

## YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 63 TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



*Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories. The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing will apply.*

### **National Memories of the Somme Beaumont Hamel, Delville Wood, Helen's Tower, Thiepval**

An earlier Virtual Visit (VV61) focussed on the Australian remembrance of the Somme battles of July – November 1916. Other countries within the British Empire suffered similar trauma as national casualties mounted. They too chose to commemorate their sacrifice through evocative national memorials on the Somme battlefield.

#### **Newfoundland Regiment - Beaumont Hamel**



During the First World War, Newfoundland was a largely rural Dominion of the British Empire with a population of 240,000 people, and not yet part of Canada. In August 1914, Newfoundland recruited a battalion for service with the British Army. In a situation reminiscent of the khaki shortage facing the first WA Contingent to the Boer War, recruits in the Regiment were nicknamed the "Blue Puttees" due to the unusual colour of the puttees, chosen to give the Newfoundland Regiment a unique look and due to the unavailability of woollen khakis on the island.

On 20 September 1915, the Regiment landed at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula. At that stage of the campaign, the Newfoundland Regiment faced snipers, artillery fire and severe cold, as well as the trench warfare hazards of cholera, dysentery, typhus, gangrene and trench foot. The Regiment formed part the rear guard, and finally withdrew from Gallipoli on 9 January 1916.

The Regiment was transferred to the Western Front in March 1916 in preparation for the Battle of the Somme. The Newfoundlanders went into the line in April 1916 at Beaumont-Hamel. near the northern end of the 45-kilometre Somme front about to be assaulted by the joint French and British force. In 30 minutes on the morning of 1 July 1916, of the 780 men who went forward, only 110 survived unscathed, of whom only 68 were available for roll call the following day. For all intents and purposes the Newfoundland Regiment had been wiped out; the unit as a whole having suffered a casualty rate of approximately 90 percent.

Purchased in 1921, a 74-acre site of preserved battlefield encompasses the grounds over which the Newfoundland Regiment made their attack on 1 July 1916. The Memorial site is the largest battalion memorial on the Western Front, and the largest area of the Somme battlefield that has been preserved. The Memorial is a bronze caribou, the emblem of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, standing atop a cairn of Newfoundland granite facing the former foe with head thrown high in defiance. The mound rises approximately 15 metres from ground level.

Opened by Field Marshal Earl Haig in 1925, the Memorial site and experience of the Newfoundland Regiment at Beaumont-Hamel has come to represent the Newfoundland World War One experience.

## **1st South African Brigade – Delville Wood**



The 1st South African Infantry Brigade was recruited at Potchefstroom in August and September 1915 for service overseas. It comprised four battalions of infantry. To keep the battalions as representative as possible just over a decade after the Treaty of Vereeniging and five years after the formation of the Dominion, the battalions were designated regionally: 1st South African Infantry Regiment (Cape of Good Hope Regiment); 2nd South African Infantry Regiment (Natal and Orange Free State Regiment); 3rd South African Infantry Regiment (Transvaal and Rhodesia Regiment) and 4th South African Regiment (South African Scottish Regiment).

The South African Brigade was committed to the capture of Delville Wood beginning on 15 July 1915. so that an attack could be launched on the German Switch Line. In the battle, both the wood and the South African battalions were almost completely destroyed. Enemy artillery fire reached 400 shells a minute and the landscape was transformed into a mess of broken, stumpy tree roots and massive shell holes. The South African Brigade had gone into battle on 15 July 1915 with 121 officers and 3,032 other ranks. At roll call on 21 July, they numbered only 29 officers and 751 other ranks.

There was very little left of Delville Wood after the War when South Africa purchased the site in 1920. Today it serves as a Memorial to South Africans who fell, not just here but elsewhere. The Memorial is located at the end of a central avenue leading into Delville Wood from the main entrance. The Avenue is flanked by a double row of oaks which sprouted from acorns gathered from a tree grown in South Africa from French acorns by Huguenot refugee, Jean Gardiol, in 1688. Over the years much of the Wood has been replanted conserving the battlefield contours.

The memorial was designed by Sir Herbert Baker, with sculpture by Alfred Turner. It consists of a flint and stone screen either side of an archway, with a shelter at each end of the screen. On top of the arch is Turner's bronze statue of two men symbolising Castor and Pollux and a war horse. Unlike the other national memorials to the missing raised to commemorate the part played by Dominion forces on the Western Front in World War I, this memorial has no names inscribed on it. Instead, the names of the missing dead of South Africa were inscribed on the battlefield memorials to the missing, along with those of the dead of the United Kingdom. Two replicas of the Memorial were made, both in South Africa. One in the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and the other is in Cape Town.

The inauguration of the Memorial brought together combatants from both sides of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Anglo Boer War, a conflict presented in the Pre 1914 Gallery at the Army Museum. Commencing with the centennial of the Battle of Delville Wood in 2016, the South African Military Veterans Association of Australasia (SAMVOA) has held an annual commemorative service at the Flame of Remembrance, Kings Park. This year (2021) the service will be on Saturday 17 July at 11h00.

