

SIR RAYMOND L LEANE

A True ANZAC Leader

1878 - 1962

By Jade McFaul



“Though born from the doomed campaign at Gallipoli, the Spirit of ANZAC is not really about loss at all. It is about courage, and endurance, and duty, and love of country, and mateship, and good humour, and a sense of self worth and decency in the face of dreadful odds.”

~ William Dean

World War I, or the Great War, is one of the most important historical events the world recalls. Spanning from 1914 to 1918, over 37 million soldiers died either for the Allied Powers, such as England, Australia and New Zealand, and France, or the Central Forces, including Germany, Turkey, and Bulgaria. It was a war of great loss and great victory; one huge battle made by many small wins and defeats. More

than 65,000 medals were awarded to courageous Australian soldiers, who risked their lives for the men they fought with, including General Raymond Leane, who has gone down in history as one of the greatest and most compassionate leaders in the Great War.



Figure 1: (From left to right) Benjamin, Edwin, Raymond, Allan, and Ernest Leane

Raymond Lionel Leane was born in Prospect, SA, on the 12th of July, 1878. His father, Thomas Leane, was a shoemaker and his mother Alice Leane was the daughter of a shoemaker. They had four other sons and three daughters, including, Edwin, Ernest, Allan, and Benjamin, the youngest son. Raymond was taught at North Adelaide Public School up to the age of twelve, where he moved to Albany, WA, to follow his family's footsteps in the shoemaking business. He later moved to Claremont, employed as a travelling salesman. Here he met and married a woman named Edith Laybourne. Three years later, Leane discovered an interest in the military, and in 1905, he enlisted in the 11th Perth Rifles Infantry Regiment. By 1910, he was a captain. During this time, he also bought and ran a successful business in Kalgoorlie.

When World War I began, Raymond immediately enlisted, and was a commander of the 11th Battalion in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) by the 25th of August, 1914. He said goodbye to his wife, and left for the war, as well as his four brothers. His battalion was one of the first to land at Gallipoli, arriving on the 25th of April the following year. However, instead of landing at ANZAC Cove, they landed near Ari Burnu Point. In May, he was put in charge of the difficult task of capturing a fort south of the perimeter of the ANZACs with the 11th Battalion. The Turkish fort was called 'Gaba Tepe' (see maps on pages 4 - 5) and it was in range of the Australian trenches. At dawn on the 4th of May, Leane's troops landed at the beach nearby to attack, but they were spotted and the enemy began to fire. The 11th could not advance and many troops were hit, but Raymond's natural leadership was clear as he kept calm. He called off the assault, signalling to the Royal Navy nearby, who covered their exit. Several soldiers were wounded, but all were rescued, even under the strong fire.

Only a month and a half later, Leane was a part of the first attack on 'Pine Ridge'. In addition, he led the second attack, and both successfully damaged Turkish defences. However, when he was speaking to an observer later on, a counter-attack was fired, and a shell exploded close by. Even though he was injured, Leane remained at his post, revealing the extent of the loyalty he had for his men. Soon, the trench was aptly nicknamed 'Leane's Trench'. He, too, was nicknamed, like many Aussie soldiers, and from his tall, square build and locked jaw, he was given the name 'Bull', even though his apparent sense of humour contradicted this. Leane was promoted twice between August and October, and held the rank of temporary Lieutenant Colonel before he was evacuated to Egypt in December.



Figure 2: The 11th Battalion in Egypt

In Egypt, he was promoted to Major on the 26th of February, 1916, and he commanded the new 48th Battalion. In this group, his executive officer was his youngest brother, Benjamin, and his troops included several other family members, including three nephews. They were recovering from Gallipoli to head to the Western Front, 700 kilometres of trenches from Belgium to Switzerland. In June 1916, Leane's battalion was posted to Pozieres, France, a strategically vital town to capture. Located in the Somme Valley (see map on page 6), it would allow the Allied Forces to advance, and prevent the Germans from advancing in return, but the conditions of these trenches along the Western Front were atrocious. Bodies were left rotting, as the shells, gas warfare, and machine-gun fire were unrelenting. It rained most days and the trenches turned into slush and cesspools, spreading infections rapidly. Rats were also extremely common, some growing to the size of cats. Worse still, those who suffered from shell-shock were told they were cowards, and sent back into the war.

