



The Battle for Pozieres



The Windmill Monument



1st Division Monument

The Somme
A brief record of Australia's involvement
in the Battle of Pozieres

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Pozieres Ridge 23/7/1916 - 5/9/1916

Setting the Scene

It is July 1916 and this is Pozieres.

Pozieres was the highest point on the *Somme –Albert-Bapaume Line* and therefore of strategic importance.

Gough had decided that the attack on Pozieres was to be a frontal one and it was to be attacked on two sides; the South West by the 48th South Midlands Territorial Division and the South East by the Australians, Birdwood's 1st ANZAC Corps together with the 4th Army.

Chain of Command

The command line stretched from Field Marshal Haig, General Gough the Reserve Army Commander, through to Major General Harold Walker, the Commander of 1st Division. As was usual none of these men had seen the ground, yet they had decided on the tactics to be used.













The Australians

The Australian troops to be used were to be:-

- 1st Division – 1,2,3 Brigades
- 2nd Division – 5,6,7 Brigades
- 4th Division - 4,12,13 Brigades



AIF INFANTRY FORMATIONS
1914-18

 1 Div 1, 2, 3 Bde	 2 Div 5, 6, 7 Bde	 4 Div 4, 12, 13 Bde
 1 Bde 1, 2, 3, 4 Bn	 5 Bde 17, 18, 19, 20 Bn	 4 Bde 13, 14, 15, 16 Bn
 2 Bde 5, 6, 7, 8 Bn	 6 Bde 21, 22, 23, 24 Bn	 12 Bde 45, 46, 47, 48 Bn
 3 Bde 9, 10, 11, 12 Bn	 7 Bde 25, 26, 27, 28 Bn	 13 Bde 49, 50, 51, 52 Bn

The Objectives

The task was difficult they had to capture (3) three objectives, the first: The Pozieres Trenches; the second: the outskirts of the village; the third: the main Road which ran straight down the middle of the village.

The Australians took the first four lines of the German trenches and penetrated into the village of Pozieres, with some of the advance parties gaining a foot hold on the road to Bapaume. It was during this action that the Australians were subject to a large number of gas shells which they nicknamed "Gassy".

Within (3) three days the Australians had suffered 5,000 casualties mainly due to artillery bombardment.

The Australians gained control of the road after house to house fighting. The fight for the Village of Pozieres was the first big conflict between the Australians and the Germans.



By the 27th July 1916 the Australians had captured Pozieres. This simple announcement thrilled the Australian Force.

“Pozieres has been regained”

By this time the 1st Division was exhausted and on the 29th July it was relieved by the 2nd Division which in two attacks succeeded in extending the Australian Lines beyond the village. Unfortunately the attack along the rest of the front by the British had failed.

The intensity of the fighting in the Pozieres area compared with the *horror* which occurred at ‘Delville Wood’. After the action not one stone of Pozieres remained above the ground. It could have been said that Pozieres never existed. Australia suffered 23,000 casualties in a six week period.

The situation was summed up in the words of one Australian who took part in the action: Lt J.A. Raws.
“The sad part is that one can see no end to this. If we live to-night, we have to go through to-morrow night and next week and next month. Poor wounded devils you meet on the stretchers are laughing with glee one cannot blame them- they are getting out of this----- my tunic is rotten with other men’s blood and partly splattered with a comrades blood.”

In the Australian Official History it is recorded that Lt. J.A. Raws in his last letter before his death on 23rd August 1916, spoke of the “*murder of many of his friends through the incompetence, callousness of those in higher authority*” is evidence not indeed of the literal truth of his words but of something much amiss in the higher leadership.

The Windmill

Notwithstanding the lack of higher leadership in a night attack commencing on the 4th August the Australians by the 5th August had taken the much contested position of the “Windmill” on the Pozieres Heights. At this time the “Windmill” was no more than a ‘mound of earth’ but it did give a good view of the surrounding area and just for good measure following a grenade attack took Hill 160.



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Other Australian Monuments - Pozieres



The Tank Monument

1st Division Monument

The Germans counter attacked and on the 7th August, Albert Jacka organised a stand up fight, for which he should have been awarded a second VC. He was wounded (7) seven times. There were 5 VCs won by the Australians at Pozieres.

Victoria Crosses Awarded



Lt. Arthur Blackburn VC (23/7/1916) 10th Battalion

Sgt. Claude Castleton VC (28/7/1916) KIA 29/7/1916 – 2nd Machine Gun Battalion

Pte. Thomas Cooke VC 24-25/7/1916) KIA

Pte. John Leak VC 23/7/1916) – 9th Battalion

Pte. Martin O'Meara VC (9-12/8/1916)

Casualties

By the 7th August the 2nd Division had suffered 6849 casualties, again mostly due to the incessant bombardment by the Germans.

A French observation of the Australians at Pozieres is quoted as: “*We French fight for our country, our ideals and our flag. Australians appear to fight because they like to fight*”.

Pozieres was more than a scattered overgrown ruin to the Australians, it was a common sight to see the Australian troops walking into newly made cemeteries reading every inscription and searching for mates graves. More than half the Australians who fought at Pozieres had been either killed or wounded.

There will be many Australian Pilgrimages to Pozieres now and in future years. The first which took place after it was regained very little had changed during the five months of German occupation. The whole field was very much as it was in the previous summer, except that the recent shellfire had added to a terrible appearance of desolation. The features of the “Windmill, Gibraltar and the Schoolhouse” are easily recognised standing out like boulders on a beach.

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The attitude of the Australians during this campaign was acknowledged in a tribute by the notorious German-American Herr Von Weigan the Berlin Correspondent of the “New York World” when he said:- “*The much glorified Charge of the Light Brigade, and the British Valour at Inkerman, pale by*

the side of the fearlessness and bravery of the Australians in their charge into certain death at Pozieres.”

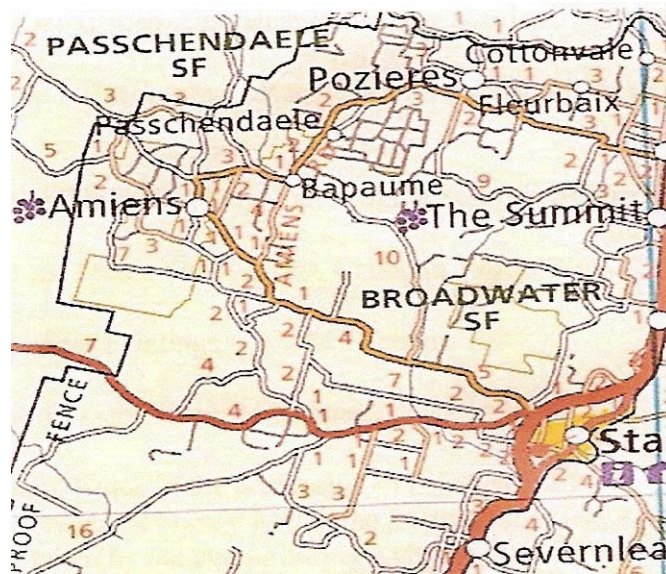
This is reinforced by a comment by the British: *“The Australians during the Battle for Pozieres seldom considered risk. Their favourite expression when confronted by a particularly dangerous project was “Give it ago”. They were less amenable to discipline than their English comrades and with a deep contempt for the “spit and polish” of the Parade Ground, which proved their worth as fighters.*

The 2nd Division was relieved by the 4th Division on the 7th August. The 4th Division made several attempts to extend the line and take Mouquet Farm unfortunately with little success until the Division was almost destroyed. By the 5th September the 4th Division had ceased to be an effective fighting force and were relieved by the Canadians. The Australians had suffered a total of 23,000 casualties.

The Battle of Pozieres was the toughest task faced by the AIF in the First World War. The remains of thousands of Australians killed in the fighting were never found and still lie beneath the fields in this tiny corner of France. Today Pozieres is a shrine to the bravery of the Original Anzacs.

A little piece of France in Queensland Australia

A little known fact about Pozieres is that after the war it was adopted as the name of a village in Queensland in memory of the Australians who saw action in the village. The land in this village in Australia was part of Land Grants known as ‘*Soldier Settlements*’ which were given to our returning veterans to assist themselves re-establish themselves after their efforts on the Western Front. In this instance the Village of Pozieres in Australia was in an area used to grow primary products (vegetables and fruit) a use very similar that in Pozieres in France.



Pozieres Queensland Australia

“They are never Forgotten”



Missing in Action

Russell Bosisto cannot claim that he had won a Victoria Cross (VC) or a Military Medal (MM) or any other decoration. He was just another soldier reported “*Missing in Action*” and he became one of the 18,000 Australians with *no known grave* and his name was engraved on the Australian National Memorial at Villers – Bretonneux and he continued to be listed as ‘*Missing in Action*’ for 82 years.

No longer Missing

Russell Bosisto was the typical ‘Digger’ in January 1916 he was to be found where he fell fighting the enemy in 1916. It was in 1998 whilst a local farmer was ploughing his land when his plough dragged on something in the soil a not unusual occurrence in this area. Farmers are continually uncovering shells and parts of weapons and equipment.

However, this find was unusual- it was the remains of a soldier from World War I which had remained undisturbed for 82 years and not far from the objective of the Battle in which he lost his life- The German stronghold “*The Windmill*” at Pozieres.

Identification

For one this was relatively easy as the remains were intact – with all the soldier’s equipment and personal possessions. He was still in possession of his rifle, which still had the bayonet fixed (the ‘*hook quillion*’ bayonet) indicated that the soldier had served on Gallipoli before being transferred to the Western Front. His rifle still had a round ‘*up the spout*’ together with his ammunition bandolier, and hand grenades. There were also personal items- the remains of his pipe his penknife and his fountain pen –but more importantly his *identity discs (dog tags)* which were still legible thankfully they were not his service issue which would have been destroyed by this time, but rather disc which had been specially made and engraved and given to him by his family.

Premonition

It has been recorded that the Australians fell more thickly at Pozieres than in any other battlefield in the war

Russell had earlier confided in a letter (*no doubt written with the fountain pen found with his remains*) to his father (which he requested not to be read to the rest of the family) this was apparently a common practice.

He told his father that France was much worse than Gallipoli. This letter was written just before he was to become a casualty “*Missing in Action*’ during the early fighting around Pozieres.

He told his father that they couldn’t move forward and that a retreat wasn’t an option. He felt he would not survive.

Since 1916 Russell Bosisto was to remain “*Missing in Action*” until that day in January 1998, with the location of his remains.

Re-internment

On the 5th July 1998 Russell Bosisto's remains were laid to rest by an Australian Army Honour Guard from the 10th /27th Battalion alongside his mates of the 27th Battalion who were also killed in the same action in the Courcellette Cemetery which is in a direct line of sight with the remains of the "Windmill".



Military Police (Anzac Provost Corps)



The functions and role of the Military Police in France does not support the concept that they remained behind the front lines in safe cushy jobs. Their job was certainly neither safe nor cushy. They were an important part of the Australian troops on the 'front lines'.

The nature of their work on 'Traffic Control & Straggler Control Posts' combined with the locating of these posts at bridges and cross roads made them targets for the enemy particularly the artillery.

An appreciation of this can be seen from their deployment during the attack on Pozieres on 23rd July 1916

