

WALKING THE BATTLEFIELD

It is easy to do two things on the Passchendaele battlefield: clearly follow the action on Bellevue Spur and in the Ravebeek Valley on the left of it, and get disoriented on the ridge on the right of it. The axis of the attacks on 9 and 12 October on the right side paralleled the line of the Ypres–Roulers railway, which ran across the ridge. But natural instinct follows the lie of the land. So you have to remind yourself constantly that the attacks were not intended to proceed along the line of the N303, which runs along the ridge. The 9th Brigade, in particular, tended to give into instinct, which made direction-keeping a frustrating business for it. Remind yourself constantly, too, that today's lush, well-manicured countryside stands in the starkest possible contrast to the appalling conditions under which the attacks took place.

The tour is intended for walkers. A goodly part of it cannot be driven, which means a long walk back to a parked car for drivers. Parking is sometimes difficult as well.

MAP NGI 1:20 000: 28/3-4 Zonnebeke–Moorslede

Leave Ypres through the Menin Gate and continue straight ahead on the N332 for Zonnebeke, 1.1 kilometres past the centre of which turn left onto the N303 at the Broodseinde roundabout. Turn left again 950 metres along onto Tynecotstraat, following the signs for Tyne Cot cemetery. Park in the cemetery car park.

From the car park entrance, head left past the hedges to the top of the hill, which is on the western edge of **Passchendaele Ridge** ①. Most of the landmarks on the battlefield are visible from this location and much of the action of 9 and 12 October can be grasped from it. Stand with your back to **Tyne Cot Cemetery**. The church at 12 o'clock is in the centre of **Passchendaele**, 1.8 kilometres distant. To your right rear, 1.5 kilometres off at 5 o'clock, is the tower of the church in **Zonnebeke**. The bed of the old **Ypres–Roulers railway** runs across the crest of the ridge to your right front, its course from **Dash Crossing**, 300 metres to your right rear on Tynecotstraat, indicated by the line of trees 250 metres to your right. It went over the N303, Passendalestraat, at **Defy Crossing**, by the building with the high-pitched roof 500 metres to your right front. **Hillside Farm** was further

PASSCHENDAELE

The advance from the 3rd Division's start line at Tyne Cot, here occupied by the 9th Brigade. Opposition came almost immediately from the Hillside Farm area.





left, towards the communications tower on the N303. The low ground 800 metres to your left is the valley of the Ravebeek. Between **Waterfields**, at 9 o'clock beyond the black-roofed barn, and **Marsh Bottom**, behind the seven poplars beyond Waterfields, the stream changes course. **Bellevue Spur** rises on the far side, and the red-roofed house atop the spur, just to the right of the

Starting from Tyne Cot Cemetery, this walk follows the bed of the old Ypres-Roulers railway past the Keiberg in retracing the right flank of the 3rd Division's assault. Cutting back through Passchendaele, it then tracks roughly along the inter-divisional boundary in the Ravebeek Valley before swinging up onto Bellevue Spur to the limit of the New Zealander's advance on II ANZAC's left flank. The Red, Blue and Green Lines and the site of Captain Jeffries's VC action are all included.

DISTANCE COVERED: 8 km

DURATION: 4 hours

HILLSIDE FARM

DEFY CROSSING



“ The Ravebeek Creek was in flood, and had been diverted in places by shell-fire, with the result that it had overflowed, and filled up all the neighbouring shell-holes. This made the creek an expanse of shell-holes filled with water. In places it was like a series of lakes, sometimes 100 yards wide ... On the right it was difficult to get forward from shell-hole to shell-hole, as every shell-hole, except the brand new ones, contained at least 2 feet of mud and water. It was impossible to get right into one without the danger of not being able to get out, but it was possible to perch on the side of one. ”

Green, FC, *The Fortieth: a record of the 40th Battalion AIF*, Hobart, 1922, pp. 88-9

black-roofed house, is **Bellevue Farm**.

Across the re-entrant 200 metres to your left front was **Augustus Wood**, which no longer exists. **Berlin Wood**, which does, is 650 metres to your left rear on

Gravenstafel Spur.

