

PASSCHENDAELE

This battle which was officially known as the Third Battle of Ypres, Passchendaele became infamous not only for the scale of casualties, but also for the mud.



Belgian independence had been recognised in the Treaty of London (1839) which created a sovereign and neutral state. The German invasion of Belgium on 4 August 1914, in violation of Article VII of the treaty, was the reason given by the British government for declaring war on Germany.

British military operations in Belgium began with the arrival of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) at Mons on 22 August. On 16 October, the Belgians and some French reinforcements began the defence of the French Channel ports and what remained of unoccupied Belgium at the Battle of the Yser.

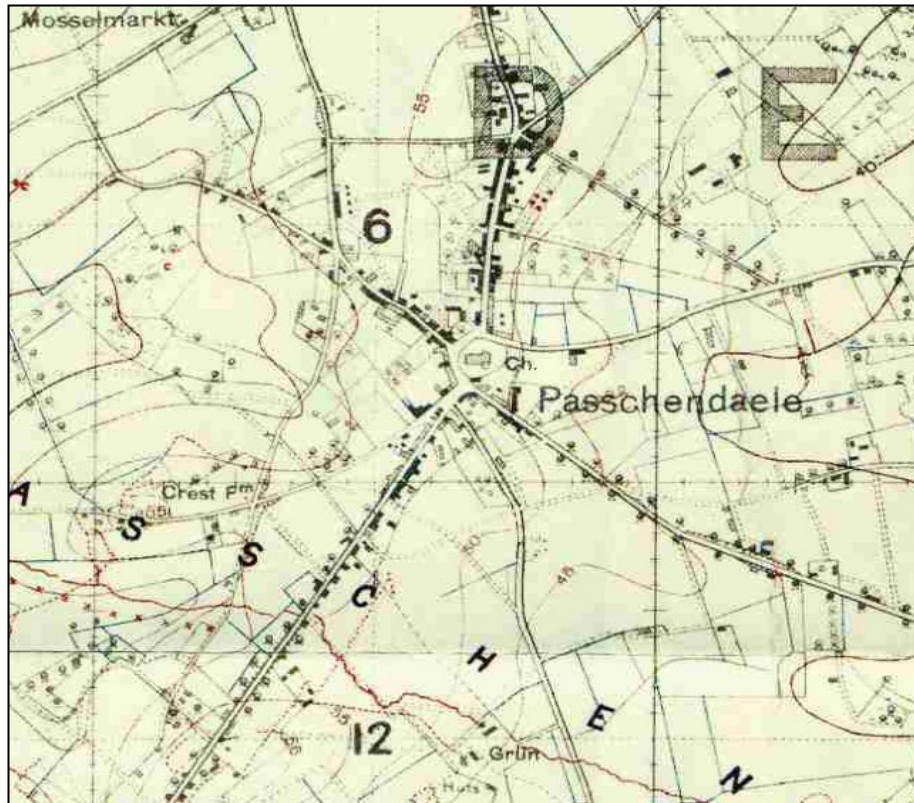
Operations further south in Flanders commenced after reciprocal attempts by the French and German armies to turn their opponents' northern flank through Picardy, Artois and Flanders, known as the Race to the Sea, reached Ypres. On 10 October, Lieutenant-General Erich von Falkenhayn, the Chief of the German General Staff since mid-September, ordered an attack towards Dunkirk and Calais, followed by a turn south to gain a decisive victory.

When the offensive failed, Falkenhayn ordered the capture of Ypres to gain a local advantage. By 12 November, the attempt in the First Battle of Ypres had also failed, at a cost of 160,000 German casualties and was stopped on 18 November.

In December 1914, the British Admiralty began discussions with the War Office, for a combined operation to occupy the Belgian coast to the Dutch frontier, with an attack along the coast combined with a landing at Ostend. Eventually the British were obliged to participate in the French offensives further south. Large British offensive operations in Flanders were not possible in 1915, due to the consequent lack of resources. The Germans conducted their own Flanders offensive at the Second Battle of Ypres (22 April – 15 May 1915), making the Ypres salient more costly to defend.

Sir Douglas Haig succeeded Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief of the BEF on 19 December 1915. A week after his appointment, Haig met Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, who emphasised the importance of obtaining control of the Belgian coast, to end the threat posed by German U-boats.

Haig was sceptical of a coastal operation, believing that a landing from the sea would be far more difficult than anticipated and that an advance along the coast would require so much preparation, that the Germans would have ample warning. Haig preferred an advance from Ypres, to bypass the flooded area around the Yser and the coast, before a coastal attack (Operation Hush) was attempted, to clear the coast to the Dutch border.



**Trench map from September 1917 showing Passchendaele.
The church and Crest Farm can be seen.**

In January 1916, Haig ordered General Herbert Plumer to plan offensives against Messines Ridge, Lille and Houthoulst Forest. General Henry Rawlinson was also ordered to plan an attack from the Ypres Salient on 4 February. Planning by Plumer continued but the demands of the Battles of Verdun and the Somme absorbed the offensive capacity of the BEF.

On 15 and 29 November 1916, Haig met the French commander-in-chief Joseph Joffre and the other Allies at Chantilly. An offensive strategy to overwhelm the Central Powers was agreed, with attacks planned on the Western, Eastern and Italian fronts, by the first fortnight in February 1917.

A meeting in London of the British Admiralty and General Staff urged that the Flanders operation be undertaken in 1917 and Joffre replied on 8 December, agreeing to the proposal for a Flanders campaign after the spring offensive.

The plan for a year of steady attrition on the Western Front, with the main effort in the summer being made by the BEF, was scrapped by the new French Commander-in-Chief Robert Nivelle and the French government in preference for a decisive battle, to be conducted in February by the French army, with the British contribution becoming a preliminary operation, the Battles of Arras.

Nivelle planned an operation in three parts, with preliminary offensives to pin German reserves by the British at Arras and the French between the Somme and the Oise, a French breakthrough offensive on the Aisne, then pursuit and exploitation. The plan was welcomed by Haig with reservations, which he addressed on 6 January. Nivelle agreed to a proviso that if the first two parts of the operation failed to lead to part three, they would be stopped so that the British could move their main forces north for the Flanders offensive, which Haig argued was of great importance to the British government. Haig wrote on 23 January that it would take six weeks to move British troops and equipment from the Arras front to Flanders, and on 14 March he noted that the attack on Messines Ridge could be made in May.

On 21 March, he wrote to Nivelle that it would take two months to prepare the attacks from Messines to Steenstraat but that the Messines attack could be ready in 5–6 weeks. On 16 May, Haig wrote that he had divided the Flanders operation into two phases, one to take Messines Ridge and the main attack several weeks later. British determination to clear the Belgian coast took on more urgency, after the Germans resumed unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February 1917.

Small operations took place in the Ypres salient in 1916, some being German initiatives to distract the Allies from the preparations for the offensive at Verdun and later attempts to divert Allied resources from the Battle of the Somme. Other operations were begun by the British to regain territory or to evict the Germans from ground overlooking their positions.

Engagements took place on 12 February at Boesinghe and on 14 February at Hooze and Sanctuary Wood. There were actions from 14–15 February and 1–4 March at The Bluff, 27 March – 16 April at the St. Eloi Craters and the Battle of Mont Sorrel from 2–13 June. In January 1917, the Second Army (II Anzac, IX, X and VIII corps) held the line in Flanders from Laventie to Boesinghe, with eleven divisions and up to two in reserve.

There was much trench mortaring, mining and raiding by both sides and from January to May, the Second Army had 20,000 casualties. In May, reinforcements began moving to Flanders from the south; the II Corps headquarters and 17 divisions had arrived by the end of the month. Ypres was the principal town within a salient (or bulge) in the British lines and the site of two previous battles: First Ypres (October–November 1914) and Second Ypres (April–May 1915).

Field Marshal Haig had long wanted a British offensive in Flanders and, following a warning that the German blockade would soon cripple the British war effort, wanted to reach the Belgian coast to destroy the German submarine bases there. On top of this, the possibility of a Russian withdrawal from the war threatened German redeployment from the Eastern front to increase their reserve strength dramatically. The British were further encouraged by the success of the attack on Messines Ridge on 7 June 1917. Nineteen huge mines were exploded simultaneously after they had been placed at the end of long tunnels under the German front lines.

Passchendaele lay on the last ridge east of Ypres, 5 miles (8.0 km) from a railway junction at Roulers, which was vital to the supply system of the German 4th Army. The next stage of the Allied plan was an advance to Thourout–Couckelaere, to close the German-controlled railway running through Roulers and Thourout. The capture of the ridge inflated Haig's confidence and preparations began. Yet the flatness of the plain made stealth impossible: as with the Somme, the Germans knew an attack was imminent and the initial bombardment served as final warning. It lasted two weeks, with 4.5 million shells fired from 3,000 guns, but again failed to destroy the heavily fortified German positions.

The battle took place on the Western Front, from July to November 1917, for control of the ridges south and east of the Belgian city of Ypres in West Flanders, as part of a strategy decided by the Allies at conferences in November 1916 and May 1917.

The front line around Ypres had changed relatively little since the end of the Second Battle of Ypres (22 April – 25 May 1915). The British held the city, while the Germans held the high ground of the Messines–Wytschaete ridge to the south, the lower ridges to the east and the flat ground to the north. The Ypres front was a salient bulging into German positions, overlooked by German artillery on the higher ground. It was difficult for the British forces to gain ground observation of the German rear areas east of the ridges.



