

# THE DUNTROON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 2/2015

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## Duntroon Trench Warfare and Bombing School Archaeological Site: An Update

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In *Newsletter 1/2015* we reported on investigations into the instructional trench system for the Trench Warfare and Bombing School (1916–17). The site, across the Molonglo from the College and within Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve, was first investigated in late 2014 by postgraduate archaeology students from the Australian National University (ANU), supervised by Dr Tim Denham. A range of 'Time Team' geophysical techniques proved inconclusive, largely due to site disturbance during the 1980s.

In June 2015 trial excavations were undertaken, with approvals from the ACT Heritage Unit and the National Capital Authority. Locations for excavation were chosen on the basis of 1940 aerial photography, and in the first test excavation it was found that the instructional trench system is still quite visible about 60–80cm below today's surface (a mix of flood sediments and more recent spoil). The old trenches appear as yellow (sand) bands, contrasting with the black soil of the floodplain.

Several levels of the trench system were revealed, thought to represent the sequence from a front-line trench back to what may be a bombing trench. Traces of post holes have been located, which may indicate a covered gallery, dugout or keep. Test pits within trench areas yielded a few artefacts, including the metal bases of several shotgun cartridges, possibly a relic from the use of Stokes mortars. These and other metal fragments are still being examined.

Additional contemporary photographs have now come to light which confirm that at least one sap was dug from the system towards the 'enemy' trench area.

The excavations were refilled for safety and to protect the site from the elements, and examination of material collected is still underway at ANU.

Further excavations are now being considered. Pending approvals, these may be selected to reveal an island traverse system, to coincide with the centenary of the trench system establishment (in March 2016). A commemorative history publication will also be published at that time.

We greatly appreciate the continuing interest and support shown by this newsletter and by personnel from the Army Museum of Officer Training—RMC Duntroon (Australian Army History Unit).

The archaeological work aroused a lot of media interest, and was visited in early July by several representatives from

the Army Museum of Officer Training—RMC Duntroon and a large contingent from the Australian War Memorial. This level of interest reflects the distinctive nature of this archaeological site.



*Excavations reveal the trench system, visible as a light sandy band across the black soil (Photograph: Mark Butz).*



*An archaeologist sinks a test pit into the trench area (Photograph: Mark Butz).*



*A contingent from the Australian War Memorial examines the excavations (RMC at rear) (Photograph: Mark Butz).*



*Dr Tim Denham of ANU explains a test pit to representatives of the Army Museum of Officer Training (Photograph: Mark Butz).*

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## Lessons from the Great War: Firepower Seminar Series

Over the period 2014 to 2018, the people of numerous nations will look back to the dramatic events of 100 years earlier when many countries were embroiled in what was thought to be the “War to end all wars”. This time of reflection will evoke various emotions including sorrow at the loss of life, thankfulness for sacrifices made, and horror at the weapons used and conditions endured which caused massive casualty rates.

Often, the theme in remembering the Great War is to focus on the human side, the soldier’s story. Imagine, however, a seminar series where professionals spoke not only of the personal stories but also about key battles and campaigns and gave an analysis of what happened and what lessons were learned. The Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company in association with four other agencies is sponsoring such a seminar series called Firepower: Lessons from the Great War.

The first seminar was focussed on “Gallipoli: The Landing at Anzac” and was held at ADFA in May 2015. The second seminar, and the final one for 2015, was also held at ADFA on 26 August 2015. The theme for the second seminar was “Gallipoli – Suvla Bay and the August Offensive”. Each seminar commences in the late afternoon (1730 hours in 2015) and is conducted over two hours with the first hour dedicated to five short presentations on various aspects of the battle. The second hour is a plenary session with the opportunity to ask questions of the speakers.

It is intended to hold three seminars in 2016 and these will be scheduled to coincide with the 100 year anniversary of the 1916 battles involving Australian forces. The first is planned for May 2016 and will focus on the “Western Front: from Egypt to Armentières”.

The website with details of the Firepower seminar series can be found at: [www.firepowerseminarseries.com.au](http://www.firepowerseminarseries.com.au).

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