



THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE OF PILLY

HERLIES OCTOBER 1914

In October 1914, the village of Herlies saw Allied and German troops clash in the hamlet of Pilly. The course leads the visitors in the footsteps of the Royal Irish Regiment, letting them discover the battlefield that has witnessed the disappearance of 170 Irish soldiers and the destruction of their regiment.

It helps understanding the combats and invites to the duty of remembrance symbolized by the Pilly memorial.



Photography : Laurent MAYERUX.

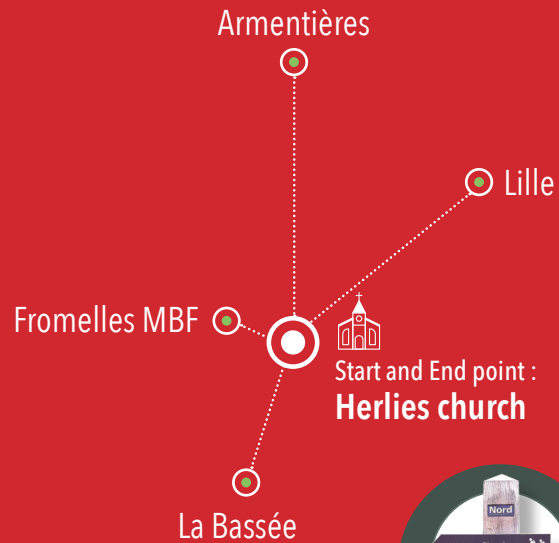
ME/INDING THE WOUND

EXPLOSIONS, CHAOS, BATTLEFIELDS,
THE MEN TURN INTO TARGETS AND SOLDIERS,
WAR ERASES THE LIFE THAT INHABITS THEM
THE SOLDIERS BECOME THE LANDSCAPE
THE DOG TAGS UNDERGO A CHANGE
THE MEN'S COLOURS SOMETIMES FADE AWAY
THE LANDSCAPE COMPOSES WITH FIELDS
OF IMMACULATE TOMBS AND LETS NATURE
REGAIN ITS RIGHTS.
IT ALLOWS THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE HEIRS
THAT WE ALL ARE;
ME / INDING THE WOUND, THIS IS OUR DUTY.

Virginie GALLOIS.



Virginie GALLOIS



Distance : 3,5 miles - Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes



Herlies

Nord
le Département est là

HerlieStorique

laura hotz
Design graphique & Développement web

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT

The Allies are at our doors — 01

October 1914, the battle of La Bassée is raging. For many days, German troops are retreating under the power of Allied Forces.

On 17th October 1914, the British are fighting in our villages, Herlies and Aubers were retaken. Fromelles falls into the hands of French cavalry. The Germans fall back towards Fournes and the hamlet of Pilly, where they regroup to organize their defence.

The Allies continue their attack — 02

At Fromelles, French Cavalry is ready to continue the offensive on Fournes.

From Aubers and the hamlet of Plouich, a company of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment is detached to march on Pilly and support the French line. On the 18 October at midday, the order to attack is given.

The barricades of the 9th Brigade — 03

In the village of Herlies, in the face of enemy fire and the non-stop guns of the German artillery, the Royal Fusiliers have built a barricade at the exit of Petits-Riez. The church belfry of Fournes parish church is highlighted at the horizon. From their positions, the British watch the Irish deployment.

Irish go on the attack — 04

The men of the Royal Irish Regiment rapidly reach the Grands-Riez. When they are seen from Pilly, German gunfire rains down on them. Caught out in the open, the Irish take refuge.

A second company is sent rapidly as reinforcements and then two others joined up. By the evening, the whole battalion is involved and preparing for a new assault.

On the Irish left flank, the French attack stalls in front of Fournes. The gap between the two allies dangerously widens. On 19th October at 2 pm, the French and Irish resume fighting. The men of the Royal Irish charge under a hail of bullets. They reach the hamlet however and engage in hand to hand combat. At 6 pm, they stand victorious on the battlefield, but the price paid is terrible, dozens of men have lost their lives in the attack.

Meanwhile, despite their resolve, the French have failed to overcome a German defence that by now has become reinforced. They have to withdraw towards Fromelles.

Far, too far from the men of the Royal Irish Regiment...

The heroic resistance of the Royal Irish Regiment — 05

On 20th October at daybreak, after a storm of artillery fire, the German infantry advance on all sides and surround the Irish. Encircled the men of the Royal Irish Regiment stand fast. Until midday, all attacks are repulsed.

The trap closes once more on the Irish — 06

At 3 pm, the Irish are still hoping for reinforcements from the rear. But the trap closes around them. Now totally alone, they fight to the end, preferring to die rather than surrender. At 3.30 pm, it's over.

158 Irish soldiers are killed in the operation. Nearly all are reported missing, their bodies may still be lying somewhere on the plains of Pilly. The battle memorial is dedicated to all those who died fighting on our soil.

Irish machine guns finally fall silent — 07

Irish machine guns had repulsed the German artillery for a long time. But they could do nothing against the artillery which had finally spotted them. When the barn which they had used for camouflage was destroyed by shellfire, the Irish knew that they had nothing more than their courage and their bayonets to fight the Germans.

Michon station, makeshift hospital — 08

All the wounded were transferred to Michon station, transformed into a temporary hospital. The Irish doctor had survived the fighting. For many days, he cared not only for the Irish wounded but for injured Germans as well.

The Germans retake the village — 09

On 21st October, enemy troops resume their offensive. The village is soon taken. Damage is considerable. Leontine, a young 17-year-old woman from Herlies, is killed by German bullets. The British retreat to the fields of Lys where the front would be based for four long years. Trench warfare has just started.

At Pilly and at Herlies, many hundreds lost their lives. Tomorrow, towards Neuve-Chapelle, Aubers and Fromelles, it would be thousands.

