

The battles that won the First World War

Australian soldiers fight toward the finish line

One hundred years ago, Australian troops fought resolutely at **Hamel**, **Amiens** and **Montbrehain** in Northern France—and made significant contributions to bringing the war to an end on the Western Front.

As the world pauses to mark the 100th anniversaries of these battles, discover how our men lived the Anzac spirit at Hamel and during the final months of conflict, now known as the 'Hundred Days' Offensive.

The 'Hundred Days' Offensive paved the way for the Armistice, the historic agreement of 11 November 1918 that silenced the guns of the Western Front and led to the end of the First World War.

The anniversary of this momentous event is now a key time of commemoration—Remembrance Day. It's an important opportunity to reflect on the sacrifice of our selfless servicemen and women, including those who

served at the Battles of Hamel, Amiens and Montbrehain. In 2018, Remembrance Day is even more significant as it marks the 100th anniversary of the Armistice.

Visit www.qld.gov.au/remembranceday to discover Queensland's special Armistice Centenary commemorations and the many ways you can be involved.



Australian and American troops during the battle of Hamel.

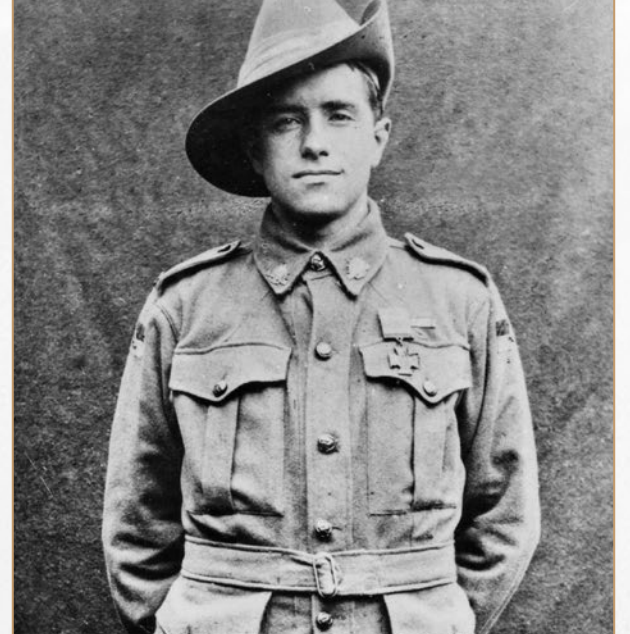


It was July 1918 and time for the allies to switch to the offensive. Since March, the Germans had led a series of devastating attacks up and down the British sector, hoping to force the British to negotiate peace before the Americans arrived in numbers.

The Germans had thrown everything at their offensives, but their forward momentum began to wane. Faced with the choice to either bunker down and defend or launch a

counter-attack, the allies chose to advance.

The decision was a turning point in what had become a long and costly war. Along with major French offensive operations, this series of successful British counter offensives, beginning with the Battle of Hamel, culminated with the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918.



Private Henry (Harry) Dalziel, VC of the 15th Battalion.

The Battle of Hamel:

A successful trial

4 July 1918

The British planned to rally at Hamel on 4 July 1918, with the units fighting under the command of Australia's Lieutenant General Sir John Monash.

The First World War had seen significant technological innovations in the form of refined machine gun technology, aeroplanes and tanks. Commanders on both sides were learning to incorporate these new resources into battlefield strategy, with varying degrees of success.

A deep thinker, Lieutenant General Monash had spent the past four years combing through these lessons. By combining the most recent technology with the latest strategy, the allied forces could hope to end the war.

As at Cambrai in 1917, men and the machines would work together at Hamel. Guns, tanks, mortars and planes—they would now become the primary vehicles of advance, clearing the way for allied troops to move faster over ground, and with far fewer losses. The improved Mark V tank would make an enormous difference to the speed of the advance and protection of Australian and American infantry taking part.

"...the true role of the Infantry was not to extend itself upon heroic physical effort, nor to wither away under merciless machine-gun fire, nor to impale itself on hostile bayonets, nor to tear itself to pieces in hostile entanglements... but on the contrary, to advance under the maximum possible array of mechanical resources, in the form of machine guns, tanks, mortars and aeroplanes." —Lieutenant General Monash.

