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Jim Beach, *Haig's Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army, 1916-1918*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 369. ISBN 978-1-107-03961-2.

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What did the British Army under Douglas Haig know about its German adversary during the First World War, and how did intelligence gathered on the enemy impact British war planning? In *Haig's Intelligence*, Jim Beach (Univ. of Northampton) takes on these questions by examining the British military intelligence system "as a whole" (5), rather than only the relationship between Haig and his chief intelligence officers. By clarifying the many components of British Intelligence, Beach provides original insights into Haig's controversial wartime decisions and the role of intelligence, for good or ill, in the performance of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

In the eight chapters¹ of the book's first part, Beach chronicles the expansion of the British intelligence system, its three most important leaders, and the methods and techniques it employed. The War Office had only a few intelligence officers in 1914, but their numbers grew rapidly as the BEF departed for the Continent and set up General Headquarters (GHQ). The first head of GHQ Intelligence, Gen. George Macdonogh, had a strained relationship with his commander in chief, Field Marshal John French, and the men Macdonogh employed at the corps level earned a reputation as "untidy" and "unmilitary" (85) eccentrics whose prewar civilian lives ill-suited them for the armed forces. Beach's evaluation shows that the Intelligence Corps suffered from the perception that it was a temporary organization whose members often lacked proper training, frontline experience, or the respect of their contemporaries. Nonetheless, Beach argues that these unconventional types were essential to the BEF's operations.

Beach provides useful background on early GHQ Intelligence, but focuses chiefly on the period following the appointment of Gen. John Charteris after Haig's promotion to commander in chief in late 1915. Charteris is often portrayed as a villain, who withheld negative intelligence to keep up Haig's spirits even though his selective reporting might distort his superior's judgment and increase casualties. Beach insists, however, that Charteris's missteps "cannot be used to absolve Haig of responsibility for his decisions" (323) and that to do so would be to overlook the complexity of an intelligence network that stretched from the frontlines to GHQ.

Gen. Edgar Cox, "the British army's expert on its main enemy" (56), replaced Charteris in January 1918. Beach demonstrates that, although Haig accepted Cox's cautious appraisals while the German army held the upper hand, he lost faith in them as he became more confident in the BEF's prospects for victory. This divergence, combined with concerns over Cox's lack of experience at the front, led to his marginalization before his untimely death by drowning in late August 1918.

According to Beach, neither Charteris, nor Macdonogh, nor Cox met the idealized standards laid out by the War Office's prewar Director of Military Intelligence. Despite this, the intelligence system as a whole functioned well. Beach details intelligence collection methods used behind and, especially, in the front lines. While flash spotting and observation could yield useful information, the most valuable source of intelligence was enemy prisoners and deserters.

Espionage, too, was a key element of intelligence collection, but Beach notes it carried a high-price for French and Belgian civilians. The interception of enemy transmissions was another valuable piece of the intelligence effort, but the utility of signals intelligence in predicting future German operations was minimal. The weakest link in the system, Beach contends, was the actual interpretation of information, which suffered from a "blurring of analytical responsibilities between GHQ and the War Office" (191).

1. That is, 1: "Organisation," 2: "Leadership," 3: "Personnel," 4: "Frontline," 5: "Espionage," 6: "Photography," 7: "Signals," 8: "Analysis."

The six chapters² of the second part of the book elucidate the place of intelligence in shaping British assessments of the German army in particular campaigns and battles. At the Somme, Charteris's staff routinely overestimated Germany's ability to reinforce its front and accordingly expected breakthroughs that never materialized. GHQ Intelligence became ever more interested in the ebb and flow of German morale. Despite British setbacks at the Somme, captured German soldiers and materials provided much clearer insights into the mood in the German trenches. Before the Arras offensive, Haig had a firmer grasp of the state of German reserves, but his failure to anticipate the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line exposed the continued unreliability of British intelligence. Even so, Arras signaled a shift and British estimations of enemy strength were ever more influenced by indications of sinking morale and political strife on the German home front.

Owing to Haig's belief that the German home front was wavering, the British were more sanguine in 1917: The Third Ypres offensive was a "key moment in the development of British Intelligence on the Western Front" (261). Improvements in intelligence methodology and personnel meant the British could size up the German army as never before. Charteris's optimism was misplaced, however, and GHQ trusted too much in reports of the Germans' low morale, misjudging their fighting spirit at Cambrai. When a German counterattack caught the BEF by surprise, Charteris's reputation suffered an irreparable blow and he eventually took the fall in order to protect Haig.

When the German army began the spring offensive of 1918, British intelligence officers remained overly confident. Beach maintains that they did often anticipate the locations of German attacks, if not the BEF's ability to counter them. British Intelligence, having learned from its mistakes under Edgar Cox in spring 1918, played a major part in the successful planning of the "Hundred Days" offensive that helped bring the German army to its knees. The British went into the war's final months with a mature, yet imperfect, intelligence system. Haig's enthusiasm grew even as his intelligence officers became more cautious in their appraisals. A clear indication of his waning faith in their abilities was his reliance by war's end on his own assessments of the German army's strength.

Haig's Intelligence convincingly shows that British Intelligence must be evaluated in its entirety, with due attention to the numerous methods of forming an accurate picture of the German army. The author concludes that the British intelligence system was "fundamentally sound," and possibly "better than those of its enemies and Allies" (326). Additional research is required to confirm the latter claim, but Beach has forced us to reconsider traditional evaluations of British operations on the Western Front—"operational decisions which have been painted as inexplicable, or assigned obtuse explanations, now appear to be straightforward responses to an intelligence picture that was sometimes changing on a daily basis" (321). The British understood that circumstances far beyond the battlefields influenced Germany's military morale and combat effectiveness.

Commendably, Beach enhances the appeal of a rather dense volume by sketching the personalities of the unconventional officers who worked for British Intelligence.³ He also gives us a salutary reminder of the obstacles posed by social class or religious affiliation to those who sought advancement within the hidebound British military establishment.

Although Beach's thoroughly researched book is not meant to be a comparative study, some discussion of German perceptions of British Intelligence would have added nuance to his analysis. German officials understood that there could be devastating consequences when soldiers revealed useful information after falling into enemy hands. Documents in German archives⁴ might have shed light on German knowledge of enemy intelligence and the measures taken to prepare German soldiers to deal with British interrogators. These are only quibbles, however, about a book that will deepen both students' and specialists' understanding of the World War I battlefield and the intelligence activities that determined how commanders approached it.

2. That is, 9: "Somme," 10: "Arras," 11: "Third Ypres," 12: "Cambrai," 13: "German Offensives," 14: "Hundred Days."

3. Thus softening the typically "hard" character of works in the Cambridge Military Histories series.

4. E.g., the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg im Breisgau.