

Somme 1916: Success and Failure on the first day of the Battle of the Somme

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The first day on the Somme, 1 July 1916, was the bloodiest day of World War One for the British army. Where did it all go wrong? The Allies exploited their initial success and, unable to draw on reserves, the Germans desperately improvised a defence. It took two weeks for the German defence to deploy enough reserve men to plug the gap and contain the allied assault. Battle of the Somme 1916. A German soldier about to hurl a hand grenade from a trench (Getty Images). Learn more about this topic: World War One with Dan Snow. Historian Dan Snow introduces some of his favourite history clips from the BBC archive, perfect for studying World War One with your class. Jeremy Paxman: The Great War. Survey of the First Battle of the Somme, a bloody and largely inconclusive battle on the Western Front during World War I. Canadian troops at the First Battle of the Somme, November 1916. Canada Department of National Defense/Library and Archives Canada (PA-000839). This article was most recently revised and updated by Michael Ray, Editor. Comprising the main Allied attack on the Western Front during 1916, the Battle of the Somme is famous chiefly on account of the loss of 58,000 British troops (one third of them killed) on the first day of the battle, 1 July 1916, which to this day remains a one-day record. The attack was launched upon a 30 kilometre front, from north of the Somme river between Arras and Albert, and ran from 1 July until 18 November, at which point it was called off. Sponsored Links. The offensive was planned late in 1915 and was intended as a joint French-British attack. The French Commander in Chief, Joffre, The Battle of the Somme began in early hours of the 1st July 1916, when nearly a quarter of a million shells were fired at the German positions in just over an hour, an average of 3,500 a minute. So intense was the barrage that it was heard in London. At 7.28 a.m. ten mines were exploded under the German trenches. Haig was not disheartened by these heavy losses on the first day and ordered General Sir Henry Rawlinson to continue making attacks on the German front-line. A night attack on 13th July did achieve a temporary breakthrough but German reinforcements arrived in time to close the gap. Haig believed that the Germans were close to the point of exhaustion and continued to order further attacks expected each one to achieve victory.