

*Gallipoli, Lone Pine and ANZAC Cove are names that are generally well known to most Tasmanians and are considered significant in the formation of both the Anzac Legend and our national identity.*

*However, Peter Charlton writes that events and places such as Pozieres and Mouquet Farm in France somehow missed their place in the Australian consciousness.*

*Outline what you consider to be the significance, if any, of the events that occurred in 1916 in both these places and whether their commemoration should attract greater attention in Tasmania during 2016.*

## Frank MacDonald MM Memorial Prize

Tom Watson

Word Count: 1,193



The First World War is often thought of as a war between nations. A war fought on a giant scale by the giants of the world. However, this is not the case. WWI was fought by men with homes and dreams and loved ones. In remembering the carnage of a battlefield, and the facts and dates of WWI, we often forget that despite its name, the World War was fought first and foremost by people. This idea is central to the Anzac legend, that an individual's own bravery can make a difference, even when at war<sup>1</sup>. However, it is also an idea that we seem to have forgotten when we reflect on the Western Front. Our attention is naturally drawn to the big numbers, and it is often forgotten that all the thousands of casualties were not just numbers on a sheet. As the centenaries of these battles approach or pass us by, it is our responsibility to reflect on whether or not they should attract greater attention.

Gallipoli, Lone Pine and Anzac Cove are names that easily come to mind when we think of WWI. As part of the Gallipoli campaign, these places are embedded in our national consciousness as key to the ANZAC legend, and as such, are an important part of our national identity. The Australian War Memorial numbers the Australian casualties on the Gallipoli campaign at 26,111<sup>2</sup>. This includes 8,709 deaths<sup>2</sup>. However, these figures are not the reason that places like Lone Pine are remembered so well. Writers such as Charles Bean and Robert Gott have heralded the Gallipoli campaign "*the making of the Anzac legend*,"<sup>3</sup> and this Anzac legend is what is remembered about Gallipoli.

Whereas stories from the Western Front tell of the horrible conditions, the incessant shelling and charges as futile as they were gallant<sup>4</sup>, the tales of Gallipoli are about courage and larrikinism in the face of such incredible danger. The fact that young men from Australia and New Zealand endured so much in their countries' names, sticking by their mates and fighting on even while shells rained around them, is something that we, as citizens of the same countries, should commemorate today. However, Gallipoli was not the only place where Australian valour was shown, so it is logical to wonder why they are remembered and commemorated so much more than the Western Front.

One reason is the way these events were reported at the time. The Gallipoli campaign was Australia's first military engagement where we fought not as British subjects, but as its ally. While we had participated in conflicts before, Gallipoli was the first time Australian and New Zealander troops fought under their own name; the ANZACs<sup>5</sup>. This is reflected in the reports Allied war correspondents wired back to Australia. As British journalist Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett stated about the landing at Anzac Cove:

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<sup>1</sup> [Swirk, The Anzac Legend](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Australian War Memorial, Australian Casualties at Gallipoli](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Robert Gott, The Making of the Anzac Legend: Gallipoli](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Heritage of The Great War, Immortal Quotes from the Great War](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Wikipedia, Australian and New Zealand Army Corps](#)

*“These raw colonial troops, in these desperate hours, proved worthy to fight side by side with the heroes of the battles of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres, and Neuve-Chapelle. ... They were happy because they knew they had been tried for the first time, and had not been found wanting.”*<sup>6</sup>

Australians were immensely proud of the way our soldiers handled themselves on the international stage, so it was easy for newspapers to skip over the horrendous waste of life to focus on the bravery shown by our young men.

Australians were filled with pride when the first reports from Gallipoli came in, but by the time battles on the Western Front came about, the novelty had worn off, and the reality of war had begun to sink in. Headlines changed from the celebratory “*Australians Win Imperishable Fame*”<sup>7</sup> (another by Ashmead-Bartlett) to the much less sanguine “*Battle of Pozieres ... the desperate conflict still proceeding.*”<sup>8</sup> And desperate conflict it was. The conflict at Pozieres lasted only 6 weeks, but in that time there were over 23,000 casualties (including 600 Tasmanians<sup>9</sup>) and 6,800 deaths.<sup>10</sup> By way of comparison, 8700 Australians died during the 8 months of the Gallipoli campaign.<sup>2</sup> The fighting at Pozieres was fierce, bloody and brutal. “*Australian troops... fell more thickly on this ridge than on any other battlefield of the war,*”<sup>11</sup> reads the plaque at the Pozieres Windmill. So it cannot be said the Pozieres is overlooked because less Australian blood soaks its soil. In fact, Pozieres had far greater military significance than Gallipoli, which had no measurable effect on the outcome of the war.<sup>12</sup> Military historian Professor Robin Prior was harsh when he said “*it was a complete waste of time,*”<sup>13</sup> but he was not incorrect.

