



NORTHERN
FRANCE

The Great War Cycling

Trail in Artois

CYCLE GUIDE



NORD
PAS DE CALAIS



Paix Frieden Peace

The Great War Cycling Trail in Artois

The First World War in Artois

The rim of the Artois plateau that lies 10 km north of Arras was a strategically important position throughout the First World War. Lorette Spur (165 m) and Vimy Ridge (145 m) overlook Gohelle Plain and the Pas-de-Calais coal basin which, in 1912, accounted for half of all the coal produced in France. Coal was the dominant energy source at that time.

In October 1914, during the “Race to the Sea” which preceded the war in the trenches, the Germans managed to seize the high ground along the Western Front and occupy the coal basin. This forced the Allies to carry out a number of offensives to try and win back these dominant positions which were rapidly fortified by the Germans.

The first French attack, the First Battle of Artois (17–19 December 1914), was a failure and cost the lives of 8,000 poilus. After the Second Battle of Artois (9 May–25 June 1915) the French started calling Notre-Dame-de-Lorette la colline sanglante (the bloody hill). They took Lorette Spur but failed to reach Vimy Ridge despite the heavy shelling and fierce fighting. In total 40,000 French soldiers were killed and 64,000 wounded for the gain of twenty square kilometres. German losses amounted to 75,000 men either killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The expected breakthrough did not happen. The Third Battle of Artois (25 September–14 October 1915) also ended in failure.

In February 1916 the British Army took over the Artois Front to relieve the French who had been sent to Verdun to repel the German attack taking place there. In April 1917 the Canadians carried

out a remarkably well-prepared lightning strike on Vimy Ridge, taking the position at a cost of 3,600 lives. This success had a profound effect on the Canadians back home and was a defining moment in the budding nation’s history.

The Great War Cycling Trail in Artois winds its way through a landscape that shows few scars of the devastation once inflicted upon it. The trees have been replanted, the trenches have been filled in, the battlefields ploughed, and the villages rebuilt. The Commonwealth, French and German military cemeteries and memorials that can be visited today were built in the 1920s to replace the numerous temporary cemeteries of the Front. They symbolize the horrific tragedy that was the First World War. A tragedy that saw the death of millions of young soldiers, victims of industrial firepower.

S. Dhote

**We hope your tour will be both enjoyable and safe.
Please remember to:**

- Respect the peaceful atmosphere of the sites and behave in accordance with the rules because they are places of remembrance and contemplation.
- Make sure you have a lock because bicycles are not allowed on to the sites.
- Respect the fragile wildlife and do not drop litter on the trails.
- Obey the rules of the road.
- Be careful because the trails are also open to other users such as pedestrians, horses, cars, motorbikes, and other vehicles.
- Wear a helmet and a high-visibility jacket for your own safety.

French National War Cemetery at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette



Coll. AD PDC

The first pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Lorette in 1919. The ruins of Ablain-Saint-Nazaire can be seen in the background.

Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Hill was already an important place of pilgrimage before the start of the First World War. As early as the seventeenth century a painter from Ablain-Saint-Nazaire erected an oratory on the hill in gratitude to the Virgin Mary who he believed had healed him at the shrine of Loreto in Italy. The painter's oratory was destroyed in the Revolution. A chapel was built on the site to replace it but this too was destroyed, in the shelling of 1914 and 1915.

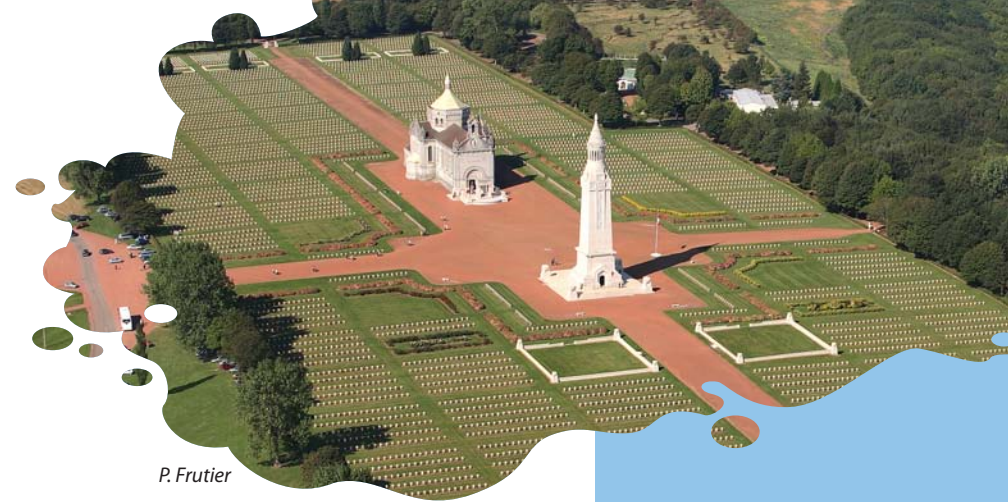
On 5 October 1914, German troops established themselves on Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Hill. Its dominating position 165 metres above sea level gave the possessor a clear tactical advantage. Along with Vimy Ridge, Lorette Hill provided the Germans with an unhindered view of the region of Arras and this enabled them to control the entire coal basin. The village of Souchez, also occupied and fortified by the German Army, constituted the low position of this stranglehold over the coalfields. From October 1914 till the end of 1915, Lorette Hill was the scene of numerous clashes between French and German soldiers. Casualties during this period were probably as high as 100,000.

