

# PROLOGUE

As a result of the 2014-2018 commemoration it is important to support enthusiastic people who have or want to establish a project around WWI. For this purpose we developed the touchstone '14-'18. It is a tool and/or guideline to bring a project to a happy conclusion. 'Learning from the War' is an aspect which the Province of West Flanders has been working on for a long time. The story of the war should be a story with an explicit peace message. This is only possible from a justified remembrance. Remembrance education is based on three very important aspects: (1) knowledge and insight; (2) empathy and solidarity and (3) reflection and action. By means of pitfalls, ideas, opportunities and concrete educational projects we elaborate on these three aspects. We also link this with the attainment targets in education. Lastly there is an appendix: background information WWI. With this touchstone we hope to help as many people as possible with the development of a good project about the Great War.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the government of West Flanders decided to unite all initiatives around the war subject in a provincial network, “Oorlog en Vrede in de Westhoek” [War and Peace in Flanders Fields]. The initiative is also supported by partners in the Westhoek region itself (museums, associations, local committees, etc.). In the lead up to the remembrance period 2014-2018 the network is fully devoted to the aspect “Learning from the war”. It is important here that the story of the war is adjusted to a justified remembrance and an obvious peace message. The network wants to guarantee that the initiatives that they support are of the highest quality.

For this reason the network decided to develop a touchstone. The inspiration source was the mission statement around high-quality remembrance education which was drafted by the “Bijzonder Comité voor Remembrance education” (BCH)\* [Special Committee for Remembrance Education]. An appeal was made to a very diverse ‘brainstorming group’ of heritage staff, experts, teachers, educational staff,.... The basis remained the touchstone of the BCH, only the interpretation was adapted. Van Alstein, M. & Nath, G. , 2012, 14-18 van dichtbij, inspiratiegids voor lokale projecten over de Grote Oorlog, 2005; STUDIO GLOBO, “Voorbij de kleuren” [Past the colours], DATUM and the comments of “Kleur Bekennen” [Confess Colours] were of great assistance in this.

Starting point is the BCH definition of remembrance education:

**“Remembrance education is working on an attitude of active respect in the current society from the collective remembrance of human suffering which is caused by human behaviour such as war, intolerance or exploitation and which cannot be forgotten”.**”

\* In 2008, Frank Vandenbroucke, Minister of Education at the time, initiated the establishment of the Special Committee for Remembrance Education (BCH). Minister Pascal Smet ensured continuity. This board consists of the educational ambassadors of a number of important actors in the area of remembrance education, educational advisory services of the different education umbrella organisations and the Ministry of Education and Training. Their task is to support school teams that work around remembrance education. Specifically focused on stimulating the quality of remembrance education, the BCH developed an instrument: the Touchstone. For more information please visit [www.herinneringseducatie.be](http://www.herinneringseducatie.be).

## TARGET GROUP: WHO IS THIS TOUCHSTONE FOR?

This instrument can be used as example for a new project or as instrument for reflection and self-evaluation in a running project. Everyone who is working on a project around the Great War (school teams, individual teachers, lecturers in teacher training programs, guides, supervisors or educational staff in organisations,...) can get started with this.

Besides this XL (extra-large) version, "Oorlog en Vrede in de Westhoek", also developed a S (small) version of this document, in which the most important tips are listed. This touchstone '14-'18 contains an appendix with extensive background information about World War I (causes, progress, ...).

## CONTEXT: A MULTITUDE OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

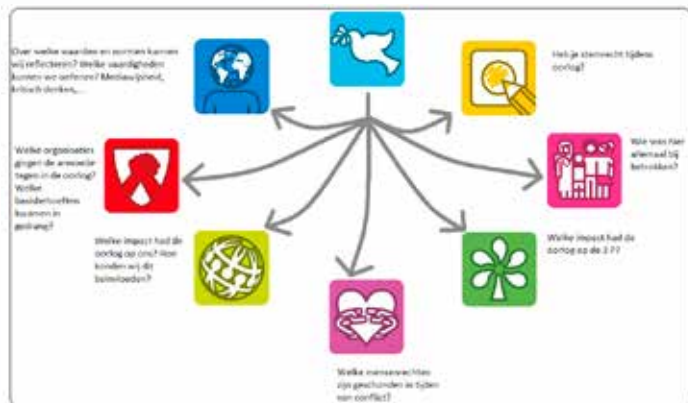
Remembrance education is of course only one of the many 'education programs' which can be worked on with young people (aside from environment education, citizenship education, health education, ...). The objectives and content of this education is not always strictly distinguishable. Just think of the ample common ground between remembrance education and peace education, human rights education, heritage education, world citizenship education, ...

What is particular for remembrance education is the starting point: the remembrance of the past. But in the end the objective comes first. Studying the past does not merely occur to know or understand the past, it is primarily about what we can learn from the past. The goal of remembrance education is 'respect', a notion that goes further than 'tolerance'. Via remembrance education we want to instigate a respectful attitude towards any person, from any origin, with any sexual nature or philosophy of life. 'Active' respect refers to our responsibility to actively take steps against disrespect in society.



Wherever you see this icon, we want to invite you to make the link between remembrance education and education to world citizenship. **What is world citizenship?** Making connections between yourself and others, close-by and far away. When you are little, the world consists of the place where you live and the people you know. The older you become, the vaster your perspective on the world becomes. The world comes closer and therefore keeps getting smaller. The world is coming at you from all sides. You don't have to

travel far or open yourself up for this concretely. Your world starts in the here and now and is not a far-from-your-bed-show! A world citizen is involved in his/her world, close-by as well as far away and is interested in past as well as future. To open up your peace education you can make links with all points of view.



Source: Kleur Bekennen

All this education is focused on thinking with young people about our own responsibility in a democratic society, in which the fundamental rights and freedoms are respected. The intention is not that this education is added 'on top of' the daily (lesson) schedule, but that it is integrated, or is at the basis of it. The link with the attainment targets is an illustration of this..

## STRUCTURE: THREE ASPECTS

Remembrance education is based on three very important aspects: **(1) knowledge and insight; (2) empathy and solidarity and (3) reflection and action**. The three aspects can be seen as three goals to strive towards, which can be worked on in a certain order. **'Knowledge and insight'** is the fundamental step to work on the following two stages in a high-quality manner. Without knowledge and insight **'empathy and solidarity'** and **'reflection and action'** remain without content and hollow. Without opportunities to implement what is learnt in 'reflection and action', **'knowledge and insight'** and **'empathy and solidarity'** remain superficial and moralising. For the purpose of clarity these aspects are presented here in separate sections. In practice however they are never strictly separate. Below

you will find a short explanation of what can be understood as **(1) knowledge and insight; (2) empathy and solidarity and (3) reflection and action.**

This explanation is followed by possible pitfalls, ideas and opportunities. The ideas and opportunities are aimed at everyone in general (heritage staff, experts, education staff, guides,...) who wants to work on remembrance education. Under “idea” we give a concrete and practical example, “opportunity” serves as inspiration. The frames refer to specific educational projects. We only present a selection of a number of projects. At the end of this document, but also on our website [www.wo1.be/educatie](http://www.wo1.be/educatie) (from October 2013) you can find many more examples. You will be able to read a ‘testimony’ on a regular basis. These are quotations of members of the brainstorming group, who are working on remembrance education and which can be inspiring. It is definitely not the intention that each project meets the different touchstone elements. Especially for primary school education this is impossible. It is however very important to have the three aspects **(knowledge and insight - empathy and solidarity - reflection and action)** in mind at all times when developing all possible large and small projects, lessons, interaction moments, etc. with participants.

## EDUCATION

By working on remembrance education, different attainment targets are focused on. Projects that are offered in a school context must be tailored to these. Since this touchstone is useful for primary as well as secondary education, there is attention for the attainment targets of the whole school career. The most evident attainment targets for primary school students are those of the learning area called world studies and the cross-curricular attainment targets with regards to social skills. In secondary education the most leads can be found in the cross-curricular attainment targets and in the subject-related attainment targets history and general subjects project [GSP]. However other subjects are also suitable for remembrance education: languages, philosophy, art, science,...are only some examples. At the end of the touchstone teachers can find a list of the relevant attainment targets in the context of WWI education. For primary school education the attainment targets are ordered according to the structure of the touchstone. For secondary school education the reader will find an overview of the relevant cross-curricular and subject-related attainment targets history and GSP.

# 1. KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT

## INSIGHT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Knowledge, in the broad sense of the word, is a necessary basis for remembrance education. Remembrance education actually intends to provide participants insight in a particular historical context, a context which is determined economically, politically, socially and culturally and in which particular processes, strategies and mechanisms play a part.



### PITFALL

Information about the past is not always historically correct. On the contrary, people often tell a coloured story. So note the reliability of your sources. Have a think about who created the source, where and why. Language can also mislead us: make sure the right word is in the right place! It was not “Germany” and “England” who were involved in the Flanders Fields battles during WO1, but the German Empire and the British Empire (including the colonies at that time).

There are many difficulties associated with actualising history. But that doesn't mean that historical projects have to avoid a current relevance. The most important message of a historical project may well be that the history cannot offer unambiguous and ready-made answers. Don't forget the role of propaganda and coloured information in this. History is often the story of the winner and the 'upper class'.



### OPPORTUNITY

The use of historical films is a popular medium for education. An increasing number of teachers consider film as an important source of knowledge, insight and realisation. This trend is however accompanied by an increasingly louder call for the development of 'historical-cinematic literacy' in young people. This has to enable them to adopt a conscious and critical attitude towards the medium and towards the relationship between fact and fiction.



### TIP

Tip for illustration: Media influences our illustration. Think about who you will make an image of. If possible provide your sources. And reflect about the source if you ask the students to analyse an image, a text.





### IDEA

Testimony: “In my guided tours the transfer of knowledge is crucial. Of course this information must be historically correct. And I always bring “ruime en internationale verhaal” [extensive and international story] as introduction.” How do I know whether my sources are reliable? This is and will always remain a difficult question. What we can suggest is to appeal to experts in the matter. (And make sure you view the many tips for research of sources at the end of the document!)



### EDUCATION

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

View a fragment of the fiction series “In Vlaamse velden” [In Flanders Fields] (from 12/01/2014) or of another movie about the Great War. Ask the students whether they noted things that are not entirely correct.

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- View a fragment of a historical movie for example ‘In Vlaamse Velden’ or ‘Parade’s End’ about the Great War. Put this next to a propaganda film from that time. Analyse the film language and compare it with the reality.
- On the website [www.archief-democratie.be](http://www.archief-democratie.be) from Rijksarchief [National Archives] you can work with various source material about the First World War. Look at the war diary of Constance Graeffe and at the same time learn something about the archives.
- With the smartphone in hand you follow the story of nurse Jane and Guillaume the gardener. Images bring the field hospital Lijssenthoek to life. The application is a part of the series ‘Dagboek 14-18’ [14-18 diary], which links five war sites with each other. [www.zevisit.com/application/orlog1418/dagboek1418.html](http://www.zevisit.com/application/orlog1418/dagboek1418.html).

## PROCESSES AND MECHANISMS

World War I did not just happen and did not develop like other conflicts. Different processes, strategies and mechanisms played an important role in this. (see background info WWI, appendix 1). For example what was the role of propaganda and pacifism in a war which lasted so long? What effect did such a large migration have on a community? Which prejudices were prevalent about soldiers from the colonies? What role did technology play in the inventions of new war weapons? Etcetera. These processes and strategies didn’t occur in a historical vacuum, but were determined and shaped by the context in which they appear.

Processes of today can show similarities with mechanisms from the First World War. The past repeats itself, but never in the same way. So students not only have to gain insight in the historical context, but also see the similarities

and differences and possible connections with today. We advocate for allowing different voices to speak, even if they contradict each other. By tracking labourers as well as office-workers, town-people as well as country-people, free-thinkers as well as religious people, women and men, we gain different perspectives



### PITFALL

Some contents require extra information about the context. Not a single cultural element stands by itself; it always exists within a larger social entity. If we don't add that context to our information, the danger exists that we will judge from our context. In that case extra information is no excessive luxury. When we study the First World War we quickly lose ourselves in a series of data and details. Try to keep your story as simple as possible and zoom in on the processes and mechanisms that have a current value. What was the impact of propaganda on the soldier recruitment? What influence does propaganda have in political contexts today?



### OPPORTUNITY

Our society is marked by diversity. We do not want children to pin each other or people from the past down to certain stereotypical group characteristics. Even just pointing out the diversity between life in the city and life in the countryside (then and now) opens up a whole range of information. Ma <https://pwwmailca01/owa/> king the distinction between rich and poor, old and young, man or woman, educated or uneducated, labourer or shopkeeper also guarantees a more balanced picture.



### TIP

Tip for illustration: Think about your own thinking patterns and the thinking patterns of others. Try to present different opinions to your students about one and the same subject.



### IDEA

- Artist Sadies Choua wrote a letter to her Moroccan grandmother about her grandfather at the front. You can use the text as starting point to speak about migration then and today.  
More info: [www.herinneringseducatie.be](http://www.herinneringseducatie.be)
- Take a diary of a soldier or someone else from the war period and get started with this.
- "Het Kotjesvolk", a music group from Poperinge, performs songs that fit in with this.,



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

- Odon, oorlogsdagboek van een IJzerfrontsoldaat' [Odon, war diary of a soldier at the Yser front], Lannoo Publishing House, is a good example of this. Pelckmans Publishing House made an interesting sequel, 'de wereldoorlog van Odon, Mikado 6' [the world war of Odon, Mikado 6] which can be downloaded from their site for free.

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- 'Private Peaceful' is a very interesting novel, which was adapted into a play by Sint-Jozefsinstituut College Turnhout.
- <http://histoforum.net/eerste/propaganda.htm> is a Dutch website regarding propaganda posters in WWI
- "De Groote Oorlog. Beleef het verhaal van 15 oorlogsgetuigen" [The Great War. Live the story of 15 war witnesses] is a book with interactive CD-ROM, which enables you to experience the First World War in sound, word and image. It is about a collaboration between In Flanders Fields Museum, Talbot House and the museum at the Yser.

## HISTORY VERSUS COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE

A historical context can for a large part coincide with what came to our time via collective remembrance. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Where history is ideally based on the neutral analysis and interpretation of sources and facts, the collective remembrance is influenced by different factors: political, social, ideological,... This can result in the collective remembrance to only consider those historical facts that serve a particular social or political purpose. In this respect it is interesting to find out how a particular topic is remembered at this moment and what could be the reasons for this. In remembrance education this realisation process plays an important role.



### PITFALL

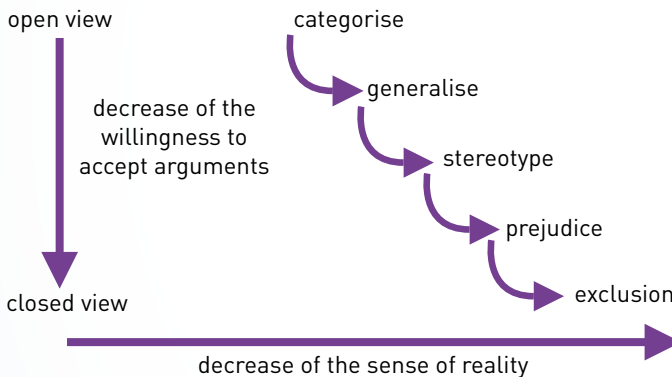
The search for experiences and routines of the previous generations enriches our historical awareness. But each fact can be read in various ways, exactly because the past is many-voiced. Historical research must not take over the partiality of the contemporary, but rather transcend it! How an emotional memory can have a hidden agenda: "Edward and Frans Van Raemdonck who were from Temse, were killed in the night in March 1916 in Steenstrate. In the collective memory the brothers died in each other's arms and their French-speaking superior did not allow the bodies to be taken away from no man's land to bury them. The outrage of this injustice made

them a symbol for the Vlaamse Beweging [Flemish Movement]. In reality the brothers were not killed by each other's side. Frans was found in the arms of Aimé Fiévez, the son of a baker from Tournai. Because this did not suit the discourse of the Vlaamse Beweging, the true version of the facts was only published in the sixties." Read more: Luc De Ryck, *Terug naar niemandsland. De geschiedenis van de gebroeders Van Raemdonck: mythe en werkelijkheid* [Back to no man's land. The history of the Van Raemdonck brothers: myth and reality], De Klaproos, Koksijde, 1997.



### OPPORTUNITY

Historians also regularly disagree about how the past should be understood. How is a particular topic remembered at this moment? It is an opportunity to also tell the unknown German story from the overpowered hinterland. Information from the 'other side' is necessary instead of the known stories! In how far is a collective memory contaminated with propaganda and myths? Who wrote the history (winner or loser)?



From: *Voorbij de Kleuren [Past the colours]*, Studio Globo



### IDEA

Testimony: "In a lot of guided tours I take a moment for stories that are told differently to the way they really happened. Drawing attention to the different ways of remembering in the different nationalities is a nice example of this too, just like the Langemark myth\*."

