

**11 NOVEMBRE 2016**

**HE Christophe Lecourtier**

**Ambassador of France to Australia**

Air Chief Marshall Mark BINSKIN, Chief of the Defence Force

The Hon Gai BORDTMANN, Representing the Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel

Vice Admiral Tim BARRETT, Chief of Navy

Air Marshal Leo DAVIES, Chief of Air Force

Brigadier Andrew FREEMAN, Representing Chief of Army

The Hon Mick GENTLEMAN, Representing the ACT Chief Minister

Ms Natasha HOOPER, Representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Your Excellencies,

Honourable guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured, to commemorate together with you - on this 11<sup>th</sup> of November - the 98<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Great War.

Honoured and also humbled, because one can hardly imagine the magnitude of the sacrifice made by our nations during that war.

One hundred years ago, millions of brave men gave their lives in what we thought would be "the last of the last".

But many more lives were shattered: parents, widows and orphans, who lost their sons, husbands and fathers. Today, to all, we pay tribute.

France is still mourning, for the “Great War” has marked the history and the landscapes of my country forever. We of course acknowledge that many other nations represented here today suffered the same tragedy.

And we have not forgotten how much Australia shared this sacrifice.

In the muddy trenches of the Somme, your Diggers and our *poilus* faced adversity together. Villers-Bretonneux, Fromelles, Pozières, Bullecourt : all these names resonate high and clear in our common history.

We know the price that you paid.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1916, the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division lost 5 533 men repelling enemy troops at Fromelles.

The same year, 6 848 soldiers were killed at Pozières, paving the way for an Australian victory.

We have not forgotten that one century ago, on the rubble of the Old world, one so close to committing suicide, a young nation was born.

This July, France solemnly reaffirmed its gratitude by inviting Australian troops to lead the military parade down the Champs-Élysées in Paris, with their New Zealand mates, on Bastille Day.

I can assure you that France will never forget.

In a few days, our Minister for Veterans affairs, followed by our Defence minister, will come to Australia and express this loud and clear.

They will stress that, more than ever, we have the duty to pass this legacy onto future generations.

History is what made us what we are. And we are proud of what has been achieved by our forebears. But history can re-run its course, if the lessons of the past are not shared well enough or properly explained.

One year ago, France was attacked, and 130 innocent people, that were just enjoying a Friday evening, were killed in cold blood. This year, on our national day, another 90 were murdered in Nice.

No doubt that the values we fought for together in the past are once again being challenged. No doubt that we must be prepared to defend them.

In this new century the Franco-Australian friendship, is more alive than ever, and the ties between our two countries are constantly strengthening in many fields.

We share not only values, but also a common agenda. Being like-minded nations, we are also tough minded nations.

With our allies, we stand together on the frontline of the war against terrorism, and we are committed to defending a rules based order across the globe.

Being neighbours in this region, where more than 1.5 M French citizens live, we regularly and efficiently cooperate to provide support to the South Pacific Island states, as well as to ensure that international laws are enforced in the Indian, Pacific and Southern Oceans.

All of this constitutes the bedrock of our strategic relationship, and it is no secret that the choice of DCNS to build your future submarines will further enhance our community of destiny.

Of course, both of us – Australia and France – are deeply engaged with major partners, to the benefit of our bilateral relationship.

Both of our countries know what they owe to the people of the United States and value the alliance we have with this great democracy.

But for the French, the European project has been the greatest venture of the last 60 years. Even if the future seems uncertain today, be sure that we will do whatever is necessary to keep it alive.

The best way is probably to address more dramatically the major concerns of our fellow citizens.

It is time for the European Union to be more ambitious on security matters and to be more assertive on the world stage.

With Germany, France made propositions in Bratislava last September. At a time when Europe is facing new threats, the objective is to put defence at the heart of European issues: the creation of a permanent strategic planning and a European Military headquarters, as well as the strengthening of Eurocorps, is some of these proposals. All this will be presented at a European Council meeting in December. For us, this is a priority.

We are also convinced that despite Brexit, that Britain will still play a major role in the security of Europe, and we welcome this prospect.

In the defence field, our two countries are linked by many political, operational and industrial commitments. Whatever becomes of the relationship between Britain and the EU, these links with France will remain essential.

For, as we all know, the challenges of tomorrow will be no less dangerous than those of yesterday.

Alone, we would probably be scared, but this is not the case. Together, more than ever, united we stand. As was the case 100 years ago.

After the Australian victory at Le Hamel, Clémenceau, then French Prime Minister, visited the Australian Imperial Force camp and told them:

*“When the Australians came to France, the French people expected a great deal of you. We knew that you would fight a real fight, but we did not know that you would astonish the whole continent.*

*I shall go back tomorrow and say to my countrymen: “I have seen the Australians. I have looked in their faces. I know that these men will fight alongside us again until the cause for which we are all fighting is safe.”*

Lest we forget.