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The Battle of the Somme: How the 18th Division Avoided Disaster, 1 July 1916

Paul Fellman

World War I was a truly horrific experience that shattered Western optimism and faith in progress. Technology and national ambitions collided across the globe but the epicenter spanned the distance between the English Channel and the borders of Switzerland. This area, known as the Western Front, consisted of hundreds of miles of barbed wire and trenches which became a killing ground where millions of soldiers fell. At the outbreak of hostilities commanders of both alliances sought to recreate victories from the previous century like those of Napoleon at Austerlitz and the Prussians at Sedan.^[1] However, conditions of warfare had drastically changed in the prior century and tactics failed to keep pace. Specifically, the appearances of the machine gun, barbed wire, and more powerful artillery made mass frontal assaults obsolete. When such operations were attempted, they rapidly disintegrated under a hail of artillery and machine gun fire. If the assault wave managed to cross No Man's Land it would not only be slowed by the wire but would also entangle the men within its deadly coils. Normal logistical issues were exacerbated by the scale of men and material involved. Millions of men and thousands of labor animals required water, food, ammunition, transportation, and the smaller comforts of life. Innovative solutions had to be found in order to service armies whose numbers rivaled the populations of cities. As a result, not long after hostilities erupted, the armies of the Western Front found themselves trapped in static positions with little chance of achieving a decisive victory. The ensuing years of trench fighting bestowed to history the popular image of the First World War as an affair of incompetent generals sending brave men to the slaughter.

The Battle of the Somme in 1916 has traditionally been the paradigm of First World War futility and blundering. July 1 was the initial day of the battle and its results were particularly horrendous-nearly 40,000 British soldiers were wounded and close to 20,000 died that first day alone. However, in his work *Forgotten Victory*, Gary Sheffield suggests that the first day of the Somme "represented an important point on a learning curve, which, at this moment, was very steep indeed."^[2] In contrast, the achievements of General Maxse's 18th Eastern Division, located along the southern sector of the battlefield, are notable on a day better known for its failures. In studying the Somme, scholars tend to neglect two factors that were crucial to the British Army's victory in 1918-the superb training and the initiative in command fostered by General Maxse.

This paper proposes a different interpretation based on research undertaken in the papers of General Ivor Maxse held in the Imperial War Museum in London. Sheffield attributes a great deal of Maxse's success to conditions favoring the 18th such as the terrain and weakness of German opposition. He asserts that the German defenders in the south were "weak to start with."^[3] While his analysis is partly accurate, Sheffield fails to recognize the similarity of the 18th's victory to later British victories in 1918. Additionally, Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson

maintain the belief that Maxse confused his primary and secondary sources of success in his official papers.^[4] They don't share Maxse's opinion that his junior officers and subalterns were the main source of his division's success. The ideas of these scholars are examined from a new angle using Maxse's papers. This paper considers the achievements of the 18th Division from a more limited viewpoint. It appreciates the various sources of success, as discussed by Sheffield, Prior, and Wilson, but also considers factors influenced by Maxse. These included training, preparation, and initiative in command exhibited by his junior officers and non-commissioned officers, or N.C.O.'s.

Before plunging headlong into the complexities of the Battle of the Somme, a short summary of the most formative and influential military events of the 19th century is necessary in order to understand the unique characteristics of the Great War. At the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, nearly all professional military commanders involved had been influenced by the events of the 19th century. Napoleon remained an icon emulated by a century of military leaders, especially those officers trained at professional military colleges. Maxse attended the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, where he studied military administration, military law, tactics, fortification, military topography and reconnaissance.^[5] Other notable graduates of Sandhurst who fought in the First World War include Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Army from 1916-1918, and Sir Hubert Gough.^[6] On the other side of No Man's Land, many of Germany's decision makers belonged to Prussian families with extensive ties to the Prussian military. Helmuth von Moltke the younger commanded the German forces in the very early stages of the war. He was the grandson of Moltke the elder, who famously led Prussia in the highly influential Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871.^[7] The younger Moltke was as deeply influenced by his military roots as his British counterparts were by their educations. It is likely that the training and education received by the British and Germans included the lessons learned during the Napoleonic and Franco-Prussian Wars.

Still in use in the early 20th century, Napoleon's "independent corps unit, as proposed by Comte Guibert" allowed several smaller bodies of troops to engage a larger mass of enemy troops and inflict devastating damage.^[8] By World War I this system was generally taken for granted, as nationalism was a stronger driving force in most of the major armed forces. However, the trend of operating with smaller units of men and limited objectives became a hallmark of the war. Another important influence on Napoleon, and thus World War I commanders, were the ideas of Antoine-Henri Jomini, who viewed war as a science that could successfully be determined by a blueprint based on certain fixed principles.^[9] A main component of his theory "called for an army to utilize the offensive action" and that "to attack itself is essential; the initiative must not be left to the enemy."^[10] Napoleon was able to use these theories to great effect; however, his 20th century heirs discovered at battles such as the Somme and Verdun that the changing nature of war had made such headlong attacks useless and irresponsible.

World War I strategists and tacticians were also greatly influenced and driven by the less distant Prussian victories over France and Austria in the second half of the 19th century. The Battle of Sedan in 1870 was the Cannae of modern tacticians who all hoped to replicate its success.^[11] Early signs of the changing nature of war were here recognized by the Prussian General Helmuth von Moltke who understood the impact of technological advances on the outcome of the Franco-Prussian War. He was well aware that Prussia's success rested in her ability to incorporate

changes in technology while the French military remained static.^[12] World War I French and British commanders also failed to appreciate technology's effects early in the war and alternatively pursued battles which would provide rapid and conclusive results. Certain commanders, including Maxse, were more responsive to the changing nature of war. He was acutely aware of the potential of new technologies such as the machine gun, hand grenade, trench mortar, and flamethrower. Unlike other British commanders at the Somme, he made certain to incorporate these weapons to great effect.

Despite the entrenched military tradition in Prussian families like the Moltkes, Germany's Schlieffen Plan was thwarted at the Battle of the Marne and her armies settled into static deadlock.^[13] The British and French had managed to resist the rapid advances from Germany's plan to conclude operations in the West before it turned to face the massive Russian army. Since the Battle of the Marne, the British army focused on mobilizing the entire empire while the French bore the brunt of casualties. On the eve of 1 July 1916, the French army was on the brink of destruction. Since February of that year the Germans had laid siege to the French fortress town of Verdun in an effort to "bleed" the French army dry. Nearly one million French and Germans had perished and by July the French were exhausted and desperately sought outside intervention. It was decided between Joffre, commander of the French forces, and his British counterpart Sir Douglas Haig, that the planned joint Anglo-French assault on the Somme had to be moved to an earlier date. Joffre had initially planned the offensive with attrition of German reserves as the main goal. However, the explosion of German action at Verdun forced the British to commence the assault on the Somme a month earlier with the aim of diverting German forces from the siege at Verdun--thus relieving the bleeding French forces.^[14]

