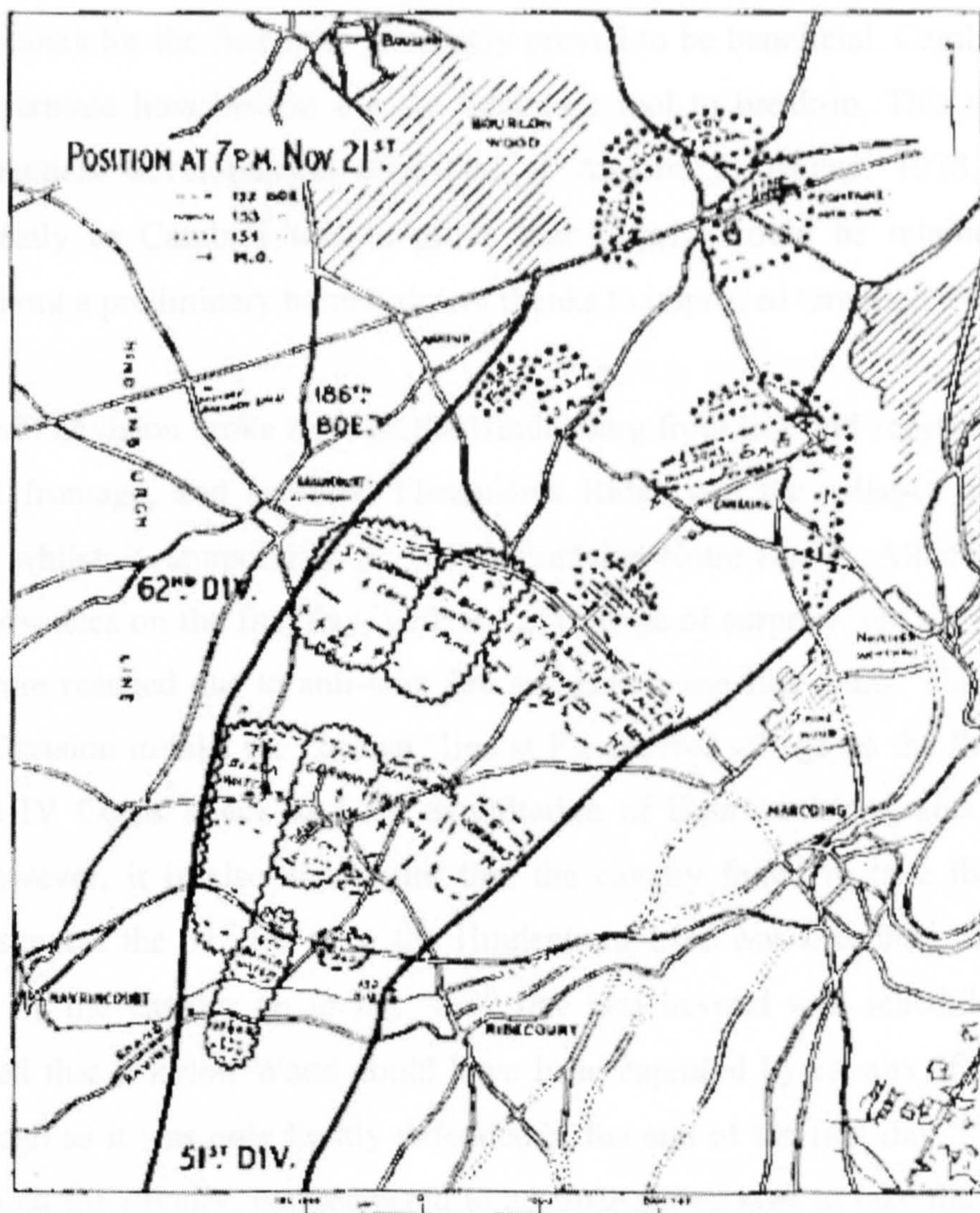
²⁰⁸ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

on the Flesquières Ridge, there were a number of casualties and repeated but only partially successful attempts to eject the enemy entrenched in a large part of the defensive line behind uncut wire and supported by thickly clustered nests of machine guns in the village. During a third phase, which took place in the afternoon and evening, heavy fighting centred around the Flesquières trench with only insubstantial advances. However, by late afternoon, a number of tanks had advanced into Flesquières village.

Early on 21 November, units advanced to the "Brown" line and the infantry entered Flesquières village without obstruction. By the close of the day, the 154th Brigade had passed through the 152nd and 153rd brigades and advanced with tanks to capture Cantaing and Fontaine-Notre-Dame.

Map 3.

The Battle of Cambrai: Position at 7pm, 21st November 1917²⁰⁹



On 22 November, the enemy counter-attacked Fontaine-Notre-Dame from the Bourlon Wood and the (Highland) Division was forced to withdraw. Renewed attempts to recapture the village and to advance on Bourlon Wood (with the aid of the 40th Division) met with failure due to an inability to destroy or incapacitate strongly entrenched enemy positions.

Analysis

In purely operational terms, the battle was a limited success at a time when enemy forces were weak and the element of surprise was with the 51st Division. As at Beaumont Hamel, after a successful initial advance the division was checked as enemy resistance stiffened.

More critically, the failure of the (Highland) Division to take its objectives (arguably) resulted in an overall stalling of the entire offensive and the resultant reverses that were experienced later in the month. However, the participation of the division in an attack that used massed tanks for the first time ultimately proved to be beneficial. Cambrai allowed the British to determine how best to use the tank as a tool to break-in. This was vital to the subsequent tactical developments displayed at Amiens in August 1918. Artillery also benefited greatly as Cambrai was to prove that surprise could be retained and success achieved without a preliminary bombardment thanks to improved targeting techniques.

The (Highland) Division broke through the Hindenburg front line and support systems across a 1500 yard frontage, and captured Flesquières Ridge and the villages of Cantaing and Flesquières, whilst it temporarily occupied Fontaine-Notre-Dame. Although, there were substantial advances on the first day, with the advantage of surprise, not all of the division's objectives were reached due to anti-tank fire and enemy machine guns. The inability of the (Highland) Division to take the "brown" line at Flesquières village on the first day caused a delay in the IV Corps attack and the exploitation of Bourlon Wood and Ridge was not possible. However, it is also significant that the cavalry failed to take the initiative and advance to support the 51st (as once the Hindenburg Line was breached, the second stage exploitation by the cavalry up to the "red" line and beyond was scheduled to begin).²¹⁰ Griffith stated that Bourlon Wood could have been captured by cavalry if they had moved quickly enough as it was only lightly defended at the end of the first day.²¹¹ If the division, with or without the cavalry, had managed to advance far enough to take the Bourlon Wood, then it might have been able to drive further into the enemy defensive system, as Wimberley related:

Cambrai with its tall spires a mile and a half away seemed within a stone's throw. A cavalry subaltern informed me that the evening before some troops had wandered all through La Folie Wood without seeing a single Boche. I am convinced that had we attacked again at dawn we could have had Cambrai almost without opposition. At the same time it is easily understood that a break through for such a depth on the very limited frontage on which we were attacking would have rendered us particularly prone to being attacked in the flanks-cut off and isolated.²¹²

²⁰⁹ After Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, Map VIII.

²¹⁰ Graham, *Against Odds*, p. 61.

²¹¹ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 161.

²¹² NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 92.

It was at the end of the first day that the battle started to go awry. It was then that there was a difference of opinion at the higher levels of command as to what action to take next. IV Corps had stressed of Bourlon Wood that 'It is very important that it should be captured the first day'.²¹³ In IV Corps opinion, when the cavalry failed to exploit, the main objective had failed, and this was the view of the GSO1 of Third Army, who recommended consolidation. However, Field Marshal Haig wanted exploitation.²¹⁴

On the second day, when the division moved forward and entered Fontaine, the position was exposed and the divisional flanks were insecure. Travers has written that:

on the second day, when the offensive advanced on the two wings, one toward Bourlon Ridge and Wood, the other toward Masnières and Marcoing, the latter advance stalled, and so the thrust of the offensive shifted towards Bourlon Wood. It was at this point that the attack should have been halted.

He went on to assert that the element of surprise had been lost and that there were not enough reserves to break through.²¹⁵ The ensuing German counter-attack pushed back the 51st Division and attempts on the fourth day to renew the advance failed. On that occasion, the right flank was exposed throughout the attack, and artillery cover was insufficient. There had also been little time to carry out a reconnaissance, the men were exhausted, and the tanks repeatedly developed mechanical problems.

Thus far the Cambrai offensive was following the same formula as the Somme and Passchendale campaigns, albeit on a smaller scale, in that it ultimately became unclear what the objectives were and combat was carried on for too long.²¹⁶ Pelham Burn stated:

These operations have again proved conclusively, in my opinion, that after the first day's battle further advance is impracticable until an entirely new operation has been planned and prepared, a proceeding that takes weeks rather than days. I have seen this proved again and again—BEAUMONT HAMEL, VIMY RIDGE, ARRAS, 3rd Battle of YPRES and CAMBRAI all go to prove my point. In all these battles the first days operations ended entirely in our favour, while succeeding days gradually turned the scale against us. The defence, with modern weapons strong out of all proportion compared with the attack is easily and quickly strengthened by the bringing up of machine guns and reserves which are never far away in a highly organised defensive system, while the ever increasing wire in front of the German rear defences is a further argument against breaking through. The enemy is operating in country well known to him and intact while we

²¹³ Woollcombe, *The First Tank Battle, Cambrai 1917*, p. 72.

²¹⁴ T. Travers, *How the War was Won*, (London, 1992), p. 26.

²¹⁵ Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 26.

²¹⁶ Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 27.

operate over unknown country in which the difficulties have been increased in the havoc of war. Further, as the advance increases our communications lengthen, and the supply of artillery ammunition becomes more and more difficult. In the operations before CAMBRAI we had everything in our favour, surprise to a degree that is unlikely ever to be obtained again, ideal weather and vast superiority in men and guns, besides assembly of troops and formation of dumps unhindered by hostile shell fire, and yet our 'break through' was never in view.²¹⁷

The divisional objectives had been ambitious as the enemy defences were in depth as Woollcombe described:

It was an immensely strong position. J.F.C. Fuller (who was GSO1 at the Tank Corps headquarters during the battle of Cambrai and was influential in the planning of the attack) had suggested that tanks should not assault it frontally, but this had not been conceded. Standing today where the lane from Ribecourt enters Flesquières, at just about where the fire trench of the Hindenburg Support Line ran, and looking back, the strength of the position is immediately clear.²¹⁸

It was a typical defensive system as outlined by Martin Samuels,²¹⁹ with limited frontal defences which grew stronger as the system deepened. Griffith has stated of the initial attack on the frontal system that, 'the Germans had a mere thirty-four guns covering the front. In these circumstances the attack almost inevitably made famous headway.'²²⁰ In addition to this, the enemy garrison in the front system was not of the best quality:

They were a miserable lot of men, unshaven of course, but so were we, but dirty, consumptive and small, or grossly fat, some of them very young, but most of them middle-aged men with cartoonist spectacles. They were a Landsturm division of "duds", poor devils, had never seen fighting on the Western front and they had been on the Eastern front in a very quiet sector.²²¹

As Woollcombe has stated:

The failure on 20th November to carry Flesquières.... was caused by a fantastic stroke of misfortune in that, as coincidence would have it, the German divisional artillery on the ridge had been specially trained in anti-tank defence by their divisional commander who was himself an artilleryman. His guns had practised it against French light tanks on the Aisne in April.²²²

Wimberley described how the enemy fought in the outpost and front line:

²¹⁷ NA, WO 95 2846, 152nd Brigade Report on the operation at Cambrai, November 1917.

²¹⁸ Woollcombe, *The First Tank Battle, Cambrai 1917*, p. 106.

²¹⁹ Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma* (Westport, 1992), p.72.

²²⁰ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p.34.

²²¹ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 88.

²²² Woollcombe, *The First Tank Battle, Cambrai 1917*, p. 103.

At one time that morning we had to cease firing the M.G.s for a minute or two, owing to a mass of prisoners which started walking towards the guns-it would have been sheer massacre to have gone on shooting.....The attack was evidently slowing down, and a line of blazing tanks outside the village wall of Flesquières told of some good work by the German tank gunners-it was a very interesting sight for our tanks seemed to be stopped on some line on the far ridge which they could not pass. I was told later that a German officer working an anti-tank gun alone-all his men having been killed-knocked out about five of our tanks at point blank range-a magnificent piece of bravery. He himself was killed in time and died by his gun with which he had seriously hindered our advance.²²³

Webster added an interesting note on the famous German gunners as he looked over the German position on the first day of the battle, saying their 'bodies were still warm when Webby examined them'. He added of the tank losses:

considerable credit for knocking them out was given to a German officer Lt. Muller and indeed mention was made in a British despatch about his bravery-but Webby did not come across the body of a Hun officer in the pits that morning.²²⁴

However, the defences became more difficult to exploit the deeper the (Highland) Division advanced into the system and as the enemy reinforced and counter-attacked:

The rear battalions were hurried forward when the attack began... On the 21st, the enemy put in 107th Division...On the 22nd, the 119th and 214th Divisions appeared...On the 23rd, the prisoners included men from the LEHR Regiment of the 3rd Guards Division (a "crack" Berlin Regiment met by the 51st Division N.E. of YPRES on July 31st, 1917).²²⁵

Much has been written about the tactics employed by the (Highland) Division at Cambrai. However, aside from the co-operation with tanks which has been dealt with elsewhere in this thesis, the approach adopted was sensible. The wave formation using 'leapfrogging' principles²²⁶ was now standard practice in the 51st and was also used by many other divisions.

The use of initiative and the application of firepower were also evident when the 51st advanced against machine guns and strongpoints, with the priority in the advance being to bypass these obstacles, leaving parties to deal with them in isolation. Harper concluded: 'Throughout there was notable success, with many examples of individual initiative, in

²²³ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 88.

²²⁴ IWM, N/A, Memoirs of Major F.W. Webster, p. 149.

