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Submission No

28

786

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FOR CABINET

DEPLOYMENT OF AUSTRALIAN FORCES TO SOUTH VIETNAM

Immediately following the Prime Minister's announcement on 29th April that an Australian Army battalion was to be deployed in South Vietnam I approved a Defence Committee recommendation to send an Australian Planning Team to Saigon for discussions with the United States and South Vietnamese authorities concerning the deployment area, role, logistic and other arrangements of the battalion.

2. Attached for consideration by Cabinet is the Defence Committee's report prepared in the light of the discussions held in Saigon and of the planning which has been proceeding in Australia on the movement of the force. I agree with the Defence Committee's report and recommend that the Cabinet:

- (a) Agree that the Australian battalion and its Logistic Support Company should be deployed to the Bien Hoa area under the operational control of General Westmoreland, Commander United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.
- (b) Endorse the proposed role of the Australian force as stated in paragraph 6 of the Defence Committee report.
- (c) Note that satisfactory provisions are being made covering the status of the forces in Vietnam and that the logistic and financial arrangements for the support of the force are proceeding satisfactorily.

Classified in
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file C 4643

14th May, 1965

SHANE PALTRIDGE
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE

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DEPLOYMENT OF AUSTRALIAN FORCES TO SOUTH VIETNAM

REPORT BY DEFENCE COMMITTEE

Introduction

1. Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 29th April of the committal of an Army battalion to South Vietnam, the Minister for Defence agreed that a Planning Team should be sent to the area to plan the deployment of the force and discuss logistic, financial and other arrangements with the United States and South Vietnamese authorities. The Planning Team has now submitted its report. Planning has also been proceeding in Australia on the movement of the Force. The views of Defence Committee on the main considerations arising from these developments are set out below.

Deployment Area

2. General Westmoreland, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam considers that the Australian forces could be readily dovetailed into 173 United States Airborne Brigade which is being deployed into the Bien Hoa and Vung Tau areas. This brigade consists basically of two infantry battalions and an artillery battalion sustained by its own logistic support force. An additional infantry battalion is urgently required to protect the large Bien Hoa airstrip, and this deployment area was provisionally agreed to by the visiting Australian Planning Team.

3. Bien Hoa is about 12 miles North-east of Saigon and its airstrip is of considerable importance not only for the Aircraft based there but also as the main staging and recovery base for operational aircraft coming into and leaving the theatre. This makes protection of the strip essential. The deployment area has been cleared of civilians. Terrorists operate in the general area surrounding the airfield at night.

4. The Defence Committee agrees with the proposal to deploy 1 RAR and its logistic support company to the Bien Hoa area.

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Composition of the Force

5. In the light of reconnaissance of the area and detailed discussion on likely roles and tasks it has been possible to finalise the composition of the Australian force. The proposed strengths of the force Headquarters and units are as follows :-

(a)	Headquarters Australian Army Force, Vietnam (HQ AAFV)	34
(b)	1 RAR (including percentage of first reinforcements)	803
(c)	Australian Logistic Support Company (Aust Log Sp Coy) (including an Armoured Personnel Carrier troop of 30 personnel)	133
(d)	709 Signal Troop (Base communications with cipher office and link to Australia)	50
(e)	Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV) already provided for and no change	100
	Total AAFV	75 officers - 1045 men - 1120
	Total less (e) for movement from Australia to Vietnam	1020

Role of the Force

6. The role of United States forces as agreed at military level is that ground combat forces are considered to have the general mission of combat support of Vietnamese Army forces (RVNAF) with the following specific missions:

- (a) Security of base area
- (b) deep patrolling and offensive operations
- (c) Reaction operations in coordination with RVNAF
- (d) Contingency Planning.

Only the first three of these roles are being considered for execution at this stage.

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7. Both the Vietnamese and the United States military authorities confirmed that only Vietnamese forces would engage in pacification operations. With regard to (c) it is envisaged that United States and Australian forces will be required to operate in co-operation with South Vietnamese units, possibly in heliborne operations, if such forces were the most suitable ones for the task. A communication now received from General Wheeler, Chairman, United States Joint Chief of Staff Committee confirms oral assurances given to the Leader of the Australian planning team by General Westmoreland that United States and Australian combat forces will remain under United States Command for these operations, and that the United States Commander will be able to satisfy himself concerning the military feasibility of the operations to be undertaken in conjunction with the Vietnamese command.

