CHAPTER 1

What Should Military Ethics Learn from World War I? A Christian Assessment

By Nigel Biggar

We attacked, I think, about 820 strong. I've no official figures of casualties. A friend, an officer in "C" Company, which was in support and shelled to pieces before it could start, told me in hospital that we lost 450 men that day, and that, after being put in again a day or two later, we had 54 left. I suppose it's worth it.[1]

—Richard H. Tawney, "The Attack"

Thus wrote Richard H. Tawney—then a sergeant, later the famous Anglican socialist—of the action on the Somme on July 1, 1916, in which he himself was shot in the stomach and lay wounded in No Man's Land for 30 hours. In their assault on the German trenches, the British (which at that time and in that place included the southern Irish and Newfoundlanders) suffered 57,470 casualties *on the first day*, of which 19,240 were fatalities. The battle, which began in July, carried on for over 4 months into November. At its end, British losses amounted to 419,654 killed, wounded, missing, and taken prisoner. The French lost an additional 202,567.[2] And the gain for this appalling cost? An advance of about 6 miles.[3]

The Somme has become a byword for disproportionate military slaughter, caused by criminally stupid and callous generals in the prosecution of a senseless, futile war. This narrative began to take root in Great Britain when I was a teenager in the 1960s and against the background of widespread opposition to America's war in Vietnam. Although now under challenge from professional historians, it remains a common view and received something of a boost 5 years ago with the publication of Christopher Clark's widely celebrated *The Sleepwalkers.* Clark concludes his account of the outbreak and escalation of World War I thus: "There is no smoking gun in this story; or, rather, there is one in the hand of every major character. . . . The outbreak of war was a tragedy, not a crime."[4] "The crisis that brought war in 1914," he tells us, "was the fruit of a shared political culture," which rendered Europe's leaders "sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world."[5]

I do not agree with Clark, but on ethical rather than historical grounds. He draws too sharp a distinction between tragedy and crime, as if they are always mutually exclusive alternatives. Crime often has a tragic dimension. Human beings do make free moral choices, but our freedom is usually somewhat fated by forces beyond our control. In addition, Clark assumes that because blame was widespread, it was shared equally. I disagree—the fact that blame is spread wide does not make it even.

Take, for example, the question of whether or not the British government was justified in going to war in August 1914. Crucial to this is reaching a moral judgment about Germany's invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg, and France, because without that invasion Britain would not have fought. Why did Germany invade? It invaded because it feared that France would attack in support of Russia. According to the Christian just war reasoning, however, the mere threat of attack is no just cause for war. Only if there is substantial evidence that a threat is *actually in the process of being realized* would the launching of *preemptive* war be justified. It is not justified to launch a *preventative* war simply because one fears that an enemy *might*

attack. One may not launch war on speculative grounds. In August 1914, France was not intending to attack Germany (and nor, of course, was Belgium). Indeed, France deliberately kept one step behind Germany in its military preparations so as to make its defensive posture unmistakable, and as late as August 1, France reaffirmed the order for its troops to stay 10 kilometers back from the Franco-Belgian border.[6] Notwithstanding that, Germany declared war on France on August 3 "on the basis of trumped-up allegations that French troops had crossed the border and French aircraft had bombed Nuremberg."[7]

It was the German government, dominated by its military leadership,[8] that launched a preventative war against France and Belgium in August 1914. It did so because social Darwinism was the "prevailing orthodoxy,"[9] and the government took it for granted that war is the natural way of deciding the balance of international power;[10] because it foresaw that the longer the next war was delayed, the longer would be the odds against Germany's victory;[11] and because "the memory of 1870 [the Franco-Prussian War], still nurtured through annual commemorations and the cult of Bismarck, had addicted the German leaders to saber-rattling and to military gambles, which had paid off before and might do so again."[12]

Clark's metaphor of the sleepwalker is a striking one, which picks out important features of the situation in the runup to the outbreak of world war. But a metaphor is, by definition, both like and unlike the reality it depicts, and it should not be taken literally. Germany's leaders were not actually sleepwalkers, but fully conscious moral agents, making decisions according to their best lights in a volatile situation of limited visibility. In such circumstances, which are not at all unusual, error was forgivable. Not so forgivable was their subscription to the creed of a Darwinist *Realpolitik*, which robbed their political and military calculating of any moral bottom line beyond that of national survival through dominance.[13]

