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## PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP  
FAREWELL TO WW1 COMMEMERATION MISSION  
SYDNEY 27 AUGUST 1993**

This is a rare privilege.

I am delighted to have the chance to farewell people who seventy five years ago were among those who made an Australian legend.

The human cost of the Great War was so terrible and the political cost of the peace so catastrophic the Allied victory has never been seen as an unmitigated triumph.

With the possible exception of Sir John Monash who was never given ultimate command, the conduct of the war produced no heroes among the generals on either side - on the contrary, as one writer said, it contributed more than any other war to the widespread belief that military commanders were less intelligent than average.

The unmitigated heroes of the Great War were the men who did the fighting - the soldiers, sailors and airmen.

And while the war produced many astonishing acts of valour and many of these were duly acknowledged with medals - it was the common soldiers, the mass of unacknowledged individuals who marched into the most appalling battles and endured the most terrible suffering and who died in the most unconscionable numbers, who were the heroes.

I think it is true to say that history judged the Great War to have returned little of any good except this - the bravery and endurance, the comradeship and humour of ordinary men and women was confirmed for all time.

In Australia it became a by-word.

Building on those nationalist and democratic sentiments which had found their voice towards the end of the previous century and which the First AIF in ~~fundamental ways reflected, these who served in the Great War~~ created a legend - the ideals to which future generations of Australians would aspire, the values by which they would live.

So, as I said, farewellling you today is a great privilege, and it is with a mixture of wonder and some humility that I do it.

It is also with appreciation: my generation of Australians, all Australians, are in your debt.

We owe you for more than your service in war but for the service you gave in the peace, building this country undaunted by depression and another war.

We are grateful for the service you have given and the faith you have had in Australia - for the example you set.

And we are grateful that seventy five years later you have been prepared to volunteer again.

Your return to France is a reminder of what a hardy and tenacious generation yours was.

It also reminds us that the Great War has lived on down the years. It found its way - often tragically - into countless homes long after the last battle was fought and it has profoundly affected the character of the nation and its people.

I am only sorry that my schedule will not permit me to be in France when you are. I will be paying a brief visit to Villers Brettoneux and Hamel in September.

It is a visit I have always wanted to make.

I am also very pleased that on November 11 I will have the opportunity to play a part in the great project to bring home to Australia, and entomb at the War Memorial in Canberra, the remains of an unknown Australian soldier.

The Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier seems to me to be an act of quite profound significance. It is a grand gesture of recognition to the men and women who served in the Great War, but more than that, it is an act which can help bind Australians together now and in the future.

The soldier, to be selected from one of our war cemeteries in France, will represent all Australian servicemen and women, who have given their lives in all the conflicts in which Australians have served.

It can help bind the generations, help us recognise that we are all part of the same story of Australia.

And in all the legacy of Australia's involvement in the Great War, or any other war, there is surely nothing more appropriate to symbolise.

It remains only to wish you on behalf of the Government and, I am sure, the people of Australia a very happy and a safe trip.

It will certainly be a quite extraordinary experience.

~~The other side of the world~~ was a much more remote place when you first went there, and all the more so because it was a battlefield.

We can only guess at what memories this trip will bring back to you - we hope that among the inevitable sadness there will also be a little happiness and pride.

Thank you.