On July 1, 1916, the British and French launched the **Battle of the Somme** to relieve pressure on the French army defending Verdun. The front ran roughly northwest–southeast, 6km east of Albert across the valley of the Ancre and over the almost treeless high ground north of the Somme. The windy terrain had no intrinsic value, nor was there any long-term strategic objective; the region around Albert was the battle site simply because it was where the two Allied armies met. There were 57,000 British casualties on the first day alone, approximately 20,000 of them fatal, making it the costliest defeat the British army has ever suffered. **Sir Douglas Haig** is the usual scapegoat, yet he was only following the military thinking of the day, which is where the real problem lay. As historian A.J.P. Taylor put it, “Defence was mechanized: attack was not.” Machine guns were efficient, barbed wire effective, and, most important of all, the rail lines could move defensive reserves far faster than the attacking army could march. The often ineffective heavy bombardment before an advance only warned the enemy of an offensive and churned the trenches into a giant muddy quagmire. Despite the bloody disaster of the first day, the battle wore on until bad weather in November made further attacks impossible. The cost of this futile struggle was roughly 415,000 British, 195,000 French and 600,000 German casualties.