



## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY, 6 JUNE 1982

### OPENING OF CONNELLAN AIRPORT

It really is I think a very great occasion and there could not be a more fitting way to honour somebody who has done a great deal for the Northern Territory and a great deal for Australia over most of his lifetime. Eddie Connellan is probably best known obviously for his contribution to aviation in the Northern Territory. Maybe not so many people know that he has also been in the forefront of pastoral activities, water conservation and disease control in the Territory, always looking to doing things better than they were done in the past and contributing not only to his own operation, to the broader knowledge of how to do things in this part of the world.

Tamie and I are delighted that it has been possible to be here and to come here on this occasion and particularly so because the Airport has been named in a way that honours the work that Eddie Connellan has done through the decades.

It was the relationship between Eddie Connellan and another great Australian going back to the pre-war years that as I understand it lead to it all. I understand that John McEwan in 1938 or 1939 said to Eddie on one occasion why don't you establish an airline and provide some services to people that might not otherwise have them. If my researchers are correct, that is where a large part of it began. Air services were established, airports developed, places for airfields picked out and at the peak the service went to about 130 or more locations right around the Northern Territory.

It is worth noting that in the earlier years the mail carried was a much larger part, much heavier in weight than freight. I was trying to point out that the need for communications between people was obviously very great because the weight of mail carried in the early days was greater than the freight carried. That obviously tells its own story and the need for communications between people who lived in the Territory and who had their links and their families maybe outside the Territory.

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I think again you would all know that now we are getting to the stage where we are seeking to establish a communication system where all people in Australia will have the same kind of communication as those who live in Melbourne or Sydney and when the new satellite is established we believe that that will be so. That is the mark of time and the changes in technology that make that kind of thing possible. The original services provided by Eddie Connellan and his team provided something that was much needed in many remote parts of the Northern Territory.

This cairn behind me is I understand it, the propellor from the first de Havilland to fly to Ayers Rock. That again, has its own story to tell in terms of aviation and in terms of the history of the Northern Territory.

Paul Everingham with the kind of vision that he has brought to the Government of the Northern Territory since independence is obviously banking on a growth in tourism. He has been prepared to back his belief with dollars and the Northern Territory Government is spending large sums in helping to promote tourism and this is obviously a large part of it right here and the Yulara Village that you are going to be visiting a little later on this morning. The number of people coming to the Territory, the dollars they are spending is growing as each year passes. A large part of them come from overseas and with the many unique features of the Northern Territory in Ayers Rock, the Olgas, Kakadu National Park, there are sites of great and enormous value to all Territorians and indeed to people wherever they may be. It will be one of the vital and growing industries in the Northern Territory, I have not the slightest doubt at all.

In passing, I think it is worth making the point that the kind of advances that have occurred in the Territory over the last four years - at the next election I am going to try and get Paul to give me a plug too - just would not have come if an administration had remained centred on Canberra. You need people with a faith and belief in their own part of the world, prepared to go out and back that with their time and with energy and with their vision. That is very much what has happened. You have only got to look at the changes around Alice Springs, the changes across the Territory since independence, since self-government to know that there is a new life, a new hope and a new faith compared to the days, when however well they did it, Ministers and public servants from Canberra seemed to determine everything that happened in the Territory.

If the Federal Government has done anything for the Northern Territory, the most important thing it has done, has been to say well you look after your own affairs, we will work in partnership and do what we can to help, but we believe you can

do much better because it is your futures that you are governing, your futures that you are determining. We believe that you can do much better than we ever could. In a sense the unleashing of the talents and the initiative of the Territorians in terms of their own government has been an enormous advance for the Territory.

Eddie I would like to thank you for everything that you have done for aviation in the Northern Territory. It has been an enormous contribution and indelibly written in the history of the Territory and the history of aviation in Australia. There are some parts of that history that might not be all that is in the records of the Department of Civil Aviation. I have here an authentic minute which was signed on 4 December 1957 by Shane Paltridge and Don Anderson and one or two others. Some parts of it said well I have never tried to put a swifty over the Department of Civil Aviation and Eddie has signed it, that's right at the bottom and witnessed by a number of people. I guess it is true. The word try is the word that was wrong because whatever Eddie did, he did not just try to do, he succeeded in doing and I think he was probably ahead of the Department of Civil Aviation at every step of the way. He might never have tried, but that has got an implication of failure and Eddie never failed.

There was another minute involving the late George Taylor who many people here would remember, with his association with Eddie and whatever and there was a meeting discussing Connellan Airways and what was going to happen in the future. George Taylor thought he would get it off to a bright start by saying, I hope those who don't like me using the language, will forgive me, but this is in the record so I have got to be accurate, aren't you the fat little bugger I scrubbed at Pearce a few years ago? That happened to be Shane Paltridge who was failed 15 years before by George Taylor of Pearce Elementary Flying School. How Shane Paltridge ever wanted to do anything for Connellan Airways after that, I just don't know. That might be just one more area where Eddie stayed one or two steps ahead of the ministers and the departments and no matter how hard the ministers and departments tried, I am sure they were never able to catch up.

As a result of it all, and as a small part of the total fabric, there is this great airport, great terminal building which is going to stand as a permanent and fitting reminder of the work that Eddie Connellan has done for the Northern Territory.

I have very great pleasure indeed in declaring Connellan Airport officially open.

I am sorry I forgot to say something that I should have. Some time ago, always looking to the future and always looking to the need to keep adequate services to the remoter areas that

could not necessarily afford to do so by themselves. Eddie Connellan approached the Federal Government to see if we would give tax deductibility to a special airways trust that would help to provide and support services to some of the remoter parts of the Territory which might not otherwise be able to sustain services under normal commercial conditions. We have provided tax deductibility for that trust. I don't know if Eddie has got somebody around here with a receipt book, but donations are tax deductible. I believe again it shows the kind of concern that Eddie has for providing services to people in the Northern Territory and I am glad that the Federal Government has been able to co-operate.

This is a very unique arrangement. I don't think any other arrangement of the same kind has been given the privilege of tax deductibility and if it wasn't for the persuasive powers of Eddie Connellan and of his reputation, I am quite sure it would not have succeeded.

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