

## **FIRST SOMME, JULY-OCTOBER 1916**

### A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

German and Allied High Commands each planned operations in 1916 that would break the stalemate and secure a victory on the Western Front. As the centerpiece on a war of attrition, the Germans planned a massive attack on the French fortress city of Verdun. The Kaiser and his commanders believed the French would present a strong and vigorous defense of Verdun for symbolic as much as for military reasons. On 21 Feb, German forces attacked Verdun with 500,000 men, initiating a battle that continued for ten months. The Anglo-French alliance devised a summer breakthrough assault on the German lines through the Ancre and Somme River valleys

Partially to relieve the pressure on the beleaguered defenders of Verdun, three Allied armies launched the summer offensive on the Somme on 1 Jul, preceded by an eight day artillery bombardment designed to destroy the forward German defenses. Over 1.7 million shells were expended over a 25-mile front, and 17 underground mines were detonated, followed by the forward movement of 750,000 men, 80% of whom were British.

North of the River Somme, General Edmund Allenby's Third and General Henry Rawlinson's Fourth British Armies made a full-frontal assault. South of the Somme, Marshal Ferdinand Foch's French Army Group of the North conducted a holding action. The immediate objectives of each attacking force (Bapaume for the British and Péronne for the French) were not reached, even after five continuous months of attacks. During the entire offensive, there were several Allied victories; on 11 Jul Rawlinson's troops captured the first line of German trenches; on 23 Jul, Australian troops captured Pozieres; on 15 Sep the British Fourth Army gained some ground near Courcellette (during which tanks were introduced to land warfare) and the same day Scottish troops captured Martinpuich.

By autumn, French forces had assumed the offense at Verdun, and Marshal Joffre urged the British overall commander, General Douglas Haig, to continue the frustrating attempts on the Somme. Finally, on 18 November, Haig halted the Somme offensive, which had resulted in a combined estimated 620,000 casualties.

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