

**Supporting Comments**  
**Pertaining to Slide Presentation**

**LT Samuel Thurnhill**  
**Direct Fire Amid the Wreckage of Pozieres**  
**22-23 July 1916**

**Major Darryl Kelly OAM**

<b>Slide 1</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Slide 2</b>	<i>Not intent on rehashing the writings delivered by previous authors, regards actions of Pozieres.</i>
	<i>Instead, it will deal with the action of a small group of Australian artillerymen and the forward thinking of their Artillery Brigade Commander.</i>
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	<i>Their mission did not change the course of battle, instead, it may have provided a valuable insight to combating a looming issue.</i>
	<i>I am out to promote argument, lateral thinking and a lot of 'what if' and 'why'?</i>
	<p><i>Background</i> <i>Command Selection</i> <i>Mission</i> <i>Execution</i> <i>Filling in the Gaps</i> <i>Analysis / Lessons</i></p> <p><i>Due to the lack of official records – I needed to immerse myself as Thurnhill!</i></p>
<b>Slide 3</b>	19-20 July - Fromelles fought and lost
	Interest now switched to breaking the deadlock on the Somme
	Key terrain of Theipval, Pozieres and the medieval burial mound of Butte de Warlencourt (Sars) - are still in enemy hands.
	<b>The allies had captured la Boisselle – insight of German defences</b>
	Pozieres attack cancelled twice previous * The latter was a godsend as a serious error was discovered by Brigadier Brudenell White, in the artillery fire plan, that if it went ahead, would have had devastating effects of the Australian attack
	Australian 1st Division is brought up to try and break the deadlock. 2nd and 4th Divisions would take their turns in the meat grinder later
	One commander seized this delay as an opportunity
<b>Slide 4</b>	LTCOL Alfred Bessell-Browne
<b>Slide 5</b>	<p><b><i>Perth Artillery Volunteers</i></b> -1896 – Rising to rank of SGT within 3 years Decorated Boer War veteran (1st &amp; 5th WA Mounted Infantry) Rose through the ranks Commissioned in the field Returned to Australia with the 1st WA Mounted Infantry</p>

