

“In what ways has the location and reinternment of the Zonnebeke Five and the missing diggers of Fromelles, been a triumph over adversity?”

In World War One nearly 60000 Australians died and approximately 18000 of those killed have no known grave.¹ It is easy to consider this figure as only that but it represents much more. These are 18000 men who had families, stories and lives; there are 18000 families who have had no final closure and don't know what happened to their ancestors. ‘[The battlefields have] long been restored to farmlands. The bomb craters and the death and destruction have been ploughed over. The homes and the church and the buildings have been rebuilt. But the memories remain.’² However the memories are not the only things that remain, as artefacts and even bodies are constantly being found across France and Belgium, both accidentally or by planned searches. The result of this is that war still continues for the relatives of the dead, who try and piece together the past and gain a sense of closure.

Throughout the Zonnebeke Five and the missing Fromelles diggers story there have been three types of triumph over adversity. The sense of loss and grief of families not ever having closure was a triumph over adversity in that the families of the Zonnebeke Five finally received closure. There were also many challenges in finding answers during the historical journey of research. It was a great triumph over adversity when access to these records was possible through the records becoming digitally available. There were also many barriers and difficulties for Lambis Englezos when attempting to get the authorities to trace the missing Fromelles diggers, and it was a massive triumph over adversity when the four hundred men were located.

From all the countries that participated in World War One, regardless of the side they were on, there are a total of 1.5 million soldiers that have an unknown resting place. Therefore, the official policy has been to simply let unknown war victims rest in peace.³ Yet this policy will always cause great debate about what should be done with found remains. Everyone has their opinions on whether remains should be left where they've been found or if they should be recovered, identified and reburied. In the middle of these debates, the families will always be caught up, for they too have their own views about this debate. How many families have unknowingly had their ancestors found, only to be left where they were? How many families would have closure if this policy wasn't in place? This policy is again reason why the war is not over for the relatives of the Australian missing; as this debate affects whether or not ancestors are recovered or not.

¹ WW1 War Heroes- 60 000 Australians died in this war, (online) available <http://www.users.on.net/~revelation/WW1.htm>

² Lindsay, Patrick. **Fromelles**, Hardie Grant Books, Victoria, 2007, pg 1

³ Ibid, pg 265

In September 2007, a digger preparing a trench for a pipeline was stopped when human remains were uncovered. Johan Vandewalle led the team of archaeologists in recovering the remains from the site near Polygon Wood. In total, five bodies and a fragment of a sixth were recovered. The first four of these skeletons were wrapped in blankets that had been tied with signal wire. When unwrapped, four complete skeletons were discovered with fragments of Australian uniforms, rising sun badges, faded colour patches and boots. The fifth soldier held particular significance for Johan Vandewalle, who unwrapped the carefully wrapped body from his groundsheet. This careful wrapping of the body all those years ago had formed a perfect death mask that caused the body to look alive and serene- even his uniform was still intact. Belgian and Australian authorities then began the search for possible identities for the 'Zonnebeke Five.' This was the first time that DNA has been used to identify World War One remains, and was quite successful, as three of the soldiers were identified.⁴ The families of Private John Hunter, Sergeant George Calder and Private George Storey would have wondered what happened to their ancestors, and for over ninety years the war continued for the families who were unable to finish the story of what happened to their relatives. Due to this find, there is now chance for closure. This is a tremendous triumph over adversity for the families who thought they would never have the chance to know their relatives whereabouts. The vast area of battlefields in France and Belgium alone make this unintentional discovery a triumph. The identification of these men using DNA after over ninety years and being able to identify three successfully is another miraculous triumph over adversity.

Before the identification of Hunter, Calder and Storey, their families only knew their tragic stories, stories which without their burial places had no ending. Through the use of archival sources, it is possible for families and historians to view the records of soldiers, Private John Hunter, service number 3504, enlisted in the 49th Battalion of the Australian Infantry on the 25th of October, 1916.⁵ Originally a timber getter from Nanango, Queensland⁶, Hunter embarked from Sydney on the HMAT Ayrshire on January 1st, 1917.⁷ At the age of 28,⁸ Private Hunter was killed on the 26th of September, 1917.⁹ A runner in the war, he passed away in his younger brother Jim's arms after a shell exploded near him at Polygon Wood.¹⁰ Jim carefully wrapped his brother in a groundsheet and buried him in a makeshift grave that would then be lost

⁴ The Zonnebeke Five, (online) available

<http://www.polygonwood.com/Polygon%20Wood%20Zonnebeke%205.htm>

⁵ Australian War Memorial-First World War Nominal Roll Page- AWM133,26-066, (online)available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war/page.asp?p=1652034

⁶ First World War Embarkation Roll, (online) available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war_embarkation/person.asp?p=250377

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Commonwealth War Graves Certificate- Private John Hunter, (online) available

