The Battle of Fromelles was the Australian Imperial Force’s (AIF’s) first major action on the Western Front during the First World War. On 19 July 1916, in less than 24 hours, the AIF’s 5th Division suffered more than 5,500 casualties, with almost 2,000 killed in action or dying as a result of their wounds, and some 400 captured.

The attack was a feint, designed to keep German reserves in the Fromelles area. On the morning of 19 July, Allied artillery commenced a bombardment of the strongly fortified German lines. Unfortunately, the artillery failed to destroy key targets during the barrage and Allied forces were subjected to heavy enemy fire as they attempted to cross no man’s land. The Australians who reached and overcame the first line of German defences quickly became disoriented, as their objectives proved impossible to locate.

Despite heavy losses, orders to withdraw were not issued until 7:50am on 20 July, with some small groups not receiving or believing them, resulting in many more casualties. Following the battle, an informal truce was arranged and many Australian wounded were rescued from no man’s land.

Many of the men who died during the Battle of Fromelles, including more than 400 unknown soldiers, are buried in the VC Corner Australian Cemetery. In 2008, a mass grave was uncovered at Pheasant Wood, near Fromelles. The remains of 250 Australian and British soldiers who had died at Fromelles were exhumed and reburied with military honours at the newly constructed Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery in 2010.

Battle of Fromelles Museum
To assist visitors to understand Australia’s role and the service and sacrifice of Allied soldiers during the Battle of Fromelles, the Australian Government has contributed more than $1 million to the construction of a new Musée de la Bataille de Fromelles (Battle of Fromelles Museum), adjacent to the Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery.

The museum tells the story of the Battle of Fromelles, taking visitors on a journey from the carnage of the battle through to the recovery and identification of missing soldiers nearly one hundred years later. It incorporates many artefacts formerly housed in the Fromelles Mairie (Town hall).

Focal points of the museum include:
- Recreations of the German and Allied trenches incorporating wood and metal from the original fortifications at Fromelles in 1916.
- A visual projection of a map describing the battle and the subsequent withdrawal.
- A vast array of artefacts, including uniforms, weapons, and personal items recovered from the battlefield.
- A display explaining the archaeological dig at the Pheasant Wood mass grave and the subsequent process of identification.
- Personal items recovered from the dig.