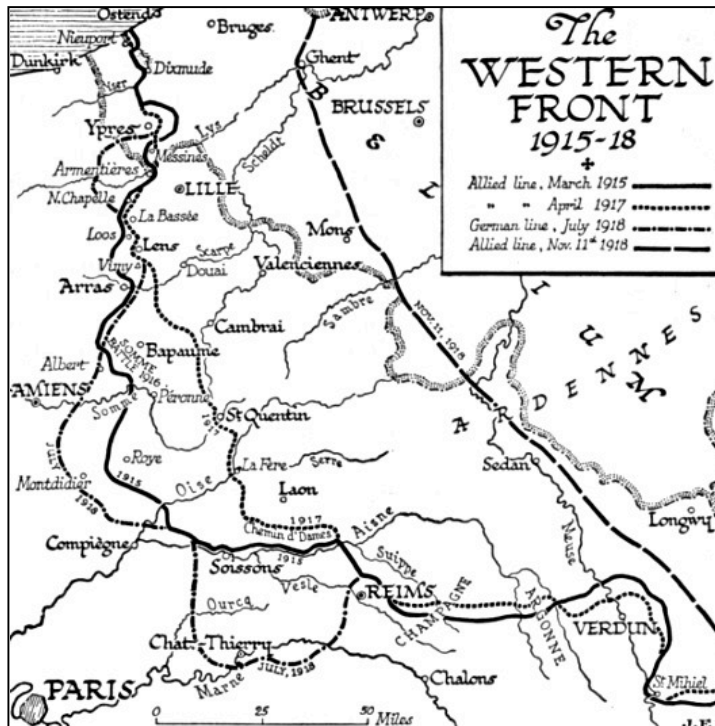




a british soldier during the battle of passchendaele, 1917

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. albert

Albert, where we will be based, was successfully held by French troops during the ‘race to the sea’ in 1914. The Germans shelled it from the high ground they occupied around the town. By 1915, the famous ‘golden madonna’ on the basilica had been battered sideways and appeared to be on the verge of throwing the infant Christ into the rubble below. This gave rise to a German superstition that whichever side caused the statue to fall would lose the war. The Germans therefore studiously avoided shelling the tower and the ‘leaning virgin’ became a well-known feature of the Western Front. In 1918, the British, aware of its value as a vantage point, demolished the tower before retreating from Albert during the German Spring Offensive. They recaptured the town shortly afterwards but the statue was nowhere to be found. The town was completely rebuilt after World War One and the statue that can be seen today is a reproduction.

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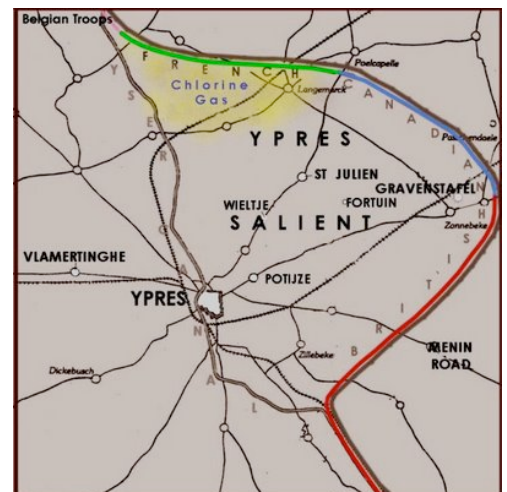


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devastating attacks and counter-attacks that can be summarised as follows:

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 Ridge, Messines Ridge) 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.

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 (albeit at a terrible human cost) not just **Paschendale** 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.

devonshire cemetery

poem to be read by british
student at this site

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overview

At the end of the first day of the Battle of the Somme over 160 of men of the 9th and 8th Devonshire Regiment were retrieved from where they had fallen in action in No-Mans-Land and the German positions. They were carried back to the British Front Line trench position, and were buried in a section of this trench near a small wood called Mansell Copse.

The graves were left in this position when the cemeteries were rebuilt after the war. 163 graves are now contained in the cemetery.

Lieutenant William Noel Hodgson, MC (grave ref. A3)

Two days before going into action on 1st July 1916 with the 9th Devons, Lieutenant William Noel Hodgson wrote a poem called “**Before Action**”. It makes very poignant reading as Hodgson did not survive to see the end of the day. He was killed aged 23 and was one of the Devons' bodies brought in that night from where he fell in action.



Captain Duncan Lenox Martin (grave ref. A1)

As the preparations for the Battle of the Somme offensive were progressing, Captain Martin, commander of “A” company, grew increasingly concerned about the known location of a German machine gun in the French civilian cemetery on the southern outskirts of Mametz village.

