MINISTER OPENS ANNUAL ARMY EXERCISE

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

The following is the text of an opening address given today by the
Minister for the Army, Mr. Malcolm Fraser, to senior Australian and
overseas service and Government Department officers to mark the
commencement of the annual Army Chief of General Staff exercise.

The exercise is being held at the Royal Military College, Duntroon,
until August 17 and provides an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and an
exchange of techniques and knowledge between serving members of several
armies.

Overseas visitors to the exercise include officers from the
United Kingdom, British Far East Command, the United States, Canada and
New Zealand.

Also attending is the Commander, Australian Force Vietnam and the
Commander, Australian Army Force in Malaysia.

In his opening address the Minister for the Army said:

"I would again like to thank the Chief of the General Staff for
giving me the opportunity of making some opening remarks at this Exercise.
On behalf of the Government in particular I welcome our visitors from the
British Army who have come from the United Kingdom and the Far East, our
visitors from the US Army and Marine Corps who have come from both the
United States and from Vietnam. I would also like to welcome our visitors
from New Zealand and Canada whom we are always more than pleased to see in
Australia.

Operations in Vietnam

Task Force:

As you know I have recently returned from a visit to Vietnam. As
one would expect I found the morale of our troops very high. They are
continuing to perform a most useful role. The changeover in the Task Force
is now complete and the new force has settled in well. We are particularly
pleased to have the New Zealand Company operating with us, in addition to
the New Zealand Battery. This is by no means the first time that
Australian and New Zealand troops have fought together in the same conflict.
In Vietnam, members of both our forces are maintaining the highest tradition which the name "Anzac" always implies.

Although fighting in the Phuoc Tuy Province has been relatively quiet in recent months, except for the current outbreak, nobody can foretell what the future might bring. In recent times the enemy has reinforced his troops in the north, in the central highlands and there are now suggestions that Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in the Third Corps Zone will also be strengthened. Of course, over this period the enemy has been able to introduce many modern and sophisticated weapons into his Army. Thus, it is quite possible that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese may decide once again to challenge our domination of the Phuoc Tuy province. If they do so decide, major clashes can be expected.

Meanwhile we have pushed the enemy forces away from the main centres of population and reasonable security prevails for 80 - 90% of the people in the Province although there can be no guarantee that incidents will not occur in any area.

During the past year, the interdependence of the RAAF and the Army has been emphasised in training and the effects of this have shown up in operations.

Every few weeks I read complimentary remarks made about the good work done by RAAF Iroquois and Caribou crews in Vietnam. Mutual understanding is a vital element to success in operations and I look forward to seeing this co-operation and mutual reliance permeate throughout all levels of both Services wherever they may be operating.

**Civic Action:**

Increasing security has given greater opportunities for civic action to be carried out. Very much as a result of experience gained over the last year a Civil Affairs Unit of nearly 50 men has been sent to Vietnam. This new Unit is settling in well and its relationship with the province officials and the villagers is good. It will be co-operating actively with the Revolutionary Development Teams and other authorities who are working to lift the standard of life of the South Vietnamese people.
It should be remembered that Army civic action is largely restricted to the immediate things which can provide resistance, the things which we have always taken for granted in Australia but which are sorely needed in Vietnam. The more long-term projects are the province of Colombo Plan and SEATO aid programmes and of the South Vietnamese themselves.

**Australian Army Training Team Vietnam**

I must mention members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam who are fighting under difficult and arduous conditions in the northern provinces. I visited several members of the team on location and also spoke with members of Revolutionary Development Teams who were working in villages in areas that were quite unsafe a few months ago. While the North Vietnamese buildup in this area has undoubtedly slowed the progress of the Free World Forces it has not stopped their progress, as I was able to see for myself.

There now seems to be a better understanding of the manner in which the Revolutionary Development Teams, the popular forces, the regional forces, the regular Army of the Republic of Vietnam units and other Free World Forces all fit in the Vietnam effort. Certainly better security is being provided for the Revolutionary Development Teams.

Wherever I went I met the highest praise for members of the Australian Army Training Team who, in many senses, are the unsung heroes of the Vietnam war so far as Australia is concerned, because they operate out of the public eye and we do not often hear of them. For its size, this band is extremely highly decorated.

