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## WAITING FOR ARMAGEDDON?<sup>1</sup>

### British Military Journals and the Images of Future War (1900–1914)

Surveying British war-expectations in August 1914 one is instinctively reminded of Robert Louis Stevenson, who had thought it »a better thing to travel hopefully than to arrive«<sup>2</sup>. When the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) left for the continent, suddenly »all the jibes and jeers« about the state of the British Army after the South African War »were hushed«<sup>3</sup>. Sir James Edmonds, chief of staff of Britain's 4<sup>th</sup> Division and later official historian of the First World War<sup>4</sup>, was deeply convinced that this was more than calculated optimism: The BEF were »in every respect, [...] incomparably the best trained, best organized and best equipped British Army that ever went forth to war«<sup>5</sup>. After the first advances to the Marne, Premier Henry Herbert Asquith even thought the British troops to be invincible »[...] not only in material and equipment but in physical and moral quality«<sup>6</sup>.

However, as in the Crimean and South African War expeditions this optimism soon proved deceptive. And we all know the story: by late September and early October 1914 Britain had already suffered more casualties than in all 19<sup>th</sup> century wars taken together. More than half of the whole BEF, about 80 000 of Britain's »finest army« had been killed (30 000) or severely wounded (50 000)<sup>7</sup>. The Empire therefore was forced to build a new army and throw more and more inexperienced amateur forces into the fray. In April 1915, these new troops made their acquaintance with gas warfare. On July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916, the first day of the Somme, Britain suffered the

1 The research for this essay refers partly to my Ph. D. thesis: Andreas ROSE, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent. Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Munich 2011 (Veröffentlichungen des Deutschen Historischen Instituts London/Publications of the German Historical Institute London, 70), p. 171–236, 385–423, and partly to a post-doctoral project funded by the Swiss National Fonds on British Military Journals and the Expectations of War (1880 to 1914): ID., »Readiness or Ruin« – Der große Krieg in den britischen Militärzeitschriften (1880–1914), in: Stig FÖRSTER (ed.), *Der große Krieg in den Militärzeitschriften der Großmächte 1880–1914* (in print).

2 Robert Louis STEVENSON, *El Dorado* (1878), in: ID., *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers*, vol. II, London 1911, p. 371.

3 Archibald HURD, *How England prepared for War. Pages of History. Secret and Otherwise*, in: *Fortnightly Review*, 96/573 (1914), p. 406–420, here p. 417; Lord Roberts' Campaign Speeches. A Continuation of »The Message to the Nation«, in: *The Academy*, 17.1.1914, p. 75.

4 James Edward EDMONDS, *History of the Great War. Based on Official Documents. Military Operations. France and Belgium 1914*, London 1937; Brian BOND, *The First World War and British History*, Oxford 1991; Andrew GREEN, *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories 1915–1948*, London 2003.

5 Military Notes, in: *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 58 (1914), p. 403–416, here p. 410–411.

6 Asquith, Guildhall, 5.9.1914, *Summons of the Nation to Arms. British People Roused by Their Leaders*, in: *York Times Current History of the European War* (26.12.1914), p. 308–337, here p. 311.

7 Hedley Paul WILLMOTT, *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, London 2003, p. 60–61.

»blackest day [...] in its entire military history«<sup>8</sup>. It had to face more than 50 % casualties in a single day. Nonetheless, the national dailies reported that »everything has gone well«<sup>9</sup>. By November 1916 Great Britain had lost more than 400 000 men. By 1918 nearly a million soldiers, four times higher than the total figure of British army deaths in the Second World War, had lost their lives.

These shocking experiences, the unparalleled horrors on the western front, the well known pictures of trench warfare and no man's land in between are still dramatic<sup>10</sup>. The conflict, without doubt, altered the very definition of war itself. It has had a lasting impact on the United Kingdom to this very day as the annual commemorations on Remembrance Sunday show. It is sometimes forgotten, however, that in the decades which preceded 1914, war was thought possible, probable, and even desirable<sup>11</sup>, and its potential outcome was perceived rather soberly, discussed intensively and closely thought out. In late Victorian and Edwardian Britain there was a deep interest in all military matters which spread beyond the concern of the professional military and naval elite. »Altogether«, James Edmonds admitted, »Britain had never entered upon any war with anything approaching such forwardness and fore-thought in the preparation [...]«<sup>12</sup>. Yet the optimism with which the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) boarded the Navy's vessels and went to the continent in August 1914 remains puzzling.

Faced with the horrors of stalemate and modern warfare, the British military leadership denied any pre-war knowledge that such events were likely to occur and showed itself almost invariably surprised by the way that the Great War unfolded. »For years«, the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF, John French recalled in 1919, he had regarded a great war as »inevitable« and had therefore observed pre-war military developments closely.

»No previous experience, no conclusion I had been able to draw from campaigns in which I had taken part, or from a close study of the new conditions in which the war of today is waged, had led me to anticipate a war of positions. All my thoughts, all my

8 Quoted in: David SAUL, *Military Blunders. The How and Why of Military Failure*, London 1997, p. 95.

9 Ibid., p. 106.

10 Historical research has not yet reached any consensus on why the Great War military stalemate occurred, offering different explanations, in a wide range of plausible and well-reasoned accounts. On the one hand research points to the discrepancy between ideas and technology or individual explanations. On the other hand historians refer to Carl von Clausewitz's »fog of war«, the complexity of conflict and unpredictable external factors. The majority of previous studies therefore mainly focus on private papers, memoirs and reflections of high-ranking officials and military leaders. With regard to the overall level of pre-war knowledge, expectations of and images of the coming war, however, questions remain, especially with regard to subsequent justifications provided in war memoirs and mirrored in other personal reflections. See for example: Paddy GRIFFITH (ed.), *Battle Tactics on the Western Front. The British Army's Art of Attack*, New Haven, London 1996; ID. (ed.), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, London, Portland 1996; ID., *The Great War on the Western Front. A Short History*, Barnsley 2008; Peter LIDDLE (ed.), *Passchendaele in Perspective. The Third Battle of Ypres*, London 1997; Tim TRAVERS, *The Killing Ground. The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900–1918*, London 1987; ID., *The Evolution of British Strategy and Tactics on the Western Front in 1918: GHQ, Manpower, and Technology*, in: *Journal of Military History* 54,2 (1990), S. 173–200; Shelford BIDWELL, Dominick GRAHAM, *Fire-Power. British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904–1945*, London 1982.

11 Zara STEINER, *Views of War: Britain before the »Great War« – and After*, in: *International Relations* 17/7 (2003), p. 7–33, here p. 9.

