

# Pozières

## A Study Guide

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### **Introduction**

Between July and August, 1916, the small village of Pozières in northern France became the centre of one of the bloodiest battles of the Great War and the key to the success of the Battle for the Somme. Pozières was stormed by Australian soldiers and captured from the German forces who had invaded and taken over the French village. In a few short weeks, Australia suffered 23,000 casualties and 10,000 lives were lost to claim this tiny patch of earth. Sadly, by the end of August the village had been destroyed. The battles to reclaim the territory for the French nation were to become legendary.

The heroism of Australians who fought at Pozières and elsewhere on the Western Front is still honoured and remembered here and in France. Pozières remains one of the most famous names from the Great War. Most of the soldiers who survived World War I are now dead, yet their sacrifices and stories are still being researched and represented in film, text, on web sites and in other ways. The film *Pozières* takes the viewer back in time, and uses historical re-enactment, still photographs, paintings and historical archive materials to pass on the story of these Australian experiences during the Great War.

### **Before Watching the Film**

Work through the following background reading, activities and questions to develop your understanding of World War I and what happened at Pozières.

### **The Great War**

The Great War began on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1914, when Britain declared war on Germany as a result of the German invasion of France and neutral Belgium. Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand became allies

in their efforts against Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey (the central powers). The German army advanced within 120 kilometres of Paris. The Allied effort to fight back the German advance is the focus of *Pozières*.

In 1915, one million tons of British ships were sunk by German submarines and the German army used poison gas as a weapon for the first time in the history of warfare. In 1916, the Germans launched the drive towards Paris along the Somme River Valley in a series of battles that was to include the Battle of Pozières.



*The Village of Pozières Before the Conflict*

- Locate Pozières on a map of France.

Official war photographers worked to provide authentic pictorial narratives of the Great War. Look at the pictures of Pozières taken by British correspondents before and after the war which were presented to the Australian government. Look at the photograph and key to the photograph of the village of Pozières on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1916.

- How would you describe the village and surrounding areas?

Look at the photograph of Pozières taken on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August after the bombardment.

- How would you describe the area?

**Curriculum Links:** The film and materials in this guide will have interest and relevance for senior secondary students of Studies of Society and Environment, History, English, Drama and Media Studies. Younger students may find some scenes disturbing.



Aerial view of the village of Pozieres before the conflict



The Village of Pozieres After the Conflict

### **Australian Involvement in World War 1**

Most Australians reacted to news of the outbreak of war with great enthusiasm and many thousands were keen to enlist. During the first two weeks of the war 17,000 men volunteered to join the Australian Imperial Forces in Victoria and New South Wales alone. There was a belief that the war would be over by Christmas, and many eager young men volunteered quickly, afraid they might miss out on the action.

Read through the following reactions and extracts.

*Whatever happens, Australia is part of the Empire to the full. Remember that when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war.*

Prime Minister Cook, *Argus*, 1914

*For good or ill, we are engaged with the mother country in fighting for liberty and peace. It is no war of aggression upon which Britons have entered, but one in defence of small nations threatened with humiliation ... if not*

- How would you describe the village of Pozieres in both scenes?
- What kind of warfare was used to cause the devastation shown in the photo?
- What do you think might have happened to the local people?
- How do the photographs help explain the dramatic casualties at Pozieres?
- What were conditions like for the treatment of casualties?

### **The Western Front**

The line of trenches dug by the German army that stretched from the North Sea to the Swiss border became known as the Western Front. It was the largest man made construction the world had ever seen.

- Visit <http://www.worldwar1.com/maps/anzwfbig.gif> to locate key sites on the Western Front.
- Find out why it was so difficult for the allies to break through the Front.