It is perfectly natural for a nation not to want to see diminished its power to realize its intentions in the world. But if social Darwinism thinks it is natural for a nation to launch a preventative war simply to forestall the

loss of its dominance, just war reasoning does not think it is right. Just cause must consist of an injury, and Germany had suffered none. Nor was it about to. As David Stevenson writes, "no evidence exists that Russia, France, or Britain intended to attack."[14]

One thing that World War I has to teach those of us who care about the rights and wrongs of war is this: *metaphysics matters*. It matters whether or not we take a fundamentally Darwinist or Hobbesian view of the world, or, say, a Christian or Kantian one. If Berlin's anxieties about national survival and dominance in 1914 had been disciplined by the principles of Christian just war reasoning—or something like it—there would have been no Western Front.

Disciplining the Pursuit of National Interest

Of course, the fact that Germany invaded France and Belgium did not determine Great Britain's entry into the war. Indeed, a majority of the British government's cabinet initially opposed sending troops to aid France. The Entente Cordiale formally committed the British only to consult with the French in case of a threat to European peace, and not automatically to activate their joint military contingency plans.[15] Nevertheless, the Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, argued strongly that Britain was morally obliged to come to France's aid. But what eventually decided the cabinet in favor of war on August 4 was Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. In British minds "Belgium" conjured up a variety of just causes: vindicating a treaty to guarantee Belgian independence and defending the rights of small nations against unwarranted aggression.

Of course, in addition to moral obligation to France and legal obligation to Belgium, national interest was also involved in Great Britain's motivation to help fend off a German attack. The Belgian coast faced London and the Thames estuary, and it had therefore long been British policy to keep that coastline free from hostile control in order to prevent invasion and preserve command of the sea.[16] It is true, therefore, that in rising to the defense of France and Belgium, the British also sought to forestall German

domination of northwestern Europe, which menaced their security. Not all national interests are immoral, however, and this one seems unobjectionable. What is morally crucial is that Britain did not *initiate* a *preventative* war to maintain a favorable balance of power; nor did it support France in launching such a war.

Germany had suffered no actual injury, nor was it under any actually emergent threat of suffering one. Unprovoked and on a fabricated pretext, it launched a preventative invasion of France and Belgium to assert and establish its own dominance. In response, Great Britain went to war to repel an unjustified attack on a neighboring ally, maintain international order by vindicating the treaty guaranteeing Belgian independence, and forestall a serious *and actualized* threat to its own national security, in which it had a legitimate interest. The second thing that World War I has to teach us is that legitimate national interests can be pursued in a manner disciplined by both law and morality.

Attrition Can Be Proportionate

The Australian Catholic moral philosopher Tony Coady is not unusual in identifying the attritional character of the Great War as its most morally revolting feature.[17] What he finds so repulsive is its apparent expression of a dullness of strategic imagination that only a criminal indifference to the loss of human life could allow: "Had the general staff viewed the wastage of life as the moral enormity it has subsequently come to seem, they would have exercised more imagination in trying to find other ways of fighting," he writes; and in a footnote he adds that "[i]n fact, there were other strategies and tactics available, most notably tank warfare, which was introduced at Cambrai but used inappropriately."[18]

If contemporary historiography is to be believed, however, Coady is almost wholly wrong here. For example, William Philpott, author of a highly praised history of the Battle of the Somme, writes that "[i]t is overly simplistic to judge that the British army was too rigid or conservative in its tactics and command. It was keen to learn, engaging with its task

thoughtfully and professionally."[19] Generals and government ministers were shocked by the numbers of casualties and strove to find ways of breaking the stalemate on the Western Front and avoiding the need for attritional warfare. That is mainly why the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign was launched in 1915—to try and open up a new, more mobile front in southeast Europe. That is why Field Marshal Douglas Haig was so quick to champion the development of the tank.[20] And that was also why he persisted in planning for a dramatic breakthrough on the Western Front in July 1916, long after others had concluded that it could not be achieved.