In Flanders, sands, gravels and marls predominate, in places covered by silts. The coastal strip is sand but a short way inland, the ground rises to the Vale of Ypres, which before 1914 was a flourishing market garden. Ypres is 20 metres (66 ft) above sea level; Bixshoote 4 miles (6.4 km) to the north is at 8.5 metres (28 ft). To the east the land is at 20–25 metres (66–82 ft) for several miles, with the Steenbeek river at 15 metres (49 ft) near St Julien. There is a low ridge from Messines, 80 metres (260 ft) at its highest point, running north-east past "Clapham Junction" at the west end of Gheluvelt plateau (2 ½ miles from Ypres at 65 metres (213 ft) and Gheluvelt (above 50 metres (160 ft)) to Passchendaele, (5 ½ miles from Ypres at 50 metres (160 ft)) declining from there to a plain further north. Gradients vary from negligible, to 1:60 at Hooze and 1:33 at Zonnebeke.



Underneath the soil is London clay, sand and silt; according to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission categories of *sand*, *sandy soils* and *well-balanced soils*, Messines ridge is well-balanced soil and the ground around Ypres is sandy soil.

The ground is drained by many streams, canals and ditches which need regular maintenance. Since 1914 much of the drainage had been destroyed, although some parts had been restored by Land Drainage Companies brought from England.

The area was considered by the British to be drier than Loos, Givenchy and Plugstreet Wood further south.

A 1989 study of weather data recorded at Lille, 16 miles (26 km) from Ypres from 1867–1916, showed that August was more often dry than wet, that there was a trend towards dry autumns (September–November) and that average rainfall in October had decreased over the previous fifty years.

Haig selected Gough to command the offensive on 30 April and on 10 June, Gough took over the Ypres salient north of Messines Ridge. Gough planned an offensive based on the *GHQ 1917* plan and the instructions he had received from Haig. On the understanding that Haig wanted a more ambitious version, Gough held meetings with his Corps commanders on 6 and 16 June, where the third objective, which included the *Wilhelm Stellung* (third line), a second-day objective in earlier plans, was added to the two objectives due to be taken on the first day. A fourth objective was also given for the first day but was only to be attempted at the discretion of divisional and corps commanders, in places where the German defence had collapsed.



The British attack was not a breakthrough operation, because *Flanders I Stellung*, the fourth German defensive position, lay 10,000–12,000 yards (9,100–11,000m) behind the front line and was not an objective on the first day.

The Fifth Army plan was more ambitious than the Plumer version, which had involved an advance of 1,000–1,750 yards. Major-General Davidson, Director of Operations at GHQ, wrote in a memorandum that there was "ambiguity as to what was meant by a step-by-step attack with limited objectives" and suggested reverting to a 1,750 yards advance, to increase the concentration of British artillery. Gough stressed the need to plan to exploit an opportunity to take ground left temporarily undefended; this was more likely in the first attack, which would have the benefit of long preparation. After discussions at the end of June, Haig and Plumer, the Second Army commander, endorsed the plan.



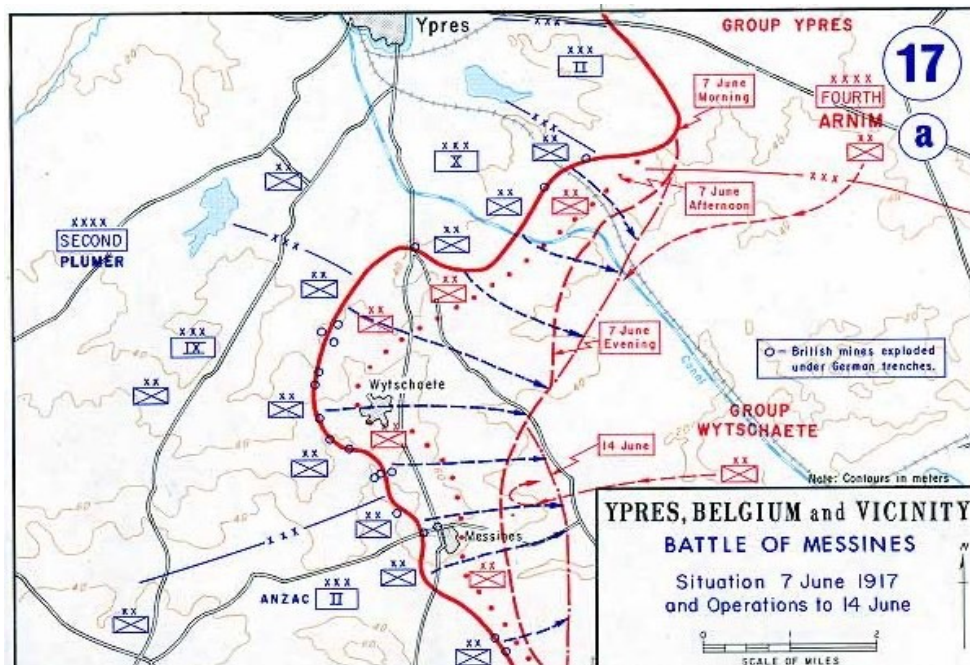
British 18 pounder battery taking

near Boesinghe, 31 July 1917

A black and white photograph showing a person lying face down in a field of debris and rubble, likely a battlefield or area of destruction. The person is wearing dark clothing and is positioned in the lower center of the frame. The ground is covered with broken wood, metal, and other unidentifiable fragments. The background is a dense field of similar debris, extending to the horizon. The overall scene conveys a sense of tragedy and the aftermath of conflict.

**German trench
destroyed by a mine explosion**

The final objectives were largely gained before dark and the British had fewer losses than expected, the plan having provided for up to 50 percent in the initial attack. As the infantry advanced over the far edge of the ridge, German artillery and machine-guns east of the ridge began to fire and the British artillery was less able to suppress them. Fighting continued on the lower slopes on the east side of the ridge until 14 June. The offensive removed the Germans from the dominating ground on the southern face of the Ypres salient, which the 4th Army had held since the First Battle of Ypres (19 Oct – 22 Nov 1914).



The Battle of Pilckem Ridge (31 July to 2 August 1917)

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The attack had most success on the left (north), in front of XIV Corps and the French First Army. In this section of the front, the Entente forces advanced 2,500–3,000 yards (2,300–2,700m), up to the line of the Steenbeek stream. In the centre of the British attack, XVIII Corps and XIX Corps pushed forward to the line of the Steenbeek to consolidate and sent reserve troops towards the Green and Red lines (on the XIX Corps front), an advance of about 4,000 yards (3,700m).

The Battle of Pilckem Ridge 31 July to 2 August: The first wounded to come in and lying on the ground at a farm in Elverdinghe. An observation balloon is rising in the background.

Group Ypres counter-attacked the flanks of the British break-in, supported by all available artillery and aircraft at about midday.

The German counter-attack was able to drive the three British brigades back to the black line with 70 percent losses, where the German counter-attack was stopped by mud, artillery and machine-gun fire.



The Capture of Westhoek (10 August 1917)

II Corps attacked on 10 August, to capture the rest of the black line on the Gheluvelt plateau. The advance succeeded but German artillery fire and infantry counter-attacks isolated the infantry of the 18th Division, which had captured Glencorse Wood.



At about 7:00 p.m., German infantry attacked behind a smokescreen and recaptured all but the north-west corner of the wood, only the 25th Division gains on Westhoek Ridge being held.

Albrecht von Thar, Staff Officer at Group Wytshchate, noted that casualties after 14 days in the line averaged 1,500–2,000 men, compared to the Somme 1916 average of 4,000 men and that German troop morale was higher than in 1916.

The Battle of Hill 70 (15 to 25 August 1917)

The Battle of Hill 70, was a subsidiary operation by the Canadian Corps against five divisions of the German 6th Army. The battle took place on the outskirts of Lens, Pas-de-Calais, from 15–25 August. Kuhl wrote later that it was a costly defeat and "wrecked" the plan for relieving divisions which had been "fought-out" (exhausted) in Flanders.

The plan to capture Hill 70 called for 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions to attack on a front of 4,000 yards (3,700m). Their objective was to capture the main enemy defensive positions on the eastern or reverse slope of Hill 70. The objectives were marked off in depth by three stages. In the first stage, the assaulting troops would capture the German front-line trenches.

The German second position on the crest of the hill during the second stage and the final stage, marked by the German's third line, on the reverse side of the slope, some 1,500 yards (1,400m) from the starting position. The 1st Canadian Division's 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade would attack north of Hill 70 while the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade would attack the summit itself. The 2nd Canadian Division's 4th and 5th Canadian Infantry Brigades would attack the rubble remains of the suburbs of Cite St. Edouard, St. Laurent and St. Emile directly south of Hill 70.

The assault began at 4:25 am on the morning of 15 August, just as dawn was breaking. Special companies of the Royal Engineers fired drums of burning oil into the suburb of Cite St. Elisabeth and at other selected targets in order to supplement the artillery rolling barrage and build up a smoke-screen.

Divisional field artillery positions executed a rolling barrage directly in advance of the assaulting troops while field howitzers shelled German positions 400m in advance of the rolling barrage and heavy howitzers shelled all other known German strong-points.