	Immediately reenlisted with the 5th contingent and returned to South Africa Earned DSO and MID
	Battery Commander 37 Battery (Militia)
	<b>Graduate of a Military Science Degree</b> – Understood the science of warfare and the effects of new technology in weapons and ammunition
	<b>Onset of WW1 Commissioned AIF as a Major.</b> Sign of his leadership, was that his whole Militia Battery also enlisted
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commanded 8 Battery throughout Gallipoli and Cape Helles Campaigns</li> <li>- Commander 1st Australian Division (MAJGEN Bridges) wanted artillery embedded in infantry front lines</li> <li>- Bessell- Browne accepted the challenge to carry the artillery fight to the enemy</li> <li>- Colonel Hobbs (Commander 1st Division Artillery) not wetted to idea</li> <li>- Carried out two actions firing over range of 400m – 160 MEN to drag the guns forward</li> </ul>
	<p>Bessell-Browne was a forward thinker but stifled at Gallipoli</p> <p>Ammunition shortages  Ammunition types – He not available until June  Out of date tactics  Command friction (Hobbs)  Did temporarily command the 2nd and 3rd Field Artillery Brigades on Gallipoli</p>
	Now in <u>permanent command of 2 FAB in France</u> he the flexibility somewhat, to seize the initiative and command, as he had the rank
<b>Slide 6</b>	<b>Outline of the mission</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Single gun with sufficient ammunition</li> <li>- Direct fire task – <b>straight down the main street of Pozieres – The Bapaume – Albert Road</b></li> <li>- Cease fire in complete darkness and move to selected area. Forward of the infantry trenches</li> <li>- Final reconnaissance forward</li> <li>- Deploy in complete darkness and under cover of main barrage</li> <li>- Enfilade enemy defences and destroy the enemy's barricade</li> <li>- Watches synchronised every hour from 1800hrs, 22 Jul</li> <li>- Withdraw</li> </ul>
	<b>Simple in theory.....</b>
<b>Slide 7</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6 Battery allocated the task</li> <li>- Wanted an officer in command</li> <li>- Didn't allocate the task until the <b>evening of the 22nd July</b></li> <li>- <b>Twilight / Sunset</b> – 2047 hours</li> <li>- <b>Moon Rise</b> – 2322 hours</li> <li>- <b>Illumination</b> 45% with intermittent cloud</li> <li>- <b>Zero Hour</b> – 0030 hours – 23 July</li> </ul>
<b>Slide 8</b>	<b>LT Samuel Thurnhill</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- British born</li> <li>- Came to Australia in 1912, after death of his mother. Settled in WA as a farmer</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enlisted in 1914 with onset of war</li> <li>- Served at Gallipoli in 8 Battery, <b>under Bessell-Browne. So he was known to Brigade Commander</b></li> <li>- Wounded August 1915, shrapnel wound to left ear</li> <li>- Evacuated to Malta for specialist treatment</li> <li>- Returned to battery, March 1916. <b>Refitting at Tel el Kebir, Egypt after evacuation from Gallipoli</b></li> <li>- Posted to 6 Battery as gun number</li> <li>- Commissioned to 2nd Lieutenant - 12 March 1916</li> <li>- Promoted to Lieutenant – 10 July 1916 – no formal officer training</li> </ul>
<b>Slide 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review of available intelligence</li> <li>- Fixation / Orientation – friendly troops</li> <li>- Detailed reconnaissance by Thurnhill – <b>needed to occur prior to the mission</b></li> <li>- Route selection – <b>traffic, time and space, hard edge</b></li> <li>- Vulnerabilities – enemy position</li> <li>- Ammunition type and quantities – <b>HE, Gas or Shrapnel</b></li> <li>- Location friendly troops</li> <li>- Withdrawal / Escape Plan - <b>Compromise</b></li> <li>- Reconnaissance conducted under extremely heavy fire</li> </ul>
<b>Slide 10</b>	<p><b>Aerial photographs of Pozieres June 1916 and July 1916.</b></p> <p><b>Bapaume –Albert Road is Roman road.</b> Dead Straight and the Romans did not go over ridges but through them. Hence term sunken road</p>
<b>Slide 11</b>	<b>Tactical Map of Pozieres</b>
<b>Slide 12</b>	<p><b>Sketch map showing allied dispositions</b></p> <p>Proposed lay up positions Firing Position</p> <p><b>Gibraltar and K Trench – to contend with</b></p>
<b>Slide 13</b>	<p><b>Photo shows</b></p> <p>Exposed left flank Gibraltar Pillbox The road leading in and the tree line</p>
<b>Slide 14</b>	<p><b>Photo shows</b></p> <p>The road today The tree lines around Gibraltar The Road where Thurnhill’s gun would have be deployed</p>
<b>Slide 15</b>	<p><b>Photo shows</b></p> <p>Pozieres Village pre war Trench line through Pozieres Village Roman Road where Thurnhill’s gun would have been deployed</p>
<b>Slide 16 HIDDEN</b>	<p>Looking back toward the firing point Road leading to Gibraltar</p>
<b>Slide 17</b>	<p><b>Preparation on Gun, Teams and Equipment</b></p> <p>Extra grease on pivot points, axles and wheel hubs Sandbags wired to wheel rims Truck types were cut down and wired to wheel rims Chains were wrapped in sandbags Sandbags wrapped and tied around horses hooves (to occur later) <b>May have considered using gas masks on the horses</b> <b>May have considered two rounds kept to blow gun</b></p>

<p><b>Slide 18</b></p>	<p><b>Ammunition movement</b>  Wagon Ammunition Mk1 &amp; 2 – 38 Rounds  Limber Mk 1 &amp; 2 – 24 Rounds  GS Wagon  Bean’s History of the First AIF, Vol 3. Scant few lines on Thurnhill’s action but footnote that the ammunition wagon used to provide cover to detachment</p>
<p><b>Slide 19</b></p>	<p><b>The Route</b>  Sausage Valley – Casualty Corner – Left on access track – Pause at Bapaume / Albert Road</p> <p>Pause and bind horse’s hooves in sandbags  Lead on to lay up position</p>
<p><b>Slide 20</b></p>	<p><b>0000h - 23 July 16</b> – steady stream of fire falling on enemy trenches Five Divisions worth of guns, plus additional French artillery</p> <p>Thurnhill and detachments ready to manhandle gun and wagon forward.  <u>They need to be in position and ready to engage at 0030h</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Considerations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manhandle gun using all available men</li> <li>- Lewis guns on left flank 10 o’clock position to contend with Gibraltar, K Trench and any flank attack</li> <li>- Thurnill and Detachment Commander bring gun into action and orient gun. -</li> <li>- Place Screw pickets in place</li> <li>- Two rounds on hand to destroy gun if compromised</li> </ul> <p>All remaining men bring up wagon / wagons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Position to provide best cover but ready access to ammunition</li> <li>- Detachment + form chain to load and unload gun</li> <li>- Two men in wagon to pass ammunition down to loading chain</li> <li>- Two men ready with staves, water, bell and brush. (Also keep area clear of produce)</li> <li>- Ready to pull layers out of the seats if hit</li> </ul> <p><b>0028h - 23 July 16</b> – All guns of the 1st Division open up - Free fire for two minutes</p> <p><b>0030h</b> - Guns of 1<sup>st</sup> Division Artillery lift fire to orchard area</p> <p><b>Thurnhill and detachment open fire and continue to fire until all 115 rounds expended, dwell on last two rounds</b></p> <p>My estimate, he would need to be rounds complete in 15 minutes of less.</p>
<p><b>Slide 21</b></p>	<p><b>The scrum huddle</b>  Produce  Ammunition loading  Cartridge case extraction  Keep under cover as best they could</p>
<p><b>Slide 22</b></p>	<p><b>18 Pounder firing in Direct Fire Mode</b></p>
<p><b>Slide 23</b></p>	<p><b>0030h – Infantry goes over the top and advances on the Pozieres Trench</b></p>