The British 18th (Eastern) Division, commanded by General Ivor Maxse, belonged to General Rawlinson's Fourth Army which was chosen to spearhead the Somme Offensive.^[15] By 26 April, his planning and preparation for the Somme were well under way. On this date Maxse held a divisional commander's conference at which he discussed offensive operations, defense, and training within his division. The surviving agenda presents a skeletal outline of specifics related to these three major aspects of the approaching battle. Many points are of general interest and would be present in most commanders' preparations such as ammunition dump site locations, wiring lessons learned at Verdun, and reconnaissance.^[16] In regards to training, Maxse utilized what brief time was left to him by providing specific areas for this purpose. He stipulated that the men were to be given two to three days complete rest and then platoon and company training would commence in the mornings, followed by football in the afternoons.^[17] Maxse wanted more time to devote to training, but his division, like many other units, was preoccupied with the construction of communication trenches and the manual transportation of ammunition and supplies. Although his division achieved wonderful success on 1 July, Maxse admitted that "our training program came to nothing; every plan was necessarily vetoed on account of our manual labor being required day and night whenever battalions were out of the trenches".^[18] In their work *The Somme*, Prior and Wilson use the 32nd Division to illuminate the scope of the British infantry's labors. This specific division "dug over 50 emplacements for trench mortar batteries, completed a water supply system through to the front trenches, dug 19.6 miles of trench...laid 160 miles of cable, erected 28 bridges for the artillery," and the list continues.^[19] Prior and Wilson also quote Maxse's "sour" summary that there was "no rest and no training for the infantry, except during the one week."^[20] Although Maxse's carefully

prepared program for training was drastically shortened, his men must have benefited from what meager time they were given.

Certain aspects of Maxse's training program are valuable insights into his foresight and clarity of vision. Paddy Griffith lists Maxse's 18th as one of few 'elite' divisions in the BEF which was dependable and operated with high standards.^[21] The division was formed from a wave of "enthusiastic volunteers" who responded to Lord Kitchener's call for patriots to enlist in the British Army.^[22] Maxse's training was undoubtedly a major factor of success, in conjunction with the special willingness of the Kitchener recruits, and he recognized the psychological and physical benefits of playing football to counteract the miasma of trench life. Maxse ordered that his men play "football in the afternoons," because "after a long spell in the trenches all ranks will be more or less rusty and slow in movement. Correct this by a short spell of close order drill *every day*...and [by] enforcing strict march discipline...also short bursts of running to get their wind right."^[23] Not only would this have improved the infantry's health, but also reinforced the chain of command which might have become more lax in trench life. He emphasized this by ordering his N.C.O.'s and platoon commanders to "get hold of their men and learn to command them in the field."^[24] Eliza Riedi and Tony Mason co-authored an article concerning the role which boxing and football played in the BEF. They "trace the process by which sport in the British Army was transformed from a mainly spontaneous and improvised pastime in the early stages of the war into a compulsory activity for troops out of the line by the last months of the conflict."^[25] Maxse was thus well ahead of his fellow commanders in recognizing the advantages of sporting activities in the spring of 1916. Football even made an appearance in No Man's Land on 1 July when Captain W.P. Nevill's company ("B" company, 8th East Surreys, 18th Division) dribbled five footballs and "arrived in good line".^[26] Captain Nevill, however, did not survive the crossing, but his example inspired the men. The 18th's physical fitness and stamina were crucial to the success of the battalions leading the assault on 1 July. These men were expected to not only cross the deadly space of No Man's Land first, but to also penetrate the entire depth of German defenses and seize the division's furthest objectives.

During the divisional commander's conference on April 26th, the issue of training specialists was also discussed. A recurring theme in Maxse's agenda was the training of specialists such as machine gunners, trench mortar personnel, bombers, and signalers.^[27] However, he was not the only voice advocating specialization within the BEF--though he did take many specific measures to guarantee specialization. The Lewis Gun was the official machine gun of the BEF. It was light-weight, bipod mounted, and could fire 500-600 rounds per minute.^[28] It was also one of Maxse's favorite discussion topics. Only thirty days after the initial assault on 1 July, Maxse dedicated a section of a letter to General A. A. Montgomery, the chief of staff to Rawlinson's Fourth Army, to put forth the best possible use of the Lewis Gun. He felt that company commanders had not yet realized that their two Lewis Guns were an integral part of their companies and "just as important to them as one of their platoons".^[29] Here, Maxse addressed the fact that there were many times when company commanders did not select the best N.C.O. to handle the Lewis Guns tactically, but rather designated privates who possessed only a strong technical knowledge of the weapon.^[30] This is comparable, albeit on a much smaller scale, to General George B. McClellan's appointment to commander of the Army of the Potomac in the American Civil War. Although he was an excellent organizer of men, he lacked the ability to lead his army in the field. The result was that the Lewis Gun was not achieving its full potential

in battle. Maxse's remedy was to allow "only the very best officers to join machine gun companies, even at the expense of other arms".^[31] His final conclusion was hard and typical of a man who "didn't suffer fools gladly".^[32] He concluded that the "present class of officer and man in them [machine gun companies] is below the average standard of the infantry".^[33]

The second innovative weapon of the war which Maxse promoted was the trench mortar. This mobile field device was able to fire from the relative safety of cover. Its mobility and firepower made it a crucial tool in eradicating enemy strong points. Like the Lewis Gun, Maxse felt that commanders did not fully appreciate the value of the mortars in dealing with entrenched defenders.^[34] However, trench mortar ammunition weighed nearly sixty pounds and greatly hindered the weapon's spontaneous use against areas of resistance. Maxse recommended that commanders incorporate the trench mortar into their plans. Reconnaissance could then be used to predetermine where resistance would be exceptionally stiff and those locations would be dealt with using the trench mortar.^[35] With this forethought, ammunition could be stockpiled or transported to advantageous positions. In after action reports, Maxse repeatedly praised his troops and their use of trench mortars to clear the formidable Craters.^[36]

Another prominent weapon was the hand grenade, which the British referred to as a "bomb" during the war. Maxse listed "bombers" as an important group of specialists who needed to be cultivated throughout the army. This was, however, a point of contention and debate amongst the upper echelons of British command. Griffith contends that there was an "anti-bomb, but pro-rifle and bayonet polemic" which was "certainly one of the most striking and widespread changes in infantry doctrine to emerge from the Somme fighting".^[37] Griffith discusses the bomb's popularity among the infantry and its distaste among commanders who feared that the passivity of its use would lead to a loss of aggression.^[38] However, the usefulness of having special bombing parties is abundantly clear in Maxse's reports for 1 July. In his report he commended the company commanders who "used their heads and sent detachments with bombers round the flanks of the enemy opposite them".^[39] This was an operational tactic which Maxse strongly believed in and advocated to his junior officers and N.C.O.s.

Bombing parties became crucial not only in the vanguard of an assault but also in the second and third assault groups. They were used in "mopping-up parties", which would follow behind assault troops to clear out enemy resistance in enemy dug-outs and pillboxes. The 18th Division's mopping-up parties "effectually put an end to any obstinate Bosches who had been passed over during the advance" and Maxse was pleased to discover that none of his forward men, to his knowledge, had been shot in the back.^[40] This method of detailing units into specific assaulting, mopping-up, and consolidating lines wasn't unique to the 18th Division. However, very few divisions found the chance to practice these tactics on 1 July or did so with comparable success. Examples of other efforts to specialize the army were demonstrated by the General Headquarters' establishment of schools to train snipers. However, many of the men trained in these schools complained of the lack of telescopic sights and the practice of some commanders who encouraged snipers to make a sport of their duty.^[41]

The bombing parties were used to great effect in the process of consolidating captured ground. Maxse believed that, "Consolidation of ground gained is left to too many individuals; I might almost say every individual. It lacks system. Each individual attempts to make himself safe, and

this results in the unit being unsafe. Remedy: we require specialists for consolidating just as we require specialists for everything else in this war." [42] Here Maxse again asserted his ardent belief that success and efficiency could be achieved by the increased specialization of the British Army. Griffith's view of special units for consolidation is also worth mentioning. He strongly believes, contrary to the great majority of 20th century historians, that in mid-1916 the British "enjoyed a lead of about a year over their opponents" in regard to 'storm troop tactics'. [43] Maxse's battle plan, correspondences, and the actions of his division on 1 July provide strong support for Griffith's thesis.

