

The CATASTROPHE

of 8 August
1918



Thilo von Bose

Translated by David Pearson and Paul Thost
with Tony Cowan

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Cover Image: Australian artist Will Longstaff's painting *8th August, 1918*, depicting Australian infantry escorting German prisoners past a German field gun and its dead crew as Australian field guns and a British tank move forward, 8 August 1918 (AWM ART03022).

End Paper Images: Three (of six) wooden boards with mounted German regimental shoulder straps collected by Lieutenant General Sir John Monash, commander Australian Corps, for intelligence purposes. 48 of these shoulder straps were captured on 8–9 August 1918, and more in the subsequent fighting (AWM REL15049.001, 15049.004 and 15049.005).

Editor's Introduction

Thilo von Bose's *The Catastrophe of 8 August 1918* was the 36th and last book in a series of popular, semi-official German histories called *Battles of the World War*.¹ It was the fifth in the series to cover battles in 1918 and, taken as a whole, their titles reflect how events that year developed: *German Victories*, *Growing Difficulties*, *The Last German Attack Reims 1918*, *Turn of Fate* and finally *The Catastrophe of 8 August 1918*. Major German offensives in spring and early summer had gradually petered out with heavy casualties. The last of them, at Reims in July, had failed outright and been followed almost at once by a devastating Allied counterstroke.² This in turn had run its course by early August and the Western Front had settled into an uneasy equilibrium; the German high command still planned to resume the offensive, but knew that, for the moment, the army was on the defensive.³ *Catastrophe* picks up the story at this point.

The idea of publishing a popular series on battles of the First World War initially arose during the war itself.⁴ General Erich Ludendorff authorised the series in 1917, and the propaganda value of the books was rated so highly that officers were taken off their normal duties to write them.⁵ After the war, when the German army began to draw up plans for military history, it quickly decided to re-launch the series under a new name, *Battles of the World War*, and the first volume appeared in 1921. The series formed part of the main triad of official and semi-official military history writing, the other two elements being the official history itself and the extensive range of regimental histories.⁶ It was written under the auspices of the *Reichsarchiv*, the central German military history organisation, and published by the reputable firm of Gerhard Stalling, which was well known for its many military publications. In fact it had published the earlier series of popular battle histories.

The fundamental aim of the new series was to make up for the perceived deficiencies of traditional military history, with its emphasis on higher levels of command, reluctance to criticise and anonymous authorship. By focusing instead on lower levels of the military hierarchy (in a similar vein to Australian Official Historian C.E.W. Bean), the series would satisfy the need of veterans and the families of the dead to understand the context in which they or their family members had fought and suffered. The series

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editor, former *Hauptmann* (Captain) and *Pour le Mérite* winner George Soldan, also had expressly nationalistic aims of reviving German pride and confidence, as well as countering what he saw as hostile historical writing on the war from abroad. These aims were left unstated. Instead, as *Reichsarchiv* President Hermann Ritter Mertz von Quirnheim said in his foreword to *Catastrophe*, the series aimed ‘to show the interrelationship of the gigantic events of the World War, to help preserve the individual actions of German men from being forgotten and to erect the memorial to the fallen heroes of the war which they deserved’. It would also serve ‘to let combatants of the World War relive their own experience and to show them individual actions in their context, as well as to give the coming generation a picture of imperishable German heroism’.⁷

The series was not intended to cover all battles — Mertz’s foreword is frank about its gaps — but it did describe defeats as well as victories. Soldan explained in his introduction to the volumes on Verdun that it was important for the series to describe such defeats. This was partly a debt owed to the dead as well as to the survivors. In addition, the books would describe the unparalleled heroism shown at Verdun. Finally, they would help understand why the battle was fought and assist future generations to learn from and avoid this fate.⁸ A book covering the events of 8 August 1918 fitted well into this framework.

Since individual volumes focused on single battles or even parts of them, they could be produced quickly. For instance, the five 1918 books all appeared in 1929–1930. In contrast, the official history covering the same period did not appear until 1944, and then only in a very limited edition for official use only; it was not properly published until 1956. As a result, the *Battles of the World War* books were among the few works available which drew on official sources. So *Catastrophe* and its companion volumes were the closest there was in the inter-war period to an official account. Not surprisingly, they were widely quoted in the British and Australian official histories, among others. Indeed, *Catastrophe* is the only German source used by Sir James Edmonds in the British account of 8 August 1918.⁹

Although the British official history describes *Catastrophe* as an official monograph, the series was in fact semi-official.¹⁰ This status had important implications — in particular, each book was written by a named author who took responsibility for the content. One original condition for

selection was that authors should have taken part in the battles they were describing.¹¹ This would have added to the authority of the narrative, but it was not always possible to find authors who met the condition. There was already a problem finding authors who were qualified not only to write history but to write it in a popular style.¹² Adding a further condition of having taken part in the battle concerned may simply have been too difficult.

The first volume written by Thilo von Bose for the *Reichsarchiv*, on the 1914 battle of the Marne, illustrates how the process worked. The title page describes Bose, in September 1914 a general staff *Hauptmann* in the Guard Corps (which took part in the battle), as the author. The book was written 'on commission from' the *Reichsarchiv*, and the editor there responsible for the book was Alfred Stenger.¹³ When the former Guard Corps commander later complained about the book's description of some of his corps' actions during the battle, the *Reichsarchiv* could reply that the book was a private work supported by the *Reichsarchiv*, which bore no responsibility for the content.¹⁴ In reality, Stenger's involvement showed the high degree of control exercised by the *Reichsarchiv*, which included deciding access to official source material.

In terms of its aims, the *Battles of the World War* series was a resounding success. It contributed to the superiority of nationalist accounts of the war over left-wing accounts.¹⁵ It was certainly a popular success; each volume sold between 40,000 and 50,000 copies, and some were printed in even greater numbers. The contract with Gerhard Stalling eventually specified that the series would consist of 36 volumes, and it duly came to an end in 1930 with the publication of *Catastrophe*.¹⁶ Both the *Reichsarchiv* and Stalling had benefited from their collaboration, the *Reichsarchiv* from the rapid production of a popularly and professionally successful series by a reputable publisher, and Stalling from the commercial success of a prestigious project. In fact, the series was so valuable to Stalling that the firm helped finance staff in Soldan's office.¹⁷ This explains Mertz's praise for Stalling's contribution in the foreword to *Catastrophe* as 'going far beyond the bounds of what was agreed in the contract'.¹⁸

Thilo von Bose played a major role in this success. He was the most prolific *Battles of the World War* author, writing seven of its 36 volumes. Despite this, little trace remains of him in the surviving records. He was born on 12 January 1880 in Zabern, Alsace, where his father was serving as

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an army officer.¹⁹ His family could trace its roots as nobility back to 1230 AD: this ancestry no doubt helped his application to join the prestigious Guard Grenadier Regiment 2, into which he was commissioned in 1900. His career clearly prospered, as in 1909 he was accepted for the German staff college (*Kriegsakademie*). Only a small minority of all officers took the entrance exam, and only about one-sixth of candidates passed. He must have done well at staff college: at the end of the three-year course, only a third of students were selected for probationary secondment to the Great General Staff in Berlin, and Bose was one of them. He was now in the top 2% of the German officer corps.²⁰ This trial period would normally have lasted two years, after which he would have been selected or rejected for permanent transfer into the General Staff.

However, the outbreak of war accelerated this process. Along with other officers at a similar stage of their careers, Bose was permanently transferred into the General Staff at the beginning of the war. He was a general staff officer in the Guard Corps during the battle of the Marne in September 1914. If he was still with the corps in spring 1915, he would have moved with it to the Eastern Front and taken part in the major Gorlice-Tarnow offensive. He may have been in the Balkans that winter, and he certainly served as chief staff officer in two divisions in the east from 1916 to 1918. He was promoted major in 1918 and his last active service job was in the Balkans, where he was a general staff officer in a corps headquarters. The Eastern Front was increasingly a backwater from 1917, so his service in mediocre formations there implies that, despite the promotion, his career was stagnating.

