THE BRITISH ARMY OF WORLD WAR I
(1) THE WESTERN FRONT 1914–16

INTRODUCTION

WHEN THE NATIONS OF EUROPE went to war in 1914, most
mobilised huge armies of conscripts numbered in their
millions, produced by long established systems that took the
whole able-bodied youth of the nation for brief compulsory military
service followed by years in the reserves. Germany put into the field
5 million men from her potential resources of nearly 10 million; the
initial war strength of France was 4 million.’ Compared to these ‘nations
in arms’ the volunteer professional army of Great Britain was numerically
paltry, deserving of the German insult ‘contemptibly little’. The
British had long entrusted the safety of their home islands to the Royal
Navy, the largest and most powerful in the world and the guarantor of
freedom of the seas for the commerce that made Britain wealthy. Yet this
powerful country sustained an illogical mistrust of standing armies,
traceable to Oliver Cromwell’s brief period of military dictatorship in
the 1650s. Since the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 Britain had
maintained the minimum military force necessary to keep the peace at
home and, subsequently, in her overseas Empire.

In August 1914 Britain sent 160,000 men of her Regular Army to
France in accordance with her treaty obligations. The expectations of the
leaders of the European powers, and the military experts who advised
them, were that the war would be a brief affair, a single campaign in
which victory would go to the alliance, whose armies outmanoeuvred
their enemies to force an unfavourable armistice upon them. Britain’s
token force would, it was thought, guarantee her a seat at these armistice
negotiations. In the event, it was to take over four years of pouring out the
blood and treasure of the British Empire before this end was reached, by
which time the ‘token’ force had grown into the greatest army Britain had
ever put into the field. By 1918 it too was numbered in millions, and had
become a tough professional force of all arms at the peak of its form,
playing a major part in the defeat of its country’s enemies in all theatres
of what had by then become a world war.

By far the most important of these theatres was the Western Front in
Europe, where a large German Army confronted a French Army
supported by a British Expeditionary Force, the remnants of the Belgian
Army, and forces of other nations which joined the fray later, such as
Portugal and the United States. By late 1914 the Western Front had
stratified into opposing lines of fortifications which extended from the
Belgian coast south of Ostend, through western Belgium and northern
France, along the borders of France and Germany, before terminating
at the frontiers of neutral Switzerland. Here, for over four years, the

OPPOSITE Despite his reputation as one of the better
commanders of British cavalry during the Boer War,
his selection of Sir John French as General Officer
Commanding the BEF in 1914 proved to be a mistake.
His advanced age, poor eyesight, fiery temper and
unimpressive intellect should have weighed against his
choice, but he remained in command of the BEF for almost
18 months before his political masters summoned up the
courage to replace him. Over the course of 1915 the BEF
fought a series of battles at Neuve-Chapelle, 'Second' Ypres,
Aubers Ridge, Festubert and Loos, none of which achieved
any important gains for the 'butcher's bill' of 267,000 men
killed, wounded and missing. In return for his voluntary resi-
ignation Sir John was given a viceroyalty and the command
of the United Kingdom Home Forces. (Imperial War Museum)

See MAV 394, The German Army of World War I (1) 1914–15 and MAV 286, The French Army 1914–18
opposing armies fought a campaign of attrition: the cynical trade-off of lives, material and wealth, until Germany accepted defeat and sought terms, withdrawing its battered army from the parts of Belgium and France that it had conquered, and marching them back across the Rhine. It was on this front that the British Expeditionary Force grew from the 160,000 regulars of August 1914 to the five armies of British and Commonwealth troops engaged in driving the beaten German Army before them when the bugles sounded ‘cease fire’ on 11 November 1918.

It is the story of this British Expeditionary Force, the BEF, that is set out in this title, from the outbreak of war in 1914 to the end of its first major campaign, the first great Battle of the Somme in late 1916. Later titles will deal with the BEF on the Western Front in 1917-18, and the British Army in other theatres of war 1914-19.

THE BRITISH ARMY IN THE EARLY 20th CENTURY

While nations such as Germany and France had, over the past century, become accustomed to peacetime conscription as a means of maintaining the trained manpower required by their armies in time of war, the people of Great Britain and her Empire had not, and refused to contemplate compulsory military service. They could see the need for a navy to keep enemies at bay and to protect Britain’s merchant fleets and overseas interests, and they held ‘jolly Jack Tar’ in high affection and esteem. ‘Tommy Atkins’, however, was held in quite a different regard by the public whose taxes paid, housed, fed and clothed him. I would sooner see my boy in his grave than in a red coat; the mother of one young soldier is reputed to have said, expressing the contempt the British public at large had for their Regular Army, then and for many years to come. British soldiers had for centuries acted as a police force at home and a gendarmerie in the countries of the Empire before the establishment of civil police, since when they had ‘aided the civil power on many occasions in putting down civil unrest. This did nothing to enhance their popularity. It is not surprising, therefore, that those who enlisted were not the cream of the nation, but the hungry, the homeless and the unemployable, those on the dole from the law, institutionalised lads from orphans and the sons of serving soldiers who drifted into ‘boys’ service’, young men rebelling against the authority of fathers or employers, others who had got girls ‘into trouble’. There was certainly a small but important levelling of decent, educated but poor young men whose only chance for the travel and adventure they craved was in the ranks of the army; but for most, military life was a last refuge.

The British Army of the early 20th century took this unpromising material and turned it into useful soldiery by means of the harshest discipline, administered by non-commissioned officers who broke no challenge to their authority. They saw their first task as breaking any rebellious spirit shown by recruits before accustomed to them to instant and unquestioning obedience of orders. Although flogging was a long forgotten barbarism, these NCOs were still backed up by a fearsome apparatus of military punishment ranging from confinement to barracks, through cells and pack-drill, to the rightly feared military prisons.

This training was supervised by regimental officers, men who came mostly from the British middle classes, attracted by a life that was for them comfortable, convivial and leisurely, with plenty of sport (which in those days meant activities on horseback or shooting wild animals) and games (today’s ‘sports’). Most officers were content to spend their service lives within the ‘family’ of their regiment. Few were militarily ambitious, and those who showed a serious interest in advancement beyond the regiment were considered by most of theirfellows to be less than gentlemen.

The pattern of service life at home and abroad was dictated by an annual training cycle, building to large-scale manoeuvres in the summer and autumn of each year. These were followed by furloughs, after which the cycle began again with individual training. Such a system suited an army composed of long-service officers and men, and there was ample time to learn next season that which had not been grasped this year. There was no training organisation to equal that of the German Army. A few ‘schools of instruction’ ran courses to qualify instructors, but most learning was acquired within units by what would today be called ‘on the job training’ – by watching the example of seniors, both good and bad. Great emphasis was placed on those aspects of military life which gave the outward appearance of efficiency: ‘turnout’ (the soldier’s appearance in uniform, both in and out of barracks), the cleanliness of barracks, cantonments or lines, and drill – which was mostly ceremonial and based on the battlefield manoeuvres of Wellington’s era, and had no application on a 20th century battlefield, as the marksmanship of the South African Boers had recently made painfully clear. By these means the British Regular Army gave all the outward appearances of efficiency as they ‘kept the peace’ at home – especially in Ireland – and abroad.

Sir Douglas Haig commanded I Corps of the BEF and took over from Sir John French in December 1915. His ability as a general continues to be the subject of controversy, but he was by far the best the British Army had. He commanded the BEF for the remainder of the Great War, and moulded it into the finest fighting machine of its time. Haig’s keen sense of duty and unswerving single-mindedness enabled him to lead the BEF to its part in the great victory of 1918. (SWM)
Response to Boer War experience

However, recent events had shown the need for the reform of the gendarmerie role into which the British Army had lapsed. Its humiliation at the hands of the Boers in 1899–1902 had led to changes in organisation, weapons, clothing and equipment and, not least, tactical doctrine. In the infantry greater emphasis was placed on musketry training and ‘houldcraft’ to produce units that could manoeuvre on a battlefield under their own fire support – ‘fire and movement’. The annual musketry course was shot at ranges from 100 to 600 yards and included snap-shooting and rapid-fire practices. The manipulation of the bolt-action rifle was practised with drill rounds until the average soldier could ‘rapid-fire’ 20 rounds per minute, with some skilful men able to operate bolt, trigger and chargers at a rate to take them to over 30 rounds per minute – though at this frantic pace their accuracy with ball ammunition was another matter. Individual and collective field firing practices showed, during which officers and NCOs were able to exercise their fire control skills. In all, 250 rounds of ammunition were allotted for each soldier to practise shooting in the course of the year, more than had ever before been expended on weapon training. As a further initiative, men were awarded badges for marksmanship and small increments in their pay for all-arms proficiency. Apart from their rifles and bayonets, however, the infantry had no other weapons save two Maxim machine guns per battalion.

The Royal Regiment of Artillery felt that it too had absorbed the lessons of the Boer War. Fire and movement was also their watchword in their defined role of supporting infantry action by fire when and where required. For this task most of their field artillery units were equipped with a quick-firing 18-pounder gun firing fixed shrapnel ammunition. With a bulletproof shield to shelter the gun crew from rifle fire, the 18-pdr was an ideal weapon with which to refight the Boer War. It was to prove less than effective for the trench warfare to come.

In common with all armies in 1914 most of the transport used by the British Army was horsed. Horses hauled its wagons, guns and limbers, and were the mounts for the cavalry units earmarked for France with the BEF. Since the Boer War the cavalry had been issued with effective rifles and trained in their use, but they were still also armed with the swords and lances considered necessary for ‘shock’ action on horseback. Throughout the war to come vast amounts of fodder were shipped to the Western Front to feed the animals of the BEF, taking up more tonnage than that for ammunition.