*with extinction, and above and beyond everything, our armies will fight for British honour.*

*Sydney Morning Herald* editorial, 6<sup>th</sup> August, 1914

*I was the eldest of six children in our family on a not too rich dairy farm near Toowoomba in 1915. There was a severe drought and things were not too good on the farm. The only topic of talk was the war and it seemed the proper thing to do was enlist, however I think it was the spirit of adventure and seeing things that was the prime mover.*

Extract from *Citizen To Soldier*

In 1914, 96% of Australians were of British descent. In spite of the fact that ever increasing numbers of Australians were born in Australia and felt a sense of loyalty to Australia, many still saw Britain as the Mother Country. Australia's parliament, legal and education system were all based on British models. School students studied British, not Australian history. In the first decade of the twentieth century, people in Australia were nervous about Russian, Japanese, French and German intentions in the Asia and Pacific regions. They were keen to support Britain in the hope they would receive protection in return should the need arise.

- What does the information you have read here tell you about why Australians became involved in the war?
- Do some library research to find out more about why Australians volunteered to join up.
- Not everyone was enthusiastic. Investigate reasons why some people did not wish to be involved.
- There were complicated diplomatic events contributing to the outbreak of war in Europe. Conduct some further library research to build a more complete picture of the causes of the war.

### ***The War Drags On***

Christmas 1914 and 1915 came and went, and the German army held firm on the Western Front. Australians were shocked by the disastrous Gallipoli campaign in Turkey in April 1915, where 7,600 lives were lost, but there was immense pride in the courage and persistence of the ANZAC soldiers. The British command then decided to move these troops on to France.

- Do some library research to find out more about the Gallipoli Landing. Why was it so disastrous?
- What legends and stories are there about the heroism of the ANZACS at Gallipoli?
- What happened in the course of the war from 1917 to 1918?
- How did the war end?

### ***After Watching the Film The Battle of Pozieres***

- To build a story and timeline of what happened at Pozieres, ask each class member to jot down the key events in sequence as they watch the film. Then as a class write up the events as a story board.
- In a class discussion, talk about the impressions you have of what it was like for the AIF soldiers at Pozieres.
- Imagine you are a war correspondent writing reports on what happened at Pozieres. Write a series of front page news articles for the *Daily Telegraph* of 16<sup>th</sup> July to 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1916 about what happened at Pozieres, based on the information and photos in the study guide and what you have seen in the film. You could refer to descriptions of the AIF soldiers you see in the film, to extracts from the *Telegraph* at the time and other information you can gather.



■ What are your impressions of Haig's views on the severity of the losses?

■ Why do you think he ordered the Battle of the Somme to continue?

### ***Soldiers' Stories***

*Pozières* tells its story through the eyes of particular soldiers and their families. As a class, or in small groups, discuss each of these characters and the factors that made their experience in the war both similar and different. Use the following points and questions to launch your discussion:

Thomas Gardiner was a thirty-three year old miner from Kerang. The voice-over tells us that 'he survived the war but not the peace'.

■ What does this mean?

■ Why do you think he was motivated to join up at first?

■ Why did his sister Mabel have a different opinion?

■ Why did he die?

■ Did he eventually understand Mabel's point of view about the war?



Eric Liddie was a twenty-two year old dental apprentice from North Sydney. He survived the war but lost his leg.

■ What compensation was he awarded for the loss of his leg? Do you think this was fair?

Matthew and Steve Grant were two brothers from Sydney who fought at Pozières.

■ What happened to the brothers?

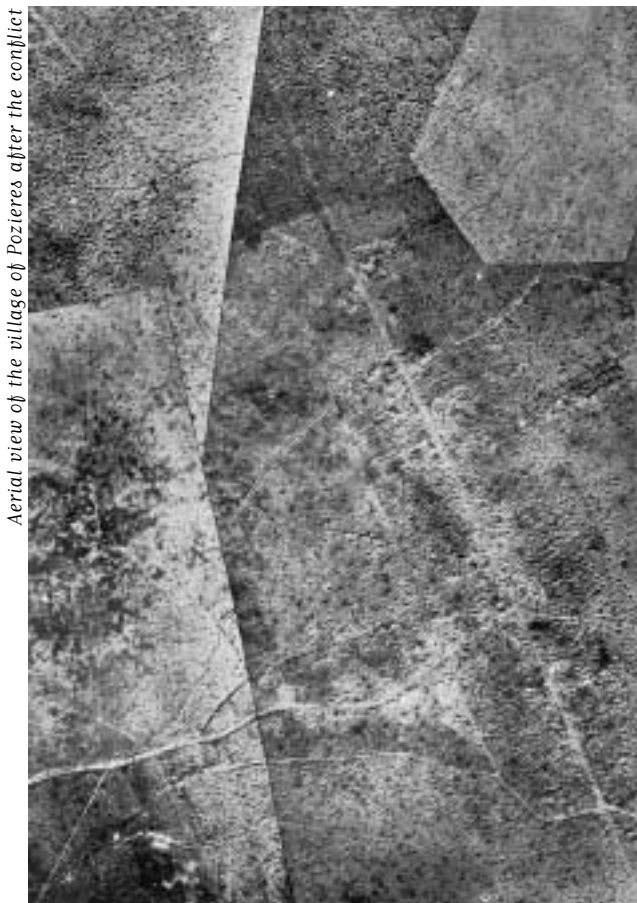
Horace Ward was a labourer from 62 York Street, Port Melbourne. He died at Pozières.

