

THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF  
AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR  
OF 1914-1918

VOLUME III  
THE A.I.F. IN FRANCE:  
1916

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THE  
AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE  
IN FRANCE

1916

BY  
C. E. W. BEAN

*With 475 illustrations and maps*

TWELFTH EDITION

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## PREFACE

COLONIAL historians have been taxed with a tendency to garnish their works with more detail than writers in older countries. If that observation is true—and probably it is—of this volume and its predecessors, the reasons are definite and easily furnished.

First, the limited nature of the field—enabling these books to be written mainly by eyewitnesses of the events and within the lifetimes and recent memories of most of the actors—has made it possible to reconstruct the fighting from the point of view of the front line, and to record with more than usual certainty the play of strains and stresses at the actual point where battles are won or lost. The chief value of national war histories such as these is to show how a people responds to the heaviest of all tests: what strain it will resist; when it will bend or break; how it compares in these respects with others; and what are the elements and signs of its strength and weakness. It also seems desirable to provide the evidence which may perhaps some day help other students to probe for the causes. In war men will exhibit in the sight of all, often a dozen times in a day, feelings and tendencies which might not be visible to their fellows once in an ordinary lifetime. Their allies beside them, and the enemy whom they face, are subjected to similar stress, and from the millions of resulting incidents there may be gleaned data for a comparative test of extraordinary interest and value. The sources from which war histories have sometimes been written—despatches of generals (which often afford only second-hand, or even third-hand, evidence of what actually happened to their troops), second-hand reports composed long after the events, and stories already half-crystallised as legend—may indicate what the leaders thought and intended, but have little authority for the occurrences on the actual battle-front. For the present history the essential data were obtained from those actually engaged, and within a few weeks of most of the events. Thus authentic materials for detailed reconstruction of the actual fighting do in a large measure exist. In the present volume the writer has endeavoured truthfully to

exhibit the Australian character as evinced under a strain which, at first gentle, suddenly increased at Pozières to terrible intensity, then eased, and in the early winter again suddenly racked the men almost to breaking point. So cruel, indeed, was the test that the human material was suspected by those who best knew it—though not by other onlookers—of having suffered permanent damage. When the volume ends, the stress shows signs of abating; and—though the fears of breakdown are not yet wholly dispelled—there are tokens that nerves and spirits may regain all their former resiliency.

Second, a comparison of the higher reports and despatches on the one hand with the mass of first-hand data concerning the front on the other confirms what the writer's personal observation had already suggested—that despatches written after a fight are rarely accurate in detail; that movements which a leader believes—and states—to have been the result of his orders have very often been made before those orders arrived, their true cause having been accident, the pressure of the enemy, the initiative of some junior officer, or even the tactical sense of the troops themselves. Probably the colonial writer regards more sceptically than those of older countries the despatches both of statesmen and of generals. He is also, perhaps, less likely to be influenced by the assumption—necessary in military operations, but in no degree binding on their historian—that for a commander's decisions the commander alone is responsible. The colonial historian, convinced that the true credit for famous achievements in war, as in politics, lies often with unknown subordinates, endeavours to sift the details until he can lay a just share of praise at the feet of those to whom it is due. In the compilation of the present volume this purpose has been deliberately kept in view. Only by this method have there, for example, been brought to light the desperate fighting on the beleaguered right flank of Fromelles and the critical situation (solved by the boldness of one young leader) in the final attack on Pozières Ridge—events about which the official operation reports were silent, simply because the higher leaders had never heard of them. No blame whatever is to be imputed for this omission; the higher authorities had duties far more

pressing than that of delving into history. But a history of those battles based merely—or mainly—on the official reports would have been a travesty of the truth.

