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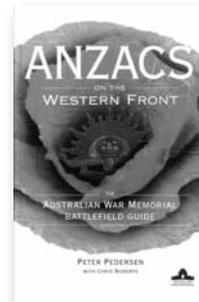


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ANZACs on the Western Front: the Australian War Memorial battlefield guide

by Peter Pedersen with Chris Roberts

*Australian War Memorial: Canberra; 2012; 600 pp.; ISBN 9781742169811;
RRP \$49.95 (paperback); Ursula Davidson Library call number: 572 PEDE 2012*



Any Australian or New Zealander going to, or thinking about visiting, the Western Front should read this book now and re-read it in the month prior to departure for Europe.

The book is a guide to the battlefields, not the cemeteries. Its layout is unusual in that each chapter has an abbreviated history of ANZAC fighting in the area, a planned tour of the battlefield, and local information on selected cemeteries and monuments.

Charles Bean took four thick volumes of the official history to tell the story of the Australian Imperial Force in France and Belgium. The author, in about a third of this book, narrates the history of both the Australian and New Zealand battles. As with Bean it is a story of the infantry, with the other arms and services receiving passing mention.

The 'Driving the Battlefield' section of each chapter starts with a general comment and refers to the local large-scale map(s) of the area. The map for each drive is marked with a sequence of numbered locations. At each location, the book gives a good description of what can be seen from that point. It also indicates locations of significant actions such as the winning of a Victoria Cross. The identification of important locations is made easy by the use of recent colour photographs. The distances to be covered and an estimate of the time to be taken to cover the tour of the battlefield are provided.

The 'Local Information' section of each chapter provides information and photographs of important cemeteries, monuments and museums relevant to Australians and New Zealanders.

The book is very well illustrated with carefully selected black and white photographs taken during or immediately after the war and with modern colour photographs with key positions annotated on the photographs.

Unless one is already familiar with the area, the 'Driving the Battlefield' section can only be used for planning purposes in Australia and New Zealand in conjunction with other aides such 'Google Earth' and local maps. It would take about a month, allowing for European weather and fatigue, to complete the entire 28 battlefield tours described in the book. As, however, most Australian and New Zealand tourists would only spend about a week on the battlefields, one must prioritise sites to be visited. The tourist must know what unit or individual s/he is following, unless s/he is doing a general introduction to the Western Front.

This book will get you to the correct battlefield and explain the sequence of the battle; however you will also often have to read the relevant section of Bean's official history or the relevant unit history to get the information you need to place a person or an individual action on a part of the battlefield. If looking for a cemetery, you should refer to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission booklet *Cemeteries & Memorials in Belgium & Northern France*.

The modern colour pictures of the battlefield and maps in this guide may also be used to complement individual history books on a specific battle, such as Le Hamel.

There is so much information in the book that it should be read chapter by chapter. Each chapter provides a wealth of information that has to be assimilated carefully. For example, on pages 364 to 366 it states: "Corporal Thomas Pope, an American, knocked out a machine-gun to win the US Army's first Medal of Honor in France". This statement is correct; however members of the United States Navy and Marines had already won Medals of Honor in France at places such as Belleau Wood and Chateau Thierry. I have already heard, at the Wolfsberg, this guide being misquoted by stating that Corporal Pope was the first American to win the Medal of Honor in France.

Just reading the history section of each chapter will give a good primer on Australian and New Zealand battles on the Western Front. The author has inserted carefully selected quotes from other authors in telling the story in the soldiers' words.

The one thing that I think was omitted from the book was the author marking his location for the vital 'The Sugarloaf' feature on his colour picture of the Fromelles battlefield. The book provides a good description of its location, but a picture would help resolve a lot of discussions at the nearby Cobbers memorial.

It is obvious from the style and descriptions that the author is first an infantry soldier then an historian. The author describes the tanks at First Bullecourt as "clapped-out Mark II's". As the Mark II tanks had only commenced production in December 1916 and all were completed in the three months immediately before First Bullecourt, a better description might have been "unreliable". The picture on page 138 shows a Mark II female tank with a Mark I sponson.

If visiting the Western Front, this is a must have book for the day pack.

John Hitchen