

Case study: General Haig and the Battle of the Somme

1 Look at Sources 50-52.

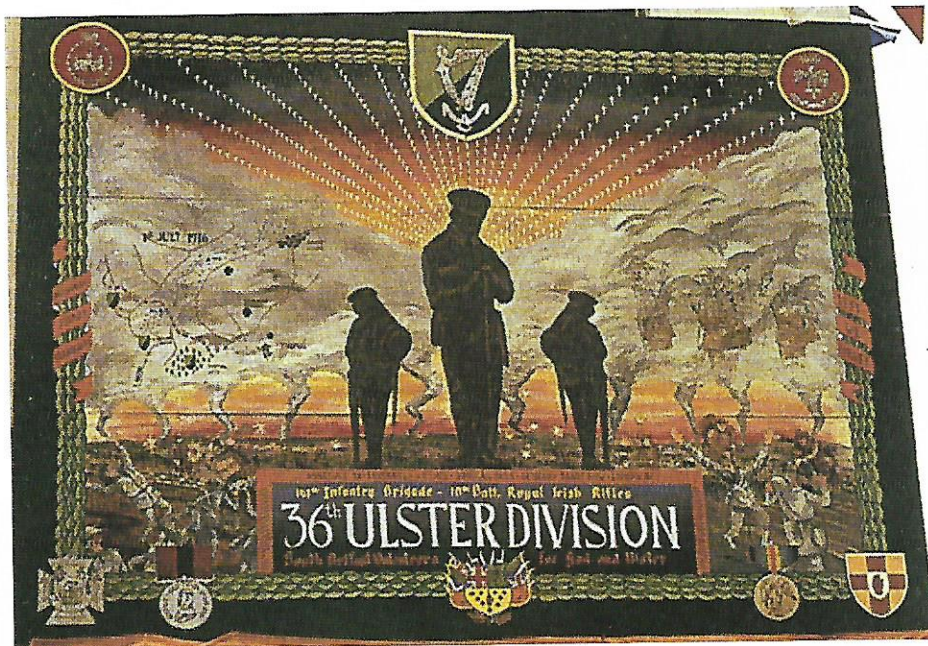
- Brainstorm a list of ten key words to define the Battle of the Somme that come to mind after looking at the sources.
- Compare your ten words with the person sitting next to you.
- Agree on the most appropriate five words.

SOURCE 51

There was no lingering about when zero hour came. Our platoon officer blew his whistle and he was the first up the scaling ladder, with his revolver in one hand and cigarette in the other. 'Come on, boys,' he said, and up he went. We went up after him one at a time. I never saw the officer again. His name is on the memorial to the missing which they built after the war at Thiepval. He was only young but he was a very brave man.

The memories of Private George Morgan who took part in the attack on 1 July 1916 at the Battle of the Somme.

SOURCE 50



A mural, painted in 1936, at Donegall Pass in Belfast. The 36th Ulster Division was one of the few units to achieve its objective on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. It suffered over 5000 casualties in the battle.

SOURCE 52

Reg. No.	Rank.	Name.	Date of Death.
12/288	Pte.	Bagshaw, William	1/7/16
12/289	"	Bailey, Joseph	1/7/16
12/291	"	Barlow, Wilfred	16/5/16
12/294	"	Batley, Edward	1/7/16
12/296	"	Baylis, Lawrence	1/7/16
12/307	Cpl.	Braham, George	1/7/16
12/310	Pte.	Bramham, George	13/10/18
12/314	C.S.M.	Bright, Arthur Willey	12/4/18
12/318	Pte.	Brookfield, Fredk. Harold	1/7/16
12/591	"	Bedford, Norman	1/7/16
12/593	"	Beniston, Aubrey	1/7/16
12/597	L/Cpl.	Blenkarn, William	10/9/16
12/600	Pte.	Bowes, Frank	1/7/16
12/604	"	Bratley, Clifford William	11/4/18
12/606	"	Brindley, Charles W.	14/3/17
12/607	"	Brown, Arthur	1/7/16
12/608	"	Brown, Samuel	6/12/17
12/611	"	Busfield, Harry Craven	18/5/17
12/862	L/Cpl.	Barnsley, Frank	1/7/16
12/865	Pte.	Barrott, John Henry	1/7/16
12/867	"	Barton, John Arthur	1/7/16
12/870	"	Bennett, Joseph Arnold	1/7/16
12/871	L/Cpl.	Binder, Walter Bertram	1/7/16
12/874	"	Bland, Ernest	1/7/16

Part of the list of dead and wounded from the Sheffield Pals Battalion on the first day of the Somme. Many soldiers were in

For British history, the Battle of the Somme is one of the most significant events in the war. Sources 50-52 give some idea of why. It was a massive battle. The casualties were horrific. Most casualties were young men in their late teens or early to mid twenties. Many pals battalions (see Source 52) were practically wiped out, and villages in Britain and around the empire lost an entire generation of young men at the Somme. For example, the 11th Cambridgeshire Battalion sent 750 men over the top on 1 July and 691 of them became casualties of war. The casualties alone would qualify this battle for a place in all history books.

But there is more. The Somme has become the focus of debate about leadership. The abiding impression of the war is that the volunteers who made up most of the army followed their orders with enormous courage, but were betrayed by their leaders. It is a popular view. It is also an easy view to support. But in this case study we want to look at the Battle of the Somme more objectively.

What actually went wrong? Was it all the fault of the British commander, General Haig? If it was Haig's fault, why are there military historians who argue that Haig was not a blundering incompetent and why are there also many military historians who believe that the Somme was not a military disaster?