

Command in a Coalition War: Reassessing Marshal Ferdinand Foch

*Elizabeth Greenhalgh**

Marshal Ferdinand Foch is remembered, inaccurately, as the unthinking apostle of the offensive, one of the makers of the discredited strategy of the “offensive à outrance” that was responsible for so many French deaths in 1914 and 1915. His acceptance of the German signature on the armistice document presented on behalf of the Entente Allies in 1918 has been overshadowed by postwar conflicts over the peace treaty and then over France’s interwar defense policies. This paper argues that with the archival resources at our disposal it is time to examine what Foch actually *did* in the years between his prewar professorship at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre and the postwar disputes at Versailles.

I

The prewar stereotype of the military leader was influenced by military and diplomatic developments on the island of Corsica during the eighteenth century that resulted in the Genoese selling the sovereignty of the island in 1768 to France. This meant that Carlo Buonaparte’s son would be a Frenchman and not Italian, thus altering the face of Europe. The achievements of France’s greatest of “great captains” thus became a benchmark for future French military leaders. A French family from the southwest corner of France near the Pyrenees saw service with Napoleon Bonaparte, and in 1832 one member of that family, named Napoleon Foch for the general, consul and emperor, married Mlle Sophie Dupré, the daughter of an Austerlitz veteran. Their second surviving son was named Ferdinand. He would become during the Third Republic the second French general, after Joseph Joffre, to be raised to the dignity of marshal of France.

* Elizabeth Greenhalgh is at the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy, Canberra.

Ferdinand Foch was inspired by the achievements of Napoleon Bonaparte, but he also suffered from the comparison, particularly in British eyes. Postwar military writers, such as J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart, were critical. Fuller called Foch a “tactically demented Napoleon”; in Liddell Hart’s biography, there are 22 references to Napoleon in the index, some of the entries running to several pages. France’s pre-war military leaders had so hypnotized themselves by concentrating on Napoleon alone, he claimed, that their doctrine and prewar planning suggested “a state of hypnotic trance.”¹

Napoleon also proved a useful stick with which to beat Foch when success beckoned in 1918. The British commander-in-chief, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, was so exasperated that he confided to his diary: “F. is suffering from a swollen head and thinks himself another Napoleon!”² At Haig’s headquarters, Foch was thought to be “drunk on victory & thinks can do what he likes with the British Army.”³

Foch taught the history of Napoleon’s campaigns when he was Professor of Military History, Strategy and Tactics at the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre in Paris (1895-1900). In 1903 and 1904 he published two collections of the lectures that he gave there.⁴ Read any compilation of military quotations and you will find examples taken from these texts. Some are seeming platitudes: “In tactics, action is the governing rule of war;” “If you wish your opponent to withdraw, beat him;” “The will to conquer: such is the first condition of victory.” Others seem ridiculous in light of what the First World War became: “The laurels of victory are at the point of the enemy bayonets;” “War is in itself only a matter of harmonious proportions between the spiritual and material elements.” Or else, it is the most frequently cited and gung-ho, “My right is driven in; my left is giving ground; the situation is excellent; j’attaque.”⁵ [Ma droite est enfoncée; ma gauche cède; tout va bien, j’attaque.]

Such reductions to mere aphorism of Foch’s thinking are reinforced by Liddell Hart’s biography, whose unflattering comparisons with Napoleon are mentioned above. Yet that 1931 work, entitled *Foch: The Man of Orleans*, remains the standard work in English. There is no archivally-based French study, although a good recent French biography replaces the mainly hagiographic postwar “lives.”⁶ Liddell Hart’s

¹ J.F.C. Fuller, *The Conduct of War 1789-1961: A Study of the Impact of the French, Industrial, and Russian Revolutions on War and its Conduct* (London, 1962), 128; and B.H. Liddell Hart, *Foch: The Man of Orléans* (London, 1931), 62.

² Haig diary, 27 October 1918, WO 256/37, Public Record Office, The National Archives, Kew [hereafter TNA].

³ C. Grant, “Some Notes made at Marshal Foch’s H.Qrs August to November 1918,” p. 19, WO 106/1456, TNA.

