

# Aussie Baker to be remembered on the Somme at Corbie.

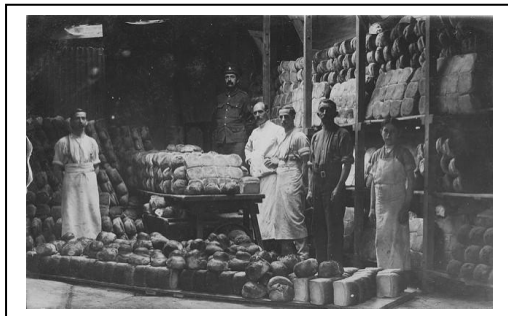
## "Le Pain dans Le Grande Geurre" ( Bread of the Great War)



**YOUNG, Charles Edward**  
Service no 8269  
Private  
5th Pioneer Battalion  
Born 27 April, 1893 at Shannon, SA  
Son of William YOUNG & Louisa  
nee CARSLAKE Of May Terrace,  
Ottoway, Rosewater, SA  
Enlisted at Keswick, SA  
Killed in action near Corbie Picardy  
France 20 May 1918  
Aged 25 years  
Buried Aubigny British Cemetery  
D 10

There is an old adage that an army marches on its stomach, and by 1914 the British Army realised that to fight even a short war in Europe it would have to provide the required infrastructure to feed its troops on campaign. Much of this work was done by the Army Service Corps (ASC) and one of its key units in providing part of the staple diet was the Field Bakery. In 1914 there was one Field Bakery in every infantry division. Staffed by one officer and ninety-two men from the ASC it could produce enough bread for more than 20,000 men. Because of the nature of their work they did not set up these bakeries near the front, and many in 1914/15 were based in locations like Calais, Rouen and Abbeville, and a little nearer the front in St Omer and Hazebrouck. They tended to be static units that did not move around much.

The first image shows the inside of a Field Bakery in France in 1914/15. A Non Commissioned Officer from the ASC is in the background overseeing the work and the men are in work aprons sorting and stacking the loaves so they can then be sent off to the troops at the front. Who the young lad at the front is, is something of a mystery; while there were many boy soldiers this one looks especially young; perhaps he was a local helping out? The second image shows an Australian officer inspecting bread readied to be sent to the front lines. There was a great deal of rivalry between the British and Australian bakers in the way that they did their jobs.



**In 2014 an exhibition “The battle to feed Tommy” looked at the food that fuelled the Front in the First World War.**

**Author Adrian Lee wrote of the issue of feeding soldiers .**

“They say an army marches on its stomach, so feeding the two million men who were in the trenches at the height of the First World War was some task. It was a great achievement that in the entire conflict not one British soldier starved to death. Yet no one should think that the Tommies enjoyed the food that was served up by the military. According to the wags on the frontline, the biggest threat to life was not German bullets but the appalling rations.

Most despised was Maconochie, named after the company in Aberdeen that made this concoction of barely recognisable chunks of fatty meat and vegetables in thin gravy. When served hot, as per the instructions on the tin, it was said to be barely edible. Eaten cold for days on end in the trenches, where a warm meal was usually no more than a fantasy, it was said to be disgusting.

It was the stated aim of the British Army that each soldier should consume 4,000 calories a day. At the frontline, where conditions were frequently appalling, daily rations comprised 9oz of tinned meat (today it would be known as corned beef but during the First World War it was called bully beef) or the hated Maconochie. Additionally the men received biscuits (made from salt, flour and water and likened by the long-suffering troops to dog biscuits). They were produced under government contract by Huntley & Palmers, which in 1914 was the world's largest biscuit manufacturer. The notoriously hard biscuits could crack teeth if they were not first soaked in tea or water.

The soldiers in the trenches didn't starve but they hated the monotony of their food. Other rations included cheese, tea, jam, sugar, salt and condensed milk. Tea was a vital part of the British soldier's rations. It was a familiar comfort and concealed the taste of the water, which was often transported to the frontline in petrol tins. If the troops were lucky they got bacon a few times a week, which they'd cook themselves over a candle taking care not to create smoke and attract a barrage of German shells.



Dr Rachel Duffett, a historian at the University of Essex, says "They were promised fresh meat and bread but the reality was often very different."

