

General douglas haig butcher or hero

[History](#)



General Douglas Haig has been blamed for the slaughter of thousands of men who were under his control in World War One. The Battle of the Somme was one of the worst fights in the entire war and 55,000 British soldiers died in the first day alone. After the Battle of the Somme, Haig got the nickname "Butcher of the Somme." However after examining the battle in more detail, some people decided that he was a brilliant general who miscalculated, "a hero of the war". So was Haig a butcher or a hero? Even at the time there were split views as to the moral standing of Haig.

On one side you had the highly respected men who fought alongside him, but on the other you had the foot men (Tommy's) and their families. Many of these men despised Haig, and arguably rightly so, but what is more important is why they hated him so much. General Haig didn't get off to a very good start after sending a letter to a newspaper saying 'this nation must be taught to bear losses. No amount of skill on the part of the higher commanders, no training, however good, on the part of officers and men, no superiority, however great, of arms and ammunition, will enable victories to be won without the sacrifice of men's lives'.

This was basically declaring publicly that he did not care how many men were killed he just wanted to win. This probably did not affect the Tommy's as much as it did their families, because they would not have seen the paper as they would have already left but their families would have seen the man who had total control over whether the son lived or died say that he didn't care about the soldiers. Another massive problem was the plan itself Haig ordered the bombardment of the Germans trenches but no-man's land was hit as well.

The exploding shells created enormous crater in the ground which filled with water creating death traps. The British fired 1, 508, 652 shells, seventy-one for every yard of the front line, and 1 in 4 did not explode leaving bombs which could potentially explode at a later date, possibly when British soldiers were next to them. Haig was sure that the bombardment would have killed all the soldiers and broken the barbed wire. He was so sure that he ordered all the men to walk forward slowly and in lines making them easy targets for the Germans to 'cut down'.

George Coppard explained how what the battle field looked like he said " Hundreds of dead were strung out on the barbed wire like wreckage washed up on a high watermark. " He then went on to ask how Haig had ever thought the bombs would cut the wire, and said that any Tommy could have told him that it just lifts it up and puts down in even more of a tangle. This shows that Haig should maybe have interacted more with his troops and asked them what they knew, this potentially could have saved many, many lives. ' Haig was fighting a war of attrition'. But was there a reason for Haig ' sacrificing his men for a few inches of soil'?

Did Haig know that he would have to face the families' wrath when he returned to England but did it anyway for the ' greater good'? Did he do better than we give him credit for? ' Douglas Haig, great General who miscalculated' this is a statement which many people at the time believed and many still do, for example, the Germans praised him for being a brilliant general and a bold man ' Field Marshall Haig is certainly one of the ablest generals of contemporary England', which shows that some thought, even though these people were the enemy, that he was a worthwhile general.

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It is also not true that he did not change his tactics, as on 15th September he used tanks to attack a different area of the Somme, which was the first time armoured tanks had been used in the war, people praised him for this by saying he was brave enough to do things that others would not if it gave him a tactical advantage and a greater chance of winning. This shows that although he appeared to not care about his men, he did and was looking out not only for them but for his country as well.

One of the most important reasons, and one which showed he could make difficult decisions and show that he was a good general, was to help the French, as the original reason for the battle was to relieve the pressure for France further south. This meant that if Haig pulled out then it could have meant that either France lost or that the co-operation would break down, something that, if it happened, would mean the end of the war for the allies.

Another reason why it was not his fault was that he had to 'work with what he had', such as the fact that they did not have many supplies, the soldiers he were given were mostly volunteers and so were in-experienced, and also the fact that he didn't want to fight the battle in the first place, and that he was only doing it to help the French, so many of the factors were not under his control.

In essence I personally believe that most of factors show that it was not his fault, as lots of them were not under his control, such as the in-experienced soldiers and also the limited supplies and the fact the battle was asked of him by the French. He was also an experienced soldier, and his tactics had

worked before in the second Boer war and in South Africa, so anyone would automatically reuse the tactics.

I think that he had the potential to make a much greater success, but unfortunately, he was not ' dealt the right cards' to make this happen. However I also believe that he was stupid to continue to use these tactics when it was clear they were not working, even if he did change and use tanks he still sent men out into no-man's land, causing many more deaths than were needed. I do not think he was a butcher, but I also don't think he was a hero I think he was a general who miscalculated and was doing his best for his country.