

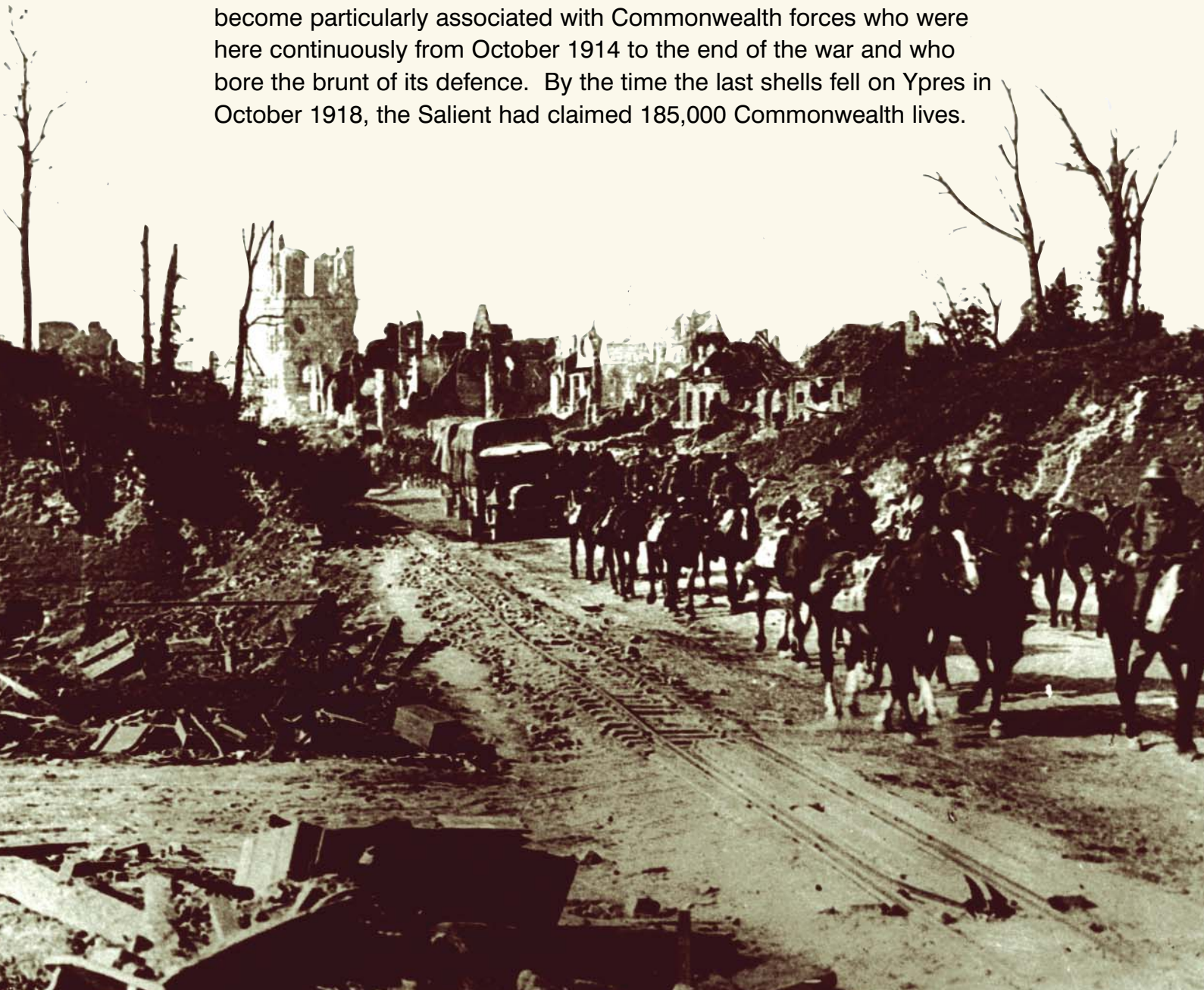


Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Ypres Salient

Between 1914 and 1918 hundreds of thousands of soldiers fought doggedly over this cramped corner of the Western Front in four years of concentrated warfare. The desolate battlefield landscape that defines the Salient's horrors in popular memory is long since gone but many reminders of the profound impression the war made here remain today, perhaps the most potent being the Commonwealth cemeteries and memorials.

