

The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

Teacher's notes

The big question

How do conflicts affect communities?

Level

Senior

Additional resources

Poppyscotland's documentary films and archive footage are available from the Poppyscotland Learning website <http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/resources-category/films/> or by ordering for free the 'Sowing the Poppy seed DVD' via this link <http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/resources/order-education-pack/>

Poppyscotland's image library is available from the Poppyscotland Learning website: <http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/resources-category/media/>

Imperial War Museums Learning Resources: www.theirpastyourfuture.org.uk

The task

This challenge is a prepared debate which can be taught as part of the Higher History Unit 'The Impact of the Great War, 1914-1918'.

The new Higher History requires that students study a unit of Scottish History.

One of the optional units of study is 'The Impact of the Great War, 1914-1918'. This unit is comprised of four examinable issues, one of which is 'Scots on the Western Front'. To enable successful evaluation of sources connected to this issue, students must have a good knowledge of the wartime experiences of Scottish soldiers including: recruitment; battles on the Western Front such as Loos and the Somme; Scottish regiments; the role of Scots in terms of commitment, casualties and leadership which contributed to the overall military British military effort.

Debating these issues is an excellent way to stimulate student interest, promote successful active learning and enhance students' confidence, research and communication skills. Students will also develop the ability to think independently and make informed judgements. Generally, as part of the Higher History curriculum, it is advised that students should participate in prepared debates informed by historical evidence and knowledge.

The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

Your challenge

Scots on the Western Front – preposition/for

The Scots were crucial to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

You have been challenged to write a speech for a debate on the contribution of Scottish soldiers to the British effort on the Western Front. Scottish soldiers undoubtedly played their part in the fighting during the First World War, especially in battles such as Loos and the Somme.

Their importance was vital. Some historians have argued that the Scottish-born commander of the British army, Earl Haig, was 'the architect of victory' who was made of the stern stuff needed to see the conflict through. Scottish troops were often viewed as excellent fighters who volunteered for the army in huge numbers.

Your task is to write a speech which argues that Scottish soldiers **were crucial** to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

- Work in groups of four or five.
- Produce a speech that should last no more than ten minutes to argue that Scottish Soldiers **were crucial** to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.
- Allocate jobs (researchers, speech writers, speech readers).

Make use of the following resources:

- The information following this page.
- The school library.
- History text books.
- The internet.
- The film 'Douglas Scott, 1930-2010, on the debate about his grandfather, Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig'
<http://learning.poppyscotland.org.uk/resource/douglas-scott-historian-1930-2010-on-the-debate-about-his-grandfather-field-marshal-sir-douglas-haig/>

The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

The Scots were crucial to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

Per head of population, Scots volunteered for the armed services in higher numbers than other parts of the United Kingdom. Scotland thus provided a reliable pool of manpower when it was needed.

By the end of 1915 2,466,719 men had volunteered for the army: 320,589 or 13% were Scottish, forming what became known as the New Armies or Kitchener's Armies.

The Scottish National War Memorial records the names of over 148,000 Scots killed during the First World War. This is a significant percentage of the million British and Empire war dead from the First World War and shows that Scotland 'punched above its weight' during the war.

Per head of population, Scotland suffered more casualties than any other part of the United Kingdom.

Scottish soldiers were viewed positively by the public and other regiments in the British army because they were seen to come from a country with a proud fighting history. The sight of Scottish battalions in their kilts was a morale booster.

Scottish soldiers played a major role in the battle of Loos in 1915. This was the first battle in which 'New Army' units were to play a significant role and many of these were Scottish. Although the battle did not achieve a breakthrough, 9th (Scottish) Division captured the German's second line of defences.

Scots soldiers won five Victoria Crosses at Loos.

The Loos Memorial (which stands virtually on a German strongpoint captured by 15th (Scottish) Division on the first day of the battle) commemorates 20,609 men who have no known grave; one third of these are Scottish.