Straddling the Ypres–Roulers railway at Dash Crossing, the **British front line** ran diagonally through the cemetery behind you, across the front of Berlin Wood and along the forward slopes of the Gravenstafel. **Flanders 1** tracked to the right of the British line across the low ground to Waterfields and Marsh Bottom before cresting Bellevue Spur at Bellevue Farm. Note how the Germans in Flanders 1 on Bellevue Spur and on the ridge ahead of you could support each other with enfilade fire. The returning rains made the going on these heights difficult. But the valley between them was almost impassable.

At dusk on 8 October, the 49th and 66th Divisions slogged forward from **Ypres**, on the skyline four kilometres behind you. Five hours had been allowed for the march. As the engineers had concentrated on making roads for the guns, the infantry tracks consisted of little more than guiding tapes. So negotiating the slime-covered crater field for the attack next morning took over 11 hours.

Arriving late, the 197th Brigade from the 66th Division passed from the cemetery diagonally through your location towards the N303 beyond Defy Crossing. Stretching down the slope below you towards the Ravebeek, the 198th Brigade advanced on time at 5.20 am to your left front behind a pathetic barrage. The 49th Division next to it splashed across the Ravebeek but made no impression on Flanders 1 on Bellevue Spur to your left. The Germans there could now lay down enfilade fire in your direction. It ripped into the 198th Brigade, which stalled on the spur 400 metres to your left front.

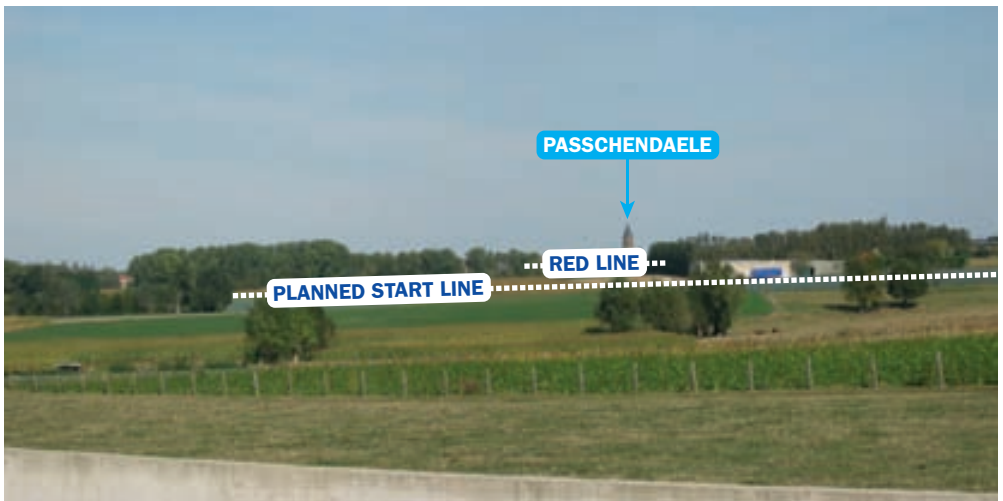
In order to protect the 66th Division's right flank, the 2nd Australian Division carried out a limited advance on the far side of the railway, which was the boundary between the two formations. The 5th Brigade, next to the railway, reached the final objective, on the Keiberg Spur midway between your location and Passchendaele, but the 197th Brigade had still not caught up on this side of the railway. Facing strong counterattacks with its flank open, the 5th came back to Defy Crossing. When the 197th Brigade, partly sheltered from the enfilade fire from Bellevue, finally arrived opposite the Keiberg, it was in a worse position than the 5th Brigade had

The valley of the Ravebeek, along which the 10th Australian Brigade and the New Zealand Division attacked on 12 October. The New Zealanders were stopped short of Bellevue Farm, which allowed the Germans to enfilade the 10th Brigade. Three days earlier, the attack by the British 98th Brigade and 47th Divisions over this ground had been shot down.

