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# PRIME MINISTER

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**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA  
THE HON R J L HAWKE AC MP  
AT A RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE MAYOR  
VILLERS-BRETONNEUX - SUNDAY 18 JUNE 1989**

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Mr Mayor  
Distinguished Guests  
Citizens of Villers-Bretonneux

I speak for all my Australian colleagues here today when I say how deeply moved we are by the warmth and generosity of the welcome we have received in Villers-Bretonneux.

We are indeed far from home. Yet there is no place in France, no place in Europe, closer - in our country's heart and in our nation's memories.

It has been made so by the immortal sacrifice of the fifteen thousand Australians who fought and fell in these fields. It has been made so by the manner in which successive generations of the people of this region, especially the children, have honoured that sacrifice and kept its memory evergreen for nearly three-quarters of a century.

Mr Mayor

One cannot but reflect, on an occasion like this, on the tremendous tides of human history which brought those young Australians here, so long ago, so far from home, so many of them never to return.

We can now see that they were involved, with millions of their comrades in arms - French, Belgian, British, Canadian and American - in a tremendous and terrible process which is still at work to this day - the unleashing of forces which continue to shape the destiny, not only of Europe, but of the whole world.

It is this terrible grandeur - this involvement, not merely in a tragic episode, but a tremendous epoch in human history - that gives meaning and dignity to their sacrifice. It is that which reclaims their memory from the wicked and wanton waste and unutterable folly and futility of war.

To that waste, the memorials throughout this region of France bear silent testimony.

They have their counterpart in the cities, towns and villages throughout Australia. Even places which did not exist in their present form have their links.

For example, Mr Mayor, you in Villers-Bretonneux have a sister relationship with the town of Robinvale in the State of Victoria, Australia. Robinvale became a township only after the First World War and then became the centre of an extensive soldier-settlement area after the Second World War. But it was named for the son of a farmer in the district - Lieutenant Robin Cuttle, Military Cross - killed in air combat in these skies in May 1918.

Villers-Bretonneux itself, entirely rebuilt from the ruins of 1918, is now known to many thousands of Australians who come, year after year, to the memorial and the cemeteries. They greatly appreciate the warmth of the welcome they receive here, thanks to the active and continuing efforts of you, Mr Mayor, and your Council; of the France-Australia Association; and of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and its staff. They are greatly moved by your faithfulness to the memory of their fellow Australians who fought and fell in France. On behalf of the Australian people, I can assure all here present that we appreciate how much your efforts over the years have helped maintain the close ties between our two countries.

It is, therefore, especially gratifying for me today to be able to announce here that part of Australia's contribution to the celebration of the Bicentenary of the French Revolution will be the establishment of a scholarship fund for the children of the Somme villages. The scholarship, which will take the form of a \$50,000 endowment, will provide assistance to the children of this area to undertake further education, in either academic or vocational fields.

The scholarship will be called the Sadlier-Stokes Memorial Scholarship. The name has been chosen to commemorate two Western Australians, Lieutenant Clifford Sadlier and Sergeant Charlie Stokes, whose courage and initiative in attacking and over-running a group of German machine-gunners kept the allied counter-attack going, and permitted the liberation of Villers-Bretonneux on the morning of 25 April 1918 - itself the most solemn of our Australian

anniversaries - the landing on Gallipoli on that first Anzac Day in 1915. Lieutenant Sadler won the Victoria Cross in the Action, Sergeant Stokes, the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Mr Mayor, I count it as a special privilege to be able to make this, my second official visit to France as Prime Minister of Australia on the eve of the celebrations of the French Revolution.

The meaning of the French contribution to modern Australia can be measured in a single sentence: the whole history of modern Australia falls within the epoch of civilisation created by the French Revolution. The Australian Bicentenary and the Bicentenary of the Revolution stand a mere year apart. During the whole period of its growth, therefore, the nation now called Australia has been influenced and illuminated by the mighty ideas unleashed by the French Revolution 200 years ago. From that perspective, perhaps no nation in the world has better cause to join the people of France in the celebration of the Revolution - not so much as a tremendous event in history, but as the triumph of an idea about human dignity, liberty and equality.

Here, at the Somme, how powerfully are we reminded of the words of the immortal Victor Hugo:

"On resiste a l'invasion des armees; on ne resiste pas a l'invasion des idees."

A stand can be made against invasion by an army; no stand can be made against invasion by an idea.

Two hundred years ago all Europe felt the force and truth of those words.

Seventy-five years ago, Frenchman and Australians fought together to prove their truth.

Today they ring around the world.

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