The statue of General Maistre

Initially erected inside the cemetery, this statue was unveiled on 27 May 1927 to pay tribute to both General Maistre and the men of the 21st Army Corps. General Maistre (1858-1922) commanded France's 21st Army Corps from mid-November 1914 till the end of December 1915 in the sectors of Lorette, Givenchy and Aix-Noulette. The statue depicts a respected military chief who is clearly sensitive to the sufferings of his soldiers.



S. Dhote



P. Frutier

Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Monument Association and its Guard of Honour

The Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Monument Association was created in September 1920. It was renamed in 1997 as The Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Monument and Ossuary Guard of Honour Association.

The guard was set up in 1925 by a group describing themselves as the "faithful servants of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette".

By 1928 a daily guard was present in the necropolis from Easter till 11 November. Today the Association has 4,000 members. The Guards of Honour can be recognized by their red, white and blue arm bands and the special badge on their berets.

Today Lorette Hill is home to the largest of the French military cemeteries. More than 40,000 French soldiers were buried there, including 22,000 unknown soldiers in eight ossuaries. The dead were brought to Lorette from more than 150 cemeteries close to the front in Artois, Flanders, Yser and on the Belgian coast. A Romano-Byzantine basilica was erected in the grounds in 1921. It was designed by the Lille architect Louis-Marie Cordonnier, as was the **lantern tower** which stands opposite. The light atop the tower represents the eternal flame.

"Lorette, a sinister name that evokes places of horror and terror, gloomy woods, sunken lanes, plateaux and ravines that have been retaken twenty times and where, for many months, day and night, we slit throats and slaughtered unceasingly to turn this corner of the earth into a mass grave."

Louis BARTHAS

"Les carnets de guerre de Louis BARTHAS, tonnelier, 1914-1918", Paris, éd. François Maspero, 1978.

"Lorette Hill appears to be just one point in the immense battlefield that stretched from the Swiss border to the shores of the North Sea. So why does this point, more than any other, deserve to be recognized? Because it was here that took place one of the longest, the bloodiest, and the most tragic conflicts of the Great War. It lasted from October 1914 to January 1916. I am sure that no other [conflict] could rival it in duration!"

*From the speech given by **général MAISTRE** on Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Hill, 12 September 1920*

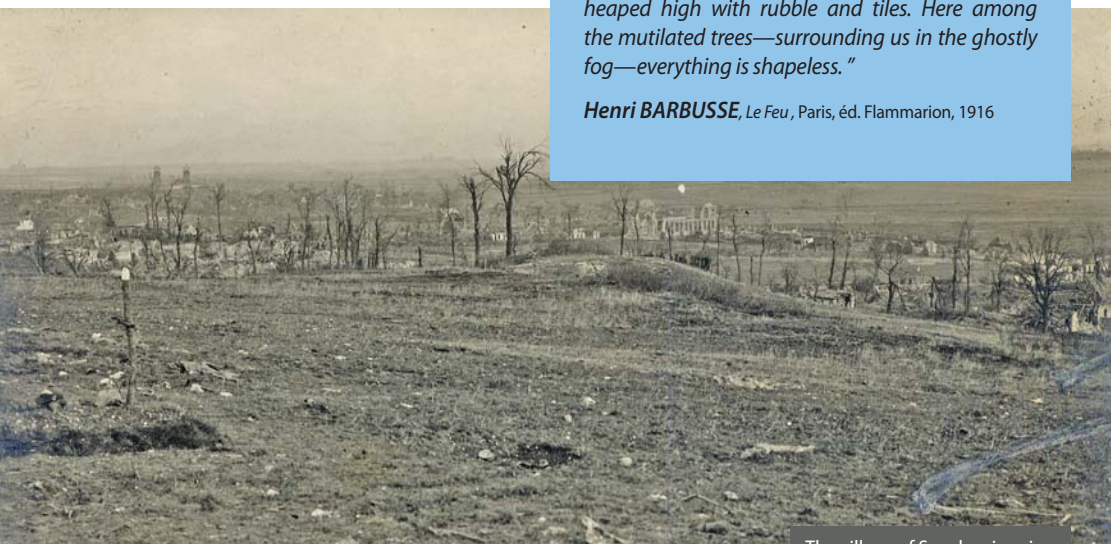
Souchez Main Square



Captured in October 1914, the village of Souchez remained in German hands for nearly a year until it was retaken by the French on 25 September 1915. By the end of the war the village had been reduced to ruins. The huge task of clearing up the rubble began in 1919. Only 66% of the civil population had returned by November 1921 and these were housed in temporary shelters. War damage compensation paid for the rebuilding of Souchez. The village also received aid from the London district of Kensington. Works to rebuild the church, which is home to some handsome stained-glass windows, began in 1928. A war memorial was raised on the edge of the main square, near the Town Hall, in memory of the men of Souchez who were killed in the fighting. It also displays the names of the civilians who were killed in 1914 and 1915, including one who had been shot by the occupiers. Uncovered during the reconstruction, the plinth of the old sandstone cross is one of the few pre-1914 relics still visible in the village. It stands on the corner of rue Pasteur and rue Curie.

