

**JAMES MARSHALL-CORNWALL: Foch as Military Commander.** London, 1972, pp 268.

Marshal Foch will always be remembered along with Joffre, Pétain, Waygand, Castelnau and the other French commanders who on several occasions helped to save their country from catastrophe during the First World War. In this book General Marshall-Cornwall considers the contribution of Foch to France's war effort and to ultimate Allied victory. As befits a volume in the 'Military Commanders' series, the bulk of the account (thirteen chapters out of twenty-one) is devoted to the period of hostilities. The first eight chapters cover Foch's early years and the development of his military thought and philosophy, and proceed to an evaluation of the European political situation in the years before 1914, including the evolution of the Entente Cordiale. Thereafter the account moves to the frontier battle in Lorraine in August 1914, the retreat to the Marne in early September, the Battle of the Marne (6-9 September), the establishment of the Aisne line, and the first battles in Flanders in October and November. It was with the development of deadlock in Flanders that trench warfare began, succeeded in turn by the massive through ineffective offensives in Artois (1915) and on the Somme (1916). As the war proceeded, Foch's ideas on how it should be conducted underwent substantial change. Throughout his peacetime career he firmly believed in the doctrine of the offensive, an attitude which derived in large part from his study of Prussian methods in 1870-71. For many years he sought to inculcate all whom he could influence with the offensive doctrine. Initial experiences in 1914 and 1915, under modern conditions of warfare, did not alter his outlook and on the Marne he caused unnecessary casualties by throwing in troops against overwhelming opposition. But as it became clear that this would be a war of

attrition — for both sides — Foch began to modify his opinion, and by the time of the Somme offensive in 1916 he no longer believed that offensive methods were effective under trench warfare conditions. From that time on he worked on the principle of breaking down the enemy with preliminary attacks and by wearing-down his morale. In January 1918 he issued a directive for the training of the newly-arrived American Army as follows:

We need a new attacking arm in order to master the machine-gun protected by emplacements and barbed wire... The attacking army will be an army of guns, tanks and aircraft, not of infantry and cavalry — the latter will only be used to hold ground captured.

Foch's preparedness to adapt to changed circumstances stood him and the Allied cause in good stead during the second half of the war. 1917 and 1918 brought disasters with the Italian defeat at Caporetto (October 1917), Russia's withdrawal from the war (December 1917) and the launching of the great March 1918 offensive by Germany. Under the shadow of imminent defeat, the Allied Commanders and political leaders for the first time put aside their rivalries and created a single post with the function of co-ordinating operations. The post went to Foch, who promptly forced an elevation of status to Commander-in-Chief. Once this had been done, his plans were implemented and his ideas were brought to bear with novel directness. Eventual Allied victory in the West owed a great deal to the appointment of Foch in a supreme capacity. The author's own feeling is, 'It was indeed fortunate for the Allies that at that particular moment of crisis Foch was available to assume the task. The occasion found the man'.

— R. J. Bouch