

BELGIUM

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During the 20th Century, tiny Belgium was dragged not once, but twice into a conflict between the Great Powers of Europe, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties on its soil and suffering to millions of civilians. In 1914 the Allies halted the German offensive in the Western corner of the country, where soldiers from both sides dug themselves in for a trench war that lasted four years. Thirty years later, the Second World War took a decisive turn on the opposite side of the country. While major Belgian towns, harbors, and railway stations were being bombed, the last German offensive was brought to a halt in the small Ardennes village of Bastogne after the Battle of the Bulge, a bloody conflict in which many foreign (mainly American) soldiers gave their lives. Many reminders of both periods can still be seen and visited, from Flanders Fields to the slopes of the Ardennes

Quick Facts

Population – 10, 458,000

Capital - Brussels- Population 998,000

Area 30,528 square kilometers
(11,787 square miles)

Language - Dutch, French, German

Religion Roman Catholic, Protestant

LifeExpectancy - 78

GDP Per Capita U.S. \$29,200

Literacy Percent 98%



The Kingdom of Belgium is a state in Western Europe. It has a northern border with The Netherlands; in the east it has a border with Germany. Luxembourg can be found in the south east and France will be found south. The North Sea is west of Belgium. It has a federal state system that exists of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

YPRES (IEPER)

This is Ypres of World War I fame and shame – “Wipers” to the Allies in the trenches, Ieper to the people who live there. The city was literally wiped off the face of the earth during the war. Today’s town, (population 35,000) 125 kms. west of Brussels, is a painstaking reconstruction which was not completed until after World War II..

Since the first century B.C., when the Belgian people were conquered by the Romans, the Flanders region has been invaded by successive armies and has suffered from the ravages of war. In spite of this, Ypres managed to establish itself as a financially and culturally rich city in the 12th century. By the 13th century Ypres had gained the status of an independent city-state.



Being only 60 kms. inland from the Belgian coast, Ypres was the hub of many important trade routes consisting of roads, rivers and canals leading to the Netherlands, France and to the English Channel. Consequently it grew into an important market place for the region. Easy access to the coast meant that the people of the city established links with the wool trade in England. The city became a very important centre for the cloth trade. Guilds and master guilds were founded. The **Lakenhalle (Cloth Hall)** was begun in the centre of Ypres in 1200. It took 100 years to complete. In 1260 the population of the city had grown to 40,000.

Originally the town had been protected by earthworks. As the town grew more wealthy the fortifications were modified to keep out prospective invaders. The oldest part of the ramparts still surviving is near the [Rijselpoort \(Lille Gate\)](#) which dates from 1385. Major work was carried out by Sebastien Le Prestre, Seigneur de Vauban (1633-1707), the famous French military engineer, at the end of the 17th century.

From 1914-1918 the city became the focus of fighting between the Imperial German Armies of Emperor Wilhelm II and the Allied Armies of Belgium, France and Great Britain. **The First Battle of Ypres** began in mid October 1914. It was the first of four long battles fighting over possession of this ancient city.



The first serious damage to the buildings occurred during the **First Battle of Ypres** (19 October - 22 November 1914). German artillery fired onto the city from its positions in the north-east, east and south-east. On 22 November 1914 the Cloth Hall (Lakenhalle) was set on fire by an incendiary device.

A few months later, in the **spring of 1915**, an intensive German bombardment was started up on the town. This was carried out by long range, heavy German artillery, which included a huge 42cm howitzer. This gun was nicknamed '[Dicke Bertha](#)' ([big Bertha](#)) by the German Army and consequently became known as 'Big Bertha' to the British Army. This bombardment was the prelude to the launch of a German gas attack on the Allied front line in the Ypres Salient on **22nd April 1915**. It was the beginning of the **Second Battle of Ypres** and the beginning of the total destruction of a beautiful Flemish city.