We do not know why the *Reichsarchiv* employed Bose as one of its *Battles of the World War* authors. The first works he wrote for them, the four Marne volumes, had been begun by a *Reichsarchiv* staff member who died in 1925. In looking for a replacement, the *Reichsarchiv* may simply have come across Bose as someone who was qualified for the job (as an ex-general staff officer) and available. Regimental networking may also have played a role since, like Bose, the director of the *Reichsarchiv*'s Military Historical Department, Hans von Haeften, was a former officer of Guard Grenadier Regiment 2.²¹ Bose did at least fit the preferred criterion of having taken part in the battle he was describing, and he was supported by Stenger, a *Reichsarchiv* staff member and former general staff *Hauptmann* who had also fought at the Marne. The *Reichsarchiv* clearly approved of their joint

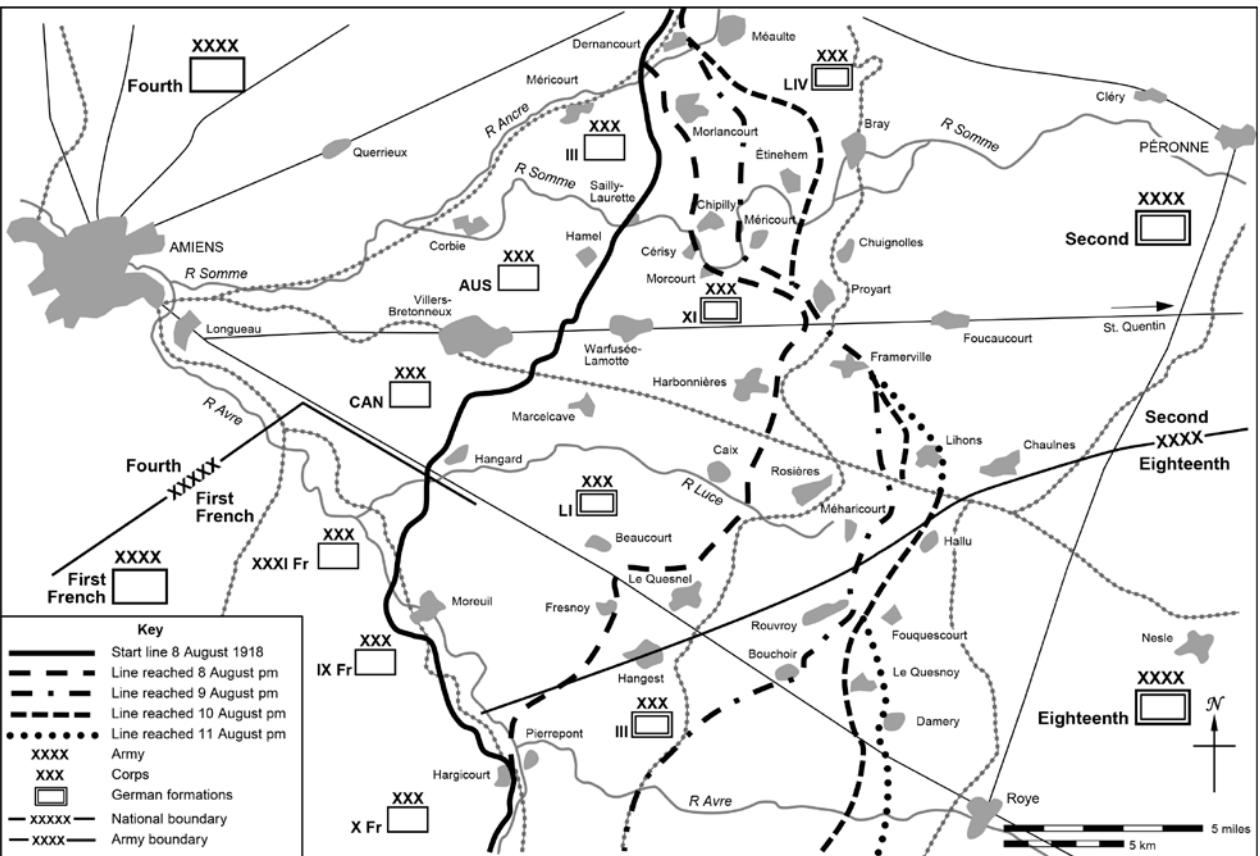
work and, despite the corps commander's complaints, it commissioned Bose to write three of the 1918 volumes, including *Catastrophe*, and Stenger the other two. Following his success with the *Battles of the World War* books, Bose went on to write a history of a Guard Grenadier Regiment, as well as a work on river-crossing operations commissioned by the Defence Ministry.²² He also wrote two research papers for the *Reichsarchiv* on the effects of bombing during the First World War.²³ He was still engaged on the second of these when he died aged 54 in 1934.

In deciding the shape of *Catastrophe*, Bose and the *Reichsarchiv* faced several fundamental problems. These included how to describe the battle it covered in terms of result, length and detail; how to strike the balance between giving the context and narrating the individual actions within the battle, both of which were primary aims of the *Battles of the World War* series; and how honest to be about the causes of the defeat.

As the Verdun example above showed, there was no problem of principle writing about a defeat. But Bose's decision to cover the opening day of the battle only is at first sight odd. While 8 August 1918 itself was certainly an important moment in the war and a serious defeat for the German army, the battle lasted until 11 August in the British definition and as late as 20 August in the German.²⁴ The German army suffered further heavy casualties and loss of ground after 8 August, but its increasingly effective resistance combined with British operational errors and growing exhaustion limited Allied success as Map A illustrates.²⁵ As the British official history comments, 8 August itself does not particularly seem to justify Ludendorff's famous description of it as the 'Black Day' of the German army.²⁶ So if Bose had covered a more extended period, he could have portrayed a battle which was certainly a major defeat but not necessarily a catastrophe.

However, there was also an advantage in focusing on 8 August. In particular, it limited the actors to the German Second Army and subordinate formations, without having to describe the neighbouring Eighteenth Army or other divisions later drawn into the battle. This had an important practical effect on the amount of detail in which Bose could describe the battle. For comparison, his first 1918 book, on the German victory in late May and early June, covered a period of 18 days.²⁷ As a result, he generally had to limit his account to the battalion level. In *Catastrophe* by contrast, he could go into much more detail about individual companies, better fulfilling the

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Map A. The Battle of Amiens showing the start line on the morning of 8 August, the line reached at the end of that day and the lines reached on 9, 10 and 11 August (when the battle ended).

series' aim 'to let combatants of the World War relive their own experience and to show them individual actions in their context', as Mertz said in his foreword.

