



Discover on this walk the story of the Canadian troops during the Third Battle of Ypres. Along the way you will meet some of the many Canadian lads who lost their lives along every street, on every corner.

In 1914, Canada, a British Dominion, was dragged like it or not into an unprecedented global conflagration. As the war progressed, the Canadians proved time and again to be tough, resilient troops. They fought in Flanders in 1915, 1916 and 1917.

Canada's dead in Flanders amounted to around 14,000. The names of almost half of them are engraved on the Menin Gate. They have no known grave; their bodies were not recovered or could not be positively identified. With Names in the Landscape, the Passchendaele Museum has been able to trace the initial burial place of one in five of these 'missing' Canadians.

*This walk follows the signposted Canadian Road to Passchendaele that starts at the car park of Tyne Cot Cemetery on the Vijfwegestraat.*

#### START: CWGC TYNE COT CEMETERY

① *Depart from the car park at the sign marking the start of the Canadian Road to Passchendaele.*

The Third Battle of Ypres began on 31 July 1917. More than 4.2 million shells were fired at German positions. The shelling churned up the landscape and destroyed the drainage system, but it left German bunkers intact. The rainwater could not drain away and a few summer showers turned the area of operations into a swamp.

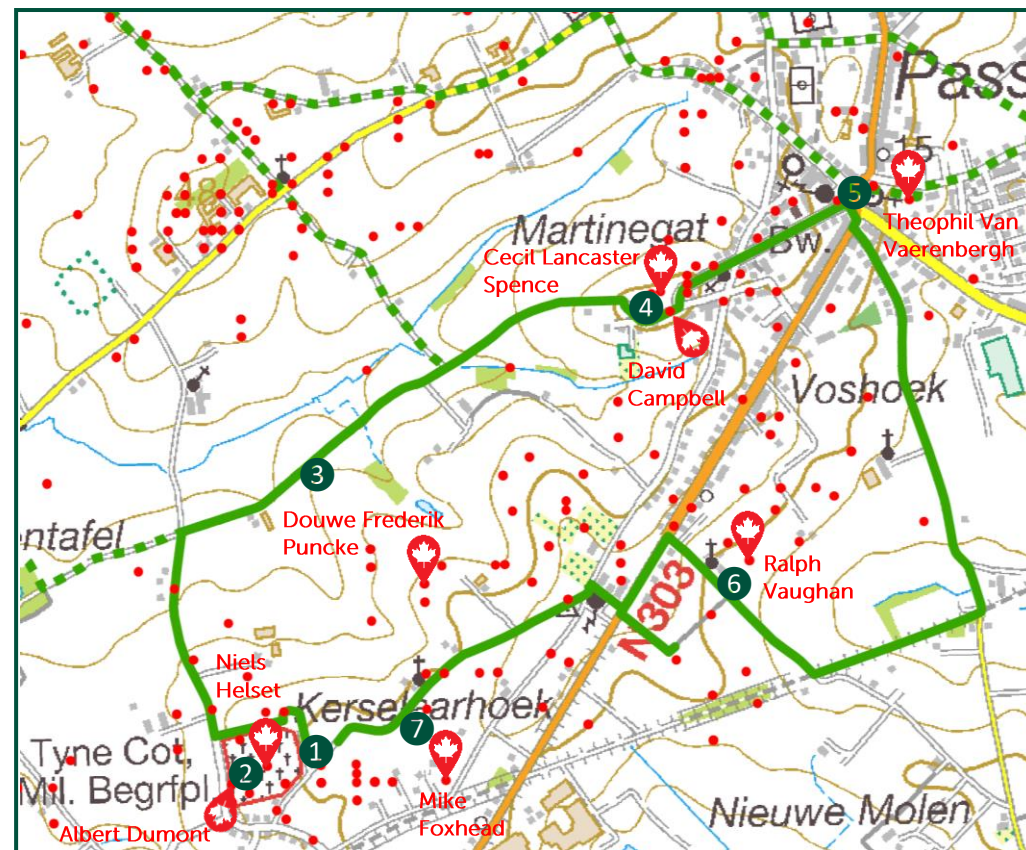
After weeks of fighting, New Zealanders, Australians and South Africans joined the exhausted British divisions. There were a few successes, but then the attack faltered once more. Stopping the offensive, no matter how many lives it might save, was not an option. A victory, even a symbolic one, was desperately needed. Field Marshal Haig's eye fell on Passchendaele. The village atop the West Flemish ridge, already shot to pieces, had been in German hands since 1914 and had assumed mythic proportions. To win it, Haig turned to the Canadians.



