

31) 200178 Private Edward **COLLYER**  
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

**Kia** 16/08/17  
2nd Bn. Royal Berkshire Regiment

**Born** Wokingham  
**Enlisted** Aldermaston  
**Residence** Chelmsford

**Awarded:** British War Medal  
Victory Medal

**Date arrived in theatre of war:** not known

As with a majority of soldiers who served in the second half of the Great War, it becomes more difficult to determine details of their early careers from surviving military records. Edward Collyer's medal entitlement would show that he had come to France at some time after 1<sup>st</sup> January 1916. However, his regimental number is that of a battalion of the Territorial Force. Its members underwent a change in their regimental numbers in early 1917 from four- and five-digit numbers to six-digit ones beginning with '2'. The fact that Edward Collyer only has a single six-digit regimental number indicates he only arrived in France from January/February 1917 or even later. Interestingly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire were not a unit of the Territorial Force and it is probable that Edward Collyer was transferred to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion because of need in early 1917.

Edward Collyer's service with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire coincidentally mirrors that of Harvey Winkworth who died with the 6<sup>th</sup> Royal Berkshire. The latter died on the first day of 'Third Ypres' fighting just to the south of the infamous Menin Road at Sanctuary Wood, 31/7/1917. On this day Edward Collyer had also taken part in an attack with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire in the division on the right. The two men would have been less than a mile from each other in this attack. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire attack had failed in part due to the failure to progress of units on either side (including that of Harvey Winkworth's Division). This failed attack by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire cost them approximately 150 casualties in total, However Edward Collyer had got through.

The commencement of 'Third Ypres' at the end of July 1917 would coincide with the start of the wettest summer in living memory. Flanders is low-lying and only remains as 'dry' ground by constant maintenance a large network of agricultural drainage ditches. The soil is heavy clay and fairly impermeable. By summer 1917, with more than two years of shellfire destroying the drainage system and a record wet summer, the resulting morass of overlapping shell craters was inevitable. Trenches as such were mainly those on maps, the reality was that men either lived above ground in joined up shell-holes or underground in dugouts/tunnels, requiring constant manual pumping to prevent flooding.



**British Officer's 'Dugout' – Ypres 1917**

British tanks could not be used in the overall battle due to the mud. Troops could only move around on 'corduroy roads' or 'duckboard tracks' to avoid the water-filled shell holes – but such thoroughfares would be regular targets for enemy artillery.



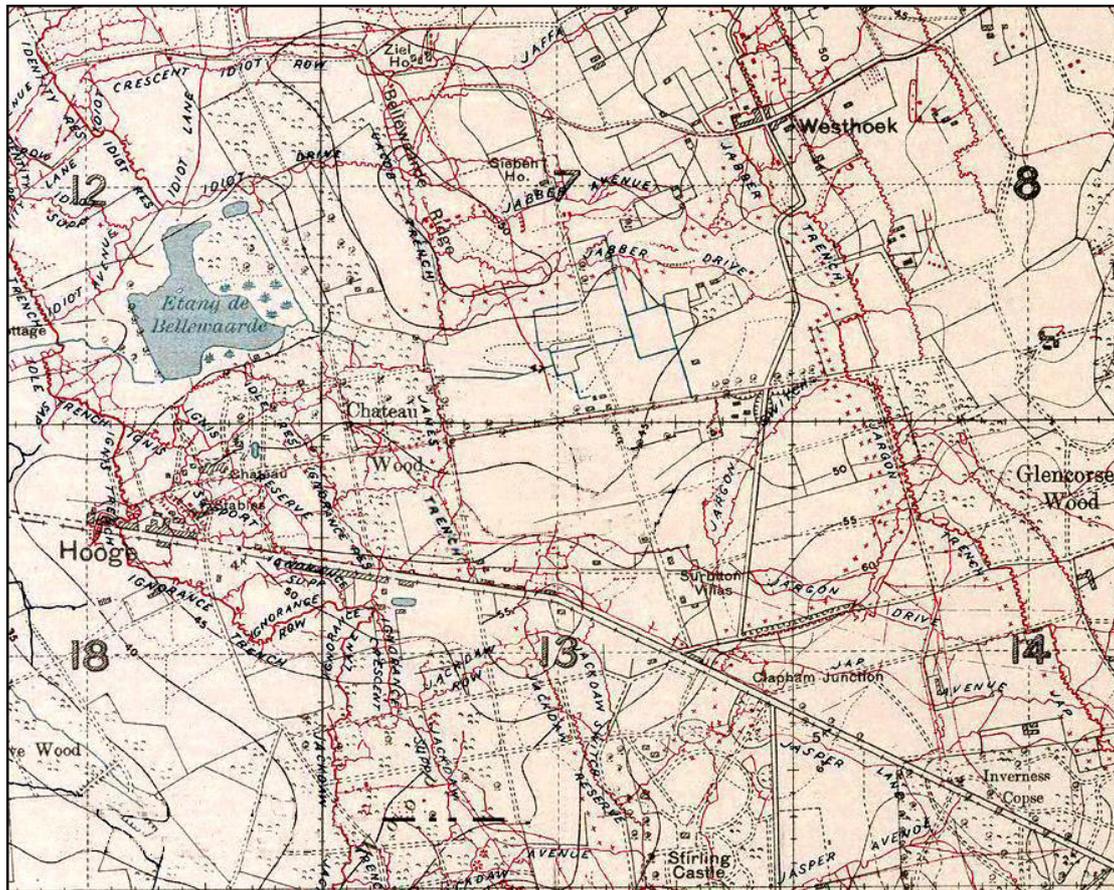
**Construction of a 'Corduroy Road' – Ypres 1917**