Although the armies of many nations served in the Salient, Ypres has become particularly associated with Commonwealth forces who were here continuously from October 1914 to the end of the war and who bore the brunt of its defence. By the time the last shells fell on Ypres in October 1918, the Salient had claimed 185,000 Commonwealth lives.



The policy of burying British Empire and Dominion troops where they fell, in the lands that they had given their lives to defend, has left behind a unique record of the war that was fought here. Ypres is probably best remembered today for the horrors of Passchendaele, and many thousands did indeed suffer and die in the Salient's great battles. But the long, long intervals between saw almost as many again fall victim to the perils of everyday life in this most hostile of environments. It is easy to forget that the first actions at Ypres were fought by a small, mobile British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in a relatively untouched landscape of villages, fields and farms, when the enduring image of the Salient is one of the great machinery of war, of massive opposing armies locked together in a landscape of unbelievable desolation. The Salient's war has many faces and the cemeteries and memorials that remain chart its progress of escalating involvement, destruction and loss.



Front cover: *The Menin Road, Ypres*

Commemoration in context – the Salient as a battle ground

The Salient – a great arc of defensive lines running from Boesinghe in the north almost to Ploegsteert in the south, with the ancient city of Ypres at its heart – was formed late in 1914 after the British Expeditionary Force and its French allies clashed head-on with German forces in the First Battle of Ypres, the last mobile actions the war would see for nearly four years. By that winter, the war of movement was over and the Salient defined as opposing forces dug-in, establishing the first primitive trench systems.

In the spring of 1915, the Germans, by now committed to a demanding war on two fronts, in the east (against Russia) and in France and Belgium in the west, took the offensive in the Second Battle of Ypres in a final attempt to take the city to secure a more sound footing for defence on the Western Front. Ypres withstood, but the Allies were driven from the surrounding ridges and left holding a much reduced salient. Occupying to great advantage the high ground, the German artillery now poured shells into the Salient, systematically destroying the city, and its surrounding villages, that they had failed to take.

Thereafter the line barely moved for more than two years. The civilian population were

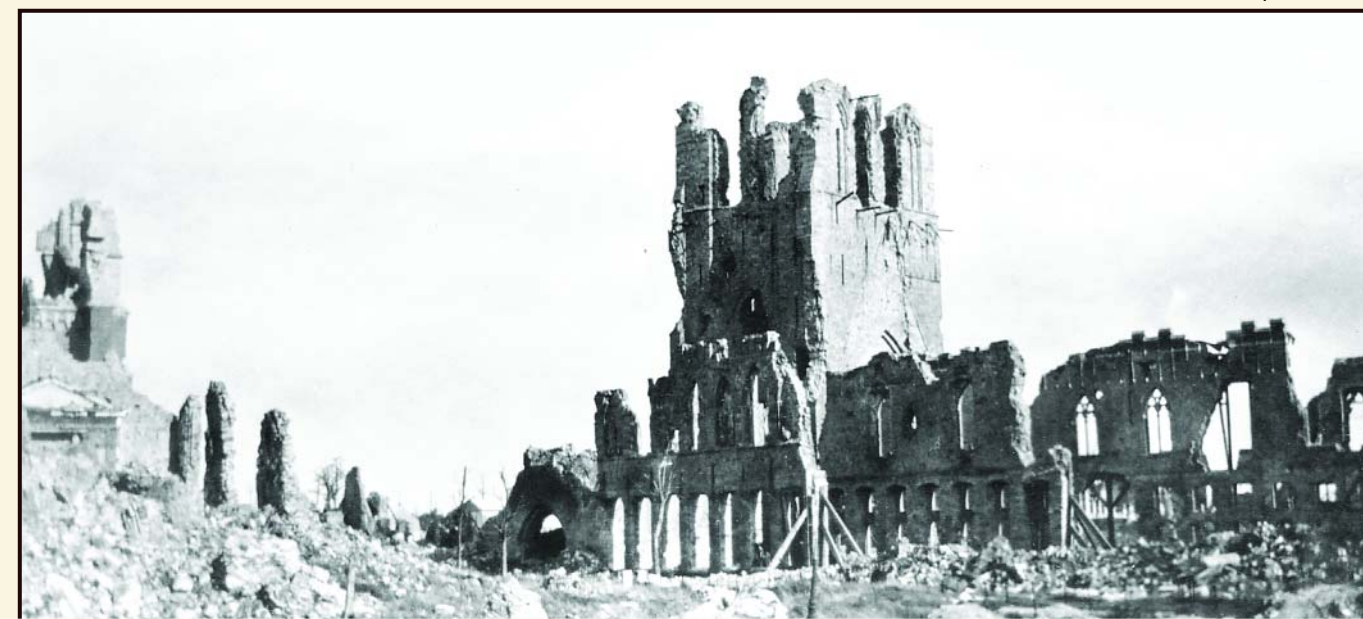
evacuated and the occupying forces settled into the long, grinding routine of trench warfare that was daily life in the Ypres Salient.

