Foch in Command

Ferdinand Foch ended the First World War as Marshal of France and supreme commander of the Allied armies on the Western Front. *Foch in Command* is a pioneering study of his contribution to the Allied victory. Elizabeth Greenhalgh uses contemporary notebooks, letters and documents from previously under-studied archives to chart how the artillery officer, who had never commanded troops in battle when the war began, learned to fight the enemy, to cope with difficult colleagues and allies, and to manoeuvre through the political minefield of civil–military relations. She offers valuable insights into neglected questions: the contribution of unified command to the Allied victory; the role of a commander’s general staff; and the mechanisms of command at corps and army level. She demonstrates how an energetic Foch developed war-winning strategies for a modern industrial war, and how political realities contributed to his losing the peace.

ELIZABETH GREENHALGH is a QEII Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales, based at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra. Her previous publications include *Victory through Coalition: Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge, 2005).
The aim of this new series is to publish outstanding works of research on warfare throughout the ages and throughout the world. Books in the series will take a broad approach to military history, examining war in all its military, strategic, political and economic aspects. The series is intended to complement Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare by focusing on the ‘hard’ military history of armies, tactics, strategy and warfare. Books in the series will consist mainly of single-author works – academically vigorous and groundbreaking – which will be accessible to both academics and the interested general reader.

A full list of titles in the series can be found at:
www.cambridge.org/militaryhistories
Illustration 1  Foch in marshal’s dress uniform
revealing the ‘quaint, kindly glance’ that Aston describes (in his Foch, facing p. 280).
Foch in Command

The forging of a First World War general

Elizabeth Greenhalgh
For Michael
# Contents

*List of illustrations*  xi
*List of maps*  xiii
*Preface*  xiv
*List of abbreviations*  xvi

**Introduction**  1

**Part I: From theory to practice**  7

Chapter 1  From the Ecole de Guerre to August 1914 in Lorraine  9

Chapter 2  ‘He held to the last quarter hour’: with Ninth Army on the Marne  23

Chapter 3  Commander-in-chief’s deputy in the north, October–November 1914  43

Chapter 4  The end of the war of movement and reflections on 1914  74

Chapter 5  Second Artois, January–June 1915  91

Chapter 6  Third Artois, June–October 1915  119

Chapter 7  The scientific method: planning the Somme, 1916  140

Chapter 8  Fighting on the Somme, July–November 1916  166

Chapter 9  In disgrace: reflections on two years of command  192
Contents

Intermezzo
Chapter 10 Intermezzo 1917 217

Part II: Supreme command
Chapter 11 At the Supreme War Council, November 1917–March 1918 263
Chapter 12 Michael and Georgette, March–April 1918 265
Chapter 13 Blücher and Gneisenau, May–June, 1918 296
Chapter 14 Marneschutz–Reims and Second Marne, July 1918 333
Chapter 15 ‘Les Boches sont dans la purée’: the Hun is really in the soup 376
Chapter 16 ‘Tout le monde à la bataille’ 407
Chapter 17 Waffenstillstand, October–November 1918 442
Chapter 18 Losing the peace 495

In conclusion: ‘Supreme command is less than people think’ 508

Bibliography 522
Index 540
Illustrations

1 Foch in marshal’s dress uniform. Photograph reproduced in Aston, *Foch*, facing p. 280


5 Liaison officers Colonel Eric Dillon and Major de Posch. From the photograph album in the Foch papers at Vincennes, 1K 129/6

6 Foch’s hand-written note, countersigned by Robertson, impressing upon Cadorna what needed to be done. Reproduced in Fadini, *Caporetto*, between pp. 256 and 257


8 Page from Foch’s notebook, 24 March 1918

9 Unified command. From the German satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*, published in Munich on 16 April 1918

10 The supreme and three national commanders on 24 July 1918 in front of Foch’s headquarters, after deciding to move onto the offensive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>List of illustrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washington DC: <a href="http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cai1996003018/PP/">www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cai1996003018/PP/</a></td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The final page of the November 1918 Armistice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The final act. <em>Mr Punch’s History of the War</em>, p. 267.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Peace and future cannon fodder. Cartoon by Will Dyson published in the <em>Daily Herald</em> on 17 May 1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>General Maxime Weygand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maps