Perhaps the most crucial element of training prior to 1 July was that period during which the 18th Division rehearsed the planned assault on exact replicas of the German trenches. By 26 April, the German trenches opposite the 55th and 53rd brigades had been marked out and dug by the 30th Division of VIII Corps. [44] Maxse wanted to take every advantage of the trenches for practicing the attack until every man was so familiar with the enemy lines that he could find his way "about either by day or night". [45] These trenches were dug near the French town of Cavillon and were based on airplane reconnaissance. [46] Although, as Maxse admitted, there existed little time for training prior to the Somme, he and his men received the maximum benefit from the week provided. He suggested to Montgomery that "if, next year, [the] infantry could be spared such manual labor and taught instead its job of fighting we should do better and have fewer casualties." [47] He felt that "surely the British Empire could organize white, black or yellow labour instead of putting everything on its infantry battalions." [48]

Maxse believed that his division's casualties on 1 July were "not out of proportion to its gains". [49] He reported that the 18th "buried over 1,200 Bosches", took 700 prisoners, and captured 11 guns. He assigned credit to the week's practice over exact models of the hostile trenches. [50] By contrast, his division suffered 807 fatalities, 2,282 casualties, with 144 missing in action. [51] Maxse's reasoning is justified by his division's unique ability to achieve all of its predetermined objectives. However, the absence of readily available reserve forces or cavalry prevented the 18th's achievements from being exploited. At the end of the first day the German defenders were relegated to "little more than a few scattered parties defending the woods to XIII Corps' front." [52]

This victory owes a great deal of credit to the division's intimate knowledge of the enemy's lines. According to Maxse, "practically every officer, N.C.O. and man knew beforehand the exact position of the enemy's trenches which *he* was expected to capture and this knowledge was a great factor in the success of the day." [53] Further, Maxse credits the effectiveness of his "dug-out clearing parties" (i.e. mopping up parties [54]) to the 18th's drill on model trenches. [55] This indicates that Maxse's decision to train specialists was not independent of his overall strategy. Rather, the decision to drill the 18th over exact models of German trenches directly increased the effectiveness of his specialist trench mortar, machine gun, and bombing parties. The effectiveness of these troops was further intensified by Maxse's organization of mopping-up parties, which fully incorporated practice in model trenches and special weapons training.

Sheffield has described the achievements of the 18th on 1 July as considerable by First World War standards and also as a demonstration of the BEF's tactical effectiveness given "the right conditions". [56] "The right conditions" were apparently French artillery assistance, weak

opposition, and the use of a creeping barrage during the assault.^[57] While his analysis is accurate as far as it goes, it fails to do justice to the achievements of not only the 18th Division, but also the remainder of the XIII Corps, the XV Corps, and the French Sixth Army, which all enjoyed relative successes in the southern sector. His analysis overlooks the training and preparation which Maxse oversaw prior to 1 July. Sheffield also fails to clearly demonstrate that German opposition in the south was weaker in terms of guns and men.^[58] The accounts of various battalion and regimental commanders belonging to the 18th Division paint a far more vivid picture than that presented by Sheffield. Their stories are convincing evidence that success in the south required more than Sheffield's "right conditions".

Many contemporary scholars consider Maxse's 18th Division to have been one of the best in the entire British Army.^[59] Griffith, Sheffield, and other scholars attribute a good deal of Maxse's success to the effectiveness of the preliminary bombardment in the south. In his lifetime, Maxse shared a similar sentiment. The conclusion of his letter to Montgomery ended with the paternal and revealing thought, "I need scarcely add that I consider my men did wonders in spite of all drawbacks and difficulties; they are a stout-hearted lot, and I am very proud of them all, especially the artillery."^[60] The British artillery's function at the Somme was to effectively demolish the German trenches, dug-outs, and barbed wire before the assault was launched. Its effectiveness along the British line directly affected the performance of each division. The 18th Divisional artillery, in cooperation with the artillery of its parent XIII Corps, produced excellent results and greatly facilitated the capture of the 18th's objectives. Prior and Wilson misguidedly demarcate the artillery's status as the primary source of Maxse's success on 1 July.^[61] Based on the performance of the 18th's infantry on that day, and during the week long preliminary bombardment, their statement is not wholly accurate. However, it does serve to emphasize the pertinent function which the artillery certainly served.^[62] Sheffield and Griffith allocate partial credit to Maxse's artillery which was one of the best trained in the British Army. Its commanders, including Brigade Major Alan Brooke and General Metcalfe, were respected for their competence and tactical innovation. Maxse collected the best officers and further improved them by cultivating personal initiative—a trait most exhibited by Alan Brooke who is credited with employing one of the first creeping barrages on 1 July by Baynes, Malcolm Brown, and Mark Connelly.^[63] The creeping barrage consisted of a curtain of shells which fell in front of the advancing troops providing much more protection than a bombardment that leaped forward in set bounds or from trench to trench.^[64] Gary Sheffield credits both the 18th and 30th Divisions with the use of creeping barrages on 1 July. He categorizes the use of the creeping barrage with several advantages denied to British elements in the north including favorable terrain and proximity to the French Army.^[65] This is undeserved because choice in tactics is not an advantage gained through fortune but rather an advantage gained through competent leadership.

Brooke, Maxse's Captain of the Royal Artillery, was entrusted with several tasks of great significance to the success of the planned assault. He was a man in whom trust was well placed. Maxse and Brooke were often together on various tours of the trenches; on one such occasion Maxse is reported to have rebuked Brooke for his clumsiness. In Maxse's biography, Baynes mentions the deep admiration which Brooke later felt for his old commander.^[66] The work of Brooke prior to the assault was pivotal to the artillery's effectiveness. It was his task to "select and register the targets to be destroyed during the preliminary bombardment, and to prepare the fire plan for supporting the infantry advance when the actual assault was launched."^[67]

Additionally he "devised a careful plan for barbed wire destruction" and advocated the use of the creeping barrage.[68] Most scholars concur that Brooke adapted the creeping barrage from a rudimentary French version. His biographer, General Sir David Fraser wrote that:

The idea of such a type of barrage was French. In the preceding March Brooke had taken a French Colonel herring round the 18th Division sector. The 'creeping' or 'rolling' barrage in exactly the same form was described to Brooke by Herring. It became, as he said, 'famous and universal'. His very individual contribution, however was to develop the system by converting it into clear maps, so that the barrage could be set out, with its timings and implications 'on the artillery board and fire orders worked out from it'. This device had much occupied Brooke in the weeks before 1st July and the result became standard, with tracings given to each artillery brigade showing battery lanes, lifts and timings.[69]

