

“Do Not Forget Australia”

To Australia with love
from the CM1 children of the École Victoria, Somme, France



Last July, in a small rural town in the Somme Valley in northern France, a teacher had a ‘big’ idea; something special for his class of 9-10 year olds for the WW1 1918 Centenary; a film about their linked history and gratefulness to Australia:

1 on the centenary of the Aussies ‘saving’ their town, Villers-Bretonneux (V-B).

2 acknowledging the gift of their school Ecole Victoria (EV) from Victorian children - Australia.

3 honouring the Aussie memorials that are in their town (the Franco-Australian Museum and the Adelaide Cemetery) and nearby (the big Australian War Memorial and Cemetery)

4 sharing the story of their ‘duty’, their ‘devoir de Remembrance’, i.e. how they honour their promise to never forget Australia.

So from September til February, the children worked as a team to research people and places and create a film. The result is a beautiful film <https://mediacad.ac-amiens.fr/m/1159> – a gift from the French children to share with us, as per the teacher’s invitation below.

Through my contact with the teacher, M. Guillaume Fournet, I have had the privilege of supporting him in trying to get his CM1 class’ film “Do not forget Australia” as widely circulated as possible. The link is also on HEN and my Enviroed4all-FB pages, with a brief introduction and contact details. In this article, I will provide some suggestions to enhance using this film to better know and understand our actions in WW1 and some further resources to add to its story. If you do not know of this part of our history, this film is a delightful way to discover it. The quality of it was recognised on Anzac Day by winning the 2018 Australian Embassy’s Sadlier-Stoke Prize. I commend this (English sub-titled) film to you and your families.

The history of the school

Can you see what is written in big letters on the porch in the photo above? It has been there since 1927, when this primary school at V-B was completed. *Imagine being a part of a community where generations of children arriving and playing at school, see this message - and the*

Dear Australian friends,

For the centenary of the Battle of Villers-Bretonneux and ANZAC Day, our class has produced a 25 minute long documentary called « DO NOT FORGET AUSTRALIA, the duty of remembrance in Villers-Bretonneux ».

The pupils and myself are extremely proud to present this film, which won the Sadlier-Stokes award in this centenary year! We will be given our prize on 25th April by an Australian personality: your Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull just after the commemoration at the Memorial!!!

Watching the film, you will follow the pupils as they make moving discoveries: the Australian National Memorial, Adelaide Cemetery, the Franco-Australian Museum, the Victoria School...

The film is subtitled in English. <https://mediacad.ac-amiens.fr/m/1159>

If you enjoy it, you are kindly asked to share it with your contacts, and with as many schools as possible. This will allow to highlight the work of our little French pupils of Villers-Bretonneux and participate in the duty of remembrance!

*With our kind regards,
the pupils of the class of CM1 from the Victoria School and their teacher, Monsieur Fournet.*

same in French in the classrooms. You would be very aware that there is something special between you and Australia! So what is it? This film explores those links from WW1.

It is hard for us to imagine our community being turned to rubble by fighting, but that is what happened to towns all over the Somme, including V-B. When the fighting stopped, where did the children go to school? In the 1920's, in Melbourne, a boy was concerned about this and he began a 'Penny Drive' to help rebuild one school at V-B. The children of Victoria got behind this and raised enough money to build a school. It was named École Victoria (EV).

As well as the film, the picture book "Two Pennies" by Vicki Bennett tells the story of the link between school children of Victoria and V-B. (If it's not at your local library, ask them to get it in). YouTube has a short video "Two Pennies 1918" by Vicki Bennett in 2015. It begins with a summary of the war and the action at V-B to explain the need for a school and then its story.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0zon2sNjiQ>

Raising money to rebuild another's school is an inspiring history that Victorian children should know and be proud of. And guess what? The EV children returned the gift. When they heard of the Ash Wednesday bushfires in Victoria in 2009, they raised today's equivalent of 2 pennies (1 Euro) per child to send to a destroyed school-Strathewan P. S. These linked histories are at <https://www.museeausalien.com/en-au/ecole-victoria>.

Links continue to be made, e.g. this film; the band story told in Derek Guille's book 'The Promise'; the EV mural (photo below).



Some Western Front / WW1 history

How can you introduce children to a War a century ago on the other side of the world? We see the beneficiaries of this and their perspective in this film. *Imagine your community was overrun by a neighbouring country. Another country's soldiers come to help and drive the invaders out, returning your control of your land.*

That is basically what happened in 1914-1915: Germany invaded Belgium and France (the Western Front theatre of war) and Turkey invaded Syria and Palestine (the Middle East

theatre of war). The main combatants – England, France, Belgium, Germany and Turkey (Ottoman) – had Empires. This brought in countries from around the world as part of these Empires – making it a 'world' war. The Allies, mainly British countries, came to help the invaded countries. It took years –til near the end of 1918- for the Allies to win.

So how did we get to be in Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Middle East? We were a part of the British Empire then, so supporting England was our 'duty', part of who we were then. As we had only just become a Federation in 1901, we also wanted to show what we were made of! There were lots of other individual reasons too.

Australia's first battle was part of the Allied invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula [G] on 25 April 1915. But the Allies failed to take Gallipoli after 9 months and withdrew in the northern winter. Our survivors and reinforcements trained in Egypt. Then they were sent to the trenches of the Western Front [WF] or the sands of the Middle East [ME]. These campaigns lasted a lot longer than Gallipoli's. They defended lands taken by Germany [WF] and Turkey [ME].

