

6



PRIME MINISTER

11 November 1996

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP ADDRESS AT AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

Your Excellencies, Sir Phillip Bennett, General Gration, General Gower, members of the Foundation, other distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen.

I first came to this War Memorial in May of 1952. I then paid my first ever visit to Canberra with my parents. I saw Parliament House for the first time in the flesh, so to speak, and I later on came over to the War Memorial. I have to confess, an odd confession given the late event that my life took, but I spent a great deal more time at the War Memorial than I did at Parliament House. I was absolutely captivated by the Memorial, I was fascinated by those dioramas depicting the battles of World War I and the general layout and presentation of the Memorial and I have carried with me since then, and I guess it was kindled in other ways in my upbringing some understanding, I hope, of the enormous sacrifice made by successive generations of Australians in defence of our country. We all can, I suppose, recite the experiences on an occasion like this, none of course more so than those who actually served. But I can remember visiting the cemeteries of northern France and walking through that magnificent Australian War Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux and quite literally being overcome by the sheer immensity, if I can put it that way, of the youth of the people who died in defence of this country. To watch headstone after headstone recording an age of 17, 18, 19, 21, 22. The awful horror and waste and sacrifice of so many young men and women in defence of Australia.

We owe everything that we have to those who died to defend our country. We owe immeasurably to those who put their lives on the line. The maintenance of this War Memorial which I agree stands tall amongst the war memorials of the world, I haven't seen any better and I want to congratulate those who over the years have worked so very hard to keep the War Memorial going. I want to assure you of the ongoing and strong support of the Federal Government and in saying that I know I speak for both

sides of politics, because honouring the Australian war dead is something that transcends all other divides.

May I say, Sir Phillip, that I am very impressed with the quality of the members of the Foundation that you have assembled. You have got together a group of people who have been successful in commerce, who have an understanding of the history of the Memorial and an understanding of the history of the Australian sacrifice in battle all around the world.

So in launching the Foundation I give with that launch the very strong support of the Government. I want to join Sir Phillip in publicly thanking Sir William Deane, Mr Kerry Packer and Mr John Laws for their own exceptional contribution to the success of the Foundation.

A partnership between the Government and private individuals in the corporate sector is to be encouraged in something of this kind. In case anybody needed any reminding all contributions to the Foundation are naturally fully tax deductible and I wouldn't like to let the opportunity go by without making that very obvious point.

Now in one's life you get tied up with a lot of foundations. You get tied up with foundations associated with sporting organisations and I have even been tied up with the odd foundation associated with schools at which one's children are educated. Some of them are very good, some of them are not so good, I think this one is going to be the very best because it is in a case that binds all of us together. It is always a good thing in national life to try to focus on things that unite Australians rather than things that divide them and if there is one thing that unites all Australians it is a deep heartfelt gratitude to those men and women who gave everything to save our country and who gave everything to give us the peace and the tranquillity and the way of life that we enjoy today.

So can I wish you, Sir Phillip, and all of the members of your council great success, great fundraising expertise, which I know you have. And you carry with you the good wishes and the affection of all of the Australian people to honour our war dead is the most uniting and ennobling of causes and one that will attract the support of all Australians.

Thank you.