In 1917 the Allies once more took the offensive. After the June success of Messines, the notorious fighting associated with the Third Battle of Ypres inched allied lines forward in terrible autumn weather, the wettest Flanders had seen in over 70 years. Conditions were appalling, losses huge. By early November, with the taking of the shattered ruins that had been Passchendaele village, the offensive was brought to a close leaving the Allies holding an extended but highly vulnerable salient.

In spring 1918, following the earlier capitulation of Russia in the east, the Germans began their great offensive in the west aimed at finishing the war. The sweeping advances reclaimed all of the ground the Allies had won the autumn before and more, pushing the Salient back practically to the gates of Ypres itself. But by August, the Germans were spent. The Allies retook the offensive and, through August and September, swept across the old battlefields and beyond in the Advance to Victory. By mid-October the front had left Ypres, and the Salient, behind.

For a more detailed account of the war in the Ypres Salient go to www.cwgc.org/ypres

The ruins of the Cloth Hall in Ypres, 1919





Ramparts Cemetery, Lille Gate, Ypres in 1919 and below, today



'Unknowns' in Hooze Crater Cemetery



Tyne Cot Cemetery, with German blockhouse in 1919 and below, today



AFTER THE ARMISTICE: making today's cemeteries

By 1919, the Ypres Salient was a desolate place, thickly sown with hundreds of soldiers' cemeteries, many more than can be seen here today. Most were little more than bare expanses of trodden earth, just a few untidy rows of graves marked by battered pieces of wood. There were little clusters of graves in fields, on canal banks, by roadsides, and countless bodies still lay out on the old battlefields.

With the civilian population anxious to return to rebuild their lives, the grisly business of bringing order to the dead began. Most of the more substantial cemeteries were left where they were, but numerous smaller ones were gathered into larger cemeteries nearby.

The bulk of this work was carried out by Army Graves Concentration Units who also undertook the massive task of clearing the battlefields. Their meticulous searches brought in thousands more bodies, those of soldiers killed in the major actions that could not be recovered in the heat of the fight. Many had lain unburied for years and all clues to their identity had been lost. These unidentified dead – more than 40,000 – account for one third of the marked burials in the Salient's cemeteries today. Their headstones, inscribed A SOLDIER OF THE GREAT WAR, KNOWN UNTO GOD, can be found in profusion, particularly in the new 'concentration' cemeteries made for them after the war

Once filled and closed, the cemeteries passed into the care of the Imperial (now Commonwealth) War Graves Commission, who completed the work of construction, turning them into the permanent memorials you see today.

WHAT THE CEMETERIES CAN TELL US

If 'read' properly, the Commonwealth cemeteries have much to say about everyday life and war in the Salient. Headstones record the units that served

where and when, their dates charting incidents, successes and failures. Cemetery locations, their size, the way they are laid out, even their names, give clues to the circumstances in which they were made. More than 150 of these cemeteries crowd the old Salient area, far more than can be mentioned here individually, but many share common characteristics and this selection will hopefully give visitors an idea of what to look for, of how to read the cemetery they are visiting.

Only general directions are given here for the cemeteries – those planning to visit can get further details from the Commission's web site or from the Michelin atlas overprinted with cemetery and memorial locations. See back page for details. Any cemetery in the Salient is worth a visit: if you do so, be sure to refer to the on-site register of burials, which includes a historical note on the cemetery's origin and a plan. Throughout this text, place names are spelt as they were during the war – many have changed today – as these have been retained in cemetery names.