Following their failed attack on 31/7/17, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire were relieved and went back to Steenvoorde via Winnipeg Camp where they would 'rest', reform and train ready for another attack in the same area.

**13<sup>th</sup> August 1917** – Battalion moved from STEENVOORDE to the Forward Area prior to making an attack on Enemy lines...Battalion Head Quarters, A and B Companies in ESPLANADE, YPRES. C and D Companies in BELLEWAARDE RIDGE.

**14<sup>th</sup> August 1917** - Battalion Head Quarters, A and B Companies in ESPLANADE, YPRES. C and D Companies in BELLEWAARDE RIDGE.

**15<sup>th</sup> August 1917** – Battalion moved forward to the Assembly position on WESTHOEK RIDGE, prior to making attack.



**Trench map - Bellewaarde and Westhoek Ridges north of the Menin Road, Ypres**

The Battalion War Diary provides a copy of the original 'Warning Order' for the planned attack by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire on the Westhoek Ridge, the following day:

2nd. Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment

SECRET WARNING ORDER

9.9.17

8th Div  
25th Infy Bde

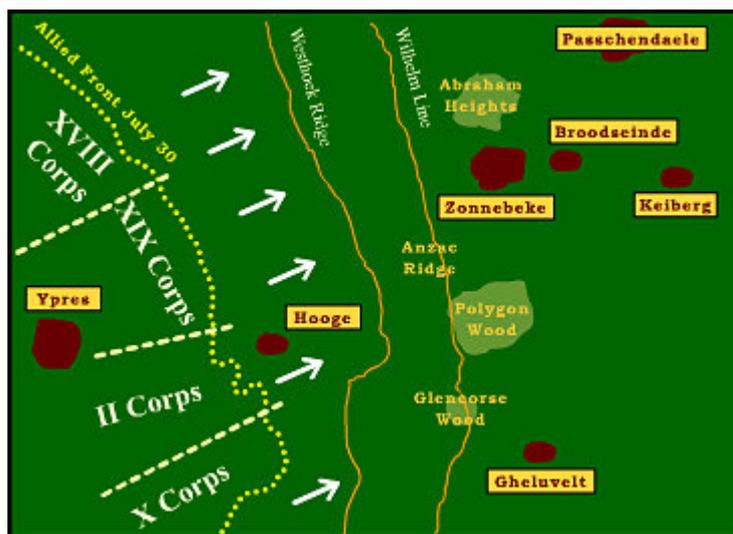
The Battalion will move from present billets on "W" Day and will assault GREEN LINE on "Z" Day.

Attack will be carried out by 8th. Division. 23rd. Brigade being on the left, 25th. Brigade on right.

25th. Brigade will attack with 2nd. Royal Berkshire Regt. on right and 1st. Royal Irish Rifles on left. 2nd. Rifle Bde. in support on left and 2nd. Lincolnshire Regt. in reserve on right.

The Battalion will attack between the following approximate boundaries. RIGHT BOUNDARY J.7.b.90.15. J.2.b.00.75. J.3.c.0.2. J.3.d.05.75. LEFT BOUNDARY J.7.b.8.8. J.2.c.65.30. J.3.a.0.0. J.3.a.4.3. This means a frontage on starting of approximately 320 Yds. and on reaching Objective of 390 Yds.