Once Leane arrived at Pozieres with his men, he left with some of the commanders in his company to survey their situation, and soon found that the German force was very experienced and effective, as they were pinned down with fire. He was later commanded to move two brigades, including his own, further north along the line, but from his earlier investigation, Leane saw this would lead to unnecessary casualties, and he disobeyed orders, both brave and wise, for on the 23rd of July, the Germans ran a full-scale and immensely intense bombing in the area, lasting 12 days. The 48th, which was not originally positioned there, was able to launch a strong counter-attack and helped to win the town. Leane valued lives over commands, even though he may have lost his rank for disobeying orders. Even still, almost 600 men in the 48th Battalion died, and over 6800 men died in the space of seven weeks fighting in the Somme Valley. A London Officer was quoted after the battles: **"The fighting at Pozieres has proved that the ANZACs would face a wall of iron and go through it."**

1917 was not a good year for Raymond Leane. He had to suffer through the loss of Benjamin, his youngest brother, and one of his nephews, both in the 48th. In October, he was severely injured and could not return until the start of the following year. Once back on his feet, Leane was permanently promoted to Colonel and Temporary Brigadier General by June 1918. Throughout his time on the

Western Front, he had led the 48th in several major battles, including Amiens, and Bullecourt, part of the Hindenburg Line.

Amiens, in the April of 1917, was going to be taken by the Germans to split the French and British armies- divide and conquer. However, the Allied Forces predicted this, and when the Germans tried to take it, not only were they weakened by the large numbers of Canadian, French, British, and Australian soldiers, but they were attacked from the rear as they advanced. It was one of the most successful wins for the Allied Powers, but it was difficult for the 48th, which, like many battalions, had to retreat. Many casualties occurred.



Figure 3: The 48th Battalion preparing to attack the Hindenburg Line

A year afterwards, in May, Leane's battalion was sent with the 46th to capture Bullecourt, on the Hindenburg Line, to allow the Allied Forces to attack the Germans from behind. They had to suffer several hours in freezing snow, before cutting their way through barbed wire and attacking the Germans in their own trenches. Unfortunately, the 46th Battalion was captured, and the 48th Battalion had to retreat. In both battles, Leane was successfully able to withdraw his troops, and he prevented

many casualties. His battalion is still remembered to this day. After the war, Leane returned home and was a part of the AIF until the 3rd of January, 1920.

In May 1920, he was named as the South Australian police commissioner and served for twenty-four years in this role. He even served in the Volunteer Defence Corps during WWII. At his retirement, he received a knighthood, and became Sir Raymond Leane. He and his wife retired to Plympton, Adelaide, and he passed away on the 25th of June, 1962, leaving behind his wife and six children.

Throughout the entire war, Raymond Leane was admired as a brilliant and courageous leader. He showed true ANZAC spirit in his actions and was well rewarded for it. He was courageous and wise, led by example, as he commanded while fighting rather than standing back, and consistently put others before himself. He endured and brought strength to his Battalions, and he received the Military Cross, the Distinguished Service Order and Bar, the French Croix de Guerre, and civilian honours. However, the most important thing was that Raymond Lionel Leane showed Australia what it truly means to serve one's country.