<http://www.cwgc.org/search/certificate.aspx?casualty=924382>

⁹ Australian War Memorial- First World War Nominal Roll, op cit

¹⁰ O'Loan, James, "ANZACS pursued around the world," originally in the Courier Mail,(online) available

<http://www.polygonwood.com>

for 90 years.¹¹ Private George Richard Storey, service number 2488, enlisted in the 51st Battalion on the 31st of March 1916.¹² Storey came from Subiaco in Western Australia and was originally a farmhand when he embarked from Fremantle on the HMAT Uganda on the 20th of September, 1916.¹³ At the age of 22¹⁴, Storey died the morning he was due to move out, after the battle of Polygon Wood.¹⁵ Recounts of his death explain that Storey was killed outright with 4 or 5 others by a shell just outside a dug out at Polygon Wood. He was described as a good steady chap¹⁶ and his mates wrote glowingly about him.¹⁷ Storey was originally commemorated at 29 The Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial but was reinterred in October 2007.¹⁸ Sergeant George Calder, service number 1868, entered the 51st Battalion on the 24th of January 1916.¹⁹ On the 18th of July 1916, the miner from Boulder in Western Australia embarked for Europe on the HMAT Seang Bee.²⁰ At the age of 23 Calder was killed on the 30th of September, 1917.²¹ Calder was originally commemorated at Menin Gate but was re interred in October 2007.²² All three soldiers are now remembered with honour at Buttes New British Cemetary, Polygon Wood, and were buried with full military honours.²³

World War One archival sources such as these have been digitalised so they can be accessible to all. Digitalisation of these records has been a triumph in the process of historical research. Families of missing soldiers may not have full closure, but this advancement in making the records accessible allows families to see something of their relatives. The rewards in digitalisation of archival sources are great for families and historians yet the nature of these sources also provide challenges for those who use them. Sources can be hard to read due to cursive handwriting and faded paper. Also, it can be difficult to find relatives archival sources if they were underage and

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Australian War Memorial- First World War Nominal Roll Page- AWM133, 50-059, (online) available http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war/page.asp?p=1656052

¹³ First World War Embarkation Roll, (online) available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war_embarkation/person.asp?p=250901

¹⁴ Commonwealth War Graves Certificate- George Storey, (online) available

<http://www.cwgc.org/search/certificate.aspx?casualty=1601384>

¹⁵ Catanzaro, Joseph, "DNA proves unearthed remains are those of WA Digger," (online) available

<http://www.polygonwood.com>

¹⁶ Australian Red Cross Society Wounded and Missing Enquiry Bureau files, 1914-18 War- 2488 Private George Richard Storey, (online) available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/wounded_and_missing/person.asp?p=584700

¹⁷ Catanzaro, Joseph, op cit

¹⁸ Australian War Memorial- Roll of Honour- George Richard Storey, available (online)

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll_of_honour/person.asp?p=509247

¹⁹ Australian War Memorial- First World War Nominal Roll Page- AWM133- 26-066, (online) available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war/page.asp?p=1652034

²⁰ First World War Embarkation Roll- George Calder, (online) available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/nominal_rolls/first_world_war_embarkation/person.asp?p=29132

²¹ Commonwealth War Graves Certificate- George Calder, (online) available

http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=1598099

²² Australian War Memorial- Roll of Honour-George Calder, (online) available

http://www.awm.gov.au/research/people/roll_of_honour/person.asp?p=521035

²³ The Zonnebeke Five, op cit

enlisted with a false name. Despite the challenges that users face, the rewards of being able to access this information outweigh these challenges.

The Zonnebeke five could have been any of 18000 missing Australian men, but it was the relatives of Hunter, Storey and Calder who had their hopes realised after the discovery. Like the two Storey brothers ninety years before them, George's nephews David and Geoff Storey undertook an emotion filled journey to Flanders Field for a ceremony on the ninetieth anniversary of their uncle's death.²⁴ Despite never knowing their uncle, the connection throughout history has not been wavered and the pain at the previous lack of closure was still as real as it was for George's family in 1917. Leading up the ceremony, Geoff Storey's emotions were mixed. "It feels like we're just getting to meet him for the first time, while at the same time we're saying goodbye...I just can't help but think of my grandmother who must have gone through terrible agonies on the home front with George dead and his brother, my father, badly wounded."²⁵ The identification of George Storey also "provides some degree of closure to a part of the family's history that has, until now, remained a mystery."²⁶

On the 19th of July, 1916, the Australian 5th Division was used against the German lines as a diversion.²⁷ The result was the greatest loss of life in a night in Australian history and devastating casualties- out of 7000 men there were 5533 casualties with almost 2000 men killed.²⁸ The Germans were given the idea of a large upcoming battle²⁹, yet this only made sense if there was no infantry attack following it. As a result the attack gave up all hope of surprise³⁰ and "Men were out in two by streams of bullets [that] swept like whirling knives...It was the charge of the Light Brigade once more, but more terrible, more hopeless- magnificent, but not war- a valley of death filled by somebody's blunder."³¹ Indeed, many blunders were made regarding the battle of Fromelles, and yet miraculously, and against all the odds, hundreds of attackers managed to break through German lines. Yet without support, these heroes were trapped by German counter-attacks and either killed or captured. Whilst some bodies were recovered, most disappeared and so for over ninety years, the fate of those who perished behind German lines has been unknown.³²

