VIETNAM CIVIC ACTION —
THE OTHER WAR

PRESS STATEMENT
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The contribution of the Australian Force in Viet Nam cannot be measured by military operations alone. The other war — the fight against ignorance, sickness and poverty — is as real as the casualties on the battlefield.

The practical assistance being given by troops to enable the Vietnamese people to improve their standard of living in a peaceful way, secure from fear of intimidation, may ultimately be the measure of the success of the Australian commitment.

Not enough is known in Australia of this important aspect of the activities of the Australian troops in Viet Nam.

Civic Action is a vital factor in the pacification process following the securing of an area by combat troops.

It is a planned operation that goes far beyond voluntary humanitarian or philanthropic acts.

Civic Action is a continuing responsibility — much has already been achieved — but much more remains to be done.

It began with 1 RAR in 1965 and has been enlarged greatly since the arrival of the Task Force in June 1966.

To date there have been only two officers and three warrant officers who are engaged full time in organizing and supervising military Civic Action. They have been assisted by military personnel on a part time basis and a first rate job has been done.
Some examples of works successfully completed by the Australian Force includes:

a. A market place constructed at Hoa Long. A project selected by the village population of 7,000.

b. A dispensary built in the poorer part of Vung Tau; constructed, fully equipped and attended daily by Australian medical personnel.

c. Vung Tau Junior Boys’ Military Academy - provided water storage and reticulation, built and fitted out library, converted stables into eight classrooms.

d. Built a community centre at Nam Binh Refugee Settlement, including a sewing room for village women plus rooms where Army doctors and dentists could give treatment.

Australian units have taken part in many other civic action projects, some initiated by the Vietnamese and others by American teams.

These include malaria control, construction and repair of village schools, provision of playgrounds, school supplies and classes in English; soil erosion and drainage projects, construction of resettlement villages for refugees, and provision of food and clothing to orphans, refugees and other destitute people.

All civic aid activities undertaken by the Force involve the spending of money. For the financial year 1966/67
the Federal Government has allotted over $100,000 to the Army for use in Civic Action work. In addition, the Australian Force has access to material and funds supplied by the US Government for approved projects. To this must be added the value of the troops' labour and voluntary assistance by Vietnamese villagers, which is not charged against the projects.

The Army is not carrying this responsibility alone. It has been greatly assisted by voluntary organizations in Australia and the United States.

The principal Australian groups and their achievements are:

a. R.S.L. "Operation New Life" has collected almost 50 tons of household items, garden tools, sewing machines, clothing and many other articles which have been used in the rehabilitation of refugees in the Australian area of responsibility.

b. Australian-Vietnamese Civil Action Project (A.V.C.A.P.). Formed in Queensland, this group has collected some $4,000 to be used mainly on educational projects.

c. Defend Australia Committee. Raised in Victoria and South Australia, it has donated $1,275 to pay for improvements to the Vung Tau Junior Boys' Military Academy. The committee also has collected a number of articles which the Army has distributed in Viet Nam, including bicycles, playground equipment and school supplies.
Recognizing the need of the people and having the staff to fulfil an aid programme has been a continuing problem.

The limited number of Army personnel available on full and part time duty to ascertain needs and develop practical projects has necessarily restricted the scope of Civic Action.

NEW PROPOSALS

Because of the importance the Government places on this aspect of our operations in Viet Nam, it has been decided to include a special Civil Affairs Unit in the 900 men being added to the Force this year. The Unit will have a strength of ten officers and thirty-six other ranks and will be commanded by a lieutenant-colonel.

This unit will be responsible for the planning, coordination and supervision of all military civic action by the Australian Force.

It will include appropriate specialists in the fields of construction, health and education.

After initial preparation it is expected that the unit will be ready for deployment in Viet Nam in June this year.

Civic Action remains the responsibility of the entire Australian Force; the Civil Affairs Unit will enable many more projects over a wider field to be undertaken and will also permit of the maximum use being made of funds and materials.
being provided by the Government and volunteer groups in Australia.

The work of the new unit will in no way inhibit the way in which many individual soldiers and units are personally helping the Vietnamese people in a variety of ways in small projects of their own.

Major P.R. Gower of Army Headquarters, who has been closely associated with this aspect of military activity, will be visiting Viet Nam next month to see at first hand work already done and to seek ideas which may influence military Civic Action in the future.