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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, NATIONAL PARK CENTRE,
ECEABAT, GALLIPOLI, 25 APRIL 1990

JOURNALIST: Well, how do you feel, Mr Hawke?

PM: I think, like all the rest of you, still very emotionally effected by, by this morning and just particularly, as you've seen, I've spent a lot of time with the old veterans and just to sit and listen to them is a most moving experience. Most of them are still thinking about the mates they left behind which is very moving.

JOURNALIST: And how are they ... Mr Hawke?

PM: I think they're in great shape. It's surprising really to, to see the resilience of them. You know, you're young and fit and, you know, when you've come far and across the world that you feel a bit, you know, down and you've got to take a while to get yourself together. Well, here are these fellows of an average age, I suppose, of about 94 or 95 and vibrant, their eyes sparkling. I think it's just the remembrance of their, their mates here and being back here that's just lifted them.

JOURNALIST: Was it what you expected this morning?

PM: I guess so. It was hard to tell in the dark at first, of course. I didn't realise just how very close we were to the beach where we did the service. I thought perhaps we were a bit further up the hill, but then when the light came up and you saw there was the water, the very water out of which those men had stepped and into that hail of death, it was unbelievably moving.

JOURNALIST: What part of the ceremony did you find most effected you?

PM: I think probably when you saw the ones who stood up for the national anthems and the ones who wanted to, but who couldn't quite make it. I think that was, you know, perhaps the most moving part in a sense.

JOURNALIST: Did you ever have to fight back tears?

PM: No, not fight back, but I wouldn't have tried. I don't think anyone there today was really trying to fight

anything back. If it happened, it happened. No-one need feel any sense of shame about tears there today.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, the big question of course is that the significance of this is perhaps the last visit that the veterans may well make here.

PM: Yes.

JOURNALIST: What's going to happen to the Gallipoli legend afterwards?

PM: I think it will, it will live on and in fact this pilgrimage today I think will serve to ensure that that happens because the new generation of Australians is going to have seen the commitment of these men of 75 years ago, who were here 75 years ago, they are going to see that and this is a sort of a regeneration of the spirit of ANZAC which will go on I think.

JOURNALIST: Do you think that's true of young people today?

PM: I think so. ... You looked at the, at the number of people there today. I particularly noticed as I was coming out, because it was too dark when we were going in, but by the end of the service I was able to move around at the end of it amongst the, the people there and as I was driving away I also saw them. Just hundreds and hundreds of young people and they weren't there just as tourists. You could tell that in listening to them and talking to them. I was with a sense of pilgrimage that they were there.

JOURNALIST: Did you find yourself looking up at the sphinx and looking up at the hill and wondering?

PM: I looked there and I didn't see the sphinx from where I was, but I really have a feeling that this afternoon when we go back there, I'd just like to get out of the car and away from the groups and just, literally, just walk by myself through the, through the battle points. I'd love it if it's possible, I don't know whether it is, to go to Quinn's Post. I mean, I think in all the reading of, about Gallipoli, that was very much in my mind because it was a remarkable achievement. It was attacked throughout the period of the eight months by the Turks and it was never once relinquished and the, the intensity of the fighting there which is unimaginable and I'd just like to get out ... for a walk around and get the feel of it directly.

JOURNALIST: Did you find that, after all the reading you've done on Gallipoli, actually being there and seeing the landscape made it all, brought it all home to you?

PM: Brought it back and you just try and, you know, close your eyes and imagine the men landing in the water

and the making their way up the, up the hill. You've got to remember that it's quite different now in a sense from what it was. That road that goes through the middle where we were was not there before. It was just a fairly sheer climb that they had there ... in 1915. But even making allowances for that, you could get an impression of what an enormous achievement that was to get from the beach up to that ridge. You've got to remember that the first day was the day they made their, their furthest incursion and at the end of that first day they'd reached about a mile and a half inland - some of them, not a lot of them - and that was the furthest point that was reached in the whole of the eight months.

JOURNALIST: Do you think every Australian should make an effort to get to Gallipoli one time in their life?

PM: Yes, I think it would be good for all Australians to get there. Yes, it is ... and I must say for myself, I'd never read so intensely about it as I had in preparation for coming here and I just feel I know more about my country now as a result of having done that.

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