⁴ *Des Principes de la guerre* was first published in 1903; second edition in 1906; third edition 1911; postwar, the seventh edition appeared in 1926; and the latest (twenty-first) edition appeared with a long critical commentary (531 pp.) in 1996. *De la conduite de la guerre* was first published in 1904; second edition 1909; on its seventh edition in 1927; and its latest (ninth and revised) edition was published in 2000 in a series of works on the Franco-Prussian War.

⁵ All translations in Peter Tsouras, *Warriors’ Words* (London, 1992), 18, 43, 477, 78, 162. The last quotation exists in various translations and is to be found in all the biographies. The variations reflect the fact that the message was never sent in these terms; only the spirit is correct.

⁶ Jean Autin, *Foch ou le triomphe de la volonté* (Paris, 1987, 1998). There is also a recent brief “profile” in English, based on secondary sources: Michael S. Neiberg,

approach reflected his belief that Britain should keep out of continental Europe and concentrate on an indirect strategy. Hence his title (and emphasis on the power of faith rather than military excellence) and hence his regret that Sir Henry Wilson, as a child, had had a succession of French nannies who taught him to speak their language. Without that skill, Wilson might not have made friends with Foch before the war and so might not have worked to commit the British Army to France.

Although Foch is blamed for his supposed preaching of the offensive, his influence is less than has been assumed. Of all those French officers who reached general officer rank between 1889 and 1914, in other words France's wartime military leaders, only one quarter were graduates of the *Ecole Supérieure de Guerre*.⁷ There were only about 70 officers admitted to the ESG each year during Foch's time as a lecturer; and in 1908-1911, when he returned to the ESG as commandant, the numbers admitted ran between 86 and 91 each year.⁸ Thus the criticism that Foch infected great swathes of the officer corps with foolish ideas cannot be sustained. Besides, a certain colonel Philippe Pétain taught infantry tactics there for a total of eight years—and nobody would accuse *him* of being an apostle of the offensive. It is unfair, therefore, to attribute to Foch's lectures *all* the blame for what went wrong in 1914.

Furthermore, Foch had nothing to do with drawing up the prewar Field Service Regulations that were the official doctrine in 1914. This was the responsibility of General Joseph Joffre who had a much greater influence and "dominated his staff and the French army" between 1911 and December 1916. It was Joffre who was responsible for the statement that the French army, "returning to its traditions, accepts no law in the conduct of operations other than the offensive," as Robert Doughty's new book makes clear.⁹

The research of French army officer and historian Michel Goya brings out a further point that should be mentioned. The French officer corps was not a homogeneous group all holding the same ideals. Active army officers looked down on the reservists; so many officers were too old or too unfit or too incompetent that Joffre had sacked 162 generals or colonels acting as brigadier generals by 31 December 1914.¹⁰ Joffre's new military doctrine was so recent (published only at the end of 1913) that it could not have percolated effectively to all. Goya describes the lack of training camps, the insufficient opportunities to command units in the field, the mistrust of re-

Foch: Supreme Allied Commander in the Great War (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2003).

⁷ Walter S. Barge, Sr., "The Generals of the Republic: The Corporate Personality of High Military Rank in France, 1889-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1982), 119 and note 112. Barge comments (p. 122): "it seems ironical that the most modern part of the military educational structure seems to have had the least effect in the highest levels of command in the French Army."

⁸ Jean Delmas, "L'Ecole Supérieure de Guerre, 1876-1940," *Revue Historique des Armées* 2002/3, table 2 p. 46.

⁹ Robert A. Doughty, *Pyrrhic Victory: French Strategy and Operations in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 26, 17.

