

How important were
haig's tactics in
bringing an end to
ww1 essay



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Field Marshall Douglass Haig was appointed Commanding Chief on the Western Front on December 15th.

He was born in Edinburgh 1861 and was educated at Clifton Boarding School and Brasenose College, Oxford. In 1833, Haig entered Sandhurst Military Academy, where he failed a competitive entrance exam for officer training at Staff College. He also failed the medical due to colour blindness. However, he still entered this college through the influence of the Prince of Wales and two years later, he fought with the cavalry regiment in Egypt. In 1899, he fought in South Africa against the Boers and in 1903; he was appointed Inspector General of cavalry in India.

Haig believed that World War 1 would be a war of attrition, which means it is a war of numbers. Haig was wealthy upper class and was taught never to shrink from an attack, but always to keep on wearing the enemy down and then to send in the cavalry followed by the infantry. He wore the enemy down with a bombardment of mines and shells. This was his tactic and he seldom changed it, this was his very repetitive tactic. Haig was not very good at oral communication so his orders or intentions were not often made clear.

Haig became the British commander in chief of Western Front in 1915. When Haig took control of the army, he was forty miles away from the front line so he had no idea of what he was sending his men into, and people had to be sent to tell Haig the situation. However, by the time the people got there the situation had changed. In addition, the generals were feeding Haig false information that was way too positive to try to impress him.

Therefore, Haig was always acting on false information. Haig was not used to fighting on such a huge scale in such terrible conditions. He was used to warm conditions in South Africa and not nearly as many men. Haig was used to dealing with small well-trained armies as he was a cavalry officer in Africa, but now he was in charge of millions of badly trained conscripts and the conditions were much different in Europe than they were in Africa.

So Haig really did not have any experience in the situation he had been given. So why was he put in charge of the allied army on the Western Front? It is definitely not because he rose through the army because he had never been in the army, but more because of his friends. He was a good friend of the King of England and he had friends in the war cabinet. Nowadays Haig has two reputations. One as a hero, because he came back from the war alive and triumphant. The other is a butcher, because if you look at the statistics of his battles, many Allies died.

He made volunteers walk slowly over 'no man's land' towards the enemy. They were just mowed down by a machine gun, but Haig still made them walk. His battle plans are seen as torture. Haig believed that he was an instrument of God, and he felt God picked him to lead the British army.

He also thought it was an honour to die for your country. Maybe this is why he made the volunteers walk. It was okay for Haig to be in favour of dying for your country because he was safe forty miles away from the frontline. Haig felt that the volunteers were not well trained enough so he made them walk across 'no man's land'.

The general carrying out Haig's orders should have stopped the men walking but thought it was not his authority. Haig had not ever visited the frontline so he could not ever know how bad it was out there. Haig's objectives were always too big. Instead of targeting a concentrated part of the German's line for the bombardment, he would target all of the German line but he did not have the time, men or ammo to deal with such an attack. Haig was a very religious man and was a lot more comfortable with death than most of his men may have been. Haig believed there would be casualties no matter what the tactics so no alternatives were looked at.

Haig's first battle was the ' Battle of the Somme'. He planned a major offensive there to relieve the French army at Verdun. He did this because the French army were not mobilised or ready to deal with the Germans attacking, so they would lose a large army of men easily. In addition, the French asked for help from the British army so they would not be happy if they were not given help.

This is why the Somme was chosen as a battleground, not as a strategic ground but for political reasons, to draw the Germans from Verdun. In addition, it was also picked so the French and British could fight together. Haig's objectives were to capture the high grounds, to relieve the French in Verdun, to inflict heavy losses on the Germans to wear them down and to show that the Germans were not invincible on the Western Front, which it looked like at the time. The German plan, as worked out by Erich von Falkenhayn, chief of the general staff of the German army, was to attack the French fortress at Verdun in great strength in an effort to weaken the French irretrievably by causing the maximum possible number of casualties.

