

There is no doubt that his meticulous care and planning has saved many casualties.

He has shown himself to be a brave and resourceful man and has upheld the highest traditions of the service.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased on the advice of Her Majesty's Australian Ministers to approve the following awards in recognition of gallant conduct in Vietnam with effect from 8th December 1966:

*Distinguished Service Order*

Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Vogler PREECE, M.V.O., Australian Staff Corps.

Lieutenant-Colonel Preece was appointed to command The First Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment, in Vietnam on 3rd December 1965 at short notice when the previous commanding officer became a casualty. At that time the Battalion was participating in operation "New Life," a divisional sized offensive operation against the Viet Cong in Binh Tuy Province. Without any hesitation and with great determination he assumed immediate and effective command of the First Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment tactical group and maintained pressure on the enemy forces until the operation was brought to a successful conclusion two weeks later.

During the next four weeks Lieutenant-Colonel Preece planned and, with outstanding success, commanded three battalion group heliborne assault operations deep into Viet Cong territory in Binh Hoa, Hau Nghia and Binh Duong Provinces. During the third of this series of operations, operation "Crimp" which lasted from 8th January to 14th January 1966, his battalion, after carrying out a well-planned assault against enemy opposition in the landing zone, located a major Viet Cong tunnel complex. This complex proved to be the target for the Brigade, the Viet Cong Headquarters which supervised enemy operations in the Bien Hoa and Gia Dinh Provinces which includes Saigon. The Battalion group cleared, searched, and destroyed many thousands of yards of tunnels deep underground, large quantities of documents were captured which provided valuable intelligence to the Government of Vietnam.

In the following four months Lieutenant-Colonel Preece continued to command his Battalion during a further four major and successful operations, three of which included heliborne assaults. Between these operations the Battalion continued to dominate its area of responsibility in the Bien Hoa airfield defences by using a well co-ordinated and aggressive patrol programme.

Throughout this period of six months of command, during which his Battalion was in almost continuous contact with a militarily proficient and fanatical enemy, Lieutenant-Colonel Preece set by personal example the very highest standards of courage, leadership and professional skill. Under his leadership the battalion has played a full and effective part in turning the tide against the Viet Cong and in restoring many thousands of South Vietnamese people to Government control.

*Military Cross*

Captain Felix FAZEKAS (48049), Australian Staff Corps.

Following service in the Citizen Military Forces, Captain Felix Fazekas was granted a Commission in the Australian Regular Army in September 1959. He served successively in the 1st Recruit Training Battalion, 1st Battalion, the Royal Australian Regiment and at the Infantry Centre, Ingleburn, and in September 1965 was posted to the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam.

On 13th November 1965 Captain Fazekas was the senior advisor to a Vietnamese Civil Irregular Defence Group Company, engaged in a search and destroy operation in the Tra Bong Valley, 15 kilometres east of the Tra Bong Special Forces Camp in Quang Ngai Province.

The company was operating on three platoon axes. Captain Fazekas accompanied the centre platoon, whilst two other Australian Army advisors, Warrant Officers K. A. Wheatley and R. J. Swanton accompanied the platoon on his right flank.

At about 1330 hours on that day, Captain Fazekas' platoon made contact with a small Viet Cong Guerilla force and a fire fight, directed by him, ensued. The enemy withdrew, leaving one weapon behind. Whilst this action was in progress the platoon on the right

came under heavy accurate machine gun and rifle fire from what was later found to be a dug-in Main Force company of Viet Cong. They were in a prepared and well-sited position. The right platoon suffered heavy casualties in a short period including Warrant Officer Swanton. Assistance was called for from Captain Fazekas' platoon.

Captain Fazekas immediately rallied and led a force of fifteen Vietnamese soldiers at the run over a distance of some 800 metres to the scene of the action. At this stage only his personal example emboldened the Vietnamese groups sufficiently to stay with him and the remainder of the platoon to follow at a distance.

On arrival, Captain Fazekas led his group in an immediate assault on the flank of the enemy position through knee deep rice paddy in the face of direct and flanking automatic fire. Though at one stage forced to adopt a firing position in the paddy from where he shot at least two enemy, he again rallied seven of his group and together they continued the assault, returning fire whilst on the move. This resolute and offensive action caused the enemy to abandon his advantageous position and move rearwards leaving behind a significant number of weapons, dead and wounded. Firing now broke out in the vicinity of the rear elements of his platoon. Captain Fazekas returned to that position through continuous enemy flanking fire and proceeded to reorganise his platoon and direct their fire with such success that the enemy ceased firing and withdrew. He then organised the evacuation of casualties and directed a successful air strike onto the suspected enemy assembly area to the rear. The Vietnamese Company Commander decided to withdraw. Captain Fazekas, aware that two wounded Australian advisors were still unaccounted for and not being able to entice the Vietnamese to return to their last known position, organised a relief force which arrived in the area at last light. He led a search force next morning and recovered the bodies of Warrant Officers Wheatley and Swanton. The complete engagement resulted in 38 enemy killed and 40 wounded.

Captain Fazekas displayed heroic personal courage and outstanding resoluteness and aggressiveness in all his actions during this engagement, whilst continually under enemy fire and with complete disregard for his own personal safety. His actions inspired the Vietnamese soldiers to stand and fight, caused the rout of an enemy party of superior strength, inflicted significant casualties and enabled the capture of a considerable number of enemy weapons. Throughout the engagement, Captain Fazekas demonstrated outstanding leadership attributes. His actions were in keeping with the highest traditions of individual bravery and professional dedication to duty in the Australian Army.

*Distinguished Conduct Medal*

24980 Warrant Officer Class II Kenneth William STOKER, Royal Australian Infantry Corps.

Warrant Officer Kenneth William Stoker enlisted in the Australian Regular Army in 1951 and served in Korea with 1st Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment. In 1954 he joined 3rd Battalion, The Royal Australian Regiment and between 1957 and 1965 he served with the Air Support Unit as a parachute jump instructor and with 1st Battalion, Royal New South Wales Regiment as an instructor. In October 1965 he was posted to the Australian Army Training Team, Vietnam.

On 8th December 1965 Warrant Officer Stoker was a military advisor with the 1st Battalion of the 5th Vietnamese Regiment, engaged on offensive operations in Thang Binh District of Quang Tin Province, Republic of Vietnam.

At about 1500 hours on that day, the 1st Battalion was halted by heavy enemy fire and forced to adopt a hasty defensive position. This position was then attacked by a Viet Cong force estimated at two battalions, whose morale was high, having already over run another battalion of 5th Regiment on the right flank of 1st Battalion. The attack continued through the night. All Battalion Officers and the majority of its Non-Commissioned Officers were killed. The defences held and the attack was repulsed. Throughout this attack Warrant Officer Stoker organised and reorganised defensive fire positions, directed mortar fire and personally incited the defenders to repel the enemy. He continually exposed himself to hostile fire with no regard to his personal safety.

In darkness at 0630 hours on the 9th December the Viet Cong again attacked under cover of heavy