12 EDMONDS, *History of the Great War* (as in n. 4), p. 13.

prospective plans, all my possible alternatives of action, were concentrated upon a war of movement and manoeuvre<sup>13</sup>.«

However, what did war leaders like French, or his successor Douglas Haig, or military commanders like Henry Wilson and Henry Rawlinson, who was in a command position at the battle of the Somme, expect? At the very least, there had been plenty of war experiences and ample evidence before 1914 that modern weaponry and indirect artillery fire would revolutionize war. Needless to say, British troops were not prepared for continental warfare, British war maps were rather sketchy and mostly incorrect, communication developments consistently lagged behind weaponry advances, and the command structure was dated, based on obedience to superiors and suspicion of subordinates. But this does not answer the question as to why lessons learned, for example in South Africa (1899–1902), and observed in the Far East (1904/05) had been ignored for so long, at least until the battle of the Somme. We know by now that Douglas Haig was not »the monster«<sup>14</sup>, who »would not even visit his wounded«<sup>15</sup> and that the British army at least by 1918 was more sophisticated than many historians had thought. Nevertheless, it remains puzzling why so many clear auguries of the future of warfare before 1914 generally went unheeded.<sup>16</sup> Why did the British army, especially Sir Henry Rawlinson, rely for so long during the war upon suicidal breakthrough tactics, the frontal assault against machine-guns, which led to it sacrificing tens of thousands of men?<sup>17</sup>

General French conceded in a self-critical moment that he was at a loss for an answer as to why nobody had realised,

»what the most modern rifle, the machine gun, motor traction, the aeroplane and wireless telegraphy would bring about. It seems so simple when judged by actual results. The modern rifle and machine gun add tenfold to the relative power of the defense as against attack. This precludes the use of the old methods of attack, and has driven the attack to seek covered entrenchments after every forward rush of at most a few hundred yards«<sup>18</sup>.

In order to study the ways in which warfare was perceived before the catastrophe of trench warfare occurred, it is necessary to consider how military institutions learn. First, in the U.K., as in most other states before 1914, expectations regarding future warfare were expressed within the regular process of debates among the service departments, the War Office and the Admiralty. Military, as well as naval, officers developed their assumptions from military manoeuvres, from incoming reports from special attachés and correspondents on foreign manoeuvres or observing wars abroad, from staff planning work or war games, organised by the intelligence

13 John FRENCH, 1914, London 1919, p. 8–9.

14 Gary SHEFFIELD, *The Chief. Douglas Haig and the British Army*, London 2011: on the known assessment see esp. p. 1–8.

15 John KEEGAN, *The Face of Battle. A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme*, London 1976, p. 329.

16 Only after the Somme was Haig quick to deploy the newfangled tank; he abandoned his cherished cavalry and embraced new tactics such as the »creeping barrage« (in which infantry advanced closely behind a carefully calibrated curtain of shellfire). SHEFFIELD, *The Chief* (as in n. 14), p. 108, 192.

17 Saul DAVID, *Military Blunders. The How and Why of Military Failure*, London 1997, p. 95–107; Niall FERGUSON, *Der falsche Krieg. Der Erste Weltkrieg und das 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1997, p. 288.

18 FRENCH, 1914 (as in n. 13), p. 9.

branch, as well as from the training and behaviour of the troops. These assumptions were then consolidated as different impressions were discussed.

Secondly, in pre-war Britain the service departments were intrinsically interwoven with the whole parliamentary system and therefore part of the public sphere of London. Hence, military learning was both a result of an external as well as an internal process. As such both service departments participated in and benefitted from the vivid public debate that linked Westminster, Whitehall and Fleet Street, and which involved not only military thinkers and special correspondents, military and naval leagues, Gentlemen's Clubs and public service institutions like the Royal United Service Institution, but also public schools, universities, and youth movements. Parliamentary debates about army and navy estimates were a key forum for such discussions and the general debate in Britain was influenced by popular cultural trends and disputes between pacifists, on the one hand, and a rising mood based upon Social Darwinist approaches, that became manifest in military circles, especially during the controversy on compulsory service and corresponding anti-German press campaigns on the other<sup>19</sup>.

Studied together, these different groups reveal much about the pre-war images and illusions that existed in Edwardian Britain such as the general orthodoxy of a »short-war-illusion« or the »cult of the offensive«. They also shed light upon the attitudes to war in general and the pre-war mind in Britain, as well as the atmosphere in which politicians, diplomats, the Army, the Navy, journalists and publicists alike discussed war, politics and international relations, and acted to shape pre-war relations. In the following article, I would like to focus first on the general image of war presented to the public through what Edmund Gosse called »The Literature of Action«<sup>20</sup> representing adventure stories and tales of British heroism and patriotism published by war heroes. The second part of the article focuses upon the genre of Service Journals – a source that has hitherto been surprisingly neglected. As institutional publications which were also part of the London press and public policy process, these periodicals reflect and connect the professional and the public debate<sup>21</sup>. In my conclusion, I will then address the question as to what extent the British discussion of modern warfare at the beginning of the century has to be considered a story of lessons not learnt.

### Attitudes towards War in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain

War might indeed have been unexpected at the moment of the actual July crisis of 1914, but the idea of a coming war had long been a preoccupation of late-Victorian and Edwardian society. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England was fraught with anxieties and crises which affected all aspects of the modern state. Dealing with England's *fin de siècle*, it becomes obvious that this was not only a highly anxious society but also one that was quite familiar with security risks, permanent colonial warfare and the use of legitimate military means to safeguard the British Isles and the Empire<sup>22</sup>. Though in degree and scope different from so-called Prussianism, mili-

19 STEINER, Views of War (as in n. 11); ROSE, Zwischen Empire und Kontinent (as in n. 1), here p. 27–101; Dominik GEPPERT, *Pressekriege. Öffentlichkeit und Diplomatie in den deutsch-britischen Beziehungen (1896–1912)*, Munich 2007; William MULLIGAN, *The Origins of the First World War*, Cambridge 2010, p. 140–144.

20 Edmund GOSSE, The Literature of Action, in: *North American Review* 168,1 (1899), p. 14–23.

21 The most important military journals were: The United Service Gazette (USG), the United Service Magazine (USM), and the Journal of the Royal United Service Institution (JRUSI). Next to the lengthy articles, the military and naval journals published special lectures and discussions on a diverse range of military matters. Andreas ROSE, *Readiness or Ruin* (in print).

