

# Why is the battle of the somme regarded as a great military tragedy essay sample



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The battle of the Somme started on July 1st 1916 and took place in the Somme area of France. The objective of the Battle of the Somme was to create a war of attrition. This meant the continuous bombing of the German trenches for seven days. The British army thought this would break the back of the German army and lead to a WW1 victory for Britain and the Allies. For many people, the Battle of the Somme was the battle that symbolised the horrors of warfare in World War One, this one battle had a marked effect on overall casualty figures and seemed to epitomise the futility of trench warfare.

A military tragedy is caused by events during war such as loss of territory, failure of weapons and other unsuccessful events, which affect the army's performance. However, a human tragedy involves procedures such as loss of lives, loss of family and friends and personal suffering. The Battle of the Somme was the result of both of these. I believe that the Battle of the Somme is regarded as such a great military tragedy because so much unhappiness was caused due to the amount of the strategy that went wrong.

The fact that the tragedy was partly caused by delayed bombing, failed tanks and inexperienced soldiers highlights the fact that it is regarded as such a great military tragedy. For many the Battle of the Somme is regarded as a great military tragedy. This is for many reasons, but in my eyes the biggest reason for this is the thousands of soldiers lost. In total the British army lost 419,654 soldiers, which is a daily loss of around 2,943 men. Overall, the first day of the Somme was a great failure.

The British army suffered a total loss of 57,470, overall this meant there were 19,240 troops dead and 35,493 wounded, and this was an astounding blow for the British armed forces. Even after this disastrous first day General Haig still followed the same battle plan for another 4 months. On the other hand you have to see the thousands of deaths, as General Haig would have, all those killed on the first day were volunteers. This is extremely sad if you look at it with a humanity aspect about it but Haig had done this purposely.

Haig was using the volunteers to kill the German professional army troops; this meant he could keep the British professional army until later on in the war. The true inexperience of the volunteers did backfire on General Haig as so many lost their lives, the deaths of the soldiers enraged families as Haig had used them as a sacrifice almost so he didn't lose any of his professionals. The fact that the French army withdrew from the battle because the Germans invaded Verdun meant Haig had to make the decision whether to postpone the battle until a later date.

Haig thought about this but then he realised that if the Germans beat the French at Verdun, France would be out of the war, which we now know would lead to Britain being defeated in WW1. Haig went ahead with the battle; this meant this once joint attack on the Germans was now being fought by half the troops that we had prepared to have. This meant even more volunteers were needed, which meant there were a lot more inexperienced troops on the battlefield.

There was an upside to going ahead without France; it meant that half of the German troops were still fighting in Verdun which took a little bit of

pressure of the ill experienced British troops. The next reason why so many people consider the battle of the Somme a great military tragedy is the, pals battalions recruitment scheme. The pals battalions recruitment scheme was an idea the military had to increase volunteer numbers. The military thought going into the battle of the Somme with all your " pals" would increase moral in all the regiments.

This could not have been any further from the reality of what it really did. The fact that friends fought side by side made the Somme that bit more horrific. Soldiers saw their best friends and relatives killed in front of them. This heavily decreased moral, soldiers were sent into a state of shock because of what they had seen. The fact that these men were ill trained and had no battlefield experience meant they were being sent for slaughter. In order to understand the true extent of the causes of the pals' battalion's regiments, you need to know how they greatly affected small communities.

For instance Leeds and Accrington were almost completely wiped of their male population. This was the ultimate downside to the pals' regiments; people virtually lost everyone they knew in their community. On the other hand " pals battalion" were a great idea and they worked in the best possible way to begin with. This was once more one of Haig's plans to recruit more volunteers to avoid the British professional army being killed. The failure of the tank also had a profound effect on the battle of the Somme being considered as a tragedy.

Tanks were first used at the Battle of Flers-Courcelette on 15th September, two months after the start of the Somme. Reliable tanks would have been

able; to be used at the Somme if it had started at the planned time; however the battle of the Somme went ahead before Haig had planned. The early start to the battle meant, Haig could not use the tanks he wanted to, or as many as he needed. Therefore the British troops had to struggle with just 49 bad quality tanks. Not only were they slow, travelling at just two mph, they were very unreliable and often broke down or got stuck in mud.

