Commonwealth War Graves Commission

AUSTRALIA'S MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission was established by Royal Charter of 21 May 1917, the provisions of which were amended and extended by a Supplemental Charter of 8 June 1964. Its duties are to mark and maintain the graves of the members of the Armed Forces of the Commonwealth who died during the two world wars, to build and maintain memorials to the dead whose graves are unknown, and to keep records and registers.

Australia is one of six Commonwealth or former Commonwealth countries which participate in the work of the Commission, the others being the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and India.

The Australian High Commissioner in London is customarily appointed by the Australian Government to be its representative on the Commission and attends, or is represented at, Commission meetings.

The cost of the Commission's work throughout the world is met by the participating countries in proportion to the number of their war graves in the Commission's care, the Australian contribution being 6.05%.

THE WAR DEAD OF AUSTRALIA

The total number of Australian war dead of the two world wars commemorated throughout the world by the Commission is 61,919 for the 1914-18 War and 40,467 for the 1939-45 War, a total of 102,386.
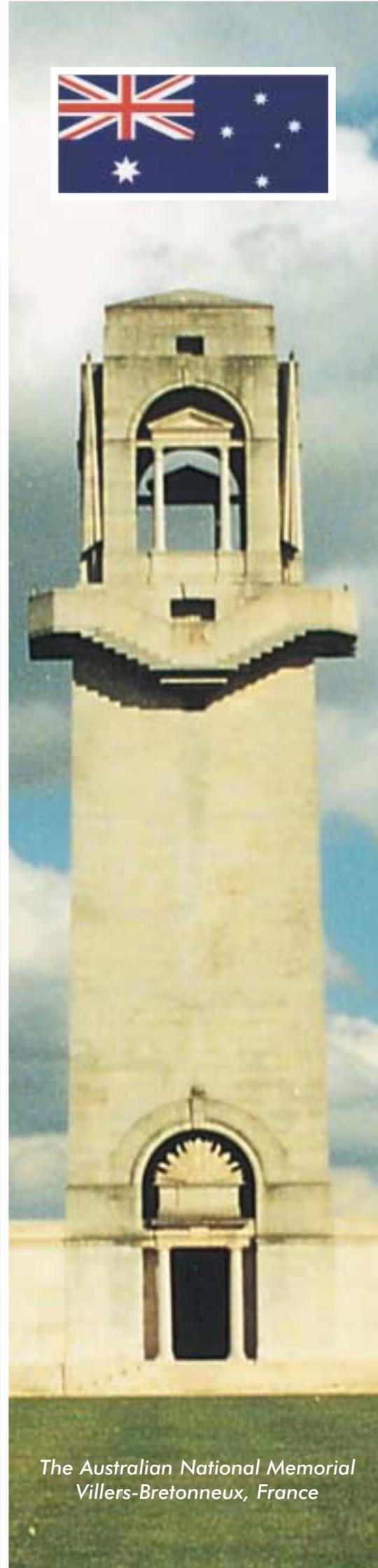
The countries in which the largest number of Australian war dead are commemorated are France (33,838), Belgium (12,952), Australia (12,181), Papua New Guinea (8,018) and Turkey (7,260).

AUSTRALIA IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

With Prime Minister Andrew Fisher having famously pledged "our last man and our last shilling", Australia entered the First World War alongside Britain on 4 August 1914. More than 330,000 Australians would volunteer and serve overseas and Australia's sacrifice would be over 60,000 dead, buried in 77 countries. Sixty Victoria Crosses, plus many thousands of other decorations, bear witness to the valour of those in the nation's armed forces.

In September 1914, in Australia's first action of the First World War, the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force captured German New Guinea; six Australians were killed in action and a submarine disappeared with its 35 crewmen.

Soon, the Royal Australian Navy and the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) were committed to the war in Europe. The first contingent of 20,000 sailed in October 1914 and the cruiser HMAS *Sydney* sunk the German raider *Emden* in the Indian Ocean in November 1914 while escorting the convoy. For much of the remainder of the war, ships of the Royal Australian Navy were deployed on convoy escort and anti-submarine duties, and in the blockade of Germany.