The Germans had moved up their reserve units on the previous night in anticipation of an attack. The main assembly of Canadian troops was detected by 3:00am, and within three minutes of the attack commencing the German artillery brought down defensive fire, but at widely scattered points.



**British Soldiers giving a drink of water to a wounded German soldier
at the Battle of Hill 70**

The affected forward positions of the German 7th Division and 11th Reserve Division were quickly overwhelmed. Within twenty minutes of the attack beginning, both Canadian Divisions had reached their first objective. By 6:00 a.m. the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade had reached the second objective line while units in the other three brigade had in some cases already reached their final objective. However, only the flanking companies of the two battalions attacking Hill 70 itself managed to reach their objectives. The remainder of both units were forced to retreat up the slope and consolidate their position at intermediate objective line.

On the right flank of the 2nd Canadian Division, the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division executed a diversionary operation which proved successful in drawing German retaliatory fire away from the main operation. Four hours later, the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade of the 4th Canadian Division attempted to exploit the weakened German force by pushing strong patrols towards the centre of Lens. This ultimately proved unsuccessful as the Germans used local counterattacks across the 4th Canadian Division's front to drive the patrols back to the city's outskirts.



The morning of 16 August was relatively quiet, with only a few attempts made by small German parties to approach the Canadian lines. After having failed to capture all their objectives the previous day and having postponed additional attacks a number of times, the 2nd Canadian Brigade attack and captured the remainder of its final objective line on the afternoon of the 16th. The assault itself lasted a little over an hour but the troops were then forced to defend against a dozen German counterattacks throughout the day.

A wounded Canadian and his buddies warm up

with some soup near Hill 70, August 1917

Attempts by the 4th and 11th Canadian Infantry Brigades to eliminate an enemy salient between Cite St. Elisabeth and Lens on the 17th failed and as had been foreseen the Germans continued to mount determined counterattacks.

On the 17th, the German command began to realize that the Canadian and British artillery would need to be neutralized before any counterattacks would be successful. The Germans began a series of counterattacks against a chalk quarry under Canadian control outside of Cite St. Auguste but also sought to wear down the Canadian artillery resources by sending up false flare signals or provoking the infantry to call for unnecessary artillery fire.

The Germans also began to utilize poison gas in earnest. Between 15,000 and 20,000 of the newly introduced Yellow Cross shells containing the blistering agent sulphur mustard were fired in addition to an undetermined number of shells containing diphosgene. The Canadian 1st and 2nd Artillery Field Brigades and the Canadian front line were heavily gassed. Many artillery men became casualties after gas fogged the goggles of their respirators and they were forced to remove their masks in order to set the fuses, lay their sights and maintain accurate fire. The Germans used the cover of gas to make a number of attempts against the Canadian controlled chalk quarry and Chicory Trench on the night of the 17th and early morning of the 18th.

All attempts against the chalk quarry failed and only one company of the 55th Reserve Infantry Regiment (on loan to the 11th Reserve Division) managed to breach the Canadian defences at Chicory Trench before being repulsed. German troops employing flamethrowers managed to penetrate the Canadian line north of the quarry on the morning of the 18th before being driven out.

The Battle of Langemarck (16 to 18 August 1917)

The Battle of Langemarck was fought from 16–18 August; the Fifth Army headquarters was influenced by the effect that delay would have on Operation Hush, which needed the high tides at the end of August or it would have to be postponed for a month. Gough intended that the rest of the green line, just beyond the *Wilhelm Stellung* (German third line), from Polygon Wood to Langemarck, to be taken and the Steenbeek crossed further north.

In the II Corps area, the disappointment of 10 August was repeated, with the infantry managing to advance, then being isolated by German artillery and (except in the 25th Division area near Westhoek) and forced back to their start line by German counter-attacks. Attempts by the German infantry to advance further were stopped by British artillery fire with many losses.

The advance further north in the XVIII Corps area, retook and held the north end of St Julien and the area south-east of Langemarck, while XIV Corps captured Langemarck and the *Wilhelm Stellung*, north of the Ypres–Staden railway near the Kortebeek.

The French First Army conformed, pushing up to the Kortebeek and St. Jansbeek stream west of the northern stretch of the *Wilhelm Stellung*, where it crossed to the east side of the Kortebeek.



British soldiers in the ruins of a church (said to be watching a bombardment of the enemy lines).

Near Zuydcoote, 16th August 1917

Smaller British attacks from 19–27 August also failed to hold captured ground, although a XVIII Corps attack on 19 August succeeded. Exploiting observation from higher ground to the east, the Germans were able to inflict many losses on the British divisions holding the new line beyond Langemarck.

After two fine dry days from 17–18 August, XIX Corps and XVIII Corps began pushing closer to the *Wilhelm Stellung* (third line). On 20 August, an operation by British tanks, artillery and infantry captured strong points along the St. Julien–Poelcappelle road and two days later, more ground was gained by the two corps but they were still overlooked by the Germans in the un-captured part of the *Wilhelm Stellung*.

II Corps resumed operations to capture Nonne Bosschen, Glencorse Wood and Inverness Copse around the Menin Road on 22–24 August, which failed and were costly to both sides. Gough laid down a new infantry formation of skirmish lines to be followed by "worms" on 24 August. Cavan noted that pill-box defences required broad front attacks, so as to engage them simultaneously.

The British general offensive intended for 25 August, was delayed because of the failure of previous attacks to hold ground, following the Battle of Langemarck and then postponed due to more bad weather. Attacks on 27 August were minor operations, which were costly and inconclusive. Haig called a halt to operations amidst tempestuous weather.

The German 4th Army had defeated the British advance to all of the 31 July objectives during August but high casualties and sickness caused by the ground conditions, endless bombardments and air attacks worsened the manpower shortage that the German defensive strategy for 1917 was intended to alleviate.

Haig transferred command of the offensive to General Plumer, the Second Army commander on 25 August and moved the northern boundary of the Second Army closer to the Ypres–Roulers railway. More heavy artillery was sent to Flanders from the armies further south and placed opposite the Gheluvelt plateau.

Plumer continued the development of British attacking methods, which had also taken place in the Fifth Army, during the slow and costly progress in August, against the German defence-in-depth and the unusually wet weather. After a pause of about three weeks, Plumer intended to capture Gheluvelt plateau in four steps, with six days between each step to allow time to bring forward artillery and supplies.

Each attack was to have limited geographical objectives like the attacks in August, with infantry brigades reorganised to attack the first objective with one battalion each and the final one with two battalions.



Plumer arranged for much more medium and heavy artillery to be added to the creeping bombardment, which had been impossible with the amount of artillery available to Gough. The revised attack organisation was intended to have more infantry attacking on narrower fronts, to a shallower depth than the attack of 31 July. The quicker and shorter advances were intended to be consolidated on tactically advantageous ground (particularly on reverse slopes), with the infantry in contact with their artillery and air support, ready to repulse counter-attacks.

The faster tempo of the operations was intended to add to German difficulties in

replacing tired divisions through the transport bottlenecks behind the German front. The pause in British operations while Plumer moved more artillery into the area of the Gheluvelt plateau, helped to mislead the Germans, Albrecht von Thaer,

Staff Officer at Group *Wijtschate* wrote that it was "*almost boring*". At first, Kuhl doubted that the offensive had ended but by 13 September, had changed his mind and despite reservations allowed two divisions, thirteen heavy batteries and twelve field batteries of artillery, three fighter squadrons and four other air force units to be transferred from the 4th Army.

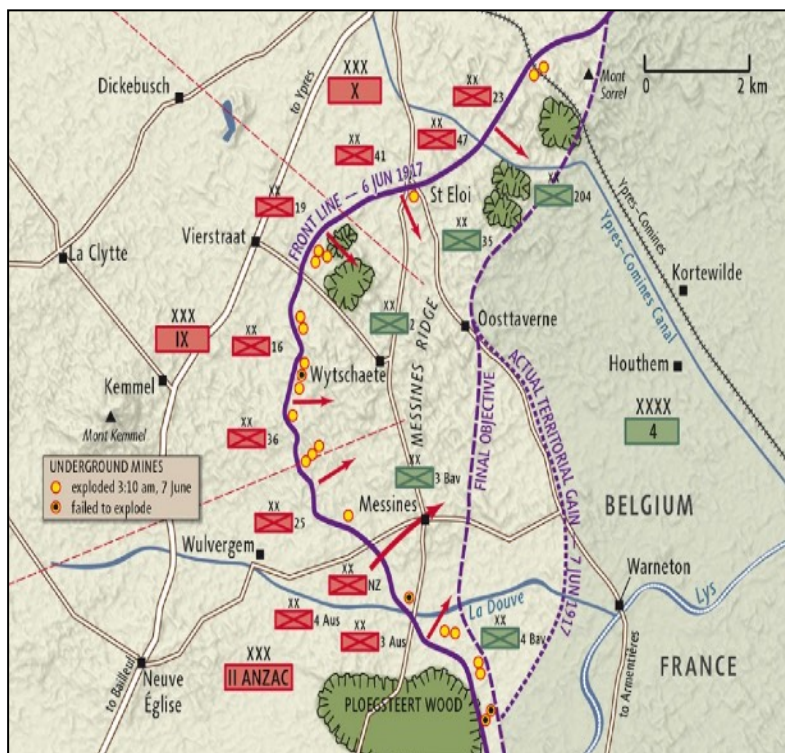
Instead of setting objectives 1–2 miles (1.6–3.2 km) distant as on 31 July, the British planned an advance of approximately 1,500 yards (1,400m), without the disadvantages of rain soaked ground and poor visibility encountered in August. The advances were much quicker, and the final objective was reached a few hours after dawn, which confounded the German counter-attack divisions. Having crossed 2 miles (3.2 km) of mud, the *Eingreif* divisions found the British already established along a new defence line, with the forward battle zone and its weak garrison gone beyond recapture. After the Battle of the Menin Road Ridge, the German defensive system was changed, beginning a resort to expedients which lasted for the rest of the battle. In August, German front-line divisions had two regiments of three battalions each deployed forward, with the third regiment in reserve.

