

# Is it fair to criticise general haig as a donkey who led lions

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Is it fair to criticize General Haig as a donkey who led lions? Douglas Haig was a General during World War One. There is much controversy over General Haig's reputation due to the high level of losses during his battles in command. Many people agree with David Lloyd George's attitude of Haig and many other British Generals of World War One. They are said to be "donkeys", incompetents who sent the "lions" (the soldier) into futile bloody battles. Many popular books, films and television programs also agree with David Lloyd George.

The sad truth, however, was between two evenly matched opponents, that there was no other way of solving the conflict. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that that Douglas Haig was a poor General, or a donkey. The evidence is that General Haig, along with many other Generals, were used to handling small-scale forces in colonial warfare. They had a lot to learn about this type of warfare, for which they were very unprepared. Furthermore, communications were poor, and armies were too big and dispersed to be commanded by a General himself.

Haig should have, however, made sure that all his soldiers knew what the plan was before they set off, and Haig should have planned how he was going to communicate with them. Moreover, if the infantry and artillery did manage to hit the enemy Haig lacked a fast moving force to use the situation effectively. Additionally, General Haig's 1914 tactics had yet to catch up with the range and effectiveness of modern artillery and the latest machine guns. Likewise, Haig learnt the wrong lesson from previous attacks, instead of persisting with short times of extreme amounts of fire.

Haig used heavier guns and longer bombardments that just churned up the ground and eliminated the element of surprise. Haig was not able to accept information passed on to him, a great example of this was when it was suggested that much of the barbed wire on the Somme was not cut, he admitted that himself, but he still continued with the attack. Another example of this was during Aube Ridge, when he also knew the wire was not cut in 1915, but he insisted the attack should continue and 1, 000 men lost their lives for no gain.

Not to mention, Haig's ordering of successive attacks on the Somme during October and November 1916, with the ground reduced to a boggy area that gave way underfoot, achieved nothing but a degradation of morale and manpower. In 1917 other Generals were telling Haig that it was pointless to continue. No matter, Haig continued to hammer away for a further three months. Haig consistently told his soldiers that German morale and manpower were on the verge of collapse and that just one more push could break the enemy.

To Haig's defense it can be said that his army played a main part in defeating the German forces in the crucial battles of 1918. Furthermore, the Somme and Passchendaele, which are battles that have been known as unnecessary murder of British troops, had sensible strategy, not least in the amount of damage they inflicted on the Germans. Moreover, Haig was not given a professional force; he was given a citizen army, which had less training and preparation for the battles. Additionally, the French tended to

decide what to do during the battles, even though Haig was an independent commander.

Besides, Germany had been working on placing high tech weapons onto the battlefield (quick-firing artillery and machine guns) and also low-tech defenses (trenches and barbed wire), which made Haig's job considerably harder. At the battle of Loos, Sir John French wanted personal control of reserves. He therefore didn't allow Haig (commander on the spot) to have them until it was too late, and the attack consequently failed causing thousands of casualties. Not to mention, at the battle of Neuve Chappelle, poor communications hampered the ability of Haig and the British Commander Sir John French, to send in reserves where they were needed.

Also, when General Haig wanted to attack in Flanders, around Ypres, where the British army was closer to supplies and also to strategic targets just behind the German's lines (coastal ports and coal mines). However, for the sake of unity in the alliance with France, the politicians at the time decided that the attack must come on the River Somme simply because this was where the British and French armies met in the trench line. The blame for the slaughter cannot, therefore, be placed entirely on Douglas Haig himself, simply because it was not his plan to attack on the River Somme.

In addition, the German commanders would be fighting on ground they knew well, they also had the advantage of telephone cable which was deeply buried and therefore harder to cut. The German generals would therefore be able receive information far more quickly than their British counterparts. In conclusion, I think it is fair to criticize General Haig as a donkey who led

lions. This is justifiable because Haig was often unprepared for the battle where he was responsible for thousands of men.

Communication was a big problem for Haig; he did not insure that his soldiers were able to communicate messages during battle, which meant that soldiers were left confused, not understanding what their next plan of action was. Furthermore, General Haig's had not been able to catch up with modern artillery and machine guns, which meant his battle tactics were often old fashioned and ineffective. Moreover, Haig was not able to accept intelligence that was passed on to him which meant he made drastic decisions, which would lead unsuspecting men to their deaths.