²²⁵ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²²⁶ 'The advance will be carried out on the "leap frog" system', 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary.

tackling isolated machine gun posts; the combined effect of rifles, lewis guns and grenades was well applied'.²²⁷

Artillery

The use of artillery at Cambrai was innovative and was a sign of continuing development and progression. That no preliminary bombardment was necessary, in contrast to the artillery tactics at Third Ypres, was indicative of a number of simultaneous tactical advances that were becoming increasingly co-ordinated in the BEF. The focus was not on the mass of shells, but on where they were going and various methods for target location had been developed, such as the use of soundranging and more effective artillery impact observation. In addition, the 106 shell had been in use for some time, guns were better calibrated, weather conditions were increasingly taken into account, and aerial photographs regularly employed.²²⁸ The use of tanks to cut the wire also released artillery resources to be utilised in other areas of the attack.

To support the divisional advance, the artillery brigades, which had been reorganised in January 1917, were by this time well supplied with guns, ordnance and ammunition. 'All echelons full and dumps of 700 with each 18 pr gun and 450 with each Howitzer. 500 rounds with each 13 pr.'²²⁹ It was also important that the quality of ammunition could be relied upon, and the divisional artillery report confirmed that, 'Ammunition. Was generally good.'²³⁰

Centralised artillery co-ordination at corps level was very necessary throughout the battle as the artillery fireplan involved 1003 guns over the army frontage. To add to the complexity and to maintain secrecy, incoming guns had to be calibrated elsewhere before deployment. The fireplan involved three elements which included the creeping barrage to support infantry and tanks, the targetting of enemy strongholds, and counter-battery work. In addition, a number of batteries were also tasked with halting enemy counter-attacks.²³¹

The (Highland) Division artillery had a difficult task to perform as it had not long arrived in the sector, although operational orders reflected the lack of familiarity and were extremely

²²⁷ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²²⁸ J.B.A. Bailey, *Field Artillery and Firepower* (Annapolis, 2004), p. 257.

²²⁹ NA, WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

²³⁰ NA, WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

²³¹ Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', in *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper*, No. 22., pp. 41-42.

comprehensive. The degree to which advances in artillery preparation and application had progressed (particularly in the difficult circumstances) was evident in divisional artillery notes produced after the battle: 'No registration was allowed and the whole of the fire was from maps and calibration [sic]. The fire was accurate and I know of no single dangerous round fired by the Field Artillery.'²³² Infantry/artillery co-operation had been extensively practised:

The ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLE is that the leading infantry should follow so closely on the heels of the barrage that the enemy has no time to recover or man his machine gun before they are on him.....This principle will be assiduously impressed on all ranks both through lectures and in practice attacks, so that every man thoroughly understands that his safety lies in getting close up to the barrage and that he must wait for no orders to advance the moment the barrage lifts.²³³

However, during the later stages of the battle, even though much of the artillery had moved forward,²³⁴ artillery support was not as effective as enemy positions were unknown and enemy retaliation was more prevalent. Wimberley noted that:

About five minutes later when we were half way across country to Cantaing, the shelling got heavier and we could see Boche running out of Bourlon Wood and from La Folie to the east. Our artillery were not retaliating at all.²³⁵

Combined arms

The usage and application of combined arms had continued to progressively develop along with improvements in technology. Cambrai tested new ideas and equipment in a full-scale operation and demonstrated how a breakthrough could occur if innovations were developed further. The relationship of the artillery to the other arms was not reduced, but redefined by this engagement. Paddy Griffith has asserted that:

The battle had originally been planned predominantly as an artillery operation to exploit the new techniques of predicted fire, and the tanks obviated the need for guns to cut the German wire, so to that extent they assisted the artillery fireplan, but it could be argued that their contribution extended little further than that. In operational terms they were certainly never intended to make the breakthrough, or trained for it, but only to accompany the infantry during the initial phases of the break-in. If any arm was intended to break out it was the cavalry.²³⁶

²³² NA, WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

²³³ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 'Instructions with Regards to Offensive Operations'.

²³⁴ 'Half of leading Brigade accompanied infantry and by nightfall this was in action.', WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

²³⁵ NLS, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 92.

²³⁶ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 164.

The shock of the tank was enough in the early phase of the attack to confound the enemy, and despite its limited firepower its overall value was demonstrated in a report from Brigadier-General Buchanan: 'None of the above [Cantaing, Fontaine-Notre-Dame, sw. corner of Bourslon Wood] were captured without very material assistance from the Tanks'.²³⁷ Harper wrote that tanks could be of great value in taking strongpoints such as defended villages, but that the assaults had to be carried out systematically:

The only chance of success lies in close cooperation between the tanks and the infantry. The tanks must in all cases halt on the first objective until it has been consolidated. The second group of tanks must then pass through to the final objective. It will be of no avail for tanks to go independently down the streets of the village in no conformity with the movements of the infantry.²³⁸

However, there were considerable problems associated with the use of the tank. Rawling has said that tank casualties on the first day had been extremely high and that those tanks that remained were in need of maintenance,²³⁹ whilst Bidwell and Graham added of the anti-tank farrago at Flesquières, 'German batteries of the 54th Division, specially trained to handle tanks, executed twenty-six of them without being molested by the infantry of the 51st Highland Division, although low flying aircraft strafed their gun positions'.²⁴⁰

The use of combined arms as close support for the infantry and as independent firepower in its own right was considered a divisional priority. Harper stressed that there should be a 'Dependence not on weight of infantry attack, but on the skilful employment in combination of all arms',²⁴¹ and that a 'purely infantry attack against an organised position cannot be considered as a serious military proposition'.²⁴²

Overall, the 1917 division was very different from that of two years before. Then the majority of infantry were ordinary riflemen, with each battalion having a small number of trench mortars and Lewis guns. However, during 1917, each platoon was capable of using the rifle, hand grenade, Lewis gun, and rifle grenades, as its primary weapons.

²³⁷ NA, WO 95 2846, 154th Brigade Report on the operation at Cambrai, 2 January 1918.

²³⁸ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, pp. 72-73.

²³⁹ B. Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare* (Toronto, 1992), p. 168.

²⁴⁰ Bidwell, and Graham, *Firepower*, p. 138.

²⁴¹ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, p. 18.

²⁴² Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, p. 28.

Machine guns were used particularly well:

Machine Guns, being a powerful weapon of defence, naturally played a more conspicuous part on the enemy's side than on ours during the battles of November 20th to 23rd; but the guns of the four Companies with the Division were kept well forward from the beginning and in the later stages did heavy execution amongst the numerous hostile parties moving against our front.²⁴³

Lewis guns had been deployed and employed to maximise small unit firepower:

In normal circumstances, one or more sections in each platoon will continue the advance in turn, covered by the fire of the remainder. Under certain conditions of ground, however, the two Lewis gun sections may remain behind and give overhead covering fire, for instance, if the attack is down the slope of a hill or across a valley.²⁴⁴

Lewis guns were also used to destroy enemy machine guns when they were located.

Training

Although the operation was shrouded in secrecy, the division had had the opportunity to carry out tailored training programmes for the Cambrai attack. Although, these were, by necessity, time restricted, the (Highland) Division had already received extensive training throughout 1917.

Centralised advice, memoranda, and SS papers had been prolific throughout the year and Harper and his senior officers ensured that the (Highland) Division trained in accordance with the general guidelines. The overriding tactical/training focus was on small-unit training. As early as January, the war diary of the 1/5th Seaforths was highlighting section and platoon training on a regular basis.²⁴⁵ In February, platoons had been reorganised into four sections, one of bombers, one with rifle grenades, one with Lewis guns, and the fourth with rifles. The platoon focus, utilising its own firepower, was intended to assist in dealing with enemy strongpoints that had proved resistant to artillery shelling. In contrast to training earlier in the war when the focus in a battalion had been on, alternately, the rifle and bayonet, then bombing, followed by an increasing use of machine guns, the new focus was on learning to use the variety of weapons in the platoon. By February 1917, the war diary of the 1/5th Seaforths indicated that platoon and section training was also taking place alongside wider

²⁴³ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²⁴⁴ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²⁴⁵ NA, WO 95 2866, 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders War Diary.

company, battalion, and brigade training manoeuvres.²⁴⁶ A further reorganisation to the four section platoon took place in May 1917, when the rifle and grenade sections were combined to form two rifle sections both equipped with rifle grenades, thus increasing the flexibility of the platoon. The decline in the concept of specialists continued as all men in the rifle sections were also trained in the use of the rifle grenade or Lewis gun, or were expected to be skilled in the use of the hand grenade. Emphasis on training and on individual initiative reflected the very real probability that mobility was set to return and the growing tendency in the BEF's tactical thought was to employ small, flexible units, rather than the use of successive massed waves of troops.

When the (Highland) Division joined Maxse's corps in June 1917, it was subjected to a very focused corps training programme. The division was trained in specific tasks on ground similar to the area over which the troops were to advance, and this concentrated on repeated platoon and company practice. Units also performed mock attacks at the battalion level in which emphasis was placed on dealing with unforeseen obstacles like machine guns and strongpoints.

Combined arms training continued to be a focus. Communications with aircraft were practised, and the artillery took advantage of the quiet times to practise precise shooting that would be required when activity began again.

By way of contrast to Maxse's XVIII Corps, the IV Corps' influence over training at Cambrai was barely evident, and the organisation of training was 'firmly delegated to divisional commanders'.²⁴⁷ However, the training undertaken by the (Highland) Division at Cambrai was good and embodied much that was considered to be 'state of the art' tactical development, and included:

Careful study of Map and Aeroplane Photographs, by all concerned, including Platoon and Section Commanders, and repeated rehearsals at length, over difficult ground, with the actual trenches to be taken by each section, marked by tapes or flags; and where every Platoon had to go by compass.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ NA, WO 95 2866, 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders War Diary.

²⁴⁷ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 148.

²⁴⁸ NA, WO 95 2846, 'Notes on operations Between Metz and the Cantaing Line November 19th to 24th 1917'.

Command and control

The relationships between the various levels of command had shifted again during 1917. Army was less assertive than in 1916,²⁴⁹ corps permitted divisions more autonomy to plan and execute, and divisions were becoming more regulated in their execution of orders and application of tactics. As Simpson has explained:

the planning of the attack was, once Third Army had taken over, much like that of other offensives in 1917. Army issued its draft in three parts, and “subject to such alterations as have already been approved by the Army Commander, the Draft Scheme will form the basis on which Corps [III and IV Corps were to undertake the initial attack] will formulate their Schemes and make preparations for carrying out the operation”.²⁵⁰

IV Corps command certainly did not cover itself in glory. It is significant that Lieutenant-General C. Woollcombe (a 51st Division GOC before the war) did not last long in command after the Cambrai battle. Cambrai was his first major engagement as corps commander and IV Corps itself had not itself seen action since 1916.²⁵¹ Harper, never one to remain silent when the opportunity arose to speak, stated at a corps conference during a dispute, ‘Sir, the IVth Corps has not been engaged in an offensive for twelve months. The 51st Highland Division undertakes offensives of this kind every three months.’²⁵² It is clear that Woollcombe did not inspire confidence. Headlam of the Guards Division confirmed the view that the corps commander was less than experienced, stating:

About midday Major-General Fielding received a telegram from the IV Corps stating that the Guards might be called upon to relieve the 51st Division in the line that night [at 8.30 a.m., on the morning of the 23rd November, Major General Fielding had asked the IV Corps whether his division was to be employed to relieve any division in the line and had been told that it was “most unlikely”], but the telegram contained no intimation as to the whereabouts of the headquarters of the 51st Division and its brigades. It was not until 2pm that this necessary information could be obtained from the IV Corps. The brigadiers of the 1st and 3rd Guards Brigades then started off to get in touch with the brigades that they were to relieve, but, as the locations supplied by IV Corps turned out to be incorrect, they were for a long time unsuccessful in their quest. It was, indeed, more by good luck than by good management that by about 6pm they succeeded in finding the advanced headquarters of the 51st Division at Flesquières. They then discovered that the staff of that division had received no instructions as to the relief by the Guards and was, as a matter of fact, arranging its own divisional relief.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Simpson, ‘The Operational Role of Corps During World War One’, p. 142.

²⁵⁰ Simpson, ‘The Operational Role of Corps During World War One’, p. 145.

²⁵¹ Simpson, ‘The Operational Role of Corps During World War One’, p. 146.

²⁵² NLS, ACC 6119/1, ‘A Scottish Soldier’, Volume I, p. 97.

²⁵³ C. Headlam, *The Guards Division in the Great War 1915-1918, Vol. I* (London, 1924), p. 297.

The leadership was tested during the new style engagement. However, Paddy Griffith's classification of Harper as 'erratic', a judgement based predominantly on the actions at Cambrai, is incorrect.²⁵⁴ Travers has also erred in stating, 'Despite two weeks of training in tank-infantry cooperation before the attack, there were instances of commanders who simply refused, or were unable to comply with tactical rules. One well-known example was Major General Harper.'²⁵⁵ Harper may have made a mistake in deployment, but there is considerably more evidence to suggest that his overall leadership was sound. Just because Harper varied his tactics from the rest of the divisional GOCs does not automatically incriminate him. Travers also used the term 'tactical rules', but there were no tactical rules, merely guidelines, and these were not enforced.

Bidwell and Graham have stated that:

as the battle was considered to be an infantry advance with tanks and not a tank advance with infantry, and although many more tanks were available than in any previous attack, the infantry still largely determined the tactics in most divisions. Consequently, there were variations in the way divisions used their tanks, some of which were not designed to maximise co-operation between the two arms.²⁵⁶

It might indeed have made a difference if all the divisions had conformed, but, as Andro and Eric Linklater stated:

The official historian blamed Harper's formation, asserting that it slowed to advance and left the infantry too far from the tanks to give support against the artillery. It must be said, however, that it was hard to see how the 7th Battalion [Black Watch], for instance, could have approached close enough to knock out the field guns except under cover of smoke, which was not available. Nor is any delay apparent in the 6th Battalion's finely executed advance, except that occasioned by machine-guns, which would presumably have been present whatever the formation.²⁵⁷

The final summation of the tank question is most accurately stated by Hussey:

the evidence shows Harper's tank/infantry tactics were neither eccentric nor silly. His [Harper's] general tactics were well ahead of many infantry specialists then and still earn serious respect today. On how to use tanks with infantry in 1917, he was in advance of Fuller himself in key aspects and we have seen how exploratory, how far from definitive, were the methods proposed: after the battle Baker-Carr [Brigadier-General of the 1st Tank Brigade at Cambrai] applauded Harper's tactics as good, and very similar to 62nd Division's which earned everyone's full praise

²⁵⁴ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 80.

