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## **The Beginning of the Learning Curve: British Officers and the Advent of Trench Warfare, September-October 1914**

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## **"The Beginning of the Learning Curve: British Officers and the Advent of Trench Warfare, September-October 1914"**

**Nikolas Gardner**

Recent scholarship has done much to undermine popular stereotypes of the inept and hidebound nature of British generalship during the First World War. Studies by Paddy Griffith, Paul Harris, Niall Barr and Albert Palazzo, among others, have demonstrated that the British officer corps experienced a relatively dramatic learning curve on the Western Front as commanders adopted new tactics and technology, honing the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) into a formidable weapon by 1918.<sup>1</sup> The bulk of this literature, however, examines the evolution of British "fighting methods" from 1915 until the end of the conflict, with most historians focusing on the period after July 1916. As a result, the lessons learned by British officers in the opening months of the war remain poorly understood.

Given the comparatively small size of the BEF in 1914, and the uncharacteristic mobility of operations in France and Belgium in this period, this is understandable. In retrospect, 1914 appears to be a brief and anomalous prelude to the prolonged stalemate that followed. Significantly, however, the autumn of 1914 provided senior British commanders and staff officers with their first exposure to trench

warfare against the German Army, and their first opportunity to reflect on how to fight it. Many of these individuals occupied key positions in the vastly expanded BEF of later years as it conducted much larger operations. Thus, their initial reactions to the nature of the First World War may help explain the subsequent trajectory of the learning curve in the British officer corps. Therefore, this paper will examine the response of senior British commanders and staff officers to the advent of trench warfare on the River Aisne in France in September and early October 1914. It will argue that these officers were quick to react, modifying existing tactics and adopting new technology to improve the overall effectiveness of the BEF, particularly on the defensive. Simultaneously, however, they retained values and assumptions about the nature of command that held the potential to undermine many of these innovations.

The First World War began abruptly for the BEF as it collided with the German First Army at Mons near the Franco-Belgian border on 23 August 1914. While British soldiers performed creditably in their first encounters with the enemy, the superior strength of German forces necessitated a rapid retreat southwards which did not end until early September in the vicinity of Paris. On 6 September, an exhausted BEF joined the French Army on the offensive, advancing

against the overextended German armies which had pursued them during the preceding two weeks. This advance continued until the 13<sup>th</sup>, when it stalled against formidable enemy positions north of the river Aisne. After three days of unsuccessful attempts to dislodge the Germans, the British strengthened their own positions and settled into the deadly monotony of trench warfare. The BEF remained on the Aisne until its transfer to Flanders during the first two weeks of October.

The German decision to establish positions north of the Aisne river valley placed the British at a distinct disadvantage if they hoped to exert any pressure on the enemy. The Aisne itself was entirely unaffordable, and all of the bridges in front of the BEF were either guarded, heavily damaged, or destroyed. The river valley was 1-2 miles in width, with little cover to conceal the movement of troops. On either side of the valley, steep slopes with spurs running towards the river rose up to 300 feet to heights above. In order to cross the river, British units had to traverse the valley, in which they were vulnerable to German fire. The British artillery could only find safe positions on the heights south of the valley, and was unable to neutralize German guns due to the difficulty of locating the enemy positions on the heights to the north.<sup>2</sup> Thus, as infantry units operated in the Aisne river valley, they were vulnerable to enemy infantry and

artillery fire without significant support from British guns. As a result, British units continued to suffer losses even after they ceased offensive operations.

Despite continuing casualties, however, the stalemate on the Aisne allowed British soldiers to adjust to the realities of the 1914 campaign. With their planning responsibilities reduced by the lull in mobile operations, commanders and staff officers had an opportunity to consider their experiences of the previous month and devise more efficient methods of conducting the war. The diaries and correspondence of senior officers in this period contain ample evidence of independent reflection regarding the nature of the conflict. In addition, analysis was encouraged by British General Headquarters (GHQ). On 24 September, Henry Wilson, the Sub-Chief of the General Staff, requested "instructions" from the staffs of the three corps that comprised the BEF, based on their experiences in the initial stages of the war.<sup>3</sup> In response, each corps submitted a detailed report in late September or early October.