How do they differ in duration and Aussie deaths? Using the Australian Army summaries of the campaigns, notice the differences below:

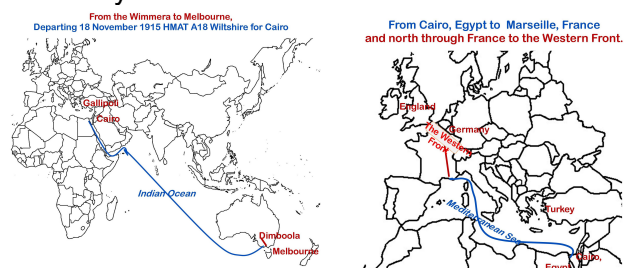
G: <https://www.army.gov.au/our-history/history-in-focus/wwi-gallipoli>; Apr-Dec 1918: 8000 dead;

ME <https://www.army.gov.au/our-history/history-in-focus/wwi-sinai-palestine-and-syria> March 1916 - Oct+ 1918: 1300 dead;

WF <https://www.army.gov.au/our-history/history-in-focus/wwi-the-western-front> March 1916 - Nov+ 1918: 46,000 dead

How did we get to the Western Front?

The film shows a neat straight line between France and Australia. It wasn't quite like that – flight technology was just beginning! Instead our troops travelled by ship, mostly around to WA, then across the Indian Ocean, up the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal to Cairo, Egypt – see map below left. It took about 6 weeks. In the northern winter, our troops trained there. In March 1916, most sailed over the Mediterranean Sea to Marseille, France, and then went by train north to the WF – see map below right. The WF ran from the English Channel to Switzerland, with many battlefields.

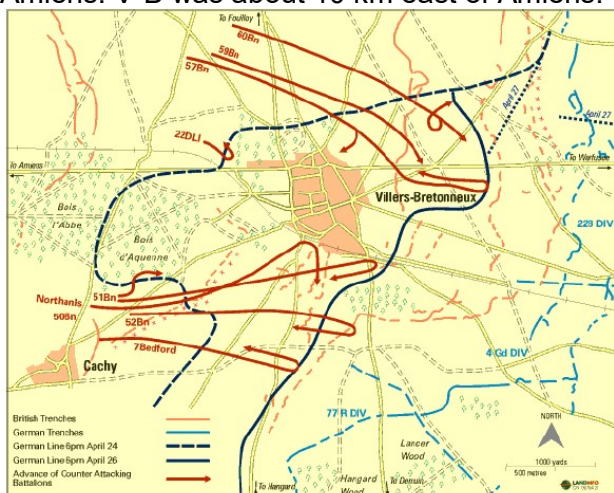


© Maps by Jeanie Clark, 2018, from a public domain base.

The Second Battle of V-B

Why are Aussies so revered in V-B and Amiens? It is because of what happened on Anzac Day 1918. *Imagine it from the perspective mentioned earlier, adding that losing your community to the invader is the gateway to losing control of your whole country! Then bring in some fresh foreign troops for a last ditch effort, and an impossible task.* Sally Murphy's picture book "*Do not forget Australia*" depicts this from a child's viewpoint in France and Australia, and then the recovery and school that linked us afterwards.

On the 24th April 1918, the Germans took V-B, again advancing (dashed line on the map below) towards the transport hub of Amiens with their aim of taking Paris. All along the defences, the Allies had been told to fight to the end to protect Amiens. V-B was about 10 km east of Amiens.



Aussies were brought in and told to retake V-B. They were not expected to be able to, but they did - and its adjacent hill (solid line on the map above), on Anzac Day, losing 1200 men (see <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/australians-western-front-1914-1918/australian-remembrance-trail/australian-5>).

Although their town was in ruins, the people of V-B were so grateful. They vowed to remember these Australians forever. The German advance was over, though it took almost another seven months for their surrender- and France and Belgium to be returned to their people.

Remembrance

How do the French show their remembrance? Their hospitality; their care of our cemeteries; the presence of memorials and museums. The film traces the path of such places at V-B, following that of Andrew Plant's very visual picture story book "*the Poppy*", linking places and history to understand them. The second part of the film takes us to the Adelaide Cemetery on the edge of V-B. It is impeccably kept as are all the war graves and memorials. The story of one Aussie soldier buried here is told on the film.

Next visit is to the Franco-Australian Museum. It sits above the school and has attracted so many Aussie visitors that it has been renovated by the Australian government in the last 5 years. It specialises in the history of our gallant Australian soldiers who saved their village, see <https://www.museeausilien.com/en-au/home>

On ANZAC Day, Australian TV ran a sequence of commemorations: our dawn service, the march, the G dawn service and lastly the VB one. The first stop in the EV film is at this V-B Australian War Memorial. It shows the Somme Valley as the children walk out to this big white memorial. Its walls (photo below) are engraved with 10,000+ Aussie names of soldiers who died on the WF, but for whom no body was found to bury. There is a cemetery here too and a couple of soldiers' stories are told here.



Sadler and Stokes

The Sadler-Stokes Prize is for projects which develop the Franco-Australian links from WW1. Who were Sadler and Stokes? Our two soldiers from the V-B battle of 24-25 April 1918 who were decorated. A 2016 Sadler-Stokes winning entry (<https://orbigny.shorthandstories.com/index.html>) focusses on recounting the V-B battle and their parts in it. When PM Turnbull presented the Prize on 25 April 2018, he spoke of their contribution and links between us and France see <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/presentation-sadler-stokes-prize>

Summary

This French children's film reminds us of the importance of freedom and the fight to retain/regain it, the generosity of children, and the importance of this (Second) Battle of V-B in starting the end of the Great War – something I think we should remember well on Anzac Days.

I thank the people of V-B and the EV for keeping their promise, their 'duty' to remember. Through their film we can better know, understand, remember and pass on what people a century ago began with their command: "*Lest we forget!*"

"Do not forget, Australia!"