Speech – His Excellency General the Honourable Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Shared Histories Project

Tuesday, 26 April 2016

Your Excellency, the Minister of Culture and Communication, Madame Azoulay, Ambassador Lecourtier, Ambassador Brady, distinguished guests.

When President Hollande visited Australia in 2014 he visited a local high school in Canberra, the Lycée franco-australien.

As part of the visit he met students who were using records from the National Archives of Australia to identify French citizens who had joined the Australian Imperial Force during World War I.

It turns out about 140 French citizens resident in Australia enlisted for service in the war.

It was from this work that the idea of a Shared Histories project between the Archives Nationales and the National Archives of Australia began.

And given our countries have so much history, it makes perfect sense that our National Archives work together:

- To recall our shared past and connections.
- To tell us a little of who we were, who we are and who we can be.
- And to explore the many things that make our rapport so unique.

And by any measure the Franco-Australian relationship is unique.

It was a Frenchman, Nicolas Baudin, whose expedition of 1800-1803 produced the first map of the Australian coastline.

The names of places—like Cape Freycinet, Peron Peninsula and Bruny Island—stand testament to the deeds and spirit of French exploration.

And despite the distance between us we share a common view of the world and genuine mutual respect.

Nowhere was this more evident than at yesterday's ANZAC ceremony at Villers-Bretonneux.

Amongst the brutality and the loss of life of the Great War a great solidarity and admiration grew between the Aussie diggers and the local townspeople.

Forced in the most dire of circumstances the bond between these men and women was intense, powerful and genuine.

And it lives on with us today, as strong, relevant and meaningful as ever.
I wish the Shared Histories project ‘Imagination, Exploration, Memory’ bonne chance—I am sure it will not only shed light on our joint history but also add to it.

Congratulations David for the receipt of the award of Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters.

It is a great honour when a country with the towering cultural reputation of France bestows an award recognising an Australian who has furthered the arts in France and throughout the world.

Thank you.