

## **Australian Government**

Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Australian War Graves



Guide to Australian Memorials on the Western Front in France and Belgium

**APRIL 1916–NOVEMBER 1918** 





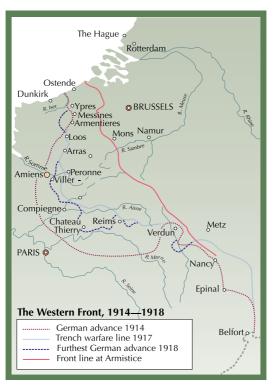
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Following the end of the Gallipoli campaign, April–December 1915, the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) began to move to France in March 1916. The 1st and 2nd Divisions were in trenches near **Armentiéres** by April and the 4th and 5th Divisions joined them in June. Meanwhile, the other Division, the 3rd, was being formed in England. All five were to see much action on the Western Front.

What we call the Western Front was actually the German western front—their eastern front was in Russia—but the French, British and Commonwealth troops accepted the label as their own. The Western Front ran continuously, in irregular and multiple lines of trenches, from the English Channel near Ostende to Belfort on the French–Swiss border, a distance of 760 kilometres. The AIF Divisions were engaged at various times on relatively short lengths of this long



front, notably in the Ypres Salient of Belgian Flanders, sections of the line in northern France and also in the Somme and Aisne sectors, east of Amiens.

The Australians, who became known as 'the Diggers', were first in action while raiding enemy trenches in 'the Nursery', a sector where newly arrived units were given their early experience of trench warfare in Europe. Their raids took place in the Bois Grenier-Armentieres–Fromelles area. It was here, too, that the AIF fought its first major battle of the Western Front. On 19 July 1916 the 5th Division, which had arrived from Egypt only ten days previously, was ordered to attack German positions at Fromelles, partly in order to prevent the enemy from reinforcing their lines on the Somme, where the British had launched a major offensive on 1 July.

At Fromelles every advantage lay with the Germans. They held the higher ground and had been established there for 18 months. The 5th Division's attack, was made on a narrow front in broad daylight and under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire. Fighting with extraordinary courage, the Diggers broke into part of the German line and held it for a time. However, the Germans, counter-attacking from the flanks, prevented any further Australian success and withdrawal became inevitable. In 27 hours of incessant fighting the 5th Division lost 5,533 men killed, wounded or captured, a quarter of its strength, and were driven back to their own start line.

Meanwhile, the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions had been sent to the centre of the Somme front near Albert to reinforce the British army, which was losing thousands of men each day. Their objective was enemy trenches in Pozières, a ruined village on the Thiepval–Pozières ridge. The 1st Division was thrown in on 23 July and under continuous heavy artillery fire took part of its objectives. When withdrawn on 27 July the division had lost 5.285 officers and men.

The survivors were relieved by the 2nd Division, whose battalions spent 12 days on the ridge, mostly in operations in the Windmill area. On 4 August

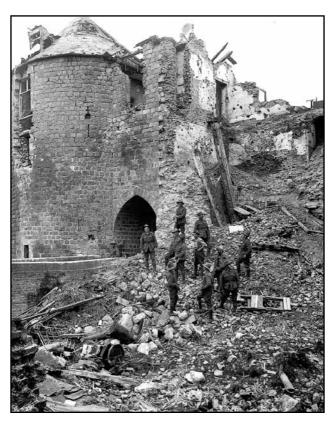


This remarkable photograph was taken by Lance Corporal C. H. Lorking as men of the 53rd Battalion waited to don their equipment for the attack at Fromelles, 19 July 1916. Only three of those here shown came out of the action alive and those three were wounded.

AWM A3042

the Division captured the heights but the men were exhausted and the Division was withdrawn. It had suffered 6,848 casualties.

The 4th Division entered the battle on 6 August to hold the Australian gains against enemy counterattacks and to press north along the ridge towards Mouquet Farm. By the time it was withdrawn on 10 August the 4th had lost more than 7,000 men. Each of the Divisions had second but shorter spells at Pozières and in total suffered 23,000 casualties on a mile of front. In the words of official historian C. E. W. Bean, 'a ridge more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth!'.