Regulars and Territorials

In the years from 1902 to 1914 the British government restructured its military forces in order to face the threat of a European war. Having
The 15 divisions then in France represented a maximum effort, and a much larger British Army needed to be raised and put into the field on the Western Front if Britain's allies were to be effectively assisted in the defeat of the German Army.

**KITCHENER'S ARMY**

Such an army was already in the process of being formed. On the outbreak of war Field-Marshal the Earl Kitchener of Khartoum was appointed Secretary of State for War, and he immediately declared that the war would be a protracted and costly affair, a challenge that Britain's military resources were too few to meet. He informed the cabinet that the country needed to raise an army of millions and prepare for a war lasting at least three years. Such was the reputation and authority of this great military autocrat that he was allowed to proceed with a plan to raise the largest army Britain had ever known, on the understanding that the nation would not tolerate conscription; his army had to be one composed solely of volunteers.

Kitchener's plan was to raise a series of what became known as 'New Armies', each numbering 100,000 men, to be formed and trained by the Regular Army in the existing regimental depots and military commands of the United Kingdom. He chose to have nothing to do with the burgeoning Territorial Force or the County Associations which administered it. He had a low opinion of the predecessors of the Territorials, based on his experiences in South Africa, and of the French Territorial troops he had observed as a young man. His prejudices were to condemn Britain in a time of crisis to a situation in which the Territorial Force and the New Armies competed for men, equipment and weapons.

On 7 August 1914 the press published Kitchener's call for volunteers for 'an addition of 100,000 men to His Majesty's Regular Army' - the 'first hundred thousand', or 'K1'. Enlistment was to be for three years or the duration of the war. The response was overwhelming: within days the attestation rate had climbed to 30,000 per day, and under such pressure the recruiting apparatus broke down. Local authorities rallied to the aid of the Regular Army and, little by little, the throng was attested, medically examined and sworn in before being sent to the depots and barracks deputised to hold and train the New Armies. Here too the vast numbers overwhelmed the resources of a Regular Army geared to the modest intakes of peace-time. Not only was accommodation at a premium (acres of tented camps were pitched), but what stocks there were of uniforms, weapons, and equipment were rapidly absorbed by the units of K1.

To train the infantry battalions, artillery brigades, Royal Engineer companies and the Field Ambulances of the six divisions of K1 there existed no training organisation worthy of the name. The British Regular recruit in peacetime received only elementary training at a 'depot' before being posted to a service unit where the real business of turning him into a trained soldier took place. Establishments such as the School of Musketry at Hythe, Kent, ran courses to train small numbers of Regular officers and NCOs in the arts of instruction. They were not in the business of turning hordes of civilians into soldiers, nor of training large numbers of instructors, and such tactical doctrine that had developed prior to 1914 was soon to be made redundant by the realities of trench warfare. Available to each New Army unit were a handful, at best, of Regular officers and NCOs. Each unit of the BEF had been ordered to leave behind in the UK three officers and a group of NCOs to assist with the formation of K1; 500 officers of the Indian Army only. It had been retained for the same purpose; and a number of wounded officers and men from the BEF's first battles were posted to New Army units after convalescence. The re-enlistment of 'time-expired' NCOs up to the age of 50 was authorised, and many elderly retired officers - 'dug-outs' - were recalled to help with training, but there were precious few experienced personnel to teach the New Armies the soldier's trade.

With insufficient rifles and ammunition, hardly any artillery equipment, few horses and shortages of equipment and clothing, there was little practical training the units of K1 could have undergone even if they had been fortunate enough to have sufficient instructors. They therefore spent most of their time at drill, physical training, route-marching and digging. Small arms were passed from group to group until factories produced sufficient for all. Artillery units practised on wooden mock-ups until their guns became available, as did machine gunners. It was to take ten months of discomfort, hard work, muddle and improvisation before the six divisions of K1 left the UK for active service overseas, three going to the Western Front and three to the Middle East. In that time they had somehow been transformed from mobs of patriotic volunteers into units with the appearance of trained soldiers, men considered fit to fight. Not all who saw them were impressed by Kitchener's Army, or by the methods the great man had employed to raise and train them: 'K's shadow army for shadow campaigns', sneered one British general officer. 'Under no circumstances can these mobs take the field... What we want... is for our little force out here to be kept to full strength.' He was to have cause to review his caustic judgement.

Even greater difficulties were suffered by the men of K2 to K5 during their training. They were amongst the more than two million men who volunteered during the first year of the war, and it was to take even longer to arm and equip...
them than it did KJ. Nevertheless, over the period covered in this title 26 New Army divisions were brought into being and sent to the Western Front.

**The Territorial Force**

 Mention has already been made of the provision for Territorials to volunteer for "Imperial Service". On the outbreak of war four Territorial Force (TF) divisions were immediately sent overseas to relieve Regular units stationed in Egypt and India. Additionally, units such as the 1/4th Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 1/5th Scottish Rifles, 1/5th Black Watch, Glasgow Highlanders, 1/4th Seahorse Highlanders, 1/6th Gordon Highlanders, 1/7th Argylls, 1/1st Honourable Artillery Company, London Rifle Brigade, Queen Victoria's Rifles, 1/12th and 1/13th Londons, London Scottish, Queen's Westminster Rifles and the Artist's Rifles were all serving with the BEF before the end of 1914. In March 1915 the 46th (North Midland) Division became the first complete TF division to arrive on the Western Front, followed by a further nine before the end of 1916. Moving to France they were divided into divisions from Canada, and those returned from the abortive Dardanelles campaign including Regulars, Territorials, and the famous ANZACs – the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.

By the time the BEF was ready to launch its first 'big push' on the Somme in the summer of 1916 it had grown to 55 divisions organised into 18 Army corps, which in turn were organised into four armies – a prodigious effort made even more astounding when we appreciate that it was achieved solely by voluntary enlistment. A National Registration Act of July 1915 began the movement towards the introduction of conscription in Great Britain, to be followed by the 'Derby Despatches', the Military Service Act of January 1916. This rendered liable for service all single men between 18 and 41, extended to married men in May; there were categories of exemption. But by mid-1916 conscription had been brought into the British Army less than 50,000 men.

The extent of the build-up of the BEF can perhaps be best illustrated by comparing its strength during its first battle in France with that for the great Somme offensive (see Table 1). This shows at a glance not only the vast expansion of the BEF over a period of less than two years, but also how great a part it was represented by Kitchener's Army.

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As the strength of the BEF had grown, so had the sectors of the Allied trench lines in Belgium and northern France which it took over. From the fairly small part played in the opening battles of the war, when the vast armies of Germany and France clashed around it, the BEF had by 1915 grown to sufficient strength (two, and then three armies) to begin offensive operations, such as the Battle of Loos in September 1915. But the first real attempt by the BEF to defeat the German Army on the Western Front occurred in the summer of 1916 when, in co-operation with the French Sixth Army, it launched a series of attacks astride the valley of the River Somme. From July until November the British Third, Fourth and Fifth Armies persisted in very costly operations that often

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**Table 1: EXPANSION OF BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, 1914-1916**

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<thead>
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<th>A: The Battle of Mons, 25/24 August 1914</th>
<th>B: The Battle of the Somme, July-November 1916</th>
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<tr>
<td>Commander-in-Chief: LtGen Sir Douglas Haig</td>
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<td>1st Corps (LtGen Sir Douglas Haig)</td>
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<td>2nd Division</td>
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<td>5th Division</td>
<td>5th Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>15th Infantry Brigade (LtCol Sir A. C. M. H. Chesham)</td>
<td>15th Infantry Brigade (LtGen Sir A. Hunter-Weston)</td>
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<td>Training in England. Men of a New Army infantry unit performing 'physical jerks' under the supervision of an instructor from the Army Gymnastic Staff, a corps of athletes dedicated to training units of the British Army to the peak of fitness before sending them off to fight. (Author's collection)</td>
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*Note: 'Bantams' were men below the normal minimum height for enlistment.*
Territorials of the Queen's Westminster Rifles, a unit of the London Regiment, practise the construction of trenches in an English wood. Digging and physical training took up a great deal of the volunteers' time as they waited for industry to supply the weapons and ammunition they needed. (Douglas Honychurch)

Waiting to go – a platoon of Territorials of the 1/15th Bn, London Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own Civil Service Rifles), photographed at Watford in early 1915. Their unit landed in France in March of that year and became part of the 47th (London) Division, a Territorial Force formation. They have received 1908 pattern webbing equipment, but note the 'long' Lee-Enfield rifles. (Douglas Honychurch)

The trench lines, once established, were not all well-ordered or properly constructed; this section is little more than a waterlogged breastwork supported by sandbags. Note the small grave-yard at far left. The two soldiers wear leather jerkins and waders. (IWM)

Ludendorff, 'The German Army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out'. The BEF had begun the campaign as mostly an enthusiastic collection of amateurs. From the divisional and brigade commanders who had commanded nothing larger than a battalion before the war, through their novice staffs learning their jobs by trial and error, down to the raw officers and men in the battalions and batteries: all had taken the shock of battle, sustained staggering casualties, and returned again and again to the fight, each time with a growing and hard-won expertise. In the words of a junior British officer who survived the battle, 'The British Army learned its lesson the hard way, and during the middle part of the Somme battle and for the rest of the war was the best army in the field'.

INfantry WEAPONS, 1914-16

The SMLE rifle
Compared to those of its enemy, the weapons of the BEF of 1914–16 were somewhat inferior – a fact frequently overlooked, and one that makes the achievements of the British Army on the Western Front the more worthy of respect.