The area of operations at Passchendaele, 1917. © CWM 19930013-528.

② *Stop for a moment in Tyne Cot Cemetery before proceeding along Tynecotstraat to Canadalaan.*

The Canadian Army leadership agreed, with some reluctance. The Canadians would attack in four phases. In the first two phases, on 26 and 30 October, the troops needed to reach higher ground. Once they had got free of the mud, they were able to capture Passchendaele. North of the village, a further stretch of ridge was taken in a final phase on 10 November.



At dawn on 26 October 1917, the Canadian artillery unleashed its deadly charge. While the defenders withdrew to their dugouts, the Canadians moved forward.

The 46th Battalion (South Saskatchewan) advanced near Tyne Cot Cemetery. A German counterattack forced it to retreat. The proportion of men missing rose to about one in seven.



CWGC Tyne Cot Cemetery, Cross of Sacrifice.

③ *Two of those missing soldiers of the 46th can be located at Tyne Cot Cemetery, where a total of 13 missing Canadians were initially buried. The 27-year-old Norwegian emigrant **Niels Helseth** was buried near what is now the Cross of Sacrifice. Nearby was also the Belgian-Canadian **Albert Dumont** who was born in Brussels. To this day, neither has a marked grave.*

③ *Continue on and look south-east past Waterfields Farm (Canadalaan 63) to the right of the road across the fields.*

④ ***Douwe Frederick Puncke**, a Dutchman from Amsterdam, emigrated to Canada a few years before the outbreak of war. At the end of 1915, the 35-year-old enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was assigned to the 50th Battalion from Calgary.*




Douwe was wounded in April 1917 at Vimy, but remained in service. A few months later, the 50th was in a supporting role at Passchendaele. The men lay in the mud for days under heavy artillery fire. Douwe was killed on 26 October 1917, leaving a wife and child.



Douwe Frederick Puncke.

**4** Walk further on to the Canadian memorial site Crest Farm. It commemorates the Canadian casualties at Passchendaele in 1917.

 **David Campbell** was from Glasgow, Scotland. As a child he emigrated with his family to Western Canada. In 1916, one month before his 18th birthday, David enlisted for military service. At the time he was working in a branch of a bank in Vancouver.



Seaforth Highlanders on their way to the front, Vancouver, April 1916. © The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada.

On 30 October 1917 Campbell's unit, the 72nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders, stormed Crest Farm. The German stronghold was on slightly

higher ground than Passchendaele and protected by a marsh. Machine gunners guarded the approaches.

After a fierce battle, the weary defenders of Crest Farm could not go on. The German artillery quickly retaliated. A barrage of fire came down on the Seaforths with great precision.

The 72nd suffered more than 270 casualties, 50 killed and 220 wounded. To this day, 43 Seaforths remain missing. We have been able to give 10 of them a place in the landscape, including 19-year-old David. The young Scottish emigrant was buried near Crest Farm.



Cecil Lancaster Spence.

Two other Canadians were buried close to the memorial, 21-year-old **James Abercromby**, also from Glasgow, and 23-year-old stenographer **Cecil Lancaster Spence**.

**5** Walk from Crest Farm to the church in Passchendaele. The straight road between the memorial and the church is symbolic of the last few yards the Canadian troops had to cross here in 1917.

The Battle of Passchendaele officially ended on 10 November 1917, but little changed at the front. At Passchendaele the Canadian garrison remained at the mercy of German shelling.

