The main purpose of my visit was to gain first hand knowledge of the current conditions under which our troops are operating in Vietnam. Thus, in Vietnam most of my time was spent in the Task Force area at Nui Dat, with the Logistic Support Force at Da Nang and with members of the Australian Army Training Team in the area south of the demilitarised zone.

I found all Australian troops in Vietnam to be in very good heart. Morale is high and they are continuing to perform, as one would expect, a most useful role. In Vung Tau province reasonable security has been established for 80 to 90% of the population.

In the last 12 months roads have been opened to traffic and commerce. Thus, it is now possible to do much more for the welfare of the people in the province.

Our own Civil Affairs Unit has been expanded as you know and is settling in well. It will continue with the same kinds of tasks that have been undertaken over the last 12 months but on a larger scale. At this stage it is too early to make a final judgement but I am hopeful that the work of this Unit can be expanded by finding room for one or two specialists not presently included in the team.

There are five Revolutionary Development Teams working in our province area. These teams consist of about 59 people who are trained for their tasks by the South Vietnamese at a special school in Vung Tau. So far about 30,000 members of Revolutionary Development Teams have been trained in this way and these members have been recruited largely from the villages to which they will be allocated. Their purpose is to assess the needs of the people in their areas and then to help them improve their own standard of life. They are not designed to step in and do all the work for the villagers. Rather, they work in co-operation with them and encourage them to do things for themselves. I saw several villages where these teams were operating and visited one in particular, north of Hue. I met the elected village leaders and there seemed to be a general enthusiasm for the work that the Teams are accomplishing. At this particular village I also met General Thang who paid one of his unannounced calls to the area. He is the Minister responsible for the Revolutionary Development Programme and he is a most impressive person. He told me that he was not only concerned that these Teams should assist in raising standards in the villages, but also that they should maintain the spirit of the people. This was emphasised in their training, for General Thang said that after 20 years of fighting he was concerned that the people might become tired and cease to have the will to do things for themselves.

Our Civil Affairs Unit will be actively co-operating with these Revolutionary Development Teams.
While reasonable security has been established over a wide area there can be no guarantee that incidents will not occur. If our forces were to be moved from the Province without being replaced by other substantial forces, the enemy — the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese units that have been pushed away from the centres of population — would return. The task is unfinished and much remains to be done. There can be no guarantee that the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese will not reinforce the units in the area and again challenge the Task Force.

When I visited the forces last year the camp area was not fully established and conditions were very difficult. Now good facilities have been installed at Vung Tau for the Logistic Support Force and the Task Force camp at Nui Dat is well developed. I was particularly pleased to see that the rest facilities at Vung Tau have been vastly improved. Modern hotel-type accommodation is to be opened in a week or two and the Armed Forces Club close to the beach is very near completion.

I spent two days around Da Nang and in the Quang Tri province north of Hue. Here I visited several members of the Australian Army Training Team in the areas in which they are operating with Vietnamese units. Every Vietnamese or United States officer that I met spoke in the highest possible terms of the work of these members. They are operating in difficult circumstances in isolated and extremely dangerous areas. The members were optimistic about the future and said that considerable progress had been made recently by the Revolutionary Development Teams in villages that were quite insecure three months ago.

I was briefed on the current situation in the demilitarised zone in the areas to the south of the Zone. The fighting record of a Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam which I visited was quite remarkable. Under skillful and aggressive leadership the Division has averaged 28 days out of each month on operations over this year. In the same period it has conducted more than 90 operations of battalion size or larger. Their record of victories over the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese is worthy of the highest praise.

In the north I was also given some figures which quite dramatically showed the effect of bombing pauses over North Vietnam. Throughout the last half of last year up to January 1967, Marine units in the north had been subject to an average of about 800 rounds of mortar fire a month. They were not subject to any artillery or rocket fire. Since February and after the Tet truce of the 8th to 12th of that month, allied units in the North have been subject to an average of nearer 4,300 rounds of mortar fire, over 1000 rounds of artillery fire, in addition to heavy rocket attacks such as that which was directed at Da Nang air base. While the evidence is not conclusive, it would seem a reasonable inference that the bombing pause during the truce enabled additional weapons and ammunition to be moved south.

North Vietnam has up to half a million men actively engaged in repairing communications networks damaged by United States bombing. Thus, their
efforts in the south are made considerably more difficult and costly by the bombing. Without bombing it is my firm belief that the loss of allied and Free World Forces lives in Vietnam would be much greater.

There is one other comment that should be made in relation to the bombing. The Free World Forces are fighting a defensive war. They are trying to keep the North Vietnamese out. They are trying to establish widespread security so that the real work of improving the lot of the people of Vietnam can be pursued progressively. On the other hand the enemy do not have to protect anyone; they do not have to provide any services; they only have to disrupt, terrorise and attack. They are the aggressors. It is difficult in any circumstances to fight a purely defensive war and at the same time achieve your objectives. The bombing of the north is virtually the only offensive weapon available to the forces of the south under the limitations and restrictions that have been placed on the ground war.

A word about the war in general. I was moderately optimistic about the progress that has been made over the last 12 months. Even though there has been some build-up in enemy forces and even though new weapons of a more modern and damaging kind have been introduced to the theatre, the enemy has made no gains. I saw for myself that security is still being extended in the northern provinces where attacks from the north have been heaviest. There has been steady, if at times modest, success by the Free World Forces. However, it must be emphasised that no short end to this war can be expected and its duration should be measured in years rather than months unless there is a dramatic change of mind on the part of the North Vietnamese. Nothing else that I can see could achieve a quick end to the fighting.

When I was in Vietnam last year the first moves were being made towards establishing representative government. A constituent assembly was elected to devise a constitution and elections are to be held in the next few weeks to establish representative government. Elections have already been held over very wide areas of the country for local village leadership. In the conditions that have prevailed, I believe the steps that have so far been taken in this direction are a truly remarkable achievement and I am therefore hopeful that the final objective in establishing representative government can be successfully attained in the programme that has already been laid down by the South Vietnamese.

Lists: A and B
Further information:

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