The front battalions had needed to be relieved much more frequently than expected, due to the power of British attacks, constant artillery fire and the weather, which caused replacement units to become mixed up with ones holding the front, rather than operate as formed bodies. Reserve regiments had not been able to intervene early enough, leaving front battalions unsupported until *Eingreif* divisions arrived, some hours after the commencement of the attack.

After another severe defeat on 26 September, the German commanders made more changes to the defensive dispositions of the infantry and altered their counter-attack tactics, which had been negated by Plumer's more conservative form of limited attacks.

In July and August, German counter-attack (*Eingreif*) divisions had engaged in a manner analogous to an advance to contact during mobile operations, which had given the Germans several costly defensive successes.

The counter-attacks in September had been assaults on reinforced field positions, due to the restrained nature of British infantry advances. The fine weather in early September had greatly eased British supply difficulties, especially in the delivery of huge amounts of artillery ammunition.



Immediately after their infantry advances, the British had made time to establish a defence in depth, behind standing barrages. The British attacks took place in dry clear weather, with increased air support over the battlefield for counter-attack reconnaissance, contact patrol and ground-attack operations.

Systematic defensive artillery support was forfeited by the Germans, due to uncertainty over the position of their infantry, just when the British infantry benefited from the opposite. German counter-attacks were defeated with many casualties and on 28 September, Albrecht von Thier, staff officer at Group Wyttschaete, wrote that the experience was "awful" and that he did not know what to do.

Ludendorff ordered a strengthening of forward garrisons by the ground-holding divisions. All machine-guns, including those of the support and reserve battalions of the front-line regiments, were sent into the forward zone, to form a cordon of four to eight guns every 250 yards (230m).

The ground holding divisions were reinforced by the *Stoss* regiment of an *Eingreif* division being moved up behind each front division into the artillery protective line behind the forward battle zone, to launch earlier counter-attacks while the British were consolidating.

The bulk of the *Eingreif* divisions were to be held back and used for a methodical counter-stroke on the next day or the one after and for counter-attacks and spoiling attacks between British offensives.

Further changes of the 4th Army defensive methods were ordered on 30 September. Operations to increase British infantry losses in line with the instructions of 22 September were to continue. Gas bombardments of forward British infantry and artillery positions, were to be increased whenever the winds allowed.

Every effort was to be made to induce the British to reinforce their forward positions, where the German artillery could engage them. Between 26 September and 3 October, the Germans attacked at least 24 times. Operation *Hohensturm*, a bigger German methodical counter-attack, intended to recapture the area around Zonnebeke was planned for 4 October.

The Battle of the Menin Road Ridge (20 to 25 September 1917)

The British plan for the battle fought from 20–25 September, included more emphasis on the use of heavy and medium artillery to destroy German concrete pill-boxes and machine-gun nests, which were more numerous in the battle zones being attacked and to engage in more counter-battery fire.

The British had 575 heavy and medium and 720 field guns and howitzers, having more than doubled the quantity of artillery available at the Battle of Pilckem Ridge.



Aircraft were to be used for systematic air observation of German troop movements, to avoid the failures of previous battles, where too few aircraft crews had been burdened with too many duties and had flown in bad weather.

On 20 September, the Allies attacked on a 14,500 yards (13,300m) front and captured most of their objectives, to a depth of about 1,500 yards (1,400m) by mid-morning. The Germans made many counter-attacks, beginning around 3:00 p.m. until early evening, all of which failed to gain ground or made only a temporary penetration of the new British positions. The German defence had failed to stop a well-prepared attack made in good weather. Minor attacks took place after 20 September, as both sides jockeyed for position and reorganised their defences. A mutually-costly attack by the Germans on 25 September, recaptured pillboxes at the southwestern end of Polygon Wood. Next day, the German positions near the wood were swept away in the Battle of Polygon Wood.

German counter-attack, 25 September 1917.

Two regiments of the German 50th Reserve Division attacked on a 1,800-yard (1,600m) front, on either side of the Reutelbeek, supported by aircraft and 44 field and 20 heavy batteries of artillery, four times the usual amount of artillery for a division.

The German infantry managed to advance on the flanks, for about 100 yards (91m) near the Menin road and 600 yards (550m) north of the Reutelbeek, close to Black Watch Corner, supported by artillery-observation and ground-attack aircraft and a box-barrage fired behind the British front-line, which isolated the British defenders from reinforcements and cut off the supply of ammunition.

Return-fire from the 33rd Division (Major-General Reginald Pinney) and the 15th Australian Brigade of the 5th Australian Division (Major-General Talbot Hobbs) along the southern edge of Polygon wood, forced the attackers under cover around some of the *Wilhelm Stellung* pillboxes, near Black Watch Corner, at the south-western edge of Polygon Wood. German attempts to reinforce the attacking troops failed, due to British artillery observers isolating the advanced German troops with artillery barrages.

Plumer ordered the attack scheduled for 26 September to go ahead but modified the objectives of the 33rd Division. The 98th Brigade was to advance and cover the right flank of the 5th Australian Division and the 100th Brigade was to re-capture the lost ground further south. The 5th Australian Division advance the next day began with uncertainty as to the security of the right flank; the attack of the depleted 98th Brigade was delayed and only managed to reach Black Watch Corner, 1,000 yards (910m) short of its objectives.

Reinforcements moved forward into the 5th Australian Division area to the north and attacked south-westwards at noon, as a frontal attack was made from Black Watch Corner without artillery support, because troops were known to be still holding out.

The attack succeeded by 2:00 p.m. and later in the afternoon, the 100th Brigade re-took the ground lost north of the Menin road. Casualties in the 33rd Division were so great that it was relieved on 27 September by the 23rd Division, which had only been withdrawn on the night of 24/25 September.

The Battle of Polygon Wood (26 September to 03 October 1917).

The Second Army altered its Corps frontages soon after the attack of 20 September, for the next effort (26 September – 3 October) so that each attacking division could be concentrated on a 1,000 yards (910m) front. Roads and light railways were extended to the new front line, to allow artillery and ammunition to be moved forward.



The artillery of VIII Corps and IX Corps on the southern flank, simulated preparations for attacks on Zandvoorde and Warneton. At 5.50 a.m. on 26 September, five layers of barrage fired by British artillery and machine-guns began. Dust and smoke thickened the morning mist and the infantry advanced using compass bearings.

Each of the three German ground-holding divisions attacked on 26 September, had an *Eingreif* division in support, twice the ratio of 20 September. No ground captured by the British was lost and German counter-attacks managed only to reach ground to which survivors of the front-line divisions had retired.



German prisoners taken during the Battle of Polygon Wood in a POW camp at Langemarck, Belgium.

The Battle of Broodseinde (04 October 1917)

The Battle of Broodseinde (4 October), was the last assault launched by Plumer in good weather. The operation aimed to complete the capture of the Gheluvelt Plateau and occupy Broodseinde Ridge. The Germans sought to recapture their defences around Zonnebeke, with a methodical counter-attack also to begin on 4 October.



British soldiers moving forward during the Battle of Broodseinde. Photo by Ernest Brooks

The British attacked along a 14,000 yards (13,000m) front and by coincidence, Australian troops from I Anzac Corps met attacking troops from the German [45th Reserve Division](#) in no man's land, when Operation *Hohensturm* commenced simultaneously.

The Germans had reinforced their front line to delay the British capture of their forward positions, until *Eingreif* divisions could intervene, which put more German troops into the area most vulnerable to British artillery. The British inflicted devastating casualties on the 4th Army divisions opposite.

On 7 October, the 4th German Army again dispersed its troops in the front defence zone. Reserve battalions moved back behind the artillery protective line and the *Eingreif* divisions were organised to intervene as swiftly as possible once an attack commenced, despite the risk of being devastated by the British artillery. Counter-battery fire to reduce British artillery fire was to be increased, to protect the *Eingreif* divisions as they advanced.

All of the German divisions holding front zones were relieved and an extra division brought forward, as the British advances had lengthened the front line. Without the forces necessary for a counter-offensive south of the Gheluvelt plateau towards Kemmel Hill, Rupprecht began to plan for a slow withdrawal from the Ypres salient, even at the risk of uncovering German positions further north and the Belgian coast.

The Battle of Poelcappelle (09 October 1917)

Poelcappelle is located about five miles north-east of Ypres. It was a strongly fortified German position, which the British struggled to take during the Third Battle of Ypres. Although the line ran through the outskirts of the village for some time, it was not until the 22nd of October 1917 that the village was finally taken by the 10th Essex and 8th Norfolk's, part of 53rd Brigade. The operation to take the village included the use of what was known as a "Chinese attack", where dummy figures were raised above the trenches to fool the Germans as to where the attack would actually take place.