²⁵⁵ Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 22.

²⁵⁶ Bidwell, and Graham, *Firepower*, p. 135.

²⁵⁷ Linklater, and Linklater, *The Black Watch, History of the Royal Highland Regiment*, p. 161.

(against a weaker defence). The Harper method worked perfectly in Phase One, and the setback in the next phase owed much to a resolute, well trained anti-tank battery hidden behind a crest and a fluke tank formation. But in concentrating on the fate of six tanks on the right flank the critics ignore the genuine problems experienced by tanks further to the left, of fuel and ammunition shortages, just as they tend to ignore the very considerable efforts which finally got tanks into the village....It was not Harper who laid down the scope and organisation for the attack on the wide slope nor the artillery method, but Corps and Army.²⁵⁸

Bryn Hammond, in his article on the 51st Division at Cambrai, thinks that 'Harper was not a brilliant tactician. He undoubtedly suffered from a blinding stubbornness....an obstinate, tactically weak general', adding somewhat dismissively, 'however, he did think himself sufficiently qualified in the matter of tactics to produce a booklet entitled Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training.'²⁵⁹ This remark is contradictory, for the booklet was an exceptional piece of work. Hussey notes that Paddy Griffith has compared the booklet with similar publications by Maxse and de Lisle, and judges it 'the best of the lot....more sophisticated than Maxse's work, especially since it links the platoon's action to the Brigade or Divisional battle and the artillery barrage (which was usually planned at Corps level) in a way that Maxse does not really mention'.²⁶⁰

Harper's leadership was more valued by the military hierarchy than by a number of post-war military historians, as, subsequent to Cambrai, Harper received a KCB and a corps, (ironically he commanded IV Corps for the rest of the war), followed by a promotion to Southern Command in Britain in 1919.

The senior officers in the division continued to have significant responsibility and influence. Continuity in command was marked at all senior levels, and collectively the accumulated experience in the 51st throughout the engagements of 1917 was invaluable. An interesting insight into the various levels of command interaction was demonstrated during a pivotal moment in the battle. Wimberley related that:

In the late evening, Hardie [Machine Gun Officer] came up and we went again to Brigade to be told that we, the HD were not to advance further, as Bournon Wood on our left was untaken and that 154 Brigade had established itself in Fontaine, along the road to Cantaing and that village itself. Hardie, the shrewd, looking at his map and seeing Fontaine like a pistol pointing into the Boche line, suggested that eight of my guns should go up and help 154 M.G. Company in the

²⁵⁸ J. Hussey, 'Uncle Harper at Cambrai, A Reconsideration', in *British Army Review*, No. 117, p. 21.

²⁵⁹ B. Hammond, 'General Harper and the Failure of the 51st (Highland) Division at Cambrai, 20 November 1917', in *Imperial War Museum Review*, No. 10, p. 98.

²⁶⁰ J. Hussey 'Uncle Harper at Cambrai, A Reconsideration', in *British Army Review*, No. 117, p. 16.

consolidation, but this the General judged as unnecessary, as reports from Colonel Unthank, commanding the 4th Seaforths in Fontaine, said there was not a Boche in sight. Those eight guns might have made a lot of difference!²⁶¹

This indicated that the brigadier-general retained overall authority over his units during combat, whilst permitting relatively junior officers to suggest a course of action. However, the word of the battalion commander still carried more weight than that of a 'specialist' officer. There was much dialogue and integration throughout the division, but it was still maintained within a rigid hierarchical order.

Organisation and administration

Organisation and administration continued to function well with staff well trained and efficient. Every effort was made to ensure that preparations for the battle were complete and effective. However, these efforts were made more difficult by the unorthodox nature of the attack and problems did occur.

Communications were, as always, vital. Major advances at the tactical level had been complemented throughout 1917 by the improved use of various applications for communications. Power buzzers, wireless, and telephones were more widely available and reliable, and the use of aircraft had increased. However, Harper pointed out that 'Conditions for the Signal Service were more exacting than at any previous battle in which the Division had been engaged',²⁶² and Brigadier-General Buchanan agreed whilst indicating some examples of problems that were encountered:

Pigeon messages were not satisfactory. A certain number never arrived, and those that did were 2 and 3 hours in reaching the Brigade. Visual requires a great deal of practice. When Battalions moved forward their station broke up and followed without any thought of leaving an intermediate station to keep in touch until Brigade got forward enough to communicate direct. Brigade schemes must be carried out at training. The Tanks continually destroyed forward lines. When they had all gone through the Artillery did likewise.²⁶³

As the battle progressed things became even more problematic, 'Very difficult after the advance began. The lamp, runner, mounted orderly and old German wires were all used at times but messages came back slowly.'²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 91.

²⁶² NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

²⁶³ NA, WO 95 2846, 154th Brigade Report on the operation at Cambrai, November 1917.

²⁶⁴ NA, WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

Intelligence was based largely on information the division had received from IV Corps command on the state of the enemy defences and enemy forces. This led to expectations that the battle would not be a difficult contest. Wimberley explained that prior to the attack 'Officers thinking one thing, would it be a walk-over as intelligence had promised'.²⁶⁵ Hussey has pointed out that the (Highland) Division intelligence failed at crucial points, such as the initial attack at Flesquières village:

The enemy's resistance in Flesquières was slackening and there is little doubt that the village could have been entered with small loss. A message was, however, received by telephone through the 6th Gordons from GOC 152nd Bde, asking that the projected attack should not be carried out, as the northern portion of the village was believed to be already in the hands of 51st Division.²⁶⁶

It was not. Ultimately, the ability of the division to advance was diminished due to a combination of less than comprehensive intelligence and inadequate foresight. Wimberley complained:

Progress was very, very slow, the road was packed with reinforcing infantry, field guns, shells for the guns already up, lorries full of stone for mending the road and filling up the mine craters; cavalry, armoured cars, a company of cyclists-hundreds of men and guns trying to pass through the narrow break before it could be closed up. After about half a mile the stream stopped altogether, and there we stuck.....I am convinced that these mine craters, which in spite of the sappers' efforts took twenty-four hours or more to bridge over, had a great deal to do with our not being able to exploit our initial success. The difference between the 31st July at Ypres and the 20th November at Cambrai were in this respect very noticeable-in the first battle everything seemed to have been thought out and prepared, in the second battle, nothing.²⁶⁷

This situation placed a heavy burden on the supply infrastructure and the 'Ammunition supply required the continuous efforts of every horse and man'.²⁶⁸ However, even with the best efforts, 'It is regrettable that more fire could not be given during the counter-attack on FONTAINE but the ammunition supply made it simply impossible'.²⁶⁹

Strength and casualties

The troops of the 51st at Cambrai were, in general, still of good quality. The ADMS report for October 1917 stated, 'The Physique of the Division is good....' and 'The General health of

²⁶⁵ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 87.

²⁶⁶ J. Hussey, 'Uncle Harper at Cambrai, A Reconsideration', in *British Army Review*, No. 117, p. 20.

²⁶⁷ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, pp. 89-90.

²⁶⁸ NA, WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

²⁶⁹ NA, WO 95 2850, 'Notes of 51st Divisional Artillery in Battle of Cambrai, November 20th to 24th 1917'.

the troops is very good'.²⁷⁰ However, the ever-growing casualty list was gradually denuding the division of its corporate experience and of the network of relationships that had developed over time. One result of this was, as Moore has stated, that 'All the Territorial units outwardly retained their structure but reinforcements were no longer exclusively from their own recruiting areas'.²⁷¹

It was significant that, although the 51st was relatively well supplied with reinforcements throughout 1917, it remained consistently understrength. However, this did not have an impact on the battle as it was not a shortage of men that contributed to any reverses. Casualty rates were relatively low and most of those were incurred during the later stages of the combat. The total number of killed, wounded or missing in the division amounted to 68 officers and 1502 other ranks.

Fig. 25 Casualties for the battle²⁷²

Officers	Killed 21	Wounded 43	Missing 4
Other Ranks	Killed 183	Wounded 1190	Missing 129

The low casualty rate would indicate that the division had fought well, but it should be remembered that the enemy were relatively weak in the early stages of the attack. The relatively low rate of officer casualties is also informative as no longer was it common practice in the division for officers to be so exposed in leading from the front, as tactics had now adopted another form.

Esprit de corps

The changing nature of the troops had a limited impact on the *esprit de corps* as long as a balance between recruitment and representation was maintained. Networks did change, but as long as they didn't change too dramatically, a continuity remained. Harper was conscious of this as early as July 1917, when he wrote to the corps commander requesting that men be

²⁷⁰ NA, WO 95 2851, 51st Division ADMS, Monthly Sanitary Report, October 1917.

²⁷¹ W. Moore, *A Wood Called Bourlon, The Cover-Up After Cambrai, 1917* (London, 1988), p. 49.

²⁷² NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division Report on the operation at Cambrai.

returned from corps school, 'As you know, we have had to replace a great deal, and we should like a few old faces'.²⁷³

However, the (Highland) Division had fought regularly and added to its reputation throughout 1917. 'When we arrived on the scene, we were greeted by the Ulster Division then holding the line with the exclamation "Burds of Ill Omen"... we were told that our appearance in that peaceful countryside denoted there was something in the wind.'²⁷⁴ Malcolm stated that the division was at its most formidable in the second half of 1917 and that it was superior to the formation that fought at Beaumont Hamel,²⁷⁵ and Wauchope added that divisional successes at the close of 1916 and throughout 1917 accounted for its selection for Cambrai.²⁷⁶

Because of this status, *esprit* was solid and morale was strong before the battle, although there was surprise amongst the officers and men that the 51st had been earmarked for another engagement. 'The news that this was the case came as rather a shock, as the Division had already fought battles in the year 1917 on 9th-12th April, 23rd-24th April, 16th May, 31st July-1st August, 20th-23rd September, and had lost in casualties since 9th April 457 officers and 9966 other ranks.'²⁷⁷

After the battle, a spat with another 'elite' formation indicated the position of the 51st on the ranking scale of divisions in the BEF:

At midnight, the Guards Division relieved our Division but not before there had been a little unpleasantness between the men of the two Divisions owing to the Guards making a few nasty remarks on the non capture of the whole of Fontaine with the result that our men commenced fighting the Guards and for a time there was quite a 'set to' with a few casualties on both sides.²⁷⁸

However this setback also indicated to the rest of the BEF that the (Highland) Division was not invincible, which may or may not have influenced subsequent judgements on its performance in the line on 21 March and beyond.

²⁷³ NA, WO 95 2845, 51st Division G War Diary, 6 July 1917.

²⁷⁴ Sutherland, *War Diary of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders*, p. 132.

²⁷⁵ Malcolm, *Argyll Highlanders 1860-1960*, p. 43.

²⁷⁶ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Vol II*, p. 170.

²⁷⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 235.

²⁷⁸ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 50.

March 1918

Narrative

In many senses Cambrai was the end of the superiority of defence over offence. The war had caused ever increasing resource shortages, both human and material, and 1918 was to provide a platform where attacks could, one way or another, ultimately cause a breakthrough. The German Army, with the advantage of the collapse of the Eastern Front and the return of troops to the west, planned a massive attack with the aim of staging an audacious breakthrough using infiltration, close-combined fire support, and decentralised command techniques.²⁷⁹

The BEF, expecting an attack, used the winter period to rework its defensive systems to cope with the new style of attack, broadly reflecting much of the theory that the enemy had applied to its own defensive systems.

Within this context in March 1918, the (Highland) Division was a part of IV Corps of Third Army and was deployed over a frontage extending from the northern edge of the Flesquières salient, with the 6th Division to the north and the 17th (Northern) Division to the south. When the 51st Division took over the sector it was in poor condition and considerable effort had to be put into reworking and improving it.²⁸⁰ GHQ had issued a memorandum on 14 December 1917 which:

laid down the broad principles upon which a defence was to be conducted... it laid down that as far as possible the defence was to be actively conducted by means of local offensives, raids, and the use of gas to harass the enemy. Defences were to be sited in depth and counterattacks were to be planned in detail. The main battle zone was to be between 2,000 and 3,000 yards (1839 to 2750 metres) deep in successive lines, and switch systems were to be included so that in the event of a breakthrough the enemy could be prevented from turning outwards and rolling up the line from the flank. The first line of defence was to be the outpost line, based on machine guns and sited so as to conform to the machine gun plan and not vice-versa.²⁸¹

Harper and his senior commanders organised the divisional area into three zones or lines. There was a front system in the forward zone that consisted of a front, support, and reserve line. The two former were continuous trenches held by wired posts, whilst the support line also contained a number of dugouts. The reserve line (which was also the front line of the

²⁷⁹ Bailey, 'The First World War and the Birth of the Modern Style of Warfare', in *Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper*, No. 22., p. 42.

²⁸⁰ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 176.

battle zone) was composed of a series of defended localities and portions of wired trenches. The battle zone contained an intermediate line with dugouts and wired trenches. At the rear of the battle zone lay the Beaumetz-Morchies line which consisted of a single continuous strongly wired trench with a series of switches that connected to the intermediate line. 'In these three systems contact is made with flank Divisions in the front, support and intermediate lines, the system of the flanking Divisions being continuous with the system of the 51st (H) Division.'²⁸² However, this continuity did not include the Beaumetz-Morchies line.

All three brigades were in the line (holding the trenches in depth from the front to the Beaumetz-Morchies line, each with a complete battalion in reserve which was designated to garrison the Beaumetz-Morchies line).²⁸³ Every line of defence, and in many places communication trenches, were heavily wired, and 'In the experience of this Division no trench system has ever been occupied which has been protected by a quarter of the wire which had been erected in this sector'.²⁸⁴ Machine guns, positioned for covering fire were sited in groups of two, and all four machine gun companies were deployed with the exception of six guns that were held in reserve.²⁸⁵ Each brigade had four trench mortars in the front line, with a further four in the battle zone.²⁸⁶ In addition, each brigade was covered by a brigade of field artillery, deployed with nine forward 18 pounders and 4.5 inch howitzers, whilst the remainder were situated in positions 3500 yards behind the front line. Tank traps were also laid and trench mortar bombs were set down as mines.

