



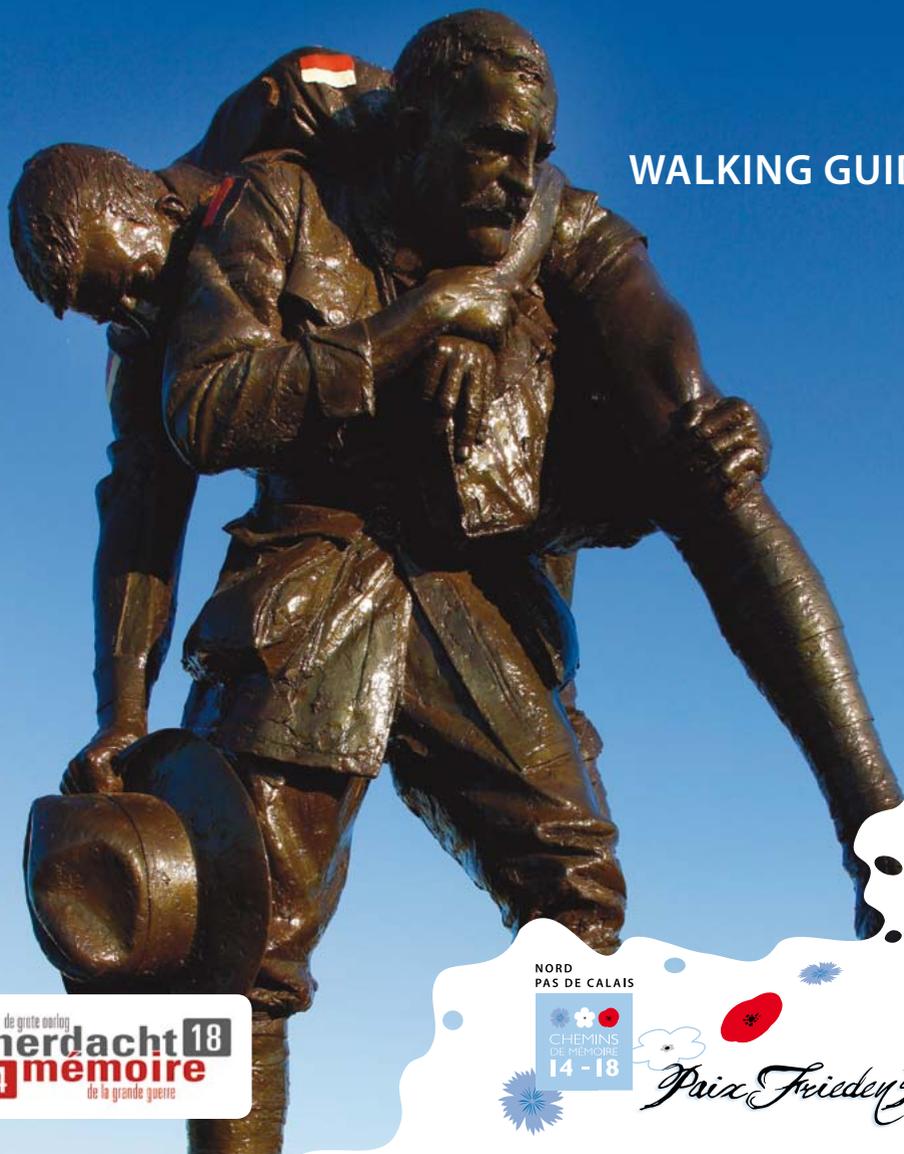
10 SITES
to visit

NORD
PAS DE CALAIS

The Battle of Fromelles



WALKING GUIDE



de gracie ontlog
herdacht 18
14 mémoire
de la grande guerre

NORD
PAS DE CALAIS



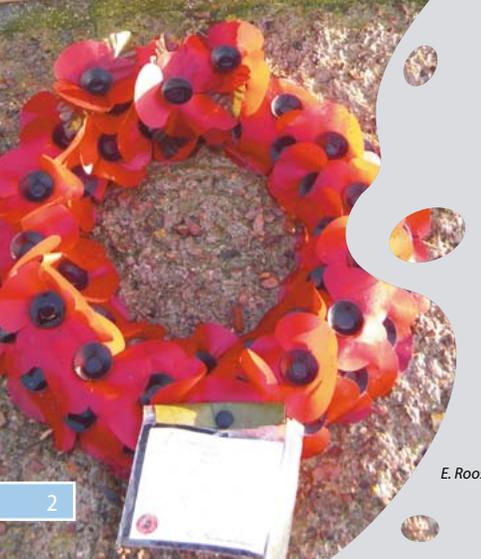
Paix Frieden Peace

Fromelles Church



The Battle of Fromelles (19–20 July 1916) was a brief but bloody episode of the Great War fought on the Western Front. Its purpose was to take pressure off the French and the British forces in the Battle of the Somme, a major offensive started on 1 July some 50 miles to the south. The fighting at Fromelles lasted twenty-four hours and resulted in a significant reverse for the British and the Australians, the latter seeing action on French soil for the first time. The Great War was an industrial one founded on heavy artillery and machine-guns and the figures from Fromelles show just how brutal it had become: the Australians suffered 5,500 casualties (2,000 killed or missing and 3,500 wounded or taken prisoner), the British had 1,500 soldiers put out of action, and the German toll was 1,600 dead or wounded.

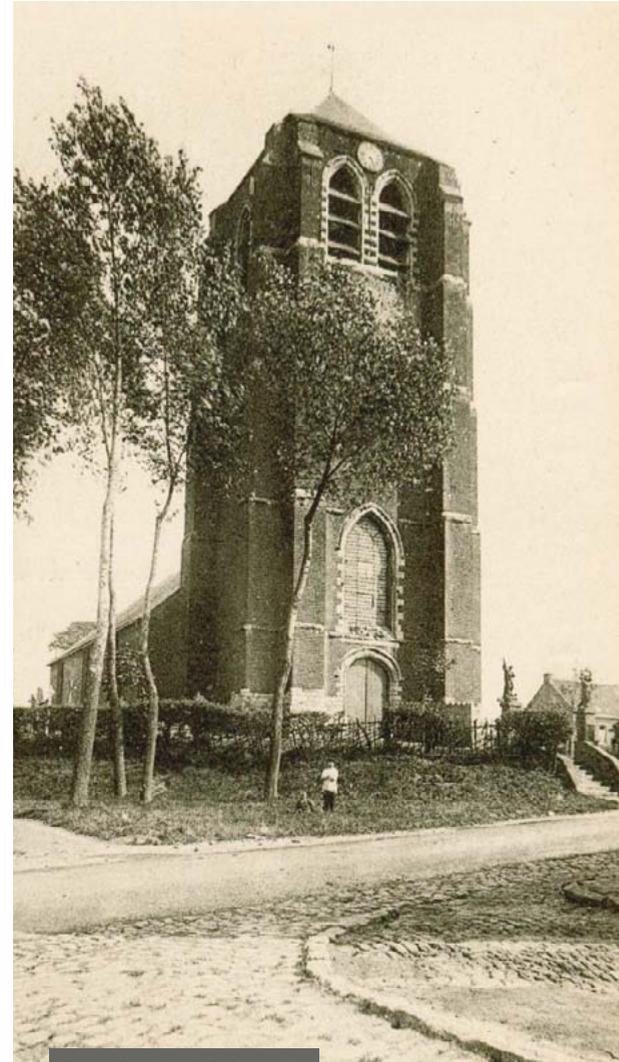
After the destruction wrought by the First World War, Fromelles lay in ruins. But the village was rebuilt and farmers returned to their ravaged fields. Today, all that remains of that terrible battlefield are the cemeteries of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and a few German blockhouses. In 2007 five mass graves were discovered. These had been dug by the Germans two days after the battle. Careful excavation revealed the bodies of 250 men, most of them Australians, and many were precisely identified through DNA testing. Their remains have since been reburied in a new cemetery at the heart of the village. Nearby, a new museum reveals the effect of the tragic battle of Fromelles on the emerging Australian nation.



E. Roose

We want your tour to be both enjoyable and safe so please remember to:

- Behave respectfully and in accordance with the rules when visiting remembrance sites in order to preserve their peaceful and contemplative atmosphere.
- Respect wildlife and do not drop litter.
- Be careful and stay alert on the trails as they are also open to other users such as pedestrians, horses, cars and motorbikes.