¹⁰ See Pierre Rocolle, *L'Hécatombe des généraux* (Paris, 1980), 262; and Michel Goya, *La Chair et l'acier* (Paris, 2005), 178. Casualties included three army commanders; 24 corps commanders; 71 divisional commanders. Of the 162, 44 per cent (71) had attended ESG: Rocolle, *Hécatombe*, 265.

serve troops. He qualifies as a “fossé” the gap between what French army corps were supposed to be able to carry out and what they could do in reality.¹¹

II

It is not only considerations of the prewar that have harmed Foch's reputation. The negative impression left in the postwar English-speaking world was reinforced by Foch's undoubtedly foolish behavior during the peace treaty negotiations. When the Germans agreed to the armistice terms that Foch presented in November 1918, he gave up the planned offensive into Lorraine that would have given the French some bargaining chips at the peace table. Foch claimed that he had no right to shed another drop of blood once the Germans had indicated their willingness to sign. Foch told premier Georges Clemenceau that his task was finished with the Armistice; the rest was up to the politicians. But when it became clear that those politicians were about to trade away occupation of the Rhineland, he became angry at the prospect of losing what he saw as the natural boundary between French and Germans. It is an index of the strain of four years of fighting that Foch would so far forget himself as to meddle in separatist movements and to risk the sack through insubordination. “The treaty is a bad treaty,” he told a French journalist during his return to France in December 1921 after a triumphant tour of the United States.¹² Or, as Winston Churchill recorded him as saying, “it is not peace, but an armistice for twenty years.” In the Foch–Clemenceau dispute about the Rhine as Germany's Western border, American historian J.C. King comes down firmly on the side of Clemenceau: “With Foch's policy France would have had to engage in a suicidal struggle in complete, moral, military, and diplomatic isolation ... fortunately Clemenceau prevailed.”¹³

Clemenceau also prevailed in the memoirs war. (As David Reynolds has shown for Churchill, publication is able to fix the story in ways which do not do justice to history.¹⁴) Foch's conversations with journalist Raymond Recouly were published posthumously as *Le Mémorial de Foch* (1929). They recounted “le drame du traité de paix”—the bitter battle between the Président du Conseil and the Allied commander-in-chief. Foch's criticisms of Clemenceau received a good airing; and Recouly's praise of Foch raised him above Napoleon. Clemenceau's response was his *Grandeurs et misères d'une victoire*, the memoir that he had not intended to write until he saw the

impudent farrago of troopers' tales in which, in the cosy privacy of the barrack-room, the soldier is unconsciously seeking his revenge for conflicts with authority that did not always end in his favour ... since the pub-

¹¹ Goya, *La Chair et l'acier*, 140.

¹² Interview with S. Lauzanne, published in *Le Matin*, December 19, 1921. The *New York Times* of December 22, 1921, reported the attempts to hose down reaction to this interview when Foch reached France: “the Marshal's words and allusions had been incorrectly interpreted and [...] what he had said about M. Clemenceau deserving to be hauled before a high court was in the nature of a joke.”

¹³ J.C. King, *Foch versus Clemenceau: France and German Dismemberment, 1918–1919* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 125.

¹⁴ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2005).

lic could hardly fail to impute to faint-heartedness my failure to reply, I cannot remain speechless. You challenge me. Here I am.¹⁵

Clemenceau's vigorous prose, honed by his many years of journalism, easily beats the pedestrian staff account that formed the basis of Foch's memoirs. Even the French official history fails to do much for Foch's reputation, being very brief on the final year of victory, especially when compared to the lengthy treatment afforded, for example, to 1914 and the Marne. The official historians could not reconcile the versions of the first half of 1918 as amended by Foch and by Pétain, and the text was thrown into a cupboard, not being published until 1931 after Foch's death.¹⁶ So Foch came off badly postwar. Even the more recent historiography downplays Foch's 1918 role. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson write that his appointment to supreme command "did not have the military significance that some commentators have claimed."¹⁷ In 2004 David Stevenson concluded rather lamely:

[Foch] viewed his role as resting on exhortation and consensus building rather than command power ... He had mellowed and wisened ... his staff ... helped co-ordinate Allied strategy more effectively than would have been possible through bilateral arrangements.¹⁸

