



## Missing Soldiers of Fromelles Discussion Group

Questions addressed to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and the Australian Government in relation to the burial pits at Fromelles

### BACKGROUND

**The Fromelles Discussion Group is concerned about government inaction over the recovery and identification of the remains of missing Australian and British soldiers who might be buried at Pheasant Wood and seeks to encourage the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to fulfil its statutory obligations with respect to the exhumation, transportation and reburial of those men left forgotten on the battlefield at the end of WWI. Since private exhumation and repatriation is not permitted because the CWGC is the only agency authorized to carry out these operations, the Discussion Group requests the organization intercede on behalf of the families and descendants of the fallen to ensure their is not further delay.**

**In fact the Director-General and Secretary of the body—Mr Richard Kellaway CBE, Commissioners and Senior staff need to make every effort to expedite this matter and to make all arrangements necessary to complete the dig of this significant military site during 2008, and this in such a way as to protect the heritage value of the burial pits and to maximize the potential forensic and archaeological evidence which might be acquired.**

**This should not be too onerous a responsibility considering the charter of incorporation which underpins the organization and the proficiency displayed in relation to other cases recently. In September 2006 the remains of 5 Australian soldiers who had fought in the Battle of Polygon Wood, Belgium were discovered and re-interred without fuss and prior to this in June 2001, twenty 1st World War soldiers were found in a shallow common grave in northern France after being placed *in situ* by comrades on Easter Monday, the 9th of April 1917 during the battle of Arras. These poor souls were exhumed and identified in a matter of months.**

**Lambis Englezos' inquiries into the missing soldiers of Fromelles were begun around May 2002 and he went before a panel which included Roger Lee, Head of the Australian Army History Unit to have his claims investigated, about the middle of 2005. Nearly three years later the best the Australian, British, French and Belgium governments can do is conduct what has been described as a trial investigative dig and this, only after public disquiet about bureaucratic delay and red tape and an apparent lack of transparency.**

Sydney lawyer Chris Bryett, the president of the group known as Recovering Overseas Australia's Missing (ROAM), was disappointed the Australian Army was re-engaging British archaeologist Tony Pollard of the Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD), to head a proposed partial dig at Pheasant Wood. In

February 2008 an article by Leigh Dayton, Science writer with The Australian, carried news that battlefield archaeologist Tony Pollard was being rehired despite criticism of his earlier report on the geo-physical exploration of the site.



## **INTRODUCTION**

CONSEQUENTLY THE FROMELLES DISCUSSION GROUP WOULD LIKE TO ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS OF THE HON. KEVIN RUDD MP PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA, THE HON. JOEL FITZGIBBON MP, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, THE HON. WARREN SNOWDON MP, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE SCIENCE AND PERSONNEL, MR ROGER LEE, HEAD OF THE ARMY HISTORY UNIT AND THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND COMMISSIONERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION.

### **REHIRING OF DOCTOR POLLARD (GUARD)**

1... Why is the newly-appointed Federal Labor Government in Australia proposing to spend in excess of \$150,000 to rehire Doctor Tony Pollard and the Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD) when a team of internationally respected experts organized by Sydney lawyer Chris Bryett, were prepared to undertake the initial work at no cost to the taxpayer and would probably oversee the partial dig with a little coaxing from the authorities involved. Government officials may remember that Vietnam veteran and mining magnate George Jones offered to fund a respected team of forensic archaeologists including Emeritus Professor Richard Wright, Sydney University forensic dentist Chris Griffiths, and forensic archaeologist Jon Sterenberg?

### **CRITICISM OF INITIAL NON-INVASIVE SURVEY**

2... Since the initial non-invasive survey report of the suspected war graves at Fromelles was criticized as being seriously flawed by eminent forensic archaeologists at Bournemouth University, will the Australian Government release the copyrighted document Pollard produced during the preliminary investigations of the burial pits in May 2007?

3... In addition, will the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which is now touted as being involved in planning and supervising the partial dig being scheduled for April 2008, support the GUARD team proceeding to a full recovery operation should the presence of any remains be confirmed? Remembering that only a detailed analysis of evidence will allow accurate interpretation insofar as the remains are concerned.

#### COMPOSITION OF GUARD

4... Will the Commonwealth War Graves Commission inform the public as to the composition of the GUARD team being proposed by Tony Pollard to participate in the forthcoming excavation of the suspected mass graves of diggers killed at the 1916 Battle of Fromelles?

5... Precisely who is being included in the GUARD team when Doctor Pollard undertakes the trial dig at Pheasant Wood and what qualifications, experience and multidisciplinary skills do his team bring to the project, and similarly any other official who might be present, whether associated with the Army History Unit or its equivalent counterparts from Britain, France and Belgium?

#### SITE SECURITY

6... The Fromelles Discussion Group would like to know what security measures, if any, have been taken by the CWGC, the British and Australian authorities or French civil, military and law enforcement officials, to protect and preserve this heritage battlefield site by deterring souvenir-hunters and vandals?

