

OPENING OF THE TOWNSVILLE ARMY BARRACKS

TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND

29TH JULY, 1966

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Harold Holt

Major-General, Mr. Premier, my Ministerial Colleague, Chief of the General Staff, Mr. Mayor, Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen and all distinguished guests assembled here today:

This, as I said this morning at the first of the three functions which are making my day in Townsville such a memorable one for me, is a very happy occasion. Here we have symbolised in this morning's ceremony a great new university; the first university in the tropics of Australia. And now here this afternoon, we have what my colleague the Minister for the Army has just described to you in some detail as the outstanding military establishment to be set up in Australia, with Townsville as its home.

I think Townsville can claim itself fortunate to have achieved this quite remarkable double. It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword and I suppose that argument still continues. Well Townsville has both, and Australia needs both.

I don't know whether over the long period of years ahead, the University of Townsville will establish itself as dominant over the military establishment. I suspect there will be encounters of an enterprising kind occasionally between the inhabitants of one establishment and the inhabitants of the other. But I hope nothing occurs which would be contrary to good order and discipline in either of these major establishments we are setting up here in this great Townsville area, the show place of the northern tropic part of Australia.

This in a way symbolises what is going on throughout the Commonwealth at this time. You and I can consider ourselves fortunate, I believe, to be living in our country in a period in which it is going through an exciting phase of development and national progress. Included in that progress has been the necessity to give greater emphasis to potentialities of the northern part of Australia. Historically, and for various economic reasons, the development of the south has proceeded to a greater extent, but we recognise that if this continent is to be held secure, if we are to develop its potentialities, then we must press on vigorously with northern development. What could more clearly express that determination than these two major establishments, one in the academic field and the other in that of military security.

Now, the Queenslander, and in particular the Northern Queenslander, has always been more conscious of the defence needs of Australia than people in any other part of the Commonwealth, and this proceeds, no doubt, from your geographical position. You are more conscious and sensitive to the fact that you are close to the danger areas of the north. It is much the same distance from Saigon to Darwin, for example, as it is from Brisbane to Perth, and those who live in the northern part of Australia realise their proximity to the danger spots of Asia. And so it is appropriate that there should be established here in this northern city of Australia a modern, large, military establishment.

You may be interested to know, Mr. Premier, if you haven't already been told this, that the decision to establish a base

here was not primarily a military decision. In fact, I can perhaps for once be forgiven if I publicly narrate a military secret. But the military advice to us when it became necessary as a result of the expansion to which the Minister for the Army has referred - to set up new military bases - the military advice which reached us was that this should be done in the Mornington Peninsula of Victoria. There were some good technical reasons for that, and it facilitated co-operation with other services and it was probably a considerably cheaper way of getting the military result than a decision to establish a military base here. But when we came to consider this in Cabinet, we felt that there were other factors which outweighed the purely military considerations - the development of the north, the security of the north, the fact that the people of the north had a right to feel that in their area of the world big things were moving which were contributing to the growth of Australia.

These were some of the considerations which came into our minds when we considered the technical problems. And so the decision was taken, and I am sure it was a decision we in Australia will never regret. Certainly Townsville will never regret it because it will bring to your community - joining the other members of the Australian Services already here - a substantial community of people. For the most part, they will be young, lively and vigorous people with their families, and they will undoubtedly add to the diversity and richness of the community life of Townsville.

In terms of trade, looking at these things in an economic sense, undoubtedly this will add to the population in a considerable way because there will be those coming to the district who service the people who are in a military establishment. This is a cumulative process whereby the needs of one have to be satisfied by the services and activities of others. And so you will find a secondary growth for Townsville from the establishment of the barracks here.

But today we think beyond that to the contribution which this barracks and the people who will be manning it make to the future of Australia. We have, as I stressed this morning, only a small population in this vast continent. So we must contrive as best we can that the people of Australia are people of quality, are people fully trained for the tasks which they are to perform, and that they manifest inside Australia and out of it the best characteristics which we believe make up the Australian temperament. And in what better environment for these purposes could young men be trained in the service of Australia than in this sunny, stimulating, invigorating atmosphere that they have here in Townsville.

Now, it is part of my duty today to give a name to these barracks. We gave a great deal of careful thought to this because this in itself is a contribution to morale and enthusiasm that develops in a particular military venue. When we discussed the problem, we thought what could be more fitting than that we should select the name of a very distinguished Queenslander, a great fighting soldier and more than that, a great fighting administrator. These barracks will be named after a native-born Queenslander who reached the highest level open to him in Australian military service. He became Chief of the General Staff and later Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the highest body in the military services of this country. From there, having given distinguished military service, both fighting service in time of war and this service of leadership and administration in a period of peace, he became the first Australian-born Governor

of the State of Queensland. And so it is with pride, and great satisfaction, that I name these barracks Lavarack Barracks, after Sir John Lavarack, the former Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, and the former Governor of your State. I am sure it is a choice you will all applaud.

And now as I proceed to the formal task of unveiling the plaque which will name the barracks, may I on behalf of myself and my colleagues of the Government, congratulate all those who have played a part in promoting this great project, the work of the Minister and his colleagues in the Army, the co-operation which we have received, and for which we are suitably appreciative, from you, Mr. Premier, and from you, Mr. Mayor. This teamwork is enabling the work here to go ahead expeditiously and satisfactorily. I only hope that I will be able to come back year by year and see the progress which will have been made both here and at the university. It will be a constant attraction to be added to the many others I feel in the pull that North Queensland makes to me when I am in the south.

Thanking you for your co-operation, I conclude with my best wishes to all who serve in this establishment. May Lavarack Barracks make a permanent contribution to the security of Australia, to the morale of Australian military forces, and may it earn for itself a reputation of pride which will mark it out amongst the great military establishments of the world.

\*\*\*\*\*