"In fact, we haven't left the plain—the vast, seared and barren plain—and yet we are indeed in Souchez! The village has disappeared. I have never seen a village disappear so completely. Ablain-Saint-Nazaire and Carency still look like a place, with their smashed and ruined houses, and yards heaped high with rubble and tiles. Here among the mutilated trees—surrounding us in the ghostly fog—everything is shapeless."

Henri BARBUSSE, *Le Feu*, Paris, éd. Flammarion, 1916



Coll. Alain Jacques

The village of Souchez in ruins

Monument to the glory of General Barbot's division

Accès préférable en voiture



This monument was unveiled in May 1937. It pays tribute to the commander of the 77th Alpine Division who was mortally wounded by shrapnel on 10 May 1915 somewhere between Carency and Cabaret Rouge.

General Barbot was very popular with his men and was known affectionately as the "Saviour of Arras" because of the stiff resistance he showed the German Army in the outskirts of the city in October 1914. His grave on Notre-Dame-de-Lorette Hill is marked with a white cross, just like those of his men.

S. Dhote



Prix Frédéric Pasteur

Cabaret-Rouge British Cemetery

Car access recommended

Cabaret Rouge is one of the largest British military cemeteries in the region. It covers more than two hectares and contains 7,645 graves from the First World War. The cemetery takes its name from a small cafe, built of red brick and tiles that once stood nearby. The cafe was completely destroyed in the fighting of 1915. The British started using the cemetery when they relieved the French troops in the sector in March 1916. At the end of the war the cemetery was enlarged to accommodate the graves of 7,000 British soldiers who fell in the Battle of Arras. More than half of the soldiers buried in the cemetery have never been identified. British architect Sir Frank Higginson designed the cemetery. The graves at the entrance encircle the War Stone and a Great Cross stands at the other end of cemetery. In May 2000 the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier were exhumed and handed over to the Canadian authorities. His remains were finally laid to rest at the foot of the National War Memorial in Confederation Square, Ottawa.



P. Frutier

"Cabaret Rouge ... was on the side of the road. It was a brick house with two low buildings next to it... So many times, old man, at the place where we stopped, so many times, just there, did I say goodbye to the old girl laughing on the doorstep as I wiped my lips and looked out to Souchez where I used to live!"

Henri BARBUSSE, *Le Feu*, Paris, éd. Flammarion, 1916



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Monument à la gloire de la Division Marocaine

This memorial in the Canadian National Vimy Memorial Park is a reminder that, prior to the Canadians' capture of the ridge in April 1917, other soldiers had also succeeded in reaching that strategic position. On 9 May 1915, while the 10th French Army was launching its major offensive in Artois, the men of the Moroccan Division set out from the sector of Berthonval Farm and broke through enemy lines to reach the summit of Vimy Ridge (Hill 140). A lack of reinforcements, however, soon obliged them to withdraw under heavy fire. In the following three days, the Moroccan Division lost 4, 207 men. Built at the instigation of the Division's veterans, the memorial was unveiled in 1925.



BnF

Moroccan infantrymen near Aix-Noulette, 1915.

The Moroccan Division

Between 1914 and 1918 the Moroccan Division distinguished itself on all the battlefields of the Western Front, including those of Marne, Artois, Champagne, Somme, and Verdun. Established in 1914, the Division was originally made up of Zouaves and infantrymen from Algeria and Tunisia (and not from Morocco as the name suggests). Prior to the war, the Division was engaged in keeping the peace in Morocco. Heavy losses in the first few weeks of the war meant the Moroccan Division had to be rebuilt in October 1914 with foreign volunteers (Poles, Czechoslovaks, Americans, Swiss, ...) enlisted in the French Foreign Legion by friendship or to fight against the Alliance. The Division was sent to Artois on 27 April 1915 in preparation for the great offensive on the front north of Arras. It meticulously prepared the terrain in the Berthonval sector by digging trenches, consolidating communications, and organizing the supply of food and munitions. After the feat of arms of 9 May, the men of the Moroccan Division fought on fiercely towards Hill 119 opposite Souchez (16–23 June 1915).

"On 9 May 1915, at 12.15 p.m., my squadron and I, we were on Vimy Ridge with a few brave men ... who, disoriented like ourselves, had pushed forward, jumping over four lines of German trenches without firing a shot; and the front was broken! ... The hearts of the General Staff weren't in this much talked-about breakthrough ... at three in the afternoon, enemy reinforcements arrived by bus from Lille (...) French reinforcements didn't arrive until the following evening at seven o'clock. The poor old boys of the Territorial Army had marched 75 km."

