



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH PAUL BARBER, RADIO 3AW, MELBOURNE,
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PB: Prime Minister, welcome first of all.

PM: Thank you, Paul. It is good to be here.

PB: Now you have seen a couple of the moving ceremonies this morning. You have seen a lot of the VE ceremonies. You are going to see a lot more this week of the VP ceremonies. To Paul Keating, citizen, what sort of impact does it have on you?

PM: Oh a very big impact. I have been very interested as Prime Minister to underwrite more fully the history of the Second World War in the Pacific, where the sovereignty of Australia was threatened and where it was saved. Before 1992, the 50th commemoration of the fall of Singapore and then Kokoda and the Owen Stanley campaign, much of the history of Australia at war has been centred around the First World War - the national identity being forged at Gallipoli etc. But it was in the Second World War where Australia was saved and we are now getting around in 1995 to the 50th anniversary of VP Day to tell that story.

PB: To right the wrong?

PM: Yes. Well just to let young Australians know that the place was under assault, that we could have lost it and yet with our Allies we fought back and won the day. So I think that is important. The other thing is, of course, I became Prime Minister in December 1991. Just a month or so later, was the 50th anniversary of the fall of Singapore. So the period I have been Prime Minister has been, if you like, 50 years on, the shadow of the whole of the Pacific campaign in the War. So you have a mind's eye picture of the time and the events and where they happened and the sequence and the time between them. You know, so in these four years I have been able to, in a sense, put myself back into 1942-45.

- PB: Tell me, do you have difficulty getting a handle on just how difficult things must have been for people up here in the north? I mean coming from Melbourne and Sydney, you come up here and you suddenly realise hang on, you know, Townsville they had three air raids - but they didn't come to anything. But they thought that the Japanese would invade through this town. I mean to be living here at that time and then to go meeting all the diggers on Saturday night, it is extraordinary.
- PM: Well, I think, that the great sea battles, of course, were decisive. That was the Coral Sea where the Japanese fleet was turned around. They were heading, of course, to Port Moresby and had they taken Port Moresby would have made then unrelenting assaults on the north east coast of Australia and then, of course, we had the opportunity, they were then forced back to the north coast of Papua New Guinea and came over the Owen Stanley's and that is where we fought them at Kokoda. The other great battle, of course, was the battle of Midway, where really in a somewhat fluky environment, the United States found the Japanese squadron and broke it up and these were the two decisive events of the sea war.
- PB: A lot of that here in Townsville.
- PM: Yes, I mean it is like the war in Europe. I mean we nearly didn't win it. I mean that is the point that was nearly ... if you look at, you know, why Hitler didn't attack Britain with a maritime campaign after the fall of France, why he opened up a flank with the Soviet Union. I mean we won the war, but I think it is worth recalling that we might not have.
- PB: Are you surprised that the Japanese, in fact, well they didn't invade Australia? I mean, are you surprised that they didn't make a greater effort or attempt?
- PM: Well they made all the effort. I mean they got themselves established in the Solomons. They got themselves established in Indonesia and they had made assaults on Australia there and had they, of course, succeeded in the sea campaign to take Port Moresby, they would have certainly then moved solidly on to Australia.
- PB: Can I ask you this one because you and I would be roughly the same generation, I would think. I know that my relatives, when they came back from the war - so we were growing up in the 50s and early 60s - were very loathe to talk to me about it. You know, say "Uncle, what happened in the war?" and they didn't want to talk about it. What was the situation in the Keating family and do you know why they didn't want to talk about it?
- PM: Well my father lost his brother in the death march from Sandakan in Borneo two months before the war ended and they expected him home. In fact, they were organising the sort of party for him to come home. I mean they got the telegram to say he had been killed by the Japanese on the death march from Sandakan to Ranau. He was the only one

who was enlisted and so it was always, in a sense, a pall hanging over my family because he was the one who went away and he was the one who didn't come back.

PB: Well, you see, there are many families like that who seem to suffer in silence, whom are aged over 50. [inaudible] they were New Zealand and Australian.

PM: Well I think it was only until people started talking about it and writing about it in the 1980s that, for instance, the Sandakan camp and the death marches and what happened at Hell Fire Pass in Thailand was not really spoken of very much, it is only recently. And the Sandakan commemorative committee have now put these memorials around Australia but they were placed there two years ago, nearly half a century later. So you are right, it wasn't spoken of very much.

PB: But it seems now and this is what surprised me coming up here this time, is that talking to the men and women - all the women that drove the trucks around here in Townsville - this time around they seem to be far more open about what happened and some are positive about their lives and the contributions they made. Well as I say when I was growing up in it, it really was that term we laugh at now "whatever you do, don't mention the war".