It was not lack of human feeling or military imagination that led the British (and French) to adopt an attritional strategy; it was the lack of alternatives during a fateful period of history that favored defense by coming after the mass production of machine guns but before the mass production of tanks and, more importantly, the development of the "creeping barrage" of sound-ranging techniques in counterbattery fire[21] and wireless communications.[22] According to Philpott, strategic attrition "made sense in the dead-locked circumstances of 1916,"[23] was necessary for any decisive defeat of the German army,[24] came close to success [in September 1916],[25] and in the end "it worked."[26]

In addition, those who damn the generalship of World War I for waging attritional war, and accepting casualties on a massive scale, must reckon with the fact that the undisputed turning point in the later war against Adolf Hitler—the Battle of Stalingrad—was horrifically attritional, its human cost rivalling that of the Great War battles.[27] They must also take on board the fact that on the mercifully few occasions in World War II when Allied troops found themselves bogged down in near-static fighting—hill-to-hill in Italy and hedge-to-hedge in Normandy—they reverted to the attritional tactics of 1917[28] and that casualty rates in the 1944–1945 campaign in northwest Europe equaled, and sometimes exceeded, those on the Western Front in 1914–1918.[29]

So here is the third lesson from the Great War: attrition, dreadful though its costs may be, can sometimes be the only effective way of

prosecuting war. And what is the only effective and available means is, logically, proportionate.

Callousness Can Be a Military Virtue

What Tony Coady found objectionable about the generals, however, was not just their boneheaded lack of strategic and tactical imagination. It was also their inhumane callousness. As he writes:

> *Part of the widespread moral revulsion from the dreadful conflict of World War I is produced by the perception that there was a callous disregard by the general staff of both armies for the well-being of their own troops. . . . Certainly, the generals seldom got close enough to the conflict to gain any sense of what their policies were inflicting upon the men, and they displayed an attitude toward the wastage of human life that suggested they viewed the troops as mere cannon fodder.*[30]

My first response to these charges is to distinguish callousness from indifference or carelessness. There is a sense in which any military commander who is going to do his job has to be able to callous himself—to thicken his skin. He has to be emotionally capable of ordering his troops to risk their lives, and, in some cases, he must be capable of ordering them to their probable or certain deaths. Moreover, the doctrine of just war requires the prospect of success, and history suggests that successful military commanders are those who are calloused enough to be ruthless in what they demand of their own troops. Take this example from the battle of El Alamein in October 1942, which was the first major land success that British imperial troops achieved against German forces in World War II. In the middle of the battle, the New Zealander Major General Freyberg held a briefing where he communicated General Bernard Montgomery's orders to Brigadier John Currie, commander of the 9th Armoured Brigade:

> [T]*he task for 9th Armoured Brigade . . . was so obviously one of difficulty and danger that when Currie's time came to make comment,*

> *he rather diffidently suggested that by the end of the day his brigade might well have suffered 50 per cent casualties. To this* [Bernard] *Freyberg had replied with studied nonchalance, "Perhaps more than that. The Army Commander* [Montgomery] *says that he is prepared to accept a hundred per cent.*[31]

Was Montgomery callous? In a certain, militarily necessary sense, yes, he was. Was he careless of the lives of his troops? Not at all. On the contrary, Montgomery was a highly popular commander because, while he was willing to spend his soldiers' lives, he was careful not to waste them,[32] and he was also careful to make sure that his men understood what was being asked of them and why.[33]

To be just, a war must have the prospect of success. To be successful, a military commander must be sufficiently callous to spend the lives of his troops. Such callousness can accompany carefulness. But can it also accompany compassion? In one colloquial sense, the answer has to be negative, for *compassion* connotes a certain emotional identification, an entering into the suffering of others, which is exactly what a commander must callous himself against if he is to order his troops to risk or spend their lives. In the midst of battle, he cannot afford compassion of this sort if he is to make a success of his job. This callousness, however, is perfectly compatible with having such sympathy for the plight of frontline troops before battle, or for the plight of the wounded afterwards, as to make sure that they have what they need. In sum, then, carefulness before battle, callousness in it, and compassion after it.[34]

Let us return to Field Marshal Haig on the Somme. Was he callous? Did he treat his own soldiers "as the merest cannon fodder"?[35] Haig was characteristically taciturn and outwardly impassive, as Edwardian gentlemen were wont to be. He also displayed exactly the kind of professional callousness that I have just defended. Winston Churchill, who knew him "slightly,"[36] wrote that Haig "presents to me in those red years the same mental picture as a great surgeon before the days of anaesthetics [*sic*]: intent

upon the operation, entirely removed in his professional capacity from the agony of the patient. . . . He would operate without excitement . . . and if the patient died, he would not reproach himself." But then Churchill adds, "It must be understood that I speak only of his professional actions. Once out of the theatre, his heart was as warm as any man's."[37] Haig was a professional soldier, but he was not insensible to the plight of his men.