The precedent of international dialogue which Brooke perpetuated was established by Maxse whose friendliness toward the French benefited his division. The XIII Corps, to which the 18th belonged, was the southernmost British Army corps in line at the Somme. The XIII shared its right flank with the French Sixth Army. The French XX Corps, an element of the Sixth Army, was commanded by the French General Balfourier. Maxse's papers record the general consensus that Balfourier's XX Corps was "considered, in peace and war, the best corps in the French Army".[70] Maxse accepted an invitation from Balfourier to review a French division and he stayed at the French General Head Quarters (GHQ) where he was the guest of General de Castlenau.[71] Maxse's fluent French and his family's friendship with Clemenceau made him less likely than other British commanders to disdain his French allies.[72] His affability and family connections provided Maxse with more than an impressive list of friends. His Francophile tendencies, and perhaps his experience in France in 1914, pushed him to advocate genuine cooperation between his divisional artillery and its French counterparts.[73] Early on in the 18th's time on the Continent each of its brigades was attached to a British division to learn the realities of trench life. Meanwhile his artillerymen were attached to French batteries for instruction. Maxse wrote:

Today the gun position will be occupied by a battery of three French and one British gun, tomorrow by two British and two French, then three British and one French. All the time that battery will be commanded by the *French* Battery Commander who had never before seen a British gunner. Only when the battery has four British guns in it will the British Battery Commander take charge. But he will be there all the time, learning with his gunners all about the locality from the experience of the French gunners who have been there on and off since November 1914.[74]

Maxse's positive attitude toward the French disseminated through the ranks of the 18th and certainly influenced its members to be more willing to learn lessons from their allies. As usual, his leadership set a high standard for others.

The 18th Divisional Artillery was a well trained organization which benefited from its French tutelage since the earlier training period in England was so brief. It is difficult to believe that "technical detail for even rudimentary gunnery could have been absorbed in the short time available" for training in England.[75] However, the artillery matured greatly in the year between

its French lessons and the Battle of the Somme. In his official report Maxse credited "a very great extent" of his division's success to the "untiring efforts and skillful handling of the divisional artillery by Brigadier General Metcalfe".^[76] The main tasks allotted to the 18th Divisional Artillery included the destruction of enemy barbed wire-approximately 9,000 yards. The artillery was also ordered to destroy enemy trenches, dug-outs, machine gun posts, and communication trenches.^[77] During the assault the artillery was scheduled to support the infantry advance with a heavy bombardment which would lift, i.e. jump, from one enemy trench to the next thus bypassing the ground between, which often harbored machine guns. The specifics of these duties were, as previously mentioned, assigned to Major Alan Brooke. This heavy bombardment was augmented by a general barrage along the divisional front which preceded the infantry advance by 50 yards every one and a half minutes.^[78] This was the creeping barrage which was designed to protect the infantry from the German machine gunners located in shell holes between trench lines.

The lethal chatter of machine guns was augmented by thousands of yards of razor-sharp barbed wire. The destruction of enemy wire was one of the most important, and difficult, tasks allotted to the 18th's artillery. It belonged to the initial phase of the preliminary bombardment that was intended to physically and mentally destroy the German defenses. Maxse recorded that his 18 pounder wire-cutting batteries succeeded in accomplishing their tasks most satisfactorily.^[79] The two unplanned additional days of the bombardment allowed for the completion of tasks which had not been satisfactorily dealt with; by the morning of the assault Maxse was informed that all wire had been cut.^[80] The German front-line wire, as opposed to that wire protecting secondary and tertiary lines of defense, was destroyed by medium trench mortars without the aid of the larger 18 pounders. The XIII Corps, to which the 18th Division belonged, "consistently recorded far more positive than negative reports" from raiding parties who examined enemy wire and trenches in the days preceding the assault.^[81]

Specifically, the wire in front of the formidable German stronghold of the Pommiers Redoubt was almost invisible from any observation location and was additionally obscured by long grass.^[82] Four French batteries of the famed 75mm. gun assisted the 18th in the destruction of this wire.^[83] This bombardment is the only explicit mention of direct French assistance in Maxse's official report although several historians make similar assertions to Mark Connelly's who speculates that "the 18 Division undoubtedly benefited from its position. Being so close to the junction with the more experienced French armies, it could expect some overlap of fire from the neighboring French artillery units."^[84] This assistance, however, would most likely apply only to counter-battery work and the specific assistance which Maxse mentions. An example of indirect French assistance, a.k.a. overlap, occurred prior to 1 July when a French 240mm mortar bomb penetrated an important German central artillery command post. Every enemy soldier in the dugout was killed in the explosion, which substantially disorganized the control of enemy fire in that area.^[85] Alternatively, the 18th Division faced fewer German guns as it attacked than the northern divisions because General Congreve, Maxse's superior and commander of the XIII Corps had devoted the most guns of any British corps to counter battery operations.^[86] The artillery's operational orders explicitly listed counter battery work as the XIII Corps' duty. Destruction of enemy artillery was left to the heavy artillery coordinated at the Corps level while divisional artillery focused on wire-cutting and other local tasks.^[87]

Despite the success of the day, Maxse was not completely satisfied with certain details. He made suggestions to his superiors for "more practice for artillery with airplane observers, [and] the *same* observer to be used continuously with the same artillery brigade; and I would use the enemy's lines as a "range" for the purpose during ordinary trench warfare."[\[88\]](#) He repeatedly showed a willingness and even desire to understand the role of new technologies so that he could best utilize them. Maxse was also unconvinced that the artillery program for the assault was the most logical. In regard to 1 July he wrote to Montgomery that:

I rather feel we are trying to do every attack by barrage. The method of applying these barrages is practically always identical, and I feel certain the Bosch always knows by our barrage when we are going to attack and where we are. I suggest that when positions are bombarded for long periods and wire has been cut, it would sometimes be preferable to attack without a preliminary intensive bombardment, and only put a barrage on *when* the attack has commenced, and then only to stop reinforcements being sent up to the point attacked.[\[89\]](#)

This is a clear departure from the strategy employed at the Somme which consisted of a week-long bombardment and an even more intense preliminary bombardment which directly preceded the British advance. He was correct to believe that the Germans recognized imminent assaults by the increased ferocity of the artillery barrage. Although the 18th Division was able to overcome the German defenders, other units suffered terribly under the fire of German machine gunners who knew what was coming. His suggestion to surprise the defenders is a nascent form of the British Army's artillery techniques utilized in 1918 which involved intense, yet extremely rapid and localized bombardments.

Maxse's experience had also taught him that communication between the infantry and the artillery would inevitably fall to pieces once the infantry began its assault on the German lines. Telephone wires were easily severed and enemy counter barrages frequently claimed the lives of messengers. Furthermore, if the attack was successful then the infantry's advance would lengthen available lines of communication and limit cooperation between the artillery and the infantry. Through innovative tactics, Maxse discovered a viable alternative to the potential deterioration of communications.

