WHAT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE DO FOR THEMSELVES

Statement by the Hon. Malcolm Fraser

Malcolm Fraser, Federal Member for Wannon, said recently that there are some who believe that the South Vietnamese are not doing very much for themselves. This belief, he said, is quite unjust.

Up to early 1965 the South Vietnamese were getting no combat support, they were suffering great casualties. This and the deliberate terrorist assassinations by the Viet Cong led to a shortage of experienced personnel in the South Vietnamese Army. Since 1966 much has been retrieved and the quality of their military units has now greatly improved.

Many of their units are fighting extremely well. In our own province area a platoon of 26 men held off a reinforced Viet Cong battalion for several hours before relief from our task force arrived. This was an heroic action.

In general terms military units in the South Vietnamese Army are fighting well and hard. The 1st Division in 1 Corps has had a continuous record of victories against the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. It has been on operations for 28 days out of every month this year and has conducted over 90 operations of battalion size or larger. Although he doesn't like the score-board method of indicating victory he said this Division has killed over 5,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong for the loss of 1,000 of its own men.

He stated that the South Vietnamese are also working well in the Civil field. 30,000 men have now been trained to take their places in Revolutionary Development Teams. These are people who are selected from several villages. They are trained and then return to their own areas. Their purpose is to assess the needs of the people and then to help them improve their own standards. They are not designed to step in and do all the work for the villagers, rather they work and co-operate with them and encourage them to do things for themselves.

Mr. Fraser said there are five of these teams operating in our area of responsibility and the Australian Civil Affairs unit is actively working with them.
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