

Organizer #1 - Passchendaele Documents

Document	Author perspective (from the five options in the document)	What claims does the author/artist make about the Battle of Passchendaele? Do they reflect on their own role in its events? If so, how?
A David Lloyd George, <i>War Memoirs</i> (1934)		
B Excerpts from Douglas Haig's published diaries (1952)		
C General Hubert Gough, <i>The Fifth Army</i> (1931) (note highlighted portions)		
D Official History <i>History of the Great War</i> (1948)		
E London Times, "The Meaning of Passchendaele" (1917)		
F Douglas Haig's army dispatch from 1917, discussing Passchendaele		
G Quote from novel, <i>Europa in Limbo</i> (1937), by Robert Briffault		
H Oral history recording (1986), Private Joseph Pickard (participant in the battle)		

I Edmund Blunden, <i>Third Ypres</i> (poem, published in 1922)		
J Paul Nash, <i>Void</i> (painting, 1918)		

Organizer #2 - Weighing My Argument

Directions: Consider the ten sources that were reviewed previously. Assign each source to one of the two columns below and discuss whether each source portrays the battle as a success or as a failure. Each source should then be assigned a “weight” as to how useful it would be when writing the history of the battle. A weight of 3 suggests the most useful, a weight of 1 suggests the least. Explain the rating you assigned.

Weighing My Argument			
Passchendaele as a Success		Passchendaele as a Failure	
Source	Weight (1-3)	Source	Weight (1-3)
<p>Summary: Add up each side. Which is “heavier”? In your opinion, why did one side win out over the other? Of the ten sources, which were the most “useful” in terms of writing the history of the Battle of Passchendaele?</p>			

Evidence discussed in the article that can also be used in the lesson plan

Source/artifact	Description
1) David Lloyd George memoir	This is an excerpt from David Lloyd George's memoirs published in 1934. He was prime minister from December 1916 to 1922.
2) Douglas Haig published diary	Douglas Haig commanded the British Army in France from December 1915 to the end of the war. These quotes were taken from part of his diary that was published in 1952.
3) Hubert Gough memoir/history	This is part history and part memoir written General Gough, who planned and led the first phase of the British offensive at Passchendaele. It was published in 1931.
4) Excerpt from the British <i>Official History of the Great War</i> .	The <i>Official History</i> was a multivolume history of the war commissioned by the British government written using documents that were classified at the time. The excerpt is from the Passchendaele volume, published in 1948.
5) <i>London Times</i> editorial "The Meaning of Passchendaele", from November, 1917	This is a newspaper account after the last day of the battle. From the <i>London Times</i> .
6) Army dispatch about the battle, from 1917	For each year of the war, the various British Army headquarters prepared summaries of their operations. These were printed in the <i>London Gazette</i> during the war and were also published in book form 1919.
7) Excerpt from a novel about the battle (<i>Europa in Limbo</i>)	An excerpt from one of the many novels published about WWI in the 1930s. The author was a medical officer during the war. It was published in 1937.
8) Oral history interview of battle participant, recorded 1986	The Imperial War Museum in London has collected oral histories of veterans who fought in WWI. This is part of an interview with a soldier who fought at Passchendaele that was recorded in 1986.
9) Poem, <i>Third Ypres</i> by Edmund Blunden	Edmund Blunden fought at Passchendaele and would become a famous poet and academic after the war. This is part of his poem "Third Ypres" first published in 1922.
10) Painting, <i>Void</i> by Paul Nash	Paul Nash was an official war artist, commissioned by the British Army to have access to the front lines. This painting depicts the battlefield at Passchendaele and dates to the year 1918.

Source #1 – David Lloyd George memoir (1934)

p. 2115 - I have carefully examined all the available documents in order to track down the originator of this muddy and muddleheaded venture (*Passchendaele*). The minutes and the memoranda which I shall quote later on will clearly show that I resisted to the very last the whole project before it ever commenced and confidently predicted its failure, giving reasons for my prediction. After its failure was beyond reasonable doubt I did my best to persuade the generals to break it (*the battle*) off. The only question therefore as to my individual responsibility is concerned is whether the initiation of this reckless enterprise can be laid at the door of the Asquith government of which I was a member.

p. 2185 – Lord Milner, Mr. Bonar Law and I thought the project (*Passchendaele*) a mistake, when Britain, with practically the only unshaken army was holding the pass until the Americans arrived; that it had none of the elements of success, that it would be very costly and that it therefore ought to be discouraged. Mr. Bonar Law did not, however, think we were entitled to overrule the military and naval authorities on the question of strategy. Lord Milner and I also hesitated to go that length...and on the question of accepting the responsibility of vetoing the operation we would have no support in the cabinet.