The Third Battle of Ypres (often referred to simply as Passchendaele because much of the fighting centred around this town north of Ypres) – July to Nov., 1917, witnessed one of the bloodiest battles in world history (see following chart)

Casualties	First Ypres (Oct. - Nov. 1914)	Second Ypres (April - May, 1915)	Third Ypres (July - Nov., 1917)
British (inc. Can.)	58,000	60,000	300,000
French	50,000	10,000	8,500
German	130,000	35,000	260,000
Victoria Crosses	11	14	59

By the end of the war in 1918 there was no building left untouched. The city was demolished. After the Armistice and the end of the fighting the local population began to return to their homes and businesses from places of refuge in neighbouring parts of Flanders or France. Every building the locals had known was shattered and in ruins; houses, shops, municipal buildings, schools, the cathedral, churches, and the Lakenhalle (Cloth Hall) were gone.

It was suggested that the city might be left in ruins as a memorial. A new city could be built nearby. But there was a pressing need to accommodate the returning inhabitants. From 1919 there was also an influx of visitors to Ypres, because the city became the focus for many pilgrims. They were travelling to the battlefields of Flanders to visit the graves of their loved ones lost in the fighting. Some believed they might even find a relative or friend still alive who had been reported as 'missing in action'. Ex-soldiers returned to the old Ypres Salient to see the ground they had fought over. Winston Churchill commented: "a place more sacred to the British race does not exist." The town was largely rebuilt and occupied once again by 1923, although it took about 20 years to complete the Cloth Hall, now home of the In Flanders Fields Museum.

Some 44 million shells were fired over this stretch of the Western Front in the two World Wars, and a fair number failed to explode. Flemish farmers still turn up bombs and ordnance every month, and the bomb disposal experts have to be called in. The poison gas canisters cause special concern. Human remains from World War I are still found on a regular basis..

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/westfront/yposalient/ypresindex.htm>

IN FLANDERS FIELDS MUSEUM



Located inside the Cloth Hall, this outstanding museum shows the slow death of the town during the war and its effects on soldiers, citizens, and buildings. The bayonets, guns, uniforms, helmets, medals and shells are all here, as well as maps of the battlefields and cemeteries and photographs.

<http://www.inlandersfields.be/default2.htm>

ESSEX FARM MILITARY CEMETERY (BELGIUM)

The cemetery is about 3 kms. north of Ieper. It is one of the most visited in the Ypres Salient as it was where Lt. Col. John McCrae wrote "In Flanders Fields", while working as a doctor in an advanced dressing station. On May 2, 1915, one of McCrae's patients and a friend, Lt. Alexis Helmer, was virtually blown to pieces by a direct hit by a German artillery shell. McCrae was touched by the last words in Helmer's diary, "It has quieted a little and I shall try to get a good sleep." The following day, McCrae was moved to write his famous poem. Helmer's grave was lost in the subsequent fighting over the ground, and he is commemorated on the Menin Gate.



John McCrae was deeply affected by the fighting and losses in France. He became bitter and disillusioned.

He felt he should have made greater sacrifices, and insisted on living in a tent through the year, like his comrades at the front, rather than in the officers' huts. When this affected his health in mid-winter he had to be ordered into warmer surroundings. To many he gave the impression that he felt he should still be with his old artillery brigade. After the battle of Ypres he was never again the optimistic man with the infectious smile. (Prescott. In Flanders Fields: The Story of John McCrae, p. 110)

During the summer of 1917, John McCrae was troubled by severe asthma attacks and occasional bouts of bronchitis. He became very ill in January 1918 and diagnosed his condition as pneumonia. He was moved to Number 14 British General Hospital for Officers where he continued to grow weak.

On January 28, after an illness of five days, he died of pneumonia and meningitis. The day he fell ill, he learned he had been appointed consulting physician to the First British Army, the first Canadian so honoured.