## **36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division – The Ulster Tower / Helen's Tower**

The Ulster Tower, located in Thiepval, France, is Northern Ireland's National War Memorial. It was one of the first memorials to be erected on the Western Front and commemorates the men of the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division and all those from Ulster who served in World War One. The memorial was officially opened on 19 November 1921 and is a very close copy of Helen's Tower which stands in the grounds of the Clondeboye Estate, near Bangor, County Down, Northern Ireland. Many of the men of the Ulster Division trained in the estate before moving to England and then France early in 1916.

On 1 July 1916, the 36 (Ulster) Division attacked the Schwaben Redoubt, a triangle of trenches with a frontage of 300 yards, a fearsome strongpoint with commanding battlefield views. Crossing 400 yards of no man's land, the division entered the Schwaben Redoubt, and advanced on towards Stuff Redoubt. Similar gains of around a mile were made across the division's front, though not without losses. Although men of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division held out for the day, the Germans mounted counterattacks, and as their stocks of bombs and ammunition dwindled, the division fell back with small parties remaining in the German front lines. The casualties suffered by the 36<sup>th</sup> Division on 1 July totalled over 5,000.



The Memorial Tower was designed by the architects Albert Leigh Abbott and JA Bowden. At the entrance to the tower is a plaque commemorating the names of the nine men of the Division who won the Victoria Cross during the Somme battles. Recalling an Honour Board in the Army Museum Lecture Theatre (See Virtual Visit 62), there is also a memorial commemorating the part played by members of the Orange Order during the battle. The inscription on this memorial reads:

*"This Memorial is Dedicated to the Men and Women of the Orange Institution Worldwide, who at the call of King and country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of man by the path of duty and self sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in Freedom. Let those who come after see to it that their names be not forgotten."*

Visitors to the Commemoration area in the World War One Gallery at the Army Museum will note that this text is drawn from that of the scroll accompanying the Memorial Plaque (Dean Man's Penny).

## **The Missing of the Somme - Thiepval Memorial**

On 1 July 1916, supported by a French attack to the south, thirteen divisions of Commonwealth forces launched an offensive along the Somme River. Despite a preliminary bombardment lasting seven days, the German defences were barely touched and the attack met fierce resistance. Losses were catastrophic with only minimal advances on the southern flank. In the following weeks, huge resources of manpower and equipment were deployed in an attempt to exploit the modest successes of the first day. The German Army resisted tenaciously, and repeated attacks and counter attacks meant a major battle for every village, copse and farmhouse. At the end of September, Thiepval an original objective for 1 July was finally captured. Attacks north and east continued throughout October and into November in increasingly difficult weather conditions. The Battle of the Somme finally ended on 18 November with the onset of winter.

The Thiepval Memorial, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, bears the names of more than 72,000 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces who died in the Somme sector before 20 March 1918 and who have no known grave. Over 90% of those commemorated died between July and November 1916. The memorial also serves as an Anglo-French Battle Memorial in recognition of the joint nature of the 1916 offensive and a small cemetery containing equal numbers of Commonwealth and French graves lies at the foot of the memorial.

The memorial, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, was built between 1928 and 1932 and unveiled by the Prince of Wales, in the presence of the President of France, on 1 August 1932. The dead of other Commonwealth countries, who died on the Somme and have no known graves, are commemorated on national memorials elsewhere.



Over the years since the inauguration of the Thiepval Memorial, bodies have been regularly discovered on the former battlefield and are sometimes identified through various means. The decision was taken that to protect the integrity of the memorial as one solely for those who are missing or unidentified, that if a body were found and identified, the inscription of their name would be removed from the memorial by filling in the inscription. For those who are found and identified, they are given a funeral with full military honours at a cemetery close to the location at which they were discovered. This practice has resulted in numerous gaps in the lists of names on the Memorial.

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site  
<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

<https://www.ww1battlefields.co.uk/somme/newfoundland-memorial-park/>

<https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/after-the-war/remembrance/beauport-hamel-newfoundland-memorial/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaumont-Hamel\\_Newfoundland\\_Memorial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaumont-Hamel_Newfoundland_Memorial)

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/somme/memorial-delville-wood.htm>

<http://www.delvillewood.com/bienvenue2.htm>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/LIB41204>

<https://www.ww1battlefields.co.uk/somme/ulster-tower/>

<https://www.ww1cemeteries.com/fra-ulster-memorial-tower.html>

<http://www.sommeassociation.com/visit/ulster-memorial-tower>

<https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/80800/THIEPVAL%20MEMORIAL/>

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/somme/memorial-thiepval.htm>

<https://vwma.org.au/explore/memorials/5441>



Regulations permitted only 10 of entitled World War One Battle Honours to be inscribed on a Regimental Colour. Of the 29 World War One Battle Honours awarded, 11 Battalion AIF selected **Pozieres** and **Somme 1916, '18** among those to be inscribed. The Somme 1916, '18 Battle Honour acknowledged involvement in three operations: the British Somme Offensive from 1 July to 18 November 1916, the defensive operations against the German 'Spring Offensive' from 21 March to 5 April 1918 and British offensive operations conducted between 21 August and 3 September 1918.