FORMATION OF ATTACK. 3 Companies in line in order from left, A, B, C and "D" Company mopping up.



Plan for the attack

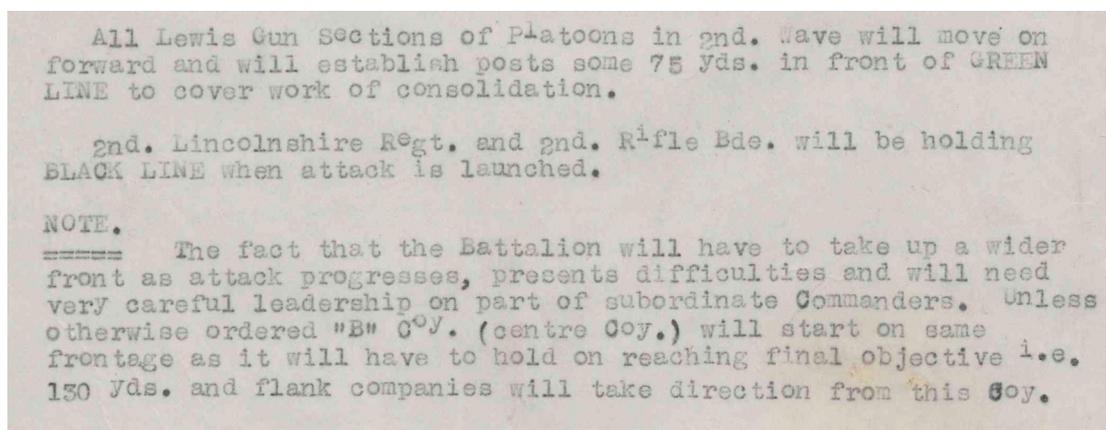
Attack will be in 2 waves. Each Coy. having 1 double ~~max~~ platoon in first wave and 1 double platoon in 2nd. wave. Moppers up will move behind first wave. One section (2 guns) 25th Trench Mortar Battery will be attached to the Battalion.

1st Wave will go right through to GREEN LINE which they will mop up themselves including all ground between road J.2.b.35.75. and J.3.c.3.4. and GREEN LINE. They will also be responsible for its immediate consolidation by means of platoon posts.

"D" Company will mop up everything between BLACK LINE and above mentioned road. O.C. "D" Company will submit as soon as possible to the Orderly Room exact details of this mopping up.

2nd. wave less Lewis Gun Sections will go as far as the trench line on ridge running S. from ZONNEBEKE REDOUBT to about J.3.c.25. 35. and will assist in mopping up this line. When this task has been completed they will be employed in digging strong points and supporting posts.

This order was then translated by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire Headquarters officers into more detailed plans for the attack. Given the ground conditions, these almost daily attacks against positions that really existed on maps, followed a repeated plan in the hope insufficient German machine-guns would be left to mow down the attacking troops who could then advance through the enemy trenches and gain perhaps 1000 yards of territory with a view to forcing a German withdrawal on a wider front – there was little else they could do.



All Lewis Gun Sections of Platoons in 2nd. Wave will move on forward and will establish posts some 75 Yds. in front of GREEN LINE to cover work of consolidation.

2nd. Lincolnshire Regt. and 2nd. Rifle Bde. will be holding BLACK LINE when attack is launched.

NOTE.  
===== The fact that the Battalion will have to take up a wider front as attack progresses, presents difficulties and will need very careful leadership on part of subordinate Commanders. Unless otherwise ordered "B" Coy. (centre Coy.) will start on same frontage as it will have to hold on reaching final objective i.e. 150 Yds. and flank companies will take direction from this Coy.

