Mud, Blood and Poppycock

Gordon Corrigan

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Extract

To Shelagh Lea: friend, artist and adviser, who did not live to see the results of her invaluable contribution to this book

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INTRODUCTION

Everyone knows – because it is endlessly repeated in newspapers, books and on radio and television – that if the British dead of the First World War were to be instantly resurrected and then formed up and marched past the Cenotaph, the column would take four and a half days to pass. Actually it wouldn't. The British lost 704,208 dead in the Great War, and if they were to form up in three ranks and march at the standard British army speed of 120 thirty-inch paces to the minute, they would pass in one day, fifteen hours and seven minutes. It is still an impressive statistic, but utterly meaningless. It is about as useful as saying that if all the paper clips used in the City of London in a year were laid end to end they would reach to the moon, or to New York, or halfway round the world. The figure is quoted, usually around 11 November each year, to illustrate the scale of British casualties in the war of 1914–18. It might mean more if it were coupled with the fact that the French dead, in the same formation, would take three days, five hours and thirty-seven minutes to complete the manoeuvre, and the Germans four days, eighteen hours and sixteen minutes. Even this would not help very much, because the French population was six million fewer than that of Great Britain, and the German population fifteen million more.

The popular British view of the Great War is of a useless slaughter of

hundreds of thousands of patriotic volunteers, flung against barbed wire and machine guns by stupid generals who never went anywhere near the front line. When these young men could do no more, they were hauled before kangaroo courts, given no opportunity to defend themselves, and then taken out and shot at dawn. The facts are that over 200 British generals were killed, wounded or captured in the war, and that of the five million men who passed through the British Army 2,300 were sentenced to death by military courts, of whom ninety per cent were pardoned.

A recent schoolchildren's visit to the Western Front required the children to visit the British cemeteries in France and Belgium and answer questions, one of which was 'Why are there so few officers' graves?' The answer sought, according to the teacher present, was that the officers took no part in the attack, being safely behind the lines enjoying a good breakfast while their men went to their deaths.[1] The teacher – and by extension much of the British public – was presumably unaware that the four companies of an infantry battalion going into the attack, 640 soldiers in all, would be led by around twenty-three officers, assuming the battalion was fully up to strength with no one away on leave or courses. Between 1914 and 1918 twelve per cent of all other ranks were killed, and seventeen per cent of the officers.

The Great War, the Kaiser's War, the First World War, call it what you will, is of contemporary interest to the British people because nearly every family in Britain had somebody killed in it. Or did they? According to the official census reports, there were approximately 9,800,000 households in Britain in 1914.[2] Statistically then, only one family in fourteen lost a member. Even allowing for extended family groupings, to include uncles, cousins and in-laws, this is not every family in Britain. Perhaps everyone knew somebody who was killed? In certain parts of the country that is undoubtedly true, largely because of the way in which we recruited our infantry, but there were large swathes of the nation from where no one was killed.

It cannot be a comfort to those widows, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters, all ageing now, who remember a loved one killed in the war, when they are told, as they all too often are, that their menfolk died in vain and that their sacrifice was a pointless waste. It is, however, not surprising that

the general public attitude should be thus. As experience of war recedes – and anyone who was old enough to take part in the Second World War is in their mid-seventies now – and when no one under the age of sixty has any experience of National Service, it cannot be surprising that the great majority of the British people have no understanding of war or any insight into what an army does and how it operates. We live in a liberal society, where individual rights are given ever greater priority and legislation outlaws any form of discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability. The British army of today, let alone that of nearly a century ago, seems a strange body indeed. As standards of health and material well-being increase, and as governments become more and more accountable to the electorate, so concepts of compulsion, unthinking obedience to orders, constant risk of death or maiming, and subordination of the individual to the corporate aim appear increasingly alien. It is said that the army should reflect society, but what an army does, and what in the final analysis it is for, do not reflect society. The army defends society but it cannot share its values, for if it does it cannot do its job. An army at war may be more representative of society than one at peace, but even then it does not reflect it, being largely composed of young, physically fit males. An army may well be used for humanitarian purposes, ranging from flood relief to the distribution of food, and from peacemaking to peacekeeping. Its structure, skills, mobility and discipline make it very good at these tasks, but an army exists to fight wars when and if these occur. A war is not a moral crusade, whatever the propagandists at the time may say; it is a trial of strength with each army striving its utmost to destroy the other by all means open to it. Some years ago the British army's small-arms training manual was titled *Shoot to Kill*. This led to protests from libertarians who claimed that such a title instilled aggression. Quite. Should the army have entitled its pamphlet *Shoot to Miss*? Soldiers are aggressive: they have to be because their job is to kill other soldiers and to do it efficiently and without moral scruple. In war individual morality must be subject to the priorities of the state, for if it is not then the army will lose, and all those hard-won human rights will count for naught.