Source #2 - General Douglas Haig, published diary (1952)

p. 240 (Tuesday, June 19, 1917) - The prime minister seemed to believe the decisive moment of the war would be 1918. Until then we ought to husband our forces and do little or nothing, except support Italy. I strongly asserted that Germany was nearer her end than they seemed to think, that now was the favorable moment for pressing her and that everything possible should be done to take advantage of it by concentrating on the Western Front all available resources. I stated that Germany was within six months of the total exhaustion of her available manpower, if the fighting continues at its present intensity.

p. 246 (Saturday, July 21, 1917) - In my opinion it would be the act of a lunatic to detach troops from France to any theater at this stage. Such a proceeding might well lose the war. Even if my attacks do not gain ground as I hope and expect, we ought still to persevere in attacking the Germans in France. Only by this means can we win.

P. 250 (Tuesday, July 31, 1917) – As regards future operations, I told Gough to continue to carry out the original plan, to consolidate the ground gained, and to improve his position as he may deem necessary for facilitating the next advance; the next advance will be made as soon as possible, but only after adequate bombardment and after dominating the hostile artillery.

Source #3, General Hubert Gough memoir/history (1931)

p. 205 – In consequence I informed the Commander-in Chief that tactical success was not possible, or would be too costly, under such conditions, and advised that the attack should now be abandoned. I had many talks with Haig during these days and repeated this opinion frequently, but he told me the attack must be continued.

p. 219 - Controversy over these battles of 1917 will continue for generations, until the passing of time has made possible a clear and unbiased judgment. The course of this story may, however, reveal some new aspects to those critics who have tried to place the 'odium' of Passchendaele on Haig – and for that matter, on me! But these battles were not fought on my initiative, nor was I responsible for their continuance.

Source #4 – Excerpt from the British *Official History of the Great War* (1948)

p. 366 - No great victory had been won; but it resulted in the Allies being in possession of the Ypres Ridge to beyond Passchendaele, and had ensured the security of the French Armies whose front, in spite of their very serious internal troubles, was intact.

p. 367 - To achieve this gain of ground and to keep the German hosts on the Western Front fully employed, the British losses incurred had been heavy and the misery endured by the troops very great. Was what had been achieved worth the cost? Our allies and our foe have no doubt whatever about it. A theory has obtained circulation that had it not been for the exhaustion of the British Armies in the Passchendaele operations, the German onslaught of March 1918 would never have succeeded to the extent that it did. The Germans, however, take the opposite view; they believe that complete success would have been theirs in the spring of 1918 had it not been for the exhaustion, practically the destruction, of their best divisions in Flanders.

Source #5, *London Times* editorial, "The Meaning of Passchendaele" (November 8th, 1917)

As we have pointed out, the larger meaning of the protracted operations of the last three months is not sufficiently clear to the general public. Too much stress has been laid upon the necessarily limited objectives of the troops engaged in each attack, and the real purpose which lies behind them has often been obscured. The bulk of the weight and strength of our military resources is not being thrown into this local struggle merely for the possession of a few ridges, however important their capture may be. The ridges are the symbols of a much larger strategical conception and their capture is the first and probably by far the most difficult step. The worst of this work is over. That is at once the origin and justification of this great feat of British arms which, with the exception of a few minor operations, has now been carried to a triumphant completion. Whenever we choose, we should be able to utilize with infinitely greater profit the positions we hold today.

GENERAL REVIEW

This offensive, maintained for three and a half months under the most adverse-conditions of weather, had entailed almost superhuman exertions on the part of the troops of all arms and services. The enemy had done his utmost to hold his ground, and in his endeavours to do so had used up no less than seventy-eight divisions, of which eighteen had been engaged a second or third time in the battle, after being withdrawn to rest and refit. Despite the magnitude of his efforts, it was the immense natural difficulties, accentuated manifold by the abnormally wet weather, rather than the enemy's resistance, which limited our progress.

