

How far does source
a prove that haig did
not care about the
lives of his men?



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Source A is a piece of text written by Haig just before the battle of the Somme (July 1916 to Nov 1916), It explains that in Haig's opinion the nation has to accept the losses of warfare. He believes that however well an army is trained and led they will have to bear sacrifices. This is true but not to the extent of the Somme where the allies alone lost a massive 620, 000 men.

Haig wrote this extract a month before the first attack suggesting that he knew there was going to be a large amount casualties. This also implies that he hadn't made much of an effort to change the tactics and save the lives of men but lazily chose to prepare the nation of heavy losses. In this extract, a stubborn side of Haig has been unleashed with his mind concentrating only on the victory of the battle, no matter what the costs. For example Haig states " a nation must be taught to bear losses" and " no of skill will enable amount of victories to be won, without the sacrifice of men's lives" giving us the impression that his determination for victory would stop at nothing.

Before arriving at a conclusion to this question, we must consider Haig's background as well as his current position. Sir Douglas Haig had had a long military career fighting in many battles and wars including the Boer War where he had served in the Cavalry. During his 40-year career he had lost many comrades and it is probable that certain toughness will grow inside him and he will learn to forget about the sadness of death. We must also remember that Haig is the General of the Allied Forces, he will want to be portrayed as a tough man ready to take tough decisions. We also know Haig is a religious man. Would a religious man send a man to his death without caring?

In the end I think 'care' is too strong a word. From the evidence above I conclude that Haig sent men to their deaths, because he personally and honestly believed himself to be doing the right thing to succeed in victory. Haig did care, but he was an old fashion general using old fashion method to succeed in a modern war.

Study Sources B & C:

Which one of these sources do you trust more?

Sources B and C are both brief extracts from accounts of the battle of the Somme. Haig wrote source B on the day before and during the first attack. He states " the men are in splendid spirits" and we wonder how men could be in such " splendid spirits" when they are living lives in a trench, probably suffering from trench foot and feeling homesick. This makes us wonder if Haig has actually visited the men in the front line, because he will find that the " spirits" of his troops are not as " splendid" as he described. Also when Haig states " the barbed wire has never been cut so well" we know that from Private George Coppard (Source C) account that the barbed wire was one of the main reasons for such a high casualty list on the first day, if anything the wire as a result of the bombardment, was " in a worse tangle than before".

Haig's statements are hugely contradicted by Coppard whose attitude towards the Generals " who told them that the artillery fire would pound such wire to pieces" suggests to us that the morale of the men was not as high as Haig had expected. The phrase also tells us that the wire was not cut to allow troops the break through to the German line. This is enough for us to

question the reliability of Source B. However, if Source B is unreliable, the <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-does-source-a-prove-that-haig-did-not-care-about-the-lives-of-his-men/>

question must then be asked why would a top British General make such statements. The reasons could be many, amongst which one could include that Haig could have been poorly informed, for political reasons, or simply to keep morale up both at home and on the front.

There are also many reasons why Source B is not accurate; amongst the most important evidence are the many eyewitness accounts and the simple fact that the British Army suffered more than half million casualties throughout the battle.

It could be argued that Coppard's interview is the experience of one man through out the 15-mile line of the Somme. However, whereas Haig would gain credibility and keep his job by lying, it is unlikely that Coppard would want to tarnish the memories of his late comrades by lying about the real incidents of the Somme. Factually, the evidence supports Coppard's case. The facts tell us that there were over 55, 000 casualties on the first day. Haig claims it was a successful attack" whereas Coppard describes the " hundreds of dead". The evidence supports Coppard when he claims that the wire was not completely cut whereas Haig states, " the wire has never been cut so well".

Coppard's purpose in doing the interview was probably to reveal the truth and horrors of war and possibly to make sure the mistakes of war are never repeated. Haig's purpose in writing Source B was probably political and to maintain his position. So I conclude that Source C is more reliable as it relates to the proven facts.

Study Sources D & E:

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These two sources are not about Haig and the battle of the Somme. How far do you agree that they have no use for the historian studying Haig and the battle of the Somme?

Sources D and E are both made to amuse the audience. Source D is a comical TV series of life in a trench. However, Source E is a piece of antiwar propaganda and even though it has been made to amuse, it shares the same point of view as the Director of 'Blackadder' (Source D) about Field Marshall Haig and his drinks cabinet.

I think a historian studying Haig and the Somme would find Sources D and E of considerable use. They both show popular ideas of Haig, one at the time of the event and the other 60 years later. As a television series, Source D would present views that the majority of the people agree with in order to boost it's ratings. This suggests that the majority of people agree that Haig was a poor leader. The series 'Blackadder goes Forth' shows both side of war; life in the frontline trenches and then in the General's headquarters. This will give a historian an insight to the conditions of the trenches and that of the headquarters.

