



What does the enduring relationship between Australians and the people of Villers-Bretonneux teach us about the Anzac Spirit?

During the course of the Great War over 400,000 Australian's enlisted and served during the war, tragically 60,000 of the brave soldiers never returned home.¹ Most troops lost their lives on the Western front in France or Belgium. Never have we seen such a devastating loss of Australian life in battle before or since. In April 1918, Australian soldiers from the 13th and 15th Brigades were sent to France to defend to the town of Villers-Bretonneux. The German forces sought to take the town because if they could capture Villers-Bretonneux they would be in a position to advance on the key city of Amiens. The Australian and British troops defended the town gallantly and Villers-Bretonneux was cleared of all German soldiers on the 25th of April 1918, the third anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli.² After the war, Australians raised money to help the people of Villers-Bretonneux rebuild their town. In particular, money raised by Victorian children went towards the funding of a school now known as Victoria School, named so in respect of the generosity of the children. Today, above the playground at Victoria School, to pay homage to the people of Australia for their generosity they have the message 'Never forget Australia' on the wall.³ The relationship between Australia and Villers-Bretonneux has maintained a strong connection because of the actions of the past and teaches us the true meaning of the Anzac Spirit. The relationship shows that the Anzac Spirit brings out the altruism in Australian people, a selfless generosity inspired by such a powerful force. Finally, the Anzac Spirit teaches us that the sacrifice our diggers made was done not just for us but for what they believed in.

The lasting relationship between Australia and Villers-Bretonneux comes down to the foundations in which it was born. The Anzacs, by laying down their lives to protect the town of Villers-Bretonneux, started the formation of this bond. During the battle 1200 Australian diggers lost their lives.⁴ Despite this, the people of Australia came together to help rebuild the town after the war. This act made the connection between these two places everlasting, and teaches us the true meaning of the Anzac Spirit. The Anzac Spirit is an assortment of qualities such as mateship, valour, empathy and initiative.

These qualities are possessed by Australian and New Zealander troops and are evoked by wartime or hardship. The essence of what the Anzac Spirit is remains as the embodiment of what all Australians try to live by. The people of Australia who went out of their way to donate money to the people of Villers-Bretonneux showed these qualities.⁵ At the time of the close of the Great War, Australia's



The rebuilding of the newly named Victoria College

¹ The Australian War Memorial - *First World War 1914–18* <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/atwar/first-world-war>

² The Australian War Memorial - *Villers Bretonneux: The End of the German Advance* <http://www.awmlondon.gov.au/battles/villers-bretonneux>

³ The Australian War Memorial - *Villers Bretonneux: The End of the German Advance* <http://www.awmlondon.gov.au/battles/villers-bretonneux>

⁴ The Australian Government - *Australians on the Western Front* <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/australians-on-the-western-front>

⁵The Australian War Memorial - *Anzac spirit* <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/anzac/spirit>

economy crashed and many families were struggling.⁶ Despite this, they were not thinking of their own needs, but the needs of those in Villers-Bretonneux. The origins in which the relationship between Villers-Bretonneux and Australia teaches us the true meaning of the Anzac Spirit and how it was instrumental in the making of the connection between the two places.

The devastation of war is said to bring out the best in people and it is clearly evident in the case of the long-lasting relationship between the people of Villers-Bretonneux and Australia. Why does war bring out the best in people, and more specifically altruism? In the case of Australians, the attributes displayed during such hardships comes down to the Anzac Spirit. Having the Anzac Spirit displayed with such gallantry had a positive effect on the civilian population. This was part of what pushed the ordinary, everyday people to show such generosity and solidarity towards the people of Villers-Bretonneux and it was the same in reverse. Due to the benevolence shown to the population of Villers-Bretonneux they also displayed the finest of the Anzac Spirit's qualities and backed Australia through and through. Since the battle, the Australian flag has continued to fly in Villers-Bretonneux alongside the French flag to display the joint victory. The connection between Villers-Bretonneux and Australia is also shown in the town of Robinvale, Victoria which was adopted as sister city of Villers-Bretonneux in 1984/5. This was inspired by Lieutenant Robin Cuttle, a resident of Robinvale, who was killed a short distance from Villers-Bretonneux during service.⁷

Due to the link that Robinvale and Villers-Bretonneux share, an inseverable bond has been created and frequent visits take place between the two towns. As well as this, in recent times the French in Villers-Bretonneux have named the main road running through the town, Rue De Melbourne and in the heart of the town stands a restaurant called 'The Kangaroo'. Furthermore, students from Victoria College despite living in France, celebrate Anzac Day honouring our soldiers at an Australian dedicated military memorial every year.⁸ These acts of solidarity show how strong the link between Australia and Villers-Bretonneux really is.



The Australian and French flags still fly side-by-side in Villers-Bretonneux

The price of the battle of Villers-Bretonneux was high for Australians with such a bloody outcome. But this sacrifice was made in honour of keeping both of our countries free. The enduring relationship between Villers-Bretonneux and Australia would not have been possible without the sacrifice of the troops in the 13th and 15th Brigades. The Anzac Spirit, with the qualities that it stands for, brings out the best in people and was key in the sacrifice made in order to keep another man's country free. The quote 'they died so we might live' displayed at the cenotaph in Singapore captures everything that the Anzac fought for and stood by.⁹ The Anzac Spirit teaches us that these sacrifices were made to stand up for what they believed in and the quote is a perfect example of that, it shows that they were willing to lay down their lives for it. The Anzac Spirit helped our troops fight for what they thought was right and that continues today. The relationships that these two places hold and

⁶The Australian Government - *The Effects of World War 1 on the Australian Economy*
<http://dl.nfsa.gov.au/module/293/>

⁷ Swan Hill Rural City Council - *Robinvale – Villers-Bretonneux*
<https://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/community/sister-cities/robinvale-villers-bretonneux/>

⁸ French Desire - *French Facts - Facts about France - Australians in War*
http://www.frenchdesire.com.au/facts/australians_in_war/

⁹ Visit Singapore AU - *The Cenotaph - a Singapore War Memorial Landmark*
http://www.visitsingapore.com/en_au/see-do-singapore/history/memorials/cenotaph.html

the connection they share, teaches us about the sacrifice made in order to honour not only our country but everything that it stands for; the Anzac Spirit. My Great-Grandfather served in the Great War and he felt that it was his duty to bear arms and protect everything that our country and its allies live for and value. Herbert George Perring stood up and fought for what he believed was right, which was protecting the land we love so that we could be free. This is crucial in the story of the long-lasting relationship between Villers-Bretonneux and Australia.

The enduring relationship between Villers-Bretonneux and Australia has been strong due to the actions of the past and present. These actions speak volumes and teach us a great deal about the Anzac Spirit, and teaches us its true meaning. The Anzac Spirit brings out a selfless generosity in people and helps us stand up for what we believe in. The Anzac Spirit is a powerful force felt in all Australians, it defines us as a nation and is seen in all acts of kindness that we witness, but it is especially prevalent in the relationship between Villers-Bretonneux and Australia. For all that our ancestors have done for us 'we will remember them.'¹⁰ Lest We Forget.

Word count (not including titles, referencing or text boxes): 1189

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¹⁰ The Ode – Line 4 'We will remember them'

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