Blaise CENDRARS, *La main coupée*, Paris, éd. Denoël, 1946

LES HAUTS-LIEUX
DE LA GRANDE GUERRE
EN ARTOIS



29,5 km
3h env.

Circuit VTC
 Accès préférable en voiture

1 Départ
Nécropole nationale de
Notre-Dame-de-Lorette

Circuit des Hauts-lieux de la
Grande Guerre en Artois

Dénivelé cumulé : 454 m

▲ Alt. max : 174 m

▼ Alt. min : 62 m



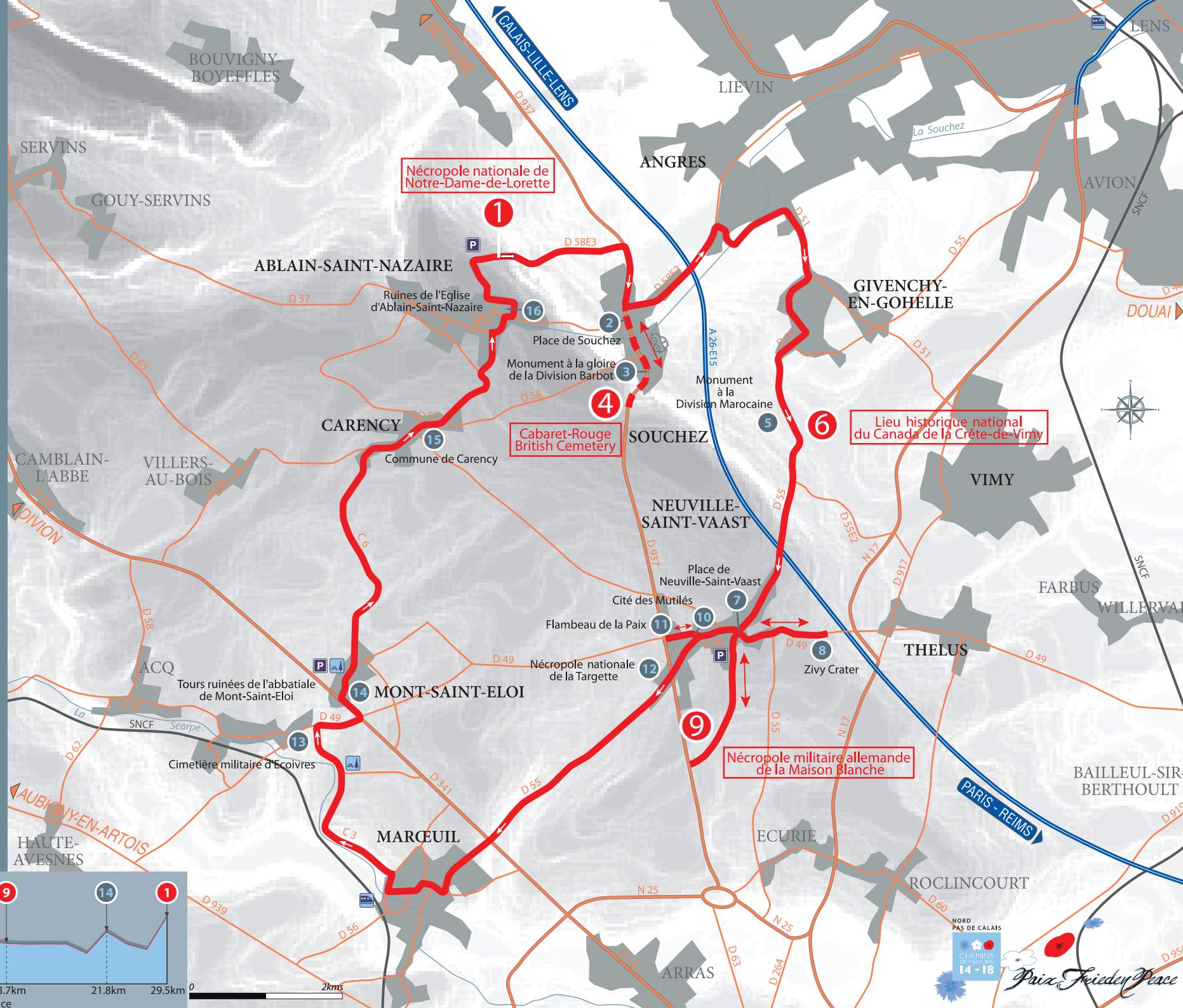
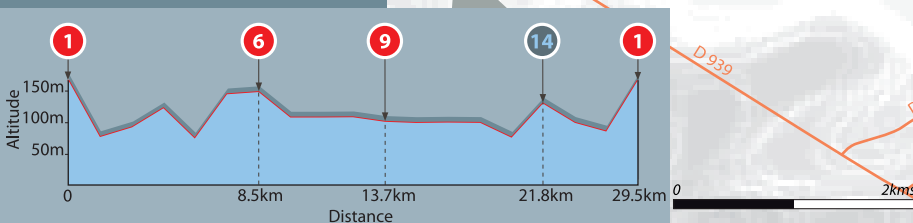
Parking



