



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP FAREWELL TO THE AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS PILGRIMAGE TO PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SYDNEY, THURSDAY, 29 JUNE 1995

It is my very pleasant duty today to farewell men and women from an heroic generation of Australians who are embarking on a pilgrimage to some of the sacred sites of our history.

The names of the places to which they are going - Kokoda, Milne Bay, Buna, Gona, Lae, Shaggy Ridge, Sattelberg, Wau, Bougainville and Wewak - have a meaning for Australians which will never fade.

They were the battlefields on which these Australians and others like them fought to save their country and defend democracy against tyranny and cruelty.

Many had already fought in terrible battles in Europe and the Middle East. Many were very young and scarcely out of school.

They fought with great courage. They defeated an implacable and ruthless enemy. They fought and won the battles which saved Australia.

That is why their place in our history is immovable and indelible.

They are the names which remind us that they were once a generation of men and women who were prepared to lay down their lives for Australia.

That is the most profound thing my generation learned, and it will be as profound to generations of Australians a hundred years from now.

I am very conscious that at times like this we must choose our words carefully.

We cannot pretend to know what you went through fifty years ago, or what your thoughts are now as you return to the battlefields.

We were never tested as you were. We don't know if we would have come through as you did.

But we do know from your example what bravery means.

We know from you what it means to love Australia.

Because of you we know better the value of democracy, peace and freedom.

So today we give thanks to you – and all the others you are representing on this journey.

We give thanks not only to the fighting men, but the women who served: those of the Australian Women's Army Service, those who nursed the wounded, *all* those women who gave their energies to the war effort at home.

And we acknowledge those whose husbands did not return. Some of those women are making this pilgrimage.

Today we recognise the labours of the Australians who provided the supplies, food and equipment needed to support the 200,000 Australians who served in New Guinea and the surrounding Islands.

We pay tribute to the men and women of the Royal Australian Navy and the Merchant Navy who between them transported over 450,000 people to Papua New Guinea between 1941 and 1945.

We also recognise the support given to Australians by the people of Papua New Guinea and the Islands.

Their courage and compassion itself forms a legendary part of our history.

Of the many things to be learned from World War Two, none was more important than the need to work closely and harmoniously with our neighbours in the region.

To continue to build a secure and prosperous future with them, and to maintain the peace and protect the environment we all share, is a duty we owe to the war-time generation.

So is building a modern, prosperous, self-reliant Australia our duty to them – our greatest duty.

Because that is what *they* did. Those who returned took up their lives again and went back to work. And by their efforts – their ambitions for themselves, their families, their communities, and their country – they made Australia stronger.

They made this a place where ambitions could flourish and enterprise be rewarded. They also made it a place in which the tradition of the fair go lived on, and the idea of supporting each other through good times and bad remained a defining element of the national character.

They made a mighty contribution to Australia, and here today and throughout this year we pay tribute to them.

We have a lot to thank them for and a lot to live up to.

It is my great privilege, then, on behalf of Australians everywhere, to wish everyone of you a marvellous and rewarding journey.

Thank you.