Fromelles Church before 1914

In the autumn of 1914 neither of the warring parties had the advantage over the other and this stalemate resulted in a continuous line of defence being established from the Vosges to the North Sea. During this 'race to the sea' the German Army set up positions on every piece of high ground that bordered its newly conquered territory. One of these was Aubers Ridge. Its dominant position gave the Germans a major strategic advantage, not the least because of Fromelles Church. From the top of its bell-tower, their lookouts had an uninterrupted view of Lys Plain from the hills of Flanders to the Pas-de-Calais coal basin. Consequently, the church soon became a target for Allied artillery and by the spring of 1916 it lay in ruins. When peace returned it was rebuilt on the same foundations but in the Neo-Romanesque style. It was consecrated in 1924.

Coll. JM Bailleul

Abbiette Bunker



Kennedy Memorial



German pioneers posing in front of a concrete fortification under construction in Prèmesques, 1916

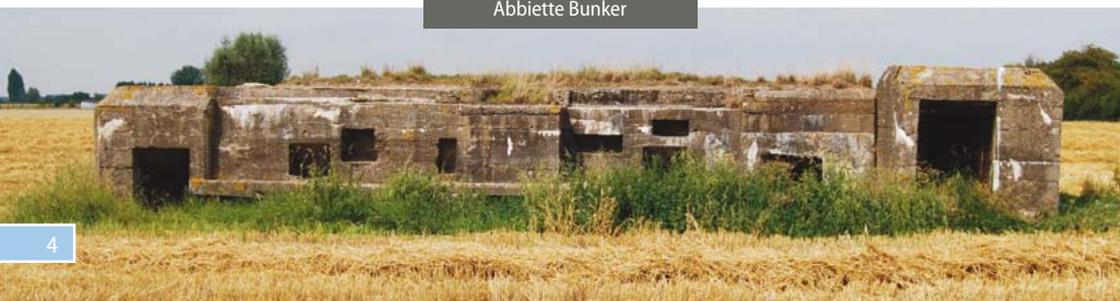
Coll. JM Bailleul

As the conflict changed from a war of movement into one of position, the armies began to install fortifications to defend their lines. In 1915 the pioneer battalions of the German Army began to erect concrete bunkers along the front. They were placed in echelon and designed for a variety of purposes. Dozens of these positions are still visible today in the area around Aubers Ridge. One of these is the Abbiette Bunker which stood about 1,000 yards behind the front line. It was a command post. The middle parados bears an

inscription indicating that it was built by the 13th Bavarian Pioneers, a battalion of the 6th German Division. The bunker features a wide firing step that allowed riflemen to shoot over the top of the bunker. History notes that from March 1915 to September 1916 a corporal named Adolf Hitler, a dispatch rider for the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment, carried messages between the bunker and the German command at Wavrin. He would return to Abbiette in 1940.

