Anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele
31 JULY-10 NOVEMBER 2017
# The Battle of Passchendaele – Contents

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Battle of Messines

In the summer of 1917, the British were determined to force a breakthrough on the Flanders front. To break through at the Ypres Salient, it would first be necessary to straighten out the Wijtschate Salient (Messines Ridge) to the south of Ypres. Starting in 1916, the British worked on an ambitious plan to tunnel underneath the whole salient and detonate powerful deep mines. In the early morning of 7 June 1917, nineteen deep mines were exploded simultaneously. The largest explosion ever caused by humans up to that time, this had the effect of a powerful earthquake and caused complete disorganisation among the Germans. One week later, the whole Wijtschate Salient had been taken and the objective of straightening the front had been successfully achieved. Haig, the Commander-in-Chief, could now concentrate on his 'Flanders Offensive', better known as the Third Battle of Ypres or the Battle of Passchendaele, which aimed to capture the German submarine ports of Ostend and Zeebrugge.

1.2 German preparations

Haig believed in a large-scale offensive on a broad front. The Germans, however, had been expecting a large-scale attack and were well prepared. Special 'Pionier' or engineers were given the task of constructing a succession of defensive lines. These lines were planned for the entire length of the front, but priority was given to the district around Zonnebeke because the German military leaders were expecting an attack. Countless rows of barbed wire, machine-gun nests, and bunkers closely followed the contours of the land and linked the most strategic points of the landscape. Misleading the enemy was a major consideration and fake trenches were one of the means used to mislead the Allies’ aerial reconnaissance. This concept of elastic defence meant that, in the event of an Allied attack, the Germans could fall back again and again on a new defensive line and organise a counter-attack from it. In addition, the Germans enjoyed the advantage of holding the sloping terrain of the ridge to the east of Ypres. This natural defensive position, with its leafy close terrain, was of great strategic importance. From the Passchendaele Ridge, in particular, the Germans had a good view across the sloping fields. Woods, hedges, and farmsteads that were still relatively undamaged in 1917 offered good cover and were key from a defensive point of view. The control of these elements had a major influence on the location of the front.

1.3 The offensive begins

During the artillery bombardments in preparation for the Third Battle of Ypres, the British fired more than 4,200,000 projectiles at the German positions – two and a half times as many as the previous year at the Somme. After repeated postponements, the British attacked in pouring rain on 31 July 1917. The heavy bombardments and the rain had turned the battlefield into a swamp and the tanks sent into action got bogged down in the mud. The 'Battle of Pilkem' gained three kilometres of territory, but the attack came to a standstill at the German line known as the Wilhelm-Stellung.
1.4 The attacks in August and September

On 10 August, the British launched a major, unsuccessful attack against the higher ground around Geluveld, from which the Germans were able to open fire on their entire right flank. In mid-August, the most important fighting took place at Langemark. After a few hot days, a dry crust developed on the mud, so it became possible to deploy tanks once more. They got stuck again, however, and the intended breakthrough on the front seemed further away than ever.

Haig realised that the offensive had become deadlocked and replaced General Gough by Plumer, who successfully employed step-by-step tactics aimed at achieving limited goals. In order to get the offensive under way again, new troops were deployed: the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC). The new troops and the modified tactics proved successful. Success was achieved in fighting around the Menin road on 20 September, at Polygon Wood on 26 September, and on 4 October at Broodseinde, where the Germans suffered major losses.

1.5 October 1917 – the battlefield becomes a quagmire

October 1917 was one of the wettest months of the century. Plumer and Gough favoured putting the offensive on hold, but Haig needed a victory. He also wanted to ensure that the Germans would not attack the exhausted French further to the south. What had originally been the goal of the first phase of the offensive now became the ultimate objective of the whole campaign: to conquer the ruins of the village on the crest of the ridge – Passchendaele.

The combination of autumn rain, saturated ground, and the destruction of the local drainage system transformed the landscape into a vast sea of mud that swallowed up men, animals, and machines. Before the offensive at Poelkapelle on 9 October, the attacking soldiers needed a full eleven hours to make their way from Ypres across narrow duckboards. In addition, artillery support became difficult, as their very first shot caused guns to sink into the mud. The Allied attack on Passchendaele on 12 October ended bloodily, especially for the New Zealand troops. On 12 October 1917, the New Zealand division launched an offensive designed to take the Bellevue spur. The result was pitiful: 2,700 casualties, including 845 dead, in less than four hours. That day has been remembered ever since as the most tragic in the history of New Zealand.

1.6 The Canadians start out on their Road to Passchendaele

Following the bloody battle on 12 October 1917, Haig ordered the offensive to be halted and had the ANZAC troops replaced by fresh Canadian troops. In April 1917, these had staged their first offensive under Canadian command at Vimy (in France) – an event that marked, for many Canadians, the true birth of Canada as an independent country. The Canadian army, fighting together as a nation, was known to be a strong and tough force, capable of turning around hopeless situations. Haig counted on these qualities when he threw the Canadians into the struggle. On 26 and 30 October, they plodded along their ‘Road to Passchendaele’. On 6 November, the Canadians finally succeeded in taking the village of Passchendaele, whose name had by then assumed mythical status: Passion-dale, the valley of suffering. But they got no further and the offensive came to an end on the crest of the ridge on 10 November. The impossible had been achieved, but at what a price: 16,000 Canadian dead, wounded, or missing.
1.7 The results

The result of the Battle of Passchendaele was pitiful: in a hundred days, half a million victims, for just eight kilometres of territory gained.

Perhaps more than any other battle, Passchendaele has come to symbolise the horrors and the great human costs associated with the major battles of the First World War. British Empire losses included approximately 36,000 Australians, 3,500 New Zealanders, and 16,000 Canadians – the Canadians being lost in the last few days and weeks of the final bloody assault. Some 90,000 bodies were never identified and 42,000 never recovered.