The overriding theme in the reports of all three corps, as well as in other recorded observations of British officers, was the dominance of artillery in 1914. In light of this recognition, the reports emphasized the necessity of defensive measures to counter the effects of enemy guns. Foremost among these were well-prepared



entrenchments for infantry, sited behind the crest of hills or ridges to protect them from direct fire from enemy artillery. Entrenchments in 1914 certainly did not rival the sophistication of the British trench system which developed in subsequent years. Neither, however, were they simply shallow depressions designed only to provide temporary cover before the next advance. The reports directed the preparation of front-line trenches with regular traverses, obstacles such as wire in front, rudimentary drainage systems and communication trenches linking them to rear areas. They also recognized the importance of protecting British guns, suggesting the concealment of artillery positions from enemy aircraft.<sup>4</sup>

British officers also recommended and implemented measures to increase the effectiveness of their own artillery. During the advance to the Aisne, from 6-13 September, a lack of coordination between infantry and artillery had hindered the progress of the BEF and resulted in repeated instances of British guns firing on friendly infantry. This problem was exacerbated once the army reached the Aisne, as the dominance of German artillery had forced British artillery units to operate out of sight of the infantry. Cooperation thus required an efficient communications system between front-line infantry units and the artillery positions behind them. At the beginning of the war, however, messages were conveyed from

infantry positions to the artillery via a complicated route through the headquarters of infantry brigades and even divisions. As a result, the information which reached the gunners was often neither timely nor accurate.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of a direct link to the front, the only alternative to this system was direct observation by the gunners themselves. Even when visual contact was possible, however, it proved difficult for them to differentiate friend from foe.

British officers recognized this problem, and advocated techniques which enhanced coordination of the two arms, as well as improving the indirect fire of the artillery. Both of these ends were furthered by the use of forward observation posts in the front lines. Connected to their batteries by telephone, artillery officers in these positions could direct the fire of their batteries onto key enemy trenches and guns, and prevent the inadvertent shelling of British troops. In practice, this means of controlling fire was far from perfect. As Paddy Griffith has observed, observation posts, "were often entirely non-existent, or manned intermittently by relatively junior officers, who could see little of what was going on and who enjoyed only very flimsy communications with their parent battery."<sup>6</sup>

Despite these limitations, British staff officers deemed observation posts equipped with telephones to be a more effective method of directing fire in conjunction with the tactical needs of the



infantry. Significantly, the posts also served to make a particular section of the front the responsibility of each battery. This practice, combined with the policy of designating "zones" of enemy territory to the guns of each division, imposed some order on the fire of the artillery where very little had prevailed during the opening weeks of the war. The allocation of artillery zones apparently began following the end of the British offensive. As late as 13 September, when guns of 5 Division repeatedly shelled infantry of the adjacent 4 Division, neither divisional nor corps war diaries contain any reference to the existence of separate artillery zones. On the 22nd, however, 5 Division requested permission to shell an enemy position in the zone of 4 Division.<sup>7</sup> By limiting the fire of the guns of each division to a particular zone, and by tying each battery within the divisional artillery to a specific frontage within that zone through a communications link, many of the mishaps of the advance were prevented.

The most revolutionary method of increasing the effectiveness of British artillery fire in 1914 was by aerial observation, a practice used by the Germans since the battle of Mons. According to Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, the British army had experimented with the technique prior to the war, but had neglected to develop it in the absence of any practical necessity for its use. When the terrain of

the Aisne river valley rendered the British unable to locate German gun positions, however, senior officers began to explore seriously the potential of aerial observation. The BEF apparently first attempted it during active operations on 15 September, when E.P. Pulteney's III Corps assigned aircraft to the divisional heavy and howitzer batteries. The technique caught on relatively quickly. By early October, the following procedure, described by the staff of Sir Douglas Haig's I Corps, prevailed throughout the BEF: "The hostile batteries are first located as accurately as possible by aeroplane; these results are then communicated to divisions and an hour at which fire is to be opened is fixed. At that hour the aeroplane again goes up, observes the fire, and signals any necessary corrections by wireless."<sup>8</sup> While the superiority of German positions remained, aerial observation allowed the BEF to improve the effectiveness of its artillery.

