

## THE CHAIN OF COMMAND ON THE WESTERN FRONT ON 30th JUNE 1916

### The War Cabinet.

The Cabinet Room, 10 Downing Street, London, SW1.

About 15 members. Chaired by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Herbert Asquith, MP.

### The General Staff.

The War Office, Whitehall, SW1.

Chief of the Imperial General Staff: General Sir William Robertson.

This was not strictly speaking a level of command: the General Staff existed to advise the War Cabinet and implement its decisions, and to oversee all aspects of the Army's administration.

### The British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

GHQ at Montreuil, Northern France.

Commander in Chief: General Sir Douglas Haig.

Manpower strength on 30 June 1916: 1,293,580.

### The Army.

First Army: La Bassée sector.

Second Army: Ypres Salient.

Third Army: Arras Front.

Fourth Army: Somme Front.

Reserve Army: Behind Fourth Army. (The Reserve Army became the Fifth Army).

Each army was commanded by a full General, except for the Reserve Army where Hubert Gough was still a Lieutenant-General.

Army strengths varied between 250,000 and 500,000 depending on operational circumstances.

The only operational units at army level were those which required semi-permanent locations such as RFC Wings, Royal Engineer Tunnelling Companies and medical units such as Casualty Clearing Stations.

All lower levels in this table regularly moved from one army to another, again depending on operational circumstances.

### The Corps.

There were three to five 'Army Corps' in each Army (separate from specialist units such as the Royal Army Medical Corps, Corps of Royal Engineers, Royal Flying Corps etc.)

The Corps commander was a Lieutenant General.

The manpower strength of a Corps was between 75,000 and 140,000, depending upon how many Divisions were required for operations.

Corps (plural) could be moved from one army to another.

As in Armies, there were some semi-permanent units, such as heavy artillery.

### The Division.

There were between three and five Divisions per Corps, unless in GHQ Reserve.

The Divisional Commander was a Major-General.

The manpower strength of a Division was about 20,000, though they were seldom at full strength on the Western Front after their first time in action.

The Division was the largest formation that was completely self-contained and, except in extreme circumstances, its units always served together.

Complete Divisions were frequently transferred from one Corps to another.

### The Brigade.

There were three Infantry Brigades per Division.  
The Brigade Commander was a Brigadier-General.  
The manpower strength of a Brigade was about 4,500.

### The Battalion.

There were four Battalions per Infantry Brigade.  
The Battalion Commander was a Lieutenant-Colonel.  
The manpower strength of a Battalion was nominally 1,036.

### The Company.

There were four Companies per Battalion.  
The Company Commander was a Captain.  
The manpower strength of a Company was about 230, but many were detached to Battalion Signals, Transport etc. The 'Trench' strength of a Company was about 190.

### The Platoon.

There were four Platoons per Company.  
The Platoon Commander was a Lieutenant or Second Lieutenant.  
The manpower strength of a Platoon was about 45.

### The Section.

There were four Sections per Platoon.  
The Section Commander was a Corporal or Lance Corporal.  
The manpower strength of a Section was about 11 men, split into Lewis-gun and Rifle sub-sections.

### Additional notes:

Officers were not said to be 'In Charge' of units, they either 'Commanded' or were 'In Command'.

There was no field formation of a full Regiment, except in the Cavalry. Even when four Battalions of an Infantry Regiment served in the same Brigade or Division, they were to all intents and purposes completely separate units and operated under the same Divisional Command structure as would Battalions from different Regiments.

There was no place in the field command structure for a full Colonel: field promotions were usually directly from Lieutenant-Colonel to Brigadier-General, leapfrogging the rank of full Colonel.

General Sir Douglas Haig was the Commander-in-Chief (C.I.C.)

The Commander of an Army, Corps, Division or Brigade was a General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.)

The Commander of a Battalion was the Commanding Officer (C.O.)

The Commander of a Company or Platoon was the Officer Commanding (O.C.)

