AUSTRALIANS ASSIST RESETTLING OF VN REFUGEES

Nui Dat - Australian Civil Affairs workers have spearheaded an all-out relief drive for people left homeless, wounded or sick following Viet Cong attacks on Baria, in Phuoc Tuy Province, Vietnam.

The Australians, working in conjunction with Vietnamese officials, have been working for five days to re-establish refugees and restore community services.

Nearly 2,000 people were left destitute after the battle.

Many had their homes destroyed or had fled from outlying areas of Baria when the Viet Cong continued to harass the villagers during their retreat from the provincial capital.

The Task Force provided accommodation in marquees, medical aid, hygiene facilities and engineers to help local authorities re-activate the city's water supply.

The Commanding Officer of 1st Australian Civil Affairs Unit, Lieutenant-Colonel John McDonagh, described the quick measures taken by the Province Chief, Major Nguyen Be Truoc, as "first class".

"Only a few hours after fighting had ended he had local officials back at work and essential services being organised," he said.

"It was his leadership that helped us get things back to normal quickly," he added.

The city hospital, which the Viet Cong used as a mortar and rocket firing base, had stopped operating.

Lieutenant-Colonel McDonagh said the surgery had been badly damaged and looted, and many of the wards would need repair.

Relief workers set up the local high school as a temporary hospital and refugee centre, and the Task Force Medical Teams treated Vietnamese and wounded Viet Cong who had surrendered.

Today, essential repairs have been made to the Baria Hospital, mainly through the help of U.S. Navy construction workers, and the task of refugee control and registration has been completed.
Lieutenant-Colonel McDonagh said most of the 2,000 refugees had now returned to their homes.

"But we still have about 40 families — more than 200 people — who have lost everything," he said.

"We are helping provincial authorities survey a refugee village on the outskirts of Baria, and I think they can be resettled there."

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OTHER STATES: ADPR AT COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

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