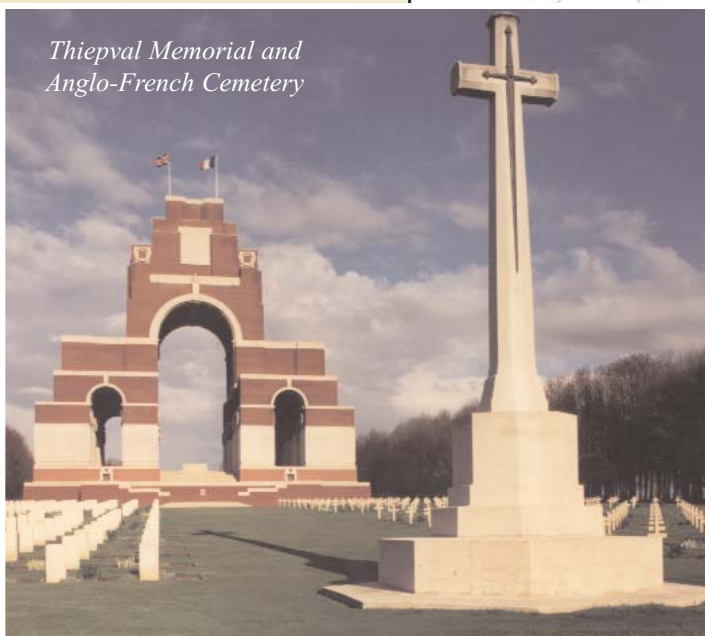
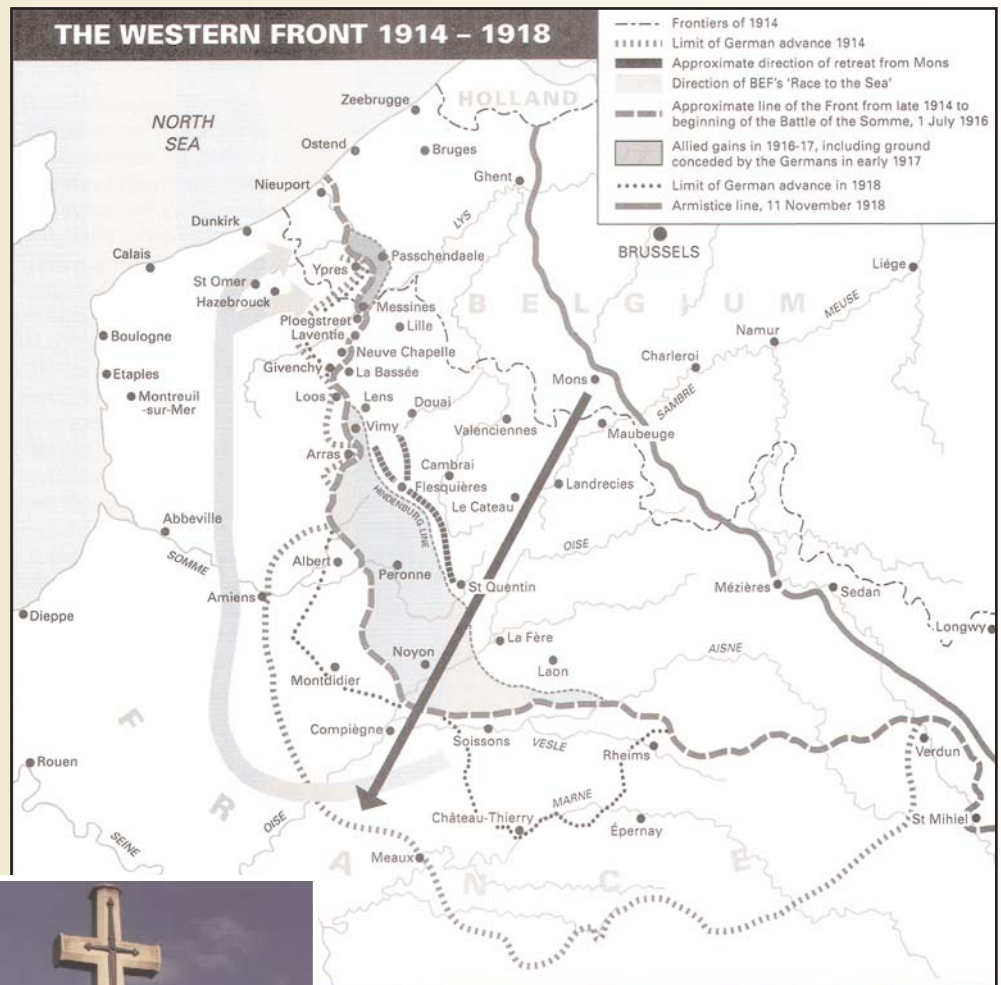