Abbiette Bunker

JM. Bailleul

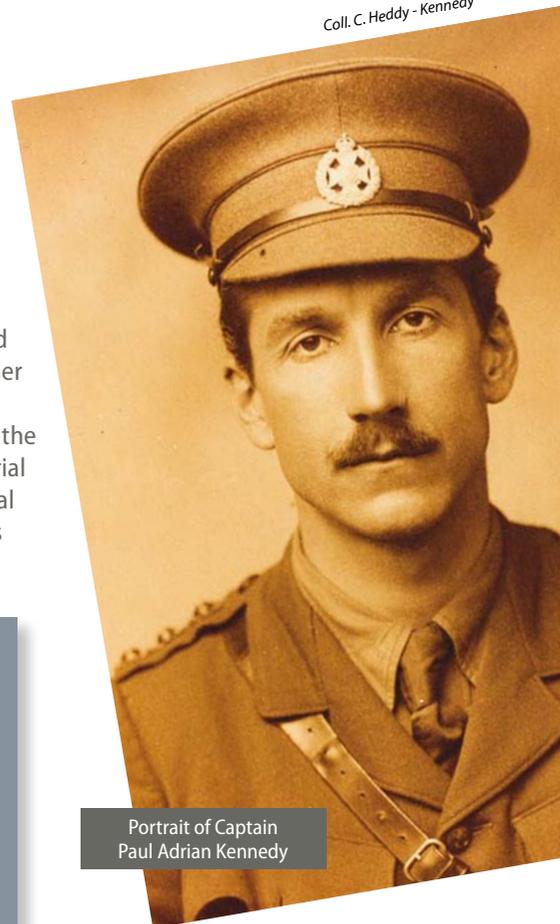


Erected in October 1922, this memorial is dedicated to Captain Paul Adrian Kennedy who was lost in action on 9 May 1915 during the Battle of Aubers Ridge. Wounded by a solitary sniper as his company advanced through the German lines in the Rouges Bancs sector near Fromelles, Captain Kennedy told his men to leave him to his fate, which they did, and he was never seen again. After the war his mother Lady E. A. Wilbraham, who had lost three of her four sons in the war, purchased a plot of land at the spot where Paul was last seen and had a memorial erected there. The original Christ of the memorial was later transferred to the chancel of Fromelles Church where it can be seen today.

The Battle of Aubers Ridge

The British Army opened the Battle of Aubers Ridge, known to the French as *Le Talus des Weppes* (Weppes Slope), on 9 May 1915. The purpose of the attack was to divert German resources from the French offensive in Artois which had been launched on the same day. Two flank attacks were planned: one to the south in the Port Arthur sector near Neuve-Chapelle; the other to the north in the Rouges Bancs sector near Fromelles. A brief preliminary shelling failed to breach the German defences and the offensive was cut short. In total the British Army suffered 11,000 English, Scottish and Indian casualties.

Coll. C. Heddy - Kennedy



Portrait of Captain Paul Adrian Kennedy

Australian Memorial Park



The Fromelles offensive was launched on 19 July 1916 to draw German soldiers away from the Battle of the Somme, which had been raging since 1 July. For the Australians, it was not only their first battle on the Western Front of the Great War, but also one of their bloodiest.

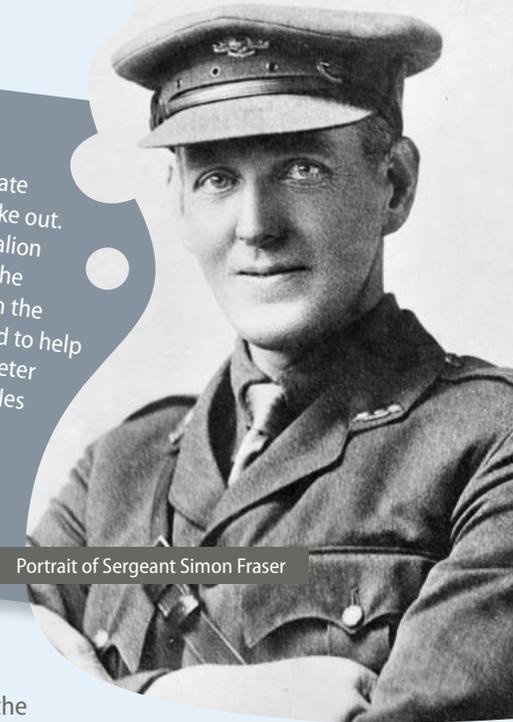
Preliminary shelling started at 11 a.m. and targeted a portion of the German front that was two and a half miles wide. At 6 p.m. the order was given for the 5th Australian Division and the 61st British Division to attack. Their

objective was to take a salient position known as the Sugar Loaf that lay opposite the hamlet of Rouges Bancs on the outskirts of Fromelles. Heavy rain in the days running up to the attack meant the terrain was sodden. The initial bombardment failed to destroy the German machine guns and, inevitably, the successive waves of soldiers who advanced through the mud succumbed to their fire (some of the concrete bunkers that sheltered those guns can be seen in the grounds of the Memorial Park today). Australian soldiers on the northern flank of the attack succeeded

Sergeant Simon Fraser

Born in 1887, Simon Fraser was farming in the state of Victoria, in south-east Australia, when war broke out. He enlisted in July 1915 and joined the 57th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force. Fraser fought in the Battle of Fromelles and his diary describes how, on the following day, he ventured out on to the battlefield to help the wounded. His bravery was the inspiration for Peter Corlett's sculpture that is the centrepiece of Fromelles Memorial Park. On 11 May 1917, during the Second Battle of Bullecourt, Sergeant Fraser was reported missing in action. His name is engraved on the Australian National Memorial of Villers-Bretonneux in the Somme.

