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PRIME MINISTER

10 November 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
UNVEILING OF SIR EDWARD "WEARY" DUNLOP MEMORIAL
BENALLA BOTANIC GARDENS**

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Thank you very much to Pat McNamara, the Deputy Premier of Victoria, to my colleague Lou Lieberman, to Mrs Gibson, the Chief Commissioner, to Mr & Mrs Heaney, to my former Parliamentary colleague, Tom Uren, one of the many POWs here today, Reverend Donaldson, ladies and gentlemen.

Yesterday I had the very special privilege of calling on Ted Matthews, who I'm told, is the last survivor of the Australian contingent that went ashore on Gallipoli on the 25th of April 1915. He turns 100 on Monday, on Remembrance Day, and I, quite literally, was in awe in the experience of being able to reach out and touch somebody who had been present at that awful moment, that awful time of both death and destruction, but also a moment that has become haloed in the Australian history and represents in so many ways things that we care and love about our nation. That little experience of mine, just in a small way, I hope taught me to try and understand the sense of awe and reverence that those whose lives were directly touched saved, influenced and inspired by "Weary" Dunlop feel about this most remarkable of all Australians.

In our dreams, I imagine, that "Weary" Dunlop represents what so many of us would like to be as Australians. He was strong, he was a champion sportsman, in fact, I understand he was the first Victorian ever to play rugby union for Australia and I well recall reading those chapters on his sporting prowess in Sue Evury's magnificent biography when he complained rather bitterly about the unforgiving hardness of the Bulli soil of the Sydney cricket ground when he first represented Australia in a test match there. He, of course, was also a champion boxer. He was a highly intelligent, very literate, well read man. He was in the best sense of that expression, the true sense of that expression, a man's man. He was a leader, he was compassionate, he was, in the greatest of all Australian traditions of mateship, he was egalitarian.

When he cared and treated for people he didn't ask what school they went to, he didn't ask whether they were Protestant, Catholic or Callithumpian, he didn't ask them who they voted for, he didn't ask them what they thought about this or that thing, rather he just treated them and cared for them and led them and inspired them because they were a fellow human being.

He represented a generation of Australians to whom all of us, particularly those who were born too young for World War II, but which all of us owe so much. There are many great heroes in the Australian story, but that generation of men who went into captivity in the darkest days of World War II they endured hardship and tragedy, they travelled journeys, they wore burdens, they provided leadership that no other group of Australians as a particular aged cohort does. And we owe them an immense depth of gratitude.

We also owe the memory of "Weary" Dunlop great reverence. Not only did he display those lovable Australian characteristics with which we so warmly identify, but he's also a far sighted man. At the end of World War II he was not one of those who said we should turn our backs on the Asia Pacific areas. He was not someone who wanted to live out in hatred and so expiate some of the feelings of hostility he no doubt had about his treatment and the treatment of his fellow Australians, but he taught us and he tells us that the future of Australian ... (inaudible)... cooperation and friendship with the people of the Asian region. He became a leading light in the Asia Australia society. He played a very active role in the Colombo plan. He was in every sense a person who looked to the future as well as someone who remembered the past and someone who remembered the enormous suffering of those he served.

I have only read of "Weary" Dunlop's exploits. I had the great privilege of meeting him on several occasions. I have talked to people who knew him, who were treated by him, who served with him and who loved him. And he represents to me something to which all of us as Australians can aspire. He has that uncomplicated generosity and decency and he had enormous strength and he had that laconic characteristic which we hold so dear as being part of the Australian existence and the Australian personality. He was in every sense of the expression - Australian to his boot heels. And the legacy that he has given to successive generations of Australians is a legacy that will warm and sustain and inspire us. And it really is entirely appropriate in this lovely garden setting, in this lovely city of Benalla here this Sunday morning, a gathering attended properly by the men, the Dunlop men that we honour, the ex-POWs of World War II, but also attended by many young people, by many children who've nourished out of remembrance this morning and have played their part. And it is an opportunity to feel immensely grateful for life and it's an opportunity to feel quietly proud of the great privilege all of us have to live in our nation Australia. And to remember that it was the unseating courage and bravery of men like "Weary" Dunlop and all the other men who are here today and, of course, their fellow soldiers who didn't come back and all the others who cared for them and looked after them.

Life at the end of its consideration is about personal courage, about character, about the capacity to do the right thing to care for one another in times of travail and times of difficulty. I can't think of a figure in Australian history who has more perfectly and completely lived out that injunction to care for others and to nurse and to look after those whose circumstances are sadly tragic. "Weary" Dunlop did that and he did it in a way that has won him the affection, not only of those he cared for and treated and preserved in life and helped back to good health, but he has also won the affection and the gratitude and the admiration of a nation that is proud to have produced a man of that stature and a nation that is grateful for what he did by way of exploration and leadership.

Of the many things that has been my privilege to do since becoming Prime Minister of Australia few can match the privilege of being here this morning of saying some words that tribute, however inadequate they are, to the memory of "Weary" Dunlop on your behalf thanking him and thanking God for him and also on your behalf thanking the men, the Dunlop men, that fought - many died, many survived - and to those who are here today can I say to you there is a special place in the hearts of all Australians to the POWs of World War II. We know the sacrifices you made. We can only begin to understand the pain that you endured, but I want you to know that a grateful nation salutes and respects the contribution you made to the peace and the freedom and the tranquillity and the happiness in which Australians live in 1996. Thank you.