22 Anne SUMMERS, Militarism in Britain before the Great War, in: *History Workshop* 2 (1976), p. 104–123; Christoph JAHR, British Prussianism. Überlegungen zu einem europäischen Militarismus im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert, in: Wolfram WETTE (ed.), *Schule der Gewalt*.

tarism was, in general, also a very popular cause in Britain. Shortly after France's defeat by a Prussian-led coalition of German states, George T. Chesney published a story entitled »The Battle of Dorking«, describing a fictitious invasion of the British Isles. Although unnamed, to contemporaries the invaders appeared inevitably as being Germans due to their military efficiency. Selling over 80 000 copies in a month, »The Battle of Dorking« set a fashion for hundreds of spy and invasion novels like »The Invasion of 1883« (1876), »The Invasion of 1910« (1906), »The Invasion That Did Not Come Off« (1909) and so on and so forth. Military and imperial heroism found favour in a growing market for juvenile literature like »The Dash for Khartoum« (1891); »With Buller in Natal; or A Born Leader« (1900); »With Roberts to Pretoria: A Tale of the South African War« (1901)<sup>23</sup>. Long before the July crisis, Britain thus witnessed a tremendous upsurge of interest in all things military, especially concerning what were termed Britain's »sporting wars«. Alfred Milner's »England in Egypt« (1892) made a deep impression, as did Lord Robert's »Forty One Years in India« (1897) and Sir George Robertson's »Chitral: A Story of a Minor Siege« (1898) which were among the most widely read stories of British heroism. General Gordon, Kitchener of Khartoum and Roberts of Kandahar were the heroes of the Edwardian generation<sup>24</sup>. This was largely the result of the success of the »Scramble for Africa«, of the time-consuming Sudan expedition and Omdurman (1898) and the South African War (1899–1902) which was seen as a catastrophe narrowly averted. It was also a result of the contemporary fears of invasion either by France, Russia or Germany or all three together and debates on national and racial degeneration. Britons were also aware of popular German military writing. Colmar von der Goltz's work »Ein Volk in Waffen« (1883) was seen as »a book that should be read by all soldiers«, while Wilhelm von Bernhardi's »Germany and the Next War« (1912)<sup>25</sup> was well-known to British readers even before its translation into English. By the outbreak of war in 1914 over 1700 copies of Bernhardi's book had been sold in Britain followed by a print-run of a staggering 201 450 copies by December 1914<sup>26</sup>. Closer scrutiny of the image of war presented in the general press reveals that warfare itself was seen as a natural, beneficial and even desirable outcome of developments. This found expression in countless newspaper articles, periodicals, science-fiction stories, music hall songs or theatre plays. This was particularly the case at the turn of the century, when the Victorian era came to a close and the Victorians reflected on the imperial balance sheet since Trafalgar (1805) while the younger generation asked themselves whether they would be able to continue to safeguard the Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup>. Frequent analogies were made to Edward Gibbon's well-known work, »The History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire« (1776), which was frequently reprinted between 1896 and 1900, while Darwinian beliefs gained momentum. War and the readiness for war seemed to many to be the best means for society to escape luxury and sloth<sup>28</sup>. Politi-

Militarismus in Deutschland 1871 bis 1945, Berlin 2005, p. 246–261. Caroline Elizabeth PLAYNE, *The Pre-War Mind in Britain. An Historical Review*, London 1928; William Joseph READER, *At Duty's Call. A Study in Obsolete Patriotism*, Manchester 1988.

23 See: Ignatius Frederick CLARKE, *Voices for Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763–3749*, Oxford 1992; See: Arnold D. HARVEY, *A Muse of Fire. Literature, Art and War*, London 1998, p. 46–70.

24 William Leonard LANGER, *Diplomacy of Imperialism: 1890–1902*, New York 1976, p. 82–83.

25 Colmar Freiherr VON DER GOLTZ, *Das Volk in Waffen. Ein Buch über Heerwesen und Kriegsführung unserer Zeit*, Berlin 1883; Field-Marshal Earl ROBERTS, *A Nation in Arms*, London 1907; Anon., *Recent Publications of Military Interest*; compiled by the General Staff, War Office, July, 1907, in: JRUSI 51/2 (1907), p. 917–946, here p. 929.

26 Thomas WEBER, *British War Propaganda and the Thesis of German Militarism*. Friedrich von Bernhardi's *Germany and the Next War* reconsidered (unpublished paper).

27 HARVEY, *A Muse of Fire* (as in n. 23), p. 46–70; Glenn R. WILKINSON, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899–1914*, London 2003.

28 Thomas HODGKIN, *The Fall of the Roman Empire and Its Lessons for Us*, in: *Contemporary Review* 73 (1898), p. 51–70; Lawrence KINGTON-OLIPHANT, *Rome and Reform*, 2 vols.,

cians like Arthur Balfour who tried to calm the public in the face of fears of invasion and imminent danger in 1905 by asserting the absolute safety of the British Isles and the Empire were sharply criticized by publicists like Spenser Wilkinson and others for their soporific effect upon the nation and blamed for undermining the martial spirit of the British population<sup>29</sup>.

Lord Wolseley, writing in political as well as military journals, recognized war as a sharp corrective to rising decadence »when the drill sergeant and gymnastics instructor are replaced by the ballet dancer and singer, not only does national power decline, but all healthy civilization seems to perish with it«<sup>30</sup>. At the turn of the century, in the British press in general, and military journals in particular, a European great power struggle had replaced the images of adventurous small wars against indigenous tribes. The idea that a fight for Britain's very existence was looming dominated public discussions on war and was the topic of numerous adventure, invasion and best-selling science-fiction and spy stories. In William Le Queux's book »Great War in England 1897« (1894), the Army had to defend the British Isles in a vividly described massive war against raping hordes of French and Russian invaders<sup>31</sup>. Soon afterwards France and Russia, Britain's traditional enemies, seemed to lose their attraction for writers and were replaced by the German peril. In Albert Curtis' book »A New Trafalgar« (1899), England was only saved from defeat against Germany by a new wonder ship. H.G. Wells, an important figure in Edwardian London's public sphere, even predicted a total global war fought mainly by airships; ahead of his time, he even predicted the use of atomic bombs<sup>32</sup>. The famous book, »The Riddle of the Sands« (1903) by Erskine Childers, which considers Germany as a major threat, ends with the slogan, that the »time has come for training all Englishmen systematically either for the sea or for the rifle«<sup>33</sup>. The message was clear: the South African War had revealed that only by preparing all citizens for war could Britain be preserved from disaster: »We must reform or perish« thought the diplomat Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice. Hence, he welcomed the idea that the »German devil« should be painted on the wall<sup>34</sup>. Others like Fabian Ware from the Morning Post agreed: »To allay fears of Germany is to throw away our only chance of getting the people here to bestir themselves«<sup>35</sup>. »The young and utterly dynamic German Kaiserreich, with its battle fleet and the unpredictable, but compared to his uncle Edward VII, youthful and energetic Kaiser appeared far more attractive as a new enemy than the well-known and rather dated traditional foes, Russia and France. It is, therefore, certainly no coincidence that the blockbuster theatre play »An Englishman's Home« by Guy du Maurier with its simple plot, reminiscent of the Battle of Dorking, depicting Germany as the enemy, was used successfully by the »National Service League« for enlisting new recruits<sup>36</sup>. »The Times« described it as »a startling testimony to the hold which the great National Defence question has taken on the

London, New York 1902; Anon. [Elliot E. MILLS], *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (1905). Anon., *The Decline and Fall of Britain* (1905), *The Speaker*, 16.9.1905, p. III; *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, in: *Review of Reviews*, 2 (1899), p. 153; see also: *Blackwood's Magazine* 2 (1899), p. 241.