The wrecked entrance to the citadel of Péronne in France photographed on 10 October 1918 (now the Historial de la Grande Guerre).

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During the dreadful winter of 1916–17 the AIF fought in deep, gluey mud, rain and bitter cold at Flers and Gueudecourt, close to Pozières. This grim period came to an end on 17 March 1917 when the German withdrawal began. The Australians captured Le Barque, Ligny-Thilloy and Thilloy, entered the wrecked town of Bapaume and followed up with many actions to recapture French towns and villages.

These British–Commonwealth actions culminated in the Arras offensive of 9 April 1917. The AIF 4th Division played a major part in the First Battle of Bullecourt on 11 April but through poor planning and the failure of the new 'tanks', the attack failed. During April, 3,400 Australian lives were lost. Between

3–17 May, during the Second Battle of Bullecourt, the 1st, 2nd and 5th Divisions were heavily engaged. The Diggers cleared part of the Hindenburg Line and held it against counter-attacks but suffered 2,250 casualties.

In Flanders, Australian tunnellers had been busy helping to plant huge mines under Hill 60, Ypres, as part of a big British offensive. On 7 June 1917, 19 mines were exploded and infantry, including the AIF 3rd Division, advanced to fight the Battle of Messines. The 4th Division soon joined in and, together with the New Zealand Division, the Australians captured Messines Ridge in one of the most successful Allied operations thus far in the war. Nevertheless, there were some 2,000 casualties by the Australians.

All five AIF Divisions were engaged in the Third Battle of Ypres (more popularly known as the Battle of Passchendaele) between July and November 1917. It was really a series of battles, the most significant for the AIF being the victories of Menin Road, Polygon Wood and Broodseinde. Much of the fighting took place in mud so deep that wounded men drowned in it. Conditions were appalling. For the first time, all the AIF Divisions fought side by side at Broodseinde. The Australian military reputation for courage and military skill grew even brighter at the price of 38,000 casualties in eight weeks of fighting.

Following the collapse of Russia in 1917 a great German offensive began on 21 March 1918 and the AIF Divisions were used at critical parts of the front to stem the furious German advance. On 26 March, a brigade of the 4th Division closed a gap at Hèbuterne, north of Albert. With the exception of the 1st Division, the AIF held the front line astride the Somme River where they fought the First Battle of Villers-Bretonneux, 4 April, and the Battle of Dernancourt, 5 April.

The 1st Division reached Hazebrouck on 12 April, only just in time to fill a great breach and stop the German advance. Further south, Villers-Bretonneux again entered Australian history when the 2nd Division fought a second battle there, 24–25 April to liberate



Peronne, France, 2 September 1918. A machine gun position established by the 54th Battalion on the morning of 1 September 1918 during the attack on Péronne. This photograph was taken the next day, after the town had been captured.

AWM E3138

the town. The Diggers' actions had saved the city of Amiens from capture. On 19 May, the 2nd Division captured Ville-sur-Ancre. Lieutenant-General John Monash became the first Australian to command the Australian Corps on 30 May 1918. He lost no time in putting his talent for meticulous planning into use. On 4 July in a major action the Australian Corps captured Le Hamel and Vaire Wood in an attack that became a model for future battles. The 1st Division was victorious at Merris on 28–29 July. On this date, too, the 5th Division was active between Morlancourt and Sailly-le-Sec.

