



PRIME MINISTER

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

**LAUNCH OF "AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS - 1945 - 1995"
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL, CANBERRA, 14 AUGUST 1994**

I am very pleased to be here once more at the Australian War Memorial. I don't think I have been to any public building more than this one in the past two and a half years.

This is understandable enough. World War II is fifty years away and we have had a series of commemorations - not just here in Canberra, but in Darwin, Kokoda, the Coral Sea and Thailand. And in Great Britain and France just a couple of months ago.

But the Memorial has been doing more than merely observing the passing of these anniversaries. Their Initiative has brought me here for the inauguration of the Vietnam Memorial, the Entombment of the Unknown Soldier and the Children of the Holocaust exhibition.

I have been deeply honoured to participate in these occasions, and like everyone else, deeply moved.

This Memorial is one of Australia's great public institutions: a storehouse of our collective memory and an icon of our faith.

It does its job superbly and for that, obviously, a lot of credit has to go to the leadership and staff.

Yet I'm sure those same people would agree that there is something at work in the Australian community which makes their job easier.

For the fact is the sentiment that emerged from Gallipoli, the Western Front and the Middle East in the First World War, does live on.

The nation has not forgotten. In fact, I have grown quite certain that the tradition of Anzac will inspire and unite us through the next century no less than it has in this.

The national response to the Entombment of the Unknown Soldier alone suggests that new generations will find in the legend of Anzac powerful symbols for their own faith. For an enduring Australian faith.

Our celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of VP Day and VE Day will express that faith and we hope will significantly strengthen it among young Australians.

The generation we will commemorate and thank was a heroic one.

They were born of the Australians who had endured World War I and the Great Depression, and who had been denied so many of life's opportunities by those tragic events. From where we stand we might be tempted to think it understandable if they had lost their belief in Australia and humane and democratic values.

They didn't. They fought a war in defence of the country they loved, and they bequeathed to their children the opportunities which they had been denied. They were nation builders.

Our freedom was their legacy: the robust democracy we enjoy, the security, the marvellous continent which is ours, the unequalled personal freedoms.

But they left us more than that. They passed on a tradition and a faith for us to live by - the ideals of courage and sacrifice, the principles of mateship, and the conviction that wherever we come from on this vast continent, whatever divides us, we are Australians. By their example they taught us about the ties that bind us, and our common cause.

And by the same example they compel us now, not just to remember them, but to pass on the lesson to our children.

We hope that the commemorative events we plan for next year will do this. We also hope, of course, that at the end of these celebrations Australians will have a much more thorough appreciation of the War itself and the nature and extent of Australia's involvement.

Today I launch "Australia Remembers 1945-1995": a program of activities that will culminate on August 15 next year, the fiftieth anniversary of the final peace.

It is a substantial program which I hope will engage the attention and involvement of all Australians, which will honour our veterans and all those others who served in non-military roles, and which will deepen our understanding of events which so profoundly shaped the story of Australia.

The focus of the program will be on Australia and Australians: the veterans of battles like those in the Middle East and Greece and Crete and in the air war over Europe: and those who fought in the Pacific War, the war to save Australia from invasion.

We will remember their service, and the grief of those they left behind. We will remember all those who lost their lives and those who lost the ones they loved.

We will remember those who served at home in factories and on farms - that generation of Australians who stoically endured the dislocation of their lives and the hardships which the War necessitated.

We will remember the great achievements and the great spirit of the times.

We will also remember those who came from war torn Europe to make their lives here, and who by doing so made all our lives so much richer.

When I opened the Children of the Holocaust Exhibition here at the Memorial earlier this year, one of the survivors told me that she had made her home in Australia because it was as far away as possible from the terrible events she had witnessed.

Over the next year we will celebrate the contribution such people have made to Australia. And we will re-affirm our faith in Australia as a place which has opened its heart and mind to people seeking refuge from wars in many parts of the world.

I hope "Australia Remembers" will add to our nation's understanding and confidence about our place in the world and our capacity to play a creative and humane part in it.

I hope it will encourage us to recognise how important it is for a nation to believe in great ideals - to have them at the forefront of our ambitions.

And I hope it will help us recognise how important it is to believe in ourselves.

We want to involve every Australian community. We want all Australians to be touched by it.

All who contributed to winning the war and making the peace - and all who benefited from those triumphs.

We want Australian women involved as never before in such a commemoration.

The great sentiment which this Memorial embodies must never be allowed to drift away from them, or any group of Australians.

If those ideals are to continue to provide inspiration and faith for Australians in the twenty first century the story must belong to every one of us - as the peace which came in 1945 belonged to us.

Thank you