There was a risk, though, that the extra detail would simply clog the narrative, making it both boring and unclear. To take one typical passage as an example:

At 6.30 pm the 1st Battalion, Infantry Regiment 478 was the first unit to reach the south-west edge of Proyart. At 7.00 pm the 3rd Battalion, Infantry Regiment 478 pushed forward into the valley just north-west of the village and gradually made contact with the south-east flank of the 1st Battalion, Infantry Regiment 13. The 1st Battalion, Fusilier Regiment 122, under the command of the Regiment 478, established itself as the second echelon on the railway line between Chuignolles and Proyart.²⁸

There are over 2000 references to individual units in *Catastrophe*, one of its most striking features.²⁹ Markus Pöhlmann comments that such units seem to us strange and interchangeable in their anonymity. But the intended readership at the time, the veterans and families of soldiers, would have understood the designations and seen what lay behind them in terms of lived experience, suffering, loss and deep personal relationships, both positive and negative.³⁰

So there were good reasons to go into this level of detail, and Bose did his best to overcome the potential lack of clarity and interest. First, the maps provided with the book enable the reader to follow the developments described in the text with some ease. Second, Bose made effective use of a unique selling point of the *Battles of the World War* series — the illustrations — to bring to life points he was making in the text. Two artists were involved. The first painted a graphic picture showing a British tank looming threateningly above a group of German soldiers in a trench (p. 48). One is falling wounded, two are dead and two others apparently surrendering or about to run away. The central figure is standing his ground, poised to throw a concentrated charge of bundled hand grenades at the tank. This picture appears immediately after the foreword and before the main text, thus setting the scene for Bose's theme of German heroism versus Allied numerical and material superiority.³¹

The other 18 illustrations are line drawings by the artist Franz Hanel. He was presumably chosen because he had illustrated the two preceding

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Battles of the World War volumes on 1918 as well as Werner Beumelburg's *Sperrfeuer um Deutschland* (1929).³² His illustrations were placed at the beginning and end of each section, in effect as commentary on the text. A particularly clear example of this comes from the final illustration, placed after the last page of the text (p. 436). It shows a lonely German soldier, dead in his trench, with his helmet, rifle and hand grenade next to him, and the enemy he has presumably just killed lying on the parapet above him. He embodies the order 'Stand fast, hold out, fire, no retreat, whatever the cost' and Bose's contention that it was not the troops who had failed on 8 August.³³

Third, Bose included a striking number of direct quotes. This was not a new technique, but he certainly took it to new lengths: the quotes form a quarter of the book, compared with some 5% for his first 1918 volume. They vary in length from two lines to two pages or more and come from a variety of sources, including official reports from the Second Army down to battalion level and, above all, from personal accounts. Bose also quoted the enemy, drawing effectively at various points on the authoritative book published by General Sir Archibald Montgomery, in August 1918 chief of staff to the British Fourth Army, the main Allied formation fighting the battle.³⁴

The personal accounts in particular were intended to increase the authenticity of the narrative by providing the much-desired story 'from below'.³⁵ Almost all are from officers at battalion and company or equivalent level. They break up and enliven what would otherwise be a dry tactical narrative. One effect of these accounts is to suggest that even in the midst of chaos and disaster, the fighting troops bravely resisted overwhelming force. Many of them seem repetitive to the modern reader, but some are undoubtedly dramatic. There were two other advantages for Bose of including so many quotations. First, he could make points without having to take responsibility for them; one example of this is his (single) illustration of the problem of dishonest reporting, analysed further below. Second, it may have accelerated production of the text. Even allowing for help from other *Reichsarchiv* staff, and in some cases such as *Catastrophe* preparatory works, producing seven 200-page books in a five-year period was a major task. Bose may have adopted any methods he could find, such as extensive use of quotations, to ease the burden.

The second fundamental problem Bose faced in shaping *Catastrophe* was how much context to give to the events he was describing. Strictly

speaking, the official history and the *Battles of the World War* series were supposed to cover different aspects of the war: the former should deal with the higher levels of command to division, the latter lower-level units from regiment down.³⁶ Bose sensibly ignored this ruling. He set out Allied plans and preparations at some length in a separate chapter; he added details of the enemy order of battle, including in an annex; and in his account of the fighting on each section of the German front, he described the Allied forces opposite and their objectives. He probably did this because the Allies were attacking, so Allied plans initiated all the actions he was describing.

Bose also examined the decisions of higher-level German formations. A particular concern was what the German army knew of Allied offensive intentions, and what it could or should have known. He was judicious here on the meaning of various items of intelligence. He did not, for instance, blindly accept unit complaints that their superiors had ignored reports about hearing tank noises before the attack; using Montgomery's account, he showed that some of these reports could not have been accurate because tanks had not yet arrived in the area.³⁷ Nevertheless, as Gary Sheffield comments in his foreword, Bose's overall conclusion about lack of German intelligence on the attack was clear: 'it should not have happened that the German command was so completely surprised by the enemy attack'.³⁸

Part of Bose's description of the attackers covers the differing quality of their formations. The German army had recognised since late 1916 that concentration of high-quality enemy formations was a key indicator of a forthcoming attack, and it had therefore developed a system for classifying these formations.³⁹ The original German assessment of troops from the British dominions, including the Australians and Canadians, was that they were militias which would require much training before they could be deployed.⁴⁰ But those days were long past, and as Bose commented, by 1918 the Germans rated the Canadian Corps highest among the assault formations, followed by the Australians and then the British and French. He did not say so, but he was apparently drawing on German intelligence appreciations as Table 1 shows. These rankings explain the concern to identify the location of the Canadian Corps and Bose's criticism of German higher command for failing to pay more attention to this vital question.⁴¹

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Table 1. German intelligence assessment of Allied divisions

Corps	Division	German assessment
III British Corps	12th British Division	Average division
	18th British Division	Good average division
	47th British Division	Good assault division
	58th British Division	Good assault division
Australian Corps	1st Australian Division	Particularly good assault division
	2nd Australian Division	Particularly good assault division
	3rd Australian Division	Good assault division
	4th Australian Division	Good assault division
	5th Australian Division	Average division
Canadian Corps	1st Canadian Division	Particularly good assault division
	2nd Canadian Division	Particularly good assault division
	3rd Canadian Division	Particularly good assault division
	4th Canadian Division	Particularly good assault division
XXXI French Corps	37th French Division	Good assault division
	42nd French Division	Good assault division
	66th French Division	Assault division
	126th French Division	Assault division
	153rd French Division	Good assault division
IX French Corps	3rd French Division	Assault division
	15th French Colonial Division	Good assault division

Bose also looked at the state of German divisions in some detail. Such analysis again originated in late 1916, when the German army recognised that, as well as studying the enemy, it needed a better understanding of its own divisions and their fitness for battle. It issued orders for weekly reporting on all divisions, classified into certain categories of fitness.⁴² Bose pulled no punches in describing the poor state of the German defenders in terms of both numbers and condition. This later led to his conclusion on the chief cause of the defeat on 8 August 1918, that ‘the physical and psychological capacities of the majority of fighters were no longer sufficient to face a major attack’.⁴³ Whether we accept this or not, Bose’s detailed description of the state of German divisions formed an important part of his context-setting and would undoubtedly have been new to most of his readers.

Bose's third fundamental problem in shaping *Catastrophe* was how honest to be about the causes of the defeat. Gary Sheffield's foreword praises his courage in being so open about what happened and why. This openness was in keeping with Mertz's stated belief that, though the series' authors were subject to *Reichsarchiv* guidelines, they should be fully independent in terms of their scholarly findings.⁴⁴ Bose of course was faced with a dilemma in terms of describing the shortcomings of the German army. He needed to explain how the defeat happened, yet if he was too frank he would in effect be saying to veterans and next of kin that their comrades and relatives had died in vain, or that their efforts had been nullified by high-level incompetence, or worse, that they had been cowards.

Bose's handling of the performance of individual divisions and the casualties they suffered illustrates how he tried to resolve this dilemma. He gave the Second Army's losses on 8 August as some 27–28,000, together with over 400 guns and huge numbers of machine-guns, mortars and other matériel.⁴⁵ This is probably accurate enough; the most detailed German statistics show that casualties over the first 10 days of August came to 48,000 men, most occurring in the first three days of the battle.⁴⁶ The 11 divisions at the centre of Bose's account in *Catastrophe* reflect these losses, suffering a total of nearly 32,000 casualties. The average of about 3000 per division compares with an average infantry front-line trench strength of the three divisions analysed in Chapter 3 of only some 2300, and itself demonstrates the extent to which the Allied attack had penetrated to the rear areas of the German defence.