The plan would be:

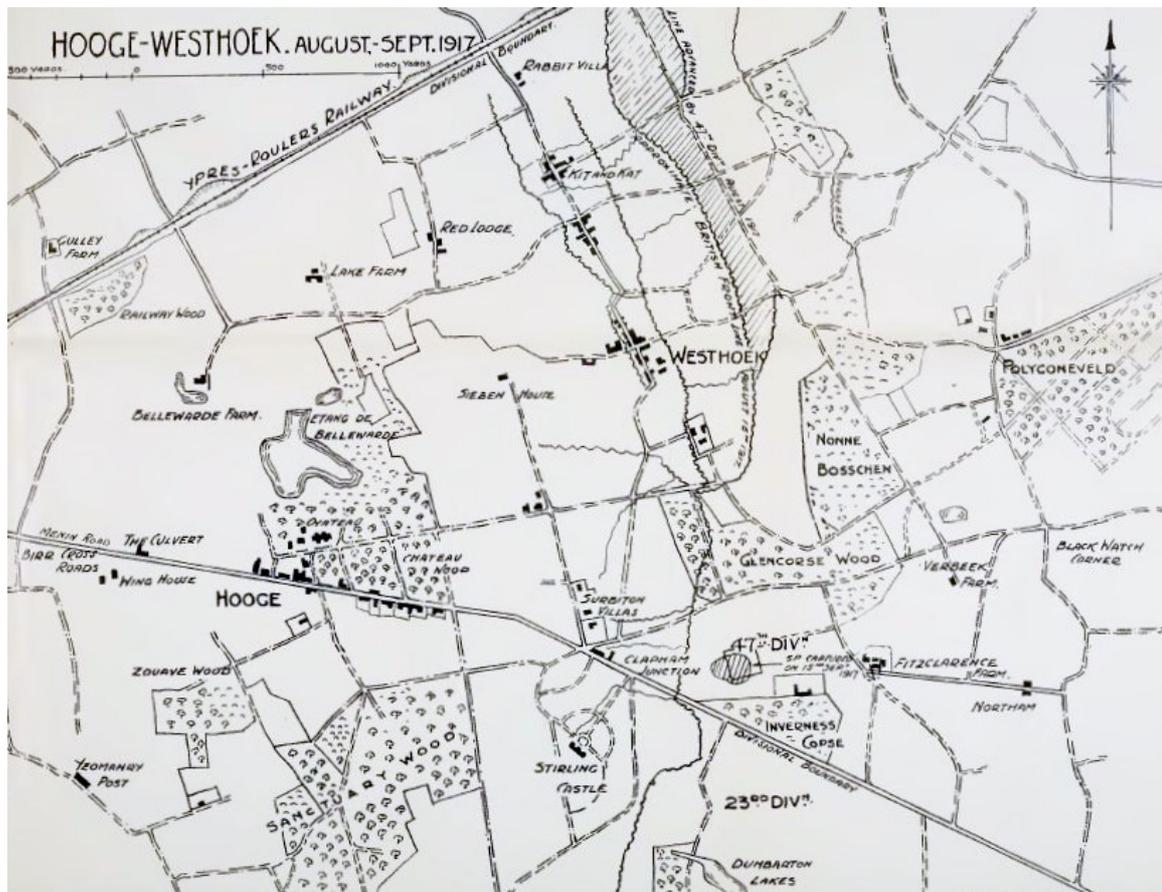
- a) Move the assaulting troops up to an assembly position in the rear of the area to be attacked.
- b) Artillery preparation and destruction of known enemy strongpoints in the front line and rear
- c) A white 'forming up' tape would be laid out by patrols just ahead of the British wire.
- d) The assaulting troops would move up during the night before the attack and form up along this white tape and remain there all night.
- e) An hour before dawn the artillery would open up on the enemy lines destroying the defensive wire, this would intensify in the last ten minutes
- f) The assaulting troops would advance at dawn right up to the artillery barrage which would then lift at Zero+few minutes allowing the attacking troops to enter and capture the line.
- g) The artillery barrage would then 'creep' towards the enemy second line allowing the support troops to advance behind it and capture the second/third lines etc.

Inevitably:

- a) The German wire would not be sufficiently cut.
- b) The advancing troops could not cross No-Man's land quickly enough due to ground conditions and would arrive too late, the protecting barrage having already lifted, by which enemy troops had been able to recover and successfully defend their trench.
- c) The artillery barrage would always progress too quickly and would be too inflexible to counteract unexpected difficulties.
- d) Uncaptured positions would allow the enemy to fire into the back of advancing troops in other areas where there had been a more successful outcome.
- e) The German defensive barrage would prevent further support troops and ammunition from being brought up, leaving a dwindling attacking force with limited attack potential.
- f) A German counter attack would be launched against the now exhausted attacking troops who would have to hang on as best they could else risk capture or annihilation.

The overall result may be only limited gains, often none at all with hundreds of casualties in conditions it would be almost impossible to recover the wounded from.

