



## Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Group

### DEDICATION OF NEW FROMELLES MILITARY CEMETERY



Though a former Chief Minister of the Northern Territory and federal president of the Liberal Party, Shane Stone, suggested the dedication of the new Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery and Reinterment Service on 19 July 2010 were overshadowed by domestic politics, the event was nonetheless an occasion for deep reflection. It gave families of identified soldiers a chance to honour the sacrifice of fallen Australian and British servicemen lost during the Battle of Fleurbaix and an opportunity for relatives to pay their respects. Highlights of the opening included attendance by HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, as well as her Excellency, the Governor-General of Australia, Ms Quentin Bryce AC. Other dignitaries included the Mayor of Fromelles, M Hubert Huchette who was invested with an honorary AM. There was also a Eurostar train named *'Remembering Fromelles'* by HRH Duke of Kent.

No mention of aggregation was made during the remembrance ceremony but that was only to be expected due to the absence of the incumbent Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, both of whom were launching campaigns for the federal election scheduled to be held on August 21. The service was attended by Chief of Army, Lieutenant-General Ken Gillespie AO and his presence was appreciated by all involved. Grieving kinsfolk were also reassured by

the federal Minister of Veterans Affairs and Defence Personnel, Mr Alan Griffen MP who acted in an official capacity to represent the Australian Government.

Proceedings at the official opening of the newly constructed cemetery appear to have gone without a hitch. Hosted by the CWGC, the Re-interment Service was however received with mixed emotions by some relatives. Generally descendants felt the dedication service was fairly swish and they were impressed with the pomp, ceremony and pageantry. But there were also a few outspoken individuals who would have liked to see relatives more directly involved in the ceremony.

Reference was made to the splendid effort of Quentin Bryce and it was felt by most that the Governor-General should be heartily congratulated on her poise, grace and humility. Ms Bryce was applauded for the way she mixed with the bereaved as well as the manner in which she paid tribute to Lambis Englezos, whose research and dedication underscored the excavation of the mass grave containing so many remains of First World War diggers and the whole Fromelles project.

**Fromelles Discussion Group is indebted to Pierre Vandervelden, WebMaster, of [INMEMORY](#) for giving permission to use the headstone photographs which append this portal.**

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DNA technology has positively identified many of the Great War Diggers exhumed from the mass grave at Pheasant Wood and all disinterred soldiers have now been reburied in the new Fromelles Military Cemetery. 94 years after the soldiers were killed in the Battle of Fromelles, thousands of Australians travelled to France to participate in the dedication ceremony and to pay homage to those recovered. Inscribed headstones were unveiled and the ceremonial procession comprising the British Army Horse Guard which delivered the last soldier to the cemetery, Governor-General Quentin Bryce and Prince Charles, was followed by the official service and wreath laying.

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As the last Australian serviceman was laid to rest at Fromelles there would have been many descendants thinking of the sacrifice of loved ones like 247 Private Arthur Donald Leigh who is still recorded as missing. Leigh was one of the outstandingly brave men involved in the action and though his name is etched on VC Cemetery Memorial, his remains may well lie in one of the neighbouring cemeteries in the region, which still contain many of the unidentified bodies from the assault.



**CONTRIBUTED BY HELEN AND WARREN THOMAS, THIS PHOTOGRAPH DEPICTS HELEN'S UNCLE, 247 PRIVATE ARTHUR DONALD LEIGH, 31ST BATTALION AIF, WHOSE NAME IS ETCHED ON VC CORNER MEMORIAL. Excited by the prospect of attending the dedication of the new Fromelles Military Cemetery, Helen communicated after the event to say the remembrance ceremony was very moving. [In addition to suggesting the organization of the occasion was flawless, Helen also referred to the address given by the Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce, saying that when the Governor-General paid tribute to Lambis Englezos, every Australian present burst into spontaneous applause and afterwards, Her Majesty's representative made a point of meeting and speaking to Australian visitors. The Thomas' also congratulated Fromelles Discussion Group for its advocacy on behalf of the missing which they described as a tremendous effort].**

The search is still on for the families of British and Australian soldiers believed to have been killed on 19-20 July 1916 so it is crucial the public continues to support the work of the Joint Identification Board and the CWGC until the conclusion of the project in 2014. By then hopefully our national leadership will come to understand what community-building means and actually listen to the summoning voice of all the dead from this attack, whether re-interred at Fromelles or not.



*PICTURE: COURTESY OF HELEN AND WARREN THOMAS.*

## FROMELLES UPDATE

Warren and Helen Thomas have been back to Fromelles twice since the original ceremony and on one of those occasions were accompanied by family. Arthur's sacrifice, and that of those who remain missing are remembered.

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Committed to honouring all war dead in Commonwealth Graves, Communal Cemeteries and Churchyards in France and Belgium, Pierre Vandervelden has kindly made the following memorial photographs available to families and relatives: <http://www.fromellesdiscussiongroup.com/FromellesHeadstones.php>

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