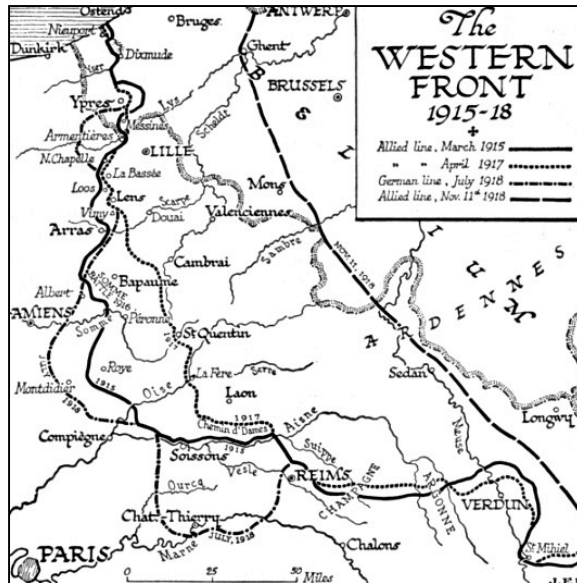




a british soldier during the battle of passchendaele, 1917

essential context



a. the western front

In August 1914, Germany activated the “**Schlieffen Plan**”: an invasion of France, via Belgium, in a gigantic sweep designed to bring the war in the west to a swift conclusion.

Unexpectedly strong resistance from Belgium and France, combined with surprisingly swift transfer of British troops to the continent, meant that the Schlieffen Plan eventually ground to a halt.

At this point both sides desperately tried to outflank each other in what became known as the “**race to the sea**”. By the end of the year this had resulted in a front line which extended from the coast of Belgium to the border with Switzerland.

All along the “**Western Front**” both sides dug trenches to protect themselves from artillery bombardments and machine-gun fire.

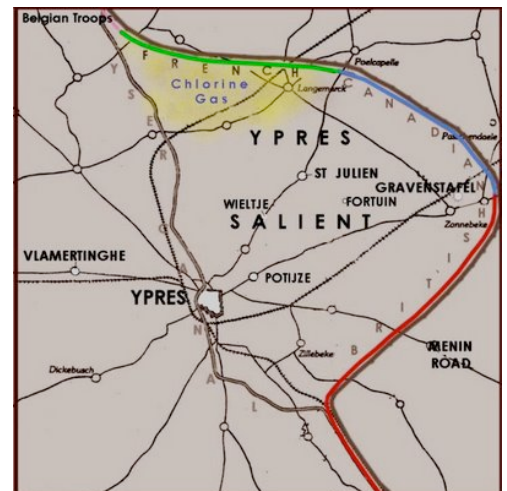
b. the ypres salient

Some of the fiercest fighting over the next four years took place on the northernmost limit of the Western Front. A breakthrough by either side in this area would have given them full control over the channel ports and therefore a much higher chance of overall victory.

Ypres, a town towards the coast of Belgium and held by the allies, fared especially badly for two reasons.

- Firstly, because it lay in a “salient” (bulge) in the front line which meant that the Germans could effectively bombard it almost every angle (see picture).
- Secondly, for most of the war, the German positions occupied the high ground looking down on the city which gave them a natural attacking advantage.

As a result, the town of Ypres became one of the most dangerous places in the world. Over the course of the war, 185,000 allied soldiers died here as the salient bulged and then contracted in a series of devastating attacks and counter-attacks that can be summarised as follows:



First Battle of Ypres (1914): The culmination of the “race to the sea”; it was here that most of the *professional* soldiers on both sides were killed.

Second Battle of Ypres (1915): The Germans used poison gas for the first time to push the allies back from the salient and capture the high ground around Ypres.

Third Battle of Ypres (1917): The allies recaptured the ridges around Ypres in a series of muddy, bloody battles (e.g.

Passchendaele) claiming 1/4 million lives in total.

Soldiers quickly became exhausted at the front line and were given regular leave; they would head back into Ypres down the **Menin Road**, then to go to the safety of villages well behind the lines. The most popular of these was Poperinge, which became famous for its bars and brothels but also for **Talbot House**, an “everyman’s club” where soldiers could relax in civilised surroundings and try to forget about the war for a while. Nearby was the casualty clearing station of **Lijssenthoek**: the site of second largest Commonwealth war cemetery.