As the stalemate dragged on and supply lines were affected by a German submarine blockade it became increasingly difficult to feed the Tommies.

One measure was to cut the meat ration and in an episode of the BBC comedy *Blackadder Goes Forth*, Baldrick describes the finest culinary offering available to troops in the trenches as "rat-au-van" - rat that has been run over by a van.

In reality matters were never that bad, nor did soldiers resort to eating their horses. However by the end of 1916 flour became hard to come by so bread, known as K-Brot was made from dried potatoes, oats, barley and even pulverised straw. The occasional arrival of vats of stew called "pan packs" was a cause for celebration.

A soldier's mess kit including the dreaded Maconochie stew .



An older tradition of a rum ration endured although it was viewed with mixed feelings. "If rum was handed out it often signalled they were about to go over the top," adds Dr Duffett, also author of *The Stomach For Fighting: Food And The Soldiers Of The Great War*.

Food science was in its infancy and the lack of variety led to vitamin deficiencies, while stomach upsets were common. Because of the shortage of fresh water, troops often resorted to drinking from the ditches and puddles.

Yet faced with such challenging conditions, the soldiers also learned to be ingenious. Before the advent of tinned food in the late 19th century, it was normal for armies to herd cattle as they went. The Gloucestershire Regiment is said to have kept the custom alive in the First World War by having a trench cow which ensured a supply of fresh milk. It's also claimed that some soldiers who were dug in for months grew vegetables.

Away from the frontline there was scope for men to improve their diet. They went fishing, poached game, scrounged fruit and liberated chickens from the French farms. Officers often turned a blind eye, believing the victims had every reason to be grateful for the presence of the British Army. Soldiers were also able to receive food parcels from home containing cakes, chocolate and other goodies, and used their wages to buy food locally.

In villages impromptu cafes called estaminets sprang up everywhere. Often they were in front rooms but they became very popular with the Tommies.

The locals soon realised that their own cuisine was not to the taste of most of the British soldiers, who were especially dismissive of the "smelly" French cheeses. Instead they began serving up platefuls of eggs and chips washed down with cheap "vin blanc" which became known as plonk.

For officers with access to transport the options away from the front were even more tempting, including the fine restaurants of Amiens. There's no doubt that the British troops ate better than their German counterparts, particularly when the war finally turned in favour of the Allies.

However a propaganda broadcast in which it was claimed that British soldiers were enjoying two hot meals a day caused an outcry because it was far from the truth.

In the reserve lines there were also Army cooks and mobile kitchens but the quality varied. Although the dishes could be plain, cooks were taught to look for nettles, sweet docks, wild mushrooms and marigold flowers with which to season dishes.

Many of the cooks died in the fighting but it was considered by the Tommies to be a cushy job.

Andrew Robertshaw, a curator at the Royal Logistic Corps Museum, in Camberley, Surrey, and author of *Feeding Tommy*, says: "There was no Army catering corps and in the trenches the men fended for themselves. But away from the frontline there was a cook for about every 100 men.

"For the first time in a major conflict frozen food, which was allowed to thaw on its way from the French ports, was also available. The priority was to keep the men fit to fight, not provide variety, but to feed so many was very impressive."

## "Le Pain dans Le Grande Geurre Corbie Picardy France

During the commemoration activities of the Great War an exhibition and event will be held in Corbie on the Somme Canal less than 2km from Villers Brettoneux.

The exhibition titled "**Le Pain dans Le Grande Geurre**" ( Bread of the Great War) looks at the role of bakers who kept the soldiers on the front line fed.

The organisers of this event want to present the Great War and to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the first battles on French soil of the ANZAC troops by looking at war that is usually seen as a symbol of destruction and death through the role of bread, symbol of sharing and fraternity.



To give birth to this project, they created an association entitled "Pomponette" whose chairman is Alain Laniget, Master baker at Corbie.

The bread and the man will be foremost in the heart of this event, beyond uniforms and nations, bread is the link. Bread making, his need, the Allied side as German fighters will be discussed objectively, even as French propaganda was white bread that of a civilized people, and black bread, the famous "KK", bread of barbarians.

Many bakers representatives of several nations of Europe, but also Africa and Australia will be present to animate together fraternally different soldier bread manufacturing.

From 5 to 30 April 2016 at the Somme Visitor Centre in Corbie .