Commonwealth War Graves Commission

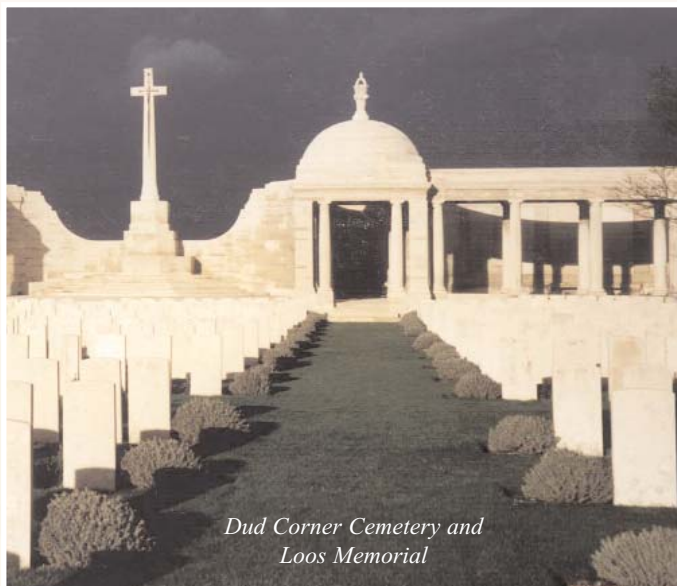
THE WORK OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION IN FRANCE

The First World War claimed the lives of 530,000 Commonwealth servicemen and women in France. Commonwealth forces fought there continuously from the arrival of the British Expeditionary Force in August 1914 until the Armistice of 11 November 1918. Following a few weeks of sweeping movement by both sides, the Western Front settled into the stagnation of trench warfare, punctuated by many costly offensives with little gain. The stalemate ended only with the German breakthrough in the spring of 1918 and the subsequent Allied advance to victory.



One of the earliest actions of the Western Front involving the British Expeditionary Force was the battle of Le Cateau on 26 August 1914. The town remained in German hands and many of the 698 burials in **Le Cateau Military Cemetery** were made by the Germans from the battleground of 1914. The 3,740 members of the British Expeditionary Force with no known grave who died between August and early October 1914 are commemorated on the **La Ferte-sous-Jouarre Memorial**.

The regular soldiers of the BEF suffered heavily in the early months of the war and as the need for more men increased Territorial and New Army units began to arrive on the Western Front. The British were soon joined by other Commonwealth nations too, the first time that the Empire, as it was at the time, had fought together as a whole.



*Dud Corner Cemetery and
Loos Memorial*

Indian troops arrived on the Western Front in October 1914 and famously fought at Neuve Chapelle in March 1915. The harsh climate of Northern France caused much illness amongst their troops and they were withdrawn from the Western Front in December 1915 to fight elsewhere, having suffered 6,000 deaths, over 4,700 of whom are commemorated on the **Neuve Chapelle Memorial**.

The Battle of Loos which took place on the 25 September to the 8 October 1915 was a disaster for the British who fought there; thousands of men were lost in just two weeks. Over 20,000 of the dead have no known grave and are commemorated on the **Loos Memorial** which forms the side and back of **Dud Corner Cemetery**. This cemetery contains over 1,800 casualties of which over 60% are unidentified. **Loos British Cemetery** contains 2,849 British and Canadian casualties. **St Mary's A. D. S. Cemetery** is a post-war battlefield clearance cemetery, established on the site of an Advanced Dressing Station, it contains the graves of 1,810 soldiers, of whom the majority are unidentified.

