



THE HON. GREG COMBET AM MP
Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science

THE HON. ALAN GRIFFIN MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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LGC FORENSICS WINS FROMELLES DNA CONTRACT

Greg Combet, Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, and Alan Griffin, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, today announced that LGC Forensics has been awarded the contract to analyse viable DNA from the remains of up to 400 World War One British and Australian soldiers found in Fromelles, France.

"The awarding of this contract marks the next step in the process in identifying those Australian and British soldiers who fought and died on 19 and 20 July 1916 at the battle of Fromelles," said Mr Combet.

"The United Kingdom and Australian Governments are jointly committed to honouring the service of these World War One British and Australian soldiers. The Australian Government will take every reasonable measure towards identifying these brave soldiers."

"The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is overseeing the project on behalf of the UK and Australian Governments and has engaged LGC Forensics to undertake the DNA analysis. LGC Forensics provided the best solution to the specific project requirements."

LGC Forensics commenced a pilot study in early May to determine viability of the DNA in the remains. It is anticipated that the results of this pilot study will be available by the end of July 2009.

All descendants who have registered their details with the Fromelles Project will be contacted soon by the Government. The UK Government will also be contacting relatives who have registered with it. This will occur regardless of whether the pilot study finds viable DNA or not.

"The process of identification will be complex and is likely to take some time," said Mr Griffin.

"It will involve examination of records, physical evidence gathered during the recovery of remains, and DNA comparison, if practical. The findings will then be considered by an identification board, which is likely to sit for the first time in March 2010, to ascertain whether the identity of any remains can be determined."

"It is the intention of both Australia and the UK, out of respect for the soldiers involved, that reinterment is not delayed pending completion of the identification

process. Once all identification data is obtained, the remains will be reinterred with military honours in the new cemetery at Fromelles. This reinterment is expected to commence in early 2010.”

“The cemetery will be the first of its kind constructed in over 50 years and it will be dedicated on the anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles in July 2010. At that time, where identifications have been achieved, named headstones will be placed for each of the identified soldiers. The placement of named headstones will continue into the future as the identification process continues,” Mr Griffin said.

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Background:

The group burial at Pheasant Wood was confirmed during a limited excavation in May 2008 which was contracted by the Australian Government. It is believed up to 400 Australian and British soldiers were buried there by German forces following the Battle of Fromelles in July 1916.

The Battle of Fromelles began 19 days after the opening of the Somme campaign on 19-20 July, and was the first battle fought by Australians on the Western Front. It is known as Australia’s bloodiest 24 hours with 5533 Fifth Australian Division casualties.

Archaeological excavation of the site was contracted to Oxford Archaeology and commenced in May 2009. Individual re-interment of remains the new Commonwealth War Graves Commission Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery is expected to be completed in February 2010. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission is overseeing the excavation on behalf of both the Australian and United Kingdom Governments.

For ongoing project updates or to register your details if you believe you may be related to a soldier buried at Pheasant Wood, go to www.army.gov.au/fromelles or call 1800 019 090.