(Adolf Hitler, a twenty-seven year old German soldier who was considered odd by his comrades, survived the same battle where Horace was killed.)

■ How were parents at home in Australia told of the loss of their loved ones?

■ What made Horace's death particularly tragic for his father?

Daniel Perry was a thirty-one year old carpenter from West Adelaide with a wife and son.



Aerial view of the village of Pozières after the conflict



- What happened to David?
- What support would the government have provided for his wife and child?
- What do we learn in the film to suggest there might have been a different outcome for Daniel with better medical facilities?

Bert Taylor was a twenty-one year old stockman from Queensland. He survived the war and became a successful author and an advocate for Aboriginal rights.

- What impressions does he give of Pozieres?

Thomas was a twenty-two year old watchmaker from Fremantle.

- It could be said that Thomas reveals an ugly side of soldiers' behavior. Do you agree?

Jim O'Brien was a thirty-one year old shearer from Winton, Queensland.

- What is Jim's attitude to the war?

- What happens to Jim?

David Pearson was an Aboriginal soldier who was wounded twice and received a military medal. He was killed in 1918.

- Why wasn't David regarded as an Australian citizen?

### **Trench Warfare**

Many thousands of AIF and enemy soldiers spent months in the trenches in France from 1916 – 1918. The German commanders ordered their troops to dig trenches to protect them from advancing French, British and Australian forces. The sad truth was that the trench warfare and 'over the top' charges achieved very little.

- How do you think the trenches were built?
- What advantages and disadvantages could you suggest for trench warfare?
- Why were there 'duck boards' at the base of the trench?
- What hardships would the soldiers on both sides have experienced in the trenches?

- Find out more about trench warfare on the web sites <http://www.worldwar1.com/reflib.htm> <http://www.hellfirecorner.com/>

### **Australian Attitudes to British Authority**

- What impressions does the film give of the Australians' attitudes to the British authorities? The re-enacted scene in the film showing AIF soldiers in the Middle East could be used for evidence in this answer.

One million Allied soldiers, including nearly 60,000 Australians, were killed in battle. Sir Douglas Haig's critics believe he was responsible for many unnecessary deaths.

- From what you see in the film, what is your opinion of Haig? Do some library research to find out more about him. Visit <http://www.co.uk/FWWhaig.htm> to find out more about the General who was responsible for many of the decisions to send Allied soldiers into battle on the Western Front.

- What were Haig's impressions of the AIF?

### **The Home Front**

The Great War had a tremendous impact on the lives of many thousands of Australians on the home front. As thousands of husbands, sons and fathers rushed off to enlist, the lives of the women, children and relatives left behind changed dramatically. It was not uncommon for three or four members of a family to enlist. Many women had to scrimp, save and take on extra work in an effort to get by.

- What different reactions do you see towards the war through the eyes of the various characters on the home front?
- What wartime factors shaped the lives of Australians who remained at home?
- Do further library research to find out more about life on the home front during the Great War.

### **The Conscription Debate**

(Note: conscription during the Great War meant the forced enlistment of young men into the army, with penalties for those who refused including imprisonment.)