19 July 1916: men of the 29th (Highland) Brigade make their way back from the fighting at Longueval and Delville Wood. The brigade was part of the 9th (Scottish) Division, the senior formation of 'K1', which lost 314 officers and 7,003 other ranks in the operations between 14 and 16 July. (IWM)
A cheerful group of officers and men of the 11th Bn, Northumberland Fusiliers, after an attack on the enemy positions near Le Sars, 6 October 1916. A New Army unit of the 23rd (New Army) Division, the 11th Northumberlands won their objective, a complex of German trenches called 'the Tangle', but had to withdraw from it later. (IWM)

The standard infantry weapon was the 0.303in 'Short Rifle. Magazine, Lee-Enfield' – the SMLE, in its Mark III form, a weapon which has passed into history with the reputation of a first-class rifle. Developed from the Lee-Metford rifle of 1889, it had by 1914 undergone a bewildering number of modifications and changes, particularly as a result of its poor showing in the Boer War. In 1910 trials and development were started on a Mauser-action rifle firing rimless 0.276in ammunition as a replacement for the Lee-Enfield, but the intervention of the Great War put an end to this move and the SMLE served on in one form or another until replaced in the 1950s.

The Lee bolt action stemmed from an American design which had been tried with a variety of ammunition before the Swiss 0.303in Rubin round had been selected. Compared to the ammunition used by other nations, that developed by the British from the Rubin was inferior, both in materials and design. It featured a rimmed cartridge case which was thought necessary for reliable extraction in Maxim machine gun actions, and these rims caused feed stoppages in rifles and light machine guns throughout the service life of 0.303in ammunition. (Such stoppages did not occur with rimless ammunition, which the German Army found worked perfectly well in their Maxim.)

The propellant of the original Rubin round had been black powder (gunpowder) but in searching for a 'smokeless' substitute the British opted for Cordite, a propellant which caused excessive barrel erosion and - when combined with primers containing corrosive chemicals - rust. Special ammunition with nitro-cellulose propellant had to be introduced to reduce machine gun barrel wear, but the only way to preserve rifle barrels was to drench them with boiling water before working on the rust with abrasives. By 1914 the 0.303in round was up to its tenth modification, in which the 'spitzer' bullet had been reduced to 174 grains, while the propellant had been increased from its original 31 to 37 grains. The resultant increased muzzle velocity - from 1,970 feet per second to 2,440fps - gave the bullet the flatter trajectory and thus greater accuracy that was sought.

These changes might have had little effect on the handling qualities of the original Lee-Enfield rifle, which weighed about 10lbs, but the decision to cut it down and lighten the barrel to suit the cavalry resulted in a weapon which was in reality a carbine, weighing a little over 8lbs and with a vicious recoil when shooting Mk VII ammunition. When the new 'short' rifle was decreed as the standard arm for all the forces of Great Britain and her Empire the British Army found itself armed with a weapon which had originally been designed by a committee, firing ammunition which had also been designed by a committee, both of which were then redesigned, altered, modified and revised over a quarter of a century from their introduction to the outbreak of war in 1914. But whatever its shortcomings the Lee-Enfield was British and (as in the case of the current British service rifle) criticisms fell on deaf ears, especially in the Treasury.

The pre-war Regulars learned to cope with its shortcomings and praised its lightness, hardness and slick bolt action. With the incentive of additional pay for good shooting they became proficient in its use through years of practice. But these standards were never reached by the infantry of the New Armies. Issued with a variety of obsolete or foreign arms for training, they had little time to practise with SMLE Mk III service rifles when these became available to them. Most fired nothing more than recruit practices on gallery ranges before heading off to France.

Other weapons
Neither were they versed in the minor tactics and fieldcraft that must be combined with marksmanship and good weapon handling to make an infantryman skilled in fire and movement. Instead they were taught the handling - and such tactics as had been devised - of the new infantry wonder-weapon: the 'bomb', which by late 1914 was seen as the ideal weapon for use in trenches, where fighting was invariably at close quarters and victory usually went to the side hurling the
most high explosive to best effect. The BEF had gone to France with one pattern of grenade, and not very many of those. The need for more was immediately apparent and the gap was filled by a variety of crude and hazardous devices most of which represented more danger to the men who threw them than to the enemy. By 1916 the ‘Mills bomb’ (more correctly the Grenade, Hand, No.5) had replaced most other types, and was safer and simpler to use. But it was still the prerogative of men specially designated as ‘bombers’ to handle grenades in the spearhead of attacks, accompanied by bayonet men to rush round trench traverses after the grenade detonated.

Casualties amongst infantry bombers were high. To those incurred in training were added the many more in combat and, as the volunteers who put themselves forward for this risky specialisation were usually the bravest and the best, this drain of potential leaders was soon felt. As time went by all infantrymen were trained in the use of the No.5 grenade, but not until the lives of some of the best men in the BEF had been squandered to least effect. (Grenades were also projected from rifles by means of powerful blank cartridges and several types of rods and cups. By these means they could be fired up to 200 yards or more with varying degrees of accuracy.)

Infantrymen continued to spend hours practising bayonet fighting, a skill that could be taught as a drill on the barrack square, and therefore an activity popular with bully-boy NCOs and with physical training instructors skilled in the sport of bayonet fencing – a gymnasium activity featuring masks, padding and spring-loaded dummy muskets. Some men became expert at the use of the bayonet, but most must have considered that, if close enough to cross bayonets with an enemy, it was best to shoot him before he shot you. Free use of the bayonet was often confined by the parapets and traverses of trenches, leading to daggers and mace-like clubs being improvised for the hand-to-hand clashes that occurred, especially at night, on patrols and trench raids.

Officers and many other ranks carried pistols. The official pattern was one of several ‘marks’ of Webley revolver in 0.455in calibre. Such was the demand for pistols that revolvers were bought from Colt and Smith & Wesson in America, and from firms in Spain, all firing 0.455in ammunition.

Machine guns, the belt-fed sustained fire weapons fired from heavy mounts, had been taken from infantry battalions early in the war to be ‘brigaded’ into machine gun companies, and then transferred with their crews to the Machine Gun Corps in order to support the infantry more effectively.

The standard weapon was the Vickers 0.303in Mk I machine gun, ordered to replace the Maxim machine gun in 1912, but both types were in use in the period covered by this title. The two guns per battalion were increased to four in early 1915, and machine gun training centres were set up in France and in the UK. By 1916 the Machine Gun Corps mustered 4,000 officers and 80,000 men.

In this time experience was gained which enabled Vickers guns to be used to the limits of their capabilities. Ammunition with nitro-cellulose propellants gave greater range to the guns and preserved the life of their barrels. Clinometers and direction dials were used in the manner of artillery dial sights, to enable targets to be registered for indirect fire supports and fire tasks at night or in smoke or fog. Once in position the Vickers could fire at the rate of one belt (250 rounds) every two minutes indefinitely, subject to the availability of ammunition, spare barrels, cooling water, lubricants and spare parts. This was the ‘normal’ rate of fire – the ‘rapid’ rate used up to a belt per minute. A high standard of training was required if the gun ‘numbers’ were to cope with the many

Men of the ‘Household Battalion’, an infantry unit formed from reservists of the Household Cavalry, parade with their Lewis gun carts, late 1916. At left are some of the unit’s stretcher-bearers; note their narrow brassards, with a red ‘S.B.’ on white. Although capable of being handled by one man, the Lewis was not considered to be a ‘light machine gun’ and was issued along with a handcart. These were later replaced by horse-drawn limbers, each of which carried two guns, their spares, magazines and ammunition. (IWM)

30 July 1916: the Battle of Pozieres Ridge on the Somme – an 18-pounder RFA gun crew pose for the camera near Montauban. (They would not be firing with horses to their front.) All the ammunition lying ready is high explosive shell which, with less than a pound of explosive, was less destructive than a 3in mortar bomb. Clearly visible is the pole trail which limited the 18-pdr’s elevation and thus its range. (IWM)
The 'Fuse, Grazne, No.100' from an illustration in the handbook for the 18-pdr gun; attached to it is the 'Gaine No.2', a device ignited by the flash of the detonator in the fuse, which then ignited the HE within the shell. As well as causing many 'prematures' in guns the 100 Fuse was found to be the cause of accidents while being transported; these included an explosion and fire that wrecked an ammunition depot at Quervilly, and a huge explosion at Wancqulin which ruined the village and caused considerable loss of life. Eventually several safety and delay devices were built into the No.100 series, as well as a needle that would strike the detonator on the shell's impact even if the fuse had been tampered with – not an unknown occurrence, given its reputation for killing gun crews. (Author's collection)

Stoppages possible on the gun as well as the care and servicing it required. (The spare parts wallet for the gun held 31 items including pliers, punches, screwdrivers and a mirror, as well as a multiplicity of spares. The gun's spare parts box contained a further 136 items.) Great skill was also demanded of the fire controllers who used rangefinders, maps and instruments to plot the fire tasks for their guns, and then set them up with aiming posts, aiming lamps and night sights.

Used in this manner, machine guns dominated man's land, covering it with carefully plotted beaten zones of fire calculated to cut down any enemy infantry attempting to cross. For example, on 24 August 1916 during the Somme battles, a machine gun company of the 33rd (New Army) Division with ten guns fired just one belt short of one million rounds while covering the brigade it was supporting. Set to deny the enemy movement in certain areas, the company used up all the water in the vicinity of its guns (for refilling their cooling jackets) before turning to urine for the same purpose. Relays of porters carried ammunition to the guns while a belt-filling machine was operated for 12 hours non-stop. One gun is recorded as having fired 480 belts of ammunition in that time.

With the centralisation of Vickers and Maxim machine guns a light automatic, the Lewis gun, began to be issued to infantry companies, which by 1916 had one Lewis per platoon. Weighted at 27lbs, the weapon was gas operated, air cooled, and fired at a cyclic rate of 550 rounds per minute, using the standard 0.303in ammunition. With a maximum effective range of 800–1,000 yards, it was fired by one man but needed eight others to carry its 44 magazines, over 2,000 rounds of ammunition, tools and spare parts. The Lewis gun was one of the best weapons in the hands of the British infantry, but it was some time before they learned to put it to best use. Only after the Somme battles were infantry tactics devised around the platoon as the basic unit in the attack, covering its movement with its own Lewis guns, rifle grenades and smoke grenades.