This meant that many didn't even make it to the starting line and could not attack; this would have been a huge disappointment as tanks were a major breakthrough in machine warfare. The tanks also failed because they were a new invention and they were still being developed properly. Commanders did not know how to use them properly; therefore soldiers had not been trained to use them to their best effect. Since the users of the tanks were inexperienced, attacks launched on the Germans were ineffective.

However could it have been the lack of experience that affected the potential of the tank. The army that fought at the battle of the Somme was made up of volunteers from across the country. Due to the huge wipe out of the original British regular army at the start of the war, Britain was desperate to get as many men as they could to help carry on fighting, despite most men having no fighting experience at all. The Lord Kitchener's New Army had formed in August 1914, this appealed to lots of young men, who had had been caught up in the charade surrounding of the war and signed up willingly.

This is the most tragic thing, as these men naively put their lives in the hands of inexperienced commanders. I believe this is upsetting as these were ordinary men, putting their lives on hold to help their country and yet

they lost their lives in such a dreadful way. On the other hand, I believe that one of the biggest disadvantages in the Battle of the Somme was the fact that the preparations were so awful and not a lot of effort was put into these important plans. British trenches were extremely poorly built, compared to the German's high class and very successful trenches.

The Germans had gained land, which they wanted to hold onto; therefore they created high quality trenches, which would survive shell attacks and bombs. These trenches were dug deep into the underlying chalk and lined with concrete and steel girders. The Germans lay low in these safe and comfortable trenches while the British bombarded the German front line with shells. " The Germans had far stronger trench positions than the British. The German troops and weapons were therefore able to survive artillery attacks and emerge relatively unharmed. "

Foolishly, the British believed these bombs had destroyed German trenches and killed most of the Germans. Haig confidently said, " There will not be a rat alive in the German trenches once were done". How wrong he was! The artillery bombardment not only failed to achieve its intended result, despite lasting for seven days, but even warned the Germans that an attack was on the way. The barbed wire was not cut and poor weather prevented accurate fire against the German artillery. Although the German trenches were damaged, the soldiers survived, and manned their positions as soon as the bombardment ceased.

The slowly advancing British soldiers were cut down in a hail of machine gun and artillery fire, which meant we suffered tremendous British casualties.

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Another huge factor when thinking, why is the battle of the Somme regarded as a great military disaster is the artillery used during the battle. Most of the weapons used by the British military failed during battle. 1, 300, 000 shells were used against the Germans however a third of these failed to explode because they were so poorly made. This was because the scale of the battle had never been seen before and the production of shells did not meet the high demand for them.

This resulted in poor quality shells that often didn't even explode. The German trenches were surrounded by barbed wire; the aim of the endless shelling of the German front line was to cut the barbed wire so that the troops could get to the trenches. The fact that the shells had been so poorly made meant the only thing they did to the barbed wire was make it more tangled up. When the British troops went over onto no-mans land, and there was only one hole in the barbed wire, as inexperienced soldiers they all rushed to the one hole.

A dramatic quote by Corporal WH Shaw really puts the horrific murders that went on during the battle into perspective. Our artillery hadn't made any impact on those barbed wire entanglements. The result was we never got anywhere near the Germans. Our lads were mown down. They were just simply slaughtered. " I think this quote really puts the battle into perspective and add to the fact that it is a tragedy because these careless mistakes, like not putting a shell together properly resulted in an enormous amount of deaths and grave losses for the British army.

To conclude, I believe the reason why the battle of the Somme is regarded, as a great military tragedy is the inexperience of the British army. I truly believe this is the main reason because of the events of the first day. This is because the fact that the troops were inexperienced the commanders were worried that their anxious troops would panic and run during the attack.

Therefore they were ordered to walk across no mans land in formations to prevent a huge rush of movement. However the soldiers did not make it far.

Despite their neat formations, they were sprayed with bullets and killed there and then. For me this is the most tragic aspect of the battle of the Somme. However tragic this is, General Haig did not mind sending these volunteers onto no-mans land for instant death, as long as it meant that the professional British army could be used later on in the war. In his mind they were helping his plan, to break the back of the German army. His battle plan was somewhat questionable but when truly reflection on the outcome of the battle, his tactics worked.

To see the battle how general Haig would have looked at it you have to see it in a military prospective. Haig would have seen his best soldiers healthy and ready to fight for their country when desperately needed, but till that time he could use volunteers. When the battle is looked at in this way it could possibly be regarded as a great military victory as we did break the backs of the Germans and all the volunteers who lost their lives helped to do it.