Facing this defensive system were arrayed the following German Army corps:

XIV Reserve Corps set to attack the right of the British 6th Division and left of 51st Division:

1st Line: 3rd Guards Division, 20th Division

2nd Line: 39th Division.

²⁸¹ F. Myatt, *The British Infantry 1669-1945* (Poole, 1983), p. 179.

²⁸² NA, WO 95 2847, 51st Division Defence Scheme, 13 March 1918.

²⁸³ The 154th Brigade on the right, 152nd Brigade in the centre, and 153rd Brigade on the left. From right to left were deployed the 1/4th Gordons, 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 1/6th Gordons, 1/7th Black Watch, and 1/6th Black Watch. In reserve were deployed 1/4th and 1/6th Seaforths and 1/7th Gordons.

²⁸⁴ WO 95 2847, 51st Division G War Diary.

²⁸⁵ 14 in the support line, 14 in the reserve line, 16 in the intermediate line, 6 in support at points between the intermediate line and the Beaumetz-Morchies line, and 8 at the Beaumetz-Morchies line.

XI Corps set to attack the centre and right of the 51st (Highland) Division and northern flank of the Flesquières salient:

1st Line: 24th Reserve Division, 53rd Reserve Division, 119th Division

2nd Line: 4th Division.²⁸⁷

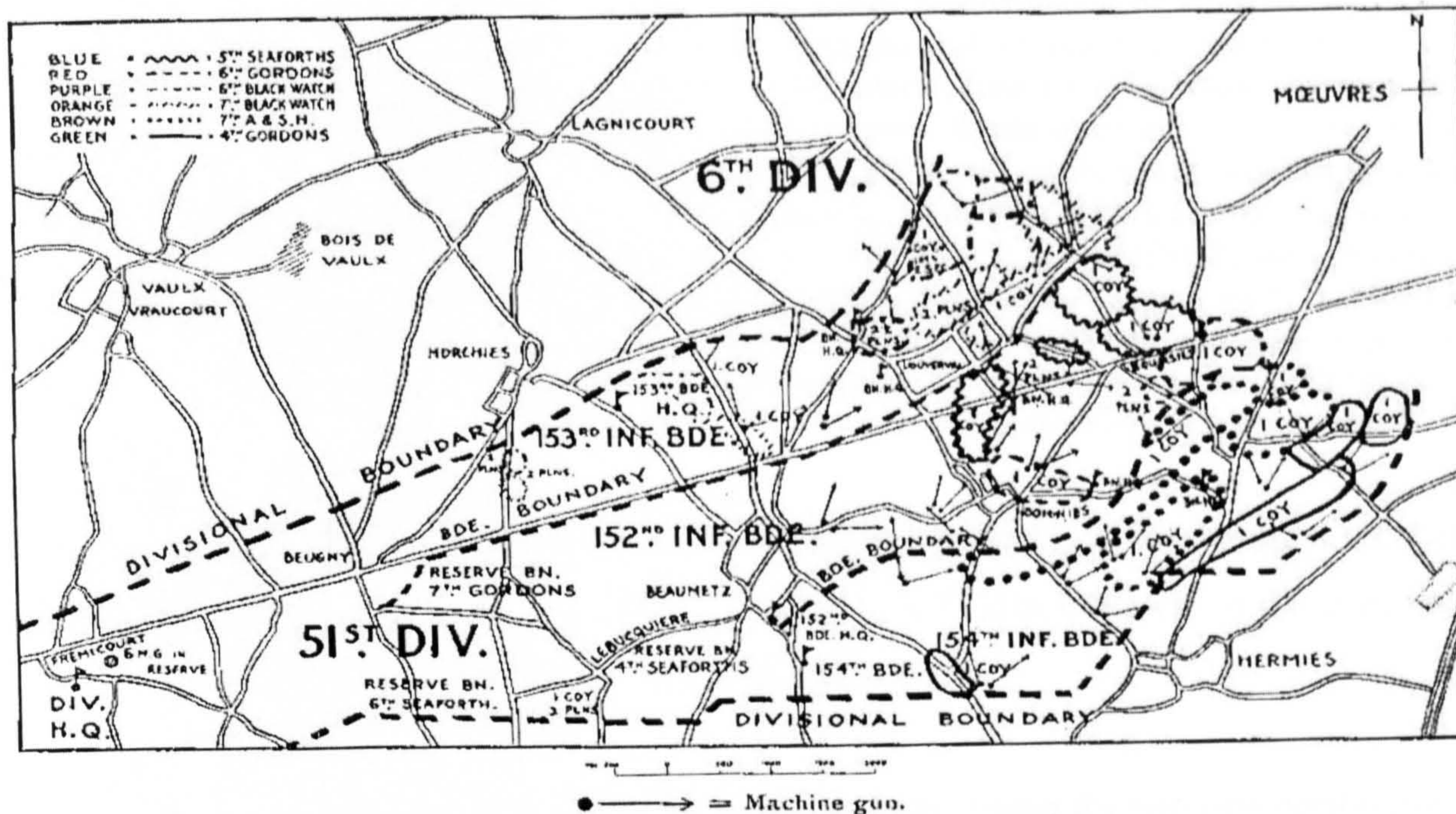
²⁸⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 272.

²⁸⁷ M. Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle, 21st March 1918* (London, 1983), p. 381.

Map 4.

The German Offensive: Disposition of 51st (Highland) Division, Morning,

21st March 1918²⁸⁸



That the division worked tirelessly to get the defences ready for an attack is undoubted and the war diaries of all units reflected that. It was also of benefit that there was relatively little enemy activity in January and early February 1918, and that period of quiet assisted divisional preparations. Every man in the 51st Division expected an attack. Patrols were consistently sent into no man's land,²⁸⁹ and as early as 18 February 1918 Bradbury stated that 'At night the Divisional Staff got the wind up expecting Fritz to make his great attack which was now expected to commence any day, consequently orders were given for all sentries to be doubled and every precaution to be taken.'²⁹⁰ The expectation continued until mid-March, when the signs for an impending attack were incontrovertible as Wrench stated, 'Reports go that Fritz is massing strongly here and is coming over in the morning', and Wimberley continued, 'About the 15th the real "wind up" started and every day we were told that the Boche would attack the next'.²⁹¹ British artillery was in action during this period with the aim of disrupting any enemy preparation, and 'One 4.5-inch howitzer battery in the 51st Division caused an estimated 100 dumps of ammunition to explode during a ninety-minute

²⁸⁸ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, Map IX.

²⁸⁹ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 177.

²⁹⁰ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 57.

²⁹¹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 113.

bombardment'.²⁹² The heightened state of alert was a constant until the attack came. When it did come, it fell on the (Highland) Division like a hammer blow. 153rd Brigade reported:

At 5.3 [sic] a.m. the enemy opened with a very heavy bombardment of all kinds of shell. He employed Trench Mortars and H.E. shells mixed with gas shell on our area forward of BEUGNY, the gas shell being more concentrated in rear of the Intermediate Line. Everyone forward of that however had to wear gas masks for from 2 1/2 to 4 hours. While there is no one of the Front or Support Lines of this Brigade North of RABBIT ALLEY now present to say what happened it is abundantly clear from accounts.....at a time varying from 9 to 9.30 a.m., the enemy in very considerable numbers appeared from the left flank over CENTRAL AVENUE, and Support Line North of the STRAND, and swept along mainly behind our Support Line from N. to South, his move being accompanied by a smoke and shrapnel barrage moving South along our trenches. In almost every case the first thing a garrison knew was that the enemy were behind their trench, and bombing along the trench from their left.... The smoke and fog prevented any distant view.²⁹³

Throughout the divisional sector, the enemy targeted divisional positions using a mixture of artillery, heavy trench mortars, and gas. The 1/6th and 1/7th Black Watch on the extreme left of the division were the first to be attacked by enemy troops:

The enemy counted on the Highlanders holding their ground despite the merciless bombardment to which they had been subjected; and in this they were right, for they succeeded in cutting off all the troops holding the front and support lines, every man of whom was either killed or captured. The survivors of these front line battalions, located in the Intermediate line and in the rear of it, soon found themselves in a desperate position, and were forced to fall back gradually, frequently halting and forming defensive flanks to retard the enemy's advance and to avoid being cut off like their comrades in front.²⁹⁴

Wimberley, who was in the battle zone with his machine guns, recorded that

The next hour passed very slowly-the shelling did not diminish in the least, and as it was still dark I guessed the attack had not begun. There was nothing to do but sit still and listen to the signaller drawling down the telephone. "Hullo Argylls, Hullo, Hullo, Hullo, Hullo Argylls"- no reply- "Line cut to Argylls, Sir". "Hullo, Seaforths, hullo, hullo" – "Line cut to Seaforths, Sir". So it went on. When the barrage started we had some eight or nine telephone lines out to various Headquarters, one by one these were all out. Infantry Brigade Headquarters was the last to go, and they reported before the line went, that they too were isolated except for their few buried cables. A few minutes later they were gone and we were completely isolated in the dark.²⁹⁵

Rear areas were being systematically targeted and that targeting also included divisional headquarters.

²⁹² Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle, 21st March 1918*, p. 117.

²⁹³ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

²⁹⁴ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, pp. 176-177.

As German forces advanced, the forward units of the division were increasingly outflanked, and the 153rd and 152nd Brigade sectors in the front and support lines were lost by early afternoon. The far left of the divisional sector, right back to the intermediate line was full of enemy soldiers. 'I then made off to join Hastings at the two nearest guns and as I did so the mist rolled away like the curtain of a theatre, revealing a sight, the like of which I had never seen before, and enough to frighten all but the bravest. The Boche were there in hundreds.'²⁹⁶ By the end of the day, many men and guns had been lost and the enemy were pressing to take the Beaumetz-Morchies line and corps deployed units from other divisions to reserve positions in case of a breakthrough.

Early on 22 March, orders were received by 51st Divisional headquarters to withdraw the division in accordance with a withdrawal by 17th Division to its right in the Flesquières salient. A new line of defence was sited on a switch line behind the intermediate line, but throughout the day units on the left continued to be pushed back and reserve troops were sent forward to assist. By the close of 22 March, enemy pressure resulted in infiltration to the Beaumetz-Morchies line and new orders were issued to form a new line of defence behind it.

On 23 March, the division was ordered to withdraw to the army line, in accordance with the 17th Division on the right. The 51st was still 'in touch' with the 17th Division throughout 23 and 24 March, but this contact was becoming increasingly fragmented, and on the following morning, 'no touch with British troops could be obtained on either flank'.²⁹⁷ The 51st was in danger of encirclement and Bewsher stated 'The remnant of the Division was thus left still facing the enemy, its three brigade headquarters just in rear of the fighting line still in the same order of battle in which they had begun the engagement, but their fighting efficiency was gone'.²⁹⁸ On 25 March 1918, the division was withdrawn into reserve and on 26 March was replaced in the line.

Analysis

March 1918 had enormous implications for the 51st Division, as it did for the whole British Army. Whatever had remained of the (Highland) Division that had fought since May 1915 was almost completely obliterated during the German March offensive and that which

²⁹⁵ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 113.

²⁹⁶ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 115.

²⁹⁷ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 292.

continued to linger was bludgeoned to extinction the following month at the battle of the Lys. The ghost of the division would remain for the rest of the war, but it would never regain the form or structure that it had enjoyed before the March engagement.

Middlebrook has stated that the 51st had a:

high reputation as a 'stormer' division dating from the attack and the capture of Beaumont Hamel during the closing stages of the battle of the Somme. But the Highlanders may have been used too often since Beaumont Hamel; they had suffered many casualties and were suspected of having lost their fighting spirit. There was also some doubt whether the Highland nature was as suited to sitting out a bombardment and then defending against an infantry attack as it was to storming German trenches.²⁹⁹

There is some merit in this, but the argument needs to be developed. The division had indeed been involved in substantial conflict, but it still remained a good division at the onset of the March offensive. Secondly, the allusion to the 'Highland nature' is melodramatic, and if referring to the romantic images of clan charges and long-ago battles is anachronistic in this context. However, when referring to the division's potential inability to defend, it should be borne in mind that the 51st had been trained (albeit not extensively) in defence techniques and it had conducted stout defences during 1917 against vigorous enemy counter-attacks. The 51st Division did fight well enough, but it will be demonstrated that the initial blow on the division was such that it did not have the capacity to recover and the only action that it was capable of taking was reaction.

The objective of the defensive system was to stop a German attack. In this, ultimately, the (Highland) Division failed, although it did delay it enough that the attack in the divisional sector lost impetus. Samuels has stated that, German 'Stosstruppen' tactics had been under development since the autumn of 1914:

By 1918, they had become the standard tactics of almost the entire German Army. In addition, the defensive system in which the British still had such faith was not only a poor reflection of the German system that it was intended to copy, but it was also seriously flawed and had contributed very considerably to the disasters of March 1918.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 292.

²⁹⁹ Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle, 21st March 1918*, p. 91.

³⁰⁰ Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma*, p. 4.

The German mode of attack, an unprecedented barrage, disruption and infiltration, and rapid and unanticipated actions, left the (Highland) Division confused and disorganised. At that stage, further actions merely increased the dislocation and the 51st began to cease to function as a formation.

GHQ had published memoranda on the BEF defensive system, and Harper, 'In view of the fact that so much new work was necessary in the sector', published a memo of his own containing key principles of defence and trench construction.³⁰¹ This memo recommended trench construction on a wider scale than had been the case previously. Harper also laid down fixed principles and practical positioning for the defence of the sector. This included the methods to build and the materials to construct defensive positions and strongholds. Carter-Campbell confirmed that Harper's system was in place exactly as embodied in the defence scheme that had issued ten days before the attack.³⁰² The division was holding a front of 5,400 yards with all brigades in the line. This was not Harper's usual deployment and meant that any retention of significant reserves was not possible, and a great deal of faith was placed in the positioning of machine guns to bolster the sparsity of troops.

