



The Battle of the Somme 1916 – background information

The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest battles of the First World War in which more than 1,000,000 men were wounded or killed; making it one of the bloodiest battles in history. It took place between 1st July and 18th November 1916 in Northern France around the River Somme.

Map 1



The aim of the Battle was to achieve a decisive victory for the Allies over the Germans on the Western Front after 18 months of trench stalemate where neither side had looked like winning the war.

Most of the soldiers in the British Army were volunteers who had joined up in 1914 in their thousands in response to a government campaign led by Lord Kitchener for new recruits. 'Kitchener's New Army' was divided into battalions often made up of volunteers from the same cities, towns and villages, or from the same workplace. In the North, these battalions were often known as Pals Battalions e.g. the Accrington Pals and the Barnsley Pals. Some battalions were even made up of sportsmen such as the Football Battalion. For many of these volunteers the Battle of the Somme was their first experience of fighting in the First World War.



Fighting alongside the British on the Somme were soldiers from all over the British Empire including Newfoundland, Canada, Bermuda, Australia and New Zealand.

On the orders of Sir Douglas Haig, the commander of the British Army, the Battle started with a weeklong artillery bombardment of the German lines. Nearly 2 million shells were fired at the Germans with the aim of completely destroying their trenches. In fact, the Germans had built deep dugouts for their men who were therefore able to shelter in relative safety. When the bombardment stopped, the Germans knew that this meant that the British and French armies were about to advance towards them. All they had to do was to climb out of their dugouts and man their machine guns and wait for the enemy soldiers to come over the top.

The first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, was the most disastrous the British Army has ever suffered. The soldiers advancing slowly over no-man's land in long lines, side by side, were told that the German trenches had been destroyed. Instead they were met with a hail of German machine gun and artillery fire and huge numbers of soldiers were quickly cut down. The surviving attackers dived for cover and advanced slowly from shell-hole to shell-hole.



Nearly all the attacks were defeated and 60,000 British troops, about half of the force, fell in battle with nearly 20,000 dead. Many of the Pals Battalions were decimated.

The Battle of the Somme continued for the next few months with the Allies making slow progress in pushing back the Germans. By November, as winter set in and with both sides exhausted, the Battle ground to a halt.

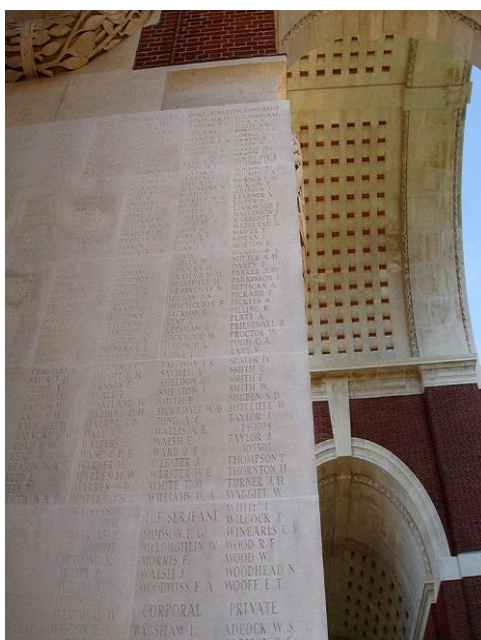
Although the Germans were weakened, the Allies failed to make a breakthrough and the War was to continue for another two years. By the end of the Battle the British had lost 420,000 men, the French lost nearly 200,000 men and the Germans around 500,000. The Allied forces had managed to advance a few miles at a huge cost in lives. For many people the Battle of the Somme brought home for the first time the true horrors of warfare in the First World War and tragic waste of human life.



The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing - background Information

The Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme is on one of the highest points of land on the old Somme battlefield. It is possible to see the top of the memorial from many different parts of the Somme. As you look around the landscape of the Somme it is useful to look out for the Memorial to help you get your bearings.


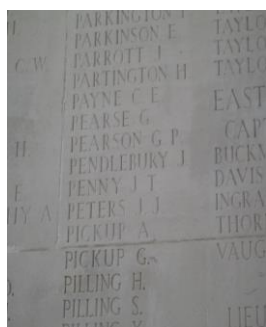
Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, a famous architect, the Memorial was built between 1928 and 1932 and is the largest British battle memorial in the world. It is a memorial to the 72,191 missing British and South African men who died in Battle on the Somme between 1915 and 1918 and who have no known grave.