\* For most people Langemark is primarily known for its German Military Cemetery, the Students Cemetery from the First World War. In this war Langemark suffered greatly, it was in fact right on the frontline. Nothing was left standing. Under the old spelling Langemarck, the village is especially known in the French and British military history as a result of the battles in November 1914. In Germany a true myth was created around the word after false bulletins of triumph from the army about heroic fighting of young German soldiers. The fighting had occurred earlier between and Bikschote, but Langemark was chosen because it sounded so German. In the German schools the heroes of Langemark were worshipped and memorial days were held and monuments were erected. Hitler, who had been stationed near Ypres, took over this hero worship and called himself a Langemarck fighter as well. Later the Vlaams Legioen [Flemish Legion] was deployed as storm division Langemarck at the East front. Interesting fact: almost every town or village in Germany has a 'Langemarck Strasse'.

Following on from this you can tell the story of Peter Köllwitz. The Kate Köllwitz museum in Koekelare or the German military cemetery in Vladslu with 'Het Treurende Ouderpaar' [the grieving parents] clarifies a great deal. In the museum it is interesting to see the evolution in the image design of Kate Köllwitz for her fallen son.

A visit to a memorial, museum, war cemetery, statue or monument, becomes extra valuable with the following tips in mind:

- Know what to expect: visit the place yourself in advance and view it through the eyes of the youngsters.
- Determine in advance what you would like to achieve with the students by visiting this place.
- Make the young people aware of the exceptional nature of such a place of remembrance. Be careful not to create expectations that are too high. Young people often have the impression beforehand that they will experience an intense catharsis during such a visit and are then 'disappointed' with the reality.
- Be aware that a place of remembrance never tells just one story. Numerous collective memories coincide in this place.



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

In Flanders Fields museum; One hundred years after WWI you keep finding traces in the landscape around Ypres. In the book 'Droommuseum van Dre' [Dream Museum of Dre] Dre goes on a bike ride in the Westhoek for each that war. The landscape is sometimes called the last witness of the war – now that all people that went through the war have passed away. With this chapter we want to encourage teachers but also parents to visit these places of remembrance – the last witnesses of the war. Each theme is also linked to one of the nominations of the Peace Prize of the Ypres city. They clarify how they, each in their own way, wherever in the world, are working on taking steps towards peace.

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

Juniorcollege History of KULeuven trains secondary education students in different types of historical thinking. The students gain sharper insights in the construction of past and present and in the distinction between history and collective remembrance.

More information: [www.juniorcollege.be](http://www.juniorcollege.be).

## FRAMES OF REFERENCE

Remembrance education enables participants to gain insight in aspects such as time documents, illustration, interpretation, subjectivity, the role of media and propaganda,... Indeed the attitude of people is determined by the knowledge and perspective that they have at that moment. It is important here to consider the environment of the participants and the fact that they are not familiar with certain historical concepts or terminology.



### PITFALL

What was an important milestone for some people is not tantamount to a balanced history of the First World War. It is not a good idea to reduce the past to one fact and forget the rest of the context. In other words do not forget to create the frame of reference before you take your participants in your story. Recognisability, daily life, concrete situations are important catchwords to remember in this regard. Big problems and theoretical structures do not belong in primary school. In secondary education however you can elaborate on this.



### OPPORTUNITY

Putting oneself in the shoes of historical characters is called 'historical empathy'. (see next chapter) This way of working offers many opportunities to create these frames of reference by means of a historical character.

Nice exercise to tap into taking oneself back to the good old days: the silence: people from 1914 experienced a rattling farmer's cart on cobblestones as something very loud, everything was quiet otherwise, no engines or other noise pollution. This also explains for a large part the shell shock by continuous blasting in the trenches. Idea to allow the participants to experience this silence as introduction to the theme.



### IDEA

Work with a lexicon. For young people (and adults) it is not always simple to project oneself in another time. A whole lot of concepts don't mean anything to them. Just think of the food vouchers, trenches,... To counterbalance this, it can be appropriate to work with a lexicon which explains the concepts you expect to have problems with.

If such a lexicon is put online, you can add images and movies to make it more transparent. On the website <http://warpress.cegesoma.be> a whole lot of newspapers from the First World War are unlocked. If you are looking for image material or information about the war press, you will find what you want here. You can quite easily sketch a frame of reference from images and stories.



### ONDERWIJS

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

"Kleine Sam, vertel ons over de Grote oorlog" [Little Sam, tell us about the Great War]; a stories project to view "the Great War" from an original perspective: [perspective] of a dog. Sam is a young pup when the war inevitably comes closer. Sam views the war like a child would: he doesn't understand everything, but senses everything that happens very strongly and sympathises intensely.

The 'Vredeskoffer' [Peace Chest] is suitable for a broad target group. In primary education it can be used in grade two or three, but it is also useful in special primary education. This chest can also be implemented as element of remembrance education.

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION

Talbot House: Workshop 12-15 years old "Met Kerstmis zijn we terug thuis..." [we will be home by Christmas] Or how this 'great picnic' evolved into the first industrialised war. By means of documents, authentic objects and testimonies the students obtain a clear picture of what war is really about, then and now ...

## HOPEFUL STORIES

Remembrance education gets added value if there is also attention for the hopeful stories. People have been at war all through history BUT people have also been making peace all through history. Interpersonal solidarity, dignity and friendship are values that even a war can't exterminate.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted on 10 December 1948, after the great suffering of the two world wars, is a milestone in history. It is still a crucial frame of reference for judging and sentencing of current crimes against humanity. Is there also attention for hopeful events, for the power of the individual who resists war? Example: peace activist and baroness Bertha von Suttner wrote 'Die Waffen nieder' before WWI and inspired Alfred Nobel to award the Nobel Peace Prize (1905)



### PITFALL

Do not merely focus on problems. Big problems are not a good point of departure to stimulate participants in their curiosity, to entice children to solidarity. By departing from the context of daily life we can focus on how people handle problems in their particular situation, which solutions they look for and find. In this manner we offer a counterpart for the unilateral, negative image that is often portrayed. This image in fact does wrong to the self-respect and life force of many people to defy difficult situations themselves.



### TIP

Tip for lesson content: Focus on people that have tried to find solutions. In all times of injustice there are people who try to fight this. This is a link you can make from WWI to current war situations. (Peaceful) resistance is something of all times.



### OPPORTUNITY

Testimony: "Armistice and the Christmas ceasefire are undeniably part of the hopeful stories, although this component could be given even more of a chance during our guided tours. I think the strength of an individual is important, that is to say as an individual you can make a difference."





## IDEA

If we want to stimulate to solidarity, it is the intention to pass on a hopeful perspective: change is possible and we can contribute a small but worthy mite to this. Teach them to think about solutions for problems of now and tomorrow. They can take steps in the direction of behaviour change themselves: how do we relate to each other respectfully in class, how can we manage material in a good manner at school? This way they can do something in their own manner about the big notion: 'No more war'.



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

Christmas Truce project (Philippe Servais)

Music played a big part during the Christmas Truce.

The opening to a small bit of peace came after songs were sung. It has always been like this: music softens morals, makes the pain of the war go away for a moment. The camaraderie grows. Singing together brings (brought) soldiers together. If the "enemy" then sings along, the differences are briefly forgotten. We use the information from the Christmas Truce in our project. Music is used rather negatively here; at the forefront in the battle. In an identical way there is the story of sport that brings people together. Thus ... opportunity no. 2 of the Christmas Truce.

Link to the present (also fits in with activation of processes):

1. The music fund: come together through music.

<http://www.musicfund.be/domains/musicfund.eu/index.php?page=muziek-en-conflict>

Citation: In Palestine and Israel too, we have been able to measure the impact of music on young people, even during the more violent periods of the Intifada: they came to learn music, to play chamber music, even when the gunfire continued. These young people refused to accept the fatality of violence and offered resistance to the occupation in their own way.

2. A world of football

<http://www.aworldoffootball.org/>

<http://www.aworldoffootball.org/roadbook.html>

Play in peace. By means of football ... briefly forget the war, break through the differences and conflicts.

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

Monologue by Wannes Cappelle (singer of Zesde Metaal [sixth metal]), monologue, in collaboration with vzw De Boot.

## 2. HISTORICAL EMPATHY AND SOLIDARITY

### WHAT IS HISTORICAL EMPATHY?

- Recognising that the values, opinions, beliefs and intentions of historical persons can differ from those of the researcher;
- Recognising that individuals and groups held and hold different values, opinions and beliefs;
- Recognising that other perspectives are normal and valuable and not 'stupid'; the willingness to explain actions and events from historical values, opinions and beliefs;
- These statements must of course be based on historical evidence;
- Recognising that your own perspective is dependent on a historical context.

### ANTIDOTE FOR INDIFFERENCE

Processes such as detachment and indifference have developed over the years in young people of today. Remembrance education therefore aims for the opposite, namely the development of historical empathy. The use of primary sources in which individuals are speaking, is essential here. In this way the people involved are represented as human as much as possible and not solely as a statistic. Insight in the dreams, ideas, feelings and plans of others aims to be an antidote for detachment and indifference.



#### PITFALL

Empathy often makes us think about sympathy. We think it is good to identify ourselves with people from the past. However we do have to be careful here: a student who reacts emotionally, will not necessarily learn anything from the story. From the perspective of remembrance education we don't strive towards emotional empathy but to historical empathy. It is important here to recognise and understand values, opinions, beliefs. For example do we think about the fact that during the Great War a figure like "Father Priest" still overawed or that the frontline region was unknown territory for many (even Belgian) soldiers? With these things in the back of our minds, we can understand and respect the choices of soldiers at the front or citizens.

**TIP**

Tip for illustration: Accept that there are things that we cannot understand. You can reflect about values and norms, but fully understanding can be difficult at times. This is a beautiful opportunity to practice values education. Other people can have other values, opinions, beliefs.

**OPPORTUNITY**

From similarities to differences. One thing is certain: we share a lot of common things with other groups and cultures (so also people that lived a hundred years ago). That is what connects us with other people. It is best to depart from those similarities when we want to approach other people. For example, it is preferable for the age of your character to correspond with the age of the target group. Participants will find a recognisable connection with their own environment. When we clearly see this common ground, we can start to discover differences. This adds colour to the other culture. Participants can be captivated by this. The 'foreign' is then embedded in the 'normal'. This makes being different maybe not completely understandable for us, but definitely more acceptable. Departing from differences has the risk, definitely with young children, for (prejudices) judgments to develop: "We play with the WWII and they [play] with a tin car, poor things!" But a focus on the similarities shows that in both cases it is a similar phantasy game!

**IDEA**

A recognisable past can seduce the public to be interested if at all in dead people and past events. In education recognisability is seen as a didactic trump card; the past becomes manageable.

How can you achieve historical empathy? These tips can put you on the right track.

- by practising repeatedly;
- by using different (primary) sources;
- by using a procedure of thinking out loud, whereby research questions help the students to focus on evidence and to not be led by emotions too much;
- by developing different working methods (socratic conversations, debates and writing tasks).



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

- Via role-play students can be allowed to express different perspectives. In this manner they get tuned into the choices different people faced.
- Maries Groote Oorlog' [Marie's Great War], an adventure trip for children (and families), inspired by the youth book of Johan Ballegeer. The kids walking tour is 5 km in length. On the way you discover the story of Marie during the First World War. This way you get to know a whole lot about the Great War and the interesting war relics in Alveringem and Oeren. By carrying out a number of fun tasks you also help Marie in her search for her brother, who is fighting in the war as a soldier. (Hof van Wyckhuize domain) Suitable for schools and families. The kids walk can be done without guide as well, which means participants can determine their own pace.

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- In the footsteps of John Gamble (15 - 18 year olds): Literally step in the footsteps of lieutenant Gamble. The correspondence of John takes us from one place to the next, at and behind the front." This is a trip offered by 'Rent a Guide'.
- Go and find a source from your own environment. Maybe you will find a diary or a letter from someone from your own village. Try to find out why this person wrote this and why he made particular choices.

## ABOUT GOOD BELGIANS, BAD GERMANS AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Historical empathy is translated in different ways in remembrance education, depending on the perspective. We can talk about solidarity with the victims, empathy with the bystanders and awareness of the motivation of the perpetrators. Or are the perpetrators victims too sometimes? How can you offer opportunities to put yourself in another perspective as a student?



### PITFALL

The person who labels everyone as a victim does not have to think about current types of exclusion, violence and deprivation. If everyone is a victim, there are no perpetrators either. A clear picture of the past is a method to approach the dilemmas of today as well in a balanced manner.



### OPPORTUNITY

Obtaining correct images and insights about other groups than the ones we belong to ourselves, is quite a task. Their interest is nurtured by recognisability and amazement about the other. Learning about something or someone is always learning about yourself too. Diversity is approached as normality. Diversity is a trump card. It is a normal phenomenon that everyone deals with on a daily basis. How evident and visible is the diversity that exists in our society and the world, in images, stories, texts that are used?



### TIP

Tip for illustration: Do not label a continent as country and point out the diversity within a country. Do not label a religion with national identities and point out the different opinions that one could have within the same country and/or within the same religion. Provide a balanced story.



### IDEA

Solidarity forms the basis of a respectful and just attitude of a human in relation to his environment. The other is no longer approached from a 'superior versus inferior' pattern, but from equality. Thinking in terms of WE and THEM wanes. One can tell that humans are not the be-all and end-all of everything. If you feel connected with people and groups, you can no longer look the other way when these people become the victim of injustice or unequal opportunities. Solidarity is a permanent undercurrent, a fundamental attitude, a foundation for ethical action.



### EDUCATION

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

- 'De heuvel' [the hill] by Willy Spillebeen (from a description of the book: "We alternately follow the Flemish farmer's family, the German Colonel Otto Peterson, who is involved with the poisonous gas program and the British major Norton Griffiths, obsessed by digging tunnels as war weapon.")
- The site [www.nooitmeeroorlog.be](http://www.nooitmeeroorlog.be) is a web quest with 6 different characters that tell their story and ask questions. As a result the students get to know 6 different points of view from WWI. (madame Tack, Fritz Haber, Hendrik Geeraert, Gavrilo Princip, unknown Zoeaaf, Joe English)

## SECONDARY EDUCATION

In Flanders Fields Museum: With the project 'De Namenlijst' [The List of Names] we want to put together an integrated list of all victims of WWI, citizens or soldiers, regardless of their nationality, whose death is linked to the Belgian territory. In this school year the focus is on Belgian citizen victims. Where only factual information on the war monuments was collected in the first round, we want to go one step further this time and collect as much information as possible for each victim. The war monuments are the starting point. By consulting local archives and libraries, making inquiries in the local history club and test and reject the "municipal collective memory", an attempt is made to put together the story of each victim.

## DO NOT JUDGE WITH TODAY'S BENCHMARKS

Those who speak about the Great War will notice that the participants tend to spontaneously put themselves in the perspective of someone from their own context and situation and emotional experience. That is why it is necessary that the participants are offered a historical point of view and insight in the historical context. It is however not the intention that the past is judged from a current perspective ('presentism'). The challenge is to let them understand the past with the context and the emotional experience of that time in the back of their mind. Indeed norms and values are restricted to a particular place and time.



### PITFALL

Remembrance education wants to be explicitly socially relevant, in contradiction with the historiography which strives for objectivity. As is emphasised in this text in various locations, remembrance education aims to learn from the past. However that does not mean that actualising a particular historical fact shouldn't happen in a well-considered and conscious manner. Knowledge of and insight in a historical context and in processes and mechanisms again make up the foundation here as well.



### OPPORTUNITY

Historians restrict themselves as much as possible to giving information about the role of values in the past and strive as much as possible to avoid moral judgments. On the other hand there are also historians who criticise this approach. They emphasise that researchers are also humans and therefore never completely objective. In addition they feel that there is a danger in presenting historical events to young people without a current ethical context.

The most important thing is that the remembrance educator is aware of this complex debate between historians and makes it clear to the target group that

history is looked at to learn from it, not to judge it with today's benchmarks.



### IDEA

Young people often react to actions and choices from the past with their own contemporary benchmark. "So stupid to want to fight in the trenches"; this refers to the difficulties young people have to put themselves in the shoes of people from the past. It is therefore important to sketch a context. Young soldiers, who reported voluntarily for the army, thought they were entering a short war. The moral pressure to participate was very high. The feather that was pinned on the boys if they hadn't reported voluntarily is a nice example of this. When the entire Australian rugby team enrolled to go and fight, they were seen as a good example of how top sportsmen sacrificed themselves for the mother country.



### EDUCATION

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

Youth books are a good way to introduce children to the perception of the environment of that time. 'Milan's Groot Oorlog' [Milan's Great War] by Patrick Lagrou, is a recent book that can help to discover what it must have been like at that time.

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION

Novels and movies can create a frame of reference for young people just as well. 'Post voor mevrouw Bromley' [Mail for Mrs Bromley] by Stefan Brijis or 'Godenslaap' [God's rest] by Erwin Mortier are only some examples. 'All quiet on the Western Front' is an American movie by Lewis Milestone from 1930. This movie is based on the book 'Im Westen nichts neues' by Erich Maria Remarque and tells the story of how Remarque, a German soldier, experienced life at the front.

