The fighting ability and bravery of young combat troops of the 6th Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, has received high praise from their Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Colin Townsend, of Brisbane, Queensland.

Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend said this aboard HMAS Sydney which is currently bringing the 6th Battalion home to Australia.

He said that his soldiers, who are now veterans of the Vietnam campaign, have just ended a year of tough operational duty.

Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend, himself a veteran of the Korean War, described his men as comparable with the best he had served with in Korea.

"The families of these men, and in fact, all Australia, can be very proud of the job these young men have done," Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend said.

"Not only in battle, but in assisting the village people of Phuoc Tuy Province in the 'other war' - the war against sickness and poverty, they have behaved in the best traditions of Australia.

"Most of them arrived in Vietnam as 'happy-go-lucky' boys. They are coming home as mature young men - and Australia can be proud of them."

The Battalion has been a unit of the 1st Australian Task Force at Nui Dat for the past year. It is being replaced by 2 RAR, from Enoggera, Queensland, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Noel Russell Charlesworth.

Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend has described the Viet Cong soldier as a sound guerilla fighter, well trained in battle, Australian troops have learned to respect them following a number of operations and battles.

"In the past year we have whittled down their influence in Phuoc Tuy Province, which was once a Viet Cong stronghold," he said.

When the Australians first arrived in the village of Hoa Long, near the Task Force Base, the inhabitants were sullen and unfriendly.

This has changed dramatically over the past year, because the locals now know that the Australians are in the area to help them. They have been given security from enemy harassment and enemy tax collectors.

As a result of this new security, the villagers now smile and wave when they see Australians.

They are genuinely friendly, and now appreciate what Australia, through its troops, has accomplished.
"There have been a growing number of enemy defectors in Phuoc Tuy Province in the past year, and this seems to indicate that our work in the past year has had results," Lieutenant-Colonel Townsend said.

He added, "I am thankful for the work of the R.S.L., the Amred Forces Overseas Fund, and similar organisations, who have assisted our troops to show the local villagers that Australia is a friend.

"Finally, I would like to give special thanks to the 6th Battalion Wives' Association, at Enoggera, who have done a wonderful job, particularly in looking after the wives of the younger Battalion members and helping them wherever possible.

"For our troops to know that someone is watching the welfare of their families, at home, means they can confidently concentrate on the job in hand in Vietnam," he said.

List: A
Further information:

CANBERRA: Major Allan S. Hinds (65-4061) (49-6030)
OTHER STATES: ADPR AT COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

1 June 1967