2. XX Corps at Morhange, 19–20 August 1914. *Source*: Based on the sketch map in Atteridge, *Foch*, 153  
3. Arrival of the armies on the Marne, September 1914  
4. Perspective map of the marshes of Saint-Gond area. *Source*: Villate, *Foch à la Marne*, ch. 2  
5. Ninth Army on the Marne, 6–9 September 1914. *Source*: Based on the map produced for Foch’s *Mémoires*  
6. From Arras to Lille, and the race to the sea, October 1914  
7. The Yser and Ypres, October–November 1914  
8. The 1915 battles in Artois  
10. Planning the Somme, 1916  
11. Gains made during the Somme fighting, 1916  
13. Operation Michael, March 1918  
14. Gains made in the Michael and Georgette operations, March–April 1918  
16. The Marne salient  
17. Foch’s counter-offensive on the Marne, 18 July 1918  
18. Extending the Amiens battle  
19. Saint-Mihiel, September 1918  
20. Lines of German defensive positions on 1 September. *Source*: Based on the map in *USAWW* 9, 508, and the map of the German rail network in *Why Germany Capitulated*
Preface

This study of the command of the French First World War general, Ferdinand Foch, who became supreme Allied commander in 1918 and was raised to the dignity of Marshal of France, has been long in the writing. Hence the list of debts incurred is correspondingly lengthy. First, however, some housekeeping.

For clarity I have italicised enemy units such as armies and divisions, and have used Allied (capitalised) to indicate the Entente Allies: principally, Britain, France, Italy and Russia. Although the USA became an associated, not an Allied, power when they joined the war in 1917, I have included the USA among the ‘Allies’ so as to avoid tedious repetition of ‘Allied and associated countries’. I have preferred ‘British’ to ‘English’ when translating from French documents (and all translations are my own unless otherwise stated). Where the colloquial expression in diaries and other personal documents required a move from literal translation so as to make better sense in English, I have given the original French as well. I have preferred to use Sir Douglas Haig’s manuscript diary, but usually there is little difference between manuscript and the typescript in the National Archives. Hence readers wishing to pursue a reference need not feel obliged to go to Edinburgh. In identifying documents in the footnotes, I have used names (for brevity) rather than titles: hence I have substituted ‘Foch to Pétain’ for ‘Le Maréchal commandant les armées alliées au général commandant en chef les armées françaises du nord et du nord-est’. Maps are a perennial problem. I have used a variety of contemporary maps, sketches and diagrams, amended as far as possible to reflect the text. When citing casualty figures (which are notoriously unreliable), I use the term ‘casualties’ to include the missing, the wounded and the killed. The references show the sources used, but the reader must make allowances for figures which may include or exclude the lightly wounded, may include or exclude prisoners, may be based on incomplete data, and may have been massaged for propaganda purposes.

The extensive research for this study could not have been undertaken without financial support. I am very grateful to the University of New
South Wales for the award of a three-year research fellowship, which allowed me the time to be thorough. In addition, King’s College London awarded me a Libraries and Archives fellowship in 2004 which enabled me to spend time in the marvellous Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives; and the Australian Academy of the Humanities awarded me a travelling fellowship in 2006 which enabled me to visit archives in the USA and in Brussels.

Friends and colleagues have provided invaluable support. I thank especially and alphabetically: General André Bach, who kindly answered my questions about the French army and pointed me towards several useful archival collections; Dr Jim Beach, who sent me chapters of his doctoral thesis; General Robert A. Doughty, who read and commented on several draft chapters; Professor Keith Jeffery, who answered my questions about Henry Wilson; Dr Edwin Jurriëns and Dr Eleanor Hancock, who helped with translations from the Dutch and German respectively; Baron Christian de Posch, who sent me copies of his grandfather’s papers; and Dr Mitchell Yockelson, who proved a helpful guide to the American archival collections. Most of all, I thank Professor John Horne; without his wise and thoughtful counsel on previous drafts, this would be a much worse book. All at Cambridge University Press have supported my endeavours efficiently and patiently.

