



Army

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The soldiers' newspaper

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Spr Curtis McGrath on the podium after winning gold in the KL2 200m canoe sprint at the Rio Paralympics. Photo courtesy Sport the Library / Jeff Crow

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Artillery with purpose

Coordinating artillery firepower was key to success during the Great War, Sgt Dave Morley reports.

THE evolution of Royal Artillery tactics and employment through the Great War was outlined in depth at the fourth Firepower: Lessons from the Great War history seminar series held at ADFA on August 31.

The presentation by Maj Trevor Watson analysed the momentous changes to the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF) artillery tactics, command and control, and structure during the Great War from lessons leading up to and during the major battles of 1916.

Maj Watson says military organisations must be agile in their ability to learn and adapt to maintain an advantage over their adversary.

"Without adaptive capacity, military organisations fall prey to their adaptive adversaries who devise, coordinate and implement new, effective strategies in pursuit of operational success," he says.

"WWI provided opportunities for the Entente Powers (UK, France and Russia) and the Central Powers (Austria-Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey) to learn and adapt during the Western Front campaign.

"The Entente demonstrated this through the BEF's development of

artillery command and control as a result of failure to coordinate firepower during the Battle of the Somme."

Maj Watson says this was demonstrated through a shift in the use of artillery, as well as the maturation of an artillery command and control structure that centralised firepower achieving coordination of fire and manoeuvre.

"In 1914, the BEF considered the role of artillery to be solely in support of the infantry," he says.

"The *Artillery Notes in Field Service Regulations* stated artillery's task was to prepare 'the way for the infantry and to support and protect the infantry throughout its progress'."

At the Battle of the Somme, the infantry expected the artillery to destroy German defences so they could occupy them. Artillery support significantly advanced as the BEF learnt and adapted artillery usage, identifying it was more effective to conduct neutralisation.

Maj Watson says this was applied practically with a creeping barrage, as well as engaging targets deeper on the battlefield.

"In essence, the artillery role remained in support of infantry, but it was used more effectively through neutralisation rather than destruction,"



Members of 6 Bty, Australian Field Artillery, occupy a position in a wheat field near Villers-Bretonneux on August 8, 1918. Photo courtesy AWM

he says. "As evidenced by the changing use of artillery at the Battle of the Somme, the BEF recognised the need for centralisation and coordination of artillery at the corps and army level, demonstrating learning and adaptation of strategies."

Maj Watson says despite the limited view that more artillery wins

battles, success cannot be attributed solely to more ammunition and guns.

"Rather, it is evident their success was attributable to the BEF's ability to centralise, coordinate and employ artillery for a unified purpose," he said.

"Without such centralisation and coordination, the issues faced at the Battle of Somme that were attributed

FREE SEMINARS

THIS was the fourth of 11 seminars in the Firepower: Lessons from the Great War series, hosted by the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company.

The next seminar is at ADFA on December 1, and will include presentations on shell-shock and PTSD, and on the development of 'Archie', the old nickname for anti-aircraft artillery. The seminars are free and open to the public, and all Army personnel are encouraged to attend.

For more information on the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company go to www.firepowerseminarseries.com.au

to poor use of artillery and variable successes would continue, but simply on a larger scale.

"It was through identifying and learning from their failures the BEF was able to successfully identify new roles and strategies for artillery to better use their resources on the Western front in 1918.

"Many of these developments are relevant today, in how demonstrated learning and adaptation forms the very foundation and hallmarks of successful military organisations."

Maj Watson began RMC in 2003 and upon graduation in 2004 was posted to A Fd Bty, 4 Fd Regt. He is currently attending Australian Command and Staff College in Canberra.

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