By the end of the war the villages in the salient had been obliterated and many – such as **Langemarck** and **Tyne Cot**, near **Passchendaele** - had changed hands several times as one army dislodged another, often destroying cemeteries from earlier battles as they did so (this helps to explain why so many graves are now for unidentified soldiers).

The city of **Ypres** itself never fell to the Germans, but was nevertheless reduced to a pile of rubble by incessant bombardments: the town we see today is, believe it or not, a complete reconstruction of the original medieval city. It was the gigantic cost of work like this that helps to explain why the allies were so keen that Germany pay **reparations** after World War One.

c. the battles of the somme

South of Ypres, further down the Western Front, is the area known as The **Somme**. On 1st July 1916 the British armies launched a gigantic assault on the German positions across a 45km front including **Beaumont Hamel** and **Thiepval**. The aim was to deliver a “knockout blow” to the Kaiser’s armies (see cartoon).

Despite a week-long artillery bombardment of the enemy lines, concluding with 16 gigantic mines being detonated under their lines (one of which created the **Lochnagar Crater**), most Germans were safely below ground in heavily reinforced concrete bunkers. The moment the artillery barrage stopped, they quickly climbed back up to their trenches – bringing their machine guns with them. As a result, on that first day alone the British army suffered 60,000 casualties, 20,000 of which were fatalities.

The tradition of allowing localities to raise their own “Pals’ Battalion” which fought as one unit meant that some communities were



destroyed by the Battle of the Somme: for example, the “Accrington Pals” from the North of England suffered an 80% casualty rate at **Serre**, whilst at **Beaumont Hamel** the Newfoundland Regiment’s casualty rate was 90%.

d. the end of the war

The to-and-fro motion of the opposing armies continued to the last. In 1917, the allies successfully took (albiet at a terrible human cost) not just **Paaschendaele** Ridge in the Ypres Salient, but **Vimy Ridge** in the Somme sector.

In 1918, however, the Germans launched an immense “Spring Offensive” on the allied lines which recaptured all of the land lost the previous year.

Nevertheless the allies were ultimately able to hold on and then counter-attack in the “Spring Offensive”. The entry of the USA on the allied side convinced Germany that further fighting was pointless. Exhausted and traumatised, they surrendered on 11th November 1918.

after the war

After the war was over, the process of grieving, burying the dead and commemorating the fallen began.

The memorials

In the Ypres salient, the British built the **Menin Gate** “memorial to the missing”, erected **St. George’s Chapel** and preserved **Talbot House**. On the Somme, the British built the Thiepval “memorial to the missing”, The Newfoundlanders built a **Beaumont Hamel** memorial park, the Canadians did the same at **Vimy Ridge**.

The cemeteries

Perhaps more powerful than the memorials are the cemeteries. These include the British cemeteries of **Lijssenthoek** and **Tyne Cot** in the Ypres Salient, the largest French cemetery, **Notre Dame de Lorette**, and the oppressive German war cemeteries at **Langemarck** and **Neuville St. Vaast**.



ypres, 1917.

Oradour sur Glane

“

”

overview

On June 10, 1944, a Nazi SS Panzer Division (on its way to repulse the D-Day landings) surrounded this community, sealed off every exit, and then dragged every man, woman, and child to the village square for an "identity check." Accusing the inhabitants of being members of the French Resistance, they separated the men from the women and children, shooting anyone who resisted. Then they killed the women and children in the church by asphyxiating them with a smoke bomb. Those who did not die quickly enough were shot. In other buildings, they mowed down the men with machine guns. 642 people were killed and then burned. 205 were children.



Just a few months later, France was liberated. When General Charles de Gaulle visited the site he declared that Oradour-sur-Glane should be left exactly as it was to serve as a monument. At the same time, the surviving members of the SS Panzer Division were put on trial by the French for war crimes. However, many of these soldiers were from Alsace, a region of Nazi Germany which was returned to France at the end of the war. In order to integrate Alsace more effectively into France, these soldiers were never sentenced for their crimes.

Q. Answer this question twice: once BEFORE you have explored the site, then again AFTERWARDS.

“If 100% represents complete approval of the decision not to sentence the guilty soldiers of Alsace, and 0% represents complete disapproval, how would you rate that decision?”

