

Jim Beach. *Haig's Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army 1916-1918*. Cambridge University Press 2013. xv + 369 pp. 20 figures, 21 tables. ISBN 978-1-107-03961-2 (Hardback). Price £65.00.

Just occasionally a book appears which explores a genuinely new topic in great detail and adds substantially to our knowledge. *Haig's Intelligence* is one such. The fruit of meticulous research and presented in clear, elegant, language it is a worthy and much needed addition to the historiography of the First World War. In a series of firm, penetrating, chapters in Part 1, Jim Beach guides the reader through the complexities of Organisation, Leadership, Personnel, Frontline, Espionage, Photography, Signals and Analysis and then moves on in Part 2 to a series of fascinating case studies: Somme, Arras, Third Ypres, Cambrai, German Offensives and the Hundred Days.

Part 1 could potentially have been a dry, though thoroughly informative read, but clever and apposite use of pithy quotation brings it to life. We read of one conference, 'dominated by a *windy, flatulent monologue* from Charteris' then, after Cambrai, 'The wolves got their teeth into Charteris, who, being plump and short of breath, fell an easy victim'. In between these events, however, we are left in no doubt about the increasing professionalisation of intelligence in the BEF, nor of the immense difficulties those responsible for it faced. So often the intelligence staff, under extreme pressure, found itself trying to make bricks without straw and to provide cast iron predictive clarity when the raw intelligence yielded nothing more than a hazy overview. Nevertheless, Beach is surely correct when he concludes that, '... intelligence had by 1918 come of age as a distinct military support function within the British army. Later generations would refine it, but its foundations were laid on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918'.

The constant problems with which the intelligence branch grappled, the fact that it was dealing with an inexact science, means that its practitioners attracted much subsequent criticism from men equipped with 20:20 hindsight. It is always easier to explain why something has happened than to predict what is going to occur and, ultimately, Charteris paid the price. Beach is particularly good on the manoeuvring which led ultimately to his sacking at the end of 1917 and although he makes a strong case that his alleged deficiencies were overstated, nevertheless one theme which runs through the entire book is that, even if Haig's heads of intelligence were not simply feeding him from first to last what he wanted to hear, there was certainly a tendency to put the best gloss on the situation - to the point on occasion of wishful thinking - and, over time, this can only have diluted the quality of analysis and advice which Haig was receiving.

One example will serve to illustrate this point. At the end of June 1916 the German lines opposite the British on the Somme were subjected to repeated releases of cylinder gas and, in a GHQ Summary of Information published the following month, it was estimated that five percent of the troops manning the first position were gassed. In truth, Infantry Regiment 180 at Oivillers, for example, suffered 'a few' fatal gas casualties and Reserve Infantry Regiment 99, defending Thiepval, only one. This brief illustration brings into focus one way in which this excellent book could have been made even better. Its time frame means that for all but the months of July and August 1916, the battles which form the case studies were directed on the German side by Army Group Crown Prince Rupprecht, the files of which - huge quantities of

them - are available for study in Munich and, in addition, large amounts of relevant information is archived in the *Hauptstaatsarchiv* Stuttgart and the *Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv* in Freiburg im Breisgau, which holds a priceless cache of documents concerning the German manpower crisis. As a result, it would be entirely feasible to test many of the intelligence assessments made against the actual facts. This would be a thoroughly worthwhile and interesting follow up to this outstanding piece of research and writing which I recommend unreservedly.

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