Contrary to popular myth (and to Tony Coady), he did get close enough to the frontline to witness the effects of his decisions on the men required to carry them out. He visited the trenches, was appalled by what he saw, and took steps to improve his troops' lot by ordering the construction of "a vast infrastructure of canteens, baths, and the like."[38] In the early days of the Battle of the Somme he paid visits to the wounded in field hospitals,[39] which made him so "physically sick" that his staff officers had to persuade him to stop.[40] After the war, he devoted the better part of his time to working for the cause of war veterans through the British Legion.[41] Haig did not view his men as mere cannon fodder.

Our fourth lesson is that successful generalship requires a certain kind of callousness—that callousness can be a military virtue—but that it need not displace all compassion.

Military Leadership Needs to Marry the Virtues of Resolve and Openness

It seems that the enormous number of casualties suffered by the British on the Somme cannot be blamed on Haig's lack of compassion for his men, or on his carelessness in spending their lives, or on his disdain for technical innovation. Can it nevertheless be attributed to his failure to adopt a more efficient strategy? Some contemporary historians think so, claiming that alternative, more efficient means of waging war were indeed available to Haig and that he declined to use them. J.P. Harris, for example, argues that by mid-1916 "a substantial proportion" of the British army's most senior officers had come to favor a cautious, step-by-step approach—"a series of limited attacks backed by concentrated artillery fire, designed to inflict

loss on the enemy rather than to gain ground."[42] Haig, however, "became fixated on the achievement of dramatic breakthrough and achieving serious strategic results,"[43] and he therefore "proceeded with an approach that practically all the sources of advice available to him indicated to be dangerously overambitious."[44]

It seems, then, that Haig's planning for the battle of the Somme suffered not from a lack of ingenuity or imagination but from a measure of over-optimism. The irony—the dreadful irony—is that it was not his boneheaded commitment to a long attritional slogging match that made his battle strategy wasteful but rather his bold refusal to settle for it. His eagerness for a breakthrough, while not just wishful thinking, nevertheless led him to compromise his attritional operations. Therefore, on the first day of battle the British artillery bombardment was spread too deeply into enemy territory, with the result that its firepower was dissipated and too much of the German frontline survived to entangle the attacking British infantry in barbed wire and mow them down with machine guns.

It seems that Haig may have been culpably stubborn. In one sense, of course, military commanders are paid to be stubborn. They are expected to keep their nerve when everyone else is losing theirs and to be resolute in the face of terrible adversity and fierce criticism. And Haig did keep his nerve right up until the war's end, while the politicians around him were going weak at the knees. Nevertheless, a wise commander will not be so stubborn as to make himself impervious to cogent criticism. Rather he will seek out colleagues whose advice he can respect, and he will listen to that advice even when its import is not welcome. Paul Harris argues that Haig was not so wise:

> [t]*he evidence is overwhelming that Haig did not engender at* [General Headquarters] *an intellectually stimulating environment in which force structure, policy, plans and operational methods could be frankly debated in his presence. . . .* [H]*e did not want some of his fundamental ideas and preconceptions disturbed. . . . He seems*

> *to have chosen the staff officers with whom he had the most regular contact from people who would implement his will without trying fundamentally to change his thinking.*[45]

Our fifth lesson from World War I, therefore, is that military leaders need somehow to combine two vying virtues: resolve that remains firm in adversity, with an openness to unwelcome counsel.

Love Can Walk the Battlefield

I began at the level of international politics by considering the justice of going to war. I then stepped down to the level of military strategy and tactics, by considering the morality of attrition and the virtues of military leadership. Now, in conclusion, I step down even further, onto the battlefield. And here, as a Christian, I am bound to ask: Can love walk on it?

I am bound to ask this because the Christian tradition of just war thinking takes its cue from St. Augustine, who argued that, while the New Testament does not forbid the use of violent force always and everywhere, it does require it to be motivated by love. To many this will seem quite implausible in practice. As the nonreligious pacifist Robert Holmes puts it, "[O]ne cannot help but wonder . . . whether it is humanly possible amidst the chaos of slaughter and gore that marks . . . combat to remain free of those things Augustine identifies as evil in war, the cruelty, enmity, and the like."[46] I do not doubt that soldiers are sometimes motivated by vengeance and hatred, but there is ample empirical evidence that that is not normal. Normally, soldiers are mainly motivated by love for their comrades, which is one of the forms of love that the New Testament endorses in Jesus' name: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Self-sacrificial love for one's friends is admirable, but those who follow Jesus must extend love to their enemies, too. Is this possible in the heat of combat? Many will suppose not, assuming that soldiers typically hate their opponents. But this is not so. In his extraordinarily wise meditation on the psychology and spirituality of combat, informed by his own experience of

