

The Battle of the Somme
Resources: Photographs



Gas Attack on the Somme

Aerial photograph of a gas attack on the Somme battlefield using metal canisters of liquid gas. When the canisters were opened in a stiff, favourable wind, the liquid cooled into a gas and blew outwards and over the enemy lines. Strong concentrations of gas could overwhelm respirators, but a change in wind direction could also reverse the cloud, which then gassed one's own troops.

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Disabled Tank

This tank only managed to advance about 100 metres into No Man's Land before it became mired in the mud and had to be abandoned by its crew. These first tanks were very slow - about the speed of a walking person - and highly susceptible to mechanical break down, muddy ground, and enemy artillery fire.

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Old Trench on the Somme

The zig-zag lines on the left are communication trenches leading back towards the rear areas in this October 1916 photograph of the Somme. The front line is better laid out, according to regulations, and the periodic bays allow for parts of the front line to be lost, without comprising the whole trench. The white chalk beside the trenches indicates that these trenches have been dug very recently.
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Artillery Barrage

This photograph shows explosions from a British artillery barrage on the Somme battlefield. There are numerous explosions across a relatively small area of ground. The bombardment is relatively uniform and likely directed against the barbed wire that can be seen running across the front.

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German Prisoners Acting as Stretcher-Bearers

Prisoners were often pressed into carrying the wounded off the battlefield, as shown by this photograph taken during the 1916 Battle of the Somme.

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German Barrage

A German barrage during an attack on the Somme, October 1916. Despite the apparent emptiness of the terrain, hundreds of soldiers may be sheltering in trenches to avoid the shellfire.

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German Prisoners Captured at Courcellette

From 15 to 20 September 1916, the Canadians captured and held the village of Courcellette. During that time, they took 1,040 German prisoners. Canadians here are seen providing the prisoners with cigarettes, food, and drinks. Prisoners would then likely have been taken to cages behind the lines, and finally to prisoner of war camps in France or England.

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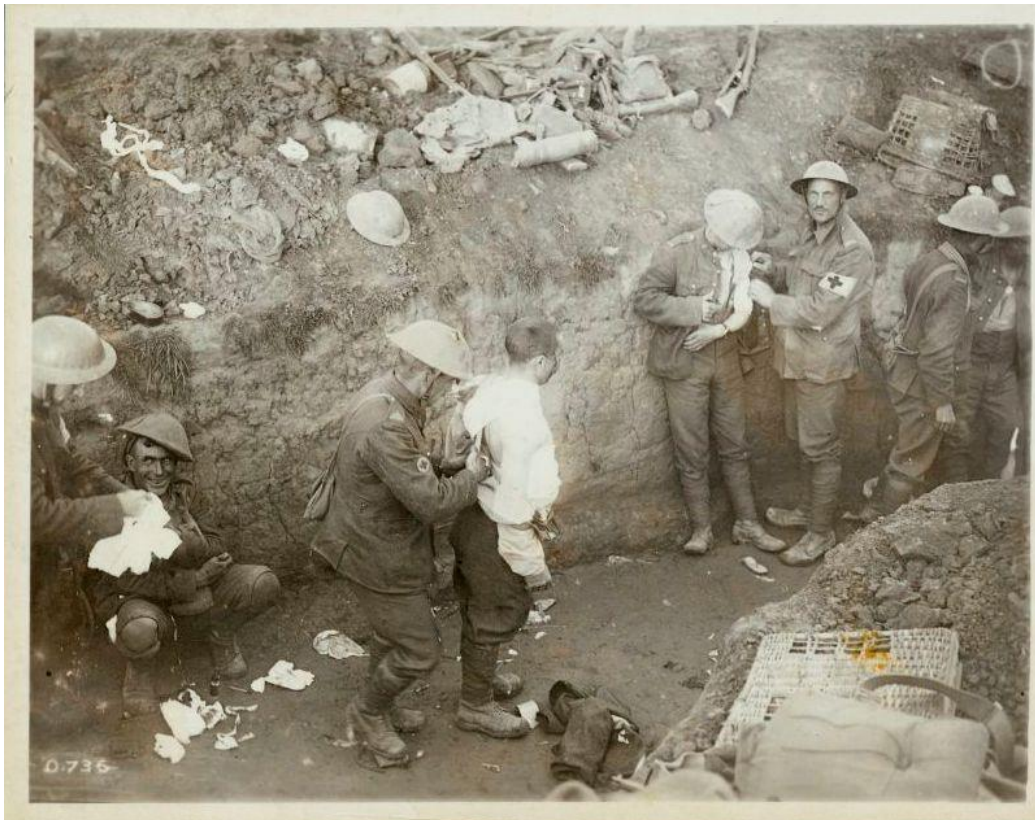
Remains of the Sugar Factory

A lone soldier stands atop the remains of the sugar factory south of Courcelette on the Somme. Several platoons of Canadian infantry and a supporting tank overran the factory on 15 September 1916, after a fierce German defence.

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Wounded at Courcellette

Medical orderlies tend to the wounded in a trench during the Battle of Courcellette in mid-September 1916. The medical orderlies wear non-combatant red cross armbands.

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