The Battle of Passchendaele still has great symbolic significance. It was, moreover, in some ways, decisive for the further progress of the First World War. The German defence proved solid, but the huge losses in men and material were disastrous for the German army. For the Germans, the *Flandern-Schlacht* (Battle of Flanders) was fundamentally a "Materialschlacht" that deprived them of the reserves they needed to attack the now defenceless French. Haig never reached Zeebrugge, but the long-drawn-out battle did lead to a new understanding of wartime tactics. The old idea of attacking on a broad front had proved unsuccessful.

In the aftermath of the battle, General Haig was severely criticised for continuing the offensive long after the operation had lost any real strategic value.

**Timeline Third Battle of Ypres** (31 July-10 November 1917)

First phase (31 July-28 August)
- Battle of Pilkem (31 July-2 August)
- Battle of Langemark (16-18 August)

Second phase (20 Sept-12 Oct)
- Battle of the Menin Road (20-25 Sept.)
- Battle of Polygon Wood (26 Sept-3 Oct)
- Battle of Broodseinde (4 Oct)
- Battle of Poelkapelle (9 Oct)
- First Battle of Passchendaele (12 Oct)

Third phase (26 Oct-10 Nov)
- Second battle of Passchendaele (26 Oct-10 Nov)
2 THE CANADIANS IN PASSCHENDAELE

2.1 Canada as a British Dominion

On 1 July 1867, the British Parliament approved the Canadian Confederation. As a result, Canada became a Dominion within what is now known as the Commonwealth. Newfoundland became a British Dominion in 1907. Dominions independently managed all their domestic affairs. For matters involving foreign affairs and defence, they remained dependent on the British motherland. Therefore, when the United Kingdom entered the First World War, its Dominions were automatically involved. They immediately answered the call to participate and volunteers were recruited in great numbers. During the first month of the war, 40,000 were recruited in Canada and 500 in Newfoundland, where almost an entire battalion had enlisted by the end of the year. Conscription was introduced in Canada in 1917 and in Newfoundland in 1918.

2.2 Canadians to the front

The first Canadian battalion reached Belgium on 5 January 1915. The First Canadian Infantry Division was deployed at the front to the south of Armentières and arrived at the Ypres Salient at the beginning of April. From then until the end of the war, Canadians were ever-present on the Western Front. In total over 400,000 men and women served overseas in Canadian units and more than 12,000 in those from Newfoundland. The Canadian population was young and partly consisted of immigrants who had recently arrived in the country from Europe and Asia. The cultural background of the Canadian troops, accordingly, was highly diverse. No other army’s composition was as heterogeneous.

2.3 The foundation of the Canadian Corps

The Canadian government wanted to create its own Corps out of two divisions from Canada. Sam Hughes, the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, offered his services, but a British officer, Lieutenant General Alderson, was placed in command of the Corps. The two division generals, however, Major General Currie and Major General Turner, were Canadian. At the end of December 2015, a third division was formed in Great Britain, under the command of Major General Mercer. In March 1916, the new division of the Canadian Corps was deployed in Flanders. The Canadian Corps now occupied the front line between Ypres and Armentières. On 28 May 1916, General Currie became the Corps’ first Canadian commanding officer. The first major battle in which the Corps was embroiled was the Battle of Mount Sorrel (Hill 62) from 2 to 13 June 1916.

2.4 The Battle of Passchendaele

In 1917, the Canadian Corps earned fame on the battlefields of France at the Somme, Vimy Ridge, and Hill 70. The Canadian Corps was fully concentrated in Flanders for the final phase of the Battle of Passchendaele. The Corps, under Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Currie, arrived on 15 October to replace the Anzacs.
A large-scale assault on Passchendaele was launched on 26 October. The operation that day cost the Canadians 2,700 casualties; three Victoria Crosses were awarded for acts of courage. Canadian troops secured defensible positions on Passchendaele Ridge and moved to higher and drier ground.

The second phase of the attack on Passchendaele kicked off on 30 October. To the north, the Canadians were supported by two British divisions; to the south, by the Anzac Corps. The objective was a modest six hundred metres of ground to gain a base for the final assault on Passchendaele, but four fortified strongpoints stood in the way of their advance. By evening, three of the four strongpoints had been captured. Losses for the day were 884 men killed, 1,429 wounded (including 130 gassed), and eight captured. Nevertheless, the step-by-step battle was gradually accomplishing its purpose.

Seven days to rest and regroup followed, during which both sides collected their wounded and dead. Shelling and gassing continued non-stop. The First and Second Canadian Divisions were brought in to relieve the Third and Fourth.

The next phase of the assault took place on 6 November 1917. At 6 am, the First Canadian Division attacked under cover of darkness. The Germans had been warned of an attack, but the Canadians moved so swiftly behind their barrage that the objective was achieved by 7.40 am. The Second Canadian Division launched an attack toward the village of Passchendaele. By the end of the day, the village was overrun and secured.

In a final assault on 10 November, the Canadians cleared the Germans from their last foothold on the ridge. The capture of Passchendaele cost close to sixteen thousand casualties.
3 THE WELSH IN PASSCHENDAELE

Many Welsh units took part in the Battle of Pilckem Ridge, at the start of the Third Battle of Ypres. The 38th (Welsh) Division, the 29th Division which included 2nd Battalion South Wales Borderers, 2nd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment and the Welsh Guards took part and many are buried in Artillery Wood Cemetery.

Welsh poet Hedd Wyn was killed on the first day of the battle on 31 July 1917. He was post-humously awarded the Bards Chair at the 1917 National Eisteddford.

The Welsh Memorial Park stands on Pilckelm Ridge and is the only war memorial outside of Wales. The Cromlech memorial is surmounted with an 8ft Welsh Dragon which was unveiled on 16 August 2014.

4 THE SCOTS IN PASSCHENDAELE

4.1 The Scottish divisions

Throughout the Great War, the Scottish presence in Flanders was constant, culminating in the Passchendaele offensive in the second half of 1917. There were only a few other occasions when so many Scottish soldiers fought so nearby each other, which makes Passchendaele one of the most important battlefields in Scottish history.

