

Was the Somme Campaign in 1916 a Long-Term Victory?

So why was Pte. Preece sniped in a relatively undefended area, where everything of value had been destroyed - as at **Peronne** in the heart of the Somme?



Because we are not “*jingostic*”, we have consistently focused our interest **in the loss of life in this war**. However, this can somehow obscure more positive long-term developments.

In some ways, the Somme Campaign had been a long-term ‘victory’ - although few realised it at the time and it was unarguably one at too heavy a price in terms of human life.

However:

- The Germans had used **conscripts** to fight since August 1914 – we had only used **Regulars, Territorials and Volunteers**.

Our own *Conscript Army* was now being trained to replace the dead of 1916. The Germans had a diminishing reserve of soldiers.

- On **16 August** -6 weeks into the campaign – the Germans “sacked their manager”. However, he was replaced by their most successful Generals, **Ludendorf** and **Hindenburg**.
- On **5 September** - 9 weeks into the campaign - the two Generals decided that the Germans must retreat - to yet another shorter and stronger defensive line, a few miles to the rear near St. Quentin: the **Hindenburg Line**. It was not breached until 29 September **1918**. Instead of ‘resting and recuperating’, the Germans spent the winter in building this hopefully impregnable defensive system.
- **5 March Pte Preece** was killed, while the Germans were ‘*scorching the earth*’ behind their retreat. This began in earnest – and at first secretly - on **14 March** and lasted until to **5 April**. We lost **4** local men pursuing the retreating German army.
- **Germany’s allies**, including Austria-Hungary, were always more trouble than they were worth. Our allies **Belgian** and **France** had fought tenaciously to hold back the German army, especially at **Verdun** in 1916.
- On **6 April** the Germans scored a spectacular “own goal” - by their *U-Boats* provoking **the USA** into declaring War on the Central Powers. Almost by default, we now had an invaluable and powerful ally.

The German Prime Minister declared with foresight: **“Germany is finished”**.

However, the “finish” took 18 months of incredible losses on both sides.

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¹ Adapted from *Noble Band of Heroes*.