Foch came off badly in another area too. When the military guarantee to France fell through as the United States Senate refused to ratify the treaty and Lloyd George refused to honor the guarantee without the Americans, and when the German reparations failed, then the feeling grew that the Armistice had been signed too soon. Foch should have fought on and signed in Berlin. This proposition was advanced by those who supported Marshal Pétain in the interwar disputes over defense policy. The Lorraine offensive that was abandoned when the Armistice was signed constituted Pétain's "stratégie des gages," and he resented giving it up. According to French historian Guy Pedroncini, Pétain wept before Foch, trying to persuade him that the Armistice was premature. Pedroncini even goes so far as to imply that 1940 was Foch's fault for not proceeding with the Lorraine offensive.¹⁹

Pétain outlived Foch by many years, of course, and so it was his more defensive-minded interwar doctrine that prevailed. Pétain also fed his legend as the savior of Verdun (with fatal consequences in 1940). It was only Pétain among the marshals of France who attended the inaugural ceremony in 1920 of what would become an

¹⁵ Quotations from the English translation, *Grandeur and Misery of Victory* (London, 1930), 5, 9.

¹⁶ R. Tournès, "L'Histoire officielle de la guerre," *Revue d'histoire de la Guerre Mondiale* 1933/3: 209–21.

¹⁷ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The First World War* (London, 1999), 177. Other historians, especially British ones, have also downplayed Foch's role. A.J.P. Taylor wrote in 1963: "Apart from controlling the reserves Foch had to stand aside and hope for the best." A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London, 1963), 168.

¹⁸ David Stevenson, *Cataclysm: The First World War as Political Tragedy* (New York, 2004), 364.

¹⁹ Guy Pedroncini, *Pétain: le soldat et la gloire 1856–1918* (Paris, 1989), 414–423. Note that this later biography makes this point much more strongly than the original doctoral thesis on which it is based.

annual commemoration of Verdun. Pétain attended almost every ceremony between 1920 and 1939, acting as the “president” of the ceremonies in 1922, 1926, 1932 and 1936.²⁰ The only “memoir” that Pétain ever published was an account of the Battle for Verdun. Gradually the memories of the Allied supreme commander were overlaid by those of the “savior of Verdun.”

So Foch’s reputation has suffered in the disputes with Pétain, with Clemenceau, and over the Rhine frontier. Coupled with a prewar reputation as the unthinking apostle of the “offensive à outrance” with a taste for Napoleonic grand gestures, his star is ready for reassessment.

III

Foch had been in command of XX Corps (based at Nancy in Lorraine) in August 1914. He took part in the fighting in Lorraine and then moved westwards to head the newly created Ninth Army in the centre of the defensive line south of the River Marne, where his troops took a tremendous battering. He experienced both defeat and personal loss in 1914: defeat in the Lorraine fighting and he admitted postwar that he had been defeated on the Marne as well, being saved only by the German decision to withdraw. Also, in 1914, Foch lost his only son and one of his two sons-in-law during the August fighting. He knew the personal cost of the conflict.

On 8 October 1914, Joffre appointed Foch as his “adjoint” (or deputy) to coordinate the Allied forces (Belgian, British and French) in Flanders. It was there that the final German outflanking maneuver around Ypres became the First Battle of Ypres that began on 20 October. The battle was fought bitterly, with Foch urging the hard-pressed troops to hang on (in any case, there was very little room for maneuver in the water-logged terrain) and dealing out reinforcements parsimoniously. Battle conditions led to such great intermingling of nationalities that close liaison was vital. The British Expeditionary Force’s chief liaison officer, Henry Wilson, described to his wife on 2 November the large amount of time that he spent at Foch’s headquarters: “We have got our troops so much mixed up with his that no order can be issued without the other’s approval etc. I think we are going to beat this attack with the aid the French have given us. It has been a stiff business.”²¹

Foch was partly satisfied with the results of the battle. His report to Joffre of 14 November noted that the Allied position was strengthening daily and that the Germans appeared to have given up the idea of taking Ypres. Combined Allied action had resulted in a victory of sorts. Yet it was a “purely negative” tactical result, he concluded, because the enemy had merely been prevented from carrying out his plan.²² (This was not, in fact, an insignificant result.) Haig retained positive memories of First Ypres. He would recall in the dark days of March 1918 that Foch “was a man of great courage and decision as shown during the fighting at Ypres in October and November 1914.”²³

²⁰ See Gérard Canini, “Verdun: Les commémorations de la bataille (1920–1986),” *Revue historique des armées* 164 (September 1986): 97–107. Also Pierre Servent, *Le mythe Pétain: Verdun ou les tranchées de la mémoire* (Paris, 1992).

