

tour

TEACHERS HANDBOOK

Reconstruction of the city of Péronne



🕒 Activity roll-out :

The « reconstruction » tour consists in walking around Péronne looking for evidence of WWI. The itinerary is depicted on the last page of the students' booklet.

Each student, or group of students, will have to stop at several spots (marked with letters A to K on the map). At each one of these stops, students will observe before answering one or several questions. Using a set of photos, they will compare the current city to the city one could see at the end of the war.

The starting and ending points of the tour are the Historial de la Grande Guerre.

🕒 Aim of the activity :

To raise the students' awareness of the impact of the war on the territories that were located on or near the front line. The suggested tour also enables to discover the different solutions chosen during reconstruction :

- Identical reconstruction (or almost exactly as it was before),
- Reconstruction inspired by what used to exist before (some elements, although altered, are still visible).
- New reconstruction making a clean break with the past.

● Corrections :

A

- a castle turned into a museum : l'Historial de la Grande Guerre.
- medieval castle of Péronne dating back from the early 13th century.
- photo n°8.
- destructions connected to the war.

B

- Georges Clemenceau.
- photo n°4.

C

- City hall.
- photo n°1.
- only three out of the four arcades existing before WW1 are still standing.

D

- Roo de Kanga.
- a kangaroo.



E

- photo n°3.

F

- Porte de Bretagne (the « Brittany gate »).
- early 17th century / built from 1601 to 1606.
- photo n°6.

G

- a dead soldier and a woman (his mother, his wife... ?).
- (students' personal opinion / interpretation)

H

- photo n°2.
- the roof.

I

- boulevard des Anglais.

J

- Rue des Naviages.
- photo n°7.

K

- Saint Jean-Baptiste church.
- photo n°5.
- the bell tower

Testimonies (booklet page 6)

- The French or English.
- The French or English.
- The Germans.
- The English.

Péronne during WW1

Only seven weeks after President Poincaré had planted the legion of honour on the city coat of arms, in remembrance of its glorious past, the enemy is at our doors again. From mid-August 1914 Belgian refugees and people from the North of France invade the town. By the end of August, the people of Péronne including councillors and the civil servants are fleeing by road or by train. The French army is retreating.

On August 28th, around 17:30, German infantrymen charge the streets, fire, and cause the first civilian casualties. For 18 days, the conquered city experiences plundering and fires. On September 15th 1914, the Germans retreat after the success of the Battle of the Marne. But they return to stay on September 24th 1914.

At the town hall, the clock is set on German time, and the Reich flag flaps upon the balcony. Appointed by the kommandantur, a local board represents the French authorities. On the lives of its members, it is responsible for public order. Péronne goes on living and its population almost returns to its pre war numbers thanks to the forced arrival of inhabitants from nearby villages along the front battle line.

Péronne, now occupied by 7 000 German soldiers, has to feed 3 500 civilians. Everything is counted, shared or usurped, including alcohol supplies, secretly bred rabbits, flour and sugar. A Spanish and American food provision operation relieves the civilians from the harsh summer of 1915. The first humanitarian convoys repatriate the sick and those unable to work, going through Germany, Switzerland, and the Alps. The occupying forces rob the city by imposing huge taxes. They seize all its valuables. The people of Péronne have to create a new currency to keep on trading.

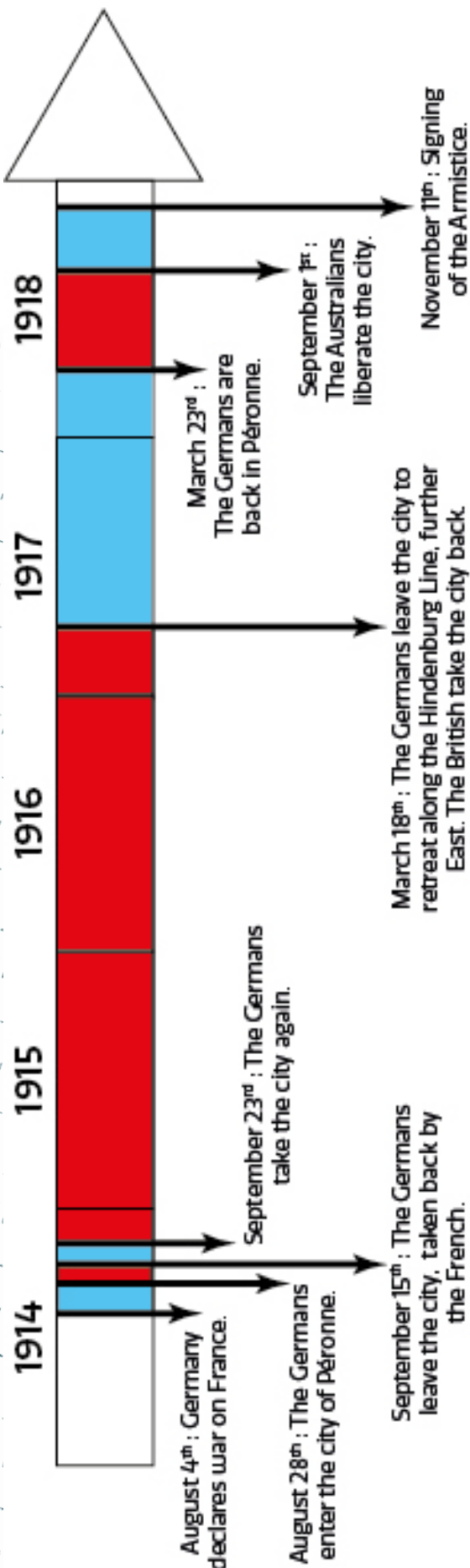
The civilians face different fears during the occupation – the threat posed by the greyish green uniforms of the Bavarian and Prussian soldiers who have invaded every quarter of the city. The men of Peronne, aged 16 to 50, endure nerve-racking hours on the parade ground fearing that at any moment they will be torn from their families to fight for the enemy, an enemy that by now is capable of anything. Finally, the people begin to lose all hope fearing they may be deprived of citizenship, never recover their freedom and forced to become German.

The Battle of the Somme in 1916 fails to liberate Péronne. The French and the British are stopped a few kilometres from the outskirts of the town. From June 24th 1916 Péronne is heavily shelled. Hundreds of inhabitants hide terrified in their cellars, hoping in vain for liberation. On July 22th 1916 the last citizens of Péronne are deported to the North and the « Aisne ». The city remains in the hands of the Germans, who abandon it during their retreat of March 1917, before re-taking it during their spring offensive in 1918. On September 2nd 1918 the Australian troops from the 2nd, 3rd and 5th divisions take Mont-Saint-Quentin and Péronne recovers its freedom.



A machine gun position established by the 54th Battalion during the morning of the attack through Peronne. The photograph was taken the following day, after the capture of the town, when positions close to it had been taken. © Australian War Memorial

Péronne during WW1



Key : City under allied control.
 City occupied by the Germans.