1914: THE FIRST GRAVES

The BEF lost 10,500 dead in the desperate scramble of First Ypres – a low figure compared to the 77,000 who died three years later in the third battle, but devastatingly significant to such a small force that had already lost heavily in the previous weeks. Less than 2,000 of the 1914 dead have known graves. At this early stage in the war there were no established military cemeteries in the Ypres area and most of the graves made at the time are found in civil cemeteries and churchyards. **Ypres Town Cemetery** has 120 graves from October and November 1914 grouped in plots among the civil graves. The **Town Cemetery Extension** has a further 127, among them – in Plot 3, Row AA – several members of the First Division Staff, who were practically wiped out on 31 October 1914 when their headquarters at Hooze Chateau took

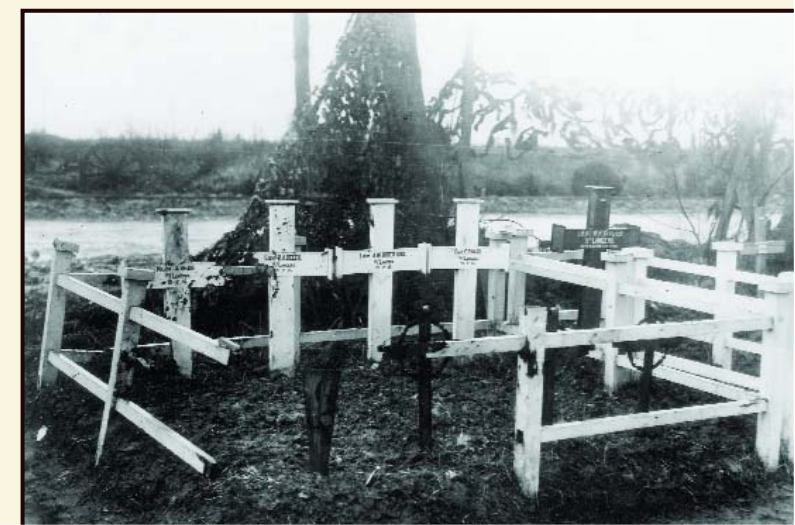
a direct hit from a shell. **Zillebeke Churchyard** has 17 identified graves of 1914, most of them guards or cavalry officers. Some of these graves from the earliest months of the war are marked by private family memorials erected before it was decided that all Commonwealth dead should have headstones of standard design.

SAFE BEHIND THE LINES

By the winter of 1914 it was clear that the war would not be 'over by Christmas' and, as the opposing forces began to prepare for a lengthy stay in the Salient, organised military burial grounds, particularly around medical posts, began to be established. Some of these cemeteries saw heavy use during Second Ypres and would continue to be used for practically the whole war. Today, many of them retain their wartime plan and character.

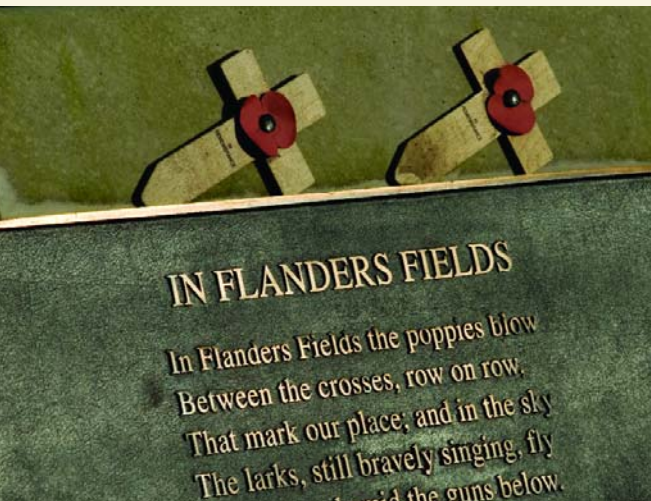
Brandhoek, between Ypres and Poperinghe, was considered relatively safe from shell fire and in May 1915 **Brandhoek Military Cemetery** was begun in a field adjoining a dressing station. It continued in use until July 1917 and the arrival of three Australian casualty clearing stations in anticipation of the forthcoming allied offensive prompted the opening of **Brandhoek New Military Cemetery**. In the space of two months, 530 Commonwealth and 28 German burials were made there. In August, a third cemetery, the **New Military Cemetery No 3**, was begun and used until May 1918.

Early graves in Ypres Town Cemetery, damaged by later shell fire



ADVANCED DRESSING STATIONS

After the regimental aid posts, advanced dressing stations were the most forward of the army's medical facilities and in the Salient some of these operated in vulnerable positions, just behind the lines, for long periods. The haphazard burial patterns in some of the associated cemeteries, made under the constant threat of shell fire, bring home the extremely difficult and dangerous conditions in which the medical services worked.