²¹ C.E. Callwell, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson Bart., G.C.B., D.S.O.: His Life and Diaries*, 2 vols (London, 1927), 1: 186.

²² “Rapport,” November 14, 1914 [written in the form of a letter to Joffre], 1K 129, carton 1, [d] “1914 et ensuite,” Archives de la Guerre, Vincennes [hereafter AG].

²³ Haig diary, 25 March 1918, WO 256/28, TNA.

So, in Flanders, a “suitable” French general was interposed between the British and French commanders-in-chief, thus providing the elements of a model of command. The principal factor was tact. This is how Foch advised General d’Urbal, commanding the French Eighth Army: “They take you as you are. Take them as they are”²⁴—which is sound advice about any sort of relationship. And Foch wrote that he was “reduced to [using] as much diplomacy as command,” because the British and Belgians only did what Foch wanted when it suited them.²⁵ Nonetheless, this was an important skill to learn and one that would be required even more in 1918.

In 1915 and 1916, as commander of France’s Northern Army Group, Foch fought the Artois battles and then on the Somme, once more alongside the British. He heeded the lessons of 1915 when developing his “scientific method” for 1916. But Verdun so reduced French resources for the summer campaign on the Somme that Foch was obliged to fight a battle in which he did not believe—he did not have enough heavy guns, and his experience had proved to him that success was impossible without superiority in heavy guns. He was obliged instead to watch his British allies advancing so slowly, at such enormous cost. To cap it all, he was sacked at year’s end on the specious grounds that his health was not good and that he had not got on well with the British.

In 1917 Foch spent the months between January and May carrying out two tasks: compiling an operational plan in case of a German attack through Switzerland; and discussing with the Italians about how French and British troops might come to their aid in the event of an emergency if Germany joined the Austro–Hungarians in an assault on the Italian front. In May 1917 Foch returned to the centre of things as Chief of the Army General Staff in Paris when General Pétain took over command of the French Army. In October, following the Italian disaster at Caporetto, Foch rushed to Rome and coordinated the Allied response and aid that he had already sketched out. Foch won high praise from the French Ambassador in Rome, who reported to Paris that no-one could have done better than General Foch who had gained a beneficial influence at the Italian HQ.²⁶

As a result of the Caporetto disaster, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George set up the Supreme Allied War Council. The Council decided on 30 January 1918 to create a General Reserve under the control of an “executive war board.” The presidency of this board was given to Foch. In theory, the Executive War Board had considerable power. In consultation with the several Commanders-in-Chief it was to determine all aspects of the composition of a general reserve; where the reserve was to be stationed; where it was to be concentrated; and how it was to be transported. But since both British and French commanders (Haig and Pétain) refused to have anything to do with it, the board recognized at its sixth meeting on 8 March that it “had been unable to form a general reserve.” It was wound up in May.²⁷

²⁴ André Tardieu, *Avec Foch aout - novembre 1914* (Paris, 1939), 127. Tardieu was a mobilized deputy and Foch’s interpreter (later High Commissioner to the United States).

²⁵ Foch to Mme Louis Bienvenüe [his aunt], December 26, 1914, 1K 129, carton 2, AG.

²⁶ Barrère (Rome) to Barthou (MAE), 10 November 1917, Paul Cambon papers, PA-AP 44, vol. 68, ff 59–60, Archives diplomatiques, Paris.

²⁷ “Historical Record of the Supreme War Council,” CAB 25/127, 20–9, TNA. The minutes of the Executive War Board’s eight meetings are in CAB 25/119.

