

Honouring our heroes who fought at Amiens a century ago

TODAY, 8 August 2018 marks the centenary of heroic actions at Villers Bretonneux in France by a North East Tasmanian farm labourer.

As Minister for Veteran's Affairs, I believe it is important we commemorate all Tasmanians who have fought and died for their country.

Alfred Gaby of Springfield near Ringarooma enlisted when he was 24 years old.

After attending school at Scottsdale he initially joined the 12th Infantry Regiment in Launceston while still working as a labourer on his father's farm at Scottsdale.

Two years later, during action at Villers Bretonneux, Lieutenant Gaby was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Three days later he was dead; killed instantly by a German sniper.

Lt Gaby was part of an allied push at Amiens, a battle that cost almost 50,000 allied and German lives but played a major role in ending World War I.

He won the Victoria Cross at Villers Bretonneux, about 25 kilometres from the town of Amiens.

Lt Gaby commanded a company which was involved in the battle of Amiens, after his rapid promotion to sergeant, then second lieutenant and then lieutenant, in the space of 10 months.

He won the VC on August 8, 1918, three months before the Armistice ended the war.

Lt Gaby led his company along the east of Villers Bretonneux and came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire.

With his troops pinned down by the fusillade, Lt Gaby found a gap in the barbed wire, approached a German stronghold and with just a service revolver proceeded to neutralise the enemy fire, capture four machine guns and take 50 prisoners.

On August 10 he was again out in front, leading his company in the face of enemy fire, when a German sniper shot him.

His VC medal, awarded posthumously, is on display at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

He died during the broader campaign to defeat the Germans at Amiens which started on August 8.

The battle was part of a 100 day offensive involving Australian, Canadian and French troops.

The Australians were commanded by the brilliant strategist, Lt General Sir John Monash, arguably Australia's finest military officer.

Monash changed the stubborn tradition of mass frontal assaults, most often directed across flat ground that offered no cover for the expendable infantry.

Instead Monash chose battle tactics, which would avoid the mass slaughter of troops, by adopting smarter battlefield deployment.

But even Monash's forward thinking failed to prevent 19,000 allied casualties and 26,000 German casualties.

After months of stalemate in appalling conditions, the Australians, Canadians and French troops covered 11 kilometres on the first day, liberating 116 French towns and villages.

The allied push achieved all the defined objectives in three days and delivered a crushing blow to the German war effort.

The Germans signed the armistice just three months later on November 11, 1918. The battle of Amiens is credited with thankfully playing a major part in the end to hostilities and the terrible carnage involving millions of casualties between 1914 and 1918.

Amiens was one of the first major battles involving armoured warfare and marked the end of trench warfare on the Western Front, until the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918

Today, a century later, we pause to remember not only Lt Gaby but the many thousands of soldiers who "went over the top" to give their lives, or who suffered terrible injuries in the battle of Amiens.

I encourage all Tasmanians to pause and reflect on the sacrifice made by not just by Alfred Gaby, but all Tasmanians and Australians who have fought and died for their country.

Lest we forget.