The war diary of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire contains a detailed and sobering account of their attack and retirement on the Westhoek Ridge on 16/8/1917:



*'On the night of 15/16<sup>th</sup> August 1917, the Battalion moved up into the line proceeding in single file. Owing to the darkness of the night and the difficult nature of the ground considerable difficulty was experienced in keeping touch and finding direction.'*



**Moving up the line towards the Westhoek Ridge**

*The Battalion was not formed up on tapes until 4am. Up to this period the Battalion suffered very light casualties in spite of considerable hostile shelling.*

*The assault on the GREEN LINE commenced at 4.45am and the ground East of Zonnebeke fell into our hands without great difficulty, about 50 prisoners being taken.*

*The HANNEBEKE was crossed and the Battalion was reformed. It was realised by the Officer on the spot that the attack on the Right had made little if any progress and the Right Company (C) took over the defence of the Right flank, whilst the other two companies continued the attacks.*

*From this time onwards there was heavy enfilade fire (MG) from NONNE BOSCHEN and POLYGONE WOOD.*

*When the barrage advanced the attack was continued and the greater part of IRON CROSS REDOUBT and the defence of the North of it fell into our hands a further 50 prisoners being taken.*

*Our Right after suffering heavy casualties was held up by a Strong Point (unlocated, possibly the eastern edge of Iron Cross Redoubt).*

*The Left Company under Capt J.G.Cahill MC with a party of Londons captured ANZAC, which was strongly held and the GREEN LINE was reached in certain places.*

*The Royal Irish Rifles were not quite up with our Left. A line of small posts running from approximately J 3 d3.9 through the NW corner of the Iron Cross Redoubt and down to J 2 c6.1. Touch was gained with troops on our Right and Left. There were a certain number of men on the forward edge of crest. Owing to casualties this line was very weak and heavy sniping and MG fire made it impossible to reorganise, some fire coming from our right rear.*

*A weak company of Lincolns came up in support. Battalion Headquarters was established in concrete dugout at J 2 c8.6.*

*About 9.30am Germans were noticed forming up on the high ground in POLYGONE and at 10.30am. A strong counterattack commenced, the enemy advancing on our front and from ESE. It is extremely hard to make out what happened on our front as no really reliable witnesses survive. Our casualties on the crest of the ridge had been very heavy and the Germans attacked in great force. According to the accounts of to men, they appeared to come from a tunnel behind ANZAC. The enemy suffered considerable casualties, but our front was driven in and the Division on the right appeared to have given way.*

*The troops were rallied by Brig General C.Coffin DSO West of HANNEBEKE, posts were established in an old trench at J 2 d8.5 and also J 2 d8.2.*

*A post of the 1<sup>st</sup> Londons was in echelon on our Right and touch was gained with troops on our Left. Units were completely mixed up.*

*The Battalion strength was 4 Officers (one wounded) and 100 men.*

*The German attack stopped on gaining the Iron Cross Redoubt line.*

*At 3pm. Germans were noticed on the high ground in POLYGONE WOOD and a pigeon message was dispatched asking for Artillery support.*

*At 3.30 the German advance commenced, there being approximately a battalion coming down from this high ground in a north-westerly direction. Another attack commenced from NONNE BOSSCHEN WOOD and from ZONNEBEKE REDOUBT. The attack on our front made very slow progress.*

*At 4.30 our heavy artillery commenced shelling the ridge causing considerable casualties. About the same time, the Brigade on our left were seen retiring.*



#### **British troops retiring across the open coming under fire**

*At 5.30 the advance troops of the attack on our front were within 600 yards whilst sniping was becoming very effective. Owing to shortage of ammunition, no fire except sniping and occasional Lewis Gun fire was allowed, This attack in the opinion of those present, would have been completely repulsed but at this time the Division on our right were seen retiring in disorder exposing our Right Post to enfilade fire and ultimate destruction.*

*The left flank was already in the air and retirement became necessary. This was effected in spite of heavy MG fire. A line was organised along concrete dugouts from J 8 a0.G8 to J 8 a4.6.*

*As the Division on our Right had last been seen retiring on WESTHOEK, it was anticipated that the Right would be held by them, this however was not found to be the case.*

*All the Royal Berkshires immediately available (60) and about 20 Lincolns moved to the right and formed a defensive flank facing West.*

*Touch was reported with the Londons, this information proved to be inaccurate and there was a considerable gap in the line which was ultimately filled by two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Northamptons.*