## ATTENTION FOR FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Connection with historical events also departs from the attention for the individual freedom of choice. Which dilemmas are these individuals faced with and do you find dilemmas in your own life too? What would you choose in those circumstances?



### PITFALL

To what extent can you put yourself in the situation, living and thinking environment of someone who was alive during the First World War? How can you put yourself in the thoughts, feelings and expectations of someone else, especially if they are far from your perspective or even inconsistent with it? There are many sides to every story as well. Exactly because this versatility is

so complex, we are quickly tempted to generalise: “Wouldn’t everyone have done the same thing?” Such a point of view ignores the margin in which you can make your own choice.



### OPPORTUNITY

War is from all times. For centuries people from all over the world have been telling stories about it. “Kom vanavond met verhalen” toetssteen [Come tonight with your stories] is a collection of about eighty fascinating European novel fragments, poems, stories and pages from picture books and comic books about war. Every author, every guardian of remembrance, viewed this war in their own imaginative, penetrating and original manner. For once it is not the adults that are playing the leading roles, the stories are almost all described or perceived through the eyes of children and young people. For readers from 8 years old.



### IDEA

Testimony: “Who wants to join in and who doesn’t? Children are given options within the role-play. Which role do they assume? Why? Teacher builds the role-play with them. They also briefly change roles. What are their experiences now?”



### EDUCATION

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

There is a game of empathy, in which you put yourself in the shoes of a British soldier and in which you have to make choices in a particular situation by means of a card game. It was made by Sint-Jan Berchmanscollege in Mol (contact person: Guy Delespaul)

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION

Tumult [Turmoil] (new name for ‘Jeugd en Vrede’ [Youth and Peace]) launches an game of empathy about WWI in your town ‘Dilemma 14/18’ in September 2013. ([www.dilemma1418.be](http://www.dilemma1418.be))  
By making decisions about difficult dilemmas, 12 to 16 year olds realise that certain choices are very difficult.

## CAUTION WITH EMOTIONS

It is important to note that the emotions mentioned here are not a goal in themselves but always a “step up” to promote insight, reflection and action. The mere confrontation with shocking images or devastating stories without further interpretation has little or no educational value. We could say that in remembrance education the almost unavoidable emotional aspect must serve



the cognitive aspect (insight and reflection).



### PITFALL

In educational topics, such as the First World War, which is far away in time and space, we are quickly tempted to keep the students involved in the lesson by means of shocking images. But an approach like this often has a wrong effect: students start to giggle or react inappropriately. These are reactions that indicate that children or young people don't know how to handle their emotions. Therefore there is the risk that an aversion is created which causes these topics to become unmentionable. So be careful: not all contents are suitable for all ages. Just like with other themes and activities you need to consider the starting point of the participants: their prior knowledge, interest, and especially what they can handle cognitively and emotionally.



### TIP

Tips for illustration: Emotions can help to be empathic. Images that only shock and have no added value for your peace education, can cause an opposite effect. Keeping a good balance in this is possible by occasionally making a reflection.



### OPPORTUNITY

Testimony: "Emotions are used as instrument to impart the peace notion, without breaking into sensation."



### IDEA

When showing the film fragments, it is important to clearly sketch the role of propaganda. For example 'Paths of Glory' by S. Kubrick (1957), 'The Trench' by W. Boyd (1999), 'Met onze jongens aan de IJzer' [With our boys at the Yser] by C. De Landtsheer (2008) have a completely different message to tell



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

- The museum at the Yser (the Yser Tower), on level 6 to 4, pays attention to animals in the war. You can find stories there of horses, dogs, canaries, dolphins, lice, rats etc
- Try to work in a(nother) theme with an example from WWI. For example a lesson around art, also specifically art made during WWI. In this way the WWI story doesn't become a 'foreign' story and they will be more open to the message you want to convey.
- You cannot just throw gruesome images at children to extract emotion. Images like this must be placed in a clear context and interpreted. [www.kindereninbezettegebied.be](http://www.kindereninbezettegebied.be) is a nice example of this; on this site children during WWI speak about life in occupied territory. Students from today get to know the living conditions of that time via all sorts of testimonies, photos and stories. This useful lesson material for the teacher is only becoming more attractive due to an increased interactive injection of the site: besides reading and viewing the testimonies you can now also test your knowledge, view a map and discover the similarities compared with today ...

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- The book 'Krieg dem Kriege' by Ernst Friedrich contains about 180 photos, gruesome images from the First World War. It shows a true picture of the war, beyond bravery and heroic death. Not the pacifists but the war-minded, kings, generals, presidents and ministers must be locked up. For Friedrich, who didn't acknowledge any party, the cause of the war is clear: capital and power. His book is an interesting case of how gruesome pictures are used to promote pacifism.
- Jan Devos selected a number of film fragments from 'The Battle of the Somme' to 'War Horse' and analysed the film language from 1916 to 2012. Very quickly you notice that images are manipulated and propaganda emerges time and time again.

## COMMEMORATIONS

The many commemorations that will occur between 2014 and 2018, take up a special spot in the context of solidarity. Remembrance and reflection about what happened, recognition of the suffering, tribute to the victims and respect for the mourning and processing of the surviving relatives, presume a kind of empathy.



### PITFALL

Every commemoration is different. Those that want to view our remembrance culture from a critical distance, should obtain information about different commemorative ceremonies. Not only does the philosophy behind it strongly vary from country to country, even within a country or within a city there are big differences depending on the organising authority. Ask yourself the following questions: Who is commemorating? What is being

commemorated? Why is it being commemorated? Are there underlying motives which are not immediately clear at first sight? In which manner is being commemorated? What is the message that this commemoration wants to propagate to the broader public?



### OPPORTUNITY

Commemorative ceremonies are suitable for achieving greater solidarity in children and young people. Solidarity can develop. Commemorative ceremonies offer opportunities to work on social and communicative skills, specifically to respectfully deal with the past.



### IDEA

Het Vlaams Vredesinstituut [Flemish Peace Institute], as a result of the Great War Centenary, developed a large-scale study on commemorations. The starting point is the question of how one should commemorate the war to strengthen the peace notion. The report looks at how this objective can be realised, among other things by means of questioning the stakeholders involved. Concrete ideas for the practice of commemoration as well as a number of crucial starting points are presented in this report. The study can be downloaded via the website [www.vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu](http://www.vlaamsvredesinstituut.eu). Their publications 'Oorlogsherdenking herdacht' [War Commemoration reconsidered] and 'Honderd jaar Eerste Wereldoorlog in het teken van vrede' [First World War Centenary in the context of peace] can also be downloaded from the website.



### EDUCATION

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

Testimony: During the apotheosis day of 'Nooit meer Oorlog' [No More War] a commemoration with wreath laying was organised. This appeals to the students; at a moment like this you can hear a pin drop.

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION

De Menenpoort [Menin Gate] in Ypres and the Last Post says a lot about the way the WWI is being commemorated. The fallen are honoured as heroes there. It is good to point this out to students and to also introduce them to other forms of commemoration such as: the grieving parents by Käthe Kollwitz

## RE-ENACTMENT

Re-enactment and living history means representing or acting out historical events. This occurs in historical costume, often in the location where the events took place. In other words, re-enactors try to simulate life in another era. (Jay Anderson)



### PITFALL

It is often said that re-enactment is just as much or even more about the present than the past. Unfortunately there is no direct, unbiased access to the past: history is always an interpretation by someone in the present. That is why there is a danger in re-enactment, that there is no or not enough attention for the broader historical context. Too often re-enactments offer a nostalgic, romanticised view of the past. There is also the danger that during the imitation of the past, re-enactors have to fill certain 'voids' in the historical knowledge with their own imagination. In addition we run the risk with this method to be confronted by feelings that are too intense. Finally, re-enactment also triggers moral questions: can the real suffering and the real horror of war violence be re-lived 'authentically'? And are we not representing the First World War too stereotypically as a war which was only fought in the trenches?



### OPPORTUNITY

If living history (re-enactment) is understood as a 'play', with a script and a director, it gains historical credibility. For the public it is clear that it is a performance, that the actors are 'staging' events from the past. In other words: the public is made aware that it is an interpretation of the history. For example as can be seen in "In Vlaamse Velden" [In Flanders Fields].



### IDEA

The public enters the world of the staged characters and asks them questions. In this manner living history gives a chance to the public to show how certain people in a certain time were thinking and how these characters were relating to each other. Let the students get to work with authentic sources (diaries, letters ...) and texts which can be well contextualised, to be understood and interpreted correctly. The fact that an appeal is made to the cognitive competencies of the young person, the danger of an emotive solidarity that is too strong is reduced. They get to know the stories from very close-up but at the same time a respectful and safe distance is kept between the young person and the historical character.

*Testimony: "Role-play is important, not from the perspective of playing soldiers, but from perceive-process-come to expression (inherent to children). Empathy is related to historical context. Re-enactment in the broad sense of the word can be enriching, if it is systematically embedded within a broader context."*



## EDUCATION

There is a big difference between the didactic principle of creating atmosphere, by means of objects, clothes, ... and dress up your group and 'play war'. It is very important to keep this in the back of your mind.

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

Testimony: "If I visit a memorial with my class I take a backpack with some objects, which I use to tell my story with, for example a spade, a helmet,...."

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Platoon Experience; A unique empathy project in the year 1917. Your group imagines itself as an Australian platoon from 1917 and follows the bloody trail to Tyne Cot Cemetery. Experienced guides take young people from 14 years old in tow by means of a historically founded story.
- Hooge Craater museum: an Experience Box with authentic objects is on offer to hang the story of the museum to the objects.

# 3. REFLECTION AND ACTION

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Remembrance education is ultimately aimed at the development of values and attitudes. The frame of reference which we want to supply here is that of human rights (right of freedom, equality, non-discrimination, ...) and children's rights (right of protection, own opinion, own religion, ...). Despite the restrictions of the concept, human rights remain a crucial frame of reference. Remembrance education brings to attention the respect for these rights and vigilance against the violation of them. This implies respect for our democratic principles, valuing cultural and social diversity and accepting responsibility.



### OPPORTUNITY

**Testimony:** During the guided tours as well as the workshops human rights are not touched on explicitly, but by means of the spontaneous reactions of the students you notice that they make that association themselves.



### IDEA

In developing values and attitudes, the school is not an island. It belongs to a neighbourhood, community, village, town. The school finds partners here to work together on equal opportunities for everyone. As such the library, sport department, local historical clubs, heritage cells, ... can be important partners. Thanks to them we can expand the living environment of the students and create meeting places for students, their parents and external partners. A school which has an eye for these connections becomes a 'broad school'.



### EDUCATION

#### PRIMARY EDUCATION

*Testimony: "Our project runs in the month of the remembrances, directly after 11 November and the day of children's rights. Which children's rights were violated? Where is the drive from Unicef among others? Children go and investigate and discover themselves".*

- In the book 'Droommuseum van Dré' [Dream Museum of Dre] there are letters from people who won the peace prize of the city of Ypres, with links to today.
- Human rights are present in the religious methods anyhow, so a WWI project can be a nice starting point.

#### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- The consequences of WWI are an opportunity chance to talk about human rights: (women's) right to vote, independence of the colonies ...

## DO NOT MORALISE

It is obvious that a one-off visit to a historical place or seeing a movie or documentary is not an antidote for extreme ideas and a disrespectful attitude. Moreover, if the students are confronted with a discourse that is too moralising, the danger exists that they pull out or that it goes all wrong. So it is of utmost importance that working on a particular attitude is viewed against a background of a decent historical knowledge. It may even be more important that the students do not just swallow well-intentioned 'lessons' but actively search for what can be learnt. That they are not told what they have to think, but in fact that they have to think.



### PITFALL

Be aware that norms can differ. Our values and norms are not by definition the values and norms of others. Being aware of this can avoid false interpretations. The less we know about a culture, the greater our attention for this should be



### OPPORTUNITY

Keep the following steps into account when developing a project. It will help them to work on the following tip: "That they are not told what they have to think, but in fact that they have to think." (see above)

- from simple → complex
- from day-to-day → to general
- from broad perception → focused perception
- from perception → to reflection
- from here and now → to somewhere in other situations
- from participating → to taking initiative



### IDEA

Look in existing lesson material for things in common with the environment of the participants. Rather than making a theme about 'WWI', focus in all sorts of themes on life during WWI: people were partying, living, working, grieving, cooking, etc. then too. In this manner similarities come to the fore and 'different becomes very normal'.



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

In a visual lesson, use art designed during WWI as an example. Play songs from the period of WWI. In other words, look in existing lessons for things in common with the WWI theme.)

### SECONDORY EDUCATION

- Talbot House, musical story - "Een Grooten Oorlog" "One Great War" by Marc Reynaerts (from 16 years old). If you are staying in the Westhoek for a number of days with your group, you can come to a standstill with this musical story, which is brought by three musician-storytellers. Theater De Kreet [The Cry Theatre] brings the story of a soldier in "the great war" but has brought together the story of so many soldiers into one fictional character. "One great war" has become a lot more than a remembrance moment. It is a "cry" against all war madness.
- For secondary education it is important that students:
  - make a distinction between factual knowledge and opinions based on values inquire critically about current conflicts
  - inquire critically about current conflicts
  - evaluate critically the consequences of their own view of the world and their own behaviour
  - weigh up possible solutions or alternatives
  - get the opportunity to put their own points of view into words and make conscious choices themselves.

## REFLECTION AND ACTION

The ultimate goal of remembrance education is 'active respect'. This communal goal wants to prepare young people for active citizenship in the society. The knowledge, skills and attitudes students have achieved via remembrance education, should constitute a counterforce against xenophobia, racism, intolerance, tyranny, violence, blind nationalism and exclusion. Remembrance education therefore wants to convert students into critical and engaged citizens, who are prepared to propagate tolerance and solidarity, to undertake individual or collective action, if they see themselves or others confronted with injustice or disrespectfulness.



### PITFALL

Think carefully when organising an action where money is being collected, for example the 12.12.12 action for the war in Syria. Firstly ask the following question: does this action help to strengthen mutual connection and solidarity among the participants?



**TIP**

Tip for illustration: Keep in the back of your mind that fundraising actions strengthen particular stereotypes and roles. So reflect when preparing a fundraising activity: what is money going to contribute to sensitisation? Are we only donors? Is money going to help? Does our responsibility stop with donating money?

**OPPORTUNITY**

The development of values in remembrance education consists of reflection on the one hand and concrete action on the other hand. The level of reflection challenges to thinking exercises such as:

- Can learning to understand a historical context mean something for my own life?
- How can I think critically about what reaches me via the media about current conflict situations and how can I form my own opinion about it?
- What can I do concretely with these insights?

**IDEA**

Action: go out in your own neighbourhood, and look for relics from WWI that can be found in your own municipality. The neighbourhood around your school is an open invitation to discover WWI. It offers a maximum of common ground with the living environment of the participants and with the society. Common ground which does not always come into play within the class walls. The neighbourhood is communal terrain for many participants. That offers opportunities for recognition and exchange. Personal contacts and stories assist you to avoid generalisations and stereotyping. An environment book can be of great service here. You can explore the neighbourhood by means of a story tour. Give the participants a task (as well) to take pictures of particular objects, such as animal, green, small, ... and let them talk about the objects or buildings they have taken a picture of. Which WWI stories can you link to them?



## EDUCATION

### PRIMARY EDUCATION

The personal school and living environment is a powerful means of teaching. It has a motivating effect and increases the involvement of the students. At the request of some schools from the Heart of West Flanders, the Province of West Flanders, 'Erfgoedcel' [Heritage Cell] TERF, 'Onroerend erfgoeddienst' [Organisation for Immovable Heritage] Radar, 'Stad-Landschap 't West-Vlaamse hart' and KATHO Tielt department PHO joined forces to stimulate the use of the school and living environment in class practice via the development of a dynamic instrument for environment education. The instrument is custom designed for the Heart of West Flanders which consists of nine cities and municipalities (Ardoorie, Hoogdele, Ingelmunster, Izegem, Moorslede, Ledegem, Lichtervelde, Roeselare and Staden).

### SECONDARY EDUCATION

- Vormen [Educate] NPO produced an educational package 'Internationaal Humanitair Recht' [International Humanitarian Law] and the Israel – Lebanon conflict (2006). This is an ideal instrument to make a comparison with the international humanitarian law in WWI.
- Lo-Renige organises, in collaboration with ITPE, peace classes with Irish schools.
- There is a project at the IV NIOOO, under the name 'Te Jong' [Too Young] where you can become godfather or godmother of a grave. More info: [http:// www.warveterans.be/herinneringseducatie-scholen/te-jong/id-menu-40](http://www.warveterans.be/herinneringseducatie-scholen/te-jong/id-menu-40).