The main Allied attack on the Western Front during 1916, the Battle of the Somme, is famous chiefly on account of the deaths of almost 20,000 British soldiers on the first day of the battle, 1 July. The attack, on a 23 kilometre front east of Albert, ran from 1 July until 18 November.

The area is dotted with Commonwealth cemeteries as well as the imposing

Thiepval Memorial which commemorates over 72,000 casualties who died in the Somme prior to 20 March 1918 and who have no known grave. Over 90% of those named on the memorial died between July and November 1916. At the foot of the Thiepval Memorial lies **Thiepval Anglo-French Cemetery** which was created to represent the losses of the French and Commonwealth nations. 300 French and 300 Commonwealth casualties rest here, the vast majority of whom are unidentified.

The South African Brigade arrived in France in 1916 and first saw action at the Battle of the Somme. Their greatest trial was at Delville Wood where they fought in July 1916 with heavy losses. Delville Wood is now the site of the **South African National Memorial. Delville Wood Cemetery** was created after the Armistice when graves were brought in from a few small Somme cemeteries and isolated sites. Almost all the burials date from July to September 1916 and there are now 5,523 burials of the First World War in this cemetery, mostly unidentified.

*The Somme battlefield
at Thiepval*

The Battle of Arras was fought by Commonwealth troops from the 9 April until the end of May 1917. Commonwealth losses were immense. **Faubourg-d'Amiens Cemetery** contains 2,651 Commonwealth casualties, largely from this offensive. The **Arras Memorial** which stands within the cemetery commemorates almost 35,000 servicemen from the United Kingdom, South Africa and New Zealand who died in the Arras sector between the spring of 1916 and 7 August 1918. Also within this cemetery is the **Arras Flying Services Memorial** which commemorates 992 Commonwealth airmen who were killed on the Western Front and have no known grave.



Vimy Crater Cemetery

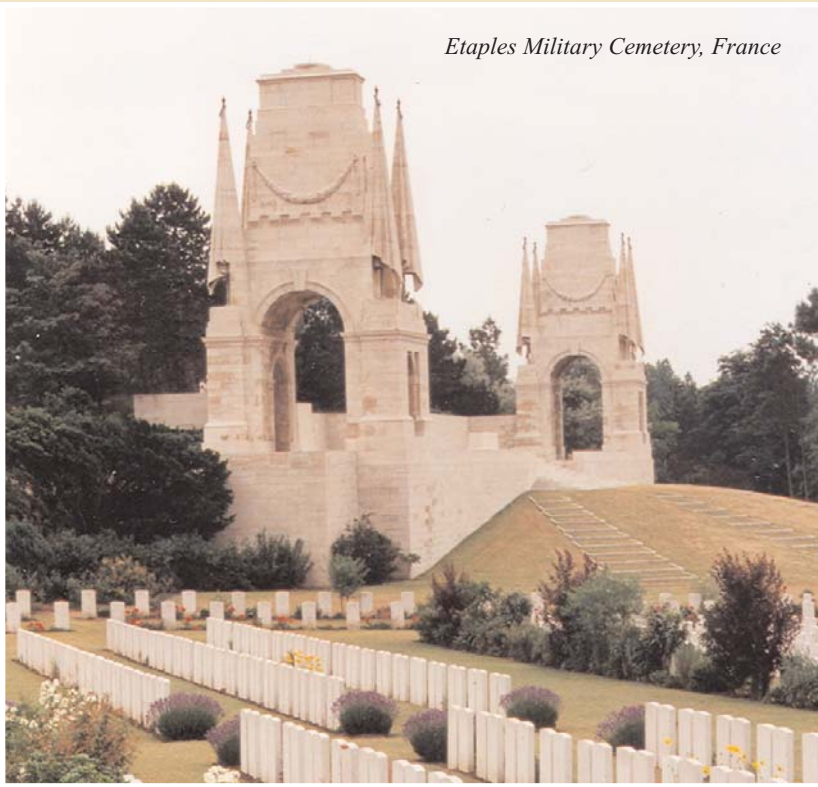
On the opening day of the Battle of Arras, 9 April 1917, the Canadian Corps who had been fighting on the Western Front since January 1915, scored a huge tactical victory; the capture of the German fortress of Vimy Ridge. After the war the highest point of the ridge was chosen as the site of the **Vimy Memorial**, commemorating all Canadians who served their country in battle during the First World War. It also bears the names of over 11,000 Canadians who died in France, many of them in the fight for Vimy Ridge, who have no known grave. At Thelus, **Zivy Crater Cemetery** and **Lichfield Crater Cemetery** are two mine craters used by the Canadians for the burial of bodies found on the Vimy battlefield. The craters are essentially mass graves and contain 53 and 57 First World War casualties respectively whose names are inscribed on the cemeteries' boundary walls.