The Australian National Memorial Villers-Bretonneux, France

But it was as part of the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign that the AIF first made its mark. For eight months in 1915, as part of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, the 1st and 2nd Divisions, together with three dismounted brigades of Light Horse, battled doggedly against the inhospitable terrain, climate, disease and a tenacious Turkish opposition. Despite significant engagements, particularly those at Lone Pine and The Nek, the campaign ground to a halt in stalemate and perhaps the greatest triumph was the evacuation in December achieved without a single death. The date the Anzacs landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula - 25 April - is today commemorated as Anzac Day.

Following a period of expansion and reorganisation in Egypt, four Australian divisions, joined by a fifth trained in England, went to the Western Front where they served with distinction. In 1916 they fought at Fromelles and on the Somme; in 1917 at Bullecourt, Ypres and Messines. After helping repel the last German offensives in early 1918, the Australian Corps cemented their reputation as 'shock troops' in the great Allied offensive begun at Amiens in August.

Light Horse regiments served in the Middle East. After helping defend the Suez Canal, the Desert Mounted Corps took part in the advance to Palestine and Syria, with major battles including Gaza, Beersheba and Jerusalem. Some served in the Imperial Camel Corps or the Australian Flying Corps.

Airmen of the Australian Flying Corps served in many theatres. A half-flight was in Mesopotamia (Iraq) during 1915-16 and, in 1916, No 1 Squadron began operating in Egypt where they moved forward with the British advance, taking part in reconnaissance and bombing raids on Turkish forces and sometimes also engaging German aircraft in aerial combat. On the Western Front, Nos 2 and 4 Squadrons flew fighters, amassing creditable scores of victories over German aircraft, while No 3 Squadron flew reconnaissance missions. A further four training squadrons were based in England.

In four years of fighting Australia had made a great contribution to the winning of a war remote from her own shores; she had suffered, despite her small population, a grievous loss of young life; but she had gained a reputation which will be forever symbolised by the word 'Anzac'.

The Western Front 1914-1918
France

Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, (left) containing more than 2,000 graves (779 of them Australian), rises from the road to a plateau overlooking Amiens, the Somme Valley and the village from which the cemetery is named. At the back of the cemetery is the **Australian National Memorial** which commemorates all Australians who fought in France and Belgium but especially the 10,772 who died in France and who have no known grave.

Adelaide Cemetery, Villers-Bretonneux, was begun early in June 1918 and used by the 2nd and 3rd Divisions before it acquired the name of "Adelaide" in July. Plot III is almost entirely comprised of 522 Australian graves. It was from this cemetery that the remains of the Australian Unknown Soldier, which now lie buried at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, were removed in 1993.

VC Corner Australian Cemetery, Fromelles, is a cemetery without headstones in which lies the remains of 410 unidentified Australians killed during the Battle of Fromelles. The names of the 1,294 missing from the engagement are listed on a screen wall to the rear.

Belgium

Hundreds of thousands of men passed through the Menin Gate on their way to the battlefields of the Ypres Salient and after the war it was chosen as the site of the memorial to many of those who died there but who have no known grave. Of the 54,000 names recorded on the massive **Menin Gate Memorial,** (left) 6,195 are Australian. Nearby **Tyne Cot Cemetery** contains the biggest concentration of Australian graves in the Salient area with 1,369.

The 1,131 Australian soldiers buried in **Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery** mostly died of wounds in casualty clearing stations and field hospitals in the region.

CWGC WAR CEMETERIES
Gallipoli 1915-1916

Of the 31 war cemeteries on the Gallipoli Peninsula 26 contain a total of 2,850 burials identified as Australian, while the **Helles** and **Lone Pine Memorials** are inscribed with the names of 4,472 Australians whose remains were either not located or positively identified. **Lone Pine Cemetery** and **Memorial** (left) are named after the solitary pine tree that grew here at the southern part of Plateau 400.

