

VISIT TO SOUTH EAST ASIA 1968

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ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON,
TO AUSTRALIAN TROOPS

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8 JUNE 1968

There are perhaps one or two things I would like to say to you and say to you as representatives of all the people in this camp and of all the Australians in Vietnam who aren't here - to say to you what I would like to say to all of them. I have only been able to meet a few this morning and they are individuals and a few from each unit. But what can be said to one can be said to all and that is that I regard it as an honour to have the opportunity to be here to see you, to have had the chance vicariously through you to talk to all my countrymen here. I think you are doing a magnificent job for our own country, and though you may be far away from it, I feel the results will be felt in our own country for decades to come.

I suppose sometimes, because of some of the activity that goes on home, you may feel that the vast majority of Australians are not thoroughly behind you because the newspapers tend to give publicity to any nut who carries a placard or sits in the middle of a road rather than to the hundred citizens, for each one who does that, who are thoroughly behind you. Please believe that your Government is behind you and ninety per cent of the Australian people are behind you in what you are trying to do. I would like to congratulate you once more on the way that you are doing it.

That is really all that I have got to say to you. I don't think that there is anything to add, except to repeat and to put it in a capsule, it is an honour to meet men doing the job they have to do as well as you are doing it. And it's an encouragement to meet men doing a job which is of such importance to their nation now and in the future.

You will have heard talk of things that are called peace talks in Paris. They aren't peace talks. They are preliminary talks to see whether there is any basis for a chance to have talks later. And you will be interested to know, those of you who are here and have been here for some time, that, so far it has been quite impossible to persuade the North Vietnamese negotiators to admit that there are any North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam at all. I daresay that you would be able to correct them on that if you could get over there, but that is the stage it has reached so far. Now I wouldn't build too many hopes too quickly on that. The hopes are to complete the job, to finish the job and to give the South Vietnamese people a chance to elect their own Government, and to demonstrate that aggression by force does not pay. This you are doing. Thank you for it. I wish I could have met you all.