Since June 1964 the following awards for gallantry have been made to this team:

1 VC
1 DSO
1 OBE
2 MBE
3 MC
5 DCM (1 with bar)
4 MM
Efforts by the South Vietnamese people:

In Australia Australians are most concerned to read about what our own people are doing in Vietnam and in the United States I would imagine the average American is concerned to read of the US exploits. I think this is natural but it does lead to a misunderstanding at times of what I regard as the very real and worthwhile effort being made by the South Vietnamese on their own behalf. Too often we have heard the cry which I believe is quite unjust, that the South Vietnamese are not doing anything for themselves. It needs to be remembered that up till early 1965 the South Vietnamese were getting no combat support. Up to this time their Regular Army Units were being very severely attacked and were suffering enormous casualties, casualties of a kind that would destroy the morale of any Army. For many years the deliberate Viet Cong objective has been to assassinate anyone who could become a leader in the military or civil field in South Vietnam and thus, great numbers of their skilled, trained personnel have been killed in one way or another. Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the South Vietnamese Army became short on experience. Since early 1965, however, I believe a good deal of this situation has been retrieved. Certainly, the quality of their units is uneven but to suggest that they are not doing what can be done to help themselves, as is too often the case, ignores the great efforts that they have made. Many of their units are now fighting extraordinarily well. There are many isolated instances of heroism. I can recall in our own area an occasion on which a popular force platoon in an entrenched position held off a Viet Cong battalion for a considerable time, inflicting heavy damage on the enemy until relief from the Task Force arrived. If it had been an Australian platoon that had been so attacked we might well have justifiably described it as one of the heroic events in Australian military history, but this action went unnoticed.

In more general terms, major units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam Forces often fight well and hard. An Army of the Republic
of Vietnam Division in the north has had a continuous record of victories against the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. It has been on operations for 28 days out of every month in this year and has conducted more than 90 operations of battalion size or larger in its own right over the same period. I do not like the score-board method of indicating victory but this Division has killed over 5000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong by body count for the loss of about 1000 of its own men. This is a great record and one of which any Division would be justifiably proud. I wish there were some way in which there could be a greater public understanding in the United States and Australia of this effort.

On the political front they have also made considerable advances. Without any of the traditional British background for democratic Government, while their country has been beset by war and insurgency, they have made notable moves on the road to representative Government. The final steps have yet to be taken but the indications I was able to get in Vietnam suggest that the elections would be fair and reasonable.

During the year I have met many people who thought that the effort to establish representative Government before greater security had been achieved was a vain waste of time. So far these doubters have been proved wrong and we must hope that they will be conclusively proved wrong in the forthcoming elections. It is worth remembering, in talking of elections in South Vietnam, that the United Kingdom, faced with the threat of invasion, suspended democracy during the last World War by the agreement of all political parties. In contrast, the South Vietnamese, fighting desperately within their own borders, are attempting to introduce and make effective the normal institutions of a peace-time democracy.

The Army in Australia

Over the last year the National Service intake into the Army has reached a steady state and regular recruiting has moved forward quite strongly, and is continuing well. I have said before that we now have the most effective fighting force that we have ever
except for periods in the first or second world wars. This has only been achieved by the hard work and dedication of all members of the Regular Army and because of the manner in which National Servicemen have accepted their obligations. It is an integrated Army. It is an Army of which all its members and Australia can and should be proud.

This expansion has occurred not without effort and not without cost, but whatever the cost it has not been allowed to detract from the standard of training for the field force units. A great compliment was paid the Army this year when General Freeman, of the United States Continental Command, visited this country to make a personal inspection of our training establishments and methods. The expansion has placed a special strain on the number of skilled officers and non-commissioned officers. Much of their skill can only be learnt by experience and so there is a gap here that will take some time to overcome. However, increased entries to the Officer Cadet School at Portsea and the Officer Training Unit at Scheyville have done a great deal to expand the number of junior officers in the Army.

In the past the backbone of the Army has been the band of officers trained to the highest possible professional standards at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. In recent years Duntroon has not attracted the number of recruits that would enable it to fulfill this task. We have been giving particular attention to this over this year. The final agreements for affiliation with the University of N.S.W have now been reached and I would like to pay a tribute to the spirit of co-operation and to the assistance we have had from the University of N.S.W authorities. Now, as you know, graduates from future intakes into the Royal Military College will be able to receive Bachelor degrees in Arts or Science in the Faculty of Military Studies. There are already some indications that this is improving the numbers applying for entry to the College.