Aire de pique-nique
aménagée



Gare SNCF



Vimy Ridge National Historic Site of Canada

6

In January 1917 Canadian command received orders to take Vimy Ridge. A few weeks later four Canadian divisions were positioned along a line that ran from the village of Écurie in the north to Souchez. The offensive was carefully planned and rigorously rehearsed. The attack started on the morning of 9 April 1917 with a period of heavy preliminary shelling. It went almost completely to plan for the soldiers of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Divisions and they reached their goals in the middle of the afternoon. At the northern end of the ridge, known as Hill 145 or "The Pimple", the 4th Division encountered much stiffer resistance and this prevented them from achieving their objective before nightfall. The Pimple was eventually captured on 12 April through the deployment of massive reinforcements. It marked the end of fighting on Vimy Ridge. In the period 9–14 April 1917, the Canadians lost 10,600 men who were either killed or wounded in the fighting leading up to their victory. The capture of Vimy Ridge marked a turning point in the history of the Canadian nation.

Canadian soldiers on Vimy Ridge, April 1917.

BnF

"Objective reached but am afraid is not fully consolidated. The mud is very bad and our machine guns are filled with mud. The men's rifles are a mass of mud, but they are cleaning them. ... I cannot give an estimate of our casualties but believe they are severe."

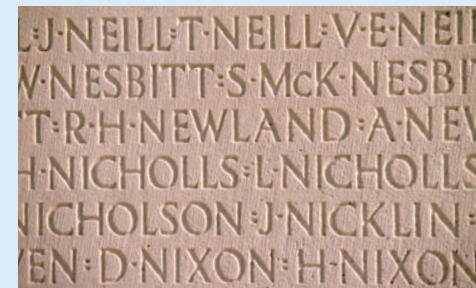
From a combat message sent by Capitaine MACDOWELL, Vimy Ridge, 9 April 1917, 8 a.m. (G. Metcalf Archival Collection – Canadian War Museum 19610015-002)

The Canadian tunnels

In preparation for their attack on Vimy Ridge the Canadians excavated a number of tunnels along a 6.4 km portion of the front. The tunnels were to provide shelter for the infantry during the preliminary shelling and to contribute an element of surprise to the attack. There were thirteen in all and their total length amounted to 9,962 metres. The longest, Goodman Tunnel, measured 1,721 metres alone. Most of them had electricity installed and were fitted out with amenities such as shelters, kitchens, latrines, first-aid posts, water reserves, and so on. It is thought that, during the period 5–11 April 1917, each tunnel contained approximately 9,700 men.

P. Frutier

Today the Vimy Ridge National Historic Site of Canada comprises more than 100 hectares of pine and maple woodland that was replanted after the war. France granted the site to Canada in perpetuity in 1922. The park continues to show the scars of the war. Some of the trenches have been preserved and made safe for the public. They show how close the Canadian and German front lines really were. Part of **Grange Tunnel** is also open to the public for guided tours given by Canadian students. An **interpretation centre** tells the story of the battle and provides educational information.



S. Dhote

The most impressive part of the park is undoubtedly the immense memorial erected on Hill 145 in honour of the 60,000 Canadians who gave their lives in the Great War. The site also provides a spectacular view of the coal basin. The twin pylons are 35 metres high, took eleven years to build and required 11,000 tonnes of concrete and 5,500 tonnes of stone. Designed by Walter Seymour Allward, a sculptor from Toronto, the memorial includes

a number of sculptures, the most famous being that of a woman representing the Canadian nation weeping for her lost sons. The names of 11,285 Canadian soldiers killed in France during the First World War whose bodies were never found are inscribed on the base of the memorial.

Neuville-Saint-Vaast Village Centre



Occupied by the Germans in October 1914 and liberated in January 1915, the village of **Neuville-Saint-Vaast** was a key component of the invader's defences. Heavily fortified, it blocked access to the strategic position of Vimy Ridge. In May 1915 the village found itself at the centre of the French offensive to break through the front line north of Arras. On 9 May the attacking French soldiers met with some very stiff resistance in the centre of the village. Fighting raged for four weeks. On 9 June 1915 the village finally came under the full control of the French Army. In 1917 Neuville-Saint-Vaast was used as a base by Canadian troops during preparations to capture Vimy Ridge. By the end of the fighting the village was little more than a field of rubble, albeit one where thousands of soldiers had lost their lives.



French soldiers in the ruins of Neuville-Saint-Vaast, 1915.

BnF

S. Dhote



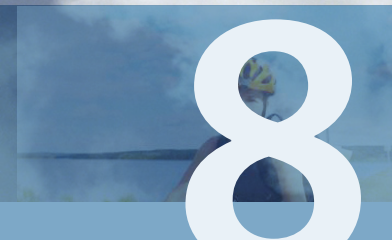
Stained-glass memorial windows in Saint Lawrence Church.