PM: Don't mention the war, no. Well it was always overshadowed by Gallipoli and Flanders, the First World War history and the Anzac identity and because there were not, if you like, battles of that enormity in the Second World War involving Australians. I don't know whether it is for that reason that it was not celebrated as much as certainly in the First World War the sovereignty of Australia wasn't called in to question, but it was in the Second World War. I mean it was young militia, young men who were not part of the regular army who fought at Kokoda, who fought the initial resistance there and I think that we are now learning to understand what that meant and to celebrate what they did.

PB: Yes, the other thing too that occurred to me that there was this pall during the 50s and whatever. That was the period, however, of well the war changed forever because immigration suddenly became a momentous thing and that has changed Australia irrevocably.

PM: Yes, Australia is now a multicultural country. A mono-culture is finished and we are a more interesting and stronger place for it.

PB: And because of the vibrancy after the ... go out of themselves so spontaneously, I just wonder whether that has rubbed off on to us and that is why we now talk about the war, our parents do, more openly than we mightn't have.

PM: I think the other thing is that it is half a century ago and people feel that this is their last chance to talk about it in any organised way.

PB: Well, again, is this the sort of grand finale, if you like, of looking back as a celebration, do we now have to head to a republic, you know, in the next century, all that sort of stuff?

PM: Well there is a bitter chapter closing in this I think going on. There is a bitter closing in this going on because I have heard a number of veterans say to me, this will be the last chance we will get together like this. It is probably the last chance for us to talk about it like this. But for those who went back to some of the theatres of the war, they feel as if we sort of, you know, made the circle. We have returned and now it is done and it was always in the mind

PB: There was a chapter, Vietnam.

PM: Now it is full, it is shut. Well history it is never shut, but at least in the minds of many people it will be more satisfied.

PB: Can I just raise one question with you, it popped up today, and that is the fuzzy wuzzy angel - the very famous guy Raphel ... - he says that if the Government wants to help him they should give him a home in his village.

PM: Well, he left me a note when I met him. I haven't read the note yet, but when I get a moment I will. I think we appreciate very much what these people did for us, the many hundreds of thousands of them and we constantly take every opportunity, you know later this year ... I first met him in Kokoda in 1992 and later this year when I open the Kokoda Memorial Village.

PB: Ok if I could just put it, it is him that features in that photograph carrying ...

PM: Yes, and along the Kokoda trail and we are building a hospital there and dedicating it to the people of Kokoda because when I went there in 1992 it was about to be overtaken by, I think, a sugar company or some other group which was harvesting some large group up to the edge of what was formerly the little village of Kokoda. At any rate now we have got two successive Papua New Guinea governments to agree to turn it into an Australian shrine. It will be an Australian-Papua New Guinea Shrine.

PB: So, you will read Raphel's letter?

PM: I will read Raphel's letter and see what we can do for him bearing in mind that upon independence, with Papua New Guinea in the early 1970s all about, if you like, the responsibilities we have in terms of the treatment of veterans passed over to Papua New Guinea and I'll see what we can do sensibly without opening up the whole precedent area.

- PB: Can we clarify another one, Bruce Ruxton always seems to get upset at most of Australia calling it VP Day, wants to call it VJ Day. Do you have a firm view on that.
- PM: No, some references have been VJ Day, some VP Day. I don't think so, but it was Victory in the Pacific, it was a Pacific war and I think it was called VP Day at the time from memory. I don't think it matters much. There was only one substantial enemy and that was Japan. We all understand that.
- PB: Are you satisfied with their apologies thus far, I mean, is that the end of it as far as you are concerned or do you want more?
- PM: Well, there have been apologies in the past. I don't think the apologies themselves matter as much as the inculcation of the truth in their population. I think that matters more. That is, that the Japanese community and its children are taught the history of the Second World War and the period of Japanese militarism. I think we would rather that openness and that understanding, that coming to terms with themselves than simply an apology because, I think, it was Prime Minister Kishi from memory back in the 1950s - 1957 or 1958 - came to Australia with a very genuine and comprehensive apology, but that has been forgotten and now people say they should apologise. So, we get another Prime Minister to make another apology. I think what we really want is for the Japanese people to understand what happened and to take the lesson from it and to declare not to be doing these things again.
- PB: A hypothetical, say you were President Keating there in August 1945, you knew you had these bombs, you had to think about whether you were going to drop them or not and you knew that the possibilities was one on Hiroshima and the other one on Nagasaki, what would you have done?
- PM: I think the history shows that the Japanese were prepared to surrender provided that the Emperor Hirohito was maintained in his majestic role as the head of the Japanese community. Subsequently, President Truman did agree to that. Had he agreed to it earlier, it is very likely that the Japanese would have capitulated before Hiroshima and before Nagasaki. Whatever the rationale for Hiroshima, I don't think there was any real rationale for Nagasaki.
- PB: So, you would have probably held off for a while longer and then if you had to go with Hiroshima, you said you wouldn't go with Nagasaki?
- PM: Well, I wasn't there and it wasn't my call. But, the history book shows, I think, that allied interception of Japanese telecommunications traffic showed that they were prepared to capitulate providing that they could get an assurance about the maintenance of the Emperor. Given the fact that President Truman finally did agree to that, had he agreed earlier the likelihood is Japan would have capitulated. One can never

be completely certain, you could say of Hiroshima probably there is an area of doubt, of Nagasaki I couldn't see any point to that.