John McCrae was buried with full military honours in Wimereux Cemetery, just north of Boulogne, not far from the fields of Flanders. Bonfire led the procession, McCrae's riding boots reversed in the stirrups. His death was met with great grief among his friends and contemporaries

Essex Farm Cemetery has 1,199 graves or commemorations (9 Canadians), including one of the youngest killed in the war – Valentine Joe Strudwick, age 15, (Plot I, Row U, Grave 8) and a **British Victoria Cross winner, Thomas Barratt, (I,Z,8)**. On 27



July 1917 north of Ypres, Belgium, Private Barratt, as a scout for patrol, worked his way towards the enemy under continuous fire from hostile snipers, which he stalked and killed. Later his patrol was similarly held up and again he disposed of the snipers. When a party of the enemy were endeavouring to outflank the patrol on their withdrawal, Private Barratt volunteered to cover the withdrawal which he did, his accurate shooting causing many casualties and preventing the enemy advance. After safely regaining our lines this gallant soldier was killed by a shell.

http://www.webmatters.net/cwgc/essex_farm.htm

LANGEMARK GERMAN CEMETERY (BELGIUM)

This cemetery is located 6 kms. north-east of Ypres, and is the only German cemetery in the Salient. There are 44,292 German soldiers from World War I buried here, of whom only 19,378 have been identified. There is a mass grave of 25,000 soldiers surrounded by shrubbery. The small stone crosses are symbolic and do not mark burials. Flat stones mark graves of four, six, or eight soldiers. The Belgians were understandably more grudging of their land for the burial of the enemy than they were for the Allies.

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/westfront/ypsalient/cemeteries/langemark.htm>



ST. JULIEN MEMORIAL



“The Brooding Soldier” is extremely moving and dramatic in its simplicity. This 13 metres high statue of a Canadian soldier with bowed head and hands resting on arms reversed was carved from a single shaft of granite. A British journalist wrote the following in 1964 for The Evening Standard: “Surely the memorial for all soldiers of all wars? For the bowed head and shoulders with reversed arms emerging from the top of the tall stone column has the gravity and strength of grief coming from the full knowledge of old wrongs done to men by men. It mourns; but it mourns for all mankind The genius of Man rises out of the stone, and once again our tears fall upon the battlefield.”

The designer, Chapman Clemsha, was wounded during the war. The monument commemorates the 18,000 Canadian soldiers who withstood the first German gas attacks on April 22-24, 1915; 2,000 were killed. The cedars are trimmed to represent shells. “Vancouver Corner” after the war was a “featureless waste of dead men, mules, tanks, and shell-holes linked together with five feet of water in each.”

http://www.webmatters.net/belgium/ww1_stjuliaan_can.htm

TYNE COT CEMETERY (BELGIUM)



Located near Passchendaele, this cemetery with 11,908 graves, 70% being identified, is the best known of more than 170 military cemeteries in the area, and is the largest British military cemetery in the world. It is awe-inspiring, more austere than many other British cemeteries that dot the countryside. A memorial wall also lists 34,927 soldiers, killed from August, 1917 until November, 1918 with no known graves.

Among the graves (LVIII – D – 26) is James P. Robertson, a Canadian, who won the Victoria Cross for gallantry in Nov., 1917.

Citation: An extract from "The London Gazette" No. 30471, dated 8th Jan., 1918, records the following:—"For most conspicuous bravery and outstanding devotion to duty in attack. When his platoon was held up by uncut wire and a machine gun causing many casualties, Pte. Robertson dashed to an opening on the flank, rushed the machine gun and, after a desperate struggle with the crew, killed four and then turned the gun on the remainder, who, overcome by the fierceness of his onslaught, were running towards their own lines. His gallant work enabled the platoon to advance. He inflicted many more casualties among the enemy, and then carrying the captured machine gun, he led his platoon to the final objective. He there selected an excellent position and got the gun into action, firing on the retreating enemy who by this time were quite demoralised by the fire brought to bear on them. During the consolidation, Pte. Robertson's most determined use of the machine gun kept down the fire of the enemy snipers; his courage and his coolness cheered his comrades and inspired them to the finest efforts. Later, when two of our snipers were badly wounded in front of our trench, he went out and carried one of them in under very severe fire. He was killed just as he returned with the second man.



http://www.webmatters.net/cwgc/tyne_cot.htm

PASSCHENDAELE NEW BRITISH CEMETERY (BELGIUM)