From nearly 200 historical documents presented on 35 panels, the exhibition evokes the images of bread during the First World War. Bread was still in the early twentieth century the staple food of the population, all social categories. As the armies were confronted with the obligation to provide food for four years to almost 4 million French soldiers and as many in Germany. Priority was given to them when flour resources started to decline due to lack of workers to plant and harvest, and food blockade in Germany. Everything concerning the bread and bakery for more than four years of war is on display both chronologically (with the great battles of the Marne, Verdun, the Dardanelles, the Somme) and thematically. The bread soldiers: its composition, its manufacture (in "stores-stations" and the combat zones), mobile and portable ovens, supplies, biscuit war. Bread hairy, but also the "Krauts", the famous "bread K.K." (Kartoffelriegsbrot: war bread with potato). The bread of fighters from the French colonies and the Commonwealth. Bread of Russian allies then English and finally the Americans are not forgotten. The exhibition was designed by CREBESC (Centre for Research and Studies on the Bakery and partnerships) and in particular by Laurent BOURCIER.

### **Aussies to take part in historical legacy** at April 2016 event.

A highlight of the exhibition will be a day of baking on the 23rd of April when 18 Aussies will join bakers from across Europe to bake bread traditionally as those baker soldiers did in camp ovens as they did during the war. Aussie Damper and biscuits will be made on the day with lashings of Vegemite and Golden Syrup !



The Aussies from Brisbane and Melbourne are part of an annual pilgrimage made to the battlefields by **InterCultural Consulting Group** from Brisbane each year. The group will also take part in a local BBQ (complete with kangaroo meat and aussie beer) and events in Vignacourt (home of the Lost Diggers photographic plates rediscovered in 2010).

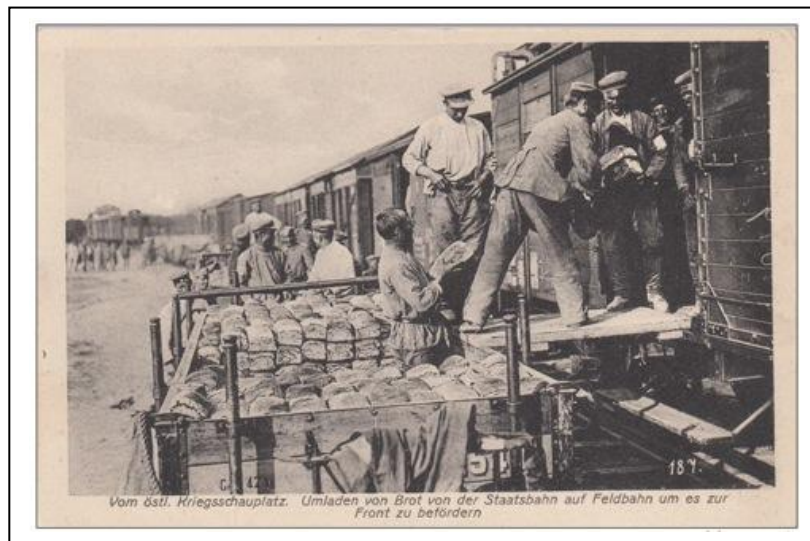


An Aussie baker of WW1 , **Charles Edward Young** who joined the AIF in 1916 and served as a baker during 1916 and 1917 for the AIF will be remembered.



He served in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Bakery to feed the soldiers and was killed as part of the 5th Pioneer Battalion near Corbie on the 20th May 1918 at Vaire-sous-Corbie. He is buried near the town of Corbie at. Aubigny -Recueillement CWG cemetery.

He will also be remembered by projection on the Australian War Memorial on the 23rd April.