Clearly, British officers quickly embraced new tactics and technology in September 1914. They did not deem these innovations to be a sufficient response, however, to the unprecedented scale and intensity of the campaign. Measures such as well-sited trenches and concealed artillery positions certainly enhanced the safety of British soldiers. In addition, improved methods of artillery spotting provided a more effective means of countering enemy guns. Nonetheless,

officers also recognized that these measures did not remove the risk to soldiers on the Aisne, particularly in light of the destructive power of enemy weapons. Thus, commanders and staff officers also placed heavy emphasis on traditional martial virtues such as morale, discipline and personal bravery. Certainly, the preservation of morale and discipline is essential to any army, and it would be quite surprising if British officers had not encouraged it. The way in which they did, however, held the potential to diminish the value of the tactical innovations they introduced in September 1914. Senior officers maintained, for example, that significant losses could actually enhance British morale while eroding that of the enemy. The 1 Division War Diary contains considerable praise for the South Wales Borderers and the Welsh Regiment of the 3rd Brigade, who suffered heavily while holding exposed positions north of the Aisne between 14-21 September. According to the diary:

The moral effect of maintaining them so long was good for our men and must have impressed the enemy with the temerity and hardihood of our troops. Heavily shelled every day, in spite of their entrenchments suffering losses continually, the Welsh and SWB maintained their positions with utmost confidence and were always ready for night enterprise as a welcome change from the day's inactivity.<sup>9</sup>

This feat may indeed have impressed the enemy. It is questionable, however, whether enduring eight consecutive days of

casualties without any tangible gains bolstered the morale of the two battalions in question. Nevertheless, the 1 Division staff deemed the moral impact of the feat sufficient to outweigh any losses suffered in the process. In contrast to the Welsh and South Wales Borderers, troops who failed to maintain their positions under fire were treated with disdain. During an inquiry into the temporary evacuation of trenches by the West Yorkshire Regiment on 20 September, Sir Douglas Haig commented scornfully:

I find it difficult to write in temperate language regarding the very unsoldierlike behaviour of the W. Yorks on the 20th.... [I]t rests with them to regain the good name and reputation which our infantry holds, and which they have by their conduct on the 20th forfeited.<sup>10</sup>

Such failures of courage were perceived to stem from a loss of morale, which was in turn a result of prolonged periods on the defensive. As the II Corps staff observed: "It has been found that during a retirement, or during the occupation of a defensive position, the morale of officers and men is apt to deteriorate to an alarming degree unless drastic steps are taken to counteract this tendency." The immediate antidote to this problem was strict discipline. Even more effective were measures designed to maintain the "offensive spirit" of the troops. As the II Corps report continued: "The best preventative is probably to insist on small local attacks and enterprises, even with the

knowledge that they must entail loss of men on missions of minor importance."<sup>11</sup> Trench raids, a practice which prevailed throughout the war, seem to have emerged on the Aisne with this intent. On 4 October, Sir Douglas Haig gave the following description of one such undertaking by the 1/Coldstream Guards of 1 Division:

A single sentry was found in the first trench, where he was bayoneted before he could give warning. A second trench was found to be lightly held and all its occupants dealt with. A little further on was a third trench, and here a sharp fight occurred in which the Coldstream Guards had a few casualties. Having effected their object, they made their way back to their own lines, after having shot or bayoneted at least 20 of the enemy; our casualties were one officer and seven men wounded, two men missing or killed. This showed a fine soldierly spirit.<sup>12</sup>

Absent from Haig's detailed account is any definition of the purpose of the foray, beyond causing limited casualties to the enemy in an effort to sustain an aggressive "soldierly spirit". Throughout the war, trench raids proved useful for specific purposes, such as determining the strength and identity of enemy forces opposite the British. In the autumn of 1914, however, it seems that they were employed primarily as a means of preserving morale following the emergence of stalemate on the Aisne. George Barrow, chief of staff of 1 British Cavalry Division in September 1914, suggested in his memoirs that such initiatives were not successful in achieving their intended purpose. As he related:



In the matter of raids... the Higher Command showed too little understanding of the nature of the British soldier. Raids for specific purposes: 'to destroy a mine-head or mortar or other weapon which is causing trouble, or to obtain information or identification which cannot be secured otherwise' (to quote from our Field Service Regulations) were often necessary, but the Higher Command were not content with this range and urged raids to be undertaken for the purpose of maintaining the offensive spirit of our men....<sup>13</sup>

It is difficult to determine with any precision the actual impact of trench raids on the morale of British soldiers in this period. It is sufficient to note, however, that even at the risk of casualties, senior officers encouraged such initiatives simply as a means of maintaining morale in the face of superior German fire-power. Thus, while British officers introduced measures which undoubtedly strengthened the defensive capabilities of the BEF, they also emphasized values and concepts which did not always prove beneficial to British soldiers holding positions on the Aisne.

