Question 1:

Gallipoli, Lone Pine and ANZAC Cove are names that are generally well known to most Tasmanians and are considered significant in the formation of both the Anzac Legend and our national identity.

However, Peter Charlton writes that events and places such as Pozières and Mouquet Farm in France somehow missed their place in the Australian consciousness.

Outline what you consider to be the significance, if any, of the events that occurred in 1916 in both these places and whether their commemoration should attract greater attention in Tasmania during 2016.
Twice a year Australia falls silent to remember the heroic soldiers who fought in the First World War. Although Australian troops participated in many horrific battles, it is the battles that occurred on the Gallipoli Peninsula that resonate in the minds of the Australian public. I will endeavour to uncover why Gallipoli and the Anzac Legend that it created is associated so profoundly with the Australian identity. I will also explore the significance of the campaigns along The Western Front and why these historically crucial battles have been overshadowed by Gallipoli.

Australian society continues to idolise the soldiers of Gallipoli. Their bravery and their stories are entrenched in our national consciousness. Qualities such as courage, determination, loyalty and a larrikin sense of humour in the face of calamitous circumstances encapsulate the Anzac Legend. Gallipoli forged an international reputation for a young Australia and became a fundamental part of Australia’s history.

When most Australians think of the Anzacs they are immediately drawn to the Gallipoli campaign. It was our first significant military engagement as a federated nation. The media widely reported this conflict in heroic and glorified terms. We tend to forget that the legendary Anzac spirit was demonstrated with equal valour on the Western Front and in every other theatre of war that Australia’s soldiers fought. Those who fought and died in any battle of ‘The Great War’, whether it was at the Somme, Pozières or Mouquet Farm all exhibited an extraordinary level of bravery, courage and determination. To think that we, as a nation have forgotten or disregarded the sacrifices that these men made is a grave wrong, and one that demands to be righted.

At the young age of 23, my great grandfather’s uncle Corporal Charles Moore was one of the many thousands of Australian men that sacrificed their life for our country. Charles incurred a head wound at Gallipoli, but eventually recovered. He states in one of his letters to his family while training in Egypt after recovering from his injury, “Perhaps things will liven up in France. In fact, I will probably get more than I want!”

France certainly did liven up more than he wanted. He became one of roughly 2,000 courageous Australian men who fought and died in the one-day Battle of Fromelles on the Western Front.

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1 Letter from Corporal Charles James Moore SERN 2392 to Guy Moore, dated 22nd March 1916, Zeitoun, Egypt (original in family archives)
The Battle of Fromelles has been described by the Australian War Memorial as “The worst 24 hours in Australia’s entire history”\(^2\) This attack was intended to draw the attention of the German forces away from the Somme offensive. Ultimately, it was a colossal failure. Australian and British soldiers assaulted over exposed grounds in broad daylight, while the German forces observed and repelled with heavy fire against them.

Charles Moore described the war in Gallipoli as “Bloody hell multiplied by bloody hell.”\(^3\) However, the bombardment and destruction at Fromelles was devastatingly worse. One quarter of the number of Australian deaths sustained in Gallipoli, also a strategic failure, occurred here in one single day. Yet, compared with Gallipoli, it has been all but forgotten.

Unlike Fromelles, the battle of Pozières was technically a success for the Australian Imperial Forces. However, in horrific battles, what might look like a victory is in many ways a loss. Pozières was a bloodbath for both sides. Australia suffered 23,000 casualties including 6,800 deaths in just six weeks and gained only one square kilometre of land. In the words of prominent Australian historian Charles Bean, the Pozières Ridge “is more densely sown with Australian sacrifice than any other place on earth.”\(^4\) Nearly as many Australians died at Pozières in six weeks as in the entire eight-month Gallipoli campaign. The military carnage was so concentrated that 4,000 of these bodies were never recovered. An excerpt from Peter Charlton’s *Australians on the Somme Pozieres 1916* illustrates the hopelessness and distress that wounded the minds and bodies of the soldiers so profoundly; “Pozières became the standard by which shellfire was judged. The bombardment, endured for days without end, sent men mad and stripped away the layers of convention and discipline that keep armies together. Some Australians deserted; others shot themselves; more went mad. The majority accepted death and mutilation as an inevitable consequence of duty.”\(^5\) Those who returned home were physically