In 1918 all Australian divisions on the Western Front were brought together in the Australian Corps. Perhaps their most famous engagement was at Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918, now the site of the **Villers-Bretonneux Memorial**, the Australian National Memorial erected to commemorate all Australian soldiers who fought on the Western Front. The 10,700 Australian servicemen actually named on the memorial died on the battlefields of the Somme, Arras, the German advance of 1918 and the Advance to Victory. **Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery** contains 2,141 United Kingdom, Australian and New Zealand casualties and was made after the Armistice when graves were brought in from other burial grounds in the area and from the battlefields.



Vimy Memorial

Etaples Military Cemetery, France



In May 1918 Commonwealth forces faced an overwhelming German attack which pushed the Allies back to the Marne. Huge casualties were suffered before the Allied counter-attack in early August which drove the Germans back and led to the eventual advance to victory. **The Soissons Memorial** commemorates almost 4,000 casualties who died during these actions and have no known grave.

Throughout the First World War the area around Etaples was the scene of immense concentrations of Commonwealth camps and hospitals. **Etaples Military Cemetery** is the largest Commonwealth cemetery in France and contains 10,773 Commonwealth burials of the First World War. The majority of these died in the hospitals and only 35 are unidentified. During the Second World War hospitals were once again stationed here until the evacuation of May 1940. There are also 119 Second World War casualties buried in Etaples Military Cemetery.

W.A.A.C tending graves at Abbeville, 1918.



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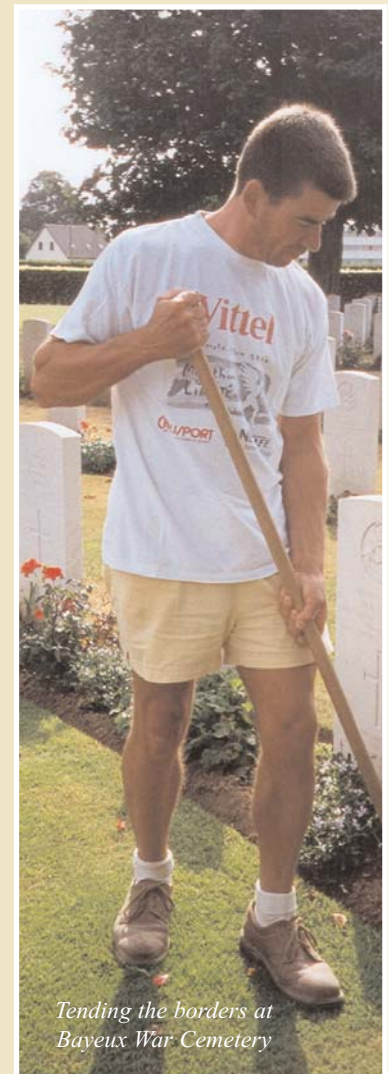
The Commission

It was in France that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission had the idea to commemorate the fallen of the First World War for ever and for ever. Since the Commission was founded in 1917, it has worked in partnership with France.

The Commission's commitment in France is to ensure that there are almost 3,000 cemeteries and 22 memorials to the fallen of the First World War, although most are concentrated in the north of France. Almost 575,000 Commonwealth casualties are buried in France.

