

## The Somme

Published to coincide with the centenary commemoration of the battle of the Somme, this new study comprises 12 separate articles written by some of the foremost military historians, each of whom looks at a specific aspect of the battle. Focusing on key aspects of the British, French and German forces, overall strategic and tactical impacts of the battle and with an introduction by renowned World War I scholar Professor Sir Hew Strachan, *The Battle of the Somme* is a timely collection of the latest research and analysis of the battle. The terrors of the Somme have largely come to embody trench warfare on the Western Front in the modern imagination, but this new book looks beyond the horrendous conditions and staggering casualty rates to provide new, insightful research on one of the most pivotal battles of the war.

For many British visitors, the fighting in the Somme starts on 1 July 1916 and few consider what happened in the area before the British took over the line, part in later 1915 and some in 1916. In fact there was extensive fighting during the opening phase of the war, as both the French and Germans tried to outflank each other. Through the autumn and winter there was a struggle to hold the best tactical ground, with small scale but ferocious skirmishes from Beaumont Hamel

to the Somme. The conflict in what became known as the Glory Hole, close to the well known Lochnagar Crater, was particularly prolonged. Evidence of the fighting, mainly in the form of a large mine crater field, is visible today. The underground war was not confined to la Boisselle, with a similar crater field developing on Redan Ridge; whilst south of the Somme, to be covered in a future volume, great lengths of No Man's Land were dominated by mine craters. Serre, best known to British readers for its association with the Pals Battalions on 1 July 1916, witnessed a significant, if local, French offensive in June 1915, with casualties running into the several thousands. It is a battle that has left its mark on the landscape today, with a French national cemetery and a commemorative chapel acting as memorials to the battle. The book is introduced by a chapter describing the role of the area in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, a war which arguably provided the seed bed for the outbreak of war in 1914. Several battles were fought in Somme villages that were to become the victims of war all over again forty plus years later.

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme was revived by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1994 as part of an acknowledgement of the peace process. The production was subsequently taken to the Edinburgh Festival in 1995 and opened at the Royal Shakespeare Company's Barbican Theatre,

London, in March 1996.

A history of the British Army's experience at the Battle of the Somme in France during World War I. After an immense but useless bombardment, at 7:30 AM on July 1, 1916, the British Army went over the top and attacked the German trenches. It was the first day of the battle of the Somme, and on that day, the British suffered nearly 60,000 casualties, two for every yard of their front. With more than fifty times the daily losses at El Alamein and fifteen times the British casualties on D-day, July 1, 1916, was the blackest day in the history of the British Army. But, more than that, as Lloyd George recognized, it was a watershed in the history of the First World War. The Army that attacked on that day was the volunteer Army that had answered Kitchener's call. It had gone into action confident of a decisive victory. But by sunset on the first day on the Somme, no one could any longer think of a war that might be won. Martin Middlebrook's research has covered not just official and regimental histories and tours of the battlefields, but interviews with hundreds of survivors, both British and German. As to the action itself, he conveys the overall strategic view and the terrifying reality that it was for front-line soldiers. Revised in 2016 from the 1971 original edition. Praise for *The First Day on the Somme* "The remembrance of those lives, difficult as it may be, will start in earnest now, with this wonderful

book. It's almost like being there yourself... enough said.”—Books Monthly (UK)  
The offensive on the Somme took place between July and November 1916 and is perhaps the most iconic battle of the Great War. It was there that Kitchener's famous 'Pals' Battalions were first sent into action en masse and it was a battlefield where many of the dreams and aspirations of a nation, hopeful of victory, were agonizingly dashed. Because of its legendary status, the Somme has been the subject of many books, and many more will come out next year. However, nothing has ever been published on the Battle in which the soldiers' own photographs have been used to illustrate both the campaign's extraordinary comradeship and its carnage.