military service in World War II, Glenn Gray writes, "A civilian far removed from the battle is nearly certain to be more bloodthirsty than the front-line soldier."[47] This view is substantiated by Richard Tawney, whom we left wounded on the Somme on July 1, 1916. Fortunately, he was discovered by a medic and eventually shipped back to Great Britain and convalescence in Oxford. The following October, he published an article in the press, where he reflected on the bewildering gulf in understanding that, he observed, had opened up between the men at the front and their families and friends back home. At one point he protests against the view of the soldier that has come to prevail in many civilian minds:

> *And this "Tommy"* [this caricature of the British soldier] *is a creature at once ridiculous and disgusting. He is represented as . . . finding "sport" in killing other men, as "hunting Germans out of dug-outs as a terrier hunts rats," as overwhelming with kindness the captives of his bow and spear. The last detail is true to life, but the emphasis which you lay upon it is both unintelligent and insulting. Do you expect us to hurt them or starve them? Do you not see that we regard these men who have sat opposite us in mud—"square-headed bastards," as we called them—as the victims of the same catastrophe as ourselves, as our comrades in misery much more truly than you are? Do you think that we are like some of you in accumulating on the head of every wretched antagonist the indignation felt for the wickedness of a government, of a social system, or (if you will) of a nation? . . . Hatred of the enemy is not common, I think, among those who have encountered him. It is incompatible with the proper discharge of our duty. For to kill in hatred is murder; and soldiers, whatever their nationality, are not murderers, but executioners.*[48]

Tawney's experience was by no means unique. Frontline servicemen do not necessarily hate the enemy. Sometimes they even feel a sense of solidarity or kinship with him. Thus Gerald Dennis, who also fought on the Western Front, confessed that at Christmas 1916 he would

> *not have minded fraternizing as had been done the previous two years for in a way, the opponents on each side of No Man's Land were kindred spirit. We did not hate one another. We were both P.B.I.* [Poor Bloody Infantry] *we should have liked to have stood up between our respective barbed wire, without danger and shaken hands with our counterparts.*[49]

Thus, too, Ernest Raymond, a British veteran of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, recalled that the Turk "became popular with us, and everything suggested that our amiability toward him was reciprocated."[50] Love for the enemy, at least in the weak sense of a certain sense of kinship with him, is not foreign to the experience of frontline troops.

This is true, but it is not the whole truth. It would surely strain credibility to pretend that pleasure in destruction, anger, and hatred are all strangers to the battlefield. Of course, they are not. "The least acknowledged aspect of war, today," writes Vietnam veteran Karl Marlantes, "is how exhilarating it is."[51] This exhilaration, however, is not always malicious. It is not always the destruction that pleases, so much as the pure thrill, even the ecstasy, of danger. A month before he was killed at the end of World War I, the poet Wilfred Owen—yes, he of the pity-of-war fame—wrote to his mother:

> *I have been in action for some days. I can find no word to qualify my experiences except the word SHEER. . . . It passed the limits of my Abhorrence. I lost all my earthly faculties, and fought like an angel. . . . With this corporal who stuck to me and shadowed me like your prayers I captured a German Machine Gun and scores of prisoners. . . . I only shot one man with my revolver (at about 30 yards!); The rest I took with a smile.*[52]

That said, it has to be admitted that the exhilaration of combat is sometimes inspired by the sheer joy—the ecstasy—of destruction. Ernst Jünger, in his classic memoir of World War I, *Storm of Steel*, bears witness:

> *As we advanced, we were in the grip of a berserk rage. The overwhelming desire to kill lent wings to my stride. Rage squeezed bitter tears from my eyes. The immense desire to destroy that overhung the battlefield precipitated a red mist in our brains. We called out sobbing and stammering fragments of sentences to one another, and an impartial observer might have concluded that we were all ecstatically happy. . . . The fighter, who sees a bloody mist in front of his eyes as he attacks, doesn't want prisoners; he wants to kill.*[53]

