



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – 68th Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
at the Commemoration Ceremony for the
68th Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea
at the Australian-American Memorial, Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – May 6, 2010)

It is an honor to be with you here today, and to join with you to remember a battle that changed the course of history. Most of the heroes of that battle are long gone, and -- in the rush of our daily lives -- might be forgotten. Yet today, as we do each year, as busy as we all are, we stop to reflect, and to remember those who came before us and the sacrifices they made to secure our freedom.

The Battle of the Coral Sea took place during some of the darkest days of World War II. Just six months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and 3 months after the attack on Darwin, our forces still decimated, many wondered if Japanese expansion could ever be stopped. In Europe the outlook was no brighter. German bombs had been falling on London for two years. Our nations needed a victory and the world needed hope. 68 years ago today at the Battle of the Coral Sea, a group of Australian and American young men gave the free world something to believe in.

Our victory in this battle was far from the end of the war. Heroic campaigns were still to come at Kokoda, Midway, Iwo Jima and many other places. But the Coral Sea was a turning point. It proved that our enemies could be defeated. Perhaps more importantly, it showed the world that our resolve could not be broken and when we stood together nothing could stop us. The battle of the Coral Sea was a major leap forward in the evolution of our partnership. It was the first time the world saw the camaraderie and cooperation that our nations would formally acknowledge just a few years later in the ANZUS treaty. Before that treaty existed, it was already written on the shores of Darwin and aboard the U.S.S. Yorktown and in the Coral Sea and it still binds us together today. It became the cornerstone of our enduring alliance.

Just two months after the battle, on the 4th of July, 1942 the American Minister and Australian Prime Minister laid another cornerstone. This was the cornerstone of the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Canberra, my family's home. That stone was a powerful sign of our long-term commitment to one another. We would not allow a World War to alter our course; in fact, adversity only drew us closer together.



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Construction of the building was slowed, but not stopped by the fighting. The residence was completed the following year, and it still stands today as a potent symbol of our relationship. When I walk by that stone and see “1942” etched on it, I think back to the courage and resolve that our alliance is built on.

Like the residence, our alliance was not finished when the cornerstone was laid. There was still a lot left to build. The relationship we have today was developed steadily over several decades. Our friends and family have fought together in many conflicts and we have emerged from each even closer together. Forged during those uncertain days of World War II, our alliance has ultimately grown into one of the strongest the world has ever seen.

There is still work to do. Even the best houses need to be fixed-up once in a while. As we face new challenges it is important that we never neglect or take for granted what we have. Instead, every day Americans and Australians work together to remold and renew our alliance to meet whatever new challenges we may face.

Even as we move forward together, we also look back and remember that we live together in the shelter and safety of a great alliance that was first built by others who fought and died for our security. And so today we pause and remember those men who made the ultimate sacrifice in the middle of a vast ocean in May 1942.

Our President, who will be visiting Australia next month, appreciates this alliance and the lives that created it. As a man who spent some of his formative years in the Pacific, he knows the Battle of the Coral Sea and its significance. In fact he has prepared a special message commemorating this Anniversary. It is now my honor to read this to you on behalf of the President of the United States and the people of the United States.

I send my warmest greetings to the people of Australia as we commemorate the 68th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

During World War II, formidable battles at sea in the Pacific theater pitted aircraft carrier forces against each other in strategic efforts to control the hemisphere and emerge victorious. The engagement in the Coral Sea, off Australia's eastern coast on May 7 and 8, 1942, holds a unique place in the history of our two nations.

The cooperation between American and Australian naval forces during this battle marked an important evolution in our alliance. This alliance would ultimately help win World War II in the Pacific theater, and was formalized in 1951 through the signing of the ANZUS Treaty. Almost 70 years later, our alliance remains one of the most important and dynamic in the world.



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As we mark the strong bond between our countries, we also remember the courage and selfless dedication of the American and Australian service members who fought this crucial battle 68 years ago. Their legacy-and that of all our men and women in uniform-is the freedom we enjoy today.

In marking this milestone, we pay tribute to the sacrifice and loss we shared at sea, and commit ourselves to building and maintaining a common future of security, prosperity, and freedom. I wish you all the best.

Barack Obama, President of the United States