



The Military, Media and Exploratory Dig



Official Photograph of La Section Photographique de l'Armée Française issued by Newspaper Illustrations Ltd., Strand, W. C., England, showing night workers on the Western Front.- [Groups such as these would gather on the battlefield at Verdun and on the Somme and elsewhere to dig and repair trenches under the cover of darkness]. *Postcard courtesy of Alan Bennett.*

“Established after the Armistice, VC Corner Cemetery Memorial records the names of 1,294 Australian First World War Diggers killed during the engagement at Fromelles and still listed as missing. It actually contains the graves of over 400 members of the AIF whose bodies were found on the battlefield and could not be identified, and other remains are located in other cemeteries nearby, which begs the question as to why the Commonwealth Government is not broadening its registration process and working toward identifying all the unknowns relating to this attack, whether interred at Pheasant Wood or the many official grave sites in the area.”

On 25 November 2008 the Australian Defence Force (ADF) convened a meeting of the Fromelles Project Group at Army Headquarters in Canberra to discuss the latest findings of Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD), which conducted the limited excavation into the mass grave at Pheasant Wood that confirmed the existence of human remains and led to the Australian Government reaching agreement to test DNA technology on a selection of the Great War soldiers that were found. Participation in the meeting appears to have been by invitation and proceeded with little or no fanfare in the mainstream media and, consequently, only

approved, officially-sanctioned bodies, departments and associations sympathetic to the approach of the current administration, were able to attend.

Fromelles Discussion Group, which has been the only body to uphold the rights of Australia's war dead in relation to the mass grave and to attempt to represent the mainstream community by lobbying for broader public consultation, was not invited. Nor presumably were other groups arbitrarily designated as unofficial by bureaucrats who work continuously to control the dissemination of information and what is reported in the news.

The meeting was attended by Emeritus Professor Peter Dennis, members of the AIF Project hosted by the Australian Defence Force Academy which operates as an adjunct to the University of New South Wales, Roger Lee who is Head of the Army History Unit, as well as other notable individuals including Lieutenant Colonel James Brownlie, Project Manager, and his offsider Ms Belinda Cole, Communications Manager which are both employed by the Department of Defence and involved in registering relatives of the missing that are likely to be buried at Pheasant Wood. Major General Paul Stevens (Rtd) and Kathy Upton Mitchell of the Office of Australian War Graves in the Department of Veterans' Affairs participated according to reports, as did a representative from the Australian War Memorial and no doubt various advisors to the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, as well as a number of private individuals like the Vice President of the FFFAIF and Lambis Englezos and Tim Whitford, both of whom are now being promoted as members of that group and associated with the Great War Forum and the Friends of the 15th Brigade, which is based in Melbourne, Victoria. Professor Bruce Scates, Director of the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University attended and so did a number of other persons connected with the Fromelles Descendants Database - an appendage of the Great War Forum.

Since hard copies of the completed GUARD report are not readily available and circulation appears to have been limited to the sectional interests mentioned, Fromelles Discussion Group is posting an internet link to the Department of Defence website hosting the material compiled by Tony Pollard, Olivia Lelong, Gaille MacKinnon, Iain Banks, Peter Barton and other contributors on behalf of the Australian Army. Having already criticized the Rudd Labor Government for spin-doctoring and trying to stage-manage the investigation into the burial pits at Pheasant Wood, Fromelles Discussion Group can not guarantee the authorities will allow us to maintain the link, even though the Office of The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, has recommended copies of the report can be downloaded by this means.

Electronic requests for hard copies of the material were transmitted to the Department of Defence and the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel when members learned the assessment was being released. Though these requests for printed copies of the GUARD report were unsuccessful, Fromelles Discussion Group is pleased to advise that Warren Snowdon has made one or two concessions in relation to the activities of Pollard and his team.

Note the Email to Nick Warner, Secretary of Defence, Office of the Secretary, Department of Defence and the Email to The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP, Minister for

Defence Science and Personnel, posted under "Other Resources", in the Quick Guide of our Home Page. These concessions are appreciated by the affiliates, supporters and friends of Fromelles Discussion Group. However that said, the group would still like to take this opportunity to remind the authorities to also account for other unidentified bodies from this attack.

