



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF THE TELECOM AUSTRALIA THEATRE
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
CANBERRA 11 NOVEMBER 1991**

Dame Beryl Beaurepaire,
Ben Humphreys
Brendon Kelson, Director of Australian War Memorial
Mel Ward, Managing Director Telecom
Your Excellencies
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

The Australian War Memorial is a unique institution not just in this country, but in the world.

It is not simply a museum, though it is a museum. It is not simply a memorial, though it is a memorial. It is not a tomb, though all the Australians who died in war are present here.

The Australian War Memorial contains all those things - museum, memorial and mausoleum - and more. It is, to quote John Curtin at the opening of this extraordinary building fifty years ago today, "the sanctuary of Australian traditions."

A sanctuary where C W Bean the father of the Memorial said we should "feel the presence of the dead", where we would find their "relics and records" close by, and where we would find understanding through knowledge. In Bean's inspired view this was the most profound way to commemoration and remembrance.

Their spirit would be here, because unlike most other countries we know their names. Although Australia returned just one body home in World War One, we had no need for a tomb of the unknown soldier, for we know who they were and we remember them.

Bean read the words of an Australian soldier, dying alone in a muddy hole in France in the First World War and kept them as motivation through the long years it took to establish this great shrine. The soldier wrote, "At least in Australia they will remember me."

On this Remembrance Day, at this opening of a new page in the story of the Australian War Memorial, it is fitting that we should remember what those Australian traditions are, what the Australians whose names are fixed forever in bronze died for: liberty, democracy, the rule of law, national sovereignty and peace.

In 1991 those traditions, which are not so uniquely Australian that we have not wanted to share them, are as important as they ever were.

We have seen over the past two years that those traditions are what people all over the world demand as well - in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, in Africa, Asia and South America.

This year, Australians have again served with distinction in war, to defeat aggression in the Gulf.

Australians are still serving overseas, under the United Nations in the Western Sahara.

Before this year ends, Australians will be serving in Cambodia, under the United Nations, to underwrite a peace settlement which Australian diplomacy has been instrumental in achieving.

No one can overlook the poignancy of the opening of the of this Memorial fifty years ago, on the eve of that massive struggle in the Pacific which did so much to shape Australia and its region.

The Pacific War was the greatest crisis in our nation's history, and we emerged from it much changed. In its way it was a rite of passage as fundamental as Gallipoli.

For if Gallipoli gave Australians a sense of our identity as a nation, the Pacific War brought us to understand our location as a nation, and our destiny as a part of the Asia-Pacific region.

It marked the decisive turning point of the colonial era in Asia, and the emergence of the complex community of independent nations which are today our neighbours and friends.

It also marked the final chapter of our own colonial era, and the foundation of our unique partnership with the United States - a distinctively Pacific relationship which has grown to reflect our increasing acceptance of the Asia-Pacific region as the place where we live.

It is fitting that today's ceremonies are the first of a series on which, over the next year, Australians will look back with that vividness which an anniversary brings to the events of fifty years ago.

There will be a series of special events to mark particular dates; the fall of Singapore, the bombing of Darwin, the Battle of the Coral Sea, and the Kokoda Trail. The Government will participate fully in these events.

I plan to be in Darwin in February to commemorate the first bombing raid; in the Coral Sea in May to commemorate the great naval battle which laid the foundations for allied control of the Pacific Ocean; and on the Kokoda Trail later in the year to remember those great battles in which Australians turned the tide of the Japanese march.

In marking these anniversaries, we will be recalling not only the sacrifices made by Australians in defence of their country, but also the sacrifices of our allies, particularly the United States. Each year the anniversary of the Coral Sea has been an occasion for the US and Australia to remember the fire in which our alliance was forged.

This year it will be a special opportunity to look back on fifty years of co-operation and partnership, and look forward to the continued growth and evolution of this relationship over the challenging years ahead.

With this in mind a Coral Sea Commemorative Council has been established under the chairmanship of Sir Eric Neal, bringing together many eminent Australians to co-ordinate and develop commemorative activities. The Council aims not only to remind Australians and Americans of the momentous events of fifty years ago, but also to encourage them to look to the future of that relationship in the twenty-first century. I am honoured to be Patron, with my friend the American Ambassador Mel Sembler and I give the Committee my full support.

Over the coming year we will also be remembering the sacrifices of other allies in the defence of Australia. I would mention in particular the Dutch forces which fought here. The government has recently agreed to contribute to the erection of a memorial in Canberra to those forces.

And in these commemorations we will also remember the Japanese, for whom the Pacific war was such an appalling tragedy, and such an important rebirth. We will remember not just the Pacific war - a war often of great ferocity and cruelty - but also the regeneration of Japan after the war and its extraordinary development as an economic power and partner for Australia, and also, increasingly, as a valued political partner in regional and international affairs.

As we move, ever more rapidly it seems, towards the twenty first century it is right that we should remember how far we have come in this great country, who made the ultimate sacrifice that has permitted us our achievements, and reflect for a moment on where we are going.

Nothing is more constant than change: that was true fifty years ago, when John Curtin spoke here, and it is true today. Curtin had to look to a re-orientation in Australia's foreign policy, to putting the economy on a war footing. Fifty years on we have look at those things again.

The Australian War Memorial has also had to face the squalls of change, right from the day it was opened. Conceived as a memorial to World War One, this Memorial was of course, opened in World War Two - and necessarily had to incorporate a second generation of sacrifice.

The story of the way the Memorial has coped or not, with change over the past fifty years, and with the troubled time between 1917, when Bean first thought of the Memorial, and 1941 - is told in Michael McKernan's fascinating and moving history, *Here Is Their Spirit*.

Suffice to say here that an institution which had not changed with the times would not have been able to commission and publish such a warts and all work.

The Australian War Memorial of 1991 is quite different to the one opened in 1941. It has not in any way betrayed the ideals of Bean - it has expanded and enhanced them. Bean looked for the best way, artistically and technically, to display the relics and records to their best advantage.

He would, I am sure, be delighted and proud that such a splendid venue as the Telecom Australia Theatre would be available for the screening of the Memorial's moving picture heritage.

Especially as Bean had encouraged two photographers, Frank Hurley and Hubert Wilkins, to try their hand at moving pictures, an infant artform at that time.

Their work, some of which has been shown during the Memorial's recent film festival, is a vivid, almost haunting reminder of the terrible ravages of that war in France and Gallipoli.

John Treloar, Bean's friend and director of the Memorial from its inception until his death in 1952, commissioned kilometres of film during World War Two - to the extent that the Memorial collection contains some 4000 titles with about 1000 kilometres of footage.

For many years this magnificent collection of film material was available to only a few scholars who were able to use it in the Research Centre.

Regrettably the great majority of Australians were denied access to an important part of their heritage.

Through the generous support of Telecom Australia that has now changed. I congratulate Telecom in joining forces with the War Memorial in this major project and the Memorial Council and management for the enterprise shown in arranging for this important partnership.

I began by saying that the Australian War Memorial is a unique institution - more than a museum, more than a tomb, more than a gallery, more than a research facility - more than a simple memorial. It is all of those things.

Over the past fifty changing years it has become a place of pilgrimage until it has nearly one million visitors a year.

While I suppose some of those visitors simply come here because it is one of the places on the tourist trail in Canberra, I am sure that none leave here without learning a little bit more about our Australian history, our collective memories and our stories about being Australian.

The Telecom Australia Theatre will make a substantial contribution to this living history.

It now gives me much pleasure to formally declare open the Telecom Australia Theatre.

* * * * *