



THE SIMPSON PRIZE



SIMPSON PRIZE COMPETITION

for Year 9 and 10 Students

2023 Winner | Victoria

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PRESBYTERIAN LADIES' COLLEGE

How significant was Australia's contribution to the Allied military victory on the Western Front in 1918?

"The Australian is accustomed to teamwork. He learns it in the sporting field, in his industrial organizations, and in his political activities. The teamwork which he developed in the war was of the highest order of efficiency." - (Monash, J., 1993).

At the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, the Triple Alliance declared victory over the Triple Entente, ending four years of fighting on the Western Front. In his book, *The Australian victories in France in 1918* (Monash, J., 1993), Monash acknowledges the 1918 allied victory on the Western Front as a result of Australia's teamwork in the Allied effort. Playing a significant role in the battle of Amiens, Fromelles and the Somme, in addition to its contribution in decisive military tactics, Australia should be commended for its contribution to the Allied victory considering that it was a recently federated country with a small population. There is no doubt that the Australian soldier had the tenacious attitude and tactics to impact the victory on the Western Front. However, when viewed in larger context, the failure of Germany's spring offensive and America's arrival also facilitated the Allied victory, making Australia's overall contribution only that of a considerable extent.

Australia was a significant factor in battles that directly led to the victory on the Western Front, and its persistent attitude in fighting until the end demonstrated a tenacious effort from a small and newly federated country. The AIF's contribution as part of the primary attacking forces in Amiens, that is recognised as the allies' turning point on the Western Front, weakened German morale to an "irredeemable defeat" (Monash, J., 1993) and instigated "the Hundred Days" campaign – a successful Allied advance that drove the Germans back until its final defeat (Battle of Amiens | World War I [1918]). On August 8, 1918, attacking Australian and Canadian troops advanced into German lines, reinforced by thousands of super-heavy field guns, 600 tanks, and 2000 aircraft, effectuating thousands of Germans to immediately surrender (Battle of Amiens | World War I [1918]). By the end of the day, troops were able to capture 8000 prisoners, crossing 10 kilometres of ground across the Western Front (Monash, J., & Macdougall, A. K., p 254). These defeats patently wore down the Germans, who suffered 26,000 casualties by the end of the week (Battle of Amiens | World War I [1918]). German losses were so grave, and morale was so low that military chief Erich Ludendorff described August 8 as "*the black day of the German Army in the history of the war*", showing the Germans that "*the war could no longer be won*" (Monash, J., & Macdougall, A. K., p 254)."

However, whilst Australia's pivotal role in Amiens did wear down the Germans to a significant extent, in context of the war at large, Germany was left in a vulnerable position due to its ramifications from the Spring offensive, which "*left the German army fatally weakened, demoralised and facing its own imminent and inevitable defeat* (German Spring Offensives 1918 | International Encyclopedia of the First World War (WW1) 2016)". The British Naval Blockade also had an impact on Germany domestically, which resulted in 763,000 deaths by starvation among German residents (The British Naval Blockade | History of Western Civilization II 2022). Nevertheless, Australia's

contribution in Amiens extended further than just providing troops. The AIF's persistent attitude at Amiens showed their dedication towards contributing to victory despite being such a small unit. Although *"deprived of the advantage of a regular inflow of trained recruits, and relying practically entirely for any replenishments upon the return of its own sick and wounded,"* the Australian Corps were still able to maintain a continuous effort in fighting (Monash, J., 1993.). For their valiant effort, residents of Amiens showed gratitude and admiration towards Australian Soldiers by creating a memorial plaque in honour of the AIF (The Simpson Prize 2023).

Australia was a key component in the coalition of Allies on the Western Front, which facilitated the allied victory in 1918. As a crucial component of the Allied powers, Australia contributed to the battles in Fromelles, the Somme, and Hamel. Additionally, the successful military approaches and tactics applied by Australian commander John Monash contributed greatly to these battles. Australia's diversionary offensive at Fromelles on July 19, 1916, was an important contribution to the allied forces on the western front (Battle of Fromelles | Australian War Memorial 2022). To prevent the Germans from transferring reinforcements to the Somme, the 5th Australian Division attacked the "Sugar Loaf" fortifications (Department of Veterans' Affairs 2012). This attack resulted in 5,500 Australian casualties in 24 hours, and 23,000 by the end of the month. Despite being ultimately unsuccessful, the attack nonetheless demonstrates the level of commitment and sacrifice made by Australians as a crucial part of the allies on the Western front. Furthermore, from July to November 1916, the AIF worked alongside British and French forces during the Battle of the Somme, attempting to defeat the Germans on the Western Front after 18 months of deadlock (What Happened During the Battle of The Somme? 2022). The infamous first day of the Somme on July 1st, with 57,000 British casualties was the greatest British loss on the western front, and one of the bloodiest wars in history (Epic History TV 2016). On July 23, the 1st Australian Division launched an assault on Pozières, and captured the village, preventing Germans from retaking it (Pozières | Australian War Memorial 2021). Over a 42-day period, Australian soldiers of the first, second and fourth Australian divisions conducted 19 raids (Pozières | Australian War Memorial 2021). As a result, there were over 23,000 Australian casualties, of which 6,800 were fatalities (Pozières | Australian War Memorial 2021). This staggering number of casualties was grave, considering Australia's prior losses in the battle of Fromelles just days earlier, and is described as *"more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth"* (Australia on the Western Front 2017). As the village of Poziers was a critical objective for the allies, this battle demonstrates Australia's commitment to the allied effort (1st Australian Division Memorial, Pozières 2012). The 23,000 casualties from the Somme were a significant number for Australians, representing a startling 7.8% of all Australian men involved in the war on the western front (World War I: The Western Front | naa.gov.au 2022). Furthermore, although Australia made up only 4.8% of the British Empire Troops (The Simpson Prize 2023), its battle casualties in relation to the number of troops in field was 64.8% (Bean, C., 1968), higher than any other any other troop in the British Isles, showing its devotion to Britain and the allies, as a small army consisting entirely of volunteers from a country only federated 13 years before WWI