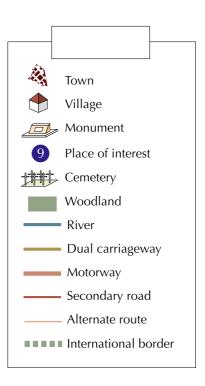
On 8 August the last phase of the war began, with the Australian Corps, now comprising all five Divisions, winning one action after another during the advance East along the Somme. There followed, 31 August–2 September, 1918 'the finest single feat of the war', the capture of Mont St. Quentin, a German defensive bastion, together with nearby Péronne town. It was a tremendous achievement, but at a cost of 3,200 casualties during August. Throughout September, the Australian Corps, though worn out, pushed into

the Aisne sector, to be victorious at Epehy, Bellicourt, Nauroy, Gillemont Farm, Joncourt, Estrées and Bony. The final Australian battle on the Western Front was the capture of Montbrehain on 5 October.

Of the 313,814 soldiers who embarked from Australia, 46,000 died in France and Belgium. About 18,000 have no known grave. There were 152,171 Australians wounded—many soldiers being wounded more than once. In the most successful period of the Australian campaign, 27 March–5 October 1918, the AIF made up less than 10 percent of the entire British forces. It captured 23 percent of the prisoners, 23.5 percent of the enemy guns and 21.5 percent of the ground wrested from the Germans.



Lt. General John Monash with his victorious troops from the battle of Le Hamel awaiting the arrival of the French Prime Minister Clemenceau. AWM E02732



## To be used in conjunction with area maps

#### Area 1:

This area, centred on Armentieres, covers the north of France and southern Belgium. It was the location of the first AIF battle.

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### Area 2:

This area, centred on Albert, covers the Somme/Ancre region north east of Amiens. It was the location for many of the most bloody battles of 1916 and 1917.

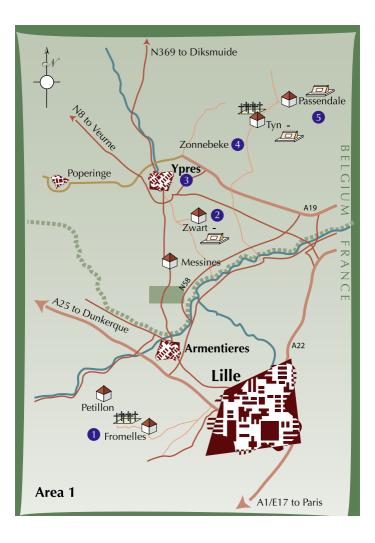
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#### Area 3:

This area, south of the Somme River, extends east from Amiens to just past Péronne. It covers the major Australian victories of 1918. page 17



The AIF Divisions fought on many parts of the front and visitors may find the following grouping of memorials useful. Note that this guide records those sites which are officially the responsibility of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. There are many other unofficial or private memorials. Some of these are referred to in the text when they are sited at or near official memorials.



#### AREA 1:

This area centred on Armentiéres, covers the north of France and southern Belgium. It covers the first AIF battle. Major AIF places of interest are:

Fromelles, France: VC Corner Australian Cemetery.

For many years VC Corner Cemetery, which has no headstones, was the only memorial to the ill-fated Battle of Fromelles on 19-20 July 1916, which was the location of the first Australian attack in France.



It is the only all-Australian cemetery in France, and on a screen wall are recorded the names of over 1.200 Australians who died in the battle and have no known grave. The unidentified bodies of 410 of them are buried under the lawns, each marked by an outline of the Cross. The cemetery is situated in the 'No-Man's Land' between the German and Australian front lines where so many of the men fell.

## Fromelles, France: Fromelles Memorial Park

The Australian Memorial Park at Fromelles is situated around the remains of German fortifications on the part of their line that was captured by the 14th Australian Brigade and held overnight on 19-20 July 1916.

The Park now contains a major bronze sculpture. entitled 'Cobbers', depicting



the rescue of a wounded soldier. The Memorial Park also contains a battle exploit plaque.

The village of Fromelles has an excellent private World War I museum, dedicated to Australian-French friendship.

