

VB's Reading Guide for the Great War

This reading guide attempts to provide some structure with the books on the Great War that I have read and would recommend, by sequencing them in a date order format.

The first two books listed focus on the lead up to war and the Western Front battles that were fought in the latter half of 1914.

The second cohort relates to the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915, beginning with Hugh Dolan's work '36 Days' that describes the pre-planning involved with the ANZAC landing. (Highly Recommended)

The third bracket focuses on the Western Front, and covers each of the major battles / campaigns in which Australia was involved.

In sequence these battles were Fromelles, Pozieres, Bullecourt, Passchendaele, Villers Bretonneux & Amiens plus battles in the 100 days offensive.

The reviews of the more comprehensive works of Les Carlyon's and Jonathon King's works cover the AIF over the full three years that our five Divisions fought on the Western Front.

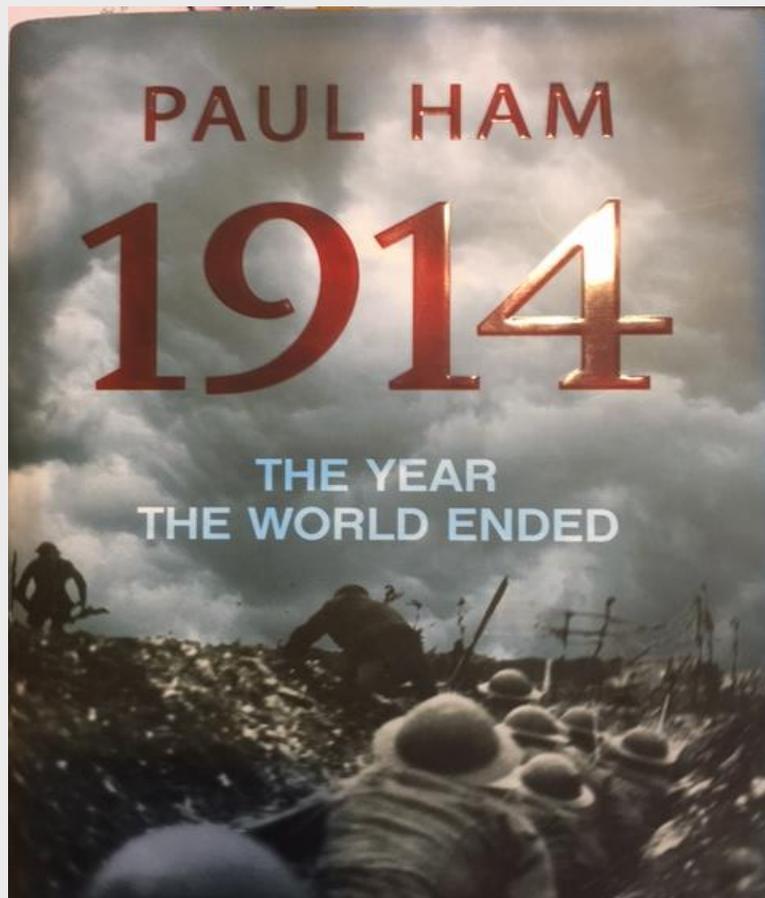
The final section provides reviews of biographies on some key Australian figures involved in the Great War on the Western Front, including Charles Bean (our official War Correspondent), John Monash and Pompey Elliott.

<1914

'1914 – The Year the World Ended'

Author: Paul Ham

(Published 2013 - William Heinemann Australia)



Paul Ham provides an excellent and detailed analysis of events in Europe in the decade preceding 1914, and the sequence of incidents that that led to war.

This work also provides an in-depth account of the many battles that occurred in the second half of 1914, accompanied by helpful maps.