Given the prevalent outlook of democratic western societies, it is perhaps not to be wondered at that politicians and others objected when in

December 2000 the British Chief of the Defence Staff pointed out that there is no place in the armed forces for the disabled. A compassionate society will, and should, legislate to prevent discrimination on the grounds of disablement, race, gender and sexual orientation. It will, rightly, introduce laws to regulate health and safety at work, to limit the hours worked by employees, and to encourage a climate in which promotion, dismissal, disciplinary procedures, orders and instructions can be challenged. But a society which seriously considers the extension of this culture to cover the armed forces, and in which the deterrent effect on a terrorist bomber of a sentry in a wheelchair is not instantly ludicrous, is unlikely to comprehend the military imperatives of the Great War. Even the humblest signaller, storeman or clerk may be required in the future, as he has been in the past, to pick up a rifle and defend himself, his comrades or his equipment. Soldiers must react instantly to orders, for if they take time to debate them, or to apply their own individual concepts of right and wrong, sense and nonsense, the moment for action will have passed. It is sometimes better to follow what in hindsight turns out not to have been the best course, than to do nothing at all.

Britain has a long history of opposition to whoever is in power, and has never been easily, or complaisantly, governed. This was in many ways a good thing, as dissent has always been able to be expressed and, apart from the Civil Wars of 1638 to 1651, we have been spared rebellion, uprising, oppression and dictatorship as experienced by most of our European neighbours. There has been no successful invasion of Britain since 1066, and since then the old order has never been swept away completely and permanently; it has merely adapted. Sniping at the establishment can go too far, however, and while it is always easy (and fun) to drag the mighty down, it is more difficult to raise someone into their place. British society has always been class-ridden. As officers, by appointment if not by birth, occupy a higher social stratum than that of the men they command, civilians have found them an easy target, and the more senior the easier. Everyone chuckles when a senior politician, or a member of the Royal Family, or an air marshal is caught putting his organ where he shouldn't; newspapers expend large sums of money trying to excavate the dirty laundry of pop stars, sporting figures and vicars. The first person to

win £1 million in a recent television quiz show was widely reviled because she was upper middle-class, as if it were only artisans who should be allowed a dip in the bran tub. Criticism of the management of war comes naturally.

It is easy for the public to criticise, and by extension to believe the worst, of the Great War. It is almost impossible for modern Britain even to begin to understand what war is or was like. A society most of whose members have never slept elsewhere than in a bed cannot comprehend that one can be quite comfortable in a hole in the ground. A society in which any distance of more than a mile is an occasion for getting out the car can scarcely conceive that a march of twenty miles carrying seventy pounds or so is no great hardship for trained troops, or that all-in stew cooked with scant regard to the health and safety at work regulations can be nourishing and tasty.

Because everybody thinks something does not mean that they are necessarily right. Majority opinion after the Great War was that it had been a just war, and that Britain had played its part in winning it. The army's reputation was high, the commanders were publicly thanked and, as had long been the custom, were granted monetary awards and titles. When the last Commander-in-Chief, Earl Haig, died in 1928, his body lay in state in Edinburgh and 100,000 people filed past the coffin. Seventy years later there was a campaign by a national newspaper to have his equestrian statue in Whitehall demolished. It was in the thirties that critical opinion began to be formed. The publication of Erich Maria Remarque's fictional *All Quiet on the Western Front* in 1929 – which the Nazis burned but the French merely banned – stimulated a spate of anti-war memoirs and novels that had begun a few years before. Poets and writers like Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke, Edmund Blunden, C. E. Montague and Frederick Manning wrote convincingly that the war had been futile. They were a minority, but their views were read. Most of them were not new to having their thoughts in print: the majority had already been published before the war, and the public paid attention to what they said after it. Siegfried Sassoon, egged on by pacifists such as Bertrand Russell, published an anti-war diatribe in *The Times* on 31 July 1917; but then he was a patient in a mental hospital at the time, and what he said caused great offence in his