This machine gun was opposite the British Front Line from where the Devons were to make their advance. Captain Martin was aware that the German machine gunners would have a clear view of his men when they began the attack across the 400 yards of No-Mans-Land toward the German Front Line. He went on leave before the battle and made a plasticine model, examining the field of fire that the machine gun would have from the cemetery.

On the morning of 1st July Captain Martin was one of the many Devons officers to be killed by the ferocious German machine gun fire as he advanced across the open valley towards the German line and Mametz village.

fricourt german cemetery

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overview

The German military cemetery at Fricourt is the resting place for 17,027 German First World War soldiers. They died on the Somme battlefields over the four years of the Great War, from late September 1914, when the German Second Army established a defensive front line in this sector, to the spring and summer Battles of the Somme in 1918.

Approximately 1,000 of the soldiers lying here were killed during the early weeks of the war from late August to the late autumn of 1914, and during the trench warfare from that time through 1915 and up to June 1916.

From the beginning of the British and French Allied Somme offensive of 1st July 1916 to the close of the battle in mid November 1916 approximately 10,000 German soldiers lost their lives on the Somme battlefields.

A further 6,000 German soldiers were killed during the large-scale German Spring Offensive of 1918 and in the battles which followed it up to October 1918.

Manfred von Richthofen

The famous German pilot Baron Manfred von Richthofen, known as the Red Baron, who was shot down and died on 21st April 1918, was first buried in a plot at the civilian cemetery at Bertangles behind the lines southwest of the Somme battlefields. His body was later moved to Fricourt German Military Cemetery but again in 1925 he was exhumed and the body was taken to Berlin for reburial.



discussion point

How does the style of this cemetery differ from the Devonshire cemetery, and why do you think it does so?

lochnagar crater

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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) | | | |

beaumont hamel memorial park

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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)?

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?

- a. They fought with their faces to the foe
- b. Friends are good on the day of battle
- c. 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?

serre: sheffield memorial park

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overview

Serre was one of the strongly fortified villages held by the Germans at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme. It has come to be linked closely with several of the 'Pals' battalions, which suffered very heavy losses in the attacks made here. The idea was that by enlisting together in the local Pals battalions they would stay together during their service. The casualty lists that came back after the 1st of July 1916 devastated some of the communities which had sent these Pals battalions. For example, of some 720 "Accrington Pals" who took part in the attack, 584 were killed, wounded or missing. Each brick in the pictured memorial to the Accrington Pals represents one fallen soldier from the battalion.



independent tasks

You will be given the time to visit the cemeteries at your own pace. Note in particular how the land slopes upwards towards the German lines, giving you some idea of the conditions the soldiers faced on 1st July 1916.

It was near this spot that Wilfrid Owen, the famous poet, was inspired to write his poem "The Sentry" after being sent to occupy a half-flooded German dugout here in 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.

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 |
|---------|--|
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |



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

pozieres australian memorial



overview

The village of Pozières was one of the German strongholds targetted for attack by Allied troops on 1st July 1916. Reinforced with bunkers and machine gun posts, it was the highest place on the Somme 1916 battlefield and therefore of great strategic importance.

Like so many other objectives, Pozières did not fall to the allies on 1st July 1916, but became instead a bloodbath over the following weeks, with the British army failing to capture the village despite four major attacks.

On 23rd July 1916, the 1st Australian division – many of whose troops had only recently fought in Gallipolo – launched a ferocious attack on the village. By the evening the Germans had been defeated.

For the next four days the division held its ground in the face of a constant artillery bombardment focused on the village from the German guns. The German bombardment continued in its intensity reaching a peak on 26th July. The remnants of the division were relieved by 2nd Australian Division on 27th July.

The casualties of 1st Division numbered almost 5,300 in those few days. The survivors were said to be dazed and haggard when they were relieved from the village.



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?

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

st. george's chapel

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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? |
|-------------------------------|--|
| | <hr/> <hr/> |
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| | <hr/> <hr/> |
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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...

in flanders' fields museum

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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 (unless it’s been moved!) 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 | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

talbot house

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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.



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

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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. |
| <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

Q. Complete the “Tyne Cot” column of the ‘comparison of cemeteries’ worksheet.

langemarck german cemetery

poem read by german
student here

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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.

vimy ridge trenches

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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

vimy ridge canadian 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 | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| The two separate "pylons" | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |



Complete the appropriate column of the “memorials to the missing” table.

discussion point :

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

notre dame de lorette french cemetery

poem to be read by
french student at
this site

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overview

The hill of Notre Dame de Lorette rises 165 metres (500 feet) above sea-level. 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, an unsuccessful French attempt to regain control of Vimy Ridge from the Germans, 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 spectacular.