Activity 1: What was the impact of almost 73,000 dead?

There are almost 73,000 names carved on the pillars of the Thiepval Memorial but how might you begin to think about the impact of the 73,000 names. Let's look at one of the names on the Memorial. **Complete the table by adding in the missing figures.**

Think about the impact of one name on the Thiepval Memorial	
People affected	Numbers
<p>James Pendlebury lived in Chorley, served with 11th East Lancashire Regiment (Accrington Pals).</p> <p>He was killed at Serre at the Battle of the Somme on the 1st July 1916.</p> <p>His name is one of the 72,191 on the Memorial – see Panel 6c.</p>	 
His wife	1
3 children	3
His parents	2
His parents-in-law	2
2 brothers	2
3 sisters	3
3 brothers / sisters in law	3
1 grandparent	1
5 nieces and nephews	5
4 aunts / uncles	4
Immediate neighbours	4
Friends from work / school	5
Number of people directly affected by the death of James Pendlebury	35
<p>1 soldier's death affected directly 35 people,</p> <p>Potentially how many people were affected by the Missing of the Somme:</p> <p>What is 35 multiplied by 73,000?</p>	EQUALS =
<p>Population of the UK in 1911 (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland)</p> <p>What percentage of the UK population might have been affected by the Missing of the Somme?</p>	<p>45,400,000</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People affected = • Divided by UK population = • Times 100 = • % of the UK population =



How did the Battle of the Somme affect different local communities?

The 4 tables here look at the impact of the Battle of the Somme on the local communities of Oswestry in Shropshire, Kidderminster in Warwickshire, Accrington in Lancashire, and Brechin in Fife, Scotland.

(Data taken from Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Vision of Britain.org.uk)

Table 1

Oswestry and the Battle of the Somme

Population of Oswestry	Male Population	Female Population	Families or Separate Units
29,335	14,611	14,724	6,578

Oswestry: War Deaths by Year. Total War Deaths 356

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
3 (.84%)	41 (11.5%)	78 (22%)	86 (24.1%)	139 (39%)	7 (2%)

Oswestry: 1916 War Dead

1916 War Dead	Killed in France	Killed July – December 1916	Remembered on Thiepval Memorial	Buried in UK July – Dec 1916
78	52 (66.7%)	56 (71.7%)	29 (55.8% of those killed in France)	4 (5.1%)

Oswestry War Dead Commemorated on Memorials to the Missing in France and Belgium (28%)

Thiepval	Tyne Cot	Menin Gate	Ploegstreet
32 (3 dead from 1917)	16	12	3
Arras	Loos	Vis-en-Artois	Poizieres
12	9	9	6



Table 2

Kidderminster and the Battle of the Somme

Population of Kidderminster	Male Population	Female Population	Families or Separate Units
40,574	18,600	21,974	9552

Kidderminster: War Deaths by Year

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
12	55	115	128	139	4

Kidderminster: 1916 War Dead

1916 War Dead	Killed in France	Killed July – December 1916	Remembered on Thiepval Memorial	Buried in UK July – Dec 1916
115	80	67	28	14

Kidderminster War Dead Commemorated on Memorials to the Missing in France and Belgium

Thiepval	Tyne Cot	Menin Gate	Ploegstreet
31	18	17	7
Arras	Loos	Vis-en-Artois	Pozieres
18	10	2	8

Table 3

Accrington, Oswaldtwistle, Clayton le Moors and the Battle of the Somme

Population of Accrington	Male Population	Female Population	Families or Separate Units
69,611	33,000	36,611	15,983

Accrington: War Deaths by Year

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
14	85	159	196	248	18



Accrington: 1916 War Dead

1916 War Dead	Killed in France	Killed July – December 1916	Remembered on Thiepval Memorial	Buried in UK July – Dec 1916
159	132	116	47	0

Accrington War Dead Commemorated on Memorials to the Missing in France and Belgium

