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An Illustrated Introduction to the Somme

Robert Parker

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The Battle of the Somme epitomized the mud and death of the Western Front. 1 July 1916 witnessed the opening round of the British Army attempt to break through an eighteen mile front of heavily defended German defenses straddling the River Somme in northern France. Preceded by an artillery bombardment of over 1500 big guns and lasting a week, the newly formed and virtually inexperienced members of Lord Kitchener's 'New Army' went 'over the top' to suffer the deadliest day in British military history.

The first day losses alone totaled 60,000 casualties, one-third of those being killed. In the next four and one-half months of combat, over 420,000 British soldiers would become casualties to one of the most intense, lethal, and futile engagements in history. The slaughter also saw over 190,000 French and perhaps as many as 600,000 German casualties. To this end, little or no geographical or strategic goal was even closely attained.

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