

# 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.