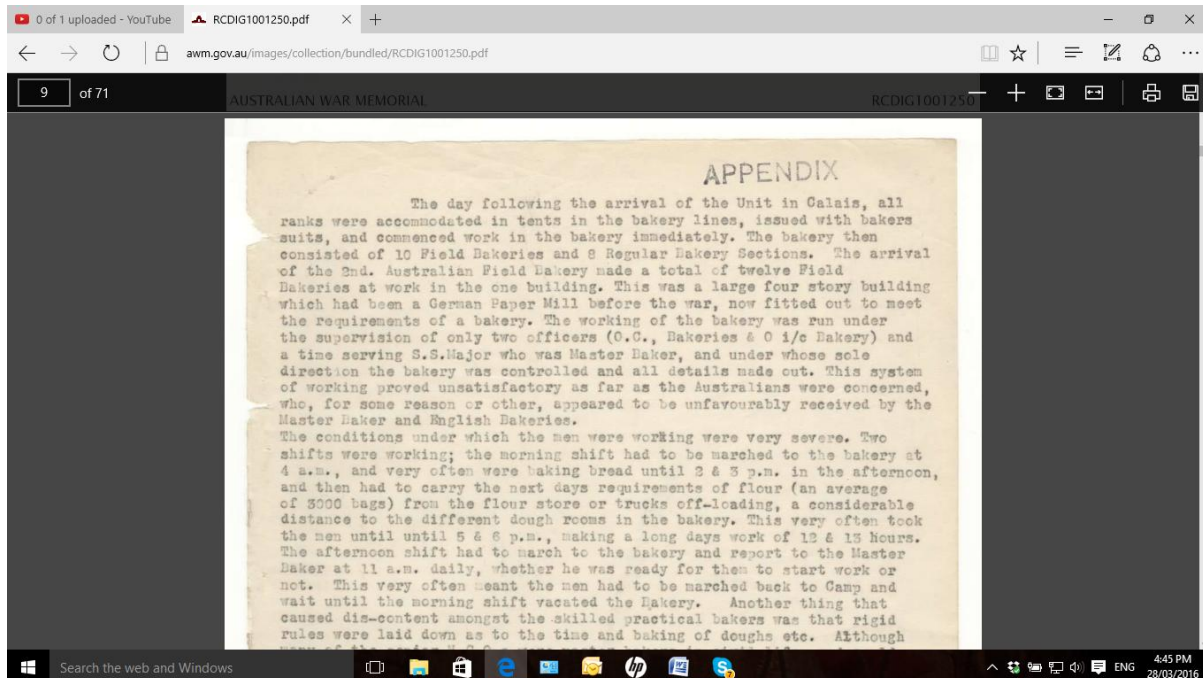


### **The recipes remembered.**

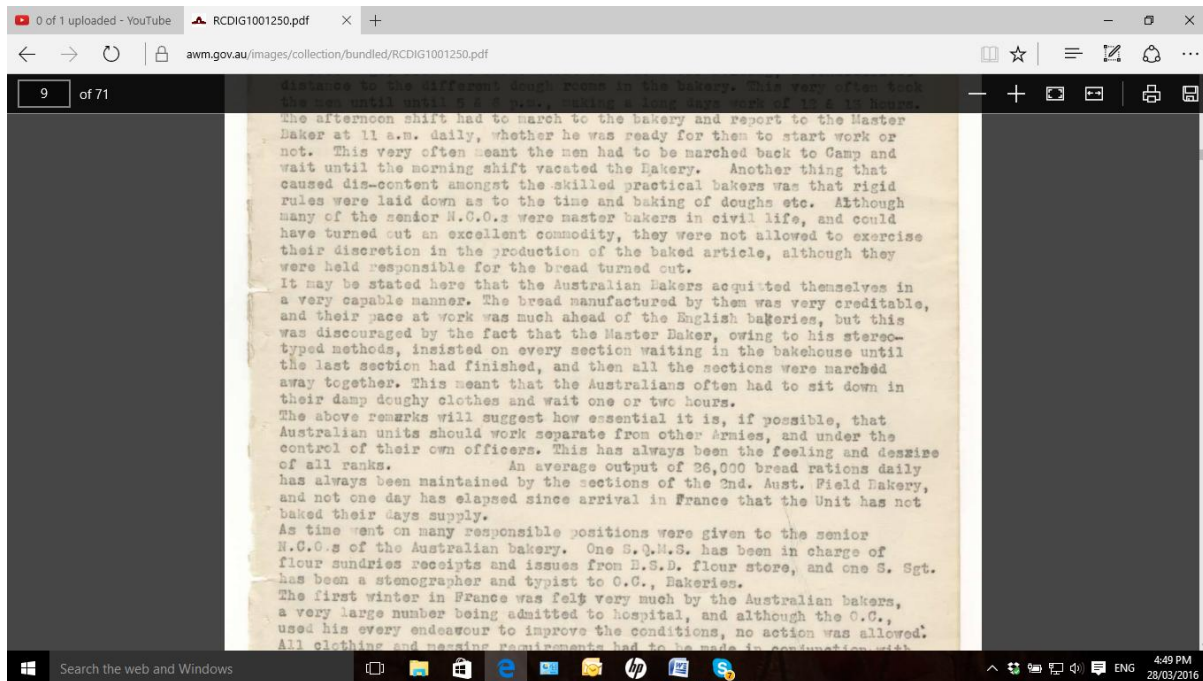
KK sourdough bread formula hard: 1 kilo of wheat flour rye flour complete 800 g pulp fermented 200 g water 1 liter Fermentation 5 hours kneading: rye flour 3 kilos leaven 3 kilos Malt 100 g water 2,600 litres salt 100 g cooked potatoes to the water with skin 2 kg oats 300 g 300 g 300 g rye bran wheat bran Knead 10 minutes in first gear (potatoes are incorporated with the skin at the beginning of kneading) score 30 minutes; weighing, shaping and development live mold; 5 hours of primer; Bake 45 minutes at 240 degrees in soil; 215 degrees vaulted into a falling oven.