The infantry tactics which he employed and taught to his men were dynamic and were justified by the success they achieved on the first day. The deployment of his forces for the initial assault displayed his willingness to defy convention. Maxse's division consisted of three brigades--the 53rd, 54th, and 55th. He was given the freedom to arrange his forces however he pleased and he chose to attack the German lines with all three brigades abreast.[\[90\]](#) Other commanders typically would have spread one brigade across the entire front with the second in support and the remaining brigade held in divisional reserve. A brigade was composed of four smaller units known as battalions. It was Maxse's plan to commence the assault with six battalions in the lead, three battalions in the assault wave, and three battalions held in brigade reserve for emergencies. In this way the first six battalions would follow the artillery barrage as closely as possible and sweep across the German trenches while special 'mopping up parties' and the support battalions would secure the second German line known as Pommiers Trench.[\[91\]](#) Maxse believed that launching his division with three brigades abreast improved communications. Also, having three brigades abreast removed the danger of passing brigades through one another and risking

confusion and dislocation of the artillery.^[92] Although Maxse's attack did not follow his plan strictly, it did so in large measure and was a success.

In his official report, Maxse admitted that some doubts existed regarding his plan to launch an attack with three brigades abreast.^[93] However, its success led him to advocate this form of attack whenever a divisional frontage exceeded 1,800 yards in an attack from trenches to gain a strictly limited objective.^[94] His opinion on this matter exhibited his understanding of modern tactics. By 1918, British commanders started attacking with strictly limited objectives and then, Howard Walters notes, strung these victories together to win the war. Although the "Bite and Hold" tactics were not originally devised by Maxse, he understood and successfully utilized them. In the same report he also contended that decentralization was made easier because each brigade and battalion commander could be allotted tasks beforehand for several days of fighting. The brigade staff, signal section, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers, machine gun companies, stokes mortar battery--all working together on a restricted front--could become experts on their own ground.^[95] Simplicity of communications and knowledge of terrain proved to be crucial components of the 18th's overall success.

Maxse's strategy streamlined communications and his troop placement effectively made reserves more mobile and accessible. If a brigade required several additional battalions in a sudden emergency, they could come from the reserves of adjoining brigades, which was more efficient than waiting for them to be sent from the divisional commander.^[96] On 1 July his brigadiers, and not Maxse himself, were in control of their fourth battalions. He recorded that "on 1st July I had occasion to thus strengthen one brigade, and it was done in a few moments. In fact an hour's delay would, on that occasion, have proved disastrous."^[97] The event of which he speaks took place in the 55th Brigade. Support arrived rapidly and enabled elements of the 7th West Kents to take a portion of Montauban Alley--the division's final objective.^[98] Maxse's experience taught him that "unless a reserve is actually on the spot it cannot intervene in time to be of use."^[99]

Although his infantry brigadiers initially expressed doubt concerning three brigades attacking abreast, they afterwards were all enthusiastically in favor of it, or so he claimed.^[100] Maxse also believed that it "greatly facilitated the close and intimate co-operation which undoubtedly existed between the Infantry Brigadiers and Artillery Group Commanders throughout the fighting."^[101] Maxse had, to some degree, overcome the obstacle of communication that had greatly hindered cooperation between the various parts of Great War armies.

Once the 18th began crossing No Man's Land at 7:30 a.m., there was little that Maxse could do to ensure success beyond that which he had already done. Victory was in the hands of the artillery, infantry, and most importantly, battalion, platoon, and company commanders. Their leadership and actions in the midst of battle could inspire men to overcome the most difficult and threatening obstacles. Maxse had sought to fill his division with able commanders since its creation in 1914. He found junior officers who, in the heat of action, would take the initiative and make crucial decisions which could determine the outcome of battles. His experience on 1 July convinced him that subalterns were such a precious and vital resource that there was an advantage to be gained by keeping back in reserve a proportion of officers and specialists. He advised Montgomery to consider keeping a proportion of the best N.C.O.'s because the losses in platoon sergeants and section commanders was severe and could not be replaced.^[102] In his

official papers Maxse described his division's action as "hard slogging by determined company commanders."^[103] He noted that the most successful commanders were those who "used their heads and sent detachments of bombers round the flanks of the enemy."^[104] He realized that although such a carefully planned operation as the Somme allowed for minimal initiative, such occasions would inevitably occur. He believed that "although the general action appears to offer few occasions for initiative in its original planning, there are opportunities when initiative is essential to success on the ground itself."^[105] In addition, Maxse viewed battle plans as "but a framework upon which subordinate commanders fight their fight" and that "success depends upon their courage and the stubborn character of the enemy".^[106]

The German character on 1 July can be described as 'stubborn' in some cases and tenacious or badger-like in extreme circumstances. The leading two battalions of the 55th brigade were hit immediately by heavy rifle and machine gun fire which came from behind the area known as the Craters. Maxse had expected determined resistance in this area and had specifically assigned Captain Kenchington of the 7th Buffs to storm the area with two platoons which had been formed into special bombing parties.^[107] The Craters, located along the front of the German lines, had been bombarded by every caliber of gun, including the 240 mm. trench mortar.^[108] The attack on the Crater's defenders further escalated with the employment of large flamethrowers. Despite the withering salvo of fire and steel the Germans there had not been completely destroyed. Fierce hand to hand fighting ensued until the Stokes mortars were unleashed upon the area for ten minutes.^[109] This enabled 2nd Lieutenant Tathem and Sergeant Upton to jump into a trench "known to contain Germans" where they "promptly dispatched five of them".^[110] Several more thrusts such as this one resulted in the complete capture of the Craters and connected trenches. This success reflected "great credit on the gallantry of Captain Kenchington and his small party."^[111] This heated action exemplifies the courage, determination, and quick thinking which Maxse expected from his commanders. Elements of the 54th brigade similarly encountered the 'unexpected' and used flanking maneuvers-a tactic central to Maxse's overall strategy. The following is an excerpt from Maxse's post-battle report which records the capture of Pommiers Redoubt:

The assaulting troops of this brigade (54th) did not encounter much resistance until they reached Pommiers Redoubt. Here the enemy put up a stubborn defense; the wire in front of the redoubt had not been sufficiently cut owing to its being concealed by long grass and the leading waves of the assault were met with heavy machine gun fire from the Redoubt. Several times our men reached the wire only to be shot down. As the frontal attack on the Redoubt was not progressing, Captain Johnston of the Fusiliers decided to take his local reserve platoon into Black Alley and thence to bomb up Maple Trench. The last 60 yards of this trench were, however, straight and a machine gun was in action at the end of it. This gun brought our bombers to a standstill in Maple Trench so Captain Johnston determined to attack the Redoubt from the rear over the open. Before doing this, snipers in Beetle Alley had to be dealt with. These were very gallantly rushed by 2nd Lieutenant Savage with a party of men. The Fusiliers were then able to get close up to the Redoubt without further casualties. Still the enemy in the Redoubt was fighting stubbornly and showed no signs of surrendering. Captain Johnston consequently put his Lewis Guns at the end of Black Alley so as to enfilade the front of the Redoubt. This broke down the enemy's defense, the Redoubt was rushed, and the tactics employed by Captain Johnston illustrate the advantage to be gained by circumventing a flank in preference to hammering at a front.^[112]

The former account records the successful fusion of bombing tactics and initiative in command advocated by Maxse.