Q. Complete the table below after visiting the interior.

| Feature | Explain why you found it interesting |
|---------|--------------------------------------|
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

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

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.



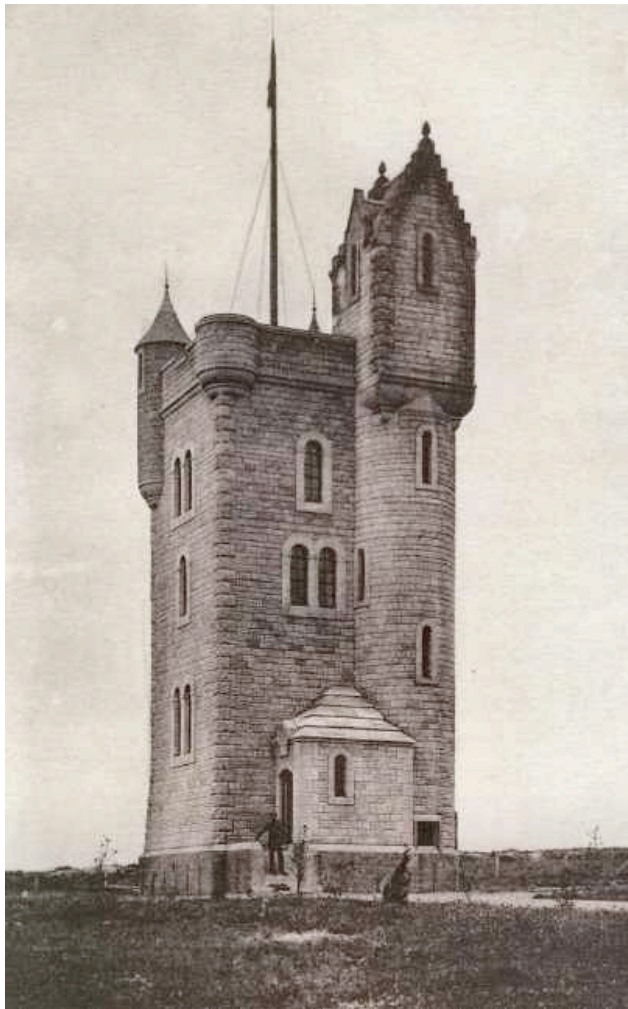
Q. Now complete the appropriate column of the “comparison of cemeteries” worksheet.

the ulster tower

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overview



The Ulster Tower is a memorial to the men of the 36th (Ulster) Division. On 1st July 1916 they were given the objective of capturing the Schwaben Redoubt, a triangle of trenches with a frontage of 300 yards, a fearsome German strongpoint with commanding views.

Unlike many divisions, the Ulstermen successfully secured their objectives. They crossed about 400 yards of No Man's Land under heavy machine-gun fire, and then not only captured the Schwaben Redoubt, but kept on going for more than a mile, and advanced on towards Stuff Redoubt, gaining in all around a mile, though not without heavy losses.

Sadly, as the day wore on and it became clear that the British army was failing to make sufficient progress, the Germans mounted counterattacks, and as their stocks of bombs and ammunition dwindled the Ulstermen had to start falling back.

The casualties suffered by the 36th Division on the 1st of July were over 5,000 in total - almost half of their strength. The tower erected in 1921 in memory of their bravery is a direct copy of Helen's Tower in County Down, where men of the 36th Division trained.

In March 2004 the Somme Association purchased Thiepval Wood, which is facing the Ulster Memorial Tower and from where the 36th (Ulster) Division made its charge on the 1st July 1916. In July 2006 the Association opened a small area of the Wood which is now available for guided tours.

south african memorial, delville wood



overview

This is the only memorial dedicated to the participation of the South African Forces on the 1914-1918 Western Front. 229,000 officers and men served with the South African Forces in the Great War. Their casualties who died in action or who died of wounds numbered approximately 10,000.



location in delville wood

The memorial is located at the end of a central avenue leading into Delville Wood from the main entrance. This is where the battalions of the South African Brigade came under withering German artillery fire in their attempt to capture and then defend the wood in mid July 1916. Both the wood and the South African battalions were almost completely destroyed. The South African Brigade had gone into battle here on 15th July 1915 with a strength of 121 officers and 3,032 other ranks. At roll call on 21st July they numbered only 29 officers and 751 other ranks.

the wood as a memorial

After the war the wood was purchased by the South African Government. It was considered a fitting place to commemorate all South African soldiers who fought and died during the First World War. The grounds of the wood were not cleared and for many hundreds of soldiers this wood remains their final resting place.

