

UNITED STATES NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS STATION IN
AUSTRALIA.

Statements in the House of Representatives on Tuesday,
26th March, 1963 by the Prime Minister, the
Right Hon. Sir Robert Menzies.

IN REPLY TO A QUESTION BY MR. WARD, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID :

The honourable member appears not to have kept himself abreast of statements made both inside this Parliament and out of it over a long period. It was as long ago as September, 1960 that the Minister for Defence told the House that discussions had begun in an informal way with the U.S.A. in relation to a naval radio communications station in Australia - not a military base. There has been at no time any proposal for a military base, and there is none now. My colleague told the House about the proposal at the very beginning and, strangely enough, no comment at all emerged from the Opposition. Later, in January 1961, my colleague made a further statement in which he announced that the results of the earlier studies pursued in relation to this subject had proved satisfactory from the technical viewpoint of the U.S. Navy and that further discussions would take place.

Mr. J.R. Fraser - Is this a Dorothy Dix-er?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES: Obviously. I know the honourable member for East Sydney so well that I was sure it was bound to come. On 17th May, 1962, I made a lengthy statement in this House about the same matter. I pointed out a number of things which apparently have conveniently been forgotten by many people. I shall not read all the statement because it is in "Hansard", but I said then, amongst other things, that the purpose of the station was to provide radio communications for U.S. and allied ships over a wide area of the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific.

Mr. Cairns - Does that include submarines?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES : Of course it does. Naval forces happen to include submarines. Then I pointed out the area of land to be affected by the project. I said that it would be about 28 square miles. I also pointed out that this was to be leased to the American authorities, the Commonwealth Government acquiring the land and being the landlord, if I may put it in that way, and therefore retaining its own sovereignty.

I said, at the same time, that the maximum practicable use would be made of Australian contractors, labour and materials. It is a pity that one should have to repeat the statement now, but I went on to say that arrangements would be made for consultation between the two Governments on matters relating to the station and its use. I said that the facilities of the station would be available to the Australian forces. Finally, I pointed out - and this again is sometimes forgotten - that the establishment of the station was within the spirit of co-operation envisaged in the ANZUS Treaty, under which the parties agreed to co-ordinate their efforts for collective defence for the preservation of peace and security.

On 6th March of this year my colleague, the Minister for Defence, made a further quite elaborate statement. I shall not read it all, but after pointing out a number of the features of this communications station, he said -

"Following consultation with the Western Australian Government, the land required for the project will be acquired by the Commonwealth Government."

He set out the area and said once more that sovereignty would remain with Australia. He then said -

".....the technical facilities of the station will be available to the Australian Armed Forces. This will contribute significantly to Australia's defence capability, particularly in the light of the Government's recent decision to establish an R.A.N. submarine service."

He added -

".....the establishment of this station will provide improved communications for allied surface ships and submarines over a wide area of the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific, and will make a highly significant contribution to general allied military capability in the area."

Then for good measure, two days later he made a further statement to a similar effect.

I have mentioned these matters because there has been a disposition in some quarters to say that the House has not been told about them. The House has been told. It has been told all that was available to be told. A number of the details of the agreement are as yet unconcluded. They are not matters of massive importance. There are certain details of the transaction which are still under discussion. In fact, only this morning my colleague, the Attorney-General, has been debating two or three outstanding points. When these details have been worked out and this matter, which is most important from the point of view of the United States of America, the Allied point of view and our own point of view, can be put in hand, we propose, so that there may be no doubt outside about the validity of what we are doing, to annexe the agreement in its full and final terms to a bill and to invite the Parliament to ratify it. That bill will be introduced as soon as possible. I do not mean within the next day or two.

Mr. Calwell - Within a couple of months?

SIR ROBERT MENZIES: I should hope it would be before then. I shall be very disappointed if the bill cannot be introduced within the next two or three weeks. That will give every member of the House an opportunity to re-read the statements already made and to arm himself with various arguments about the matter.

IN REPLY TO A QUESTION BY MR. WHITLAM, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID :

Certainly Australia. This is not something that will displace the ANZUS Pact. It is, on the contrary, something that rather tends to grow out of it, and when the agreement is presented to the Parliament ...

Mr. Haylen - Oh!

SIR ROBERT MENZIES: I know that honourable members opposite have never quite cared for the ANZUS Pact. We on this side and the Australian people care for it. When the agreement is presented to the Parliament, honourable members will find that it refers back specifically to the ANZUS Agreement and derives from that a very fine reason for stepping forward into this act which will give to the United States of America - our allies for all these purposes - the right to establish a communications centre. Honourable members opposite have been so beguiling themselves with ideas of a radio station surrounded by nuclear weapons, and a naval base in the vicinity, that they have simply forgotten to read what has been said about the proposed station or to understand what the real nature of the proposal is.