Two other officers who received special recognition by Maxse were Majors Irwin and Kemp-Welch. Major Irwin, commanding the 8th East Surreys, went forward into the fighting and gathered all the troops he could find and personally led them forward, thus removing the Germans who threatened the flank of the neighboring 90th Brigade. Irwin realized "that his personal leadership was required and was quick to act at a critical moment."^[113] Equally impressive was the leadership demonstrated by Kemp-Welch, commanding The Queens Battalion, which struggled in the face of determined resistance along the German line known as Back Trench. Like Irwin, he went forward and personally reorganized his men. He then sent a bombing party of Pioneers up the communication trenches connecting the German lines of defense.^[114] As these bombing parties attacked the flanks of Back Trench, Kemp-Welch led a frontal assault. The trench immediately fell and one hundred and sixty-three Germans were taken prisoner. Kemp-Welch and his men were later held-up by German machine guns in Montauban Alley, and a gap had also formed between the flanks of the 53rd and 55th brigades and threatened the overall advance. At this point, Kemp-Welch received two Stokes guns and used them "most effectively."^[115] His exemplary leadership and use of tactics enabled the floating flanks of the 55th and 53rd brigades to make contact. These two majors embodied the courage and initiative which Maxse expected of all his junior officers. They risked their lives and their exemplary leadership secured crucial objectives. Maxse later wrote in his official report that "I cannot however close this meager narrative without bringing to notice the behavior of Majors Irwin and Kemp-Welch to whom our ultimate success was mainly due."^[116] Needless to say, being mentioned in the dispatches of one's divisional commander was quite an honor.

A different view of the "hard-slogging" carried out by Maxse's junior officers is presented by Prior and Wilson. They argue that in commenting thus, Maxse had confused primary and secondary sources of success.^[117] They believe that Maxse's determined company commanders could only have operated as they did if the artillery had already eliminated a high proportion of defenders and their weaponry.^[118] They concluded that "training, in short, was valuable only in an environment which gave trained troops a decent chance of exercising their skills."^[119] Yet even they admit that Maxse's division *was* undeniably well trained. His division was 'given' the chance to exercise its skills because of the effectiveness of its counter-battery and wire-cutting work. Its training became a primary source of success after the artillery had already played its part. If the 18th had been poorly trained it would have certainly failed on 1 July no matter how effective the preliminary bombardment.

Unfortunately, few other British units made any notable progress on 1 July. Those which shared the joy of success were all situated along the southern sector in the same neighborhood as Maxse. Other divisions which were "dependable on all occasions" and considered "elite" fell victim to the general failure of the day; the 36th Ulster Division is a particularly well known example.^[120] The 36th Division achieved outstanding success early on 1 July after it had advanced nearly a mile and captured three of the four German lines. The division's preliminary bombardment, like that of the 18th, had effectively cut the German barbed wire. However, in a bitter turn of events, the 36th was forced to relinquish all the ground which it had captured after suffering staggering casualties. As Malcolm Brown notes:

.....
This was the most dramatic advance in the northern half of the British attack. Unfortunately, the inability of other divisions to keep up with them against unexpectedly fierce German retaliation, together with the fact that as the day wore on they were in increasing risk of running out of bombs and small-arms ammunition, meant that they had no alternative but to relinquish the ground gained.^[121]

Historian Gary Sheffield believes that the story of the 36th illustrates the "products of an inexperienced army fighting a major battle for the first time" and is also evidence of the "inadequacies of 1916-vintage communications".^[122] Without a comprehensive examination of the 36th's preliminary training it is difficult to refute the conclusions of Brown or Sheffield. However, the contrasting experiences of the 18th and 36th Divisions provide future scholars with a fresh topic to research based on the varying degrees of preparation each division experienced. Of particular importance are the programs and measures established by the commanders of the 18th and 36th to handle reinforcements and re-supply-factors, as Brown believes, that directly influenced the 36th's retreat at the end of 1 July. Issues of supply and reinforcement were consistently present in Maxse's battle plans. In March, he initiated the construction of eight Russian saps which were dug to within 20 yards of the German front trenches. Measures were taken by Major Hickling of the Royal Engineers to guarantee the secrecy of the tunnels and on 1 July they remained undiscovered. Maxse later reported to Montgomery that:

All had Vickers machine guns in them; three had big flame projectors, all the eight had blasting charges of various strengths; one had a big charge which entirely blew up Kasino Point and all its machine guns, leaving a crater of 100 yards diameter in the chalk. These eight saps then became eight communication trenches across No Man's Land, and were more useful than any other mining enterprise...^[123]

The saps provided excellent means by which messages, reinforcements, and ammunition could traffic between the British lines and areas of action. Use of the saps after the initial assault was most likely made easier by the absence of a fierce German bombardment of No Man's Land similar to other areas of the battlefield.

The performance of General Aylmer Hunter-Weston at the Somme makes him an excellent candidate for the title of 'Donkey General'. He made the infamous decision to detonate the explosives under Hawthorne Ridge at 7:20 a.m., a full ten minutes prior to the planned assault.^[124] Hence the Germans had sufficient time to make ready for the attack which would obviously commence.^[125] The Germans were given yet more opportunity to prepare their defenses by the premature conclusion of the British bombardment in conjunction with the early explosion. "In this manner a mine seventy-five feet deep, over 1000 feet long, and packed with 40,600 pounds of ammonal, which the Royal Engineers' 52nd Tunnelling Company had taken...weeks to construct, was blown to much dramatic effect but to little purpose."^[126] Hunter-Weston, when discussed solely in context with the Battle of the Somme, is the apparent antithesis to General Maxse in both planning and execution. Although both men used tunnels and explosives, only Maxse's efforts ended with success. Perhaps it is unfair to lay sole responsibility for the Hawthorne debacle on Hunter-Weston. If the artillery hadn't ceased its bombardment, the Germans might not have been able to recover so well from the mine explosion. Nonetheless there are other events which support the contrast in characters. Brigadier-General H.C. Rees,

commanding the 94th Brigade, 31st Division, VIII Corps, conveys an image of Hunter-Weston as a stubborn, reticent old man when faced with dissenting opinions. Rees felt that the time provided for the capture of each objective was too short and he "had a severe argument with Hunter-Weston" before inducing him to allocate an extra ten minutes for the capture of a specific orchard.^[127] Rees was further "looked upon as something of a heretic for saying that everything had been arranged for except the unexpected, which usually occurs in war".^[128] These were the words of an officer who Maxse would have gladly commanded. Rees exhibited initiative in command and good sense-traits which Maxse encouraged from all his men and openly credited as primary sources of his division's success. In this case, Hunter-Weston appears to have discouraged independent thought and sensible preparation in favor of his rigid plan. The gulf which separates similarities between Maxse and Hunter-Weston also reflects his ability to command.