Answer 1 [before the visit]:

Answer 2 [after your visit]:

Q. Did your answer change? Why?

independent tasks

You are instructed to remain **SILENT** throughout the time you visit the site. Please respect this rule fully. Answer these questions after your visit.

Q. What part of the village had the most powerful effect upon you? Explain your choice.

Q. Did remaning silent throughout your visit enhanced your experience of the site, or limited it? Explain.

Q. What was the most important thing you learned by visiting this site?

Q. What questions does this site raise that we could investigate further?

Q. Write your own one-sentence summary of the Menin Gate in the “Quote-Unquote” box for this part of the workpack.



notre dame de lorette french cemetery

poem to be read by
french student at
this site

“ ”

overview

The hill of Notre Dame de Lorette rises 165 metres (500 feet) above sealevel. Four mass graves contain the unidentified remains of thousands more. It is sobering to realise that those buried here – approximately 35,000 soldiers – represent just 2.5 percent of the estimated 1,398,000 French war dead of World War I.

The Battle of Lorette lasted 12 months from October 1914 to October 1915. Over 100,000 people were killed and as many were wounded on both sides. On the cemetery are more than 20,000 individual tombs. There are 8 ossuaries (the main one being at the bottom of the Lantern Tower) where the bones of 22970 unknown soldiers have been gathered.

You will be split into two teams on this site. One team will visit the ossuary first, the other will visit the basilica first.

the ossuary

In this monument [pictured] you will see a marked tomb on the floor. The simple inscription states that here lie the remains of thousands of soldiers - in fact about 8,000 unknown soldiers.

The crypt contains the coffins of Unknown Soldiers from the Second World War, the Concentration Camps (A deportee), Northern Africa, and Indo-China.

Q. Is this mass grave more or less affecting than the spectacle of individual graves in the main cemetery? Why?



the basilica

This chapel looks austere from the outside, but inside it is pretty spectacular.

Q. Complete the table below after visiting the interior.



Feature	Explain why you found it interesting

Q. Now complete the first column of the “comparison of cemeteries” worksheet overleaf.

comparison of cemeteries

	French: Notre Dame de Lorette	British: Tyne Cot	German: Langemarck
Gravestone Design / Material / Inscriptions			
Monuments / Sculptures			
Most notable other feature			
Overall Atmosphere: one word summary with explanation			

After visiting all three cemeteries, answer this question:

Q. Which cemetery did you find the most affecting, and why?

vimy ridge memorial

“

”

overview

In recognition of Canada's war efforts (see later notes about Vimy Ridge Trenches), France granted Canada perpetual use of a portion of land on Vimy Ridge under the understanding that the Canadians use the land to establish a battlefield park and memorial.

The memorial took monument designer Walter Seymour Allward (pictured) eleven years to build.



King Edward VIII unveiled the memorial on 26 July 1936, in the presence of 50,000 Canadian and French veterans and their families.

To reach the memorial you climb the ridge that was taken at such a heavy cost in 1917, and can then look beyond it into the fertile plains which the Germans were so desperate to defend.

independent tasks

Around the base of the memorial are inscribed the names of 11,285 missing Canadian Soldiers. Some of these are listed in the format “[real name] serving as [adopted name]”.

Q. Find an example of such a name and photograph it.

Q. Why do you think some of these soldiers served under an assumed identity rather than their real names?

Q. Identify three key features of the memorial, and provide your interpretation of what you think they represent. The first two are chosen for you.

	What do they represent?
The figures of people	
The two separate "pylons"	



Complete the first column of the table overleaf.

comparison of "memorials to the missing"

	Vimy Ridge	Thiepval	Menin Gate
Site and Situation			
Architectural Style			
Most notable other feature			
Overall Atmosphere: one word summary with explanation			

After visiting both sites, answer this question:

Q. Which memorial did you find the most affecting, and why?

vimy ridge trenches

“

”

overview

Vimy Ridge is the most important battlefield for the Canadians. The distance between the German and Canadian trench systems is amazingly just 5-10 meters in places!

The ridge which lies ahead of the trenches as you enter was held by the Germans between 1914-1917 and was a crucial part of their defences, barring the way to the mines and factories in the plain below which had been of great use to the German war machine.