The care of graves and memorials in France is undertaken by the Commission's horticultural teams in Beaurains, south of Arras, which employs over 1,000 staff, many of whom are being gardeners. In a country as large as France, the practice is the use of mobile groups, each responsible for a number of memorials within a region. About 20 administrative offices makes up one third of the Commission's workforce.

Horticultural



Tending the borders at Bayeux War Cemetery

The Commission's horticultural teams operate to the highest standards to keep the cemeteries in fitting memory of the fallen.

Today the Commission's horticultural teams in France are supported by a Senior Horticultural Officer up to 1,000 staff. These gardeners are where all the work is done.



Work in France

War Graves Commission's founder, Fabian Commonwealth's war dead equally and in 1917 it has had a close association

is the largest anywhere in the world. There are memorials to the missing all over the country, and the scene of bitter fighting in both world wars, where casualties are buried or commemorated in

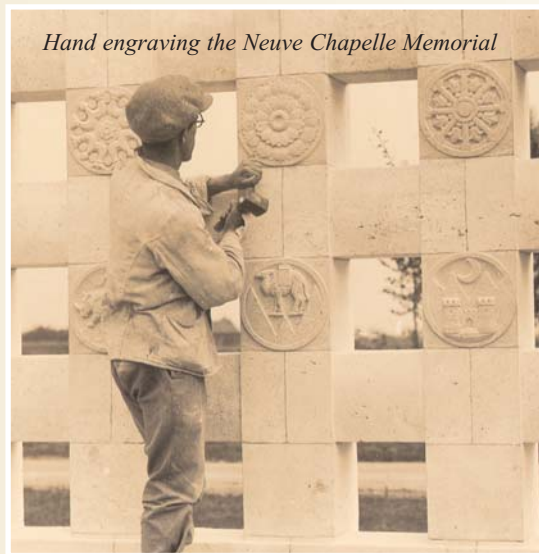
is directed from the Commission's complex in France around 425 members of staff, the majority of whom since the Commission has found that the best way to be responsible for a number of cemeteries and their administrative staff service the operation, which is a worldwide task.

	Cemeteries	Burials First World War	Burials Second World War
Pas de Calais	625	180,000	4,500
Nord	340	61,000	3,000
Somme	410	128,000	1,300
Calvados	116	200	25,000
	Memorials	Commemorations First World War	Commemorations Second World War
Pas de Calais	7	96,000	-
Nord	4	8,500	4,500
Somme	6	99,500	-
Calvados	1	-	1,800

Department

The main role of the horticultural department is to ensure that the original appearance and quality are maintained and that the cemeteries are attractive as memorials to the dead.

The cemeteries and memorials in France are tended by 33 mobile horticultural groups, the majority headed by a Head Gardener supported by 13 members of staff with an average of 20,000 graves to care for. The groups work from base sites where their equipment is stored.



Hand engraving the Neuve Chapelle Memorial

Works Department

The main role of the Works Department is to ensure that the grave markers, memorials and cemetery structures, which were designed by some of the most eminent architects, are maintained to the highest standard. This is achieved through regular inspection and maintenance cycles. The work is carried out by the Commission's team of highly skilled craftsmen together with the best local and international contractors.

Within the Beaurains facility are the central workshops of the Commission which produce high quality replacements of, and repairs to, many of the structural elements in wood, metal and masonry. The workshops also house state of the art equipment for manufacturing replacement headstones, memorial panels and road direction signs both for France and other countries throughout the world.