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL BENCHMARKS

7... Knowing that Professor Wright headed groups that located and excavated mass graves in what was formerly Yugoslavia, that Chris Griffiths was commander of the Australian Defence Force Recovery Team and assistant surgeon-general RAAF and that Jon Sterenberg was until recently head of the Excavation and Examination Division of the International Commission on Missing Persons in Sarajevo, the Fromelles Discussion Group would like to enquire into the forensic and archaeological benchmarks or standards the GUARD team is applying to Pheasant Wood.

8... Tony Pollard's team aside, the Fromelles Discussion Group would also like the public to be told what other governmental, political and civil officials from Australia, Britain and France will be in attendance at the excavation or be involved servicing the project?

#### TENDERING PROCESS

9... When will the CWGC and the Australian Government release details of the tendering process associated with the latest appointment of the GUARD team and will it make all tender documents relating to previous non-invasive survey available to the public? Were there any other companies approached to tender for the proposed trial dig and which authority or body will make the decision to proceed to full recovery if the quality of evidence necessitates this?

## PROPOSED TRIAL DIG

10... What scientific basis is there to partially uncovering and then recovering remains that might be found and equally importantly, will the methodology that is being proposed during the trial dig lead to unnecessary exposure and therefore loss of archaeological integrity within the burial pits, or cause damage that could be avoided by proceeding to full recovery without further unnecessary delay and with the approval of the CWGC and all agencies of the affiliate nations involved?

11... Media pronouncements about the trial dig lately suggest the forthcoming excavation of the heritage site at Fromelles will be merely exploratory. If this is not the case then the Fromelles Discussion Group requests further information on the intentions of the CWGC and the Australian Government with respect to time frame and the scientific examination of these suspected mass graves in northern France, particularly since the British Archaeological Jobs Resource: Battlefield Archaeology—A Guide prepared by Tim Sutherland of the Department of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford suggests there are probably other as yet undiscovered mass graves from this era on the Western Front?

12... In the context of asking what standards and procedures will be applied to the excavation, recording, lifting and sampling of remains the Fromelles Discussion Group would like to ask what the evaluation, assessment and reporting requirements are being placed on GUARD?

13... Considering best practice in forensic archaeology is of paramount importance at Pheasant Wood during the trial dig, will the site be properly surveyed to facilitate 3-D modelling and will this process be supplemented or enhanced through the use of regular metal detector scans and radiography? Radiography being crucial to allow the analysis of ferrous material which might be found in association with skeletal remains. Of course, this then begs the question as to whether Doctor Pollard will lift and bag any bone elements which might be found during the limited excavation?

## FULL RECOVERY

14... Should the British and French authorities accede to the appeal by the Fromelles Discussion Group for GUARD to expedite a fully recovery operation during 2008 (assuming the team currently proposed is not replaced, supplemented or added to), could the CWGC and the Federal Government let the public know as to what this might cost and what other scientific or forensic services might be needed to bolster the project to this extent. Given the burial site at Pheasant Wood is reportedly the largest discovered mass grave found on the Western Front to date, recovery would require the full array of archaeological and artefactual methods and techniques outlined by Tim Sutherland, and this would obviously include the use of trained osteologists and of course DNA matching.

## PROVISION OF ADEQUATE RESOURCES

15... Since at one point the Office of Australian War Graves denied there were any World War One soldiers buried at Fromelles as show in a press release titled 'Time To Find Our Missing Men' which appeared in the Canberra Times on March 13, 2005 will the Rudd Labor Government give the public an assurance that adequate

resources will be allocated eventually to support a full archaeological dig at Pheasant Wood.

#### ESTIMATE OF COSTS

16... Officially what steps have been taken to locate the relatives of the deceased soldiers who are presumed to lie just outside of Fromelles and in the eventuality that full recovery and identification can take place, what provision has been made for those relatives to participate in any subsequent re-interment ceremony that might be held in the future? For example, what cost does the Australian Government envisage for transporting and accommodating the relatives who might choose to attend, or for the commemoration of the fallen once their remains have been reburied?

17... Has the Australian Government prepared an estimate of the costs which would be associated with a full recovery operation, including the exhumation, transportation, examination, identification, and re-interment of remains, together with other expenses which might be incurred like the use of techniques necessary for carrying out a multidisciplinary archaeological survey and analyzing and documenting any evidence that might be found?



**Battlefield archaeology requires a multidisciplinary approach and an array of modern techniques and consequently, the Fromelles Discussion Group advocates the Australian, British and French authorities utilize the most up to date practices to gain the greatest amount of information from the burial pits, even if this means using other international experts who are not adverse to volunteering their services to conduct the dig.**

**Like the Conflict Archaeology International Research Network (CAIRN) founded by Tim Sutherland, Fromelles Discussion Group believes it is important to promote a greater understanding of battlefield archaeology by disseminating information within the general community to make sure the public is fully informed of decisions being made on their behalf by our elected officials.**