## Aussie Baker - Private Charles Edward Young

Charles Edward Young from Port Adelaide, South Australia enlisted in the AIF on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1915 . A 22 year old baker prior to enlisting on 14 June 1915, he embarked for overseas with the 19th Australian Army Service Corps Field Bakery and Butchery from Sydney on 30 November 1915 aboard HMAT Suffolk. His first posting was with the 2nd Field Bakery. While serving in France with the 2nd Field Bakery, he was promoted to Sergeant on 5 March 1916 and then on 22 September 1917 reverted to the rank of private at his own request and transferred to the 5th Pioneer Battalion. We know no reason for this request. During his baking time from early March 1916 until September 1917 he worked in the Australian bakery at Calais that was producing some 26 000 items per day. The diary entry gives a sense of what was happening in the bakeries.







The 5th Australian Pioneer Battalion was formed in Egypt on the 3rd March 1916, following the allied evacuation at Gallipoli. It was formed from a nucleus of original 'Anzacs' and an influx of reinforcements that had newly arrived from Australia and designated to the service under the 5th Division. A Pioneer Battalion was essentially a construction and labour unit. During World War I it was employed to construct road works (including corduroy roads [2]), to dig communications trenches, insert 'duck board' tracks, build saps, and extend 'light rail' systems. They were considered to be the 'handy men' of a Division and often completed their essential work under fire. The 1916 influx of 5th Pioneer reinforcements consisted of mainly tradesmen, miners and craftsmen, mostly originating from South and Western Australia. Of the 14 Officers and 600 men who marched into the battalion lines at Tel-El-Kebir, Egypt on the 3rd March 1916, only 100 new Pioneers had seen previous active service.

A diary of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion gives some insight into his work during 1917 after leaving his baking duties.

In early 1917 he and the battalion returned to the Somme.

The diary notations tell us of the events.....

"The Somme once again – Villers Brettoneux.

After 2 days at Reninghelst the Battalion moved southwards by train – a tedious journey as usual but the monotony was considerably relieved by the excitement at the time, all were warned to be ready for instant action. At Doullens the battalion detrained & marched 10 miles by night to the village of Arqueves. 'D' Coy however

