



WE WOULD NOT NORMALLY BE ISSUING A NEWSLETTER AGAIN UNTIL JULY, BUT THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON EVENTS SCHEDULED FOR 19 JULY AND LATER NEED TO BE BROUGHT TO YOUR ATTENTION NOW.

FROMELLES DAY COMMEMORATION

19TH JULY, 2020

On 19th July, 1966, on the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles, veterans of the 5th Division on their final Parade, called on the Trustees of the Anzac War Memorial, Sydney to always remember the sacrifice of the 8,100 soldiers of the 5th Division killed in action during the First World War and those who had died since. A commemorative service has since been held each year on 19th July to discharge that commitment.

Arrangements for the commemorative service have been arranged by Families and Friends of the First AIF (FFFAIF) in conjunction with the Anzac Memorial in the years since. Arrangements for this year's commemorative service have needed to be adjusted on account of the public health issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic in Australia and more severely around the world.

The Anzac Memorial in Sydney has now re-opened (9 June) on weekdays with visitors booking visit times that are time restricted and physical distancing rules are enforced and parts of the Memorial have capacity restrictions.

The Anzac Memorial have advised that with physical distancing, the capacity limit for the Auditorium is 35 people including Memorial staff, and that the capacity limit will be strictly adhered to.

The physical distancing requirements are likely to stay in place throughout June and July. As the 19 July is a Sunday, there is a significant possibility that the Memorial will not have re-opened on weekends, although the Premier may direct or the request that the Memorial return to weekend openings. Accordingly, the Fromelles Day Commemoration at the Anzac Memorial, will be subject to the following considerations:-

- Scheduled for Monday 20 July;
- To be regarded as a "private event" rather than a "public event" to avoid uncontrolled gatherings in and around the Anzac Memorial;
- Limited to 35 invited people who would be required to provide contact details in advance (for contact tracing);
- Be of limited duration (1 hour target);
- Physical distancing (1.6m) would be required at all times including seating in the Auditorium.

FFFAIF will issue the invitations for attendance on behalf of the Trustees of the Anzac Memorial. As numbers will be limited to 35, there can only be

In this edition:

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**Fromelles Day
Commemoration
Sydney
July, 2020**

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**Annual
Conference
Cancelled**

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**A Mother Who
Hoped**

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**William McGhie
who fought at
Fromelles**

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**Our Soldiers'
Stories**

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**Musee de la
Bataille de
Fromelles
Re-opens.**

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**We've still got so
much to do.**

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ONE representative of each “descendant “ organisation who will be able to participate and lay a wreath.

Wreath-laying would be possible in the Hall of Memory. Priority will be given to representatives of 5th Division AIF, people of NSW, rest of Australia, UK, France, Belgium, descendants, war widows, Legacy, with individuals and families invited to provide messages to be placed on commemorative stars for the Anzac Memorials Star Ceremony.

However, ALL members and friends are invited to send a message or nominate a soldier’s name(s) to be included on a Commemorative Star and cast into the Well of Contemplation during a Star Ceremony.

We are hoping to have the Commemoration live streamed to several web-sites (FFFAIF, Anzac Memorial, NSW RSL, but all subject to confirmation).

If you wish to send a message or nominate a soldier’s name to be included on a Commemorative Star, to be cast into the Well of Contemplation during a Star Ceremony, please forward an email to either:

- ◆ Jim Munro, FFFAIF – President@ffaif.org.au. or
- ◆ Geoffrey Benn, Fromelles Association – gyb456@gmail.com.

Changes to these arrangements will be updated on our Facebook page.

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FROMELLES ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON 1 AUGUST, 2020 CANCELLED

Sadly, if you haven’t been made aware of it yet, due to ongoing concerns about the possible effects of Covid-19 and the need to ensure we eliminate the chances of re-infection, we have had to cancel the Annual Conference we had scheduled at Toronto on 1 August, and the venue has been cancelled.

But we want to get together with you just as much as you want to attend.

When social distancing enables us to meet in more numbers than we are able to at present, we will have pleasure in notifying you all of the new date for our Annual Conference.

Until then, keep your (safe) distance, and get tested if you have any concerns about Covid-19.

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A MOTHER WHO CONTINUED TO HOPE.