At 07.30 hours on 1 July 1916, the devastating cacophony of the Allied artillery fell silent along the front on the Somme. The ear-splitting explosions were replaced by the shrill sound of hundreds of whistles being blown. At that moment, tens of thousands of British soldiers climbed out from the trenches on their part of the Western Front, and began to make their way steadily towards the German lines opposite. It was the first day of the Battle of the Somme. By the end of the day, a number of the regiments involved had met with some degree of success; others had suffered heavy losses for no gain, whilst a few quite literally ceased to exist. That day, the old infantry tactics of the British Army clashed head-on with

the reality of modern warfare. On what is generally accepted as the worst day in the British Army's history, there were more than 60,000 casualties a third of them fatal. In this publication, the authors have drawn together, for the first time ever, all the War Diary entries for 171 British Regiments that went over the top that day a day that even now still touches so many families both in the United Kingdom and around the world. The result will be a vital work of reference to the events of 1 July 1916, a valuable information source for not only for those interested in military history, but genealogists and historians alike.

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This new edition of Paul Reed's classic book *Walking the Somme* is an essential traveling companion for anyone visiting the Somme battlefields of 1916. His

book, first published over ten years ago, is the result of a lifetime's research into the battle and the landscape over which it was fought. From Gommecourt, Serre, Beaumont-Hamel and Thiepval to Montauban, High Wood, Delville Wood and Flers, he guides the walker across the major sites associated with the fighting. These are now features of the peaceful Somme countryside. In total there are 16 walks, including a new one tracing the operations around Mametz Wood, and all the original walks have been fully revised and brought up to date. Walking the Somme brings the visitor not only to the places where the armies clashed but to the landscape of monuments, cemeteries and villages that make the Somme battlefield so moving to explore.

A provocative reinterpretation of a defining World War I battle argues that it provided crucial information to British and French forces to ending the war by shaping period understandings of such emerging technologies as the tank and machine gun. Reprint. The First World War created the modern world. A conflict of unprecedented ferocity, it abruptly ended the relative peace and prosperity of the Victorian era, unleashing such demons of the twentieth century as mechanized warfare and mass death. It also helped to usher in the ideas that have shaped our times--modernism in the arts, new approaches to psychology and medicine, radical thoughts about economics and society--and in so doing shattered the faith in rationalism and liberalism that had

prevailed in Europe since the Enlightenment. With *The First World War*, John Keegan, one of our most eminent military historians, fulfills a lifelong ambition to write the definitive account of the Great War for our generation. Probing the mystery of how a civilization at the height of its achievement could have propelled itself into such a ruinous conflict, Keegan takes us behind the scenes of the negotiations among Europe's crowned heads (all of them related to one another by blood) and ministers, and their doomed efforts to defuse the crisis. He reveals how, by an astonishing failure of diplomacy and communication, a bilateral dispute grew to engulf an entire continent. But the heart of Keegan's superb narrative is, of course, his analysis of the military conflict. With unequalled authority and insight, he recreates the nightmarish engagements whose names have become legend--Verdun, the Somme and Gallipoli among them--and sheds new light on the strategies and tactics employed, particularly the contributions of geography and technology. No less central to Keegan's account is the human aspect. He acquaints us with the thoughts of the intriguing personalities who oversaw the tragically unnecessary catastrophe--from heads of state like Russia's hapless tsar, Nicholas II, to renowned warmakers such as Haig, Hindenburg and Joffre. But Keegan reserves his most affecting personal sympathy for those whose individual efforts history has not recorded--"the anonymous millions, indistinguishably drab, undifferentially deprived of any scrap of the glories that by tradition made the life of the man-at-arms tolerable." By the end of the war, three great empires--the Austro-

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Hungarian, the Russian and the Ottoman--had collapsed. But as Keegan shows, the devastation extended over the entirety of Europe, and still profoundly informs the politics and culture of the continent today. His brilliant, panoramic account of this vast and terrible conflict is destined to take its place among the classics of world history.