By 1916 the number of Australian volunteers for the AIF was declining; at the same time there were increasing casualties on the Front. The British government requested more men. Prime Minister Billy Hughes' decision to introduce referendums on the conscription of soldiers to fight in the war in 1916, and again in 1917, caused bitter divisions in Australian society.

The results of the first referendum were:

YES vote	1,087,332
NO vote	1,158,881
Majority for NO	71,549

- What do these statistics tell you about the attitudes of Australians during the war?
- What do you find out in the film about the arguments and campaigns for and against conscription?
- In the film, you see a re-enactment of the incident where an egg is thrown at Prime Minister Hughes. Why did this happen?
- Why do you think the senior sergeant refused to charge the offender?
- Why did this incident lead to the formation of the first Federal Police Force?
- Do some further research on the conscription debates. Class members could look at conscription posters and poetry, and investigate the views of people including Daniel Mannix and John Curtin, groups such as the IWW, people from different religions and unionists. Note the various reasons why they voted for or against conscription.



Dressing station near Pozieres

- The 'Blood Vote' poem is believed to have been critical in persuading many women to vote against conscription. Read the poem and talk about what it means. What is your opinion of the power of the poem?
- Conduct a class debate to argue for and against conscription.
- What was the outcome of the second conscription referendum in 1917?



### **Attitudes to Germans in Australia During the War**

Sections of the film provide insights into what happened to Germans in Australia during the Great War.

- What does the film tell you about the treatment of German nationals living in Australia during the war?
- How do you think the men and women would have felt about what was happening?
- Do you think there was any real basis for fear of German people who had lived in Australia, in some cases, for many years?
- Find out more about what life was like for the men who were sent to internment camps.
- Why do you think German place names were changed?

### **The End of the War**

At the end of the Great War, 60,000 Australian soldiers had been killed out of a total Australian population of only five million. Australia went through a period of great social, economic and political division. The war shocked people all over the world. It had caused so much senseless loss of life, with as many as ten million soldiers killed. Vast areas of farmland and forest in Europe were destroyed, and many Australians came home physically crippled and psychologically devastated.

- In one scene in the film, you see footage of a shell-shocked soldier. How can you explain the shell-shock so many soldiers experienced?
- Why do you think the medical professions found it difficult to treat these conditions?
- In what ways would it have been particularly traumatic for soldiers requiring plastic or reconstructive surgery?
- For some soldiers, the return home was easier than for others. Why did some soldiers cope better with the return to Australia?
- How long was it before Australia was involved in warfare again and why?

### **Media Studies**

- How would you describe the genre of this film?
- Write a critical review of *Pozières* for a film magazine.
- How do you think the combination of factual presentation of issues and re-enactment works in the film?
- What emotional reactions does the film generate?
- Make a list of all the different source materials used as images in the making of this film.
- List and comment on how links are made between the different themes.

### **Further Activities**

The war diaries of Reg Part provide us with great insights into what life was like at Pozières. He describes the battle scene as 'hell with a vengeance' and records his story of being gassed in the trenches.

Visit <http://www.scotch.sa.edu.au/WarDiary/RegPart.htm#France> to read Reg's story.

Visit the Australian War Memorial to complete further research on Australians in wartime and to do a virtual tour of the memorial. <http://www.awm.gov.au/>

### References: Books

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Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs, *A Guide to the Battlefields, Cemeteries and Memorials of the Gallipoli Peninsula*, 1998.

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A.M. Nixon, *Somewhere in France: Letters to Home – The War Years of Sgt. Roy Whitelaw, 1<sup>st</sup> AIF*, Five Mile Press, 1989.

L.L. Robson, *Australia and the Great War*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1969.

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### Films

*Gallipoli* – directed by Peter Weir, written by David Williamson, 1981

### Community Organizations

■ Department of Veterans' Affairs in your state or your federal Member of Parliament

■ Commemorative Activities Section

Department of Veterans' Affairs

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Email [cas@dva.usgovdva.telememo.au](mailto:cas@dva.usgovdva.telememo.au)

World Wide Web: [www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au)

■ the RSL in your state

■ museums in your state

■ The Australian War Memorial

Anzac Parade

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Telephone (06) 243 4211

*Pozières* is available through Ronin Films:

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