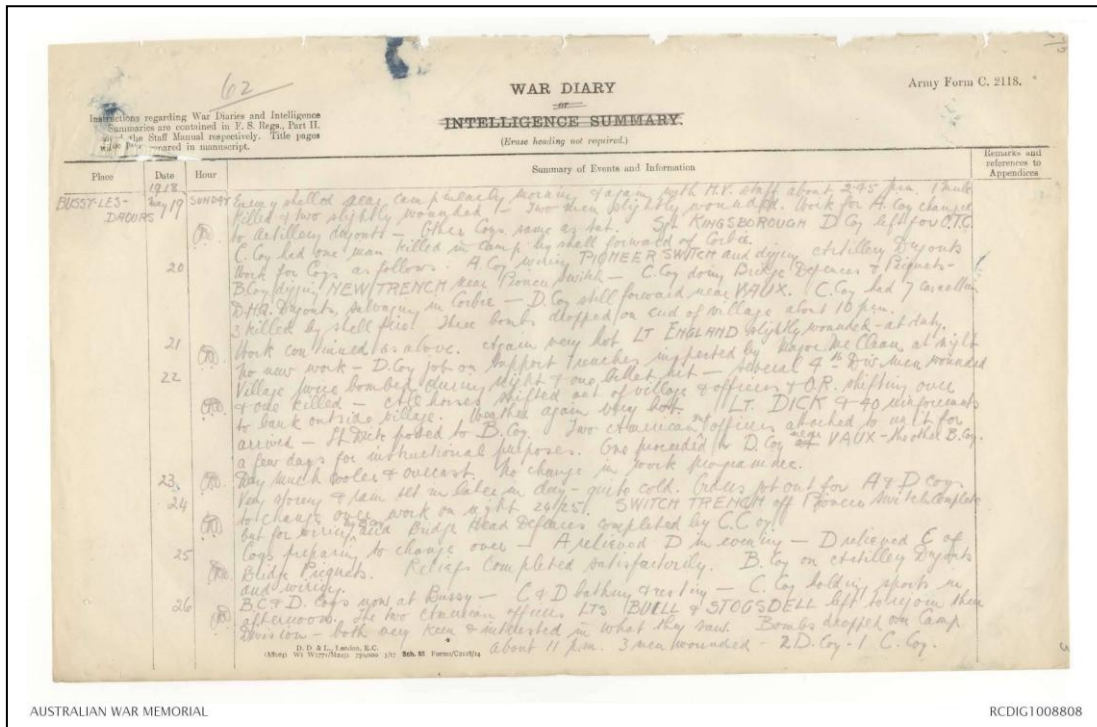
travelled in a separate train & detrained at Mondicourt. At Arqueves the whole battalion rested but were under orders to be ready to move at one hours notice – consequently no transport could be unloaded. Regular parades were held when possible to keep everyone fit. While at Arqueves an unfortunate accident occurred resulting in the death of Lt. R.W. Palmer.

This village was picqueted every night to limit the action of spies & one escaped German prisoner was thus captured. On Apr 5th the battalion moved on very short notice by motor bus thro' Amiens to the village of Daours on the somme; thence by march to Blangy- [Trouville?] where they billeted. The battalion lost no time in reconnoitring the Divisional area so as to be prepared for emergencies. Work was commenced by burying 2½ miles of cable 3ft 6 ins deep in one day & next in establishing roads across the marshes alongside the river to provide means of retreat should such action be necessary. 1000 yds of corduroy road was thus built. Trench systems were next tackled and a series of strong posts being first dug which were subsequently connected. The battalion's camp was shelled on the evening of Apl 17th & that same evening detachments on duty guarding road mines in the village of Villers-Brettoneux were gassed & had to be replaced. Owing to a slight change in the Divisional sector the battalion moved to near the village of Bussy les Daours & dug in on a large bank on the slopes of the R[iver] Hallue. Trench digging was still the order of the day until April 24th when the battalion was kept in readiness for instant action owing to the capture of the village of Villers Brettoneux by the Germans fortunately for one day only.

Late April the Battalion was involved around Viller Brettoneux during the advance.

The situation relaxed somewhat on April 28 & trenches were captured. Companies were occasionally moved from Bussy when their work lay too far from the camp for instance 'D' Coy were camped for a period at Vaux sur Somme, 'B' Coy near Aubigny & 'C' Coy were camped all along the River Somme acting as bridge guards to the various crossings from dubigny to the front line. Trench digging in the meantime was proceeding rapidly the battalion moving from one job to another, each trench after being dug was defended by barbed wire entanglements. A large number of bomb proof shelters (50 in all) were also built for various batteries.

He was was killed as part of the 5th Pioneer Battalion actions near Corbie on the 20th May 1918 at Vaire-sous-Corbie. He is buried near the town of Corbie at. Aubigny -Recueillement CWG cemetery.



The diary entry of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneers points to deaths on the 20<sup>th</sup> May.

Charles Edward Young was one of those killed.

Images from AWM, Imperial War Museum.

Content Materials sourced from AWM, National Archives, 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneers diary entries, "Battle to feed Tommy" 2014 exhibition- Adrian Lee 2016 Bread of the Great War exhibition- Corbie France.