This tendency also influenced the promotion and removal of commanders in September 1914. Among infantry commanders, senior British officers showed a clear preference for individuals who displayed personal bravery under fire and a stoic acceptance of losses suffered by their formations. No British commander in 1914 exhibited these qualities to a greater extent than Edward Bulfin, commander of the 2nd Brigade in Samuel Lomax's 1 Division. On the



Aisne, Bulfin's brigade had spearheaded the advance of I Corps in the final stages of the offensive. It then bore the brunt of German attacks during the ensuing stalemate until it was relieved on 19 September. Throughout this period, Bulfin displayed a grim determination in the face of heavy losses. According to John Charteris, a member of Haig's I Corps staff: "Bulfin was really almost peevish when he was told that his brigade was to be pulled out for a short rest and replied 'We never asked to be taken out - we can hang on here quite well.'" The commander of the 2nd Brigade expressed similar sentiments to Haig and Lomax over tea on the 20th, informing them: "We never asked to be relieved, and you know, I hope, that we would have held our trenches until we were all destroyed."<sup>14</sup>

Bulfin's steadfastness on the Aisne impressed his superiors. Sir Douglas Haig's diary, often a forum for criticisms of other officers, contains a description of Bulfin as "a tower of strength", and "one of my stoutest hearted brigadiers."<sup>15</sup> In late October, Sir John French, the commander-in-chief of the BEF, recommended Bulfin for promotion to Major-General for distinguished conduct in the field. The commander of II Corps, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, praised similar qualities among his own brigadiers. As he described Count Gleichen, commanding the 15th Brigade: "He is quite undisturbed by the heaviest shell fire and most alarming situations, and is a most

efficient Brigadier."<sup>16</sup>

Officers perceived to be deficient in courage, tenacity and stoicism did not fare so well in 1914, regardless of their other attributes. This is evident in an examination of the career of Ivor Maxse, commander of the 1st (Guards) Brigade at the beginning of the war. Maxse later attained prominence commanding 18 Division at the Somme, and XVIII Corps during 1917 and 1918. Paddy Griffith has characterized him as one of the "undoubted elite" of British commanders during the war. This distinction stems in large part from Maxse's tactical ideas. His lectures on the training of infantry earned him recognition in the officer corps prior to the war, and in 1918 he was appointed to the position of Inspector-General of Training of the BEF in 1918.<sup>17</sup> Despite his repute as a tactician, however, Maxse's performance in 1914 was distinctly mediocre in the eyes of his colleagues. After losing a rearguard battalion during the retreat in late August, Maxse proved cautious as he commanded his brigade during the advance to the Aisne. This trepidation incurred the scorn of his superiors. On 6 September, Haig commented in his diary that Maxse "seemed to have lost his fighting spirit which used to be so noticeable at Aldershot in peace time!" Maxse's command of the 1st (Guards) Brigade ended under rather unusual circumstances in mid-September. Upon his promotion to Major-General, Sir John French promptly sent

him back to England to command the newly-formed 18 Division, recommending him to the Secretary of State for War as "an excellent trainer of troops."<sup>18</sup>

At first glance, Maxse's reassignment appears entirely legitimate and even astute. As a Major-General, he was entitled to command a division. Sir John French was also correct in his estimation of Maxse's training skills, and his decision ultimately paid dividends for the BEF. Within the context of the 1914 campaign, however, French's justification for sending Maxse back to England appears rather dubious. At this stage of the war, it would have appeared highly unlikely to the commander-in-chief that Maxse would return before the end of hostilities. In mid-September, the notion that the conflict would continue even beyond the spring of 1915 was by no means widely accepted. French himself remained optimistic that the Germans would soon be defeated.<sup>19</sup> The task of organizing and training 18 Division, however, took more than a year, and it only reached the front in 1916. By sending the commander of the 1st Guards Brigade home for such a purpose, Sir John French effectively indicated that he was content to do without Maxse's services for the duration of the war. The commander-in-chief's willingness to part with an experienced formation commander is particularly curious, since around the time of Maxse's reassignment to 18 Division, two

brigades within the BEF were without commanders, and four divisional commands would become vacant during the month of October. Despite this dearth of experienced senior commanders, Ivor Maxse was deemed unsuitable for a posting in the field.