At Arras in 1917, 9th (Scottish) Division (alongside 4th Division) made an advance of some three and a half miles. This was the biggest gain made by any unit since trench warfare began.

Ernst Junger, one of the German army's most highly decorated officers fought against Scottish soldiers in 1918 and states in his book *Storm of Steel*: 'They were Highlanders, and their way of fighting showed us that we were dealing with real men'. He also described his Scottish opponents as 'obdurate' (stubborn) and 'elite'.

Historians such as Gary Sheffield and John Terraine argue that Haig was not callous but a realist who understood that the First World War could only be won by a strategy of attrition and he pursued this strategy ruthlessly to the end. If Haig should accept responsibility for high casualties and battles that were unsuccessful, he should also be seen as the man who encouraged the use of new tactics and weaponry that ultimately led Britain to victory in 1918.

The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

The Scots were not crucial to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

Dr Benjamin Ziemann, a German military historian, has found no evidence in German military archives or soldiers' personal accounts to suggest that Scottish soldiers were particularly feared by German soldiers. He claims that this idea was largely created by Scots soldiers keen to prove their superiority in a similar fashion to the boasting done by Bavarian units in the German army.

Another German historian, Gerhard Hirschfeld, has also claimed that there is no evidence that German soldiers thought of Scottish soldiers as 'Devils in Skirts' or 'Ladies from Hell' and that their fascination with Scottish soldiers had more to do with their uniforms than their fighting ability.

Britain raised 65 divisions during the First World War, only three of these were Scottish – 9th (Scottish) division, 15th (Scottish) division and 51st (Highland) division. Canada and Australia, by way of comparison, sent four and five divisions respectively to fight for Britain.

These Canadian and Australian units were considered elite and often given the most difficult assignments when attacking strongly defended German positions.

As the war progressed, heavy casualties and difficulties in finding replacement manpower meant that new recruits were sent to regiments that needed them most, regardless of traditional recruiting grounds – thus many Englishmen ended up in Scottish regiments. This makes it difficult to assess the contribution made by purely 'Scottish' soldiers.

In his memoir, 'Goodbye to All That', Robert Graves describes how a fellow officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers described the Scots as 'dirty in the trenches, they brag too much and they charge like hell – both ways'.

Field Marshal Haig who commanded the British army in France for much of the war was a Scottish soldier. He has been criticised by historians such as John Laffin who argue that his strategy of attrition (wearing the enemy down) was callous and his mismanagement of British strategy and the fighting of battles such as the Somme and Third Ypres led to the needless deaths of thousands of men.

The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

Your challenge

The Scots on the Western Front – opposition/against

The Scots were not crucial to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

You have been challenged to write a speech for a debate on the contribution of Scottish soldiers to the British effort on the Western Front. Scottish soldiers undoubtedly played their part in the fighting during the First World War, especially in battles such as Loos and the Somme. But just how important were they?

Some historians have argued that the Scottish-born commander of the British army, Field Marshal Haig, was a bungling butcher who needlessly slaughtered thousands of his own men. Others claim that Scottish troops were nothing to be feared and that their reputation as good fighters owed more to their own boasting. Your task is to write a speech which argues that Scottish soldiers **were not crucial** to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

- Work in groups of four or five.
- Produce a speech that should last no more than ten minutes to argue that Scottish Soldiers **were not crucial** to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.
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The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

Your speech

Today I am here to show that Scots were/were not crucial to the overall success of the British army on the Western Front.

My first reason is that

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My second reason is that

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My third reason is that

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Some could argue that but I still believe that Scots were/were not crucial because

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Overall I urge you to believe me when I say 'Scots were/were not crucial to the success of the British army on the Western front'.

The Scots on the Western Front debate challenge

Higher History self assessment

What have I learned?

Through my research, in preparation for my speech, some Scottish battles that I have read about are

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I know that Scots made a significant contribution to the war because

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Although some could argue that

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I can describe the experience of Scots at war

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Specific examples are

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