

WWI tactics, "Terminus est"

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John Bishop — 30 Nov 1998, 11:46

If you read more about WWI tactics, the naive view that stupid generals threw away young lives becomes less tenable--though some generals were stupid, or at least careless about the many young lives cut short.

The front was (as someone else said here) like a thin skin; many of the offensives did pierce it. But no "breakthrough" happened, as the follow-up over no-mans-land was too difficult. In other words, it was easy (if expensive) to take control of the enemy's front line; it was possible (if very expensive) to take control of the next few lines back; it turned out to be pretty much impossible to convert that success into a war of movement, as the successful troops were too hard to support, and they generally got beaten back to the old line.

So what generals experienced was a set of near-successes, each needing only just a little bit more effort to be the big success. That's an experience that makes you eager for another try, with a bit more effort.

That said, I'll concur that there were cultural expectations and class snobbery and mental inertia; many more died than needed to, and the elites of the time deserved to lose respect and legitimacy.

On another matter, the mixed armies are not odd; the classic world expected that each people would provide men armed after the manner of their people: slingers from the Balerics, hoplites from Hellas, etc. An imperial system would find such recruitment easier than running a load of draftees through a homogenizing military education.

Finally, I think we can assume that "Terminus est" is not really in Latin, but in some other language which Wolfe represents by Latin due to its social function. I suspect the "ancient" language of the future is meant to be English, and the sword bears the the legend "This End Up".

-John Bishop