

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Northampton		
Unit of Assessment: 28 - History		
Title of case study: Highlighting British military intelligence within the First World War centenaries		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Jim Beach	Senior Lecturer	2012 to Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 to 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact

Dissemination of **Jim Beach's** ground-breaking research on British military intelligence during the First World War raised historical awareness amongst the public and within government. The research influenced cultural producers in the creation of content for the BBC. This impacted on four key audiences:

1. members of the public engaging with the conflict's centenary;
2. heritage organisations curating intelligence-related content;
3. drama and documentary makers undertaking First World War projects; and
4. GCHQ, which was marking its own centenary.

Overall, Beach's research modified underlying understanding and thereby changed the ways in which impacted audiences presented history, heritage, and performance.

2. Underpinning research

Beach researches the history of British military intelligence in the First World War. His archival work in Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United States has underpinned a variety of outputs, including *Haig's Intelligence*, a monograph that examined intelligence provision on the Western Front [3.1].

Haig's Intelligence showed how, particularly during the attritional battles, intelligence about their enemy affected British military decision-making. Reception of this monograph, and the novelty of its content, is summed up by reviews in the leading academic history journals: 'The word 'seminal' is all too often applied to book, but in the case of *Haig's Intelligence* it is thoroughly deserved [...] **Beach's** meticulous scholarship opens an interesting line of thought about the relationship between the commander and intelligence staffs [...] it is a very important book indeed.' (*War in History*); 'The definitive work on the [British Expeditionary Force's] intelligence system [...] Beach's book sets a new standard for the history of battlefield intelligence studies' (*Twentieth Century British History*). Overall, the monograph provided a much-needed explanation of the intelligence dimension within Britain's war on the Western Front.

Since 2014, **Beach** has continued to research and publish in this area: two book chapters on British Tank Corps intelligence [3.2] and British intelligence and the Battle of Verdun [3.3]; an edited primary source, the diary of a corporal working in signals intelligence [3.4]; and two co-

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authored, refereed articles on signals intelligence in the trenches [3.5, 3.6]. The last three focused on signals intelligence and reinforced the underlying substance of the historical engagement with GCHQ. More specifically, the articles were important in two ways. The first [3.5] subjected the frontline intelligence system to a thorough re-examination and concluded that the impact of frontline signals intelligence had been under-estimated. While the other [3.6] broke new ground in conducting a prosopographical analysis of a substantive sample of First World War intelligence personnel. This research highlighted issues surrounding language skills, nationality, and security concerns.

Building upon the 'Personnel' chapter of *Haig's Intelligence* [3.1], **Beach** led a co-production research project, *Secret Soldiers: The Intelligence Corps in the First World War*. Undertaken in collaboration with the Military Intelligence Museum, in 2017 the project was funded for one year (GBP20,000) by the Arts & Humanities Research Council through the Everyday Lives in War First World War engagement centre. **Beach** and a small team of volunteer researchers harnessed their investigative expertise in pursuit of the records of an estimated 2,000 soldiers who served in that corps during the conflict.

3. References to the research

[3.1] **Beach, J.** (2013). *Haig's Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army, 1916-1918*. (Cambridge Military Histories). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139600521>

[3.2] **Beach, J.** (2015). Scouting for brigands: British Tank Corps Reconnaissance and Intelligence, 1916-1918. In A. Searle (Ed.), *Genesis, Employment, Aftermath: First World War Tanks and the New Warfare, 1900-1945* (pp. 108-135). (Modern military history). Helion & Company. <https://www.helion.co.uk/military-history-books/genesis-employment-aftermath-first-world-war-tanks-and-the-new-warfare-1900-1945.php>

[3.3] **Beach, J.** (2018). British Intelligence and the Battle of Verdun. In S. Jones (Ed.), *At All Costs: The British Army on the Western Front, 1916* (pp. 93-116). Helion. <https://www.helion.co.uk/new-and-forthcoming-titles/at-all-costs-the-british-army-on-the-western-front-1916.html>

[3.4] Schürhoff, V., **Beach, J.**, & **Beach, J.** (Ed.) (2015). *The Diary of Corporal Vince Schürhoff, 1914-1918*. History Press.

[3.5] **Beach, J.**, & Bruce, J. (2019). British Signals Intelligence in the Trenches, 1915-1918: Part 1, Listening Sets. *Journal of Intelligence History*, 19(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16161262.2019.1659580>

[3.6] **Beach, J.**, & Bruce, J. (2019). British Signals Intelligence in the Trenches, 1915-1918: Part 2, Interpreter Operators. *Journal of Intelligence History*, 19(1), 24-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16161262.2019.1659581>

4. Details of the impact

The impact of **Beach's** research was mediated through four main channels; the Western Front Association, the Military Intelligence Museum, Radio 4's *Tommies* series, and GCHQ. The detail of this, and additional effects through subsidiary channels, are outlined below.

