



PRIME MINISTER

REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP

BATTLE OF THE CORAL SEA COMMEMORATION, TOWN HALL, SYDNEY,
2 MAY 1992

This week we celebrate the Battle of the Coral Sea : the first battle of the Pacific War in which the enemy suffered a strategic setback, the first to check the tide of his advance, the first to give us respite.

Because it restrained Japanese military expansion in our region, and helped make possible further victories in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and at Midway, the Battle of the Coral Sea was a turning point in the War and in our history.

Because it saw Americans and Australians joined in common purpose, defending not only Australia and the region but the ideals we share, it was a turning point in our relationship.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first test of our alliance. The bravery and sacrifice of our sailors and airmen gave it the strength to last.

Fifty years later that bond endures, the friendship is as strong as ever.

We owe a great deal to the American, Australian and allied servicemen who fought in the Battle of the Coral Sea.

In particular we owe much to the United States, then and still, the greatest liberal democracy in the world.

The might of the US Navy and the courage of American and Australian fighting men won the day. Australians have never forgotten, never ceased to express their gratitude.

But in this coming week it should not be so much the might of arms we celebrate, as the might of an idea.

I mean the idea of freedom. The idea of democracy.

That, I think, is what the Battle of the Coral Sea should mean to us now.

If we are properly to honour those who fought and died, we must stay true to those liberal democratic principles which they defended, true to the ideals of justice and fairness, true to their faith in what they had built at home and what they aspired to build for their children.

True to the humane principles at the root of our democracies.

In welcoming you back to our country, Secretary Cheney, you may be sure that we Australians have not forgotten either the debt we owe, or the principles which were so bravely defended.

You and Dr Cheney, all those Americans on board the ships of the US fleet, and all those who are visiting Australia to join in these great celebrations, may be assured of a very warm welcome.

We have looked forward to your coming. We look forward to your stay, and trust that it will be a very happy one.

Thank you