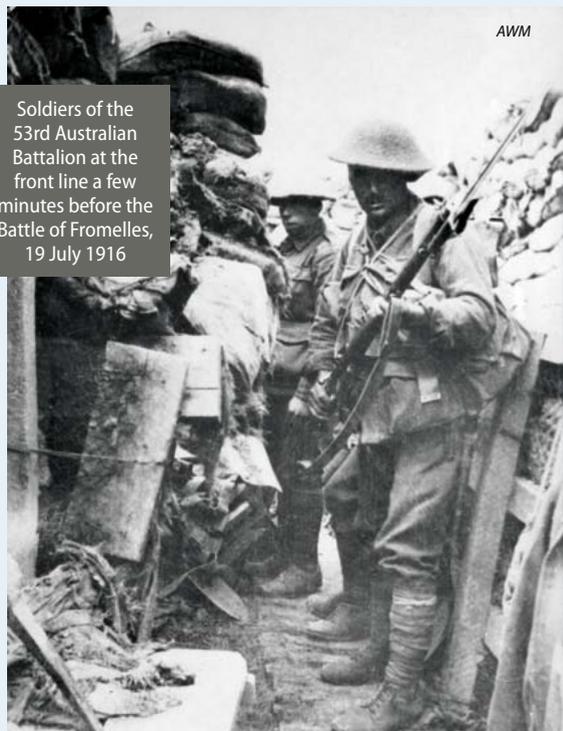
Portrait of Sergeant Simon Fraser



in crossing the German front line but were unable to hold out against the ferocious counter-attack. The following day at around 9 a.m. the operation was halted. No ground had been gained. Casualties in the Battle of Fromelles were colossal. The 61st British Division lost 1,500 men while more than 5,500 Australians were either killed, wounded or missing. On the German side, over 1,600 Bavarians were put out of action.

In the next three days, despite no official truce being proclaimed, Australian soldiers went out into no man's land to succour their wounded comrades. The bravery and humanity of their gesture is remembered in the statue that stands in the centre of the park. It was unveiled in July 1998 and dedicated to the 'cobbers' of the Great War. A replica of Peter Corlett's statue can be seen in the gardens of Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance.

AWM



AWM

Soldiers of the 53rd Australian Battalion at the front line a few minutes before the Battle of Fromelles, 19 July 1916

Detail of Sergeant Simon Fraser's statue in the Memorial Park



A.S. Flament

'... and I could not lift him on my back; but I managed to get him into an old trench and told him to lie quiet while I got a stretcher. Then another man ... sang out "Don't forget me cobbler". I went in and got four volunteers with stretchers and we got both men in safely.'

Sergeant Simon Fraser quoted by Charles Bean in *The AIF in France, 1916, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Vol. 3, Sydney, 1929



THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES



8.5 km

2 hrs 30 min approx.

Starting point: Fromelles Church



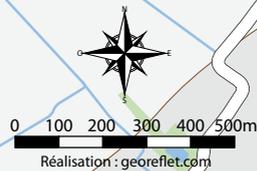
Circuit de la Bataille de Fromelles 8,5 km

▲ Max. elevation: 29 m

▼ Min. elevation: 15 m

P Car park

Picnic area with amenities



Réalisation: georeflet.com

V.C. Corner Cemetery and Memorial

5

The attacks launched by the British in the sector prior to the Battle of Fromelles were brief but intense. They featured a number of individual exploits that were rewarded with the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest military distinction, and this is reflected in the cemetery's name: V.C. Corner.

Of all the war cemeteries in France, this is the only one to be exclusively Australian. It comprises two mass graves marked with a white cross and these contain the remains of 410 unidentified Australian soldiers found on the battlefield at Fromelles at the end of the war.

A memorial wall facing the entrance to the site bears the names of the 1,299 Australians who were reported missing in action after the Battle of Fromelles on 19–20 July 1916. Recently, in 2009, the remains of some of these men were found in Pheasant Wood and have since been identified.