Haig understood the potential of the post of permanent president of the Executive War Board, remarking that Foch “had been made generalissimo but that this would not affect matters.”²⁸ Indeed Haig made quite sure of this by his arrangements with Pétain for mutual assistance in the case of enemy attack. The British members of the Supreme War Council recognized that the “impasse over the General Reserve could only be solved by creating a generalissimo agreeable to governments and CinCs,” a solution surrounded by “almost insuperable difficulties.”²⁹ Those insuperable difficulties were swept aside on 21 March 1918 in the first of the German Spring offensives. A few days later (on 26 March) Foch was given the task of coordinating the Allied armies (extended on 3 April to the “strategic direction of military operations”).

His energetic responses to the German Spring offensives that threatened to separate the French and British Armies made him the obvious (and, indeed, only) person to undertake the duties of the newly created position. If he did not play a large role in stopping that first German offensive, he took the weight from the shoulders of the two commanders, Pétain and Haig, and he collected reserves as best he could. He used reserves only when absolutely necessary, and he argued long and loud with the British and the Americans to get more troops into France. Consequently he was ready in July when the opportunity for a counter-offensive presented itself. Pétain would have delayed the proposed operation, but Foch countermanded Pétain’s orders and seized the moment. Thus began the series of coordinated attacks that led to the railway carriage in the clearing at Rethondes and the German request for an armistice.

This short outline of Foch’s wartime career shows what a varied and “useful” career he had had—a good preparation for his new and unprecedented role: coordination in 1914; army group commander in 1915 and 1916, sandwiched between British and French armies; administrative and planning roles in 1917 and early 1918; and experience of the *limits* of command both as president of the Executive War Board in 1918 and, earlier in 1916, as the sacked commander of the Northern Group of Armies. He was confident that he was the right man for the job when German guns finally forced unity of command on the Western Front. That confidence communicated itself to the politicians who gathered on 26 March in the town hall at Doullens and gave Foch supreme command.

The intensive efforts that Haig made to massage the record about his part in Foch’s appointment are an indicator of the very real importance that Haig gave to Foch’s role.³⁰ Unlike later historians who dismiss unity of command as mere window-dressing that amounted to very little, Haig knew that without French help, invigorated by an energetic and positive leader, the British Expeditionary Force would have been driven into the sea. Haig’s exaggerated claim to have played an important part in securing Foch’s appointment is an index of his great need. While he had *not* been prepared to deal with Foch as leader of the Executive War Board by supplying British

²⁸ Rawlinson diary, February 6, 1918, RWLN 1/9, Sir Henry Rawlinson papers, Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge. Rawlinson was the British permanent military representative on the Supreme War Council.

²⁹ Rawlinson’s secret note, “The Executive War Board, Versailles,” initialed March 9, 1918, RWLN 1/10, *ibid.*

³⁰ See my “Myth and Memory: Sir Douglas Haig and the Imposition of Allied Unified Command in March 1918,” *Journal of Military History* 68 (July 2004): 771–820.

divisions for a General Reserve, he *was* prepared to accept Foch as allied Commander-in-Chief. He commented, “he felt sure the new arrangement would work, as he would have to do with ‘a man and not a committee.’”³¹

Foch’s methods were indeed those of a man and not a committee. He held but one single meeting of all his national commanders, on 24 July, just after the first of the Allied counter-offensives that continued until the Armistice, when he urged that the time had now come to pass to the offensive.³² This is not to say that he did not discuss matters with his Allies. He saw Haig more than sixty times during the period after 26 March—that is, on average, every three or four days.³³ As he had discovered in 1914 in Flanders, he could not issue orders but had to persuade. After the war he downplayed the role of unity of command many times. It was “infantile,” he said, to believe that “a few lines on a piece of paper handed over to a man could change from one day to the next the course of events.” Unity of command cannot be imposed by decree, particularly on commanders of a different nationality; it can only be imposed by the “man charged with exercising that command, using his influence over those with whom he must collaborate.” He got the Allied armies moving, he claimed, “not by severity but by confidence and persuasion.”³⁴ The image he used in his published memoirs was a musical one. After a run-in with Haig and the British government in June over moving reserves away from Haig’s front, he likened the difficulty to a great orchestra needing a certain amount of time to tune its instruments. When that orchestra was made up of elements coming from different places, then a tuning fork was needed.³⁵ Foch was that tuning fork.

