



May, 2015

Special points of interest:

- An Anthropologist's view
- Finding David Anderson
- Fromelles 2016
- AGM in July

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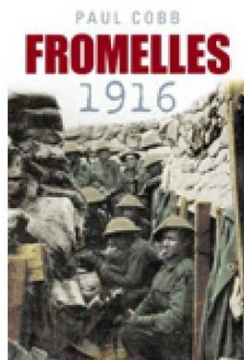
Hello again to all our members and friends of those who share our interest in the Battle of Fromelles and those who we are trying to identify.

The last five months have been a little 'slower' than we would like, but we have some items which we hope you will find interesting this month.



Upcoming talk by Paul Cobb (author of 'Fromelles 1916').

We are very pleased to confirm arrangements for Paul's talk on Fromelles 1916.



Paul will be in Australia briefly, and while here, has agreed to give a presentation on behalf of the Western Front Association and the Fromelles Association of Australia.

Not to be missed.

Paul Cobb: "Fromelles 1916"

1:00 pm for 1:30 pm, meeting ends at 4:00 pm.

Sunday 28th June 2015, in the ANZAC Room

99 York St., Sydney

(near Town Hall station and Queen Victoria Building)

Refreshments to be served.

Our hosts have asked that we please bring a memento of the Great War for possible "show and tell".

Lest we forget.

'Fromelles 1916' is the title of Paul Cobb's talk based upon research on this battle dating back to 1989. Research took Paul to the Imperial War Museum and National Archives in the UK and the AWM, Canberra; he interviewed veterans and scoured a wide range of primary sources culminating in the publication of his acclaimed book 'Fromelles 1916' in 2007.

This talk covers the formation of two Imperial and Australian Divisions, their preparations for the battle, the ill-fated attack itself and the aftermath plus forms of commemoration. Further material deals with the archaeological excavation on a mass grave and the creation of a new cemetery in the village of Fromelles where many of the soldiers have been identified using DNA techniques.

Many maps and photos are used to illustrate this account of Australia's first action on the Western Front after arriving from Egypt in early 1916.

Paul is long-standing member of *The Western Front Association 1914-18* and a former Vice Chairman and currently chairman of the Wiltshire branch in the UK. He is also a member of the *Gallipoli Association* and author of two other books on the Great War. Both grandfathers served in the Great War (Egypt, Italy, Ireland, France and Flanders) and a great grandfather died serving with the Royal Flying Corps.

For those lost so far from home.

Why Do We Search For Soldiers Long Since

Buried and Lost?

Have you ever wondered what it would feel like to be involved in the actual retrieval of the soldiers in the mass grave? Here is an insight:

“... those people were known, and they’d been lamented and farewelled. With the victims of war and atrocity, I felt as if we were bringing the dead into the light. We were recognising them and giving them back their humanity, telling them they didn’t deserve to be treated the way they had been. Even if no one ever paid for the violence committed against these people, it was enough just to do that one thing for them.

I wasn’t alone in feeling this way at Fromelles. Every time we found another body, every time we carefully scraped away the earth from another skull and saw in our mind’s eye a young man’s face, most of us reacted the same way. Here was someone’s son, someone’s brother or father, husband or lover, someone who had been missed and mourned until there was no one left alive who had known him.”



Extract from ‘Ronan’s Echo’,

© Joanne van Os, 2014

www.joannevanos.com

And there are stories to be told, of families finding their lost soldier, just like this one:

For those lost so far from home.

2560 Sergeant David Samuel Anderson - The Story Behind The Discovery

From Jill Byrnes, April, 2015

My Great Uncle was Sergeant David Samuel Anderson. He went to the First World War and was 'missing in action' after the Battle of Fromelles, in Flanders, France in July 1916. After almost a century of our family wondering what happened to him, as a result of genealogy research and DNA technology, in 2014 he was identified from a mass grave, and re-interred with his name on his headstone, at the Fromelles Military Cemetery.

The sadness of not knowing

Since childhood I remember my mother talking about 'Uncle Dave'; about her mother and grandmother grieving and wondering what happened to their brother and son who went missing in France. They never really knew what happened to him; whether he was taken prisoner or killed, or lost his memory and was living somewhere else. They hoped he would somehow come home one day.