With 24 pages of photographs, 2 endpaper maps, and 15 maps in text

Once assumed to be a driver or even cause of conflict, commemoration during Ireland's Decade of Centenaries came to occupy a central place in peacebuilding efforts. The inclusive and cross-communal reorientation of commemoration, particularly of the First World War, has been widely heralded as signifying new forms of reconciliation and a greater "maturity" in relationships between Ireland and the UK and between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland. In this study, Jonathan Evershed interrogates the particular and implicitly political claims about the nature of history, memory, and commemoration that define and sustain these assertions, and explores some of the hidden and countervailing transcripts that underwrite and disrupt them. Drawing on two years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Belfast, Evershed explores Ulster Loyalist commemoration of the Battle of the Somme, its conflicted politics, and its confrontation with official commemorative discourse and practice during the Decade of Centenaries. He investigates how and why the myriad social, political, cultural, and economic changes that have defined postconflict Northern Ireland have been experienced by Loyalists as a culture war, and how commemoration is the means by which they

confront and challenge the perceived erosion of their identity. He reveals the ways in which this brings Loyalists into conflict not only with the politics of Irish Nationalism, but with the "peacebuilding" state and, crucially, with each other. He demonstrates how commemoration works to reproduce the intracommunal conflicts that it claims to have overcome and interrogates its nuanced (and perhaps counterintuitive) function in conflict transformation.

An analysis of the memorialisation of Australia's role in the Somme and the Anzac mythology that contributes to Australia's identity.

With a few notable exceptions, the French efforts on the Somme have been largely missing or minimized in British accounts of the Battle of the Somme. And yet they held this sector of the Front from the outbreak of the war until well into 1915 and, indeed, in parts into 1916. It does not hurt to be reminded that the French army suffered some 200,000 casualties in the 1916 offensive. David O'Maras book provides an outline narrative describing the arrival of the war on the Somme and some of the notable and quite fierce actions that took place that autumn and, indeed, into December of 1914. Extensive mine warfare was a feature of 1915 and beyond on the Somme; for example under Redan Ridge and before Dompierre and Fay. The French limited offensive at Serre in June 1915 is reasonably well known, but there was fighting elsewhere for example the Germans launched a short, sharp, limited attack at Frise in January 1916, part of the diversionary action before the Germans launched their ill-fated offensive at

Verdun. The book covers the Somme front from Gommecourt, north of the Somme, to Chaulnes, at the southern end of the battle zone of 1916. The reader is taken around key points in various tours. For many British visitors the battlefields south of the Somme will be a revelation; there is much to see, both of cemeteries and memorials, but also substantial traces of the fighting remain on the ground, some of which is accessible to the public. It has always been something of a disgrace that there is so little available, even in French, to educate the public in an accessible written form about the substantial effort made by France's army on the Somme; this book and subsequent, more detailed volumes to be published in the coming years will go some way to rectify this. British visitors should be fascinated by the story of these forgotten men of France and the largely unknown part of the Somme battlefield.

The Battle of the Somme is one of the most famous, and earliest, films of war ever made. The film records the most disastrous day in the history of the British army—1 July 1916—and it had a huge impact when it was shown in Britain during the war. Since then images from it have been repeated so often in books and documentaries that it has profoundly influenced our view of the battle and of the Great War itself. Yet this book is the first in-depth study of this historic film, and it is the first to relate it to the surviving battleground of the Somme. The authors explore the film and its history in fascinating detail. They investigate how much of it was faked and consider how much credit for it should go to Geoffrey Malins and how much to John MacDowell. And they use modern

photographs of the locations to give us a telling insight into the landscape of the battle and into the way in which this pioneering film was created. Their analysis of scenes in the film tells us so much about the way the British army operated in June and July 1916—how the troops were dressed and equipped, how they were armed and how their weapons were used. In some cases it is even possible to discover what they were saying. This painstaking exercise in historical reconstruction will be compelling reading for everyone who is interested in the Great War and the Battle of the Somme.

