

## REVIEWS

inflicted wounds. The core of this section lies with the chapters 'Old Tactics' and 'New Tactics'. Tactical history has long been a neglected subject amongst military historians and so it is welcome to see it returned to prominence here. In this section the author traces how pre-war principles proved their value, and provided the basis for a considerable degree of tactical innovation in the trench battles of 1915.

Morton-Jack's superb research underpins his argument. Indeed, if a criticism can be made of the book it is that it can sometimes overwhelm the reader with information. The thematic structure offers an opportunity to cover diverse topics, but this occasionally comes at expense of narrative clarity. The absence of maps is notable, and some guidance would have been most useful in the discussion of the Tirah campaign and the tactical actions of 1914 – 15.

The strength of the book lies in its sense of balance. Both the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian Army are discussed and highlighted. The result is a study that places the Indian Army firmly into the context of the modern military historiography of the First World War, illustrating how pre-war experience in the Tirah had informed a peacetime learning process, which was then rapidly refined in the heat of battle on the Western Front.

Overall, this is an excellent volume. It is unfortunate that its inflated price prevents it reaching a wider audience, as this book will be of interest for scholars and students alike.

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**William Philpott, *Attrition: Fighting the First World War*. London: Little, Brown, 2014. 400pp. ISBN 978-1-4087-0355-7. Hardback. Price £25.00.**

Winning the total war of 1914 to 1918 required the total mobilisation of societies. While scholars of the war often treat that statement as axiomatic, William Philpott has given us the best-detailed analysis of that process to date. He identifies attrition as involving five factors: the land battlefield; the maritime battle space; the home front; the diplomatic front; and the alliance front. In order to win the war, the Allies had to defeat the Central Powers on all five. More importantly, they had to do so over time, husbanding resources, reorienting their societies, and suffering casualties at levels equal to or less than those of their enemies.

Attrition has ever since carried a negative connotation, and well it should. As a strategy it counts on winning a war by killing men at "acceptable" ratios rather than seeking territory or some other carefully defined objective that could produce

victory. It is anything but Clausewitzian, as it does not set political goals; killing precedes war aims rather than following logically from them. Attrition could become, as one wag quipped, a way of winning the war by having the last two soldiers of your army bayonet the last two soldiers of the enemy's army, then toast their success with prune juice. On the more intellectual level, attrition proved that modern warfare had come a long way from the period of the German Wars of Unification. Casualties had become not an unpleasant adjunct of military campaigns, but their goal. Instead of close, carefully managed battles like Königgratz/Sadowa, World War I featured months long campaigns designed to (as the euphemism went) wear out the enemy's reserves.

Philpott argues that the generals (if not always the politicians) of the World War I era understood this transformation of war quite well. They recognised in 1914 that winning would require years of bloody, murderous attrition on a number of levels. The gruesomeness of a strategy intended to kill millions failed to appeal to the politicians, for obvious reasons. They often reacted by looking for quick fixes like (in the Allied case) Gallipoli and the Nivelle Offensive or (in the German case) unrestricted submarine warfare. These fixes, Philpott argues, seemed to promise an alternative to mass murder, but never yielded anything close to victory, as indeed the attritional generals knew all along.

Most scholars have identified Lord Kitchener as the prophet of this type of warfare, building up Great Britain's New Armies in anticipation of using them in 1916 or 1917. Philpott argues that he was far from alone. Both French General Joseph Joffre and (perhaps more controversially) British Field Marshal Douglas Haig saw attrition as the way to victory, notwithstanding the latter's hope for breakthroughs on the Somme and at Passchendaele. Philpott thus argues (correctly) that Erich von Falkenhayn's murderous plan for the battle of Verdun was not the novel approach to war that readers of Alistair Horne's *The Price of Glory* have taken it to be. Rather, it was simply another in a long, gruesome line of attritional battles designed to kill men in unprecedented numbers.

That attrition became the route to victory should not blind us to its enormous human and social costs. The soldiers of the war understood full well how they were being used, leading to events like the mutiny on the Chemin des Dames, the Revolution in Russia, and the disillusion of men like Rudolph Binding, whom Philpott quotes extensively. Attrition also meant that the warring powers had to adapt their domestic and imperial systems to find the resources they needed in enormous numbers. It further meant that they had to tolerate the moralising of Woodrow Wilson, the leader of the one country whose resources could tip the balance.

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*Attrition* thus stands out as a major contribution, even in this period of renewed scholarly attention to the war. One hopes that, in the second edition, the publisher will do a more thorough job of cleaning up some of the typographical and formatting errors. The book deserves it.

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**Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, & Gerhard P. Gross (eds.). *The Schlieffen Plan: International Perspectives on the German Strategy for World War I*. Translation edited by David T. Zabecki. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. 577pp. ISBN: 978-0-8131-4746-8. Hardback. £69.50.**

While this book shares some of the unevenness often found in conference-paper collections, it contains much to recommend it to any serious student of the crucial early phases of the First World War. Unfortunately, its merits do not extend to fulfilling the implied promise of its title; weaknesses in initial concept have been compounded by passage of time to deprive it of significance regarding its ostensible subject, the 'Schlieffen Plan'.

Like virtually all contemporary writing about the 'Schlieffen Plan', the book has its origins in Terence Zuber's startling 'The Schlieffen Plan Reconsidered', *War in History* vol. 6, no. 3 (1999), pp. 262-305, soon followed by *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan: German War Planning 1871-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), adapted from his Würtzburg dissertation. He sought to overturn virtually everything that had been said over the preceding eight decades regarding the German plans in August-September of 1914, in the process harshly condemning the scholarship of many.

The central issue was how far the German operational plan in the West in August-September 1914 was formed on the model of the ideas expressed by Alfred von Schlieffen in a memo completed in February 1906 (but back-dated to his last day as chief of the Prussian General Staff, 31 December 1905). Described by Schlieffen as a *Denkschrift* (think-piece), its contents reflect its title: '*Krieg gegen Frankreich*' ('War against France'). In its more than 4700 words, Russia is mentioned solely to dismiss her from consideration and no provision is made to guard Germany's eastern frontier. Germany's troop strength was inadequate to execute the memo's concept for a strictly western campaign in 1905/1906, let alone for the two-front war of 1914.

After Germany's defeat, some senior surviving General Staff officers claimed that the 1914 plan was nevertheless that of Schlieffen (by then dead) and that it failed