A variety of mortars were devised for trench warfare and some of these, particularly the Stokes mortars, were issued to the infantry. They were operated in batteries controlled by a brigade trench mortar officer. The Stokes was a fairly crude weapon, a tube with a 3-inch bore which propelled canisters of high explosive towards the enemy by means of shotgun cartridges filled with ballastite. When fitted with augmenting charges of propellant the bomb could be hurled to a maximum of 550 yards. The weapon had no sights because of its inherent inaccuracy, but could produce a great volume of fire which could be used to 'bracket' an area of ground. Its bombs also contained more than twice the amount of high explosive than an 18-pdr shell.

ARTILLERY, 1914–16

The most common equipment used by the Royal Regiment of Artillery in 1914–18 was the 18-pdr gun; about 1,500 of these had been issued before 1914, and over 9,000 more were to be manufactured and issued by the war's end. It has been calculated that in 1914–18 the 18-pdrs fired more shells than any other British artillery pieces: nearly 100 million rounds. Of the ammunition stocks allocated for the opening of the Somme battles in summer 1916, for example, 2.6 million rounds were for the 18-pdrs, which made up roughly half of the gunpower used.

These guns had been designed for open warfare, for which their mobility, fixed shrapnel ammunition and high rate of fire made them ideal weapons; but they were soon found to be less than perfect for the conditions prevailing in trench warfare. Their single 'pole' trails limited elevation to 16 degrees and their range to 6,525 yards. Their shrapnel rounds were detonated in the air by time fuses and acted like giant shotguns, showering forward their loads of lead/antimony balls; these had a lethal effect on troops in the open, but were less effective against those dug in below the surface. When a high explosive shell was devised for the 18-pdr in 1915 it had only 13oz of Amatol HE, which, with its flat trajectory, made it the equivalent of the German 77mm 'whizzbang'. The 18-pdr had never been designed to fire the enormous amounts of ammunition called for in trench warfare, however, and they broke down under the strain. Malfunctions were common in their hydro-spring recoil systems, which were eventually replaced with more durable hydro-pneumatic systems. Other problems with the guns and their ammunition (especially the fuses) were eventually overcome, but nothing could be done to improve the range of shell-power of the weapons that made up half the British artillery's resources.

From the onset of trench warfare there had been a shortage of artillery ammunition, especially the high explosive shell (HE) which was desperately needed. British artillery ammunition had to be 'rationed', for example, at Ypres in late 1914 guns were limited first to 20 rounds per gun per day, then ten rounds, and finally just two. No one had foreseen the vast quantities of ammunition that the siege conditions of trench warfare would consume over and above the stocks calculated for 'open' warfare, and the inability of the military bureaucracy and Royal Ordnance Factories to meet demand led to what became known as the 'shell scandal', which boiled over in early 1915. It resulted in ammunition production being put on a more practical footing, but it
was to be 1917 before a sufficiency of the right types of ammunition became available. Until then the BEF operated under a distinct disadvantage as regards the use of its artillery.

One of the better weapons available to the Royal Field Artillery was the 4.5in howitzer. (The British Army usually referred to guns by their shell weight and howitzers by the diameter of their bores.) There was one battery of 4.5s to every three of 18-pdrs, and these excellent pieces were capable of high-angle fire which hurled a 35lb shell out to a distance of 7,300 yards. The 4.5in ammunition was not 'fixed', which meant that propellant charges could be varied to increase the versatility of the gun. The HE shell carried 4lbs 10ozs of explosive, but its effect was somewhat reduced by the No.100 Fuse and its modifications, which often malfunctioned or allowed the shell to partially bury itself before detonating.

Heavy batteries of the Royal Garrison Artillery operated many types of guns and howitzers, ranging from the comparatively new 60-pdr (with a 60lb shell and a maximum range of 12,300 yards) to obsolete 12in naval guns mounted on railway carriages, and huge siege howitzers which could lob a 1,400lb shell 10,795 yards (to put those figures in everyday context, the shell weighed more than half a ton, and the range was more than six miles). Royal Artillery trench mortar batteries operated the heavier mortars when those were devised. The RA also operated anti-aircraft guns as they came into service, ranging from the 'pom-pom' heavy machine gun to the 3in gun introduced in 1914.

The Royal Flying Corps, 1914–16

The RFC remained a corps of the British Army until April 1918, when it merged with the Royal Naval Air Service to become the Royal Air Force. Formed from the Air Battalion of the Royal Engineers in 1912, the RFC went to France with the BEF in 1914 with four squadrons of aircraft dedicated to reconnaissance and communications flights, as well as balloon units whose task was that of observation.

Within days the pilots and observers of the aircraft had armed themselves with pistols, rifles and a variety of crude bombs with which they engaged ground targets and enemy flying machines. As more men and aircraft arrived on the Western Front 'aggressive patrolling' increased, especially when the first Lewis guns became available in early 1915. As more effective aircraft types, machine guns and bombs were developed, so did aerial warfare, which included the attacking of enemy aircraft and observation balloons as well as the bombing of their rear areas. Aerial artillery observation was also developed, as was aerial photographic reconnaissance. Over the period 1914–16 the air arm of the BEF was transformed from a collection of flimsy machines dedicated to observing and carrying messages, to a vital weapon with which to strike at the enemy, to destroy his aerial observation, and to combat his fighting machines attempting to do the same.
inventor lodged plans for a tracked armoured fighting vehicle with the British War Office in 1912. Powerful internal combustion engines and track-laying vehicles were in being before 1914, and the British Army bought many Holt tractors which it used to tow heavy guns. The Royal Naval Air Service operated an Armoured Car Division of armoured and armed ‘tenders’ (or trucks) in 1914; and the BEF formed a Motor Machine Gun Service with guns and crews mounted on motor-cycle combinations.

It was not until the realities of trench warfare were appreciated that solutions were sought to the problems of providing effective close support to infantry attacking across no-man’s-land, and in particular the destruction of enemy machine guns. Hindering development of ‘landships’ or ‘machine gun destroyers’ was the mutual mistrust that existed between the General Staff, who were not the most imaginative body of men, and the engineers capable of developing and building such machines. The Staff were too involved with the problems of winning the war with the resources to hand, and felt disinclined to speculate on what might be achieved by what some saw as wellfounded fantasies. The engineering industry were perfectly capable of overcoming the army’s problems, but needed the military to define these problems and to issue detailed specifications as to what the machines were required to do.

In June 1915 these were put before a recently established Landships Committee, who were asked for a machine with (a) a top speed of not less than 4mph on flat ground; (b) the capability of sharp turns at speed; (c) a reversing capability; (d) the ability to climb a 5ft parapet with a 1-in-1 slope; (e) a gap-crossing ability of 8ft; (f) a radius of action of 20 miles; (g) a crew of ten men with two machine guns and one light cannon. From this point development proceeded until, in early 1916, demonstrations of the new vehicles were held in the UK before Kitchener, Mr Lloyd George (then Minister for Munitions), the Chancellor of the Exchequer and other decision makers. For security purposes the vehicles were already being called ‘tanks’, since they strongly resembled large tanks. Despite Kitchener’s remarks that they were ‘pretty mechanical toys’ and that ‘the war would never be won by such machines’, an order for 100 tanks was placed on 12 February 1916.

As the tanks went into production their crews were being assembled from the ranks of the Motor Machine Gun Service (which was at the time being reduced), from the Mechanical Transport sections of the Army Service Corps, and from civilian recruits who had answered advertisements in the press and motor trade publications. Called the ‘Heavy Section’ of the Machine Gun Corps, they took the first 50 tanks to France on 30 August 1916.

By early September these vehicles had moved to the area of the Somme battlefields, and on the 15th of that month 36 of them went into action in what was to be the first tank battle in history. Their appearance shocked the enemy; but the lumbering monsters were underpowered, mechanically unreliable, and crewed by men ill prepared for the battle. Most tanks broke down, became mired in the mud, or were hit by enemy artillery; but at least one vehicle came close to leading the infantry it supported in a rupture of the enemy lines. The potential of the tank, a British concept, was clear to friend and foe alike.

The Royal Navy ashore, 1914-16

Maintaining the security of the BEF’s sea lines of communication was a task the Royal Navy performed with great efficiency throughout the war; but the ‘senior service’ contributed to the war on land also, especially on the Western Front. The outbreak of war found the Royal Navy with a surplus of reservists from which the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, formed a division of sailors and marines to fight on land. This first Royal Naval Division was sent to defend the port of Antwerp in 1914, and in attempting to do so suffered heavy casualties, many of whom became prisoners-of-war or internees in neutral Holland. The division was re-formed and sent out to the abortive Dardanelles campaign, on the conclusion of which it was sent again to the Western Front. There it took part in the final battle of the Somme campaign. In addition to sailors and marines in the Royal Naval Division (by 1916 reduced by casualties to such a degree that one of the division’s brigades was composed of army units), Royal Marine personnel crewed heavy guns; and the Royal Naval Air Service flew aircraft and operated armoured cars in support of the BEF.

**ORGANISATION AND TACTICS**

Trench warfare, once established, brought the infantry of the BEF into direct confrontation with the enemy on a 24-hour-a-day basis. The only respite battles could look forward to was a relief from the front line of trenches. This might find them relocated to a reserve trench line perhaps a few hundred yards in the rear; or in an area behind the trenches where they might be safe from all enemy fire but long-range artillery or bombing aircraft, but where they became available as labour to carry forward to the trench lines the enormous amounts of materials needed for their maintenance and repair.