Essex Farm Cemetery, to the north of Ypres, was not far from the Yser Canal, which actually formed the front line in this part of the Salient between April 1915 and August 1917. The concrete buildings used by the dressing stations operating here during that period can still be seen in the cemetery today, and it was here that John McCrae wrote his poem *In Flanders Fields* while serving with the Canadian Army Medical Corps in May 1915. Almost 1,200 burials were made here during the war and the lack of plan in the layout – the headstones in some rows crammed shoulder to shoulder – give some indication of the urgency with which they were made.



Canadian Headstones at Railway Dugouts Burial Ground

A little south-east of Ypres, west of Zillebeke village, and very near the front line, the scant shelter offered by a railway embankment at Transport Farm attracted advanced dressing stations. Burials began at **Railway Dugouts Burial Ground** in April 1915, made in small groups without any definite arrangement, and continued until the armistice. By that time 1,700 were known and marked, but in the summer of 1917 a considerable number had been completely obliterated by shell fire. Today, more than 330 of those known to have been buried in the cemetery, and in two other cemeteries brought into Railway Dugouts after the war, are commemorated by special memorials.

Special memorials

Special memorial headstones – those that commemorate men whose known graves in certain cemeteries were later lost or destroyed – are particularly numerous in the Ypres Salient. Here, where continuous violent activity was concentrated into a restricted area, some of the cemeteries inevitably got caught up in the action.

Several such in the commune of Zillebeke, a particular Salient 'hot-spot', suffered badly. **Maple Copse Cemetery** was used by advanced dressing stations in June 1916. The cemetery was mostly destroyed in later fighting, and when it was enclosed after the armistice only 26 of the 256 named graves known to have been made there could be definitely identified. A further 52 graves were found and marked as unknowns. Today, special memorial headstones commemorate 230 men whose graves in the cemetery were destroyed.

CASUALTY CLEARING STATIONS

Though removed from the front line, the closely packed headstones of these great cemeteries say much about the huge cost in life expended in holding the Salient. Casualty clearing stations were usually established beyond the furthest range of the German artillery, on the main lines of communication between the battlefields and military bases in the rear. **Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery**, west of Poperinghe, was begun by the 15th French Evacuation Hospital but by June 1915 was being used by Commonwealth casualty clearing stations based at Remy railway siding. Today, the cemetery's 9,900 Commonwealth and 880 burials of other nationalities (mainly French and German) make it the second largest Commonwealth cemetery in Belgium.

Many cemeteries in the Salient still bear their original soldiers' names and a few kilometres to the north-west of Poperinghe is a group of three casualty clearing station cemeteries, wryly called **Mendinghem, Dozinghem and Bandaghem (Haringhe) Military Cemeteries**, in imitation of Flemish place names. Mendinghem was established in July 1916, and the two others the following July in anticipation of Third Ypres.



Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery

Groups of special memorial headstones in Seaforth Cemetery



Right: Maple Copse Cemetery during the war

Left: A temporary marker records lost graves at La Clytte Military Cemetery



FRONT LINE

Between the spring of 1915 and summer of 1917 the front barely moved and, while it was never quiet in the Salient, this relative stability encouraged fighting units to begin cemeteries right in, or just behind, the front line. Some were used only for a matter of weeks, others for much longer, and many took on a distinct divisional, or even regimental, identity.

Prowse Point Military Cemetery



Some of these small cemeteries remain today, particularly to the south of Ypres, in almost their original plan. Others formed the nucleus for larger cemeteries when the surrounding battlefields were cleared. In these cemeteries, the original wartime burials can generally be distinguished by their irregular layout.

Prowse Point Military Cemetery, well to the south of Ypres on the edge of Ploegsteert Wood, is one of the earliest. Begun by the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers and the 1st Royal Warwicks in November 1914, it continued in use until April 1918.

The Bluff, a narrow, wooded ridge to the south-east of Ypres, where the opposing trenches had been forced close together, was another 'hot-spot' which saw almost continuous activity for the whole of the war. Here, three closely grouped cemeteries tell vivid stories of life in the front line. **Hedge Row Trench Cemetery**, the most forward of the three, was used between March 1915 and August 1917, but was so severely damaged by shell fire that after the war it proved impossible to pinpoint the positions of the individual graves. Headstones for the 98 men buried there are arranged in a circle around the central cross or placed against the boundary walls. **First DCLI Cemetery** contains 76 graves, 50 of them officers and men of the First Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, all of whom died between April and July 1915. A row of graves was added from the battlefield after the war. **Woods Cemetery** was used between April 1915 and September 1917 by units holding the sector and their field ambulances. The layout of the 326 graves is extremely irregular, reflecting the conditions of burial at a time when the front line was only just beyond the wood.