'Combined arms' attacks had been trialled before but never executed to full effect. One failing was that the infantry didn't trust that the tanks could protect them. This was an understandable sentiment considering the poorly-executed attacks at Bullecourt in April 1917.

In the weeks before the battle, Lieutenant General Monash organised for the infantry to spend time training with the tanks—going through exercises to become familiar with the new technology and learn to trust in the brute strength of the machines. The troops became so fond of them that they made up pet

names that were chalked on to the tanks' iron sides. And on 4 July 1918, as man and metal advanced side by side behind a protective artillery barrage and with aircraft wheeling overhead, the fullest extent of the 'combined arms' attack became reality.

The closer integration of the tanks and infantry was just one of many improvements at Hamel. The battle also famously led to the allies using aeroplanes in a novel way. As this was the first war in which aircraft were employed, commanders were still learning how useful they could be.

Based off German accounts, the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) implemented an innovative plan to use the aircraft for battlefield ammunition drops. Prior to this development, the heavy and cumbersome munitions boxes had been carried on foot for kilometres across rough terrain. This was a difficult task that left the carrying parties vulnerable to attack, often resulting in heavy casualties.

The method of dropping ammunition to ground forces by parachute was developed by No. 3 Squadron AFC and was perfected by Townsville local, Captain Lawrence James Wackett. The air drops allowed the timely delivery of supplies to advancing infantry, maintaining the momentum that was so vital to the advance. Four specialised carrier tanks were also used to bring up ammunition and wire for the front line troops; a task that would normally have taken over 1000 men.

One soldier who would soon be in need of ammunition resupply was Private Henry Dalziel of the 15th Infantry Battalion. He had been a fireman on the Cairns-Atherton Railway before finding himself facing strong resistance from an enemy machine gun at Pear Trench, south-west of Hamel.

The Germans ahead of him had somehow managed to escape the allies' air and artillery fire. The unexpected German resistance slowed the ground advance in this sector, and overcoming this was critical for the success of the attack.

Private Dalziel's task was formidable. He crawled forward with his Lewis machine gun and, though outnumbered three-to-one, took out the enemy resistance. With the tip of his trigger finger shot off, Private Dalziel soldiered on in a remarkable display of resilience and fortitude.

As he fired relentlessly toward the main trench, enemy rounds came in unexpectedly from another direction. Private Dalziel abandoned his Lewis gun and dashed toward the new source of fire—right into a nest of German machine gunners. With nothing more than his pistol, he managed to kill or capture the entire crew.

It was a stunning feat, but not the end of Private Dalziel's exploits that day. As ammunition supplies began to run low, the innovative air drops became the 15th Battalion's saviour. Private Dalziel personally made two supply runs to collect and deliver these much-needed munitions to his comrades, until he was severely injured by a gunshot wound to the head.

His incredible bravery and ability to harness the element of surprise earned him a Victoria Cross. Despite his horrific injury, Private Dalziel thankfully recovered to receive the honours he deserved and was greeted with a hero's welcome at every train station from Townsville to Atherton as he made his way home.

Lieutenant General Monash believed surprise was an important factor in overwhelming the Germans. Operational secrecy was paramount to maintain this element of surprise at Hamel; his own troops only learned of the planned attack in the final few days before it launched.

As the date for offensive approached, Lieutenant General Monash devised a program to condition the enemy into regular patterns of artillery fire interspersed with gas and smoke shells. This conditioning artillery fire forced the Germans into wearing gas masks.

When the assault finally launched on 4 July 1918 (timed to coincide with the now-expected artillery fire and a feint attack elsewhere), the gas masks hampered the enemy's vision, making it more difficult to repel the Australian and American troops. In a further surprise, the wave of advancing infantry was supported by

tanks. They had been secreted miles behind the line, and aeroplane sorties and artillery fire had been cleverly used to mask the sounds of their loud engines.

Tanks were one of the war's major technological innovations. By 1918, their performance was such that they wrought havoc on both sides. While Britain produced thousands of tanks with many variants and the French produced light and heavy tanks in large numbers, Germany manufactured only 20 examples of their large, ungainly A7V Sturmpanzerwagen. As a result, each one captured or destroyed was a significant development.

