UPF Ypres, Belgium: Peace Road at several World War I military cemeteries

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Ypres, Belgium - Peace Road participants visited and offered prayers at several World War I military cemeteries.

From 1914 to 1918 during the First World War, Flanders' fields saw major battles on the Western Front. A million soldiers from more than 50 countries were wounded, killed or missing in action here. Countless cities and villages were entirely destroyed, their populations scattered across Europe and beyond. The destruction of the city of Ypres and the brutal conditions endured during the Battle of Passchendaele became worldwide symbols for the senselessness of war.

Today the peaceful region still bears witness to this history through its monuments, museums and, above all, cemeteries.

The Peace Road event on August 1, 2021, had as its theme "Connecting the World: A Road to Reconciliation and Hope for No More War."

By visiting the major war cemeteries of the nations that took part in World War I, the 25 participants from both Belgium and France symbolically connected countries from both sides in a spirit of reconciliation.

In the spirit of "love your enemy," they first visited the German Military Cemetery at Langemark, where

more than 44,000 soldiers are buried. These include 3,000 inexperienced young soldiers, many of them students. For this reason, the cemetery is also known as the Studentenfriedhof (Students' Cemetery).

From there the Peace Road event went to the Belgian Military Cemetery at Houthulst, and the Canadian Memorial at Sint-Juliaan, known for its imposing statue called "The Brooding Soldier." The monument is dedicated to the more than 2,000 soldiers who died following the first World War I gas attack.

The next stop was Tyne Cot Cemetery and Memorial to the Missing, the largest cemetery for Commonwealth forces in the world, for any war.

On the way back to Ypres, the participants stopped at the French Cemetery of Saint Charles de Potyze, where, at the entrance, a Breton Pieta mourns the almost 5,000 French dead.

The Peace Road event concluded in Ypres at the famous Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing, which commemorates the British and Commonwealth soldiers whose graves are unknown. Remarkably, since 1927 people have gathered at this gate every evening at 8 p.m. for a solemn rendition of the bugle call "The Last Post" in memory of the war dead.

Former Prime Minister Yves Leterme sent a message expressing his regret for not being able to participate in the event. All the participants were deeply moved. Sincere prayers were offered at each cemetery, and several participants had the feeling that the soldiers had been waiting a long time to be liberated from their resentment and miserable suffering.

It was raining a lot during the day, in this wettest Belgian summer on record. However, every time the participants paused for a group picture, the rain suddenly stopped, only to resume shortly afterward. Through this, the participants felt that God was blessing this Peace Road event.