Between 31 July and 10 November 1917, all three Scottish divisions on the Western Front, the Ninth (Scottish) Division, the 15th (Scottish) Division, and the Fifty-first (Highland) Division, were engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres, better known today as the Battle of Passchendaele. In addition, many Highland and Lowland battalions served in mixed British Divisions. The Scottish diaspora was equally important: soldiers of Scottish origin could be found with almost all of the other British and Dominion forces engaged. This is illustrated by the fact that the majority of the nine Canadian men who won the Victoria Cross at Passchendaele in the last week of October and the first week of November 1917 were either Scottish-born or the children of Scottish immigrants.


4.2 The Battle of Passchendaele

From the first day to the last, Scottish units were involved in the struggle to take the ridge. On the first day of the battle, the Fifteenth (Scottish) Division found itself in the eye of the storm. After fierce fighting, it succeeded in taking the Frezenberg, a small piece of higher ground before Zonnebeke.
It would take another fifteen days before the Ninth (Scottish) Division, incorporating the First South African Brigade, would reach the edge of the village, less than three kilometres from the line where the Fifteenth Division had dug in on 31 July.

In the meantime, the Fifty-first (Highland) Division moved slowly towards Poelkapelle in a vain attempt to find the Germans’ weak point. After two months of fighting, many of the exhausted British troops were replaced by Australians and New Zealanders; when they, in turn, ran out of reserves, the Canadians came up, determined to – at last – take the ruins of the little village with the almost mythical name: Passchendaele.

Apart from a few short breaks, the Scots held the line in front of Zonnebeke from 31 July to 20 August 1917. The area around the Frezenberg and before Zonnebeke is a very important battlefield, historically, situated as it is in the centre of the offensive whose initial goal was Passchendaele, and whose ultimate goals were Roeselare and Torhout.

5 THE NEW ZEALANDERS

5.1 Inclusion of the New Zealand Division

The Third Battle of Ypres, as General Haig’s offensive was called, began on 31 July 1917. Passchendaele was the initial objective. At first, the Fifth Army, under General Gough, made limited progress against fierce opposition. The advance quickly bogged down, though, when heavy rain turned the battlefield into a morass. Although Gough’s men made several attempts to press forward in these dire conditions, no progress could be made towards Passchendaele.

With visions of a strategic breakthrough fading fast, Haig now looked to General Plumer’s Second Army, which included the New Zealand Division as part of II ANZAC Corps, to seize Passchendaele. Using the bite-and-hold tactics he had employed at Messines, Plumer launched his first attack on 20 September. He aimed to take the plateau in a series of short steps, each carefully prepared and well supported by artillery fire.

5.2 Gravenstafel Spur

The New Zealand Division made its first attack on 4 October 1917. Its role was to provide flanking cover for an Australian assault on the Broodseinde Ridge. The New Zealanders’ objective was Gravenstafel Spur, the first of two spurs from the main ridge at Passchendaele (the other was Bellevue Spur). Once again, artillery played a big part in the success of the attack, which was made by the First and Fourth Brigades.

The bombardment, which began at 6 am, caught many Germans in the front lines, causing heavy casualties and disrupting the defence. Although the going was difficult – ‘The mud is a worse enemy than the German,’ divisional commander Sir Andrew Russell complained – the New Zealand troops advanced 1,000 metres to secure the spur and consolidate their position. More than a thousand prisoners were taken, but the attack cost more than 320 New Zealand lives, including that of the former All Black captain Dave Gallaher (view story p.13).
The events of 4 October had a tragic aftermath. The British high command mistakenly concluded that the number of enemy casualties meant enemy resistance was faltering. It resolved to make another push immediately. An attack on 9 October by British and Australian troops was to open the way for II Anzac Corps to capture Passchendaele on 12 October. In the rapidly deteriorating conditions, this timetable was a recipe for disaster. The plan failed at the first hurdle. Without proper preparation and in the face of strong German resistance, the 9 October attack collapsed with heavy casualties.

### 5.3 The blackest day

Preparations for the 12 October attack on Bellevue Spur, especially the positioning of the supporting artillery, could not be completed in time because of the mud. As a result, the creeping barrage was weak and ragged. Some of the shells dropped short, causing casualties among the New Zealanders waiting to advance. To make matters worse, the earlier artillery bombardment had failed to breach the obstacle presented by the German barbed wire. Another key set of targets, the Germans’ concrete pillboxes with their deadly machine-guns, was also left largely undamaged.

Troops from the Second Brigade and the Third (Rifle) Brigade advanced at 5.25 am in drizzle that soon turned into driving rain. As they struggled towards the ridge in front of them, they found their way blocked by the uncut barbed wire. Exposed to raking German machine-gun fire from both the front and flank, the New Zealanders were pinned down in shell craters in front of the wire. A few determined individuals tried to get through the barrier, but they were quickly killed. Orders came for another push at 3 pm, but this was mercifully postponed and then cancelled. The troops eventually fell back to positions close to their start line. For badly wounded soldiers lying in the mud, the aftermath of the battle was a private hell; many died before they could be rescued. The toll was horrendous. There were about 3,700 New Zealand casualties, of whom 45 officers and 800 men were either dead or lying mortally wounded between the lines. In terms of lives lost in a single day, this remains the blackest day in New Zealand’s post-1840 existence.

### 5.4 The battle ends

On 18 October, II Anzac Corps was relieved by the Canadians. In a series of well-prepared, but costly, attacks in atrocious conditions, Canadian troops finally occupied the ruins of Passchendaele village on 6 November.