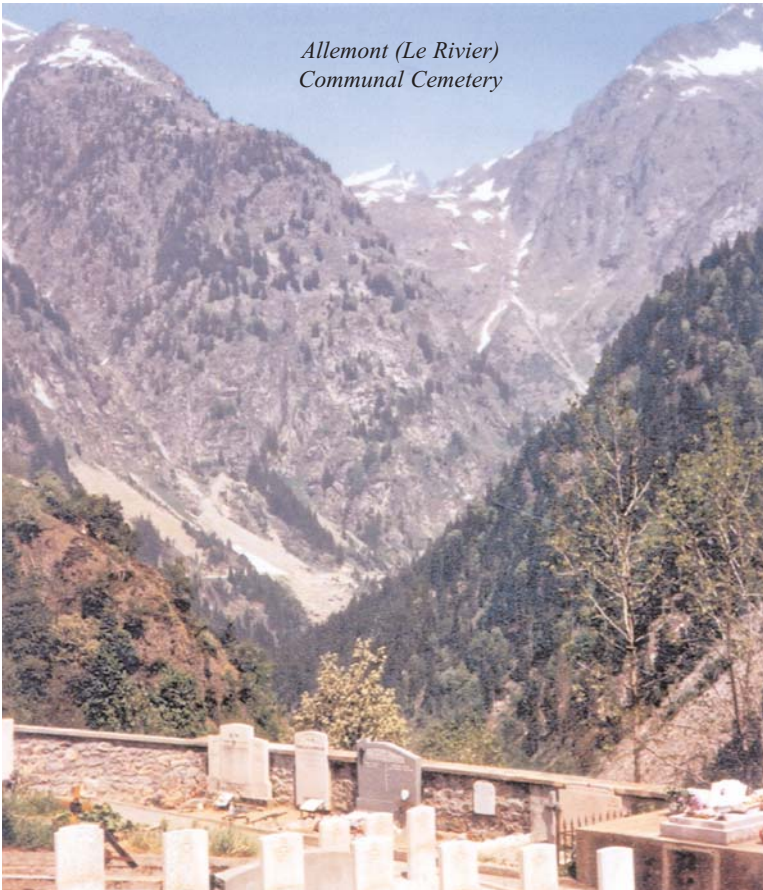


Central stores, Beaurains. A Senior Head Gardener selects tools for his team.



Engraving headstones in the workshops.

*Allemont (Le Rivier)
Communal Cemetery*



The Second World War claimed far fewer lives in France and 45,000 Commonwealth war dead are buried or commemorated there. The majority rest in large cemeteries in the north of the country, where most of the fighting took place. However the air war claimed many lives over remote parts of the country and many sailors were washed up in coastal areas, giving rise to the large number of communal cemeteries and churchyards containing one or a few burials.

The Second World War in France claimed only a tenth of the lives that had been lost there in the First. The losses of the British Expeditionary Force were few until the German's unleashed their Blitzkrieg, or 'Lightning War' at the beginning of May 1940 when they went on to subdue Holland, Belgium and France in little over six weeks. British and Allied troops were forced to fall back on the channel ports for evacuation, most being taken off by sea from Dunkirk.

The dead of the Dunkirk withdrawal are buried in hundreds of cemeteries and churchyards all over Northern France. The front swept over much of the ground which had been fought over during the First World War and many graves were added to cemeteries of that conflict. **Terlincthun British Cemetery, Wimille** was a substantial First World War cemetery. Wimille was devastated when the British garrison at Boulogne held back the Germans, giving vital cover to the withdrawal at Dunkirk. 149 Second World War casualties are buried here, alongside 4,377 First World War dead.

More than 4,500 soldiers were killed during the scramble back to the Channel ports and have no known grave. They are commemorated on the **Dunkirk Memorial, Dunkirk Town Cemetery** in which the memorial stands also contains a plot of 793 Second World War graves.

Many airmen of all Commonwealth nationalities lost their lives over France during the air war for Northern Europe. Most lie buried in communal cemeteries and churchyards all over France. **Choloy War Cemetery**



was created after the war for the burial of 461 casualties, mostly air force, whose graves had been recovered from isolated sites where they could not be maintained.

Between their dramatic evacuation from Dunkirk in May 1940 and the Normandy landings of June 1944, Commonwealth activity in France was limited to coastal raids and special operations. Following a successful raid on the port of St. Nazaire in March 1942, it was decided that a large scale raid on the port of Dieppe would unsettle the Germans and provide valuable experience for the future invasion. A mainly Canadian force of over 6,000 men attacked on 19 August. However the Germans had been alerted and the element of surprise was lost. Casualties were extremely heavy. The majority of the dead lie in **Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery** which contains 948 burials and commemorations, mostly from August 1942.