The village of Passchendaele is about twelve kilometres north-east of Ypres and the cemetery is one kilometre to the north-west of the village. The immediate area was, from October, 1914 to the end of 1918, one of the most fought over in the war. Almost all in the cemetery died in the autumn of 1917. There are 1,000 British and 650 Canadians, among others

http://www.kingandempire.com/pdale_overview.html

SANCTUARY WOOD MUSEUM & HILL 62

After World War I, the Schier family who owned the woods, had the foresight to understand that their battered piece of ground would one day be of historical interest. They enclosed the trench lines and dugouts, the splintered trees and the debris of war with a fence, and added a small museum with items salvaged from



nearby cemetery

http://www.ww1battlefields.co.uk/flanders/sanctuary_wood.htm

MENIN GATE

Just before 8:00 p.m. each night the police halt the traffic through the Menin Gate. The buglers then march into the middle of the road under the great arch, facing the spires of the Cloth hall, and play "The Last Post." In its very simplicity, this is one of the most moving experiences imaginable. It has been going on every night since 1929, with the exception of the four year Nazi occupation during World War II.



This monument is intended as a fitting memorial to those soldiers without a grave – "He is not missing – He is here." The massive vaulted gate is made of French limestone, weighs 20,000 tons, and is 135 ft. long, 104 ft. wide, and 80 ft. high. On its many panels are inscribed the 54,900 names of those who were killed between the outbreak of war on Aug. 4, 1914 and Aug. 15, 1917. The remain

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/westfront/ypsalient/meningate/meningate.htm>

Brussels

Brussels is more than 1000 years old. Today the name Brussels stands for an agglomeration of 19 communes forming one of the three Regions of the federal Belgian state; the capital of the Kingdom of Belgium; the headquarters of the French and Flemish Communities.

Brussels also has an important international vocation: as the European capital the city is home to the European Commission and to the Council of ministers of the European Union (EU). The metropolitan area has a population of 2.1 million people or about 20% of the whole country.

Brussels is the bilingual capital of Belgium. This means that both French and Dutch are the official languages of the city. Street names and traffic signs are always in these two languages. Furthermore, it is a cosmopolitan city where many different cultures live together and where different languages can be heard on each street. This liveliness and international flair is, of course, intimately related to its role as a crossroads for all of Europe.

The same variety and contrast can also be found in the different architectural styles in Brussels, the former capital of the medieval Duchy of Brabant. Gothic cathedrals and churches are next to - and sometimes in stark contrast with - gracious classical facades like the buildings around the Royal Square (Place Royale - Koningsplein), or beautiful art nouveau and art deco houses.

The heart of Brussels and the place to start getting to know the city is the Grand'Place (Grote Markt). This historic market square with its splendid guild houses and the impressive Gothic beauty of the Town Hall, is widely considered to be one of the most beautiful town squares in Europe.

Brussels' vibrant, cosmopolitan atmosphere and multicultural beat make it much more than simply the administrative hub of Europe. For all its world-class restaurants, architecture, and art, though, the city keeps a relatively low profile, so you'll have the breathing room to relish its landmarks, cobbled streets, and beautiful parks.

At the end of the 19th century, Brussels was one of the liveliest cities in Europe, known for its splendid cafés and graceful Art Nouveau architecture. That gaiety, however, was stamped out by German occupation during the First and Second World Wars. Still, the city made a comeback little more than a decade later, its reemergence on the international scene heralded by the World's Fair and the Universal Exposition of 1958. It became the European Economic Community's headquarters that same year, a precursor to its hosting of the EU's administrative and political arms.

As a by-product of Europe's increasing integration, international business has invaded the city in a big way since the 1960s. The result: city blocks of steel-and-glass office buildings set only a few steps from cobbled-street neighborhoods featuring hallmarks of the city's eventful past. Over the centuries, Brussels has been shaped by the different cultures of the foreign powers that have ruled it. It has learned the art of accommodating them and, in the process, prepared itself for its role as the political capital of Europe. In 1989 the Brussels region became autonomous, on a par with Flanders and Wallonia. The city is technically bilingual, though French is the dominant language. Now, diversity is the capital's greatest strength; one-third of the city's million-strong population are non-Belgians, and you're as likely to hear Arabic or Swedish spoken on the streets as French or Flemish.

