

War graves for Fromelles diggers

The Australian and British Governments will seek to have the remains of their World War I soldiers — buried in mass graves near Fromelles in 1916 — exhumed and given individual burials with military honours.

The Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, announced on July 31 that this was “the most fitting way to commemorate our brave soldiers and will ensure [that] the heroism they showed in the terrible battle of Fromelles will be remembered and revered.”

He went on, “Should these remains have been discovered by postwar battlefield clearance teams in 1919, the war dead would have been reinterred with individual headstones; our men are no less deserving of that honour and dignity today.”

The joint decision follows the limited excavation of the Pheasant Wood site in May this year, when the Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD) confirmed that human remains were present and assessed their condition, number and nationality.



The archaeology team studying the mass graves near Fromelles recovers early-pattern shrapnel balls (bottom centre) in the topsoil over pit 6.

French permission sought

Planning will begin immediately and, subject to the approval of French authorities and with the support of the people of Fromelles, a time-frame for the recovery of remains will be announced later this year. Future work, including the significant task of preparing a war cemetery, will be undertaken under the auspices of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Mr Snowdon added, “[Although] acquisition of the land near Pheasant Wood for a permanent war cemetery is a Commonwealth War Graves Commission responsibility, we acknowledge the generous offer of land by the owner of the mass-burial site, Madame Demassiet, and will consider the needs of all parties, including the tenant farmer, in this process.”

Work is under way to confirm the names of those believed buried at the Pheasant Wood site and the Australian and British governments have agreed to share equally the costs of research, exhumation and reburial.

Mr Snowdon made the joint announcement with Mr Derek Twigg, British Undersecretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans.

Details of the Fromelles research and limited excavation are available online at www.defence.gov.au/fromelles. Members of the public who believe their relatives may be buried at Fromelles are encouraged to register their details on the web site or on the Fromelles Public Inquiries line: 1800 019 090.

Search goes on for Vietnam digger

On the eve of Vietnam Veterans’ Day, the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, has announced that an investigation team may be one step closer to solving the mystery of Australia’s last missing digger from the Vietnam War.

Private David Fisher, of the Special Air Services Regiment, fell from a rope beneath a Royal Australian Air Force helicopter in the course of a “hot extraction” of his patrol in 1969. He fell into thick jungle and, despite an extensive search of the area by an SASR patrol and infantry units, no trace of him was ever found.

Extensive research work, including interviews with locals and Vietnamese veterans earlier this year, has helped the Australian investigation team to pinpoint a possible location, at which an initial survey has discovered a small quantity of human remains.

On August 16, Mr Snowdon said, “This week a Defence forensic anthro-

pologist, an archaeologist and several Army historians will conduct a full dig in the location where Private Fisher is believed to have fallen.

“The Australian team will work closely with Vietnamese officials. They know what they are looking for and now have a good indication of where to search.

“In addition the team is undertaking a preliminary examination of records relating to the two Royal Australian Air Force personnel also missing in Vietnam.”

Flying Officer Herbert and Pilot Officer Carver disappeared without a trace in Canberra aircraft A84-231 on November 3, 1970 while on a bombing mission.

“The Australian Government is doing everything it can to account for these brave men and we are extremely appreciative of the support provided by the Vietnamese Government and its people,” Mr Snowdon said.

ADF task force to clear Kiribati ordnance

An Australian Defence Force joint task force has deployed to the Pacific Island nation Kiribati to commence Operation Kiribati Assist after a request by the Government of Kiribati for help in the disposal of World War II unexploded ordnance (UXO) throughout Kiribati. The Kiribati islands were occupied by the Japanese during World War II and most UXO there are rem-

nants of this conflict and include artillery projectiles, aerial bombs, rockets, mortars and mines identified during a 2007 reconnaissance of the islands. The 22-strong joint task force includes a command group; a RAN clearance diving team to handle underwater UXO; Army and RAAF teams who will handle land-based UXO; and a medical team.

Peacekeeping centre to aid Asia-Pacific region

Major General (Retd) Mike Smith has been appointed inaugural executive director of the Asia Pacific Centre for Civil-Military Cooperation.

The \$5.1 million centre will coordinate government agencies in civil-military coordination and cooperation, including advice on integrating the civil and military components of operations.

The centre will be established in Queanbeyan and will comprise government officials from departments and agencies that play central roles in Australia’s international engagement and deployments.

Its aim will be to harness government agencies in developing practical contributions to stabilisation, reconstruction and peace-keeping operations, providing outreach capability to non-government and international organisations. It will network internationally with similar organisations including regional peace-keeping centres.

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support Dr Mike Kelly AM said, “Mike Smith brings to this position a wealth of knowledge and experience ... within Defence and non-government organisations.

“Mike Smith’s expertise in civil-military cooperation stems from his field experience as Deputy Force Commander in East Timor and subsequently as the Chief Executive Officer of AUST-CARE.”

Committee has equipment concerns

A parliamentary Public Accounts Committee’s progress report on equipment acquisition and financial reporting in Defence has found that Defence has made significant progress in improving its financial position and has demonstrated a strong commitment to implementing the recommendations of the 2003 Kinnaird review.

“However, the Committee still has a number of concerns,” says the Chairwoman of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Sharon Grierson. “While the reform agenda is in train it’s time for Defence to focus on measuring the effectiveness and outcomes of that agenda in a more systematic and explicit way.”

For more information: the inquiry secretary on (02) 6277 2336 or visit <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/defence/report.htm>

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