*No further German attack took place and at [?] the Battalion was relieved by the Northamptons and went into Reserve on the BELLEWARDE RIDGE. As soon as possible, the Battalion was reformed into four platoons and Headquarters, the strongest platoon being approximately 30.*

*The fighting strength of the Battalion was 3 Officers and 115 men. The conduct of the Battalion was very good. When the 1<sup>st</sup> retirement took place a considerable number of wounded, including at least one Officer had to be abandoned and fell into the hands of the Germans. In addition at least one German aeroplane was brought down by our rifle fire.*

*Signed Lt-Col, Commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Berkshire 20/8/17'*

The War diary gives the following casualties for the attack on 16/8/1917

Officers: Killed 2, Wounded 8, Wounded and Missing 1, Missing 4

Other ranks: Killed 13, Wounded 231, Missing 120

Edward Collyer was one of those killed in action in this attack; a majority of those 'missing' may indeed have also been killed in action. As with many, Edward Collyer's body would not be identified and thus his name is recorded on:

TYNE COT MEMORIAL, Belgium, Panels 105 to 103 and 162



**Scene from the Westhoek Ridge - today**

## TYNE COT MEMORIAL



### **Location Information**

The Tyne Cot Memorial to the Missing forms the north-eastern boundary of Tyne Cot Cemetery, which is located 9 kilometres north east of Ypres town centre.

### **Historical Information**

The Tyne Cot Memorial is one of four memorials to the missing in Belgian Flanders which cover the area known as the Ypres Salient. Broadly speaking, the Salient stretched from Langemarck in the north to the northern edge in Ploegsteert Wood in the south, but it varied in area and shape throughout the war.

The Salient was formed during the First Battle of Ypres in October and November 1914, when a small British Expeditionary Force succeeded in securing the town before the onset of winter, pushing the German forces back to the Passchendaele Ridge. The Second Battle of Ypres began in April 1915 when the Germans released poison gas into the Allied lines north of Ypres. This was the first time gas had been used by either side and the violence of the attack forced an Allied withdrawal and a shortening of the line of defence.

There was little more significant activity on this front until 1917, when in the Third Battle of Ypres an offensive was mounted by Commonwealth forces to divert German attention from a weakened French front further south. The initial attempt in June to dislodge the Germans from the Messines Ridge was a complete success, but the main assault north-eastward, which began at the end of July, quickly became a dogged struggle against determined opposition and the rapidly deteriorating weather. The campaign finally came to a close in November with the capture of Passchendaele.

The German offensive of March 1918 met with some initial success, but was eventually checked and repulsed in a combined effort by the Allies in September.

The battles of the Ypres Salient claimed many lives on both sides and it quickly became clear that the commemoration of members of the Commonwealth forces with no known grave would have to be divided between several different sites.

The site of the Menin Gate was chosen because of the hundreds of thousands of men who passed through it on their way to the battlefields. It commemorates those of all Commonwealth nations, except New Zealand, who died in the Salient, in the case of United Kingdom casualties before 16 August 1917 (with some exceptions). Those United Kingdom and New Zealand servicemen who died after that date are named on the memorial at Tyne Cot, a site which marks the furthest point reached by Commonwealth forces in Belgium until nearly the end of the war. Other New Zealand casualties are commemorated on memorials at Buttes New British Cemetery and Messines Ridge British Cemetery.

The TYNE COT MEMORIAL now bears the names of almost 35,000 officers and men whose graves are not known. The memorial, designed by Sir Herbert Baker with sculpture by Joseph Armitage and F.V. Blundstone, was unveiled by Sir Gilbert Dyett on 20 June 1927.

The memorial forms the north-eastern boundary of TYNE COT CEMETERY, which was established around a captured German blockhouse or pill-box used as an advanced dressing station. The original battlefield cemetery of 343 graves was greatly enlarged after the Armistice when remains were brought in from the battlefields of Passchendaele and Langemarck, and from a few small burial grounds. It is now the largest Commonwealth war cemetery in the world in terms of burials. At the suggestion of King George V, who visited the cemetery in 1922, the Cross of Sacrifice was placed on the original large pill-box. There are three other pill-boxes in the cemetery.

There are now 11,956 Commonwealth servicemen of the First World War buried or commemorated in Tyne Cot Cemetery, 8,369 of these are unidentified.

The cemetery was designed by Sir Herbert Baker.