PB: Of all the ceremonies that you have been a part of and seen both over VE Day and now our own celebrations here is there one that stands out that has moved you more than any other?

PM: The one that moved me most was the visit to Kokoda in 1992. The reason was that it was defended by young men, by boys in shorts - in singlets and shorts - with machine guns. Australians 18 years of age militia, as I said not part of the regular army, fighting the crack Japanese marine troops, combat marines who came across the plain and from the coast through Popondetta up to Kokoda. I think, that sort of valour, I talked today about the innocence of Australia then - a small country, innocent of these sorts of forces in the world - fending off the Japanese. The crack manifestation of Japanese militarism with 18 year old boys in shorts. The thing that has always made me feel so sad about it all was obviously Changi, Sandakan, Kanchanaburi, Hell Fire Pass, the incarceration in brutal terms of Australians and British soldiers by the Japanese.

PB: I met a guy today who was nine stone, when he came back he was five stone. He went from Singapore to Changi to the Burma Railway to then making armaments in Japan, actually saw the bombing of Hiroshima and I can't believe that he is so relaxed about it today.

PM: Tom Uren was in that position. Tommy was taken to Japan and he worked in a coal mine and he saw the flash of either Hiroshima or Nagasaki - I can't remember which one - but he saw the flash.

PB: This guy said he didn't know what it was.

PM: No, and we were in Japan at an Australian cemetery earlier this year and I thought that was a very sad place because imagine being an Australian in Japan in 1945 in the snow and the cold and then coming into summer and the bomb and the Japanese holding you in contempt - a pretty sad place to be and a pretty sad way to go.

PB: You are absolutely right. I know you haven't got much time, you have got to go off, if you don't want to answer a couple of domestic issue questions that is fair enough, but I wonder if I can just throw a couple at you. Carmen Lawrence, is she finished?

PM: No. The High Court has said that until the jurisdiction of West Australia, until the processes have run their race there, it can't intercede in this. What's happening here is that the executive government of Western Australia has employed as an arm of the executive a Royal Commission to do things that none of the rest of us have ever used the executive government to do. That is what she is resisting. If the point comes where she gives testimony in this, I have no doubt she will do it very forthrightly.

PB: So, you still confident in her ...

PM: Absolutely.

PB: Martin Ferguson, that issue and the resolution of it with him looking at now getting a seat, is that a sign that the days of factional party hacks, if you like, taking safe seats, is that a sign that that is over?

PM: I would hope we wouldn't have party hacks taking safe seats and certainly with Martin Ferguson, the Labour Party will be stronger and the government will be stronger because he is a person that has represented working Australians all through his adult life, joining the government. I mean, one of our claims is that we sincerely represent the interests of working people and to have the leader of a movement that has most adequately represented them join us would be a good thing for us. I think the public will regard that change well.

PB: One more, I was quite angry at this criticism myself of your wife Annita Keating and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra going overseas and ... we ought to be encouraging it not knocking it, John Howard refused to actually intervene ...

PM: You see, I would not have a front bencher of mine attacking the wife of the opposition leader or a front bench member. Nobody attacked my wife when she played a role in the Olympic selection in Monte Carlo and represented Australia in Barcelona. And the Barcelona representation, I think, materially helped the Monte Carlo selection. There is enough to argue about in public life if that is what it is about over policy without bringing in these things. So, running Senator Alston out and then seeing which way the wind blows is not a very manly thing for Mr Howard to be doing.

PB: Does it make you angry?

PM: Not much, there's nothing that could happen in the Liberal Party that surprises me. Here they have got the whole force of the state in Western Australia arraigned against the one woman member of our Cabinet and they are out there chasing my wife over something she is doing to support ... I mean, my wife is a European, she has been through Germany and France and Britain on so many occasions she doesn't need a visit with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra to see Europe. She is doing it only to advance what she thinks is Australian culture.

PB: Has it in any way acted as a catalyst for you because you have got your back to the wall according the polls ... John Howard is going to get in easily this time.

PM: I've got more substantial things to argue about than that.

PB: Alright, one final question, you were talking about young people and of course you have got a young family yourself and what are their thoughts about VP celebrations. What do you kids, what do you want them to remember from this weeks and last week activities?

PM: I think the best that we can hope for with children as young as mine is for it to register with them, to know that it was a great event in the history of Australia, that Australia was saved by the courage of many young people at the time and that those values of liberty and egalitarianism and democracy which resided in the hearts of those young Australians that fought in shorts at Kokoda, are still out there today in the young Australians of this generation.

PB: Thank you very much, we'll talk again I hope.

PM: Thank you very much indeed.

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