(Federation and the Seat of Government debate, 1900–1911 2012). Moreover, Australian commander John Monash's meticulously developed military tactics and leadership were effectively put into use during the successful attack in Hamel (ABC News 2008). Monash ordered bombers to attack Hamel as noisier aircrafts distracted from the movement of the tanks and were able to coordinate numerous attack arms due to thorough and well-organised planning (Hamel: the textbook Victory - 4 July 1918). Whilst the AIF was undoubtedly smaller and less skilled than other allied forces, as a civil engineer, Monash's ability to combine weapons allowed him to utilise this, setting him apart from other military leaders (Hamel: the textbook Victory - 4 July 1918). For the first time on the Western Front, planes dropped ammunition and supplies by parachute, and saw the use of the Mark V tank, which would be used extensively in later battles (Hamel: the textbook Victory - 4 July 1918). Monash had tank and infantry divisions paint their insignias on tanks - each tank and battalion advanced together, promoting camaraderie and expediting movement planning (Hamel: the textbook Victory - 4 July 1918). The successful capture of Hamel and its surrounding territories was a major tactical victory for the Australian Corps, offering a key footing around the Somme and fortifying Hill 104 and the Villers-Bretonneux plateau (Hamel: the textbook Victory - 4 July 1918). Importantly, this region also bolstered the allied defence of Amiens showing Australia's contribution as part of the Allied team (Hamel: the textbook Victory - 4 July 1918).

While Australia played an important role in assisting the Allied effort, when viewing the victory in a larger context, the failed German Spring Offensive and arrival of American Troops also contributed to the Allied Victory to a substantial extent. In Germany's Spring Offensive of 1918, Ludendorff aimed to drive the British from the Somme and the French from the Aisne, in its last attempt to secure victory on the Western Front (The Great War 2018, Kaiserschlacht - German Spring Offensive 1918). However, the Germans lacked the mobility needed for strategic victory. Men, supplies, and weaponry struggled to traverse the ravaged landscape of the Western Front - resulting in 240,000 German deaths (Trueman 2015). This failure left German forces weakened and facing the Allies' inevitable counteroffensive (Trueman 2015). Furthermore, America's arrival on the Western front in 1918 altered the dynamics of battle on the Western Front, having a considerable impact on the allied victory. Recognised as "Britain's last army", the United States' presence on the Western Front obstructed the Germans' ability to fight the enemy and was a significant factor in their defeat in the war (Voices of the First World War: Arrival of The American Troops 2022). German Officer Hartwig Pohlmann recounts that; *"In July 1918 we tried to cross the River Marne but....we met first American troops.....more American troops will come to the front line and the enemy will become overwhelming for us* (Voices of the First World War: Arrival of The American Troops 2022, Paragraph 49)."

In conclusion, the Allied victory on the Western Front was multifaceted. Whilst Australia played a substantial role in the Allied perseverance, when considered in a larger context, other factors facilitated this victory. Australia was a vital element of the Allied war effort, playing a crucial role in

Amiens, Fromelles, and the Somme, introducing decisive military techniques, making its contribution to the war laudable and of a considerable extent. On the other hand, Germany's unsuccessful spring offensive and the entrance of American forces on the Western Front in 1918 weakened the Germans, allowing the Allies to secure victory in 1918. Therefore, Australia's contribution to the victory on the Western Front was commendable, but to a substantial extent. Nonetheless, as November the 11th approaches, the country will continue to acknowledge and celebrate Australia's contribution to the Allied victory on the Western front in 1918 – an indelible event imprinted into our history and culture.

Word Count: 1500

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Appendix

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	Cases							Percentage	
	Population	Raised	Took the field	Killed and died of wounds	Wounded	Reported Prisoners	Total	Troops in field to population	Battle casualties to troops in field
United Kingdom	48,089,249	5,704,416	5,399,563	702,410	1,662,625	170,389	2,535,424	11.2	47.1
Canada	8,361,000	624,964	422,405	56,625	149,732	3,729	210,086	5.0	49.7
Australia	4,875,325	416,809	331,781	59,342	152,171	4,084	215,045	6.8	64.8
New Zealand	1,099,449	128,525	98,950	16,654	41,317	530	58,501	8.9	58.6
South Africa	6,685,827	136,070	136,070	6,928	11,444	228	18,600	2.0	13.6
India	315,200,000	1,440,437	1,388,680	53,486	64,350	3,762	121,598	0.4	9.1