Who was David Samuel Anderson?

I started researching my family history some years ago, and looked into David's story. David was born at Bergalia (near Moruya NSW) in 1891. David's father was the Manager of Bergalia Estate (which was owned by his uncle), but sadly David's father died of Typhoid Fever in 1896 at the age of only 39, leaving his wife Kissock with six young children to raise. Kissock moved to Sydney with the children and so David continued his education in Sydney, and became a manufacturing jeweller. He was in the Scottish Rifles, a keen footballer, played piano and was unofficially engaged to Esther Hamilton. David was described as tall with a solid build and 'firm chin', and very popular.



The long road to finding David

My mother gave me some of his memorabilia, including a ring that he had made, and a copy of the telegram and letter her grandmother received from the Army. In 2001 I looked up David's records through the Archives and the Australian War Memorial. I learned from his service record that David served in Gallipoli and Egypt before France. At the Battle of Fromelles, July 19-20 1916, David went 'missing in action'. His body was never found, and he was not listed by the enemy as a prisoner. Surviving soldiers who fought beside him gave conflicting accounts, one that he had been taken prisoner, others that he had been killed. All however said that he had got into the German trenches. Eventually it was decided by the authorities that he had been 'killed in action', but nobody really knew for sure. He became one of the tens of thousands who had 'no known grave'.

In 2007 I heard on the news that a mass grave had been found at Fromelles, which was believed to contain the bodies of 140 soldiers who had been killed in that battle where David went missing in July 1916, and buried by the Germans. This was incredibly exciting – the prospect of possibly finding David!

For those lost so far from home.

You can also check out our Facebook page under: Fromelles Association of Australia. Click on Recent Posts.

There was some controversy at the time, however, about whether the mass grave should be excavated, or the bodies left undisturbed. I contacted a group which was advocating for the excavation, and provided information about David and his family for an online article, pointing out that if the mass grave was not excavated, the soldiers would not get a proper burial. The article was published online in 2008, and is still accessible online. As it turns out, it is very lucky that I did contribute to that article, because it helped a number of people contact me with regards to David, but more on that later. Fortunately also, the Australian government decided to proceed with excavating the grave.

The Australian Army's Unrecovered War Casualties (UWC) Unit asked people who thought they might be related to a soldier in the mass grave to register. I did so, as did other family members. The grave was excavated in 2009 and DNA samples were taken from the bodies, together with other identifying information, where available. There is a very interesting book all about the excavation, by Oxford Archaeology.

Very few soldiers were able to be identified from the excavation alone, as the ID tags had been removed by the Germans when they buried the soldiers, and sent to the Red Cross in Geneva, so that the families could be informed. The Red Cross carefully kept the records but they were not 'found' until a historian was looking for them as a result of the mass grave at Fromelles being found. During and after the war, for complex reasons many of these records did not find their way to the authorities, and therefore to the relatives of the deceased.

The Germans did also carefully record the location of the mass grave, but again for various complicated reasons it was not found, even after the war when the Commonwealth War Graves Commission were looking for graves. Books on Fromelles by both Tim Lycett and Peter Barton are good sources of information on why this information was never found after the war, and also about how the mass grave *was* eventually found due to research by an Australian teacher, Lambis Englezos and friends – another complex and amazing story.

In 2010 the soldiers' bodies were re-interred in a new military cemetery at Fromelles. The Army's UWC called for relatives to provide DNA to help identify soldiers who had gone 'missing in action' at the Battle of Fromelles. My cousin gave UWC a family tree according to their specifications, and from that my mother was identified as a possible DNA donor, and provided DNA. However the Army subsequently told us that Mum's DNA was 'not a match', so we assumed that meant that David was not in the grave.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P10534.001

In fact I discovered much later that Mum's DNA was a partial match, but more DNA donors were required to confirm it. However I didn't understand this from UWC's letters. We were only asked to 'further investigate your family tree for DNA testing options' (letter received April 2012). Part of the problem was that the UWC was under staffed, and they had hundreds of people to contact. They therefore sent only form letters, not ones specific to each family. I did phone UWC once in 2012, but was just told that they were under staffed as above, but we were still on the list and would be informed of any developments.