29 ROSE, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent* (as in n. 1), p. 230.

30 Quoted in: Jonathan BAILEY, *Great Power Strategy in Asia. Empire, Culture and Trade, 1905–2005*, New York 2007, p. 48.

31 See: ROSE, *Zwischen Empire und Kontinent* (as in n. 1), p. 82–101.

32 Herbert George WELLS, *The World Set Free*, in: *English Review* (February 1914), p. 321–340.

33 Erskine CHILDERS, *The Riddle of the Sands*, London 1903, p. 336.

34 Cecil Spring-Rice to Valentine Chirrol, 21.6.1907, Spring-Rice Papers, Churchill College Archive Centre Cambridge, CASR 1/21.

35 Quoted in: Keith WILSON, *A Study in the History and Politics of The Morning Post, 1905–1926*, Lewiston, 1990, p. 26; see also: Cecil Spring-Rice to E.R. Roosevelt, 6.9.1908, Spring-Rice Papers, Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge, CASR 7/30; Fabian Ware to Leopold Maxse, 13.3.1909, Maxse Papers, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, MAXSE/459.

36 Anon., *The Moral of »An Englishman's Home«*, in: *National Defence* (1909), p. 417–419.



thoughts and imagination of the English public<sup>37</sup>. Together with the numerous anti-German press campaigns, such as the one which accompanied the publication of William Le Queux's best-selling novel »The Invasion of 1910« (1906) in which the British Army fights a major war of manoeuvre against the invading forces of the Kaiser, these stories provided the public not only with an enemy worth fighting but also with a certain idea of future warfare. In sum, this idea was marked by four major characteristics:

Firstly, war was generally seen as natural phenomenon and even as »a blessing« in certain public circles. Not only did it appear as a legitimate means of action for nations, but also as a beneficial development and as a manly task undertaken to safeguard the Empire and Britain from decline<sup>38</sup>. »War is to man what motherhood is to woman, a burden, a source of untold suffering, and yet a glory« stated one commentator<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, success on the battlefield indicated that the nation, or race, was not only an efficient but also a righteous one.

Secondly, it is striking that the image of the common soldier, typified by Tommy Atkins<sup>40</sup>, greatly improved in the pre-1914 period. By 1914 the soldier had come to be equated with ideals of advancement and to be perceived as a harbinger and safeguard of civilization. He was perceived as spreading law and order to the faraway regions of the Empire and as preserving the British way of life at home<sup>41</sup>.

Thirdly, and this is particularly striking, war began to be seen as a potential cataclysm, fought abroad as well as at home, rather total in its impact on societies and nations. Some commentators in this regard predicted that war would bring about the probable »ruin« of the Empire<sup>42</sup>.

And fourthly, notwithstanding this increasing association of war with a Darwinian struggle for existence, war was paradoxically very often linked with images of sports, hunting games or chess tournaments. To men like Captain Francis Grenfell, for example, German soldiers were a species of fox or boar, to be hunted for sport. This kind of portrayal of war often also drew upon theatrical imagery, depicting war as a form of entertainment event<sup>43</sup>. Battles were described as a type of drama staged in front of an audience of spectators. These presentations of warfare linked combat to leisure activities which were amusing and entertaining<sup>44</sup>.

37 Quoted in: Iain Boyd WHYTE, *Anglo-German Conflict in Popular Fiction, 1870–1914*, in: Fred BRIDGHAM (ed.), *The First World War as a Clash of Cultures*, Rochester 2006, p. 43–99, here p. 62.

38 WILKINSON, *Depictions and Images of War* (as in n. 27), London 2003, esp. p. 42–51.

39 Maurice BARING, *With the Russians in Manchuria*, London 1905, p. 133.

40 »The nineteenth century brought changes which eventually changed Tommy Atkins from a hard-drinking mercenary with little self-respect and no thought beyond blind obedience to an intelligent, hard-living, reasoning young man ready for promotion. The principal change came through the Cardwell reforms in 1871. Prior to this the soldier had served for twenty-one years or longer and took his discharge with no hope of post-war employment or promotion. His crimes were regarded as normal and he speedily infected new recruits with the same ideas. [...] The Cardwell reforms, by introducing the short service system, removed the bad elements.« Alan GRAY, *Tommy Atkins through the Ages*, in: *Contemporary Review* 168 (1945) p. 91–95, here p. 94.

41 WILKINSON, *Depictions and Images of War* (as in n. 27), p. 52–66.

42 Frederick MAURICE, *The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent. From His Journals and Letters*, London 1928, p. 89–90; P. HOLLAND (Capt.), *War with Armies of Millions*, in: *United Service Magazine* 136 (1897), p. 631–650; Thomas Miller MAGUIRE, *Readiness or Ruin* (lecture), in: *JRUSI* 53/2 (1909), p. 1579–1606; Anon., *Readiness*, in: *Naval Review* 1/2 (1913), p. 117–124.

43 WILKINSON, *Depictions and Images of War* (as in n. 27), p. 91–109.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 68–90.