"One of the most beautiful town squares in Europe, if not in the world", is a phrase often heard when visitors in Brussels try to describe the beauty of the central market square. French-speakers refer to it as the 'Grand-Place', whereas in Dutch it is called 'de grote Markt'. The tourists of the 20th century are not alone in their admiration. Archduchess Isabella, daughter of Filip II of Spain wrote about the square during her visit to Brussels on September the 5th 1599: "Never have I seen something so beautiful and exquisite as the town square of the city where the town hall rises up into the sky. The decoration of the houses is most remarkable."



During the early Middle Ages small wooden houses were scattered around the market, but as from the 14th century the rich and powerful patrician families built stone mansions.

Gradually the market turned into the main commercial and administrative centre of the city. In 1402 the construction of the town hall started (which would eventually be completed around 1455). The square had by then already become the political centre where meetings were held, where executions took place and where dukes, kings and emperors were officially received. In the following centuries most wooden houses were replaced with beautifully decorated stone ones, mostly owned by the Brussels guilds.

Nowadays, the Grand-Place is the main tourist attraction of the City of Brussels. All through the year it is visited by thousands who like to spend some time wandering around and admiring the beautiful buildings, or sitting down on one of the many terraces having a good Belgian beer. Concerts and musical happenings are organized all through the year on the square. The most famous events that take place here are the annual Ommegang (an historical procession at the beginning of July) and the biennial flower carpet.



New York has the Statue of Liberty, Copenhagen has the mermaid and Brussels has the Manneken Pis. This statue of a little boy in a somewhat compromising position has since several centuries been a major tourist attraction in the city. When most people see our 'manneken', the first reaction is always one of amazement: "Look, how small he is ! Why does everybody want to see him ?" The people of Brussels, however, accept him the way he is. After all, it doesn't always have to be big to be beautiful. Imagine he would be the size of the Statue of Liberty : Brussels would be continuously flooded !

Nobody actually knows why the manneken is there. He is believed to be nothing more than a decoration on top of a fountain, where people in the Middle-Ages came to get fresh water. Already in the 15th century a fountain called 'manneken-pis' existed in the Stoofstraat/Rue de l'étéuve. The official origin can be traced back to the 13th of August 1619 when the city ordered the sculptor Jerome Duquesnoy to make a new bronze statue of manneken-pis to replace an old and withered one. During the course of the centuries our little manneken has often been hidden to protect him against bombs of invading armies. He has also been stolen several times by plundering soldiers and even by the citizens of Geraardsbergen, a city in Flanders that claims to possess the oldest statue of a peeing boy in Belgium.

A lot of people do not know that the manneken-pis is very often dressed. At the moment he has a wardrobe of more than 600 costumes, which are all preserved in the King's House, or City Museum at the Grand-Place, the central market square of the city. He received his first costume on May the 1st 1698. The governor of the Austrian Netherlands gave the costume on the occasion of festivities organized by one of the guilds of Brussels. Many more costumes were to follow. Even nowadays he still receives new gear when folklorist groups visit Brussels. To thank them for the gift, the manneken offers the people of such groups beer which comes directly from a beer barrel attached to the statue. Among the more special costumes are for instance : an Elvis Presley outfit and a Mickey Mouse costume.

BRUGES

Bruges is often called "The Venice of the North" as this splendid city is one of Belgium's crown jewels. In no other European city is there more of a feeling and look of medieval times as in this city close to the North Sea.

Today's Bruges has a population of about 45.000 people (the old center) or 120.000 people (center together with the suburbs). These numbers clearly show that Bruges is not a tiny miniature city. It ranks, even today,



among the important cities of Belgium. It is also the capital of the Belgian province of West-Flanders. A lot of people take day-trips from Brussels to Bruges, but there is too much to see here to fill only 1 day. The best way to visit Bruges is to spend at least one night in one of the many beautiful and cozy hotels. Later in the evening, when all the tourists have gone, Bruges finds back its charm and quiet of old times. When one is lucky with the weather, a stroll through the tiny medieval streets can be an enchanting experience. Bruges is always beautiful, in the summertime as well as in the wintertime. Lucky visitors will never forget the city after they have seen it on a snowy December or January day.