6 THE AUSTRALIANS

6.1 Menin Road and Polygon Wood

The Australian infantry divisions joined the Third Battle of Ypres, which had been going on since 31 July, when they took part in the Battle of the Menin Road on 20 September 1917. Fortunately for them, a change in the weather brought better fighting conditions. The side-by-side advance of the First and Second Australian Divisions took them up to the splintered remnants of Polygon Wood not far from Zonnebeke. The Fourth and Fifth Divisions then took over and, as part of the wider effort, they attacked on 26 September. In both cases the fighting was bloody. German concrete pillboxes often blocked the Australians’ progress, and many men fell under shell and machine-gun fire. However, with heavy artillery support, the objectives were taken and enemy counter-attacks held off. These systematic step-by-step advances, staying within range of the supporting artillery, pushed the line forward by a few kilometres, but they were made at a heavy cost; in just over a week there were almost 11,000 Australian casualties.

6.2 Broodseinde and Passchendaele

The First, Second, and Third Australian Divisions captured Broodseinde Ridge on 4 October 1917. It was a vital victory. But then it began to rain. Five days later, the Second Australian Division suffered heavily in a further attack in the mud. Finally, on 12 October, another attack, involving the Third Division assisted by the Fourth, was made against the village of Passchendaele atop the main ridge. In the face of heavy fire, the men fought in the mire while struggling to keep up with their artillery barrages. Ground was taken but could not be held. In wretched conditions, with casualties mounting at an appalling rate, the Australians had to fall back. The troops were finally exhausted and could do no more; by 15 October, they handed over to the Canadians.


7 INDIVIDUAL STORIES

7.1 The story of Alex Decoteau, long-distance runner and Olympic athlete

Alexander ‘Wuttunee’ Decoteau finished sixth in the 5,000 metres at the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games. Before the war, Decoteau dominated the field of long-distance running in western Canada, but he also excelled in other sports, including boxing, football, and cricket. Professionally, he set a milestone by becoming Canada’s first Indigenous Canadian police officer. After the war had been raging for two years, Decoteau enlisted. Initially, he was part of the 202nd Edmonton Sportsmen’s Battalion and later part of the Forty-ninth (Edmonton) Battalion. At sports competitions behind the front, Decoteau won two important races, for which he received a gold watch from King George V.
By the grey autumn of 1917, however, Decoteau was on the front line at Passchendaele. His unit ‘resided’ close to Waterloo Farm and proceeded from there to the forwardmost lines. On 30 October 1917, they were supposed to attack and push through until they reached the German support line. The offensive turned into a fiasco, with 70 dead and 273 injured. Alexander Decoteau was among the dead. His body was retrieved from the battlefield and buried in Passchendaele New British Cemetery.

7.2 The story of Dave Gallaher, All Blacks rugby captain

During the war, rugby competitions were organised far behind the front. Australians, New Zealanders, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Irishmen, Welshmen, Frenchmen, and South Africans battled each other. One of the best-known games, between the French National Team and the New Zealand All Blacks, was played on 8 April 1917 at Vincennes. Since 1910, the sport had been immensely popular in France, but the large crowd of spectators must have looked on with surprise as the New Zealanders performed their famous ‘Haka’ – a traditional war dance, meant to intimidate their opponents. The All Blacks won with ease, but the French were nevertheless proud of their performance.

The war hit rugby players particularly hard. A remarkable number of rugby players were killed in action in the Westhoek. There is even a monument there – to David Gallaher, the legendary All Blacks captain. Because of his contribution to the sport, he acquired hero status in the history of rugby. Although Gallaher was too old for the army, he volunteered to serve after his younger brother, Douglas, fell in France. He went through his own baptism of fire with the Second Battalion of the Auckland Regiment on 26 June 1917. In the autumn of that year, his unit was on its way to Passchendaele. On 4 October, Dave Gallaher was fatally wounded during the siege of ‘s Graventafel Spur. He died later the same day in Poperinge and is buried at the Nine Elms Cemetery near the town. His grave has become a site of pilgrimage, not only for tourists from New Zealand but also for the All Black team, who come to pay homage to their legendary captain. Since 2000, as a sign of respect and shared grief, the national rugby teams of France and New Zealand play for the Dave Gallaher Trophy.

7.3 Jimmy Speirs

Football legend Jimmy Speirs was born on 22 March 1886 in Glasgow, Scotland. He played for a number of teams, including Clyde, Leeds City, and Glasgow Rangers. As captain of the English club Bradford FC, he scored the winning goal in the 1911 FA Cup Final.

Despite having a family with two children, Jimmy volunteered for the Army in 1915 and served with the Seventh (Service) Battalion of the Cameron Highlanders. He won a Military Medal and became a Sergeant. He was killed on 20 August 1917, aged 31, during the build-up to one of the many attacks during the fight for Passchendaele, one of the most dramatic battles of the Great War.

He is buried at Dochy Farm in Langemark-Poelkapelle.

http://www.longroadtopasschendaele.be/jimmy-speirs/
7.4 Noel Chevasse

Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse VC & Bar, the son of the Bishop of Liverpool, was a British doctor and Army Officer and Olympic athlete, one of only three people to be awarded a Victoria Cross twice. He was a Captain in the Royal Army Medical Corp, attached to the 10th Battalion of the King’s (Liverpool Regiment), the Liverpool Scottish battalion as Surgeon-Lieutenant.

In June 1915 at Hooge, Near Ypres, Chavasse’s bravery earned him the Military Cross. He was first awarded the VC for his actions on 9 August 1916, at Guillemont, France and then between 31 July and 2 August, the second at the Battle of Passchendaele. His citation read ‘For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty when in action. Though severely wounded early in the action whilst carrying a wounded soldier to the Dressing Station, Capt. Chavasse refused to leave his post, and for two days not only continued to perform his duties, but in addition went out repeatedly under heavy fire to search for and attend to the wounded who were lying out. During these searches, although practically without food during this period, worn with fatigue and faint with his wound, he assisted to carry in a number of badly wounded men, over heavy and difficult ground. By his extraordinary energy and inspiring example, he was instrumental in rescuing many wounded who would have otherwise undoubtedly succumbed under the bad weather conditions. This devoted and gallant officer subsequently died of his wounds.’