Pozieres, on the other hand, dealt a decisive victory for the Allied war effort, and the Australians distinguished themselves, leading the charge on Mouquet Farm.<sup>10</sup> So why then, do we devote the lion’s share of our commemorative energies to a failure?

Perhaps, the sheer devastation at Pozieres is a part of the explanation. Research shows that as the number of victims increases, our capability to show empathy is reduced<sup>14</sup> – we require an identifiable victim to empathise with. Unfortunately, in the popular imagination, the big numbers are the most memorable features of the Western Front. Speeches made about Gallipoli focus on the individual stories of soldiers, but anything about the Western Front tends to focus on the futile stagnation of trench warfare and the overwhelming casualty statistics. And while these things should be remembered, they should never be made more important than the individual traits of

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<sup>6</sup> [Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, 1915](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, The Adelaide Advertiser, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1915](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Tasmanian Press Association, The Mercury, July 25<sup>th</sup> 1916](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Bruce Mounster, World War I battlefield relic from Pozieres to be presented at Launceston ceremony](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Australian War Memorial, Battle of Pozieres](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Australian Government Department of Veteran’s Affairs, Visiting the Windmill](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Australian War Memorial, Gallipoli](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Professor Robin Prior, 2005](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Karen Jenni & George Loewenstein, Explaining the Identifiable Victim Effect](#)

those who make up the statistics. We should commemorate not the battles that were fought, but the people involved in these battles.

The circumstances under which the battles were fought is also an argument for why Gallipoli is better remembered. Unlike the reputedly cruel and cold Germans the ANZACs fought on the Western Front, their Turkish foes at Gallipoli proved to be every bit as human as the ANZACs were, and this quickly added to the Anzac legend. This quote, written by Lieutenant Thomas Cozens, showcases the sentiment of the Australian soldiers:

*“Extraordinary friendly exchanges between the Turks and our fellows this morning early. Some of our chaps ran right over to the enemy trenches and exchanged bully, jam, cigarettes etc. The whole business was wonderful and proves how madly unnecessary this part of the war is.”<sup>15</sup>*

This human element was somehow missing on the Western Front. To suggest the Germans were worthy of sympathy would have been considered extremely unpatriotic. This lack of humanity seems to go against the Anzac legend, and could be one reason as to why Pozieres is not remembered as strongly as Gallipoli.

Also, whereas Gallipoli was a new and exciting adventure, halting the German's advance on Paris was a dirty job that just needed to be done. The distinction between the two makes the Western Front comparatively unattractive to remember.

However, the way we commemorate Pozieres is possibly the strongest reason why it is overshadowed by Gallipoli. Remembrance of Gallipoli is about all the individual traits that make up the Anzac Legend; honour, bravery and mateship to the end. Remembrance of Pozieres is about the legacy of war – death and destruction.

So when commemorating the battles of Pozieres and Mouquet Farm, and indeed any battle fought, think not of the statistics, or of a young nation fighting above its weight in a foreign land. Think of the soldier, fighting his way through the mud, unwilling to let his mates down and clinging to the hope that the next bullet fired does not have his name on it. Think of Brigadier Harold ‘Pompey’ Elliot, crying at the sight of his ruined brigade returning from a battle that was lost before it began.<sup>16</sup> When commemorating war, think not of the war itself, but of the individuals who strived so hard to survive in the midst of it, and perhaps you will be closer to understanding war for what it truly is – a sinister parody of chess played with living, suffering and, all too often, dying pieces.

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<sup>15</sup> [Lieutenant Thomas Evan Cozens, 1915](#)

<sup>16</sup> Ross McMullan, ‘My brave boys have done all that man could do’

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