

## SOURCE 58

*Should I have resigned rather than agree to this slaughter of brave men [at the Somme]? I have always felt there are solid grounds for criticism of me in that respect. My sole justification is that Haig promised not to press the attack if it became clear that he could not attain his objectives by continuing the offensive.*

An extract from the war memoirs of David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister during the war.

## SOURCE 60

*By 1918 the best of the old German army lay dead on the battlefields of Verdun and the Somme . . . As time passed, the picture gradually changed for the worse . . . as the number of old peacetime [1914] officers in a unit grew smaller and were replaced by young fellows of the very best will, but without sufficient knowledge.*

A German opinion on the German army of 1918.

- 1 Read Source 58. Is Lloyd George blaming himself or Haig for events at the Somme?
- 2 Do you regard Sources 59A and 59B as more or less shocking than Source 56? Explain your answer.
- 3 Source 60 seems to suggest that the tactics of attrition eventually worked. Does that mean it was morally justifiable? Give reasons.
- 4 How far does your work on this case study support or challenge your answer to the Focus Task on page 32?

Haig was bitterly criticised after the battle by his own soldiers, by politicians and in the newspapers. He gained the unwanted title of 'The Butcher of the Somme'. Was this fair? Haig's interpretation was very different. He had warned the politicians in 1916 that the country needed to be prepared for heavy losses if the war was to be won. Haig believed that the key objectives of the Battle of the Somme were achieved. It saved Verdun – its main objective. And some of Germany's best troops were killed and injured in the battle – a fact that would come back to haunt them in 1918.

This was of little comfort to people in Britain. The Somme changed British attitudes to the war. Until the Somme, people believed that a victorious battle could lead to a breakthrough and thus end the war. The Somme brought home to many people that this would be a long, grim war of attrition.

The battle also damaged confidence in the leaders. In the chaos and confusion of the first days of the battle, many of the reports were misleading and over-optimistic. The high expectations and the confusion about what had happened made the press and public suspicious of their own commanders. Relations between Haig and the British Prime Minister David Lloyd George were particularly poor.

## SOURCE 59

**A 2nd Lieutenant G H Ball, C company, 1/5th South Staffordshires**

*I . . . joined this battalion on 13 June 1916. Previous to this attack [1 July] I had only been in the trenches for two days – I am 18 years of age.*

**B Captain John Kerr, 5th Sherwood Foresters, whose men in the fourth wave were supposed to carry supplies across to the men who had led the attack at 7.30 a.m.**

*The smoke had at that time [approximately 8.10 a.m.] practically disappeared and the enemy's trenches were plainly visible – my men were shot down as soon as they showed themselves and I was unable to get forward beyond 70 or 80 yards.*

Extracts from evidence given to the Inquiry into the 46th Division's performance on 1 July 1916.

## FOCUS TASK

## How should we remember the Battle of the Somme?

The Somme is remembered differently by many people. Historians disagree about whether it was a victory or a disaster. Ordinary people are unsure whether their grandfathers and great grandfathers died for a purpose.

Read the information and sources on pages 33–36 and do some research of your own, perhaps using the internet. Decide how you think people in Britain should remember the Battle of the Somme and prepare a presentation on the topic.

Here are some descriptions to start your thinking:

- a brutal campaign of attrition that achieved its main objectives
- a crucial battle that saved the French army
- a disaster
- a great victory at a terrible cost
- a shocking case of incompetent leadership on the part of General Haig
- one major step towards the defeat of Germany
- a tribute to the heroism of ordinary soldiers
- an example of cynical political leaders shifting the blame on to military leaders
- an example of society being shocked by the reality of war and looking for someone to blame.

You could present your conclusions as an ICT presentation. Alternatively, you could create a website about the battle.