Canadian tunnellers dug tunnels under the Ridge (which we will explore in a guided tour) and then used these as exit points for their troops to launch a surprise attack on the German positions after bombarding them with over a million shells over the course of a week (the largest artillery bombardment in history up to that point). Between 9th-12th April 1917, under cover of a creeping barrage, the Canadians managed to seize the ridge from the Germans, who had occupied it for three years. There were 11,000 Canadian casualties (3,500 dead) - 200,000 people had lost their lives during the war in battles over the ridge.

Q. What was the most interesting thing you learned from the guided tour? Explain your answer.



vimy ridge after being seized by allied troops, april 1917

thiepval memorial

“

”

overview

Thiepval was one of the fortress villages that was held by the Germans during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. The houses in the village, although flattened, had deep cellars where the Germans held out, and their machine gun posts were not destroyed by the bombardment.

After the War ended, Thiepval was chosen as the location for the "Memorial to the Missing" (designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens) to commemorate those who died in the Somme sector before the 20th of March 1918 and have no known grave. In this sense it serves the same purpose as the Menin Gate, which does the same thing for soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient.

independent tasks

the memorial

Q. Take the time to explore the memorial. How many Commonwealth soldiers do you think are commemorated here?

Q. What percentage of these do you estimate died during the Battle of the Somme (July-November 1916?)



Complete the “Thiepval” column of your ‘comparison of memorials to the missing’ table from earlier.

discussion point :

Which “Memorial to the Missing” do you find more effective: Vimy Ridge or Thiepval Memorial?

the visitor centre

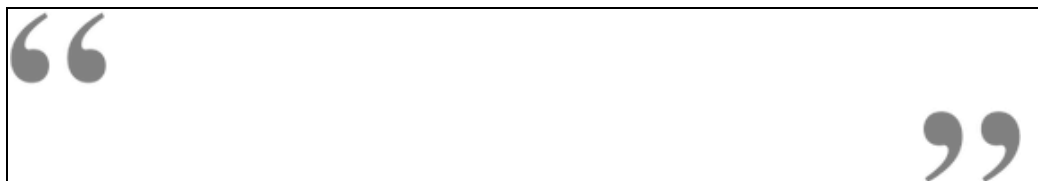
The visitor centre was opened in 2004. Choose two key features within it and explain why you found them particularly noteworthy.

Feature	Explain why you found it interesting / informative / effective



British soldiers advancing on Thiepval on the first day of the Battle of the Somme

neuville saint vaast



Neuville-Saint-Vaast is the largest German war cemetery in France. It is the resting place for 44,833 German soldiers of which 8,040 were never identified and were buried in a common grave.

There is no central building, just a field of crosses, with soldiers buried four to a grave. The bodies of the dead were originally buried in small cemeteries close to the Western Front, spread over more than 110 villages in the area. Most of the soldiers died in the intense fighting on Lorette Spur (1914-1915) and Vimy Ridge (1917-1918).

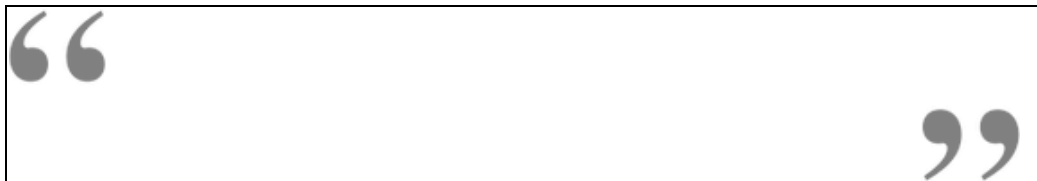
The Treaty of Versailles of 1919 provided for the shared maintenance of war cemeteries. In 1922 France therefore granted her 'ex-enemies' who fell on her soil the right to a grave and the bodies were moved there. In 1926 control of the site was handed to the German War Graves Commission. The commission planted trees and erected a stone monument inscribed with the first words of Uhland's famous poem, Ich hatt einen Kameraden (I had a comrade).

Between 1975 and 1983 the VDK completely redesigned the cemetery in Neuville-Saint-Vaast. Cast-iron crosses replaced the wooden ones, each one engraved with the names of four soldiers, and stone headstones were introduced for Jewish soldiers buried there.

