

Year 8 History: How did WW1 affect people at home?



World War One was a total war—everybody was involved in some way:

- Although many men volunteered to join up, in 1916, conscription was introduced. Any man aged 18-41 was liable to be called up. Some refused and were called conscientious objectors.
- To fill the gaps left by men at war, women were allowed into jobs for which they were previously considered unsuitable. They were particularly important in munitions factories, making shells for the artillery guns. This was hard and dangerous work, with chemicals dyeing the women's hands and faces yellow. They were nicknamed 'canaries' as a result. Many women were given the vote in 1918
- German U-boats tried to starve Britain into surrender by sinking shipping bringing food—this led to rationing being introduced in 1918.
- The government took much greater powers than previously as a result of DORA (Defence of the Realm Act). They took over industries, censored press reports of the war, introduced British Summer Time & pub opening hours were changed considerably. David Lloyd George was Prime Minister from 1916.
- British civilians were subject to attack for the first time. The Germans used battleships to bombard the coast and zeppelin airships to bomb British towns and cities. Thousands were killed.

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World War One Weapons & technology

1. World War One soldiers were equipped with rifles (Lee Enfield), which could have a bayonet attached, & hand grenades (Mills bombs).
2. Both sides bombarded the enemy with artillery shells, fired from huge guns placed miles behind the front lines.
3. Trenches were defended by machine guns, which were too heavy to carry and operated by a team.
4. Gas was used for the first time by the Germans. The main types were chlorine, phosgene & mustard gas. All soldiers were equipped with gas masks.
5. Both sides dug tunnels under No-Man's Land and exploded mines under the enemy's trenches.
6. The war was fought in the air, with planes taking part in 'dog-fights.' The leading pilots were known as 'aces.' The Germans also used Zeppelins to bomb Britain.
7. Horses were used to pull heavy equipment around.
8. Soldiers sometimes used motor-bikes or bi-cycles to move about. Pigeons were used to carry messages.



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General Haig: Butcher of the Somme?

The British & French launched a huge assault on the German trenches near the River Somme in northern France. It was hoped that this 'big push' would lead to total victory.

Prior to the troops going 'over the top' on 1st July 1916, a week-long artillery bombardment of the German trenches took place. Haig was the Commander of the British forces and was confident that there could be no survivors. British troops were told to walk across No-Man's Land.

However, German soldiers had been sheltering in underground bunkers and were safe. When the bombardment stopped they raced to their machine guns and opened fire on the advancing troops.

There were 57,000 British casualties that day, of which 19,230 were dead. This is the worst day in British military history. Many of the casualties were the recruits of 1914, fighting in Pals' Battalions, like the Accrington Pals.

The battle continued until November. The British gained only a few miles of territory for the loss of almost 100,000 soldiers.

The phrase Lions led by Donkeys, has been used to describe the British army, with brave soldiers commanded by stubborn and foolish leaders, such as Haig.

He has been accused of a failure to change tactics, even after the losses of 1st July, and of being uncaring about the sacrifices made by so many of his men.

According to this interpretation, he was the Butcher of the Somme.



However, many historians have challenged this view. They have argued that:

- The British attack succeeded in drawing German troops away from Verdun, where the French were near to defeat.
- Given the strength of the German defences any attack would lead to huge losses and there was little else that Haig could do.
- The British tactics did evolve during the battle. New weapons such the tank were used and the creeping barrage was used to provide artillery support for advancing infantrymen.

British Tank: Mark I



- The experience of the Battle of the Somme improved the British army and allowed it to win the war two years later.
- The losses suffered by the Germans (200,000 killed, missing or taken prisoner) weakened their army and led to their defeat.

According to this interpretation, he was not the Butcher of the Somme.

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Key Terms			
armistice	A ceasefire, which began at 11am on 11.11.18	creeping barrage	When artillery fire advances as the soldiers did to provide protection as they crossed No Man's Land
bayonet	A blade which could be attached to a rifle	propaganda	Government
canaries	Nickname for women munition workers, whose faces turned yellow through exposure to chemicals	rationing	Limiting access to items in shortage — some food (not bread) was rationed from 1918 onwards.
ensorship	Government control of information relating to the war. Soldiers' letters & news paper reports were censored during the war	regiment	An army unit.
conchies	Conscientious objectors—who refused to fight on moral or religious grounds	total war	Where war affects all—not only those in the armed forces
conscription	Forcing men to join the armed forces.	U-boats	German submarines, sinking ships carrying supplies to Britain