One such capture was led by Queensland teacher, Major James Alexander Robinson of the 26th Battalion. Major Robinson had already been recognised with a Distinguished Service Order after participating in the first trench raid undertaken by Australian troops on the Western Front.

A few weeks after the attack on Hamel, Major Robinson's remarkable determination was shown again as he directed a crew to salvage the abandoned German A7V Sturmpanzerwagen Mephisto from no-man's land.

The recovery mission was incredibly dangerous but its success was an invaluable morale booster for Australian troops. Mephisto became a physical symbol of the Australians' ascendancy across the summer of 1918. The men subsequently covered the tank with names, quotes, drawings and paintings.

Major Robinson continued to fight right up to the signing of the Armistice and eventually made it home to Brisbane, as did his prize trophy tank, which was shipped from Europe.

Mephisto is the last surviving First World War German tank, and due to its size and physical presence, it is hard not to be impressed by this imposing machine.

Mephisto still resides in Brisbane and will be on permanent display in the Queensland Museum at Southbank from November this year. It serves as a tangible reminder of the determination and ingenuity of Australian troops.



Lieutenant General Sir John Monash KCB VD decorating members of the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade, after their successful engagements at Hamel and Vaire Wood.



A parachute used to deliver ammunition to front-line troops by Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force units.



The German A7V Sturmpanzerwagen, Mephisto, captured by the 26th Battalion at Monument Wood.

The Battle of Amiens:

The 'Hundred Days' Offensive begins

8 August 1918

March 1918

The Spring Offensive

Germany struck at Amiens in an attempt at victory before the US arrived to support the allies.

April 1918

Stalemate

German momentum waned and the stalemate of preceding years once again took hold.

4 July 1918

The Battle of Hamel

'Combined arms' tactics under Lieutenant General Monash saw the allies push back into France and re-take the town of Hamel.

14 July 1918

Mephisto tank captured

Australian soldiers from the 26th Battalion, led by Queensland's Major James Robinson, completed a successful trench raid and captured the prized tank.

8 August 1918

The Battle of Amiens

In another example of the allies' mobile, multi-faced warfare, 20km of the German frontline was overrun, across four days of fighting.

31 August to 2 September 1918

The Battle of Mont St Quentin/Péronne

Arguably the Australians' most brilliant action of 1918, our troops stormed the heights of Mont St Quentin and helped capture the town of Péronne.

18 September 1918

Australian attack on the Hindenburg Outpost Line

A major attack that probed the depth and complexity of the Hindenburg Line defensive system.

29 September 1918

First assault on the Hindenburg Line

The allies broke a 10km wide hole in the formidable trenches, along with Germany's last hope of holding on to the Western Front.

5 October 1918

The Battle of Montbrechain

The 2nd Australian Division took Montbrechain for the allies, in the last Australian infantry attack of the war.

11 November 1918

Signing of the Armistice

The fighting came to a halt with Germany signing the Armistice at Compiègne, France.

28 June 1919

Treaty of Versailles

The Great War was ended in treaty, exactly five years after the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The Archduke's assassination at the hands of Yugoslav nationalist, Gavrilo Princip, was a key event that contributed to the start of the war.

This is a snapshot of events related to the 'Hundred Days' Offensive and the Armistice.

Hamel was a great victory, but it was a test run for what was to come. A little over one month later, at 4.20am on 8 August 1918, 100,000 allied troops stormed a 20km stretch of the German line east of Villers Bretonneux.

Although the battle continued for four days, the allies overran the entire German front line positions in just three hours during the first stage of the advance. This first day—8 August 1918—was a decisive moment of the war and went down in German history as der Schwarze Tag (the Black Day).

The Battle of Amiens was the culmination of years of technical advances. It was a powerful display of the new mobile, multi-faceted style of warfare that would see the trench model largely left behind.

Despite tactical improvements and the proliferation of greater offensive

firepower, the battle was still incredibly dangerous for the troops on the ground, as three Queensland men—Lieutenant Claude Napier King, Corporal Daniel Pritchard and Corporal George Norman Prentice—could certainly attest.

