



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF RAAF BASE TINDAL
KATHERINE - 31 MARCH 1989**

Administrator,
Chief Minister,
High Commissioners,
New Zealand Minister of Defence, Bob Tizard,
Parliamentary colleagues,
Chief of the Air Staff,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Forty-seven years ago, Australians were facing the gravest dangers and the greatest challenges of our history.

Nineteen forty-two was in many ways our most perilous year. Our very survival was threatened by military attack and invasion.

After Pearl Harbour, with the stunning advances of the Japanese armed forces through South-East Asia and the Pacific, and with the bulk of Australia's own armies engaged in the struggle in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, Australia's vulnerability - indeed, our virtual defencelessness - was exposed as never before.

On February 15, 1942, the fortress of Singapore that Australian defence planners had relied upon as our principal guarantor of safety, fell to the Japanese.

Four days later, for the first time in our history, Australian soil was struck by an enemy as Japanese air forces attacked Darwin.

Amidst the confusion and horror of that attack, the defenders of Darwin displayed many individual acts of heroism.

But perhaps none better illustrates the determination and the grit of the Australian armed forces than the actions of Wing Commander Archie Tindal.

On the morning of 19 February, as the Darwin RAAF Base was under attack, Wing Commander Tindal manned a machine gun mounted on top of a trench, and kept up a steady rate of fire as the air strike continued.

When he was killed by a cannon shell he became the first member of the RAAF to be killed in combat on the Australian mainland.

It is in his memory, and in recognition of his courage, that the Base is named. I have just presented a painting depicting Tindal's gallantry which will hang in the entrance of the Headquarters Building.

I note also with pleasure that his sister, Mrs Elizabeth Mitchell, is with us today to mark this ceremony.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are many lessons to be learned from the events of 1942.

It was a dark year - but the fact is that in the long months and years following that first attack on Darwin we did eventually repulse the enemy from our shores and from our region.

We did it with the incomparable leadership and self-sacrifice of Prime Minister John Curtin.

We did it with the valour of our fighting men who after a brilliant record of service against the European Axis nations, were brought home to defend Australia in the Pacific theatre.

We did it with the generous and courageous assistance of our allies, especially the Americans who stood shoulder to shoulder with us in the worst of the fighting.

The grim lessons of the Second World War brought home to Australians the vulnerability of our nation to attack and external threat.

We learnt also that Australia cannot abrogate its responsibility to provide for its own security: ultimately we Australians are responsible for our own destiny.

With today's ceremony, we are proving that those realities of our strategic situation, so dramatically highlighted in 1942, have been well and truly understood and are, at last, being acted upon.

For the first time, as a result of the Government's 1987 Defence White Paper, Australia's defence policy now places full and proper emphasis on the development and maintenance of a self-reliant defence capability.

In addition, our alliance arrangements and our firm friendships with countries in the region provide the framework within which we can not only deter aggression against Australia but also promote the security of our region and, ultimately, of the globe.

Fundamental to all this is the maintenance of a modern and effective defence force.

In planning for defence self-reliance, the Government's defence policy has focused on the need to develop and maintain a credible force able to mount operations in Australia's area of direct military interest.

In particular, the White Paper clearly emphasised the crucial need to protect our northern approaches.

That is what RAAF Base Tindal is all about.

So with this ceremony we are marking the inauguration of one of the most important defence bases Australia has developed in many decades.

RAAF Base Tindal is the permanent base for a squadron of F/A-18 aircraft - a major component of Australia's Tactical Fighter Force and the most powerful operational unit in our far North.

Tindal provides tangible proof of the technological strength and the strategic orientation on which Australia's defence planning will be based into the 21st century.

More particularly, it is concrete evidence of the key role which the RAAF will continue to play in preserving our national security in the North.

It is, accordingly, appropriate that this major RAAF facility be officially commissioned into service today, the anniversary of the establishment of the Australian Air Force - as it was then called - on 31 March 1921.

For the Air Force, Tindal is the central and most important component of an arc of air bases being developed across northern Australia. To the west lies the bare-base RAAF Base Curtin at Derby which I opened last year. Further west is the airfield at Learmonth. To the east, in addition to our defence facilities at Townsville, plans are well advanced for the construction of a bare-base airfield on Cape York Peninsula.

