



## PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
ENTOMBING CEREMONY, CANBERRA, 2 JULY 1992

On behalf of the Australian government and people it is my pleasure to welcome you here.

I extend a particular welcome to those who are veterans of the Vietnam War, and to the many relatives and friends of those who died in Vietnam and whose memory we are honouring today.

I thank you all for coming to this historic ceremony in the life of our nation.

The men to whom we pay tribute gave their lives for their beliefs. They believed in Australia.

They went to Vietnam as their fathers' generation had gone to Europe and the Middle East and Asia and the Pacific; and as their grandfathers' had also gone to Gallipoli and France and other foreign battlefields.

They went in defence of their country and the things they had been raised to believe in.

Like those previous generations, they saw no incongruity in travelling far from home to defend their country's freedom. They saw their duty.

They went believing that in defending democracy in Vietnam they were defending democracy everywhere - and, most particularly, Australian democracy.

Today we do not judge the political wisdom which sent them there, or which delivered Australians to other theatres of war throughout this century.

These people gave their lives for Australia.

We pay tribute today to their bravery and sacrifice. We pay tribute to their love of this country and their faith in its traditions and its future.

And in commemorating them we hope and trust that this and future generations of Australians will find in themselves the same love of Australia, and the same faith in its future.

The Vietnam War cut deeply into Australia's soul.

By comparison with the two World Wars the list of names recorded here is small.

Yet this is somehow a measure of the burden the veterans of Vietnam had to bear and have borne ever since.

Vietnam touched us all: it went deep into Australian politics, Australian life, Australian thinking.

It divided the country to an extent unequalled since 1917.

It did great damage. It did some good.

Its effects are still with us.

They always will be.

But no Australian knows these effects half as well as those who fought and suffered there.

And no others paid the price that these 504 Australians paid.

In honouring their valour and sacrifice today, we acknowledge that in this most debated and disputed of all wars, the first war to be televised, the real burden remained where it has always been in war - on those who fought and on their families and friends.

I think it can be said that the passionate debates at home contrived to obscure this fact: as if the war was really being fought here.

It was not. As these 504 Australians knew. As the veterans of this and all other wars know. As their loved ones know.

In fact I think it is true that our forgetting this was an extra burden, an extra pain, for the veterans of Vietnam and their families and friends to bear.

That is why today those words "Lest We Forget" have a profound meaning.

The memorial will be henceforth the symbolic resting place of all those who died serving Australia in Vietnam.

Those who visit the memorial in future years will know that Australia did not forget.

They will know that these Australians were heroes of the same order as the Anzacs, as those who fought in France, the Middle East, New Guinea and every other place where Australians have gallantly fought and died.

From now on Australians will know that - and they will know it better if our hopes today are realised:

I mean our hope that now we are putting aside for all time the differences and the bitterness which the Vietnam War engendered in our community.

Our hope that such faith and courage as these Australians had will not be found wanting in this and future generations.

Our hope that this commemoration of those who died will be taken as a symbol of the gratitude which the nation owes them and their loved ones.

And our hope that we will succeed in building in Australia a fair and just democracy, faithful to our best traditions and brave enough to embrace the future.

For there can be no better way to honour the memory of those whose names are recorded here.

Thank you.