## Images of War in British Military Journals

At the same time that this general debate on warfare within British society was occurring, the military discourse within the service journals tried to close the gap between the popular image of modern war and its reality. However, the debate within the military journals was far more complex, and linked to military structures such as top-down processes and inter-service rivalries. To the Edwardian military journal pundits, there was plenty of recent combat experience from which to construct a rather clear view of any future war. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, discussion concentrated mainly on Britain's »sporting wars« in the colonies. By the turn of the century, however, the insights from the South African War predominated. The conflict against the Boers proved the revolutionizing impact of smokeless powder, rapid gun-fire, the advantage of defensive positions and the uselessness of frontal assaults against machine-gun fire or well-prepared trenches. »Direct advance on the enemy«, as the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* and the *United Service Gazette* concluded, »without his fire having been previously beaten down, will expose the troops to destruction«<sup>45</sup>. »The defender, occupying ingeniously constructed trenches and using smokeless powder, is practically invulnerable to both gun and rifle«<sup>46</sup>. Baden Fletcher Smyth Baden-Powell gathered from his South African experiences that modern rifles make »certain zones« on the battlefield »practically impassable«<sup>47</sup>. While thinkers such as Jean de Bloch or Norman Angell concluded that a natural decline in the use of war would occur as it became increasingly senseless, junior officers serving against the Boers predicted long and costly trench warfare in the future. The artillery, it was presumed, would certainly play a dominant role, while the *arme blanche* would lose its significance. Many younger officers like John Frederick Charles (J.F. C.) Fuller, Fletcher Baden-Powell or others already anticipated the stalemate of the trenches and tank-like mobile fortresses<sup>48</sup>. Such perceptive prescient imagination and lessons, however, remained the ideas of those with the time to write articles. These younger military thinkers arrived at a conclusion which contradicted the generally assumed cult of the offensive before 1914, realising that the next war would be dominated by defensive positions:

»A defensive line well covered with a clear foreground is almost unassailable in front under modern conditions. It is no good deducing lessons from the days of Frederick, or even from those of Napoleon. In both instances troops could get within distances of their enemy which nowadays would mean annihilation [...]. The value of artillery has enormously increased that is far more accurate and its shrapnel shell a far more efficient man-killing projectile than any which has yet been employed in modern war. [...] Now the probability of a man being hit in the open compared with one in a sheltered trench

45 Löbell's Annual Reports 1889, in: JRUSI 44 (1890), p. 1020–1024; see also: Anon., The Protection of Flanks in Tactical Positions, in: *United Service Gazette*, 28.5.1898, p. 432; Anon., Tactics in Modern War, in: *United Service Gazette*, 11.2.1899, p. 119.

46 George HENDERSON, *Science of War*, London 1905, p. 159–160, 411. Quoted in: Michael HOWARD, *Men Against Fire, Expectations of War in 1914*, in: *International Security* 9/1 (1984), p. 41–57, here p. 46. As early as 1891 General Wolseley had discovered the advantages of the defensive. W.W. KNOLLYS [Col.], The Effect of Smokeless Powder in the Wars of the Future, in: *United Service Magazine* 125 (1891), p. 65–74, here p. 69.

47 Baden Fletcher Smyth BADEN-POWELL [Maj.], *War in Practice. Some Tactical and Other Lessons of the Campaign in South Africa 1899–1902*, London 1903, p. 43.

48 Hermann Gaston de WATTEVILLE [Lt.], Motor cycles for Military Purposes, in: JRUSI 48/1 (1904), p. 245–254; R.A. Johnson [Maj.], Military Cycling and the Home Army, in: JRUSI 50/1 (1906), p. 153–180.

is at least four to one. [...] The defensive has gained greatly in comparison with the offensive<sup>49</sup>.«

However, by 1904–1905, European armies and British senior officers in particular rejected any idea of defensive warfare. The Russo-Japanese war was short but intense, leaving the world shocked by its drama. In this war a range of innovations could be examined: indirect artillery fire, hand grenades, machine-guns, barbed wire, search lights, poison gas, wireless communication and motor vehicles, not to forget the impact of war on financial markets. »The real fact is, the last position today is no more than some dozen of paces from the enemy. On this position, one remains glued to the ground, often for long periods of time, because neither side ventures to risk assault<sup>50</sup>.«

A large number of military observers witnessed the conduct of the Russo-Japanese war and their findings were widely publicized and discussed. Commentators immediately acknowledged that the war had provided important insights, particularly with regard to a struggle between great powers. Conclusions differed significantly between different generations and military ranks, although most observers were deeply impressed by the sacrificial spirit of Japanese, as well as Russian, soldiers and the mass slaughter during the Manchurian campaign. For most junior officer commentators, again, the lessons appeared rather clear. At Port Arthur, where Russia lost more than 65 000 soldiers, and at Mukden, where more than 600 000 soldiers fought, the dimensions of modern trench warfare became evident:

»Rifles cracked, machine-guns spluttered, guns boomed and boomed again and the air was turned into an inferno of shrieking missiles. The rays of the search lights went up and down, rockets shot into the sky like enormous fiery snakes and burst [...]. It was the struggle of human flesh against iron and steel, against blazing petroleum, lyddite, pyroxyline, and melinite, and the stench of rotting corpses<sup>51</sup>.«

Ashmead Bartlett, South African war veteran and correspondent for the »Daily Telegraph« at Mukden, was appalled:

»There were practically no bodies intact; the hillside was carpeted with odd limbs, skulls, pieces of flesh, and the shapeless trunks of what had once been human beings, intermingled with pieces of shells, broken rifles, twisted bayonets, grenades, and masses of rock loosed from the surface by the explosions<sup>52</sup>.«

49 W.H. JAMES [Cpt., late RE], *Modern Weapons and Their Influence on Tactics and Organisation*, in: JRUSI 43/2 (1899), p. 1289–1305, here p. 1291, 1294.

50 Anon., *Infantry Combat in the Russo-Japanese War. Reminiscences of the Commandant of a Russian Company Commander*, in: JRUSI 50/2 (1906), p. 1169–1177, here p. 1175; Montgomery M. MACOMB, *The Russian Infantry Soldier*, in: JRUSI 50/2 (1906), p. 1160–1168; Anon., *Infantry Combat in the Russo-Japanese War*, in: JRUSI 50/2 (1906), p. 1274–1276, here p. 1275.

51 E.K. NOJINE, *The Truth about Port Arthur*, London 1908, p. 183–184, 252; Jonathan BAILEY, *Military History and the Pathology of Lessons Learned: The Russo-Japanese War. A Case Study*, in: Williamson MURRAY, Richard Hart SINNREICH (ed.), *The Past as Prologue. The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, Cambridge 2006, p. 180. Recent Publications of Military Interest; Compiled by the General Staff, War Office, July, 1908. Communicated by the General Staff, in: *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution* 52/2 (1908), p. 1003.

52 Ellis ASHMEAD-BARTLETT, *The Siege and Capitulation*, London 1906, p. 330. British Biographical Archive 1881–1931, S. 145; Ashley W. BARRETT [Cpt.], *Essay. »Q« Club Prize of 1906: »Lessons to be Learned by Regimental Officers from the Russo-Japanese War«*, in: JRUSI 51/2 (1907), p. 797–823.

