



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
LAUNCH OF THE BOOK THE BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF
THE AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
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It is a great privilege to be able to co-launch this book with President Ramos here in Canberra.

Last week, hundreds of thousands of Australians participated in very moving ceremonies throughout the country to commemorate the end of the war in the Pacific fifty years ago. For many young people who took part or watched, these events gave them a chance to thank the generation of Australians who achieved the victory and to reflect on its meaning for our country now.

The battle of Leyte Gulf was one of the critical events leading to the victory we celebrated last week, and Australia was proud to have played its part in it.

The battle saw the largest Royal Australian Navy involvement in a single campaign during the war. RAAF Wireless Units also played an important part.

Before the battle, thirteen Australian ships, operating as part of the US seventh fleet, had been involved in a number of fierce battles for control of the sea lanes around the Philippines.

Then, on 20 October 1944, seven of them participated in the allied operations to recapture Leyte Gulf and Panoan. The greatest amphibious force ever assembled in the Pacific - and second only to the D Day landings in Europe - landed four divisions of the US 6th army and began the liberation of the Philippines.

On the day after the landings, which were accomplished without loss of life, Japanese kamikaze bombers attacked the allied fleet, including HMAS Australia - on which thirty crew members, including the ship's captain, were killed.

Australia has remembered the Australian Task Force Commander at Leyte, Commodore Collins, in the name given to our country's new class of submarines.

The Battle of Leyte Gulf reunited the allies with the courageous Philippines resistance forces, who had fought so bravely for three years against the occupying Japanese.

Those many thousands of Filipinos who fought and died for our common cause deserve the thanks of all Australians.

I hope this book will be more than a fine commemoration for those who were involved in the campaign, or who have family who were.

I hope it will remind a new generation of Australians and Filipinos that our countries have common security interests, that these interests have been tested in the past and that we can best preserve them today by working together to build a strong defence partnership ourselves, and a regional environment which preserves the security of all the countries in it.

For this reason, I was very pleased that we were able to witness today the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on defence co-operation which will provide a forward-looking framework for developing the defence ties between us.

I congratulate the Department of Defence and the staff of the Australian Defence Force Journal on this excellent publication.