8. The Defence Committee considers it is important that the role of the Australian force should be the same as that of United States combat forces and that the roles as stated in sub-paragraph (a), (b), (c) and (d) above are acceptable. In instances where the employment of Australian forces is likely to affect Australia's relations with the Republic of Vietnam, or any other country, the Commander, Australian Army Force, Vietnam will consult as appropriate, with the Australian Ambassador in Saigon.

Command

9. Australian Army units will not operate directly under Vietnamese command. The overall command of units and personnel will be vested in the Commander of the Australian forces, and he will be under the operational control of General Westmoreland, Commander, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. The Australian infantry battalion will be brigaded with and under operational control of the appropriate United States brigade echelon. These arrangements were explained by the Australian Ambassador to the Vietnamese authorities who accepted them.

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Status of Forces

10. All United States and Australian Service personnel now serving in South Vietnam are regarded under the Pentilateral Agreement (the Agreement signed in 1950 between the United States, Cambodia, France Laos and Vietnam relating to aid for mutual defence of Indo China) as operating as part of the diplomatic mission of their countries and are entitled to appropriate immunities and advantages according to status. The United States authorities have advised that they do not intend to seek any fresh agreement with the Vietnamese to cover the combat troops now being introduced to the theatre and have suggested that Australia also might not ask for a new agreement. The Prime Minister of South Vietnam has already advised the Australian Ambassador that the battalion would be granted the same advantages and facilities as are granted to United States Forces. The Australian Ambassador has proposed that it might be useful to exchange notes with the Vietnamese Government confirming specifically that the proposals of the Pentilateral Agreement apply to the battalion.

11. American Service personnel who commit offences are tried by United States General or Summary Courts Martial and not by Vietnamese courts. By arrangement with the Vietnamese authorities United States personnel are sometimes allowed to appear in Vietnamese courts to make a deposition or give evidence, and vice versa. The Pentilateral Agreement does not cover the settlement of claims for civil damage. A Judge Advocate attached to the United States Military Assistance Command has a delegation to settle civil claims of up to one thousand dollars. For larger claims the United States has a team of three members with a delegation of fifteen thousand dollars. The United States regard their troops in this theatre as being on duty at all times and therefore accept liability in respect of claims arising from occurrences which would be regarded by the Australian Services as being off-duty acts.

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12. The Defence Committee considers that in general the United States approach to the status of forces is acceptable to Australia and that the Australian Ambassador should confirm that the provisions of the Pentilateral Agreement will apply to the battalion. The Committee considered that a local delegation should be given jointly to the Commander, Australian Army Force Vietnam, and the Australian Ambassador in Saigon to settle claims in respect of on-duty acts of Australian forces. The question of the acceptance of liability for the off-duty acts of our forces would be considered further after the views of the Australian Ambassador have been obtained.

Logistic and Financial Arrangements

13. Under a Military Working Agreement signed on the military level the United States has accepted the responsibility to provide all logistic and administrative support for the Australian battalion on the same basis as that normally supplied to United States forces. The provision and maintenance of items unique to the Australian forces will be our responsibility. During the initial period of approximately six months, until the United States Army Logistics Command has expanded and become fully operative the United States will be able to provide only rations, POL, some types of ammunition and some personnel services.

14. With the exception of ammunition, financial rates for that portion of the maintenance of Australian forces which the United States Command is now able to provide, have been agreed, i.e. rations, POL and personnel maintenance. A separate rate will be agreed for ammunition usage on receipt of further information from the United States Command. In six months time, when the United States Army Logistics Support Command has been expanded to enable it to provide other maintenance support and when better information and statistics are available, further rates will be established. The Defence Committee agreed with the Army view that the rates established are reasonable.

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Movement and Timing

15. The detailed plan for the movement of the Australian force to South Vietnam is nearing completion. This will involve the combined use of HMAS Sydney, RAAF C130 aircraft and chartered civil aircraft (Qantas). HMAS Sydney is scheduled to leave Australia about 27th May on a 12/13 day passage to the area with appropriate sea and air convoy protection. The route will be east about New Guinea to the Philippines area then across the South China Sea to South Vietnam. HMAS Sydney will discharge at Vung Tau and on movement of personnel and stores to Bien Hoa has been arranged. Air movement of personnel involves some 5 flights commencing approximately on 2nd June with a sortie each alternate day through the Philippines. Clearances for the use of Philippines/United States transit facilities are being negotiated. The movement of the forces will be a security operation.

Directives

16. Attached are draft directives to the Commander of the Australian Army Force, Vietnam and to the Commanding Officer of the Australian infantry battalion in South Vietnam. The Defence Committee has examined these directives and considers that they are acceptable.

Department of Defence

CANBERRA

May 1965

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