

The battle of the somme

[War](#), [World War 1](#)



The Battle of the Somme In February 1916, after a year of stalemate, the Germans decided to attack France and capture strategic French forts in the area of Verdun, 15 miles west of Paris. They aimed to 'bleed France white' with the attrition tactic developed by their commander, Falkenhayn. In an attempt to force the Germans away from Verdun, the French allies from Britain, led by General Haig, planned an artillery bombardment of the Germans. The battle carried on for a whole 10 months with a death toll of approximately 1. 25 million warriors. General Haig, a strong believer in attrition, was the culprit in many people's views including a German commander who praised the British soldiers and described them as 'lions led by donkeys' also criticizing their leaders. One of the reasons why Haig was blamed was due to his stubbornness in changing his ways. It was clear from day 1 that the plan was a failure as Britain lost 60, 000 soldiers in that day increasing to 420, 000 in the next 4 months. Historians John Laffin and Paul Fussell criticized Haig's strategy. Laffin believed that if deployed more defensively, Britain would not have lost so many men. Meanwhile, Fussell lamented the lack of simple and effective ideas used such as stopping the British barrage for two minutes before dawn, the time when a large portion of the attacks occurred. As a result, the Germans, expecting an attack, would return to their trenches to set up their machine guns. Had Haig taken risks and tried new ideas he might have not been blamed for the slaughter of so many troops. On the other hand, General Haig was viewed innocent by some in regards to the poor quality of the shells fired by the British artillery. 1/3 of the shells failed which was not Haig's fault. Also, the attacks were not a total failure as part of the goal was reached when the Germans had to withdraw

some troops from Verdun which eased the pressure on France. The Germany army also had to cope with the huge loss of junior officers, out of the 650,000 casualties, who could not be replaced. In conclusion, despite the poor quality of artillery at his disposal, General Haig should be known as the 'Butcher of the Somme' as he had many alternative plans to use when his original one was unsuccessful. His poor management also played a part as he has been criticized for wasting what could have been a crucial weapon, the tank. By Karim Zahran