

BACKGROUNDER

Battle of Fromelles

19 July 1916 - 20 July 1916

Fromelles was the first major battle fought by Australian troops on the Western Front. Directed against a strong German position known as the Sugar Loaf salient, the attack was intended primarily as a feint to draw German troops away from the Somme offensive then being pursued further to the south. A seven-hour preparatory bombardment deprived the attack of any hope of surprise, and ultimately proved ineffective in subduing the well-entrenched defenders. When the troops of the 5th Australian and 61st British Divisions attacked at 6 pm on 19 July 1916, they suffered heavily at the hands of German machine-gunners. Small parts of the German trenches were captured by the 8th and 14th Australian Brigades, but, devoid of flanking support and subjected to fierce counter-attacks, they were forced to withdraw. By 8am on 20 July 1916, the battle was over. The 5th Australian Division suffered 5,533 casualties, rendering it incapable of offensive action for many months; the 61st British Division suffered 1,547. The German casualties were little more than 1,000. The attack was a complete failure as the Germans realised within a few hours it was merely a feint. It therefore had no impact whatsoever upon the progress of the Somme offensive.

Battle of Pozières

23 July 1916 - 07 August 1916

Pozières, a small village in the Somme valley in France, was the scene of bitter and costly fighting for the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions in mid 1916. The village was captured initially by the 1st Division on 23 July 1916. The division clung to its gains despite almost continuous artillery fire and repeated German counter-attacks but suffered heavily. By the time it was relieved on 27 July it had suffered 5,285 casualties. The 2nd Division took over from the 1st and mounted two further attacks - the first, on 29 July, was a costly failure; the second, on 2 August, resulted in the seizure of further German positions beyond the village. Again, the Australians suffered heavily from retaliatory bombardments. They were relieved on 6 August, having suffered 6,848 casualties. The 4th Division was next into the line at Pozières. It too endured a massive artillery bombardment, and defeated a German counter-attack on 7 August; this was the last attempt by the Germans to retake Pozières. Mouquet Farm, a key position at Pozières, was the site of nine separate attacks by three Australian divisions between 8 August and 3 September 1916. The attacks cost the 1st, 2nd and 4th Australian Divisions over 11,000 casualties, and not one succeeded in capturing and

ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREAT MUSEUMS

holding it. **CONTACT DETAILS**

GPO Box 345
Canberra ACT 2601
tel: (02) 6243 4211
fax: (02) 6243 4325
web: www.awm.gov.au