Although the bitter taste of the Somme never fully faded, it grew fainter over the next two years in the wake of other near defeats and costly victories, but the British learned many lessons which became integral to victory in 1918. Maxse discussed many of these in his letter to General Montgomery. He recognized and espoused the strict necessity of troop specialization such as machine gunners, ammunition runners, trench clearing parties, and consolidators. He also advocated training programs designed for specific operations like the drill over models of the German trenches that the 18th carried out. This extreme specialization made the men experts in their specific fields. The British Army also learned the crucial lesson that artillery assaults were most effective when large numbers of guns focused on a very limited area.^[129] In addition, the British learned that any future bombardments resembling the scale of the Somme would require a greater concentration of heavy guns. They successfully incorporated this knowledge at the Battle of Arras in 1917.^[130] The trend in lessons that emerged after the Somme reveals an emphasis on minimalism in war; artillery bombardments and the infantry would all be told off to accomplish very specific tasks. However, despite the many lessons learned at the Somme, the British Army continued to experience growing pains and made mistakes in its adolescence. Passchendaele, part of the Third Battle of Ypres, is a good example of the British Army's continued growing pains. Sheffield believes that General Gough's tactics were overly ambitious and the artillery barrage lacked the heavy concentration of fire-power which was crucial to success. Gough simply forgot or ignored the lessons learned at the Somme.^[131]

Following the separate peace between Russia and Germany a large number of German divisions became available for duty on the Western Front. The Germans capitalized on this temporary advantage in numbers and launched a fierce offensive against the British named *Michael*. Although the initial results were overwhelmingly positive for the German Army, it was unable to fully exploit its breakthrough due to the tenacity of the British defenders.^[132] From this near disaster the British recaptured much of their lost ground and set the stage for their overwhelmingly successful "Hundred Days" during which the lessons of the Somme, as used effectively by Maxse, were successfully utilized. Sheffield believes that "the British Army, having initially been confused by the new conditions of warfare, had by July 1918 tamed the new technology and worked out effective ways of harnessing it."^[133] Following this line of thought, the British Army learned many of its new tricks in the crucible of the Somme.^[134] Sheffield's view contends with that of Paddy Griffith who believes that the British Army had little to learn at the Somme and its disappointment on that day was caused by a failure in execution rather than

doctrine.^[135] The truth is perhaps unattainable but its location is somewhere between these two scholars' positions. Although certain commanders, like Maxse, exhibited an understanding of Griffith's "doctrine" in July 1916, the results of the first day indicate that not every corps or divisional commander possessed a similar grasp. Artillery and communications became as fundamental to the tactics of 1918 as they were to Maxse on 1 July. His artillery had successfully communicated with the infantry arm of his division which increased the accuracy and importance of each round fired. In 1918 this cooperation between the various units was commonplace throughout the entire British Army. This joint, fluid level of operating elevated the British Army to the status of weapons system.^[136]

The British Army's transformation from a small, elite fighting force of professionals in 1914, to the incredible machine of war fueled by total national mobilization in 1918 was a grueling and costly process. The Army learned its lessons on battlefields such as Neuve Chapelle, the Somme, and Passchendaele. In the case of the Somme, the first day of the battle was a massive disappointment. The battle had been so well planned that failure was inconceivable. The memory of this day has been disfigured by the ghastly facts and figures that define it as a failure. The initial assault faltered yet the battle dragged on another four months until its conclusion in November by which time nearly one million men had perished in the maelstrom. The numbers and details of the battle shape both the public and scholarly memory of the battle, surrounding it in a miasma of ill will toward British Army commanders. However, the passage of time has had the effect of numbing this anger and a new school of historians has emerged. The recent and highly influential works of Sheffield, Griffith, Prior, and Wilson have had the effect of casting new light upon old history. The careers of many British generals are resurrected under the new understanding of World War I. Sheffield has even proposed that "unpalatable as it may seem, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Somme was an essential precondition to success in the last two years of the war."^[137] His hypothesis salvages some purpose from an otherwise incomprehensible nightmare. Maxse's story, largely overlooked by this new school of historians, reinforces Sheffield's conclusion. His collection of papers, bequeathed to the Imperial War Museum, is evidence that the 18th Division's success on 1 July exceeded the parameters of simple luck. He took every measure possible to ensure victory--not only by training his men for the battle but also in encouraging initiative in command. He recognized his junior officers to be his most effective instruments once the action began. After honing the 18th into an elite fighting force he proceeded to employ it in the most efficient manner. By attacking with three brigades abreast on 1 July he alleviated many issues associated with 1916 communications that continued to plague the armies of the First World War through 1918. Nonetheless, even a story of success like that of Maxse and his 18th Division on 1 July came at an awful price. On this date, the division suffered 3,233 casualties. This figure might have been worse, however, if not for Maxse's training efforts and the courage of his junior officers who, together, and regardless of circumstances, achieved a lonely and underappreciated victory during the Battle of the Somme.

^[1] Andrew Howard Walters, *Initiative in Command: The Learning Curve in the British Army during World War I* (Hattiesburg, Mississippi: Graduate School of the University of Southern Mississippi, 2003), 19.

[2] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 2002), 169.

[3] Ibid., 168.

[4] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 59.

[5] John Baynes, *Far From a Donkey: the Life of General Sir Ivor Maxse*, (Brassey's: London and Washington, 1995), 17.

[6] Michael Duffy, First World War.Com, <http://www.firstworldwar.com> (accessed 2 May 2009).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Walters, *Initiative in Command*, 9. At the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars, France was best suited to use the independent corps system because, as Walters explains, the system required a level of morale which was generally absent from armies. The French Revolution had sparked an intense spirit of nationalism in her soldiers who then possessed enough fervor and moral strength to oppose massed bodies of troops.

[9] Ibid., 10.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Helmuth von Moltke, *The Franco-German War of 1870-1871* (Greenhill Books, London: 1992), 5. Quoted in Walters, *Initiative in Command*, 17.

[13] Baynes, *Far From a Donkey*, 116.

[14] Michael Duffy, First World War.Com, "Verdun" and "The Somme", firstworldwar.com (accessed 2 May 2009).

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Agenda: Divisional Commander's Conference April 26th, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM. Although I was unable to discover other records of this conference it is safe to presume his audience contained at least his brigade commanders. It would not be out of character for Maxse to have also invited battalion commanders. The wiring lessons of Verdun would most likely have been disseminated from GHQ down through the ranks.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 3. Montgomery was General Rawlinson's Chief of Staff for the Fourth Army to which Maxse's 18th Division belonged.

[19] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 59.

[20] Ibid.

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[21] Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918*" (Yale University Press: New haven and London, 1994), 80. Griffith lists only 15 divisions as being undoubtedly elite.

[22] Baynes, *Far From a Donkey*, 122. These volunteers overwhelmed Kitchener's expectations and from this group were formed the "Kitchener Armies". These units were unique because of the educations and often middle-class backgrounds of the volunteers. In contrast, the pre-war British Army had been kept small and highly professional.

[23] "Agenda: Divisional Commander's Conference April 26th, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 2.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Eliza Riedi and Tony Mason, "'Leather" and the fighting spirit: sport in the British Army in World War I." *Canadian Journal of History* 41.3 (Winter 2006), 485.

[26] "Notes for General Maxse's *History of the 18th Division*" composed by Major A.P.B. Irwin commanding 8th East Surreys and his adjutant, Captain O.C. Clare. Maxse Papers, IWM.

[27] "Agenda: Divisional Commander's Conference April 26th, 1916"

[28] Michael Duffy, "Lewis Gun" last updated May 23, 2003. Accessed from http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/mgun_lewis.htm on February 14, 2009.

[29] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916", Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 1.

[30] Ibid. Technical knowledge of the Lewis gun amounted to an individual's ability to both "strip" and reassemble the Lewis gun. Although this mechanical know-how could be useful in the event of overheating or jamming, the gun's true battlefield capabilities weren't being exercised.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Baynes, *Far From a Donkey*, 125.

[33] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 4.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

[36] "1st July. 55th Infantry Brigade (Right)" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1. The Craters, located along the front of the German lines, were great gouges in the earth caused by explosives. Maxse was aware of the potential difficulty it would take to overcome them and dedicated special units to their capture. However, resistance was extremely stubborn and required the special attention of trench mortars to soften the Germans' defense.

[37] Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, 69.

[38] Ibid., 67-9.

