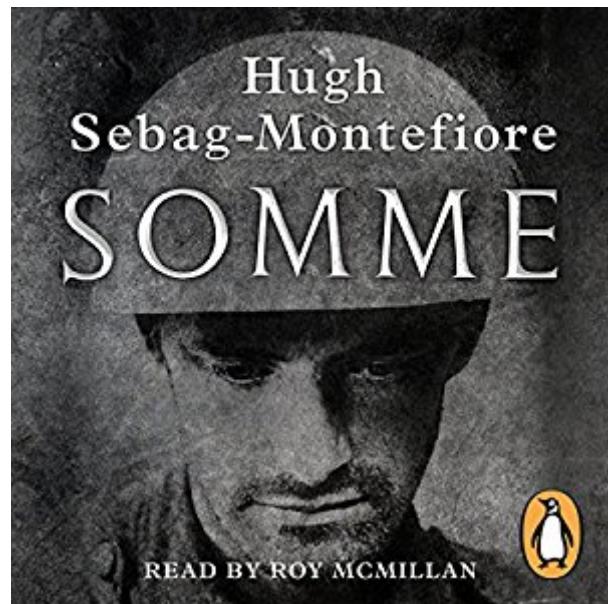


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Somme: Into The Breach



Synopsis

No conflict better encapsulates all that went wrong on the Western Front than the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The tragic loss of life and stoic endurance by troops who walked towards their death is an iconic image which will be hard to ignore during the centennial year. Despite this, this book shows the extent to which the Allied armies were in fact able repeatedly to break through the German front lines. The author has uncovered some remarkable stories, as yet unknown, of action and heroism in the face of battle. He weaves in these firsthand experiences, creating a remarkable portrait of life at the front.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

July 1st 1916 was the start of the battle of the Somme. It was the day when the British Army suffered its largest single one day loss. The actual battle finally finished in September 1916. It saw the first use of tanks and is generally regarded as a failure. On balance it's hard to make the claim that it was a total failure. It did relieve pressure on Verdun and it did encourage the German army to redirect a lot of effort to the submarine war in the Atlantic. This eventually led America to join World War I which led to Germany's eventual defeat much more quickly than the British and French could have achieved on their own. But the casualties on the first day were awful and were the result of so many mistakes that the idea that the British army were lions led by donkeys persisted for many years. Even if the senior British generals learned from their mistakes on the first day of the Somme the casualties mean that those lessons were too dearly bought. More recent historical claims which try to exonerate Haig and Rawlinson still aren't convincing. Hugh Sebag-Montefiore has attempted

the monumental task of summarising the whole of the battle of the Somme in one book. He succeeds but the book is difficult to read. Sebag-Montefiore has used source material very extensively. The letters and diaries of British, German, ANZAC and South African troops are quoted frequently. These add significant colour to the story but also break the narrative quite comprehensively. The book is divided into 35 chapters. Each of which covers a sector/date of the battle. For the most part this is difficult reading as the totality of the disaster is made very clear and then reinforced in a Kafka-esque way. Whilst the scope of the battle is covered the consequences are not really covered at all. This is a shame as the context of the Somme is as important as the details of the battle itself. In the end this is a book for the serious, detail oriented military historian. That's not me. I appreciate the scholarship but the lack of a narrative and lack of strategic context make this book difficult to recommend to the general reader. If you need the detail it's there but I think most readers won't need the detail and so will get less from this book than they could otherwise have done.

A solid work of research. Very revisionist in its conclusions. Armchair generals have no concept of the difficulty changing tactics in the middle of a battle. "Butchers" have long been the bywords for Haig, and the other general officers at the Somme. Some did learn from the lengthy battle. Some did not. I believe the valid criticism of the leadership would be they stayed too far away from the front to actually see what was going on. Communications were only a step above the mounted messenger of Wellington's time.

Enjoyed book.

Excellent historical account with many fascinating details. Highly recommend.

Really good book but very dense.

Inability to enlarge maps and jump easily from text to map makes the electronic edition very frustrating

excellent detailed description of the Somme battle.

A remarkable history and a very good read.

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