

MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND GENERAL DALY

Statement by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

An article in The Australian today purported to report details of a conversation between General Sir Thomas Daly and the Prime Minister.

Allegations in the article that General Sir Thomas Daly criticised the Minister for Defence are untrue.

On Monday 1 March I learnt that stories were circulating in the Press Gallery alleging that serious criticisms of the Army were being made by "Defence sources".

Those criticisms were to the effect that it had been necessary to call in J. I. O. to report on the Army's activities, that the Army was seeking to "sabotage" civil action, and that the Army had operated outside Phuoc Toi Province without proper permission. According to press rumours General Sir Thomas Daly was named in these reports.

On hearing this, and on hearing that a newspaper proposed to publish these rumours the next day, I rang Sir Thomas Daly and asked if he had heard of these canards.

Sir Thomas said he had not and I asked him to call at once.

The purpose of this was to warn Sir Thomas Daly of what was being said. It was also to make three things clear.

The first was that all there was to go on was rumours in the Press Gallery and there was no indication as to whether there was any truth in the stories that these rumours had originated from Defence sources.

The second was to make it clear that I knew the allegations against the Army were false, that I had the utmost confidence in the Army and its commanders and that I wanted Sir Thomas Daly and the Army to know this.

And the third was that if these false allegations against the Army appeared publicly they would be denied at the highest level. We did not propose to allow servicemen to be subjected to such unjustified criticism without fully defending them.

This has been done, unequivocally, by the Minister for Defence, and by a joint statement issued by the Chief of the General Staff and the Minister for Defence.

At no time did Sir Thomas Daly "denounce" the Minister for Defence or accuse him of disloyalty to the Army or to the Army Minister.