In addition to these bases, work is proceeding as a matter of high priority on the development of an Over-the-Horizon Radar network to cover our northern approaches.

This surveillance capacity, combined with the substantial airpower which the RAAF will be able to provide from Tindal and through the other bare-bases in the North, will comprise a key element of Australia's ability to protect our security: the ability to monitor, identify and, if necessary, intercept air and sea traffic across thousands of kilometres of coastline.

In short, the development of RAAF Base Tindal as the northern home-base for a fighter squadron is a major expression of the Government's defence policy and our commitment to placing greater emphasis on our defence capabilities in Northern Australia.

Earlier last year, as I am sure most of you are aware, our remaining Mirage fighters based at Butterworth in Malaysia were returned to Australia. Their participation in Five Power air defence exercises will be replaced by annual deployments of F/A-18 Hornets from Australia to Malaysia and Singapore for periods of not less than 16 weeks.

The first such deployment occurred last in September for the largest air defence exercise in the history of the Five Power Defence Arrangements. During such exercises the aircraft are operationally assigned to the Five Power Integrated Air Defence System.

All aircraft of the RAAF tactical fighter force are of course available to contribute to the activities of the Integrated Air Defence System. Our policy is to give all elements of our fighter force experience with our Five Power partners. Indeed, 3 Squadron based at Williamstown, is currently deployed to Singapore on such training.

But 75 Squadron based here at Tindal is particularly important in providing Australia's capability to meet our commitments to the Integrated Air Defence System, because from here they are only a few hours flying time from South East Asia.

In assigning 75 squadron to the Integrated Air Defence System we are demonstrating the strength and durability of Australia's commitment to the Five Power Defence Arrangements, and to the security of our neighbourhood.

The value of Tindal in underpinning our Five Power commitments shows how the Government's policy of expanding our defence capabilities in Australia's north and west helps us to play a larger role in South East Asia.

Bases like Tindal, and the expanding Naval presence in the West, allow the Australian Defence Forces to deploy more forces more quickly to South East Asia, in support of our friends and allies there, than we have ever been able to do before.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The significance of this new base should not be estimated solely in strategic terms. The contribution it will make to the economic development of Northern Australia is a second, and very important, element of Tindal's role.

Since October 1984, when I officiated at a ceremony to commemorate the commencement of works on this site, the Commonwealth has spent \$230 million in the Katherine area to complete stage 1 of the project. This figure does not include the value of the Hornet aircraft, their spares and other associated equipment, which will be based at Tindal.

Stage 2 of the Tindal Base, to replace interim facilities and to extend some stage 1 works, has been approved by the Parliamentary Works Committee and will be funded by the Government. Planning for stage 3 is well advanced.

Tindal will also provide a significant injection of funds into the local economy. If account is taken of the flow on effect of the RAAF presence, approximately \$11 million will be spent each year in the Katherine area and some \$14 million in the Northern Territory as a whole.

The stationing of large numbers of Defence personnel and their dependants in the Katherine area must, of course, have a significant impact on the local community.

The Country Task Force of Government MPs visited Katherine in 1987 and identified the need for additional civilian infrastructure to support the dramatically increased population here. The Federal Government will do what we can to support Local and Territory Government initiatives to address these needs arising from the establishment of the Tindal Base.

The close cooperation achieved between the Federal Government, the Northern Territory and Local Governments and the local communities has been a key ingredient in the successful establishment of RAAF Base Tindal.

I also offer my congratulations to the many unions involved, the contractors, the RAAF, and the coordinating authority which drew all these efforts together - Australian Construction Services.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have spoken today about the crucial strategic and economic role which RAAF Base Tindal will play over the coming years.

Tindal's success in fulfilling those roles will depend ultimately on the dedication and commitment of the individual men and women who make up the RAAF.

It's important to remember that fact - and to understand the many difficulties which service life places on those individuals and their families.

The Government remains firm in its commitment to give full priority to addressing the special needs and concerns of our service men and women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have great pleasure in declaring Royal Australian Air Force Base Tindal open.

In doing so I extend my best wishes to all those who will operate this base and I express my complete confidence in your abilities to fulfill the heavy responsibilities that await you.
