Major and Mrs. Holt's Concise Guide to the Western Front -North (vol one), South (vol two) by Major Holt, Pen & Sword 2004, 2006

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Recommended Readings

*Major and Mrs. Holt's Concise Guide to the Western Front - North (vol one), South (vol two)*

by Major Holt, Pen & Sword, 2004, 2006

Reviewed by George Geib

Tourism, aided by easy Chunnel access, has made World War One’s Western Front a significant British tourist destination. The battlefields, cemeteries, and memorials of the Great War are a busy place.

While it always helps to know Flemish or French, neither are necessary to visit Ieper (French Ypres, British slang Wipers), Vimy, or the Somme where English is the second language. If you're planning such a trip, you'll quickly encounter Tonie and Valmai Holt. The Holts have driven all the fields, and provide detailed maps and directions to take you on the roads and tracks that cross them. (They assume you brought your car from Britain, and provide all their distances in miles rather than kilometers.)

They miss very little. Tiny cemeteries, roadside shrines, wall plaques, and local amenities are all here (and keep in mind there are well over 100 cemeteries maintained just by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.). Be aware that their guides can send you to some moving experiences that are off the main paths: their advice at the Somme took us to the Devonshire Trench Cemetery and the 38th (Welsh) Division Memorial. Surprisingly few sites retain the “feel” of the trenches (the Holts will steer you to them), and cemeteries and memorials far outnumber museums.

The Holts admire valor and sacrifice, and they will tell you why those sites deserve respect. Two weeks and nearly a thousand kilometers of driving last summer from Ieper to St. Mihiel with the Holts convinced me they are the guides of choice. Take them with you when you go back to the Front.

- George Geib is a professor of history at Butler University.