Click this link to access the Pheasant Wood—Data Structure Report directly in pdf format: <http://www.defence.gov.au/fromelles/files/fromellesreport.pdf>

The report is accompanied by photographs, map extracts, diagrams showing pit locations and cross-sections, depictions of artefacts and data tables, notes on methodology and an historical and archaeological background.

Click this link to access the initial non-invasive or geophysical report produced by GUARD: <http://www.defence.gov.au/fromelles/summary.htm>

When the initial scientific survey is uploaded, the document will appear in the right hand column of the schedule titled "Official Research and Investigation" on the Defence website as has happened with the report from the limited excavation referred to above. [Contrary to advice contained in that schedule though, no list of Australians believed to have been buried in the mass grave at Fromelles has yet been uploaded].

Click this link to access the GUARD's contract details for the trial dig held between May/June 2008:

<https://www.tenders.gov.au/?event=public.cn.view&CNUUID=E220D6D3-AF87-36E7-1FAA889297336DFA>

Electronic path recommended by Warren Snowdon's Chief of Staff for the purposes of accessing the Australian Government tender notice in relation to the site excavation at Fromelles.

The Pheasant Wood Fromelles - Data Structure Report is significant because it refers to the fieldwork undertaken during the limited excavation, describes the condition of the remains, the potential for DNA preservation and in keeping with views espoused by Fromelles Discussion Group since the beginning of 2008, amends the number of missing likely to be found in the burial pits upwards. According to the final report, Pollard and his team found undisturbed remains in five of the eight pits, retrieved distinctive artefacts, provides insights into the scientific basis of the project, documents the historical and archaeological background of the dig and evaluates the actual site being analyzed.

Having confirmed the presence of remains GUARD now estimates 178 Australian soldiers are buried at Pheasant Wood, a number which, of course, shows the inaccuracy of previous calculations. Indeed, Patrick Lindsay in his book on Fromelles, promulgates the figure of 1,131 unidentified bodies being buried in other cemeteries in the region. Referring to the Office of War Graves which presumably did the maths, there are supposed to be **410** at VC Corner Cemetery, **266** at Rue David Military Cemetery, **142** Ration Farm Military Cemetery, **120** Auber's Ridge British Cemetery, **72** "Y" Farm Military Cemetery, **52** Le Trou Aid Post Cemetery, **27** Rue du Bois Military Cemetery, **22** Rue-Petillon Military Cemetery, **10** Anzac Cemetery at Sailly-sur-la-Lys and **10** Sailly-sur-la-Lys Canadian Cemetery. Prior to the trial dig this was thought to constitute 163 missing soldiers; although as we have seen, this figure has

been amended by GUARD during its preliminary excavations at the heritage site in northern France.

Historically the collection, transportation and laying to rest of these unidentified members of the 5th Division AIF was a major feat and a tribute to the work of the grave registration units and the newly-incorporated Imperial War Graves Commission at the end of WWI and it is a testimony to their dedication and efficiency to now realize the unknowns in these cemeteries like those at Pheasant Wood are congregated awaiting recovery, identification and individual memorialization.

Surely at the beginning of the 21st-Century, with the development of more enlightened customs, morés and conventions, the Federal Government will accept the need to identify all Australia's war dead from this skirmish, particularly when the scientific and forensic apparatus for their exhumation and identification, will already be established when the full excavation of Pheasant Wood gets under way in May by Oxford Archaeology, which is described on its own website as being a leading service-provider in the field specializing in outreach, community archaeology and commercial work. In trying to narrow the field of candidates likely to be found in the burial pits at Fromelles over recent months though, the Department of Defence appears to have piteously and lamentably forgotten the whereabouts of many of the patriotic Australian soldiers who fell on 19-20 July 1916 during the Battle of Fromelles and that were subsequently listed as missing.

This was something all participants at the 2008 Chief of Army's Military History Conference on 'The Military, the Media and Information Warfare' held on Thursday 9 and Friday 10 October 2008, and subsequently the Fromelles Project Group, should have considered and discussed at length. It should be the prime concern of the new Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, ^{AO, DSC, CSM} and the Army History Unit and the Office of Australian War Graves and the Department of Veteran Affairs, as well as all our elected parliamentary representatives, party officials, service and community organizations and veteran support groups.