They were crammed inside the tank, Orpheus, being transported to the front when it was hit by a barrage of enemy artillery fire.

Despite flames and flying bullets, the men managed to haul themselves, a wounded comrade, their bulky machine gun and several boxes of ammunition out of the wreckage.

Lieutenant King was hit soon after and never made it back to his New Farm home. However, Corporal Pritchard and Corporal Prentice managed to set up their gun and confront the Germans at terrifyingly close range.

It was a single moment in a sprawling battle, one of thousands that led to success that day. Corporal Pritchard and Corporal Prentice both received Military Medals for their valour—although Prentice never got to wear his medal, being killed in battle just six weeks later.

Although an incredible victory, the Battle of Amiens was a costly win for the allies, with 21,234 casualties, one quarter of whom were killed. The enemy had lost nearly 30,000 men as prisoners, their front line had been overrun, and the allies now had momentum on their side. It was the beginning of the end.

Amiens was the start of what historians now refer to as the 'Hundred Days' Offensive—a succession of allied victories that led to the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918.



Tanks such as Orpheus and Newry were crucial to the success at Amiens.



Officers of the 12th Australian Machine Gun Company, including 2nd Lieutenant Claude Napier King (back row second from left).

The Battle of Montbrechain:

Through the Hindenburg Line

5 October 1918

The great success of the Battle of Amiens put the allies on the front foot but there was still a formidable obstacle ahead—the Hindenburg Line. It was an 11km deep defensive position with intertwined trenches, machine gun posts, deep barbed wire ditches, and thousands of German soldiers.

Furthermore, Hindenburg wasn't one line, but seven separate lines—all of which had to be broken, seized and occupied for the Germans to be militarily defeated.

The assault began on 29 September 1918, with a brutal advance over a 5km wide land bridge that crossed the St Quentin Canal. The Germans knew this attack was to be launched, so no surprise could be summoned. Three days' artillery bombardment and 150 tanks took Australian, British and American Divisions across the land bridge.

The Hindenburg trench system fell line by line. The 3rd and 5th Australian Divisions passed through the main line, followed by the 2nd Division who made it all the way through to take the town of Montbrechain on 5 October 1918.

The Australian Corps suffered 34,000 casualties under Lieutenant General Monash's command during the critical 'Hundred Days' Offensives. Of those, 430 Australian soldiers lost their lives capturing Montbrechain—among the last of more than 60,000 to die over the course of the war.

It wasn't the last assault of the war, but it was the last battle for the infantry of the Australian Corps. Exhausted after months of fighting, the Australian troops were withdrawn for rest after taking Montbrechain.



The town of Montbrechain, captured by Australian troops on 5 October 1918.



*Sailors marching in an Armistice Day peace procession in Flinders Street, Townsville, Queensland, 1918.
- John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.*

Map of Northern France

Circa 1918

Signing the Armistice:

A sombre celebration

11 November 1918

Throughout September and October 1918, the allies advanced through the last of the enemy lines. Before one of these final battles, more than 4300 Germans chose to surrender rather than fight. By November, their forces had all but collapsed and Germany signed the Armistice.

