



Battle of Passchendaele facts: Where exactly and when was it? How many casualties were there? Why is it so important?

When was the Battle of Passchendaele?

The offensive began on July 31, 1917 and ended more than three months later, on November 6.

Why was Passchendaele launched?

The British army's commander in chief in France, General Sir Douglas Haig, believed Germany's army was close to collapse and needed "just one more push" for defeat.

A French assault, called the Nivelle Offensive, had ended in disastrous failure in May 1917, spurring General Haig on to push for a major British offensive.

Shortly before Passchendaele, in June, the Allied army captured nearby Messines Ridge, which also boosted the belief that German troops' morale was low.

What happened?

The Passchendaele offensive began on July 18 with a bombardment attack on German lines with thousands of guns and millions of shells.

Then, in the early hours of the morning on July 31, the infantry assault began. But to the army's surprise, the German army fought well and Allied gains were not as large as expected.

At the same time, the area saw the heaviest rainfall in more than 30 years leaving soldiers drenched in mud. Many men and war horses drowned in the liquid mud, and even tanks became stuck.

The assault was temporarily stopped before starting up again on September 20 with further attacks in early October.

The German army also unleashed mustard gas, leaving many soldiers with chemical burns.



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Despite massive Allied losses and small gains, General Haig refused to accept defeat and ordered more assaults.

Troops finally captured the village on November 6 and the offensive was called off with General Haig claiming success.

How many people died?

Although it is difficult to calculate exact numbers, around 325,000 Allied and 260,000 German soldiers died in the Battle of Passchendaele.

Among the Allied deaths were 36,000 Australians, 2,500 New Zealanders, 16,000 Canadians. Some 42,000 bodies have never been recovered.

Why was it important?

The battle became a symbol of muddy trench warfare and large numbers of casualties which defined the First World War.

Allied forces advanced just five miles during the entire campaign

The operation led to criticism of General Haig for continuing the campaign even after it became apparent a breakthrough might be unlikely.

Although both sides suffered badly, one common view is that German forces could afford the loss of troops even less.

How is it being remembered?

The towering Menin Gate in the Belgian town is covered with the names of 54,391 British dead who have no known grave, according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



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