



Source A Timeline of Private Edwards' service in the Australian Imperial Force

1915

- **27 July:** Enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force
- **20 November:** Embarked from Melbourne Australia on HMAT *Commonwealth* with reinforcements for the 24th Battalion
- **30 December:** HMAT *Commonwealth* arrived at Suez in Egypt, but the men were not allowed off until 2 January 1916.

1916

- **16 January:** Admitted to hospital in Cairo, Egypt, with Tonsillitis.
- **22 January:** Released from hospital.
- **24 February:** Transferred to the 8th Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, as part of the reorganisation of the AIF.
- **26 March:** Moved from Cairo to Alexandria in Egypt in preparation for journey to France.
- **31 March:** Arrived at Marseilles in France. Edwards immediately leaves the ship and goes missing for several hours. He is later charged with going 'absent without leave' (AWL) when he arrived in France. He is awarded 7 days' Field Punishment No. 2, which will begin once the battalion establishes a camp near the battlefields.
- **1-2 April:** Edwards' entire battalion spends two days on a train travelling to an area not far from the France-Belgium border (between Bailleul and Steenwerck).
- **6 April:** The battalion resumes its training with route marches and musketry training.
- **8 April:** Edwards begins his sentence earned by going AWL on the wharf after arriving in France: seven days Field Punishment.
- **April:** Edwards' battalion continues training in northern France for the entire month. The weather is very wet and they often have a hard time on long marches.
- **1 May:** Edwards' 8th Battalion arrives at Fleurbaix and camps in billets close to the front line. For the next week, they come under heavy German artillery fire. Edwards' brother Charles wrote a letter home describing how he left his blankets and underpants out to air, and when he brought them in they were all "torn about" from the fire. They would continue to rotate in and out of the front line in this quieter sector known as "the Nursery".
- **15 May:** The 8th Battalion moves into the front line after about one week in reserve. The weather is now hot and muggy, and although this is a quiet sector of the line, a number of men are killed by random enemy fire.
- **May** Edward writes home describing his first time in the front line. He said 'for his part' he would sooner have a good straight out go at the Germans, who were only a few hundred yards away behind sand bags. This would be a better way of finishing the job, instead of trench fighting which was rotten. He was in the trenches for two weeks and had a 'fair time' except for rats and mosquitoes. He also reported that it was 'great to have a wash followed by a sleep with one's clothes off'.

- **17 June:** The 8th Battalion was in the front line near Sailly when they were ordered to 'stand to'. No attack came, but for the first time they smelt some poison gas across their trenches.
- **27 June:** Edwards' brother Charles, also serving with the 8th Battalion, writes a letter to their parents to say that Edward had previously been working with a bombing party, and had joined a raiding party.
- **6 July:** The 8th Battalion was relieved from the front line and withdrawn to a reserve camp behind the front to continue training.
- **9 July:** 8th Battalion spends the morning at church parade (Catholic and Protestant services were held separately) and at 4.00 pm received orders to move to Bailleul and get on a train to the South. By 10.00 pm the battalion had moved to Bailleul and had settled into billets for the night.
- **10-11 July:** The 8th Battalion was moved to Doullens by train, arriving at 1.15 am. Once clear of the station, they were all served coffee. At daybreak the men began their march to the battlefields of the Somme. Over the coming days more than 30 men reported blistered feet, but only seven were allowed to stop marching and recover.
- **14 July:** The men arrived at Rainneville overnight. On the evening of the 14th the whole battalion was gathered and its commanding officer addressed them. He warned his men that in the coming days or weeks they would be called into the front line and would probably experience very hard fighting.
- **16 July:** The 8th Battalion arrives at Varennes, where its officers begin to prepare for the attack to come with a series of conferences, and the other ranks continue training in advancing in fighting order.
- **20 July:** The 8th Battalion moves into position near Albert. The battalion is now close enough to the front line that its officers can go forward and see the area they will fight over in a few days.
- **23 July:** In the early hours the 1st Australian Division launches an attack on the fortified village of Pozières. At 4.45 am the 8th Battalion, which has been in reserve, moves forward into trenches at the south-western corner of the newly captured village. One company of the battalion starts carrying water up to the fighting troops ahead of them, the other three, including Private Edwards' B Company, remain in readiness to move forward if required. They spend the entire day under extremely heavy German artillery fire. By the afternoon the battalion had been moved further forward, with Edwards' B Company taking up a position almost in the middle of the village. They spend time constructing strong defensive points under fire.
- **25 July:** After two days sheltering from shellfire in the strongpoints, B Company of the 8th Battalion takes part in an attack to clear the village and advance to the north. Private Edwards' B Company was initially in support of the main attack, and then advanced to continue its work of constructing strong points.
- **26 July:** Private Edwards is reportedly killed in action. On this day the 8th Battalion continued to build up their defences in the new territory captured during its attack up the west side of Pozières. Little is known of the manner of Edwards' death. Too often it was too difficult to formally record these details during battle and so many details were lost.