South-west of Ypres, the whole progress of the war can be charted in the **Voormezeele Enclosures**. Begun in the spring of 1915, the original regimental grouping of graves made by infantry units that held this part of the line can still be made out in the plots of the current cemeteries. **Enclosure No 1** has graves made by the artillery in the autumn of 1917 when they were brought forward in the wake of the Third Ypres advances, and a few made by the Germans when the cemetery fell into their hands in the spring of 1918. After the war, graves brought into **Enclosure No 3** include those of many men of the units that had retaken the ground the following September.

BATTLEFIELD

Battlefield cemeteries – those arising from specific actions or incidents, made quickly, at the time, in the heat of battle – are not common in the Ypres Salient. Although the major battles, particularly Third Ypres, left many battlefield cemeteries behind, most were moved into larger cemeteries after the war, or their identities became blurred by continued use or later concentrations from the battlefields.

The clearest examples arise from the week-long Battle of Messines, one of the Salient's unqualified successes for Commonwealth forces, which stamped a distinct identity on some of the cemeteries it left behind. Early on the morning of 7 June 1917, nineteen great mines blew the Germans off the Messines Ridge to the south of Ypres, bringing the first significant movement this section of the line had seen since late 1914. By evening the ridge and all principal objectives had been secured and in the days that followed some of the dead were recovered and buried in a number of small cemeteries on the ground taken.

Lone Tree Cemetery, named after a crater made by one of the mines, has many graves from the first day of the battle, mostly from the Royal Irish Rifles of the 36th (Ulster) Division. More of the division's dead are buried in nearby **Spanbroekmolen British Cemetery** which was destroyed in later operations but



First DCLI Cemetery



Woods Cemetery with distant views of Ypres



An Australian headstone at Toronto Avenue Cemetery



Suffolk Cemetery

La Belle Alliance Cemetery





rediscovered after the war. Bethlehem Farm, just outside the village of Messines, was captured by the 3rd Australian Division on 7 June and two cemeteries were made nearby. Most of the 44 graves in **Bethlehem Farm East Cemetery** are of Australians killed between 7 and 10 June 1917. Further south, in the fringes of Ploegsteert Wood, is **Toronto Avenue Cemetery**, in which lie another 78 Australians killed between 7 and 10 June. Nearby **Mud Corner Cemetery** was begun on 7 June and continued to be used as a front line cemetery by New Zealand and Australian units until December 1917.

Third Ypres left more than 40,000 named graves in cemeteries throughout the Salient but few of the associated battlefield cemeteries remain in anything like their original form. Those that relate most directly to the battle are to the north and east of Ypres.

After the action had moved on, a cluster of small cemeteries around Boesinghe were begun in what had been no-man's land before the battle began on 31 July. Among these are **Track X, No Man's Cot, Welsh (Caesar's Nose)** and **Aeroplane** cemeteries. Almost all of the 45 graves in **Bridge House Cemetery**, north-east of Ypres, belong to the 59th (North Midland) Division and date from 26-28 September, the battle of Polygon Wood. The cemetery was made at the end of the month. The location and layout of **Polygon Wood Cemetery**, east of Ypres, might suggest that it too relates to the fighting of September 1917 when the wood was finally taken by the Australians, but nearly all of the 103 graves (including 60 New Zealanders) were made by front line troops during the winter months.

The Second Battle of Ypres, the determined German thrust to the north of the Salient, left 15,500 Commonwealth dead, only 3,000 of whom have known graves. In this battle, the Allies were very much on the defensive and most of the missing were left behind when the Salient contracted, but some cemeteries contain graves that give snapshots of specific incidents. On 25 and 26 April 1915, there was severe fighting

Lone Tree Cemetery

north-east of Ypres, on the road between Wieltje and St Julien, and some 150 of the dead were buried on the spot at **Seaforth Cemetery (Cheddar Villa)**. Among the dead are 100 men of the 2nd Seaforth Highlanders. The cemetery was badly damaged by later shell fire and there are many special memorials representing the graves lost. Row C of **Divisional Cemetery**, a little west of Ypres, contains the collective grave of 23 men of the 2nd Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment who were killed in the German gas attack at Hill 60 on 5 May 1915. The Germans had introduced gas to the Western Front two weeks before in the battle's opening moves.