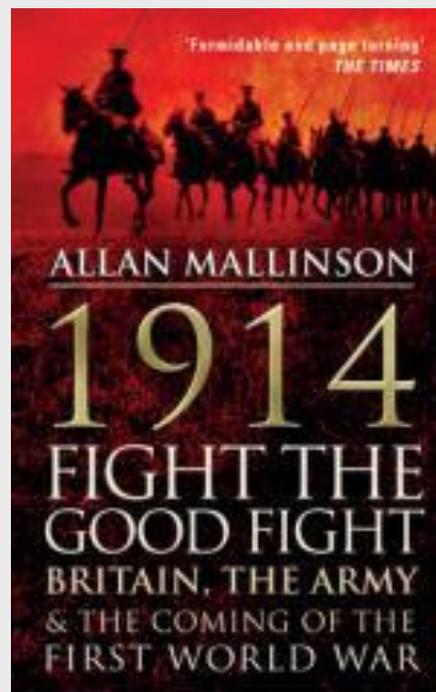
I would recommend Paul Ham's book to the serious reader who seeks to gain a more detailed and deeper understanding of the pre and first phase of the Great War.

<1914

'1914 – Fight the Good Fight'

Author: Allan Mallinson

(Published 2013 – Bantam Press)



Allan Mallinson is a former infantry and cavalry officer with more than 35 years of experience in the British Army.

In August 1914 the BEF consisted of just six well trained / professional infantry divisions and one of cavalry together with supporting and communications units, for a total of some 165,000 men.

The BEF was in effect the regular army in Britain, with the rest of its professional forces located in guarding the Empire, particularly in India, to quell the growing threat for independence in that country.

Unlike the continental powers with their large conscript armies, Britain in 1914 did not have a deep manpower reserve of trained soldiers to call on.

As suggested by the title, the first part of Mallinson's book focuses on the British government and its army in the lead up to war prior to 1914, while the second part analyses in considerable detail the role of the British army on the Continent in the first months of the War.

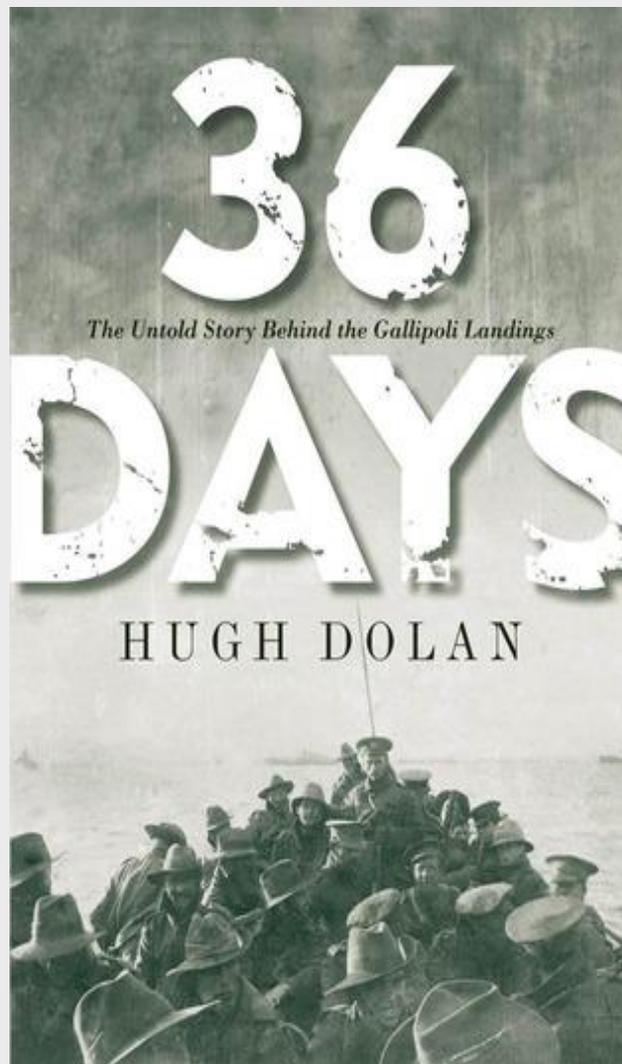
I would recommend Allan Mallinson's book for those seeking a more in depth understanding of the early phase of the War from the British perspective. I particularly liked his ability to provide some interesting 'what might have been scenarios'.

