



Centenary education

The 16th Battalion

Middle/upper primary

The 16th Battalion was one of the most highly decorated battalions in the armies of the Allied Forces. During the course of World War I (WWI) the battalion fought at Gallipoli and also along the Western Front, in France and Belgium.

The battalion was brought together six weeks after the outbreak of WWI in August 1914. Three-quarters of the battalion were recruited in Western Australia, with the remainder coming from South Australia. They first trained at Blackboy Hill near Perth, then left for Melbourne on 21 November 1914. It was here that they joined three other battalions (the 13th, 14th and 15th) to become the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade (AIF) and complete their training and organisation under the command of Colonel John Monash.

On 22 December 1914, the 16th Battalion, made up of 32 officers and 979 other ranks embarked on the transport ship, *A40 Ceramic* at Port Melbourne, and sailed for Egypt, with a brief stop in Albany, Western Australia.

They arrived in Egypt on 3 February 1915, disembarking at Alexandria. They travelled by train to a camp at Heliopolis, remaining there and undergoing training until early April 1915.

On 11 April 1915, the 16th Battalion boarded the troopship *Hyda Pasha* and sailed to the Gallipoli peninsula. On the afternoon of 25 April, the battalion assembled in the ship's hold. At about 6pm the battalion went ashore at Anzac Cove and made their way up the hills. For the next five days they stayed there, under heavy fire from Turkish troops to their front and rear. The hill they held was later called 'Pope's Hill', the name of their commanding officer.

At dawn on 26 April, the warships shelled 'Russell's Top', breaking up the Turkish ranks, and during the next two days there were attempts to reinforce the battalion. On the evening of 30 April, after five days of intense fighting, the 16th Battalion was relieved by the 15th Battalion and were able to rest for two days.

On 2 and 3 May, the 16th Battalion attacked the Turkish positions, but were met with heavy fire, resulting in the loss of many lives. At 6pm on May 3 the last members of the battalion were withdrawn. When the 16th Battalion landed at Gallipoli (on 25 April) it had 1000 members. At roll call on 3 May only nine officers and 290 men answered their names.

From May to August 1915, the battalion was heavily involved in establishing and defending the front line of the Anzac beachhead, attacking Hill 971 on 4 August. The battalion continued to serve until the evacuation from Gallipoli in December 1915. They returned to Egypt, where the AIF expanded and reorganised.



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In June 1916, the battalion sailed for France and the Western Front. Their first major action in France was at Pozières, in the Somme valley. It was here that Private Martin O'Meara won the battalion's first Victoria Cross medal.

The battalion spent much of 1917 in Belgium advancing on the Hindenburg Line (the German defensive position). They suffered heavy losses in April when they attacked the Germans at Bullecourt and the tank support they were supposed to have did not arrive.

In March and April 1918, the battalion helped stop the German Spring Offensive, and in June, at Hamel, Lance Corporal Tom Axford was awarded the battalion's second Victoria Cross.

On 8 August, the battalion participated in the great Allied offensive of 1918, fighting near Amiens. This advance by British and Empire troops was considered the greatest success in a single day on the Western Front and in late August the battalion's third Victoria Cross was won by Lieutenant Lawrence 'Fats' McCarthy.

The battalion continued operations in the area until 11am on 11 November 1918, when the guns fell silent and the war came to an end.

The survivors returned to Australia for demobilisation and discharge. It is estimated that well over 10,000 men passed through the ranks of the 16th Battalion during the course of the war.