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The Allied plan for 1916, as laid out by commanders in chief, Marshal Joffre of the French army and General Sir Douglas Haig of the British, was to attempt to break through the German lines in the west by a massive offensive during the summer in the region of the River Somme. The Germans opened the Battle of Verdun, on February 21. Because of the severe losses in the battle, the French were able to contribute to the Allied offensive on the Somme only 16 divisions of the 40 originally planned; the offensive, which began on July 1 and continued until the middle of November, consequently was largely in the hands of the British. They succeeded in winning about 125 sq miles of territory, but the drive did not bring about a breakthrough. The Battle of the Somme marked the earliest use of the modern tank, deployed by the British on September 15 in an attack near Courcelette. From October to December the French staged a counter-attack at Verdun and succeeded in recapturing Forts Douaumont and Vaux (November 2), restoring the situation that had prevailed before February.

In August, Hindenburg replaced Falkenhayn as German chief of staff with General Erich Ludendorff. Lloyd George gave Haig all the men and ammunition he needed. Lloyd George could not deny Haig the men or ammunition because he was friends with the King, who had influence over Lloyd George. He could not even make Haig change his tactics.

Lloyd George was in a difficult position because he did not want Haig to have the men but had no choice, but Lloyd George had an overview of the whole war and was more accountable for people as he had to commit men elsewhere. Lloyd George also thought that success would come by attacking German Allies from the Balkans (Eastern Front). Haig was ready to use his <https://assignbuster.com/how-important-were-haigs-tactics-in-bringing-an-end-to-ww1-essay/>

bombard, cavalry and infantry tactics and set up the guns for the bombardment. He had pictured a classic cavalry breakthrough. German scout planes saw these guns being set up and knew Haig's repetitive tactics so the Germans knew what was coming and they prepared for it. They moved back in secret out of the range of the guns and dug trenches that were twelve foot deep ready for the inevitable bombardment.

At 7am, two mines exploded to signal the beginning of the attack. The allied bombardment lasted almost a week (five days) but had little effect. Haig believed that the bombardment had done its job and ordered an attack on 1st July 1916. Despite the large number of casualties, the attack was not called off.

The British soldiers in the Somme were mainly volunteers with very little training so they were told to walk across 'no mans land'. They were not allowed to run across 'no mans land' land because they would lose the shape of the attack. They were also attacking uphill at a concealed enemy because the Germans had the high ground and through barbed wire. They also had heavy equipment. Twenty thousand allied troops died on the first day and there were forty thousand casualties.

The bombardment had not even destroyed the barbed wire let alone the machine guns or German soldiers. Lloyd George was concerned about the losses at the Somme but Haig was determined to carry on the attack. Haig thought the Germans were being worn down and one last push would equal victory. This was, however, not the case.

Haig thought that the Germans were near to collapse so why change the tactics. In September, Haig sent out fifty tanks into battle. However, some tanks got stuck in the mud and twenty-nine broke down before they reached the battlefield. Therefore, the new technology of the tank was a big failure. However, there were a few successes, the Allies advanced a mile and many experienced German generals died. In addition, the British army, despite heavy losses, gained valuable experience and became a more effective fighting force.

The casualties at the end of the Somme were horrific, six hundred and twenty thousand allied troops died. However, four hundred and fifty thousand German troops died which was a slight plus to all the allied casualties, and some of those were some of Germany's best and most experienced soldiers. In the end, six miles had been gained by the Allies. The new technology (tank) had been used, so it could have been improved for the next battle because it did not work in the Somme.

A new technique had been used in the Somme, the creeping barrage and artillery ambush. This proves to be useful in the future. In addition, the French held on to Verdun, which was important. On the downside, the British military was criticised publicly for the first time. This was not good for morale at home or on the front.

