

# Zantvoorde British Cemetery



**CWGC**  
Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Designed by noted architect Charles Holden, Zantvoorde British Cemetery was formed after the Armistice when Commonwealth burials were concentrated here from the nearby battlefields and from German cemeteries. There are now more than 1,580 servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in the cemetery, most of whom remain unidentified. Of those whose names are known, over a quarter died in the desperate fighting of October and November 1914 around Zantvoorde (now Zandvoorde), Zillebeke and Gheluvelt as Allied troops strove to prevent the German forces from seizing the high ground overlooking Ypres and reaching the Channel ports.

## The Fall of Zantvoorde Village, October 1914

Units of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) first clashed with the German Army in this sector on 19 October 1914 as they moved toward Menin and encountered German forces advancing from the other direction in an attempt to take Ypres. Heavy fighting to the north and south of the Menin Road saw the front-line move back and forth over the next three weeks as British and French forces tried to stop the German advance as far away from Ypres as possible.

By 30 October the officers and men of the elite Household Cavalry had positioned themselves in shallow, improvised



WW1 Q 46190

trenches just east of the village. The cavalymen in front of Zantvoorde should have been relieved the night before and sent to the rear for a much-needed rest, but enemy pressure in the sector was so great that their relief was sent to support another part of the line. These units of Life Guards and Royal Horse Guards had been ordered to dismount and defend the British front-line using every man who could fire a rifle, including those usually assigned to transport and other non-combatant duties. Only a very small number of units were held in reserve for deployment to sections of the line that were in imminent danger of breaking.

At 6.45 on this dull, misty morning, artillery fire began to rain down on the British positions. For more than an hour it seemed as if every one of the 260 German heavy guns in the sector were concentrated on the scant lines of cavalry and men were killed, wounded, and buried as their trenches were blown in. Those who survived the bombardment then faced an infantry attack of overwhelming force at 8 am. In the 1st Life Guards alone more than five officers and 100 men were killed or missing by 10 am, one squadron losing all but one man, who was badly shaken by his experiences. Despite this determined defence of the village, the Germans soon took Zantvoorde and the troops of the cavalry brigade were forced back to a new line in front of the village of Klein Zillebeke. German gunners immediately took advantage of their newly gained high ground to fire shells into the British lines east and west of Zantvoorde. Counter-attacks were mounted to retake the village but failed in the face of heavy artillery fire and large numbers of fresh German troops. The village had been captured and would remain in German hands until 28 September 1918.

The chaotic nature of the fighting that took place around Zantvoorde in October 1914 is revealed by the number of men who were killed in action but have no known grave. Many of those who fell while attempting to defend the village were subsequently buried by the Germans as unidentified British soldiers and today are either commemorated on the Menin

Gate or lie beneath headstones that bear Rudyard Kipling's immortal words, 'Known Unto God'.



WW1 Q 53324

Left: Draft of 1st Life Guards preparing to leave for France, London, August 1914

Links: Officiëren en soldaten van de 1st Life Guards bereiden zich voor op hun vertrek naar France, Londen, augustus 1914

Above: British Cavalymen eating beside his horse near Zantvoorde, October 1914

Below: Een Britse cavalierist eet naast zijn paard in de buurt van Zantvoorde, oktober 1914

## Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commission is responsible for the commemoration of almost 1,700,000 members of the Commonwealth forces who gave their lives in the two world wars. The graves and memorials of these men and women, who came from all parts of the Commonwealth and who were of many faiths and of none, are found around the globe in 153 countries. For more information about the Commission, our work and how to search our records online visit [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org) Enquiries are also welcome at our offices: **CWGC** Head Office Tel: + 44 (0) 1628 507200 E-mail: [casualty.enq@cwgc.org](mailto:casualty.enq@cwgc.org)  
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For more information about this location and some of those commemorated here, scan the QR code (right).

