

**THIS EMAIL TRANSMISSION WAS FORWARDED TO THE INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAM, DATELINE, SBS TELEVISION ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2009, AS A RESPONSE TO AN ENQUIRY FROM THAT ORGANIZATION ABOUT THE CONTENTION THAT SURROUNDED THE FROMELLES DIG. DATELINE EXPLAINED THE PROGRAM WAS PLANNING TO FILM A STORY ON THE MISSING SOLDIERS AND SOUGHT HELP TO BACKGROUND THE EXCAVATION.**

**VICTORIA STROBL, DATELINE, SBS TELEVISION, SYDNEY:**  
Dear Victoria,

### **Background on Fromelles DIG**

**Thank you for contacting Fromelles Discussion Group through its Email functions last week. As you would already know, this group has been operating on the internet since February 2008 in order to encourage the Commonwealth Government to identify, rebury and individually memorialize the missing Australian Great War soldiers discovered at Pheasant Wood. Lately we have extended that campaign to seek the aggregation of the remains of all missing and unidentified First AIF personnel from the attack which took place on 19 / 20 July 1916. The purpose being to have them all included in the recovery project while the infrastructure was in place to facilitate their recovery, identification and individual commemoration.**

No doubt **Dateline—SBS Television** is aware that on 2 April 2009, former Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the Hon. Warren Snowdon MP, released a document titled *'Fromelles: Who is buried at Pheasant Wood?'* This list comprised the names of 191 World War One Diggers the Federal Government believed was buried in the mass grave outside the village. But what is not commonly known is that there are meant to be 1,131 unidentified bodies from this battle currently interred in other cemeteries in the surrounding area, and consequently this group would appreciate **Dateline—SBS Television** picking up on this particular aspect, as it is crucial to understanding the establishment of Fromelles Discussion Group as an independent community-based forum and the background to the dig.

There are said 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.

This is the reason Fromelles Discussion Group called on the Rudd Labor Government to establish a permanent US-style JPAC command as part of Australia's defence administration to assist with the ongoing process of recovering this country's war dead from major catastrophic conflicts like WWI and WWII—something which is particularly important now the International Red Cross in Geneva has declared that it is preparing to digitize its 1st World War records.

In this context **Dateline—SBS Television** might like to enquire into when the archaeology report relating to the excavation will be released by the authorities and discuss other paramount issues such as the reluctance of the Federal Government to consider aggregation as well as the value of establishing a formal, dedicated domestic recovery jurisdiction to assist with future investigations. Other aspects that could be reported upon by SBS now that the dig at Fromelles has ended and Greg Combet has suggested most of the 250 sets of remains that have been found are believed to be Australian, is whether the United Kingdom and Commonwealth governments will re-introduce funding to enable the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to reinvigorate the process of searching for missing soldiery on the Western Front.

Victoria, besides this aspect there is the question of the levels of funding being committed to the new Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery. Once constructed by the CWGC, the new cemetery will need additional funding. Financial outlays will be required for general upkeep, administration and the maintenance of headstones, gardens and grounds. There is a need to report on the archaeological and forensic techniques employed during the dig, the possibility of creating a DNA sample bank from relatives and descendants of Great War soldiers to assist with the identification of new finds in the future and international co-operation with respect to the Red Cross digitization project that has been proposed by the Red Cross Museum. In so far as the Fromelles project is concerned, one might ask whether DNA results from the remains found in the dig will be kept for relative matching beyond the period being officially allowed for the completion of the current venture.

Information relating to the Red Cross digitization project can be found on FromellesDiscussionGroup.com or by means of contacting Roger Mayou, the Director of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum, @ [http://www.micr.ch/index\\_e.html](http://www.micr.ch/index_e.html) . Perhaps SBS might also look at the piecemeal approach adopted by the Australian Government with respect to actually recovering the remains at Fromelles. Namely its lack of openness during the early stages of the investigation, failure to properly detail the techniques being employed during the investigations and determination not to broadly consult the Australian community about what should happen with the remains once excavated.

Working to keep alive the memory of all the missing from this particular assault, Fromelles Discussion Group has tried to fulfill an educational and advocacy role and it is upon this basis that aggregation was first proposed. Regretfully though to date the United Kingdom and Australian governments have ignored this plea and hurried the construction of the Fromelles cemetery to ensure relatives and descendants do not have the opportunity to ask for repatriation.

Nowadays the archaeological and forensic excavation at Pheasant Wood has moved beyond issues to do with the preparatory work undertaken by Oxford Archaeology. Instead organizations like SBS Television should be enquiring into other matters like the country of origin of the thousand or more Australian soldiers who went missing during the Battle of Fromelles and ask why the 1,131 unknowns previously mentioned, should be lost to history when the science behind DNA testing has advanced to the degree that it has and its use has become so prevalent. Hardly a week goes by without one of the television networks screening a programme about

battlefield archaeology on the Western Front, however the best the Commonwealth Government can do is offer the public rhetoric and mythologize our past.

SBS Television might like to look at the missing listed at VC Corner Cemetery Memorial in greater detail than has been done up to the present. Service records held by the National Archives of Australia, for example, show that although these individuals enlisted in the First AIF and were mostly born in Australia, some derived from other countries like New Zealand, England, Sweden, Wales, Holland, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, Belgium, Denmark, Canada, and places like India.

There is little more that can be added for the moment. Excepting to suggest that **Dateline—SBS Television** enquire into the tendering process that led Oxford Archaeology to be hired for the purpose of conducting the disinterment of the fallen, the nature of the contracts granted to Oxford Archaeology and LGC Forensics, and the adequacy of the programme of DNA testing and comparison described recently by the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiél and Science. By this I mean, providing an explanation of the actual anthropological, archaeological, historical and scientific techniques that are being employed to identify the long neglected servicemen of the 5th Division AIF.

In addition we invite you to examine the material that has been uploaded to FromellesDiscussionGroup.com to ascertain the full range of issues we have been canvassing. Though not in a position to comment on the controversy mentioned in your Email, the group has posted a **BATTLE OF FROMELLES ROLL OF MISSING** which lists 1,294 names found on VC Corner Cemetery Memorial, and offers assistance to relatives wanting to research family members. Our website contains a Reading List, a LINK to the Data Structure Report produced as a result of the trial dig in 2008 and a scan of the CWGC Charter, with the latest Discussion Paper being titled *'Keeping Alive The Memory Of The Fromelles Fallen'*.

Understandably this group has been critical of the short-sightedness of the Rudd Labor Government with respect to the dig. It was presented with an opportunity to undertake a project of truly historic proportions but failed to do so, preferring instead to limit the cost of the operation at Pheasant Wood and also the application of DNA technology.

**Should you require more specific information please feel free to forward your questions. These will be transmitted to affiliates for comment and consideration.**

**Kindest regards,**

**Grant Triffett, Convenor/Administrator, Fromelles Discussion Group**

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