

**Category:** Best PR Stunt / Experiential Event  
**Agency Name:** Ogilvy&Social.Lab  
**Start Date:** 01/01/2017

**Campaign Name:** The Mud Soldier  
**Client Details:** Visit Flanders  
**Campaign Finish Date:** 31/08/2017

## Brief

The First World War, one of the deadliest conflicts in history, saw some of the fiercest battles fought in a small part of western Belgium, often referred to as 'Flanders Fields'. Between 2014 and 2018, VISITFLANDERS aims to inspire 2 million international tourists to visit the region for the centenary of WWI.

One of the most iconic chapters of World War I, was the Battle of Passchendaele, which claimed almost 500,000 casualties in 100 days of fighting. Alongside the relentless warfare, incessant rain turned the battlefield into a deadly quagmire, leaving men and horses literally drowning in a sea of mud. The ferocious fighting would ultimately result in a territorial gain of just 5 miles, but this atrocious part of WWI would leave an indelible mark on history.

This campaign needed to take this poignant Great War story, and **inspire** a relevant audience to **travel** to Flanders Fields to see the scars of the battle. In line with a strategy adopted by VISITFLANDERS for its entire programme of WWI activities, this Passchendaele campaign needed to be implemented with sensitivity and respect.

## Rationale

On the morning of 25 July 2017, VISITFLANDERS, in conjunction with Westminster City Council, unveiled a unique art installation called The Mud Soldier, on the North Terrace of Trafalgar Square, right in the heart of London.

The sculpture, made from sand and mud from Passchendaele, represented an exhausted British WWI soldier. It slowly dissolved as it was exposed to the rain over a period of 4 days. The Mud Soldier, like many men 100 years ago, would eventually fall victim to the elements. Like memories fading away over time.

The dissolving Mud Soldier offered a powerful visual message, appreciated by both passers-by and journalists, while providing strong content for VISITFLANDERS' organic and paid social media campaigns.

Potential tourists in 6 countries, with an interest in WWI, history, ancestry, ... were targeted as part of a social CRM funnel campaign. This required carefully tracking of every engagement, and re-engaging potential visitors with rational, emotional or commercial content, based on their position in the funnel, to maximize conversion rates.

Press and public responded immediately, embracing the statue as a symbol of WWI soldiers' daily struggle and sacrifice. People came from cities all over the UK just to see the sculpture and shared their family stories. They joined VISITFLANDERS' efforts to commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele by lending their voice and sharing images of the statue on social media using #MudSoldier and #Passchendaele100, allowing the Mud Soldier to share its message of remembrance across borders. The campaign reached over 65 different countries with most of the conversations applauding a painful but beautiful tribute to the fallen of the Great War and conflicts ever since.

## Constraints

A marketing campaign based upon a horrifying historic event, needs to be approached respectfully and with caution.

The campaign needed to run immediately ahead of the beginning of the Battle of Passchendaele commemoration. Media would be covering the official UK Government commemorations, and would therefore seek stories to tie in with this, putting high pressure on the timing.

Getting access to Trafalgar Square involved working together with Westminster City Council, accommodating to their wishes, together with several practical/procedural aspects, such as the incorporation of a 'rain' sprinkler system into the design, to make sure the sculpture would dissolve gradually.

## Results

After the unveiling of the sculpture, the story started spreading all over online and traditional media. The Mud Soldier was featured in media outlets across the world, but especially in the UK.

BBC One covered the Mud Soldier numerous times, as did ITV and London Live. BBC Radio covered the story on Radio 2, Radio 4 and local radio stations. The story, illustrated with beautiful photographs, found its way into print/online editions of The Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Independent, Daily Mail, Daily Express, Metro

These reports took VISITFLANDERS' story, and ultimately, the invitation to visit Flanders Fields, into millions of homes across the UK, reaching around 38 million contacts for an estimated media value of over £277,000.

Partners like Westminster City Council, Department of Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, historians Peter Doyle and Dan Snow, ... offered their support by spreading our story.

# Creative Support Mud Soldier

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## Press:

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**Press release:**

<https://flandersfields1418.prezly.com/press-release#>

**Teasing video for press:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3L93QmqHTNA>

**Complete video for press (after event):**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bSKP9iTtkw>

## Supporting Video:

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<https://vimeo.com/244364812>

Pass: MudSoldier2017!