Looking back at his experience in Vietnam, Marlantes recognizes the same phenomenon: "This was blood lust. I was moving from white heat to red heat. The assigned objective, winning the hill, was ensured. I was no longer thinking how to accomplish my objective with the lowest loss of life to my side. I just wanted to keep killing gooks."[54] Marlantes is acutely aware of "the danger of opening up to the rapture of violent transcendence," of "falling in love with the power and thrill of destruction and death dealing. . . . There is a deep savage joy in destruction. . . . I loved this power. I love it still. And it scares the hell out of me."[55] Nevertheless, he is quite adamant that it is "simply not true . . . that all is fair in love and war, that having rules in war is total nonsense."[56]

Anger, hatred, rage, the sheer pleasure of destruction: these are all powerful emotions on the battlefield, but they can be governed. The last one can be refused; the first three can be rendered discriminate and disproportionate. Whether or not they *will* be governed depends crucially on the military discipline instilled by training, and especially on the quality of leadership in the field. In support of this, let me close with testimony from a more recent conflict. Writing about his experience in Helmand Province in 2008, Lieutenant Patrick Bury of the Royal Irish Regiment wrote this:

> *Killing, whatever its form, can be morally corrosive. Mid-intensity counterinsurgency, with its myriad of complex situations, an enemy who won't play fair and the constant, enduring feeling of being under threat, compounds such corrosiveness. . . .* [A]*t the beginning*

of the tour, it was relatively easy to maintain a sense of morality among the platoon. But when the threat to our lives increased, as the Taliban began fighting increasingly dirty, as the civilians became indifferent and as we were either nearly killed or took casualties, this became increasingly difficult.

There is a balance to be struck between morality and operational effectiveness, between softness and hardness. . . . My platoon sergeant would always strive to keep the soldiers sharp, aggressive, and ready to fight their way out of any situation. . . . However, as a junior officer I felt the need to morally temper what the platoon sergeant had said to the men. . . . I think, in hindsight, this unacknowledged agreement I had with my platoon sergeant worked well. He kept the platoon sharp and ready, "loaded" as it were, and I just made sure the gun didn't go off at the wrong place at the wrong people. . . . The platoon was so well drilled it barely needed me for my tactical acumen. But they did need me for that morality.

Sometimes I felt my own morality begin to slip, that hardness creeping in. Sometimes I thought that I was soft, that my platoon sergeant was right and I should shut up and get on with it. Sometimes I'm sure the platoon felt like that! I was unsure. And at these times my memory would flit back to Sandhurst, to the basics, and I would find renewed vigour [*sic*] *that what I was saying was indeed right. My moral compass, for all its wavering, was still pointing North. And that was the most important lesson I was taught in Sandhurst, and that I learnt in Afghanistan.*[57]

So, the sixth and final lesson that military ethics should learn from World War I, supplemented by Vietnam and Afghanistan, is that love *can* walk the battlefield—in the strong form of love for one's comrades, in the weaker form of a sense of fellowship with the enemy, and in the weakest form of disciplined forbearance.

Notes

*Parts of this article first appeared in chapters 2 and 4 of my book, *In Defence of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and are reprinted here with the kind permission of Oxford University Press.

[1] Richard H. Tawney, "The Attack," in *The Attack and Other Papers* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 20. "The Attack" was originally published in *The Westminster Gazette* in August 1916.

[2] Consensus about the numbers of British and French casualties in the Battle of the Somme settles around those given by Captain Wilfrid Miles in his contribution to the British official history of the war, which are the ones cited here. See William Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the 20th Century* (London: Little Brown, 2009), 600. Estimates of the German figures, however, range from 400,000 to 680,000 killed and are the subject of vigorous dispute, since what is at stake is the identity of the victor in the battle of attrition (Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 600–601); Gary Sheffield, *The Somme* (London: Cassell, 2003), 68, 151.

[3] During the whole of the battle, "the deepest Anglo-French penetration of the German lines was less than six miles." See Martin Gilbert, *Somme: The Heroism and Horror of War* (London: John Murray, 2006), 243.

[4] Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin, 2013), 561.

[5] Ibid., 562.

[6] Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1, *To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 91. See also David Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004), 30.

[7] Stevenson, *1914–1918*, 29.

[8] Strachan, *First World War*, vol. 1, *To Arms*, 21.