These were descriptions that could undoubtedly have come from the Great War a decade later. As a young witness reflected, the mark of the next war will be:

»Lying down in [...] positions, mutually drenching each other with bullets and shrapnels, suffering considerable losses, and taking no repose, either by day or night [...] In my opinion a similar situation could be prolonged for an indefinite time with the character of a war of position, and degenerate into immobility, without producing any decisive result<sup>53</sup>.«

Modern weapons, Captain Sankey was certain, strengthened the defensive at least ten-fold. This would also have its impact upon the duration of a future conflict. Instead of reckoning with weeks, Sankey thought that future war would be defined by endless sieges and battles in which »each army will then practically become a garrison of an enormous extended fortress«<sup>54</sup>. Nevertheless, military leaders arrived at different conclusions: »The defensive«, as General Knox stated, was »never an acceptable role to the Briton, and he makes little or no study of it«<sup>55</sup>. While junior officers, in their predictions, had come surprisingly close to what actually happened ten years later on the western front, their seniors focused instead upon Japanese »Bushido«, literally the Samurai-like »path of chivalry« and self-sacrifice<sup>56</sup>. Senior military commentators concluded that the Russo-Japanese war provided a lesson in the importance of morale and regarded high morale rather than modern weaponry, including artillery, as the primary determining factor in any coming war. Major General Brooke, thus, described the official attitude in the »United Service Magazine«: »One could not make omelettes without breaking eggs – victory went to the army that had been trained to die rather than to avoid dying«<sup>57</sup>. Others backed this approach: »Forward against the enemy whatever the cost! The defeat of the enemy is consummated by the assault with fixed bayonets«<sup>58</sup> or: »The real lessons«, from the Far East, »are moral rather than material«<sup>59</sup>. As another commentator stated »The modern British officer should be Bushido incarnate, and he would be the very ideal soldier«<sup>60</sup>. General Ian Hamilton

53 Anon., *Infantry Combat in the Russo-Japanese War; Observations and Personal Reminiscences of the Commandant of a Russian Company*. Translated by permission of the French Minister of War from the »Revue militaire des armées étrangères«, in: JRUSI 50/2 (1906), p. 1169–1177, here p. 1176.

54 C.E.P. SANKEY, *The Campaign of the Future. A Possible Development*, in: *Royal Engineers Journal* 5 (1907), p. 4–6.

55 Quoted in: Tim TRAVERS, *Technology, Tactics, and Morale. Jean de Bloch, the Boer War, and British Military Theory, 1900–1914*, in: *Journal of Modern History* 51/2 (1979), p. 264–286, here p. 271.

56 M. DE NÉGRIER, [Gen.], *The Moral of Troops*, in: JRUSI 49/2 (1905), p. 1426–1435, here p. 1429; Walter KIRTON, *With the Japanese on the Yalu*, in: JRUSI 49/1 (1905), p. 269–288, here p. 282; Thomas Miller MAGUIRE, *Readiness or Ruin* (lecture), in: JRUSI 53/2 (1909), p. 1579–1606, here p. 1582; see also: Alexander BANNERMAN, *The Creation of the Japanese National Spirit*, in: JRUSI 54/1 (1910), p. 697–719, here p. 709.

57 BROOKE [Maj.-Gen.] *Some Reflections*, in: *United Service Magazine* 26 (1903), p. 374–380, here p. 377; POLLOCK, *Arms and Methods in War*, in: *United Service Magazine* 26 (1903), p. 627; Frederick Natush MAUDE [Lt.-Col.], *The Evolution of Modern Strategy*, London 1905, p. 146; see: TRAVERS, *Technology, Tactics, and Morale* (as in n. 55), p. 273.

58 Martin SAMUELS, *Command and Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888–1918*, London 1995, p. 76.

59 EVE, *The Value of Imagination in Peace and War*, in: *United Service Magazine* 28 (1904), p. 462–463; Colonel Kiggell, quoted in: TRAVERS, *Technology, Tactics, and Morale* (as in n. 55), p. 273.

60 Thomas MAGUIRE *Commentary in: A.B.N. Churchill [Maj.], The Army as a Profession* (lecture), in: JRUSI 54/1 (1910), p. 166–198, here p. 190.

who was convinced that contemporary civilization was becoming less and less capable of conforming to the antique standards of military virtue, put forward the thesis that the human will could overcome barbed wire and fire-swept zones. At Gallipoli, where he led the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) to destruction, he was to learn that this theory was rather incomplete<sup>61</sup>.

Rather incomplete also were the conclusions drawn concerning the impact of modern artillery and its indirect gunnery. The young artillery officer, Captain Guinness, thought himself »bold« in making the assertion against his superiors that »we shall get the worst of it in the first ten minutes of the next artillery duel« and that all evidence showed that the future belonged to indirect and distant fire<sup>62</sup>. His superiors held a different opinion based upon older chivalric military ideals. To them indirect fire, though effective seemed dishonourable. They trusted in the fact that the English field artillery would »never consider their role is to sit behind a hill a mile and a half in the rear while the assault is taking place«<sup>63</sup>. Until the very beginning of the war in 1914 they saw »absolutely no excuse for artillery remaining idle in face of the enemy; if they cannot see him, they must push forward until they do, even if this entails their being used as machine-guns«<sup>64</sup>. This, in fact, was an attitude that proved disastrously costly. From 1914 until the Somme, the British were simply out-gunned. The distant artillery remained purely an auxiliary of the infantry. In 1909 even the lance was reintroduced, a move which went against all manoeuvre experiences and Douglas Haig had three cavalry divisions brought up to the Somme front, contrary to all pre-war assessments<sup>65</sup>.

To the younger analysts of the Russo-Japanese War it seemed plausible to see the next war as a gigantic struggle and the lessons to learn seemed clear: war was no longer a duel between armies, but a life and death struggle between nations, paralyzing the whole life of a country and infantry weapons and indirect artillery fire in defence would outclass the offensive. To them the war in the Far East offered tantalizing insights into the character of warfare in the coming decades.

61 TRAVERS, *Technology, Tactics, and Morale* (as in n. 55), p. 264–286, here p. 272.

62 C.D. GUINNESS, *Artillery Positions and Screening Guns*, in: *Proceedings of the Royal Artillery Institution* 24 (1897), p. 61–95; »We may run the risk of suffering great losses at the outset of a campaign«, in: L. KEIR, *Direct and Indirect Fire*, in: *ibid.*, p. 231–241, here p. 240; G. MACKINLAY [Maj.], *Accuracy of Artillery Fire*, in: *JRUSI* 31 (1887/88), p. 439–490; J.C. DALTON [Maj.], *Artillery Fire by Night*, in: *JRUSI* 31 (1887/88), p. 1021–1023.