On 15 September 1916 during the Battle of the Somme, tanks - one of the decisive weapons of twentieth-century warfare - were sent into action for the first time. In his previous books Trevor Pidgeon, one of the leading authorities on the early tanks, has told the story of that memorable day, but only now has his account of later tank operations during the Somme battle become available. In this, his last work which was completed shortly before he died, he reconstructs the tank actions that took place between late September and November when the Somme offensive was closed down. His account gives a vivid insight into the actions and experiences of the tank crews, and it shows the appalling dangers they faced as they maneuvered their crude, vulnerable and unreliable machines towards the enemy. His book will be essential reading for anyone who is familiar with his previous studies of the subject and for anyone who wants to follow in the tracks of the tanks as they lumbered across the battlefield nearly 100 years ago.

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Much controversy has surrounded the Somme offensive relating to its justification and its impact upon the course of the war. General Sir Douglas Haig's policies have been the subject of considerable debate about whether the heavy losses sustained were worth the small gains that were achieved which appeared to have little strategic value. That was certainly the case on many sectors on 1 July 1916, where British soldiers were unable to cross No Man's Land and failed to reach, or penetrate into, the German trenches. In other sectors, however, breaches were made in the German lines culminating in the capture that day of Leipzig Redoubt, Mametz and Montauban. This book aims to highlight the failures and successes on that day and for the first time evaluate those factors that caused some divisions to succeed in capturing their objectives whilst others failed. An important new study, this book is certain to answer these questions as well as challenging the many myths and misconceptions surrounding the battle that have been propagated for the last 100 years.

*Pals on the Somme* covers the history of all the Pals Battalions who fought on the Somme during the First World War. The book looks at the events which led to the war and how the Pals phenomenon was born. It considers the attitude and social conditions in Britain at the time. It covers the training and equipping of the Battalions, the preparations for the Big Push, 1st July 1916, and going over the top, and how each battalion fared, failed or succeeded. It looks at how they Battalions had to undergo a change after the 1st July, due to the heavy casualties, and the final victory in 1918, and

how the battalions were eventually amalgamated. The final chapter examines how each area coped in the aftermath of losing their men in the three year slaughter. It covers the organizations and visits to the Battlefields as they are today.

On 1 July 1916, after a stupendous seven-day artillery preparation, the British Army finally launched its attack on the German line around the River Somme. Over the next four and half months they continued to attack, with little or no gain, and with horrendous losses to both sides. This book, written by the world's foremost expert in the subject, describes in chilling detail everything from the grand strategy to the experience of the men on the ground. Illustrated throughout, it is a stunning and absorbing depiction of the horror that was the Somme in 1916.

Peter Simkins has established a reputation over the last forty years as one of the most original and stimulating historians of the First World War. He has made a major contribution to the debate about the performance of the British Army on the Western Front. This collection of his most perceptive and challenging essays, which concentrates on British operations in France between 1916 and 1918, shows that this reputation is richly deserved. He focuses on key aspects of the army's performance in battle, from the first day of the Somme to the Hundred Days, and gives a fascinating insight into the developing theory and practice of the army as it struggled to find a way to break through the German line. His rigorous analysis undermines some of the common assumptions - and the myths - that still cling to the history of these British

battles.

Rescuing from history the heroes on the front line whose bravery has been overlooked, and giving voice to their bereaved relatives at home, Hugh Sebag-Montefiore reveals the Battle of the Somme in all its glory and misery, helping us to realize that there are many meaningful ways to define a battle when seen through the eyes of those who lived it.

Major and Mrs. Holt's Battlefield Guide to the Somme is, without doubt, one of the best-selling guide books to the battlefields of the Somme. This latest updated edition, includes four recommended, timed itineraries representing one day's traveling. Every stop on route has an accompanying description and often a tale of heroic or tragic action. Memorials, private and official, sites of memorable conflict, the resting places of personalities of note are all drawn together with sympathetic and understanding commentary that gives the reader a sensitivity towards the events of 1916.

Including a 60-minute DVD with rare contemporary footage taking you right into the battle, this title is an illustrated history of the deadly Somme offensive of 1916. It takes a look at the outbreak and progress of this bloody war, with reasons behind it, its impact and aftermath.

