

Six of the best First World War reads

While the centenary commemorations of the Somme offensive continue during the coming months, Allan Mallinson examines new books on wider aspects of the Great War

Jutland: The Naval Staff Appreciation, edited by William Schliehauf (Seaforth Publishing)

Jutland: The Unfinished Battle, by Nicholas Jellicoe (Seaforth Publishing)

BOOM: The Life of Viscount Trenchard, by Russell Miller (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

Betrayed Ally: China in the Great War, by Frances Wood and Christopher Armander (Pen & Sword)

Loyal to Empire, by Patrick Crowley (The History Press)

G.H.Q., by Sir Frank Fox (originally published 1922), republished in limited edition by Charles Goodson-Wickes (Beaumont Fox)

Command of the sea was the first requirement of victory, and the centenary commemorations on June 30 this year of the battle which emphatically demonstrated that command, Jutland, passed off reverently but distantly at Scapa Flow in the Orkneys, the home fleets wartime base. The accompanying television analysis of naval strategy was distinctly lightweight, however.

Fortunately Seaforth Publishing has given us two books of substance on Jutland, the only true clash of dreadnoughts in history. It was a controversial battle. Britain had expected another Trafalgar and although the German High Seas Fleet was driven back to its base at Wilhelmshaven, it appeared that the Germans had inflicted more damage on Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's ships than his on Admiral Reinhard Scheer's. The navy carried out a detailed post-mortem, which has remained in effect unpublished until now.

Jutland: The Naval Staff Appreciation, edited by the Canadian naval historian, the late William Schliehauf, and completed by an American colleague, Stephen McLaughlin, sets the record straight in a forensic but compelling read. A more graphic account, addressing the subsequent controversy, not least the unedifying chicanery in which Sir David Beatty, commanding the battlecruiser squadron, sought to enhance his own reputation — quite unnecessarily — at the expense of Jellicoe's, is given in **Jutland: The Unfinished Battle**, by Nicholas Jellicoe, the admiral's grandson. It is closely reasoned, fair-minded and thoroughly readable.

The war in the air led to the greatest advances in technology and practice of any aspect of operations, even the introduction of the tank. In 1914 the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) consisted of about 80 rudimentary unarmed machines,



the following year he was sent to India as commander-in-chief. It was not what he wanted — he had been one of the four original divisional commanders in the BEF of 1914, had then commanded a corps, and lately 1st Army — but his experience and common sense would bring much needed grip and reform in a country that was always something of a powder keg, as well the home base for a great deal of the military effort in the Middle East (and to a lesser extent, France). Crowley provides a valuable picture of the sterling quality of the better sort of infantry general of the Great War, especially once released from the straitjacket of the Western Front: more cob-like than racehorse, certainly, but no donkey.

On which subject, perhaps attention should turn finally to the man charged with the direction of the entire British effort on the Western Front, Sir Douglas Haig — or rather, to his headquarters. Sir Frank Fox's **G.H.Q.**, first published in 1920 and now reissued in a limited edition by his great-grandson, Charles Goodson-Wickes (Beaumont Fox, £25), is an absorbing study of Haig's chaotic HQ at Montreuil-sur-Mer. Fox — a journalist and temporary soldier — paints a vivid picture of the comprehensive complexity of the British Expeditionary Force, with organisational diagrams, statistics and vignettes of day-to-day life. The BEF, or more correctly in the later stages of the war, the British Armies in France, was the largest organisation the country has ever maintained abroad — more than two million men.

Montreuil-sur-Mer began to look as much like a colonial administration as an operational headquarters, with directors of agricultural production (Brigadier-General the Earl of Radnor) and forestry (Brigadier-General Lord Lovat), controllers of labour, of salvage and of canteens, subordinate directors of docks, of inland water transport, of roads, and of light railways. The list goes on, testimony to the industrialisation of the war and the sheer scale of Haig's purview. For these and other reasons, on taking over as C-in-C at the end of 1915 he had moved G.H.Q. back from Saint-Omer to Montreuil, almost on the Channel coast, placing him 70 miles and more behind the front line.

Fox writes: "It was the job of General Headquarters to try to see the war as a whole." In fact, Haig found it difficult to see strategically beyond the Western Front or the tactical reality of the war in the trenches. Fox's fascinating book explains a lot.

Allan Mallinson is the author of *Too Important for the Generals: Losing and Winning the First World War*, published by Penguin Random House, £19.99

admirable primer on the early development of air power.

The war spread worldwide of course, and not just by sea and air. While the fighting in Africa and the Middle East generally receives attention, the contributions of British and French imperial troops, the war in China and the part played by the Chinese in Europe are not. British troops skirmished with German troops on the Chinese mainland and in 1917 China, like the United States, declared war on the Central Powers. An army of Chinese labourers the size of the original British Expeditionary Force (some 140,000) on the Western Front maintained roads and railways, dug reserve trenches and worked in French factories, 10,000 of them dying in the process. Another 200,000 served in Russia, most of them caught up subsequently in the Revolution, of whose individual fate little is known.

Peking's offer of Chinese troops for the Middle East, Africa and even the Western Front was received enthusiastically by the French, who had not the means of shipping them, but unenthusiastically by the British, who had. Then, at the Versailles peace conference in 1919, the Chinese were humiliated by the

"Big Four" (US, Britain, France and Italy) granting Japan the former German colonies in China. In **Betrayed Ally** (Pen & Sword, £19.99) Frances Wood and Christopher Armander tell the story of China in the Great War with clarity and objectivity.

General Sir Charles Monro is not a household name. In his foreword to Patrick Crowley's **Loyal to Empire** (The History Press, £25), Professor Gary Sheffield describes Monro as "a difficult subject for a biographer", because he did not leave a great many personal papers. Monro is difficult also because, in the best sense, he is so wholly unremarkable. In every sense he was "solid", his rise to major-general steady but unspectacular, though as commandant of the school of musketry he had made a notable contribution to the improvement in the army's rifle shooting, which proved so critical in 1914.

If he is remembered for anything it is for Churchill's barbed quip, when Kitchen sent Monro to Gallipoli in October 1915 to assess the situation and he recommended evacuation: "He came, he saw, he capitulated." However, this at least confirmed Monro's solid reputation with the War Office, and in August