

## **The Start of the Battle**

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World War 1 was one of the largest conflicts in European history. It involved nearly eighteen nations and this large number of nations taking part truly gave it the just name of a "World War". The conflict started off with a few smaller political events that shifted the mood of the governments from peace to the need of a larger conflict. This created a powder keg that only needed a spark to ignite the flame of war. The spark came with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on June 28, 1914

The war started as Austria invaded Serbia. This caused "Russia to mobilize towards Austria. Germany was called to Austria's side and as a precaution invaded neutral Belgium and Luxemburg". As the Germans tried to push into France, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany/Austria. What followed was four years of carnage and bloody conflict

During the next four years, battles were fought in which millions of artillery shells were fired and millions of men were killed or mutilated. The advent of new weapons led eventually to the development of trench warfare and this in turn led to stalemate. For two years nobody moves on the western front

In 1916 an attempt was made to break out of the trench stalemate. The British decided in the year to begin a new offensive at the Somme in France. The area of Albert (located in a northern region in Picardy) was the starting point of this offensive. From September 1914 to August 1918, This site had been the site of four major battles, fought by British, French, and German forces.

This new offensive for 1916 was planned to be a counter attack against the German defence position near the river Somme. This was being done to help recapture land that was taken during an earlier German offensive. The British decided along with the French to attack across the south bank of the river. They believed this was the least defended position held by the Germans

A British Commander by the name of Haig suggested that an artillery bombardment help the capture of the Montauban spur which was a piece of land bordering the river. He believed that would be easier on the first day of the offensive and that the tactical benefit of possessing of the

Montauban and Serre spurs, would reduce the danger from German counter attacks.

Problems arose, when the French contribution to the offensive was reduced and in late May, there was doubts that the French would even participate at all.

“The British Forces heading into the Battle of Albert were on the other hand not unprepared or unequipped. They had received a large shipment of artillery bringing combat ready guns up to 1,537”. After digging in the guns were ready. However the German forces on the other side were doing the same and began to build up two large defensive trenches. The first was nothing more than a sentry nest but the second one was much more defensible. This would help slow down the British forces during the attack. German artillery was also organised in a series of sectors with each soldier was required to remember what sector they were in if they wanted the support from the artillery unit.

The Battle of Albert began on the 1st of July. Nothing went to plan for the British right from the start. This would eventually result in the British army enduring the bloodiest day in their history, suffering 57,470 casualties, This including 19,240 dead on the first day alone. This was one of the largest losses of men that the British had taken up to this point in a single battle.

The battle began with confidence for the British shelling attacks the German positions before the Anglo-French infantry attacked on 1 July. During this time the French army had captured all of the German first positions except for Frise on the Somme Canal and captured near 4000 Prisoners.

The Germans however counter-attacked at Belloy, La Maisonette and Biaches. This increased French Casualties. During this time artillery began a bombardment of the German second position. Frise was captured and the second position attacked and broken into at Herbécourt, where the French surrounded the village. The attack was driven out at Assevillers, with the help of artillery-fire from the south and with the help of the French cavalry. The Germans had abandoned their artillery as the French made their quickest push through the war.

“One of the largest conflicts of the opening days was at Contalmaison when three battalions attacked the German Quadrangle Support Trench on 7 July”. Before the main attack the Allied powers bombarded the

Trench but the shots fell short and landed on their own troops. The Germans soon started their counter attack with a bombardment and pushed back the enemy troops. The Allied Forces were back where they began.

Soon an attack from woods to the left of the trench was tried but the troops were pushed back near 400 yards by heavy machine gun fire from the enemy positions. As another battalion moved into Contalmaison and fortified a church defending themselves from enemy attacks for a few hours. Soon enemy bombardments and fresh German troops forced them to retreat from their position out of the town. After a few more small skirmishes the Germans attempted a attack from the Leftern woods. A British Recon plane pointed it out quickly and they were ambushed by small arms fire from the troops.

Again the Allies tried to push the left flank getting further towards north end of Ovillers. On July 9th, two brigades of the German Division spent the morning attacking south and west of Contalmaison and part of the Brigade entered Bailiff Wood before being forced out by fire from the British artillery. The British soon attempted a counter attack through the woods which was again driven back by the defensive line with many casualties on both sides. Soon after the Germans had to retreat from their frontline defence position.

The German positions between Mametz Wood and Contalmaison, were finally captured by the French Division, after they were outflanked by the capture of the village and the southern part of the wood. However bombing attacks on enemy trenches on 9th failed.

The French Sixth Force moved forward towards the Flacourt plateau near the Village soon captured Belloy-en-Santerre and Feuilleres. On 4 July and busted through the German third line but German reinforcements were able to hold them back and protect Barleaux. British attacks south of the road between Albert and Bapaume began on 2 July 1916 Bernafay and Caterpillar woods were occupied from 3–4 July and then fighting to capture Trones Wood, Mametz Wood and Contalmaison took place until early on 14 July. This battle was the opening days of the war and it was a show of how brutal the future conflict of the Somme would be as the high number of casualties in a single day would pay testament to how brutal this new style of combat was

By the 13th of July the Conflict had lead to high casualties numbers on both sides of the conflict. The English casualties were the worst of the three forces fighting in these battles them taking a total of 82.470 over the thirteen days the largest in the battle compared to the Germans 56.515 casualties. The French forces took the least amount of casualties due to their focus on air support and levelling the ground with bombardment before the forces moved in. The French troops only losing 24.600 compared to the massive amount of deaths the other forces took at the bloody conflict. This battle was only one of many and was not even one of the bloodiest of this multi nation conflict and it was only the stepping stones towards the larger conflict that was the second world war that more than 60 million people died in

The battle of Albert was a disaster for the allied forces. Despite planning taking place no real advance was made. The casualties were huge on both sides. The allied commands had to regroup and rethink a new way of ending this conflict. The era of the tank was about to begin