

Before Dawn

Just before the break of dawn, the spring breeze dies down and there is calm as the colour of the sky approaches a deeper orange. The murmur of voices also fades as the mayor of the town approaches the podium. Children gaze at the motionless soldiers standing sentry, and look up at one of the flags gently billowing on its pole, the Southern Cross barely visible between the folds of navy blue. It is Anzac Day, and the scene could be from any small town in Australia. But there are two different flags hanging here - though both red, white and blue - and when the town mayor starts to speak, it's in French.

This is the village of Villers-Bretonneux, in the north of France, whose residents have commemorated this quintessentially Australian day since 1919. It was utter coincidence that the battle fought by the Australian 13th, 14th and 15th brigades to free the town from German forces in 1918 fell on Anzac Day, but it wouldn't have been far from the minds of those Australian soldiers that they were fighting, and this time winning, on the third anniversary of the Gallipoli landing, and all that it signified. In the end, they arose victorious, driving the German army out of the town over several days, and most historians agree that their success played a major part in finally stopping the Central Powers' advance in the final year of that terrible war. Despite the success, over a thousand young men from the other side of the world paid for this victory with their lives on that first day alone, with many more casualties from the later days and artillery bombardment.

Following the Gallipoli campaign, most units of the Australian Imperial Forces were mixed to allow any new recruits to be familiarised with the Western Front by experienced veterans. So the soldiers, most of whom were very young men no more than thirty, were not lacking in knowledge of the situation and the possibilities of death, yet that did not stop them from heroically charging into battle to help the French reclaim their land.

Following the war, the mayor of Villers-Bretonneux made a deeply moving speech thanking the Australian and other Allied troops who fell protecting the town, and vowed to help preserve the integrity of the graves of the fallen soldiers. Even during the German occupation of the village during the Second World War years later, the French still continued to celebrate the lives of troops that had protected their country in the First World War despite the Germans not allowing commemorations such as this to occur. The fact that the French were willing to do this for the Australians is striking.

The joint Franco-Australian dawn service is now held at the Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux, which was erected in 1938 to commemorate all of the men that died on the Western Front and is frequently visited by people from Australia.

Almost a century after the initial battle to reclaim the village, the relationship between Australia and Villers-Bretonneux has not faded in the slightest, and if anything has grown. In 1927 there was the unveiling of the impressive Victoria School to replace the boy's school that had been destroyed in the war, but this was not simply a school. Hearing of the destruction of the town, the children of Victoria went around fundraising to help rebuild the school. Due to the Australians' generosity, the school started to teach its students about iconic Australian flora and fauna as well as the sacrifice that the Diggers made to save their town. On top of every classroom door of the school is the saying "N'oublions jamais l'Australie" - never forget Australia.

It is only honourable that such acts of bravery and heroism be recognised and remembered. Even though the ANZAC troops came from a completely different place with different customs and conventions, not to mention a completely different language making communication difficult, the qualities and ideals exemplified by the Australian troops are universal to all peoples. This is further reinforced by the fact that they knew the battle would be bloody and hard, but they still pushed on and demonstrated extreme selflessness, but most of all the ANZAC spirit.

Angus Gurry
Year 9

The ANZAC spirit was first forged in Gallipoli when the Australians and New- Zealanders were astoundingly brave and selfless and has gone on to be a term used to describe people living up to the example set by the ANZACs. The ANZACs were known to be courageous in the face of danger, optimistic, loyal and egalitarian. Although there were around two thousand casualties, the men refused to ever give up and eventually retook the village much to the appreciation of the French inhabitants.

Since that decisive day in 1918, the relationship between the two different peoples has only strengthened. For example, in 2009, when a bushfire burnt down a school in Victoria during the Black Saturday fires, the schoolkids of Villers-Bretonneux helped by raising \$20,000 to cover some of the cost to rebuild it. It is amazing to think that these children, 82 years later, are willing to help fundraise for a place that they have never seen, simply because they know that the bonds that were created that morning are everlasting.

The relationship between the people of Australia and Villers -Bretonneux teaches us that the ANZAC spirit is not just about 60,000 troops in a campaign in Gallipoli; it's about how so many soldiers volunteered to face the prospect of death from the enemy just to reclaim a small and insignificant town that had been taken from its owners. It's about how the Victorians fundraised for the Victoria School, how the gesture was repaid almost a century later, how two places from the opposite sides of the world forged such a special relationship from the ashes of a devastating conflict. This is the true spirit of ANZAC.