Bruges is unique, in the sense that here the town authorities have done the utmost to preserve the medieval-looking image of the city. Of course, not every stone in Bruges has come to us straight from the Middle Ages. The 19th century neo-gothic style is more present than one should think. Because of these 19th century renovations, some critics have put Bruges down as a 'fake' medieval city. Nevertheless, the combination of old, not so old and new fascinates everyone who first sets foot in Bruges.

CHURCH OF OUR LADY

It took 2 centuries (from the 13th to the 15th) to build this church, whose soaring 118m (387-ft.) spire can be seen from miles around Bruges. Among the many art treasures here is a beautiful Carrara marble sculpture of the *Madonna and Child* by Michelangelo. This statue, made in 1504, was the only one of Michelangelo's works to leave Italy in his lifetime and is today one of the few that can be seen outside Italy. It was bought by a Bruges merchant, Jan van Mouskroen, and donated to the church in 1506.



The church also holds a painting of the *Crucifixion* by Anthony Van Dyck, and the impressive side-by-side bronze **tomb sculptures** of the duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold, who died in 1477, and his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, who died at age 25 after falling from her horse in 1482. A windowpane under the tombs allows you to view the 13th- and 14th-century graves of priests.

GROENINGE MUSEUM

The Groeninge ranks among Belgium's leading traditional museums of fine arts, with a collection that covers paintings in the Low Countries from the 15th to the 20th centuries. The Gallery of Flemish Primitives holds some 30 works -- many of which are far from primitive -- by painters such as Jan van Eyck (there's a portrait of his wife, Margerita van Eyck), Rogier van der Weyden, Hieronymus Bosch (*The Last Judgment*), and Hans Memling. Works by Magritte and Delvaux are also on display

GHENT

Ghent is the fourth largest city of Belgium with about 250.000 inhabitants. It is not as big as Antwerp but bigger than Bruges. It is also less famous among tourists than the often praised Bruges.



However, for some people Ghent is the real diamond of Flanders and Belgium. In a unique way, Ghent has managed to preserve its medieval power while keeping with the times. The city center alone is a showcase of medieval Flemish wealth and dModern Ghent certainly cannot be overlooked in Belgium. The city has an important omme harbor, thanks to the canal Ghent-Terneuzen which allows sea-going vessels to bring their products to the city and its industrial hinterland. Because of the central location in the count the 'Flanders Technology' fair can regularly be organized. The Belgian State University (RU

Rijksuniversiteit Gent) continues to grow in importance. The presence of so many young people and students has turned Ghent into an important Flemish cultural center.

Ghent is also the flower city of Belgium. Flower growers from the region around Ghent sell their beautiful begonia's and azalea's all over the world. Every 5 years the successful 'Gentse Floraliën' (Ghent Flower Show) attracts thousands to the city. The tourist will not have eyes enough to admire the awesome architectural wealth, which offers a splendid combination of impressiveness and idyllic charm of the proud and (in former times) often rebellious city of Ghent.

Lace: There are two kinds of Belgian lace: exquisite handmade pieces and machine-made stuff. Machine-made lace is not necessarily bad -- indeed some of it is very good -- but this is the form used to mass produce pieces of indifferent quality to meet the demand for souvenirs. The highest-quality lace is handmade. Brussels, Bruges, and Ghent are the main, but far from the only, points of sale.

Pralines: The Swiss might argue the point, but the plain truth is that Belgian handmade chocolates, filled with various fresh-cream flavors, are the finest in the universe. Those devilish little creations -- handmade Belgian pralines -- are so addictive they should be sold with a government health warning attached. You can't go wrong if you buy chocolates made by Wittamer, Nihoul, Leonidas, or Neuhaus, available from specialist stores around Belgium.

ADEGEM CANADIAN WAR CEMETERY

In the last week of September 1944, the Allies held the city of Antwerp, but the Germans held both shores of the Scheldt estuary, so that the port of Antwerp could not be used. The task of clearing the southern shore of the estuary was allotted to the 3rd Canadian Division, aided by the 4th Canadian Armoured Division and the 52nd Division. Their operations lasted from October until the beginning of November 1944; by 3 November the Germans had been cleared from the north-west corner of Belgium and the south shore of the Scheldt was free. There had been fierce fighting for two weeks for the crossing of the Leopold Canal.



