

# Passchendael Mud

My husband and I went to see this in Trafalgar Square this morning.



It's a statue of a WWI soldier, resting, sleeping on his kit, made to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Passchendael, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres. It is only there for four days. Two young Dutch artists, sisters Damian Van Der Velden and Kilian Van Der Velden made him from mud, clay and sand taken from the site of the battlefield.

Exposure to the elements (and some artificial rain if we had any uncharacteristic sunshine in London in July – it did happen two weeks ago) means that the statue has already started to melt away since it was erected yesterday.

Damian Van Der Velden told CBS Canada *"I was trying to get the emotional or exhausting feeling that the soldier has to have at that moment . . . All his energy is gone". The Passchendaele mud, she said, is "the heart and the soul" of the statue, and collecting it was harrowing experience.* *"If you walk on it, you know you are walking on a death field," she said. "It's strange. You cannot imagine."*

From one side he looks like a young boy dozing peacefully. From the other side he looks older and in discomfort. I don't know if that is deliberate, or merely the effect of a night's rain.





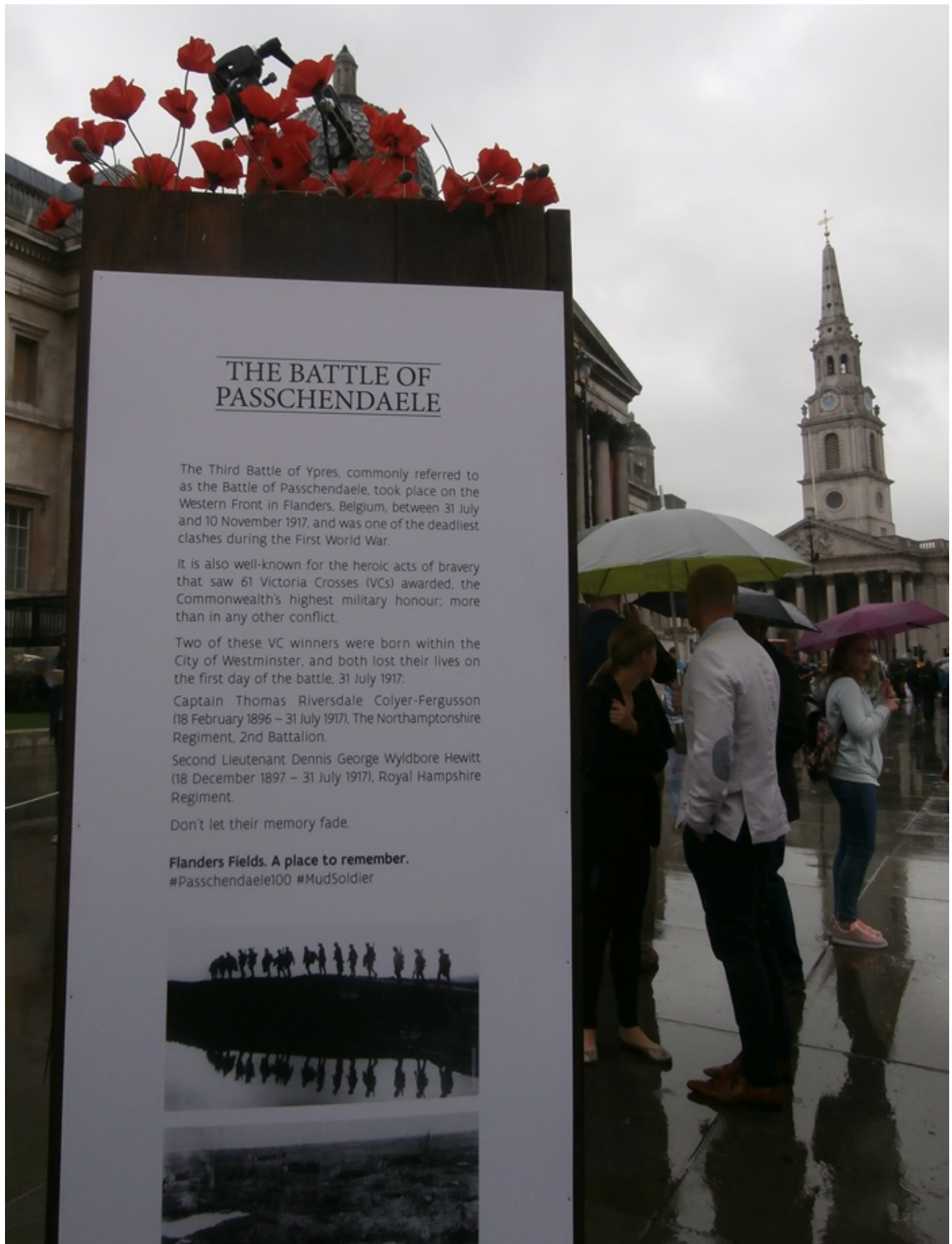


I did start to speak to Damian Van Der Velden, asking her how she decided on the appearance of the subject, but as she was telling me about her source sketches she was interrupted and I decided not to interfere with her subsequent conversation – the lady concerned was visibly moved.



The statue is being filmed and a time lapse video is intended. I wish he could be cast in bronze and erected permanently on the fourth plinth. Some of the modern art featured there has been good; some thought-provoking if not to my taste; too much has been rubbish.





## THE BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE

The Third Battle of Ypres, commonly referred to as the Battle of Passchendaele, took place on the Western Front in Flanders, Belgium, between 31 July and 10 November 1917, and was one of the deadliest clashes during the First World War.

It is also well-known for the heroic acts of bravery that saw 61 Victoria Crosses (VCs) awarded, the Commonwealth's highest military honour; more than in any other conflict.

Two of these VC winners were born within the City of Westminster, and both lost their lives on the first day of the battle, 31 July 1917:

Captain Thomas Riversdale Colyer-Fergusson (18 February 1896 – 31 July 1917), The Northamptonshire Regiment, 2nd Battalion.

Second Lieutenant Dennis George Wyldbore Hewitt (18 December 1897 – 31 July 1917), Royal Hampshire Regiment.

Don't let their memory fade.

**Flanders Fields. A place to remember.**

#Passchendaele100 #MudSoldier