For those lost so far from home.

Then in 2013 a voluntary organisation called the Fromelles Association of Australia contacted me, after tracking me down via that online article about David from 2008! This group wanted to help find as many of the soldiers who had not yet been identified as could be, by contacting relatives of the remaining unidentified diggers and trying to find suitable DNA donors from the families.

The UWC cannot give out names of relatives due to Privacy laws, so the Fromelles Association of Australia had to find family members from what little information was publicly available. They explained to me in simple terms what was required to find a suitable DNA donor for David. That is, to find a male-only line DNA donor (light bulb moment). I provided a family tree to them, and using that plus online Births Deaths and Marriages data, they were able to find a suitable DNA donor. This meant going back to the generation before David, and tracing down the lines to find a suitable donor living today. The Fromelles Association produced a report in the form required by the Army, which was accepted. The DNA donor identified (whose great, great grandfather was David's grandfather) provided DNA, and then we waited for the result. Just before Anzac Day 2014 we got the wonderful news from the Army that the DNA was a clear match and David was identified in the grave!

It was overwhelming to get this news, there are no words to describe it. I was in tears and shaking. I phoned all the family and we rejoiced together for hours. My mother was so happy. For so long we had thought that David was not in the mass grave at Fromelles after all, and would never be found. It was such a wonderful and unexpected relief to know he was there.

The headstone dedication ceremony

Eight family members travelled to France in July 2014 for the ceremony to dedicate David's headstone at the Pheasant Wood Military Cemetery in Fromelles. It was wonderful to see David's name on a headstone, in a beautifully kept Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery. Finally. We took with us his medals, a piece of Anderson tartan, a ring he made as a jeweller, a photograph of David, and other items to 'show' David he had not been forgotten. It was very moving to be there, representing my family. My Mum was 91 years old and not able to travel to France. I was able to take photos and video so that I could show her the headstone and the ceremony. We also toured some of the other battlefield areas. It was sobering to see in cold hard marble and stone, all the tens of thousands of men who died, just in the First World War. The cemeteries and memorials are everywhere.

One of the things that was very special in France was finding out how much Australians are respected there, because of their role in helping to free France from the enemy which had invaded. In many houses in Flanders we saw Australian flags and other symbols, which the locals use to thank us and let us know how grateful they are. There are also schools which are especially designated as schools to promote understanding and exchange between France and Australia, because our soldiers fought for France.

What happened to David?

There is now a Fromelles Museum which explains very clearly what happened in the Battle, and what each battalion did. From this and other reading we now know what probably happened to David, and how he ended up in mass grave dug by the Germans, behind their lines. Fromelles was the first engagement of the Australians in France (the Western Front). The Australians had only just arrived and were not familiar with the terrain, they had to attack through boggy ground, and the German front line was very strongly fortified with concrete machine gun emplacements. The bravery of men leaving the safety of their trenches to attack under such conditions is unimaginable. The attitudes of the Generals who sent them on such a pointless attack is another story, well documented elsewhere. There were 5,500 casualties among the Australians in 24 hours, 1300 of which were 'missing in action', many still not found to this day. David's battalion (the 54th) was one of the very few that were able to capture the heavily defended German front line. They also continued to advance into enemy territory, but this unfortunately was their undoing. The Germans ultimately circled around behind them and cut them off. From there it was only a matter of hours before they were all killed or taken prisoner.



For those lost so far from home.

**Why not
Submit Your
own story for
inclusion in
future
Newsletters?**

In conclusion

Even though David Anderson was my great uncle, and I never knew him personally, the unresolved grief and sorrow is passed down through the generations because there is no closure when someone is missing in action. After all the research however I do now feel like I know David personally, in a way. I have his ring, I have his medals, I have been to his graveside, which I had a small part in bringing to fruition. I and my family are immensely grateful to the Australian Army UWC Unit and to the Fromelles Association of Australia for making this possible. Closure is a wonderful thing. We now feel we can lay David to rest in our hearts.