To this twofold desire—to give a true picture of the test of battle, and to distribute the credit as widely as possible among those who deserve it—the particularity of these narratives has been due. The author has, however, endeavoured to prevent mere multiplicity of detail from obscuring its own bearing either on the development of the A.I.F. or on the course of the greater struggle. If the achievement of this aim has been possible, it has only been so because the field was comparatively small. If the writer had had to deal with fifty divisions instead of five, a different method must have been adopted. Indeed, in the next volume of this series—describing the retreat of the enemy to the Hindenburg Line, and the Battles of Bullecourt, Messines, and Ypres (1917)—the method of the present one will be impossible. The story of each of these events, if written on the same scale as that of Pozières, would itself fill more than half the book. The narrative must therefore necessarily be much more general, and a vast amount of incident exhibiting the reaction of Australians to those famous tests must go unrecorded—at least in these pages.

The author's gratitude for constant assistance is especially due to the Director, Acting-Directors, and staff of the Australian War Memorial; to Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds and the staff of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence in London; and to Mr. T. H. E. Heyes, who, as the representative of the Australian War Memorial for three years, carried out his researches among the British war records. Suggestions made by Sir James Edmonds have in many places added much to the value of the text. The writer is also deeply indebted to the officials of the Historical Section, French Ministry of War, and to Mr. C. H. Voss, the Australian Trade Representative in Paris, as well as to the Director of the Imperial German Archives at Potsdam, to Captain J. J. W. Herbertson, and to Herr A. Stenger for their unfailing courtesy and constant personal effort towards furnishing material for the French and German sides of the narrative; to the High Commissioner

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In addition to books and other publications mentioned in foot-notes, the following works have been consulted:

*Military Operations, France and Belgium*, by Sir J. E. Edmonds; *The World Crisis, 1916-1918*, by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill; *The Empire at War, 1914-1918*, by Sir Charles Lucas; *A History of the Great War*, by John Buchan; *Life of Lord Kitchener*, by Sir George Arthur; *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries*, by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell; *From Private to Field-Marshal and Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914-1918*, by Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson; *Out of My Life*, by Marshal von Hindenburg; *My War Memories and The General Staff and its Problems*, by General Ludendorff; *French Head-Quarters, 1915-1918*, by Jean de Pierrefeu; *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, by Captain A. D. Ellis; *The New Zealand Division, 1916-19*, by Colonel H. Stewart; *The Eighth Division in War, 1914-1918*, by Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Boraston and Captain C. E. O. Bax; *The History of the Twentieth (Light) Division*, by Captain V. E. Inglefield; *The Story of the 20th Division*, by Captain Stair Gillon; *The History of the 35th Division in the Great War*, by Lieutenant-Colonel H. M. Davson; *The Royal Naval Division*, by Douglas Jerrold; *Histories of 251 Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War (1914-1918)*; *Forward with the Fifth*, by A. W. Keown; *History of the 10th Battalion, A.I.F.*; *The Story of the Twelfth*, by L. M. Newton; *The Fighting Thirteenth*, by T. A. White; *With the Twenty-Second*, by Captain E. Gorman; *The Red and White Diamond*, by Sergeant W. J. Harvey; *The Blue and Brown Diamond*, by Lieutenant-Colonel W. Dollman and Sergeant H. M. Skinner; *The Fortieth*, by F. C. Green; *The Story of a Battalion*, by W. Devine; *The 8th Australian Field Ambulance on Active Service*, by L. W. Colley-Priest; *The Army Quarterly; Chronology of the War*, issued under the auspices of the Ministry of Information.

The author also acknowledges his debt to a great number of eyewitnesses of the events recorded, and to those others who have made available, either directly or through the Australian War Memorial, letters and diaries containing many frank and invaluable narratives.

C. E. W. B.

SYDNEY,

8th August, 1928.