Hill 60, Zwarte-Leen, Ieper (Ypres) Belgium: 1st Australian Tunnelling Company



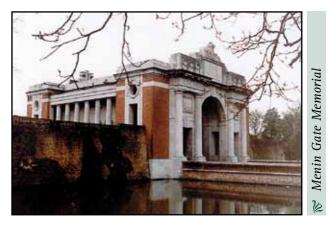


Hill 60

Hill 60 is a hillock 60 metres high formed from the spoil of a 19th century railway cutting. It was the best observation point in the region and both sides fought fiercely for its possession. The Germans were holding it in November 1916 when the 1st Tunnelling Company took over maintenance of the British mines beneath it. Above and below ground the Diggers fought to prevent the Germans from finding the galleries and mines. Today, Hill 60 is an enclosed grassy area of craters, shell holes and mounds.

# Menin Gate Memorial: Ieper (Ypres) Belgium

Organised by unit, the names of nearly 6,200 Diggers who died in Flanders and have no known grave are engraved on the walls of this great archway, which is known as The Memorial to the Missing of the Salient. There is no specific AIF memorial in Ieper itself other than the plaque on the ramparts above Menin Gate.



A 'Last Post' ceremony takes place at Menin Gate every night of the year at 8.00pm with buglers from the Ieper Fire Brigade.

The 'In Flanders' Fields' Museum is located in the Cloth Hall in the main square of Ieper, quite close to the Menin Gate.

Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke, Belgium: 5th Division Memorial.

The obelisk crowns the Butte, the mound of a pre-1914 firing range in Polygon Wood. During heavy fighting in September 1917 the 5th Division recaptured the wood. From Ieper, take the road to Zonnebeke and in this village watch for the road sign to the memorial which is located in the Buttes New British War Cemetery.



₩ 5th Division Memorial



# Passchendaele, Belgium: Tyne Cot Cemetery

The Passchendaele–Broodseinde Ridge was the scene of heavy fighting — the 'Third Battle of Ypres' — between July and October 1917 and all five AIF divisions were engaged. The bodies of 1,369 Australians are buried in Tyne Cot cemetery, more than in any other cemetery. A German blockhouse forms the base for the Cross of Sacrifice and an inscription notes that it was captured by the 3rd Division on 4 October 1917.

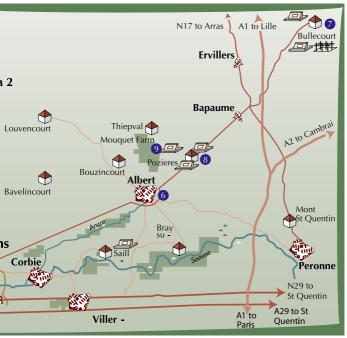
The community of Zonnebeke have established a visitor centre adjacent to Tyne Cot Cemetery, and there is a 2km memorial walkway connecting the cemetery with the village of Zonnebeke itself. In the village chateau is a Museum to the battles.

### AREA 2:

This area centred on Albert covers the Somme/Ancre region north east of Amiens. It was the location for many of the most bloody battles of 1916 and 1917.

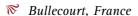
## **N** Albert, France

A good centre for Australians visiting Pozières, Flers, Gueudecourt, Bapaume, Bullecourt, Mont St Quentin,



& Bullecourt Digger

Péronne, the Somme River villages and those of the Aisne, as well as Hargicourt, Bellicourt and Montbrehain. Albert has a railway station, good accommodation and an interesting military museum below the church. During the war Albert was important as the base area for many AIF operations.



This town has several AIF memorials, the

most important of which is a small memorial park in which stands a major sculpture in bronze. The Park's commemorative plaque reads:

Sacred to the memory of the 10,000 members of the Australian Imperial Force who were killed or wounded in the two battles of Bullecourt, April–May 1917, and to the Australian dead and their comrades-in-arms who lie here forever in the soil of France. 'Lest we Forget'

Bullecourt has a private World War I Museum, and in the main street is the 'Australian Slouch Hat Memorial', a felt hat bronzed for durability. Other



Slouch Hat Memorial



S 1st Division Poziéres

smaller memorials are in a sunken side road to Riencourt. The town's people have designed a walking tour and brochures are available at the Museum. Bullecourt can be reached from Bapaume through Ecoust St Mien or from Arras through Croisilles.