63 Quoted in: BAILEY, *Military History* (as in n. 51), p. 170–194, here p. 175.

64 Quoted in: Sanders MARBLE, *Royal Artillery Doctrine, 1902–1914*, in: *War Studies Journal* (1996), p. 98.

65 KEEGAN, *Face of Battle* (as in n. 15), p. 242; »Horsemen armed with firearms cannot cope successfully with cavalry either in attack or defence«, in: Douglas HAIG, *The Use of Cavalry and Other Mounted Forces*, in: *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa. House of Commons and Parliamentary Papers [HCPP]*, Cd. 1789 (1903), p. 49–52, here p. 50. A different impression of Haig conveys Brian BOND, *Doctrine and Training in the British Cavalry 1870–1914*, in: Michael HOWARD (ed.), *Theory and Practice of War. Essays presented to Captain B.H. Liddell Hart*, London 1965, p. 95–125, p. 107: »Cavalry has never been able to beat staunch infantry except by surprise, and now it is almost impossible for cavalry to approach near enough to the enemy's firing line to effect surprise«; Lord ROBERTS, *Memorandum on Cavalry Armament*, in: *JRUSI* 43 (1903), p. 575–582; Anon., *Cavalry of the Future. A Prediction*, in: *USG*, 12.9.1903, p. 732; »It [the cavalry] has lost its importance on the field of battle, without however, giving up the idea of being able to intervene effectively«, stated the well-known lieutenant general Pelet-Narbonne, cited in: *The Future of Cavalry*, in: *Army and Navy Gazette*, 8.9.1906, p. 841–842; Anon., *How Not To Do It*, in: *Cavalry Journal* 1/2 (1906), p. 316–317; HOLBROOK, *The Russo-Japanese War IV: Mistchenko's Cavalry Raid*, in: *United Service Magazine* 30 (1905), p. 382.

»We have just been witness to a great war. Such an enormous number of effectives engaged, with the employment of weapons brought to the highest state of perfection, has never before been seen. The war has been carried on in both densely populated regions and regions almost deserts, on the plains and among mountains, under the heat of a torrid summer and the snows of two rigorous winters. The siege of a fortress, on which the whole art of the engineer had been expended, battles which have sometimes lasted several days – may, even some weeks – permit us to realize what the fighting of the future will be<sup>66</sup>.«

The Russo-Japanese war thus represented a watershed with regard to the imagination of future warfare; even senior commanders who held to traditional views were affected. Henry Rawlinson, later second in command at the Somme, already thought the era of small wars at an end. The only war that he could imagine after the war in the Far East was a major conflict of life and death, either against Russia or against Germany<sup>67</sup>. From now on the British Army focused upon plans for an expeditionary operation to fight side by side with France.<sup>68</sup> However, though Anglo-French staff talks took place, the lessons and consequences learned from recent wars for modern land warfare seemed to take a back seat.

### Lessons not learned?

The lessons of the Russo-Japanese War and the Balkan Wars of 1912/13 where again trench warfare, the extensive use of barbed wire, long distance artillery and the war in the air were experienced<sup>69</sup>, therefore seem to be a typical story of lessons not learned by the British military which remained optimistic about the British army's ability to win a future conflict<sup>70</sup>. For years a great power struggle had been debated in public in Britain. Nevertheless, war remained a distant adventure to many readers of science-fiction stories and press reports until they found themselves in the trenches on the western front. To the general public during the pre-war period, war appeared rather distant and the denial of death was a striking characteristic of the image of any future war which was often likened to a sporting event, chess tournament or theatre play. Perceived as a legitimate form of interaction between nation states, however, war at the same time also appeared throughout the whole period as a beneficial phenomenon and a chance for glory in a man's life. Militarism was widespread in Edwardian England and Tommy Atkins, symbolizing the ordinary soldier, became increasingly popular as a symbolic safeguard of British civilization, while Social Darwinist beliefs were also indispensable in shaping pre-war British mentalities, which were influenced by sensationalism, as well as by the conviction that a future war was inevitable.

Looking at the service journals we certainly find the same Social Darwinist beliefs, although combined with rather more realistic ideas concerning a major war. Younger officers in particu-

66 DE NÉGRIER [Gen.], Some Lessons of the Russo-Japanese War, in: JRUSI 50/1 (1906), p. 687–698, here p. 687.

67 Frederick Barton MAURICE, The Life of General Lord Rawlinson of Trent. From His Journals and Letters, London 1928, p. 89–90.

68 Robert Stephenson SMYTH BADEN-POWELL [Lt.-Gen.], Training for Territorials (lecture), in: JRUSI 52/2 (1908), p. 1469–1501; Anon., The International Situation and the Army, in: Army and Navy Gazette, 15.5.1909, p. 464–465.; RASON [Cpt.], Communications between England and Russia, in: JRUSI 55/2 (1911), p. 1553–1576; J. FORTESCUE, Joint Expeditions, in: Army Review 4 (1913), p. 1–15; A. DE TARLÉ [Cpt.], The British Army and a Continental War, [Transl. from »Revue de Paris«], in: JRUSI 57/1 (1913), p. 384–401.

69 C.B. MAYNE [Col.], The Balkan War and some of its Lessons, in: JRUSI 57/1 (1913), p. 633–660.

70 BAILEY, Military History (as in n. 51), p. 170–194.

lar seemed to be aware of this. They were used to new inventions and technologies and many of them foresaw the horrors of long and enduring trench warfare. Instead of concentrating on the much cited »cult of the offensive«, they emphasized the increased strength and advantages of defensive positions against the offense very sharply.

Their seniors on the other hand rejected most of the new ideas concerning defensive tactics and modern technology. They even denounced the idea that defensive action might be stronger than the offensive as a »national calamity«.<sup>71</sup> The difference between both groups, however, was not solely caused by ordinary intergenerational tensions. It was rather a typical case of »bottom-up« lessons identified but rejected by the »top-down« hierarchical and institutional framework<sup>72</sup>.

