

Haig was not a social person: he was abstemious, disliked having to explain himself and could best be described as dour. Nice men, however, do not necessarily win wars and the fact was that the obvious and best-qualified candidate for overall command - by training, experience and performance in the BEF to date - was Haig. Alone amongst the original warring powers, the moral of the British army never cracked, and it was the British army that in 1918 was the only Allied army capable of mounting a massive and sustained offensive. During the 'Hundred Days' of 1918 Haig's army decisively defeated the German army on the Western Front. When criticism of him began at home in the 1930s, General Pershing, Commander-in-Chief of the American army on the Western Front and not a man naturally inclined towards the British, said, "How can they do this to the man who won the war?"

There can be no doubt that Haig was a superb military manager. It is not Haig's management that is faulted by his critics, but his supposed stubbornness in persisting with attacks when they were, it is said, obviously going to fail. This is to look at the Western Front from an Anglo-centric point of view and to neglect what was happening elsewhere. The Somme had to be persisted with because of what was happening 100 miles away at Verdun, and the prolongations of Third Ypres bought time for the French army, almost destroyed by mutiny, to be reconstituted. Haig wanted a breakthrough; he never wanted to engage the British army in battles of attrition. Until 1918 that breakthrough was never achieved, but nor could anybody else on either side achieve it. Haig was neither hidebound nor resistant to technology; indeed it was Haig who, on taking over command of the BEF, first heard of the experiments with tanks and insisted that development should be given a high priority. Haig encouraged the development of air power, and it was the BEF who by 1918 had the only strategic bomber force capable of any meaningful contribution to the war.

Years after the war, when disillusionment set in and people saw that England had not been transformed into a 'land fit for heroes', the hunt for someone to blame began. It was exacerbated [made worse] by authors with an axe to grind and poets who wrote for money. 'British generals did the best they could with what they had, and were by and large successful in a war that no one had expected or trained for' makes for a dull headline. 'Butchers and bunglers' sells books and newspapers, particularly when the objects of attack are dead or retired.

Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock*, (London, 2003)