One of the VDK's missions is to promote 'reconciliation above the graves' and to this end they encourage young volunteers to take part in work camps every summer to maintain German cemeteries throughout Europe.



lochnagar crater



overview

The Lochnagar Crater is one of the original 1 July 1916 Somme craters, created when British soldiers detonated two charges of ammonal (of 24,000lb and 30,000lb) which they had planted under the German lines.

It was blown along with 16 others at 07.28 on the morning of 1 July 1916: two minutes before the start of the offensive . The area around the crater fell to the Allies over the next two days.

Many of the German soldiers in the trenches around the mine were vapourised. Many more still lied buried under the crater, which is therefore a mass grave.



Q. Why were the mines detonated 2 minutes before the troops were ordered “over the top” rather than at the same time?

Q. The picture shown here is of the Hawthorn Ridge mine, detonated 8 minutes earlier than the others, at 7.20am. Your teacher will tell you why: write the answer here.

	Your guess	Actual answer	Difference
Explosion: Metres high			
Crater: Metres wide			
Crater: Metres deep			
Total (the lower the better)			

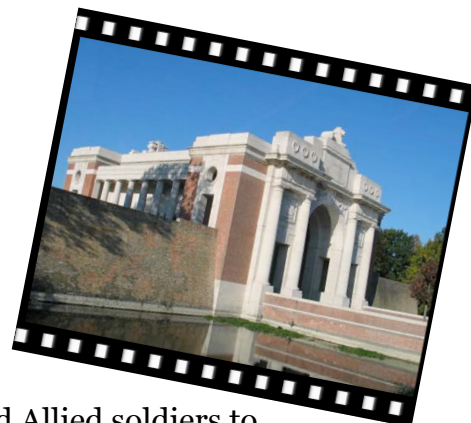
the menin gate



overview

As the first “Memorial to the Missing” and the location for the nightly “Last Post” ceremony the Menin Gate is one of the most important monuments of the war.

Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and built by the British government, the memorial was unveiled on 24 July 1927.



It is placed on the main road out of the town that led Allied soldiers to the front line of the Ypres Salient. The lion on the top, looking towards the front line, is a symbol not just for Britain but for Flanders.

It is sobering to think that the Menin Gate commemorates just a small fraction of casualties from the British Empire: soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient before 15th August 1917 and who have no known grave.

Q. The war ended on November 11th 1918. Why then do you think the cut-off date of August 15th 1917 was chosen for this memorial?

Q. Why is a lion on the top of the monument?

- a. Because it is the animal used to represent courage
- b. Because it is the animal used to represent Britain
- c. Because it is the animal used to represent Flanders
- d. All of the above

Q. Why was the Menin Gate was built at this particular spot?

- a. Because this was the gate of the town closest to the fighting
- b. Because this was the gate used by troops on their way to the front
- c. Both of the above

independent tasks

Q. Take the time to explore the memorial. How many Commonwealth soldiers do you think are commemorated here?

There are Latin inscriptions set in circular panels either side of the archway, on both the east and west sides: "Pro Patria" and "Pro Rege" ('For Country' and 'For King').

Q. If you could place two further inscriptions on the North and South sides of the Menin Gate, what would they be?

1.

2.

Q. Despite their massive contribution, New Zealand and Newfoundland soldiers are not commemorated on the Menin Gate. Why?

Q. Find a panel on the memorial where a name has clearly been removed. Take a photograph.

Q. Why do you think names are still occasionally removed from the Menin Gate?



In his poem 'On Passing the New Menin Gate', Siegfried Sassoon attacked "this sepulchre of crime...a pile of peace-complacent stone". The Austrian writer Stefan Zweig, in contrast, said that it was "more impressive than any triumphal arch or monument to victory that I have ever seen".

Q. Why do you think that Sassoon was so critical of the Menin Gate?

Q. Write your own one-sentence summary of the Menin Gate in the "Quote-Unquote" box for this part of the workbook.

Q. Complete the final column of the 'comparison of war memorials' table from earlier.

st . george ' s chapel

“

”

overview

At the end of the war, the Imperial War Graves Commission sent hundreds of people from Britain to start clearing the Ypres battlefield and building British cemeteries and memorials.