The majority of the men buried at Adegem died during the operations for the clearance of the south bank of the Scheldt, but many Canadians who lost their lives elsewhere in Belgium were also brought here for burial. A number of isolated graves from various communal cemeteries and churchyards in Belgium have also been brought into this cemetery since the end of the war. The cemetery now contains 1,119 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War and one unidentified burial of the First World War. There are also 33 Polish and two French burials.

More than 42,000 Canadians gave their lives in the war. Canada and the world recognize the sacrifices and achievements of all Canadians, like those who fought in the Battle of the Scheldt, who accomplished so much and left a lasting legacy of peace. Most of the Canadians who died in the Battle of the Scheldt are buried at two Commonwealth War Cemeteries in the region. Adegem Canadian War Cemetery is in the northwest corner of Belgium, not far from the Dutch frontier. It contains the graves of 848 Canadians, most of whom lost their lives during the bitter struggle to clear the Breskens pocket on the south bank of the Scheldt.

Bergen-op-Zoom Canadian War Cemetery is located in southwest Holland. It contains the graves of 968 Canadians, most of whom fell fighting to open the sea approaches to Antwerp and make that port available to Allied shipping.

The Canada War Museum

The museum shows us World War II, the way people lived it in Flanders. It takes you back to the heart of that time through the many realistic scenes. You can experience the period of mobilisation, occupation and liberation. That liberation of Flanders by the Canadian troops is represented in a most expressive way: a monumental panorama of the Battle from the Leopold Canal and various dioramas who reconstruct the military actions. Most of the collection objects are loaned out by local collectors. This exceptional museum, unique in Europe, was founded in honour to all those who were affected by this terrible wrinkle in history.

The advance of the Canadians towards the Ostend-Bruges-Ghent line had coincided with the Gestapo recognition of Maurice Van Landschoot as a Resistance leader and he disappeared into the underground systems he had used for allied aircrews and other escapees, emerging only after the Canadians had cleared the area. He had been, he considered, very lucky, and this luck, he felt, was owed entirely to the Canadians, especially to those who had died liberating his country. Accordingly, on his deathbed in 1987, concerned that there was still too little tribute paid by the Flemish to their liberators, he asked his son, Gilbert, to do something to commemorate the sacrifice of the Canadians that would help educate future generations about the terror and misery of the Nazi occupation.

To honour his promise to his father, Gilbert Van Landschoot built the Canada Museum in the gardens of his house at Adegem, and on the land around he created three new gardens in traditional English, French and Japanese styles. In the Museum stained glass windows record the arms of the Belgian and Canadian provinces together with arms of all the Belgian and Dutch towns freed by the Canadians. Other stained glass windows feature the badges and formation patches of all the Canadian, British and Polish units attached to the 1st Canadian Corps.

The exhibits in the Museum include everything a researcher might seek, from armoured vehicles down to matchboxes, from uniforms to machineguns, from radios to daggers. Some of these have been donated, but most are on loan, for as the Museum is not state-funded it is not easy to buy desirable items.

The Battle of the Scheldt – October-November, 1944



The failure to take the bridge at Arnhem in September 1944 lost an opportunity to shorten the war and made the capture of the port at Antwerp essential for logistics, but before this could be used the enemy dug in on both sides of the Schelde had to be removed. This task was given to the 1st Canadian Corps. Their four divisions on the left wing of the allied army swept across the flat Flanders plain, traversed the canals against fierce opposition, crossed into Dutch territory, cleared the southern bank of the Schelde, and then invaded the flooded peninsular on the northern side. The task of liberating the Scheldt was entrusted to the First Canadian Army, under the command of Lieutenant-General Guy Simonds (in place of General Crerar, who had returned to England because of severe illness).

The unique geography of the area made the First Canadian Army's challenge even more daunting. North of the estuary lay South Beveland. Beyond South Beveland lay the island of Walcheren, which had been fortified into a powerful German stronghold. The south bank of the estuary was flat floodlands enclosed by dykes, known as "polder country". It was below sea level and well-suited to defence.