Middle East

Most of the 175 Australians buried in **Beersheeba War Cemetery,** Israel, died as a result of the attack and capture of Beersheba from Turkish forces in October 1917. Graves from outlying areas and small graveyards were brought into the cemetery after the Armistice. **Jerusaleum War Cemetery** (right) contains the graves of 144 Australians and **Damascus Commonwealth War Cemetery** has 139 Australian burials.
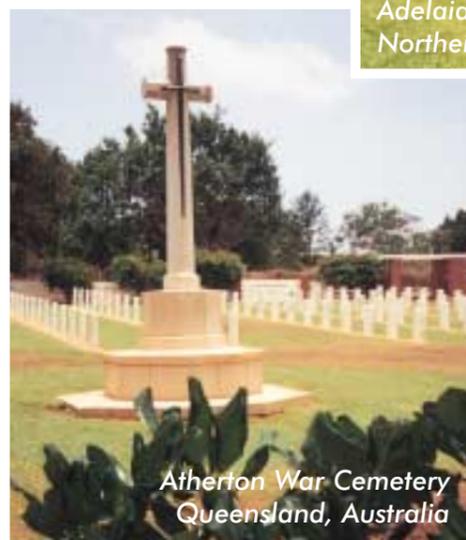
AUSTRALIA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During the Second World War, Australians served and died in many parts of the world - from the searing deserts of North Africa to the steamy jungle-clad islands of the Pacific, the U-boat infested Atlantic Ocean to hazardous shipping lanes off eastern Australia, flak-torn skies over Europe to air-raided Darwin, training establishments in countries as diverse as Australia, Canada and South Africa, and in prisoner of war camps in Europe and the Far East.

The main component of the Army was the militia Citizen Military Force (CMF), retained for home defence, with the 2nd Australian Imperial Force (AIF) formed for service overseas. In 1941 its 6th Division fought in Libya and Greece, the 9th and part of the 7th at Tobruk, Libya, and the 7th in Syria. Units were recalled in 1942 to defend Australia but the 9th Division stayed and fought at El Alamein.

Adelaide River War Cemetery, Northern Territory, Australia

Atherton War Cemetery Queensland, Australia

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) retained many personnel in Australia while contributing also to the Empire Air Training Scheme. Hundreds were killed in training accidents in Australia, Canada, South Africa and Britain. Many aircrews and ground staff served in Europe, the Middle East, Italy or Burma with the Royal Air Force (some in Australian squadrons) with the heaviest losses in Bomber Command.

The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) sent warships to various theatres. Major actions were fought in the Mediterranean, the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, and the loss of merchant ships and HMAS *Sydney* to raiders and submarines led to the introduction of convoy escorts. RAN personnel were also seconded to the Royal Navy.

When Japan entered the war in December 1941 most of the 8th Division AIF was in Malaya. Detachments served in Rabaul, New Guinea and Ambon, and Timor in the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia). Some 22,000 Australians - including sailors of HMAS *Perth*, airmen and nurses - became prisoners of war. One-third died in captivity, many on the infamous Burma-Thailand Railway.

During 1942-43 Australia suffered air raids on Darwin and other northern locations, and a midget submarine raid on Sydney Harbour. In Papua New Guinea, CMF and AIF units repelled Japanese forces with decisive battles at Milne Bay and on the Kokoda Track. RAN warships participated in the Battle of the Coral Sea and escorted convoys, while RAAF squadrons flew bombing, reconnaissance and anti-submarine missions.

In 1943-44 Australian forces helped push back the Japanese in New Guinea and in 1944-45, isolated pockets of resistance were dealt with at Bougainville (3rd Division), New Britain (5th Division) and Aitape-Wewak (6th Division). The 7th and 9th Divisions meanwhile invaded Borneo. All of these final campaigns were supported by RAAF units and RAN warships, some of which also served in the Philippines or off Okinawa, Japan.

CWGC WAR CEMETERIES

Egypt

El Alamein War Cemetery contains 1,234 Australian burials while the Alamein Memorial commemorates 658 soldiers and airmen who died in the North African campaign whose graves are not known

Singapore

Before 1939 **Kranji War Cemetery,** Singapore was a military camp. After the war the cemetery was developed by the Army Graves Service and many graves were brought into it from the cemetery at Changi, Singapore's main prisoner of war camp. There are 1,115 Australian burials in the cemetery and 1,643 Australians commemorated on the **Singapore Memorial** which stands within the cemetery.