Source B Overview of the 8th Battalion AIF. (Overview provided by Dr Meleah Hampton, author of *The Battle of Pozières, 1916*, Big Sky Publishing, 2018)

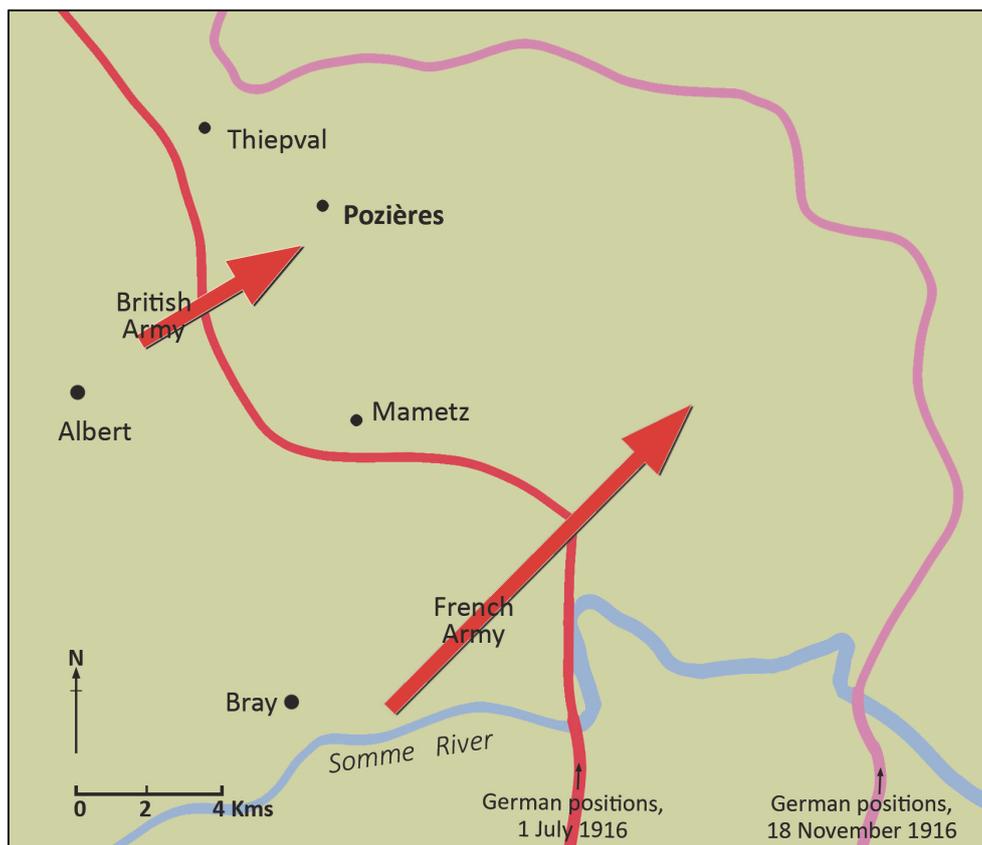
The 8th Battalion was one of the first units raised for the AIF. It left for service overseas with the first group of Australian soldiers in late 1914. The 8th Battalion first served on the Gallipoli peninsula before being evacuated at the end of 1915. During the early months of 1916, the entire AIF was expanded and reorganised in preparation for transfer to the Western Front. Arriving in France at the end of March 1916, the 8th Battalion spent a period of time gaining valuable experience in the quieter 'nursery' sector of the line around Belgium. The unit's first major action was at Pozières in July 1916, when it played an important role establishing strong points in newly captured positions. The 8th Battalion continued to serve on the Western Front for the remainder of the war, participating in the fighting around Bullecourt in early 1917, and later that year at the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as 'Passchendaele'. The following year the battalion was involved in successful efforts to stop the great German advance known as 'the Spring Offensive' and continued to fight on the Somme until late September 1918, when it was exhausted. In fact, its numbers were so low that it was combined with as many as three other battalions until the surviving men were brought home in 1919.

Source C The Battle of Pozières, 1916 (Account provided by Dr Meleah Hampton author of *The Battle of Pozières, 1916*, Big Sky Publishing, 2018)

After two years of stalemate on the Western Front, the French and British commanders planned a major offensive in the Somme region to be launched in 1916. French plans were ruined by major German attacks on Verdun in February 1916, and the British were left to conduct the Somme campaign with much less French assistance than expected. The first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, was a horrific failure. The British suffered as many as 60,000 casualties (20,000 dead and 40,000 wounded) for very small territorial gains. Nevertheless, with the French under pressure at Verdun, the Somme offensive had to continue if only to prevent the Germans from using all of their reinforcements against the French. Over the coming months the British continued to launch attacks on the Somme, making small gains at a huge cost.

In late July the Australian battalions of 1st Anzac Corps entered the front line of the Somme offensive. They attacked and captured the village of Pozières on the 23rd. Australian forces continued to attack German positions in this area for the next six weeks, making a series of small advances that pushed their line forward a little over a mile. During these attacks, the Australians captured an important German trench system known as 'the O.G. Lines' (it is believed O.G. stood for 'old German'), but failed to take the fortified German positions at Mouquet Farm to the north. This small series of gains cost the 1st Anzac Corps a staggering 23,000 casualties (6,800 killed), which was a similar number to the losses on Gallipoli – but over six weeks instead of eight months.

Source D Map of the Western Front showing the location of the Battle of Pozières in 1916



Source E The French village of Pozières in 2014



A Brave Young Recruit

“I Am Not Afraid to Die.”

WANGARATTA—Cr. W. H. Edwards, J.P., of Wangaratta, has received official information that his son, Private Edward Edwards, was killed in action in Belgium* on 26th July. Private Edwards was nineteen years of age. He enlisted on 3rd August, when he was barely eighteen years of age. He was engaged in the Commonwealth Audit Office. He wrote home seeking the permission of his parents to enlist, as he was anxious to avenge the death of his cousin, Private Charles Powley, who had been killed at Gallipoli. He concluded his appeal with the spiritual sentence: ‘I am not afraid to die.’ He was among the first Australian troops sent from Egypt to France and had been there four months. He was with a bombing party, and later joined a raiding party. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards on Monday received news that their other son, Private Charles Edwards, had been wounded in France.

* Private Edwards was killed at Pozières which is actually in France, not Belgium.