1915

‘36 Days – The Untold Story Behind the Gallipoli Landings’

Author: Hugh Dolan

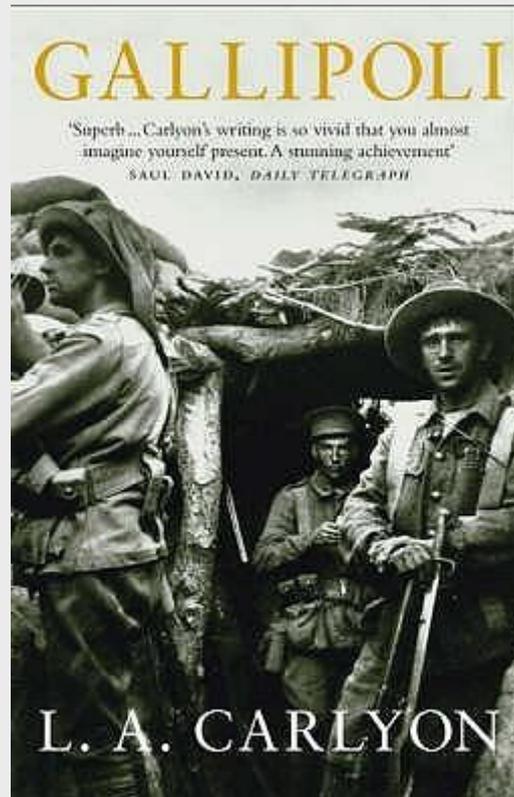
Published 2010 – Pan Macmillan Australia



1915

'Gallipoli' Author: Les Carlyon

Published: 2001- Macmillan



Les Carlyon's 'Gallipoli' dealing with the Allied invasion of Turkey in the Dardanelles is one of those books that you find hard to put down once you start. In over 540 pages of narrative we get to hear the soldiers speak of their terrible trials and tribulations fighting in a harsh environment against a formidable enemy.

The book's main focus is upon the Australian involvement but Les also deals with the role of the other Allied contingents, soldiers and sailors of the British and French Empires, and from the perspective of the enemy, 'Johnny Turk', who many Australian soldiers came to respect despite the horrific fighting they experienced.

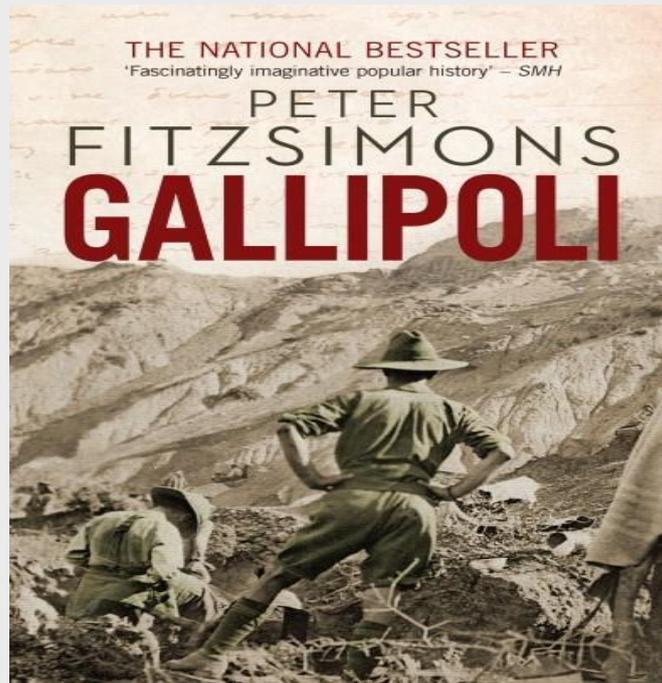
Carlyon employs a relaxed writing style that uses numerous first-hand accounts of the soldiers from both sides, who fought during this campaign. The narrative is engrossing, full of interesting facts and stories and just pulls us along in a narrative that has an ending we all know.

It is unlikely that this book will provide serious scholars of the Gallipoli campaign with anything new or startling, but many readers will find Carlyon's account engaging and informative, particularly with regard to the many blunders made by the British High Command under General Hamilton.

