



Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army`s Art of Attack, 1916-18

Paddy Griffith

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Historians have portrayed British participation in the Great War as a series of tragic debacles, with lines of men mown down by machine guns, untried new military technology and incompetent generals who threw their troops into improvised and unsuccessful attacks. In this book Paddy Griffith, a renowned military historian, examines the evolution of British infantry tactics during the war and challenges this interpretation, showing that while the British army's plans and technologies persistently failed during the improvised first half of the war, the army gradually improved its technique, technology and, eventually, its self-assurance. By the time of its successful sustained offensive in the autumn of 1918, he argues, the British army was demonstrating a battlefield skill and mobility that would rarely be surpassed even during the Second World War. Evaluating the great gap that exists between theory and practice, between textbook and bullet-swept mudfield, Griffith argues that many battles were carefully planned to exploit advanced tactics and to avoid casualties; but that the breakthrough was simply impossible under the conditions of the time. By the end of 1916 the British were already masters of 'storm-troop tactics' and, in several important respects, further ahead than the Germans would be even in 1918. In fields such as the timing and orchestration of all-arms assaults, predicted artillery fire, 'commando-style' trench raiding, the use of light machine guns or the barrage fire of heavy machine guns, the British led the world. Although British generals were not military geniuses, the book maintains they should at least be credited with having effectively invented much of the twentieth century's art of war.

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