## Pozières. France: 1st Division Memorial

This obelisk as a memorial to the 1st Division at Pozières is easily seen 200 metres off the D929 Albert-Bapaume road. Notice also the 'Gibraltar' German strongpoint across the road, captured by the 1st Division in July 1916, which is being excavated.

'The Windmill Site' is situated further north on the way towards Bapaume. Though originally dedicated to the 2nd Division, this unusual monument has a national flavour. It is a square of formerly shell-torn ground where the windmill once stood and where so many Australians fought and died. A stone bench carries this inscription:



'The ruin of Pozières windmill which lies here was the centre of the struggles in this part of the Somme battlefield in July and August 1916. It was captured on 4th August by Australian troops, who fell more thickly on this ridge than any other.'

隊 Mouquet Farm, Pozières: Battle Exploit Plaque

A German fortress to the west of Pozières, Mouquet Farm was the scene of ferocious fighting in July–September 1916. Little remains of the old farmhouse but a new one was built nearby. A plaque to commemorate the AIF's effort and its 6,300 casualties is at the entrance to the farm, by the side of the Pozières–Thiepval road.



3rd Division Memorial

#### AREA 3:

This area, south of the Somme River, extends east from Amiens to just past Peronne. It covers the major Australian victories of 1918.

Le Hamel, France: Australian Corps Memorial Park

The ridge above this small village was the site of one of the AIF's most successful battles, fought on 4 July 1918. Entirely under Australian planning and command, the victory established the pattern for Allied operations on the Western Front. The Australian Corps Memorial Park contains a walking trail and a series of interpretive panels as well as a central commemorative area. The remains of the trench at the Park were the final objective for the attack on 4 July 1918 and the start point for operations on 8 August 1918 leading to the Armistice on 11 November 1918.

Due to deterioration, the original memorial was replaced in 2008.

Le Hamel is only a few kilometres from the Australian National Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux.



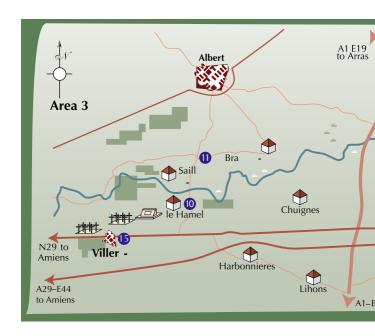
Sailly-le-Sec, near Albert: 3rd Division Memorial The obelisk stands prominently on the ridge north of the Somme River. By the side of the D1 Corbie–Bray road, the memorial is reached from Albert by the D42 Meaulte and D1 Corbie roads.

# Bellenglise, near St Quentin, France: 4th Division Memorial

The easternmost of all AIF memorials, the 4th Division's obelisk stands on high ground where the Hindenburg Line once barred the Allied approach. From Péronne take the N44 and E44 towards Vermand and turn left onto the D33. Beyond Vandancourt, turn left onto a farm road at the hamlet of le Petit Arbre. 12

# Mont St Quentin, Péronne, France: 2nd Division Memorial.

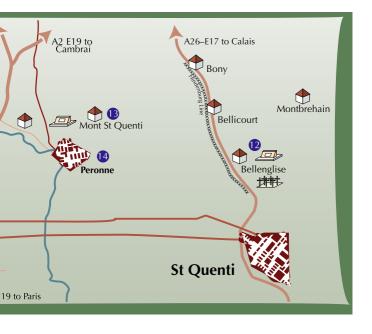
The original, depicting a Digger about to bayonet a German eagle, was removed by the occupying German army in 1940. Australia replaced it with a magnificent 2.5 metre tall slouch-hatted Digger in battle dress. The Memorial is by the side of the N17 Bapaume–Péronne Road in the village of Mont St Quentin. 13

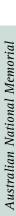


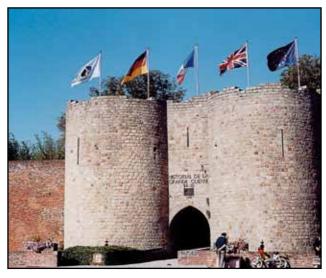


Péronne, France:

This walled and fortified town was captured by the AIF early in September 1918 in an operation linked to the taking of Mont St Quentin, overlooking Péronne. In the town centre in Péronne is the Historial de la Grande Guerre, a tri-lingual museum, that traces the history of the First World War. A self guided tour developed by the Historial for visitors to the 1916 battlefields commences here.