The commander of the 6th Brigade, R.H. "New Zealand" Davies, was removed under similar circumstances in September 1914. The retreat from Mons apparently took a heavy toll on Davies, a member of the New Zealand Staff Corps. As Haig related to his wife on 4 September: "little New Zealand Davies has disappointed me: the want of sleep and food has quite changed him...." The I Corps commander's dissatisfaction stemmed from his subordinate's lack of resolve. In his diary, Haig characterized Davies as "very jumpy and nervous...." On the recommendation of Charles Monro, commander of 2 Division, the 6th Brigade commander was removed on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Haig nonetheless recommended Davies for a divisional command, noting in his diary: "he has many good qualities and trains and leads men well."<sup>20</sup>

Given that both Davies and Maxse had served under Haig prior to the war, the I Corps commander may have attempted to soften the circumstances of their removal. Neither promotions nor new appointments, however, disguised the fact that these officers had failed by the standards of their contemporaries in the fall of 1914.

Thus, traditional values and concepts continued to influence promotions and removals of high-ranking officers as well as the day-to-day operations of the BEF in this period. Certainly, qualities such as courage and tenacity under fire were essential among regimental officers. It is debatable, however, whether they were the most appropriate criteria for evaluating relatively senior officers whose responsibilities were largely managerial.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper does not offer a comprehensive assessment of the response of British officers to the scale and intensity of the First World War. At most, it provides a snapshot of this response at a point very early in the conflict. Nevertheless, this snapshot reveals much about the first reactions of senior officers to the advent of trench warfare. In the process, it also sheds some light on the subsequent learning curve experienced by the officer corps as a whole. Overall, officers reacted quickly to the stalemate in September 1914. Far from being preoccupied with the resuming the offensive, they recognized the vulnerability of British units and took steps to improve their defensive positions on the Aisne. They were also quick to embrace new technology such as aircraft in order to improve the effectiveness of their own artillery and reduce the dominance of enemy guns over



the Aisne river valley. In addition, however, senior British officers placed a strong emphasis on the importance of morale, discipline and courage in coping with the realities of war in 1914. In fact, the policies they advocated to maintain these qualities reduced the value of defensive innovations introduced in the same period. Thus, senior officers encouraged costly practices such as trench raids and the holding of exposed positions as a means of maintaining British morale while depleting that of the enemy. They also favoured subordinates who displayed personal bravery and stoicism, even among formation commanders whose primary responsibility was not the leadership of soldiers on the battlefield.

The fact that British officers exhibited these tendencies is not entirely surprising. As Albert Palazzo has argued, a pragmatic approach to war and an emphasis on morale and personal bravery were elements of the ethos of the British officer corps in this period.<sup>21</sup> What is notable is that in 1914, individual officers displayed these tendencies simultaneously. Sir Douglas Haig, for example, advocated aerial observation in order to reduce the vulnerability of British units to enemy artillery, while praising the acceptance of heavy casualties by subordinate commanders and advocating potentially costly trench raids for the purpose of maintaining morale. In light of this blend of innovation and traditional martial values, Haig and many of his



colleagues may be labeled "hybrid" officers. The "hybrid" officer was a product of intellectual ferment in the officer corps in the decade prior to 1914. Since the South African War, senior officers had engaged in tactical debate and modernized staff training with the intent of increasing the professional competence of the officer corps. Given the strong regimental traditions of the British Army, however, these individuals retained many values characteristic of regimental officers. Many senior members of the BEF in 1914 possessed this "hybrid" character. Haig, Henry Wilson, Henry Rawlinson, and Thompson Capper, among others, had been at the forefront of prewar tactical debate and educational reform. Yet despite their elevated rank in 1914, they also retained qualities such as a penchant for physical activity, a concern for the morale of the rank and file, and a strong emphasis on personal leadership on the battlefield. This "hybrid" nature influenced their response to the advent of trench warfare in 1914.