The French First Army and British Second and Fifth armies attacked on 9 October, on a 13,500 yards (12,300m) front, from south of Broodseinde to St. Jansbeek, to advance half of the distance from Broodseinde ridge to Passchendaele, on the main front, which led to many casualties on both sides.

Advances in the north of the attack front were retained by British and French troops but most of the ground taken in front of Passchendaele and on the Becelaere and Gheluvelt spurs was lost to German counter-attacks.



Poelcappelle church in about 1915

General William Birdwood later wrote that the return of heavy rain and mud sloughs was the main cause of the failure to hold captured ground. Kuhl concluded that the fighting strained German fighting power to the limit but that the German forces managed to prevent a breakthrough, although it was becoming much harder to replace losses.

First Battle of Passchendaele (12 October 1917)

The final phase, the advance on Passchendaele, took place in October and November, the aim being to take the strategically important high ground of the Passchendaele ridge. The first battle of Passchendaele, on the 12th October, failed to take the village, and the second battle of Passchendaele lasted from the 26th of October until the 10th of November.

The First Battle, on 12 October, was another Allied attempt to gain ground around Passchendaele. Heavy rain and mud again made movement difficult and little artillery could be brought closer to the front. Allied troops were exhausted, and morale had fallen. After a modest British advance, German counter-attacks recovered most of the ground lost opposite Passchendaele.

There were 13,000 Allied casualties, including 2,735 New Zealanders, 845 of whom had been killed or lay wounded and stranded in the mud of no-man's-land. In lives lost in a day, this was the worst day in New Zealand history. At a conference on 13 October, Haig and the army commanders agreed that attacks would stop until the weather improved and roads could be extended, to carry more artillery and ammunition forward for better fire support.



Aerial view of Passchendaele village before and after the battle

On the 17th and 18th of October 1917, men from the battalion viewed a relief map (made at 1:1000 scale in concrete at Ten Elms Camp near Poperinghe) of the area they were to attack. On the 17th Lieutenant Frank Hutchinson joined the battalion. He was one of those who would die in the attack less than two weeks later (like many of the others he has no known grave and is commemorated on the Menin Gate).

The battalion spent the next few days practicing for their attack, and on the 27th Lieutenant Walter Martell led an advance party into the line, with the remainder of the battalion following the next day.

On the 28th of October the 85th Battalion moved to Potijze, where they had supper, and then moved up to the front line. A German counter-attack had driven the 44th Battalion (which they were relieving) back, and men of the 85th helped out.

There were four officers killed here, even before the main attack (due on the 30th). Captain MacKenzie was shot in the abdomen by a machine gun, and survived a little while to direct operations, dying shortly afterwards. Lieutenants Martell and Anderson were killed, whilst Lieutenant Christie was wounded. He was taken back to the Regimental First-Aid post, but there he was killed by a shell, as was his batman who had come back with him. This Aid Post was located at 'Tyne Cottage' - Tyne Cot.

The preparations for attack were made after dusk on the 29th, and the next morning, the attack was scheduled to begin at 5.50 a.m. 'A', 'B' and 'C' Companies were to make the attack, on ground from where the railway used to run, across to the road. 'D' Company was in reserve. There was a preliminary barrage,

but it was felt to be light and of little use in this sector. The attackers were met immediately with rifle and machine-gun fire from the Germans, with nine officers hit immediately, two Company Commanders (Captains Hensley and Clayton) being killed outright. The fire-fight continued, and progress could only be made by the men leaping from shell-hole to shell-hole. Anyone attempting to walk or stand upright was hit - such as Sergeant Rushton of 'A' Company, who stood up, shouted "Come on 'A' Company!" and was instantly killed. At this point, Major Anderson brought some of the reserves of 'D' Company forward. This gave the Canadians the impetus they needed, and they pushed on, capturing machine gun posts and 'putting the crews out of action'.

They took their objective (the Blue line) at 6.38 a.m., nearly an hour after they had started out. It was just after this that Lieutenant Hutchinson, in charge of the battalion Tump Liners (a group which carried supplies and equipment in containers partly supported by a band around the forehead) led them up carrying ammunition but was killed after being with the battalion less than two weeks. Major Anderson, Second in Command of the Battalion, was also killed about this time.

The 85th Battalion held their positions for the remainder of the day and the next, although Germans could be seen firing and trying to counter-attack from Passchendaele village and Hill 13. The 85th were relieved on the evening of the 31st of October. They had captured ten machine guns and a field gun, taken a large (but unknown) number of prisoners and expended around 50 rounds of ammunition per rifle. The cost to the 85th Battalion had been considerable. Of 33 officers involved in the attack (including those at Battalion Headquarters), twelve were killed, whilst another 11 were wounded. Of the 20 officers with 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' companies, only one, Lieutenant W Bligh, came through unharmed.

The Battle of La Malmaison (23 to 27 October 1917)



After numerous requests from Haig, Petain began the Battle of La Malmaison, a long-delayed French attack on the Chemin des Dames, by the Sixth Army (General Paul Maistre). The artillery preparation started on 17 October and on 23 October, the German defenders were swiftly defeated, losing 11,157 prisoners and 180 guns, as the French advanced up to 3.7 miles (6.0 km), capturing the village and fort of La Malmaison, gaining control of the Chemin des Dames ridge. The Germans had to withdraw to the north of the Ailette Valley early in November. Haig was pleased with the French success but regretted the delay, which had lessened its effect on the Flanders operations.

The Second Battle of Passchendaele (26 October to 10 November 1917)

The British Fifth Army undertook minor operations from 20–22 October, to maintain pressure on the Germans and support the French attack at La Malmaison, while the Canadian Corps prepared for a series of attacks from 26 October – 10 November. The four divisions of the Canadian Corps had been transferred to the Ypres Salient from Lens, to capture Passchendaele and the ridge. The Canadians relieved the II Anzac

Corps on 18 October and found that the front line was mostly the same as that occupied by the 1st Canadian Division in April 1915.

The Canadian operation was to be three limited attacks, on 26 October, 30 October and 6 November. On 26 October, the 3rd Canadian Division captured its objective at Wolf Copse, then swung back its northern flank to link with the adjacent division of the Fifth Army. The 4th Canadian Division captured its objectives but was forced slowly to retire from Decline Copse, against German counter-attacks and communication failures between the Canadian and Australian units to the south. The second stage began on 30 October, to complete the previous stage and gain a base for the final assault on Passchendaele. The attackers on the southern flank quickly captured Crest Farm and sent patrols beyond the final objective into Passchendaele.

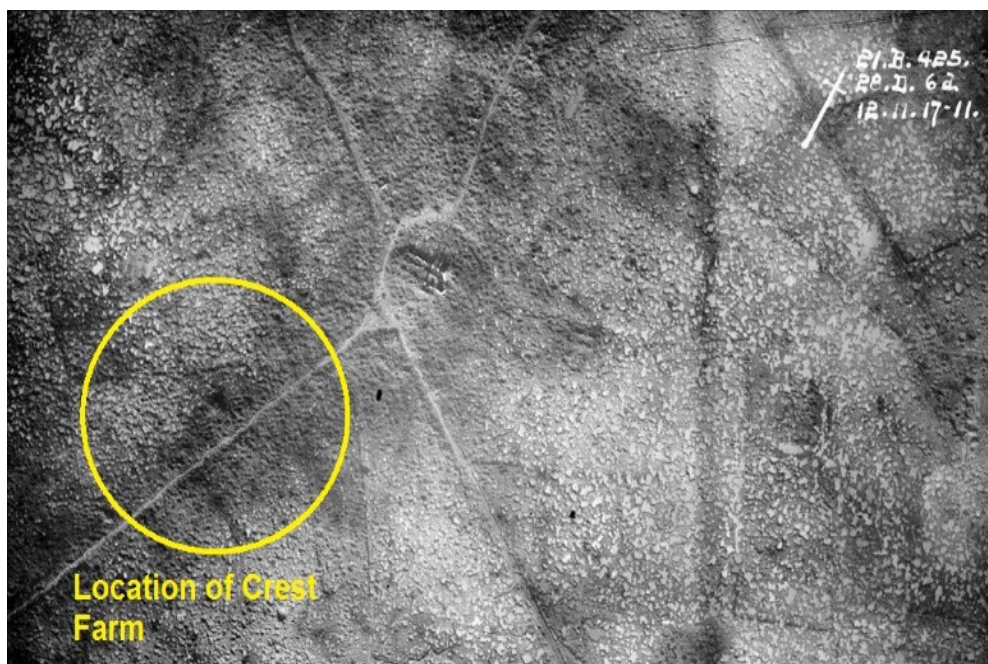


Terrain

through which the Canadian Corps advanced at Passchendaele.

The attack on the northern flank again met with exceptional German resistance. The 3rd Canadian Division captured Vapour Farm on the corps boundary, Furst Farm to the west of Meetcheele and the crossroads at Meetcheele but remained short of its objective. During a seven-day pause, the Second Army took over another section of the Fifth Army front adjoining the Canadian Corps.