However, a key weakness in the defence in depth principle that Harper and GHQ advocated was that, in periods of poor visibility and heavy attack, strongpoints could be isolated and lack supporting fire. On 21 March, visibility was poor, and it is debatable whether the attack might have been halted if this had not been the case, as the fog compromised the defence scheme, with units being broken up and command becoming isolated, often in the hands of junior officers and NCOs. In addition to this Carter-Campbell was critical of Harper's trench construction:

Owing to the depth of our trenches and the height of the excavated earth piled up on the traverses and on the paradors, the men could not see what was taking place on their flank, nor use their rifles to a flank; nor could they see or bring fire to bear on the enemy in rear of them until he was well within bombing, and, probably, Flammenwerfer, distance.³⁰³

Harper, along with GHQ, had made an error of judgement in failing to take into account that flanking could be the main form of enemy attack. As Travers has emphasised, 'There was, however, a decisive error in GHQ's estimation of the nature of the German offensive. This

³⁰¹ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 265.

³⁰² NA, WO 95 2846, 'Report on the Operations from March 21st-26th 1918', 23 April 1918.

was that GHQ obviously expected the German offensive to follow the 1917 BEF model of a manpower and wearing down campaign.³⁰⁴ Harper should have known better. As early as October 1916 he had stressed:

It is the duty of every Commander to protect his flanks the moment he occupies a new position. This principle holds good for the advanced post as for the Brigade. ... Neglect of this principle has been the fruitful cause of troops being turned out of positions which they have won.³⁰⁵

There was also an insufficient number of switch lines which, had there been more, would have been very useful as a measure to halt outflanking in the rear areas. This would suggest that the front systems had been the priority. The defence scheme asserts that:

The main Zone of defence will be the Battle Zone, and the Corps Scheme of Defence is to defend this Zone against all attacks, and to regain by counter attack any portion of the Battle Zone in which the enemy gains a footing. The 51st (Highland) Division will defend the Battle Zone by preventing the enemy from breaking through the Forward Zone, and will, therefore, offer the most resistance to any hostile attack from the Front, Support and Reserve Lines.³⁰⁶

This was not a mistake in principle, but a disproportionate concentration on the positioning of units in the forward and battle zones without adequate reserves and tends to support Samuels' assertions that the BEF failed to allocate resources in the correct way. Samuels points out that, 'Largely as a consequence of the emphasis on offensive operations up to that time, the British Army had no up-to-date doctrine for defence, commanders had no guide how to lay out positions, how to deploy men within the system, or how to react to enemy attacks'.³⁰⁷ The Cambrai inquiry had focused predominantly on the British attack and inadequately on the German counter-attack, but it did emphasise that the troops needed training and that there was a lack of doctrine for defence in depth.³⁰⁸

A crucial point was the flanks. As Lieutenant-Colonel J.M. Scott stressed:

The main lesson to be learned is that Defensive systems must be prepared on an Army basis. It is not enough that certain Divisions work hard while holding the line, but all should work to one

³⁰³ NA, WO 95 2846, 'Report on the Operations from March 21st-26th 1918', 23 April 1918.

³⁰⁴ Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 53.

³⁰⁵ NA, WO 95 2845, 'Instructions with Regard to Offensive Operations', 22 October 1916.

³⁰⁶ NA, WO 95 2847, 51st Division Defence Scheme, 13 March 1918.

³⁰⁷ Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma*, p. 114.

³⁰⁸ Simpson, 'The Operational Role of Corps During World War One', p. 162.

system. If the trenches recently lost had been organised months before, and the work carried out as the 51st (Highland) Division did it; there would have been a different report to make today.³⁰⁹

His analysis stated that, if the flanks on either side of the 51st had held, then it would not have had to withdraw. However, it is symptomatic that each of the reports of the divisions in question refers to insecure flanks.

How the division fought in defence was as important as the defensive system it occupied. The enemy forces arrayed against it were formidable. Travers has calculated that on the Third Army front, fourteen British divisions were attacked by elements of seventy-six German divisions.³¹⁰ German morale was high and the men were willing to do what was needed to end the war.³¹¹ Major Jobson of the 1/4th Seaforths described the enemy method of attack:

A screen of scouts was first thrown out and the infantry would follow at an interval of from 300 to 400 yards- generally in two double waves. The extension appeared to be about 10 paces and the distance between lines about 100 to 200 yards. Behind the two waves of infantry was a line of machine gunners, behind these again light field guns and trench mortars. When the infantry came within effective rifle or machine gun range he adopted a "dribbling" method of advance very similar to that described in the attached pamphlet. Men would spring up irregularly along the line-rush forward about 15 or 20 paces and lie down again- the same process being followed by the men behind. The advance of the hostile infantry was covered all the time by overhead fire from the machine guns in the rear. As the hostile infantry closed with the infantry, light machine guns and trench mortars were rushed up- the field guns firing point blank at our positions. Aeroplanes would also hover over our line and harass infantry with low flying machine-gun fire. Throughout his forward movement the infantry would put up star shells as an indication of the position of the infantry. The system of co-ordination of arms adopted by the enemy was very well carried out. His method of attack appeared to be an adaptation of the leap frog system.³¹²

However, as Terraine points out, the:

'storm troops' were only part of the Army and the quality of the whole mass was too uneven for the universal application of the new elixirs. This was gloomily recognised by O.H.L., which allotted training and equipment priorities to 'attack divisions' as opposed to 'trench divisions.'³¹³

The enemy attack was centred on the artillery bombardment which worked its way along the flanks. Jonathan Bailey states that:

³⁰⁹ NA, WO 95 2846, Lieutenant Colonel J.M.Scott, 1/5th Seaforths to 152nd Brigade HQ, 30 March 1918.

³¹⁰ Travers, *The Killing Ground*, p. 222.

³¹¹ Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle, 21st March 1918*, p. 63.

³¹² NA, WO 95 2846, 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders, 31 March 1918.

³¹³ J. Terraine, *Impacts of War 1914 and 1918* (London 1970), p. 130.

By March 1918, the Germans had begun trying to devise new ways of controlling barrages from the front line, although the British experience was that this was not possible in a large centralised plan, since information rapidly became out of date. Great attention was paid to coordinating the close and deep battles. The neutralisation of enemy forward positions would have offered little advantage had enemy guns been left intact and its C2 system paralysed. German tactics developed well in 1917, but failed because they had lost the materialschlacht.³¹⁴

With the heavy bombardment on rear areas and extensive counter-battery work, the aim was to roll back the enemy to each strongpoint and then use a combination of arms to destroy it.

Whole groups of German divisions had sometimes been given a line of advance that angled sharply away from the apparent centre line of attack. This was especially so for several miles on either side of the Flesquières salient where the Germans were attempting to complete a massive encircling movement, the base of which was twenty miles across. This pincer hit the 51st Division and Carter-Campbell explained:

His system of attack would appear to have this advantage over ours, namely, that he is not tied down to the consolidation of a particular objective, but he continues fighting with a view to rolling us up to a flank and turning our defensive lines. He thus introduces a more fluid form of attack and reduces the necessity of frontal attacks against our original defended lines to a minimum, but it is not thought that this form of attack compensates him for his much larger proportion of casualties....Until the Division broke off from the fight on the evening of March 26th, the enemy by this means found almost every weak place in the British line, and the battle consisted of repeatedly forming defensive flanks to check him in his areas of penetration and ultimately of withdrawing.

However, for the (Highland) Division:

There was undoubtedly too great a tendency to deal with a turned flank by a conforming movement rather than by fire power, as, normally, it was only a small advanced guard which threatened our flanks: these advanced guards not being adequately engaged and dealt with by fire were soon reinforced and turned into an offensive force which compelled our withdrawal'. The result was that 'frequently small local successes by which the enemy penetrated portions of our line, led to a general withdrawal, and were treated as a serious turning of the flank instead of being met by fire and manoeuvre on the part of the local Commander, and our action in these cases frequently flattered the enterprise of the enemy.'³¹⁵

The worst of the outflanking was on the opening day as the bombardment was at its heaviest and the weather its poorest. The front line troops did not stand a chance:

³¹⁴ J. Bailey, 'British Artillery in the Great War', in P. Griffith (ed), *British Fighting Methods*, p. 38.

³¹⁵ NA, WO 95 2846, 'Report on the Operations from March 21st-26th 1918', 23 April 1918.

This incident is described by a soldier in the 51st (Highland) Division who did not want his name mentioned. "there were no dug-outs in our front line; it was very thinly held to prevent casualties. We had to huddle up under the parapet during the shelling; there was no other shelter. When the bombardment lifted, we were not attacked frontally. We were considerably shaken by the shelling. It was a moment of fear. 'what's coming next out of the mist?' we fired our rifles blindly into the mist then heard firing from our left and from our rear. We realised that we were being outflanked. The men started to drift back until we were left with only two men, myself and a sergeant. The next thing I knew was that two Germans were coming up the trench to our left; they were about ten yards away. The sergeant had been at the rum for some time. I cleared off; I wasn't going to get caught. The last I saw of the sergeant he was shaking his fist at the Germans and using strong language. I saw him taken prisoner."³¹⁶

Wimberley stressed the shock of the outflanking movement:

Writing these orders and making all the arrangements took some threequarters of an hour, and I was just sending a runner with orders to this effect, when we heard steps coming down the dug-out. The next moment a grimy and dishevelled Machine Gunner came stumbling into our earth chamber, his clothing torn, one leg badly burnt and evidently much exhausted. He gasped out that he was the survivor of the two guns at Louveral at the garden wall there, and that they had been attacked from the rear and squirted by Germans with liquid fire. I could hardly believe my ears—these two guns were only some twelve hundred yards on our left front and a good mile behind the front line. If the Boche were there, they had practically broken right through.³¹⁷

The ability to take the initiative was wanting. (Highland) Division counter-attacks invariably failed due to lack of information and overwhelming enemy forces, but also because the 51st continued to act as the enemy anticipated:

I arranged to send forward a company of 6th Black Watch from the BEAUMETZ-MORCHIES LINE, (which by 10.17 a.m. had been reinforced by 2 1/2 Companies of 7th Gordon Highlanders) to attempt to relive POST 29 and drive back enemy in the valley. This Company advanced as far as the road North of the valley at J.7. but by that time had sustained 50% of casualties from Machine Guns near the R.E. Dump and could go no further.³¹⁸

Major-General Harper's ideal counter-attacking scenario did not exist during the March offensive:

Deliberate counter only after enemy has been checked and situation clear for 'adequate artillery combination' etc to be arranged. Should be treated like any attack and needs careful thought and preparation—flanks must always play a part in the plans. If circumstances are such that a counter-attack has no reasonable chance of success, the principle which governs the employment of the reserve is that it should be so disposed as to offer resistance to the enemy's advance.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle, 21st March 1918*, p. 174.

³¹⁷ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, pp. 114-115.

³¹⁸ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³¹⁹ Harper, *Notes on Infantry Tactics and Training*, p. 93.

Crucial to the discussion is to what extent the 51st Division failed to function. The German attack principle partly focused on paralysis of the enemy. Travers has explained that IV Corps seemed to inspire the rumour of a German breakthrough as it was repeatedly the focus of massive German onslaughts, and in particular one report stated that the:

51st Division simply ceased to operate as a unit from 23 March, and on 25 March made no effort to stand, but conducted a dour, deliberate, and selfish retreat. Every day the 51st retreated and left its neighbours in the air.

Another officer confirmed that the 51st was inactive and that on the 25th, at a divisional conference, the GOC, Carter-Campbell 'to the surprise of all present, declined to put his division in the line saying that the men were exhausted and demoralised and could not be trusted to stand'.³²⁰ We have already determined that the 51st had to be withdrawn, but Travers's version of events is extremely damning. His evidence is based on a report from an officer from a neighbouring division, and it has become apparent that it was all too common for that evidence to be biased or incomplete when considering the situation on the flanks.

A variety of sources demonstrates the actual sequence of events after the opening attack on 21 March. Wauchope stated of the left flank on the morning of the second day (22 March), 'While the artillery pounded us, the infantry was steadily trying to work up to our wire and line, but the defence held, in spite of heavy casualties'.³²¹ Wrench emphasised the strain that the division was under: 'The fatigue is awful and the strain of holding is tremendous, and God knows how long it will go on. Our line is getting thin while the Germans seem to be coming on in inexhaustible numbers and must surely get through sometime.'³²² However, 153rd Brigade's Report confirmed that it was standing firm and there was no question of a collapse.³²³

On 23 March, 153rd Brigade recorded that orders had been issued to stage a withdrawal due to insecure flanks, however there was to be no retreat without further orders.³²⁴ A similar

³²⁰ Travers, *Killing Ground*, p. 240.

³²¹ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 180.

³²² IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 183.

³²³ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³²⁴ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

state of affairs existed early on 24 March when, 'At 11.17 a.m. Division notified me that if enemy broke through in front of us the 19th Division would fall back by successive stages and if it was necessary for them to retire through our line, we were to cover their withdrawal'.³²⁵ However, later in the day, enemy pressure increased. 'At 3.50 p.m. I ordered units in the event of their being pushed back by overwhelming numbers to retire one line through another, and no line to retire without informing the troops on its flanks'.³²⁶ Pressure was mounting. Wrench believed he was fortunate to become a casualty:

Praise God from Whom all blessing flow;-- I'm wounded. What a bombardment it was all night. We stuck it out till this morning when we had to beat it to a trench behind. Then the General took me out round all the posts the brigade is holding over on the ridge in front. Our front is thinning out and being stretched too as the men grow fewer in numbers. We were shelled to hell, some bursting only a few yards away as the aeroplanes were showering down their bullets like hail.³²⁷

On 24 March, whilst at Reincourt, the 1/6th Gordons were faced with a dilemma:

On the left "A" Company's flank was totally unprotected. "C" Company was in touch with troops on the right and was holding the enemy, but soon after five o'clock a message came from the Officer Commanding the next Brigade saying that he had been outflanked and was preparing to withdraw. The message was passed on to "B" Company, but the messenger, in delivering it, used the word "Retire". "Go back," was Donald Clark's spirited answer, "and tell him that this Division never retires." To remain now meant being surrounded, and it was decided to move back to new positions.³²⁸

Retire in this context meant disorderly retreat, not an orderly withdrawal.