Reflection and action is possible by means of project action. Dynamo3 is a possible partner for project support. 'Kleur Bekennen' [Confess Colours] can also support you here. Their educational staff will happily assist you with establishing a project about remembrance education with a link to the South and the world. Schools that structurally program worldwide activities can count on financial support from 'Kleur Bekennen'. Schools with a short-term project (Worldwide Project) receive less support than schools that work around world citizenship in a longer and more intensive way (World Citizen Trajectory). Make sure you have a look at <http://www.kleurbekennen.be/aan-de-slag-met-je-klas>.

How do you apply for financial support and assistance? Via the website [www.kleurbekennen.be](http://www.kleurbekennen.be).

Do you need educational materials to enrich your project?

Via the online catalogue: <http://www.kleurbekennen.be/goed-materiaal/online-databank>. Are you looking for digital teaching materials?

The blog <http://kleurbekennen.wordpress.com> is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for this.

# ATTAINMENT TARGETS PRIMARY EDUCATION PER TOUCHSTONELEMENT

## INSIGHT IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

**5 World studies – time**, Historical time, 5.7 know the great periods from history and able to situate obvious historical elements in their environment and important historical characters and events they are introduced to, in the right period of time by means of a timeline 5.8 able to illustrate by means of an example that a current situation, which is recognisable for children and which was influenced by history, was different in the past and evolves during the course of time

**6 World studies – space**, general skills space, 6.11 able to consult an atlas and able to use a number of maps, by means of the key, wind direction and scale.

**1.Dutch – listening** 1.7 the students are able to order information from an informative TV program intended for them, in a personal and well-organised manner.

**2. Dutch – speaking** the students are able to use the appropriate language register when they 2.1 provide information about themselves to peers 2.2 ask someone for missing information 2.3 report to the teacher about a topic that was handled at school 2.5 answer questions from the teacher regarding a relevant topic 2.7 ask questions regarding a relevant topic which can be understood and answered by peers.

## PROCESSES AND MECHANISMS

**2. World studies – technology** 2.5 illustrate that technical systems evolve and improve 2.6 illustrate how technical systems are based on knowledge of characteristics of materials or of natural phenomena among other things 2.7 recognise steps of the technical process in concrete experiences (pose the problem, develop, make, utilise, evaluate solutions) 2.9 technically resolve a problem that was created by a need, by completing different steps of the technical process 2.15 use and/or realise technical systems in different areas of application in technology 2.18 illustrate by means of examples from different areas of application in technology, that technical systems can be useful, dangerous and/or harmful for themselves, others or nature and environment

**Learn to Learn** 4 the students can resolve simple problems in a systematic and comprehensible manner.

## FRAMES OF REFERENCE

**7. Use of sources** the students are able to consult different sources of information at their level

**3. Dutch – Reading**, the students are able to retrieve information from 3.2 details in diagrams and tables for the purpose of the public 3.3 texts in magazines intended for them.

**Learn to Learn** - 2 the students are able to use different sources of information at their level in a systematic manner 3 the students are able to obtain and use related information (other than texts too) in a systematic manner.

## ANTIDOTE FOR INDIFFERENCE

**3. Dutch – reading** the students are able to judge, based on either their own opinion or information from other sources, information which is present in: 3.6 different letters or invitations intended for them 3.7 advertising texts that directly relate to their living environment.

## VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS AND BY-STANDERS

**4. World studies – Society, social-cultural differences** 4.8 be able to illustrate that different social and cultural groups have different norms and values 4.11 be able to illustrate that labour migration and the problem of refugees have played a role in the development of our multicultural society.

## DO NOT JUDGE WITH TODAY'S BENCHMARKS

**5. Wereldoriëntatie - tijd**, General skills time 5.10 realise that there is a distinction between an opinion about a historical fact and the fact itself.

**1. Musical education – music**, 2.3 be open for contemporary music, music from other times, other countries and cultures.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

**4. World studies – Society, political and legal phenomena**, phenomena 4.13 be able to illustrate the importance of the fundamental Human Rights and Children's Rights. They recognise here that rights are complimentary. 4.15 be able to illustrate in which way international organisations strive to promote welfare and/or peace in the world.

## REFLECTION AND ACTION

**3. World studies – human, me and other** 3.6 be prepared to look for a nonviolent solution in a simple conflict situation in relation with peers. By means of world studies education children achieve knowledge and insight in themselves and their relation with the environment; they realise skills to interact with this environment and they are encouraged to have a positive attitude towards themselves and their environment.

**Social skills – relationships domain** 1.1 The students are able to introduce themselves in an assertive manner. 1.2 The students are able to summon respect and appreciation in interaction with others. 1.3 The students are able to care for something or someone. 1.4 The students are able to ask for help and to be helped. 1.5 The students are able to take the lead during group tasks and cooperate under supervision of a co-student. 1.6 The students are able to be critical and formulate their own opinion. 1.7 The students are able to adopt a defensible attitude towards peers and adults by sending signals which are understandable and acceptable to others. 1.8 The students are able to adopt a discrete attitude. 1.9 The students are able to admit to be wrong or powerless, listen to criticism and learn from it.

**Social skills – communication rules domain** 2. The students are able to observe a number of verbal and non-verbal communication rules in functional situations. 3. **Social skills – cooperation domain** 3. The students are able to cooperate with others, without distinction in social background, gender or ethnical origin..

**1. Dutch – listening** the students are able to judge, based on either their own opinion or information from other sources, information which is present in: 1.8 a discussion with known peers, 1.9 a conversation with known peers 1.10 a formulated appeal by peers.



# THE TOUCHSTONE AND (CROSS-CURRICULAR) ATTAINMENT TARGETS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

## CROSS-CURRICULAR ATTAINMENT TARGETS (CCATS)

The CCATs are presented in a **structuring framework**. It is an overview of the attainment targets with a **common base**, 7 contexts and the learn to learn package. The attainment targets in the common base are focused on a number of **key competencies**.

The key competencies, which can be found in the touchstone as well:

- empathy,
- critical thinking,
- media knowledge,
- open constructive attitude,
- respect and responsibility

The attainment targets are also ordered in 7 contexts, but the contexts that are especially prevalent in the touchstone are:

- Context 5: **political-legal society** with four mutually related themes: active citizenship, human and children's rights and fundamental freedoms, characteristics and the operation of a democracy and European/international dimension
- Context 7: **social-cultural society** refers to what is deemed socially and educationally important for living together in a multicultural and democratic society: community culture as dynamic fact, community as reality of diverse subgroups, **remembrance education** (method for learning how society should carry on, from the perspective of an instructive looking back at negative and positive events from our own past and that of communities elsewhere in Europe or the world), meaning of conflicts and art-related culture exploitation

## ATTAINMENT TARGETS

### SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS HISTORY GRADE 1 STREAM A

#### **Knowledge and insight**

The students

1. explain the notions generation, decade, century, millennium by means of historical evolutions, departing from the present
5. formulate one social problem for each of the development stages of the chosen frame of reference for example the problem of finding balance of power in global relations
8. demonstrate that mutual associations and interactions exist within and between these domains
9. give an example of: the difference between trigger and causes, a cause and effect relationship, a means to an end association
13. give examples of comparable social behaviour in history, such as in migration, sedentarisation, urbanisation, form of government, subjection, battle for emancipation, revolution
14. make the distinction between local, regional, national, European, world wide and have knowledge of the culture and the history of Flanders
16. compare the studied societies with each other and with the problems of contemporary society

17-23 : **skills**

24-29 : **attitudes**

### SUBJECT-RELATED DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES SOCIAL EDUCATION GRADE 1 STREAM B

#### **Society dimension**

4. Learn to fight for respect of the human and children's rights and social justice
7. Learn to consider other opinions and protect from prejudices

#### **Time dimension**

8. Be able to draw up a task distribution and time planning in a small group for a well-defined task
11. Be able to manage the notions point in time, time period, before, now, later, day, week, month, year, generation and century in relation with timen
12. Be able to situate on a timeline important characters or events that feature in the lessons
13. Be able to consult simple sources and living witnesses
14. Illustrate differences in use of time between before and now, here and

elsewhere

15. Be able to compare the daily life of people in a different time with their own life by means of simple source material
16. Develop a critical mind in dealing with historical information

### **Space dimension**

19. Situate important places on a map of Flanders or Belgium and on a map of other studied places

### **Theme 'the city in the past and present'**

30. Recognise and explain traces from the past in a city

## SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS HISTORY GRADE 2 ASO

### **Knowledge and insight**

The students

3. expand the number of historical notions and problems and specify them from the perspective of their evolution in time

### **(despite note until around 1800, also applicable for WWI)**

4. describe some fundamental characteristics from different social domains per development stage of the Western society and judge them as innovative or conservative
6. formulate a cohesive picture of the Western society per development stage, with attention for associations between and interactions within social domains
7. explain the social evolutions in the development stages of the Western society from the perspective of continuity – discontinuity, slow change – fracture, evolution – revolution
8. indicate when our regions and their cultural development had a cross-regional meaning
10. formulate elements of explanation for one and the same fundamental social problem for each of the development stages of the historical frame of reference
12. give examples of norm-conforming and norm-deviating social behaviour, from the social values of that time
13. clarify some elements from the studied societies which influence later societies or today's [society]

14-24 : **skills**

25-30 : **attitudes**



## SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS HISTORY GRADE 2 TSO/ KSO

3. Expand the number of historical notions and situate them in time and historical space
4. Describe some fundamental characteristics from two social domains of your choosing per development stage of Western society and judge these as innovative and conservative
6. Demonstrate a number of mutual associations between and interactions within social domains for the development stages of Western society
7. Indicate when our regions and their cultural development had a cross-regional meaning
9. Give some elements of explanation for one and the same fundamental social problem for each of the development stages of the historical frame of reference
10. Give examples of norm-conforming and norm-deviating social behaviour, from the social values at that time
11. Clarify some elements from the studied societies which influence later societies or today's [society]

12-19: **skills**

20-25: **attitudes**

## SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS GENERAL SUBJECTS PROJECT GRADE 2 BSO

### **Functional language ability**

De leerlingen

1. are able to listen and read informatively
2. are able to listen in interaction with others
3. are orally assertive: they are able to obtain, summarise and report information
4. are able to request for information in writing and to report in recognisable and concrete situations
5. are able to express their own opinion and feelings
6. use appropriate language and etiquette
7. are able to use resources to speak fluently and improve their communication

### **Functional Arithmetic Competence**

The students

14. are able to read and interpret a diagram representation

### **Functional Data acquisition and processing**

The students are able to

19. make use of information and communication technology under supervision

### **Organisational Competence**

The students are able to

- 21. organise, implement and evaluate individual tasks of limited size, under supervision
- 22. in group tasks under supervision: consult and actively participate, implement instructions, reflect
- 23. deal with formal and informal agreements, rules and procedures
- 25. request help

### **Time and Spatial awareness**

The students

- 27. know the outlines of social structures and mechanisms which govern or influence their life
- 29. are able to illustrate based on current events and own experiences that their life is embedded between past and future
- 30. are able to compare aspects of daily life of people in another time or in another place with their own life, under supervision
- 31. are able to concisely describe important world problems
- 32. are able to situate, orientate and project themselves with the use of appropriate information
- 33. respect the historical-cultural heritage

## SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS HISTORY GRADE 3 ASO

### **Knowledge and insight**

The students

- 2. expand a number of historical notions and problems and rationally adapt these in the broad historical context
- 4. know the lines of force of the historical frame of reference in terms of time, space and sociality
- 5. apply the notions civilisation and modernity and globalisation to Western society and other societies
- 6. analyse fundamental conflicts and rifts which modern societies are confronted with
- 7. analyse the rifts in the evolving Belgian society from 1830
- 8. describe the most important elements of the cultural domain per development stage of Western society, in relation to the others
- 9. clarify the role of our regions as fellow player in European and worldwide context
- 11. demonstrate that ideologies, mentalities, value systems and philosophies influence societies, human behaviour and the past

12. able to apply one category from each historical dimension on Western society
13. question the past to clarify current areas of tension
- 14-22: **skills**
- 23-29: **attitudes**

#### SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS HISTORY GRADE 3 TSO/ KSO

1. expand a number of historical notions and problems and rationally apply these in the broad historical context
3. demonstrate the lines of force of the historical frame of reference in terms of time, space and sociality
4. Describe fundamental conflicts and rifts which modern societies are confronted with
5. Describe the rifts in the evolving Belgian society from 1830
6. Describe the most important elements of the cultural domain for some development stages of Western society, in connection with the others
7. Situate the role of our regions as fellow player in European and worldwide context
9. Demonstrate that ideologies, mentalities, value systems and philosophies influence societies, human behaviour and the past
10. Question the past to clarify current areas of tension
- 11-18: **skills**
- 19-25: **attitudes**

#### SUBJECT-RELATED ATTAINMENT TARGETS GENERAL SUBJECTS PROJECT GRADE 3 BSO

##### **Functional Linguistic Competence**

The students are able to

1. find the essence in oral and written information
2. reflect and evaluate about that information
3. verbally use gathered information
4. verbally reason
5. formulate simple information in writing
6. verbally express themselves clearly

##### **Functional Data Acquisition and Processing**

The students are able to

11. find, select and use relevant information in concrete situations
12. understand and use information from divergent text material
13. spontaneously make use of information and communication technology

(ict) that is relevant to them

### **Organisational Competence**

The students

14. recognise that they have to make choices to organise their life adequately
15. are able to independently plan, organise, implement, evaluate and if necessary adjust tasks
16. are able to consult and actively participate, implement instructions as a team, reflect and adjust, in group tasks

### **Time and spatial awareness**

The students

17. recognise based on current events and own experiences: that there is a connection between past, present and future and that there are cultural differences in daily life of people
18. know relevant aspects of their own region
19. are able to recognise and discuss important world problems

## **TIPS**

Below is a list with some archives, documentation centres or research institutes:

- Dienst voor de Oorlogsslachtoffers [War Victims Service], Brussels  
[www.warvictims.fgov.be](http://www.warvictims.fgov.be)
- Imperial War Museum, Londen - [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)
- In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres - [www.inflanderfields.be](http://www.inflanderfields.be)
- Instituut voor Publieksgeschiedenis [Institute for Public History], Gent - [www.ipg.ugent.be](http://www.ipg.ugent.be)
- Legermuseum [Army museum], Brussel - [www.klm-mra.be](http://www.klm-mra.be)
- Nationaal Instituut voor Oorlogsinvaliden, Oudstrijders en Oorlogsslachtoffers [National Institute for War Invalids, War Veterans and War Victims] - [www.inig.be](http://www.inig.be)
- Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdokumentatie [Dutch Institute for War Documentation], Amsterdam - [www.niod.knaw.nl](http://www.niod.knaw.nl)
- Stichting voor de Eigentijdse Herinnering [Foundation for Contemporary Remembrance] - [www.fmc-seh.be](http://www.fmc-seh.be)
- Studie- en Documentatiecentrum Oorlog en Hedendaagse Maatschappij [Study and Documentation Centre War and Contemporary Society] - [www.cegesoma.be](http://www.cegesoma.be)

- International Society for First World War Studies - [www.firstworldwarstudies.org](http://www.firstworldwarstudies.org)
- Collectif de recherche international et de débats sur la guerre de '14-'18, Frankrijk - [www.crid1418.org](http://www.crid1418.org)
- Clio Online – Themenportal 1. Weltkrieg, Duitsland - [www.erster-weltkrieg.clioonline.de](http://www.erster-weltkrieg.clioonline.de)
- Historial de la Grande Guerre, Peronne - [www.hitorial.org](http://www.hitorial.org)
- Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence - [www.massviolence.org](http://www.massviolence.org)
- C07 Erfgoedcel [Heritage Cell] - [www.westhoekverbeeldt.be](http://www.westhoekverbeeldt.be) en [www.historischekranten.be](http://www.historischekranten.be)
- Projectvereniging [Project Association] BIE- [www.veertienachtien.be](http://www.veertienachtien.be) - [www.erfgoedbankmidwest.be](http://www.erfgoedbankmidwest.be) - [www.versteendegetuigenissen.be](http://www.versteendegetuigenissen.be)

Other interesting websites:

- [www.film-en-geschiedenis.ugent.be](http://www.film-en-geschiedenis.ugent.be)
- [www.vvlg.be](http://www.vvlg.be)
- <http://histoforum.net>
- [www.wo1.be](http://www.wo1.be)
- [www.klascement.be/herinneringseducatie](http://www.klascement.be/herinneringseducatie)
- <http://www.warveterans.be/herinneringseducatie-scholen/te-jong/id-menu-40>
- <http://www.cobra.be/cm/cobra/projecten/wereldoorlog>

# SOURCES

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3. Miguel Boutry: Rent a guide, [www.rentaguide.be](http://www.rentaguide.be),
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## APPENDIX: BACKGROUND INFORMATION WWI - FREDERIK DEMEYERE

The First World War has set a lot of tongues wagging already as topic of studies and analyses. The historiography about the first holocaust has known different trends since 11 November 1918, whether or not coloured with a political background. The best description of the global conflict may be this one quoted by Dassen, when he speaks about the seminal catastrophe of the 20th century. The modern historiografie of the previous century indeed bestows the First World War with the title of "First". It is the first European war which is fought on a world scale. It is also the first initiative for new totalitarian regimes like Bolshevism, fascism and Nazism. The 14-18 war also marks the beginning of the downfall of European world power: new players such as Japan and America conquer the stage.