By the mid-1920s, this community had grown to several thousand people, and Sir John French led the campaign built a church to serve as a memorial to the British dead and as a place where bereaved relatives visiting the cemeteries could gather.

The church has its own distinctive cross reminiscent of the Cross of Sacrifice in the British cemeteries. Inside is a prominent memorial to John French, designed by Reginald Blomfield – the same man who designed the Menin Gate.

There are a number of commemorative plaques around the church installed by British schools and organisations in memory of those who died in the Ypres Salient. Most of these give their view about what these soldiers died for.



independent tasks

**Q. Which ONE plaque, in your view, has the “best” message?
Take a photograph of it and explain your choice.**

**Q. Which ONE plaque, in your view, has the “worst” message?
Take a photograph of it and explain your choice.**

Q. Complete this table AFTER looking at a selection of plaques.

Name of school / organisation	What does its plaque suggest that the soldiers were fighting/died for?

Q. Our school will be laying a wreath at the Menin Gate. What shall we write on the dedication?

First sentence: choose one word per line, or add your own.

In [proud | grateful | sorrowful |]
 [memory | honour | recognition |] of
 [British | Empire | all] soldiers who died
 [bravely | needlessly | tragically |]
 [in the Ypres Salient | on the Western Front | in World War One | In the
 World Wars]

Second sentence: complete this sentence in your own words.

They died fighting for...

Q. Write your own one-sentence summary of St. George's Chapel in the "Quote-Unquote" box for this part of the workpack.

in flanders' fields museum

“

”

overview

This museum was opened in 1999. It is situated in the “Cloth Hall”. This building, like much of the city, has a medieval “feel”. However, the original city was completely destroyed by artillery fire during the First World War. Unlike Oradour Sur Glane, however, the decision was taken to completely reconstruct it, brick by brick, in the years after the war. It was the gigantic cost of work like this that helps to explain why the allies were so keen that Germany pay reparations after World War One.

The museum adopts a very “modern” approach. The first thing you will see upon entering is this sculpture.

Q. What does it commemorate?

Upon entry, you will be provided with a “role card” of a real-life individual who experienced the war in Ypres. As you journey around the museum you will learn about their experiences and their fate by using your card into the computer of several “character kiosks”.



independent tasks

Q. Which character did you follow?

Q. What were the most interesting aspects of his or her life story?

What parts of the museum had the greatest impact on you and why?
Take photographs of each one to use back in the class when we return.

	Description of item	Explain why you found it particularly powerful
Photograph / Painting		
Video Clip		
Other object / artefact / document of your choice		

Q. Write your own one-sentence summary of the Museum in the “Quote-Unquote” box for this part of the workpack.

talbot house

“

”

overview



During the First World War, Poperinge was situated a few kilometres behind the Ypres Salient. In 1917 approximately 250,000 men were billeted in the area.

On 11th December, 1915, Chaplain "Tubby" Clayton (pictured) opened a soldiers club at "Talbot House" or "Toc H". For hundreds of thousands of tired soldiers, this site became 'a home from home', where they found a little bit of humanity, rest and peace. Instead of prostitutes and alcohol, the soldiers got books, sing-songs and wholesome humour.

Q. Who was “Talbot” and why was his name given to the house?

Q. Why was Talbot nicknamed “Toc H” by the soldiers?



Tubby Clayton ensured the house was open to men and officers alike. He created a library where soldiers could check-out a book by leaving their cap behind as a ticket. There was a large kitchen which served as a tea room and a beautiful walled garden where men could sit and try to forget about the war for a while.

Most importantly, the attic was converted into a chapel where regular services were held. It was this chapel which became a focal point for many and was known as the 'heart' of the House. Many men would sadly attend their final communion here before heading back to battle, never to return again.

independent tasks

After the guided tour is finished, answer this question.

Q. What were the THREE most interesting things you learned from the guided tour? Explain your answer.

a.

b.

c.

Q. Write your own one-sentence summary of the Museum in the "Quote-Unquote" box for this part of the workpack. At the other sites, remember to do the same from now on!



lijssenthoek cemetery

cross-laying exercise to
take place here



Lijssenthoek cemetery is the second largest Commonwealth cemetery. At Tyne Cot – the largest - the majority of the burials are unidentified. At Lijssenthoek, however, almost all the 9,901 graves are for named individuals.