[9] Ibid., 54. According to Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54, one expression of social Darwinism that was "widely celebrated" at its publication in 1912 was Friedrich von Bernhardi's *Deutschland und der nächste Krieg*. In it Bernhardi writes, "War is a biological necessity of the first importance. . . . Without war, inferior or decaying races would easily choke the growth of healthy budding elements, and a universal decadence would follow. . . . Might is at once the supreme right, and the dispute as to what is right is decided by the arbitrament of war. War gives a biologically just decision, since its decisions rest on the very nature of things." See Friedrich von Bernhardi,

Germany and the Next War, trans. A.H. Powles (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), 10, 12, 15.

[10] It seems that German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg was an independent convert to Darwinist fatalism. As a young man his reading of Ernst Haeckel, Charles Darwin, and David Strauss had undermined his religious-humanist-Aristotelian confidence in basic cosmic harmony and replaced it with a vision of the universe as subject to the eternal struggle of blind forces. See Thomas Lindemann, *Les Doctrines Darwiniennes et la Guerre de 1914*, Hautes Études Militaire (Paris: Institut de Stratégie Comparée & Economica, 2001), 203–204.

[11] At the War Council of December 8, 1912, Helmuth Johann Ludwig von Moltke pressed the view that a European war was inevitable and that, as far as Germany was concerned, the sooner it happened the better. See Strachan, *First World War*, vol. 1, *To Arms*, 52. His advocacy of preventive war prevailed, with the result that "the decision for peace or war was made conditional not on the objectives of policy but on the state of military readiness" (54).

[12] Stevenson, *1914–1918*, 596.

[13] Incidentally, one of the dangers of Christopher Clark's deliberate withdrawal from moral judgment is exposed in an article that appeared in *Die Welt* in January 2014, where three German historians and a journalist invoke Clark's historiography of 1914 as a reason for renouncing the "moralisation" of war and returning to national *Realpolitik*. See Dominik Geert et al., "Warum Deutschland nicht allein schuld ist," *Die Welt*, January 4, 2014, available at <www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article123516387/Warum-Deutschland-nicht-allein-schuld-ist.html>. The fact that social Darwinist *Realpolitik* gave us the Western Front seems to have escaped them. For critical German commentary on both Clark and Geert et al., see Heinrich August Winkler, "Und erlöse uns von der Kriegsschuld," *Die Zeit*, August 18, 2014, available at <www.zeit.de/2014/32/erster-weltkrieg-christopher-clark>.

[14] Stevenson, *1914–1918*, 596. Lest this reading seem like the familiar fruit of traditional British chauvinism, let me invoke one of today's leading German historians of World War I, Gerd Krumreich. A critic of Clark's thesis, Krumreich wrote in *Le Monde* in March 2014 that, while both sides had piled up the gunpowder in the years preceding 1914, it "is incontestable that it was the Germans who set it alight." See Krumreich, "Les deux camps ont rempli la poudrière," *Le Monde*, March 11, 2014, iii.

[15] Stevenson, *1914–1918*, 35.

[16] British anxiety about the Belgian coast was not paranoid; during the Great War the Germans used Belgium as a U-boat base. See Stevenson, *1914–1918*, 147.

[17] C.A.J. Coady, *Morality and Political Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 181.

[18] Ibid., 185n8.

[19] Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 151.

[20] J.P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197, 259; Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 361–363.

[21] According to Strachan, artillery was "the true artisan of victory." See *The First World War* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), 307.

[22] Jeremy Black, *Warfare in the Western World, 1882–1975* (Chesham, Northern Ireland: Acumen, 2002), 47; Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 156, 606.

[23] Philpott, *Bloody Victory*, 130.

[24] Ibid., 129.

[25] Ibid., 346.

[26] Ibid., 597.

[27] Ibid., 628.

[28] G.D. Sheffield, "The Shadow of the Somme: The Influence of the First World War on British Soldiers' Perceptions and Behaviour in the Second World War," in *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West 1939–1945*, ed. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), 36.

[29] Ibid., 35: "British and Canadian battalions suffered about 100 casualties per month on average on the Western Front in the First World War. In the 1944–1945 northwest European campaign, battalions suffered a minimum of 100 per month but 175 per month was not uncommon. The daily casualty rate of Allied ground forces in Normandy actually exceeded that of the [British Expeditionary Force], including the [Royal Flying Corps], at Passchendaele in 1917."

