

Australia War Memorial



The Memorial is more than a monument. Inside the sandstone building, with its copper-sheathed dome, selections from a vast National Collection of relics, official and private records, art, photographs, film, and sound are employed to relate the story of a young nation's experience in world wars, regional conflicts, and international peacekeeping.

The Memorial forms the core of the nation's tribute to the sacrifice and achievement of 102,000 Australian men and women who died serving their country and to those who served overseas and at home. A central commemorative area surrounded by arched alcoves houses the names of the fallen on the bronze panels of the Roll of Honour. At the head of the Pool of Reflection, beyond the Flame of Remembrance, stands the towering Hall of Memory, with its interior wall and high dome clad in a six-million-piece mosaic. Inside lies the Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier, an official war grave and national shrine.

Conception

Many a man lying out there at Pozieres or in the low scrub at Gallipoli, with his poor tired senses barely working through the fever of his brain, has thought in his last moments: "Well – it's over; but in Australia they will be proud of this." (Charles Bean)

After the anguish of Gallipoli, the Australians of the 1st AIF (Australian Imperial Force) and their official war correspondent, Charles Bean, moved on to the greater horrors of the Western Front in France and Belgium. The Australians' first big battles were at Fromelles and Pozieres, in July 1916. Bean was immediately appalled by the sufferings of the men. He wrote in his diary: Pozieres has been a terrible sight all day ...

One knew that the Brigades which went in last night were there today in that insatiable factory of ghastly wounds. The men were simply turned in there as into some ghastly giant mincing machine. They have to stay there while shell after huge shell descends with a shriek close beside them “ each one an acute mental torture “ each shrieking tearing crash bringing a promise to each man “ instantaneous “ I will tear you into ghastly wounds “ I will rend your flesh and pulp an arm or a leg “ fling you half a gaping quivering man (like these that you see smashed around you one by one) to lie there rotting and blackening like all the things you saw by the awful roadside, or in that sickening dusty crater. Ten or twenty times a minute every man in the trench has that instant fear thrust tight upon his shoulders “ I don't care how brave he is “ with a crash that is a physical pain and a strain to withstand.

A month later the idea of a memorial museum for Australian was born, as Bean's confidant A.W. Bazley later recalled:

I remember in August 1916 when after his busy days tramping the Pozieres battlefield and visiting units in the line he would roll out his blankets on the chalk firestep of the old British front line ... on the edge of Becourt Wood and Sausage Gully. We used to sleep feet to head “ C.E.W.B., Padre Dexter, myself, and others “ and although I cannot recall the actual conversations today I do remember that on a number of occasions he talked about what he had in his mind concerning some future Australian war memorial museum.