

Battle of the Somme

The Battle of the Somme took place during the First World War in France by the River Somme. It began on 1st July 1916 and ended on 18th November 1916. The French army had lost many soldiers to the German army at Verdun. The British Army were ordered to help the French army defend themselves against the Germans.

Trenches

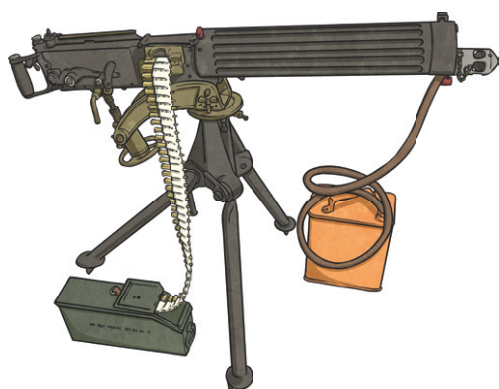
During WWI, huge trenches were dug into the ground wherever there was a battle. The soldiers would live in the trenches and, when ordered to, had to climb up out of the trenches and run towards the enemy troops.

This was called “going over the top”. Trenches were muddy, narrow and damp.

1. In which season did the battle of the Somme begin?

2. How long did the battle last?

3. Describe what you think it would have been like in the trenches.



The British Plan

The plan was to fire at the German lines and then advance towards them on foot and fight face to face.

Many British commanders did not think this was a very good strategy, but others like the British General, Douglas Haig, thought it was the best thing to do.

On that first day, the British Army fired 1 738 000 shells at the German trenches. Then they advanced towards them.

It was catastrophic.

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The Germans were hardly affected as they hid deep in their trenches. They stayed where they were, and as the British Army came towards them, they started firing.

The British soldiers were mown down by German machine gunfire.

The British Army suffered 20 000 casualties on that first day!

Did you know?

The British Army had soldiers from other countries fighting with them. The men came from Ireland, Newfoundland, South Africa and India.

4. Why do you think some commanders didn't think the British plan sounded like a very good strategy?

5. Name two other countries where soldiers from the British Army came from.

The British Plan

Many people in Britain were angry at the huge loss of so many young men, and called it 'The Lost Generation'.

Back in Britain, people began to build simple war shrines in honour of the fallen soldiers. These were simple, wooden tablets with the names of the men carved into them.

Journalists were given misinformation about the battle, and reported that, "German prisoners are surrendering freely and a good many have already fallen into our hands." This was not true.

6. What do you think a 'Lost Generation' means?

7. Why did people build war shrines?

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The End of the War

Winter was closing in. The terrible weather meant men were trying to fight in muddy, boggy fields. Fighting was suspended. The plan was to carry on fighting in February, but the Germans decided to retreat. The battle was officially over on 18th November 1916.

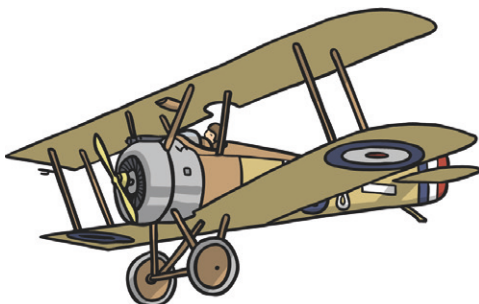
Battle of the Somme Facts

- It had been a terrible battle, with 420 000 casualties for the British Army.
- The French lost 200 000 men.
- The Germans lost 500 000 men.
- Many men from Britain had been grouped together in battalions from the same town. The groups were called British Pals.

8. What does 'fighting was suspended' mean?

9. Why was it a terrible battle?

10. What is your opinion of the Battle of the Somme?



Battle of the Somme Answers

Answers

1 In which season did the Battle of the Somme begin?

Summer

2 How long did the battle last?

4 months

3 Describe what you think it would have been like in the trenches.

Own description

4 Why do you think some commanders didn't think The British Plan sounded like a good strategy?

Because they knew a lot of soldiers would be killed.

5 Name two other countries where the soldiers from the British Army came from.

Any of the following: South Africa, India, Newfoundland, Ireland.

6 What do you think a Lost Generation means?

That so many young men died that there was none from that generation left.

7 Why did people build war shrines?

To remember the soldiers who had died.

8 What does 'fighting was suspended' mean?

That they stopped fighting for a while.

9 Why was it a terrible battle?

Because so many men died or were wounded.

10 What is your opinion of the Battle of the Somme?

Own opinion, must be justified.