We know of the Grieving Mother from Ballarat, and the letter she wrote seeking to know of the fate of her son at Fromelles. We can reveal another grief-struck mother’s loss on the making of her enquiries regarding her son:

Eric Floyd HANCOCK

Regimental number: 3240
Place of birth : Allyn Brook, New South Wales
School : Manning College and East Maitland High School,
New South Wales
Religion: Church of England

Occupation: School teacher
 Address: 13 Wigram Road, Glebe Point, Sydney, New South
 Wales
 Marital status: Single
 Age at embarkation: 20
 Height: 5' 9.75"
 Weight: 126 lbs
 Next of kin: Father, H J Hancock, Monkarie, Wards River, New
 South Wales
 Previous military service : Served in the Citizen Military Forces.
 Enlistment date: 18 September 1915
 Place of enlistment: Sydney, New South Wales
 Rank on enlistment: Private
 Unit name: 17th Battalion, 7th Reinforcement
 AWM Embarkation Roll number: 23/34/2
 Embarkation details: Unit embarked from Sydney, New South Wales, on
 board HMAT A29 Suevic on 20 December 1915
 Rank from Nominal Roll: Corporal
 Unit from Nominal Roll: 55th Battalion
 Fate: Killed in Action 20 July 1916
 Place of death or wounding: Fleurbaix, France (Battle of Fromelles)
 Age at death from cemetery records: 21
 Place of burial: No known grave
 Commemoration details: V.C. Corner (Panel No 11), Australian Cemetery
 Memorial, Fromelles, France
 Panel number, Roll of Honour,
 Australian War Memorial: 160
 Miscellaneous information from
 cemetery records: Parents: Henry and Eda HANCOCK
 Other details: War service: Egypt, Western Front
 Embarked Alexandria to join the British Expeditionary
 Force, 19 June 1916; disembarked Marseilles, France, 29
 June 1916.
 Promoted Corporal, 10 July 1916.
 Medals: British War Medal, Victory Medal
 Sources: NAA: B2455, HANCOCK Eric Floyd
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Statements given in order to determine his ultimate fate were given to a Court of Enquiry from four witnesses:

From Red Cross File No 1251007, **Lt Col D.M. McCONAGHY**, 55th Bn (patient, 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth, England), on 5 February 1917 stated: 'Hancock was killed in the German trenches at Fromelles which were afterwards re-captured by the enemy. His body was not recovered.'

A Second statement was given by 4745 **Pte J.W. BELL**, Machine Gun Section, 55th Bn (patient, Edmonton Hospital, London, England), on 7 February 1917: 'At Fleurbaix, S. of Armentieres on July 20/16 Hancock was killed and buried at Saily in the cemetery.' A Third statement was given by 4861 **Corporal H. NIXEY**, B Company, 55th Bn, on 2 March 1917: 'I saw him killed on the morning of July 20th at Fromelles by a shell. We had to retire leaving dead and wounded behind. I saw the Germans burying him, as we had four hours' armistice to bury the dead. The wounded the Germans took.' A Fourth statement was given by 2938 **Pte R.W. CARRUTHERS**, B Company, 55th Bn (patient, 4th Northern General Hospital, Lincoln, England), 8 March 1917: 'Cpl. Hancock was shot through the head and killed instantaneously close by me side (sic) during a counter attack at Armentieres on July 20th, 1916. He was not buried, his body was left in a German communication trench.' Eye Witness: Yes.
Note on file: 'No trace Germany. Cert. by Capt. Mills 10.10.19.'

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Despite these statements, Eric's mother believed Eric to have been taken as a prisoner of war. She wrote to the Commissioner, British Red Cross Society, London, on 27th May, 1918:-

Could you inform me if you know of a repatriated Australian Prisoner of War from (indecipherable) answering to this description – Viz – Light brown hair slightly wavy, tall about 5'10 ½ to 11 inches. Very light blue eyes, small scar on lower lip towards the right hand corner an old bullet wound on left arm from just above the elbow (caused by possible accident years ago). His complexion was fair, the features refined, well educated (a Sydney University trainee student before enlistment).

He is 23 years of age but may look older ... (indecipherable).

I am enclosing a photo of him which is much like tissue (tho' a snap shout). You will notice he has broad well shaped shoulders. His name is Corporal Eric Floyd Hancock no. 3240, B Comp. 55th Battalion, AIF, and he was reported killed in action July 20th 1916 at Fleurbaix France.

