REST AND RECREATION LEAVE FOR SOLDIERS SERVING IN VIETNAM

Further developments in the Rest and Recreation Programme have recently been announced in the Federal Parliament. R & R leave is the 5-days out-of-country leave given to all soldiers during their 12 months tour of duty in Vietnam.

Up to date the approved centres in which soldiers could take this leave have been in South East Asia, for example Bangkok, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Manila, Hawaii, and Singapore. Because of the increasing number of troops using these centres, and the consequent pressure being placed on facilities there, the Americans have been negotiating with our Government for some time to have Australia included in the choice of R & R Centres for their troops.

Approval for this has now been given and Australian soldiers who choose to do so will also be able to come to Australia on their five days out-of-country leave. The Australians will come here on the planes chartered by the Americans for the transport of their own troops and they will come at the expense of the American Government. Initially the planes will come only to Sydney but eventually the Gold Coast will also be used as an R & R Centre.

So that the Australian soldiers, no matter where they live in Australia, will have a minimum of four nights at home during their R & R leave period here, the Australian Government will pay internal air transport costs to get them to and from their homes from the point of arrival in Australia, and travelling time will of course also be allowed where necessary for this purpose. Where this extra time in Australia means that the soldier misses the return flight on the American charter planes, which come in on strict 5-day schedules, he will be returned to Vietnam by civil air services.
The Federal Government has recently announced extensions to the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Plan. These will introduce benefits under the plan for short-term servicemen. Under present arrangement all soldiers are covered for war-caused injuries by Repatriation benefits. Additional benefits for injuries or death caused during service in the Army are also available under the DFRB fund which in the past has only been available to long-term servicemen. Benefits under this fund are available no matter how injuries or death may be caused - during war, during duty in Australia or while on leave at home. In other words it is an insurance fund that covers contributors for injury, death, or, in the case of long-term servicemen, for a pension. The new arrangements will extend the provisions of this Fund to short-term servicemen, National Servicemen, three-year enlistees and CMF members on full-time duty for a 12 months term.

These provisions are in addition to entitlements that a soldier might gain in Australia under the Commonwealth Employees' Compensation Act which, in effect, covers soldiers injured in the course of duty in Australia.

The benefits under the DFRB Fund are in three categories.

1. If a soldier serves his 20 years or more, he becomes eligible for a pension and this has always been the long-term inducement for soldiers to serve on and make the Army or one of the other services their career.

2. On the death of a serving soldier, whether from war causes or from accident or sickness in Australia, a pension (usually five-eights of the maximum pension that would have been payable for his rank) will be paid to the widow. The pension for the widow of an Australian private on this basis would be about $1,024 per year and for the widow of a sergeant about $1,307 per year. Payments in addition to these will be made for dependant children of widows. If the death is war-caused, the dependant would also get a repatriation pension in addition to this.

3. In addition, there are benefits for soldiers who have been invalided out of the Army.

The first of these provisions would not apply to a soldier on a two-year term. However, the extended scheme will allow these short-term servicemen to gain the other two benefits. For example, where a soldier suffers a
disability caused during his service in the Army and where this seriously
impairs his capacity to work, a pension will be paid to him while his civilian
earning capacity is affected. An example of an extreme case in this category
would be that of a married private short-term soldier who is permanently
incapacitated as a result of war service. He will receive a pension of $31.50
a week under this new provision, together with a basic tax-free $30.55 a week
pension under Repatriation. If there are children there are additional repatria-
tion benefits, of course, and for TPI pensioners all medical and hospital
treatment is provided free of charge by the Repatriation Department.

The Government made this decision about the DFRB payments in
preference to the introduction of a special insurance scheme on the American
lines for all soldiers. Such a scheme would only have benefited dependants
of soldiers who actually died as a result of or during his service. In contrast,
the DFRB scheme provides substantial benefits on a much wider basis.

Legislation for the introduction of these extensions is at present
being prepared and further details will be available when the Bill is
introduced into the House of Representatives.