Three rainless days from 3–5 November eased preparation for the next stage, which began on the morning of 6 November, with the 1st Canadian Division and the 2nd Canadian Division. In fewer than three hours, many units reached their final objectives and Passchendaele was captured. The Canadian Corps launched a final action on 10 November, to gain control of the remaining high ground north of the village near Hill 52, which ended the campaign apart from a night attack at Passchendaele on 1/2 December, an attack on the Polderhoek Spur on 2 December and some minor operations in the new year.



In a German General Staff publication, it was written that "Germany had been brought near to certain destruction (*sicheren Untergang*) by the Flanders battle of 1917". In his Memoirs of 1938, Lloyd George wrote, "Passchendaele was indeed one of the greatest disasters of the war ... No soldier of any intelligence now defends this senseless campaign ..."

In 1939, G. C. Wynne wrote that the British had eventually reached Passchendaele Ridge and captured *Flandern I Stellung*; beyond them were *Flandern II* and *Flandern III* (which was nearly complete). The German submarine bases on the coast had not been captured but the objective of diverting the Germans from the French further south, while they recovered from the Nivelle Offensive of April, had succeeded.

In 1997, Griffith wrote that the *bite and hold* system kept moving until November, because the BEF had developed a workable system of offensive tactics, against which the Germans ultimately had no answer. A decade later, Sheldon wrote that relative casualty figures were irrelevant, because the German army could not afford great numbers of losses or to lose the initiative, by being compelled to fight another defensive battle on ground of the Allies' choosing.

The Third Battle of Ypres pinned the German army to Flanders and caused unsustainable casualties. At a conference on 13 October, a scheme of the Third Army for an attack in mid-November was discussed. Byng wanted the operations at Ypres to continue, to hold German troops in Flanders. The Battle of Cambrai began on 20 November, when the British breached the first two parts of the Hindenburg Line, in the first successful mass use of tanks in a combined arms operation. The experience of the failure to contain the British attacks at Ypres and the drastic reduction in areas of the western front which could be considered "quiet", after the tank and artillery surprise at Cambrai, left the OHL with little choice but to return to a strategy of decisive victory in 1918.

On 24 October, the Austro-German 14th Army, under *General der Infanterie* Otto von Below, attacked the Italian Second Army on the Isonzo, at the Battle of Caporetto and in 18 days, inflicted casualties of 650,000 men and 3,000 guns. In fear that Italy might be put out of the war, the French and British Governments offered reinforcements. British and French troops were swiftly moved from 10 November – 12 December but the diversion of resources from the BEF forced Haig to conclude the 3rd Battle of Ypres short of Westrozebeke, the last substantial British attack being made on 10 November.

Casualties

Various casualty figures have been published, sometimes with acrimony, although the highest estimates for British and German casualties appear to be discredited. In the Official History, Brigadier-General J. E. Edmonds put British casualties at 244,897 and wrote that equivalent German figures were not available, estimating German losses at 400,000. Edmonds considered that 30 percent needed to be added to German statistics, to make them comparable with British casualty criteria.

In 2007, Sheldon wrote that although German casualties from 1 June – 10 November were 217,194, a figure available in Volume III of the *Sanitätsbericht* (1934), Edmonds may not have included them as they did not fit his case. Sheldon recorded 182,396 slightly wounded and sick soldiers *not struck off unit strength*, which if included would make 399,590 German losses. The British claim to have taken 24,065 prisoners has not been disputed.

Commemoration

The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing commemorates those of all Commonwealth nations, except New Zealand, who died in the Ypres Salient and have no known grave. In the case of the United Kingdom only casualties before 16 August 1917 are commemorated on the memorial. United Kingdom and New Zealand servicemen who died after that date are named on the memorial at Tyne Cot Cemetery.

There are numerous tributes and memorials all over Australia and New Zealand to ANZAC soldiers who died in the battle, including plaques at the Christchurch and Dunedin railway stations. The Canadian Corps participation in the Second Battle of Passchendaele is commemorated with the Passchendaele Memorial located at the former site of the Crest Farm on the south-west fringe of Passchendaele village.

One of the newest monuments to be dedicated to the fighting contribution of a group is the Celtic Cross memorial, commemorating the Scottish contributions and efforts in the fighting in Flanders during the Great War. This memorial is located on the Frezenberg Ridge where the Scottish 9th and 15th Divisions, fought during the Battle of Passchendaele.

TYNE COT

Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery and Memorial to the Missing is the largest cemetery for Commonwealth forces in the world, for any war. The cemetery and its surrounding memorial are located outside of Passchendaele, near Zonnebeke in Belgium. The name "Tyne Cot" is said to come from the Northumberland Fusiliers, seeing a resemblance between the many German concrete pill boxes on this site and typical Tyneside workers' cottages (Tyne cots).

The Cemetery lies on a broad rise in the landscape which overlooks the surrounding countryside. As such, the location was strategically important to both sides. The concrete shelters which still stand in various parts of the cemetery were part of a fortified position of the German *Flanders I Stellung*, which played an important role in the area during the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917.

On 4 October 1917, the area where Tyne Cot Cemetery is now located, was captured by the 3rd Australian Division and the New Zealand Division and two days later a cemetery for British and Canadian war dead was begun. The cemetery was recaptured by German forces on 13 April 1918 and was finally liberated by Belgian forces on 28 September. After the Armistice in November 1918, the cemetery was greatly enlarged from its original 343 graves by concentrating graves from the battlefields, smaller cemeteries nearby and from Langemark.

The cemetery grounds were assigned to the United Kingdom in perpetuity by King Albert I of Belgium in recognition of the sacrifices made by the British Empire in the defence and liberation of Belgium.



The Cross of Sacrifice that marks many CWGC cemeteries was built on top of a German pill box in the centre of the cemetery, purportedly at the suggestion of King George V, who visited the cemetery in 1922 as it neared completion. The King's visit, described in the poem *The King's Pilgrimage*, included a speech in which he said:

"We can truly say that the whole circuit of the Earth is girdled with the graves of our dead. In the course of my pilgrimage, I have many times asked myself whether there can be more potent advocates of peace upon Earth through the years to come, than this massed multitude of silent witnesses to the desolation of war".

— King George V, 11 May 1922

The stone wall surrounding the cemetery makes-up the *Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing*, one of several Commonwealth Memorials to the Missing along the Western Front. The UK missing lost in the Ypres Salient are commemorated at the Menin Gate and the Tyne Cot Memorial.

Upon completion of the Menin Gate memorial to the missing in Ypres, builders discovered it was not large enough to contain all the names as originally planned. They selected an arbitrary cut-off date of 15 August 1917 and the names of the UK missing after this date were inscribed on the Tyne Cot memorial instead.

Additionally, the New Zealand contingent of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission declined to have its missing soldiers names listed on the main memorials, choosing instead to have names listed near the appropriate battles. Tyne Cot was chosen as one of these locations.

Unlike the other New Zealand memorials to its missing, the Tyne Cot New Zealand memorial to the missing is integrated within the larger Tyne Cot memorial, forming a central apse in the main memorial wall.

The inscription reads: "Here are recorded the names of officers and men of New Zealand who fell in the Battle of Broodseinde and the First Battle of Passchendaele October 1917 and whose graves are known only unto God".

The memorial contains the names of 33,783 soldiers of the UK forces, plus a further 1,176 New Zealanders. Three British Army Victoria Cross recipients are commemorated here.

- Lieutenant Colonel Philip Bent (1891–1917)
- Corporal William Clamp (1891–1917)
- Lance Corporal Ernest Seaman (1893–1918)

Others notable commemorates include:

- Lieutenant Allan Ivo Steel, English first-class cricketer.
- Lieutenant David (Dai) Westacott, Welsh rugby international.

Basildon Borough Residents whose names are remembered in the Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Grave Cemetery include:

Rifleman Frank Ingram GILLSON

12th Battalion The Kings Royal Rifle Corps no. R35208.

He enlisted at Leyton.

Died of Wounds on 16th August 1917 aged 32 years.

Remembered on Panel 115 – 119 and 162a and 163a.

One of five children born in 1887 at Chelmsford and married to Ada E. Gillson (nee Pearson) in 1913 at West Ham. His son Frank Ingram Gillson was born in 1914 West Ham.

Possibly killed during the Battle of Langemarck. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private John CHAPMAN

2nd Battalion The South Wales Borderers no. 45798.

He enlisted at Grove Park Greenwich RASC. It was a large railway marshalling yard taken over by the ASC for the duration.

Killed in Action on 16 August 1917 aged 22 years.

Remembered on Panels 65 – 66.

He was one of eleven children born to William and Maria Chapman of Bridge Cottage South Green Great Burstead and started his working life as a Butcher's Errand Boy prior to enlistment. Probably killed during the Battle of Langemarck.

Private William SAVEALL

1st Battalion The Essex Regiment no. 201500.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Killed in Action on 16 August 1917 aged 20 years.

Remembered on Panels 98 – 99.

He was the son of William and Elizabeth Saveall (who also died in 1917) of Norsey Farm. William was born in Little Laver and had a sister Elizabeth born 1898 Billericay and Joseph born 1900 West Horndon.

Probably killed during the Battle of Langemarck.

Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Corporal Oscar Sewell LADBROOK

16th Battalion The Welsh Regiment no. 59887.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Killed in Action on 16th August 1917.

Remembered on Panels 93 – 94.