Limited by the Imperial War Graves Commission to 66 letters - and that included counting the space between each word as one letter - this first in a short series of books highlights what The Times called, 'the heart of the bereaved'; the thousands of

silent voices that 'speak' from the war cemeteries. Voices which stand at the opposite end of the commemorative spectrum to the Cenotaph; an austere 'silent' tribute to the Empire's dead, the other a clamour of individual 'voices', each one a personal tribute to an individual and cultural reference from the world which these soldiers and their families lived in. In this book, the selected epitaphs look at a variety of themes, tones and locations from both ordinary and famous backgrounds, the privileged and the poor—the officers and men who all lie in some corner of a foreign field. Second in the series publishing in 2017 will feature epitaphs from the Battle of Passchendaele (1917). A complete study of these epitaphs will be published to coincide with the centenary of the Armistice in 2018.

Between 1 July and 18 November 1916 Britain's new volunteer army took the leading role in a battle on the Western Front for the first time. The Somme offensive was intended to achieve a decisive victory for the British and French Allies over the Germans, yet the Allies failed to achieve all of their objectives and the war was to continue for another two years. Over a million men from both sides became casualties in the long and bitter struggle on the Somme in 1916. This book tells this story through the unique collections of IWM. Using artefacts, medals, documents, interviews, film, art, and photographs, it reconstructs not only the history of the famous battle, but provides an intimate insight into the experiences of those who were there.

On the first day of the Somme enlisted railwayman Jim Stringer lies trapped in a

shell hole, smoking cigarette after cigarette under the bullets and the blazing sun. He calculates his chances of survival - even before they departed for France, a member of Jim's unit had been found dead. During the stand-off that follows, Jim and his comrades must operate by night the vitally important trains carrying munitions to the Front, through a ghostly landscape of shattered trees where high explosive and shrapnel shells rain down. Close co-operation and trust are vital. Yet proof piles up of an enemy within, and as a ferocious military policeman pursues his investigation into the original killing, the finger of accusation begins to point towards Jim himself . . .

Edwin Lutyens' Memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval in Northern France, visited annually by tens of thousands of tourists, is arguably the finest structure erected by any British architect in the twentieth century. It is the principal, tangible expression of the defining event in Britain's experience and memory of the Great War, the first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916, and it bears the names of 73,000 soldiers whose bodies were never found at the end of that bloody and futile campaign. This brilliant study by an acclaimed architectural historian tells the origin of the memorial in the context of commemorating the war dead; it considers the giant classical brick arch in architectural terms, and also explores its wider historical significance and its

resonances today. So much of the meaning of the twentieth century is concentrated here; the Thiepval Memorial to the Missing casts a shadow into the future, a shadow which extends beyond the dead of the Holocaust, to the Gulag, to the 'disappeared' of South America and of Tianenmen. Reissued in a beautiful and striking new edition for the centenary of the Somme.

Published in a new edition on the centenary of the seismic battle, this book provides the definitive account of the Somme and assigns responsibility to military and political leaders for its catastrophic outcome. “A magisterial piece of scholarship. . . . It is a model of historical research and should do much to further our understanding of the Great War and how it was fought.”—Contemporary Review “Revisionist history at its best.”—Library Journal (starred review) “A major addition to the literature on the military history of the Great War.”—Jay Winter

While best known as being the scene of the most terrible carnage in the WW1 the French department of the Somme has seen many other battles from Roman times to 1944. William the Conqueror launched his invasion from there; the French and English fought at Crecy in 1346; Henry Vs army marched through on their way to Agincourt in 1415; the Prussians came in 1870. The Great War saw three great battles and approximately half of the 400,000 who died on the

Somme were British a terrible harvest, marked by 242 British cemeteries and over 50,000 lie in unmarked graves. These statistics explain in part why the area is visited year-on-year by ever increasing numbers of British and Commonwealth citizens. This evocative book written by the authors of the iconic *First Day on the Somme* is a thorough guide to the cemeteries, memorials and battlefields of the area, with the emphasis on the fighting of 1916 and 1918, with fascinating descriptions and anecdotes.