No battlefield cemeteries remain from 1914, but later advances reclaimed parts of the old battlefields and allowed for some of the dead to be recovered from what had been no-mans land. **Irish House Cemetery** which was begun in the aftermath of Messines, gives us a glimpse of one of these early actions. Buried in Row A are 33 Officers and men of the 1st Gordon Highlanders (all but three unidentified) killed in the 3rd Division's attack on Wytschaete in December 1914.

1918: the German gains

In 1918 the war of movement returned to the Western Front with the German spring offensive. Many of the Salient's Commonwealth cemeteries fell into German hands in March and were not regained until the autumn. During this time some of the cemeteries were used by the Germans, but mainly for the burial of Commonwealth dead left behind as the Allies withdrew.

Other cemeteries that had been in relatively safe positions now found themselves in the front line and some new cemeteries were begun. West of Ypres, **Hagle Dump Cemetery** at Elverdinghe and **Red Farm Military Cemetery**, just beyond Vlamertinghe, were begun in April 1918 and nearly half of the 46 burials in the latter arose from local fighting on 27 April.



Polygon Wood Cemetery in German hands, 1918, and right, the cemetery today



CONCENTRATION CEMETERIES

Numerous cemeteries illustrate the intensive post-war concentration work that went on in the Ypres Salient. They range in size from a few hundred graves to many thousands, but all are notable for the high number of 'unknowns' they contain.

Many grew around existing dressing station, front line or battlefield cemeteries. East of Ypres, **Perth Cemetery (China Wall)** was a front line cemetery of 1917, expanded from 130 to nearly 2,000 burials, and **Hooze Crater Cemetery**, another 1917 cemetery of 76 graves, grew to nearly 6,000 from the battlefields of Zillebeke, Zantvoorde and Gheluvelt. But perhaps the most famous example of a cemetery of this kind is **Tyne Cot Cemetery**.

'Tyne Cottage', a barn named by the Northumberland Fusiliers, stood near the level crossing on the Passchendaele-Broodseinde road. It was captured by the 2nd Australian Division on 4 October 1917 in the advance on Passchendaele and a German blockhouse – it and three others remain in the cemetery today – used as an advanced dressing station. By the following March, 343 graves had been made in an irregular pattern around it. The cemetery was

greatly enlarged after the Armistice from the battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck. With nearly 12,000 graves it is now the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world in terms of burials. More than 8,000 are unidentified. At the suggestion of King George V, who visited the cemetery in 1922, the Cross of Sacrifice was placed on the original blockhouse.

Some of the concentration cemeteries made in their entirety after the war are removed from the other Salient cemeteries, right out on the old battlefields themselves.

To the south-east of Ypres, many who died in the desperate fighting round Zantvoorde, Zillebeke and Gheluvelt in late October 1914 were buried in **Zantvoorde British Cemetery**. Most of its 1,600 burials are unidentified, but among the named graves are more than 100 of the 1914 dead buried at the time in cemeteries behind the German lines. To the north-east, deep in the battlefields of 1917, towards the furthest limits reached by the Passchendaele offensive, lies **Poelcapelle British Cemetery**. By far the majority of the 7,500 graves (6,300 of them unknowns) date from the last five months of 1917, but there are also many graves of 1914 and 1915.

