

Address by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull

Anzac Day Dawn Service

25 April 2018

Villers-Bretonneux, France

In the quiet peace of dawn, we pause and remember this place, as it was one hundred years ago.

Green fields and trees have returned to take the place of mud, and trenches and all the wreckage of war.

A landscape of peace - but one hard won by young Australians fighting with the soldiers of the British Empire and of France.

The deeds of these young men have echoed down the years.

Here on the Western Front, death had seized the landscape and refused to yield. A stalemate.

And then, in March 1918, a German onslaught began. The spring offensive, Ludendorff's battle of annihilation.

Their march west seemed unstoppable.

And on April 24th, Villers-Bretonneux was captured for a second time.

The small village had to be rescued. A vital point, the key to Amiens it could not be allowed to be held by the enemy.

The Australians were called upon, just three years removed from the landing on Gallipoli.

It was said they had no chance. But they were confident and it was ANZAC Day the next day.

At ten past ten, the 13th brigade advanced in classic Australian style.

"Boys, you know what you have to do. Get on with it", was the laconic pep-talk from one Officer.

'The whistle of bullets,' said one captain, 'became a swish and patter, and boys fell all round me, generally without a sound.'

It was fire unlike any experienced before. But still they pushed on.

And shortly before midnight, with a ferocious roar, the 15th brigade joined the assault.

As dawn broke at this moment a century ago, victory appeared certain.

April 25th, 1918. ANZAC Day.

It was, to both friend and foe, one of the greatest feats of the war.

The cost was great.

Three-thousand, nine-hundred Australian men were ordered to fight.

There were about 2,500 casualties.

But Villers-Bretonneux was saved. The architect of the victory Sir John Monash described it as the turning point in the war.

The Australians had come from the other side of the world to defend the freedom of France.

We meet here 100 years later; on land long healed — to remember them.

And we join Australians everywhere in remembering all the men and women who have served our nation, and who are serving it today.

We honour their bravery, their sacrifice and their loyalty.

We show that they are not forgotten.

For the best way to honour the courage and sacrifice of the diggers of World War One, is to support the servicemen and women, the veterans and the families of today.

On this dawn, we are joined by friends.

The people of France, the people of Villers-Bretonneux, do not forget Australia's sons. They are their sons, too.

Here the Australian flag flies high; kangaroos guard the entrance to the town hall; Victoria School — rebuilt with donations from Australian children — is stamped with the words, N'oublions jamais l'Australie.

Let us never forget Australia.

There is love and heartfelt gratitude, here.

There is friendship.

We are mates, brothers in arms - just as the Australian digger and the French Poilu were mates a century ago. Just as they are in freedom's cause today.

Let us remember the value of friendship on this day and in this year — one-hundred years since the First World War, and its terrible destruction, ended.

Let us vow to learn the lessons of that destruction; to open our arms, and our hearts, to our neighbours.

And let us commit to forging a stronger, safer world. Together.

We honour the sacrifice of the ANZACs and we honour the values for which they fought. Freedom, democracy and the rule of law – our Australian way of life. In every age, freedoms hard won and hard fought.

Lest we forget.