This I have never believed and I must tell you that nine different clairvoyants state that he was not killed but was taken prisoner on that date by the Germans and was suffering from lack of memory. As there have been several mistakes made regarding men who have been reported killed and they have been found later to be alive, I felt I could not refrain from writing direct to you, as no doubt there are plenty of young men suffering from shell shock or loss of memory whose identity is not known. We have had not any particulars from the Military Authorities re his (indecipherable) and have not received his disc or anything he wore .

I had several reports from our Australian bureau of the Red Cross but each report contradicted the other and the description of the soldier was wrong every time and certainly did not seem to refer to my boy.

Should you find a soldier answering to the description and which someone to identify him.

These soldiers would be able to do so because even were he disfigured as they were very intimate with him.

His brother 1830A Signaller Reginald J Hancock B coy 34th Bn AIF at present at Sig. School of Instruction, Salisbury Plain. [She then went on to name various other soldiers.]

You may be able to find out if there is a prisoner in Germany answering to his description. He may be still in hospital there. This may seem a strange letter to you, but being his mother and not believing he was dead I felt I must try and find him if he really is alive. He also has a large

For those lost so far from home.

black mole on his back the lower part of his spine. Trusting you will be able to find out something reassuring about him and trusting you in anticipation.

[signed] E.M. Hancock

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A response was given to Mrs. Hancock by (Miss) Vera Deakin, in a letter dated September 26th, 1918. The letter advised that:

“there has been no trace of him as a prisoner of war in Germany, and from this as well as from several unofficial reports of his death given by men of the same battalion, we fare there is unfortunately no reason to doubt the official report of his death in action.”

In a post-script to the letter, Mrs. Hancock was informed:

We are herewith returning Cpl. Hancock’s photograph as we are afraid it will not be needed by identification.

Eric Floyd Hancock is commemorated at the V.C. Corner (Panel No. 11) Australian Cemetery Memorial, Fromelles, France.

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On a different note, we now provide the story of a soldier who fought at Fromelles, went on to serve again in battle, and returned to Australia:

William McGHIE

William was a battle hardened digger who fought at Gallipoli with the 25th Bn. before transferring to A Coy 31st Bn in April, 1916. His basic details are as set out below:

Regimental number: 1554
 Religion: Roman Catholic
 Occupation: Chemist
 Address: Hartly Street, Cairns, Queensland
 Marital status: Single
 Age at embarkation: 18
 Next of kin: Father, Robert McGhie, Emerald, Queensland
 Enlistment date: 25 February 1915
 Rank on enlistment: Private
 Unit name: 25th Battalion, 1st Reinforcement

After serving at Gallipoli, William was transferred to 31st Bn while in Egypt. He departed Alexandria on 16th June, 1916, and moved to Fleurbaix where he would fight with his Battalion in the Battle of Fromelles.

The following is his description of the Battle of Fromelles written only days later when he was in hospital:-

At 6.00pm on Wednesday 19th July came the long waited for order – “The first wave will advance”. The first wave went over the parapet, then the second, the second caught up to what

For those lost so far from home.

We took the first line easily, bayoneting what Germans were in the trench, and taking some prisoners. We could not find any German second line so we advanced about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile, over open country towards the German guns. Here we commenced to dig in, as our own artillery opened on us here as well as the German guns, we were under a hellish fire by now, men were falling every side of me.

We had to retire back to the German front line again. Here we changed the parapets, and we built a trench 80 yards in front of the German line. We held the line all night. At daybreak the Germans counter attacked, they drove us out of our front line at 6.00am. At about 8.00 am they had us out of their original front line. We could not hold it as we had no reinforcements at all, and we were all cut to pieces. I went through all this somehow or other.

At about 10.00am when in our own trenches, a shell burst on top of me and knocked me clean out. At present I am in the 25th G.H. on the outskirts of Boulogne. I am feeling real good. This is the 22nd.

On Sunday 23rd I was sent from hospital to Basl (?) spent the night there, next morning to the 5th Australian Divisional Base Depot at Etaples. So far had a good time at Etaples, went to Bull Ring on 31st July and August 1st."

McGhie re-joined the 31st Bn on 7th December, 1916. In the time following, he was on leave in England, returned to his Battalion, was appointed to 8th Training Battalion, and then the 14th Training Battalion. He again served in France with the 31 Bn and was promoted to L/Sgt on 1st August, 1918.