I cannot believe that the Royal Military College is not able to attract more than a sufficient number of young men of the calibre it requires. A few weeks ago I had extensive discussions with a small group of headmasters to see where we were falling down in our appeal
for applicants to the College and to see what steps can and should be
taken to make entry to the College more appealing to the high quality
young men we seek to attract. These discussions were useful and in the
near future I hope that agreement will be reached on a number of steps
that we can take to help achieve our objective.

In this regard, there are some ancient myths that need to be
dispelled. It is often said that an Army career can only be a short
term one; that there is no security of tenure from the time of entry to
the normal age of retirement at 60 or 65. This is of course true for
many officers but it is also true that in most cases the experience
gained in the Army makes it possible for retiring officers to gain
first class jobs in a variety of civilian fields. And now that it is
possible for their military experience to be backed by a recognised
degree these possibilities can only be widened.

In any case the difference between a career in the Army and one
in other large scale enterprises is not as wide as it is often depicted.
With company takeovers, changes in management and changes in technology,
most people find that the nature of their job changes from time to time.
And how many people work for the same company or organisation all their
life? For that matter there is more security in the Army than in a good
many kinds of private employment where changing business fortunes can
quite dramatically alter the course of a man's career.

Manpower

The increase in the size of the Army has brought a number of
difficulties with it which are new to the Australian Army. I have
already indicated the strains in skilled officer and non-commissioned
officer fields. But the growth in the Army has resulted in much greater
posting turbulence. Men are moved around more often than was once the
case. They are away from their family for longer periods of time. Now
that the rapid rush of expansion has concluded it is our objective to make
improvements in a number of these fields.

But there are many factors which increase the Army's problems
For the first time we have 2100 people entering and leaving the Army
every three months. For the first time we have a significant proportion
of the Army, about 40%, on a short term two-year basis. This means that it is much more difficult than it once was to have every person in the Army in the most advantageous position at each and every point of time.

Other matters complicate posting arrangements. A close watch must be kept on the numbers of National Servicemen serving in operational units. Experienced officers and non-commissioned officers and soldiers need to be rotated through the training organisations and we need to make provision for the maximum numbers of members of the permanent Army to gain operational experience. Not least, we have to provide for a proper rest and recreation period for members who have served overseas in the theatre of war. These are all problems that have grown out of the present situation and they are all problems that complicate man management to a marked degree.

We also recognise that there is a marked difference between what can be demanded of an Army the size of ours when the rest of the country is at peace and what can be demanded of the same Army when the whole nation is mobilised for war. During general war it is accepted that soldiers may be away from Australia in the theatre of conflict for years at a time and that in these circumstances individuals will willingly make sacrifices and endure hardship. However, in situations such as that which exists at present, when the rest of the country is largely untouched by the war, it would be unreasonable to expect the soldier to undergo the rigours that would be demanded of him during general mobilisation. He has his family to think of and the natural desire to lead as normal a life as possible. Thus, periods of service overseas must be arranged so that a soldier is assured of spending a reasonable amount of time at home between tours of duty. If we do not do this the effect on recruitment and re-engagement rates would be felt very strongly and this would obviously have serious implications for the Army.

However, there are other factors that mitigate this situation. For the three years since 1954/55 we have spent $100 million
on new building programmes, establishing permanent brick accommodation so that many of the old tin sheds of the past can be knocked down. Permanent accommodation for about 9000 members of the field force at Holsworthy, Enoggera, Puckapunyal, Swanbourne and Townsville has been or will be completed over the next year. We still have problems of overcrowding and lack of suitable accommodation but these are gradually being overcome.

Since the 1964/65 building programme began about 1400 married quarters have been handed over to the Army and about 1100 more will be completed in the near future. This should greatly ease the problem of homes for soldiers who are moved from one posting to another.

**Conclusion**

In summary the Army has a year of achievement behind it, achievement of which all Australians are I think rightly proud. The steady state of National Service will give us some opportunity to consolidate the position that has been won but I can see additional challenges ahead. The advance made in Vietnam must be consolidated and improved and there will be no immediate reduction in the pressure that is being placed on the skilled manpower within the Army.

I know very well that members of the Army recognise the importance of the role it is playing for the security of Australia and that whatever is asked of it in the future will be performed willingly and efficiently. On behalf of the Government I would like to express my warm appreciation to the whole Army for what has been achieved over the past year, and to wish you gentlemen a successful and valuable week.

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13 August 1967

Lists: A, B and C

Further information:

CANBERRA: Major E. Ross-Smith
(65-4061) (86-1138)

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