the "last tree"

The "Last Tree" is the only surviving hornbeam tree in Delville Wood, or Devils Wood as it was also known to the British Army. During the battle to capture the wood from the German Army from 15th July 1916 the German artillery shelled the British-held position to a pulp. This single hornbeam tree is the only tree that survived the shelling more or less intact and it has continued to grow since the war. Visitors will see that trunk is studded with shards of metal artillery shell casing.

historial de la grande guerre, peronne

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overview

The Historial de la Grande Guerre museum was opened on 1st August 1992. It is an international museum of comparative history, attracting over 80,000 visitors a year. All presentations are made in three languages — French, English and German — to show the experiences of the major participants in the First World War and the impact of this conflict on the 20th century. The museum's displays and films aim to show the visitor not only what life was like for the soldier in the front line trenches, but also how he lived behind the trench lines. The effect of the Great War on the civilian populations who were occupied by an enemy force or were forced to flee their homes is an important part of the museum's exhibitions.



What was the most effective part of the museum and why?

If there was time to visit only this museum, or the Flanders Fields Museum, which would you recommend and why?

compiègne armistice site



overview

The armistice between the Allies and Germany ended the First World War. It went into effect at 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918, and marked a complete defeat for Germany, although not technically a surrender.

The Germans were responding to the policies proposed by American president Woodrow Wilson in his 14 Points of January 1918. Although the armistice ended the actual fighting, it took six months of negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference to conclude the Versailles peace treaty.

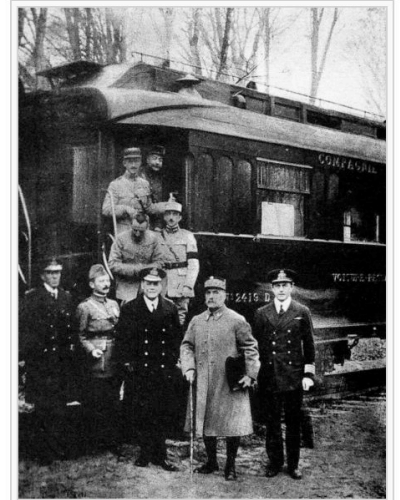
The armistice was signed in a carriage of Marhsall Foch's private train. In November 1927, it was ceremonially returned to the forest in the exact spot where the Armistice was signed. Marshal Foch, General Weygand and many others watched it being placed in a specially constructed building: the Clairiere de l'Armistice.

There it remained, a monument to the defeat of the Kaiser's Germany, until 22 June 1940, when Hitler, Göring and Ribbentrop swept into the Clairiere and, in that same carriage, demanded and received the surrender armistice from France:

"Through my glasses I saw the Führer...read the inscription on the great granite block in the center of the clearing: Here on the eleventh of November 1918 succumbed the criminal pride of the German empire...vanquished by the free peoples which it tried to enslave." I look for the expression on Hitler's face...It is afire with scorn, anger, hate, revenge, triumph...Suddenly, as though his face were not giving quite complete expression to his feelings, he throws his whole body into harmony with his mood. He swiftly snaps his hands on his hips, arches his shoulders, plants his feet wide apart. It is a magnificent gesture of defiance, of burning contempt...." – William Shirer

During the Occupation of France, the Clairiere de l'Armistice was destroyed and the carriage taken to Berlin, where it was exhibited in the Lustgarten before being destroyed later in the war.

After the war, the Compiègne site was restored and a replacement carriage, correct in every detail, was re-dedicated: an identical (and original) Compagnie des Wagon-Lits carriage, built in 1913 in the same batch as the original and present in 1918.



The allied representatives at the signing of the armistice. [Ferdinand Foch](#), second from right, seen outside his railway carriage in the forest of Compiègne.

Oradour sur Glane

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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?



a - comparison of cemeteries

| | French: Notre Dame de Lorette | British: Tyne Cot / Lijssenthoek | German: Langemarck / Fricourt / Neuville |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Gravestone Design / Material / Inscriptions | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Monuments / Sculptures | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Most notable other feature | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Overall Atmosphere: one word summary with explanation | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

After visiting all the cemeteries, answer this question:

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

b - comparison of "memorials to the missing"

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

After visiting all sites, answer this question:

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

c - comparison of "national memorials"

| | Northern Ireland (Ulster) | South African | Australian |
|---|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Site and Situation | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Architectural Style | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Most notable other feature | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| Overall Atmosphere: one word summary with explanation | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |

After visiting all sites, answer this question:

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

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with ten evenly spaced horizontal blue lines. The lines are parallel and extend across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]