Tyne Cot Cemetery and the Tyne Cot Memorial

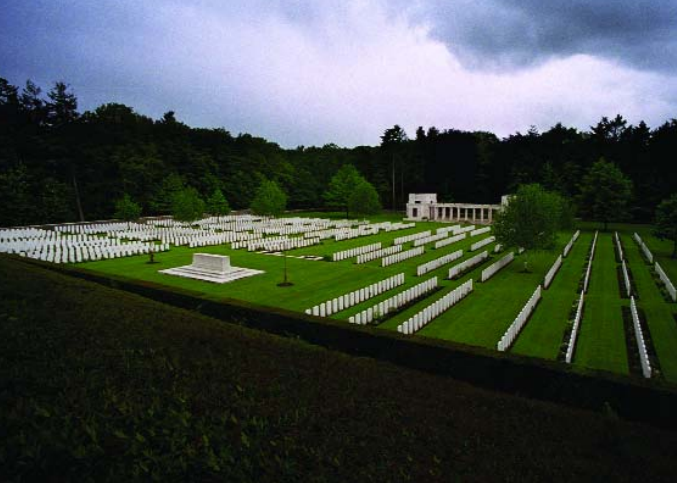


Graves Concentration

The postwar work of the Graves Concentration Units was documented by Corporal Ivan Bawtree, a photographer attached to a Graves Registration Section active in Ypres in 1919. Bawtree went on to work for the Imperial War Graves Commission. Here, the 129th Exhumation Company combs the Passchendaele battlefield. When a body is found, it is carefully searched for clues to its identity before being removed for burial, in this case to **Passchendaele New British Cemetery**. This is a concentration cemetery made after the war from more than 2,000 bodies, three-quarters of them unidentified, brought in from the 1917 battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck.

Despite the rigorous searches, bodies continued to be discovered in numbers in the Salient right up to the start of the Second World War and even today up to thirty sets of remains are found on the old Western Front every year. South of Ypres, **Bedford House Cemetery**, enlarged to more than 5,000 burials by post-war concentrations, has an entire plot filled with bodies discovered all over the Salient in the 1930s. **Cement House Cemetery** (2,500 burials) north of Ypres, begun by field ambulances and units of the line in the autumn of 1917, was also considerably enlarged with graves from the battlefields and has plots that continue to be extended for the burial of newly discovered remains even now.





The New Zealand Memorial at Buttes New British Cemetery



Above and below: The Ploegsteert Memorial



A craftsman at work on the Menin Gate Memorial in the early 1920s



The Missing

But the cemeteries only tell part of the story of the Ypres Salient. For the rest we must look to the great memorials to the missing where 100,000 of the Commonwealth's dead are remembered by name, the men who have no known grave. Eighty percent of the missing were killed in the Salient's major battles and, while many of their bodies were recovered after the war, more than half of them were lost without trace.

When the Imperial War Graves Commission considered how to commemorate the missing of the Ypres Salient, it soon became clear that a single memorial would be insufficient. In the end, five were needed. The largest of these is the **Menin Gate Memorial** in Ypres itself. One of the best known Commonwealth memorials anywhere in the world, it sits astride the road along which hundreds of thousands of troops passed on their way to the front. The memorial commemorates more than 54,000 officers and men from Canada, Australia, undivided India and South Africa, and those from the United Kingdom who died before 16 August 1917. To the north-east of Ypres, the **Tyne Cot Memorial** near Zonnebeke, commemorates a further 35,000 United Kingdom and New Zealand dead who died after that date, most of them during the Passchendaele Offensive. The memorial stands close to the furthest point reached by Commonwealth forces in Belgium before the final advance to victory. New Zealand chose to commemorate its dead on memorials closely associated with the battlefields on which they had lost their lives. More than 1,100 are listed among the missing at Tyne Cot, and there are other New Zealand memorials at **Messines** (in Messines Ridge British Cemetery) and at **Polygon Wood** (in Buttes New British Cemetery).

Ploegsteert, at the southern limit of the Ypres Salient, was beyond the range of the major offensives, but the **Ploegsteert Memorial**, which stands in the Royal Berks Cemetery Extension, commemorates more than 11,000 United Kingdom and South African servicemen who died in this sector during the course of day-to-day trench warfare that characterised this part of the line.

Right: The Ypres Menin Gate Memorial



The Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is responsible for marking and maintaining the graves of those members of the Commonwealth forces who died during the two world wars, for building and maintaining memorials to the dead whose graves are unknown and for providing records and registers of these 1.7 million burials and commemorations found in most countries throughout the world.



Spanbroekmolen British Cemetery

Enquiries about the location of individual burials and commemorations in Belgium may be directed to either of the offices below or to the Debt of Honour Register - a search by surname database at the Commission's web site at **www.cwgc.org**

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The Commonwealth cemeteries and memorials of the Ypres Salient are included in **Cemeteries and Memorials in Belgium and Northern France**, a specially overprinted Michelin road atlas available from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. To order a copy contact either of the above offices.

Visitors with a mobility impairment may have difficulty with access to some cemeteries. For more information contact the Commission's Head Office.

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