The main task of front-line infantry was to defend and maintain their positions by manning the ‘firestep’ almost shoulder to shoulder if they were threatened, and to repel any enemy attack
with Lewis gun, rifle and grenade. Support from artillery, machine guns and mortars could be called for, but was not under their control. Infantry units of the BEF were encouraged to pursue aggressive patrolling, which meant that at night, in addition to the maintenance of the barbed wire in front of their positions, they sent out into no-man’s-land parties of officers and men who provided standing patrols, listening patrols, reconnaissance patrols and fighting patrols. The aim of most of these was to dominate no-man’s-land and to bring back information on enemy activity. Fighting patrols, however, went into the enemy’s front lines expressly to capture prisoners for interrogation. Snipers operated from the front line, and from hides in no-man’s-land which they built and occupied under cover of darkness.

British infantry in the attack in 1915 and 1916 depended entirely on fire support from their artillery and machine guns as they attempted to cross no-man’s-land and the barrier of the German barbed wire before getting into the enemy trenches. Artillery and mortar fire was expected to breach the enemy wire, neutralise his machine guns and suppress his artillery. Not only were British infantry units untrained in the sort of minor tactics that might have enabled them to cross no-man’s-land by dashing from cover to cover while using their own firepower; they were usually forbidden to attempt to do so, by orders that they were to advance in line, and to keep marching forward unless wounded (or killed). These crude tactics worked if the artillery were successful in suppressing enemy fire and smashing the enemy wire. When they were not, as in the opening attacks of the Somme battles, the infantry suffered horrendous casualties as they lay trapped in the open under the fire of German artillery and machine guns. Where they were able to gain the enemy front trenches they began bombing, bayoneting and snap-shooting their way forward via the enemy communication trenches, as long as reinforcements and ammunition could be got across no-man’s-land.

These bloody assaults were nearly always made in broad daylight and after intense artillery bombardments had announced British intentions to the Germans. However, on 14 July 1916, an attack was made on the Somme in darkness and without the usual preliminary bombardment. The Germans were taken completely by surprise and, in a matter of a few hours, the British Fourth Army were established on the Bazentin Ridge and had probed the vital position of High Wood to find it unoccupied. The tantalising opportunity for a breakthrough was lost here when requests for permission to push on were denied in order to wait for the cavalry to come up. By the time they did, later in the afternoon, the Germans had already plugged the gap.

The infantry fighting unit was the battalion, notionally with a strength of about 1,000 officers and men but often operating with a strength

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3 See Elia 86, The Military Sniper since 1914

(continued on page 33)
THE TERRITORIAL FORCE, 1914-15
1: Captain, London Scottish
2: Corporal, Queen Victoria's Rifles
3: Trumpeter, Oxfordshire Yeomanry (Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars)

KITCHENER'S ARMY, 1914-15
1: Private, 10th (Service) Battalion, Durham Light Infantry
2: Signaller, 11th (Service) Battalion, The Welsh Regiment
3: Private, 15th (Scottish) Division
FRANCE & BELGIUM, 1914
1: Sergeant, 1st Battalion, The Gordon Highlanders
2: Seaman, Royal Naval Division
3: Infantryman, trench clothing, winter 1914/15

FRANCE & BELGIUM, 1915
1: Lieutenant-Colonel, 9th (Service) Battalion, The East Surrey Regiment, 24th (New Army) Division; Loos, September 1915
2: 2nd Lieutenant of infantry, raiding dress
3: Artilleryman of an ammunition column
THE SOMME, 1916
1: Major-General C.E. Peirce, GOC 2nd (Regular) Division
2: Lewis gunner, 1/6th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry (Bishop Auckland Rifles), 50th (Northumberland) Division, Territorial Force
3: 'Bomber', 1/6th Battalion, The Black Watch, 51st (Highland) Division, Territorial Force
4: Gunner, Royal Field Artillery

THE SOMME, 1916
1: Sergeant, 1st Battalion, The Grenadier Guards Lewis gunner, 1/8th Battalion
2: Private, Royal Army Medical Corps
3: Nursing sister, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (Reserve)
4: Chaplain, Army Chaplains Department
far below this figure. Battalions were commanded by lieutenant-colonels; at battalion headquarters were found signallers, the machine gun section, the regimental medical officer and medical orderlies, a quartermaster and staff, the transport section with horses, wagons and carts, and such personalities as the second-in-command, adjutant and regimental sergeant major. Battalion HQ changed slightly over the period covered. Machine gun sections went, and battalion Lewis gun, sniping and gas officers were appointed. When in the line the quartermaster and transport were left with the ‘rear details’; and these sometimes included a number of officers and men ‘left out of battle’ around whom the unit could be reconstructed in the event of heavy casualties.

Four ‘rifle’ companies were the main fighting strength of the battalion, each with a paper strength of 227 officers and men but invariably functioning with fewer; these included drummers, buglers orpipers and a number of former bandmen acting as stretcher-bearers. Captains commanded companies, and subaltern officers (sometimes sergeants) commanded each of the four platoons that made them up. Platoons were divided into four sections, each commanded by an NCO.

* * *

By 1916 the artillery of the BEF was in a state of transition, from what it had been in August 1914 (batteries and brigades of horse and field artillery whose purpose was the support of cavalry and infantry units in a war of movement), to the powerful and homogeneous force it had become by 1918. By that date it had fully adapted to the conditions of the Western Front, where it had pushed gunnery to the limits of its possibilities in order to master the artillery of the enemy.

With the onset of trench warfare the resources of the Royal Garrison Artillery had been summoned to bring to the Western Front the heavy weapons that this branch usually employed in the defence of ports and fortresses. As the artillery strength of the BEF was built up a struggle for the control of this powerful arm developed. Surprising though it may now seem, ‘General Officers Commanding, Royal Artillery’ were, in 1916, advisors and not commanders. Wrangling with the General Staff obtained them
some limited powers, but it was not until December 1916 that the powers of GOCs RA were positively resolved.

Organisational problems included deciding the best use to be made of experienced battery officers, and that of obtaining the best effect from the available gunpower. Four-gun batteries had been introduced in early 1916, and batteries had been taken from divisions to form Army brigades. Some of this shuffling of resources was found to be advantageous and some not: in early 1917, for example, a reversion was made to six-gun batteries.

Over the course of the Great War the artillery of the BEF was constantly developing the technical equipment and skills necessary for the accurate application of indirect fire – i.e. the location and engagement of targets not visible from gun positions, especially enemy artillery. These means included sound-ranging, flash-spotting, gun calibration, application of meteorological data, accurate field survey and observation from the ground and the air.

Problems with communications handicapped artillery more than other arms, particularly when they limited or prevented contact between observers and gun positions. Without the flexibility of fire control so essential to the effective support of infantry in the attack, heavy dependence was placed on barrages run to a timetable to ‘shoot’ them on to their objectives. These used up enormous quantities of ammunition, not always to best effect.

A Royal Field Artillery 18-pdr “brigade” of 1914 was the equivalent of an infantry battalion in strength, with an establishment of 28 officers, 766 other ranks, 700 horses, 18 guns and limbers, 72 horse-drawn vehicles and 5 bicycles. A brigade operating 4.5in howitzers had an almost identical establishment but required only 62 carts and wagons. A Royal Garrison Artillery brigade of 6in howitzers, however, required nearly 1,000 officers and men and 600 horses to operate their 16 pieces.

The Corps of Royal Engineers had a multiplicity of tasks including communications, field works, tunnelling the miles of shafts and chambers necessary to set mines beneath enemy fortifications, bridging, the operation of railways, canal and river craft and the discharge of war gases. The organisation and establishments of RE units varied greatly according to their task.

The organisation of the medical services of the BEF, although mainly concerned with the task of the evacuation and treatment of casualties, also varied from unit to unit. In battle the wounded infantryman

Back from the battlefields of France and Belgium came the wounded, to be healed and, if possible, sent back out to the fighting. These convalescents posing with their nurses wear a mixture of service uniform and ‘hospital blues’ – a bright blue jacket and trousers, sometimes worn with a white shirt and red necktie. (Author’s collection)

Table 2: COMPARATIVE DIVISIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS, 1914 & 1916

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TOTALS:
12,170 all ranks
5,854 horseshoes
54 x 18-pdr, 18 x 4.5in, 4 x 60-pdr
24 Vickers machine guns
877 carts & vehicles,
392 cycles,
9 motorcycles,
9 motorcars
878 carts & vehicles,
372 cycles,
54 motorcycles,
13 motocars, 3 motor lorries,
21 motor ambulance cars
would first be attended to by a stretcher-bearer before being carried to the battalion's medical officer at the Regimental Aid Post. (If he could walk, the wounded man was expected to get there under his own steam.) From the RAP he would proceed, perhaps via an Advanced Dressing Station, to a Casualty Clearing Station, before being conveyed by ambulance to hospitals in the rear areas. Most of the services mentioned were operated by a Field Ambulance, a unit of the Royal Army Medical Corps, whose typical organisation consisted of ten officers and 242 other ranks, 100 horses and 16 horse-drawn ambulances, later replaced by motor ambulances.

The role of the Army Service Corps on the Western Front was the supply to the BEF of just about every commodity needed. The organisation of ASC units also varied according to their tasks, which ranged from field bakeries and butcheries to the provision of forage. Thousands of tons of stores were constantly on the move from the ports and bases of the BEF to the troops in the line, and the magnitude of the task of the ASC may be gauged by its growth in strength from 500 officers and 6,000 other ranks in 1914 to 4,408 officers and 31,478 other ranks in 1918. Ammunition was the responsibility of the Army Ordnance Corps, whose services also included workshops for the repair and maintenance of transport of all kinds, artillery, ammunition, small arms, etc. (It is worth noting that as the BEF's casualties rose the fit men in the ranks of the ASC and AOC were 'combed out' and drafted into the infantry, in exchange for medically downgraded men from the front.)