**“For our soldiers who died in foreign wars for their souls let us pray
It's only to remember them that we have Anzac day
Their bones may lay in foreign fields but in history they survive
And the spirit of the Anzac is still very much alive.”**

~ An exert from *Anzac Day*, Francis Dugan

Map of the Gallipoli Peninsula

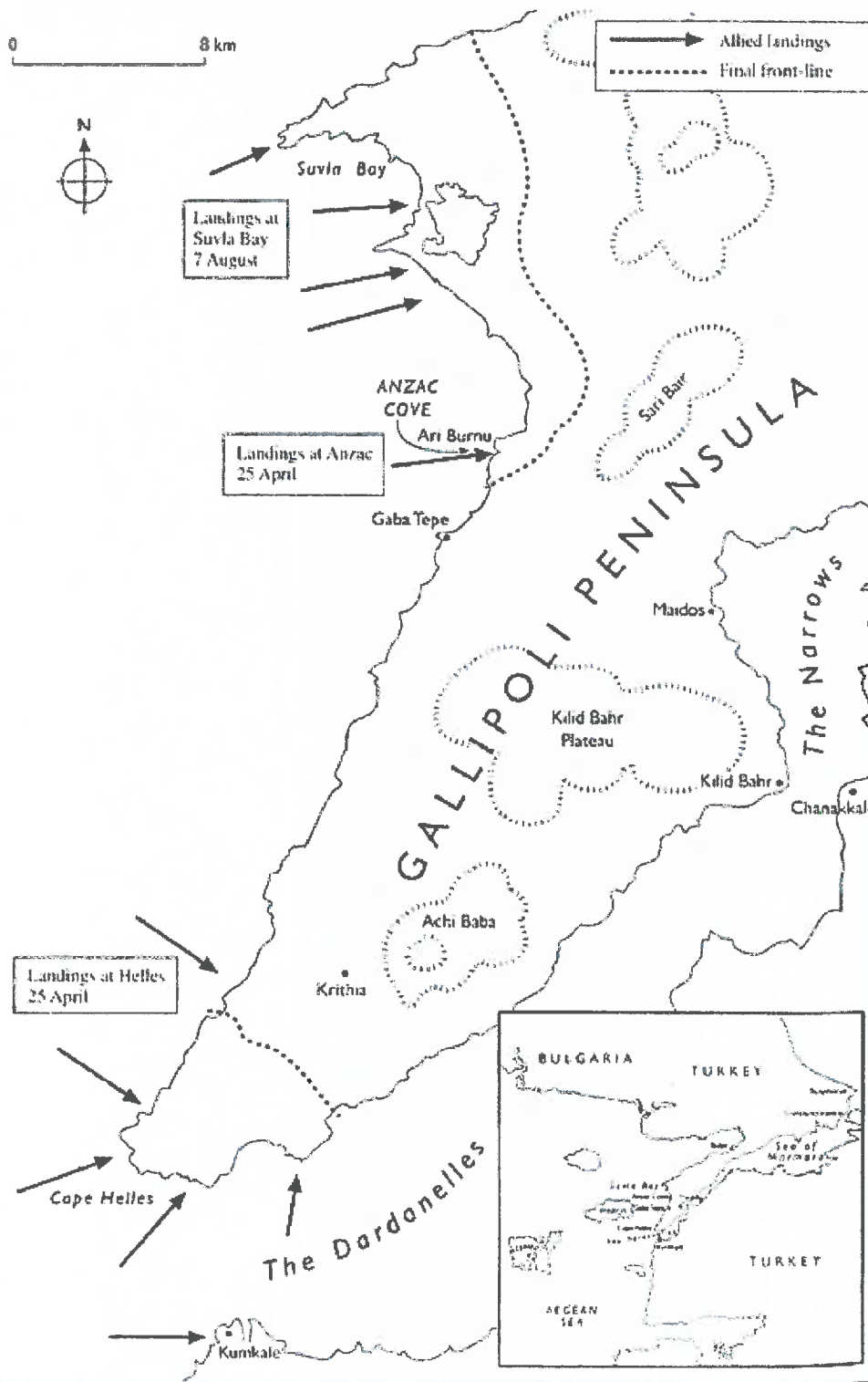


Figure 4: Detailed Map showing Allied (British) landings on Gallipoli Peninsula (n.d.)