Engaging the public through the Western Front Association.

Since 2014, **Beach** has given fifteen talks to Western Front Association (WFA) branches, with audience sizes ranging from twenty to fifty. He also spoke to their conferences in 2016 and 2018 to average audiences of 150. Furthermore, in September 2020, **Beach** and Bruce spoke to a synchronous audience of 450 in a [WFA talk online](#). Uploaded to YouTube on 29 October, the talk was viewed another 450 times within four days, as of 24 March 2021 viewed 1080 times.

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The articles [3.5, 3.6] were publicised to this audience and 300 views of them occurred across the following fortnight. The impact of all these talks upon attendees' awareness of intelligence matters has perhaps been summed up best by the Chairman of the Leicestershire and Rutland branch. He wrote that the 'popular' and 'well attended' talks brought a subject that had 'not received the attention it merits [...] to a wide audience and thereby challenging, and indeed enhancing, their current understanding of [the First World War]' [5.1]. Another, more specific example, was recorded online by an attendee at a July 2016 talk. He stated that the presentation provided 'context for a lot of the decisions that Haig took, for example: prolonging the [Battle of the Somme] into November [1916], when ground conditions were so poor, is seen in a new light when you realise that intelligence reports at the end of October had started to indicate that German morale had finally started to weaken' [5.2].

Beach's monograph *Haig's Intelligence* [3.1] further impacted on members of the public with an interest in the First World War. For example, in 2014 the administrator of the Great War Forum publicly posted the comment: 'have now just finished the book. It added a great deal to my understanding [...] I feel driven back to [earlier histories] to read them again in the context provided by this excellent book' [5.2]. Another user 'endorse[d] the review', stating that he had 'heard Jim deliver a lecture recently at Aldershot' and that the book 'added a great deal to [his] understanding' of military intelligence during the war [5.2].

Heritage enhancement through the Military Intelligence Museum and Bletchley Park

In November 2013, the Military Intelligence Museum appointed **Beach** as their First World War historical advisor, a role he fulfilled until 2019. In their testimonial regarding his work, the museum stated that **Beach** 'influenced and enhanced the overall development of the Military Intelligence Museum in a major and significant way' [5.3]. His 'advice and counsel' were instrumental in helping 'to improve the relevance and standing of the Museum in not just the military intelligence community, but to the wider public [5.3]. Overall, **Beach's** research and advice led to the museum 'being seen more widely as a source on First World War Military Intelligence in particular and also military intelligence historical knowledge in general' and helped them better understand how to satisfy the general public [5.3].

As historical advisor, **Beach** provided advice, fact-checking, and contextual research for museum curation, acquisition and outreach. He created a catalogue 'Guide to the First World War Sources in the Museum', which 'has now become the authoritative document on the Museum's holdings of information on this period' and is 'proving to be an invaluable contribution to academics, military historians, and the general public' who visit the collection [5.3]. He also helped the museum to respond to enquiries from members of the public, as well as 'from such diverse sources as the BBC (for their Remembrance Sunday coverage), Australia, the Army Football Union and the Intelligence Corps itself to support their commemoration events' [5.3]. Additionally, **Beach** provided the 'concept and content' for a new First World War interactive display in the museum. This was 'of a particular value to the Museum and the Intelligence Corps as it helped to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the raising of the original Intelligence Corps' [5.3].

Beach led the Secret Soldiers co-production research project in collaboration with museum volunteers. The museum testified that the project 'highlighted the work of the Museum to not only researchers but members of the general public' [5.3]. The project's initial findings were shared at a workshop in December 2017. The audience of forty attendees included retired intelligence practitioners, heritage professionals, and members of the public. Feedback collected included:

- an attendee with a pre-existing broad interest in the conflict said it had 'clarified there was a role played by intelligence' in the war;
- a retired member of the Intelligence Corps reported that it had 'reveal[ed] theatres and activities not previously known by me';

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- an attendee who had previously studied contemporary intelligence studies noted that, before the workshop, they 'did not understand just how instrumental [the First World War] was in kicking off the modern intelligence age';
- an attendee with little prior exposure to the conflict's history reported that it had 'definitely improved their knowledge [5.4].

Like the WFA audiences, their engagement changed their perception of British military intelligence during the war.

