



## PRIME MINISTER

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

**LAUNCH OF P40 KITTYHAWK PUBLIC DISPLAY, AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL, CANBERRA 26 AUGUST**

Dame Beryl Beaurepaire and members of the Council of the Australian War Memorial, my Cabinet Colleague Ben Humphreys and other parliamentary colleagues, veterans of the Milne Bay campaign, representatives of the veterans organisations, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Dame Beryl, for your warm welcome.

I am a great admirer of the Australian War Memorial - it is one of the great public institutions of Australia.

I'm very pleased that my first official function here should take place on such an important anniversary, and that I should be celebrating with you a marvellous addition to the national collection.

There is a great romance attached to the Kittyhawk.

World War II invested them with certain - almost human - characteristics. They were sturdy, reliable fighters. Brave planes.

They earned that reputation in a number of theatres, Milne Bay among them.

The one we are about to inspect is a pedigreed representative of the breed - it has a substantial and documented history of service with the RAAF, including service in the Battle of Milne Bay.

It was flown at Milne Bay by Buster Brown who is with us today. Later it was flown in New Guinea by Wilf Arthur whose exploits in it earned him the DFC. Mr Arthur is also here today.

This plane will put visitors in touch with one of Australia's most important battles - a battle which truly helped to turn the tide against the Japanese advance and secure victory in the battle for Australia.

All nations commemorate their war dead. But the Australian War Memorial commemorates them quite uniquely.

Here are recorded the names of all servicemen and women who gave their lives for Australia.

To walk in the Memorial's courtyard is a sombre experience - yet it is one that I think every Australian should make.

It is not an easy thing to comprehend the meaning of war in Australia's history.

This Memorial testifies to enormous sacrifice. It also testifies to a great tragedy.

It reminds us both of heroism and incredible folly.

There are 60,00 names on the first World War roll.

That is 60,000 young men and women who gave their lives.

But we can only begin to comprehend the loss to a young nation when we know that they come from a force of just 300,000 and a population of just over 4 million.

The calamity of World War I can never be measured, but I know that from its inception, and the great efforts of its founders, Charles Bean and John Treloar, the Australian War Memorial has helped us get it in perspective.

There is more than a list of names here.

The Memorial holds records which allow us to see these young men and women in a personal light - with the same aspirations and hopes that we all share; with a love of country from which we all can learn; with a hope for the future that was denied to them, but which we have a duty and a reason to maintain.

The Memorial contains the story of Australia at war - the story of the campaigns themselves, so vividly portrayed in the galleries.

There are soldiers' uniforms here still encrusted with the mud of the battlefields of France, still speaking to us of the terrible winters that the first AIF endured.

The Museum also contains, I understand, such icons of the national story as the boats used at Gallipoli to ferry Australian troops ashore.

I gather that these boats and other large objects will soon be accessible to the public at the storage and display facility at Mitchell, for which, I am pleased to say, funding was provided in the Budget.

I intend to see them one day.

This is truly a people's memorial.

Yet I think it can be reasonably said that the Australian War Memorial bore the marks of its origins - a Memorial to the men and women of 1914-18 - and there was not sufficient attention paid to the Second World War and subsequent wars.

It was not until 1971 that extensions were completed to allow the Memorial to tell the story of those who served in World War II.

I realise that because space had been limited for so long there was not the same urgency in collecting as there had been during and after World War I.

Ladies and gentlemen

I think you will know that I am keen to see that the story of World War II, and in particular the Pacific War, is told to Australians with the same intensity and understanding that characterised our telling of the legends of Gallipoli, France and Palestine.

For this reason I hope that we will be able to find the means of helping the Memorial develop its Pacific War Gallery.

The 50th Anniversary of the key battles and campaigns of the Pacific War has given us an opportunity to remind Australians of the risk the nation faced in 1942, and the debt they owe those men and women who defended it - and I mean both on the battlefield and off it.

At Darwin and in New Guinea, Australians lost their lives turning back the enemy.

The crucial battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, and of Milne Bay and Kokoda made sure that Australia would not be isolated and defenceless, but rather the crucial base from which the Allies would drive back the Japanese.

Already this year it has been my privilege to take part in ceremonies commemorating the battles at Darwin, the Coral Sea, Kokoda and other places in New Guinea.

I count my visits to the memorials to Australian soldiers in these places among the most moving experiences of my public life.

I had hoped to visit Milne Bay but this proved to be impossible - it seems I would I have needed a Kittyhawk to get there.

Milne Bay is perhaps the most significant battle of all.

Here, a combined operation of the three Australian services resisted and repelled a powerful Japanese force, inflicting on the Japanese army its first defeat on land since Pearl Harbour.

The battle played a major part in thwarting Japanese attempts to take Port Moresby.

Yet despite its importance in the defence of Australia, despite the bravery and skill and sacrifice of the Australians who fought there, it is a battle of which few Australians have any knowledge.

The acquisition of this aircraft and the modest display associated with it - along with the dedication of the Memorial's staff led by Brendan Kelson and Michael McKernan - will no doubt help to enlarge our understanding of the Battle of Milne Bay, and through it the battle for Australia.

It will also reclaim for those who fought there some of the recognition they richly deserve.

Those of you who served and are present with us today may not seek this honour, but it is yours.

Australia owes you a debt of gratitude. It owes those who fell there a debt that can never be repaid.

I think we should all be grateful to the Memorial for having the vision and the will to significantly improve the way the story of Milne Bay will be told.

The experience of war lives on to haunt generations of Australians who did not themselves take part. I know this from my own family's experience.

By telling the story and paying due tribute, the Australian War Memorial has played an indispensable role in helping those who came after to understand.

In its way it makes us all part of the story, and that is an essential comfort to any nation.

The Memorial has done Australia a great service.

So, Dame Beryl, I congratulate you, the Council and the Staff.

This aeroplane will help tell the story of the defence of Australia in 1942.

It will remind us of the debt we owe to those who fought and died.

And it will ensure that their names will live forever.

Thank you all for coming.