Where Bose potentially ran into difficulties was accounting for the nature of the casualties, a very high proportion of which were missing. This term literally meant that the men involved were no longer with their units after the battle and that what had happened to them was unknown. Some of them would have been killed but never found, while others would have been captured after being wounded. But experience showed that the overwhelming majority would simply have surrendered. The question of the missing had been a neuralgic point for the army since at least late 1916, because large numbers of prisoners implied that the troops had not fought hard enough: even if surrounded, units were expected to fight their way out at the point of the bayonet.⁴⁷ OHL (the *Oberste Heeresleitung* or Supreme Army Command) was so concerned about this issue that it regularly investigated cases where the number of missing seemed excessive.⁴⁸

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Table 2. Casualties of German divisions, 8–10 August 1918

Division	Total casualties	Missing as % of total casualties
13th Infantry Division	4036	95
225th Infantry Division	4346	92
41st Infantry Division	3196	89
14th Bavarian Infantry Division	3348	88
117th Infantry Division	4558	86
192nd Infantry Division	2204	70
109th Infantry Division	2379	67
43rd Reserve Division	1003	66
119th Infantry Division	2712	57
1st Reserve Division	1333	53
27th Infantry Division	2552	44
Total	31,667	78

The breakdown of casualties by division in Table 2 would not have reassured Ludendorff.⁴⁹ The 13th and 41st Infantry Divisions, with the highest and third highest percentages of missing, would have been of particular concern. Both were pre-war ‘active’ divisions, a type of formation which OHL valued highly; one sign of this was that many were specially chosen as assault divisions for the spring 1918 offensives, including these two. Yet 95% and 89% respectively of their casualties were missing. In both cases, over 80% of officer casualties were missing too. This was particularly serious, since officers were regarded as the ‘bearers of the offensive spirit’.⁵⁰ The fact that so many went missing lends credence to one theory of the large number of German prisoners taken in summer 1918, that these were ‘ordered surrenders’ in which officers led their men into captivity.⁵¹

Bose would certainly have been aware of such statistics for individual divisions. Even if he did not have the German figures, Montgomery’s book includes details of numbers captured, broken down by formation and divided into officers and other ranks.⁵² Bose did not ignore this issue; indeed, he stated that more than two-thirds of German casualties were prisoners, and that there had been instances almost everywhere of soldiers simply giving up.⁵³ But he did seek to mitigate its seriousness for individual units. In fact, the bulk of his concluding chapter was designed to resolve the question of

whether the troops had culpably failed in their duty as soldiers. He argued that they had not.

In Bose's account, weak front-line units in weak defences were often simply overwhelmed by the weight, speed and suddenness of the attack. Units in support further back might well suffer the same fate, but wherever possible bravely resisted against impossible odds. Units surrendered when completely encircled or after firing their last rounds or, if they were headquarters, burning their papers. Officers were killed or wounded doing their duty to the last. When captured, they saw enemy casualties caused by their fire and some even managed to escape. In quite a few cases, Bose or his eyewitnesses avoided talking about capture at all. Instead, resistance came to an end, units became victims of encirclement or were overrun and only a few men came back.⁵⁴ Where Bose wanted to describe soldiers falling back in panic or disorder, he usually did so by quoting eyewitnesses, often from another unit. For example, a battalion commander in the 41st Infantry Division recorded that, as he was advancing to counter-attack, he came across men from regiments in the 13th Infantry Division withdrawing in disorder and mostly without weapons.⁵⁵

Bose passed over one important aspect of the large numbers of missing, the major psychological blow to the German command system caused by the implications for discipline and morale. Ludendorff himself wrote in his memoirs of his shock at some of the events on the battlefield on 8 August:

I was told of deeds of glorious valour but also of behaviour which, I openly confess, I should not have thought possible in the German Army; whole bodies of our men had surrendered to single troopers, or isolated squadrons. Retiring troops, meeting a fresh division going bravely into action, had shouted out things like "Black-leg," and "You're prolonging the war," expressions that were to be heard again later. The officers in many places had lost their influence and allowed themselves to be swept along with the rest.⁵⁶

Ludendorff in fact quoted just such incidents when he briefed the Kaiser on the events of 8 August two days later, and this is recorded in the memoirs of the OHL liaison officer to the Kaiser, *Major Alfred Niemann*.⁵⁷ Bose cited Ludendorff's book and would surely have been aware of Niemann's, but he ignored these passages.

He also said nothing about the severe psychological strain senior officers were now under. Most famously, it has been suggested that Ludendorff

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suffered a nervous breakdown during this period. This is not certain, but multiple sources attest to his poor mental state even before 8 August.⁵⁸ Events since the failure of the last German offensive in mid-July and the subsequent successful Allied counter-attack had badly affected others too. Mertz, then a department head in OHL, wrote of the 'completely passive' morale and loss of nerve there.⁵⁹ At the beginning of August, Niemann found that the French counter-attack had made the utmost demands on the nerves of OHL staff, who bore all the signs of deep intellectual and psychological fatigue.⁶⁰ Ludendorff thought that the Second Army commander and chief of staff had lost their nerve following the 8 August attack.⁶¹

All this was a sign of the intellectual and moral decay of the German command system which was now beginning, and Bose said little about it.⁶² A further sign of this decay is the problem of dishonest reporting, which Bose did mention. The means he chose was to quote an artillery officer who was ordered to find positions for new batteries which would be arriving. The officer was told by his headquarters that what was important was the report, not actually having the positions.⁶³ This technique illustrates how Bose used quotations from personal accounts to set out a problem while not taking direct responsibility for citing it himself. There are echoes here of the *Reichsarchiv's* ability to distance itself from responsibility for the contents of the *Battles of the World War* books.

The problem of dishonest reporting was in fact more serious than Bose's treatment implies. The root cause was, ironically, the army's 'can-do' attitude and consequent disapproval of anything which looked like pessimism. As pressure increased from the end of 1916, speaking honestly about the realities of the situation, particularly the condition of the troops, came to be seen as expressing pessimism. Before the 8 August attack, the Second Army's operations officer told OHL that the Army urgently needed fresh divisions. Some of its divisions were so exhausted that they would not withstand the attacks which the Army firmly expected. OHL's response was to ask how an Army operations officer could make such a statement: he should beware of succumbing to pessimism. The Army's chief of staff, *Oberst* (Colonel) Erich von Tschischwitz, had also briefed Ludendorff personally about the real situation a few days before the attack, but had been given such short shrift that he had desisted from making any further warnings.⁶⁴

Even while the battle was still raging, accusations about who was to blame for the defeat began to fly. Bose's clearest statement on responsibility

for the defeat is his evidence, quoted by Gary Sheffield, that lessons drawn from new French tactics from 18 July were not passed to the Second Army or its subordinate formations. Bose did not say so explicitly, but at this point he must have been blaming either OHL or Army Group Rupprecht or both for this omission, which he saw as crucial given the central role of these tactics on 8 August. Others in the *Reichsarchiv* would also have found fault with OHL or the army group, though not necessarily for the same reasons. Mertz considered that the army group's chief of staff, Hermann von Kuhl, bore primary responsibility for completely ignoring the Second Army's concerns about its poor state given that it was expecting to face an enemy attack. Instead, Kuhl had submitted a reassuring report to OHL.⁶⁵ Similarly, the *Reichsarchiv* commented in an internal paper on Ludendorff's agitated interventions in the Second Army's handling of the battle, which not only exceeded his authority but produced damaging results on the battlefield.⁶⁶

However, in August 1918 Ludendorff clearly won the blame game, as illustrated by the number of senior participants in the battle who were sacked. This phenomenon became increasingly common as difficulties mounted throughout 1918. In the Second Army, Tschischwitz was sacked on 10 August. On this occasion his boss, General Georg von der Marwitz, survived, but he (and his new chief of staff) were both removed after a perceived defeat a few weeks later.⁶⁷ By then others had already gone. On 18 August, Marwitz reported that General Eberhard von Hofacker, commanding the LI Corps, tended to pessimism, did not show the necessary hardness towards his troops and sometimes failed to exert his personal influence on his divisional commanders.⁶⁸ Following this damning report, Hofacker was sacked; not long after, his chief of staff was moved to an administrative job in the backwater of the Eastern Front. The commanders of the 41st and 119th Infantry and 43rd Reserve Divisions were all removed before the end of August. The commander of the 225th Infantry Division was given no further active service employment when his division was disbanded on 1 September. Bose could avoid mentioning any of these dismissals, a further advantage of limiting his focus to the single day of 8 August.