However, Source D was made 60 years after the war so the director must have made it using sources such as E and other possibly accounts.

Source E also shows how men were kitted out and how poorly training would have prepared them for the reality of the war they were about to fight. This is useful as it shows how much thought they gave to the training and equipping of his troops.

I think both sources are relevant to a historian studying Haig as they show the view shared by many people, which is always important. Source E also tells us that the whole of the nation did not support the war propaganda and it gives a historian an insight to Britain during 1914-1918.

Study Sources F, G & H:

Do Sources G and H prove that F is wrong?

Source F is an extract from a recent book called " British Butchers and Bunglers of World War". The tone of the title is derogatory, particularly towards Haig. The book centres on the popular view, that Haig was a bungling old general. The book, like many written, is based on opinion rather than on fact. Whilst the book probably contains statistical evidence, the success or failure Haig's battle strategy is to an extent based on opinion. The writer has not taken into consideration that WW1 was the first type of war to be fought in trenches and with machine guns. I think it's unfair to blame Haig (who had been trained as a cavalry officer) for not having developed a successful strategy. The author has also forgotten to mention had Haig not reacted at the Somme, the French would have been taken at Verdun and the German army would have overwhelmed the British.

Source G is an extract from the " German Official History of the First World War" which surprisingly contradicts Source F. Unlike many other sources, this extract compliments the British for their victory. Source G is telling us that the victors of the Somme were given a great morale boost for the future. It also meant that the Germans had lost all of their experienced soldiers, which weakened the German front line. It seems as though the Germans are <https://assignbuster.com/how-far-does-source-a-prove-that-haig-did-not-care-about-the-lives-of-his-men/>

praising Haig, unlike Source F. However, this source may also be questioned given that at the time of writing the Germans were paying massive reparations to the allied forces so they might have felt if they could keep in good terms with the allies, they may be able to clear some of the debt. However this is unlikely.

Source H was written by a British general 57 years after the battle of the Somme. Because of the amount of time between the battle and the time of writing, it is possible that that of others has influenced his memory.

Especially if he had risen to the rank of General, he would have been in an environment where Haig was respected, as his superiors were followers of Haig. However whilst this has some merit, it is more likely that the General as a military person could appreciate more Haig's strategy. He begins by saying that the German armies were broken by the "courage and resolution of Haig's armies, which had complete confidence in the leadership of their commander". This completely contradicts Source F which claims Haig was a terrible commander.

In conclusion whilst Source F repeats a popular view of Haig, I believe that Sources G and H does prove F wrong as it was written one by a fellow general with military training and from German point of view which had no reason to be bias.

Study Source I & J:

Why do you think that sources I and J differ about the Battle of the Somme?

Sources I and J are both comments made by Lloyd George during and after the Battle of the Somme. Even though the sources have been written by the same man they completely contradict each other. It is almost as if the extracts were written by different men.

Source I is part of a letter written by Lloyd George to Haig after his visit to the battlefields during the battle of the Somme. Lloyd George seems to be congratulating Haig on the battle plans. He seems sure that battle is going in their favour yet it was still another month until the battle ended.

There are various reasons why Lloyd George did not write what we would have expected him to write. Firstly, Lloyd George would have wanted his General to be confident in his actions; he would have to encourage him. Secondly it would be stupid to start a quarrel with your General during a battle and bad for the morale of the troops.

Source J is an extract written by Lloyd George in the 1930's. He is now 14 years later criticising Haig claiming that at the time of his visit he was confused by the cavalry in No mans Land.

Now 14 years later and with no need to encourage Haig he speaks freely. However it may also be that at the time of writing Source I he did not see the faults in the British line up and is in Source J lying to try to stop any blame falling on him as Secretary of War.

Study all the Sources.

" Haig was an uncaring General who sacrificed the lives of his soldiers for no good reason" How far do this sources support this views.

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I believe that these sources do not go far to support this view. This is based on the following: -

Sources A and B written by Haig himself, perhaps shows his deficiencies as a modern day leader not necessarily an uncaring butcher.

Source C written by written by a private in the army, whilst giving a realistic picture from the trenches could not possible see the overall strategy.

Sources D & E whilst relevant in promoting the populist view, again are biased.

Sources F, a recently written book, again follows the more popular view and is a better titles to sell books.

Sources G is probably the most unbiased view given that it was written by the enemy with little to gain. This source perhaps gives the biggest insight into Haig's strategy.

Source H again does not support the view of the question, and was the only sources written by a fellow general who has been trained in warfare.

Sources I and J both written by Lloyd George, highlights the difficulty in coming to any conclusion. He contradicts himself and argues convincingly for and against, proving that the question, even with the benefit of hindsight, is a difficult one to answer.