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PRIME MINISTER TO OPEN TIDBINBILLA

DEEP-SPACE TRACKING STATION

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Statement by the Hon. Allen Fairhall,  
Minister for Supply.

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The Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies, K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P., will officially open the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration Deep-Space Tracking Station at Tidbinbilla, near Canberra, at 11am on Friday, March 19 next.

This was announced today by the Minister for Supply (Mr. Allen Fairhall).

The official ceremony will be attended by senior representatives of the United States Government, NASA and its agencies, the Department of Supply and associated Commonwealth Departments, and representatives of Australian business, science and industry.

The Deep-space Instrumentation Facility at Tidbinbilla, 28 miles south-west of Canberra, became operational on February 1 this year when it began its first task in tracking the Mariner 4 deep-space probe which NASA launched on a scientific and photographic mission to Mars on November 28, 1964.

When the spacecraft makes its closest approach to Mars, about 5,000 miles from the planet on July 14, its trip through space will have exceeded 325 million miles.

The Tidbinbilla station, together with other stations in the NASA Deep-space Network (Goldstone, in California, and Johannesburg, South Africa) will continue tracking the Mariner 4 spacecraft till its mission is accomplished.

BACKGROUND.

The station at Tidbinbilla is the fifth tracking facility to be established in Australia by NASA to date and is the first of three tracking installations programmed for the Australian Capital Territory. The first tracking facility at Muchea (W.A.) has been closed down.

Two tracking installations have been established near Woomera (South Australia) and another installation is operating at Carnarvon (Western Australia).

In the Canberra region, a second tracking installation is under construction on behalf of NASA for tracking scientific earth satellites in the Orroral Valley, and Government-to-Government agreement has been reached on a station at Honeysuckle Creek to support the United States Apollo lunar manned spaceflight project.

The stations are being established under a Government-to-Government co-operative agreement to facilitate spaceflight operations being conducted by the United States.

These stations form integral parts of worldwide tracking networks set up under the auspices of NASA. The Department of Supply is responsible for implementing Australia's commitment in respect of the Australian stations, and this responsibility is discharged through the Weapons Research Establishment.

The Tidbinbilla station has been constructed to increase the capability of the Deep Space Network to meet the additional requirements brought about by expansion of the deep-space exploration programme.

NASA sponsored the Tidbinbilla tracking station and assigned responsibility for overall technical control of it to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of the California Institute of Technology.

In keeping with the policy of the Commonwealth Government to utilise the capabilities of private industry in the space research activities being carried out in Australia on behalf of NASA, a contract was let to SpaceTrack Pty. Ltd., a jointly owned subsidiary of Hawker de Havilland (Aust.) Pty. Ltd., Elliott-Automation Pty. Ltd., and Australian Electrical Industries Pty. Ltd. for the operation and maintenance of the station under the direction of a Department of Supply Station Director.

The Station Director is Mr. R.A. Leslie, of Weapons Research Establishment (Department of Supply); Mr. M.S. Glenn is the Jet Propulsion Laboratory resident officer, and the Station Manager is Mr. John Galbraith, of SpaceTrack Pty. Ltd.

Monday, February 22, 1965 P.M.

CANBERRA A.C.T.