Again on 25 March, 153rd Brigade confirmed that it was to hold its position and work with flanking units. 'At 10.40 a.m. orders were sent to units, that if the 19th Division were forced to withdraw, we were to cover their retirement and hold on till the last possible moment.'³²⁹

However, later on 25 March, at 2.35 p.m., the division did begin to give way:

³²⁵ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³²⁶ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³²⁷ IWM, 85/51/1, Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 184.

³²⁸ D. MacKenzie, *The 6th Gordons in France And Flanders* (Aberdeen, 1921), p. 145.

³²⁹ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

About this time a general retirement was in progress though the enemy did not appear to be pressing unduly from the South, and I telephoned the G.O.C. Division that I considered the situation somewhat critical unless a line of fresh troops could be formed somewhere through which the much mixed remnants of Divisions could pass and reform. The G.O.C. ordered further efforts to be made to hold these men back and accordingly I sent all mu [sic] staff out to the East of IRLES-PYS Valley to do this and went myself to the PYS Ridge.....The disorganisation however owing to the mixture of other Divisions was so great and the lack of officers or rather of any exertion on the part of their officers (with a few exceptions) was so marked that as soon as one had one party going well and went on to take another, men behind and on the flanks kept going steadily back. I saw no sign of panic or of the slightest hurry on the part of any groups of men or individuals but all appeared in an apathetic sort of way to have a fixed idea of getting back somewhere, presumably behind some line of fresh troops.³³⁰

Bradbury on the headquarters staff of the machine gun battalion affirmed the breakdown in the division:

News travelled like lightning through the lines that the German cavalry had broken through and was approaching the village.... Almost immediately from every point which the eye could see there came galloping scores of horses and mules drawing every kind of conveyance imaginable in addition to thousands of men running. Evidently panic had caught hold of everybody. Our own officers, instead of behaving like officers, soon caught the same fever and instructions were issued for everything to be thrown into the limbers as quick as possible and to move off irrespective of turn or order but as soon as they were ready..... Each driver therefore had the 'wind up' immediately and without even waiting to get properly loaded and fastened up they galloped across the fields towards the only road which led to the rear.³³¹

This is critical. This was the point when the old (Highland) Division ceased to exist: 'Brigadier General BURN came up and after conferring we decided that we ought to go at once to Division and report, as the situation appeared very serious and it was now impossible to stop the general retirement except on a line of fresh troops'.³³²

Artillery

The artillery support for the division was found wanting. Travers asserts that:

Seen from a command perspective, there was general agreement that the artillery support of the infantry in the retreat was a relative failure due to lack of liaison. In other words, the local infantry brigade and battalion commanders had no control over the artillery when they needed it, especially in an emergency, because artillery orders came either from division or corps.³³³

³³⁰ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³³¹ IWM, 81/35/1, Memoir of S. Bradbury, p. 62.

³³² NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³³³ Travers, *How the War was Won*, p. 85

Lieutenant-Colonel J.M. Scott of 1/5th Seaforth Highlanders confirmed that 'Liaison between Infantry and Artillery when lines are down should be improved'.³³⁴

There were also a significant number of artillery brigades positioned in the battle zone. As the engagement progressed, numerous accounts referred to gun positions being abandoned due to positions being overrun. The lack of co-ordinated artillery support coupled with the loss of firepower through abandoned or captured guns was critical to the division, as the 51st had come to expect, at the very least, an adequate artillery support.

Combined arms

Small unit tactics and firepower were crucial to the defence of the (Highland) Division sector and this was an area where the 51st was relatively well advanced. However, there were a number of negatives. Along with the reorganisation of the infantry brigades, trench mortar batteries and machine gun companies had also undergone restructuring during February 1918. This reorganisation had not fully 'shaken down' before March, and, as Griffith points out, 'They sometimes failed to ensure a fully interlocking coverage of the whole front, and on other occasions they lacked decisive leadership'.³³⁵ Infantry commanders tended to lay the blame on the machine guns, but the gunners' retort was, 'They alleged machine guns had been overrun only because they had continued firing to the bitter end in a vain attempt to cover the over-hasty retreat of the infantry'.³³⁶ This is significant because the (Highland) Divisional sector relied heavily on paired machine gun cover and as it was so pivotal to the defence the following analysis will focus on this particular aspect of combined arms use during the engagement.

Captain Wimberley was acting divisional machine gun officer from January 1918:

When I got to Division I found that rumours of a great Boche offensive for the spring were coming in to Headquarters every day, and in consequence "Uncle" was ordering a strengthening of the line everywhere. From the M.G. point of view we wanted deep dug-outs for every gun, so that the team might stand the bombardment, and in consequence all M.G. Companies in the Division, with the technical help of the R.E.'s got busy. Hardie was very keen on guns being grouped in pairs and near the infantry. This was undoubtedly sound. Grantham [Machine Gun School], looking at it purely theoretically, advocated guns away from the infantry and the recognised trench line, in

³³⁴ NA, WO 95 2846, 1/5th Seaforths report to 152nd Brigade, 30 March 1918.

³³⁵ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 127.

³³⁶ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, p. 128.

order to escape the enemy's artillery fire. But what was gained by this disposal of the guns was more than lost by the weakening of the teams' morale.³³⁷

In the (Highland) Division it was an operational expectation that the work of the machine gunners would be carried out closely alongside the infantry.

However, Wimberley also commented that the corps co-ordination was less than effective when it came to machine gun positions throughout the corps sector:

I rode over to a place, Vaulx, west of Morchies, and there met the B.G.G.S., by name Brigadier General De Pree, the Corps M.G.O., a Major Westrop, the D.M.G.O. of the division on our left, by name Deane-Drummond, and the other D.M.G.O., whose name I have forgotten. We had a most argumentative day. De Pree was, in my opinion, an idiot about M.G.'s-there is no other word for him-he had no idea of placing guns at all, and did not know how to set about it. Weston was sound according to his lights, but very keen on the battery system of 6 and 8 guns, which I thought too many eggs in one basket. Deane-Drummond was frankly bored, he was a typical Munster Fusilier, and I believe very gallant in action. However, we all agreed that De Pree was all wrong, and, together, dissuaded him from the positions he usually chose.³³⁸

Major Westrop was actually correct, as Wimberley himself realised, but it is interesting that his influence was insufficient to ensure consistency in the corps:

Next day, however, came orders that each division was to send a sketch of their suggested positions to Corps. I spent a full day, by myself, on the Corps line on the HD front, and drew my sketch, and next morning rode out, along with D.C. [G.S.O.1], and showed him my prospective positions, the majority of which he approved. At that time I was a firm believer of never grouping more than two guns together, as I considered that was sufficient fire-power to stop an attack. Afterwards, or rather now, I am in favour, on occasions where the field of fire is wide, of putting four guns together. I found that two guns together were not enough on the 21st March, but until I personally saw it, I never would have believed that the boche could attack in such dense formations.³³⁹

Training

Lessons learnt from April 1918 stressed that the division had not been sufficiently trained for the type of defensive positions it held:

Few lessons were learnt in the operations in April. Beyond those that have previously been learnt in the operations in March. The following points were again emphasised:- TRAINING The most important lesson learnt both in the operations beginning on April 9th and those beginning on March 21st, was that the system of training in force did not prove equal to the test of semi-open warfare.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 106.

³³⁸ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 107.

³³⁹ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 107.

³⁴⁰ NA, WO 95 2847, 'Lessons Learnt from the Operations from April 9th to April 15th 1918'.

Efforts had been made to tackle the lack of training in defence as soon as the division occupied the sector with the expectation that it would face a German attack. On 15 December 1917, Harper lectured officers on 'Principles of Deliberate Defence',³⁴¹ and training programmes were to focus on both offence and defence. The GHQ memos on defence in December 1917 and March 1918 were comprehensive, but, as usual, were ambiguous enough to permit tactical flexibility, and the defensive principles were complex, and it was not a straightforward task to develop training programmes that applied. In addition to this, the (Highland) Division had to deal with a poor trench system, significant fatigue work, and winter conditions. However, with the attack imminent and the weather improving, there was an increase in training activity including the establishment of battalion schools.³⁴²

Command and control

Outwardly, it was hugely significant that Major-General Harper left the division just days before the attack. For an officer to take over the command of a division, no matter how capable that officer was, would have been difficult, but to take over command of a division that was deployed in a sector with an incomplete defensive system and on the eve of an imminent attack, made it all the more problematic. That impairment of command weakened the ability of a formation to react and respond, as Brigadier-General Louis Oldfield's friend, Miss Whittaker, testified: 'When the attack came in full ferocity on March 21st, Uncle [Harper] had just become corps commander. This meant tremendous weight on Louis, since the new divisional commander was necessarily still unfamiliar with men and positions.'³⁴³

The division was fortunate that the senior officer cadre had been in place for some time and were familiar with the way that the division fought. Brigadier-Generals Pelham Burn, Beckwith, and Buchanan had been in command since July 1916, August 1917, and September 1917 respectively; the CRA and the CRE since July 1916 and March 1917 respectively; and the GSO1 and AA and QMG since November 1916 and March 1917 respectively. Only the ADMS was relatively new to command (November 1917), but Lieutenant-Colonel Rorie did have continuous service in the RAMC of the (Highland) Division. It could also be considered fortunate that Harper had stayed in command as long as

³⁴¹ NA, WO 95 2863, 152nd Brigade War Diary.

³⁴² NA, WO 95 2863, Memorandum from F.W. Bewsher, 12 January 1918.

³⁴³ IWM, PP/MCR/134, Papers of Miss Whittaker, p.138.

he did as it permitted him to carry through his plans for the defensive system and his troops to gain experience of the system under a familiar leadership.

However, if the transfer of command at such a crucial point was detrimental to the fighting efficiency of the formation, then the same can be suggested of Harper's arrival at IV Corps (of which the 51st was a constituent part at this time). The same rule applied for Harper as that which affected his successor in the 51st, in that it would have been extremely difficult for him to fully maximise command of the corps under those circumstances.

The army hierarchy was aware that the BEF was in an unusual defensive situation prior to March, and considered it prudent to apply a more centrally-driven level of conformity (as had been the case during the early stages of the battle of the Somme). However, as usual with BEF centralisation, the guidelines were vague. The flexibility inherent in this permitted divisions a degree of latitude of interpretation, such as Harper's 'ideal' trench dimension, or Wimberley's machine gun siting. 'A number of new trenches were everywhere dug to strengthen the position in depth, and in all these new trenches, we, the Machine Gunners, were more or less allowed to choose the position for the platoon and M.G. dug-out post.'³⁴⁴

That the corps commander Woollcombe, was replaced the week before the attack does not indicate confidence in his abilities, and his leadership may have impacted negatively on the defensive systems of the divisions on either side of the 51st. The interpretation of the centralised guidelines, and the corps application and co-ordination of them, would have been crucial. However Woollcombe had failed to impress at Cambrai, and Wimberley stated of his chief of staff, 'He left Corps when Woollcombe, the Corps Commander, left, and a new B.G.G.S. took over; but how a man like that man seemed to have got such a very responsible job as B.G.G.S., I can't imagine'.³⁴⁵

It would appear that Woollcombe had been moved on as a result of a number of changes at the higher levels of the BEF immediately prior to 21 March 1918. Middlebrook states that it was difficult to understand 'the way in which several high-level command charges were allowed to be made at this time'.³⁴⁶ This situation has long been the subject of debate without

³⁴⁴ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier' Volume I, p. 106.

³⁴⁵ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 107.

³⁴⁶ Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle, 21st March 1918*, p. 128.

a definite conclusion. However, the papers of Miss Whittaker emphasised the role that Brigadier-General Oldfield played in those command changes:

Louis had leave and we got two days hunting in East Devon. The leave had very important consequences for, after long deliberation, he and another general headed to risk their futures and made representations on some aspects of the High Command to the most exalted persons they could get. They proved eventually to be very exalted indeed... not the very highest but the next to it. Even now I cannot bring myself to mention the names of the other General or the men they saw. There was a succession of interviews lasting hours, and in the end Louis overstayed his leave. All that I heard seemed too confidential even for my locked journal, and the details have gone from my memory, but there are letters written after his return.... 2/3/18 "It is surprising how easily I got the opportunities I wanted, and how well I was received. The result in part was immediate and the future will see great changes... If only I could have done this a year ago, but of course my opinion would have had little weight then." 13/3/18 "Changes have started out here exactly as I had hoped, possibly more than I had hoped. Among others, Uncle got his Corps, this Corps".³⁴⁷

The ability of both the 51st Division and IV Corps to react to the onslaught was impaired by the changes in command. Just as it was also highly significant that the commanding officers of the battalions on the extreme left of the division, the 1/6th and 1/7th Black Watch, which faced the brunt of the initial attack, were both new to their commands in March 1918. However, the nature of the German attack was to disrupt the ability to command and control at all levels, and often units were left to fight predominantly on their own.

Throughout the previous two years Harper had been devoted to inculcating a level of tactical decentralisation throughout the units in the division. However, consistent engagement and substantial casualties had impacted upon the progressive development of this ability, and much of what had been achieved had centred on using initiative in attack. Faced with the German disruption tactics and a disintegrating defensive system, and a lack of command and control from headquarters, the ability of smaller units to act was diminished.

Organisation and administration

The organisation and administration of the division had functioned well prior to the attack. Whatever the merits or otherwise of the defensive system, every effort had been expended to cover all conceivable eventualities, with the one notable exception of an omission of any comprehensive plan for a retirement.

³⁴⁷ IWM, PP/MCR/134, Papers of Miss Whittaker.

