

Film Show - The Battle of the Somme

Alan Lee

On Monday 12th September 2016, thanks largely to the efforts of Mike McFarnell, the people of Dover, and from further afield, were treated to a free viewing of original footage of the Battle of the Somme. The film was released through the kind partnership of the Imperial War Museum and English Heritage.

In 1916 whilst the Somme Campaign was ongoing, the Battle of the Somme film was released as newsreel and seen by over 20 million people. Audiences flocked to the cinemas for a chance to see actual footage from the battlefield and in the hope of spotting their loved ones on screen.

The film was 74 minutes long and was shown at the Silver Screen Cinema, Dover, with the kind co-operation of the management and staff. There were two showings one at 11.00am and one at 2.30pm. The film was also shown in the secret wartime tunnels, Dover Castle, on Sunday 11th at 7.30pm.

The Battle of the Somme was a major allied offensive against the German Empire during the First World War. It

lasted from 1st July to 18th November 1916 on both sides of the River Somme in France. It was one of the largest and bloodiest battles in history, in which more than 1,000,000 men were wounded or killed. In 1916 the British, French, Italian and Russian armies, (the Allies), had agreed a strategy of combined offensives against the Central Powers. The Somme offensive was the Franco-British contribution. The main part of the offensive was to be made by the French army, supported on the northern flank by the Fourth Army of the British Expeditionary Force.

When the German Army began the Battle of Verdun on the Meuse on 21st February 1916, many French divisions intended for the Somme were diverted and the supporting attack by the British then became the principal attack.

The first day of the Battle of the Somme on the 1st July 1916 against the German Front Line comprised:

A diversionary attack at Gommecourt on the northern, left wing of the attack front by two divisions of the British Third Army.

A centre thrust totalling over 100,000 men of 12 divisions in five corps of the British Fourth Army between Maricourt and Serre in the vicinity of the Albert-Bapaume road.

An attack astride the River Somme on the British right wing by two corps of the French Sixth Army from Foucaucourt-en-Santerre south of the Somme to Maricourt on the north bank.



Before the Attack The Battle of the Somme 1916

At 07.20 hours, ten minutes before Zero Hour, eight huge mines were detonated. The largest was under Hawthorn Redoubt at Beaumont Hamel a German strongpoint on the crest of Hawthorn Ridge. The plan was to detonate the mines and to lift the heavy artillery barrage off the German front line at the same time, ten minutes before the infantry attack. This gave the German troops sheltering in their dugouts and bunkers forewarning that the British attack was imminent. As the British began their advance, the German troops who had survived caved-in bunkers carried out their well-rehearsed drill of climbing out from the protection of their deep bunkers to man the smashed-in trenches and their strategically-placed machine gun positions. This had devastating consequences for most of the men in the British battalions advancing towards them.

Heavy casualties in many sectors of the British attack, with large numbers of men wounded or killed by German bullets



Hawthorne Ridge mine explosion



Leaving the Trench



Over The Top



German Soldiers



Sikh Soldiers



British Wounded during Battle of the Somme

before they could even cross No Man's Land, resulted in only a few small successful gains of ground north of the Albert-Bapaume road.

South of that road and on the far right of the attack the British achieved significant success on the front between Mametz and Maricourt, with troops of the 18th and 30th Divisions successfully reaching their objectives by the end of the day.

Almost all the divisions attacking north of Mametz village had a day of disappointment and loss. Small parties did reach some of their objectives beyond the German front line, but the overwhelming loss of thousands of British troops wounded and killed within the first hour of the attack limited the possibility of any support or reinforcement.



German POWs



The Somme Dead

The first day of the Battle of the Somme achieved limited success and was also the worst day in the history of the British army, with over 57,000 casualties, mainly on the front between the Albert-Bapaume road and Gommecourt, where the attack was defeated and few British troops reached the German front line.

The British army on the Somme was a mixture of the remains of the pre-war regular army, the Territorial Forces and the Kitchener Army, which was composed of Pals Battalions, recruited from the same places and occupations.

Following the tragedy of the first day of the battle on 1st July, with its heavy British losses and limited gains in captured ground fighting settled into a war of attrition

At the end of the battle on the 18th

November the British and French forces had penetrated only 6 miles into German-occupied territory. The Anglo-French armies failed to capture Péronne and were still 3 miles from Bapaume, where the German armies maintained their positions over the winter.



Early Tank on the Somme 1916

Notable for the importance of air power and the first use of the tank the battle remains controversial over its necessity, significance and effect.

The dreadful irony of the situation would be that within 14 months the ground won

at such great cost to the British Army in 1916 would be swept back under control of the German Army in the Spring Offensive of March and April 1918.

Refurbishment Committee

Jeremy Cope

We continue to lobby and work for improvements to standards of cleanliness and of reduction of litter in our town. It is not easy to affect standards which can only come from how all who live in Dover conduct themselves. One area that has improved is the verges alongside the A2 and the A20 roads. Not, I fear, because car and lorry drivers have improved their behaviour but simply that those responsible have sorted matters. A thank you to Alan Sencicle for his lobbying.

The planters in the middle of town have been really very good this year. One area that Sylvie Parsons continues to lobby about is the care and maintenance of the topiary in the Market Square which could do with some TLC.

Jenny Olpin and John Cotton continue with their liaison with the police through their regular meetings. They take forward members' concerns so that if you have any matters you feel are appropriate do please let Jenny know tel: 01304 825011 or jenny.olpin@uwclub.net

Other matters

I understand that we can still keep our old fashioned street lampposts if they need to be converted to use LED lighting. Our particular concerns are the lampposts in, for example, Castle Street. Jenny and Mike Weston continue to work at getting signs for tourist use on the paths that include the Bleriot Memorial and Langdon Cliffs.

If our members have concerns on any of the matters covered by the committee do please let me know on 01304 211348