1915

'Gallipoli' Author: Peter Fitzsimons

Published: 2014



Peter Fitzsimons has developed a unique writing style whereby his many narratives on the Great War utilize numerous primary documents that draw from official political and military documents as well newspapers of the time and individual soldiers' diaries.

His narratives are consistently presented in a clear date order format, and so provide his readers with an engaging and easy to follow sequence of the topics he is dealing with.

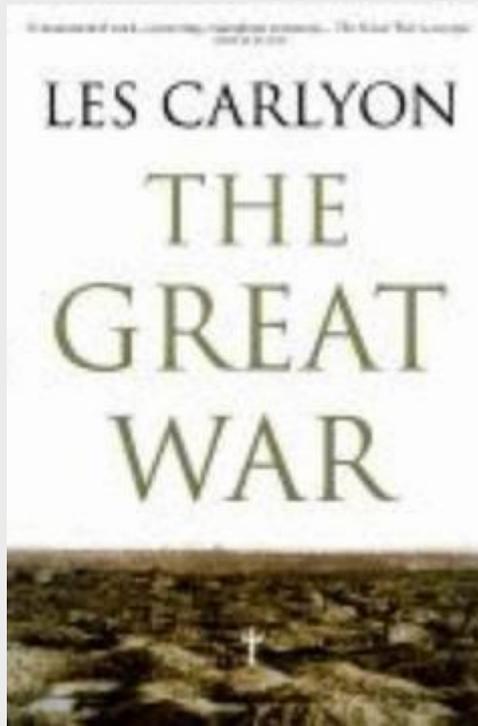
As with Les Carlyon's works, Peter's books dealing with the AIF at Gallipoli and on the Western Front provide rollicking Aussie style narratives often in 'yarn' formats that are likely to engage more current day (and younger) Australians and provide them with valuable insights into the exploits and experiences of our WW1 Diggers that they would otherwise be unlikely to access.

1916 > 1918

'The Great War'

Author: Les Carlyon

(Published 2006 – Pan Macmillan Australia)



Les Carlyon's highly accredited tome provides a comprehensive overview of the contribution that our Australian Diggers made on the Western Front from mid 1916 through to the end of the War.

Carlyon employs a relaxed and anecdotal style of narrative that 'shifts effortlessly from the political salons of London, Paris and St Petersburg, to trenches that smell of mildew on old sandbags'.

This book covers the major battles the AIF were involved in on the Western Front from July 1916 through to the armistice in November 1918, each of which is well supported by detailed maps.

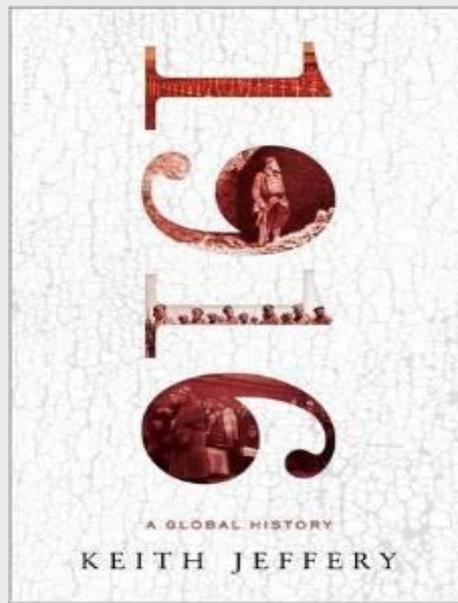
In my opinion Les Carlyon's work provides the best reading option for somebody with a basic knowledge of the Great War who seeks to extend their understanding, particularly of the Australian contribution.

1916

‘1916 – A Global History’

Author: Keith Jeffery

Published 2015 – Bloomsbury



In a novel presentation Keith Jeffery takes a different and interesting approach to writing history. This book is comprised of twelve chapters – with each chapter devoted to a month of the year of 1916, dealing with a different aspect of the Great War.

