



# PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER  
OPENING OF COUNTER-TERRORIST TRAINING FACILITIES  
SPECIAL AIR SERVICE REGIMENT  
SWANBOURNE - 3 OCTOBER 1991**

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General Gratton,  
Colonel Lewis,  
distinguished guests,  
ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to open the Special Air Service Regiment's counter-terrorist training facilities.

Over the years I have heard a great deal about the Regiment's capabilities and it is reassuring to see at first-hand your high level of skills and expertise.

As we are all aware, there is a certain aura about the Special Air Service Regiment.

The Regiment is recognised as a highly trained force that Australians will be able to rely upon in the most exceptional of circumstances. Its worldwide reputation has been earned the hard way, through years of training and commitment, and from the numerous sacrifices which are part of becoming a highly dedicated and professional military force.

This Government regards terrorism as a horrifying and senseless phenomenon which is beyond justification, regardless of the circumstances.

Australia must be prepared to act resolutely where terrorism threatens innocent life, and, as a final resort, to sanction the use of force.

While Australia has, in many ways, been lucky in avoiding terrorism, we have not escaped unscathed. We cannot assume on the basis of geography or some misplaced sense of optimism that Australia is removed from the world of the terrorist.

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And as the Gulf War demonstrated, the threat of terrorism is with us and will remain with us for a long time to come. As a Government we must, and will, continue to face up to this threat and ensure that Australians are protected from terrorism.

We will continue to work towards the peaceful resolution of conflict, wherever it may occur. We will continue to be at the forefront of nations seeking international co-operation in the fight against terrorism. We will continue to support international moves to ensure that terrorists are held accountable for their actions. And we will continue to ensure that Australia has a balanced and effective defence against terrorism.

And in particular, we will continue to look to the Special Air Service Regiment to provide a counter-terrorist capability that is the equal of any in the world.

Australia has come a long way since the tragic Hilton bombing incident in 1978. The Commonwealth, in close co-operation with the States and Territories, has worked solidly at developing sensible and balanced counter-terrorist arrangements. This was clearly demonstrated during the Gulf crisis, when Australia's counter-terrorist authorities operated effectively at a higher level of alert for an extended period of time.

It is of great satisfaction to the Government that no Australian suffered injury as a result of terrorism during the Gulf War.

These Special Training Facilities form an important element of Australia's counter-terrorism arrangements. Their very existence and the skills which they hone may well contribute in a measurable way to deter an act of terrorism. They are also concrete evidence of this Government's continued commitment to deal firmly and realistically with the threat of terrorism.

And while I sincerely hope that the skills of the Regiment will never be called upon for this purpose, I recognise that a highly trained and suitably equipped counter-terrorist force is an unfortunate necessity in an unpredictable and often violent world.

Ladies and Gentlemen

These world class training facilities represent, in many ways, a quantum leap in technology. They are a tribute to the ingenuity and imagination of the designers and engineers from both the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Construction Service.

We must never forget, however, that these facilities are secondary to the men and women of this Regiment. It is to you that Australia will look, as a last resort when everything else has failed, to resolve a terrorist incident. In such circumstances this country will need your expertise and your professionalism.

I am confident that, should the need ever arise, you will live up to these high expectations.

I am also confident that as Australia moves towards the twenty-first century, we will continue to have a counter-terrorist capability that is amongst the foremost in the world.

I am confident of that because of two key qualities which are characteristic of the Australian Defence Force as a whole, but which are particularly reflected in the Special Air Service Regiment, and among that elite most clearly in the Tactical Assault Group. Those two characteristics are the real foundations of the fine new facilities we are to open here today.

The first of those characteristics is great dedication to technical expertise. Throughout the ADF, technical expertise is a matter not just of pride but of life and death. But as we have seen here this morning, nowhere is that more literally true than in the Tactical Assault Group. My government places confidence in the SAS because we know that it can do its supremely difficult job so well. This is a profession of perfectionists; near enough is simply not good enough. These buildings are a testament to their commitment to perfecting the skills which we in the Government, and which all Australians, rely on them to maintain at a razor pitch.

But like perfection in any field, the extraordinary skills of the men and women of the Special Air Service Regiment are not perfected without great cost. To all of them, the effort in sheer hard work, punishing training, demanding exercises, and the psychological strains unique to their profession constitute an extraordinary price to pay. So all of them, all of you here today, show to an extraordinary degree the second of the two characteristic qualities of the ADF which I mentioned - the quality of dedication and sacrifice.

But as Colonel Lewis has said for some the sacrifice has been even greater. Their dedication exemplifies your commitment. Their spirit animates your regiment. It is therefore altogether fitting that this new facility should bear the name of one of their number: Sergeant Ewan Miller.

I am honoured to declare open the Sergeant Ewan Miller Special Training Facility; and to those of you who will work here, my best wishes, and more importantly the best wishes of the people of Australia.