“Can You Tell Me What the Army is Doing With the DNA Kits?”

We often receive contact from interested people, asking how is the search and the processing, going?

Anecdotal information from members and other callers, suggests Army staff are getting a lot of ‘flack’ at present. Lots of enquiries are being made about the progress of DNA testing, but few responses seem to be issued. Contact seems variable.

From Royce Atkinson: Formal dialogue with the Association continues at a high level, and submissions continue to be actioned quickly. At times, the office has been unattended for some time, and ‘I think’ this is more to do with attending various parts of the world for body retrieval, rather than anything to do with the Fromelles Project.

DNA processing, Identifications and Submissions Generally

Again, from Royce Atkinson: The Army decided not to undertake any DNA testing in 2015. The cutoff for submissions for the 2014 identifications announced in April 2014, was 24 January, 2014. Submissions made after that date, were to be ‘held’, and all submissions made between 24 January 2014 and approximately January 2016, were to be processed, and DNA collected during that period. Formal announcements will again be made about April 2016.

Thus, 2 years of submissions and ‘matching’ will culminate with successful announcements being made to coincide with the centenary services in 2016.

We understand that so far, there has been no collecting, nor testing of DNA of those who have been located as potential descendants.

Much concern has been expressed both within and external to this association, about the decision to hold testing. Perhaps the following paragraphs may provide some information.

As at March 2015, the Association is informed that government policy continues to be implemented. That policy states; (para 4 – Letter to the President, from The Hon Warren Snowdon, Minister for Veterans Affairs, dated 18 June 2013):

“To that end, although formal cooperation on the project with the British will conclude after a final headstone dedication ceremony at the Fromelles cemetery in July 2014, the UWCS-A team will continue to process all data received and collect and process suitable reference samples until all opportunities to achieve identifications have been exhausted”.

Thus, no time limit has been applied to this policy, rather whilst so ever suitable donors are being found, testing will continue.

Since February 2014 we have lodged 61 soldier submissions on behalf of families, which relates to the identification of 99 DNA donors. 14 of these soldiers are on the German Death Lists.

Our “best guesstimate” for identifications this year is 20.

So the search continues.

Upcoming Events in Fromelles 2016.

We do not have any information on upcoming “events in Fromelles” at this time. We will need to await the informal information from members and associates in that regard, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We hope to have more solid information for the benefit of all, at our upcoming AGM in July.

If anyone has information about events that are being organized by family or friends, please pass them on to us via our secretary by email to: gvb456@gmail.com.

Accommodation and Travel Arrangements in Fromelles in 2016.

We are aware that as of the publishing of this Newsletter, there are at least 40 people going to Fromelles in 2016 from our Association alone. Encouraging indeed.

As yet we have no idea what is being proposed by Department of Veterans Affairs as to official arrangements.

Membership Application Form Updated.

A revised membership application form will be attached to all newsletters, with a request for information about the soldier of interest for the intending member.

If you haven't joined our Association already, we would love to welcome you to the group! Fill in your own details in the application attached and send it to us with your payment.

Membership will run from July to the following year June.

Facebook Page.

We will place information on the Facebook page progressively, and we welcome your own contributions to the page itself.

And, we will also upload an amended Member Application form to our Facebook page.

For those lost so far from home.

Date and Venue of Next Annual General Meeting

Save the date: **25 July, 2015** in the Hunter Valley.

Venue: **Cessnock Ex-Services Club,**

201 Vincent Street, Cessnock (Ph: 4991 1884)

From: 10.00 am for 10.30 start.

There will be a speaker coming to our AGM from UWCS-A. Please bring your questions.

Martin Hood, a researcher, will be giving a presentation on the search for and finding of living people in our quest to identify those who have so far been unidentified.

The Fromelles Association of Australia has incorporated in order:

- **To champion the Sacrifice of the Soldiers who served at Fromelles, and their families.**
- **To promote, encourage, and document research designed to identify the missing soldiers of the Battle of Fromelles.**
- **To forge strong relationships with organisations and people interested in the Battle of Fromelles, especially families of soldiers, the Australian Army, and the citizens of Fromelles.**

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