John Keegan who is a modern military historian suggests Haig was ‘an efficient and highly skilled soldier who helped lead Britain to victory in the First World War. However there is evidence that Haig was an over confident blunderer. In this essay I will examine the evidence in sources A-G to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to support John Keegan. I will first start with the sources supporting Keegan’s view of Haig.

Source A is a part of a report sent by Haig in 1916 reporting the aftermath of the Somme. Source A shows how the battle was going from Haig’s perspective. He thinks that the Germans were “beaten men, ready to surrender if they could”. This source is useful because it shows that Haig thought the battle was going well and he did not want to admit that he may have messed up. However this source is limited because it is written by Haig who is twisting the truth so he can keep his rank as general and because Haig received information from his officers that was not true.

Source C (i) is Haig’s view on the battle of the Somme prior to the battle. Haig thought that heavy casualties were necessary to win the battle. He believed that heavy losses are inevitable and that “the nation must be taught to bear losses”. Haig did not see a death on the battlefield as a tragedy; he saw it as an honour. The source shows us that Haig does not mind making hard decisions to help lead Britain to victory. However from my own knowledge of the battle of the Somme I know that the heavy casualties could have been prevented if Haig had used more modern battle tactics; for example if on the first day of the Somme the British soldiers had checked if the Germans had survived the artillery bombardment; instead of assuming that all the Germans had died the battle could not have been nearly as many casualties. This source is limited because it is written by Haig before the battle. Haig knew there were going to be heavy losses so he tried to prevent himself being blamed for them by saying that heavy losses are inevitable. This source is useful because it tells us that Haig was not afraid to make hard decisions.

Source C (ii) was written by Haig on the 30th of June, the day before the battle of the Somme. Haig is saying that every thing is going well “the barbed wire has never been so well cut”. However from my own knowledge I know that this is not true and that the commanders were over confident “All the commanders are full of confidence”. This source is limited because it is written by Haig who was over confident and thought the number of British troops would overwhelm the Germans. I think the source is useful because like source A, it shows that Haig twists the truth so that he does not lose his position as general. However because the source is written by Haig who does not want to look as if he had made a mess of it all the source does not tell you what it was really like the day before the battle and how good Haig was at leading the British army.

Source C (iii) was written by Haig on the 1st of July the day the battle began. Again he is saying the battle is going great “All went like clock work”. This is not true. Because Haig’s officers were scared off him, so they did not tell him how bad the battle was going. Also because Haig wanted to keep his position as general and did not want to look like a blunderer he twisted the truth to make it seem as if the battle was going better than it was. This source is limited because it is written by Haig who received the wrong information from his officers and believed the battle was going well. However this source is useful because like source C (ii) it shows that Haig twists the truth to make himself appear like a better leader and not a blunderer.