979 words

Bibliography

Ww1westernfront.gov.au. (2017). *Second battle of Villers-Bretonneux / Visiting Villers-Bretonneux / Australian National Memorial, Villers Bretonneux / Australians on the Western Front 1914-1918*. [online] Available at: <http://www.w1westernfront.gov.au/villers-bretonneux/visiting-villers-bretonneux/second-battle-of-villers-bretonneux.php> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

ABC News. (2017). *Villers-Bretonneux remembers decisive battle 90 years on*. [online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-04-25/villers-bretonneux-remembers-decisive-battle-90/2415632> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Smh.com.au. (2017). *Anzac Day focus turns to Western Front - National - smh.com.au*. [online] Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/anzac-day-focus-turns-to-western-front/2008/04/19/1208025549025.html> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Memorial, T. (2017). *Enlistment statistics, First World War / The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww1> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Museeaustralien.com. (2017). *Site officiel du Muse Franco-Australien de Villers- Bretonneux - Victoria school*. [online] Available at: http://www.museeaustralien.com/en/?Victoria_school [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Culture Victoria. (2017). *Villers-Bretonneux - Culture Victoria*. [online] Available at: <http://www.cv.vic.gov.au/stories/a-diverse-state/villers-bretonneux/> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

NewsComAu. (2017). *Anzac Day: The French kids that 'don't forget Australia'*. [online] Available at: <http://www.news.com.au/national/the-school-kids-that-dont-forget-australia-in-villersbretonneux/news-story/fd4e566140410dd27d65ad207c208a80> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Memorial, T. (2017). *First World War 1914-18 / The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war> [Accessed 16 Jun. 2017].

Angus Gurry
Year 9

ABC News. (2017). *Looking back on the battle of Villers-Bretonneux*. [online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-06/battle-of-villers-bretonneux/5497598> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Two In France. (2017). *Villers-Bretonneux and Australia - Two In France*. [online] Available at: <https://twoinfrance.com.au/places/villers-bretonneux-and-australia/#7/49.714/0.644> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

ABC News. (2017). *Villers-Bretonneux to remember fallen Anzacs*. [online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-25/anzac-day-villers-bretonneux/6420494> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

Willmott, H. (2017). *World War 1*. 2nd ed. London: Darling Kindersley Ltd, pp.252- 255.

Memorial, T. (2017). *Battle of Villers Bretonneux*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E10S> [Accessed 16 Jun. 2017].

Annotation 1

Memorial, T. (2017). *First World War 1914-18 / The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war> [Accessed 16 Jun. 2017].

This source is a large page on the AWM site which was used in this essay to get a solid understanding of major events occurring during the First World War as well as the Gallipoli Campaign which was a major factor in the birth of the ANZAC spirit.

Accuracy - This source, as it is located on the Australian war memorial is almost guaranteed to contain correct information as the website is government run and maintained by the Department of Veteran Affairs. This makes factual errors very unlikely to be present.

Reliability - for the reasons previously stated, it would be highly unlikely that this website would have any reliability issues because the site is run by government historical professionals who would be sure to make the site as factually sound as possible.

Usefulness - this source was very useful when the essay was first being written as it allowed for a solid knowledge foundation of the First World War in general which in turn was beneficial for the authoring of the essay.

Annotation 2

ABC News. (2017). *Looking back on the battle of Villers-Bretonneux*. [online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-06/battle-of-villers-bretonneux/5497598> [Accessed 12 Jun. 2017].

This source is a page on the ABC website which offers a plethora of information regarding the Australian involvement in the Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux and limited information on the Western Front in general.

Accuracy - the information in this source, although three years old, when cross-referenced with other sources checks out to be almost flawless in details.

Reliability - as an ABC paper, this paper was most likely written by a journalist rather than a historian, but as the national broadcasting company it would be likely that this paper would have had numerous fact-checks before it was published.

Angus Gurry
Year 9

Usefulness - this source was incredibly useful in acquiring a large quantity of information about the Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux itself, and the in the early stages of writing it was visited frequently.

Annotation 3

Willmott , H. (2017). *World War 1. 2nd ed.* London: Darling Kindersley Ltd, pp.252- 255.

This source, while accessed comparatively late in the writing of this essay still provided to be a valuable asset in ensuring that the information provided was as factually correct as possible.

Accuracy - Cross-referencing this source with other proved it to be very similar to the others in content, meaning it is very likely that it is accurate.

Reliability - As a generalisation, printed sources are more likely to be reliable than ones found on internet pages as they usually go through more rigorous fact checks and edits. This history book is no such exception and has numerous editors listed proving that it is very historically reliable.

Usefulness - This source, though used very late, was still helpful to an extent in edits once the main body of the essay had been completed.