

OPENING OF TULLAMARINE AIRPORT  
MELBOURNE, Vic.



1 JULY 1970

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

Mr. Premier, My Lord Mayor, Parliamentary Colleagues and Ladies and Gentlemen:

Just about six years ago, on a very dank and drizzling and miserable September day, in my capacity as Minister for Works, I drove the bulldozer which turned the first sod for the construction of this airport.

And very glad indeed I was to do it for two reasons. One was that it began construction of an airport sooner than it had been thought construction would begin. And the other was that I had escaped the consequences of taking a rather risky gamble.

You see, what happens when edifices of this kind are constructed by the Government is that after the basic decision, the Department of Works prepares general plans and then those general plans are submitted to the Parliamentary Committee on Public Works. And only after the Parliamentary Committee on Public Works has agreed to the general plans are the detailed plans proceeded with. This is a very good and a very proper way of going on. But in this particular case I felt it would add an inordinate time to the date on which construction should begin, so I instructed the Department of Works to assume that the Parliamentary Public Works Committee would agree to the general plans and to go right ahead with the detailed plans. This was a very reprehensible thing to do and I hope it will never be repeated by any Minister for Works! But the end result was, because the Committee did agree with the general plans, that we were able to start much sooner, and I was able to avoid the embarrassment which would have occurred if the Committee had not agreed to what we had put forward. Those were the two reasons why I was glad to be able on that day to begin this construction.

And I remember then that the whole 5,000 acres of farmland which was to become this airport gave the impression of being nothing but a sea of mud and a rather bleak and a rather repellent cold rural scene. But now today, Tullamarine... I like the name "Tullamarine"... I'll have more to say about that later. - but now today Tullamarine and that farmland has been transformed into Melbourne airport. It has become a significant addition to the aviation maps of the world, an international airport - international because those who planned it were progressive and imaginative in their thinking - international in size and its sophistication, and international because it will provide truly international services.

So today Tullamarine phases Victoria into the international airline circuit and offers facilities to travellers as a port of arrival and of departure equal to any facilities offered anywhere in the world. One more window on the world for Australia, one more window through which the world can look at Australia, and for that reason, I think, a big day for us.

This, as you were told by Senator Cotton, has been a record year for Australian civil aviation. . . . two international terminals completed in our largest cities within weeks of each other and record numbers of passengers carried. And this year we celebrate fifty years of civil aviation and the fiftieth birthday of Qantas - Queensland and Northern Territory Air Service which, you may remember, began with these old machines looking as if they were tied together with wire, in Queensland and in the Northern Territory, and which today gives its name to our international service.

We have come a long way in half a century to rank as we do amongst the first six nations of the world, and we can take pride in that. But in taking pride in it, let us look back a little, let us look back to past examples of services to aviation, because looking back to past examples may sustain a vision for the future. Let us remember men like Hudson Fysh, Kingsford Smith, Bert Hinkler and a host of other Australians, and let us never forget that they were the first to cross the great oceans of the world, except the North Atlantic, and even there Harry Hawker almost made it. These were the men who blazed the trails across hitherto untravelled skies.

So this airport stands today as a monument, as I see it, to the men of the past and it stands as a promise for what we can do in the future. There are no limits to the distance we can go if we plan well, if we build well as I think we have done here and if we are inspired to venture in the years to come, as the pioneers of aviation of whom I have spoken were inspired to venture in their time.

Sir, before I declare this airport open, there are two things I would like to say. When I declare it open, I am going to call it Melbourne Airport, and that is what it will officially be. But I hope and I believe - and this is a personal hope and belief - that that lovely liquid name "Tullamarine" will not disappear from our vocabulary, and that around the world Tullamarine - Melbourne Airport in brackets, - or if you like: Melbourne Airport - Tullamarine in brackets, will be known by names such as La Guardia or Heathrow or whatever it may be.

So when I do declare it open, I do it in the hope that it will be known not only as Melbourne Airport but as Tullamarine and that as Tullamarine, it will be an airport able to operate for seven days a week and for twenty-four hours a day. And I hope and believe this will be so if for no other reason than when there is an investment of this size then the more use that it got from it the better it is for everybody.

And there is no need for an airport not to operate, provided those living around it are not harassed by the noise of such operation. Those living around Tullamarine now, I believe, would not be so harassed, and it is our intention as a government that this airport should so operate, subject in the future to just this one qualification that the State authorities concerned see that there is not built up around the perimeter of this airport housing settlements which, in the future, might lead to great noise discomfort to those living in them.

Having the airport, let us have a buffer zone around it, and it then will operate as an international airport should.

Ladies and gentlemen, I declare Melbourne Airport open and unveil the plaque which records the event.