 On 17 November 1917, 19-year-old Canadian soldier **Theophil Van Vaerenbergh** was killed. The young man came from Nieuwerkerken near Aalst, Belgium and was still a child when his parents fled 'poverty-stricken Flanders'.


In 1916 the young emigrant enlisted to fight in Europe. On 17 November 1917, Theophil's unit was under fire all day. Within a few hours, 12 lads were killed, including Theophil. The Belgian Canadian found his final resting place some 70 metres east of the Passchendaele church, which was shot to pieces, less than 70 kilometres from Nieuwerkerken as the crow flies.

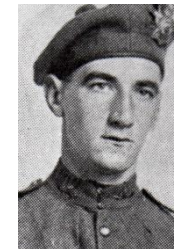


A group of emigrants casts a last glance at Flanders before embarking for the New World. Eugène Laermans, *The Emigrants*, 1894. Royal Museums of Fine Arts (KMSK)

**6** Continue along Zuidstraat and the De Stroroute cycle path to Nieuwe Molenstraat.

On 30 October 1917 the 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) attacked in the direction of this street. The men had a tough time of it. The guns covering the attack sank into the mud and could provide hardly any support. As the Highlanders pulled out of the mud, they immediately came under heavy fire.

 By the end half the Highlanders were dead, missing or wounded. Even before its return to Canada, the 85th Battalion erected a memorial column at the farthest point it reached during the battle. Nearby, **Ralph Vaughan**, a clerk from Halifax, Nova Scotia, was buried with two comrades. On 14 December 1917 he would have turned 20.




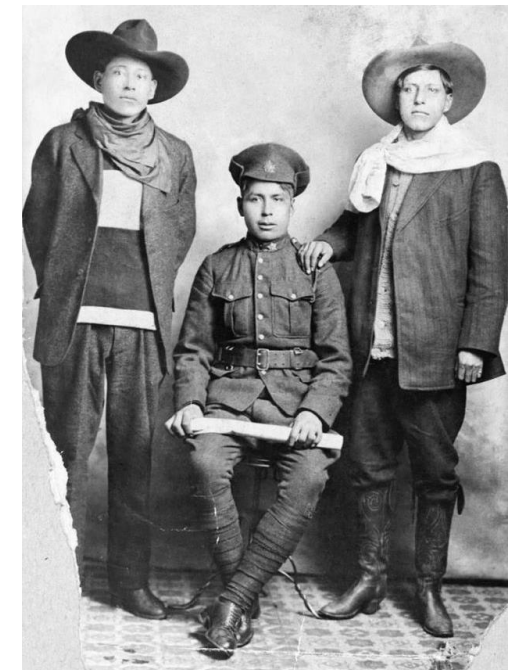
Ralph Vaughan.

**7** Further on you can see the memorial column of the 85th Battalion Nova Scotia Highlanders. Then continue the walk and stop at the little chapel on Vijfwegestraat.

The Canadian Army had long been wary of taking Indigenous Canadians into its ranks. But to compensate in part for the unprecedented losses, it started actively recruiting among the Indigenous peoples. However, there was great distrust among the First Nations of Canada, Inuit and Métis. The

tribal nations were indifferent or even downright hostile to a war that had nothing to do with them. Nevertheless, the recruitment campaign on the reservations was a success. Many young men were eager to prove themselves and enlisted voluntarily.

 At the end of September 1917, 18-year-old indigenous herdsman **Mike Foxhead** joined the 50th Battalion from Calgary. On 22 October 1917, Mike's unit found itself in the front line at Tyne Cot. The conditions were terrible. The Canadians waited in the mud for the opening attack of 26 October.



Mike Foxhead in uniform with two friends. © Glenbow Museum, NA-5-16.

Mike Foxhead, a boy of just 19, did not live to see that day. He died on Tuesday 23 October 1917. Mike was buried near the long stretch of woodland in the distance, opposite the chapel, but his body has never been found or identified.

Consult Names in the Landscape and this walk online:

