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Using archival sources to identify battlefield sites and the fates of the missing: The First Battle of Bullecourt 1917 as a case history

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ABSTRACT

The First Battle of Bullecourt took place in April 1917 and two study cases of the Australian missing from that event have been investigated. Firstly, the fate of Captain Allan Edwin Leane, and secondly the fate of an unaccounted group of wounded last seen in a German dugout. Australian and German unit diaries were used in conjunction with mapping and aerial photography to determine what happened and where.

Introduction

Australia has over 18,000 missing personnel from the First World War's fighting on the Western Front, and the 2008 confirmation and subsequent recovery of remains from mass graves at Fromelles, the majority Australian, has raised the prospect of locating more of Australia's missing.¹ But those missing from the fighting at Fromelles represent less than four per cent of Australia's wartime missing. The First and Second Battles of Bullecourt in April and May 1917 resulted in more than 2,200 Australian missing – which is 1,000 more than the figure for Fromelles – and with these figures excluding the generally overlooked 1,875 British missing from Bullecourt.²

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DOI: [10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v11i1.1873](https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v11i1.1873)

¹Department of Veterans Affairs, Australia (DVA), *Memorials to the Missing*, <https://www.dva.gov.au/commemorations-memorials-and-war-graves/memorials/war-memorials/memorials-missing>. Accessed 7/12/2019.

²The Australian figure is derived from the Roll of Honour commemorated on the Australian National Memorial to the Missing at Villers-Bretonneux; Paul Kendall, *Bullecourt 1917: Breaching the Hindenburg Line*, (Stroud: Spellmount, 2010), p. 350.

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This paper describes the process used to identify possible locations for missing Australian Imperial Force (AIF) soldiers at Bullecourt, and the role of organisations seen as having responsibility for commemoration, notably the Australian Army, the British Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission that maintains the memorials and cemeteries in France and elsewhere.

Policy

Following the discovery of Australian remains at Fromelles in 2008 the Australian Army established a specialist unit, Unrecovered War Casualties - Army (UWC-A), which has been tasked with recovering and identifying the missing from the wars in which Australia has been a participant.³ The position in the United Kingdom is completely different since it is British Government policy that the Ministry of Defence will not actively search for the remains of missing UK service personnel from the UK's past conflicts.⁴ Canada, New Zealand, India and South Africa follow the British policy pertaining to recovery. Nevertheless, the British have introduced the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC), and Canadians the Casualty Identification Program for the purpose of identifying remains from incidental discoveries.⁵

The Imperial War Graves Commission was created in May 1917 and changed its name to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) in 1960. The CWGC was originally created by the UK and the then five Dominions, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and South Africa, although its remit has since grown to include the war dead from other states. Interestingly the CWGC has no provision in its charter that requires it to recover the missing, rather it is responsible for the upkeep of existing

³Denise Donlon, Anthony Lowe and Brian Manns, 'Forensic archaeology and the Australian war dead', In W.J. Mike Groen, Nicholas Marquez-Grant and Robert C. Janaway (Eds.), *Forensic archaeology: A global perspective*, (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), p. 381.

⁴Tracey Bowers, 'The identification of British war casualties: The work of the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre', *Forensic Science International*, 318 (2021) 110571, p. 1.

⁵David Tattersfield, 'J triple C: The unsung heroes', *The Western Front Association Bulletin*, Number 111, (August 2018), pp. 31-32;

Laurel Clegg, 'Farm to France: The identification of Canada's Missing Winnipeg Soldiers from the Amiens Battlefield', In: Derek Congram (Ed.), *Missing Person: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the disappeared*, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2016), pp. 288-310.; Casualty identification <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/military-history/history-heritage/casualty-identification-military.html> Accessed 4 February 2023.

cemeteries and memorials.⁶ The CWGC asserts that the responsibility to recover and identify the dead lies with the respective armed services, although the CWGC willingly takes responsibility for adding the names to headstones through rededications, and reinterments to existing cemeteries with full military honours for more recently found remains.⁷

On an international scale, Australia is one of only two states having an agency to locate the historic fallen. The United States is the other, but only for the Second World War and later conflicts, where it provides a model to emulate. Previously, there was no precedent for the Australian armed services attempting to locate their missing after a nominal period of exhumation and the concentration of remains to war cemeteries which followed the cessation of hostilities. Until 2010 Australia followed British policy.

Fromelles

The Battle of Fromelles is remembered as Australia's greatest military tragedy in 24 hours, with 5 Division suffering some 5,500 casualties, including 1,957 killed.⁸ In the late 1990s, Lambis Englezos had compiled evidence of the existence of mass graves at Pheasant Wood near Fromelles. To confirm the burials, a joint Australian Army and British Ministry of Defence project approved an exploratory investigation of the ground in 2008. The remains of 250 Australian and British soldiers were exhumed in 2009 and reinterred in a new CWGC cemetery. Currently, 173 Australians have been identified. Prior to 2010 the Australian Army's response to the discovery of human remains was tasked to their History Unit which was formed in 1996. The Australian authorities' approval for a permanent capability for this recovery and identification resulted in the establishment of the UWC-A in 2010.⁹

The success in convincing Australian authorities and the CWGC of the existence, and location of mass graves at Fromelles was in a large part due to the role of aerial photographs and other primary forms of evidence.¹⁰ The 2009 exhumation at Pheasant

⁶Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2003), p. 28.

⁷David Tattersfield, 'J triple C: The unsung heroes', *The Western Front Association Bulletin*, Number 111, (August 2018), pp. 31-32.

⁸Tim Lycett, '31st Battalion, Australian Imperial Forces, Killed In Action, 21st July 1916', Submission to Office Australian War Graves, CWGC and Australian War Memorial, (November 2016).

⁹Donlon, et. al., 'Forensic archaeology and the Australian war dead', p. 381.

¹⁰Tony Pollard & Peter Barton, 'The use of First World War aerial photographs by archaeologists: A case study from Fromelles, northern France', In W. Hanson, & I. Oltean (Eds.), *Archaeology from historical aerial and satellite archives*, (New York, NY: Springer, 2013) pp. 87-104.

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Wood has become a benchmark case study in forensic archaeology. Despite the precedence of Fromelles, there have been no further deliberate recoveries made by the Australian Army on the Western Front.¹¹ Devising methodologies to examine and data mine primary sources provides a new avenue for investigation and the search for the missing, such as at Bullecourt which is examined in this paper. It will be shown that these techniques can be applied to other battlefields to enable resolution in the accounting for the fallen.

Fromelles and First Bullecourt were comparable battles with similar disastrous outcomes in terms of casualties, where, despite the German trench lines being breached by the AIF they could not be held against counterattack, so the ground gained was lost. Consequently, the attackers were unable to bury the majority of their dead or recover their wounded from the enemy trenches. The Red Cross Bureau in Berlin advised the Allies that the Bavarian regiment at Fromelles had buried the British dead, including Australians, in mass graves and this assisted the recovery investigations at Pheasant Wood.¹² Furthermore, the orders of the Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment 21 to construct mass graves were discovered in the Munich War Archive.¹³ However, it is unclear how the Germans of 27 Württemberg Infantry Division dealt with the Australian dead at Bullecourt in April 1917. The instigator for investigating the Fromelles site, Lambis Englezos, used the mass grave hypothesis as a precedent for his subsequent work on locating the Bullecourt battlefield burial of Major Percy Black, 16 Battalion, but that search has so far been unsuccessful. The difficulty in working with topographical and historical data in locating sites at Bullecourt, and its interpretation for archaeology, has previously been demonstrated in tracing the path of Ernst Jünger on the first day of the German Operation Michael in 1918.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in recent years advances in technology have been applied in the search for tanks on the battlefield, yet the successful location of Tank 796 was largely due to 'tankography' rather than modern geophysical surveys.¹⁵

¹¹It should be noted that unplanned (incidental) recoveries continue to be made on a routine basis as a result of activities such as road construction etc.

¹²The National Archives of Australia (hereinafter NAA) MP367/1 446/10/1840, Court of Inquiry, p. 623 & pp. 647-648.

¹³Tim Lycett and Sandra Playle, *Fromelles: The Final Chapters*, (Melbourne: Penguin, 2013), p. 107.

¹⁴Nils Fabiansson & Hedley Malloch, 'Making sense of eyewitness accounts in locating historical sites: Ernst Jünger at Bullecourt 21 March 1918', *Stand To!*, No. 69 (January 2004), pp. 15-22. Jünger later wrote his memoirs in *Storm of Steel*.

¹⁵Richard Osgood, 'Mud, blood, and green fields beyond: Exercise Joan of Arc, Bullecourt 2017',

<https://breakinggroundheritage.org.uk/onewebmedia/report%202017.pdf>. Accessed 31 January 2023; Brenton Brooks, *Tankography* as used here is the determination of

75 www.bjmh.org.uk

Information Sources

This study utilises archival resources including contemporary unit diaries, contemporary mapping, aerial photography, and soldier's testimonies to investigate the missing at Bullecourt on 11 April 1917. Importantly, the article also makes use of German archival sources. The intention here is to demonstrate the integration of under-utilised techniques to re-evaluate previous assumptions of events, and so formulate new methods that can be applied to conflict archaeology and in investigations by recovery agencies. The focus is on the conflict landscape of the Hindenburg Line as attacked by the Australian 12 Brigade.

The Allied 1917 Spring Offensive & The Prelude to Battle

The Allies' main spring offensive in 1917 was conducted by the French under General Robert Nivelle on the Chemin des Dames. However, the Germans disrupted these plans in February and March by strategically shortening their defensive front. In *Operation Alberich* the Germans withdrew to the *Siegfriedstellung*, a prepared defence line between Arras and the Aisne, which was referred to by the Allies as the Hindenburg Line. To support the Nivelle Offensive in early April, the British Third and First Armies created a diversion to the north with an attack at Arras including the assault on the Vimy Ridge, and so assist the main French attack planned for a week later.

Nearby, and to the south, General Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army was to assist Lt General Edmund Allenby's Third Army break out.¹⁶ Gough proposed to attack a salient in the Hindenburg Line, using the British 62 and Australian 4 Divisions supported by tanks, across a 3,500 yard front with Bullecourt at the centre. In the muddy conditions behind the front, a shortage of horses led to transport difficulties for the artillery and its ammunition supplies. This reduced the availability of the new, instantaneous Percussion No. 106 fuzed shell, which was more efficient against barbed wire.¹⁷ Lt General William Birdwood, the Australian Corps commander, objected to Gough's planned attack because: the wire was uncut; the line was strongly held; and the tanks to be used to support the attack were unreliable.¹⁸ On 9 April 1917, Major William

the final positions of derelict tanks on the battlefield by analysis of wartime mapping coordinates, aerial and ground level photography.

¹⁶Charles E.W. Bean, *The AIF in France 1917, Vol. IV of Official history of Australia in the war of 1914-18*, (Canberra: Angus & Robertson, 1937), p. 258.

¹⁷Ross Mallett, *The Interplay between Technology, Tactics and Organisation in the First AIF*, (Canberra: Australian Defence Force Academy, 1999), p. 107. Honours Thesis.

¹⁸Australian War Memorial (hereinafter AWM) AWM 3DRL/3376 1/3 Part 1, Personal diary of Field Marshal Lord William Birdwood, 1 January – 31 December 1917. Diary entry for 9 April 1917.

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Watson, from the recently formed Heavy Branch Machine Gun Corps (HBMGC), conceived the idea that his company of tanks concentrated on a narrow front could flatten the wire entanglements, and so enable a surprise infantry assault in the absence of artillery support.¹⁹ Gough agreed to the scheme and a hastily organised attack was ordered for the following morning.²⁰ Watson's company was equipped with obsolete Mk Is and Mk IIs, then commonly in use as training tanks. Additionally, there was no preparatory practice of combined tactics between infantry and the new weapon. This improvised attack was to be made on a 1,500 yard front between Bullecourt and Riencourt.

On the morning of 10 April, the tanks of 11 Coy, D Battalion, failed to reach their allotted assembly points, and the attack was called off. Rather than cancel, Gough rescheduled the attack for the next morning, disregarding the unreliability of the tanks. Birdwood again unsuccessfully protested.²¹

Hindenburg Line Defences

By understanding the defensive system to be attacked, the later implications for the distribution and recovery of the dead can be better interpreted. Although the formidable defences of the Hindenburg Line were not yet complete, by the end of March 1917 the Allies were aware of the details in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt.²² Following German High Command doctrine, the defence system incorporated the village as a natural strong point. A new trench had been constructed in some places in front of, but for the most part immediately behind, the original line. This was sited almost entirely on the reverse slope. Some of the dugouts in the original support line had been abandoned before completion. A captured German prisoner stated that in the former support line, the dugouts were of the usual deep type with four entrances, two for each company. Machine gun positions had all been accurately mapped, with three uncovered machine gun emplacements in each company sector of some 150 yards. The machine gun positions gave perfect enfilade along almost the entire outer edge of the wire. They were protected by an additional depth of wire immediately in front of them. Nevertheless, as late as 9 April Gough, believing that the *Alberich*

¹⁹The artillery would instead concentrate on neutralising the German batteries.

²⁰William H.L. Watson, *A Company of Tanks*. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1920) pp. 44-45.

²¹AWM 3DRL/3376 12/1a, Operations: Bapaume-Bullecourt, William Riddell Birdwood.

²²AWM2018.785.69, Maps and aerial photographs relating to the First World War service of Lieutenant-Colonel James Murdoch Archer Durrant, 1915 – 1918; AWM4 1/30/15 PART 4, Intelligence HQ 1st ANZAC Corps war diary April 1917.

withdrawal was a sign of German weakness, was convinced the Germans intended to evacuate the Hindenburg line.²³

The First Battle of Bullecourt

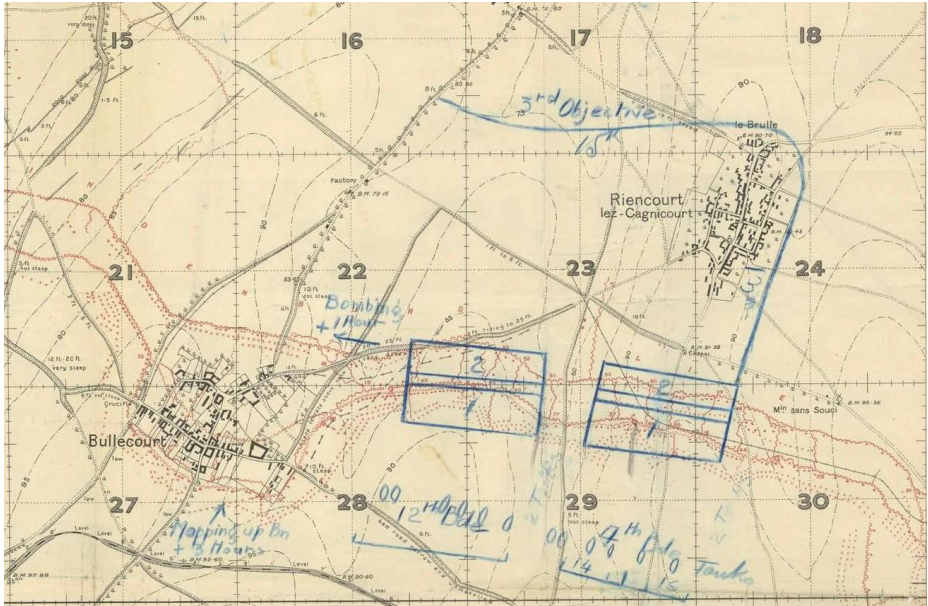


Figure 1: Objectives in Hindenburg Line for 12 and 4 Brigades at Bullecourt on 11 April 1917. Objectives 1 and 2 are OG1 and OG2 respectively.²⁴

On 11 April, the tanks either broke down or were quickly hit and knocked out. The two infantry brigades were then exposed to withering enfilade fire and were left to get through the barbed wire alone. Incredibly, they achieved their first and second objectives (Figure 1) and occupied the trenches designated OG1 & OG2, where OG is derived from the Pozières nomenclature 'Old German'. After a few desperate hours the Australians were dislodged by German counter attacks. The day ended in disaster with the result that the dead and wounded could not be buried or recovered by the

²³AWM4 1/48/13 PART 2, General Staff Headquarters 4th Division war diary April 1917.

²⁴AWM4 23/31/30.

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attackers. Australian casualties were over 3,000, including some 1,170 taken prisoner.²⁵ German losses were 749 including 42 taken prisoner.²⁶

Prisoners of War & the AIF Dead: What Archival Records Reveal

The AIF suffered over 215,000 casualties during the four years of the First World War, including 60,000 dead. Of the 4,044 men who became prisoners of war, 3,848 were captured on the Western Front.²⁷ The relatively small number captured often results in their fate being overlooked and their stories neglected, largely due to their circumstances falling outside both the ANZAC narrative and commemorative rituals.²⁸ Nevertheless, the high number of captives taken on the single day of First Bullecourt, demonstrates they were an important component of the battle, even if it was disastrous. Prisoners of war represented less than 2% of overall Australian battle casualties on the Western Front yet accounted for 39% of losses on 11 April 1917. Post war statements following repatriation from Germany are therefore an important resource for testimonies of the events of the battle.

The treatment and the experiences of the men taken into captivity at Bullecourt varied. This study will investigate the fate of some cases which ultimately are concerned with the missing. The Germans found the battle had unexpectedly and quickly turned in their favour. At Riencourt, German escort crews were soon guarding over 1,000 Australians at prisoner collection points behind the front. Prisoner columns were mistakenly shelled by rearward German artillery thinking they were advancing enemy troops.²⁹ The unforeseen capture of such a large number of prisoners also placed strain on the Germans' ability and capacity to deal with them.

Sergeant Frederick Peachey, 15 Battalion, an escaped prisoner reported,

²⁵Bean, *The AIF in France 1917, Vol. IV*, pp 342-343, p. 543. Bean's figures are inconsistent; The Australian prisoner figure is based on reported German success after the battle and has not been revised by scholars; Arthur G. Butler, *The Western Front, Vol. 2 of Official History Australian Army Medical Services*, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1940), p. 156, Battle casualties 11 April 1917 – Killed in Action (KIA) 825, Died of Wounds (DW) 32, Wounded 1,059, Prisoners of War (PoW) 1,275, Total = 3,191.

²⁶Bean, *The AIF in France 1917*, p. 349

²⁷Arthur G. Butler, *Problems and services, Vol. 3 of Official History Australian Army Medical Services*, (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1943) p. 896.

²⁸For example, see, Aaron Pegram, *Surviving the Great War: Australian Prisoners of War on the Western Front 1916-18*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 4.

²⁹D. Simon, *Das Infanterie-Regiment „Kaiser Wilhelm, König von Preußen“ (2. Württemb.) Nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Stuttgart: Chr. Belsersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), p. 67. Translated by Peter Rothe.

being ordered to remove our dead (of 4 Brigade) out of the trenches, and put them into shell holes with twenty or thirty in each.... Identification discs were not taken. After this was done we had to remove our wounded who had been left in the barbed wire, those who had leg wounds and could not walk were shot with a revolver through the head.³⁰

Major Black leading 16 Battalion was killed instantly while rallying the men at the wire between OGI and OG2.³¹ Black's remains are presently sought by citizen 'searcher' organisations, including 'Team Lambis', based on Peachey's sole affidavit. At the time, the Australian Red Cross Bureau advised that parties of prisoners had hastily buried 200 or 300 of Australian dead in unmarked graves near where they fell.³² Despite the efforts required to remove, dispose, and bury the dead in improvised mass graves, no collaborating statement has been located among the balance of hundreds of former prisoner reports. This questions the validity of Peachey's eyewitness testimony as a reliable data source.

Unlike Fromelles, there are no German Red Cross Bureau notifications for the use of mass graves at Bullecourt, and neither are there indications of earth works in the aerial images.³³ The absence of records for such makeshift cemeteries at Bullecourt presents a greater challenge than was the case at Fromelles. Major William Trew, 24 Battalion, stated he considered comparatively few of the men killed on 11 April and 3 May at Bullecourt had been buried when the Australians left the area some weeks later.³⁴ During the Second Battle of Bullecourt, the padre of 14 Battalion returned, searched and found paybooks and discs. He took a great deal of trouble to identify the men lying dead around Bullecourt.³⁵ 5 Division after their territorial success during the second battle came across a lot of 15 Battalion from the first battle that had not been buried at all, except by shelling.³⁶ Furthermore, the lack of any war time battlefield clearance is evidenced by the 280 unburied bodies recovered in the old No Mans Land

³⁰AWM30 B13.18. Prisoner of war statements, 1914-18 War: 4th Australian Division, 15th Battalion, 8 to 13 April 1917.

³¹AWM 940.431092 R432, William Henry Murray letter to Cyril Longmore dated 26/4/17.

³²AWM IDRL/0428, Australian Red Cross Society (hereinafter ARCS) Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau Files.

³³NAA MP367/1, 446/10/1840, Court of Inquiry, p. 623 & pp. 647-648; Pollard & Barton, 'The use of First World War aerial photographs by archaeologists', p. 96.

³⁴AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

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area at Bullecourt in 1919.³⁷ However, this clearance was conducted before adequate recovery protocols had been devised for exhumation teams. Consequently, some areas remained uncleared, and the identities of those recovered were often lost during cemetery concentrations.³⁸ The discovery in 2009 of four members of the British Army's Honourable Artillery Company in a pasture within the village demonstrates the inadequacy of some post-Armistice clearances.³⁹ Therefore the burial practices of the dead from individual battles must be investigated based on their merits, rather than relying on the precedence and expectation set by the Fromelles mass graves. However, collating and analysis of the records that are available can assist in determining the fates of the missing.

The Fate of Captain Allan Edwin Leane

The final fate of casualties is often confused, particularly behind enemy lines, with the presumed 'official' cause of death being erroneous when primary documentation is consulted. Those fates have then been perpetuated without re-examination. This study analysed a range of documentation originating from German agencies, principally their Red Cross Bureau, to demonstrate if these archival resources can clarify what happened to the missing. Such a case warranting closer scrutiny is that of Captain Allan Edwin Leane, 48 Battalion, who continues to be reported as having died of wounds in German captivity.⁴⁰ Although Captain Leane was last reported by members of his battalion in Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS) Missing Files as being mortally wounded or being killed behind German lines, there is no report from German agencies that he was taken into captivity.⁴¹ Why does this ambiguity exist, and an examination of the German records held by the International Committee of the Red Cross Historic Archives (ICRC) provide further evidence beyond that available in Australian archives?

Confusion arises from Leane's documented date of death. This was recorded as *gestorben*, translated as 'fell', on 2 May 1917 by the German A.O.K.6. (Chief Army

³⁷AWMI8 9966/1/21, Graves correspondence to and from Lt Q S Spedding, Corps Burial Officer.

³⁸Brenton Brooks, 'Epitaph to the Missing: Agencies which abandon the unrecovered AIF dead on the Western Front', *Sabretache*, Vol. LXI, No.2, (June 2020), p. 44; See grave concentrations from Noreuil British Cemetery No.1. to Quéant Road Cemetery, Buissy, e.g., 899 Ross Patterson 13 Bn "Buried in this cemetery actual graves unknown", <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1252532> Accessed 31 January 2023; NAA B2455, PATERSON ROSS dossier.

³⁹'WWI soldiers finally laid to rest after 96 years' <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-22253147>. Accessed 31 January 2023.

⁴⁰Pegram, *Surviving the Great War*, p. 191.

⁴¹AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files, Allan Edwin Leane.

Command 6) in their report of 6 May.⁴² Leane next appears on the Red Cross Bureau Berlin Office *Nachlassliste* dated 20 Aug 1917, and this was the first notification to the British of his fate.⁴³ Enquiries were made in September and October 1917 by the ARCS in London to investigate the circumstances of his death.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, death whilst a prisoner of war was recorded in his dossier on 9 October 1917, despite there being no advice he had ever been in captivity.⁴⁵ The German Prisoner Care Department responded they had no details of Leane ever being a captive.⁴⁶

After the war, efforts by Captain Charles Mills to extract a death register in Berlin, record Leane as being killed in action near Bullecourt.⁴⁷ On the same page, Captain Henry Stanley Davis, 46 Battalion, was listed as being killed in action in the middle of April near Riencourt, also in the A.O.K.6. report of 6 May.⁴⁸ To compare the official documentation of prisoners who died in captivity, known cases with CWGC graves were investigated. In contrast to battlefield fatalities, prisoner of war deaths were clearly labelled on German death vouchers or certificates, a detail not recorded against Leane.⁴⁹ Those who died in German hospitals had their details reported in *Totenliste*, but Leane does not appear under this category either.⁵⁰ The majority of men who died in captivity do have identified CWGC graves, since their deaths were recorded in hospitals and the original interments took place well behind the front lines. Captain Leane has no known grave and is commemorated on the Australian National Memorial to the Missing at Villers-Bretonneux. A fate commonly experienced by those killed on the day of battle.

⁴²AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files.

⁴³International Committee of the Red Cross Historic Archives (hereinafter ICRC), <https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/1509685/698/13937/>. Accessed 31 January 2023.

⁴⁴AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files.

⁴⁵NAA B2455, LEANE ALLAN EDWIN p. 13

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁷Captain Charles Mills OBE, late 31 Battalion AIF, was wounded and captured at Fromelles. He was appointed the PoW Red Cross representative for Switzerland in March 1918, and after hostilities was instrumental in accounting for the 'Missing in Action' whilst stationed in Berlin for the Wounded and Missing Bureau.

⁴⁸AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files.

⁴⁹AWM18, 9982/2/34, POW Correspondence from Captain Mills, Berlin.

⁵⁰See Hemsley 48 Bn, ICRC,

https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Zoom/E/04/01/C_GI_E_04_01_0070/C_GI_E_04_01_0070_0084.JPG/4. Accessed 31 January 2023.

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Further investigation revealed Captain Leane and Captain Davis were in the same *Nachlassliste*.⁵¹ A translation of Leane's death voucher sent to AIF Headquarters in 1919 defines *Nachlassliste* as 'Left Property', which can be regarded as personal effects.⁵² 'The Left Property Office reports – has left paybook containing his will handed in with list 28/2630 on 19.9.17 for dispatch to England'.⁵³ As with Captain Davis' case, Allan Leane's body was most likely located on the battlefield and identified from his paybook by enemy details in May and reported to their command. The entry in Captain Leane's dossier that he was a prisoner is unsupported by German documentation or protocol, and the Roll of Honour should be reviewed for amendment to 'killed in action'. The approach undertaken here in evaluating a diverse array of archival material for an individual can be expanded to the perspective of the collective unit to seek patterns on a larger scale, such as burial clusters.

Missing Attackers from 12 Brigade

More Australians remain missing at Bullecourt than were killed at Fromelles, with sixty-three per cent of those missing from the two battles of Bullecourt remaining unrecovered from the battlefield.⁵⁴ With such a high figure, it is suggested that the records could be re-evaluated and lead to locating the sites of remains. A preliminary analysis of the witness statements in ARCS Files of the Missing in the First Battle identified a cluster of wounded men from 12 Brigade last seen placed in a German dugout in OGI.⁵⁵ This dugout was established by Major Victor Waine as 46 Battalion's advanced headquarters and dressing station.⁵⁶ During the attack, injured men were carried or ordered to this dugout to have their wounds dressed. When the Germans counter attacked the trench, they threw bombs down into the dugout and captured those present, including the wounded.⁵⁷ Major Waine endeavoured to go out via the second entrance but found the enemy blocking that outlet. Despite men in this dugout being taken prisoner, as determined by repatriation statements, other wounded that were identified sheltering with them remain missing. Sergeant Charles Burton recalled his companions' misfortune. Among those who were in the dugout that he could remember, but are now classified as missing, include 2304 William Gordon Campbell and 2384 George Samuel Burton (he had been severely wounded in the stomach) of

⁵¹ICRC, <https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/List/1226140/698/13916/> Accessed 31 January 2023.

⁵²AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files.

⁵³AWM IDRL/0428, ARCS Wounded and Missing Files Allan Edwin Leane.

⁵⁴Brooks, 'Epitaph to the Missing', p. 44.

⁵⁵Carl Johnson, Pers comm.

⁵⁶AWM30 B10.4. Prisoner of war statements, 1914-18 War: 4th Australian Division, 46th Battalion, 8 to 13 April 1917.

⁵⁷AWM30 B10.13. Prisoner of war statements, 1914-18 War: 4th Australian Division, 48th Battalion, 8 to 13 April 1917.

46 Battalion.⁵⁸ Cross referencing to the ARCS Files of the Missing, a group of at least twelve wounded men remain unaccounted for, with no known burial details, indicating they may still be interred in the dugout. If the Germans encountered the bodies, they should appear in *Nachlassliste*. This gives rise to the question could the location of that dugout be determined.

Aftermath – The Second Battle

The Second Battle of Bullecourt was launched on 3 May 1917 with broadly the same objectives as the First Battle. Initial success was achieved only by the Australian 6 Brigade, 2 Division, which had been assigned the objective of 12 Brigade in April.

In an endeavour to seek further information detailing dugouts etc. the Australian unit diaries have been examined. Fortunately, and as a part of consolidation efforts of the former German trenches, 6 Brigade's company of Field Engineers were tasked with reporting on the captured defences and the condition of the enemy's dugouts.⁵⁹ The details and location of 23 dugouts in squares U.23, U.28 and U.29 were recorded on an accompanying trench map. This was a significant archival find. No traces of concrete shelters were found in the captured works. A number of dugouts were also incomplete, especially the connections between staircases. This detail corroborated intelligence gathered on the German defences prior to the first battle.⁶⁰ In OG2 a large dugout having three entrances and two chambers was recorded. However, in OG1 no double entrance dugout as described by Major Waine was found, although its prospective location is detailed later in the article.

Evaluating Württembergische – Infantry Regiment 124 – Events to Verify the Australian 12 Brigade Account of Attack

German state archives are a potential resource for insight to the events. Such resources have largely been ignored by anglophone researchers yet account for the enemy's actions. Recent acknowledgement of the importance of such German records can be seen in the translation of von Bose's work on their 'Black Day'.⁶¹ Bean had the 27 Infantry Division's regimental histories translated for his work, but the accurate regimental maps are absent from his archival records. This study has examined the mapping located in the Württembergische war diaries, with the intention of superimposing on them the Australian records to see if they coincide, and so verify details of the location of fighting. This is an important consideration in formulating the

⁵⁸AWM30 B10.4. Prisoner of war statement by 2383 Sgt C D Burton.

⁵⁹AWM4 14/25/19, 6 Field Coy Engineers war diary May 1917.

⁶⁰AWM2018.785.69

⁶¹Thilo von Bose, Translated by Pearson, D. & Thost, P. with Cowan, T (Ed.). *The Catastrophe of the 8 August 1918*, (Newport: Big Sky Publishing, 2019).

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locations of potential burial clusters for the units involved, especially when formations were reinforced or rotated during the fighting to secure trench gains.

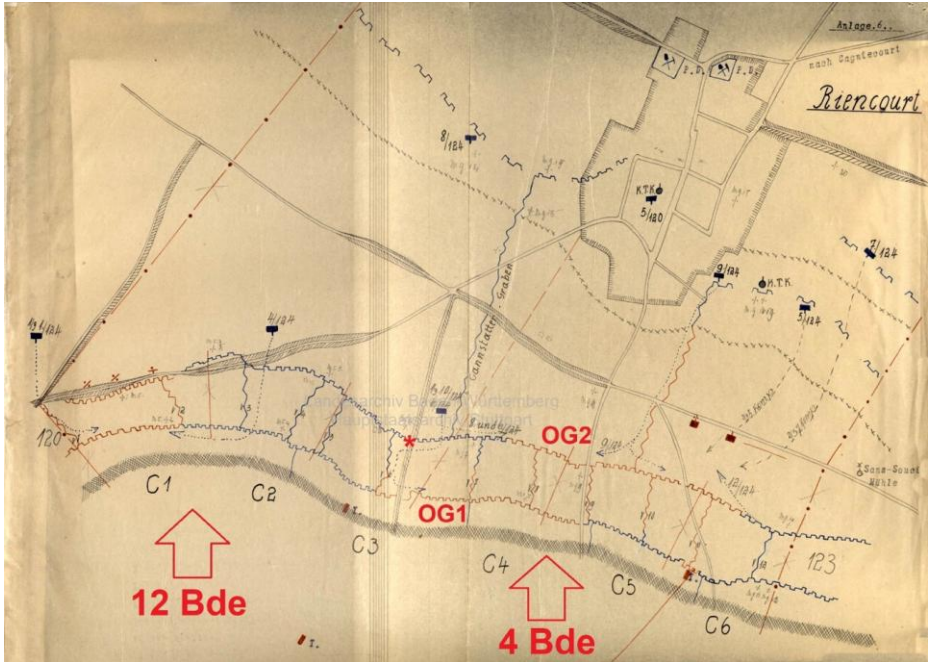


Figure 2: German trenches OG1 and OG2 of Hindenburg Line between Bullecourt and Rieniencourt. Trenches breached by the Australians are indicated in red. Reputed 48 Battalion block at Central Road shown at *. German counter attacks are blue dotted lines.⁶²

Examining the German report of their lines which were taken by 12 Brigade, it contrasts with the account of the Australians. 48 Battalion reportedly established trench blocks in OG2 on the right at Central Road U.23.c.85.05., and on the left in Sunken Road at U.23.c.0.4. It was thought 4 Brigade was at least 400 yards to the right of their expected point in the German line. However, the Germans mapped that the Australians breached the section of their OG2 support trench further to the west towards Bullecourt as shown in Figure 2 and did not extend eastward to the Central Road. In front of Rieniencourt, the German records agree with the accounts of 4 Brigade for the territory held – Section C4 – C6. On the basis that 4 Brigade were in the correct position, this would support the theory that 12 Brigade were 400 yards

⁶²Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg – Generallandesarchiv Stuttgart M94 GR123.

westward of the position they believed they had occupied. This aligns with the German account of their trench line temporarily being lost in the section CI.

Site Evidence Based on Exhumations of the Fallen

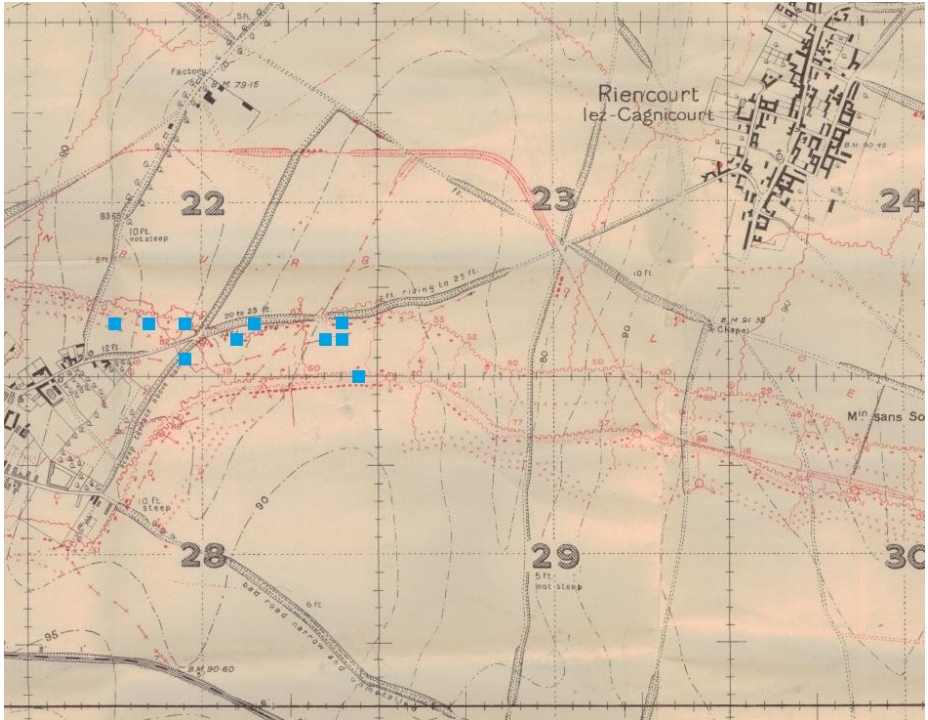


Figure 3: Exhumation sites of identified men from 12 Brigade (shown as blue squares), recovered near vicinity of OGI and OG2. All recoveries were within square U.22. No unidentified men from the brigade were discovered in U.23.⁶³

Confirmation of the German positions taken by 12 Brigade during the First Battle can be verified by physical evidence of their occupation. The strongest link can be revealed by those killed in the trenches and buried close to where they fell. For the 4 Division total of 923 deaths, 95 of those killed on 11 April have known graves in CWGC cemeteries. Fourteen of these graves can be identified as 12 Brigade exhumed from

⁶³Co-ordinates of recovery site extracted from CWGC Burial Returns for Concentration of Graves (Exhumation and Reburials). For example see, 1888 Charles Brooks, 48 Bn, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/565619/charles-brooks/#&gid=2&pid=1>. Accessed 4 February 2023.

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According to the German indication of ground lost, 46 Battalion occupied part of the trench including dugouts numbered 14 and 15 by the Australian Engineers with an additional four to the west towards the village. The repatriation statement given by Major Waine recorded the headquarters and dressing station at which he was captured as being a double entrance dugout. However, the engineers did not discover a double entrance dugout in OGI. This indicates the dugout entrances in this section of trench may have been blown in by artillery after the First Battle. Alternatively, the Germans may have sealed the entrances as a readymade tomb. Despite Major Waine being taken to the rear, a group of at least 12 wounded men who were being treated in the same dugout have disappeared and remain unaccounted for. It is likely therefore that the missing men are entombed in an intact German dugout.



Figure 6: Overlay of aerial image of German trenches with current land usage. Aerial image taken on 6 April 1917 of newly constructed Hindenburg Line, corresponding to British map squares U.22.d and U.28.b.⁶⁶ The entrances of the lost 12 Brigade dugouts are located below the square traverses of the German trench within the white box. Australian Memorial Park containing the 'Digger' statue is identified. Courtesy of Google Earth.

⁶⁶McMaster University, 51b.U22 (Bullecourt, Hindenburg Line) April 6, 1917.

By overlaying an aerial image taken in early April 1917 of the unmolested, newly constructed trenches, on present day mapping, these former dugouts have been identified as being in the arable field surrounding the Australian Memorial Park containing the 'Digger' statue, see Figure 6.

This field was previously owned by Jean and Denise Letaille, who donated the land for the Memorial Park, which was inaugurated on 25 April 1992. Peter Corlett's iconic 'Digger' statue was unveiled during the ANZAC Day ceremonies there in 1993. The Memorial Park incorporates the former OG2. The position of the memorial is an accurate landmark for a visitor to reflect where fighting in the trenches took place. The Letaille's legacy continues from the establishment of the Bullecourt 1917 Museum which houses a collection of artefacts and relics from the local battlefield which were previously stored in their barn on the museum site in the village. The museum and the 'Digger' statue are now emotive destinations for Australians on visits to their forefathers' battleground. The discovery of an intact dugout would also provide preservation and educational opportunities for the museum. But to do that the site needs an investigative survey supported by the Australian Defence Force's UWC-A to search for the OGI dugouts and so establish whether wounded AIF soldiers were entombed there and confirm if their bodies are still present. As was the case at Fromelles any remains discovered could be recovered and interred with full military honours. If no means of identity, such as discs, are present the remains can be sampled for DNA extraction and the conduct of family profiling to enable identification.

The author maintains there is an obligation under their remit for the UWC-A to find these bodies and if successful lead on to their recovery, reinterment and resolution for the families.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Bullecourt was the site of a re-entrant in the Hindenburg Line that witnessed two battles in 1917, involving the four divisions of the I ANZAC Corps, which achieved nothing of tactical value for the cost of 10,000 Australian casualties.⁶⁸ Of the 2,200 missing Australians, 63% have not had their remains recovered from the battlefield.⁶⁹ In addition, the British commemorate a further 1,875 missing on the Arras Memorial.⁷⁰

⁶⁷For the UWC-A 'Mission Statement', see, Ian McPhedran, 'A detective story', *Where Soldiers Lie: The Quest to Find Australia's Missing War Dead*, (Australia: Harper Collins Publishers, 2019), p. 133.

⁶⁸Bean, *The AIF in France 1917, Vol. IV*, p. 489.

⁶⁹Brooks, 'Epitaph to the Missing', p. 44.

⁷⁰Paul Kendall, *Bullecourt 1917*, p. 350.

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This study was not able to locate any German documentation held by the Stuttgart archives that the 27 Infantry Division, then garrisoning the Bullecourt sector of the Hindenburg Line in April 1917, had performed any clearances for a collective burial of enemy dead.⁷¹ In contrast, after launching Operation Michael in 1918 German burial details, from Ernst Jünger's III Division, assisted by prisoners, were observed burying British dead in a previously established soldier cemetery, see Figure 7. Several names on the existing crosses can be read which confirms the site as the Ecoust Military Cemetery. The policy of burying enemy dead may have varied between German divisions or reflects that in 1917 the continued violence of the contested Bullecourt battleground simply consumed the dead.



Figure 7: Photocard showing Ecoust Military Cemetery 23 March 1918 after the Germans have retaken the area. Several names on the existing crosses can be read, including Douglas Ferguson 10 FAB, AIF. British prisoners help bury the dead from the North Staffordshire Regiment. (Author's collection)

With the absence of evidence for mass graves, alternative methods need to be sought to resolve the whereabouts of the missing. Critical analysis of reliable historic testimony and documentation allows present day investigators to derive their fates.

⁷¹The generosity of Florian Wein in accessing the records at the Stuttgart Archives is gratefully acknowledged.

The official fate of Captain Allan Leane remains ambiguous due to a lack of clarity within the ARCS Missing Files held by the Australian War Memorial. However, by broadening the investigation to *Nachlassliste* and *Totenliste* held by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and comparing his case to known casualties, it can be deduced Leane was killed in battle as opposed to dying of wounds whilst a prisoner.

This methodology assisted in accounting for individuals, however, expanding to collectives, such as all ARCS missing statements for a battle, enables spatial patterns to be discovered. Elucidating burial clusters requires more extensive investigation involving collation of data, and an ability to recognise and distinguish nuances in soldier testimony or archival documents to classify locations. Soldier statements often refer to local landmarks, such as near a tank or sunken road, which are generally not site specific enough for use in analysis of the broader battlefield front. An understanding of unit dispositions allows a greater focus within the conflict landscape to be searched. Sites of documented burials can be assessed against CWGC clearance records to ascertain the prospect of recovery. An accurate depiction of areas of interest can eliminate 'noise' in the evidence to enable a more efficient use of prospective archaeological survey resources. A lack of rigour analysing evidence led to a false positive in the search for a mass grave at Messines, Belgium, in March 2018.⁷²

Data mining can be further enhanced by using the repatriation statements made by former prisoners of war who witnessed the final carnage and detritus in enemy territory. In the past, repatriation statements have been underutilised but they do offer contemporary accounts of the conflict. Examining this testimony in conjunction with unit diaries and aerial images can transform the interpretation of the battlefield landscape and its evolution. The juxtaposition of recently accessed German mapping for breached trenches challenges the 12 Brigade descriptions of captured positions in the Hindenburg Line. Furthermore, the comparison and resultant discrepancy of German dugouts before and after the First Battle of Bullecourt identifies the position suspected of being used for a dressing station that is associated with a distinct group of unaccounted dead.

Advances in technology, principally DNA analysis, also increase the likelihood of identifying individual remains.⁷³ However, the research required to supply historical context and data mining from multiple archival depositories for determining burial locations has received minimal recognition. Support for international collaboration to access, translate and process records is warranted. If the Australian recovery agency

⁷²Ian McPhedran, *Where Soldiers Lie*, p. 221.

⁷³'Cutting edge DNA technology to identify Australian fallen soldiers' remains', <https://www.nationaltribune.com.au/cutting-edge-dna-technology-to-identify-australian-fallen-soldiers-remains/> Accessed 4 February 2023.

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is advocating that the identities for thousands of missing soldiers can be achieved by breakthrough DNA technology, then they need to discover and exhume the remains to investigate.⁷⁴ As the final unknown soldiers of Fromelles are being identified, is there a priority to find those still lost?

Adopting innovative and improved research techniques provides an opportunity to challenge the official international agencies, including the UWC-A, to assess their performance, and review and update recovery protocols and mandates. Recent finds such as Sergeant Samuel Pearse VC, and the Winterberg Tunnels, demonstrates the commitment of citizen searchers.⁷⁵ Despite such successes and the increased capability of 'searcher' organisations, the missing war dead remain at risk of being lost forever unless changes are made to the remit of the official agencies.

The author maintains that finding the missing war dead is an obligation greater than attendance at commemorative ceremonies.

⁷⁴Shelley Lloyd, 'WWII diggers buried in Pacific battlefields could be identified by new DNA test', <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-24/new-test-to-help-id-remains-unknown-soldiers-wwii-battlefields/11025876> Accessed 4 February 2023.

⁷⁵Angelique Donnellan and Max Tillman, 'Remains of long-lost Australian digger Sam Pearse likely found in Russia', <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-24/remains-of-long-lost-australian-digger-likely-found-in-russia/11528854>. Accessed 31 January 2023; Knut Krohn, 'Der Streit um die Toten am Winterberg', <https://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/inhalt.erinnerung-an-den-ersten-weltkrieg-der-streit-um-die-toten-am-winterberg.493831d3-619c-454b-9d0e-1503b2855577.html> Accessed 31 January 2023.