Chavasse died of his wounds in Brandhoek at the age of 32 and is buried at Brandhoek New Military Cemetery. His headstone carries, uniquely, a representation of two Victoria Crosses. Chavasse is believed to be commemorated by more war memorials in the UK than any other individual. Sixteen have currently been recorded by the UK National Inventory of War Memorials.

7.5 Poets Hedd Wyn and Francis Ledwidge

On 31st July 1917 Welsh poet Hedd Wyn and Irish poet Francis Ledwidge were killed fighting in the first battle of Passchendaele only a few miles from each other. They are both buried in the same Artillery Wood Cemetery.

Francis Ledwidge was serving in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and was one of a working party repairing the road when a shell exploded amongst them, killing five men and an officer. The men were buried where they fell at Carrefour de Rose (Rose Crossroads) which is just to the south of the Artillery Wood Cemetery, and reinterred in the cemetery later. The Ledwidge Memorial marks the spot where he died.

Hedd Wyn, (Private Ellis Humphrey Evans) had joined the Royal Welch Fusiliers only the month before he died, on the battlefield at Boesinghe. He had submitted an entry ‘The Hero’ to the National Eisteddford in 1917 and was posthumously awarded the Bard’s Chair.
8 THINGS TO SEE RELATED TO THE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE

8.1 Battle sites

The Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917
This museum tells the story of the war in the Ypres Salient, with special emphasis on the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917. Zonnebeke and its five villages have the largest concentration of underground constructions. Because these dugouts are generally not accessible to the public, a life-like reconstruction has been built in the Museum.

Crest Farm Canadian Memorial
This marks the place where the Canadian Corps saw fierce fighting during the Second Battle of Passchendaele and won possession of the high ground at Crest Farm.

New Zealand Memorial at ’s Graventafel
This memorial commemorates the New Zealand Division’s participation in the Battle of Broodseinde on 4 October 1917. This attack by ANZAC forces successfully pushed forward the Allied trench line in the early part of the Passchendaele offensive but was followed by an inadequately prepared attack on 12 October 1917.

Passchendaele church
Passchendaele church was totally destroyed by shellfire in 1917. However, it has since been reconstructed and now dominates the village square. Within the church are memorial windows in honour of the 66th Division of the British Expeditionary Force.

Ross Bastion Memorial Plaques
These bronze bas relief memorial plaques commemorate actions of the Australians during the Great War. These memorial plaques are all the work of Dr Ross J. Bastiaan who used his dental skills, materials and equipment to sculpt the memorial plaques. There are plaques at the Menin gate in Ypres, in the centre of Passchendaele (Zonnebeke) opposite the church and in the town-centre square of Messines.

Memorial to the Seventh Division, Broodseinde
This memorial is an obelisk with the figure 7 on each side. It was erected in 1924 on the site where the Seventh Royal Artillery Division had taken the Zonnebeke Ridge in 1917.

85th Division (Nova Scotia Highlanders) Memorial
This monument was the first one to be erected in the region. It honours the memory of the 85th Canadian infantry (Nova Scotia) Battalion which suffered heavy losses during the Third Battle of Ypres at the end of October 1917.

www.passchendaele.be

8.2 Cemeteries

**Tyne Cot Cemetery and Visitor Centre (Zonnebeke)**
This is the largest Commonwealth War Graves Commission military cemetery in continental Europe, with almost 12,000 tombstones. The back wall of the graveyard is inscribed with the names of 34,957 missing soldiers who fell in the Battle of Passchendaele and later.

**Polygon Wood (Zonnebeke)**
Polygon Wood is a large wood 1.6 kilometres 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 Ninth (Scottish) Division on 28 September 1918. There you will find a burial ground named Buttes New British Cemetery with the New Zealand Memorial, which commemorates 383 officers and men of the New Zealand Division. On top of the 'butte' (hill) you will find the Memorial of the Fifth Australian Division. In Polygon Wood you can still see the remains of several shelters. Each year on ANZAC Day (25 April), the efforts of the ANZAC soldiers are commemorated during a service called the 'Dawn Service'. Polygon Wood Cemetery lies on the other side of the road.

**Passchendaele New British Cemetery (Zonnebeke)**
The cemetery was created by concentration of graves following the Armistice. The structure of the front of this cemetery is somewhat unusual, with almost a barred window appearance such as a prison might have. Almost all the graves date from the autumn of 1917, and thus from Third Ypres. There are 2101 burials here, 1600 of which (more than three-quarters) are unidentified.

**Artillery Wood Cemetery (Boezinge)**
1307 First World War casualties are buried of whom 506 are unknown. There are many Welsh burials, including that of the famous Poet Hedd Wyn.

**Canada Farm Cemetery (Elverdinge)**
Canada Farm Cemetery took its name from a farmhouse used as a dressing station during the 1917 Allied offensive on this front. Most of the burials are of men who died at the dressing station between June and October 1917. There are now 907 First World War burials in the cemetery.

**Derry House Cemetery 2 (Wijtschaete)**
Derry House Cemetery (there is now only one) was begun in June, 1917, by the 11th Division (32nd Bridge), and used as a front-line cemetery until December, and again in October, 1918, by the 2nd London Scottish. There are now over 150, 1914-18 war casualties commemorated in this site. The cemetery covers an area of 1,680 square metres and is enclosed by a brick and stone wall.

Nine Elms British Cemetery (Poperinge)

The cemetery was first used from September to December 1917 for burials from the 3rd Australian and 44th Casualty Clearing Stations, which had been moved to Poperinge (now Poperinge) in preparation for the 1917 Battle of Ypres. The cemetery was used again by fighting units between March and October 1918, the period of the German offensive in Flanders. The cemetery contains 1,556 Commonwealth burials of the First World War and 37 German war graves from this period. There are also 24 Second World War burials in the cemetery, all dating from the Allied retreat to Dunkirk in 1940.