Following the Armistice of 1918 numerous books have been written by many authors about a myriad of aspects regarding the Great War. As a consequence it has logically become increasingly difficult for today's historians writing one hundred years later to present new perspectives on issues that most likely have been previously dealt with. However in this work "1916 A Global History" Keith Jeffery I think has achieved that difficult objective.

What he has done in this book is analyse the year 1916 from the perspective of its twelve calendar months, by dealing with a topic of the War that was relevant to each month of that watershed year, involving him taking a **global approach**, which is something few historians attempt to do.

A second feature of this book is that within each chapter Jeffery incorporates a section based on personal diaries of the time to provide human dimensions to the war. As a result we learn about some key social aspects of the Great War including the roles of women, indentured labour from various colonies and the impact the war had on international trade.

These are aspects of the Great War that are infrequently dealt with in most books, and I found many of them interesting and informative.

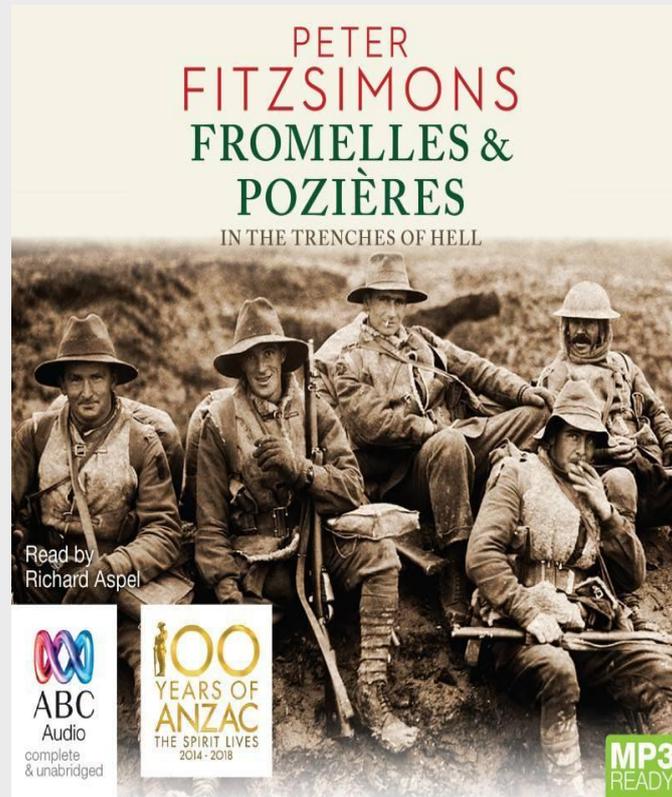
In my opinion Keith's book is one for the serious reader with a keen interest in learning more about the Great War.

1916

‘Fromelles & Pozieres’

Author: Peter Fitzsimons

Published – 2016 – Penguin Random House Australia



In this book Peter Fitzsimons deals with the first two battles that the AIF fought on the Western Front in 1916.

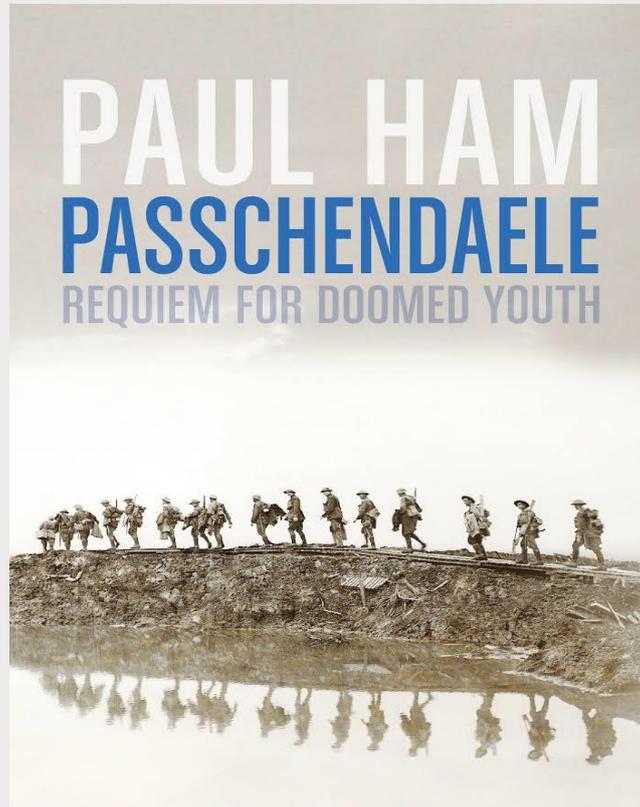
While many Australians may have heard of Pozieres, significantly fewer will be aware of the tragedy that befell our soldiers at Fromelles in northern France in a futile and poorly planned battle that was virtually covered up by the British authorities of the day and remained so for almost a century.

