

AUSTRALIANS END VIETNAM SERVICE

Last 66 Soldiers Get Muted
Welcome as They Return

By ROBERT TRUMBULL

Special to The New York Times

SYDNEY, Australia, Dec. 20 —The last Australian troops in Vietnam came home today to a muted welcome, ending a 10-year commitment that had divided the nation.

The contingent, 66 men, landed in two transport planes at the Royal Australian Air Force base at Richmond, near Sydney. Only a few dozen relatives were present.

It seems clear that Australian attitudes toward the involvement in Vietnam have changed. Few believe that it was in the country's interest, though many did when it was instituted by a conservative Government.

The first action of the new Labor party Government was to end military conscription. About 60 per cent of the 12,000 conscripts now in uniform have elected to accept the new Government's offer of discharges. The others will complete their 18-month terms, qualifying for servicemen's benefits. A small number have chosen to transfer to the regular army.

The men who returned today were noncommittal. An enlisted man, asked whether he thought the commitment had been worthwhile, replied: "What I think doesn't really matter, does it?"

Australian participation began with the assignment of 30 jungle-warfare experts as advisers to the South Vietnamese. The force, moving gradually into a combat role, reached a peak of about 8,000.

The Australians lost 475 killed and 2,348 wounded, and won four Victoria Crosses, the British Commonwealth equivalent of the American Medal of Honor.