A brief description of German military organisation and doctrine will assist in understanding Bose's detailed tactical account. The highest level of the organisation was OHL, from summer 1916 headed by *Generalfeldmarschall*

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(Field Marshal) Paul von Hindenburg, with Ludendorff as his deputy. In practical terms, though, Ludendorff was in charge. Army groups were the next command level. There were four on the Western Front in August 1918, with a fifth in the process of being established. Their role was to coordinate the Armies under their command, in particular by controlling the flow of reserves and other resources. The Armies themselves actually conducted the battle. The formations in the sector covered by *Catastrophe* were Army Group Rupprecht, under the command of Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, and its subordinate Second and Eighteenth Armies. The Second Army in turn controlled three corps, by this stage of the war holding organisations through which divisions flowed as the combat situation required.

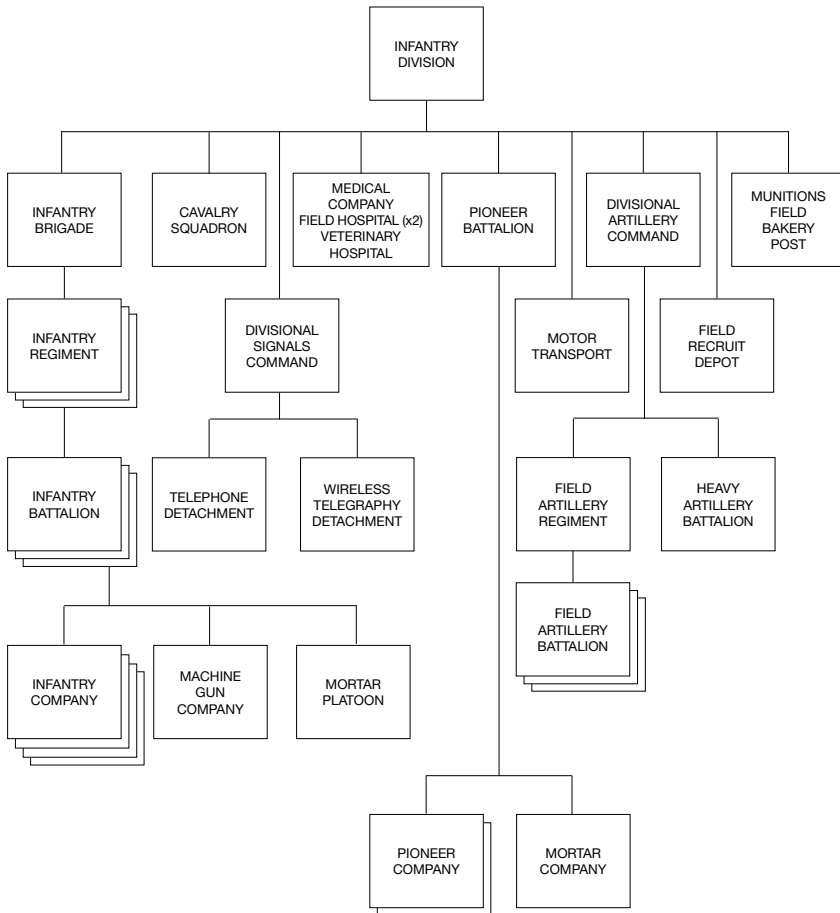


Figure A. Organisation of a German infantry division, 1918.

The division was the principal combat formation. In 1918, it consisted of an infantry brigade with three regiments, an artillery command and a variety of supporting units (see Figure A).⁶⁹ The German army still regarded the infantry as the most important element on the battlefield, and *Catastrophe* focuses particularly on the regimental level and below. An infantry regiment had three battalions. Each battalion comprised four companies of four platoons, a company of 12 heavy (medium in modern terms) machine-guns and a platoon of four light 7.6-cm mortars. Infantry companies each had six light machine-guns and two grenade throwers. The fighting strength of a battalion was supposed to be 650 men, but as Chapter 3 of *Catastrophe* shows, often fell dramatically below this.⁷⁰

The divisional artillery commander controlled the division's own field artillery regiment and heavy artillery battalion, together with any other guns temporarily allocated. The field artillery regiment had two battalions (*Abteilungen*) of 7.7-cm field guns and one of 10.5-cm light field howitzers. A battalion had three batteries, each with an establishment of four guns. In early 1918, batteries were allocated two extra guns as a temporary measure, so the regiment's total holding varied from 36 to 54 guns.⁷¹ The division's heavy artillery battalion belonged to the Foot Artillery, a separate arm of service, and its units were designated accordingly. The battalion was organised into two batteries of 15-cm heavy field howitzers — the 5.9-inch in British terms — and one battery of 10-cm guns, totalling 12 artillery pieces in all. Each field and heavy battery had two machine-guns for anti-aircraft and close-in defence.⁷²

The division's own supporting units included pioneers, signallers, medical and other specialists. Of these, *Catastrophe* mainly mentions the pioneers and signals. Following repeated reorganisations, in 1918 a division had a pioneer battalion headquarters, two pioneer companies and a mortar company. The latter operated four heavy 25-cm and eight medium 17-cm mortars, giving the division a total of 48 mortars including the infantry's light 7.6-cm weapons.⁷³ The Divisional Signals Commander (*Divkonach*) controlled the telephone and wireless telegraphy detachments. These were the two main signalling means, supplemented by light signalling, heliographs, flares, wireless, earth telegraphy ('power buzzers' to the British), pigeons, messenger dogs, runners and riders.⁷⁴ The aim was to ensure that if one or more of these means failed, enough of the others still worked to enable the efficient transmission of reports and orders.

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A division could also be temporarily assigned or supported by extra resources, particularly of artillery and machine-guns. Higher-level headquarters from corps upwards controlled or allocated as needed so-called army field artillery regiments and the heaviest artillery. The Foot Artillery operated a wide variety of guns, organised in different ways. Apart from the divisional heavy artillery described above, these included 21-cm *Mörser* heavy howitzers in three-gun batteries and other weapons such as the 15-cm *Kanone* in two-gun batteries.⁷⁵ Machine Gun Marksman Detachments (*Maschinengewehr-Scharfschützen-Abteilungen*), controlled and allocated by OHL, were specially formed from men proven in combat. Each consisted of three companies and a total of 36 heavy machine-guns. They therefore provided considerable extra automatic weapon support to threatened sectors.⁷⁶

In early August 1918, although the German army hoped to resume the offensive, it was, for the moment at least, on the defensive. The doctrine in force was set out in a key document titled *Principles for the Conduct of the Defensive Battle in Trench Warfare*, which in essence called for defence to be in depth, mobile and offensive.⁷⁷ 'In depth' meant that the defenders and their defences should be distributed throughout several consecutive positions or zones in which the enemy would meet increasing resistance as they advanced and their attack weakened (see Figure B).⁷⁸ The Forward Zone (*Vorfeld*) was to be held by a light garrison which should retire if the enemy launched a major attack. Its purpose was to force the enemy to make a properly prepared assault, costing time and casualties, while avoiding heavy losses to the defence. Next came the Battle Zone (*Kampfzone*), with the Main Line of Resistance (*Hauptwiderstandslinie*) at its forward edge.⁷⁹ As these terms implied, the defenders were to make a determined stand here. If they were forced back, the Main Line of Resistance was to be recaptured by counter-attack launched from the Artillery Protective Line (*Artillerieschutzstellung*) laid out at the rear edge of the zone. The artillery was deployed behind this second line. Finally, there was to be at least one rearward zone, which must be far enough back that the enemy artillery could not destroy both it and the Battle Zone at the same time.

