



## THE BATTLE AND MEMORIALS OF THE YPRES SALIENT

### THE BATTLES OF YPRES

In the First Battle of Ypres, in the late autumn of 1914, a relatively small British Expeditionary Force was operating in close proximity to Belgian forces to the north and French to the south, in an allied command structure. Advancing through Ypres, they met a larger force of young and untrained Germans, the Volunteer Reserve Corps, and pushed them back to the Passchendaele Ridge. After attack and counter-attack, notably in Polygon Wood, the Germans were finally driven back and Ypres was saved before winter set in and warfare temporarily ceased. Losses on both sides were considerable.

The events of late 1914 saw a change in the nature of warfare from mobile infantry, with some use of cavalry charges, to full scale trench warfare where defence was the best form of attrition.

The Second Battle of Ypres commenced in April 1915 when the Germans released poison gas against the Allied lines north of the city, this being the first time that the deadly weapon had been used in the war. The fleeing battle-weary troops were replaced by the fresh 1st Canadian Division who steadfastly resisted a second gas attack and stood their ground. However, the force of the first attack had seriously indented the Allied-held Ypres Salient and it was necessary for the British to shorten their lines of defence by withdrawing.

There was little more significant activity on this front until 1917 when, in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), it fell to the British to divert German attention away from a weakened French front. A first offensive was launched, to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge, and the attack was a complete success. A few weeks later the main assault began and after a long and dogged struggle, often in appalling wet weather, Passchendaele Ridge and village were taken.

The struggle continued in 1918, with early German success, but a final great effort was undertaken by the Allies in September and in mid-October the last shell fell on Ypres and the Fourth Battle ended.

### THE MEMORIALS

From Langemarck to Messines and from Poperinghe to Dadizeele, there are 137 cemeteries in Belgian Flanders containing the dead of the Commonwealth Forces; and in those cemeteries there are the graves of 40,000 unidentified soldiers. They, and 50,000 others whose graves are not even to that extent known or marked, are the officers and men commemorated by name on four Commission Memorials in Belgium.

The names from all the overseas forces except those of New Zealand and Newfoundland, and the names from the Corps and Regiments of the United Kingdom of those who fell before 16 August 1917 appear on the Menin Gate, Ypres (now known as Ieper). The names from the forces of the United Kingdom from that date, with those of certain New Zealand dead, appear on a Memorial in Tyne Cot Cemetery, Passchendaele. The remaining New Zealand names appear on Memorials in Buttes New British Cemetery, Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke, and Messines Ridge British Cemetery.

A division of the names between several sites was found to be desirable as well as inevitable. The Menin Gate was a natural site for selection; hundreds of thousands of men passed through it to the battlefields of the Ypres Salient, and it represents the deliberate obstinacy with which the British Empire, from 1914 to 1918, refused to surrender a few square miles of Belgian soil. On the other hand there was available at Tyne Cot a large cemetery on the highest part of the West Flanders battlefield, on the site of a German fort, and close to the furthest point reached by British arms in Belgium until nearly the end of the War. It was therefore historically fitting that Tyne Cot should be one of the sites for Memorials, and that a date in the summer of 1917, when the advance to Passchendaele was in progress, should be chosen to divide the British names between Ypres and Passchendaele. The date chosen was the night of 15-16 August, when the Battle of Langemarck began.

## THE YPRES SALIENT

These Memorials cover the whole period of the War, except the months of August and September 1914; and they serve the area from Langemarck in the north to the northern edge of Ploegsteert Wood, 4 kms south of Messines, which (in its widest sense) is the Ypres Salient. The term has no exact geographical significance. It varied from year to year, as the map shows; but it has in the history of the War the significance of a long series of fierce attacks and defences, with Calais and Boulogne as their bases on the British side and the whole mastery of Belgian soil as their objective.



Approximate Allied line after			
—	—	—	22-11-14
- - -	- - -	- - -	25-8-16
· · ·	· · ·	· · ·	10-11-17
+	+	+	30-4-18

**Note:** The places names shown in this historical map are as they were known at the time of the First World War. Many are spelled differently today.

## THE MENIN GATE MEMORIAL, YPRES



Ypres (now known as Ieper) is one of the old towns of Flanders and, eight centuries ago, it was the greatest of them. It decayed through changes in trade and industry, through political troubles, through many sieges and some captures.