[39] "Summary of Fighting on 1st July, 1916". Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 26.

[40] "Summary of Fighting on 1st July, 1916", 27.

[41] Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, 73.

[42] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916", Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 2.

[43] Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, 62. The term 'stormtroop tactics', in this paper, is tantamount to special 'assault units' and 'consolidation units'. Many old-school historians of the First World War have attributed the novelty of 'stormtroop tactics' to German ingenuity. Griffith disagrees.

[44] "Agenda: Divisional Commander's Conference April 26th, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, 2.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Baynes, *Far From a Donkey*, 136-137. Baynes references a letter dated July 5, 1916 and written by Maxse. However, Baynes fails to note the location of the correspondence or the intended recipient. This has made further use of this interesting letter very difficult.

[47] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916", 4.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid., 3.

[50] Ibid.

[51] "18th Division: Casualties and Sick Wastage Return for Year 25th July 1915 to 24th July, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2.

[52] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 168.

[53] "Summary of Fighting on 1st July, 1916" General Maxse, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 26.

[54] Mopping up parties were units of men whose duty it was to search the captured lines for any remaining enemy combatants.

[55] "Summary of Fighting on 1st July, 1916", 27.

[56] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 168-9.

[57] Ibid.

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Paddy Griffith, Malcolm Brown, and John Baynes among others.

[60] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916", 5.

[61] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 59.

[62] The British plan for the Battle of the Somme included a five day preliminary bombardment of fantastic proportions. The British hoped to destroy the German defenses so thoroughly that the infantry might casually walk across No Man's Land unopposed. This was not the case. Weather did not permit an attack on the fifth day and the bombardment was extended by two days. Nearly 1.5 million shells pummeled the German lines but in many cases achieved little destruction.

[63] Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, (Pan Books, London: 2002), 52; Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 137; Mark Connely, *Steady the Buffs!: a Regiment, A Region, and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 99.

[64] Connely, *Steady the Buffs!*, 99.

[65] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 168; As referenced from Sir Martin Farndale, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery: Western Front 1914-18* (London: Royal Artillery Institution, 1986), 146-47.

[66] Nichols, *The 18th Division in the Great War* (Blackwood, 1922), 49-50. Quoted in Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 131.

[67] Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 137.

[68] Connely, *Steady the Buffs!*, 99.

[69] General Sir David Fraser, *Alanbrooke* (Collins, 1982), 72. Quoted in Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 138.

[70] Maxse Papers at WSRO, (Chichester), files 210 and 211. Quoted in Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 135.

[71] Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 136.

[72] Ibid., 128. Baynes finds excellent quotes from Maxse which truly illuminate his character and bring him to life in *Far From A Donkey*. Maxse wrote, "As I speak French and always like seeing French officers, quite a number call on me when passing anywhere near this locality. They know they will be more welcome than they seem to be in certain other British headquarters. The result is that I pick up a good deal which escapes some of my superiors."

[73] Maxse commanded the 1st Guards Brigade and saw early action in 1914 at the Battle of the Marne. This battle was "the beginning, for the British, of trench warfare" and it was this experience which gave Maxse an edge in preparing the 18th for war. Baynes covers this period in chapter 11 of Maxse's biography.

[74] Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 128. As referenced from a letter from General Maxse located at the WSRO, Files 154, 210, 211.

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[75] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 58. "Other" early training programs here refer to training at Codford and Purfleet where the 18th Division was first formed. There were frequent shortages of artillery pieces and ammunition upon which the men could train. However, Baynes indicates that Maxse squeezed the maximum value out of what time and munitions he possessed (127).

[76] "The Battle of the Somme", 14 August 1916, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 21.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 65.

[82] *Ibid.* "Pommiers Redoubt was a circular trench fortress, 1,000 yards from the front line, lavishly equipped with machine-guns and dug-outs, and protected by belts of wire." Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 105.

[83] *Ibid.* The French 75 mm was developed in 1897 after several years of secret development. It was the first fully integrated quick-firing gun with an innovative recoil system which allowed for more consistent accuracy. This information is available online at the website for the First Division Museum at Cantigny.
<http://www.firstdivisionmuseum.org/museum/exhibits/tankpark/75mm.aspx>. (Accessed 20 April, 2009).

[84] Connely, *Steady the Buffs!*, 99. Connely bases his claim upon the war diaries of the 18th Division and the 7th Buffs but broadly lists August 1915-June 1916 as the dates relevant to his statements. This would technically only cover the week-long preliminary bombardment and not the barrages which accompanied the assault.

[85] Terry Norman. *The Hell they Called High Wood* (Kimber, 1984, 1989), 42. Quoted in Baynes, *Far from a Donkey*, 139.

[86] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 107.

[87] "Operation Order No. 1: by Brigadier General S.F. Metcalfe, D.S.O., Commanding Artillery, 18th Division" 19 June 1916, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 22: p.1.

[88] "Summary of Fighting on 1st July, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 27.

[89] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 5.

[90] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 166. The author discusses how recent research has "suggested that the tactical picture of Rawlinson [determining] that the infantry should advance in a slow, long-moving line" is erroneous.

[91] "The Battle of the Somme", 14 August 1916, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 2. In a separate file, 17/2, Maxse justifies his decision to attack with three brigades abreast.

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[92] Ibid., 3.

[93] Ibid., 2.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 3.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 11.

[99] "Additional Notes", 5 August 1916, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 2.

[100] Ibid.

[101] "The Battle of the Somme", 14 August 1916, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 4.

[102] "Letter to General A.A. Montgomery from General Ivor Maxse: July 31, 1916" Maxse Papers, IWM, File 17/2: p. 4.

[103] "The Battle of the Somme", 14 August 1916, Maxse Papers, IWM, File 23/1: p. 26.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., 8.

[107] Ibid., 10.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid., 19.

[113] Ibid., 11.

[114] Ibid., 7. In the week provided for practicing the assault Maxse had trained his local reserves to capture enemy strong points from the flanks whenever frontal attacks were held up. They were trained to "expect the 'unexpected'" which would inevitably occur. This practice took place on the model German trenches.

[115] Ibid., 12.

[116] Ibid., 11.

[117] Prior and Wilson, *The Somme*, 59.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Graves, *Goodbye To All That*, 145. Quoted in Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front*, 80.

[121] Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, 70.

[122] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 165.

[123] "Maxse to General A.A. Montgomery, 31 July 1916," Maxse Papers, IWM, London, File 17/2: p. 4.

[124] Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, 66.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

[127] Brigadier-General Rees, quoted in Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Somme*, 39.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 172.

[130] Ibid., 195.

[131] Ibid., 204-9.

[132] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 221-31. Sheffield firmly believed that despite the British Army's survival it faced very real destruction. Several elements of Gough's Fifth Army fell back and left the flanks of their neighbors dangerously exposed. In *Michael*, Sheffield also makes the interesting distinction between the German command's plans which still relied upon the skill and maneuvering of the infantry to be the main impetus of the attack. The German commander, Ludendorff, rejected the British "Bite and Hold" tactics which relied heavily on artillery support to provide the impetus of the attack.

[133] Ibid., 237.

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[134] Ibid., 169. Sheffield wrote that, "...the notoriety of the 'First Day on the Somme' should not be allowed to overshadow the fact that it represented an important point on a learning curve..."

[135] Griffith, 56-64. Quoted in Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 167.

[136] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 241.

[137] Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 189.