The enormous number of horses deployed by the BEF required the services of many units of the Army Veterinary Corps, whose companies mustered 6 officers and 221 men each. They attended to the health of the horses in units as well as those in the 'remount services', the organisation that bought or impressed animals into the army and trained, transported and held them as replacements.

Behind the units of the BEF in the line there existed by 1916 a system of bases, mostly established around the Channel ports of northern France, from Rouen to Boulogne. From these a lines-of-communication organisation moved men and munitions to the front on a network of railways, roads, rivers and canals, and brought back the casualties, both human and material, to be restored or repaired. This vast enterprise required hundreds of thousands of officers and men, enlisted foreign labourers from the Empire, and French civilian workers (mostly women), to move the stores needed by the BEF, to construct accommodation, to operate the factories and workshops manufacturing everything from duckboards to camouflage nets, to staff the base depots which trained and sent forward reinforcements, to police the rear areas, to staff the military prisons, and to provide anti-aircraft defence for those parts of the organisation vulnerable to air attack.

Finally, there were the headquarters, from the General Headquarters of the BEF down through those of the armies and corps to the Division and Brigade headquarters. As a rule, the more senior the command the further from the line would be found the headquarters, which was invariably sited in and about buildings offering the space and comfort considered vital to its efficient functioning. Headquarters also drew to them large numbers of officers and men; the more senior the headquarters, the greater the number of general officers, their staffs, orderlies, grooms, drivers, cooks, etc., and of the units whose duty it was to guard and, if necessary, defend the headquarters from enemy attack. (For example, GHQ BEF had at one time 1/1st Bn, Honourable Artillery Company, and two sections of AA artillery for such protection.) Infantrymen moving up to the line viewed these headquarters, bases and lines of communication with envy for the soft life of the personnel who staffed them, regarding them with the customary contempt reserved for those who wore the uniform of a soldier but were never in harm's way.

UNIFORM

The field service uniform worn by the BEF was known as Service Dress. Introduced in 1902, it was made from serge — a durable twilled worsted fabric — in an earth brown colour known officially as 'drab' but universally called 'kaki'.

Office's Service Dress had been modified slightly by 1914 and consisted of a jacket with an open collar, patch pockets on the breast and bellows pockets on the skirts, dull metal buttons and collar badges. For most officers rank was displayed by worsted braid, 'pips' and crowns on the cuffs of the jacket. Breeches were worn with puttees by 'dismounted' officers, and with leggings or field boots and spurs by those whose duties required them to ride. Boots (and all other items of leather) were brown. Headdress consisted of a peaked cap. Officers bought all their uniform, equipment and arms from the tailor and outfitter authorised by their regiments in peacetime, so there were slight regimental differences in materials, cut and insignia before the outbreak of war. The officers of the Guards regiments chose to ignore regulations and wore badges of rank in the style of senior officers, i.e. on their shoulder straps; they also wore forage caps with coloured bands and laced peaks, and buttons grouped to show their regimental seniority. In Scottish regiments the Glengarry bonnet was worn by all, while the highland regiments still maintained the kilt as a suitable netherwear for active service. For officers on active service in France special officers' shops were set up from which they could buy clothing and equipment when necessary; these were rarely of a regimental pattern.
Service Dress for other ranks differed in style and material from the uniforms of their officers. The jacket was worn loose-fitting, and featured a turned-down rolled collar, rifle patches on the shoulders, and patch pockets on the breast. Side pockets were let into the skirts below the waist, and there was a pocket for a field dressing (bandages and gauze pads) under the flap of the skirt. All buttons were brass and regimental shoulder titles in metal were worn on the shoulder straps. Badges of ranks were worn on the sleeves of the jacket, and a variety of worsted badges were worn to indicate instructors' qualifications, skill-at-arms, specialist or trade qualifications and a Serviceman's Medal for good conduct. Dismounted men wore trowsers in Service Dress, mounted men wore riding breeches; all wore puttees and ankle boots.

British Army boots came from the factory with the uppers in reversed hide, rather like a coarse suede. They were issued well greased with waterproofing dubbin, and standing orders in some units of the pre-1914 Regular Army decreed 'one pair to be kept brown and greased'. (This treatment produced footwear that gave better protection in the extreme conditions of the Western Front than that given by DMS boots in the Falklands in 1982.) Steel tips were fitted to the soles and heels of boots as well as hobnails or studs.

Under the loose-fitting Service Dress different layers of clothing could be worn, all woolen, and ranging from very substantial underwear and flannel shirts to waistcoat and cardigan sweaters. Both officers and other ranks wore greatcoats of heavy, closely woven, supposedly 'waterproof' material; that for officers was double-breasted, while the other ranks' coat was single-breasted for dismounted men. Mounted soldiers had short, double-breasted greatcoats which were called 'British Warm'. This practical and comfortable uniform was topped off for most by a very impractical peaked (visored) cap; stiffened with wire, it did little to shelter the head from rain or sun, but was an ideal place to display the regimental cap-badge. Captains and in the jacket pocket of each soldier was his record and pay book or 'small book'; and from 1906 each man wore identity discs about his neck.

It is interesting to note that when the officers and men of the German Army first saw British prisoners they thought their Service Dress resembled a golliwog costume, especially that of the officers with their collars and ties. The years 1914 to 1916 saw little change in other ranks' Service Dress except for a modified pattern of jacket, the introduction of various patterns of 'trench' or soft cap, and the more practical Balmoral and Tam-o'-Shanter bonnets for Scottish units. Protective clothing issued for the trenches included rubber boots and waders, leather jerkins and animal skin waistcoats, but no effective waterproof clothing other than the issue 'groundsheet' - a 6ft x 3ft rectangle of macintosh material that was often worn as a crude cape. As time went by officers acquired an extraordinary range of commercial protective clothing for wear in the trenches, from 'trench caps' and 'trench macks' to 'trench boots'. (Less obvious were the 'bullet-proof' vests available through military tailors. Trench armour was developed and tested, but the only item on general issue by 1916 was the steel helmet.) It became fashionable to buy shirts, ties, breeches and puttees in the very palest hues of khaki - in the case of breeches, of shades closer to pink than fawn. (One inspecting general officer, on enquiring where a young officer had obtained his almost white shirt and tie, was sent the reply 'From the same place your Staff Captain buys his breeches'.)

Personal equipment

A set of personal equipment made from woven cotton webbing had been authorised in 1908 and was worn by the infantry of the Regular Army, some units of the Royal Engineers and by most of the infantry of the Territorial Force by 1914.4 Cavalry wore a set of equipment in leather, the main item of which was a bandolier carrying 90 rounds of ammunition. Gunners and other mounted troops also wore this equipment, but with a 50-round bandolier. Men of corps such as the ASC and AOC wore sets of equipment made up from obsolete patterns.

Officers' equipment was of the same pattern regardless of the arm or branch of the wearer. A pattern called the 'Sam Browne' had been uniform for some time prior to 1914, and it came with all the necessary straps and cases to enable the wearer to carry his sword, pistol, ammunition, binoculars, compass and maps. (Swords were discarded soon after the opening battles of the war.)

On active service an infantry soldier of 1914 carried the clothing he stood up in, his rifle and bayonet, 150 rounds of ammunition, water bottle, entrenching tool, and a full 'marching order' set of equipment. In his pack he carried a greatcoat, cap comforter (knitted cap), holdall (containing knife, fork, spoon, washing and shaving kit, etc.), 'housewife' (sewing kit), mess tin, spare socks and towel. His haversack contained an 'iron ration' (a tin of concentrated food, to be consumed only in

4 See MMA 108, British Infantry Equipment (© 1908-2000)
the direst emergency), daily rations (usually corned beef and biscuits), ration bag, and groundsheet. As time went by this burden was increased with items such as anti-gas equipment, steel helmet, grenades, extra ammunition and digging tools. It soon became practice to dump packs in rear areas and to wear haversacks in their place; this was called 'battle order'.

In 1914 the company which had supplied the 1908 webbing equipment to the British Army had all but ceased production and could not meet the massive demand for their product. An alternative equipment set was designed in leather, and initial orders for a million sets were placed with manufacturers of leather goods in Great Britain and the USA. The 1914 pattern leather equipment was made in leather given a khaki or brown finish, and had packs and haversacks made of canvas. It was mostly issued to units of the New Army and the Territorial Force.

**Insignia**

Unlike the soldiers of the German Army, the British soldier wore no badge or title to identify his country. Badges on caps and titles on shoulders identified members of, say, the 3rd Dragoon Guards, The Queen’s, or the Tyneside Scottish, and in doing so they demonstrated the 'tribal' nature of the regiments of the British Army - soldiers of the King and proud to be, but more fiercely proud of their regiments.

This display of regi- mental insignia, which included the titles of units painted on the sides of vehicles, made identification of British units and formations an easy matter: an enemy spy need only stand beside the road and read the titles of the units passing. Therefore, by early 1915 schemes of 'battle insignia' had been introduced; the titles displayed on flags, signboards, vehicles and guns were replaced by devices and symbols which concealed formation identities from the untrained observer. Similarly, schemes of 'battle patches' were devised and worn on uniform, to conceal unit and formation identities from those who did not need to know, and conversely to make them more obvious to those who did. Units of Kitchener's Army introduced the first schemes, which enabled the rapid identification of a man's brigade, battalion, and company from coloured devices on the back or sleeves of his jacket. The practice spread throughout the infantry of the BEF, so that in time the little pieces of cloth became the badges that identified a front-line soldier.