The total depth of this multi-zone defensive system varied, but was intended to be 5–10 kilometres or more. The system should be strengthened with fixed defences such as barbed-wire obstacles, shelters for the garrison and properly constructed positions for machine-guns and mortars. The bulk

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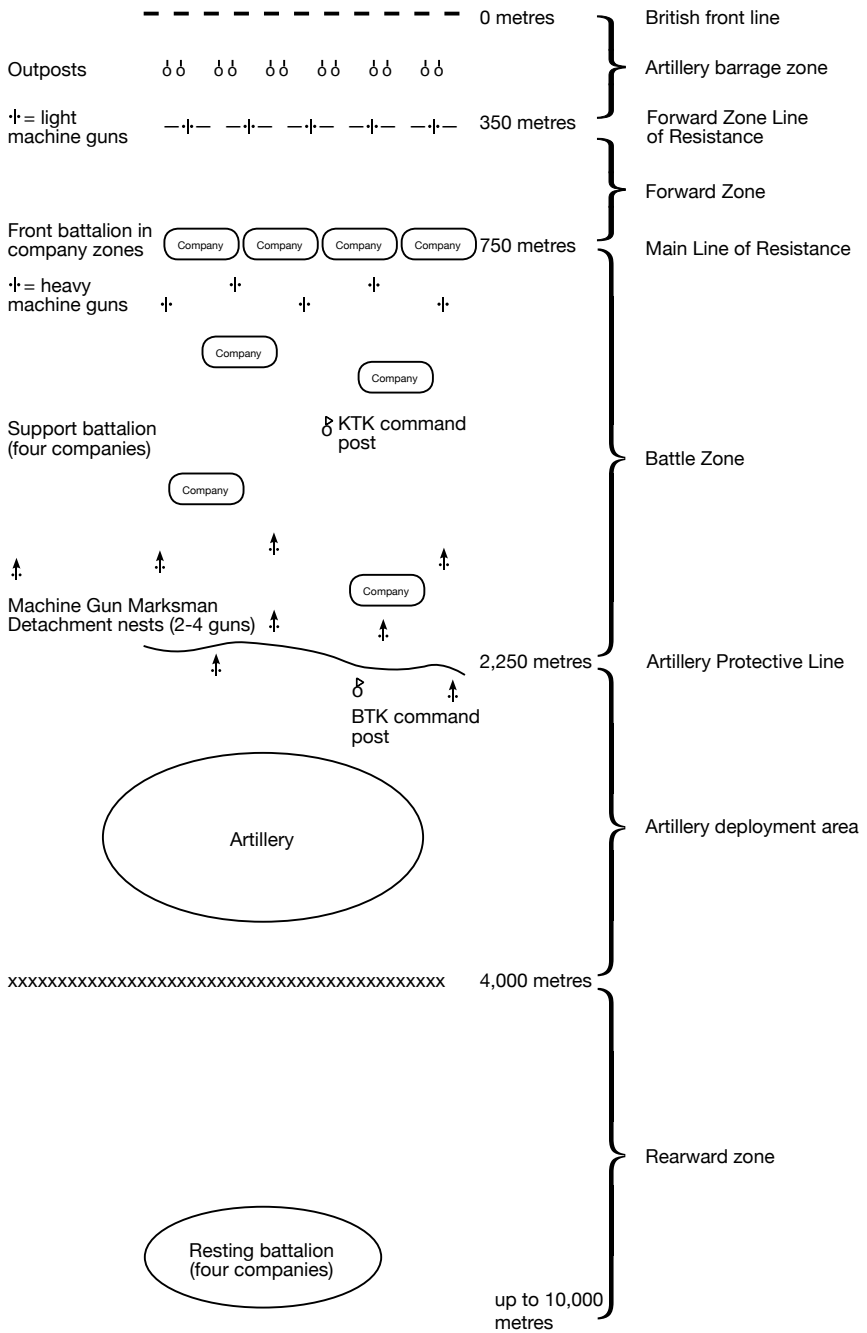


Figure B. Defensive layout of a German infantry regiment (schematic).

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of these defences would be located behind the Forward Zone in order to avoid immediate destruction during the enemy's pre-assault bombardment. The defending garrison was distributed throughout the defensive system. Typically, a division holding a sector of the front (*Stellungsdivision*, translated as 'front-line division') deployed its three infantry regiments side by side. Each regiment deployed one battalion to garrison the Forward Zone and Main Line of Resistance (*Kampfbataillon*). The battalion commander controlled all defensive resources in his area as the 'Commander of the front-line troops' (*Kampftruppen-Kommandeur* or KTK). The regiment's second battalion was deployed in support in the rear of the Battle Zone, under the 'Commander of the supports' (*Bereitschaftstruppen-Kommandeur* or BTK). The third battalion was located further back still, where it acted as a reserve while resting or training (hence Bose's use of the term 'resting battalion' — in German, *Ruhe-Bataillon* — for such units).

The 'mobile' element of the defensive doctrine called for the garrison to exploit the whole depth of this system to fight its battle. Defenders were authorised to withdraw in the face of heavy enemy attack, but by the end of the action were to ensure that they retained or recaptured the whole system. The 'offensive' part of the doctrine comprised action by both infantry and artillery. Where necessary, the front-line garrisons were to counter-attack with even a few squads or platoons. If they failed, the battalions in support and reserve would be thrown into the battle. If they too were unable to restore the situation, the divisions waiting in reserve further back, the so-called intervention or counter-attack divisions (*Eingreifdivisionen*), would be committed in whole or in part.⁸⁰ The artillery were to support infantry action with different types of fire. Their principal tasks were to neutralise the enemy artillery through counter-battery work; to destroy enemy infantry defences and garrisons; to shell the enemy's rear areas and reserves; to preempt the assault through annihilating fire (*Vernichtungsfuer*) as the enemy were forming up, and if that failed, to prevent the attackers reaching German positions by barrage fire (*Sperrfeuer*); to engage enemy tanks; and to support counter-attacks.⁸¹

Catastrophe makes clear the gulf between this doctrine and the reality of the German army's 'Black Day'. Its very detailed descriptions show that the Second Army indeed tried to fight the battle as laid down in doctrine, but completely failed due to a variety of factors including the near-total collapse of the signalling system described above. Bose quoted Montgomery

to explain the results of the fighting in the Australian Corps area, and his subsequent comment can stand for his view of the whole battle:

In their own assessment therefore, the enemy owed their success mainly to the fog, surprise, the tanks and the effect of the artillery fire. One can only completely agree with this. However, the numerical weakness of the defenders must also be included, as well as the absolute inadequacy of their defences and the almost complete neutralisation of the German artillery.⁸²

On the last page of the book, Bose supplemented this list with an emphatic statement that the disaster of 8 August arose from the physical and psychological inability of most of the Second Army's soldiers to resist the Allied attack. He then drew a straight line from the high command's realisation of this weakness to the decision to seek peace terms and end the war.⁸³ Here, he was telescoping events for dramatic effect. When Ludendorff briefed the Kaiser on 10 August, he was still strongly influenced by the crisis two days before; his emphasis on poor morale in the Second Army as a cause of the serious defeat there led the Kaiser to comment that Germany had reached the limit of its strength and the war must be ended.⁸⁴ But as the situation stabilised, Ludendorff became more confident that the army could hold on. It was only after much hard fighting and faced with an even greater crisis that Germany eventually asked for peace terms in early October.⁸⁵

As a source, *Catastrophe* is valuable for what it tells us about both the historiography and the history of the First World War. It is a representative example of an important and successful component of German historiography on the war, the *Battles of the World War* series. It illustrates the sometimes conflicting aims of the series and how one author, Thilo von Bose, found his way through the resulting dilemmas to write a detailed and readable account. It is also a fitting end to the series, in that Bose produced a credible explanation for an iconic battle which began the process leading to German defeat. He did so while giving maximum credit to the troops who fought the battle, and therefore comfort to the post-war veterans and next of kin who formed much of the book's readership. Records of its sales do not survive, but if it sold the average of 40–50,000 copies, it was a truly popular success.

