A SOLDIER
OF THE GREAT WAR
5TH BN. CANADIAN INF.
KNOWN UNTO GOD
There could be no truer measure of the impact of the First World War and its shocking death toll than the efforts made to commemorate the fallen. More than a thousand war cemeteries cluster along the old Western Front, while no fewer than seventeen memorials listing the names of the missing stand in mute testimony to the destructive power of the Great War. One hundred and fifty war cemeteries dot the landscape in the Ypres Salient, two hundred and forty house the dead on the Somme battlefields – each of the battlefield tours will lead you past these “silent cities,” and the monuments preserving the memory of Canada’s efforts and sacrifice in the Great War. We have therefore included two appendices outlining the Canadian battlefield memorials and the principles which guided the design and construction of the Commonwealth war cemeteries.
Official First World War Canadian Memorials

The Canadian Battlefields Memorial Commission (CBMC) was established in 1920. Based on the recommendations of senior officers the Commission selected eight sites (listed below) on which to commemorate the achievements of Canadian soldiers in the Great War. The CBMC launched a national architectural and design competition in December of 1920 and out of the 160 submissions chose seventeen finalists who were then asked to produce a plaster maquette of their design. There was some indecision at first, as it was unclear whether the CBMC wanted eight identical monuments or wished to give certain battles greater significance; but eventually, as Jonathan Vance has noted, “in many ways the outcome of the CBMC’s deliberations was governed by the designs submitted...two stood far above the others.” What became known as the Brooding Soldier, proposed by Regina sculptor Frederick Clemesha, was selected for St. Julien. What became Canada’s most famous war memorial, the twin pylons atop Vimy Ridge, was the creation of Toronto artist Walter Allward. The remaining six locations received identical granite block monuments (each with an inscription commemorating the relevant feat of arms) which were to be placed on a low circular flagstone terrace within a small landscaped park.
Canadian Memorials in Belgium

**St. Julien** – commemorating the heroic stand of the First Canadian Division during the gas attack at Ypres in April 1915.

**Hill 62** – commemorating the part played by Canadian troops in the defence of Ypres between June and August 1916.

**Passchendaele** – commemorating the capture of Crest Farm by the Canadian Corps during the Battle of Passchendaele, October-November 1917.

Canadian Memorials in France

**Courcelette** – commemorating the part played by the Canadian Corps in forcing the Germans back from their defences on the Somme from September to November 1916.

**Vimy** – commemorating the capture of Vimy Ridge by the Canadian Corps on 9-12 April 1917.

**Le Quesnel** – commemorating the attack by the Canadian Corps, 100,000 strong, on 8 August 1918, which drove the enemy back a distance of eight miles on the first day and commenced the triumphant advance of the Hundred Days.

**Dury** – commemorating the capture of the Drocourt-Quéant Switch and the breaking of the Hindenburg Line on 2 September 1918, during the Second Battle of Arras.

**Bourlon Wood** – commemorating the crossing of the Canal du Nord, the capture of Bourlon Wood, and the rupture of the final Hindenburg Line defences on 27 September 1918.

Some of the most striking monuments on the Western Front, featuring the caribou symbol of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, honour the distinct contribution made by Newfoundland to the Allied cause:

Newfoundland Memorials in Belgium

**Courtrai (Kortrijk)** – commemorating the performance of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in the Battle of Lys in October 1918.
The Vimy Memorial. [Matt Symes]
Newfoundland Memorials in France

Beaumont-Hamel – commemorating the sacrifice made by the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916.

Gueudecourt – commemorating the successful action of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment in the Battle of the Somme on 12 October 1916.

Monchy-le-Preux – commemorating the Newfoundlanders’ participation in the Battle of Arras on 14 April 1917.

Masnières – commemorating the participation of the Newfoundland Regiment in the Battle of Cambrai on 20 November 1917.

The official unveiling of the Monument at Beaumont-Hamel, June 7, 1925. Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig and French General Marie Fayolle were in attendance and visible in the photo. [NAS (130)X234011]
Commonwealth War Cemeteries

The Imperial War Graves Commission (the Commonwealth War Graves Commission since 1960) was established in 1917. The Commission was responsible for the identification and burial of the war dead of the British Empire, and to maintain the cemeteries and memorials in perpetuity. At the behest of Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, three of the greatest architects of the time, Sir Edwin Lutyens, Sir Herbert Baker, and Sir Reginald Blomfield, worked out the standard design and features for the war cemeteries. One of the most gifted writers in the English language, Rudyard Kipling, was invited to compose the commemorative formulae appropriate to the monuments and headstones. Amidst much deliberation and debate – some of it quite heated, especially on the choice of religious imagery, the use of a headstone as opposed to a cross, and the policy that the dead not be repatriated for private interment but buried among their comrades in the lands where they had fallen – the Commission’s guiding principles were laid out in Kenyon’s 1918 report:

1. Each of the dead should be commemorated individually by name on a headstone or on a memorial dedicated to the missing.
2. Headstones and memorials should be permanent.
3. Headstones should be uniform in design and the inscription of personal details.
4. There should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race, or creed (although the Commission took great care to observe the traditions of non-Christian or Jewish peoples, such as the Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims of the Indian Army, or the Chinese who served in labour battalions).

