



Préfecture de la région Picardie
Direction régionale des Affaires culturelles
Service régional de l'Archéologie



Press Release
February 7, 2006

The body of an Australian soldier, killed during the First World War, found during an excavation

Saint-Quentin, Aisne

While carrying out an evaluation near Saint-Quentin (Aisne), archaeologists from the Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives (Inrap) discovered the body of a First World War soldier.

The French *Gendarmerie* and the *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (the only organisation authorised to recover the bodies of British soldiers who died in France), were immediately informed by Patrick Lemaire, the Inrap archaeologist in charge.

An Australian officer killed in battle in 1918?

The skeleton was found in a mortar crater about fifty metres from one of the many trenches which formed the forward German defence line, constructed in 1917 and known as the "Hindenburg Line". The position of the body seems to indicate that the soldier fell into the mortar hole, killed by enemy bullets.

This discovery follows that of a German soldier during another preventive archaeology operation last year in the same sector. It was not possible to identify him, so he was buried in a collective cemetery.

In the present case, successive working of the land has left the skeleton in a poor state of conservation, but the presence of some personal effects gives us some clues as to his identity. Firstly, his nationality is indicated by his military badge, that of *The Australian Commonwealth Military Force*. Then, his rank: three revolver bullets made in England found at the level of his thorax, could correspond to the disintegration over time of one of his uniform pockets. This would help identification as only officers and non-commissioned officers carried revolvers. Lastly, the year of his death indicated by a George V coin dated 1918 and which was probably in his trouser pocket. He probably fell during the battles which raged around Saint-Quentin at the end of September 1918.

From his uniform and personal effects, the buttons of his jacket and shirt and a wooden pencil remain.

From 1916 to 1918, the Australians were engaged on numerous fronts such as the Somme and Flanders. Out of 330,000 men, 60,000 were killed and 166,000 wounded or mutilated.

The body will be taken away on 8 February

The site, marked by World War I (munitions, mortar holes and trenches) also contains interesting remains dating from the Middle Neolithic period, as well as 1st century AD Roman farms.

Inrap

With more than 1,800 collaborators and researchers INRAP is the largest French archaeological organization and one of the foremost in Europe. A public research establishment, it carries out most of the archaeological evaluations and excavations in France. Within the framework of national and regional planning policy, it acts on behalf of private and public property developers (local and regional authorities, Motorway companies, French railroad system . . .). More than 2,500 excavations are undertaken every year in mainland France and in the D.O.M. (French overseas departments).

Developer: The Urban Development Zone « Parc des Autoroutes » is being developed by the Société d'Équipement du Département de l'Aisne (SEDA) acting for the Communauté d'Agglomération de Saint-Quentin.

Curation: Regional Archaeology Service (Drac Picardie)

Preventive Archaeology Operator: Inrap

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