He was one of six children born to Charles (a Hay and Straw merchant) and Amelia Ladbroke and took on the role of Clerk within the business until his enlistment. Oscar was born in West Norwood Surrey.

Probably killed during the Battle of Langemarck. His probate was to his sister Ina Amelia Smith of Crescent House Billericay. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Lewis BAYLISS

1st/7th Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders no. 326107.

He enlisted at Salisbury Wiltshire.

Killed in Action of 20 September 1917 aged 25 years.

Remembered on Panels 141 – 143 and 162.

He was one of five children born to William and Sarah Bayliss of Crown Street Billericay and followed his father's work of a Bricklayers Labourer until his enlistment. Possibly killed at the Battle of the Menin Road Bridge. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Lance Corporal Albert William HEARD

26th Battalion The Royal Fusiliers no. 60275.

Died of Wounds on 20 September 1917 aged 21 years.

Remembered on Panel 28 – 30 and 162 – 162a and 163a.

He was one of ten children born in Pleshey to George and Emma Louisa Heard and they lived at Elm Road Wickford. Possibly killed at the Battle of the Menin Road Bridge. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private James JOHNSON

11TH Battalion The Royal Warwickshire Regiment no. 28736

He enlisted at Reading in Berkshire.

Killed in Action on 26 September 1917 aged 27 years.

Remembered on Panel 23 – 28.

He was one of nine children born locally to Elijah and Ellen Johnson. He appears to be a jobbing labourer by profession prior to enlistment. The family lived at The Cottage Painters Hill Vange.

It is possible he was killed during the attack on Polygon Wood or the German counter-offensive on the Menin Road Battle.

Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Alfred Charles Henry HICKS

1st Battalion The Cambridgeshire Regiment no. 330162.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Killed in Action on 29 September 1917 aged 28 years.

Remembered on the Addenda Panel.

He was the grandson of George and Ann Hicks of Great Burstead who later lived in Rectory Road Little Thurrock. At one time Alfred was a Dock Labourer. He had not married at the time of enlistment.

Possibly killed at the Battle of Polygon Wood.

Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Thomas Frank HILLS

7th Battalion The Leicestershire Regiment no. 40038.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Killed in Action on 06 October 1917 aged 36 years.

Remembered on Panels 50 – 51.

He was the son of Walter and Emily Hills. He was born in Haggerston and latterly lived in the High Street Great Burstead working as a Bakers Roundsman. Possibly killed in skirmishes or German Counter offensives from the Battle of Broodseinde on 4 October 1917. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Sergeant Joseph SCALLY

1st Battalion The Irish Guards no. 3608.

He enlisted in Dublin which was also his birthplace.

Killed in Action of 09 October 1917.

Remembered on Panel 10 – 11.

He was the husband of Ethel Scally (nee Lucas) whom he married in the first quarter of 1917 in Billericay and they subsequently had a Daughter Josephine Frances Scally born on 04 January 1918 whom he would not have known. Possibly killed during the Battle of Poelcappelle. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Ernest George NEVILLE

2nd/7th Battalion Manchester Regiment no. 42350

He enlisted at Warley in Essex and was formerly no. 45933 Northamptonshire Regiment.

Killed in Action on 09 October 1917 (aged 28 years)

Remembered on Panel 120 to 124

He was the son of George and Eliza Neville of Osborne Road Bowers Gifford and the husband of Elizabeth Jane Neville living at Meadowsweet Cottage North Benfleet. He was a Domestic Gardner by profession. They had two children namely Percy Harold born 14 July 1910 and Stanley George born 28 February 1913 they lived in Fairview Cottage North Benfleet. Possibly killed during the Battle of Poelcappelle. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private William John BURRELLS

Essex Regiment 2nd Battalion no. 26888.

He enlisted at Southend on Sea in Essex.

Officially accepted as Killed in Action on 10 October 1917 aged 26 years.

Remembered on Panel 98-99.

He was the son and one of seven children born to William and Eliza Burrells (later of May Cottages Shoebury Road Great Wakering) and was a Railway Clerk by profession. His father was a Railway Goods Inspector. The family originally based in Walthamstow. Possibly killed during skirmishes or German counter-offensive from the Battle of Poelcappelle.

Private Herbert TRIGG

8th Battalion The Suffolk Regiment no. 45823

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Formerly no. 10578 in the Territorial Reserve.

Officially a resumed death on 12 October 1917 aged 19 years.

Remembered on Panel 40 – 41 and 162 – 162a.

He was one of four children born in Ashurst Worthing Sussex to William and Mary Georgina Trigg latterly living with his mother at Watts Farm Nevendon Road Wickford. Possibly killed during the First Battle of Passchendaele. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Harry George FRANCIS

Border Regiment no. 28272 (formerly with the Essex Regiment 11th Battalion no 32844

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Killed in Action on or about 02 December 1917 aged 24 years.

Remembered on Grave Reference Panel 85-86.

He was the eldest of three children born to Charles and Margaret Francis and the husband of Ellen Pritchard and father of Dorothy Ellen Francis of Laindon. Originally he was a horse driver later a Carman by profession. Awarded British War Medal and Victory Medal.

THE MENIN GATE

The Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing is a war memorial in Ypres, Belgium, dedicated to the British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed in the Ypres Salient of World War I and whose graves are unknown. The memorial is located at the eastern exit of the town and marks the starting point for one of the main roads out of the town that led Allied soldiers to the front line. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and built and maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Menin Gate Memorial was unveiled on 24 July 1927.



Ypres occupied a strategic position during the First World War because it stood in the path of Germany's planned sweep across the rest of Belgium, as had been called for in the Schlieffen Plan. By October 1914, the much-battered Belgian Army broke the dykes on the Yser River to the north of the City to keep the western tip of Belgium out of German hands. Ypres, being the centre of a road network, anchored one end of this defensive feature and was also essential for the Germans if they wanted to take the Channel Ports through which British support was flooding into France. For the Allies, Ypres was also important because it eventually became the last major Belgian town that was not under German control.

The importance of the town is reflected in the five major battles that occurred around it during the war. During the First Battle of Ypres the Allies halted the German Army's advance to the east of the city. The German army eventually surrounded the city on three sides, bombarding it throughout much of the war. The Second Battle of Ypres marked a second German attempt to take the city in April 1915. The third battle is more commonly referred to as Passchendaele, but this 1917 battle was a complex five-month engagement. The fourth and fifth battles occurred during 1918.

British and Commonwealth soldiers often passed through the Menenpoort on their way to the front lines with some 300,000 of them being killed in the Ypres Salient. 90,000 of these soldiers have no known graves. From September to November 1915, the British 177th Tunnelling Company built tunnelled dugouts in the city ramparts near the Menin Gate. These were the first British tunnelled dugouts in the Ypres Salient.

The carved limestone lions adorning the original gate were damaged by shellfire, and were donated to the Australian War Memorial by the Mayor of Ypres in 1936. They were restored in 1987, and currently reside at the entrance to that Memorial, so that all visitors to the Memorial pass between them.

Basildon Borough Residents whose names are remembered on the Menin Gate Memorial include:

Private Reginald Ernest HAMMOND

11th Battalion The Royal Fusiliers no. 25837

He enlisted at Ealing in Middlesex.

Killed in Action on or since 10 August 1917 aged 26 years.

Remembered on Panels 6 – 8. He was the son of Thomas and Mary Hammond latterly of Brook Cottage Dry Street Landon Hills and the husband of Charlotte Grace Hammond (nee Norton). They married at Northwood Middlesex on 13 February 1917. Possibly killed at the Battle of Westhoek.

Private Herbert Thomas MOTT

7th Battalion The Queens Own Royal West Surrey Regiment no. G21421.

He enlisted at Southend on Sea in Essex.

Killed in Action on 10 August 1917 aged 22 years.

Remembered on Panels 11 and 13 – 14.

He was the third child of six born all born in Wickford to Charles and Elizabeth Mott and who assisted his father in running an Oil and Hardware business in the High Road. Possibly killed at the Battle of Westhoek.

Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Reginald John CRANFIELD

8th Battalion The Lincolnshire Regiment no. 235153 (formerly no. 9136 Cambridgeshire Regiment)

He enlisted at Kynochtown Essex.

Presumed killed in action on or since 31 July 1917 aged 28 years. Remembered on Panel 21.

He was one of seven children born at Sible Hedingham in Essex to John and Emma Cranfield latterly of Clarence Cottages in Vange and he assisted as a Farm Worker. Possibly killed at the Battle of Pilckem Ridge.

Gunner Charles POLLEY

288th Siege Battery The Royal Garrison Artillery no. 119652.

He enlisted at Dover on 13 September 1916.

Died of wounds on 14 August 1917.

Remembered on Panel 9. He was one of eleven children born in North Benfleet to John and Maria Polley latterly of Little Mussels Farm Bowers Marsh where his father was a Stockman. Possibly killed during German counter-offensives. Awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Private William BARKER

13th Battalion The Royal Fusiliers City of London Regiment no. 63735.

Formerly 11855 The Royal West Surrey Regiment.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex. Died of wounds on or since 04 August 1917 possibly during German counter-offensives around the Battle of Pilckem Ridge. He was one of at least seven children born in Burnham on Crouch to John and Elizabeth Barker. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Basildon Borough Residents whose names are remembered on or in other cemeteries or memorials relating to the Battles of Passchendaele:

Private George Edwin REVENING

11TH Battalion The Border Regiment no. 28238 (formerly 32863 The Essex Regiment)

Died of Wounds on 09 September 1917 aged 22 years.

