

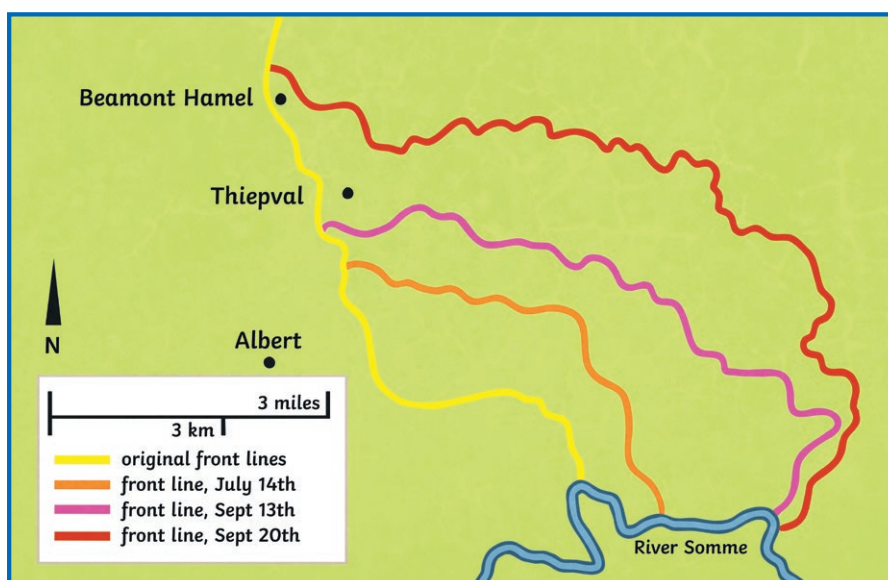
Case Study Battle of the Somme

Read the information on the Battle of the Somme and, using the key below, highlight the following:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Battle Dates | <input type="checkbox"/> Reasons for the Battle Being Fought |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Key Moments during the Battle | <input type="checkbox"/> Why It Was a Failure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Why It Was a Success | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Important Information |

What Was the Battle of the Somme?

The Battle of the Somme took place in northern France and is often referred to as the bloodiest campaign of the First World War. It lasted for 141 days; starting in July 1916 and ending in November 1916. At the end of the campaign, it was estimated that more than one million soldiers were killed or wounded on both sides: Britain lost 623,000 men, the French lost 200,000 men and the Germans 500,000.



Why Was the Battle of the Somme Fought?

The aim of the battle was to help relieve the French soldiers who were fighting to the east of Paris at Verdun. For months, the French had been subjected to heavy losses and by July 1916 they had lost about 360,000 soldiers (it continued until December 1916). The Allied commanders decided that if they could divert German troops away from Verdun it would make it more likely that the French army could win.

Why Was the First Day of the Somme so Notorious?

The first day of fighting at the Somme began on the 1st July 1916. It began with the British and French forces continuously shelling the German front line for a week. During this time, 1,738,000 shells were fired. This was then followed by over 100,000 troops being sent 'over the top'. This tactic was a total disaster as the Germans were well dug into their trenches, were highly trained and the initial shelling had done nothing to weaken their defences.



As the Allies advanced they were mown down by German machine guns and rifles. On that first day, 19,240 soldiers lost their lives and there were 57, 470 casualties. Despite this, Field Marshall Haig (Commander of the Western Front) decided to continue. The Battle of the Somme is often used as evidence to prove that the tactics and plans used by the Army generals were misjudged and had little regard for human life. Others, however, have argued that with a war of entrenchment there was no other realistic choice in order to break the stalemate.

What Happened Next?

After the first offensive, the Allies had gained only three-square miles of territory. Unfortunately, most of this was taken back by the German forces as the British could not replenish the front line quick enough. Where the French and British attacked the German trenches alongside each other, they found greater success and compromised the German's front line. After two weeks, however, the Germans had found enough reserves to stop any further weakness in the front line, stopping any further advancement.

Why Was the Battle of the Somme Such a Disaster?

High proportions of the soldiers who fought at the Somme were volunteers who had only received basic training and most of whom had no battle experience whatsoever. They were known as 'Kitchener's Volunteer Army' and were normal men who had signed-up believing it was their duty. Many of the soldiers were as young as 16 and had never fought in a battle before. This inexperience was in direct contrast to the German Army battalions stationed at the Somme which were largely made up of experienced and highly trained soldiers. Faced with battle-ready soldiers, armed with large numbers of machine guns, the Allies, it seemed, were doomed from the start.



Another reason for the failure of the Somme was the misjudgement of the commanding officers and poor planning. This is proven by the original battle plan; having a regiment of cavalry on standby behind the front line. When the infantry had broken the German line, the cavalry was to charge. The fact that both sides had been entrenched in trench warfare for two years, that no man's land was littered with barbed wire and that the enemy was armed with machine guns, did not seem to change the view that this was a good plan.

Why Do Some Argue That the Battle of the Somme Was a Success?

The aim of the Battle of the Somme had been to relieve the French troops in Verdun by forcing the Germans to redirect some of their troops to the Somme. In this regard, it was a success. The land that was captured was also the greatest victory of land advancement of any of the battles that had been fought prior to this.

At the end of the battle, the Allies had advanced along a thirty-mile strip that was seven miles deep at its widest point. However, for each mile of land that was gained 88,000 Allied men lost their lives. Over the course of the battle, fifty-one Victoria Crosses were awarded. Many still argue the futility of the Battle of the Somme and how it was the biggest contributing factor to Britain having 'a lost generation'.