In Britain, the Somme was seen as a failure but is now seen as a turning point in WW1. Haig's objectives were at least achieved. He gained the high ground, inflicted heavy losses on the Germans and relieved the French at Verdun. After the 'battle of the Somme', Lloyd George tried to limit Haig's

power by putting British forces on the Western Front in control of a French general. However, this did not work because the French general tried something different and it did not work so Haig took over in charge of the Western Front and planned his next huge offensive.

In 1917, the Allies made two large-scale attempts to break the German lines on the western front. The first Allied attempt took place near Arras between April 9 and May 21. While it was being planned by the British and the French high commands, the Germans withdrew from their original line along the Aisne to a new position, previously prepared somewhat to the north, and known as the Hindenburg line, against which the Allies directed their attack. Their offensive included the Third Battle of Arras, in which Canadian troops captured the heavily fortified and stubbornly defended Vimy Ridge, and the British forces made an advance of 6 km (4 mi); and a battle on the Aisne, and one in the Champagne district.

A preliminary battle at Messines set the stage for the main attacks (July 31-November 10) at Ypres, the so-called Third Battle of Ypres or Passchendaele campaign. Desperate fighting, in which each side suffered approximately 250, 000 casualties, did not result in a breakthrough. Haig's aims were to capture the high ground and to secure channel ports at Ostende and Zbrugge. Lloyd George kept on delaying Haig the go ahead to attack because he did not think that the British public could cope with another massive loss and because the French were not ready to help, so the good whether went and the rains came.

This made fighting conditions almost impossible to cope with. Thousands of men drowned in thick seas of mud. Ypres is below sea level so the water levels just got higher and higher. Lloyd George could have stopped the attack all together but that option was impossible because of Haig's friendships with the King and other people in the war cabinet.

Finally, Lloyd George could not delay Haig any more he had to give him the go ahead due to the pressure from the King. Haig's men were fighting in the position of a salient. This meant that they could be attacked on three sides. Haig was not discouraged by the casualties at the Somme. He believed that the Somme was as a good attack had occurred in the wrong place.

Haig saw Passchendaele as the last chance to win the war before the Americans came over. He believed that Passchendaele was the place where the war could be won even though he had not inspected the frontline. Haig's plan was almost the same to the Somme; it was the old bombardmentcavalryinfantry. Most of the soldiers at Passchendaele were conscripts, so were not enthusiastic about fighting, neither were they well trained. In fact, they were very badly trained.

Ypres was strategically much more important then anything else that happened in the war because if the Germans got control of it they would gain controls the channel ports Ostende and Zebrugge. When in control of these ports the Germans could easily stop the supplies getting through to the Allies and possibly invade England. The third battle of Ypres was precipitated by a massive British offensive directed against enemy

installations, and designed to break through to the Belgian coast. In its initial, phase the operation succeeded brilliantly.

On June 7, 1917, British forces took the strategically important village of Messines, the heights of which commanded miles of German-occupied territory. The second phase of the offensive (July 31-November 10) proved disastrous, however. Prolonged rainfall and heavy Allied bombardment had transformed the battlefield into a swamp, and the Germans, operating from concrete pillboxes, took a heavy toll of Allied troops with mustard gas and machine-gun fire. After months of bitter fighting in deep mud, Canadian infantrymen captured the ruined village of Passchendaele. At this point, the Allied command halted the offensive.

Allied troops had pushed the German lines back only 8 km (5 mi); each side suffered over 250, 000 casualties. The ground in and around Ypres is heavy clay. The rains came in 1917 and the water did not drained away. The land was also churned up by the bombardment. The bombardment lasted two weeks and four million shells were used.

People were dying in the quagmire of a battlefield left by the bombardment. The attack of the cavalry and infantry began on the 31st July. On the 7th of November, the Allies took the village of Passchendaele. Even though they had the high ground, they were now in an even more of a pronounced salient. Passchendaele was then recaptured by the Germans in 1918. Haig kept on getting positive reports so he did not call of the attack even though the awful conditions were killing men.

However, the British troops learned a lot and the bombardment did wear the Germans and their resources down. In addition, there were German casualties after the bombardment.