Battle of the Somme:

In early 1916, the French proposed a joint Franco-British offensive astride the river Somme. Because of [Verdun](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/battle-of-verdun), the British army assumed the major role of the Somme offensive. Hence, on July 1, 1916, the British army attacked north of the Somme with fourteen infantry divisions, while the French attacked astride and south of the Somme with five divisions.

In defense, the German army deployed seven divisions. The British attack was planned by [Douglas Haig](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/douglas-haig) and Henry Rawlinson, GOC Fourth Army. The two differed about the depth of the offensive and the length of the bombardment, so the adopted plan was an awkward mixture.

Trench Warfare:

The artillery was the key to the offensive, but it did not have the ability to cut all the wire, destroy deep German [trenches](http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/world-war-i-history/pictures/world-war-i-trench-warfare/german-front-line-trenches), knock out all enemy guns, or provide a useful barrage for the infantry attack. And at zero hour on July 1, the artillery shifted away from the German front trenches too quickly and left the infantry exposed. But the French, with Verdun experience, had much more heavy artillery and attacked in rushes, capturing more ground and suffering less. After July 1, a long stalemate settled in, with the German army digging defenses faster than Allied attacks could take place. Despite small advances, the Somme became a bloody battle of attrition, and Haig has been criticized for prolonging the campaign into winter, especially for the last six weeks. The Somme was an expensive lesson in how not to mount effective attacks, but the German army was also weakened and in February retreated to new, and shorter, defensive lines.

The Battle of the Somme was one of the largest battles of the First World War. Fought between July 1 and November 1, 1916, near the Somme River in France, it was also one of the bloodiest military battles in history. On the first day alone, the British suffered more than 57,000 casualties, and by the end of the campaign the Allies and Central Powers would lose more than 1.5 million men.

The first day of the Somme offensive, July 1, 1916, resulted in 57,470 British casualties. In contrast, the French, with fewer divisions, suffered only around 2,000 casualties. By the time the offensive ended in November, the British had suffered around 420,000 casualties, and the French about 200,000. German casualty numbers are controversial but may be about 465,000.