



# BATTLE SCARRIED

The 47th Battalion in the First World War

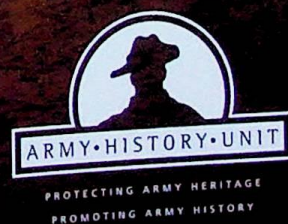


CRAIG DEAYTON

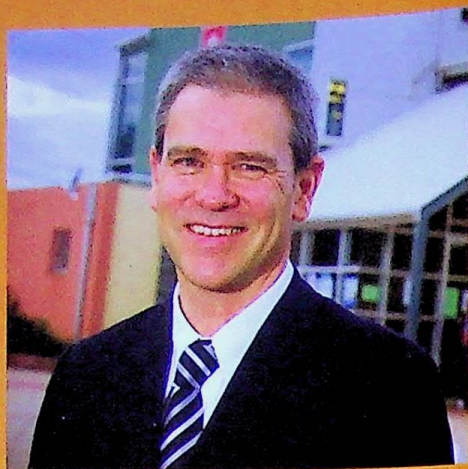


The story of the 47th Battalion, of the men who fought and died within its ranks, of the triumphs, the tragedies and the sacrifices in the cause of that great war of liberation, has passed into history, one part of that great story so painstakingly chronicled by Bean, Australia's official historian, 'as a tribute to great hearted men and to their nation, a possession forever'. The old soldiers faded away, among them Private Denver Gallwey, who contributed much to his nation's story of the First World War, and who died on 26 May 1967. To him belong the final words of the story:

'In the consummation of this work, I pass into oblivion.'







Craig Deayton is a History teacher with a special interest in Australia's military history. He has worked as a teacher and College Principal for over twenty-five years and is currently Principal of Sacred Heart College in Hobart. Craig holds a Bachelor's degree in History and a Masters degree in Education. This is his first book.

Craig lives in Hobart with his wife Tracey and children Patrick, Dominic, Michael and Annie.

*Front cover image, top: A rare photograph of the 47th Battalion in the front line. Water carriers of the 47th near Garter Point where the battalion lost 20 killed during its week in the line. (AWM E00771)*

*Front cover image, bottom: Passchendaele. The Ypres-Roulers rail embankment on the afternoon of the attack of the 12th of October. (AWM E03864).*

*Front flap image: 47th Battalion Sweetheart brooch. Such brooches were usually worn by female relatives to show pride and support for a loved one serving overseas. The 47th badge is unusually intricate (most were simply miniature enamelled colour patches) featuring national floral symbols of wattle and waratah and the outline map of the nation.*

*(Courtesy Ian Wakely & Ross Johnson)*

*Back cover image: Passchendaele. Hurley's famous photograph taken in the Ypres salient of Australian infantry moving out to relieve a battalion in the front line at dusk. (AWM E00833)*

*Inside front cover: The village of Dernancourt prior to the battle on the 5th of April, 1918. The rail embankment which skirted the town formed the main defensive position for the 47th Battalion during the battle.*

*Inside back cover: Aerial view of the obliterated village of Dernancourt following the fighting on the 5th of April.*

*Photos courtesy Bridges Memorial Library, Royal Military College Duntroon. Third Battle of the Somme 1918, General Staff (Intelligence) Australian Corps. Album of images donated by Brigadier General T.A. Blamey.*

*'The dead and wounded of the 47th Battalion lay everywhere underfoot'*

With these words Charles Bean, Australia's Official War Historian, described the battlefield of Dernancourt on the morning of the 5th of April, 1918, strewn with the bodies of the Australian dead. It was the final tragic chapter in the story of the 47th Australian Infantry Battalion in the First World War.

The 47th Battalion fought in some of the First World War's bloodiest battles. From their first calamitous experience of war under the terrible shell fire of Pozieres, to the costly and futile attacks on Mouquet Farm and the frigid winters on the Somme they suffered through the fighting on the Western Front in 1916. In April of 1917 they were trapped and almost surrounded at 1st Bullecourt. A mere eight weeks later, they 'hopped the bags' at Messines where they lost over half their number. In October they fought and died by the score in the mud of Passchendaele.

One of the shortest lived and most battle hardened of the 1st Australian Imperial Force's battalions, the 47th was formed in Egypt in 1916 and disbanded two years later having suffered one of the highest casualty rates of any Australian unit. Their story is remarkable for many reasons. Dogged by command and discipline troubles and bled white by the desperate attrition battles of 1916 and 1917, they fought on against a determined and skilful enemy in battles where the fortunes of war seemed stacked against them at every turn. Not only did they have the misfortune to be called into some of the A.I.F.'s most costly campaigns, chance often found them in the worst places within those battles.

Finally, at the Battle of Dernancourt they fought in the 4th Division's titanic struggle to save Amiens from the great German offensive of 1918. It was at Dernancourt that the 47th Battalion found itself squarely in the path of the heaviest attack ever faced by Australians in this or any war. Fatally weakened by their losses, and under a cloud after the formal inquiry into the battle, the 47th Battalion was broken up. For the Queenslanders and Tasmanians of the 47th Battalion, disbandment meant not only the loss of their battalion, but disgrace and heartbreak as well. Worse still, it meant the ties of comradeship and the bond to their fallen mates were severed at one stroke. In their own bitter words, they were 'thrown away'.

Though their story is one of almost unrelieved tragedy, it is also story of remarkable courage, endurance and heroism. It is the story of the 1st A.I.F. itself – punished, beaten, sometimes reviled for their indiscipline, they fought on – fewer, leaner and harder – until final victory was won. And at its end, in an extraordinary gesture of mateship, the remnants of the 47th Battalion reunited. Having been scattered to other units after their disbandment, the survivors gathered in Belgium for one last photo together. Only 73 remained.



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