Remembered in the Coxyde Military Cemetery. He was one of eleven children born to Henry and Louisa Revening of Woodfield Cottage Oak Road Basildon and was a Farm Labourer by profession. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

His elder brother William was also killed in action with the London Regiment of the Royal Fusiliers 8th Battalion on 03 August 1916 and is buried in Pozieres British Cemetery.

In June 1917, Commonwealth forces relieved French forces over six kilometres of front line from the sea to a point south of Nieuport (now Nieuwpoort) and held this sector for six months. Coxyde (now Koksijde) was about ten kilometres behind the front line. The village was used for Rest Billets and was occasionally shelled, but the cemetery started by French troops, was found to be reasonably safe. It became the most important of the Commonwealth Cemeteries on the Belgian coast and was used at night for the burial of the dead brought back from the front line.

Gunner John Ward BAYFORD

2nd Siege Battery The Royal Garrison Artillery no. 51882.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex on 20 November 1914.

Died from Wounds on 30 October 1917 aged 24 years (born 23 September 1893) in Casualty Clearing Station no. 61. Remembered in Dozinghem Cemetery.

He was one of five children born in Great Burstead to John William and Mary Anne Bayford latterly residing at 8 Sun Street Billericay. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Private Joseph Peter HOWLAND

2ND Battalion The Essex Regiment no. 27854.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex. Died from Wounds on 18 October 1917 aged 38 years. Born at Weylams Lane Little Burstead in 1879. Remembered in Dozinghem Cemetery.

He was one of ten children born to Alfred and Mary Howland of Little Burstead. Awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Private Albert SPELLER

10th Battalion The Essex Regiment no. 26674.

He enlisted at Warley in Essex.

Died of Wounds on 24 October 1917 aged 28 years.

Remembered in Dozinghem Cemetery. He was one of nine children born in Great Burstead to Alfred and Charlotte Speller latterly residing in Crown Street Great Burstead. Awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Gunner Harry STONE

38th Heavy Battery The Royal Garrison Artillery.

Died from Wounds on 05 August 1917 aged 22 years.

Remembered in Dozinghem Cemetery. He was one of fifteen children born in Ramsden Heath to Frederick and Emily Stone. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Sergeant Fred Edward ASHBEE

In 1911 he was a professional soldier (Gunner) in 23rd Company of The Royal Garrison Artillery based in Lydd Kent and was not married at that time.

126th Siege Battery The Royal Garrison Artillery no. 26040. He was born in Billericay Essex in 1886. Died from Wounds on 07 August 1917 aged 30 years. He married Alice Hellico in Alverstoke Hampshire in 1915. Remembered in Mendinghem Cemetery. Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Westvleteren was outside the front held by Commonwealth forces in Belgium, but in July 1917, in readiness for the forthcoming offensive, groups of Casualty Clearing Stations were placed at three positions called by the troops Mendinghem, Dozinghem and Bandaghem. The 4th, 47th and 61st CCS's were posted at Dozinghem and the military cemetery used until early 1918.

Private Charles CULLEY

9TH Field Ambulance of the Australian Army Medical Corps. no. 18896.

Killed in Action on 04 October 1917 aged 27 years.

He was one of eight children born to John Steward and Ann Sarah Culley latterly of Thynne Road Jacksons Lane Billericay. Charles Culley was born in Grays. He emigrated to Sydney NSW Australia arriving on 07 October 1912 on an unassisted passage scheme. Remembered in Ypres Reservoir Cemetery.

Awarded the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

From October 1914 to the Autumn of 1918, Ypres (now Ieper) was at the centre of a salient held by Commonwealth (and for some months by French) forces. From April 1915, it was bombarded and destroyed more completely than any other town of its size on the Western Front, even so certain buildings remained distinguishable. The ruins of the Cathedral and the Cloth Hall stood together in the middle part of the city, part of the infantry barracks stood in an angle of the south walls and the prison, reservoir and water tower were together at the western gate.

Three cemeteries were made near the western gate; two between the prison and the reservoir, both now removed into the third on the north side of the prison. The third was called at first, the "Cemetery North of the Prison" later Ypres Reservoir North Cemetery and now Ypres Reservoir Cemetery.

This cemetery was begun in October 1915 and used by fighting units and field ambulances until after the

Armistice, when it contained 1,099 graves. The cemetery was later enlarged when graves were brought in from the battlefields.

2nd Lieutenant Sydney John LEETE

28th Battalion The Worcester Regiment attached to the Royal Flying Corps.

Killed in Action on 28 July 1917 aged 24 years.

Remembered in Harlebeke New British Cemetery. He lived at Hurstcroft Wickford.

Harlebeke village was taken on the night of 19-20 October 1918 by the 9th (Scottish) Division.

Harlebeke New British Cemetery was made after the Armistice when graves were brought in from the surrounding battlefields of 1918 and, in 1924-25, from German cemeteries or plots in Belgium. The earlier concentrations are in Plots I and X, and the later in Plots I, II and XI to XIX. In the latter group are many graves of October 1914.

Flight (Squadron) Commander Theophilus Chater VERNON

Royal Naval Air Service Royal Flying Corps.

Killed in Action of 15 September 1917.

He was born in Hong Kong on 05 September 1887. In 1901 he was a boarding student at Beaumont College Old Windsor in Berkshire. It was a Jesuit Public School and amongst its former pupils was the Actor Charles Laughton. At the time of his service he lived at 6 Artillery Mansions Westminster Middlesex. Remembered in the Malo-les-Bains Communal Cemetery.

Private Edwin William HORNSEY

1ST Battalion The Norfolk Regiment no. 26501.

Killed in Action on 09 October 1917 aged 25 years.

Remembered in the Buttes New British Cemetery. He was the second son of three children born to William John and Emily Eliza Hornsey. He married Annette G. Crinall in Romford during the first quarter of 1915.

Awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Polygon Wood (the "Polygone de Zonnebeke", or Polygoneveld) is a large wood south of the village of Zonnebeke which was completely devastated in the First World War. The wood was cleared by Commonwealth troops at the end of October 1914, given up on 3 May 1915, taken again at the end of September 1917 by Australian troops, evacuated in the Battles of the Lys, and finally retaken by the 9th (Scottish) Division on 28 September 1918. On the Butte itself is the Battle Memorial of the 5th Australian Division, who captured it on 26 September 1917. Polygon Wood Cemetery is an irregular front-line cemetery made between August 1917 and April 1918, and used again in September 1918.

Acting Bombardier Richard MEREDITH

81ST Battery 5th Brigade of The Royal Field Artillery no. 70252.

Killed in Action of 28 September 1917 aged 25 years (born on 10 September 1892).

Remembered in the Divisional Collecting Post Cemetery. Awarded the 1914 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. He enlisted at Gravesend in Kent as a Driver.

He was one of seven children born to James and Mary Meredith living on the Station Estate at Pitsea. Richard married Edith Ann Gray in the 3rd quarter of 1917 in West Ham and her address was shown as 38 Parkhurst Road Manor Park.

Divisional Collecting Post Cemetery was begun by field ambulances of the 48th (South Midland) and 58th (London) Divisions in August 1917. It continued in use until January 1918 and at the Armistice contained 86 graves. Between 1924 and 1926, the original cemetery was considerably enlarged when graves were brought in from the surrounding battlefields and some small burial grounds in the area. The cemetery and extension essentially form a single site, but the records of the original burials and concentrations were kept separately until they were combined in 2001.

Captain Edgar Hazel HESTER

Adjutant 2nd Battalion attached to 7th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Killed in Action of 16 August 1917. Remembered in Bedford House Cemetery.

He was the son of George Hester and Margaret Jane Grant, born in Brighton Sussex on 20 Feb 1885.

He was a professional soldier serving from about the time of marriage to Mary Hilda Lucy Charleton in Paddington 1906. His service as 2nd Lieutenant dates from 16 February 1907. In 1911 he was serving in Sierra Leone with the Regiment. In 1914 he was Lieutenant with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Awarded the 1914 star and clasp, the British War Medal and Victory Medal.

Bedford House, sometimes known as Woodcote House, were the names given by the Army to the Chateau Rosendal, a country house in a small, wooded park with moats. Although it never fell into German hands, the house and the trees were gradually destroyed by shell fire. It was used by field ambulances and as the headquarters of brigades and other fighting units, and charcoal pits were dug there from October 1917.

In time, the property became largely covered by small cemeteries; five enclosures existed at the date of the Armistice, but the graves from No.1 were then removed to White House Cemetery, St. Jean, and those from No.5 to Aeroplane Cemetery, Ypres. Enclosure No.2 was begun in December 1915, and used until October 1918. After the Armistice, 437 graves were added, all but four of which came from the Ecole de Bienfaisance and Asylum British Cemeteries, both at Ypres.

Enclosure No.3, the smallest, was used from February 1915 to December 1916; the burials made in August-October 1915 were largely carried out by the 17th Division. Enclosure No.4, the largest, was used from June 1916 to February 1918, largely by the 47th (London) Division, and after the Armistice it was enlarged when 3,324 graves were brought in from other burial grounds and from the battlefields of the Ypres Salient. Almost two-thirds of the graves are unidentified.