Statement by the Minister for the Army, the Hon. Malcolm Fraser, M.P.

Complaints had been received from some soldiers concerning leave provisions for service in Vietnam.

Stating this today, the Minister for the Army said that some misunderstanding had been caused by a recent decision to review the location at which soldiers would be allowed to take leave granted in lieu of duty performed in Vietnam on Sundays and Public Holidays. Soldiers who were called upon for duty on these days could be recompensed either by being allowed to stand down from duty locally for an equivalent period, or, under certain conditions, to accumulate this leave until their return to Australia. The first ten days of such extra duty are recompensed automatically by the five days R & R leave and the five days local leave in Vung Tau, allowed to all troops. There troops are required to work more than ten Sundays or holidays, additional recompense is necessary. For health and other reasons it is essential that soldiers should get their proper rest and that lost rest days be made up as soon as possible that is, by equivalent local leave or stand down, rather than by accumulation and deferment until return to Australia.

However it was recognised that commitments in Vietnam in relation to the size of the force made it difficult to grant unlimited stand-down. For this reason, a local instruction had permitted accumulation of days in lieu of Sundays and holidays up to 24.

The recent decision of the Government to increase the size of the force by 900 men was specifically intended in part, to ease the problem of granting stand-down to troops. It was decided accordingly that the accumulation of deferred days would be limited to 12 after 1 July 1967, thus increasing the requirement for local stand-down. The total entitlement is not changed in any way, and no soldier who has accumulated more than twelve deferred days under the old conditions would have his accumulation reduced.

None of the foregoing affects in any way the other entitlements for soldiers serving in Vietnam including the 30 days Recreation Leave to be taken on return to Australia. This is two weeks more than the annual leave entitlement for service in Australia. Soldiers who accumulated the maximum of 12 days deferred leave in lieu of Sundays and holidays would thus have a leave entitlement of 42 working days or seven weeks on return to Australia, in addition to any leave left over from their service prior to Vietnam.

The Minister concluded by saying that directions had been issued to the Commander AAFV to promulgate the full entitlement to all troops to obviate further misunderstanding.

Lists: A and B.

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Author/s:
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Title:
Leave for troops in Vietnam

Date:
22 June 1967

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File Description:
Leave for troops in Vietnam

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