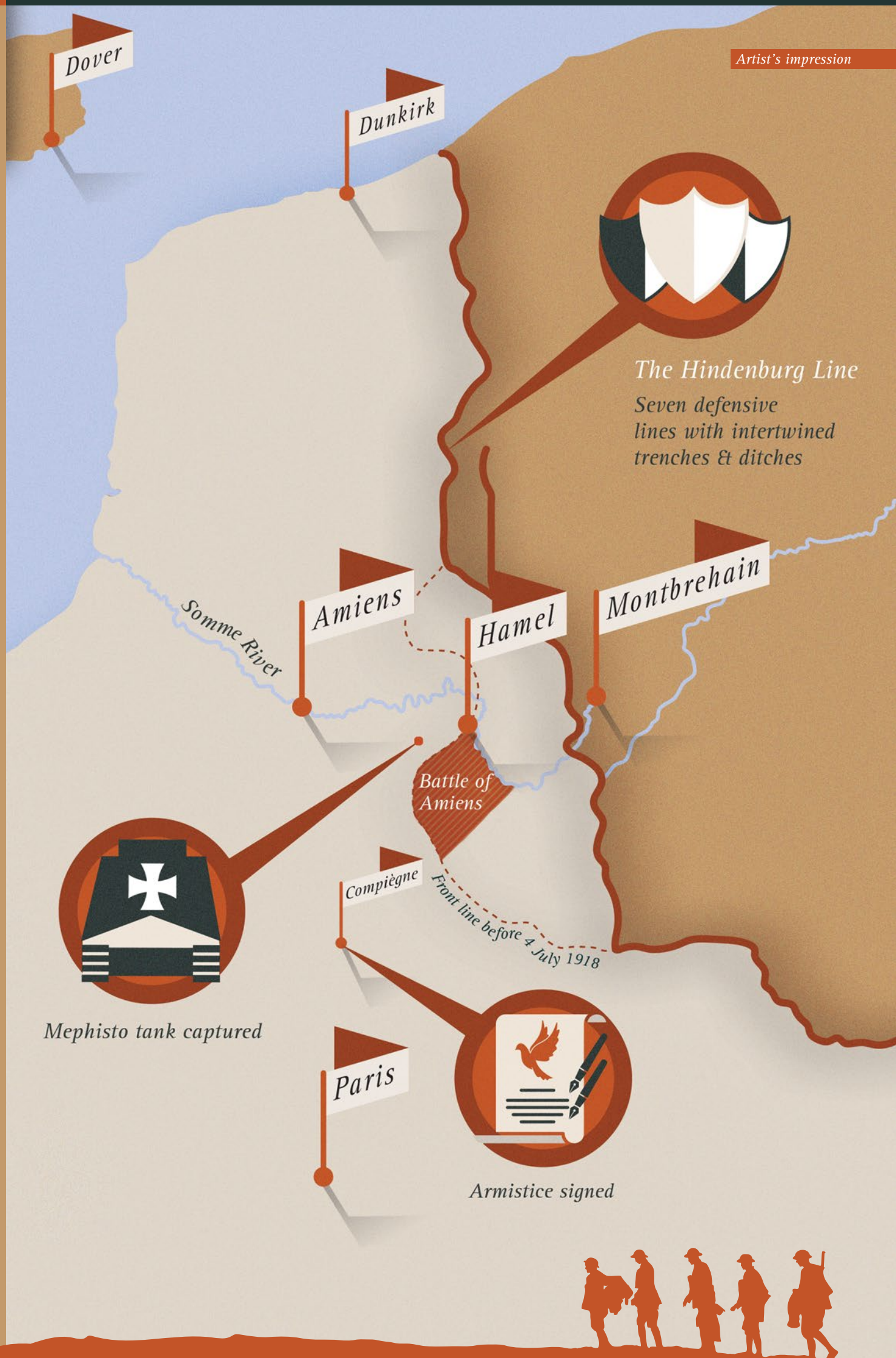
The end of fighting was cause for great celebration back home. And while the news was also welcomed by Australia's servicemen and women, many were likely still coming to terms with the sacrifice, exhaustion and sorrow of the previous months' battles.

Queenslanders Major James Robinson and Private Henry Dalziel, who had made their marks as Battalion Commanders (26th Battalion) and Victoria Cross recipients respectively, both survived the war. Major Robinson was able to celebrate and commemorate with his Battalion in France. Private Dalziel shared the moment with wounded comrades as he recovered in an English hospital.

Corporal Daniel Pritchard was also in England, still 15,000km from his wife and daughter in Emerald. The fighting was done, but the journey home could not come quickly enough for many. Despite Lieutenant General Monash's expertise in designing the repatriation process back to Australia, it would be another year before many made it home.

The Queensland Government acknowledges the contribution of Dr Andrew Richardson, whose advice and expertise was invaluable in the development of this resource.

The following imagery has been sourced from the Australian War Museum: C397319, C376078, C397335, C1268, C1259407, C1259398, C44025 & C194603.



Artist's impression

*The Hindenburg Line
Seven defensive
lines with intertwined
trenches & ditches*

Battle of Amiens

Front line before 4 July 1918

Mephisto tank captured

Armistice signed