The village of Neuville-Saint-Vaast was completely rebuilt after the war. The central square of the village, where the **war memorial** stands, is named after the famous author Roland Dorgelès who wrote *Wooden Crosses*. Nearby, the facade of the new **council offices** displays two inscriptions that evoke the fighting and the commendation awarded to the village. Like the council offices, the **church** was also rebuilt after the war but in a neo-Gothic style. Dedicated to Saint Lawrence, it was opened in June 1925 by Mgr. Julien, Bishop of Arras. Some of the stained-glass windows evoke the Great War and one of them shows Lorette Cemetery. Many ex-voto and commemorative plaques are displayed inside the church. The church is made of reinforced concrete, and the inventor of this construction technique, **François HENNEBIQUE**, actually came from the village. He was born at No. 64, rue du Canada on 25 April 1842.



E. Roose

Zivy Crater



Situated halfway between the villages of Neuville-Saint-Vaast and Thélus, the British cemetery at **Zivy** is unusual in that it lies in a crater created by an exploding mine. There are only two British cemeteries of this type, the other being nearby *Lichfield Crater*. **Zivy Crater** contains the remains of fifty-three soldiers of whom five

have not been identified. Almost all of them belonged to the Canadian Army and lost their lives in the attack on Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917. There are no tombstones in the cemetery; instead, the names of the interred soldiers are displayed on plaques affixed to the peripheral wall.

German War Cemetery at La Maison Blanche



This German military cemetery covers more than seven hectares and is the largest in France. It contains the remains of 44,833 German soldiers, of whom 8,040 were laid to rest in an ossuary. The cemetery was built at the end of the Great War under the supervision of the French authorities.

This German military cemetery covers more than seven hectares and is the largest in France. It contains the remains of 44,833 German soldiers, of whom 8,040 were laid to rest in an ossuary. The cemetery was built at the end of the Great War under the supervision of the French authorities. It is a concentration cemetery, that is to say, the remains of German soldiers originally buried in more than one hundred villages across the department of Pas-de-Calais were exhumed and reburied there. The cemetery was designed and



Coll. Alain Jacques

The Labyrinth

The Labyrinth lay between the villages of Neuville-Saint-Vaast and Écurie and, like its name indicates, was an extensive network of firing and communication trenches. The German Army installed many defensive positions there, such as blockhouses, dugouts, machine-gun nests, barricades, and so on. The Labyrinth comprised two main trenches called von Kluck and Eulenburg. French efforts to take the position began on 9 May 1915 and progress proved to be extremely slow and toilsome. The capture of Neuville-Saint-Vaast facilitated the work of the French and by 16 June 1915 the Labyrinth was entirely in their hands.



E. Roose

The LEUREGANS Memorial

This memorial to Second-Lieutenant Leuregans was financed by his family. The courage and determination shown by the young officer—he was only eighteen—was universally praised. During heavy shelling he encouraged his “old” men of the Territorial Army with the words: “Come on my old daddies, you’re not going to let your child die alone!”

developed by the German war graves commission, the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (VDK), an association created in 1919 by German war veterans. Today the VDK has many young members who carry out maintenance and other works in the cemetery in a spirit of reconciliation “above the graves”. Like all the German military cemeteries, Maison Blanche blends into its surroundings by retaining the natural relief of the terrain. Much of the land is given over to trees to evoke the forest of German mythology that watched over the warrior dead. Each cross marks the graves of four men. The tombstones mark the graves of soldiers belonging to the Jewish faith. In the centre of the cemetery stands a monument inscribed with the words *Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden* (I had a comrade), quoted from a poem by Ludwig Uhland.

The plain lying in the direction of the village of Écurie, now given over to agriculture, was the scene of fierce fighting in 1915. It contained a vast network of trenches known appropriately as “The Labyrinth”.

“The attack went well and only failed when we came up against the Labyrinth, which was a real fortress...”

