



2 Why do we think of World War One Generals in this way?

Narrated by Professor Gary Sheffield

When Field Marshall Haig, died in 1928, many hundreds of thousands lined the streets to watch his coffin pass. All coming to see the man many believed was central to the victory that ended the war. His memorial service in Westminster Abbey was broadcast live to the nation by the BBC.

This collective tribute shows how Haig's role in delivering victory was considered at the time. Yet so many people regard him and his colleagues in the British High Command as responsible for the worst casualties in British military history and battles that have become bywords for pointless slaughter – the Somme in 1916 and Paschendaele in 1917.

Why is that?

After the war, memoirs of politicians such as the war time Prime Minister David Lloyd George sought to deflect attention from themselves by blaming the military leaders.

Many popular versions of the history of World War One in books, films and on television have furthered this image, such as Alan Clark's 'The Donkeys', which borrowed from a pre-war description of poor command of heroic troops – 'Lions led by donkeys'.

1960s musical and film *Oh What a Lovely War* continued the idea that a generation of young men was unnecessarily wasted by incompetent leaders.

In *Blackadder Goes Forth* General Melchett, a character who understands very little of the daily lives and horrific existence of those men under his command, sends them off to certain death in battle.

This image has stuck in the minds of many, but in reality it is a caricature

Is it time to re-assess this view?

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