old battalion which was still in France. Opposing voices were ignored, and Graham Greenwell, who stated baldly in *An Infant at Arms* that he had thoroughly enjoyed his war, was flayed by the reviewers. Pacifism became fashionable between the wars, and in 1933 the Oxford Union voted overwhelmingly that they would in no circumstances fight for King and Country. Much has been made of that motion, but a properly conducted debate will vote according to the quality of the argument presented, rather than in accordance with the voters' personal intentions. In the event, of course, they did fight. The arrival of the Second World War brought a temporary halt to criticism of the First, but there was a resurgence in the 1960s when anti-establishment fervour became widespread. Writers such as J. F. C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart were critical of the way the war had been managed, and particularly of its commanders. Liddell Hart became the leading exponent of the study of the Great War, and anyone who expressed a view contrary to his was unlikely to be widely published or listened to. Unfortunately Liddell Hart had a personal axe to grind. He was evacuated from the battle area on three occasions during the war: once with a fever, once when concussed by an exploding shell, and finally in July 1916 when he incurred flesh wounds and suffered the effects of gas. On the second and third occasions he was sent back to England to recover, and after his second evacuation he did not return to the front. It does now appear that the injuries from his third experience of battle were more psychological than physical.[3] One cannot blame him for that, but having been found wanting in physical courage – at least in his own mind if not in those of others – he sought ways to explain why it is not courage but intellect that wins wars. The generals were clearly men of courage; therefore they must be made to appear without intellect, and all the mistakes and failures could be laid at their doors.[4] Joan Littlewood's production of the play *Oh! What a Lovely War* was made into a film of which the scriptwriter admitted that it was one part himself and three parts Stalin. It was an enormously popular film, well made and highly entertaining, with a superb musical soundtrack, but about as historically useful as *The Wind in the Willows*.[5]

Any study of the British effort in the Great War must be approached from an understanding of what the army was required to do, and why it was where it was in the first place. It is totally unrealistic to impose today's

standards on the events of 1914–18. No modern general would throw 200,000 men straight at a well-defended and fortified enemy line north of the River Somme: he would go over it, round it, bypass it or punch through it. The assets to do this – tanks, helicopters, paratroops, tactical nuclear weapons – were not available in 1916. What made the British army attack along the Somme and keep attacking was dictated by what was happening at Verdun, 120 miles to the south-west.

The war was fought between two coalitions, but that of the Central Powers, consisting of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria, was dominated by Germany, with by far the strongest economy and largest armed forces. On the Allied side, at some stage during the conflict, no fewer than twenty-four countries were technically at war with Germany, or with Germany and one or more of her allies. Some of these Allies or Associated Powers were of little account: Luxembourg, with its army of 150 royal guards who doubled as the nation's postmen in time of peace, had no opportunity to play any part, being occupied by Germany in the first few hours of the war. The declaration of war in April 1917 by Panama, with no armed forces at all, is unlikely to have caused General Ludendorff to break out in a cold sweat; nor would that in May 1918 by Costa Rica, with a standing army of 600 men and a navy of two patrol craft commanded by an admiral, have kept the Kaiser lying awake at night. Liberia (from August 1917) and Haiti (from July 1918) cannot seriously have expected to save Europe by their efforts. These countries, along with Guatemala (April 1917), Cuba (April 1917), Nicaragua (May 1917), Brazil (October 1917) and Honduras (July 1918), came into the war on the coat-tails of the American declaration of war against Germany in April 1917 and against Austria-Hungary in December. They made no military contribution but their formal entry into the war did allow German investments and assets in their countries, and German ships in their ports, to be seized. Even Siam declared war in July 1917. China, which joined in August 1917, was utterly unable to do anything, such was the internal state of the country, although she did allow the Allies to recruit labourers for duties behind the lines in Europe; large numbers of these Chinese died during the influenza epidemic of 1918. Italy joined the Allies in May 1915 against Austria-Hungary, largely in the hope of territorial gain, and