Visitors to the war cemeteries will notice great variety within the uniformity of monumental features. Small battlefield cemeteries may hold as few as forty or fifty burials, where the vast collection cemeteries, such as Etaples or Tyne Cot, contain 11,000 and 12,000 respectively. The cemetery names preserve the names of the old Western Front (Cheddar Villa, Ration Farm, Stump Road) and sometimes the nicknames bestowed by homesick soldiers (Lancashire Cottage,
Caesar’s Nose, Dud Corner, or the immortal puns on Flemish place names, Bandaghem, Dozinghem, Mendinghem, i.e. “bandage ‘em,” “dosing ‘em,” and “mending ‘em”). Dominion Cemetery, Toronto Avenue Cemetery, Maple Leaf Cemetery, Quebec Cemetery are a few examples of the names attesting to the Canadians in a given sector.

The cemeteries are usually enclosed by low brick walls and entered through wrought-iron gates, but there is no standard pattern for the interior. In most cases the architects sought to conserve the original outlay wartime burial grounds with their jigsaws of graves huddled around a former dressing station or aid post. Cemeteries with more than forty burials feature Sir Reginald Blomfield’s Cross of Sacrifice (with an inlaid Crusader sword), the only overtly religious symbol common to the war cemeteries. Cemeteries with more than a thousand burials will also feature Sir Edwin Lutyens’s deliberately neutral Stone of Remembrance, on which the words “Their name liveth for evermore” appear. They were proposed by Rudyard Kipling, who in his regard for the fallen and their families felt that no words of his own could do them justice, and so turned to chapter 44 of the Book of Ecclesiasticus. But as the father of a son listed among the missing, Kipling looked within himself to find the simple, moving formulation “A soldier of the Great War, known unto God,” which visitors will see on nearly half of all graves.
The headstones over identified burials present the personal details in descending order: regimental insignia (on British graves) or national emblem (a maple leaf, for instance, on Canadian graves); enlistment number and rank; the soldier’s name; his unit; date of death and age (if known). A Cross or Star of David was engraved below the register of personal information, but the religious symbol was omitted if the soldier’s papers listed no religious affiliation or if his family forbade the inclusion of a religious symbol. For a small cost the families could also have a short valedictory inscription placed beneath the Cross: “Son of my heart, live forever. There is no death for you and me,” “The only child of aged parents,” “Death is not a barrier to love, Daddy,” “The shell that stilled his true young heart broke mine. Mother” – many are indescribably moving and convey the sorrows of the parents, wives, and children, unknown to history, who bore the burden of loss imposed by the Great War for the rest of their lives.

Unlike the sombre French or German cemeteries, the Commonwealth war cemeteries present the aspect of an English cottage garden, in keeping with Kenyon’s assertion that “there is no reason why cemeteries should be places of gloom.” With this in mind, the architects worked closely with leading horticulturalists to blend flowers and plants native to England with local varieties.

Canadian war dead buried behind the lines near a dressing station, May 1916. [PA 000176]
and to offset the uniformity of white monumental features with the colours of nature. The perfectly manicured lawns and constant maintenance added to the impression of a carefully tended garden that despite its solemnity could become a place of renewal and even hope. In a gesture of reconciliation, German burials were often included in the Commonwealth cemeteries. As the cemeteries took shape during the 1920s and the monuments were raised in honour of the fallen, many felt the sorrow and desire of King Edward VIII as he told a Canadian mother at the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial, “Pray God, madam, it shall not happen again.” Sadly and ironically, however, just as the Commission’s work was nearing completion in the late 1930s, the Great War resumed in a far more terrible form.

Today more than 900 gardeners tend to the cemeteries of both World Wars. The lawns, plants, and flowers are groomed and replaced when necessary, as are the headstones which the elements have worn or effaced. Five percent of a cemetery is redone each year, so that the whole is redone every twenty years. The bodies of soldiers killed nearly a century ago still emerge from the battlefields, and the Commission makes every effort to identify them, give them an honoured burial, and to contact next of kin. For more information, visit the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (www.cwgc.org).

Ontario Cemetery. [Matt Symes]