Lambis Englezos, a Melbourne high school teacher³³ travelled to Fromelles and became fixated with the missing men and their fate.³⁴ By using simple maths,

²⁴ Storey, Jenni, "Brothers embark on emotional journey for lost uncle," originally in West Australian Newspaper, available (online)

<http://www.polygonwood.com/Polygon%20Wood%20Site%20Map.htm>

²⁵ Loc cit

²⁶ Loc cit

²⁷ Lindsay, Patrick. **Fromelles**, Hardie Grant Books, 2007, Victoria, pg 5

²⁸ Loc cit

²⁹ Lindsay, Patrick, op cit, pg 73

³⁰ Ibid, pg 74

³¹ Ibid, pg 100

³² Ibid, pg 5

³³ Ibid, pg 187

³⁴ Ibid, pg 201

Lambis calculated that the number of unknown graves did not match the number of missing. "He could have accepted a handful who had gone missing through the uncontrollable vagaries of war...but not hundreds."³⁵ Using aerial photography of the area before and after the battle of Fromelles, Lambis was able to conclude that the missing men had been buried by the Germans in mass pits at Pheasant Wood.³⁶ Lambis tried to show his findings to various authorities, but was constantly met with dead ends.³⁷ After the struggles to get the Panel of Investigation to even listen to Lambis's claims, John Williams, a member of the panel reported that he found nothing unusual at Pheasant Wood.³⁸ This made it more difficult for Lambis's claims to be believed. Chris Bryett, an amateur historian and lawyer who wanted to help Lambis,³⁹ knew the only to get the Panels attention was to start up a private dig.⁴⁰ Recovering Overseas Australia's Missing inc was formed and was a world class team who was able to execute a private dig if no one else would.⁴¹ Lambis decided to stay with the official process to get his cause noticed. After years of trying to get noticed by authorities, going to the media and setting up organisations to 'make some noise',⁴² a dig was finally commissioned to by Australian army in co-operation with the British army and French authorities.⁴³ The commissioned dig was an enormous triumph over adversity for Lambis Englezos and everyone else who helped to get attention to the Fromelles cause. It was also very much a personal triumph to Lambis, who had fought for so many years and was not listened to by the Panel. His passion for Fromelles and finding the lost diggers had finally paid off and more good news was to come.

In 2008, the remains of 400 Australian and British soldiers were found in the mass graves at Pheasant Wood. There is now new hope for Australian families who have waited over ninety years to discover their ancestors' fates.⁴⁴ Both historians and amateur researchers in Britain and Australia are putting together a list of possible soldiers that could be buried in the pits. However, there are many drawbacks in identifying the soldiers. We weren't as accurate in our documentation during that time period, and as many were illiterate, spelling of names could be wrong. Men also enlisted under false names to join when they were underage- there is no clue to what the boys' real names are.⁴⁵ On the 5th of May 2009, work on recovering the remains

³⁵ Ibid, pg 205

³⁶ Ibid, pg 207-211

³⁷ Ibid, pg 211

³⁸ Ibid, pg 259-262

³⁹ Ibid, pg 252

⁴⁰ Ibid, pg 267

⁴¹ Ibid, pg 268

⁴² Loc.cit

⁴³ Ibid, pg 369

⁴⁴ Tasker, Belinda, "Race on to identify diggers at Fromelles," Brisbane Times, March 24, 2009, (online) available

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/news/national/race-on-to-identify-diggers-at-fromelles/2009/03/24/1237656897998.html?page=2>

⁴⁵ Ibid

from the Fromelles pit began. A team of thirty archaeologists began the massive excavation, and hopefully the mystery behind the soldiers identities will start to unravel.⁴⁶ This is a triumph over adversity as no one believed that the soldiers were really there; and because of some determined people willing to fight for what they believed, these soldiers were discovered.

Until the Fromelles and remaining Zonnebeke soldiers are identified, the war is not over. Regardless whether the war is ten, fifty or hundred years past, the war will not be over for the families of the missing in Australia until all loved ones are found and given the honour they deserve. It doesn't matter that these families never met their ancestors, it is a family bond and there cannot be full closure until every member of the family is accounted for. The missing men of World War One and the search to find and recover them is full of adversity. The case studies of the Zonnebeke Five and the missing diggers of Fromelles prove to Australia and the world with dedication and determination, these challenges and difficulties can be triumphed over.

Word Count: 2239

⁴⁶ Australian Associated Press, "Scientists Start Excavation of Fromelles mass graves," Tuesday 5th May, (online), available <http://www.livenews.com.au/rss-link/scientists-start-excavation-of-fromelles-mass-graves/2009/5/5/205231>