



Has History Misjudged the Generals of World War One?

Narrated by Professor Gary Sheffield

1. The myth of lions led by donkeys

[At the Cenotaph]

This is the site of the Nation's remembrance of the war dead of Britain and the Commonwealth and the nearly one million people who lost their lives in World War One. For many the great loss of men, particularly in the trenches of the Western Front, has often been blamed on the Commanders. The stereotype is that the ordinary soldiers were lions led by donkeys. The donkeys being the uncaring, out of touch generals safely out of harm's way in comfortable chateaux miles behind the front lines.

This statue is of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig – the Commander in Chief of the British Armies on the Western Front between 1915 and the end of the war. When he died in 1928 hundreds of thousands went onto the streets to show their tribute to the man they saw as having a central role in winning the First World War.

So why do so many people have a very different view of Haig and his fellow generals today?

Well, undoubtedly there were examples of incompetent leadership in the war, the popular image of British High Command does not tell the whole story of the way they conducted, experienced and delivered victory in the war

So, has history misjudged the British generals of World War One?

Film footage courtesy of British Pathe