Understanding the 'hybrid' character of senior British commanders and staff officers may shed new light on their performance later in the war. In particular, it may help explain why in subsequent campaigns, senior commanders like Haig embraced new technology, while clinging to seemingly obsolescent views regarding the importance of morale on the battlefield. In addition, it can help

reconcile the stereotype of the incompetent and stubborn British general with recent scholarship that demonstrates the dramatic learning curve experienced by the British officer corps as a whole. As the response of British officers to the advent of trench warfare in 1914 demonstrates, it was possible to retain traditional values which were not well attuned to the nature of the First World War, while simultaneously embracing innovations that improved the effectiveness of the BEF.

1. Albert Palazzo, *Seeking Victory on the Western Front: the British Army and Chemical Warfare in World War One*, (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2000); J.P Harris and Niall Barr, *Amiens to the Armistice: the BEF in the Hundred Days' Campaign, 8 August-11 November 1918*, (London: Brassey's, 1998); Paddy Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*, (London and Portland OR: Frank Cass, 1996); Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-1918*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
2. Haig Diary, 13 September 1914, Haig Papers, National Library of Scotland (NLS), Edinburgh; WO 256/1, Public Record Office (PRO), Kew; Loch Diary, 12-14 September 1914, Lord Loch Papers, Imperial War Museum (IWM); James Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1914*, (London: Macmillan, 1931), 371.
3. 'MEMORANDUM' from Sub-Chief of Staff, Henry Wilson, 24 September 1914. II Corps War Diary, WO 95/588, PRO.
4. Memorandum", I Corps War Diary, WO 95/588; "Notes, Based on the Experience Gained by the Second Corps, During the Campaign", October 1914, II Corps War Diary, WO 95/629; "Report of III Corps", III Corps War Diary, WO 95/668; Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien Diary, 19 September 1914, CAB 45/206, PRO.
5. Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 68; Mowbray Diary, 2 October 1914, J.L. Mowbray Papers, IWM.
6. Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-1918*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 41.
7. 4 Division War Diary, 13 September 1914, WO 95/1439; 5 Division War

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Diary, 13 September 1914, WO 95/1510; III Corps War Diary, 13 September 1914, WO 95/668; II Corps War Diary, 13 September 1914, WO 95/629, PRO.

8. "Memorandum", I Corps War Diary, WO 95/588; II Corps War Diary, 26 September 1914, WO 95/629; III Corps War Diary, 15 September 1914, WO 95/668, PRO. See Haig Diary, 16 September 1914, NLS; WO 256/1, PRO, for reference to the use of aerial spotting on 16 September in I Corps. For an account of prewar experimentation with aerial artillery spotting, see Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power*, 101-102.

9.1 Division War Diary, 14 September 1914, WO 95/1227, PRO.

10. Haig's handwritten comment on Lomax to I Corps, 23 September 1914, I Corps War Diary, WO 95/588, PRO.

11. "Notes", II Corps War Diary, WO 95/630, PRO

12. Haig Diary, 4 October 1914, NLS; WO 256/1, PRO.

13. George Barrow, *The Fire of Life*, (London: Hutchinson, 1931), 158.

14. John Charteris, *At GHQ*, (London: Cassell, 1931), 39. See also Haig Diary, 20 September 1914, NLS; WO 256/1, PRO.

15. Haig Diary, 20, 27 September 1914, NLS; WO 256/1, PRO.

16. Smith-Dorrien Diary, 22 September 1914, CAB 45/206, PRO.

17. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, 83. See also Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power*, 126, for a description of Maxse as one of a group of "excellent divisional commanders"; and Martin Samuels, *Command or Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918*, (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 121-123.

18. French to Kitchener, 17 September 1914, WO 33/713, PRO; Haig Diary, 6 September 1914, NLS; WO 256/1. On Maxse's caution during the retreat, see also Bulfin Diary, 2 September 1914, CAB 45/140, PRO.

19. Rawlinson Diary, 1 October 1914, Rawlinson Papers, 1/1, Churchill College, Cambridge.

20. Haig Diary, 22 September, 18 September 1914, NLS, WO 256/1, PRO; Haig to Mrs. Haig, 4 September 1914, Haig Papers, NLS.

21. See Palazzo, *Seeking Victory on the Western Front*, particularly ch.1.