declared against Germany in August 1916. Her participation was more of a hindrance than a help to the Allies, necessitating the diversion of six French and five British divisions and an American regiment to the Italian Front in 1917 to stave off their host's collapse. Greece entered the war in June 1917, her eye on her traditional enemies, Turkey and the Balkan states. Japan joined the Allies early, in August 1914, with a view to picking up German colonies in China and the Pacific. She took no part on land, but her navy was of help in protecting Allied trade in the Far East from German commerce raiders. Portugal came into the war on the side of her oldest ally in March 1916, and sent two small divisions to the Western Front. The efforts of Serbia (the immediate cause of the war), Montenegro and Romania were directed against Austria-Hungary and confined to their own geographical area.

Within the Allied coalition, the nations that actually mattered were France, Russia, Belgium, the United Kingdom and, neutral until 1917 but of enormous importance to the war effort even before entry, the United States of America. Belgium spent most of the war on the defensive, clinging grimly to that sliver of the country not occupied by Germany, and resisting British and French blandishments to take part in joint offensives. As the ostensible reason for the British declaration of war, however, she was important. On the German side Austria-Hungary was a ramshackle multi-ethnic state whose sole unifying factor was its Habsburg ruler, successor to the Holy Roman Emperor and now Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary. While not quite a German client state, Austria-Hungary was so far inferior to Germany in military and economic strength that, in examining the war in the west, it is reasonable to concentrate on Germany on the one hand and France, Britain and, in time, America on the other.

In the West, at least, this was a coalition war and for most of it Britain was the junior partner on land. Decisions as to the conduct of the war could not be made by British generals – or British politicians – in isolation. Actions looked at through Anglocentric eyes may well seem unnecessary, foolish even, but when examined in the context of the war as a whole the reasons for them become clearer.

The British army of the period 1914–18 was really four armies: the old professional regular army, with its associated reservists; the Territorial

Force, of civilians turned soldiers at weekends and at annual camp; the 'New Armies' raised from volunteers in the first year of the war; and the conscripts, joining the ranks from 1916 onwards. Each of these groups had a different ethos and a different perspective on the war; each had its own aspirations and needed handling in a different way. As a generality, the regular army was rarely found wanting; the Territorial Force lacked equipment and was deficient in some aspects of training, but when committed fought well; the New Armies were enthusiastic and drawn from a higher stratum of society than the regulars, but were – not surprisingly – hopelessly inexperienced and undertrained when first deployed; the conscripts, unlike the other three groups, did not fight as units but were used as individual reinforcements, thus perhaps finding the culture of the army harder to adjust to. Any study of the British army in the Great War must take these factors into account.

My own interest in the war was kindled as a schoolboy by my headmaster, a lofty figure with whom we boys rarely came in contact and who, when Empire Day was replaced by Commonwealth Day, summoned the whole school to announce that it would no longer be celebrated by a half holiday. 'Wilf', as he was known, did little teaching, except to the Upper Sixth A Level mathematics class. As this was in the days when university was but one of the many options open to a public schoolboy, we were a small band of six. I was there because two passes at A Level granted exemption from the Civil Service Commissioners' examination for entry to Sandhurst, and maths seemed a reasonable bet. Of my fellow pupils one was, like myself, trying for Sandhurst; two were whiling the time away before they could take over their fathers' estates; one was destined for the church, and one really was intending to read mathematics, at Cambridge. Apart from the Cambridge candidate (he succeeded in gaining a scholarship), none of us took sums very seriously, a fact that Wilf recognised early in the year. He was not just a dry old mathematician, however. He had been an infantry officer in the Great War and, as a change from quadratic equations, often threw us mathematical problems pertaining to war. 'A brigade consists of a headquarters and four battalions, each of 1,000 men. It has a cyclist company and a company of the Army Service Corps attached. It has an escort of two troops of cavalry. The infantry marches at

two miles per hour. The brigade sets off from Cassel at 0900 hours. At what time does the last man reach Poperinge?' This was much more fun than proving that $e = mc^2$, but whatever answer we came up with was always wrong. As Wilf wryly pointed out, the brigade was held up for four hours in Steenvorde because the gendarmes considered that the commander lacked the necessary travel pass. Wilf had enjoyed his war. He had been wounded and he had seen his friends and his men killed, but he did not consider the war to have been unnecessary, or a waste, or badly conducted.