By 1914 it was one of the smaller towns of the Belgian Province of West Flanders, joined by canals and railways to the French border and the sea. It stood in flat, intensely cultivated, country; but to the south-west was a low range of hills running from Kemmel westward to Godewaersvelde and rising again at Cassel, and to the north and east were the gradual ascents afterwards known to the British troops as the Pilckem Ridge, the Passchendaele Ridge and the Menin Road Ridge. It was described in 1905 as a dead or phantom town, a cemetery, deserted by industry and trade, but carefully guarding the great buildings erected in its prosperity. The ramparts built by Louis XIV, modernised by the Dutch Government before 1830, and dismantled by the Belgian Government in 1854, remained as wide promenades on the east and south sides. There were two main gateways: the Lille Gate which retained its flanking towers and the gate towards Menin which was only a passage between two ends of wall.

At the Menin Gate there stands today a "Hall of Memory", 36.5 metres long and 20 metres wide, covered in by a coffered half-elliptical arch in a single span. At either end is an archway 9 metres wide and 14.5 metres high, with flat arches on either side of it 3.5 metres wide and nearly 7 metres high. In the centre of the sides are broad staircases, leading up to the ramparts and to loggias running the whole length of the building. The names of over 54,000 officers and men are engraved in Portland stone panels fixed to the inner walls of the Hall, up the sides of the staircases, and inside the loggias. Each of the four straight arches is flanked on either side by an engaged Doric column and surmounted by an entablature. Over the central arches are large panels for the dedicatory inscriptions; and above these panels is a recumbent lion on the east side, and a sarcophagus, with a flag and a wreath, on the side facing the town.

The inscription repeated over the two main arches is:

TO THE ARMIES OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE WHO  
STOOD HERE FROM 1914 TO 1918 AND TO THOSE  
OF THEIR DEAD WHO HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVE.

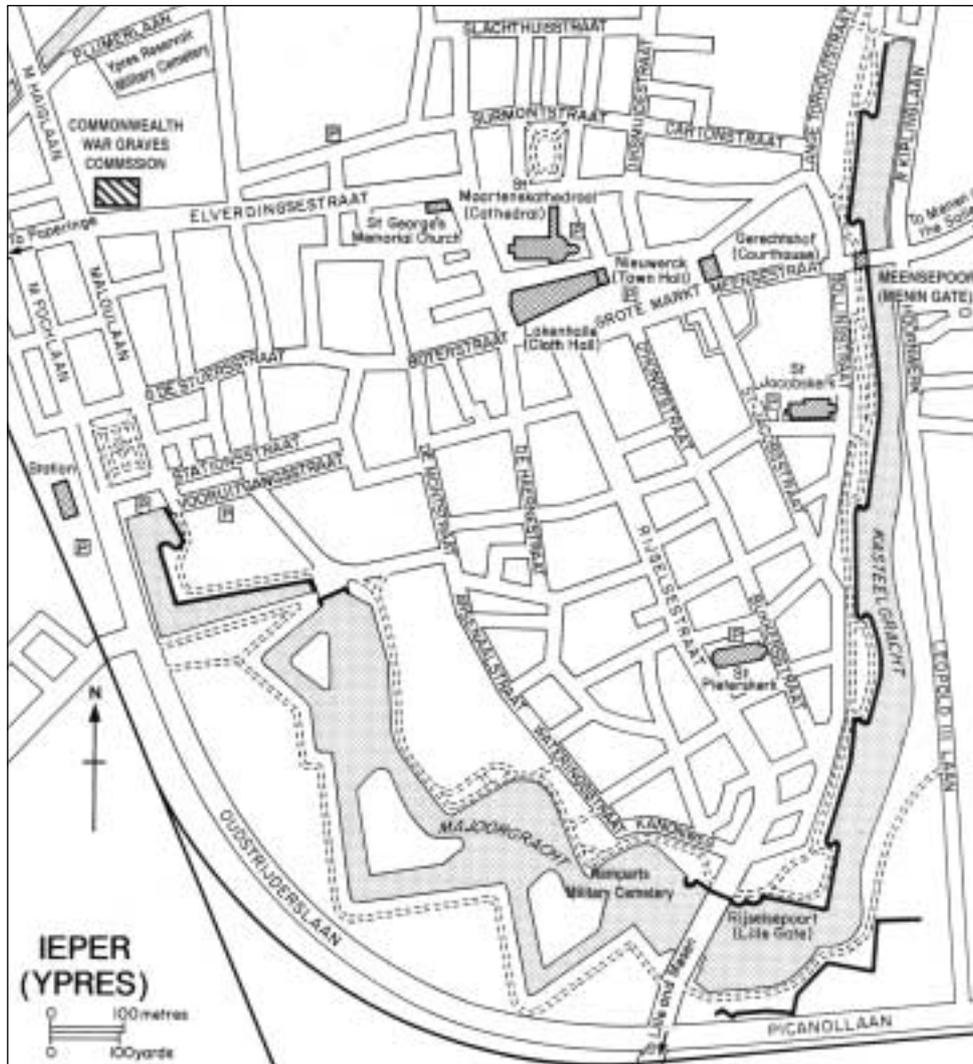
The following words are inscribed over the entrance to the southern staircase leading out of the main hall:

IN MAIOREM DEI GLORIAM  
HERE ARE RECORDED NAMES OF OFFICERS AND  
MEN WHO FELL IN YPRES SALIENT BUT TO WHOM  
THE FORTUNE OF WAR DENIED THE KNOWN AND  
HONOURED BURIAL GIVEN TO THEIR COMRADES  
IN DEATH.

Over the entrance to the northern staircase are the words:

THEY SHALL RECEIVE A CROWN OF GLORY THAT  
FADETH NOT AWAY

The Memorial, built of reinforced concrete faced with Euville stone and red brick, was designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and unveiled by Field Marshal Plumer in 1927. It is situated on the eastern side of the town, on the road to Menin (Menen) and Courtrai (Kortrijk) and each night at 8 pm the traffic is stopped while members of the local Fire Brigade sound the Last Post in the roadway under the Memorial's arches.





## THE TYNE COT MEMORIAL

The Tyne Cot Memorial forms the north-eastern boundary of Tyne Cot Cemetery, which is situated between Passchendaele (now known as Passendale) and Zonnebeke. The name "Tyne Cottages" or "Tyne Cottis" was given by the Northumberland Fusiliers to a group of German blockhouses, or pill-boxes, situated near the level crossing on the Passchendaele-Broodseinde road. Three of these blockhouses still stand in the cemetery; the largest, which was captured on 4 October 1917 by the 3rd Australian Division, was chosen as the site for the Cross of Sacrifice by King George V during his pilgrimage to the cemeteries of the Western Front in Belgium and France in 1922. The Tyne Cot Cemetery is now the resting-place of nearly 12,000 soldiers of the Commonwealth Forces, the largest number of burials of any Commonwealth cemetery of either world war. It first came into being in October 1917 when one of the captured pill-boxes was used as an Advanced Dressing Station, resulting in some 350 burials between then and the end of March 1918. The cemetery was much enlarged after the Armistice by the concentration of over 11,500 graves from the battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck and from a few small burial grounds. The dates of death cover the four years from October 1914 to September 1918 inclusive. Unnamed graves in the cemetery number nearly 8,400, or seventy percent of the total, and the names of the unidentified soldiers who lie in them are inscribed on the Menin Gate and on the panels of the Memorial which stands to the rear of the cemetery.

The site of the Memorial is on high ground on the western slopes of the Passchendaele Ridge, from which the whole country to the English Channel lies open. It is in the middle of an agricultural district, with widely scattered farms and small villages. It represents the most desperate offensive fighting of the Commonwealth Armies in Belgium, as Ypres represents their most stubborn resistance, and it stands close to the farthest point in Belgium reached by Commonwealth arms in the First World War until the final advance to victory.

The Memorial, designed by Herbert Baker and with sculpture by F. V. Blundstone, is a semicircular flint wall 4.25 metres high and over 150 metres long, faced with panels of Portland stone on which are carved nearly 35,000 names of those who have no known grave. There are three apses and two rotundas: the central apse forms the New Zealand Memorial and bears the names of nearly 1,200 officers and men who gave their lives in the Battle of Broodseinde and in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele) in October 1917; the other two, as well as the rotundas and the wall itself, carry the names of United Kingdom dead who fell in the Salient between the 15 August 1917, when the Battle of Langemarck began, and the Armistice, in the Third and Fourth Battles of Ypres. Two domed arched pavilions mark the ends of the main wall, each dome being surmounted by a winged female figure with head bowed over a wreath.



A section of the Tyne Cot Memorial, skirting the north-eastern boundary of Tyne Cot Cemetery