BERLIN WOOD

POELCAPPELLE

FLANDERN 1



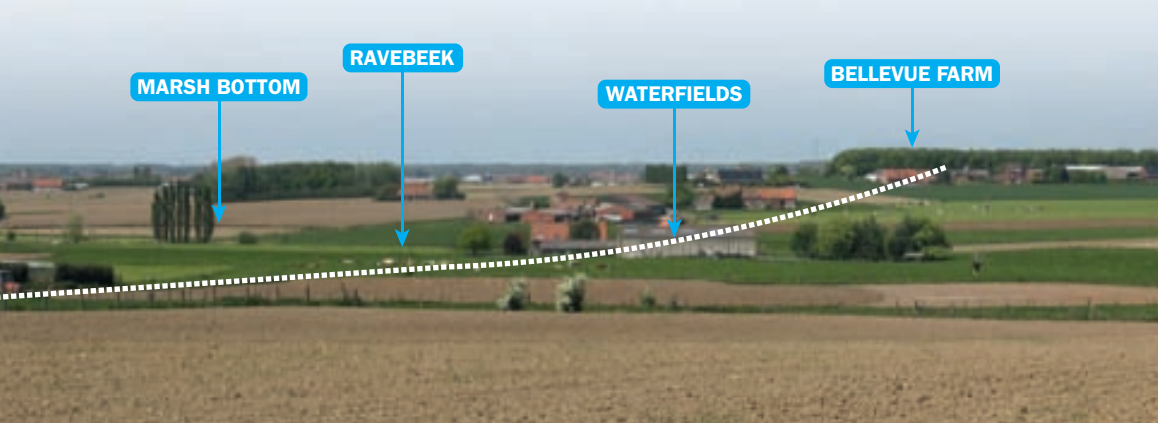
been: on its own with both flanks open. It withdrew at dusk.

Now consider this. As the 66th Division was believed to have pulled back to its first objective, a line that ran across your front and through Defy Crossing, the 3rd Australian Division was to have attacked from there on 12 October. When the truth was discovered, the 3rd's start line had to be pulled back to Dash Crossing and the cemetery, from where the 9 October attack began. The 3rd's **Red Line** remained set beyond the house and the barn with the green door ahead of you, halfway to Passchendaele. Only part of the advance on 9 October had got that far and the ground gained could not be held. Yet the 3rd Division on 12 October was to go well beyond Passchendaele, through the same mud and with the same weak barrage.

Attacking on the far side of the valley on 12 October, the New Zealand Division

The pulling back of the start line from the position shown to Tyne Cot Cemetery. The picture was taken from the Visitors' Centre.

was cut to pieces in the Flanders 1 wire to the left of Bellevue Farm, just as the 49th Division had been. The Red Line ran to the right of the farm. The 3rd Australian Division advanced between the Ravebeek and the railway, with the 12th Brigade on the far side of the railway securing its right flank. On the Ravebeek flank, the 10th Brigade, with the 37th Battalion leading, immediately hit strong resistance at Waterfields and Augustus Wood. The 38th and 40th Battalions joined the 37th to clear it. All three battalions pushed on together under deadly fire from Bellevue to the Red Line. There they halted, apart from the 38th Battalion party that took the Crest Farm strongpoint beyond the distant trees to your front, and reached Passchendaele church. Passing through your location as a disorganised throng and with no hope





The Ypres–Roulers railway cutting east of Broodseinde after the attack on 12 October. The Australian facing the camera on the far right is Private Austin Henderson of the 38th Battalion. Though this well-known photograph is usually credited to Frank Hurley, Hubert Wilkins, another Australian official photographer, was also in the cutting at the time.



The cutting today, now part of the Australia Walk, which follows the bed of the old track to Zonnebeke.

of catching the barrage, the 9th Brigade was held up for an hour by strongpoints at Augustus Wood, Hillside Farm and Defy Crossing. Though the 34th Battalion was supposed to be in the lead, these strongpoints fell to the 35th Battalion. The Red Line was gained under continuing heavy fire, whereupon the 35th went on to Passchendaele's outskirts. Drastic losses precluded going further. The same fire prevented the 12th Brigade from getting much past the Red Line. Too weak to resist counterattacks, the remnants of the 9th fell back to your location; the 12th to Defy Crossing. Now in danger of being outflanked on both sides, the survivors of the 10th Brigade came back too.

Walk down the hill, turn left at Tynecotstraat and stop 180 metres along at **Dash Crossing** 2. The bed of the old railway, which crossed the road here, has been refurbished as **Australia Walk**. Information panels that start at the