As time went on and I became seriously interested in military history, it seemed to me that much received opinion about the Great War was simply wrong. Anecdotal evidence from old soldiers, and statistics in the Public Record Office, did not seem to support much of the pejorative writings and opinions of modern commentators. It seemed to me that while the Great War was unique in British history, in that it was the first and last occasion when Britain fielded a mass army opposed to the major enemy in the main theatre for the entire period of hostilities, it was neither unnecessary nor badly conducted. Mistakes there surely were, but most were honest errors made by men who were as well trained and as well prepared as they could be, conducting a war the like of which no one on either side had expected. During the recent past, since my retirement from the army in 1998, I have conducted numerous battlefield tours, over half of them to the battlefields of 1914–18. I have tried to explain to my listeners what war is really about, how an army does its business and why much legend of the Great War is simply that: legend. I have myself come to the conclusion that Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, far from being the 'butcher and bungler' of popular belief, was the man who took a tiny British army and expanded it, trained it and prepared it until it was the only Allied army capable of defeating the Germans militarily in 1918. Some of my listeners have gone away convinced, some have nodded politely and continued in the comfortable safety of their preconceived ideas. People do not like their illusions shattered.

There is today a 'revisionist' school of military historians who are prepared to regard the war as history rather than as an emotional experience, but most popular reading clings to the old myths of incompetence and unnecessary slaughter. Even John Keegan, in his book *The First World*

War, has as his opening sentence, 'This was a tragic and unnecessary conflict.' To be fair to Sir John, he does not say that British participation in the war was unnecessary. I would argue that the aggressive nature of Germany's war aims made it essential to confront them by force, all other options having been exhausted, but Sir John does say that the efforts of revisionist historians are 'pointless'. I regret having to take issue with Sir John, the doyen of modern military historians. It was he, along with David Chandler, who as a lecturer in military history at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the early sixties first stimulated my latent interest in the history of my profession, and who taught me never to accept historical accounts at face value, but to probe and question and pry and dig until the primary evidence was uncovered. Admiration and respect for Sir John need not prevent occasional disagreement with his conclusions.

I believe that the evidence does not support the popular view of the First World War as being unnecessary, or ineptly conducted by the British. The British regular army in 1914 was 257,000 strong, most of it scattered around the Empire in its primary role of a colonial gendarmerie. The Territorial Force and the Reserves numbered, at least on paper, a further 620,000. Unlike the continental powers Britain had always eschewed conscription and, unlike the French and the Germans, the bulk of the population had no military experience. Once at war expansion was rapid and unprecedented. A nation that does not practise conscription in peace, and then has to expand hugely in war in order to field a mass army, will inevitably suffer casualties and make mistakes while that army is learning its trade. It cannot be otherwise, and it is to the very great credit of the British army of 1914–18 that it did learn its trade and was the only army capable of taking the offensive in 1918.

In this book I have tried to look at some of the prevalent myths of the Great War and to examine the evidence relating to them. Some – the deadly effects of gas, the unimportance of the American army – I find to be without foundation: gas hardly killed anyone once it was known about, and the Americans made a very definite military contribution to the war, particularly at the Second Battle of the Marne. Some myths are partly true: some public schools did suffer heavy casualties amongst their ex-pupils, although not anything like the 'lost generation' of mythology – not all of

Harold Macmillan's friends were killed on the Somme. Some beliefs are simply misunderstood: it is quite true that one quarter of all the shipping from Britain to France during the war carried fodder for horses, but only a very small proportion of this was for cavalry horses: the bulk of British (and French and German) transport for artillery, ammunition, supplies and ambulances was horse-drawn; and in any case, the cavalry was nothing like the useless adornment that is often claimed.