Communications were again, despite technical advances, a problem. The heavy German bombardment destroyed telephone communications, the deep buried cabling being wrecked by high explosives. In the early stages, the ability of the division to communicate was also hampered by the fog. Visual signals could not be seen. Pigeons and equipment, such as wireless, were often captured and runners could not get through. This led to isolation. The situation was not aided by the consistently changing positions of units and headquarters. 'Communication with Brigade Headquarters had become impossible. My runners had got through, but not back again, and the necessary removal of Brigade Headquarters further back made touch difficult until after dark.'³⁴⁸

As the position stabilised (to a degree) after the first onslaughts and the division fell back, attempts were made from divisional headquarters down to individual sections to restore order and pattern to (Highland) Division actions. However, confusion was everywhere and overwhelming, and it was not just the 51st:

Tonight the 19th division came up and counter attacked Doignes with the aid of some tanks but tho' the tanks got here the 19th did not, leaving the 154 bde almost hopelessly surrounded. There is only one way open now to retire to the Hermies defences. Went with the B.M. to the new line at 7 p.m. to see what the position was and what a mix-up. Men from the 6, 19, 17, 21, and 51 divisions are all running over each other not knowing where their front lines are and so groups from all and either of these divs are assembled together with any stragglers under different officers to hold posts here and there and try to keep some semblance of a connected line. The noise was almost maddening and we were challenged at various places. From Demicourt we proceeded back the way to Doignes but half way over the hill a sentry stopped us and told us it was still held by the Germans. So thus the 19th div didn't do their stuff, and we were saved running into God knows what.³⁴⁹

Intelligence had suggested that an attack was imminent. On the eve of the battle, the war diary of the 256th Artillery Brigade recorded, 'Unusual movement on the Divisional front on our left was reported during the afternoon by our observers. Indications point to an attack tomorrow morning. Special harassing fire scheme arranged and carried out in addition to the harassing fire and concentrated shoots. Batteries warned to keep a sharp lookout',³⁵⁰ but infantry patrols 'encountered no enemy and noticed nothing unusual',³⁵¹ and there was no specific warning order from Third Army on 21 March. However, it is barely conceivable that it would have made any difference to the outcome.

³⁴⁸ Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch in the Great War, 1914-1918, Volume II*, p. 181.

³⁴⁹ IWM, 85/51/1, The Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, pp. 182-183.

³⁵⁰ NA, WO 95 2854, 256th Brigade R.F.A., 1/2 Highland F.A. Brigade.

³⁵¹ NA, WO 95 2846, 'Account of Operations Commencing March 21st 1918', 8 April 1918.

Strength and casualties

There had been substantial changes to the recruitment and reinforcement of the division immediately prior to March which did have a negative impact on its capacity to defend. Due to the lack of manpower in the British Expeditionary Force, infantry brigades had been reduced from four to three battalions. In the biggest reorganisation since Bedford, 1/5th Gordons, 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and 1/9th Royal Scots left the division on 2, 4, and 6 February respectively.³⁵² The result of this was that the (Highland) Division had the same amount of line to hold, but with three battalions less (hence the reason why all three brigades were in the line). The theory was that greater divisional firepower would compensate for the loss of infantrymen.

The division had become increasingly understrength over the previous months, but was still relatively strong by comparison with other BEF divisions. It is also clear that although the ADMS Report stated that, 'The Physique of the Division is good.... The General Health of the troops is good',³⁵³ the lack of quality in reinforcements was beginning to become more evident in the division. The cabinet committee on manpower had allocated only 100,000 category A men to the Army, with 100,000 men of lower medical grades.³⁵⁴ Wimberley stressed how dangerous to operational ability this actually was:

With first rate N.C.O.'s and men, it is no doubt better to separate [machine guns] from the infantry in defence, but by 1918, with our category of "B" men, and conscripts, they needed the infantry with them, and the infantry needed us too -one Corps encouraging the other. A failure to observe this human frailty, led to many instances where gun teams left their guns, when the Germans got within a 100 or 200 yards of them, when often the attack might have been repulsed at the last minute with stouter-hearted troops.³⁵⁵

There were also proportionally fewer recruits from local areas and proportionally more from wider Scotland and to a lesser degree wider Britain. The reinforcement of the officer class with good quality officer replacements was also problematic, as 'The drain on officers had been severe during the last twelve months, and the deficiencies, in this respect were hard adequately to replace'.³⁵⁶

³⁵² NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division G War Diary.

³⁵³ NA, WO 95 2851, 51st Division ADMS, Monthly Sanitary Report, February 1918.

³⁵⁴ Terraine, *Impacts of War 1914 and 1918*, p. 138.

³⁵⁵ NLS, ACC 6119/1, 'A Scottish Soldier', Volume I, p. 106.

³⁵⁶ Bewsher, *The History of the 51st Highland Division*, p. 263.

Casualties had been heavy during the engagement. Wrench outlined the devastation to the units:

Now I hear that the roll call of the units hardly average 100 men each so it has been an awful massacre.... The 152 and 153 brigade batts have about 60 men left while in the Black Watch I am told 10 men answered the roll call. Ten men. My God, so the battalion is almost wiped out, but there must be many stragglers lost in the confusion who will turn up yet. Anyhow, I do hope so. The Germans have not yet broken our line tho, and it might seem like the Highland Division is hanging on, as it were, to the very last shreds of its reputation.³⁵⁷

The fate of the British units in the forward and battle zones was particularly harsh. Of the 153rd Brigade, the official history stated that ‘the troops occupying the Forward Zone had been mostly killed, buried by the bombardment, or taken prisoner; the few survivors were not capable of much resistance, and none returned to tell the tale’.³⁵⁸

Over the five day period, the total casualties were 219 officers and 4,646 other ranks. Assuming that most of these casualties were from infantry battalions, the proportionate losses were enormous. Brigadier-General Oldfield wrote of the artillery, ‘We struck the first blast of the avalanche. The Boche came in through the Division on our left, and came in behind us. Our casualties were heavy, about half the officers in the fighting part of the RA.’³⁵⁹

Fig. 26 Casualties for this battle³⁶⁰

Officers	Killed 24	Wounded 92	Missing 103
Other Ranks	Killed 308	Wounded 1624	Missing 2714

Esprit de corps

Prior to the battle, the *esprit de corps* was still strong. The division had performed well throughout 1917 and, despite the twin blows of brigade reorganisation and the loss of Harper, the 51st Division maintained a consistency in senior officers and was still considered by itself and by others to be a formidable fighting force. Morale appeared to be high. The sector that

³⁵⁷ IWM, 85/51/1, Diary of A.E. Wrench, Volume II, p. 184.

³⁵⁸ J. Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1918, Volume I*, (London, 1935), p. 221.

³⁵⁹ IWM, PP/MCR/134, Papers of Miss Whittaker, p. 138.

the division was deployed to defend appeared to be robust, there had been less aggression over the previous three months, which had given the troops the opportunity to rest and recuperate away from constant engagement, the weather was improving, and leave was in operation.

Numerous accounts verify that sound morale continued during the opening days of the attack. The report of operations from 153rd Brigade stated that, 'All ranks had had rations and water, but practically no sleep owing to the cold, but though tired they were cheerful and had plenty of fight in them'.³⁶¹

Until the retreat on 25 March, the biggest cumulative problem was fatigue and exhaustion and 153rd Brigade reported, 'At 4.55 a.m. I was able to report the Brigade in position. The men were in good fettle considering what they had gone through but were extremely tired. The night however was so cold that no one could sleep for more than half an hour.'³⁶²

However, the post-battle impact on *esprit de corps* was significant and negative. The old cadre was shattered, and was perceived by the remaining and reinforcing troops as having been shattered. The battle on the Lys hammered this home and with the loss of so many key figures and many of the rank and file, the continuity in *esprit de corps* that had been consistent throughout the war was severely diminished.

In conclusion, these four battles demonstrate a significant developmental process for the 51st Division, much of which was in tune with generic advances across the BEF, such as the combined use of arms, progressive training, and tactical deployment to combat changes in enemy defences. However, to a degree, each formation still retained its own ability to evolve and some formations became more individual in style than others. This was subject to a number of internal and external variables, such as the quality and style of leadership, the number of casualties, and the range of battle experiences. The (Highland) Division was one of the more individual divisions.

³⁶⁰ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division G War Diary.

³⁶¹ NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

³⁶² NA, WO 95 2846, 153rd Infantry Brigade. 'Account of Operations Commencing 21 March 1918', 8 April 1918.

Throughout the war, the ability of the division to perform was strongly affected by external factors outwith its control. These factors could include strategic deployment and timing of attack, but also more logistical elements such as reinforcement and supply.

Upon its arrival in France, the division, with a high level of *esprit de corps*, but only partly trained in (by then) already outdated concepts, was entirely unprepared for battle. At Givenchy, led by the inexperienced, its objectives were not met. Command and control mechanisms were faulty, preparations were inadequate and incomplete, and the incorrect tactics were applied during the engagement.

However, the division learned from Givenchy and its subsequent deployment and activity, and by 1916 centralised advice became more prevalent. By Beaumont Hamel, the (Highland) Division was ready for a battle for which it had had adequate time and training to prepare. Its objectives were largely achieved and the division fought extremely well, applying the appropriate tactics under predominantly favourable battle conditions. Command and control were effective and it was highly significant that the *esprit de corps* of the 51st was inexorably strengthened by the capture of Beaumont Hamel.

As centralisation continued and aggression increased, the (by then highly regarded) 51st Division fought and trained consistently throughout 1917. The division continued to be reinforced adequately and was well supplied. At Cambrai, the efficiency that had become a hallmark continued with satisfactory divisional preparation and training prior to the engagement. The objectives were largely achieved with one significant failure, and the command and control functioned effectively. However, although predominantly sound, elements of tactical planning and administration within the division were flawed, but under the conditions of the battle that was perhaps understandable.

By March 1918, although the division prepared its defences with customary efficiency and thoroughness, a number of key factors diminished its ability to defend its position. The loss of Harper, the reorganisation of the infantry brigades and the sheer weight of the enemy assault had significant negative impacts. The division fought well up to a point and a testimony to this was the extent to which it suffered critical damage. However, ultimately the command and control failed and tactically the 51st was outfought and outthought.

Conclusion

It is clear that for a formation to perform effectively and efficiently in war, two essential elements must positively interact. The first element is the capacity to achieve an optimal internal balance and the second is that the military system must sustain and support that balance. The prime function of any formation in war is to fight. In order for it to fight well, a division must have soundly-trained men that can be relied on to carry out their martial tasks; it must be led by competent officers; and it must be proficient in the appliance of tactics and technology. If the military system fails to support a formation, to the extent that there are problems in the supply of ordnance or ammunition; or the provision of training facilities and resources is inadequate; or a formation is overused (or underused) in battle, then the delicate balance within a division can destabilise. The reverse of this scenario is also true, in that the correct form of military support can assist in maintaining an optimal balance.

To a considerable extent, the analysis of the 51st (Highland) Division has concentrated on its internal balance over the course of the war, whilst simultaneously determining the degree to which that balance was supported by the military system. Each formation serving in the BEF during the First World War would have had its own distinctive mix of internal balance and external systemic support. However, the variables in both balance and support were ubiquitous and would have included: training; recruitment and reinforcement; and *esprit de corps*; whilst the ultimate test of the mix was in the division's performance in battle. It has been demonstrated that the 51st Division was for a considerable period a poorly-trained formation, with inadequate internal training procedures and insufficient external support. However, increasingly capable, experienced, and progressive officers, in partnership with a willing and able body of men, in time created and maintained a divisional system that promoted and fostered a progressive training ethos. The inculcation of combined arms and small unit tactics and training, whilst developing a capacity for initiative amongst junior officers and men, pays testimony to that.

Centralised advice and support structures (such as higher echelon schools of instruction) were vital to the development of the division. The (Highland) Division greatly benefited from this dissemination of up-to-date tactics and methods, which were products of an increasing bureaucratisation within the BEF and an improved ability to rationalise and interpret lessons learnt through combat experience. Crucially (either by accident or design on behalf of the higher command), the progressive training capacity of the 51st was marked, for the most part, by a productive balance between active service (time spent holding the line, carrying out fatigues, etc) and active training (individual, unit, and formation training), and a sustainable casualty rate.

For the 51st Division, the period of training under the command of Major-General Harper was its most productive and progressive. Before and after Harper, the division failed to establish the correct internal balance and/or the military system did not provide effective support.

The importance of maintaining a divisional structure constituted by units from the Highland regions, or regions associated with the Highlands, throughout the war is clear. It is also clear that officers and men would ideally be recruited from the established pre-war Territorial and regimental recruiting areas. The inability of those areas consistently to provide sufficient reinforcements as the war continued led to a proportional dilution of other ranks from local regimental recruiting areas. However, the subsequent focus on the provision of reinforcements from wider Scotland (and not wider Britain) was significant. To maintain a body of predominantly Scottish troops for the rest of the war (which was not without its difficulties in the post-conscription era), the military drafting system had to provide a 'priority service' to the 51st Division. That the system benefited the (Highland) Division and other Scottish formations and units is evident from the research, but it is interesting to contrast these findings with other formations (such as many English divisions) that were not so well supplied.

The significance of the balance of recruitment and reinforcement to the 51st Division becomes very apparent through an analysis of the divisional *esprit de corps*. This *esprit*

was, in part, a result of a consistently strong internal identity, which was a construct of formation and sub-formation loyalties, regimental traditions, and a stake in Scottish culture and society. It was also the product of a partnership forged between officers and men that was sustained by strong belief reinforced by daily ritual.

The *esprit* had always been manifest. The division had considered itself different and distinct from the outset, but the success at Beaumont Hamel actively solidified and magnified it, creating a strain of martial self-belief that was to be constant from that day on. Interactions with other formations and national groups were never quite the same and that was reflected by a widespread recognition amongst allied forces, veneration in Britain, and respect from its enemies.

Ultimately, the evolution and development of the 51st (Highland) Division followed a rather fortuitous course. The long period before it was consistently used in battle permitted it time to train, bond, and prepare. Its introduction, too soon, to battle at Givenchy was marked by a failure of internal balance and external support, whilst its greatest triumph at Beaumont Hamel was the result of good preparation and 'everything going well on the day'. The *coup de grace* at Beaumont Hamel catapulted the division to fame and seemed to ensure that it was accorded priority for the rest of the war. It is probably true to state that the division fought more efficiently during 1917 than it had at Beaumont Hamel, with a good balance and improved systemic support. However, the nature of the balance changed as the division suffered heavier casualties and was overemployed in battle, but this was offset by advances in training, prompt reinforcements, and an adequate supply of equipment and ammunition. By the battle of Cambrai, although the division fought well enough, there were signs that the balance was beginning to fail. In March 1918, both the balance and the system were failing. To meet the German onslaught, the (Highland) Division held an underprepared sector, had experienced a change in leadership, had undergone divisional reorganisation, and lacked reserves. However, the greatest single factor that led to the disintegration of the division was the strength of the enemy.