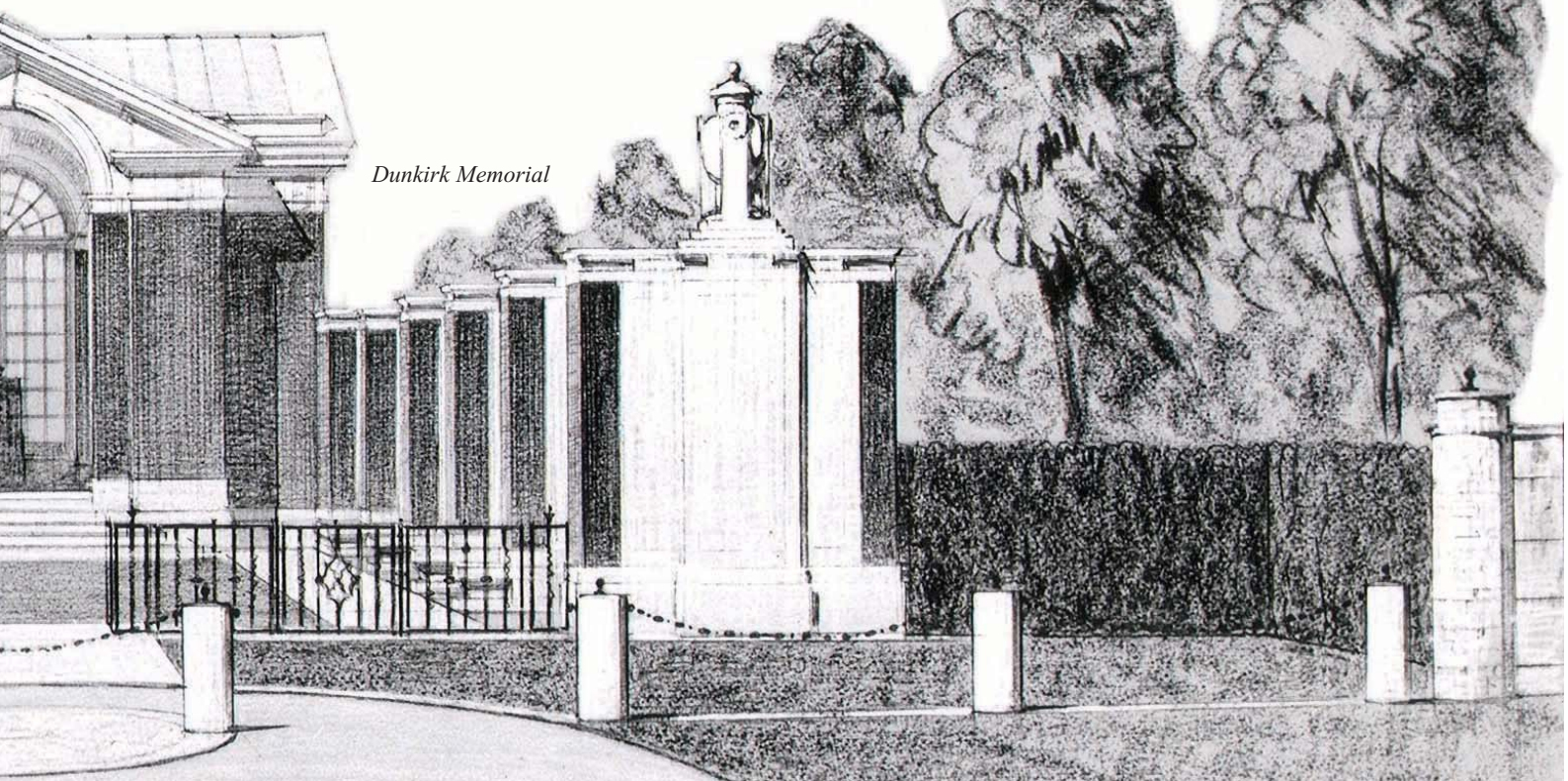
Choley War Cemetery



Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery

ever been undertaken. Despite the losses, D-Day went largely as planned and by the evening of 6 June it was clear that it had been a success and would secure the eventual liberation of France. There are 18 Commonwealth cemeteries in Normandy containing 22,000 casualties of the invasion. Many more can be found in communal cemeteries and churchyards.

