



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
OPENING, '1945: WAR & PEACE', AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL,
11 AUGUST 1995**

I am delighted to be here today to open the '1945: War and Peace' exhibition, and to launch the Australian War Memorial's Public Appeal.

I regularly make the pilgrimage down Anzac Parade - and I happily do so - because the War Memorial is one of our great public institutions.

It documents the experiences of Australians at war. It preserves and protects our national memory.

And it educates our young people in what J S Manifold called "the old heroic virtues" of Australia.

It inducts them into the Australian faith.

Last year I launched the Memorial's first ever Capital Appeal. The Appeal aims to raise \$20 million to renew the Memorial - to redevelop the major galleries and to enliven the stories which they tell.

The Federal Government gave the lead gift of \$2.5 million to the Capital Appeal - and since then the State and Territory governments have together pledged \$2 million.

And corporate Australia has also been part of the effort.

Today we are launching the next stage of the Capital Appeal, the public phase. Over the coming months, millions of Australians will be asked to donate to the Memorial - and I'm sure they will rally to the cause.

Money alone, of course, can not rebuild a great museum.

I'm convinced that the public appeal will also engage the community in the affairs of the Memorial - and encourage a sense of its community ownership.

Let me say that I think it is entirely appropriate that the first exhibition arising out of the Capital Appeal looks at the Australia of 1945.

1945 was the last year of the most destructive war in history.

It was the year in which an alliance of free nations finally answered the challenge to the values which sustain our civilisation.

1945 was the year of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

But it was also the year in which Australia welcomed home hundreds of thousands of our uniformed men and women.

'1945: War and Peace' illustrates to new generations how the lives of Australians were affected by the war - and the dreams that were held for the peace.

It is a profoundly human exhibition - and it displays some wonderful relics.

A sweetheart brooch sent by a soldier to his mother.

A handkerchief signed by her dad's comrades which was a seven year old girl's seventh birthday present.

A baton belonging to Blamey, and the fuselage of a Beaufort bomber.

This exhibition tells us some wonderful stories. It tells us, for example, about Moira Atkins, who served as a nurse on the island of Labuan. In 1945, she won a beauty contest - and with it a kiss from Mountbatten. I'm delighted to learn that Moira is here today, and I look forward to meeting her.

It's also a very democratic exhibition. I'm told that those visitors who recall VP Day can contribute their memories to the display - and in doing so strengthen and deepen the story.

In this way, '1945: War and Peace' is a conversation - part of the great national conversation of the *Australia Remembers* year.

The curator of this exhibition, Peter Stanley, and the rest of the War Memorial staff, have done a marvellous job of presenting this story. But of course they cannot claim authorship - because that honour belongs to the whole World War II generation.

It belongs to Australia's fighting men. And it belongs to those Australians who stayed at home and performed miracles of production so that the war could be fought and won.

If a single message can be derived from '1945: War and Peace' - and a single lesson learnt - it is that we are strongest when we work together.

The people that we see and read about in these galleries were united in pursuit of a common cause - and a just cause.

The Australians of 1945 believed in themselves, trusted each other, and loved Australia.

Today, as much as ever, we need their belief.

We also need their energy, and their sense of purpose. Because while the achievements of the World War II generation were great, their task remains unfinished.

That task is to build and protect a strong, fair, prosperous and self-reliant nation. We owe the same duty as the Australians of World War II: a duty to the next generation, to the future Australia.

And the best way to honour the lives of the Australians of 1945 is to continue their work.

It is important that as the war recedes in our history, it does not also recede in our memory.

This generation of Australians and the generations to come must never forget that 40,000 names appear on the Memorial's Roll of Honour.

Let me congratulate all those people who are working so hard to reinvigorate the Australian War Memorial - the people's museum. In particular, the Chair of the National Appeal, Dame Beryl Beaurepaire, former Director Brendan Kelson and Deputy Director Michael McKernan, and the Head of Development Ros Casey.

Together, these people are leaving a marvellous legacy to the Memorial - and no less to the nation.

I am very happy to officially open the '1945: War & Peace' exhibition and launch the Public Appeal - and may I commend both the exhibition and the Appeal to all Australians.

Thank you.