Thiepval	Tyne Cot	Menin Gate	Ploegstreet
49	25	27	14
Arras	Loos	Vis-en-Artois	Pozieres
36	24	12	16

Table 4

Brechin and the Battle of the Somme

Population of Brechin	Male Population	Female Population	Families or Separate Units
9,836	4,285	5551	2527

Brechin: War Deaths by Year

1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919
1	43	59	69	70	9

1916 War Dead

1916 War Dead	Killed in France	Killed July – December 1916	Remembered on Thiepval Memorial	Buried in UK July – Dec 1916
59	53	43	11	3

War Dead Commemorated on Memorials to the Missing in France and Belgium

Thiepval	Tyne Cot	Menin Gate	Ploegstreet
11	5	10	0
Arras	Loos	Vis-en-Artois	Pozieres
12	13	1	2



What happened to the Accrington Pals?

When war broke out in 1914 a number of towns across Britain asked for permission to recruit their own Battalions where men from the same town, the same street and some cases, the same football team, were able to join together and serve alongside each other. Recruitment to these Pals Battalions was very successful and was a source of local pride. They became part of a local regiment so the men from Accrington and other towns in north and east Lancashire became the 11th Battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment. Bradford, a larger city recruited two Pals Battalions – the 16th and 18th Battalions of the West Yorkshire Regiment, and the Sheffield City Battalion and Barnsley Pals joined the 12th Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment. These soldiers were all part of General Kitchener's 'New Army'. For most of the men from the north of England the Battle of the Somme was their first real experience of war, they had spent very little time on the front line and had suffered very few casualties.

The Pals Battalions in parts of the Somme battlefield suffered very heavy casualties in the first hours of the Battle. The men from the Accrington Pals were particularly hard hit; approximately 700 men from the Accrington Pals went into action on the 1st July 1916 and within half an hour over 580 men had become casualties including 235 killed. Many of these came from the same few streets in the small Lancashire town of Accrington – many people in this community had a relative or friend who was killed or wounded on this day and in the months and years that followed.



A Pals Battalion marching on the Somme in 1916



Battalion War Diary for 11 East Lancashire Regiment (Accrington Pals) written on the 1st July 1916

7.20 a.m. Bombardment opened (on German lines) and the 1st wave of men crossed into No-Man's Land. The Germans opened almost immediately with machine gun fire followed a few minutes later an immense bombardment on our trenches.

7.22 a.m. The 2nd wave of men proceeded to follow the 1st wave into No Man's Land.

7.23 a.m. Men of the Barnsley Pals crossed into No Man's Land following my 2nd wave.

7.32 a.m. I saw my 3rd and 4th wave of men advancing from the trenches across No-Man's land. By this time there was intense machine gun and artillery fire from the enemy.

8.10 a.m. Capt. Gurney and the Barnsley Pals arrived with only 9 men. I could not see any of my waves except for wounded men lying in No-Man's land. Germans bombarding our trenches.

Percy Holmes, the brother of an original Pal, recalled "I remember when the news came through to Accrington that the Pals had been wiped out. I don't think there was a street in Accrington and district that didn't have their blinds drawn, and the bell at Christ Church tolled all the day."

(The Accrington Pals website - http://www.pals.org.uk/pals_e.htm)



How have the memories of the Accrington Pals been kept alive since 1916?



Memorial to the Accrington Pals on the Somme, France

The memorial was built with red Accrington brick and dedicated in 1991 to the memory of the Accrington Pals.

The Accrington Pals website

This website is dedicated to the memory of the 11th (Service) Battalion (Accrington) East Lancashire Regiment, better known as the Accrington Pals. The website can be found at:

http://www.pals.org.uk/pals_e.htm

The Accrington Pals, a play by Peter Whelan

This fictional play was written in 1982 by Peter Whelan. It tells the story of the men of the Accrington Pals who volunteered to fight in the British Army during the First World War and of the women who were left behind in Accrington. More details can be found by searching *The Accrington Pals*, Peter Whelan, on Google.

The Accrington Pals, a song by Mike Harding

In 1986 Mike Harding, a folk singer wrote a song about Accrington Pals – the lyrics and the song can be found on his website at:

<http://www.mikeharding.co.uk/books/poetry/poems/the-accrington-pals>