



First Day on the Somme

Martin Middlebrook

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After an immense but useless bombardment, at 7.30 am. On 1 July 1916 the British Army went over the top and attacked the German trenches. It was the first day of the battle of the Somme, and on that day the British suffered nearly 60,000 casualties, two for every yard of their front. With more than fifty times the daily losses at El Alamein and fifteen times the British casualties on D-day, 1 July 1916 was the blackest day in the history of the British Army. But, more than that, it was a watershed in the history of the First World War. The Army that attacked on that day was the volunteer Army that had answered Kitchener's call. It had gone into action confident of a decisive victory. But by sunset on the first day on the Somme, no one could any longer think of a war that might be won. After that it was a struggle that had simply to be endured.

Martin Middlebrook's research has covered not just official and regimental histories and tours of the battlefields, but interviews with hundreds of survivors, both British and German. As to the action itself, he conveys the overall strategic view and the terrifying reality of an new kind of war for front-line soldiers.

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