[30] Coady, *Morality and Political Violence*, 184. Shortly before this passage, he explicitly connects the battle of the Somme with his indictment of military leadership: "Images of the Somme . . . fueled antiwar sentiment as very little before had done; and much of the revulsion and moral outrage sprang from the futility of the trench warfare and the sense that the generals on both sides had too little concern for the human lives committed to their responsibility. . . . Many believed at the time that this war was unjustified, and with the benefit of hindsight, many more believe it now. . . . [M]uch of the rejection of World War I as unjust stems from the wholly intelligible belief that the costs were so disproportionate" (181).

[31] Barrie Pitt, *The Crucible of War*, vol. 1, *Year of Alamein 1942* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 396–397.

[32] Ibid., 190, 192: "Montgomery's view was the staff were the servants of the troops, and that it was the staff's job to see that whatever objective was given to fighting troops, it was within their capability and that they were provided with everything necessary to achieve it."

[33] At El Alamein, Montgomery instructed his officers to explain to every one of their men, on the eve of battle, the overall plan and the part he was to play in it. Ibid., 282–283.

[34] As it happens, A.J. Coates means by *compassion* largely what I mean by *carefulness*: "the principle of proportionality applies in the first place to the economical and compassionate deployment of one's own troops. . . . It demands economy in the use of force: that commanders should not waste the lives of their own soldiers in the pursuit of unattainable or relatively unimportant military objectives. . . . Compassion is a military as well as a civilian virtue." See Coates, *The Ethics of War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 221, 227. My reservation is not over what Coates means by compassion, but over what the word generally connotes.

[35] Coady, *Morality and Political Violence*, 95.

[36] Winston Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1937), 226.

[37] Ibid., 227.

[38] Niall Barr and Gary Sheffield, "Douglas Haig, the Common Soldier, and the British Legion," in *Haig: A Reappraisal Seventy Years On*, ed. Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (London: Leo Cooper, 1999), 226.

[39] Douglas Haig, *War Diaries and Letters, 1914–1918*, ed. Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 197 (July 1), 199 (July 4).

[40] Robin Neillands, *The Great War Generals on the Western Front, 1914–1918* (London: Robinson, 1999), 170; Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood, and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War* (London: Cassell, 2003), 205. The report that his hospital visits made Haig "physically sick" Neillands attributes to Haig's own son, whose witness is, arguably, not disinterested; and Corrigan's report of Haig's staff officers persuading him to cease visiting I have not been able to corroborate. Nevertheless, what they claim is consistent with my reading of Haig's diaries (as edited by Sheffield and Bourne), where I found mention of visits to field hospitals and a main dressing station in the entries for July 1 and 4, 1916, but none thereafter.

[41] Barr and Sheffield, "Douglas Haig," 230.

[42] Harris, *Haig*, 537.

[43] Ibid., 537.

[44] Ibid., 539–540, 545–546. While Sheffield qualifies Harris's judgment, he does not disagree with it. See Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Aurum, 2011), 163, 174, 175, 369, 374.

[45] Harris, *Haig*, 538–539. Again, Sheffield qualifies, rather than refutes, Harris's argument (*The Chief*, 180, 375).

[46] Robert L. Holmes, *On War and Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 133–134, 135.

[47] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, intro. Hannah Arendt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 135.

[48] Richard H. Tawney, "Some Reflections of a Soldier," in *"The Attack" and Other Papers* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 25, 27.

[49] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999), 148, quoting Gerald V. Dennis, "A Kitchener Man's Bit (1916–1918)," 1928, 129, Imperial War Museum.

[50] Ernest Raymond, *The Story of My Days: An Autobiography 1882–1922* (London: Cassell, 1968), 120, quoted by Richard Harries in "The De-romanticisation of War and the Struggle for Faith," in *The Straits of War: Gallipoli Remembered*, intro. Martin Gilbert (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 190–191.

[51] Karl Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011), 62.

[52] Wilfred Owen, Letter 662, to Susan Owen, 4 or 5 October 1918, in *Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 580. The irregular capitalization is Owen's.

[53] Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hoffman (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 232, 239.

[54] Marlantes, *What It Is Like to Go to War*, 103.

[55] Ibid., 61, 63, 67, 160.

[56] Ibid., 228.

[57] Lieutenant Paddy Bury, "Pointing North," unpublished paper, May 2009. Bury instances the demoralization that poor leadership allows to develop in *Callsign Hades* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 117, 233: "I can't trust some of that platoon to make the right decisions. Some of them are fully aware that down here they are indeed deities of their own little universes. . . . Much of it is down to leadership. . . . It feels like the platoon commander lost the respect of his platoon months ago. It was the little things that added up, the little things he didn't do."