



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP

CORAL SEA RECEPTION, GREAT HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE
4 MAY 1992

It is my great privilege tonight to host this reception in honour of those American and Australian servicemen and women whose courage and sacrifice fifty years ago did so much to keep us free.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was the first major check to Japanese military expansion in our region. It forced a seemingly invincible enemy to rethink and reconstruct their plans for domination of the area.

Plans which, after the battles of New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Midway they were forced to abandon altogether.

In stemming the tide of Japanese aggression, the Battle of the Coral Sea had great consequences for the war.

It also had great consequences for the peace: for it forged a bond between Australia and the United States which will endure for as long as the cause of democracy endures with us.

The bond has its most obvious manifestation in the alliance between our countries.

The war in the Pacific was the foundation of that alliance.

But its resilience derives from more than our experience of World War II.

It derives principally from our long friendship.

Americans have been coming here for 200 years.

They came to trade in the earliest days of European settlement. In 1840 the United States Exploring Expedition came in the course of their remarkable scientific survey of the Pacific.

In 1908 the Great White Fleet came - and received a stupendous welcome.

Australians have always recognised something of themselves in Americans - as well they might.

We are both countries of the New World - as one great Australian patriot of a much less complex age exclaimed - Christopher Columbus and James Cook were the saviours of mankind.

These days we don't imagine ourselves, or even the two explorers, in such exalted terms.

But we do remain countries whose strength has been the strength of those who not only imagined a better life, but who had the courage to seek it.

And who sought it - and made it - in the New World, in our countries.

We both derive our strength from individual effort and initiative.

We derive it therefore by enshrining those values which encourage and protect the rights and opportunities of individuals - I mean tolerance, freedom and justice.

Our strength, and the strength of our alliance, is derived from our shared liberal, democratic and humane values.

These remain, I believe, our common aspirations: they are, I have no doubt, our greatest aspirations.

It follows that it is our common duty, our duty to the heroes of the Coral Sea, to see that those values are not eroded.

Nor can we say that we have fulfilled our duty, if we fail to create in this generation faith and hope of the kind which inspired those men and women of 1942 to risk everything for the cause of their countries.

That is why it is not enough on this fiftieth anniversary of the battles which decided our future, to merely pay homage to the past - we will most truly honour the Coral Sea heroes when we find the ways to guarantee the future of the next generation as they guaranteed ours.

If we are to remain countries of hope and faith, it seems to me that we must be countries of renewal. We must be prepared to move on.

While taking care to preserve those great democratic values and traditions on which our way of life is built, and for which so many fought and died, we must change.

That is why Australia seeks a renewed sense of national purpose.

It is also why the Australian government now directs so much of its attention to its economic transformation and its trade and political focus to the Asia-Pacific region.

For us, it is the direction of the future: a rapidly changing reality which Australians are now accommodating.

For the same reason Australia would like to see the United States reaffirm its role in the region.

We would like to see a US institutional and investment presence to match the trade and strategic one.

We think it would be in the United States' interests, and very much in the interests of the region, if the world's greatest liberal democracy were integrated with Asia and the Pacific to a degree at least equivalent to that obtaining with Europe.

A greater US presence in the Pacific can only help the region fulfill the promise of its name - as an ocean of peace and stability.

We would like to see the friendship so manifest fifty years ago renewed and regenerated in this year of commemoration and in the years to come.

I take this opportunity to welcome Secretary Cheney and Dr Cheney to Canberra.

And to welcome all of you - particularly, of course, those veterans to whom we are all so indebted and in whose honour tonight's reception is held.