The plan for opening the estuary involved four main operations. The first was to clear the area north of Antwerp and secure access to South Beveland. The second was to clear the Breskens "pocket" behind the Leopold Canal, and the third was the capture of South Beveland. The final phase would be the capture of Walcheren Island. On October 2, the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division began its advance north of Antwerp, while the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, supported by the 4th Canadian Armoured Division, began the assault over the Leopold Canal. In both areas the fighting was fierce. The well-entrenched German forces made it difficult for the Allied forces to advance.

The 2nd Canadian Infantry Division, advancing north to close the eastern end of South Beveland, made good progress against the enemy paratroopers who were barring the way. Casualties were heavy as Canadian troops attacked over open flooded ground, but by October 16 they had seized the town of Woensdrecht at the entrance to South Beveland.

At this point, the challenge and opportunity was clear to all and Field-Marshal Bernard Montgomery, overall commander of the First Canadian Army and Second British Army, issued a directive making the opening of the Scheldt estuary the top priority. To the east, the British Second Army attacked westwards to clear the Netherlands south of the Maas River. This helped secure the Scheldt region from an outside counter-attack.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant-General Simonds concentrated on the area north of South Beveland. The 4th Canadian Armoured Division, which had been engaged at the Leopold Canal, moved north of the Scheldt and drove hard for the town of Bergen-op-Zoom. By October 24, the entrance to South Beveland was breached and secured and the 2nd Canadian Division began the advance into South Beveland, assisted by an amphibious landing by the 52nd British Division. By October 31, the area was secured by the Allies.

Fighting along the Scheldt's southern shore was equally fierce. Here, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division encountered tenacious German opposition as it fought to cross the Leopold Canal and clear the Breskens pocket behind the canal. The attack began on October 6 against fierce opposition, and for three days a slender bridgehead was in constant danger of elimination. Finally, on October 9, an amphibious assault broke the enemy's hold on the canal, and the bridgehead was deepened. Troops and tanks crossed the canal and the Germans withdrew into concrete bunkers along the coast. More fighting followed, but by November 3 the south shore of the Scheldt was secured.

On October 24, the third phase of the battle to free the Scheldt began with the 2nd Canadian Infantry Division moving against South Beveland. The Canadians hoped to advance rapidly, by-passing opposition and seizing bridgeheads over the Beveland Canal, but they too were slowed by mines, mud and strong enemy defences.

An amphibious attack was made across the West Scheldt by the 52nd (Lowland) Division to get in behind the German's Beveland Canal defensive positions. Thus this formidable defence was outflanked and the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade began a frontal attack in assault boats. The engineers were able to bridge the canal on the main road. With the canal line gone, the German defence crumbled and South Beveland was cleared.

This left the island of Walcheren as the last obstacle to securing the port of Antwerp for Allied use. However, the Germans had fortified their position on the island and the only land approach was the long narrow causeway from South Beveland. To make matters worse, the flats that surrounded this causeway were too saturated with sea water for movement on foot but with too little water for an assault in storm boats.

The island was attacked from three directions: across the causeway from the east, across the Scheldt from the south, and from the sea. To hamper German defence, the island's dykes were breached by heavy Royal Air Force bombing, which flooded the central area and

allowed the use of amphibious vehicles.

The Canadians attacked the causeway on October 31 and, after a costly struggle, established a foothold. Then, in conjunction with the waterborne attacks, the 52nd British Division continued the advance. On November 6, the island's capital Middelburg was secured, and by November 8 all enemy opposition ended.

Meanwhile, the 4th Canadian Armoured Division had pushed eastward past Bergen-op-Zoom to St. Philipsland where it sank several German vessels in Zijpe harbour.

Thus, with the approaches to Antwerp free and the country up to the Maas River cleared, the Battle of the Scheldt was over and the crucial supply line, essential to fuel the allied advance to liberate Europe, was secured. The channel was cleared of mines and, on November 28, the first convoy entered the port of Antwerp, led by the Canadian-built freighter *Fort Catarqui*.

The Battle of the Scheldt exacted a heavy toll on the First Canadian Army. Between October 1 and November 8, 1944, the First Canadian Army suffered 12,873 casualties (killed, wounded, or missing), 6,367 of whom were Canadians.