The reason there are so few anonymous graves here is explained by the circumstances in which the cemetery was established. In contrast to Tyne Cot (which is the resting place of men who died in an intense, horrific, chaotic battle), Lijssenthoek was the location of a casualty clearing station away from the front lines just outside of Poperinghe. The casualties were being treated for their wounds and would have been evacuated from the Front Line area wearing their identity tags.

staff nurse nellie spindler

Nellie is one of only two British female casualties of the First World War to be buried in Belgium. She was aged 26 when she died and was from Wakefield, Yorkshire. In August 1917, during the first three weeks of the Third Battle of Ypres (Paaschendaale), her Clearing Station was hit by German artillery shells. Five nurses were concussed, but Nellie also suffered a chest injury from which she died 20 minutes later.



Over one hundred officers, four generals and the Surgeon-General attended the funeral. The grave reference is Plot XVI, Row A, grave 3. From the main entrance turn immediately right and follow the southern cemetery boundary for about a hundred metres. The grave is in Row A, the row closest to the cemetery boundary.

discussion point

There are also a number of graves to Chinese people here. China was neutral in World War One. Why do you think these men were here?

independent task

After the war, families had to pay the British government to have an inscription placed on a gravestone at the cost of 3.5 pence per letter. Some of these brief messages are very personal and moving. Take the time to read the inscriptions on a number of headstones for named soldiers. Write here an example of **one** inscription that you found particularly powerful ready to discuss later. **You will be given a memorial cross to place on the grave of your chosen person.**

tyne cot british cemetery

poem to be read by british student at this site

“

”

overview

Tyne Cot Cemetery is the resting place of 11,954 soldiers of the Commonwealth Forces. It is the largest Commonwealth military cemetery in the world.

The graves are for soldiers who died in the Battle of Passchendaele: in October 1917 allied troops managed to seize this high ridge of land from the Germans under relentless machine gun fire and almost incessant rainfall that turned the battlefield into a swamp. They lost the land again after almost continuous fighting in March 1918.



Two German concrete pillboxes, from which many of the men buried here were machine-gunned to death, are incorporated in the cemetery; the cross of sacrifice is built directly on top of a third.

independent tasks

Take a sample of the gravestones. What percentage do you estimate are for unidentified soldiers (“known unto God”) whose names therefore appear instead on the Menin Gate and Thiepval Memorial?

If the area of the cemetery was divided between all 11,954 soldiers commemorated here (not just those with gravestones), how much land would each soldier be given?




For each step of land from the bottom of this ridge to the top, how many lives do you estimate were lost?

notable graves

Three winners of the Victoria Cross – the highest award for military gallantry available to British Empire soldiers – are buried here.

Q. Try to locate the graves of these three men.

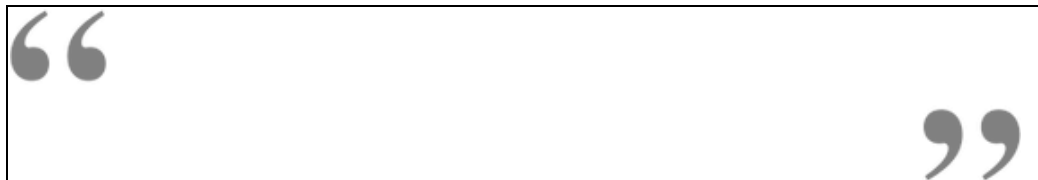
Q. In the bottom row of the table, include an extract from the gravestone inscription.

		
Captain C S Jeffries	Sergeant Lewis McGee	Private James Robertson
<i>Plot XL, Row E, Grave 1</i>	<i>Plot XX, Row D, Grave 1</i>	<i>Plot LVIII, Row D, Grave 26</i>
He led a team capturing four machine guns and thirty-five prisoners, then pushed forward under heavy machine-gun fire to attack another pillbox, capturing two machine guns and thirty more prisoners. He was mortally wounded during this second attack by a machine-gun bullet to the stomach.	His platoon was suffering severely from machine gun fire coming from a pillbox. Single-handed, McGee rushed the post armed only with a revolver. He shot some of the soldiers inside and captured the rest and thereby enabled his platoon to reach their objective. He was killed in battle several days later.	Robertson rushed a machine gun post, killed four of its crew and then carried the machine gun up to the top of the ridge, where he drove the Germans back by firing continuously at them. He then went out under heavy fire to rescue two soldiers in no-man's land; he was killed as he returned with the second man.

