

Does haig deserve the nickname butcher of the somme

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There are various reasons why Haig deserves his nickname 'Butcher of the Somme', on the first day of the Somme he led '57, 000 men to slaughter'. Haig was given the responsibility of these men, and therefore their lives. Due to his poor organisation 'no one quite knew what they were doing', he left his men sitting targets for the German machine gunners.

Haig's lack of organisation also meant the British didn't reach the front line in time. Due to the 'slow pace of the British' the Germans were able to emerge from their dugouts and set up their machine guns. This now meant the British were up against a highly defensive German army who were prepared for the British arrival; whereas if Haig advanced his troops with the French specialists, their numbers would've overwhelmed the German army, therefore wouldn't have suffered 57, 000 casualties on day 1.

Haig was also guilty of leaving his army malnourished; he took soldiers straight off the train from the coast, gave them nothing to eat and expected them to attack. His quote was 'A hungry soldier fights better'. This tactic clearly had no advantage or effect on the British army; all it did was damage morale and left them with little energy to fight a heavily equipped German army.

In 1916 the first tanks were used in the war and Haig was keen to use them. Even though he was advised by an expert that they did not have enough to launch an attack, Haig still put forward an attack. 'The British had 49 tanks but only 15 took part in the battle', This was because they either got stuck or broke down before they even got to the battle field; this links in with Haig's

poor organisation skills to control his army, leading weak tanks and their crews into slaughter.

However, despite all of Haig's faults in the war, many things were over exaggerated about him. In 1915 the British and French leaders decided to launch a joint offensive on the Germans. If this was to take place they would have to do it on the French/British sectors, this being the Somme. Haig pointed out that this was a bad place to launch an offensive on the Germans, but his comment was overlooked.

Some also may argue that he led men into slaughter, but before the attack he pointed out that the army he was given was a volunteer army, filled with inexperienced and minimally trained men, and that they were not ready to encounter an army as heavily equipped as the Germans. But again, his comment overlooked.

Then in early 1916, the Germans launched an offensive on Verdun. The French troops in Verdun were getting overruled by the Germans, so French participants from the Somme were ordered to go over and fight in Verdun. Haig then noticed that the battle of the Somme wouldn't now give a decisive result and had a request put forward to call it off. But since it was necessary to relieve French pressure at Verdun, he was ordered to continue on with the Somme.

People also do not take into account that defensive and offensive technology was different then. There were far better ways of killing people than preventing troops from being killed. This meant Haig was doing what every

other army was doing; he just came up against a better equipped army, whereas he was left with one with little to no experience.

In conclusion perhaps Haig does not deserve his nickname ' Butcher of the Somme'; he understood and recognised flaws in the British/French offensive, but when pointed out, little notice was taken. Over the war the French and Germans had more mobilised men killed than the British; so if Haig was a ' Butcher', what nicknames would have been given to the French and German generals?