If the internal balance and external support provided a positive mix of variables, progress was possible. However, the 51st had suffered reverses since it had mobilised in 1914, and the setback of 1918 merely underlined that linear progress was not a constant for formations throughout the First World War.

Annexe 1 The Constitution of the 51st (Highland) Division

At mobilisation on 5 August 1914, the 1st (Highland) Territorial Division was composed of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd (Highland) infantry brigades. The 1st (Highland) Brigade (Seaforth and Cameron) was composed of 1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders, and 1/4th Cameron Highlanders, whilst the 2nd (Highland) Brigade (Gordon) was composed of 1/4th, 1/5th, 1/6th, and 1/7th Gordon Highlanders. The 3rd (Highland) Brigade was composed of 1/6th, 1/7th, 1/8th, and 1/9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.¹

Whilst the (Highland) Division was stationed in Bedford, six infantry battalions left to join the British Expeditionary Force in France. The 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders and 1/6th Gordon Highlanders left in November 1914, and the 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders left in December 1914. The 1/4th Gordon Highlanders, 1/4th Cameron Highlanders, and 1/9th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders left the division in February 1915.²

To replace the infantry battalions of the (Highland) Division that had been sent to France, 1/6th and 1/7th Black Watch joined 2nd (Highland) Brigade on 17 April 1915. Four Lancashire battalions also joined on 17 April 1915 and formed the 3rd (Highland) Brigade. Those battalions were 1/4th Loyal North Lancaster Regiment, 1/4th King's Own Lancaster Regiment, 1/8th King's Liverpool Regiment, and 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers. The 1/6th and 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were transferred to the 1st (Highland) Brigade to bring that formation to full brigade strength.³

Between 30 April and 5 May 1915, the division moved to France and on 12 May was redesignated 51st (Highland) Division and the three infantry brigades were renumbered 152nd, 153rd, and 154th Brigade.⁴ From 19 May to 9 July 1915, the 2/5th Lancashire Fusiliers were sent to St Omer for further training. 1/6th Scottish Rifles were attached to

¹ National Library of Scotland, ACC 7380 File 4, The Papers of Major General D.N. Wimberley.

² NLS, ACC 7380 File 4, The Papers of Major General D.N. Wimberley.

³ NLS, ACC 7380 File 4, The Papers of Major General D.N. Wimberley.

⁴ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary.

154th Infantry Brigade on 2 June 1915.⁵ On 19 August 1915, 1/8th Royal Scots joined the division as the pioneer battalion.

On 6 January 1916, the four Lancashire battalions that formed 154th Brigade left the (Highland) Division, and in February 1916 were followed by 1/6th Scottish Rifles.⁶ Also in January 1916, 1/4th and 1/5th Black Watch, 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders, and 1/4th Cameron Highlanders joined the division to form 154th Brigade. With the exception of 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders, those battalions left 51st Division on 15 February 1916.⁷ The 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders were joined by 1/9th Royal Scots, 1/4th Gordon Highlanders, and 1/7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, on 1 March 1916, 23 February 1916, and 1 March respectively, to bring 154th Brigade to full strength.⁸ On 12 June 1916, 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders left 152nd Brigade to be replaced by 1/6th Gordon Highlanders who had joined on 1 June 1916.⁹

When the infantry brigades of the British Army were reorganised in 1918, 1/5th Gordon Highlanders, 1/8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and 1/9th Royal Scots left the division on 2, 4, and 6 February respectively.¹⁰

On 6 October 1918, 1/7th Gordon Highlanders and 1/6th Gordon were amalgamated to form 6/7th Gordon Highlanders in the 152nd Brigade. The 1/6th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders replaced 1/7th Gordon Highlanders in the 153rd Brigade on 6 October 1918.¹¹

Supporting Units

At mobilisation, the (Highland) Division's attached units were as follows:

The Divisional Royal Artillery was made up of three field artillery brigades (I, II, and III Highland RFA), a mountain artillery brigade (IV Highland RGA), and a heavy battery (Highland (Fifeshire) RGA). Each artillery brigade had an ammunition column. There

⁵ Becke, A.F. *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A* (London 1936), p. 105.

⁶ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 105.

⁷ NLS, ACC 7380 File 4, The Papers of Major General D.N. Wimberley.

⁸ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 105.

⁹ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 105.

¹⁰ NA, WO 95 2846, 51st Division G War Diary.

¹¹ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 105.

were two Royal Engineer field companies (1st and 2nd Highland RE), a divisional signals company (1st Highland), three field ambulances of the Royal Army Medical Corps (1st, 2nd and 3rd Highland), and four companies of the Divisional Transport and Supply Column (1st Highland).¹²

On 19 August 1914, the General Staff war diary of the 51st Division stated, 'instructions were received to reorganise the Supply and Transport Services of the Division on the same basis as those of the Expeditionary Force, the T and S Column, plus a proportion of the 2nd Line Transport of units, to be formed into a Divisional Train and the enlistment of the personnel for a Divisional Supply Column of Mechanical Transport being at once proceeded with'.¹³

Whilst in Bedford, the IV Highland Mountain Artillery Brigade, the 2nd Highland Field Company RE, and 1st Highland Field Ambulance¹⁴ left the division to join other formations in the field. To replace the RE Company and the RAMC field ambulance, second line units were sent to join the division from Scotland (2nd/2nd Highland and 2nd/1st Highland respectively). A divisional cyclist company, a divisional ammunition column (as well as the artillery brigade ammunition columns), and a mobile veterinary section were formed. A squadron of the Northern Irish Horse also joined the division.

After arrival in France, when the (Highland) Division was redesignated, divisional troops, such as the ammunition column and cyclist company, were also renumbered 51st.

By 10 May, the Northern Irish Horse and the divisional cyclist company had left the (Highland) Division. An additional field artillery brigade (1st Lowland RFA) and field ambulance (2nd Highland) joined 51st Division on 10 November 1915 and 31 January 1916 respectively.¹⁵

¹² Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 106.

¹³ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary.

¹⁴ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary.

¹⁵ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 106.

Between the 15 and 16 January 1916, each infantry brigade received a machine gun company that was numbered after the parent brigade¹⁶ and on 13 July 1917 a further machine gun company joined as divisional troops (232nd Machine Gun Company). On 19 February 1918, the infantry brigade machine gun companies and the 232nd Machine Gun Company formed a composite unit within the division that was designated No. 51 Battalion Machine Gun Corps.

Infantry brigades each received a trench mortar battery numbered 152/1, 153/1, and 154/1 by 16 March 1916.¹⁷ A second battery was attached to each brigade numbering 152/2, 153/2, and 154/2 by May 1916. Within the infantry brigades, the batteries were amalgamated to form 152nd, 153rd, and 154th Trench Mortar batteries by July 1916. Three medium trench mortar batteries joined as divisional troops between March and April 1916, and were designated X, Y, and Z Medium Trench Mortar batteries (51st Division). A divisional heavy trench mortar battery joined the 51st on 18 October 1916 and was designated V Heavy Trench Mortar Battery (51st Division). In February 1918, the medium batteries were reorganised and the division had X and Y Medium Trench Mortar batteries thereafter. The heavy trench mortar unit left the division during February 1918.¹⁸

The field companies of the Royal Engineers were renumbered 400th (formerly 1st Highland), 401st (formerly 2nd Highland), and 404th (formerly 2nd/2nd Highland), and a divisional employment company joined the 51st on 16 June 1917 and was numbered 245th Divisional Employment Company on 4 April 1917.

The four field artillery brigades were renumbered during May 1916 and I, II, and III Highland brigades becoming 255th, 256th, and 258th. I Lowland Brigade RFA was renumbered 260th by 15 May 1916.¹⁹ Brigade ammunition columns were also reorganised

¹⁶ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

¹⁷ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

¹⁸ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 106.

¹⁹ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division CRA War Diary.

and merged into the divisional ammunition column during this month.²⁰ In August 1916²¹ and January 1917, 258th and 260th were broken up.²²

During the period of emergency on the Western Front in late 1914 and early 1915, the East Lancashire (42nd), the Wessex (43rd), and the Home Counties (44th) first-line Territorial divisions were sent to replace Regular divisions returning from imperial garrison duty. These divisions were essentially composed of the pre-war battalions and supporting units. The North Midland (46th), the 2nd London (47th), the South Midland (48th), the West Riding (49th), and the Northumbrian (50th) divisions were sent to the Western Front before the (Highland) Division and were also mainly composed of their pre-war territorial units.²³

The (Highland) Division was the first Territorial division to be sent to France that had been seriously affected by the loss of a number of its pre-war infantry battalions and support troops. However, other first-line Territorial divisions (serving in all theatres) experienced similar upheaval. The Lowland Division (52nd) lost three infantry battalions and support troops, the Welsh Division (53rd) lost six infantry battalions and support troops, the East Anglian Division (54th) lost three infantry battalions, the West Lancashire Division (55th) lost all twelve infantry battalions (three to the (Highland) Division) and its support troops were attached to other divisions, and the 1st (London) Division (56th) also lost all twelve of its infantry battalions and its support troops were attached to other divisions.²⁴

Most of these attachments were of a temporary nature and many infantry battalions and supporting troops returned to the parent formation at a later date. All the infantry battalions and the RE company that left the (Highland) Division in Bedford were returned at various stages of the war. However, with the other first-line territorial divisions this

²⁰ NA, WO 95 2854, 51st Division DAC War Diary.

²¹ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division CRA War Diary.

²² Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, p. 106.

²³ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, pp. 36-100.

²⁴ Becke, *Order of Battle of Divisions. Part 2A*, pp. 109-147.

was not always the case. Of the infantry battalions of the 52nd (Lowland) and 53rd (Welsh) divisions, none were returned to the parent formations.

With two major exceptions, the infantry composition in the (Highland) Division remained 'largely' unchanged throughout the war. The first of these exceptions was a divisional reorganisation in January 1915 when the battalion structure in the Territorial Force was altered from eight companies to four companies in line with the Regular Army. Each of these companies had four platoons, which in turn were composed of four sections.²⁵ The second exception occurred in early 1918, when, due to a shortage of troops, each infantry brigade was reduced from four to three battalions.

However, there were a number of changes to the composition of the supporting services during the course of the war. As with the alterations in the infantry units, these structural changes were generic and over a set period affected all the infantry divisions of the British Army in France and Belgium.

²⁵ NA, WO 95 2844, 51st Division G War Diary.

Annexe 2 Divisional Artillery Development

By the end of 1914, there were already no fewer than five different field artillery establishments with the Regular divisions in France, and still another field artillery establishment was added in 1915 with the arrival of the Territorial Force divisions.

On arrival in France, the artillery of the 51st was one field brigade below the official war establishment of Territorial Force divisions, with two field brigades of 15 pounder guns at twelve guns to a brigade; one howitzer field brigade which had eight 5 inch guns; one heavy battery of four 4.7 inch guns, and brigade and divisional ammunition columns.¹

The low establishment of the Territorial divisional artilleries often entailed the provision of additional artillery from the Regular divisions, so as to assist a Territorial division in carrying out its appointed tasks. In 1916, partly by reducing the artillery of regular divisions in France to 64 guns and howitzers, similarity of field artillery establishment was at last secured for all divisions. By then, the heavy battery had been withdrawn to corps, and the 15 pounder and 5 inch howitzers had been replaced by 18 pounders and 4.5 inch howitzers, a process noted in the DADOS war diary on 27 August 1915: 'Received notification that 24 Guns, Carriages, and Limbers Q7 18 pr and 72 Wagons Ammunition and Limbers Q7 18pr will arrive at supply railhead during night of 27th-28th inst. These are for rearming the Division.'²

By January 1916 the howitzer brigade had eight 4.5 inch howitzers. By May 1916, the (Highland) Division artillery was brought up to full strength with four field brigades (with the arrival of the 1st Lowland in November 1915) totalling forty-eight 18 pounders, and twelve 4.5 inch howitzers.

From June 1915, the changes in artillery establishment are evident from the following reports from the divisional A and Q branch:

¹ Becke, A. *Order of Battle of Divisions Part 2A* (London 1936) pp. 150-151.

² National Archive, WO 95 2853, 51st Division DADOS War Diary.

June	1915: 23x 15 pounders and 7x 5 inch howitzers
July	1915: 20x 15 pounders and 7x 5 inch howitzers
August	1915: 24x 15 pounders, 7x 5 inch howitzers, 16x 18 pounders, 4x 4.5 inch howitzers
October	1915: 24x 18 pounders, 8x 5 inch howitzers, 4x 4.5 inch howitzers, 4x 4.5 inch howitzers
January	1916: 36x 18 pounders, 8x 4.5 inch howitzers
February	1916: 36x 18 pounders, 12x 4.5 inch howitzers
March	1916: 36x 18 pounders, 12x 4.5 inch howitzers
May	1916: 48x 18 pounders, 12x 4.5 inch howitzers. ³

In a memo to the headquarters of the divisional artillery dated 15 May 1916, Lt. Colonel A.J.G. Moir (AA and QMG) stated, 'The reorganisation of the Divisional Artillery has been carried out. It consists now of four artillery brigade and a Divisional Ammunition Column. The Howitzer Brigade and the Brigade Ammunition Columns have been abolished. Three of the Artillery Brigades consist each of three 18 pounder Batteries and one 4.5" Howitzer Battery. The fourth artillery Brigade consists of three 18 pounder batteries.'⁴

However, the divisional artillery was again reorganised in 1917. On 14 January 1917, a memo from the headquarters of divisional artillery stated, '1. The Field Artillery will in future be divided into two categories:- a) The Divisional Artillery which will form an integral part of the Division. b) The Army Field Artillery Brigades which will be available for allotment to Armies, by Armies to Corps and by Corps to Divisions as the situation demands.' The memo continues: 'The Divisional Artillery will consist of 36 18-pounder guns and 12 4.5" Howitzers and will be organised as follows:- Two Brigades of 3 6 gun 18-pdr. Batteries [and] 1 6 gun 4.5" How. Battery each'.⁵

³ NA, WO 95 2848, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

⁴ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division A and Q War Diary.

⁵ NA, WO 95 2850, 51st Division CRA War Diary.

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