Taking pre-war images, expectations and military knowledge into account, the military leadership laid special emphasis on morale, courage and discipline and not enough emphasis on fire power and tactics, particularly after the Russo-Japanese war. Here the public discussions, which largely aimed at developing the spirit of the nation, matched with the attitudes of senior officers and high command. However, it was not simply denial, ignorance, adherence to tradition or failure that explains this misinterpretation of reality which led to such errors as the re-introduction of the lance in 1909, for example. It was also the logical outcome of a situation where the army leadership was fighting for its legitimacy and its budgets, as well as partly for conscription and a mass army of a continental scale, all of which appeared to be threatened by liberal »retrenchment and reform«. It was no coincidence that preposterous science-fiction stories and theatre plays such as Le Queux's »Invasion of 1910« or Du Maurier's »An Englishman's Home« and many others were co-sponsored not only by Lord Northcliffe and his mass circulating papers<sup>73</sup> but also by the so-called »thinking soldiers« of the »National Service League«. Senior military figures like Charles à Court Repington, Lord Roberts, Charles Beresford, Ian Hamilton and others regularly painted various »devils on the wall« to encourage the British people to become more warlike in spirit<sup>74</sup>. As a result, however, psychological and moral qualities and the fighting spirit of the nation became more important than military analysis and technological details<sup>75</sup>.

Officers in command also had to think increasingly politically and viewed lessons through the distorting lenses of political intrigue, social attitude, military orthodoxy and wishful thinking<sup>76</sup>, particularly with regard to recruiting men who had not undergone compulsory training in an age of possible mass slaughter. In the pre-war period, among other things, it was believed that armies, especially volunteer armies in times of retrenchment, needed a positive and spectacular vision of how war would develop, how it could be won and how they could shape the development of warfare in the face of changing technological, strategic and social factors<sup>77</sup>.

71 Spenser Wilkinson to Lord Roberts, 15.7.1905, Roberts Papers, National Army Museum, R 87/64; see also: *The Morning Post*, 16. and 25.5.1905; *The Spectator*, 20.5.1905, p. 737.

72 BAILEY, *Military History* (as in n. 51), p. 184–188.

73 The Northcliffe Press owned the »Daily News«, »The Times«, »The Observer«, »The Daily Express«, »Sunday Times«, and »The Daily Mirror«. Lord Northcliffe's credo was, among other things, that »the average Briton liked a good hate«. Quoted in: Paul Michael KENNEDY, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*, London 1980, p. 362.

74 Andreas ROSE, »The writers, not the sailors ...«: Großbritannien, die Hochseeflotte und die »Revolution der Staatenwelt«, in: Bernd HEIDENREICH, Sönke NEITZEL, (ed.), *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich, 1890–1914*, Paderborn, Munich, Vienna 2011, p. 221–240.

75 This becomes particularly obvious during the investigation by the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence from 1907 to 1908. ROSE, *Empire und Kontinent* (as in n. 1), p. 385–423.

76 BAILEY, *Military History* (as in n. 51), p. 170.

77 Royal Commission on the War in South Africa, vol. I., House of Commons and Parliamentary Papers, Cd. 1790 (1904), p. 107–109, 113.



Whereas science-fiction stories with a happy ending were believed to increase the public martial spirit, speculation on the horrors of war and unpopular evidence regarding the nature of lethal fire swept zones dominated by machine-gun fire and invisible artillery fire seemed counter-productive for winning new recruits; indeed it was believed that it might lead to understandable inertia in existing military structures and in the budget struggle. Whereas in the military journals, debates on innovations pressed for reform and change, these did not match senior officers' strategic and political imperatives in view of the context of a liberal government which was unfavourable to military expansion. It was precisely because many foresaw longer and intense battles that they believed would be too costly to sustain that the next war, therefore, had to be short and had to be fought offensively, in keeping with what was believed to be the national ethos and tradition of the British race, and it had to be won by rapid manoeuvres because there was no other plan. After a short phase of paralysis after the Boer War, during which discussions focused upon Jean de Bloch's work and the superiority of the defensive, the Russo-Japanese war reassured military leaders that offensive wars would still be possible, though costly. They believed that the increasing firepower available to the infantry and, in particular, to the artillery would make this more, rather than less, likely. Observing the Japanese victory, they believed that firepower would be less significant in the coming struggle than high morale and the undisputed qualities of the ruling British race. A doctrine that emphasized lighter, more mobile forces, as well as human qualities rather than expensive technology, therefore, appeared much more attractive.

Thus, in the decade prior to 1914, many believed and were daily told by best-selling newspapers and other publications that the answer to contemporary military challenges, as well as to modernity itself, lay in manipulating human nature.

Ironically, the British army sought desperate remedies in the form of morale precisely because it recognized that the technological realities described by Jean de Bloch were likely to exist during any future war. The fact that it was widely recognised that technological advances now meant that an intense fire swept zone was likely to prove a challenge for troops led the British to emphasise *esprit-de-corps*, generic value judgement, willpower, obedience, self-discipline and voluntary self-sacrifice<sup>78</sup>. The consequences of this were to be seen right at the beginning of the First World War, when morale and self-sacrifice proved ineffective as a means of breaking the enemy line, although it took the BEF two years to adapt and to respond more adequately to the technological realities. After the war, John French, Douglas Haig and James Edmonds, to name but a few, re-wrote their own versions of events, expressing unashamedly self-serving delusions. Of course, they could have been more aware during the pre-1914 period of the likely realities of any future conflict and General French actually had known better. As a student of the Russo-Japanese war, he had already concluded in early 1906:

»We shall have battles lasting for several days, troops probably perfectly stationary, and firing at one another in the hours of daylight, whilst movements in the attack, whether infantry or artillery and all entrenching, whether in attack or defence will have to be done under cover of darkness<sup>79</sup>.«

Yet overall what the British expectations of a future war reveal is that military decisions are taken in an institutional, collective framework, where the lessons of previous individual expe-

78 BROOKE [Maj.-Gen.] *Some Reflections*, in: *United Service Magazine* 26 (1903), p. 374–380, 377; POLLOCK, *Arms and Methods in War*, in: *United Service Magazine* 26 (1903), p. 627; MAUDE, *Evolution of Modern Strategy* (as in n. 57), p. 146; see TRAVERS, *Technology, Tactics, and Morale* (as in n. 55), p. 273.

79 Quoted in: BAILEY, *Military History* (as in n. 51), p. 190.



riences are often marginalised for political or cultural reasons. Writing in December 1914, as commander-in-chief, responsible for the British Expeditionary Force to the continent, French seemed to have forgotten or pushed aside his earlier insights when he expressed a sudden surprise regarding the revolutionizing effect of modern weapons: »A battle is a siege on one side and a fortress on the other, but on a gigantic scale«<sup>80</sup>. It was at this collective level that British pre-war delusionary expectations about a future war gained influence and this helps to explain the tragic failures to prepare adequately for the carnage unleashed by modern weaponry on the battlefield in the First World War.

80 Quoted in: Philip TOWLE, *The and British Military Thought*, in: *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies* 116 (1971), p. 64–68, here p. 64.

