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PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP YOKOHAMA WAR CEMETERY AT HODOGAYA - SATURDAY, 27 MAY 1995

We are here to mourn the loss of the 280 Australians buried here and to give thanks.

We mourn because they died young and far from home and did not have a chance to live out their lives in the country they loved, among the people they loved.

We mourn because they were Australians like ourselves and they suffered cruelly.

We mourn because they remind us of the 17,000 other Australians who died in the war against Japan, almost half of them as prisoners; and of the millions of others who died in that war.

And we give thanks because it was by the courage and sacrifice of people like these that our country was saved.

It is because they loved freedom that we enjoy freedom.

It is because they loved and believed in Australia that we have an Australia to love and believe in today.

We give thanks because they set us an example by which to live. Their graves remind us of our duty to Australia.

These Australians endured forced labour and imprisonment.

They died of inhuman treatment and neglect.

We know that what they went through others went through in prison camps in other parts of Asia - in Burma and Thailand, Borneo and Ambon.

We will never forget the evil that was done to our fellow Australians.

And we believe that Japan should not allow these events to be forgotten.

We believe that our friendship will be stronger if the truth about these events is known to the Japanese people - and we are pleased that the Japanese government has taken steps to make it known.

As Australia remembers the end of the war this year we honour all those who fought and died. And we remember all the innocent lives that were lost.

We pledge ourselves to see that these things do not happen again.

For that reason we also pay tribute to those who have had the vision and faith to build a partnership between our two countries.

They saw that their duty to the dead was a duty to the living.

We could pay no greater tribute to the Australians buried here than to dedicate ourselves to another fifty years of peace and friendship between Australia and Japan.

Among these graves we remember the terrible suffering and destruction that the war inflicted on a generation.

And we are reminded that our greatest gifts are peace and freedom and our greatest duty to preserve them.

For that we give thanks to these Australians.

They died so far from home, but we know they are here and we will never forget them.

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