

MASTER



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## PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
AUSTRALIAN VIETNAM FORCES NATIONAL MEMORIAL DEDICATION  
CEREMONY**

I welcome you all to Canberra. I know that many of you have come hundreds of miles. And many years. Too many years.

Today is a great day in the life of our country.

This memorial will forever honour the Australians who fought and died in Vietnam. It honours all those who served.

We honour them for the same reason we honour those previous generations of Australians who served in wars on foreign soil.

For their sacrifice. For their faith.

These Australians believed in their country as those earlier generations did. They believed in democracy and freedom, and by defending it in Vietnam they believed they were defending it everywhere.

They believed in duty.

They were brave.

Those whose names are entombed in this memorial paid the ultimate price for their belief in Australia.

It is true that no war divided Australia like the Vietnam War. It is true that often we remember those years more for the protests at home than for the fighting abroad.

The years of Vietnam corresponded with a great social and political upheaval in Australia. The war was itself one of the catalysts of change.

There is no doubt that in all the turmoil we lost sight of the reality of Vietnam. We lost sight of those who did the fighting, and the waiting. And by doing that we made their reality worse.

For all the drama in the streets, and parliaments and public halls, the real war was, as always, on the battlefields where young men and women died.

The real tragedy was in their suffering and death and, as ever, in the loss which lives on in the hearts and minds of those who loved them.

We cannot make good this hurt any more than we can undo the war itself.

But, by this memorial, we can make good the memory.

It is the symbolic resting place of the 504 who died. It means that at last they will join the exalted ranks of Australians who died in other wars.

It is a memorial to all the men and women who served in Vietnam.

It is a memorial for all those for whom the war has meant suffering and loss. All those whose experience of Vietnam still haunts them. All those here today.

We should recognise, therefore, that it is a memorial for all Australians; because, as a nation, we should all bear the burden.

It is a great memorial.

I hope it will be taken as a symbol of the nation's gratitude.

I hope that it will remind us of our own duty, and that this and future generations will find in themselves the same love of Australia, and the same faith in our future.

And I hope it will remind us always that we live in a great country dedicated to freedom and peace.

Thank you.

CANBERRA

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