In addition to his work with the Military Intelligence Museum, in 2016 **Beach** was invited by Bletchley Park to act as an advisor during an enhancement of their 'Road to Bletchley Park' displays, a permanent exhibition that explains First World War signals intelligence. Drawing upon material from his monograph, **Beach** provided content, curation advice, and fact-checking. In particular, he signposted the curators towards unique images and key documents that he had found during research for *Haig's Intelligence* [3.1].

Influencing cultural content within broadcasting

Beach was employed as a historical advisor for three BBC drama series (Crimson Field (2014), Homefront (2016) and Tommies (2014-2018) He provided intelligence-related script critiques and re-write suggestions for the BBC1 Sunday evening television series *Crimson Field* (2014) [5.5], and written and oral writers' briefings for series six of *Home Front* on Radio 4 (2016) [5.6]. **Beach's** research also had particular impact upon the long-running Radio 4 drama series *Tommies* (2014-2018), [5.7] which featured core characters engaged in signals and intelligence work. The series creator confirmed the influence of **Beach's** research on the storylines: in 2016, on a blog chronicling the series' production, he acknowledged the impact of *Haig's Intelligence* [3.2]; in 2018, he confirmed this in an email exchange with **Beach** in which he expressed the 'huge debt I owe you for the guidance given by your books and articles' [5.7]. He went on to explain:

it's hard to estimate how valuable your contribution has been actually. Take an episode like 18th November 1916 – I would never have thought to base it around sound ranging. My whole current notion for March 1918 – that our particular characters are overly focussed on [named German generals] – comes straight from you. The list is endless [5.7].

Beach subsequently provided plot advice for the series finale (November 2018) and the blog again noted the influence of his research on those scripts [3.4, 5.7]. According to the series creator and producer, the BBC estimated a regular audience for the series' episodes at close to 1,000,000 [5.7].

Changing public and internal perceptions of GCHQ's history

Beach wrote three short historical pieces for the GCHQ website. The first (September 2017) was written in collaboration with the Military Intelligence Museum archivist and Bruce and was based on a group of women codebreakers. The second (March 2018) was about the signals intelligence corporal featured in the edited diary [3.3] and was published on the centenary of his actions that led to the award of a Military Medal. The third (July 2019) highlighted a key finding from one of the signals intelligence articles [3.5] in relation to the Battle of the Somme. According to GCHQ's Historian, the pieces 'attracted a large number of hits in the months immediately following their publication' [5.6]. He also stated that the articles enabled GCHQ 'both to deepen people's understanding by adding meticulously researched facts to their top-level received wisdom and to make a wider public aware that there was a [signals intelligence] story about the Western Front' [5.8].

Additionally, the articles had impact on GCHQ training and recruitment:

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- The first and second articles ‘were starting points for a programme of education inside GCHQ which was directed at establishing that GCHQ staff (at least) should all be aware of the richness of GCHQ’s pre-Bletchley Park origins’ [5.8].
- The first article, which highlighted the ‘Hush WAACs’, a group of women codebreakers, ‘was used by colleagues at recruitment events aimed at attracting women and BAME candidates into technological careers at GCHQ’ [5.8].

The GCHQ Historian noted how the articles ‘affected how we portrayed GCHQ during our centenary year in 2019’, both internally with staff, and externally with the public [5.8].

Overall, the impact of Beach’s research has been multi-dimensional. It was conveyed to members of the public through his direct engagement work through the Western Front Association. A wider audience was also affected through his contribution to broadcasting, whereby a significant cultural output (*Tommies*) was deeply influenced by his outputs. And, most significantly, his work shaped the ways in which a major national intelligence agency engaged with its centenary.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] WFA Leicestershire branch letter.

[5.2] Great War Forum. “Haig’s Intelligence: GHQ and the German Army 1916 -1918.” Accessed September 29, 2020. <https://www.greatwarforum.org/topic/208154-haigs-intelligence-ghq-and-the-german-army-1916-1918/>.

[5.3] Military Intelligence Museum letter.

[5.4] Secret Soldiers workshop evaluation data.

[5.5] The Crimson Field, 21:00 06/04/2014, BBC1 London, 60 mins.
<https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/06DDDBDA?bcast=108803954>

[5.6] GCHQ Historian letter.

[5.7] Comments from *Tommies* producer.

[5.8] GCHQ websites:

- gchq.gov.uk/information/hush-waacs
- gchq.gov.uk/information/signals-intelligence-under-fire
- gchq.gov.uk/information/communications-security-in-1916-the-la-boisselle-find