Account by soldier **Claude PARRON**



S. Dhote

Home for Disabled War Veterans

10

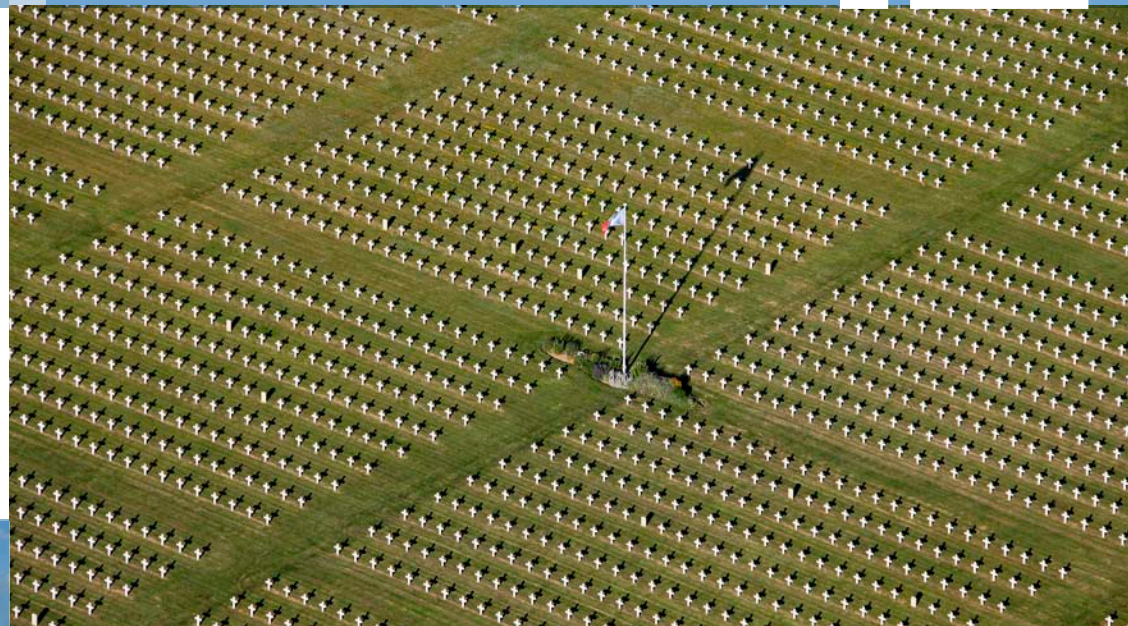
Built in 1928, the home comprised sixteen houses for disabled war veterans who were, for the most part, employed in looking after the military cemeteries in the area. Part of the home was reserved for families who could stay there while they attended to the graves of their loved ones. Situated on *rue du 11 novembre* (Armistice Day Street), each of the houses comprising the home bears the name of a general who commanded troops in the region of Artois: BARBOT, JOFFRE, FOCH, PETAIN, MANGIN, and so on.



E. Roose

French National War Cemetery at La Targette

12



P. Frutier

Torch for Peace

11



Unveiled in 1932, the Torch for Peace depicts a hand thrusting out of the ruins to hold aloft a flame. It symbolizes the rebirth of the village after the destruction of the First World War. A similar message appears on the village's coat of arms as: "9 mai – Resurgam – 1915" (9 May – I shall rise again – 1915). A concrete arch once adjoined the Torch to mark the entrance of the home.

F. Beirnaert

The French National War Cemetery at La Targette opened in 1919. Its size reflects the great number of soldiers who were killed in the sector. The cemetery covers more than four hectares and contains the graves of 12,210 French soldiers, of whom 11,443 fell in the First World War. Two ossuaries contain the remains of 3,882 men. Its layout of regimentally aligned white crosses is very different to that of the small British cemetery adjoining it.

"La Targette British Cemetery" was first used by the British in April 1917 and contains 641 graves of which three date from the Second World War.

"I've been round the makeshift cemeteries, the village cemeteries ... I haven't been able to find the grave of our late lamented."

*From a letter sent in June 1915 by Captain **Henri BAUDIMENT***

searching for his brother who went missing in action on 11 May 1915 at Neuville-Saint-Vaast.

Écoivres Military Cemetery

13



The vast military cemetery in the hamlet of Écoivres is unusual because it contains both British and French soldiers. It was originally a plot of the village cemetery which had been set aside for the remains of 787 French soldiers killed in the fighting of 1915, mostly on the front between Souchez and Neuville-Saint-Vaast. The British relieved the French in the region of Artois in February 1916 and they too used the cemetery for burying their dead. By 1917 most of the troops in the sector were Canadians involved in preparations for the assault on Vimy Ridge. The Great Cross of Sacrifice, a characteristic element of British cemeteries, bears on its front face the sword of Saint George pointing downward as a sign of mourning. A Stone of Remembrance bearing the inscription "their name liveth for evermore" also stands on the site (only cemeteries containing more than 400 graves were awarded this privilege by the British authorities).

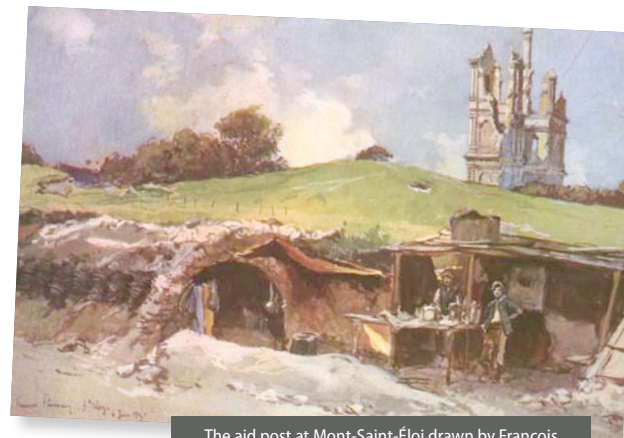
E. Roose

Kenneth Weeks, American author who died for France in 1915

Écoivres communal cemetery contains the grave of Kenneth Weeks, a young American from Boston. Author of several books and plays, Weeks settled in the French capital in 1910 after studying at the Paris School of Fine Art. When war broke out in August 1914 he signed up for the French Foreign Legion. He was reported missing in action at Givenchy on 17 June 1915. His body was found in November 1915. The death of the promising young author was announced in the *New York Times* dated 16 January 1916.