That insistence on the personal touch to persuade rather than to order was reflected in Foch’s refusal to have a large staff. Unlike Eisenhower in the Second War, Foch had no allied foreigners on his small staff, and he relied on his Chief of Staff General Maxime Weygand and a handful of heads of bureaux based in a quiet château (nicknamed the “monastery”). His liaison officers all gave proof of the affection which Foch inspired. His American liaison officer, Colonel T. Bentley Mott, translated his memoirs into English; his principal British liaison officer, General J.P. Du-Cane, acted as a conduit for interpreting ideas and produced a very useful postwar memoir on Foch that he had privately printed; another British liaison officer, General Charles Grant, wrote some very sympathetic articles as obituaries in 1929. Weygand defended his chief in print most loyally.

Finally, Foch was not only an energetic “can-do” commander, but also a thinker. His notebooks reveal a mind grappling with the problems of fighting a modern industrial war, and his frequent letters to his wife (who recorded many of his comments in her diary) provide further evidence for the evolution of his ideas. We certainly have the archival evidence to underpin a study of the war’s supreme commander, such as Guy Pedroncini produced for Pétain.

³¹ “Memorandum by Lord Milner on his Visit to France, including the Conference at Doullens, March 26, 1918,” CAB 28/3, TNA.

³² “Mémoire lu à la Réunion des Commandants en Chef des Armées Alliées,” 24 July 1918. They all met again in October to discuss armistice terms.

³³ Maxime Weygand, *Mémoires: idéal vécu* (Paris, 1953), 489.

³⁴ Raymond Recouly, *Le Mémorial de Foch: mes entretiens avec le maréchal* (Paris, 1929), 13, 15, 18, 19, 20.

³⁵ Maréchal Foch, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la guerre de 1914–1918*, 2 vols (Paris, 1931), 2: 104 (describing the meeting with Haig, Wilson and Milner on June 7).

IV

Hence, Foch's qualities of leadership cannot be denied. If leaders are those who are able to persuade others to follow their exhortations, then Foch's claim to fame rests on his success between 1914 and 1918 as a *leader*.

Paradoxically, even in such a dehumanizing conflict as the First World War, personality was important: Foch's insistence on "moral qualities" (for which he has been ridiculed) was not too far off the mark. It is the moral qualities of energetic leadership that Foch exhibited—together with the tact and diplomacy that I have outlined—that should be remembered, not his prewar writings or his postwar foolishness.

Winston Churchill, who was Foch's equal in energy and self-confidence, wrote of Foch in 1937:

The magnitude of the events which Marshal Foch directed is of course beyond compare in the annals of war [this is pre-Second World War]. But it will be found, I believe, as time passes, that the valour of his spirit and the shrewd sagacity of his judgment were of the highest order. Fortune lighted his crest. His peculiar gift of obstinate combativeness which had gained his laurels at the Marne and the Yser, when the only hope was not to despair, led him to serious disasters in the offensive battles of Artois and the Somme. In 1914 he saved the day by refusing to recognize defeat. In 1915 and in 1916 he broke his teeth upon the Impossible. But 1918 was created for him. In the first phase of the Ludendorff offensive no one knew so well as he how to use every ounce of strength to defend every inch of ground, and so to hoard reserves. In the second phase, when the initiative passed to the Allies, they had for the first time in the war not only the superior numbers, but the cannon, the shells, the tanks and aeroplanes—in short the apparatus indispensable for a successful advance. Then it was that the characteristic genius of Foch attained its full and decisive expression, and with cries of '*Allez à la bataille,*' '*Tout le monde à la bataille,*' he heaved the mighty wave of allied armies, French, British, American and Belgian, forward in vast, united, irresistible attack.³⁶

That verb "heaved" sums up the essential Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the energetic and self-confident allied general-in-chief.

³⁶ Winston Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (London: Readers Union Ltd and Thornton Butterworth, 2nd ed. 1939), 194.