In considering the actions of British commanders during the war I have adopted the standards of judges conducting a judicial review, a legal process where decisions made by ministers, functionaries, tribunals, panels and other quasi-official bodies are subject to challenge in hindsight. In deciding whether decisions taken were reasonable at the time, the judges ask themselves: 'Could a reasonable man, faced with the evidence he was faced with, come to the conclusion that he did, even if we, faced with the same evidence, might have come to a different conclusion?' It seems to me that this is the only approach that can reasonably allow an assessment of the capabilities and competence of those charged with conducting military operations in the world's first total war. In general, British command and leadership on the Western Front emerges unscathed, albeit occasionally bruised, from such an examination, although that in other theatres – such as Gallipoli and Mesopotamia – may not. I have concentrated my attention on the Western Front because it was there that the bulk of the British army fought, and there that the war was to be won or lost. I do not say that other non-European theatres were not important, but I do say that success or failure in them was not, in the long term, germane to eventual victory or defeat. The Eastern Front was, of course, an important theatre of war, but I have largely ignored it because the British army had no involvement there until after the armistice of 1918 was signed. At the same time I recognise that had the Eastern Front not occupied the attention of up to a quarter of all available German divisions until late 1917, the results of the earlier battles on the Western Front might have been very different.

As participants in the war open their archives and release documents previously classified, the sources for a study of the war increase with every passing year. Between 1922 and 1927 the German government published,

in forty volumes, what it considered to be all the relevant diplomatic and military correspondence from 1871 to 1914, with the aim of expunging the 'war guilt' that had been attached to Germany since the Versailles Treaty. I have not read these forty volumes, but historians such as Fritz Fischer have, and while Fischer, although a German, is considered by some scholars to be biased against his own government's behaviour before and during the war, much of what he quotes speaks for itself. The principal German military leaders wrote their memoirs after the war, and while these are in some cases selective, and written to justify their own actions, much German military thinking prior to the outbreak of war is revealed. On the Allied side the start point must be the Official Histories. They too may be biased, but they do record what actually happened, even if the thinking behind specific operations is sometimes shaded and mistakes understated. British cabinet papers are now, for the most part, in the public domain, as are many of the more sensitive files dealing with such subjects as military executions. Unit war diaries are an excellent primary source for operational detail. In some cases they were written after the event, in others they were edited before being submitted up the chain of command, but for what actually occurred at unit level they are the most accurate sources available to us. Memoirs, diaries and letters of participants are useful, but must be used with care. A soldier might well complain that he never saw a general in the front line, while the unit war diary records frequent visits by brigade, divisional and corps commanders. These accounts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Not every soldier in the firing line will see a visitor, while behind the lines the whole unit will be drawn up on parade to see and be seen by the great man. Fortunately for the historian, the British army loves paper; and post-operation reports, casualty returns, strength returns, records of ammunition expenditure, equipment tables, receipts for the issue of stores, training programmes, enlistment records, training notes, citations for awards and records of promotions and postings were meticulously compiled and filed, much of this material still being available today. A particularly useful document is *Statistics of the British Empire in the Great War 1914–1919*, a rich fund of information produced by the War Office after the war. Deaths in the war have now been placed on CD-ROM, making comparisons of the casualty

rate in the various geographical districts of the nation an easier task than hitherto. Regimental histories, while they too must be treated with care, usually include accurate records of locations, casualties and decorations, and lists of officers, and sometimes of non-commissioned officers, present at any particular period.

In preparing this book I owe particular thanks to the writings of John Terraine, who ploughed a lonely furrow for many years in his efforts to explain the British participation in the Great War, and to show that all those British deaths had not been in vain. Professor Brian Bond of King's College London, Professor Peter Simkins recently of the Imperial War Museum London, Dr Gary Sheffield of the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Dr John Bourne of the University of Birmingham, and Robin Neillands are all inspirational historians of the war, persuaded by the evidence and without axes to grind. I have been greatly encouraged by my fellow members of the British Commission for Military History, a body with a low public profile but a high reputation for scholarship. Here I must pay particular tribute to Chris McCarthy, for many years the General Secretary of the Commission, who not only motivated me to write my first-ever book, but is the author of *The Somme: The Day-by-Day Account* and *Passchendaele: The Day-by-Day Account*, which lay out, starkly and devoid of emotion, exactly what every division of the British and Empire armies did on each day of those two climactic British battles of the Western Front.