Badges of rank were worn on both sleeves by NCOs and warrant officers: a single chevron indicated the appointment of lance-corporal, two chevrons a corporal, three chevrons a sergeant, three chevrons and a crown a staff-sergeant, a crown (on the cuff) a warrant officer up to 1915 and a warrant officer Class II thereafter, and a badge of the Royal Arms a warrant officer Class I from 1915. As always in the British Army, there were exceptions to these broad rules, with the Foot Guards choosing to add extra chevrons to the sleeves of their junior NCOs, and the Royal Artillery calling NCOs with one chevron 'bom bardiers'. There were special badges of appointment for regimental quartermaster sergeants, for drum, bugle and trumpet sergeants, bandmasters, etc.; but most appointments, such as regimental sergeant major, battery sergeant major and company quartermaster sergeant carried no special badges other than those of rank.

Officers up to and including the rank of lieutenant-colonel wore a combination of stars, crowns, chevron tape and tracing braid to indicate rank. One star marked a second-lieutenant, two a lieutenant, three a captain, a crown a major, and a crown and one star a lieutenant-colonel. The more senior the officer, the more brash was worn with these badges. Colonels and above wore their badges of rank on their shoulder straps: a crown and two stars for a colonel, a crossed sword and baton for a brigadier-general, a crossed sword and baton with one star for a major-general, a crossed sword and baton with a crown for a lieutenant-general, a crossed sword and baton with a crown and a star for a general, and crossed batons within a wreath surmounted by a crown for a field-marshal. General officers wore caps with red bands and much gold lace which also indicated their status, thus giving rise to the nickname 'brass-hats', as well as other distinctions such as gorget patches.

5 See MAA 182, British Battle Insignia (1) 1914-18
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THE PLATES

A: THE REGULAR ARMY, 1914
In August 1914 Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered General von Kluck, his commander of the German First Army, to 'wear over General French's contemptible little army'. His order led in time to the original BEF referring to themselves as 'the Old Contemptibles', but long before that name became commonplace spread the men of the BEF sang as they marched to the tune of 'The Girl I Left Behind Me': "And we don't give a f--- for old von Kluck! All his f---ing army!" This cheerful and ironic refrain probably expressed the true nature of the old time Regulars better than the many thousands of words written about them: tough, arrogant, skilled in their arms and proud of their being 'at the point of fighting for a fight. One of the greatest military historians in the English language called the BEF 'the most highly trained striking force of any country - a rapier amongst scythes'; the German chief of-staff called it 'that perfect thing apart'. When it clashed with the German Army it invariably exacted a fearsome toll before retiring; one German officer wrote, 'Our men attacked with the utmost determination, but again and again they were driven back by those incomparable soldiers. Regardless of loss the English artillery came forward to protect their infantrymen and in full view of our guns kept up a devastating fire'. But the losses of the BEF in these battles were grievous and increasingly difficult to replace; by the end of 1914 few 'Old Contemptibles' remained, and the BEF would never again be the 'perfect thing apart'. Our plate shows officers and men of the BEF as they appeared on landing in France in August 1914.

A1: Private, 2nd Battalion, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, 19th Infantry Brigade
The author's grandfather, Lieut George Green, was a signer with this unit, having been called from the reserve to join the battalion at Portland. He marched and fought with the 2nd RWF for over a year until killed in action near Loos in September 1915. (The circumstances of his death are recorded in Frank Richards' book Old Soldiers Never Die.) Note his Service Dress, his regimental cap badge, his shoulder titles (a kneeling bomb over 'RWF'), his Field Service Marching Order equipment, and his SMLE rifle. On his sleeve are the chevrons of good conduct badges marking his seven years with the colours, and the crossed flags of a regimental signaller. He carries a set of signalling flags.

A2: Private, 2nd Dragonos (Royal Scots Greys), 5th Cavalry Brigade
Note the differences between his uniform and that of the infantryman, particularly the way puttees were wound over-lapping upwards rather than downwards. His equipment, saddlery and bridle are mostly brown leather; his sword is of the 1908 pattern and is strapped to his saddle, as is his SMLE rifle. His cap badge shows the Eagle of the French 45th Line captured at Waterloo; what his French allies made of this and similar items commemorating such victories may be imagined. (See also MAA 136 (Revised), British Cavalry Equipment 1800-1941)

A3: Gunner, Royal Field Artillery
He carries a round of shrapnel ammunition for an 18-pounder gun. Note his 50-round bandolier; although every gunner carried rifle ammunition, only two rifles per gun team were carried clipped to the timber.

B: THE TERRITORIAL FORCE, 1914-15
This plate shows members of units of the Territorial Force who volunteered for 'Imperial Service' and crossed to France to fight with the BEF in 1914.

B1: Captain, London Scottish
Officially the 1/14th (County of London) Battalion, this was one of the first to go, arriving at Le Havre on 16 September. Their first battle was at Loneville in November. Our subject in Service Dress is cut as for an officer of a highland regiment and his kit is the 'Haddon Grey' chosen by the regiment on their formation. Note his Glengarry bonnet with badge and blue 'torse', the cutaway 'doublion' shirt of his tunic and cut ranking arrangement peculiar to Scottish regiments, his sporran, hose and garters. He wears the full Sam Browne equipment including broadsword, pistol and ammunition pouch, binoculars, compass, haversack, water bottle and slung greatcoat.

B2: Corporal, Queen Victoria's Rifles
This 1/9th County of London Battalion arrived in France in early November. As a member of a Rifle regiment he wears black insignia and buttons on his Service Dress, and his badges of rank are of the coloured pattern worn with full dress – another Rifle regiment affectation. His webbing equipment is of the pattern provided by County Associations, which differed from the 1908 pattern in having carbine carriers for 60 rounds instead of 150. His rifle is a (long) Lee-Enfield Mk I.

B3: Trumpeter, Oxfordshire Yeomany (Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars)
This unit landed in France in September 1914, and had joined the 2nd Cavalry Division by November of that year, remaining part of that formation for the remainder of the war. Apart from his cap badge and titles he is clothed and equipped exactly as a regular cavalryman. Note that both a bugle and a trumpet were carried, on green cords by this unit – the former for calls on horseback and the latter for disembarked calls. Just visible on his upper sleeve is his metal badge of crossed trumpets. Trumpeters do not appear to have been armed with pistols at this time; he wears a 90-round bandolier, and his mess tin is strapped to the leather boot of his SMLE rifle. His greatcoat, ground sheet and wallets are strapped to the front and rear arches of his saddle.

B4: Private, 10th (Service) Battalion, Durham Light Infantry
A member of K1, 'the first hundred thousand', at bayonet training. He is dressed in the midnight blue uniform that was issued to most New Army troops until Service Dress became

To this day unexploded British HE shells continue to be ploughed up from the fields where the Somme battles took place. These were photographed near Serre, awaiting collection by the ordnance disposal units of the French Army. (Author's collection)

A young Territorial artilleryman proudly wears the Imperial Service badge on his right breast, signifying that he has volunteered to serve overseas in the event of a war. See Plate B. (Author's collection)
available. His equipment is a mixture of obsolete 1882 and 1888 patterns in buff leather, and his rifle is the Mk i version of the SMLE. The blue uniform was hated by Kitchener's men, since it marked them as tyros: Regulars scathingly referred to its wearers as 'Militia men', even though the Militia had been absorbed into the Special Reserve some years earlier.

C2: Signaller, 11th (Service) Battalion, The Welsh Regiment

The volunteer of a unit of K3 is practising visual signalling with flags, shortly after the formation of the battalion in September 1914. Still in civilian clothes, he carries his raincoat 'bandolier fashion', and his jacket pockets bulge with the personal possessions he has brought with him on enlistment. Most New Army volunteers enlisted in working clothes or clothing suitable for outdoor activities, but those who marched off to war in lounge suits and light shoes had no cause to regret their choice during their first weeks in the army. Shoes and boots wore out with constant drilling, and 'gent's natty sulling' gave little protection from wind and rain.

Until uniform of any sort became available civilian boots, overcoats and replacement clothing were bought from local outfitters as a stopgap measure.

C3: Private, 15th (Scottish) Division

Yet another stopgap was the issue of obsolete uniform items from military resources. This soldier typifies one of the units of this New Army formation; his battalion is not identified, but the details are taken from a photograph of men of the division drilling at barracks at Aldershott in September 1915. Of the many men captured by the camera, no two are dressed the same; our subject wears the full dress trousers of a line regiment, the full dress doublot of a Scottish regiment, and a civilian cloth cap.

D: FRANCE & BELGIUM, 1914

The BEF first clashed with the German Army near Mons, Belgium, on 23 August, from whence they conducted a fighting withdrawal into northern France to the River Marne, where the enemy were contained and then driven back. The 'retreat from Mons' has passed into legend as much for its endless marching as for its bloody battles, such as that at Le Cateau. Heavily outnumbered battalions and batteries inflicted crippling casualties on the advancing Germans before slipping away to join the columns marching south. Such was the exhaustion of the marching men during this critical two-week period that several recorded falling asleep while continuing to march.

D1: Sergeant, 1st Battalion, The Gordon Highlanders

This unit suffered so many casualties at the battle of Le Cateau that the survivors became 'Army Troops' from 12 to 30 September while reinforcements were brought up to bring the battalion up to strength. Note the general appearance of a senior NCO of a highland regiment at this time, including his Glengarry bonnet, 'cutaway' jacket, kilts worn apron over his Gordon tartan kilt, and regimental hose and garters. He wears the 1908 pattern Field Service Marching Order marching equipment, and carries a SMLE Mk III rifle. His medal ribbons mark him as a veteran of the Boer War.