Despite their bravery and tenacity, the Diggers of the AIF suffered horrendous casualty rates in these early Western Front conflicts which lead many of them to begin to question the leadership capabilities of the British Command to which our Australian government had so readily assigned them.

1917

‘Passchendaele – Requiem for Doomed Youth’

Author: Paul Ham Published: 2016 – William Heinemann



Passchendaele epitomises everything that was most terrible about the Western Front. This four-month battle, fought from July to November 1917, was perhaps the worst year of the war where photographs show haunting blackened tree stumps rising out of fields of mud, corpses of men and horses drowned in shell holes, terrified soldiers huddled in trenches.

Paul Ham's *Passchendaele: Requiem for Doomed Youth* describes how ordinary men on both sides endured this constant state of siege, with a very real awareness that they were being gradually, deliberately, wiped out.

Yet the men never broke: they went over the top, when ordered, again and again and again. And if they fell dead or wounded, they were casualties in the 'normal wastage', as the commanders described them, in this war of attrition.

Paul Ham tells the story of ordinary men in the grip of a political and military power struggle between British Prime Minister Lloyd George and Field Marshall Douglas Haig that determined their fate and left a legacy that has shaped the destiny of the world for over a century.

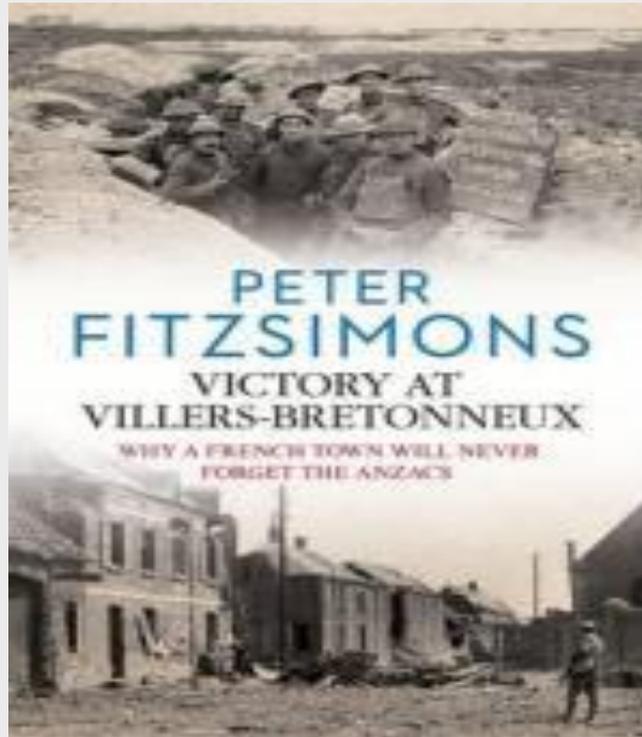
Passchendaele examines the culpability of both politicians and generals in a catastrophic and futile campaign that destroyed the best part of a generation of young men.

1918

‘Victory at Villers-Bretonneux’

Author: Peter Fitzsimons

Published – 2016 – Penguin Random House Australia



In my opinion the battle for Villers- Bretonneux was arguably the most significant and best fought victory by the AIF on the Western Front over the course of the War.

However relatively few Australian’s know about this most significant battle, and this book by Peter Fitzsimons will help to rectify that gap in our collective knowledge of the Great War.