1916. *The Somme*. With over a million casualties, it was the most brutal battle of World War I. It is a clash that even now, over 90 years later, remains seared into the national consciousness, conjuring up images of muddy trenches and young lives tragically wasted. Its first day, July 1st 1916 - on which the British suffered 57,470 casualties, including 19,240 dead - is the bloodiest day in the history of the British armed forces to date. On the German side, an officer famously described it as 'the muddy grave of the German field army'. By the end of the battle, the British had learned many lessons in modern warfare while the Germans had suffered irreplaceable losses, ultimately laying the foundations for the Allies' final victory on the Western Front. Drawing on a wealth of material from the vast Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, *Forgotten Voices of the Somme* presents an intimate, poignant, sometimes even bleakly funny insight into life on

the front line: from the day-to-day struggle of extraordinary circumstances to the white heat of battle and the constant threat of injury or death. Featuring contributions from soldiers of both sides and of differing backgrounds, ranks and roles, many of them previously unpublished, this is the definitive oral history of this unique and terrible conflict.

Analysis of British and German prose fiction written between 1916 and 1937, with different ideological points of view. Authors represented include, from Germany, Fritz von Unruh, Josef M. Wehner, Werner Beumelburg, Arnold Zweig, and from Britain, Alec J. Dawson, Alan P. Herbert, Arthur D. Gristwood, Frederic Manning and David Jones.

The first day of the Somme has had more of a widespread emotional impact on the psyche of the British public than any other battle in history. Now, 100 years later, Robert Kershaw attempts to understand the carnage, using the voices of the British and German soldiers who lived through that awful day. In the early hours of 1 July 1916, the British General staff placed its faith in patriotism and guts, believing that one 'Big Push' would bring on the end of the Great War. By sunset, there were 57,470 men – more than half the size of the present-day British Army – who lay dead, missing or wounded. On that day hope died. Juxtaposing the British trench view against that from the German parapet,

Kershaw draws on eyewitness accounts, memories and letters to expose the true horror of that day. Amongst the mud, gore and stench of death, there are also stories of humanity and resilience, of all-embracing comradeship and gritty patriotic British spirit. However it was this very emotion which ultimately caused thousands of young men to sacrifice themselves on the Somme.

"Despite superior air and artillery power, British soldiers died in catastrophic numbers at the Battle of Somme in 1916. What went wrong, and who was responsible? This book meticulously reconstructs the battle, assigns responsibility to military and political leaders, and changes forever the way we understand this encounter and the history of the Western Front"--Publisher description.

After an immense but useless bombardment, at 7.30 am. On 1 July 1916 the British Army went over the top and attacked the German trenches. It was the first day of the battle of the Somme, and on that day the British suffered nearly 60,000 casualties, two for every yard of their front. With more than fifty times the daily losses at El Alamein and fifteen times the British casualties on D-day, 1 July 1916 was the blackest day in the history of the British Army. But, more than that, as Lloyd George recognised, it was a watershed in the history of the First World War. The Army that attacked on that day was the volunteer Army that had answered Kitchener's call. It had gone into action confident of a decisive victory. But by sunset on the first day on the Somme, no one could any longer think of a war that might be won. Martin Middlebrook's

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research has covered not just official and regimental histories and tours of the battlefields, but interviews with hundreds of survivors, both British and German. As to the action itself, he conveys the overall strategic view and the terrifying reality that it was for front-line soldiers. Describes the historiographical controversies about this Anglo-French offensive and provides the most up-to-date, comprehensive bibliography on the subject.

A U.S. release of a classic memoir by the author of *Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It* weighs the significance of World War I as it is reflected in memories, works of art, cemeteries and traditions that illuminate humanity's understanding of and relationship to the conflict. Original.