The staff of the Academy Library of UNSW@ADFA and all the libraries and archives that I used were unfailingly helpful. Special thanks go to the Service historique de la Défense, whose staff in the army archives remained friendly and welcoming despite having to work under very difficult conditions as the reading room was shifted from one building in the Château de Vincennes to another. For permission to quote from material they hold I am grateful to: the Virginia Historical Society (Mott papers); the Library of Congress (department of manuscripts); the Royal Archives and the Army Archives in Brussels; les Archives nationales, Paris; les Archives diplomatiques, Paris; la Bibliothèque de l’Institut, Paris; the National Archives (Public Record Office), Kew; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge; the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum, London; the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London; and the manuscripts department of the British Library, London. I am grateful to Earl Haig for permission to use the Haig papers, and to the Warden and Fellows of New College Oxford (Milner papers). I thank also the DITEEX in Vincennes for permission to consult the papers of Generals Brugère, Cointet and Weygand. Finally, M. André Prunet-Foch received me most kindly in Paris and gave me permission to consult and quote from the Marshal’s illuminating letters in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.
Abbreviations

ADC aide-de-camp (military assistant)
AEF American Expeditionary Forces
AFGG + vol. no. Les Armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre (see Bibliography)
AS Artillerie spéciale (i.e. tanks)
AS + vol. no. Poincaré, Au service de la France (see Bibliography)
BEF British Expeditionary Force
CA Corps d’Armée
CCC Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge
CIGS Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CinC commander-in-chief
COS chief of staff
CS Fayolle, Cahiers secrets (see Bibliography)
CWF Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front (see Bibliography)
[d] dossier
DA Direction de l’Arrière (dealt with transport and supply matters in rear areas)
DAB Détachement d’Armée de Belgique
DAN Détachement d’Armée du Nord
DC Division de Cavalerie
DGCRA Direction Générale des Communications et des Ravitaillements aux Armées (organisation to control all the army’s transport and supply services)
DI Division d’Infanterie
DIC Division d’Infanterie Coloniale
DMO Director of Military Operations (at the War Office in London)
DR Division de Réserve
E-M Etat-Major (general staff)
xvi
**List of abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EWB</td>
<td>Executive War Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Ferdinand Foch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td><em>Foreign Relations of the United States</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAN</td>
<td>Groupe des Armées du Nord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GB</td>
<td>groupe de bombardement (bomber force)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHQ</td>
<td>General Headquarters (British)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GQG</td>
<td>Grand Quartier Général (French HQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GQGA</td>
<td>Grand Quartier Général Allié (Allied headquarters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Weygand, <em>Idéal vécu</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Journal de Marche (war diary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMO</td>
<td>Journal des Marches et des Opérations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joffre, JM</td>
<td>Pedroncini (ed.), <em>Journal de Marche de Joffre</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHCMA</td>
<td>Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAE</td>
<td>Ministère des Affaires Etrangères</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC + vol. no.</td>
<td>Mordacq, <em>Le Ministère Clemenceau</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>non-commissioned officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH + year</td>
<td>Edmonds <em>et al.</em>, <em>Military Operations: France and Belgium</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OH Italy</td>
<td>Edmonds and Davies, <em>Military Operations: Italy</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OHL</td>
<td>Oberste Heeresleitung (German high command)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMR</td>
<td>Permanent Military Representative (to the SWC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW</td>
<td>prisoner of war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td><em>Paris Peace Conference</em> (volume in <em>FRUS</em>; see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>Doughty, <em>Pyrrhic Victory</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWW + vol. no.</td>
<td>Link (ed.), <em>The Papers of Woodrow Wilson</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QMG</td>
<td>Quartermaster General (head of logistics in the British army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAW + vol. no.</td>
<td>Reichsarchiv, <em>Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918</em> (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFC</td>
<td>Royal Flying Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHD/T</td>
<td>Service Historique de la Défense/Département de l’Armée de Terre, Château de Vincennes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWC</td>
<td>Supreme War Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xviii</td>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USA WW + vol. no.</strong></td>
<td>United States Army in the World War (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VTC</strong></td>
<td>Greenhalgh, Victory through Coalition (see Bibliography)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WO</strong></td>
<td>War Office (British)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>