World War 1 is irrefutably the first total armed encounter. The Swiss historian Förster described the notion 'total war' by means of four criteria. The war which was devised and implemented by Ludendorf and Hindenburg from 1916 (when both formed the Dritte Obere Heeresleitung) convincingly confirms each of the four parts. It concerned a total mobilisation: all possible personal and material means had to be at the disposal of the war apparatus. There was a total control: censorship, propaganda and the control of public opinion (and often associated with widespread religious themes). Total war also requires total war objectives: There was only the possibility to win or lose. The enemy had to be completely subjected, materially, economically, morally and militarily. The last criterion may well be the most famous aspect of the First World War: the total war methods. In this conflict nothing was sacred; all possible means were employed to break the enemy. The methods became more and more radical in this, which resulted in a systematic destruction of infrastructure and landscape.

For a long time there was only attention for the great political history of the conflict from the perspective of the historical study. But once the world of the social-historical analysis focused on the topic, it became clear that the conflict had caused a much greater slip stream than initially was thought. From the research into the experience of the First World War, some historians formulate the thesis of the second Thirty Year War. A number of aspects in

both World Wars clearly line up, hence a Thirty Year conflict; 1914-1945. It also deserves mention that a widespread setting of the First World War in history demands a look at the period before 1914. Only then it becomes clear that the build-up to the conflict was rooted much deeper than is generally accepted.

Within the scope of this publication it was on the one hand impossible and on the other hand not desirable to make an exhaustive historical study about the buildup, the progress and the aftermath of the First World War. Here we extract a concise overview of the armed encounter from a collection of the literature at our disposal. The focus is primarily on events that occur within Belgium

## 1. WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE ...

The deepest roots for the tragedy of the First World War can be traced back to the beginning of the 19th century, in the Industrial Revolution. The industrialisation ensured an innovation of the social structure in the European society and, most importantly, the rise of a number of new strong governments. Moreover the aftermath of the French Revolution was detaching feelings of nationalism here and there, which appeared like a ticking time bomb for the survival of other, older government structures.

The European governments were in great need of their colonies for the development of their industry and the aura of their power. On the one hand the colonies were cheap sources of raw materials for their own economy and on the other hand the colonial areas were used as market for their own products. This colonial expansion primarily took effect in the second half of the 19th century: in 1870, 70% of the world was under European rule; by 1914 this percentage had already risen to 85. The craving for colonies and the growing urge for profiling of different European powers produced an ideal breeding ground for conflicts. A number of conflicts in Europe and Asia that got out of hand eventually led to the fuse which made the European powder keg explode

...



## FRENCH-GERMAN WAR 1870-1871

Since the French Revolution, France was the most important military power on the European continent. But Napoleon III feared the fast growing industrialisation in the German states, as well as their growing nationalist attitude under the leadership of Prussia and Count von Bismarck.

Bismarck pushed the principles of the Realpolitik to the extreme. This political vision in which the interest of the nations was overpowering did not leave room for moral or ethical objections. Everything was for the benefit of the nation. To do this Bismarck applied some sort of “divide and rule” technique. He positioned the German states in such a way that the neighbouring countries would compromise each other each time and would eventually come off worst. In his vision of a unified Germany, the most important military opponents on the continent (Austria and France) had to be eliminated. The Prussian-Austrian war was already settled in 1866 to the advantage of the German states. Now France had to be defied.

Reason for the French-German conflict was the succession to the throne in Spain. One of the pretenders was the German Prince Leopold van Hohenzollern. France threatened to be enclosed by Hohenzollerns in this case. Napoleon III, leader of the Second French Empire, demanded from the German King Wilhelm I that he would withdraw his support for Leopold as pretender to the Spanish throne. Wilhelm I complied with this request. But when Napoleon III shortly after sent an envoy to the German King (who was staying at Bad Ems at the time) with the demand to never reconsider this decision, Wilhelm I refused. He sent a telegram (the renowned Emser dépêche) to Bismarck on 13/07/1870. The latter rewrote the telegram in insulting terms and as such distributed it to the press. The French did not leave this provocation undisturbed and they declared war on the German states.

The French had hoped that in case of an armed encounter, the South-German states would turn their back on Prussia. But the influence of the nationalism was greater than anticipated and all German states lined up as 1 front. Just like France, the German states had provided the army with modern weaponry. The German armies did have a numerical advantage: within 18 days they had pulled together an operation of 380,000 men at the French border. France on the other hand only had half of this number of men. The numerical preponderance of the German armies can be explained by the fact that they had many reserves. France didn't believe in the importance of reserves,

especially not in mobile warfare.

The German troops pursued an offensive war with big losses, but they crushed the French forces who withdrew in the Metz fortification after 3 battles. A relief force under command of Emperor Napoleon III himself was defeated before Metz, whereby the French Emperor was taken as prisoner of war. In October 1870 Metz surrendered, which paved the way to Paris for the German troops. At the end of 1870 they laid siege to Paris. During this siege, the unity of the German states was settled in the Hall of Mirrors of the Palace of Versailles, whereby Wilhelm I was appointed as Emperor.

The siege to Paris was dragging on: the French Republic kept putting armies together and furthermore the civil resistance was a thorn in the eye of the German troops. They felt it was a way of cheating that civilians resisted against the victors of the regular army. The German troops were therefore very repressive in their dealings with these 'francs-tireurs'. On 10 May 1871 the Peace of Frankfurt was signed – the end of the French-German war. The treaty provided that the industrially important region Alsace-Lorraine was going to be transferred to Germany. In exchange for a triumph march on the Champs Elysée, France was allowed to keep the French-speaking city Belfort and its surroundings. Furthermore a war contribution of 4 billion gold francs was charged, and the German army would keep Northern France occupied as long as it was not paid. The new French government was able to pay back the contribution within 3 years by means of loans from the bourgeoisie, but the resentment for the lost regions remained and fed the idea of revenge against Germany. This would appear as an important element in the reason for the First World War.

## RUSSIAN-JAPANESE WAR 1904-1905

The same expansionistic attitudes in the Far East guaranteed a conflict situation between on the one hand the Russian Tsarist Empire and the Japanese Empire. While Europe and the United States were pursuing an imperialistic world policy, Russia realised an unbridled territorial expansion. It expanded its territory in the direction of the Indian and Pacific Ocean.

The motivation for the expansion in the Pacific Ocean was the search for a permanent ice-free harbour for the navy.

The Trans-Siberian Railway played an important role in this conflict; it was actually a Russian excuse to profile itself in the Chinese province of Manchuria. This was however equivalent to a direct provocation of Japan.

By pulling the control of Manchuria over to them, the Russians obtained the harbour city of Port Arthur, an important stake for the Russo-Japanese conflict. After a decade of diplomatic tug-of-war and entering into various alliances with Western powers (by Great Britain among others), an armed conflict eventually ensued.

On 8 February 1904 the Japanese navy attacked the harbour city of Port Arthur by surprise. The following year different battles were fought between both antagonists, whereby the Russians had to taste defeat almost systematically. Eventually the Russian surrender was confirmed by the Treaty of Portsmouth (5 September 1905) whereby Russia loses the influence over Korea, together with the areas on the Liaodong Peninsula and Southern Sakhalin.

The importance of this armed conflict in the Far East is never fully understood by the contemporaries. In many aspects it was the first modern war and a direct precursor for the First World War. Moreover it was the first time that an Asian power defeated an established European nation, which was the immediate reason for the expansionistic behaviour of Japan and a first seed for the Japanese strength in the Second World War.

Although both fighting powers had some sort of balance in military strength, Japan consequently appeared to have the upper hand. The explanation for this is twofold. On the one hand there is the human factor; in the Japanese army each officer and soldier is educated well, and promotions are enforced based on proven capacities and competencies. In the Russian army there was more of an active favouritism at work, which did not always lead to a leadership that was driven and competent. On the other hand the big distance between the army and the home country was a disadvantage for Russia: the provisioning became difficult which appears to be a very important element in modern warfare. In the First World War this will also be a determining factor for Russia in its military actions.

Although the great European powers all had observers in the conflict, the different superpowers did not all appear to be inclined to learn a lesson from the fate of the fighting parties. England and France remained convinced of the strength of the infantry and cavalry despite the clear indications. In the picture of warfare that was prevalent in the 19th century, an armed encounter consisted of large groups of infantry who approached each other and unleashed a volley of gunfire. The deciding factor here was the number of shots and the accuracy of the fired bullets. Once the lines of the enemy were broken, the cavalry came on the stage with a charge to disperse the enemy

and claim the battle. The role of artillery was subordinate here and totally undervalued.

The conflict in the Far East however had clearly shown how deadly the impact of good artillery with explosive projectiles could be on unprotected infantry. In addition, the use of a machine gun by the infantry made the cavalry charge a real suicide action. Further the deployment of troops in unprotected open landscape was a deadly mistake with the modern armament. The usual artillery also appeared inadequate to effectively open fire on dug-in positions. Mortars and grenades were already used in 1904-1905; two types of weapons that would turn out to be influential in the course of the First World War. The German army was more open for this innovative application of explosives and by the beginning of the First World War it disposed of heavy siege artillery (Howitzers) which proved very efficient against the Belgian forts around Liège and Antwerp among others.

### ETHNICAL HOTCHPOTCH OF THE BALCANS

In Eastern Europe as well, as logical consequence of a number of historically grown situations, positions were taken that would inevitably lead to the global armed conflict. The seed for all problems in this part of Europe was in the composition of the Austrian-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Both entities were connected with each other in 1521, by a marriage between the Austrian House of Habsburg and the Royal House of Bohemia and Hungary.

The French Revolution and the new political trends at the beginning of the 19th century caused the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire. Austria became an independent empire, and immediately had to deal with a strong Prussia that was leading the German 'Bund' (a confederation of the German states). Hungary was no longer prepared to remain under Austrian rule due to nationalist influences. An uprising of the Hungarians was only able to be suppressed with the help from the Russians in 1848. Prussia took advantage of this weakened position of Austria: in an armed conflict in 1866 the Empire of Austria was defeated, after which it ceased to exist as well.

This defeat forced the Austrian government to give in to the Hungarian demand. In 1867 the Austro-Hungarian Compromise was concluded: both populations obtained the same status and the country was divided into two independent entities. Problem with this solution was that the Slav population was completely ignored within the empire and that the territory was arbitrarily divided using the Leitha River as border. In 1878 an Austrian-Hungarian military force ousted the Turks from the Bosnia-Herzegovina province, after

which the area was annexed in 1908.

Here another sovereign state from the Balkans came on the stage, the small monarchy of Serbia. In 1867 the Serbs had succeeded to oust the Turks with the help of the Dual Monarchy. In the aftermath of this triumph the monarchy appeared to become dependent on Austria-Hungary politically as well as economically. Serbia rebelled against this; the Bosnia-Herzegovina province was an important point of discussion. The Serbs wanted an autonomous Slav state in the Balkans. Russia saw its chance to keep Austria-Hungary in check and supported Serbia in this endeavour.

At the beginning of the 20th century two Balkan wars were fought. The wager was the areas which initially were in possession of the weakened Turkish-Ottoman Empire. Serbia, Greece, Montenegro and Bulgaria fought to expand their territory. International diplomacy and material support from Tsarist Russia among others led to an explosive balance at the eve of the Great War. Serbia emerged as victor from the battle and established its image as a strong state. This inevitably led to tensions with the neighbouring Dual Monarchy, which eventually led to the murder of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.

## WEB OF ALLIANCES

Parallel to the development and settlement of the conflicts described above, the heads of state and political leaders of Europe pursued an active alliance diplomacy. In general it can be said that the European powers were suspiciously conscious of a constant fear of besiegement. It had to be avoided at all costs that their country became encircled by enemy powers, which in the case of war would mean a lost cause. Initially Great Britain was not enticed to forming alliances.

The international policy which was pursued by the leading conservative political position in London was labelled by outsiders as a "Splendid Isolation". Whether this was actually the intent of the policy or more a coincidence is still a point of discussion between historians. One thing is certain: the aim was to maintain the European and global balance of power.

England would only intervene in the international relations if this balance was endangered. The underlying intent however was to defend and safeguard the overseas colonies and dominions (self-governing colonies).

Indeed, the free overseas trade was literally the driving power behind the Empire. The British categorically refused to enter into an agreement or alliance with every European superpower. At the same time they did expand

their global influence by promising diplomatic and material support to all sorts of non-European powers.

Everything changed with the end of the French-German war. The German 'Bund' united in a unified German Empire. This new superpower which could depend on an important military strength and a strong industrialisation started to profile itself more and more.

In 1873 Germany, the Austrian-Hungarian Dual Monarchy and Russia entered into the League of the Three Emperors. This treaty ensured the partners that in case of military aggression against one of them, both others would offer military support. The Germans entered into this treaty in fear of French retaliations after the defeat in 1871.

Barely 6 years later Germany and Austria-Hungary, influenced by the changing political situation, entered into a new alliance, the Dual Alliance. This alliance had to guard both partners from an attack from Russia. In 1881 Italy asked to enter into this Dual Alliance; for they feel threatened by the expansionist attitude from France. This was the start of the Triple Alliance.

In 1887 Russia decides to exit the Three Emperors' League, partly due to the fact that the Dual Alliance had been organised without their knowledge. As assurance the Russians acquire the Reinsurance Treaty from Bismarck. Germany unilaterally promises to maintain neutrality if Austria-Hungary entered into an armed encounter with Russia. This agreement was dissolved in 1890 when Bismarck disappeared from politics and Germany no longer saw an advantage in a renewed treaty with Russia.

The new balance of power in Europe prompted Great Britain to evaluate matters again. Their aloof attitude led to tensions with several European superpowers. Initially England made overtures to the Triple Alliance to form a bloc against the Russian dominance in the Far East. England hoped to anticipate a threat to its colonies in the East with this. The contradictory interests of England and Germany however could not be reconciled and the negotiations failed.

In 1902 England entered into an alliance with Japan, to counter the Russian power bloc. This immediately meant the end of the Splendid Isolation as well. In the meantime the relations with the European powers were normalised. In 1904 France and England signed the 'Entente Cordiale'. This agreement was based on two basic principles. On the one hand this treaty guaranteed that colonial disputes between both countries would be talked over without an

armed conflict.

On the other hand both partners were assured of mutual military support in case of an attack from the Triple Alliance. For France this meant an additional assurance. Since 1870 there had been a French-Russian Treaty that in case of an attack from Germany or one of its allies, the Germans would have to fight a war on two fronts.

In 1907 an English-Russian Entente was entered into. Later in that year all mutual treaties were replaced by the Triple Entente between France, England and Russia. Although mutual military support was promised on paper in case one of the parties was attacked, this alliance was a rather loose entity. During peace time there was virtually no collaboration. The Germans however saw a great threat in this and from the outset geared their plans towards a war on 2 fronts. At the beginning of the First World War the label "Entente" was used to indicate the allied troops. This includes: the United Kingdom, France, Russia, the United States, Italy, Belgium, Serbia, Montenegro and Andorra. On the other side was the Triple Alliance or the Centrals: Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire.

## 2. FIRST SHOT OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In previous paragraphs an extensive account has been outlined of how the European superpowers, at the transition of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, positioned themselves towards each other and the world in a complicated network of alliances and mutual fear of besiegement. This powder keg of tense international relations only needed a spark to explode.

### FUSE AT THE POWDER KEG

The spark came in Sarajevo, on 28 June 1914. The Austrian crown prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie Chotek visited the capital of the province of Bosnia- Herzegovina when it was a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. The sovereign kingdom of Serbia however was of the opinion that the province should be added to their country to unite all Slav populations of the Balkans into 1 nation. Since 1906 this had led to growing conflict situations between both nations.

Three Bosnian students, Princip, Gabrez and Cabrinovic, made contact with the terrorist association "the Black Hand", which taught them to handle weapons and ammunition. Beginning of June 1914 they left for Sarajevo to kill the Archduke. On 28 juni Franz Ferdinand and his wife inspected the troops.



A first attempt to assault with a hand grenade failed. Despite the threat the crown prince decided to continue the visit anyway. When the vehicle of the Archduke drove past, Gavrilo Princip drew his FN M 1910 pistol and killed Franz Ferdinand as well as his wife. The student was arrested but because he was only 21 years old, he could not receive the death penalty. He was sentenced to 20 years in jail, but died in 1918 after contracting tuberculosis.