A major new history of the most infamous battle of the First World War, as described by the men who fought it. On 1 July 1916, Douglas Haig's army launched the 'Big Push' that was supposed finally to bring an end to the stalemate on the Western Front. What happened next was a human catastrophe: scrambling over the top into the face of the German machine guns and artillery fire, almost 20,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers were killed that day alone, and twice as many wounded - the greatest loss in a single day ever sustained by the British Army. The battle did not stop there, however. It dragged on for another 4 months, leaving the battlefield strewn with literally hundreds of thousands of bodies. The Somme has remained a byword for the futility of war ever since. In this major new history, Peter Hart describes how the battle looked from the point of view of those who fought it. Using never-before-seen eyewitness testimonies, he shows us this epic conflict from all angles. We see what it was like to crawl across No Man's Land in the face of the German guns, what it was like for those who stayed behind in the trenches - the padres, the artillerymen, the doctors. We also see what the battle

looked like from the air, as the RFC battled to keep control of the skies above the battlefield. All this is put in the context of the background to the battle, and Haig's overall strategy for the Western Front, making this the most comprehensive history of the battle since Lyn MacDonald's bestselling work over 20 years ago.

Previous works have concentrated on the 'Pal' in Britain's northern towns and cities. This book seeks to explore the little appreciated part in the Battle of the Somme played by the Regular and Volunteer Service battalions of two small West Country regiments; the Devonshire Regiment and the Dorset Regiment. These two regiments had five battalions in action on the first day of the battle and were represented in most of the significant attacks during the three and half months of the 1916. The reader will be able to form a clear picture of the battle's development as a whole through the eyes of Westcountry soldiers who fought on the Somme. Mercy dog, Flo, has more to contend with than racing across the dangerous battlefield of the Somme. Can she get her medical kit to the injured? Can she lead Ray, the stretcher-bearer, and his donkey to them in time? Depicting the key landmarks of the Somme, this story pays tribute to the remarkable bravery of the animals who played their part during World War One. offensive to be waged against Germany even as France poured incredible numbers of men into the slaughterhouse that was the desperate defense of Verdun. *élan vital*” of the French people, a quality, he argued, that set the Gallic race apart from the rest of the world. French losses were just under 200,000. The Germans lost at least 650,000. Just as the French refused to give up ground at Verdun, the Germans held on stubbornly at the Somme—so stubbornly that General Ludendorff actually complained that his men “fought too doggedly, clinging too resolutely to the mere holding of ground, with the result that the losses were

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heavy.” The only thing “conclusive” about the Somme was the ineluctable fact of death. No battle ever fought in any conflict provided a stronger incentive for all sides to reach a negotiated peace—the “peace without victory” that Woodrow Wilson, still standing on the sidelines, urged the combatants to agree upon. Instead, the Kaiser, appalled both by Verdun and the Somme, relieved Falkenhayn and replaced him with Hindenburg and Ludendorff, who had achieved great success on the Eastern Front. The new commanders created two new defensive lines, both well behind the Somme front. On the one hand, it was a retreat. On the other, it was a commitment to draw the French and British farther east and invite them to sacrifice more of their soldiery. The modest advance the British made was but the prelude to additional slaughter.

‘The heavy smell of blood filled the air, and every moment you had this intense fear that the next bullet was meant for you. So remembered William Thorne, a South African volunteer soldier who fought in the muddy trenches along the River Somme in France on Europe’s Western Front. A boy of nineteen at the time, he was one of thousands of South Africans who took part in the 1916 Somme Offensive between the Allied forces and the Germans. It was one of the bloodiest and costliest conflicts of the First World War, resulting in over a million deaths. The men of the 1st South African Infantry Brigade were involved on a large scale and distinguished themselves in all major engagements during the campaign. But their bravery came at a price. In the first month alone, after six days of fighting to recapture the village of Longueval and clear Delville Wood of enemy soldiers, of the brigade’s 3 433 soldiers, only 750 were left standing. The rest were dead or wounded. By the armistice, the South Africans had suffered some 15 000 casualties in France, of which one third had died.

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