\(^3\) Letter from Corporal Charles James Moore SERN 2392 to Guy Moore, dated 22\(^{nd}\) November 1915, “in the trenches”, Gallipoli, Turkey (original in family archives)


\(^5\) Charlton, P. *Australians on the Somme Pozieres 1916*, Methuen Haynes, Singapore, 1986, cover blurb
and emotionally scarred for life, many beyond repair. We must acknowledge the atrocities that these soldiers lived through and keep their memories and stories alive.

When comprehending the colossal numbers of soldiers who fought and died in the First World War, it is easy to forget that every one of those soldiers had his own unique story. Captain Ivor Margetts was an admired army officer whose qualities and personality encapsulated the Anzac Legend and motivated his men to keep fighting on. His positive outlook on life and his sense of humour made him a popular character to be with. He was born in Wynyard and showed immense talent in a variety of sporting hobbies, including rowing and AFL. After the battle of Pozières, a renowned photograph was taken with one sole cross in the midst of the spoiled landscape. “G.A McKenzie, a stretcher bearer, ‘stuck up a little cross on his grave in memory of him.’ The following night two other offices from the 12th Battalion were buried close by. During the Spring Offensive of 1918, the German Army recaptured the area and Margetts’ grave was obliterated.”6 This photograph (Image 1) features on the cover-page of this essay.

The battle of Mouquet Farm ensued after the battle of Pozières. The allied assault commenced on the 14th of August when Australian forces, including Tasmanian battalions, attacked the farm occupied by the German Empire. The attack gained a small amount of ground, although a horrific number of casualties were incurred. 11,000 Australian men were either killed or injured in this battle. In subsequent attacks by the Germans, Mouquet Farm changed hands several times, although ultimately won by the Allied Forces. It is disturbing that so many soldiers from both sides of the war were killed in counter-attacks that ultimately would not change the military outcome.

Reflecting on how Australia’s attitudes towards battles on the Western Front came to be, it seems that over the years the Australian public wanted to block out the incomprehensible carnage that these campaigns inflicted. While this is understandable, it is a monumental disservice to the legacy of the thousands of diggers that faced the appalling reality of industrial warfare.

Only weeks prior to the time of writing, the centenaries of Pozières and Mouquet Farm were commemorated. In Tasmania ceremonies took place in most major towns and cities. RSL Tasmania played a fundamental role in making this happen and should be commended for this. However, the milestone commemoration did not make a huge impression in the media.

As Pozières was the first major victory for the Australian Imperial Forces, it is perplexing that the Centenary of Pozières made such little impact compared to Gallipoli.

Our attitudes towards commemorating the many deadly battles that occurred on the Western Front must change. Each year, we should dedicate the 23rd of July, the commencement of the Pozières campaign, to reflect on the events that took place on the Western Front and pay our respects to the men and women who served there.

As Australians, whether descending from Anzac heroes or new to our shores, we have a responsibility to remember all who died for our country. We must acknowledge the tragedies that war inflicts upon so many lives. All of the men and women who fought for our nation, whether they fought on the battlefield, nursed the broken men or supported our war effort from home should be honoured and remembered. As significant as Gallipoli may be, we must not centralise our focus on just one battlefront. Instead, we must acknowledge and respect the sacrifice that so many made serving Australia and the British Empire and commend their bravery and service.

Lest we forget.

Image 2, Private Charles James Moore

Image 3, Lieutenant Ivor Stephen Margetts
References:


Fitzsimons, P. Fromelles and Pozieres in the Trenches of Hell, William Heinemann, Australia, 2015


Photos

Image 1:

Image 2:
Photo of Private (later Corporal) Charles James Moore SERN 2392, taken in Sydney before leaving in 1915 (original in family archives)

Image 3:
Photo of Lieutenant (later Captain) Ivor Stephen Margetts, 12th Battalion AIF, standing outside his tent, possibly at Brighton Army Camp, Tasmania https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H15808/