The staffs of the Public Record Office, the British Newspaper Library, the Prince Consort's Library Aldershot, the British Library, the Office of Population Statistics and the Templeman Library of the University of Kent at Canterbury have all been unfailingly helpful in my searches for hard evidence on which to base my conclusions, and Mrs Shelagh Lea has, if it is possible, surpassed herself in producing accurate maps and line drawings from my near-illegible sketches. I am grateful to Tony Cowan for permission to make use of his Cowan Report on Army Postings, a monumental work that traces the career of every officer of the rank of colonel and above who served in the British army from 1914 to 1918. Miss Elspeth Griffith, the archivist of Sedbergh School, and Mr Richard Overton have been of great assistance in supplying me with the details of Old

Sedbergians who served in the war, as have Colonel Tony Lea MC of St Lawrence College, Thanet, and Dr Duncan of the Royal School Armagh. Miss Patricia Hardcastle, of the Catholic Media Office in London and Father O'Donoghe of the Jesuit Provinciate in Ireland have gone to great lengths to help in my investigations into the role of padres in the war, and particularly in my enquiries about Father Willie Doyle MC. To Colonel Andrew Pinion OBE I owe a huge debt for his advice on, and technical knowledge of, artillery in the Great War. Colonel Bob Alexander has helped me greatly by his encyclopaedic knowledge of machine guns and their characteristics. Stuart Sampson has been a mine of information on the law as it stood in 1914, and Colonel Dick Austin as to how it stands today; Simon Jones, of the King's Regiment Museum, has been kind enough to advise me on the history of gas warfare, and Brigadier Douglas Wickenden has, as in the past, been unfailingly helpful in answering my untutored questions on the psychiatric effects of war on its participants. The opinions, and the errors, are mine and mine alone.

My wife Imogen has, as always, been a tower of strength. Her ability to read a map, honed during twenty years' service in the Women's Royal Army Corps and Adjutant General's Corps, has been of immense assistance when conducting reconnaissance of the relevant battles, and she has compiled the index. I am not (quite) pompous enough to believe that it was seventeen years of listening to me pontificating about battles that drove her to seek a history degree, as a full-time student at the age of forty-three, but her academic studies have enabled her to comment on the text and to make observations that had not occurred to me. Angus MacKinnon and Ian Drury of Cassell – about as far removed from the image, so beloved by authors, of the wicked publisher as it is possible to be – and my editor, Anthony Turner, have been encouraging and helpful throughout.

This book may not convince all my readers of the validity of my claims, but if it at least prompts them to ask for the evidence when confronted with yet another fulminatory condemnation of the British war effort of 1914–18, then I shall have achieved my aim.

J. G. H. Corrigan
EASTRY, KENT, 2002

NOTES

1 *Bulletin of the Western Front Association*, no. 56, February 2000.

2 There were official censuses in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland in 1911, and in England, Wales and Scotland in 1921. The Irish Free State and Northern Ireland held separate censuses in 1926. In all cases the census reports included the number of occupied dwellings, a dwelling being a self contained collection of rooms that were occupied by an individual or group, either a house or a flat. In arriving at the number of households in 1914, I have assumed that the rate of change was constant between 1911 and 1921 for Great Britain, and between 1911 and 1926 for Ireland. This cannot, of course, be entirely accurate, but is probably as near to the correct figure as it is possible to get. Statistics are contained in: *Census of England and Wales 1911, General Report with Appendices*, HMSO, London, 1917; *Census of England and Wales 1921, General Tables*, HMSO, London, 1925; *Report of the Twelfth Decennial Census of Scotland, Vol. II*, HMSO, London, 1913; *Report of the Thirteenth Decennial Census of Scotland*, HMSO, Edinburgh, 1923; *Census of Ireland 1911, Preliminary Report with Abstract of the Enumerators' Summaries*, HMSO, Dublin, 1911; *Preliminary Report on the Census of Northern Ireland 1926*, HMSO, Belfast, 1926; *Saorstát Éireann Census of Population 1926, Vol. IV, Housing*, Dept of Industry and Commerce, Dublin, 1926.

3 The question is examined in detail in Alex Danchev, *Alchemist of War, The Life of Basil Liddell Hart*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1998.

4 Professor Brian Bond in *Look to your Front, Studies in the First World War*, Spellmount Publishers, Staplehurst, 1999.

5 For an assessment of British anti-war writing see Professor Brian Bond, 'British Anti-War Writers and Their Critics', in Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon*, Leo Cooper, London, 1996.