'We found the old no-man's-land simply full of our dead. The skulls and bones and torn uniforms were lying about everywhere.'

Charles Bean, Australia's official war correspondent, during a visit to Fromelles on 11 November 1918, Armistice Day.



Detail of the memorial at V.C. Corner

A.S. Flament

Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery

6

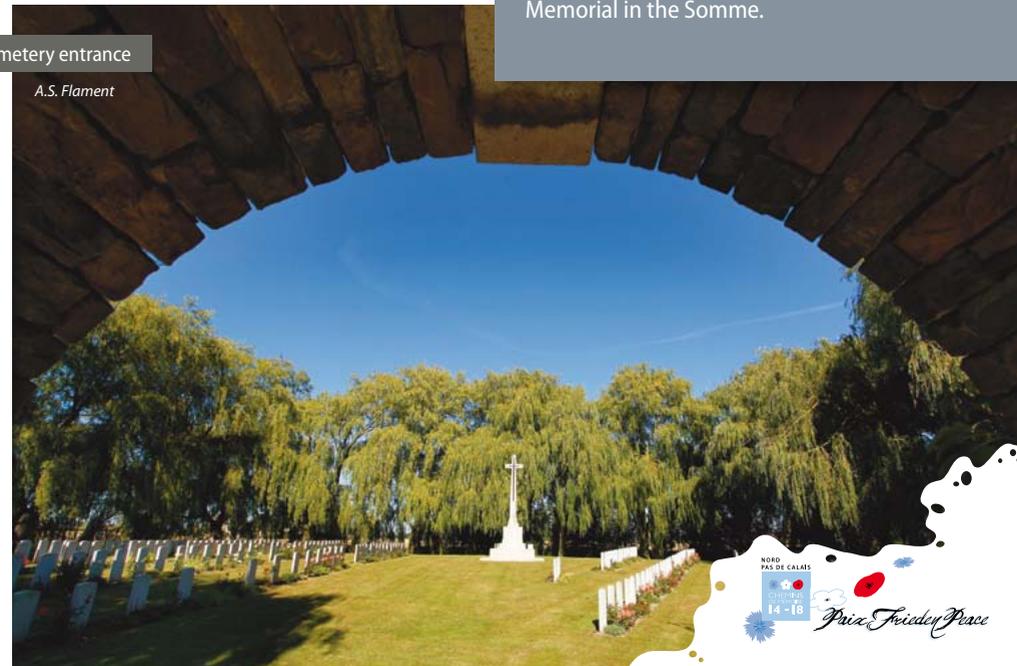
Designed by Sir Herbert Baker, this cemetery is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful remembrance sites of the Western Front. As its name indicates, it adjoined an aid post situated in a place called Le Trou (The Hole), near Fleurbaix, on the British Army's support line of trenches. It contains the graves of 351 British soldiers who died in various battles in the sector: Le Maisnil (October 1914), the Battle of Aubers Ridge (9–10 May 1915), the Battle of Loos (25 September – 14 October 1915) and the Battle of Fromelles (19–20 July 1916). Only 149 of the men buried in Le Trou have been identified.

Sir Herbert Baker

Sir Herbert Baker (1862–1946) was a leading figure of British architecture at the time of the First World War. He designed prestigious buildings in South Africa, Great Britain and India. In the aftermath of the war he was employed by the Imperial War Graves Commission, alongside the architects Edwin Lutyens and Reginald Bloomfield, to supervise the construction of military cemeteries and memorials for the British Imperial Forces. Baker was responsible for the Tyne Cot Military Cemetery at Zonnebeke near Ypres, the Neuve-Chapelle Indian Memorial and the Delville Wood South African National Memorial in the Somme.