Indonesia

Ambon War Cemetery contains 1,100 Australian burials and was constructed on the site of a former camp for Australian, British and Dutch prisoners of war, many of whom died in captivity. The **Ambon Memorial,** with 444 Australian commemorations, stands in the cemetery confines.

Malaysia

Labuan War Cemetery (below) is the only war cemetery in North Borneo and contains 1,200 Australian burials, including those relocated from Sandakan and from the prisoner of war camp in Kuching. Many graves are un-named, partly because the Japanese destroyed records before the liberating Australian forces reached the camp. The Labuan Memorial stands immediately inside the main entrance gate and records the names of 2,225 Australians.

Papua New Guinea

Those who died in fighting in Papua and Bougainville are buried in the **Port Moresby (Bomana) War Cemetery,** (left) started in 1942 by the Australian Army Graves Service and containing 3,348 Australian burials. The **Port Moresby Memorial** records the names of 741 Australians whose graves are not known.
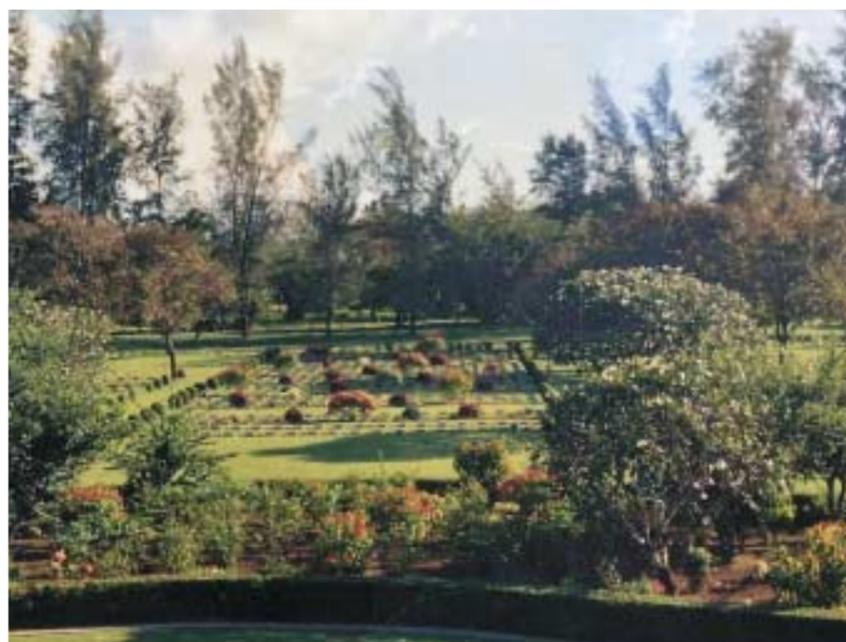
Rabaul (Bita Paka) War Cemetery is the smallest of the three war cemeteries in Papua New Guinea and contains the graves of 429 Australian casualties who died in New Britain and New Ireland. Within the cemetery, an avenue of bronze panelled stone pylons forms the **Rabaul Memorial** on which the names of 1,216 Australians are recorded.

Lae War Cemetery contains the graves of 2,373 Australian casualties and the **Lae Memorial** is inscribed with the names of 328 Australians who have no known grave.

Thailand-Burma (Myanmar)

Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand, is only a short distance from the site of the former "Kanburi" prisoner-of-war base camp, through which most of the prisoners passed on their way to other camps. It is the largest of the three war cemeteries on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Australian burials number 1,362.

Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery, Myanmar, (below) was created by the Army Graves Service for the graves originally located in prisoner-of-war camp burial grounds or isolated sites along the railway track between Moulmein and Nieke. There are 1,348 Australian burials in the cemetery.