Ruined towers of Mont-Saint-Éloi abbey

14



BM de Lille

The aid post at Mont-Saint-Éloi drawn by François Flameng and published in the magazine *L'illustration*, 25 September 1915 (Ref. P906)

The village of Mont-Saint-Éloi is known above all for the ruins of its eighteenth century abbey. The abbey was attacked during the French Revolution and only the towers were left standing. The front line never moved close enough to the village for it to endure the devastating shelling that characterized the Great War. As a result, the village retains much of the white limestone buildings it had before the war. The towers of the old abbey were useful observation posts and, because of this, the target of much German shelling which greatly damaged them. Throughout the war the village was occupied by troops, first the French (1914–1915) and then the British (1916–1918). In 1917 much of the occupying troops were Canadian. A British aerodrome was built on the outskirts of the village.

"I visited the towers of St Éloi which are two kilometres away from our position. They have been partly demolished. The narrow street further on is nothing but a pile of rubble. The cemetery has been churned up by shells of all calibres. An impressive sight."

Account dated 1 March 1915 by gunner Louis COHEZ.

Mont-Saint-Éloi: the towers of the old abbey before shelling (Portfolio 96.20)



BM de Lille

NORD
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14-18

Prix Thiers Peace

Carency Village

15



French stretcher-bearers evacuating a German prisoner, drawing by Pierre FALKE made in Carency, on 12 May 1915.

Carency is often associated with the landmine warfare that marked the first few months of 1915. Making little progress in the capture of the village, the French Army decided in December 1914 to engage in a veritable underground war in the hope that it would push the Germans back. They started tunnelling across the front line to place powerful explosive mines under the enemy's positions. This turned into a war of attrition with both armies using mines to devastating effect. The village was eventually recaptured, albeit in ruins, from the Germans on 9 May 1915 during a vast French offensive.

Ruined church of Ablain-Saint-Nazaire

16

Ablain-Saint-Nazaire, lying at the foot of Lorette Hill, was occupied early in the war, in October 1914. The Germans fortified and successfully defended the village until it was permanently retaken by the French Army in May 1915.

In the aftermath of the war Ablain-Saint-Nazaire was little more than a field of rubble but reconstruction was swift and complete by 1924. The new church and the new town hall are enduring examples of the reconstruction works which, for the most part, were financed by German reparations.

Ablain-Saint-Nazaire's old church was severely damaged in the shelling of 1914 and 1915. In the aftermath of the war it was decided to preserve the church as it was, as a reminder. Today it is a protected historic monument. The original Gothic church was built in the sixteenth century by the architect who also designed Arras town hall, Jacques Caron. The ruins clearly show the layout of the church. In former times it comprised three aisles and an imposing thirty-four metre high tower. Even before the end of the war documents and photographs of the ruined church were being published.



The church and its surroundings. In the background can be seen Lorette Spur, 27 September 1917, fonds Valois, BDIC

"At the entrance to the village, where several companies parade at the same time, the mutilated church stands out against the sky, its tower strangely white and worn, pounded and scored by heavy shells, its profile shaped like the island of Corsica."

Jean GALTIER-BOISSIERE, *Un hiver à Souchez*, Paris, éd. Berger-Levrault, 1917

"We followed a road, crossing Ablain-Saint-Nazaire in ruins. We could vaguely make out the whitish outlines of the houses and the dark spidery roof timbers hanging in the air. The village was so long that, after entering it in the middle of the night, we saw the last of its houses begin to pale in the morning frost."

Henri BARBUSSE, *le Feu*, Paris, éd. Flammarion, 1916.

"The column ... entered the main street of Ablain-Saint-Nazaire. Ablain lies at the foot of the bare plateau of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette and was one of the first villages to be retaken by French troops in the offensive of 9 May. We fought with grenades and knives on the remaining barricades of the narrow streets; we grappled in the houses, firing at point-blank range on the stairs; we slit each other's throats in the cellars. The walls were shattered, the roofs razed, the trees flattened..."

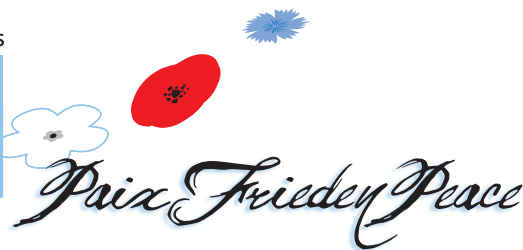
Jean GALTIER-BOISSIERE, *Un hiver à Souchez*, Paris, éd. Berger-Levrault, 1917

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