EMBARGO: 10:00PM

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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

FRIDAY, 30 APRIL 1982

CORAL SEA BALL

It is a very great pleasure to have Mr and Mrs Bush with us here tonight. I understand that you, Mr Vice-President, have some familiarity with Australia from a previous visit. But more particularly you are no stranger to the region in which we live. For not only were you involved in the Pacific War, where you won three air medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross, but in more recent years you were the first incumbent of the U.S. Office in Peking from 1974 to 1976.

A visit by an American Vice-President is a highly significant event in itself, but in Australia-America week, the visit of a Vice-President who was a distinguished and courageous participant in the Pacific War is particularly appropriate, particularly significant.

I am delighted that both you and Mrs Bush were able to accept my invitation and that of the Australian-American Association to visit us now when we commemorate two major land-marks in the close relationship between Australia and the United States.

Our common purpose this evening is to commemorate the Battle of the Coral Sea, a victory which Australians will always remember with profound thankfulness. But we are also celebrating this week the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Entry into Force of the ANZUS Treaty, a treaty which remains a cornerstone of the relationship between our two countries, and which was founded on our shared experiences in the war in the Pacific.

The significance of the events which took place early in 1942 is beyond the living memory of two-thirds of the Australian population, yet it has a special meaning for all of us. I was just old enough at the time to sense the widespread unease in Australia in the months between Pearl Harbour and the Battle of the Coral Sea, but it was only later, and with the benefit of hindsight, that I began to really understand what people had felt. To understand that the fear of invasion and occupation of Australia had been so real and so widespread. People really wondered whether to move to the country or whether they would be safer to stay in the cities.

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At the beginning of 1942, the allies' prospects in the Pacific looked very gloomy indeed. Not only had great capital ships of the U.S. Pacific Fleet been sunk at Pearl Harbour at the end of 1941, but in February 1942 Singapore had fallen. We had experienced the first effects of war on our own territory with the bombing of Darwin, and in early May the Philippines had also fallen. Those events appeared to be a prelude to the actual invasion of Australia, and the feeling of gloom and despondency was possibly at its deepest just before 7 May 1942 when the first major sea battle in the Pacific took place.

The victory which the U.S. won at the battle of the Coral Sea was not measured simply in terms of the number of enemy ships sunk, its significance was strategic rather than tactical as it prevented Japan from establishing naval supremacy in the Pacific Ocean. For the Battle of the Coral Sea was the precursor to the Battle of Midway a month later, and the damage inflicted on the enemy's ships during the Coral Sea Battle could well have tipped the balanced, thereby ensuring the allies' victory at the Battle of Midway restoring the balance of naval power in the Pacific and putting the allies on the offensive.

Together with the later activities of our own troops on the Kokoda Trail, the Battle of the Coral Sea secured Australia against the threat of invasion and it permitted the United States to have largely unhindered access to Australia for the rest of the war.

I remember the sense of relief which was felt when, early in 1943, the first major U.S. convoy steamed into Port Phillip Bay in Melbourne, an event which, but for the Battle of the Coral Sea, would not have been possible at all.

Our experience together in war helped to set the scene for an increasingly close relationship between our countries in peace. It is hardly surprising that there is enormous warmth and affection for Americans in Australia, and I know that this warmth is reciprocated by Americans, for whenever I visit the United States I meet people who were in Australia during the Second World War and in subsequent years.

It may surprise some people here to learn that in 16 of the 40 years since the Battle of the Coral Sea, Australians and Americans have fought side by side, and if you add in peace-keeping initiatives, in one way or another we have stood side-by-side in defence of freedom and democracy in every one of those 40 years. Indeed it is less than a week since Australia and the U.S. embarked on a new peace-keeping task together with other countries, in the Sinai, jointly serving the interests of peace in an area remote from our own shores. The kind of co-operation that has occurred over those 40 years gives meaning to the formal arrangements whose anniversary we are also celebrating at this time - the ANZUS alliance.

In its pursuit of stability, security and peace, how different ANZUS is from the shackles which bind the so-called "allies" of the other super power. The ANZUS alliance has always been an instrument for peaceful co-operation and security.

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It is a relationship based on mutual respect, entered into by free people to protect and promote their interests, with none of the fear seen in Poland, or Czechoslavakia or Hungary, or any of the other countries of Eastern Europe. We are bound together by a common belief in freedom and democracy, and the desire to choose how to live our own lives, principles which are held to be paramount in free nations.

We all recognise, Mr Vice-President, the enormous efforts that the United States has made in the interests of world peace and stability over the last 40 years, for as the largest democratic nation, so much of the burden of defending freedom and democracy has fallen on her shoulders. But while the United States undoubtedly is the cornerstone of the defence of freedom throughout the world, this defence is not a burden that it should bear alone.

I was once asked why Australia was concerned with the great issues, the relationships between the United States and Europe, and between the Western Alliance and the Warsaw Pact. And what right, I was asked, did Australia have to speak on these issues. We are a nation of fifteen million people and clearly our physical power is limited as a consequence. But that doesn't prevent us having a view to be put, and - I hope - to be be heard. The freedom. the liberty of Australians, depends as much upon the working out of the relationship between the Western Alliance and the Soviet Union as does the freedom and liberty of Western Europe or the United States itself.

And while in many of these things we are not a principal party, we are nevertheless vitally interested. Peace and freedom are too important to be left to the super powers alone. Over and above that, the Australian Government has an obligation to Australians.

We, not Americans or Europeans or Englishmen, must be protectors of Australian liberty, of Australian democracy. We owe it to our fathers who fought for peace and liberty to see that we fulfil that obligation, and we owe it more to our children. We owe it to them to make sure that peace does not go by default simply because those who want it leave its defence to others.

We in Australia recognise that if we wish the United States to do what is necessary in defence of world peace, we must do what we can on our own account, and I believe this Government has lived up to that obligation in many ways.

Mr Vice-President, today's world is facing threats to its stability, to its security, more serious than any that have arisen in the last forty years. We see the enormous and superior military strength of the Soviet Union; we see a worsening economic situation in many countries, leading to serious and tragic levels of unemployment and hardship; we see poor nations increasingly overwhelmed by the burden of debt; and developed nations unable to devise solutions to their own economic problems let alone those of others.

Against this background, the meetings taking place next month at the Versailles Summit of major Western economic powers, and at the summit of NATO heads of government in Bonn take on added urgency.

Following Afghanistan and Poland, there are some problems to be tackled within the Western alliance. These are compounded by economic difficulty and uncertainty and it will be harder to achieve the necessary unity and sense of purpose.

In all of this, the burden of leadership rests on the United States, on President Reagan, and I am sure you would all want me to wish him and his administration well in the great and enormous responsibilities that will be with them.

Mr Vice-President, I thought it appropriate in this year in particular to speak of the origins of the on-going relationship between the United States and Australia, because it has a particular relevance to the problems that need to be faced, and it does not hurt to remind ourselves the relationship between the United States and Australia is not just one of shared values and interests, but one which is based in history and shared sacrifice by Americans and Australians.

Since its inception in 1948, the Australian-American Association has worked tirelessly to promote understanding between our two countries, and to provide a continuing contribution to the development of friendly contacts. I know that I speak for the Association as well as for myself when I say that we are indeed very grateful Vice-President George Bush and Mrs Bush have been able to join us for the celebration of Australia-America week.

We know the pressures of office and we are glad to see the United States recognising its interest in Japan, South-East Asia, Australia, New Zealand and China by the Vice-President's visit to the Pacific area.

It is timely and welcome, and the discussions we had earlier today have been of great value. Mr Vice-President, I bid you welcome to Australia.

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