What was actually accomplished under such adverse conditions is the most conclusive proof that, given a normally fine August, the capture of the whole ridge, within the space of a few weeks, was well within the power of the men who achieved so much. They advanced every time with absolute confidence in their power to overcome the enemy, even though they had sometimes to struggle through mud up to their waists to reach him. So long as they could reach him they did overcome him, but physical exhaustion placed narrow limits on the depth to which each advance could be pushed, and compelled long pauses between the advances. The full fruits of each success were consequently not always obtained.

Notwithstanding the many difficulties, much has been achieved. Our captures in Flanders since the commencement of operations at the end of July amount to 24,065 prisoners, 74 guns, 941 machine guns and 138 trench mortars. It is certain that the enemy's losses considerably exceeded ours. Most important of all, our new and hastily trained Armies have shown once again that they are capable of meeting and beating the enemy's best troops, under conditions which favoured his defence to a degree which required the greatest endurance, determination and heroism to overcome.

Source #7– Novel, *Europa in Limbo* (by Robert Briffault, published in 1937)

Never probably had human eye looked upon such a vastness of desolation. Over the whole prospect was not one leaf or blade. Mile after mile the earth stretched out black, foul, putrescent, like a sea of excrement. Not a sign of animal and vegetable life; none of human life either, for it hid itself underground, and only the dirt-spouts thrown up by missiles of death, bursting like mephitic bubbles over the foulness, gave visible indication of its presence. But everywhere the detritus and garbage of the murderous madness. It was one vast scrap-heap. And, scattered over or sunk in the refuse and mud, were the rotting bodies of men, of horses and mules. Of such material was the barren waste that stretched as far as the eye could see.

Source #8 - Oral history interview of participant (Pvt. Joseph Pickard) in the battle, recorded in 1986.

What were the men and yourself doing in the final minutes before the attack? What would you do? Check your equipment or?

You're just sitting on the edge of this shallows with your feet probably in the water or something like that, and when the whistle went and you went forward, it was a toss-up whether your legs would come or not. The ground was yellowy-green. You know what that stuff's like? Soft, like quicksand. I got one leg in there, and two fellows got a hold of me rifle like that and pulled us out with one leg [laughter]. The things that hit you, you never forget them like that.

So you could hardly get-- you could hardly get forward for [crosstalk]--

[We were?], plunging forward like that, you see. I mean, you couldn't walk, and there was a railway running along the side, and that railway ran to [inaudible]. [inaudible] ran along there, and Passchendaele was up there on the ridge and the [inaudible] was just at the bottom. [inaudible] was there. And the Passchendaele was just on a ridge, just across the [inaudible]. I think there was-- was it nine divisions when they were that day.

So you were part of a mass attack. What could you see as you ran-- as you stumbled or [tripped?]-- got across no man's land?

Well, I can't do-- there was nothing to be seen. You saw what you're struggling across in your mind and your thoughts were sort of-- on the ground you were traveling, you wanted to avoid the-- these places like quicksands and that sort of thing and you're standing on, standing on-- there was a whole [roof of?] shells and God knows what [going?] on top of you, and there was machine guns whistling past your ear, whizzing by, God knows everything. [crosstalk].

Was there a lot of casualties that you could see?

Yeah. You see them dropping. I think we lost 13 out of 16 those guns that day, and the crews. There was about six men in a crew you know. We lost about 13 guns and crews out there.

How far did you have to advance before you came to the German wire?

I'd say, that's a matter of guesswork I suppose, as it was near enough to-- 100, 150 yards? 200 yards? Something like that. I couldn't [crosstalk]--

What state was your battalion in and you in when you got to the wire?

There was hardly anybody left. You see, you got there and you found you're no further forward. I mean it was like a stone-- worse than a stone wall.

Source #9 - Poem, excerpt from *Third Ypres* (by Edmund Blunden, published in 1922)

The War would end, the Line was on the move,
And at a bound the impassable was passed.
We lay and waited with extravagant joy.

Now dulls the day and chills; comes there no word
From those who swept through our new lines to flood
The lines beyond? but little comes, and so
Sure as a runner time himself's accosted.
And the slow moments shake their heavy heads,
And croak, "They're done, they'll none of them get through,
They're done, they've all died on the entanglements,
The wire stood up like an unplashed hedge and thorned
With giant spikes-and there they've paid the bill."

Source #10 – Painting, *Void* (Paul Nash, 1918)