A Map Leane Used in Gallipoli



Figure 5: Anzac cove landing map used by Raymond Leane (1915)

Map of the Western Front in France

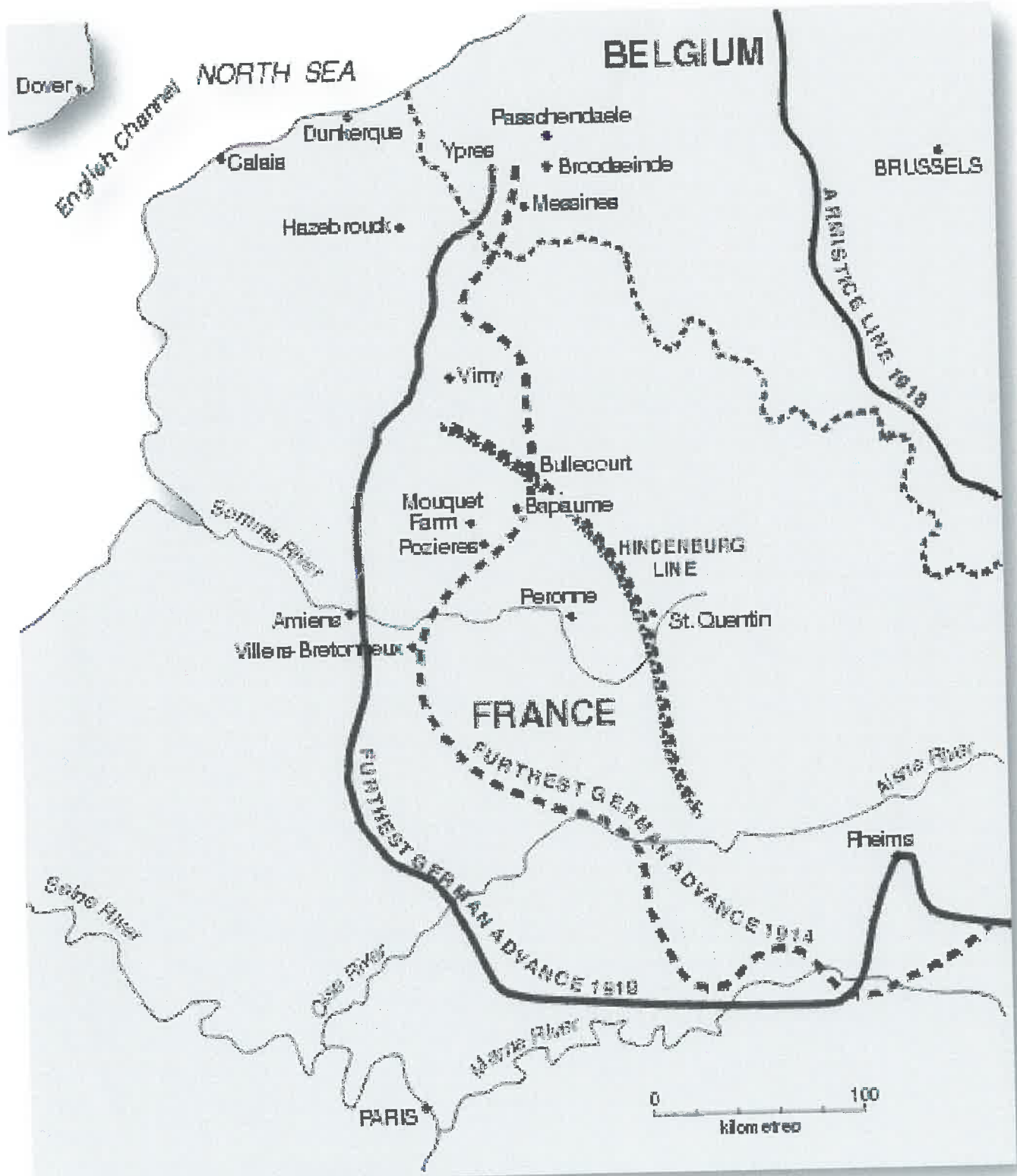


Figure 6: Map of the Western Front (n.d.)

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