## CONTENTS

I. PREPARATIONS IN EGYPT—THE DESERT LINE . . . . .	1
II. THE DOUBLING OF THE A.I.F. . . . .	32
III. THE ARRIVAL IN FRANCE . . . . .	69
IV. THE MOVE TO THE FRONT . . . . .	92
V. TRENCH-WARFARE AT ARMENTIÈRES . . . . .	117
VI. THE NEW BASE . . . . .	145
VII. THE FIRST FIGHTING IN FRANCE . . . . .	188
VIII. THE PLANNING OF THE SOMME OFFENSIVE . . . . .	219
IX. THE RAIDS AT ARMENTIÈRES . . . . .	243
X. THE ARRIVAL OF II ANZAC . . . . .	288
XI. OPENING OF THE OFFENSIVE AND THE MOVE TO MESSINES	307
XII. THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES . . . . .	328
XIII. THE BATTLE OF FROMELLES ( <i>continued</i> ) . . . . .	391
XIV. OPERATIONS AT POZIÈRES—JULY 14TH TO 22ND . . . . .	448
XV. THE TAKING OF POZIÈRES . . . . .	494
XVI. THE TAKING OF POZIÈRES (II)—GERMAN BOMBARDMENT BEGINS . . . . .	532
XVII. THE TAKING OF POZIÈRES (III)—JULY 25TH AND 26TH	558
XVIII. FIRST GENERAL ASSAULT UPON POZIÈRES HEIGHTS . . . . .	600
XIX. THE TAKING AND HOLDING OF THE POZIÈRES HEIGHTS . . . . .	647
XX. THE LAST COUNTER-ATTACK ON POZIÈRES HEIGHTS . . . . .	699
XXI. THE ADVANCE TO MOUQUET FARM . . . . .	726
XXII. THE DEADLOCK AT MOUQUET FARM . . . . .	771
XXIII. THE LAST ATTACKS ON THE FARM . . . . .	803
XXIV. THE EFFECTS OF POZIÈRES. REST AT YPRES . . . . .	862
XXV. FLERS. THE SOMME BATTLE ENDS . . . . .	894
XXVI. WINTER . . . . .	950
APPENDICES . . . . .	959
1. The Sollum Expedition . . . . .	959
2. The Light Cars in the Libyan Desert . . . . .	965
COLOUR PATCHES OF THE AUSTRALIAN FORCES . . . . .	968
INDEX . . . . .	969



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Camel train carrying water to the front line east of Ferry Post	24
The end of one of the Decauville railways east of Ferry Post	24
A front-line post east of Serapeum .. .. .	25
Front line constructed in the desert east of Ferry Post ..	25
Troop train of 2nd Division halted in the Rhone Valley ..	72
A typical billet in France .. .. .	72
5th Brigade Headquarters, La Rolanderie .. .. .	72
Billet of 17th Battalion after being shelled by the Germans ..	72
"Monsieur et Madame" .. .. .	73
Australians buying chocolate at the roadside in France ..	88
Men in billets, Sailly-sur-la-Lys .. .. .	88
Australians billeted in a farm south of Armentières .. ..	89
A battalion in France, April 1916 .. .. .	108
An <i>estaminet</i> within 800 yards of the firing line .. ..	108
A view close behind the front at Bois Grenier .. .. .	109
Australian infantrymen shortly after arrival in France ..	124
The convent wall, south of Armentières .. .. .	124
The breastworks south-east of Armentières .. .. .	125
View near Sutton Veny camp .. .. .	172
Australian soldiers examining the ancient walls of Old Sarum	172
Codford village in the snow .. .. .	172
Troops leaving Codford for return to Australia, 1919 ..	172
Artillery being inspected by the Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes and Rt. Hon. Andrew Fisher .. .. .	173
General Birdwood and the Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes .. ..	173
A shelter in the line south of Armentières .. .. .	260
Messines, in July 1915 .. .. .	260
Barrage and smoke cloud covering a German <i>flammenwerfer</i> attack .. .. .	261
The opposing lines at Fromelles .. .. .	366
Men of the 53rd Battalion, 19th July, 1916 .. .. .	367
The "River" Laies .. .. .	412
One of the old trenches behind the German front line near Fromelles .. .. .	412
Air views of trenches dug across No-Man's Land by Australians during the night of 19th July, 1916 .. .. .	413
The Somme battlefield in July 1916 .. .. .	460

