

The Brandhoek Military Cemeteries



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Commonwealth War Graves Commission

Brandhoek became a centre for army medical care in May 1915 when Field Ambulance No. 81 of the British 27th Division established a dressing station in the village as medical units were withdrawing west from Ypres (now Ieper) in the face of German attacks. British servicemen soon began burying their fallen comrades in a field adjoining the dressing station, which became Brandhoek Military Cemetery. Brandhoek remained a site for medical units, from field ambulances and dressing stations to large casualty clearing stations, throughout the war.

In the summer of 1917, in preparation for the major Allied offensive which would become known as 'Third Ypres', three casualty clearing stations were sent to Brandhoek. Land was also set aside for two new cemeteries, Brandhoek New Military Cemetery and Brandhoek New Military Cemetery No. 3. The former contains over 550 burials, including those of 28 German soldiers, all dating from 1917. Over 500 British officers and men were laid to rest here in July and August 1917, including Captain Noel Chavasse, one of only three men in history to have been awarded the Victoria Cross twice. All three of the Brandhoek cemeteries were designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, the architect of the Menin Gate Memorial, with the assistance of Noel Ackroyd Rew who had served on the Western Front as an officer with the Royal Engineers.



IWM Q 5935

The Fifth Army and the Battle of Pilkem Ridge, 31 July – 2 August 1917 October 1914

From July to November 1917, eight battles were fought in the Ypres Salient, which together are known as the Third Battle of Ypres, 'Third Ypres', or simply 'Passchendaele' after the village that was fought over in late October. These large-scale actions formed stages in a major Allied offensive designed to drive the German forces from their dominant positions on the high ground east of Ypres, and involved hundreds of thousands of men. On the Allied side alone, all of the British Second and Fifth Armies, along with units of the French First Army, were deployed and suffered heavy

casualties. The armies cared for thousands of wounded men using a sophisticated chain of medical and evacuation facilities from front-line aid posts and field ambulances to dressing stations, casualty clearing stations, base hospitals and hospitals in Britain. The Fifth Army assigned No. 32, No. 44, and No. 3 Australian casualty clearing stations to Brandhoek to serve as specialist field hospitals providing initial surgical care for all abdominal cases from II, XVIII, and XIX Corps.

In the early hours of 31 July, the assault divisions of the French First Army and British Fifth Army went forward in thick mist behind an immense creeping barrage. Men of the British II, XVIII and XIX Corps were to carry out the main attack of the day on the high ground either side of the Ypres-Menin Road. They advanced a distance of about one mile before stiff enemy resistance slowed down and confused the attack. The German plan of defence, which allowed the Allied attackers to make progress before striking back with pre-sighted artillery and special counter-attack units, was extremely effective. All British units reached and overran the German front-lines, but were cut down and suffered very heavy casualties as they attempted to advance further into enemy territory.

Dreadful weather conditions added to the ordeal of enemy counter-attacks as Belgium experienced the heaviest summer rain in 75 years and British troops struggled to hold their new

ground. Rain and slippery mud made it very difficult to move guns up to new positions, evacuate casualties, or observe German troop movements. As August unfolded, Allied troops fought to gain or regain key points in the line as rain continued and ground conditions made every aspect of living and fighting all the more gruelling.



IWM Q 5728

Left: Battle of Pilkem Ridge, stretcher-bearers struggle to carry a wounded man to safety near Boesinghe, 1 August 1917

Links: Slag om Pilkem Ridge, brancardiers ploeteren om een gewonde soldaat in veiligheid te brengen bij Boezinge, 1 augustus 1917

Above: The Battle of Pilkem Ridge, a dressing station manned by the RAMC near Boesinghe, 31 July

Boven: The Battle of Pilkem Ridge, a dressing station manned by the RAMC near Boesinghe, 31 July

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 Enquiries are also welcome at our offices: **CWGC** Head Office Tel: + 44 (0) 1628 507200 E-mail: 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).