Among the 270 New Zealanders buried here is Dave Gallaher. David “Dave” Gallaher (30 October 1873 - 4 October 1917) was a New Zealand rugby union footballer. For his story view p. 13.

Poelcapelle British Cemetery (Poelkapelle)

This is a large cemetery, with nearly 7,500 burials and an astonishing 6,321 of these are unidentified. This reflects the nature of the cemetery; it was made after the Armistice by the recovery of graves from the battlefields around and also the concentration of graves from other cemeteries. Many of the burials are from the last half of the year 1917.

One grave here is said to be that of Private John Condon, listed in the cemetery details as aged 14 and ‘thought to be the youngest battle casualty of the First World War.

Perth Cemetery (Zillebeke)

Perth Cemetery was begun by French troops in November 1914, and adopted by the 2nd Scottish Rifles in June 1917. It was used as a front-line cemetery until October 1917 and it was not used again until after the Armistice. The 158 French graves have been removed to another cemetery.

There are now 2788 war casualties commemorated in this site. Of these, 1367 are unidentified and special memorials are erected to 26 soldiers from the United Kingdom and 1 from Canada, known or believed to be buried among them.

www.cwgc.org

8.3 Memorial ceremonies and events

25 April (6 am) – Anzac Day – Dawn Service
Buttes New British Cemetery – Zonnebeke

Annual tribute to all the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought in WWI. A few officials will plant the first trees of the Wood of Peace.
www.passchendaele2017.org
30 July 2017 – Official commemoration Third Battle of Ypres and four years war in the Ypres Salient

On 30 July the British government, the city of Ypres, and the Belgian and Flemish governments hold an official commemoration for the four years of war in the Ypres Salient, the third battle of Ypres included. There will be a special Last Post at the Menin Gate at the occasion of the 100-year anniversary of the third Battle of Ypres at 8 pm with a live projection of the ceremony on screens on the Grote Markt. There will also be a multimedia projection with live music/reading & poetry on ‘The Battles of the Ypres Salient 1914-18’ on the Market Square outside the Cloth Hall at 10 pm.

www.visitypres.be
www.passchendaele100.org

31 July 2017 – Official commemoration Battle of Passchendaele
Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke, and Menin Gate, Ypres

On 31 July, the British government, the community of Zonnebeke and the Belgian and Flemish governments hold an official commemoration at Tyne Cot Cemetery in memory of those who died in the Passchendaele region. There will be live capitation and Living History event at the chateau grounds of the Zonnebeke mansion.

www.passchendaele2017.org
www.passchendaele100.org

31 July 2017 (5.50 am) – Opening ceremony Battle of Ypres-Passchendaele
Welsh National Memorial Hagebos, Langemark

31 July 2017 (pm) – Centennial commemoration of the dead of the poets Hedd Wyn and Francis Ledwige
Artillery Wood Cemetery, Poperinge

19 August 2017 (am) – Scottish Memorial Ceremony
Scottish monument on the Frezenberg, Zonnebeke

From 31 July to 20 August 1917, three out of four large Scottish units, the Ninth Division with the First (and only) South African Brigade, the Fifteenth Division, and the Fifty-first Division, were almost simultaneously engaged in the Battle of Passchendaele. On 19 August, all Scottish and South African casualties will be officially commemorated at the Scottish monument at Frezenberg in Zonnebeke.

www.passchendaele2017.org

26 September 2017 – Australian Memorial Ceremony
Buttes New British Cemetery, Zonnebeke
This peaceful Australian ceremony takes place at Buttes New British Cemetery in Polygon Wood. The cemetery is the last resting place of more than 500 Australians, of whom more than half have never been identified. Many were in the Fifth Australian Division, as the current location of the cemetery is where, exactly 100 years ago, the Fifth Australian Division conquered Polygon Wood after a fierce battle.

www.passchendaele2017.org

26 September & 12 October 2017 – Wood of Peace – tree planting
Polygon Wood

In 2017, a tree will be planted for each fallen soldier with a known grave at the two British cemeteries at Polygon Wood (Buttes New British Cemetery and Polygon Wood Cemetery). There will be two planting days: 26 September and 12 October. In addition, a monument to all the missing soldiers will be erected in a central area in the new park. In the initial phase, all descendants of the fallen soldiers can register via www.passchendaele2017.org. In a second phase, the public at large will be invited to actively contribute to the Wood of Peace by linking up with a fallen soldier for whom no next of kin have registered. The Wood of Peace will keep the memory of those who lost their lives during WWI alive for many generations to come.

www.passchendaele2017.org

6 October 2017 – German Memorial Ceremony
German cemetery, Menenwald, Menen

12 October 2017 – New Zealand Memorial Service
Zonnebeke

On 12 October 1917, the New Zealand Division advanced to take the Bellevue spur. The result was devastating: 2,700 casualties, including 846 dead, in less than four hours, for a terrain gain of less than 400 metres. That day has been remembered ever since as the most tragic day in the modern history of New Zealand. Exactly one hundred years later, special ceremonies, involving youngsters, at Tyne Cot Cemetery and at ‘s Graventafel will remind us of this sacrifice.

www.passchendaele2017.org

14 October 2017 – Silent City Meets Living City
Tyne Cot Cemetery, Zonnebeke

Tyne Cot Cemetery in Zonnebeke is a silent but important witness to the Battle of Passchendaele. With nearly 12,000 graves and 35,000 names of soldiers with no known grave, Tyne Cot Cemetery is the largest Commonwealth cemetery in the world. On 14 October, the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 and the community of Zonnebeke will hold a moment of silence and reflection at Tyne Cot Cemetery to commemorate the many victims. Participants can register via www.passchendaele2017.org to be part of this unique and powerful event at this symbolic location.

www.passchendaele2017.org

10 November 2017 – Canadian Ceremony of Rememberance
Crest Farm Memorial/Passchendaele Church, Zonnebeke
10 November 1917 marks the day that Canadian troops ended the Battle of Passchendaele by capturing the ruins of the village. The Passchendaele Ceremony commemorates the end of the battle and all casualties, communities, and countries involved. The ceremony starts with a subdued reflection at the Crest Farm Canadian Memorial, followed by a torchlight parade along the Canadalaan. The parade follows the path of the last hundred metres of the attack and ends in Passchendaele. After the ceremony, all participants will be invited to an open-air reception, followed by a concert in the church. [www.passchendaele2017.org](http://www.passchendaele2017.org)

11 November 2017 – Armistice Special Last Post  
Ypres  
Soon more information on [www.visitypres.be](http://www.visitypres.be)

11 November 2017 2 PM – Black Watch Corner Ceremony  
Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke  
[www.passchendaele2017.org](http://www.passchendaele2017.org)

12 November 2017 – 2017 Alex Decoteau Run  
Zonnebeke/Passchendaele

Run in commemoration of the Indigenous Canadian Alex Wuttunee Decoteau, who participated in the 5,000 metre race during the 1912 Olympics, and of all those who fell in the Battle of Passchendaele.  
[www.passchendaele2017.org](http://www.passchendaele2017.org)

8.4 Exhibition: Total War in Flanders

FROM 3 JUNE 2017 TO END 2017

In 1917, the Great War escalated in Flanders into a total war. Science, technology, industry, economy, and society were the cogwheels of a war machine operating at full speed. At the front, the scope and the severity of the violence defied all imagination. An unprecedented number of troops, modern weapons, and new technologies formed the machinery of armies that could no longer afford to lose. The huge destructive power of the artillery wreaked havoc in the landscape. Behind the front, the whole society was mobilised to keep the war industry going. Daily life became bleaker and the image of the other side was reduced to that of ‘the enemy’. Today we still see the scars in the landscape and the places of remembrance and commemoration. The project ‘1917: Total War in Flanders’ connects these various locations in a route of exhibitions and information points:
In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
The thematic exhibition in the Royal Hall of the In Flanders Fields Museum gives the visitor a general introduction to the Mine Battle of Messines and the Third Battle of Ypres. There is an important place in the exhibition for the work of the Australian war photographers Frank Hurley and Hubert Wilkins and the re-worked contemporary photographs of Ian Alderman.
www.inflandersfields.be

Three information modules in the Ypres Salient, Ypres
Each of the three modules explains the position of the Allied armies on the eve of the Third Battle of Ypres. At each location, films reflect on the terrible storm that would soon break: a storm that was destined to dramatically reshape the landscape around Ypres.
www.visitypres.be

Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, Zonnebeke
The imposing ‘Villa Zonnedaele’ mansion is the setting for a thematic exhibition about the crucial role played by the devastated landscape during the Battle of Passchendaele. Both armies were forced to adjust their tactics, their methods of attack, and their logistical systems. The impact on ordinary soldiers, both physically and psychologically, was immense.
www.passchendaele.be

Tyne Cot Cemetery Visitors Centre, Zonnebeke
An information module in the visitor centre next to the imposing Tyne Cot Cemetery tells the story of the landscape. Using an interactive panorama panel, the visitor will learn how to read the different layers of this landscape: what was the effect of the Third Battle of Ypres and what traces can we still find today?
www.passchendaele.be

Heuvelland Visitors Centre, Heuvelland (Kemmel)
The thematic exhibition ‘Zero Hour 07-06-1917: The Archaeology of a Battle’ in the Heuvelland Visitors Centre (currently under construction) illustrates the material heritage left behind by the Mine Battle of Messines. A selection of excavated artefacts occupies a central position. The visitor will learn about the function of these objects during the battle and how they were rediscovered many years later. The exhibition also demonstrates how the wartime heritage has been dealt with in the years since the Great War came to an end.
www.toerismeheuvelland.be

Sint-Laurentius (St. Laurence’s) Church, Heuvelland (Kemmel)
The church in Kemmel is the setting for the thematic exhibition 'Irish Blood on Flemish Soil'. Ireland has had a troubled history. Yet during the Mine Battle of Messines the Sixteenth (Irish) Division and the Thirty-sixth (Ulster) Division fought side by side. In view of their underlying political differences, it is justified to regard this as a unique act of partnership and cooperation. Even today, this collaborative participation in the battle has a strong symbolic value.

www.toerismeheuvelland.be

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**Tourist Information Point (TIP), Messines**
The thematic exhibition '100 New Zealand Faces of Messines' focuses attention on the enormous impact of the First World War on New Zealand. From a population of barely one million inhabitants, almost 10% travelled to the other side of the world to fight in the Great War. Using the stories of 100 individuals, the dramatic effects of the war on this small country are explored.

www.mesen.be

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**Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery Visitors Centre, Poperinge**
An information module in the visitor centre next to the imposing Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery tells the story of the preparation of this hospital site in the run-up to the Third Battle of Ypres. Nothing was left to chance, resulting in a tangible sense of 'the calm before the storm'. The full ferocity of this storm, when it finally broke, is best evidenced by the sheer scale of the site, the number of casualties it dealt with, and the growing size of the neighbouring cemetery in the terrible summer of 1917.

www.lijssenthoek.be

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**Guynemer Pavillon, Langemark-Poelkapelle (Poelkapelle)**
The Guynemer Pavillon (currently under construction) houses a two-part exhibition, which tells the stories of the role of military aviation in the war and of the French participation in the Battle of Passchendaele. The part played by the French Army in this largely British and Commonwealth offensive was crucially important. Although that army was in a state of crisis in 1917, it was still able to make a cautious but significant advance towards Houthulst Forest. Increasing use was also made of military aviation throughout 1917, evolving from a purely observational role to become an integral part of the war machine.

www.langemark-poelkapelle.be

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**Belgian Military Cemetery, Houthulst**
An information module at the Belgian Military Cemetery in Houthulst highlights the impact of munitions on the region in 1917. During the Third Battle of Ypres, the concentrations of artillery were much heavier than anything previously seen. The number of shells fired by the guns reached staggering new levels. Even today, these munitions are still being found and their effects are still being felt.
**Drie Grachten (Three Canals) site, Houthulst (Merkem)**