Cemetery entrance

A.S. Flament



Rue-Petillon Military Cemetery



Pheasant Wood



O. Delory

View of the graves of the Australian soldiers killed in the raid of 15 July 1916

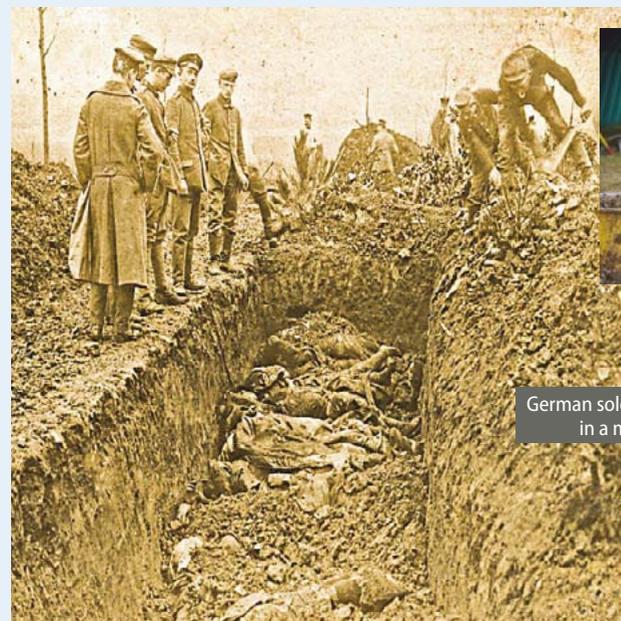
The entrance to Rue-Petillon Cemetery in Fleurbaix is marked by a triple arch which opens on to a beautifully gardened graveyard where the bodies of 1,500 soldiers from across the British Empire rest in peace. Some Germans are buried there too. As with the nearby Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery, Rue Pétillon was situated on the

British support line and adjoined an aid post; however this one was installed in the ruins of a house that soldiers jokingly called 'Eaton Hall' after the country home of the Duke of Westminster. The graves of thirty Australian soldiers killed in a German raid on 15 July 1916 are easily identifiable because they stand so close together.

In 2007 and 2008, following independent research by French and Australian historians, the Australian government surveyed a plot of land on the edge of a wood known to the Germans fighting in the Great War as Pheasant Wood. Sampling indicated the presence of five mass graves which had been dug by the Germans in the aftermath of the Battle of Fromelles.

In 2009 the bodies were carefully exhumed and DNA samples were taken to identify them. In total 250 bodies were recovered. After careful study by a team including archaeologists, anthropologists, medical experts and military historians, the bodies were finally laid to rest in the new Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery.

Using samples taken during the excavations, scientists are currently attempting to identify the bodies and their programme of research is expected to continue into 2014. The process involves comparing anthropomorphic data with administrative information relating to soldiers reported missing after the battle. Australian and British families who lost an ancestor during the fighting are also DNA tested to aid identification.



German soldiers burying the dead in a mass grave, 1915

coll. JM Bailleul



CWGC

Archaeologists on site at Pheasant Wood in 2009

Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery



Standing close to the church, on a rise facing the Western Front, a Cross of Sacrifice overlooks the many gravestones in the hexagonal cemetery of Pheasant Wood. Every single one of the 250 bodies found in the recently discovered mass graves was reburied with full honours by representatives of the British and Australian Armies. Pheasant Wood Cemetery is the first cemetery to be built by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission since the 1960s. It was officially opened on 19 July 2010 in the presence of British, Australian and French dignitaries. To date ninety-four soldiers have been identified. As identification proceeds, the gravestones bearing the inscription 'Known unto God' will be gradually replaced with ones engraved with the personal details of the soldiers.

Military cortège transferring the 250th and final body from the mass graves of Pheasant Wood to the new cemetery during the opening ceremony on 19 July 2010



G. Funk

Battle of Fromelles Museum



Rising Sun badge worn by soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force in the the Great War

coll. JM Bailleul

Overlooking the new military cemetery, the museum describes the fascinating work that was required to excavate and identify the bodies discovered in Pheasant Wood ninety-two years after the Battle of Fromelles. It tells the story of the battle and the lives of some of the soldiers who fought in it. In addition to the objects collected by a club of local historians, some of the artefacts on display were found in the mass graves and are currently on loan from the Australian Government.



Coll. M. Delbarre

Helmet belonging to a soldier of the 21st Bavarian Reserve Infantry Division

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Northern France Region of Culture



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www.cwgc.org

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in Northern France:
www.remembrancetrails-northernfrance.com

Discover the INTERREG project "The Great War Remembered"
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www.1418remembered.co.uk/



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