A battalion of the 2nd Division on the march, 1916 .. ..	461
The King inspecting a dugout on the Somme battlefield .. ..	488
British infantrymen on the Somme .. ..	488
Part of a battery of British 4.7-inch guns in Sausage Valley, Pozières .. ..	489
A howitzer of the Australian Siege Artillery Brigade .. ..	496
The centre and northern arm of Pozières before bombardment had shattered the trees or most of the buildings .. ..	497
The back gardens of Pozières shattered by British and German bombardment .. ..	544
The site of part of the trench-line dug by the Australians on 23rd July, 1916 .. ..	545
Troops congregating around their regimental "cookers" .. ..	592
Some of the 1st Division after relief .. ..	592
Ambulance returning with wounded down Sausage Valley .. ..	593
An Australian signaller repairing his gear .. ..	593
General Birdwood speaking to men of the 2nd Infantry Brigade in Vadencourt Wood .. ..	600
Brigadier-General Gellibrand and his staff in Sausage Valley, 1st August, 1916 .. ..	601
Pozières cemetery .. ..	672
Stakes of the old German wire in front of the O.G. Lines .. ..	672
The plateau east of Pozières .. ..	673
The windmill at Pozières, October 1916 .. ..	712
Pozières main street and the windmill before the war .. ..	712
View from O.G.1 over the green country behind the German lines .. ..	713
View from O.G.1 towards Mouquet Farm .. ..	713
Remains of O.G.2 south of the main road .. ..	752
Wounded at the advanced dressing-station .. ..	753
Stretcher-bearers bringing in wounded under a white flag .. ..	753
Machine-gunners of the 2nd Division coming out of Pozières .. ..	792
Point 54, The Quarry, and Mouquet Farm .. ..	793
The southern cellars at Mouquet Farm .. ..	812
One of the rubble heaps at Mouquet Farm .. ..	812
The ruins of Mouquet Farm .. ..	813
"K" Trench and Park Lane, north of Pozières .. ..	844
The Quarry, near Mouquet Farm .. ..	845
The slope down which lay the Australian communications south of Mouquet Farm .. ..	845
The opposing lines north of the Ypres-Comines Canal .. ..	884

## ILLUSTRATIONS

xiii

Infantry resting near Fricourt, winter of 1916 .. ..	885
Australians in improvised shelters near Montauban .. ..	912
An Australian driver and his pack-horse .. ..	912
The Maze at Yellow Cut .. ..	913
Yellow Cut, looking north-east from The Maze .. ..	913
German artillery observers on the heights between Bapaume and Péronne .. ..	936
German dugouts during the winter on the Somme .. ..	937
A German sentry in The Maze .. ..	937
Australian front line (Biscuit Trench) near Gueudecourt ..	952
A man of the 39th Battalion in the trenches at Houplines ..	952
Infantry near Willow Siding, Fricourt .. ..	953
"The Shrapnels" .. ..	953

## LIST OF MAPS

1 No. 2 (Central) Section of the Suez Canal Defences, 1916	29
2 The concentration area of the I Anzac Corps in Flanders, April 1916 .. ..	77
3 The Western Front, April 1916 .. ..	81
4 British and German trench systems near Bois Grenier, summer of 1916 .. ..	104
5 Typical artillery barrage for a trench raid .. ..	268
6 The battlefield of Fromelles .. ..	380
7 The back area allotted to the I Anzac Corps on the Somme, July-August 1916 .. ..	450
8 The battlefield of Pozières and Mouquet Farm .. ..	532
9 The I Anzac sector of the Somme battlefield on 5th November, 1916 .. ..	896

## DIAGRAM

Colour patches of the Australian Forces, 1914-1918 ..	968
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## CHRONOLOGY FOR 1916.

(*Italic* type indicates events dealt with in this volume.)