Q. Complete the “Tyne Cot” column of the ‘comparison of cemeteries’ worksheet that you began earlier.

langemarck german cemetery

poem read by german
student here



overview

Langemarck Cemetery is the only German one in the Ypres Salient and contains 44,292 burials. An oak panel just inside the entrance to the cemetery lists the names of the German missing.



Langemarck changed hands several times in the war. The Germans took the town in 1915 as part of the first campaign to use poison gas. They then installed a number of large “pillboxes” which were only taken by British troops in 1917. In 1918 it fell into German hands again during the “Spring Offensive” and was finally retaken by the Belgians on 28 September.

The first large headstone is a mass grave containing 25,000 soldiers. Flat stones mark burial plots: often up to eight soldiers share a (sometimes unknown) grave, buried in a “standing up” position below your feet.

Q. Why do you think so many German soldiers are packed into each grave?

Q. What is the difference between Langemarck and Tyne Cot?

Q. Why do you think they differ so much?

independent tasks

The photograph on this page is of mourning German soldiers at Langemarck in 1918. The soldier second from right was killed just two days later.

This photograph inspired the sculpture of the “four mourning soldiers” which is situated at the far end of the cemetery.

Q. What mood does the sculpture seek to evoke? How does it do so?



The sculpture was originally situated at the edge of the “mass grave”. It was moved to the “horizon” of the cemetery in the 1970s as part of general restoration work.

Q. Do you think that the sculpture is more effective in its current position? Explain your answer.

Q. Look at the dates of death on a sample of gravestones. In what periods does the fighting here appear to have been at its heaviest?

Q. Now complete the column for Langemarck in your “comparison of cemeteries” worksheet that you began earlier.

beaumont hamel memorial park

“

”

overview



On 1st July 1916, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme, the Newfoundland Regiment made a brave but unsuccessful attempt to take the German trenches ahead of them, which had been heavily fortified since 1914 and which additionally had the benefit of natural protection by being situated in a deep natural ravine (“Y Ravine”).

The Battle of the Somme was the regiment's first major engagement. To hasten their

advance, they climbed out of their support trenches in St. John's Road behind the British lines (the site of the present car park, pictured). They then marched towards the British support trenches and no-man's land beyond.

Clearly visible to the German machine gunners, many were killed before they had even reached the British lines. No troops got any further than the “danger tree” (the remains of which still stands in the field) and within 30 minutes the regiment had been obliterated by enemy machine-gun fire: of almost 800 troops, 90% became casualties and all 22 officers were killed.

The German trenches around “Y ravine” were attacked again and captured by the 51st (Highland) Division on the 13th November, 1916.

In 1921 the people of Newfoundland purchased the land and turned it into a memorial site. This is the largest battalion memorial on the Western Front, and the largest area of the Somme battlefield that has been preserved. There is also a memorial to the 51st Highlanders and several cemeteries on the site.



independent tasks

the caribou memorial

The memorial is in the form of a Caribou, the emblem of the Newfoundland Regiment. Designed by Basil Gatto, it faces the enemy trenches in a striking pose.

Q. In your view, what appears to be the attitude of the Caribou (e.g. defiance, grief, anger, sorrow)? Explain your choice.

the highlanders' memorial

The memorial was designed by George Paulin, who can be seen in this picture working on the sculpture. The model for the soldier was Robert Rowan, a Scots soldier who fought in a number of major campaigns 1914-1918 and survived.



Q. On the memorial is inscribed in Gaelic "La a'Blair s'math n Cairdean". What do you think this translates as?

- They fought with their faces to the foe
- Friends are good on the day of battle
- It is a sweet and noble thing to die for one's country

Q. In your view, what appears to be the attitude of the Scots soldier? Explain your choice.

Q. Which do you find the most moving of the two memorials? Explain your answer.

Q. What are the most notable ways in which these trenches differ from those at Vimy?

Discussion Point: If someone only had the time to visit EITHER Vimy Ridge OR Beaumont Hamel Trenches, which would you recommend they choose, and why?

Notes 1

Notes 2

Notes 3

Notes 4