He was awarded the Military Medal for "conspicuous gallantry, skilful leadership and devotion to duty during the operations near Bellicourt between 29th September and 1st October, 1918".

"During the operations of 29th and 30th September and 1st October after his platoon commander had become a casualty, he assumed command, and displayed an initiative and conception of leadership of a very high standard. His bearing and utter disregard of danger during heavy artillery and machine gun fire formed an example to his men." He was promoted Sgt on 15th October, 1918, and returned to Australia on 8th April, 1919, where he was discharged at Brisbane on 19th July, 1919, three years after he was wounded in battle at the Battle of Fromelles.

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FOR OUR SOLDIERS' STORIES, WE ARE DOING GREAT!

We (as in our band of genealogists and researchers) have in recent months been working on compiling stories of our Fromelles soldiers and their families. Some have been identified, some have yet to be, and some may never be. But their stories will be recorded for posterity.

We are writing stories for every soldier we become aware of, who fought at Fromelles. While we expect that most will relate to the Australian 5th Division, we also hope to publish stories about both British and German soldiers.

Our upcoming website will have 2 parts, one of which will be dedicated to publicly accessible information about the Battle of Fromelles.

In relation to the 'boys' who fought at Fromelles, whether Australian, British, or German, we have taken a conscious decision to attempt to portray far more than a clinical, unemotional story, and to build a site that embodies what the real effects this

battle had on everyone, from soldiers to families, both then and now.

Additionally, we were worried that donations to Museums might never be placed on display, so by having a website we could ensure that we could both preserve and display.

Without the stories brought home by those that survived, we would never know how the Battle was really fought, so any stories from those folk will be extraordinarily powerful.

So far, our researchers and genealogists have "completed" the first batch of soldier stories that kind of selected themselves initially. About 50. Wow!

And we have more than that being compiled from information being passed on to us by families of the Fromelles soldiers.

While we have more than 50 stories well progressed, we still have some tweaks in progress for some of them and some others not quite finalised, from information passed down through the generations since, copies of newspaper clips, and even photographs which have not been posted on sites such as the Australian War Memorial previously.

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RE-OPENING OF THE MUSEE DE LA BATAILLE DE FROMELLES



In post Covid-19 update, our friends at the Musee de la Bataille de Fromelles, have posted to advise us that:-

The preparations for the reopening of the museum are over!

The plexiglass panes have been installed at the checkout, stickers showing the flow and health instructions are laid, the audioguides are disinfected and charged, everyone has their mask. In short, we are ready to welcome you tomorrow from 1.30pm. And let us tell you that we are looking forward to seeing you again!

The Museum reopened to the public Wednesday, 17 June.

To ensure the safety of all, a specific health

plan has been established and validated by the

Committee of Health, Safety and Working Conditions and the health authorities of the Métropole Européenne de Lille.

- ◆ ◎ New days and opening hours:
Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday from 1.30pm to 5.30 pm
- ◆ ◎ Wearing mask is obligatory from 6 years old.
- ◆ ◎ Before entering the building, hand washing is obligatory. Hand-sanitizer is available.
- ◆ ◎ Group reservation is highly recommended and limited to 10 people maximum.
contact@musee-bataille-fromelles.fr Tel: + 03 59 61 15 14
- ◆ ◎ Contactless payment is to be preferred. A tray is used to avoid exchange of money or ticket.

For those lost so far from home.

- ◆ ◎ Ground marks ensure respect of flow direction and safety distances.
Find all the information here:

<https://www.musee-bataille-fromelles.fr/.../practical-informa...>

[and yes, the link finishes just as it is shown]

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We may not be able to meet in large numbers yet.

We may have to defer our activities in some ways but we won't cease them.

We will continue researching genealogical lines so we can locate possible donor candidates for soldiers interred but unidentified in Pheasant Wood Cemetery, Fromelles. And we will be working on our website so we can upload all those fabulous stories of our soldiers lost in the Battle of Fromelles.

So until we can meet up again, stay well, stay safe, and get tested if you think you have symptoms of Covid-19, or for that matter, anything that needs attention.

Because we care.

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FROMELLES ASSOCIATION
OF AUSTRALIA

For those lost so far from home