- Jan. 5—Military Service Bill introduced by Mr Asquith (passed on Jan. 24).  
" 8—Withdrawal from Cape Helles completes the Gallipoli evacuation.  
" 15—Russians attack the Turks in Transcaucasia.  
" 23—Montenegro makes terms with invading Austrians
- Feb. 15—Fifth Battle of the Isonzo begins.  
" 16—Russians take Erzerum.  
" 21—Battle of Verdun begins.
- March 1—Germany opens extended submarine-campaign.  
" 9—Germany declares war on Portugal.  
" 18—Russian offensive in north begins.  
" 19—Sir John Maxwell withdrawn from Egypt, leaving Sir Archibald Murray in undivided command.  
" 20—*I Anzac Corps begins landing in France.*  
" 24—Steamer *Sussex* torpedoed in English Channel.  
" 26-28—Inter-Allied conference at Paris.  
" 27—British local attack at St. Eloi.
- April 24—Outbreak of the rebellion in Ireland.  
" 25—German battle-cruisers raid Lowestoft and Yarmouth.  
" 29—Surrender of Kut.
- May 8—Through American protest, Germany modifies submarine campaign.  
" 11—German local attack south of the Hohenzollern Redoubt.  
" 14—Austrian offensive in the Trentino begins.  
" 21—German local attack at Vimy Ridge.  
" 25—Great Britain extends compulsory service to married men.
- May 31-June 1—Battle of Jutland.
- June 2—German local attack at Ypres.  
" 4—Russian offensive (Brusilov's) begins.  
" 5—H.M.S. *Hampshire* mined; Lord Kitchener drowned. Arab revolt breaks out.  
" 7—*II Anzac Corps begins to reach France.*  
" 10—New Zealand passes Compulsory Service Bill.  
" 16—Italian counter-offensive in the Trentino begins.
- July 1—*First Battle of the Somme opens.*  
" 4—Russian advance in the Ukraine.

- July 7—Lloyd George becomes Secretary of State for War.  
 „ 19-20—*Battle of Fromelles.*  
 „ 23—*Battle of Pozieres opens.*  
 „ 25—The re-formed Serbian Army takes its place on the Salonica front.  
 „ 27—Germans court-martial and shoot Captain C. A. Fryatt.
- Aug. 2—Allied attack in Macedonia begins.  
 „ 4-5—*Battle of Romani.*  
 „ 6—Sixth Italian offensive on Isonzo launched (*Battle of Gorizia*).  
 „ 27—Roumania enters the war.  
 „ 28—Italy declares war on Germany.  
 „ 29—Hindenburg (with Ludendorff) replaces Falkenhayn.
- Sept. 13—Struggle over conscription begins in Australia.  
 „ 14—Seventh. *Battle of the Isonzo* begins.  
 „ 15—Renewal of Somme offensive—"tanks" first used. Successful French counter-offensive at Verdun.  
 „ 29—Venizelos establishes a Provisional Government in Crete.
- Oct. 9—Eighth *Battle of the Isonzo* begins.  
 „ 24—French recapture Fort Douaumont.  
 „ 28—Venizelos Government established at Salonica. Referendum in Australia; conscription rejected.  
 „ 31—Ninth *Battle of the Isonzo* begins.
- Nov. 11—Raid on Maghdaba (Sinai) by light horse and camel corps.  
 „ 15-16—Inter-Allied conference at Paris.  
 „ 18—*First Battle of the Somme ends.*  
 „ 19—Monastir captured by French and Serbians.  
 „ 22—*3rd Australian Division begins to reach France.*  
 „ 23—Venizelos Provisional Greek Government at Salonica declares war on Bulgaria and Germany.  
 „ 29—Admiral Beatty takes command of the Grand Fleet; Admiral Jellicoe becomes First Sea Lord (Dec. 4).
- Dec. 6—Mackensen takes Bucharest.  
 „ 7—Lloyd George succeeds Asquith as Prime Minister.  
 „ 9—War Cabinet formed in Great Britain. First meeting held.  
 „ 12—Nivelle succeeds Joffre in command of French Armies. Germany issues "Peace" note to Allies.  
 „ 15—Second successful French counter-offensive at Verdun.  
 „ 18—President Wilson's suggestions concerning a Peace conference issued.

There were 38 air raids on England (including 7 on London) during the year.