

The Battle of the Somme

Two battles fought in 1916 are clear examples of the slaughter that took place on the battlefields of France. One was the battle of Verdun. The other was the Battle of the Somme.

To relieve German pressure on Verdun, the British under General Douglas Haig launched an attack along the Somme River in northwest France on July 1. This was the battle in which the tank was introduced by the British. A few months earlier, the Germans had developed another new weapon, the flamethrower, which shot out a stream of fire. The use of the tank and the flamethrower added to the already mounting casualties on the western front.

The British attack accomplished little except to draw some German troops away from Verdun. Even with the help of tanks, the British were unable to break through the German army's lines. By late fall, the attack was over and both sides counted their losses. When combined, British and French casualties totalled 615,000. (In one day alone, the British suffered 60,000 casualties.) German losses were estimated at 650,000. Each side paid a high price and had little to show for it. The Allies had only gained about seven miles.

As is often true in battlefield disasters, the outcome at the Somme cost General Erich von Falkenhayn his job as chief of the German General Staff. He was removed by the German emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II, and replaced by General Paul von Hindenburg.

Fill in the blanks to complete the following statements about the Battle of the Somme.

1. The British attack at the Somme was intended to relieve German pressure on _____.
2. _____ was the British commander who directed the attack at the Somme.
3. The British introduced the _____ as a weapon of war.
4. The Germans used a new weapon, the _____, in their attack on Verdun.
5. Even though a total of _____ British, French, and German soldiers were killed, the Allies gained only about _____ miles.
6. The man who became chief of the German General Staff after General von Falkenhayn was replaced was _____.
7. Preceding the attack at the Somme on July 1, 1916, the British bombarded the German trenches for eight days. Some 1,537 British guns fired 1,723,873 rounds without letting up. In round figures, what was the average number of rounds fired each day? _____ What was the average number of rounds fired by each gun during the eight days? _____