**Exploring the Battle of the Somme**

**A toolkit for students and teachers**

**PART 1**

**EXERCISE 1**

1. How many days did the Somme Battle last?
   1. 141 days.
2. How many men are there in an infantry division?
   1. 12,000. A division had three brigades of four infantry battalions. A battalion has 1,000 men.
3. How many casualties did the 16th Division and 36th Ulster Division suffer during fighting on the 1st July and in September?
   1. 9,348
4. Looking at the map on Slide 1, how many British Corps took part in the initial attack on 1st July 1916? What were their numbers?
   1. Six. Numbers are in Roman numerals from top to bottom, 7, 8, 10, 3, 15 and 13.
5. Why aren’t infantry battalions shown on the map?
   1. Infantry battalions are too small to be accurately represented on a map of this scale. They are represented by the formations of which they are part e.g. Corps.

**PART 2**

**EXERCISE 2**

1. Why were trenches constructed in a zig zag way?
   1. (1) Zig zag trenches localized the effects of artillery shells exploding in trenches. If the trenches were straight then the blast from an exploding shell would travel down the trench killing or hurting those it passed. By creating right angles in the trench this limited the area affected by detonating artillery round. (2) Zig zag trenches also allowed troops to shoot in different directions.
2. Looking at the map on Slide 4 and using the key above, list the obstacles and features that soldiers faced in moving from their start positions to their objective at the Schwaben Redoubt?
   1. (1) Open ground of no man’s land would make the advancing soldiers easy targets. (2) Solders on reaching the German lines had to get through barbed wire entanglements (marked with x x x x x). (3) They had to cross over trenches which could be six feet wide and six feet deep.
3. Are the British soldiers marching uphill or downhill to the Schwaben Redoubt during their attack? Give reasons for your answer.
   1. The contours show the land is sloped but it is unclear whether this is up or downhill for the advancing British soldiers. In fact, it is up hill as the Germans trenches occupy the higher ground to allow for better observation of advancing enemies.
4. In kilometers, how far is it from the start point to the Schwaben Redoubt?
   1. One kilometer. The text shows says that each square is 1,000 metres, the start point and Schwaben Reboubt are almost perfectly aligned with the grid lines.

**PART 3**

**EXERCISE 3**

1. Looking at the map on Slide 5 and using the key above, list the obstacles and features that soldiers of the 16th Division faced in their line of advance?
   1. Soldiers faced four lines of trenches and two lines of barbed wire. Trenches could be a major obstacle as they were up to 6 feet wide and 6 feet deep. They also had to move through two villages.
2. What measures could be taken to overcome such obstacles?
   1. Wire – Artillery could cut the wire with shells. Soldiers would have been wire cutters to help them get through such obstacles. Tanks could also have been used to cut the wire – the first tank went into action on 15th September 1916 very close to where the 16th Division had been fighting.
   2. Trenches – Ladders were often carried by soldiers to help them climb in and out of trenches or act as bridges to get across trenches.
3. What was different about the terrain and landscape that the men of the 16th Irish faced in their advance compared to that faced by the soldiers of the 36th Division?
   1. The 36th Division faced an uphill march over open ground. The 16th Division faced a relatively flat terrain but had to pass through two villages. Villages were frequently fortified and house cellars made good bunkers and machine gun posts for the Germans.