After the news of the murder, riots occurred in Austria where many Serbian shops and properties were looted and destroyed. On 23 July 1914, Austria-Hungary sent an ultimatum to Serbia, the so-called July Ultimatum. The terms of the ultimatum consisted of ten points. Serbia decided to accept the ultimatum except for point 6. This stipulated that Serbia had to thoroughly investigate the murder and allow the assistance of Austrian officers in this. These officers had to have free access to the Serbian territory. This was unconstitutional according to Serbia. The refusal of this one point was the sign on the wall for Austria: on 28 July 1914 the Emperor declared war on Serbia. The network of alliances and unions ensured a snowball effect. Within one week most European countries were implicated in an international conflict. On 30 July the Russian Tsar announced a general mobilisation to support their ally Serbia. Germany, ally of Austria-Hungary, reacted to this by declaring war on Russia on 1 August and announcing a general mobilisation. That same day German troops occupied Luxemburg. On 2 August the German government sent an ultimatum to King Albert I with the demand for free passage over Belgian territory. On 3 August Germany declared war on France and the next day German troops violated the Belgian neutrality by crossing the border without permission. This was the moment for the United Kingdom to declare war on Germany from its side as well. Europe had reached a state of total territorial war.

## TACTICAL APPROACH OF THE WESTERN FRONT

Both continental leading figures, Germany and France had been living on bad terms with each other since the end of the French-German war. Both developed a strategic plan that would procure a fast victory in case of war. For this Germany counted on the lines of force of the Schlieffen plan, France had the plan XVII. At the end of the 19th century the German army command felt compelled to prepare for a two-front war. France and Russia had of course entered into an alliance. The Schlieffen plan wanted to force a fast decision on the Western front, before the sluggish Russian apparatus had been able to mobilise the army. In 1906 a final plan was drafted, the Schlieffen plan.



This tactical scenario assumed that France would respect the neutrality of the Lowlands as well as Switzerland and therefore would deploy all of its troops between Belfort and Sedan. Germany was going to deploy a small army force there which was going to carry out a feigned attack and consequently withdraw in Alsace-Lorraine. In the meantime the main force of the German army, a very strong right wing, would make a sickle cut through Belgium and the Netherlands to attack the French military force in the back and occupy Paris. An important point for the implementation of this plan was a French push in the Alsace region and a fast German passage through the neutral Lowlands. Von Schlieffen died in 1913 and was replaced at the top of the army command by Moltke. He adjusted the scenario in such a way that the army in Alsace was strengthened; this would strongly reduce the provoking effect in this region. Furthermore the passage was no longer through the Netherlands, but through Belgium only.

The implementation of the Schlieffen plan in 1914 completely failed due to a number of causes: inadequate German mobility, effective French resistance, Belgian resistance and ditto time gain, problems at the Eastern front and the refusal of Moltke to deploy extra troops from the Eastern front into the West. On the French side a reformation of the defences at the German border had been thought about since the defeat in 1871. Moreover the old European power had to get used to the idea of a strong German empire at the other side of the Rhine. Initially plans were drawn up for defensive military positions (plans XIV and XV) but eventually plan XVII was adopted as final strategy by general Joseph Joffre in 1911 in case a war with Germany was announced. The plan was designed by Ferdinand Foch and based on an offensive of brute force and belief in the French 'élan' on the battlefield. Fed by the revanchism about the defeat in 1871, the objective of the plan became the recapturing of the Alsace and Lorraine regions. For this purpose four French armies were positioned in the Metz and Thionville regions. They were going to attack and be able to recapture these regions in a short timeframe. A fifth army would be quartered in Northern France as reserve.

France was of course convinced that Germany would not dare to attack through Belgium. The neutrality of this country was assured by the Treaty of London and a violation of this would result in a blatant war between Germany and Great Britain. What was not taken into account was that Germany considered the Treaty of London as a scrap of paper only: the German plan of attack in fact counted on an undefended French-Belgian border. Only a coincidence ensured a stalling German push which caused Paris to be saved and a trench war to be developed.

### 3. BELGIAN TROOPS AUGUST - OCTOBER 1914 (POOR LITTLE BELGIUM)

#### VIOLATED NEUTRALITY

- In 1904 the German tactical Schlieffen plan leaked: it became clear that in case of an armed encounter Germany would not respect Belgian neutrality. As a reaction to this, the Belgian government decided in 1908 to upgrade financial efforts for the benefit of the army. At the end of 1909 the government announced the personal conscription; four years later a generalised conscription was implemented.
- The tensions with Germany kept rising and on 21 July 1914 the government announced a general mobilisation. Belgium then disposed of a field army of 6 divisions, a division of cavalry and army troops. The Belgian army was disorganised and in full reorganisation. Due to this transition stage there was a shortage of weapons and especially artillery. Moreover there was no unanimity in the army command about the tactical strategy to be followed.
- Eventually it was the King himself who took the plunge and established a strategic plan. A large army concentration was built up at the left bank of the Meuse River, while Antwerp, as 'réduite national', would fulfil the role of supply station. They counted on the great resistance that the German invader would experience if he wanted to push through the valley of the Sambre and Meuse River to France. The 'Point Fortifié Liège' was designed as a fortified citadel surrounded by a girdle of 12 forts; 6 large pentagonal fortifications with 6 smaller triangular forts in between. Each of these forts was equipped with a mix of cannons and Howitzers (heaviest calibre 210mm). The fortifications were erected in inferior and plain concrete. Moreover, they were designed for the common projectiles from 1887. At the beginning of the First World War this was completely superseded: the projectiles that the German artillery fired had up to 2.5 times the impact strength. Furthermore the Germans introduced a 420mm Howitzer (Grosse Bertha, Kurze Marine Kanone M). The Liège position was under the command of Leman and was manned by the 3rd Army Division, the 15th brigade of the 4th Army Division, 4 fortress infantry regiments and some smaller units. In between the fortified forts sconces and trenches were built.
- On 2 August 1914 Albert I sent a letter to the German Emperor Wilhelm II in which he pleaded for the Belgian neutrality. The answer came in the form of an ultimatum. Germany feared a French invasion via Belgium and demanded passage on Belgian territory to stop the French push. That same

moment German troops already crossed the Luxemburg border under the same pretension. After Belgium was promised armed support from France as well as England, Albert I informed the German Emperor that Belgium refused passage. As a result of this Germany declared war on France.

- On 4 August Belgium followed; at 8 in the morning the German troops crossed the Belgian border at Gemmenich. It was the first advance guard of the German 1st and 2nd army (under the command of respectively Gen. von Kluck and Gen. von Büllow). When the German troops reached Visé, the artillery of fort Pontisse opened fire on them. Reprisals followed against the civilian population of Visé: 36 civilians were killed and their houses were burnt to the ground. At 11pm Great Britain delivered an ultimatum to Germany to leave Belgium. Germany rejected the ultimatum and consequently Great Britain declared war on them too.

## POINT FORTIFIÉ LIÈGE

In the night of 4 on 5 August, the German troops constructed a boat bridge at the site of Visé. On the evening of 5 August, 6 German infantry brigades started a concentric attack on Liège. When the 38th and 43rd divisions threatened to break through between Bonnelles and the Ourthe, Leman sent the 15th brigade (which was planned as reserve) to help. At Sart-Tilleman the German push was stopped. In the meantime the German 34th brigade succeeded in crossing the Meuse at Lixhe. The artillery of the Liers and Pontisse forts however beat off the attack. A German company still managed to get up to the headquarters of Leman before it was fully destroyed. By way of precaution Leman withdrew with his headquarters in the citadel. The continuous attack eventually bore fruit: here and there German troops broke through the lines. The German artillery then opened fire on the citadel. In the chaotic situation Leman decided not to put the 3rd Army Division on the line, he sent the division to the majority of the field army that had lined up at the Gete. After this, Leman also submitted further and entrenched himself in the fort of Loncin, the most modern of the Liège fort girdle. From this position Leman was able to control the road and the railway line to Brussels. On 7 August Ludendorff was in Liège himself; the citadel surrendered without a fight. But the road to Brussels was properly closed off by the artillery bombardments from the fort girdle West of Liège. The German army command decided to deploy the 420mm Howitzers. After bombardments the different forts surrendered one by one between 13 and 16 August. Fort Loncin was even completely destroyed when one of the German projectiles arrives in the powder magazine.

## RETREAT TO ANTWERP

After the 3rd Army Division had left Liège, the Belgian field army developed the defence of Namur and the Gete to keep the passage to Antwerp free for the Belgian troops that had to withdraw. On 10 August, the German cavalry besieged the Belgian positions alongside the Gete. On 12 August a clash ensued between Belgian troops in Haelen, under the command of general de Witte, and 2 German cavalry divisions under the command of general major von der Marwitz. The German cavalry prefers an old style charge with the naked sword, which was mowed down by the Belgian defence. The battle is known in Belgian military history as the Battle of the Silver Helmets; after the fighting several helmets of the fallen German cuirassiers were found, some of which were plated with silver.

The Belgian success in Haelen was granted a short life only. On 18 August the German invader put up a massive offensive North of the Meuse. The push was unable to be stopped: the Belgian troops withdrew in North-West direction. On 19 August the largest part of the Belgian army was located behind the Dijle River. In the area of Aarschot it came to fierce battles after which German reprisals followed against the civilian population. The Belgian army command decided to fully withdraw in Antwerp. On 20 August Brussels falls; 60,000 German troops are sent to Antwerp to block the Belgian army.

Between 21 and 25 August several battles were settled in the region between Namur - Charleroi - Bergen and the French-Belgian border. The whole of it is often indicated as the Battle of Frontiers. German troops entered into the confrontation with 2 French armies that were moving into Belgium, after which the latter had to withdraw badly damaged. The fortifications around Namur were besieged and finally succumbed on 25 August. On 23 August the German and British troops of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) crossed swords for the first time.

The British troops initially held out during the Battle of Mons, but had to retreat eventually. The following day the British occupied the positions around Le Cateau; they were conserved until 27 August due to heavy losses to allow the BEF to carry out a retreat to France. The French troops and the BEF pulled back into positions around Verdun, where they were fortified by 2 newly formed French armies (5th and 6th). There they waited for the German push to Paris. Due to the military actions at the border with France, the pressure on the Belgian army in the Antwerp fortification eased. To relieve the British and the French.

## ANTWERP FALLS

When the BEF retreated from Le Cateau in a hurry end of August 1914, von Kluck (commander of the German 1st Army) thought that the British had been defeated. At the request of von Bülow who had engaged with the French 5th Army, he came to his aid. This caused a gap in the German wave of attack, which the German army command was not aware of. Joffre, field marshal of the French troops, utilised the opportunity and carried out a counteroffensive with the just established French 6th army. The action went into history as the Battle of the Marne: it was the turning point in the successes of the German Schlieffen plan. The 1st and 2nd German Army suffered great losses and had to retreat. They could only close the gap in their front because the French were not able to keep the counteroffensive going due to a stalling provisioning. The German troops withdrew in positions behind the Aisne River.

After the actions at the Marne, the German army staff concentrated on the Belgian troops in Antwerp. If the front became stuck in Northern France, a secured supply was of utmost importance and so the Belgian threat had to be eliminated. A siege group was put together, 120,000 men strong, under the command of von Beseler. The attack was preceded by a concentration of heavy artillery fire on the positions between Lier and Mechelen, between 28 and 31 September. The Belgian troops had to yield somewhat. The actual attack came on 1 October 1914. The line of forts and sconces between Lier and Mechelen initially stood firm. The continuous pressure however became too high and the Belgian troops moved back on 3 October to positions behind the Nethe River, where they were joined by 2,000 British Marines, accompanied by new heavy artillery. From 4 to 8 October heavy fighting followed around these positions. Slowly it became clear that the German troops threatened to break through at Lier; moreover other German units were ready to cross the Scheldt River at Dendermonde. After some doubt the king decided that the Belgian troops had to be withdrawn to the coast. The Belgian field army left the city quickly, while the fortification army gets orders to further defend the city. On 9 October the majority of the Belgian field army succeeded to cross the Gent-Terneuzen channel. The situation in Antwerp had become untenable in the meantime and the mayor capitulated on 10 October: 33,000 Belgian soldiers fled to the North and were interned in the Netherlands.

On 14 October the field army reached the Yser River, where a very last line of defence was built. The retreat from Antwerp was covered by the Belgian Cavalry division and a French-British force under the command of Rawlinson and Ronarc'h. In the meantime the BEF had also arrived in the Ypres sector.

## BATTLE OF THE YSER (18 TO 31 OCTOBER 1914)

The choice to erect a very last position of defence at the Yser was based on the river itself. It was 15 to 20 m wide and could easily be occupied as a defensive position. The Belgian field army positioned itself at the Yser and the Ieperlee channel, over a distance of 38km, from Nieuwpoort over Diksmuide and Fort de Knocke to Boezinge. The troops were exhausted, provided of scarce ammunition and cannons of 75 and 150 mm. Diksmuide was fortified with 6,000 French Fusiliers Marins. The 1st Belgian Cavalry Division was stationed as advance guard around Kortemark. The 2nd Cavalry Division (a collection of all cavalry from the infantry divisions) and 2 other divisions were stationed as reserve.

After the failure of the Schlieffen plan the new German army command (von Falkenhayn) wanted to keep the initiative. He planned a great offensive over a total front of 100km, from the North Sea to La Bassée. Objective of the action was to force a breakthrough in the direction of one of the channel harbours (Dunkirk, Calais or Boulogne-sur-mer). The German Ersatz units were deployed opposite the Belgian troops. Their numerical majority was not that great, but they were supplied with heavier (up to 420mm) and more artillery. Furthermore ammunition was not that scarce for them and morale was a lot better.

On 18 October the Battle of the Yser erupted. At the start of the combat the 6th Belgian Army Division was relieved by 2 French divisions at the Ieperlee. This shortened the Belgian front to 28km. The 6th Army Division was moved and deployed as support in the sector around Pervijze. During this first stage of the Battle, the inferior Belgian artillery received support from the British warships at the Belgian coast. With their heavy guns projectiles were shot up to 32 km inland. This support proved to be of vital importance to be able to defend the sector around Nieuwpoort. The pressure on the Belgian front was raised even more the following days and bit by bit the Belgians had to surrender the right bank of the Yser, excluding some bridgeheads.

The hopeless defence of the Yser line and the exhaustion in the badly damaged Belgian army made the army command think about a possible other defence tactic. In the past the tactic of inundation had often been used in the Yser region to take up defensive positions. The hydrology of the area was exceptionally suitable for this. The lowland region was transected by two independent water systems. On the one hand there was a network of waterways, brooks and ditches which evacuated the rainwater to the sea. On the other hand there was an embanked channel system which guaranteed shipping traffic through the region. Both systems came together in a junction,



called Ganzepoot, in Nieuwpoort. This hydrological complex regulated the total water level in the Yser region. If the overflows (drains that normally let the rainwater flow to the sea at low tide) were opened at high tide, it would inundate several sectors of the Yser region. The technique of inundation was employed for the first time on 21 October under the command of commander Dossin. Skipper Geeraert and a detachment of the engineering corps opened the overflow of the old Yser at high tide: the Nieuwendamme Creek was flooded. The inundation succeeded only partially but it enabled the Belgian troops to safeguard the vital hydrological complex.

During the second stage of the Battle of the Yser, on 22 October 1914, German troops succeeded to cross the Yser at the bend of Tervate, right on the dividing line between the positions of the Belgian 1st and 4th Army Division.

Despite numerous counterattacks of soldiers on the line, carabinieri and grenadiers, it was obvious very quickly that the bend of the Yser, between Tervate and Schoorbakke was lost. Shortly after, the German offensive came to a stop due to a shortage in reserve troops. The Belgians used the calm to analyse the situation. Quietly a start was made on preparing the withdrawal on the Nieuwpoort – Diksmuide railway line. At the suggestion of Feys, the Veurne examining magistrate, and with the assistance of Karel Cogge who was a staff member of the public body in charge of protection against flooding in Veurne, the Yser region would be flooded. In the night of 25 on 26 October all openings in the railway verge were closed and an artificial verge between the railway line and the Veurne channel was made by means of 'vaderlanderkes' [sandbags]. From 27 to 29 October, at different moments in time, the gates of the old sluice of Veurne were opened to flood the Yser region. The inundation was not big enough because the flow rate of the feed pipes was too low and the tides were not too high. From 29 October to 2 November, at the direction of skipper Geeraert, the sliding gates of the Noordvaart were opened as well. This action allowed enough water to enter the land which caused the Yser region to be submerged. On the whole an artificial lake was created which was delineated by the railway verge on the South side of the Yser and the Yser itself on the North side. The inundation came not a day too soon, because on 30 October a new German offensive commenced. German troops were able to conquer Pervijze and Ramskapelle, but due to the rising water they had to withdraw on the lines at the right bank of the Yser. In their haste large amounts of material were left behind and hundreds of Germans were trapped by the water, drowned or were shot. The front became completely stuck due to the inundation and remained as good as unchanged until the end of the war. To maintain and control the inundation, a sapeurs-pontoniers company was established from September 1915.

