



The AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN Memorial

Queen Elizabeth II opened the Australian-American Memorial, affectionately known as 'The Eagle', on 16 February 1954. It stands at an imposing 73 metres in the forecourt of the Defence Offices at Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey Square, Russell. The Memorial symbolises both the deep gratitude felt by Australians to American service personnel for their assistance during the World War II (1939-1945), and the close ties which were established during that conflict.

In 1948 the Australian-American Association resolved 'to establish a memorial in Canberra in the form of a monument or statue, to perpetuate the services and sacrifices of the United States forces in Australia and to symbolise Australian-American comradeship in arms'. To give effect to this resolution, a Federal US Memorial Committee was appointed. Among the members of this Committee were the Rt. Hon. R.G. Casey, Federal President of the Australian-American Association (later to become Governor-General of Australia), and Sir Keith Murdoch, Victorian President of the Australian-American Association and father of media owner Rupert Murdoch.

It was thought that a memorial of considerable size and striking design was essential, and an Australia-wide competition was held in 1949. From the 32 entries received, the design by Richard M. Ure won the competition. The winning design provided for an octagonal aluminium column surmounted by an aluminium eagle with wings upswept in a victory sign.

The search for a suitable site for the Australian-American Memorial was extended from 1948 to 1951. Eight different locations were considered before the site now occupied, at the apex of the Kings Avenue, was selected and approved by the Commonwealth Government. The area at the time was bushland.

In 1950 the Prime Minister R.G. Menzies launched a nation-wide appeal to raise the amount of 50 000 pounds, a vast sum at the time, to build the Memorial. Within six weeks, more than 63 000 pounds had been raised. The population of Australia at the time was only eight million people. The Commonwealth Government later made a substantial donation to cover rising costs and the Memorial was finally completed at a cost of 100 000 pounds. Work commenced in December 1952 and was completed in just over one year. Vice President of the United States of America, Richard Nixon, visited the site in the early stages of construction.

The Australian-American Memorial has a hollow octagonal column with a steel framework, which is sheeted with aluminium panels and sandblasted to give the appearance of stone. Nine tons of aluminium was used to cover the shaft. The inside of the column has a system of ladders — 22 inclined and vertical ladders lead to the top of the Memorial. Two murals feature at the base,



one relating the story of American combat in the Pacific and the other a profile map of America in copper. The column is topped with a bronze sphere surmounted by a stylised figure of the American Eagle by the distinguished sculptor, Paul Beadle.

'The Eagle' was constructed in Sydney and transported to Canberra by road. The eagle and sphere alone are 11 metres high. Calm weather conditions were needed to place the eagle on top of the column, which was done by crane at night. The Memorial's height and unique design make it one of Canberra's best-known and most recognised monuments.

From the surplus funds available after the appeal, state memorials were erected in Brisbane and Adelaide.