D2: Seaman, Royal Naval Division

In early October the Royal Naval Division arrived in Antwerp and helped to cover the withdrawal of the Belgian Army from the port. This sailor of the division, fighting in the role of infantryman, wears the standard uniform of an ordinary seaman of the time but without the blue jean collar. His cap 'tally' bears the legend 'R.N.V.R.' marking him as a member of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. His trousers are tucked into webbing garters, and his equipment is the leather pattern peculiar to the Royal Navy. His rifle is the (long) Lee-Enfield Mk I. In the confusion of the withdrawal from Antwerp three units of the 1st Naval Brigade (the Hawk, Seabow and Collingwood Battalions) became detached, and were either taken prisoner or interned in Holland — an inauspicious debut for what Churchill's Assistant Director of Naval Operations called 'Winston's tuppenny untrained rabbles'.

By the winter of 1914/15 the appearance of the highland infantryman had changed considerably. Coloured hose tops and 'spats' had been replaced by khaki hose and short puttees. The colourful Glengarry bonnet had been replaced first by a blue Balmoral bonnet, then by a khaki Balmoral, and finally by a khaki serge round cap called a 'Tam-o'-Shanter. These four Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders pose in their newly-issued animal-skin winter jerkins; three wear khaki Balmorals, and the man standing at centre a 'Tam-o'-Shanter. See Plate D. (Author's collection)

By 1916 the British soldier carried two anti-gas wallets or haversacks, each containing a flask and a hood soaked in chemicals. In one he carried the 'Hypo helmet' (left), and in the other the later 'P helmet' (right) with an exhalation valve. Also carried were pairs of gas goggles for protection against lechthyrene 'gas' and 'tear gas'. See Plate E. (Author's collection)

E: FRANCE & BELGIUM, 1915

E1: Lieutenant-Colonel, 9th (Service) Battalion, The East Surrey Regiment, 24th (New Army) Division; Loos, September 1915

Caught unawares by the German use of war gases in April 1915, the Allies were not slow in developing the weapon themselves. In the Battle of Loos in September, the first in which the New Army formations were used in the attack, gas was released to support the assaulting infantry. To protect them from its effects they wore hoods made from layers of flannel and cotton which were impregnated with a mixture of caustic soda, phenol and glycerine, and fitted with eyepieces and a valve for breathing out. Carried a 'P helmet', it was tucked into the collar of the jacket, as demonstrated here by the commanding officer of a unit of the 24th Division; this formation was thrust into the battle a scant fortnight after concentrating in France, and lost 4,178 casualties in the process. Note our subject's Sam Browne equipment, two haversacks for anti-gas equipment, cuff badges of rank, 0.455in Webley revolver, and his walking stick — an item adopted by many officers at this time. Note also the 'flash' of ribbon in the regimental colours of black, white and red worn by officers of the 9th Suffrances as an aid to identification in battle.

E2: 2nd Lieutenant of infantry, raiding dress

Wearing a 'cap comerfer' and 'blacked up' with soot for a night-time trench raid, he wears and carries nothing by which his unit could be identified if he is captured or killed, and his equipment is kept to the bare minimum. His weapons are a 0.455in Webley Mk VI revolver, a Pritchard-Greener bayonet, and an improvised bludgeon. The big bellows pockets of his Service Dress jacket accommodate hand grenades.

E3: Artilleryman of an ammunition column

This gunner leads a mule loaded with 18-pounder shells. He wears a leather jerkin over his Service Dress, and a soft trench cap with earflaps, christened the 'Gor'Blimey' —
perhaps by the first sergeant-major who saw it. His anti-gas haversacks accommodate his helmet, hood, helmet and tear gas goggle.

F: THE SOMME, 1916
F1: Major-General C.E. Pereira, GOC 2nd (Regular) Division
Contrasting starkly with the figures surrounding him, this general officer demonstrates the splendour of the uniform of a 'brass hat', from his red-banded and gold-braided cap to the spurs on his highly polished boots. General Pereira took over command of the 2nd Division on 27 December 1916 and remained its GOC for the remainder of the war. The general was formerly an officer of the Foot Guards, and this is reflected in the cut of his Service Dress and the pattern of his Sam Brown. Note his badges of rank, the gorget patches on his collar, and his red divisional brassard upon which he wears the badge of the 2nd Division: one red and between two white eight-pointed stars.

F2: Lewis gunner, 1/6th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry (Bishop Auckland Rifles), 50th (Northumberland) Division, Territorial Force
By this time issues of the 'Brodie' pattern steel helmet had become general; sometimes worn with canvas or hessian covers, they were painted in a wide range of colours. The large brass plate on the back of the helmet, on its leaded support, and on both sleeves represents his helmet and unit by its shape and colour respectively. Note on his cuff the wreathed 'MG' badge which at this date marked proficiency with the Lewis gun; the black buttons on his Service Dress (an affectation of his regiment). His 1914 pattern leather equipment, anti-gas haversacks, and the 0.455in revolver with which most machine gun 'No.1s' were by then armed. (The history of the DL notes that the reinforcements sent up to replace the casualties incurred during the Somme fighting included the first 'Derby men' or conscripts, who were mostly from southern England.)

F3: 'Bomber', 1/6th Battalion, The Black Watch, 51st (Highland) Division, Territorial Force
Note the blue cut at the top of his sleeves, denoting a cavalry and artillery officer, and the red and knitted green bands of a qualified bomber on the upper right sleeve. He wears a canvas apron with pockets containing ten No.5 Grenades or 'Mills bombs' above his 1914 pattern equipment. Note also his anti-gas haversack, one of which is worn in the manner of a sporran. His Black Watch tartan kilt is covered by a canvas apron and he wears short puttees in place of the less practical spats (cf Plate D1).

F4: Gunner, Royal Field Artillery
This figure depicts a typical gunner, striped to the waist in order to distinguish the businesses of field gunners from those of infantrymen. In this case a 4.5in howitzer. He is adjusting a No.83 'time and percussion fuse' which has been fitted to an E5 shell. The No.83 was frequently used in place of the No.100 'Faulkner' from mid-July 1916; the design and manufacture of the 100 Fuse was flawed, and its use in HE shells resulted in an alarming number of 'prematures' which destroyed guns and killed and injured their crews. Diesy devices were eventually built into the 100 Fuse series, rendering their use safer for the gunners but ensuring that HE shells partially burst themselves before detonating. This reduced the effect on the enemy and cluttered the battlefield, making it almost impossible in places.

G: THE SOMME, 1916
G1: Sergeant, 1st Battalion, The Grenadier Guards
He has retained his helmet and anti-gas equipment for protection during his journey out of the battle area, and he has a casualty evacuation label fastened to his jacket. Note his regimental titles and battalion numerals on both sleeves, above badges of rank incorporating the regimental grenade badge.

G2: Private, Royal Army Medical Corps
Assisting him is an RMC orderly. Note the typical warm weather working dress of the 'greyback' shirt, with its neck band rolled inside, and trousers worn loose; the leather belt decorated with various souvenir cap badges is a typical personal affectation. This far behind the lines, boots were sometimes produced in quantities and issued to B Company. It is apparent from this uniform that medical service is being provided for French troops, and that the RMC were undertaking medical duties in this area, perhaps for the French. The uniforms of the British Army and French Army were virtually identical during World War I. Note also the addition of the 1916 pattern steel helmet to the British Army medical officer's uniform. This, however, was not standard issue at this time, and the officer is wearing a leather cap instead. The helmet became standard issue for medical officers in 1917.

G3: Nursing sister, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (Reserve)
This is the service dress worn outdoors, in the traditional grey and red of the QAIMNS. For duty the hat and cape ('tippet') were replaced by an apron and cape ('veli'). The maroon bars on her sleeve are the badges of a 1st Class Nursing Sister; nurses did not have military rank but were accorded the status of officers.

G4: Chaplain, Army Chaplains Department
Assembling with the reception of the casualty, this chaplain displays the equivalent rank of captain on his shoulder straps, which for this department are distinguished by broad black side stripes. He wears the black Maltese cross badge of the ACHD on his cap, and on the collar of an old working jacket which is patched with leather at elbows and cuffs; note also the black buttons. In the background is a Commor ambulance bearing the sign of XIV Corps, in which the Guards Division serves.

H: ROYAL FLYING CORPS, 1914-16
H1: Sergeant Observer
The uniform for the other ranks of the Royal Flying Corps is depicted here. The 1914 pattern 'lancer' jacket (often referred to as a 'maternity jacket') was peculiar to the RFC, it was worn by some officers, but most preferred to continue wearing the uniform of the regiments from which they had transferred into the Corps. Both officers and men wore this Field Service cap. Note the other ranks' Corps title on his sleeves above his badges of rank; and the flying 'brevet' on the left breast, in this case an 'O' for observer with a single wing. Our subject wears a 1908 pattern webbing and is armed with a 0.455in Webley revolver.

H2: Pilot, flying clothing
Officers purchased their own flying clothing of a wide range of commercial patterns, and the items bought in by the government for issue to other ranks also showed many variations. This airman wears a leather cowling-type helmet covering most of the face, with rolled wind deflectors in front of the ear apertures, and a pair of yellow-tinted anti-glares goggles. The double-breasted leather coat with a fur- or fleece-lined collar and a convenient horizontal pocket

A private of a New Army unit of the Royal Army Medical Corps, 1916. Note his waterproof cap cover; his 'modified' Service Dress jacket, cut more simply than the pre-war model and with larger, unpleated patch pockets; and the red cross badge on his sleeves. (Author's collection)

was typical flying clothing before 1918. The lined gauntlets have slits allowing the choice of alternative glove and mitten fingers, the latter being clipped back out of the way (as shown on his left hand) when separate gauntlets were needed for greater dexterity. The thigh-length sheepskin and leather "fug boots" were originally designed by Major Lance Hawker, VC. The sheepskin was much appreciated, but the leather was often claimed that he had been shot down by Baron von Richthofen's brother Lothar, but the latter always denied it. (IWM)
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