The Dieppe Raid, although costly, was valuable in ensuring the later success of the D-Day landings of 6 June 1944, the largest air, land and sea operation which had

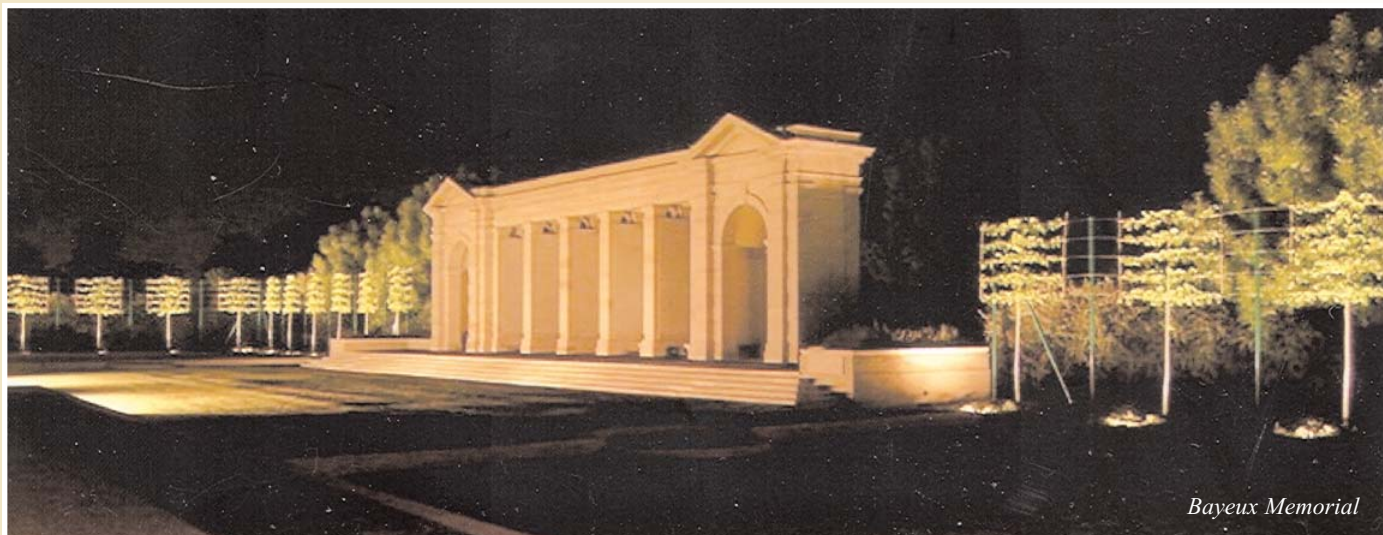


Dunkirk Memorial

The largest Second World War cemetery in France is **Bayeux War Cemetery** which contains 4,144 burials, mostly of the Battle of Normandy. Opposite this cemetery stands the **Bayeux Memorial** which commemorates over 1,800 casualties of the Commonwealth forces who died in Normandy and have no known grave. One of the smallest Second World War Commonwealth cemeteries in France is **Jerusalem War Cemetery**, Chouain which contains only 47 burials. The tiny hamlet of Jerusalem was the scene of bitter fighting

when a German armoured column sought to retake Bayeux shortly after its liberation.

Calais was liberated by the Canadians in September 1944 as they advanced up the French coast into Belgium in pursuit of retreating German forces. **Calais Canadian War Cemetery** contains the graves of 704 Commonwealth casualties, mostly from this period of fighting.



Contact Information

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 which are found in most countries throughout the world.

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

Acknowledgements

Map kindly provided by Malcolm Brown from his book, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the Western Front*.

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