

Draft - subject to accreditation and change

Paper Reference(s)

Edexcel GCSE

History A (Modern World)

Unit 3

Modern World Source Enquiry

Option A: Britain and the First World War 1914-23

Sources Booklet

Instructions to Candidates

The sources should be used with the question paper.

Do not return this Sources Booklet with the question paper.

Background information

The British armies played an important role on the Western Front in the years 1915-17, taking part in offensives such as the Somme in 1916. Some historians claim that the Somme was a disaster and have blamed commanders such as Haig for far too many unnecessary casualties. Other historians have defended Haig, insisting that the Somme was not a total failure and that there were other factors causing heavy casualties. So, what were the main reasons for such heavy casualties?

Source A: From an interview with Private George Coppard about the Battle of the Somme. Coppard survived the battle and the interview was given sixty years later.

Hundreds of dead were strung out on the barbed wire. Quite as many died on the enemy wire as on the ground. It was clear that there were no gaps in the wire at the time of attack. The Germans must have been reinforcing it for months. It was so thick that daylight could barely be seen through it. How did the commanders, miles from the front line, imagine that the British soldiers would get through the wire?

Source B: An illustration from a British newspaper, July 1916, with the title 'The Surrey Regiment Play the Game'. It shows British troops, kicking footballs, advancing on the first day of the Somme.



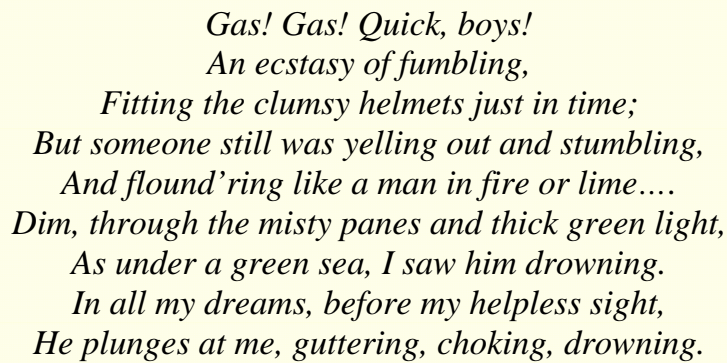
Source C: From a report by the Commander-in-Chief, Douglas Haig, to the British Government, 1 July 1916.

Very successful attack this morning. Several (officers) have said that they have never been so well instructed of the nature of the operations. All went like clockwork. The battle is going very well for us and already the Germans are surrendering freely. The enemy is so short of men that he is collecting them from all parts of the line. Our troops are in wonderful spirits and full of confidence.

Source D: A painting from 1918-19, based on earlier photographs. It shows men, blinded by mustard gas, being led to the treatment tent.



Source E: From the poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* (this is part of a Latin phrase. It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country) written by Wilfred Owen in 1917. Owen was a British soldier who served in the trenches and was killed in November 1918.



*Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!
An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime....
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.*

Source F: From a biography of Douglas Haig, written in 1991.

If generals are judged on whether they win wars, then Haig must be judged a success. The cost of the victory was appalling, but Haig's military methods were in line with the ideas of the time. Attrition was the method used by all sides to achieve victory. Nevertheless, he did not try alternative methods which could have reduced the cost in human lives.