## 4. GUARD OF THE YSER

After the Battle of the Yser, the remainder of the Belgian field army organised itself behind the frontline between Steenstraete and Nieuwpoort. Between Nieuwpoort and Diksmuide the heightened railway verge functioned as frontline with the great inundation zone in front of it. South of Diksmuide this frontline followed the bank of the Yser, and then trail Ieperleekanaal at Fort de Knocke. The sector was manned by the Belgian field army, with temporary fortifications from French and British divisions in the South and the North..

### BELGIAN ARMED FORCES

The cornerstone of the organisation of the Belgian front was the army division. This is a Belgian compromise for an organisation of the army that is a cross between an army corps and an infantry division. At the start of the war the Belgian field army counted 6 army divisions. Each of these divisions consisted of 3 mixed brigades, except for the 3rd and 4th army division which counted 4 brigades each. Each mixed brigade comprised 2 infantry regiments among others. After the Battle of the Yser only 3 infantry regiments remained in the different army divisions (due to the loss of men). An exception was the 3rd army division which still counted 6 infantry regiments, this due to reorganisation after the defence of Liège.

The reorganisation at the beginning of 1915 rearranged the size of the army divisions. Besides the infantry regiments, each division received an artillery regiment, an engineering battalion and a transport corps. The 1st and 4th army divisions each kept a cavalry regiment.

In 1917 the Belgian troops were reorganised again. The 6 army divisions then counted 3 infantry brigades each (primarily consisting of 2 infantry regiments). In addition each division had a second artillery regiment and an engineering regiment consisting of 2 battalions. The transport corps from 1915 and any cavalry units were retained. Beginning of 1918 the divisions were reformed again: each of the 6 army divisions now comprised 2 infantry divisions (numbered from 1 to 12), each containing 3 infantry regiments. In addition a cavalry group, a third artillery regiment, a third engineering battalion and a supplementary battalion. The transport corps was retained.

The ten cavalry regiments that were put together at the time of mobilisation were also reformed during the course of the war. At the Yser front there were 2 cavalry divisions with 4 cavalry regiments each, and a carabiniers-cyclists battalion, a riding artillery group, a pioniers-pontoniers-cyclists company and a small transport corps. After the reorganisation only 1



cavalry division, divided into six cavalry regiments in three brigades, 2 battalions of cyclists, a riding artillery group and an armoured vehicle group, the pioniers-pontoniers-cyclists company, a transport corps and 2 supplementary squadrons remained. In addition the army divisions could rely on the support of the so-called army troops: heavy artillery regiments, a pontonniers battalion, an aircraft squadron, the barrage balloon companies, the searchlight company, ...

## POSITIONS

In the course of the war Belgian positions were continuously extended, improved and rearranged. In broad terms, four parts or zones can be identified. For the large defensive positions, small posts were built that were pushed forward. This concerns observation posts, guard posts, outposts, listening posts, ... In the inundated zones these were mostly dry islands in the big surface of water. These "postes aquatiques" therefore often changed occupation.

Behind the big defensive obstacle (the river, the inundation or the railway verge) a first line was extended. This first line consisted of different elements:

- First line with a fighting trench;
- Second line with a support trench;
- Third line with reserve trench and commando post (this one could still be deduplicated or further extended).
- Throughout the line there were communicating trenches, (concrete) dugouts, latrines, aid posts, barbed wire obstacles, ...

Behind Nieuwpoort, via Booitshoeke and Lampernisse, behind Nieuwkapelle and further on to Reninge, was the second line. This was again built up with different trenches and support points. The second line functioned as an in-between position.

The third line ran from Koksijde and Veurne, via the Lo-kanaal and behind the Yser, upstream to the Fintele. This consisted of at least 2 lines with trenches and several support points. From the back area and from line to line, battery tracks, connecting tracks and narrow gauge railways (Decauville railways) were built. Ammunition depots, engineering depots, bandage posts and supply posts were erected in various places.

## SECTORS

Each deployed army division was assigned a sector of 6 km wide. Each sector was further divided according to the internal organisation in 2 or 3 subsectors, with clear dividing lines extended to front and back. The sectors were referred to with 1 or 2 place names, but this was not always as clear. The division in sectors did not always remain the same throughout the war. The subdivision was dependent on the inundations, the front length, but also the number of deployed units. The occupation of the sectors constantly changed as well. The deployed divisions would defend a specified sector for some months and were then given three weeks leave in De Panne, Ghyselde, .... At the time of a new drive at the front they were assigned to a different sector to erase old memories.

**Nieuwpoort sector** was defended by the French 81<sup>ème</sup> Division d'Infanterie Territoriale until February 1915. In March 1915 a Belgian regiment was briefly stationed there, but after the end of March the defence was taken up again by a French group. In July 1917 the British 15th Army Corps was deployed there, in preparation for their plan of attack for the coast. In November 1917 French troops were stationed there again until the Belgian 6th Army Division took over the zone in February 1918. From August 1918 this was the 5th Army Division. In the whole duration of the war, the Belgian Sappeurs-Pontoniers were the ones who maintained the inundation.

**Ramskapelle sector** was added to the Pervijze sector in December 1916. The Pervijze sector stayed in the hands of the 3rd Army Division from December 1914 to April 1916. The Boyeau de la Mort was extended as a key position at kilometre marker 16 near the Yser.

**Oud-Stuivekenskerke sector** was a subdivision which was only erected in November 1916. This sector was defended by 2 cavalry divisions who relieved each other until June 1917. After that this sector was united to 1 large sector together with those from Pervijze and Ramskapelle and defended by 1 army division. In January 1918 the Oud-Stuivekenskerke sector was again subdivided and assigned to the unified Cavalry Division. On 6 and 18 March 1918 the deployed troops were able to withstand the German assaults and retain the big guard posts Reigersvliet and Oud-Stuivekenskerke.

**Diksmuide and Nieuwkapelle sectors** sectors are often mentioned together because they are both located behind the Yser. Yet each has their own history

and own characteristics. In the winter of 1916-1917 they were united under the guard of 1 army division. From July 1917 they form the Belgian assault sector for the share in the British offensive. In November of that same year they are again divided to be joined again in April of 1918. From June 1918, the 4th Army Division was deployed here which later participated in the final offensive from this point.

**Noordschote sector** between Fort de Knocke and Driegrachten, was first in the hands of the French 89ème Division d'Infanterie Territoriale. On 25 March 1915 the Belgian front was extended to the Maison de Passeur. This larger sector was thereafter assigned to a Belgian army division. In July 1917 the French 1ère Armee was stationed there. In November 1917 it became a Belgian sector again, including the conquered area towards the East. This new sector received the name Merkem. On 17 March 1918 the 3rd Army Division was able to break the German attack. In July 1918 the 1st Army Division was here to assist with carrying out the final offensive from this point.

**Steenstrate sector** was created from the Belgian front handover of 30 March 1915. During the first German gas attacks, the 6th Army Division was deployed here; however the carabiniers and grenadiers were able to stand their ground. In 1916 it became the French Steenstrate-Boezinge sector of the 36ème Corps d'Armee. In June 1916 it again became a Belgian sector with the name Steenstrate-Sas. In July 1917 the sector was taken over by the French 1ère Armee. In November of that same year it became the British Boezinge sector. End of March 1918 a Belgian Army Division took over the sector. In August 1918 an infantry regiment of the 6th Army Division was deployed for the purpose of the final offensive.

**Brielen sector** was in British hands until June 1918, when a Belgian infantry division was stationed there. The Boezinge and Brielen sectors were joined very quickly and put in the hands of one army division. In August 1918 the 6th Army Division was deployed here too which joined the final offensive on 28 September.

## INTERNAL ROTATION AND FRONTLINE SERVICE

In the different divisions and infantry regiments an internal system of rotation determines service at the frontline. Frontline service comprised several things: the "guard" in the first line, picket service behind the line, half rest or demi-repos in the cantonments. Under normal circumstances the troops were

divided as follows: one third was responsible for direct defence, one third for the other work and the possible interventions and one third was assigned as reserve. These roles were rotated.

The actual frontline service, in the first line, was for the infantry. They had support from their own machine guns, trench artillery and the engineering corps. In cavalry regiments half squadrons were put on foot to man the trenches. During frontline service the men experienced shooting from trench artillery and of artillery, firing of machine guns and guns (snipers among others), the danger of grenades and poison gas. Sometimes it even came to man to man battles. Reconnaissance patrols were sent out and raids were carried out on the enemy positions. In the trenches themselves, soldiers were on the outlook or behind a mounted weapon for hours. After being replaced there was the option to sleep a few hours while sitting or eat a frugal meal. Then repairs to the parapet and firing positions followed. Others were assigned to collect food or ammunition; others had to help the stretcher-bearers with the care of the wounded or burying the dead.

The living conditions were atrocious: unmodified uniforms which were not washed for far too long, not enough food, mosquitoes, flies, mud, rain, wind, cold, not enough sleep, ...

In total 63,000 Belgians would be killed due to war activities. Another 14,000 militaries have to be added who died of disease, which in view of their age is almost exclusively due to the war conditions. About 30,000 Belgian militaries were killed at and behind the frontline. 100,000 became injured on one or several occasions after which 35,000 of them could no longer be "deployed".

## CANTONMENTS AND CANTONMENT LIFE

The troops in the field were assigned a municipality or hamlet as cantonment for their days of demi-repos. They disposed of some buildings, aside from some sheds and barns. For the officers, rooms in houses were requisitioned. Huts and tents were erected next to the existing buildings, later also wooden barracks.

In the cantonment there was always an infirmary or a hospital. That is also why a bed of war graves often arose at the cemetery of the hamlet or municipality. Sometimes an individual Belgian military cemetery was established. The cantonments for the full rest periods were situated further to the back. For example in De Panne there were vacant villas, cafés, movie theatres, ... These places to rest were usually better equipped and provided with more comfort.

The rest periods as well as the demi-repos had a fixed program: food

distribution, inspection, exercises, marches, maintenance for weapons and equipment, inspection again, troop inspection, chores, requiem masses, ... On Sundays and in the evenings the soldiers were able to visit the pubs within the garrison borders.

Chaplains and stretcher-bearers set up reading areas; writing of letters was an important activity. The soldiers wrote to family but also to their 'marraines de guerre'. Sport competitions, races and even fairs were organised.

The nightrest in the barracks and the sheds was often disturbed. Vermin, fleas, lice, rats, drunken soldiers, troops that left for the frontline, ...

Due to the awkward situation in the trenches and in the cantonments there were many diseases (scabies, typhoid, dysentery, Spanish flu, ...).

## FRONTLINE MOVEMENT

The army in the field, lead by French-speaking officers and with a majority of Dutch-speaking soldiers, was an ideal breeding ground for the Flemish awareness. This situation was promoted further through the contacts with stretcher-bearers (often clergymen and teachers) and chaplains and the numerous daily incidents. In February 1917 various student groups were banned for the soldiers.

The hard core however continued to work under the supervision of the athenaeum teacher Adiel Debeuckelaere and his secretaries Hendrik Borginon and Filip De Pillecyn. The clandestine organisation revolted against the unequal treatment of monolingual Flemish people. It became a political lobby group with delegates in all divisions. Between June 1917 and July 1918 ten publications were distributed; open letters, pamphlets and the Frontline song. A tried and tested method to attract attention were the flying trips: a dozen men put various Flemish slogans on the trenches in a lightning visit and then quickly disappeared from sight.

The name "Frontline movement" was seldom used. It is more readily utilised by writers after the war: the name frontline movement was used for the Flemish movement at the frontline, while "frontline party" is used as indication of the clandestine organisation of Debeuckelaere. During preparation activities for the final offensive Corporal Debeuckelaere was taken into captivity. This thoroughly disrupted the organisation.

## 5. YPRES IN THE CENTRE OF THE ACTION

After the fall of Antwerp the 3rd German Army Corps (von Beseler) continued along the coast. On the East side of the Leie [Lys] River the 6th German Army

marched on. In between, the newly formed 4th German Army was deployed, with the objective to march on in the direction of Diksmuide and Ypres. In the race to the sea, the control of these cities would mean that the German troops had free passage. Furthermore the strategic value of Ypres would become even greater, if it appeared in the beginning of 1914 that not a single movement at the Yser frontline was possible anymore. The geographical composition of the landscape around

Ypres would play a determining role during the course of the First World War. The arched ridge at the East and South-East of the city offered a widespread view at the surrounding landscape. Control of this hill ridge was of vital importance to be able to utilise aimed artillery fire and to take up the most favourable position for defence.

### **FIRST YPRES (19 OCTOBER - 22 NOVEMBER 1914)**

The advancing 4th German Army reached the area of Ypres in the beginning of October 1914. During the night of 5 on 6 October an uhlansen patrol blew up the railway to Komen [or Comines] and sawed through two telephone poles. On 7 October the 3rd German Cavalry Division arrived in Ypres: the vigilante patrol fled and joint efforts from French and British troops stemmed the German advance at Mont des Cats after which the latter withdrew. Six days later the British installed themselves in Ypres: together with the French units they prepared to take up the defence of the region. Between Steenstraete and Broodseinde the French Cavalry Corps (the Mityry) and the 9th French Corps took up positions. The sector around Ypres was in the hands of the British general French, commander-in-chief of the BEF. Between Broodseinde and Zandvoorde he positioned the 1st British Corps, under the command of lieutenant-general Haig. From Zandvoorde to Mesen [Messines] the defensive position was manned by the Cavalry Corps, lead by lieutenant-general Allenby.

The first stage of the First Battle near Ypres consists of the battles that occur at the end of October 1914. On 21 October the 26th German Reserve Corps and the 51st German Reserve Division advanced from Roeselare to Langemark. The untrained infantry advanced in a far too compact formation. They were dispersed by the Scottish professional soldiers of the BEF, the Scottish Riflemen. There were many German victims, especially at Steenakkersmolen, which was later redubbed as 'Totenmuhle'. On 24 October the battles stopped. Six days later, after an artillery barrage of 1 hour, the German troops attacked the Geluveld-Zandvoorde sector by surprise. The British regrouped in Klein-Zillebeke.

The Germans marched on and conquered the castle of Hollebeke, but the provision of French fortifications inhibited a final bursting of the line. On 31 October the German troops occupied Geluveld too, but British artillery stationed in Polygon Wood prevented a further advance along the Menin Road; an aimed counterattack provided the control of Geluveld again. Mesen [Messines] and Wijtschate surrendered one by one to the German attack, but thanks to the deployment of French reserve troops the gap was mended. On 1 and 2 November the Germans attacked again; they respectively conquered Geluveld and St Eloi. Eventually the attack was stemmed due to a shortage of reserve troops on German side.

The second stage of the battles occurred in November. At that time it was clear that an advance march was no longer possible at the Yser frontline. The German army command anticipated a new offensive between Diksmuide and Mesen. Three corps were deployed: von Beseler, von Linsingen and Fabeck. On 10 November von Beseler largely conquered Diksmuide. On its left flank, between Poelkapelle and Zonnebeke, the 26th Reserve Corps was again stopped by the defence of Langemark: The Second Battle for Langemark was again a slaughter, but Bikschoote was finally occupied by the Germans. The day after, von Linsingen advanced via the Menin Road. The British professional soldiers who had dug themselves in, caused a real slaughter among the Prussian Guard, but the numerical surplus of the Germans allowed them to advance anyway. Near the Verbrande Molen [Burnt Mill] the German offensive was finally stopped. Nevertheless on 11 November von Fabeck attacked from St-Eloi.

In the night of 11 on 12 November the British unsuccessfully attempted to win back a part of the terrain in a counteroffensive. The front fell quiet: the exhausted German troops dug themselves in and on 22 November they fired on Ypres city. The Lakenhalle [Cloth Hall] went up in flames at this time. In the aftermath of the First Battle of Ypres the German troops carried out another offensive around Hill 60; they conquered the strategic elevation which would prove to be crucial in the coming years as vantage post and observation post. The result of the first contest in Ypres was disastrous for the BEF. The professional army was more than halved after the campaigns in Mons, Le Cateau and Ypres. The remaining troops were sent home to form the core of a new mass army yet to be established. The French take over the full Ypres sector.

During the “forgotten winter” the troops dug themselves in on both sides. They tried to protect themselves against themselves and against nature as



best they could. Here and there a short Christmas ceasefire was established; the troops met each other in no man's land and exchanged food and souvenirs – even though the army command did not like it. The French in the Salient around Ypres didn't give much attention to the building of trenches. Spread out machine-gun nests were dug out, linked by barbed wire obstacles. There was no comprehensive network of trenches, with frontlines and communicating trenches. Furthermore only little was done to keep the hygiene in check. The bodies of the fallen from the First Battle of Ypres were not cleared, the trenches were used as toilets, ... When the British and Canadians took over a part of the front in the spring of 1915, the first task was to build decent trenches and clearing and rearranging the allied front.

The German position on Hill 60 was blown up on the eve of the Second Battle (17 April) by tripping three British mines. The British infantry stormed the hill, despite serious German resistance. The latter wanted to prevent the discovery of the dug-in gas bottles. Only on 5 May did the Germans succeed in the full recapture of the hill.