Given the different aims he had to fulfil, Bose's work was inevitably a compromise: he told the truth as he saw it, but not the whole truth. He

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certainly moved beyond Helmut von Moltke the Elder's dictum that it was a duty of piety and patriotism not to damage the reputation of Germany's heroes.⁸⁶ Indeed, as Gary Sheffield observes in his foreword, Bose showed moral courage in the degree of historical objectivity he was able to achieve. *Catastrophe* is the most detailed account of 8 August 1918 from the German side. By comparison, the much later German official history devoted only 19 pages to the whole battle, including its prologue, and just three to 8 August itself.⁸⁷ In addition, though we may question some of Bose's judgements, he had access to records which were destroyed in the Second World War. Examples include his description of German forces before the battle, and his evidence on the failure to circulate lessons and instructions after the French attack of 18 July. For these reasons, *Catastrophe* has and will always have a unique value.

Dr Tony Cowan

Endnotes

Editor's Introduction

- 1 I am grateful to Dr Markus Pöhlmann for his generous advice on this introduction; to Barbara Taylor for Map A; and also to Major General (Retd) Jonathan Bailey, Dr Jonathan Boff, Ian Brewer, Andy Grainger, Simon Jones, David Pearson, Dr Andrew Richardson and Major General (Retd) David T. Zabecki for their helpful comments.
- 2 David T. Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives: a Case Study in the Operational Level of War*, Routledge, London, 2006; Michael S. Neiberg, *The Second Battle of the Marne*, Indiana University Press, 2008.
- 3 Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: Die militärischen Operationen zu Lande*, Vol. XIV: *Die Kriegführung an der Westfront im Jahre 1918*, E.S. Mittler, Berlin, 1944, pp. 537–38.
- 4 This section draws heavily on two works by Dr Markus Pöhlmann: *Kriegsgeschichte und Geschichtspolitik: Der Erste Weltkrieg: Die amtliche deutsche Militärgeschichtsschreibung 1914–1956*, Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn, 2002, especially pp. 56–57, 102, 142 and 194–216; and “Das große Erleben da draußen”. Die Reihe *Schlachten des Weltkrieges (1921–1930)* in Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener (eds), *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg*, Editions Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, pp. 113–31.
- 5 Arndt von Kirchbach and Esther von Kirchbach (eds), *Pietate et Armis: Erinnerungen aus dem Leben von Arndt v. Kirchbach*, 4 vols, Ebersbach, Göppingen-Jebenhausen, 1985, Vol. II: *1914–1918: Der Erste Weltkrieg*, pp. 182–83. Kirchbach's volume in the series was *Kämpfe in der Champagne (Winter 1914–Herbst 1915) (Der grosse Krieg in Einzeldarstellungen Band 11)*, Gerhard Stalling, Oldenburg, 1919.
- 6 ‘Semi-official’ means that, as described below, the *Reichsarchiv* commissioned and supported the works concerned but did not directly write them.
- 7 Bose, *Catastrophe*, pp. 44, 46.
- 8 Ludwig Gold and Alexander Schwencke, *Die Tragödie von Verdun 1916 (Schlachten des Weltkrieges Bände 13–15)*, 3 vols, Gerhard Stalling, Oldenburg, 1926–1929, Part I: *Die deutsche Offensivschlacht*, Introduction.
- 9 Brigadier General Sir James E. Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium 1918*, Vol. IV: *8th August–26th September. The Franco-British Offensive*, HMSO, London, 1947, pp. 88–92 (hereafter, ‘BOH 1918, IV’).
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. xxi.
- 11 Martin Reymann, unpublished manuscript, ‘Bearbeitung des Werkes “Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918” in dem Reichsarchiv und durch die Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres’, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Freiburg (hereafter, ‘BA/MA’), RH61/20, f. 94.
- 12 *Ibid.*, f. 116.
- 13 Major a.D. Thilo von Bose, *Das Marnedrama 1914 (Schlachten des Weltkrieges Bände 22–25)*, 4 vols, Gerhard Stalling, Oldenburg, 1928, I, title page.
- 14 *Reichsarchiv* department head Hans von Haefen to Mertz von Quirnheim, 20 August 1928, BA/MA, Haefen Nachlass, N35/24.
- 15 Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 221–25 and 264.
- 16 Reymann, ‘Bearbeitung des Werkes “Der Weltkrieg 1914–1918”’, f. 275 and 304–05.
- 17 Pöhlmann, *Kriegsgeschichte*, p. 201.
- 18 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 46.

- 19 Personal details are from Deutsches Adelsarchiv e.V. (ed.), *Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels: Adelige Häuser A*, Vol. VIII, Limburg an der Lahn, C.A. Starke, 1966, p. 139; military details from the author's database of German officers and formations.
- 20 Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt der Bundeswehr (ed.), *Die Generalstäbe in Deutschland 1871-1945: Aufgaben in der Armee und Stellung im Staate*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1962, p. 18.
- 21 A suggestion from Markus Pöhlmann.
- 22 *Das Kaiser Alexander Garde-Grenadier-Regiment Nr.1 im Weltkriege 1914-1918*, Bernhard Sporn, Zeulenroda, 1932; *Flußübergänge im Weltkriege*, E.S. Mittler, Berlin, 1934.
- 23 'Wie war die Wirkung feindlicher Bombenangriffe auf Bahnhöfe?', BA/MA, RH61/296; 'Die feindlichen Luftangriffe auf das Heimatgebiet und das lothringische Industriegebiet in den Jahren 1916-1918', BA/MA, RH61/727.
- 24 Großer Generalstab, *Die Schlachten und Gefechte des Großen Krieges 1914-1918*, Hermann Sack, Berlin, 1919, p. 384.
- 25 For a clear analysis of the battle as a whole, see Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: the Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson 1914-18*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, chapters 28 and 29.
- 26 BOH 1918, IV, p. 162.
- 27 Major a.D. Thilo von Bose, *Deutsche Siege 1918. Das Vordringen der 7. Armee über Ailette, Aisne, Vesle und Ourcq bis zur Marne (27. Mai bis 13. Juni) (Schlachten des Weltkrieges Band 32)*, Gerhard Stalling, Oldenburg, 1929.
- 28 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 294.
- 29 This includes multiple references to the same unit, and over 200 references to French and British units.
- 30 Pöhlmann, 'Die Reihe *Schlachten des Weltkrieges*', p. 121.
- 31 The artist is so far unidentified apart from the initials with which he signed the picture, either 'E.M.' or 'E.M.'
- 32 Beumelburg was the second most prolific *Battles of the World War* author after Bose, who quotes *Sperrfeuer um Deutschland* in *Catastrophe*.
- 33 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 198.
- 34 Major-General Sir Archibald Montgomery, *The Story of the Fourth Army in the Battles of the Hundred Days, August 8th to November 11th, 1918*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1920.
- 35 Pöhlmann, 'Die Reihe *Schlachten des Weltkrieges*', p. 121.
- 36 Mertz von Quirnheim 1924 report to the Historical Commission, in Reymann, 'Bearbeitung des Werkes "Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918"', f. 240.
- 37 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 68.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 430.
- 39 Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres, *Vorschriften für den Stellungskrieg für alle Waffen: Teil 8. Grundsätze für die Führung in der Abwehrschlacht im Stellungskriege. Vom 1. Dezember 1916. Neudruck vom 1. März 1917*, Reichsdruckerei, Berlin, 1916, Section 3.
- 40 OHL Nachrichtenabteilung circular, [no ref.], 20 March 1915, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, München, Abteilung IV, Kriegsarchiv, Infanterie-Divisionen (WK) 4392.
- 41 Bose, *Catastrophe*, pp. 72, 428, 430. Table 1 covers the Allied infantry divisions mentioned in *Catastrophe*; German intelligence did not evaluate the three British cavalry divisions which also took part in the attack. The table is compiled from OHL Abteilung Fremde Heere circulars, 'Mitteilung über die britische Armee Nr. 4. Kampfwert des britischen Heeres', Nr. 4610, 1 January 1918, Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, M33/2 Bü 536; and