	<p>After expending all ammunition (115 Rds), Thurnhill ceases fire and withdraws gun</p> <p>Detachment withdraws back down the Bapaume / Albert Road</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can't go right as will get tied up in infantry advance</li> <li>- Can't go left rear as may be thought to be enemy counter attack or flanking movement and may be engaged by friendly forces</li> <li>- Retrace route is best a safest option</li> <li>- The gun is pushed into a shell crater</li> <li>- recovery can occur later</li> <li>- breech and firing mechanism removed and carried separately *</li> </ul>
<b>Slide 24</b>	<p><b>Analysis / Lessons.....</b></p> <p><b>This was a 'Maverick Undertaking' by Bessell-Browne</b></p> <p><b>No mention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 DIV Operational Orders</li> <li>- 1 Div Arty Operational Orders</li> <li>- 1 Div Arty Operation Summary seemed vague and past tense</li> <li>- 2nd or 4th Battalion Unit War Diaries</li> </ul> <p><b>He was a forward thinker</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visited the captured German pillboxes at la-Boisselle and Ovillers</li> <li>- Knock down houses but retain and improve cellars and lower floors</li> <li>- Identified the strength of German defences and their use of reinforced concrete</li> </ul>
<b>Slide 25</b>	<p><b>Analysis / Lessons.....</b></p> <p>Direct fire was still a valuable tactic – as he used at Gallipoli</p> <p>Carried the fight to the enemy by use of artillery – Which he later did in 1917 / 1918</p> <p><b>Thurnhill</b></p> <p>Given a task and got on with it</p> <p>Lateral thinking to get the job done</p> <p>Good use of the 'What If?'</p> <p>Actions on compromise or possible capture</p> <p><b>May have actually fired on Gibraltar as well</b></p> <p><b>Thurnhill - as yet had not undertaken any formal officer training – relied on experience and an element of luck</b></p>
<b>Slide 26</b>	<b>On Call Targets – Questions Later</b>
<b>Slide 27</b>	Tactical Sketch Map of the Pozieres area. This is to show the change of target in the offensive Fire Plan, to the orchard area and the engagement of K Trench.
<b>Slide 28</b>	Photo of 18 Pounder gun fully configured with horse team and Ammunition Limber (24 Rounds)
<b>Slide 29</b>	Handwritten extract of the 2 Field Artillery Brigade (2 FAB) Unit War Diary for 22/23 July 1916. Highlighting the Thurnhill mission. It indicates that the initiative was initiated by COMD 2 FAB, and potentially not circulated to the higher HQ (1 DIV Artillery)
<b>Slide 30</b>	Summary of events log from the 1 <sup>st</sup> Divisional Artillery Order for Action, in attack on Pozieres. The entry made for 0200h 23 July indicates report from 2 FAB of a single gun direct fire action. The text suggests, that this was the first time that 1 DIV Arty, had heard of the action.

<b>Slide 31</b>	Recommendation for Honours and Awards – Military Cross for LT Thurnhill. This is the most comprehensive document pertaining to the action and thus came under the most analytical scrutiny.
<b>Slide 32</b>	<p>Extract from academic paper:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE GOD OF WAR: The Changing Face of Australian Field Artillery in World War One Christopher Marlowe</b></p> <p>Speaks of the shallow effects of indirect artillery on hardened positions and preferred use of Direct Fire. Thurnhill's action is featured.</p>
<b>Slide 33</b>	Extract denoting Bessell-Browne's ability to forward think, in the aggressive use of artillery. This was as Commander 5 <sup>th</sup> Division Artillery at Polygon Wood September 1917.
<b>Slide 34</b>	<b>Photos taken of Scott's Post, Polygon Wood.</b> Shows clear indication of a direct hit by a direct fired artillery projectile. Scott's post is located in the middle of the rolling barrage of the 5 <sup>th</sup> Divisional Artillery – under command of Bessell-Browne. The 4.5" gun was found at Polygon Wood and is reputed to have belonged to the Australian's. This could have been another Maverick mission undertaken by Bessell-Browne.