### SECOND YPRES (22 APRIL - 25/27 MAY 1915)

In April 1915 the allied defence of the Ypres Salient looked like this. The 87th French Territorial Division was stationed (formed in Brittany) between Steenstraete and Langemark. From Langemark to just South of Poelkapelle the frontline was manned by the 45th French Division from Algiers. From the French line the positions were manned by the Canadian 1st Division, up to 's Graventafel (Berlin Wood). The British 28th, 27th and 5th Division were consecutively stationed South of Berlin Wood. On the other side of no man's land the 46th, 51st and 52nd Reserve Division entrenched themselves opposite the French Divisions. The 4th German Marine Brigade was deployed here as reserve. The 2nd Reserve Erzats Brigade and the 38th Landwehr Brigade were stationed opposite the Canadians, with the 37th Landwehr Brigade as reserve. Opposite the British divisions there were the 53rd and 54th Reserve Division, the 39th and 30th Infantry Division and the 3rd Bavarian Division.

On 22 April the German artillery started an extensive shooting of the Northern sector of the Salient. Late in the afternoon 5,730 bottles of chloride gas were screwed open. With a North-East wind, the gas cloud drifted off to the trenches in the Steenstraete-Pilkem sector. The French troops fled in a panic; in no time a gap of 6 to 8 km was created in the allied front. The German infantry, which advanced immediately behind the gas cloud, conquered Langemark within the hour and marched on to Pilkem Ridge and Kitchener's



Wood at St-Juliaan. Instead of crossing over to Ypres, the German troops dug themselves in, as was agreed before the attack. The army command did not fully comprehend the success of the new weapon and lacked the necessary reserves to consolidate the ground gained. In the meantime the Canadians organised a counterattack at St-Juliaan and by the evening Belgian and British fortifications came to the rescue as well.

Between 23 April and 3 May different offensives were carried out with poisonous gas. The German troops conquered Hill 60 and marched on to the ridge of Hill 62. The British general Smith-Dorien suggested to French that a tactical withdrawal would save the troops a lot of grief and harm. French would not hear of it and replaced Smith-Dorien with general Plumer. On 8 May the Frezenberg was conquered; on 24 May the Germans advanced to the hill ridge of Bellewaerde, but there the British barely held out. At the end of the battles it became clear that the newly formed frontline was an indefensible position. After this the allied troops at the site tactically withdrew. The Salient was shrunk so much here that the city centre of Ypres was now also within reach of the German light artillery.

In the latter days of the Second Battle of Ypres the German army command deployed yet another new weapon. On 30 July 1915 they carried out an attack with flame-throwers in the area of Bellewaerde, but there again there appeared to be a shortage of operatives to be able to consolidate the success. "All quiet on the western front..." is a relatively accurate description for the period from mid 1915 to June 1917. The allied troops carried out offensives in the Champagne, Artois and at the Somme, while the German army command focused on Verdun. In December 1915 the commander-in-chief of the BEF was replaced by general Haig. During this calm in the turmoil the German troops took advantage of this to reorganise themselves and bring the ranks back at full strength.

### **THIRD YPRES (31 JULY TO 10 NOVEMBER 1917)**

In 1916 it was relatively quiet along the front on Belgian territory. In France on the other hand tough campaigns were being fought around Verdun and the Somme.

At the start of 1917 the French and British army command decided to launch a decisive offensive. Plans were made to initiate a large aimed offensive along the front in Artesia and the area of Cambrai. Various factors, an anticipating movement of the German troops among others, ensured that the actions did not achieve the intended effect.

In addition Germany declares unrestricted submarine war. The British commander-in-chief Haig decided that the German lines had to be broken: the submarine bases of Ostend and Zeebrugge had to be eliminated.

As some type of prelude to the Third Battle of Ypres, a short offensive was carried out at the hill ridge of Mesen [Messines] and Wijtschate between 7 and 14 June. In the night of 6 on 7 June, 19 mines were simultaneously detonated under the German positions. The British took over the positions of Mesen and Wijtschate in the subsequent assault. One month later, on 12 July 1917, the German army command 79 opened an attack on the Salient with the blistering mustard gas. After the action the German troops had to eventually withdraw into their 2nd line anyway.

On the eve of the Third Battle of Ypres, the front occupation looked like this. The 4th British Army under the command of Rawlinson was posted along the coast, ready to advance to Ostend and Zeebrugge. The Belgian army was posted from Nieuwpoort to Drie Grachten (Merkem). The French 1st Army was positioned between Drie Grachten and Boezinge. The 5th British Army (Gough) was stationed from Boezinge to the canal near Hollebeke. Lastly between Hollebeke and the Leie [Lys] the 2nd British army was posted in the frontline. On the German side the defence was observed by 4 army groups of the 4th German Army. The Gruppe Nord (von Schröder) was posted from the coast to Schore, de Gruppe Dixmuden between Schore and the railway to Langemark, the Gruppe Ypern South of there to 't Hooghe and the Gruppe Wyttschaete from the Menin Road to the Leie [Lys]. The allied outnumbered them 3 to 1. The tactical planning of the allied consisted of preceding each infantry attack with an extensive artillery barrage. In addition various groups of tanks were deployed here and there at the allied front. The German army command anticipated this and left the most advanced line thinly manned. In the second line the "Eingreifdivisionen" were ready to fortify the frontline immediately after the shootings.

On 15 July an allied artillery barrage started. The mass deployment of the Howitzers and cannons kept the German troops deep in their underground hide-outs. A less positive effect was the total destruction of the drainage system of the Salient landscape. In combination with the exceptionally heavy rainfall that summer the shooting modified the landscape into one big mud pie. On 31 July the time had finally come; over the whole frontline from Diksmuide to the Leie, the allied troops were going 'over the top'. Immediately it became clear that a massive coordinated attack was impossible due to the situation of the water-diseased landscape. The Third Battle of Ypres

disintegrated in a succession of a series of local battles, which can be summarised in three stages.

The first stage occurred between 31 July and 28 August 1917. The French 1st Division conquered Bikschote during the Battle of Pilkem (31 July to 2 August). The British Guard Division advanced in the direction of Langemark and the 38th Division recaptured Pilkem. The German defence however was not yet broken and the combination of a landscape that was shot to pieces and a lot of rain made a fast advance impossible. In the following days the 25th Division marched on to the Westhoek (Zonnebeke), but a breakthrough to Geluvelde was impossible.

Between 16 and 18 August fierce battles were again fought around Langemark. French troops reached St-Jansbeek, British divisions conquered Langemark and St-Juliaan and two Irish divisions occupied Fortuinhoek and Frezenberg. However a breakthrough in the direction of Zandberg was unable to be forced. After 18 August attacks followed, including with tanks, but all with barely any ground gain as a result. On 28 August all offensives fell quiet, Haig wanted to let the mud dry and bring the 2nd British army (ANZAC) into position as relief/fortification. Furthermore the allied side was devising a new tactic.

In a second stage of the Third Battle the British high command modified the tactic; even more extensive artillery barrages were performed preceding actual offensives, and the infantry now carried out local front attacks with limited objectives instead. Between 20 and 25 September fierce battles followed at the Menin Road. The British conquered Rose Farm, Wurst Farm, Bremen Redoubt, and a piece of the Wilhelmstellung between Nonnebossen and Herenthage. They also occupied a corner of Polygon Wood at this time. Between 26 September and 3 October the core of the battles was near Polygon Wood. The British surprise attacked Shuler Farm and the high ground at 's Graventafel, Dochy Farm, Zonnebeke and Polygon Wood. In the meantime ANZAC troops occupied the sector North of Zonnebeke in. The Germans supplied three new divisions to fortify the Zonnebeke sector.

On 4 October the Battle of Broodseinde was fought out. British troops recaptured Poelkapelle, 's Graventafel, Tyne Cot, Broodseinde and Polderhoek; but this at the expense of big losses on both sides. Despite protests of Plumer as well as Gough, Haig continues with the offensive: he wanted to obtain possession of fixed roads to Passendale [Passchendaele] and Westrozebeke.

Five days later, on 9 October, the Battle of Poelkapelle was fought out. French units conquered Mangelare, Veldhoek and the verge of Houthulst Forest,

while the British occupied Koekuit and retrieved Reutel. However, the British offensives on Vijfwegen, Passendale and Nieuwmolen failed. On 11 October the whole frontline between Diksmuide and Armentieres was attacked with yperite for 2 hours.

On 12 October a first offensive burst out around Passendale. All initial attacks were repelled. The following day Haig ordered to cease the offensive temporarily. They had to wait for better weather and for the Canadian troops who were to relieve the ANZAC troops. On German side a Gruppe Staden was organised in a hurry between the Gruppe Dixmuden and the Gruppe Ypern. On 16 October the Germans withdrew from Broodseinde to Drogerbroodhoek. The Australian troops however did not follow. The Canadian Corps took over the frontline from the 2nd ANZAC Corps in the night of 17 on 18 October.

In the third stage, between 26 October and 10 November, all offensives concentrated around Passendale [Passchendaele]. This is what was afterwards called the Second Battle of Passendale. On 26 October the French conquered Merkem and they advanced to Houthulst Forest. For fear of being enclosed behind the Blankaert, the Germans evacuated the sector. Belgian troops crossed the Yser and joined the French near Luyghem-molen. The British and Canadians kept plodding away in the waterlogged terrain West and South of Passendale.

On 30 October the 3rd Canadian Division reached the Goudberg between Passendale and Westrozebeke. The 4th Canadian Division recaptured Crest Farm South-West of Passendale. Between 31 October and 5 November Haig reorganised the troops and located the majority of the troops under the command of Plumer.

The 1st Canadian Division reached the Mosselmarkt on 6 November and somewhat

later also Westrozebekestraat in Passendale. The 2nd Canadian Division conquered the ruins of the church on that same day. British attacks on Polderhoek and Geluveld were however repelled. On 8 November Plumer was temporarily replaced by Ramlinson. On 10 November the British succeed in advancing another half of a km.

The outcome of the Third Battle of Ypres was a nightmare. High losses on both sides, a salient around Ypres with another salient pushed forward on top of that (a strategical nightmare to defend), a broken morale among the men (with desertion as logical consequence as well), ...

## 6. GERMAN SPRING OFFENSIVE 1918 (9 APRIL TOT 29 APRIL 1918)

The winter 1917-1918 proved to be an absolute low for the allied as well as the German troops during the First World War. The troops were severely thinned and tried to reorganise themselves in a landscape that was completely shot to pieces.

The Russian revolution immediately meant the end of the Russian participation in the First World War. The Russians signed a treaty with Germany which allowed the full operation of the East front (about 1,000,000 men) to be transferred to the West front. This new impulse strengthened the troops and allowed the belief in a total offensive to grow. This recently acquired numerical strike power had to be played out fast, before the United States was able to put together an operation with the allied that was too large. In addition the continuous pressure of the economical blockade was slowly being felt. A new general artillery tactic was applied: the Feuerwalz, where the objectives were massively fired at in turn, but no longer for hours as had been the case up until then. In this manner the artillery used to deprive the infantry of every chance for surprise. In the new tactic the infantry (more specifically the special new Sturmbataillionen) was working a lot closer together with the artillery. Under a cover of artillery fire they marched on the enemy line, after which they broke through the line and penetrated the positions that were defended too strongly.

The German commander-in-chief Ludendorff devised a plan of attack which consisted of carrying out blitz attacks here and there to break the resistance of the allied. Early in the year various actions were undertaken at the Somme. Initially the Germans got many victories, but due to the massive deployment of French fortifications, the action eventually halted. The allied managed to reorganise themselves and to consolidate a closed front.

Then Ludendorff concentrated on the sector between Houthulst and La Bassée, (the so-called Fourth Battle of Ypres). On 9 April 1918 German troops broke through the Portuguese lines near Neuve Chapelle. British and Australians were barely able to close the gap. The day after that the German actions are concentrated on the Ypres Salient. Ploegsteert, Mesen [Messines] and Hollebeke were occupied by the Germans. From 12 April the British pulled the majority of the troops back from the Passendale [Passchendaele] ridge; only the frontlines were kept occupied. One day later the Germans made remarkable progress along the full front South of Wijtschate. On 16 April the last British troops were pulled back from the Passendale ridge. The completely conquered area from the Third Battle of Ypres was surrendered

without a fight. South of the Salient the Germans conquered Belle, Dranouter, Kemmel and St-Elooi. Belgian troops (3rd, 4th and 9th division) foiled a German breakthrough North of the Salient during the Battle of Merkem. On 25 April the Germans occupied the Kemmelberg and chased the French defence away. On 26 April the British withdrew even further in the Salient, up to the line Wieltje, Potyze, Kruiskalseide and Zillebeke-Vijver.

Three days later the German offensive ended with a push up to just before Loker, de Clytte and Voormezele. Between 18 August and 6 September 1918 a series of British recapturing battles ensued. The advancements lead to the reconquering of Loker, Kemmel, Dranouter, Nieuwkerke, Ploegsteert and Nieppe.

## 7. FINAL ALLIED OFFENSIVE (28 SEPTEMBER TO 11 NOVEMBER 1918)

After the German troops handed over the initiative in June 1918, a momentum of unstable balance followed between both fronts. But from August 1918 the number of American units at the Western front grew considerably: the German opponent slowly lost its numerical advantage and the initiative moved to the allied. They prepared to deploy a decisive final offensive. The French field marshal Foch was appointed as coordinator of the allied troops. He wanted to force a decision before the end of 1918. The plan consisted of implementing three offensives, started up one after the other, to divide the German resistance and eventually break it.

On 26 September the 4th French Army and the 1st American Army attacked in the direction of Mézières. The wooded hills made it hard to advance and the German troops were able to stand their ground locally. The next day an offensive started a little more North in the direction of Philippeville. Haig captained an Army group consisting of troops of the Commonwealth and the 1st French Army. Initially the allied realised a gap in the German lines, but after regrouping the Germans stood their ground on 8 October.

The third offensive started on 28 September. The first stage is known today as the Fifth Battle of Ypres. The Flanders Army group, consisting of the Belgian army supplemented with British and French units under the command of King Albert I, crossed the Yser between Diksmuide and Houthulst. They conquered Houthulst Bos and locally broke through the Flandern II-stellung. On 30 September they reached the Flandern I-stellung and chased away the German troops off the hills around Ypres.

On 14 October the attack was continued: an offensive was carried out on



Roeselare – Torhout – Tielt. The following day the German front completely disintegrated and the withdrawal of the German troops started. On 23 October the German troops regrouped behind the Afleidingskanaal and the Leie [Lys]. The Flanders Army group, fortified by French and American units, again attacked in the direction of the Leie. The German resistance eventually broke completely: on Monday 11 November an armistice was signed after 1,568 days of war. The armistice and the peace treaties that would be concluded afterwards, held the seeds for what the Second World War would become. The heavy burden of debt that was placed on Germany, depriving of parts of its industry, depriving of its colonies, ... All these measures eventually brought about a reaction of nationalist unity among the German population. This in turn was the ideal breeding ground for ideologies such as Nazism..

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The translation and production of this publication is a part of the European INTERREG IVA 2 Seas Programme 'Great War'. The INTERREG IVA 2 Mers Seas Zeeën Programme promotes crossborder cooperation between the coastal regions of 4 Member States: France, England, Belgium and The Netherlands.

The 2 Seas crossborder Operational Programme was approved by the European Commission in September 2008 and has a budget of €167 million community funding (ERDF) for the period 2007-2013. The Programme has three priority themes as well as a common priority with the France (Channel) – England INTERREG IVA Programme.

Priority 1: Creating an economically competitive, attractive and accessible area

Priority 2: Promoting and enhancing a safe and healthy environment

Priority 3: Improving quality of life

Priority 4: Common priority with the France (Channel) – England programme.

The Great War project is a regular cross border Cooperation project that brings together partners from different countries in the Programme area who wish to develop or solve a shared cross-border issue in line with the objectives of the Programme priorities.

The territories of the projetpartners are the province of West-Flanders, the province of Antwerp , Cambridge County Council, The City of Brighton and Hove, the departments Pas-de-Calais, Aisne, Somme and Nord and the cities of Etaples and Montreuil. The Great War project will explore the legacy of the conflict across the 2 Seas area in particular.

The project partners wish to offer quality Great War sites to remembrance tourists as well as to young people and to the local communities of the regions concerned. The project will establish this innovative new network of sites before the commemorations of the 100th anniversary of the Great War being planned for 2014. Memory tourism sites and museums are significant assets

that will help this project generate a common understanding across the 2 Seas area of the events of the Great War, its legacy and its contribution to the society in which modern European citizens live and work. The Great War project will feed their perception of war and peace in today's world, whilst also favouring the economic development of the 2 Seas territories involved.

Therefore, the province of West-Flanders integrates her communication about the artistic commemoration of the GreatWar in 2014-2018, called GoneWest, within this project. The province hopes to reach an international audience by developing different communication tools and communication studies.

The province organises different training programs and eductours for the partners, tourism offices, educational staff and battlefield networks as well. They are developing educational tools such as an educational toolkit together with the province of Antwerp.

This publication, the touchstone is a guideline to develop educational tools yourself.