This information module tells the story of the destruction of the Drie Grachten site by French artillery prior to the opening of the Third Battle of Ypres. The module also focuses on the storming of the position by the Fusiliers Marins Battalion (French Marines). Autochrome colour photographs – which were very rare at that time – illustrate various aspects of this local victory.

www.houthulst.be


### 8.5 Guided tours/routes/itineraries

#### Car or coach itineraries

**The Battle of Passchendaele, Zonnebeke**

- Memorial Museum Passchendaele: 10 am*
- Lunch in Zonnebeke: 12 noon**
- Walk to Tyne Cot Cemetery: 2 pm
- Visit to Tyne Cot and visitor centre: 3 pm*
- Buttes New British Cemetery: 4 pm

*From June to December, extra temporary exhibitions about the events of 1917

**For lunch suggestions have a look at www.toerismezonnebeke.be

**The Canadians in Flanders Fields**

**Ypres — Zonnebeke — Zillebeke**

### DAY 1

- In Flanders Fields Museum: 10 am
- Lunch in Ypres***: 12 noon
- Essex Farm, where John McCrae wrote his world-famous poem: 2 pm
- ‘The Brooding Soldier’ memorial to the Canadian First Division during the first gas attack in 1915: 3 pm
DAY 1

- Tourist Information Point, Messines: 10 am
- New Zealand soldier statue: 10.45 am
- New Zealand Memorial, Messines: 11 am
- Messines Ridge British Cemetery: 11.30 am
- Peckham Farm Crater, Messines: 12 noon
- Lunch in Ypres***: 12.30 pm
- In Flanders Fields Museum: 2 pm
- Menin Gate: 4 pm

***For lunch suggestions have a look at www.visitypres.be

DAY 2

- Nine Elms British Cemetery in Poperinge, where 270 New Zealanders are buried, including the All Blacks captain Dave Gallaher: 10 am
- Memorial Museum Passchendaele: 11 am
- Lunch in Zonnebeke**: 12.30 pm
- Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke: 2.30 pm
- New Zealand Memorial at ´s Graventafel: 4 pm

**For lunch suggestions have a look at www.toerismezonebeke.be
The Australians in Flanders Fields

DAY 1

- In Flanders Fields Museum: 10 am
- Menin Gate: 12 noon
- Lunch in Ypres**: 12.30 pm
- Hill 60 and Caterpillar Crater: 2 pm
- Toronto Avenue Cemetery: 3.30 pm

DAY 2

- Memorial Museum Passchendaele: 10 am
- Lunch in Zonnebeke**: 12 noon
- Polygon Wood: 2 pm
- Tyne Cot Cemetery: 3.30 pm

***For lunch suggestions have a look at www.visitypres.be
**For lunch suggestions have a look at www.toerismezonnebeke.

The British and the battles of 1917

DAY 1

- Tourist Information Point, Messines: 10 am
- Messines Ridge British Cemetery: 11 am
- Peckham Farm Crater: 11.30 am
- Pool of Peace: 12 noon
- Bayernwald: 12.30 pm
- Lunch in Hevelland****: 1 pm
- Hill 60 and Caterpillar Crater: 2.30 pm
- Menin Gate: 4 pm

DAY 2

- Memorial Museum Passchendaele: 10 am
- Tyne Cot Cemetery: 11.30 am
- Lunch in Zonnebeke**: 12.30 pm
- Polygon Wood: 2.30 pm
***** For lunch suggestions have a look at the website www.heuvelland.be
**For lunch suggestions have a look at www.toerismezonnebeke.

Guides and organized tours

For guides, contact the tourist offices:
in the Ypres or Messines area: www.visitieper.be
in the Zonnebeke/Passchendaele area: www.mmp.zonnebeke.be
in Heuvelland/Wijtschate: www.heuvelland.be

If you want to book an organised battlefield tour, please have a look at the list of suppliers on http://www.flandersfields.be/en/inspiration/battlefield-tours

9  FURTHER INFORMATION

9.1 Websites

Interesting websites for a visit to Flanders Fields are:

www.flandersfields1418.com

www.flandersfields.be

9.2 Pictures

On our Flickr page you will find pictures of Flanders Fields. All images may be freely used, provided copyright is acknowledged.

www.flickr.com/photos/visitflanders/sets/72157625168448934

If you have any problems, please contact Kanittha Paksee: kanittha.paksee@toerismevlaanderen.be,
+ 32 2 504 03 06.

9.3 Interviews

Franky Bostyn
Coordinator, Historical Section, Ministry of Defence, and former curator of Memorial Museum
Passchendaele 1917
franky.bostyn@telenet.be
9.4 Accessibility

VISITFLANDERS strives to ensure access for all visitors and provides information on all aspects of an accessible stay. The following symbols are used in this info pack:

is used to indicate wheelchair-accessible options. Whereas certain locations provide easy access, others may require a little more effort or third-party assistance. For more detailed information on wheelchair-accessible locations, please consult our “Great War centenary - Accessible for all” brochure.

indicates the museums and/or sites that offer additional facilities for visually impaired visitors. For more detailed information regarding these facilities, please consult our “Great War Centenary - Tips for visually impaired visitors” brochure.


For more specific details on all disability-related facilities, please contact pieter.remmerie@intro-events.be

Also useful in terms of wheelchair-accessible locations is the AccesSEAble app, which can be downloaded via Google Play, the App Store or the Windows Phone Store.

Website and contact at VISITFLANDERS:
accessible@visitflanders.com

9.5 Visit Flanders contacts

If you want more information about visiting Flanders, you can find it on our website: [www.visitflanders.com](http://www.visitflanders.com).

You can also contact the press manager of Visit Flanders in your country.

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9.6 Sources
Evans Shaw S., *Canadians at War*, Goose Lane editions, 2011