

Vic. Digger hurt saving his mates

From GEOFF JONES, Herald man in Vietnam.

SAIGON, Sun. — The Viet Cong bullet that went through both legs of Machine Gunner Kevin Stephens will leave him with one permanently stiff.

He'll never play for Longwarry again in the West Gippsland Australian Rules League. But lying in Vung Tau Hospital he is already working out a way to drive a tractor on his father's dairy at Ripplebrook, near Drouin, Victoria.

Even after being hit, Kevin kept blazing away with his 23 lb. M60 machine gun.

His mother, Mrs Kath Stephens, said today she was "very proud" of her son. "But I haven't slept a wink at night. I just lie there worrying about him in that hospital," she said.

ON THE RUN

Kevin would have kept up the fire longer had it not been for his ammunition belt fouling on one of his water bottles. But he had already produced sufficient firepower to put the Viet Cong on the run and save his mates who were quickly moving up to him. Company Commander, Major Don Paterson, of Greensborough, Victoria, shot the Viet Cong who put the bullet through one of Kevin's knees and the flesh of his other leg. Kevin, 21, is with D Company, Seventh Battalion, which saw most of the action in last week's Operation Broken Hill in Phuoc Tuy province.

His platoon sergeant, Sgt. Ron Allen, of Townsville, said: "He did a terrific job. If he hadn't kept that fire up we could have lost a lot more boys."

Mrs Stephens has five other children, two of them older than Kevin.

Kevin, she said, was a cattle taster before he went into the Army.

Kevin became engaged three months ago to Loris Harvey, 19, the Longwarry telephone exchange operator.

He was called up for National service in July last year.

Mrs Stephens said, "Kevin often helped Roy—that's my husband—on the farm.

"He played ruck for Longwarry. Pretty good, they said.

"Now I just want him home."