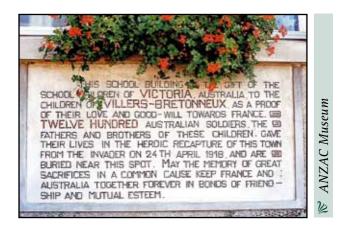
The Historial de la Grande Guerre is situated in an imposing fortification which was severely damaged during the First World War and was liberated by the Australians on 2 September 1918.

- Villers-Bretonneux, France: Three major Australian sites
- The Australian National Memorial. A few kilometres north of the town, on the D23, the Memorial consists of a great central tower flanked by wing walls carrying panels commemorating the 10,767 Australians who died in France and who have no known grave. Note that a further 1,227 Australians with no known grave are



commemorated at Fromelles and 17 missing from the Australia Flying Corps are commemorated on the Arras Flying Services Memorial in the Faubourg D'Amiens Cemetery at Arras. The Australian National Memorial is the site of an annual Anzac Day ceremony.

• Franco-Australian Museum. Located in the Victoria School, which itself is a memorial to Victorian soldiers. The museum is not open everyday. Please check the website for opening hours: www.museeaustralien.com



• Adelaide Cemetery. Close to the town in Adelaide Cemetery is the exhumation site of the Unknown Australian Soldier, who now lies at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. The grave from which the remains were taken has its own special marker and can be located towards the rear of the cemetery at Plot 3 Row M Grave 13.

Villers-Bretonneux is twinned with Robinvale, Victoria, and has several Australian street names.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemeteries and Communal Cemeteries. Australian Servicemen are buried in 596 cemeteries in France, 163 in Belgium and 413 in the United Kingdom. CWGC addresses:

Director

France Area

Head Office 2 Marlow Road MAIDENHEAD BERKSHIRE UK SL6 7DX

Fax: (01628) 771208

Email: casualty.enq@cwgc.org

Rue Angèle Richard 62217 BEAURAINS Tel: (01628) 634221 FRANCE Tel: (03) 21 21 77 00 Fax: (03) 21 21 77 10

Director Northern Europe Area Elverdingsestraat 82 B-8900 IEPER **BELGIUM** 

Tel: (057) 20 01 18 Fax: (057) 21 80 14

Australian visitors to the Western Front are advised to contact the Office of Australian War Graves prior to departure in order to obtain details of the location of individual graves or memorials. The address is:

PO Box 21, WODEN, A.C.T., 2606 Tel: (02) 6289 6510 Fax: (02) 6289 4861

E-mail: WarGraves@dva.gov.au

The Office of Australian War Graves also has available for sale a MICHELIN atlas, showing the locations of Commonwealth cemeteries in France and Belgium (\$20).

#### Websites:

www.ww1westernfront.gov.au www.somme-battlefields.com www.anzac.org



Australian soldiers who fought on the Western Front often trained or took their leave in England. In addition, the seriously wounded were evacuated to England and many soldiers embarked from England after the War's end.

#### Of interest are:

- Chalk 'Rising Sun' Badge at Fovant, Wiltshire
- AIF Chapel at the St. John's Church, Sutton Veny, Wiltshire
- St Mary's Church, Harefield, Middlesex.



St Mary's Church, Harefield



This photograph, taken near the site of the Australian Corps Memorial Park at Le Hamel, looks across the ground over which the Australians advanced on 4 July 1918.