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- 'Divisionsliste. Bewertung der französischen Divisionen', Nr. 5660a., 5 September 1917, Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe (hereafter, 'GLAK'), 456 F3/650. Later documents on individual divisions show that these evaluations remained broadly the same throughout 1918.
- 42 For the origins of this system, see Anthony Cowan, *Genius for War? German Operational Command on the Western Front in Early 1917*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, King's College London, 2016, Chapter 8.
 - 43 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 434.
 - 44 Mertz von Quirnheim to Hans von Haeften, 27 August 1928, BA/MA, Haeften Nachlass N35/24.
 - 45 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 424. BOH 1918, IV, p. 162 speciously claims that German casualties in the whole battle were as high as 75,000.
 - 46 'Aufstellung über die Verluste in den drei ersten Tagen der "Abwehrschlacht zwischen Ancre und Oise". August 1918', in unpublished Reichsarchiv research paper, 'Die Abwehrschlacht zwischen Ancre und Oise 8.-12.8.1918. IV. Betrachtungen über die Schlacht; Ergebnisse u. Erfahrungen', BA/MA, Obkircher Nachlass, N2214/6 (hereafter, 'Reichsarchiv, 'Die Abwehrschlacht', IV, 'Betrachtungen' and so on).
 - 47 Unpublished Reichsarchiv research paper, 'Die Entwicklung der Stimmung im Heere im Winter 1916/17', BA/MA, RH61/1655, Section 7.
 - 48 E.g. OHL to Army Group Crown Prince, Ic Nr. 2985 geh.op., 27 April 1917, GLAK, 456 F1/249.
 - 49 Table 2 is compiled from 'Aufstellung über die Verluste in den drei ersten Tagen der "Abwehrschlacht zwischen Ancre und Oise". August 1918'.
 - 50 Kronprinz Rupprecht von Bayern, *Mein Kriegstagebuch* (ed. Eugen von Frauenholz), 3 vols, Deutscher National Verlag, München, 1929, I, p. 113.
 - 51 Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 215–31.
 - 52 Montgomery, *The Story of the Fourth Army*, Appendix C, which, unlike the German figures, covers from 8 August to 11 November 1918.
 - 53 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 426.
 - 54 *Ibid.*, pp. 222, 224, 226, 228, 230.
 - 55 *Ibid.*, p. 278.
 - 56 General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1919, pp. 683–84.
 - 57 Alfred Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution. Die entscheidenden Ereignisse im Grossen Hauptquartier im Herbst 1918*, Verlag für Kulturpolitik, Berlin, 1928, p. 44.
 - 58 Reichsarchiv, 'Die Abwehrschlacht', I, 'Lage vor der Schlacht', BA/MA, Obkircher Nachlass, N2214/3, p. 9 is one example. More details in Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914-1918*, Allen Lane, London, 2014, pp. 532–34.
 - 59 Reichsarchiv, 'Die Abwehrschlacht', I, 'Lage vor der Schlacht', pp. 9–10.
 - 60 Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*, p. 29.
 - 61 Hermann von Kuhl, unpublished manuscript, 'Persönliches Kriegstagebuch des Generals der Inf. a.D. von Kuhl (Nov 15-Nov 18)' in BA/MA, RH61/970, 10 August 1918.
 - 62 On the decay of the German command system, see Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: the British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 8.
 - 63 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 84.

- 64 Reichsarchiv, 'Die Abwehrschlacht', I, 'Lage vor der Schlacht', pp. 13 and 18.
- 65 Ibid., pp. 7–8 and 19.
- 66 Reichsarchiv, 'Die Abwehrschlacht', III, 'Rückblick auf die Führung', BA/MA, Obkircher Nachlass, N2214/5, p. 2.
- 67 Kuhl, 'Kriegstagebuch', 20 September 1918.
- 68 Württemberg representative in the Military Cabinet to Duke Albrecht of Württemberg, 8 September 1918, Archiv des Hauses Württemberg, G331/548.
- 69 The description here focuses on the elements of a division mentioned in *Catastrophe*. Figure A is based on Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War*, Combat Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1981, Figure 2 (p. 17). The most comprehensive modern study of a First World War German division as a combat formation is Christian Stachelbeck, *Militärische Effektivität im Ersten Weltkrieg: Die 11. Bayerische Infanteriedivision 1915 bis 1918*, Schöningh, Paderborn, 2010; the division's order of battle at different dates is on pp. 372–76.
- 70 Hermann Cron, *Geschichte des Deutschen Heeres im Weltkriege 1914-1918*, Siegmund, Berlin, 1937, pp. 117–18, 177 and 180–81.
- 71 Ibid., pp. 149–50.
- 72 Ibid., pp. 159–60 and 163.
- 73 Ibid., pp. 173 and 180–81.
- 74 Ibid., pp. 232–35.
- 75 Ibid., p. 160.
- 76 Ibid., pp. 129–31.
- 77 Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres, *Vorschriften für den Stellungskrieg für alle Waffen. Teil 8: Grundsätze für die Führung der Abwehrschlacht im Stellungskriege. Vom 1. September 1917*, Reichsdruckerei, Berlin, 1917, which updated earlier versions issued in December 1916 and March 1917 (see fn. 39). For a modern account of German defensive doctrine and practice in summer 1918, see Boff, *Winning and Losing*, pp. 165–78.
- 78 Figure B is adapted from G.C. Wynne, *If Germany Attacks. The Battle in Depth in the West*, Faber and Faber, London, 1940, Sketch 22 (p. 311); and from Major Ludwig Bramsch memorandum, 'Vorfeldzonen', 10 October 1917, BA/MA, RH61/924, f. 74. These show the defensive layouts of German infantry regiments in October and November 1917, which were generally the same as in August 1918. The figure is not to scale, and distances are illustrative.
- 79 The Battle Zone was sometimes known as the Major or Main Battle Zone (*Großkampffzone* or *Hauptkampffzone*).
- 80 Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres, *Grundsätze für die Führung der Abwehrschlacht im Stellungskriege*, September 1917, sections 6, 10, 27 and 39–43.
- 81 Ibid., sections 50–57.
- 82 Bose, *Catastrophe*, p. 192.
- 83 Ibid., p. 434.
- 84 Niemann, *Kaiser und Revolution*, pp. 44–45.
- 85 David Stevenson, *With Our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918*, Allen Lane, London, 2011, Chapter 2.
- 86 Dr. habil. Eberhard Kessel, 'Moltke und die Kriegsgeschichte', *Militärwissenschaftliche Rundschau*, 6. Jahrgang 1941, p. 124.
- 87 Reichsarchiv, *Weltkrieg*, XIV, pp. 549–67.