Greece-Crete

In March and April 1941 the Commonwealth sent over 58,000 servicemen and women to defend Greece. Of these, 17,125 were Australians of the 6th Division, AIF. Of the Australian dead, 197 are buried in **Suda Bay War Cemetery,** Crete, and 252 in **Phaleron War Cemetery,** Athens, while 328 are commemorated on the **Athens Memorial.**

United Kingdom

There are over 7,000 Australians commemorated in the United Kingdom from both world wars. Many of the cemeteries contain the graves of those who died of wounds after evacuation from the Western Front during the First World War. Some cemeteries of interest are **Harefield (St Mary's), Churchyard,** Middlesex; (left) **Brookwood Military Cemetery,** Surrey; **Durrington Cemetery** and **Sutton Veny (St John) Churchyard,** Wiltshire; (right) **Cambridge City Cemetery,** Cambridgeshire and **Oxford (Botley) Cemetery,** Oxfordshire. The **Air Forces Memorial, Runnymede,** Surrey, commemorates by name RAAF casualties lost in action in the air war over North Western Europe. RAN casualties who died while serving with the Royal Navy are recorded on the **Plymouth Naval Memorial,** Devon, and Australian Merchant Seamen, who played a vital role in both wars, on the **Tower Hill Memorial, London.**

Australia

There are over 70 war cemeteries and war plots in Australia. **Sydney War Cemetery,** established in 1942, is the largest of its type with 608 Australian burials. The **Sydney Memorial** and the **Northern Territory Memorial** commemorate men and women of the Australian Forces who lost their lives in the eastern and southern regions of Australia and in adjacent waters south of 20 degrees latitude.

OFFICE OF AUSTRALIAN WAR GRAVES

The Office of Australian War Graves (OAWG) administers on behalf of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, both in and outside Australia, matters relating to the responsibilities of the Department in respect of war graves. The Office operates as an agent of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in Australia, Papua New Guinea, Norfolk Island and the Solomon Islands. As such, it maintains war cemeteries, associated memorials and individual war graves in these countries on the Commission's behalf.

In addition to its operations on behalf of the Commission, OAWG is also responsible for the official commemoration of those Australian veterans who died post-war due to their war service, and the maintenance of those memorials in perpetuity. OAWG also constructs and maintains overseas memorials at sites of major significance to Australia's military history. An information service is provided for those seeking historical information for research and family histories.

Battle Exploit and National Memorials

OAWG also administers the maintenance of several battle exploit memorials located at overseas sites. These include: 1st Australian Division Memorial, Pozieres; Windmill Site, Pozieres; 2nd Australian Division Memorial, Mont St Quentin; 3rd Australian Division Memorial, Sailly le Sec; 4th Australian Division Memorial, Bellenglise; 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, Hill 60, Zillebeke; 5th Australian Division, Polygon Wood, Zonnebeke; Tobruk Memorial, Libya; Surrender Point Memorial, Labuan Island; Australian Memorial, Jerusalem; 9th Australian Division Memorial, El Alamein; Vyner Brooke Memorial, Bangka Island; Kokoda Memorial; Sogeri Memorial; Cape Wom Memorial, Wewak; AIF Memorial, Lae and the Coastwatchers' Memorial, Madang.

In addition, OAWG has constructed and maintains national memorials such as the Anzac Commemorative Site, Gallipoli; Australian Memorial Park, Bullecourt; Australian Corps Memorial Park, Le Hamel; Australian Memorial Park, Fromelles; (left) Hellenic-Australian Memorial, Crete; Sandakan Memorial Park, Malaysia; Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum and Walking Trail, Thailand and the Isurava, Milne Bay and Popondetta Memorials in Papua New Guinea. The Australian War Memorial, London was dedicated on 11 November 2003.

Services Available to the Public

Locations

Records are kept at the Commission's Head Office in the United Kingdom and at the Office of Australian War Graves which enable the staff to help enquirers locate a particular grave or a name on a memorial.

Directions to Visitors

The Commission can provide directions to all Commonwealth war cemeteries and memorials throughout the world. Requests should be made well in advance.

Publications

Publications relating to the Commission's work can be supplied on request.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission
Enquiries Section
2 Marlow Road
Maidenhead
Berkshire
SL6 7DX
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 1628 634221
Fax: +44 (0) 1628 771208
E-mail: casualty.enq@cwgc.org
Web Site: www.cwgc.org

Office of Australian War Graves
PO Box 21
Woden ACT 2606
Australia
Tel: +61 (0) 2 6289 6477
Fax: +61 (0) 2 6289 4861