



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P.J. KEATING MP DOORSTOP, HELLFIRE PASS, SATURDAY, 9 APRIL 1994

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J: Prime Minister, you are drawing parallels from our past to our future, how do you see this visit here to Hellfire Pass in those terms?

PM: Our first engagement with Asia was in war, our first engagement of substance with this country was in war. It is now an engagement not only in peace, but in partnership. What happened here was slavery during the war. The Japanese strategic objectives, many thousands died using primitive devices to cut a pass like this and other passes to build a railway which was of strategic value in the conquest of Burma. We should not simply remember the thousands who died here including Australians, but the many hundreds of thousands of local people who had no medical support what so ever as indeed we had, but thousands of Australians, British, Dutch, some Americans, Malays, Thais died here. And for us this has become a symbol of endurance; of tenacity; of ingenuity; of compassion and part of the Anzac legend which was born in Gallipoli and in Flanders and in Western Europe has been added to during the Second World War in places like this.

So, I think we should have these things in our mind when we think about that part of Asia closest to Australia, in thinking about the relationships we now have to draw on this experience and to value it and learn from it.

J: Prime Minister, should young Australians focus on the atrocities of an old enemy or the sacrifice of fathers and grandfathers?

PM: We focus on the faith these people had in Australia - in what we built there; in the values we had established there and that which kept them going through this terrible period of tribulation for them. That is the spirit we wish to remember and we have seen it embodied in many Australians. Unfortunately, too many are here still, buried here.

J: Prime Minister, you have chosen to go to a war site here, but not in Vietnam. Can you explain why?

PM: We don't have any cemeteries in Vietnam. We brought all of the Australian dead home. So, there isn't the Australian war cemeteries in Vietnam that there is in Thailand or indeed in other parts of South-East Asia.

J: It is a more complex equation though isn't it, we are talking here about a country where Australia was always allies with Thailand, in Vietnam it is a more complex situation to deal with though isn't it?

PM: Well, continental Australia was under threat in the Second World War and I think that it was a battle for our nation and this was of that battle.

J: The resignation of the Japanese Prime Minister, would you care to comment on that?

PM: No, well, I don't know any more than I think you've already reported.

J: Mr Prime Minister, do you think Japan has adequately apologised for the ... war?

PM: I think it has sought to do that. I think we would like the Japanese people particularly younger Japanese people to understand fully the ramifications of the war and it is in the telling of the history that Japan has to be more fulsome and complete in articulating its role in this period.

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