RIVER PATROL FORCE/ RIVER PATROL FLOTILLA FIVE (TF-116)
Operation Game Warden
8 November 1967 - 3 November 1968 (07-14-2008)

On 24 March 1965, the first US Navy organization to commence counter-infiltration operations in Vietnamese waters was the Vietnam Coastal Patrol Force – Operation Market Time - under the operational control of CTF-71, a Seventh Fleet force. On 31 July 1965, TF-71 was disestablished and became TF-115 under the operational control of Commander, US Military Advisory Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV) through Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward, USN, Chief of the Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVADGRU) Vietnam. Later that year, planning commenced for the expansion of Market Time to the Rung Sat Special Zone, the maritime approaches to Saigon and particularly the Long Tau and Soi Rap Rivers. Previously, Operation Market Time/TF-115, the Coastal Surveillance Force, composed of a wide variety of ships and craft, ranging from Vietnamese "basket boats" to US escort vessels (DEs), destroyers and Coast Guard cutters had exclusively patrolled the coastal waters of the Republic of Vietnam. The expanded mission resulted in the employment of two Mk. IV LCPLs (Landing Craft Personnel, Large) that made the initial patrols. They were metal-hulled successors to the 36-foot "Higgins" boats used in World War II. The LCPLs operated from the Vietnamese Naval Repair Facility in Saigon and concentrated their efforts to the port of Saigon and its approaches. Later, the initial patrol areas expanded to include the Mekong Delta; the area of responsibility of the IV Corps Tatical Zone (CTZ.)

In November 1965, the Navy awarded a contract to the United Boatbuilders, Bellingham, WA, for the construction of 120 31-foot Mk. I River Patrol Boats (PBR.) On 18 December 1965, the River Patrol Force, TF-116, Operation Game Warden, was established with Admiral Ward as the Task Force Commander. In February 1966, SEALs commenced operations in support of TF-116. On 18 March 1966, in a ceremony held at Nha Be, Captain Burton B. "Burt" Witham, Jr., USN, relieved Admiral Ward as CTF-116. On 1 April 1966, Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam was established as the naval component of COMUSMAVC and administratively assigned to Commander-in-Chief US Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT.) Rear Admiral Ward became the commander and retained the title of CHNAVADVGRUV and CTF-115. Fifteen days later, Captain Clifford L. Stewart relieved Admiral Ward as CTF-115.

On 8 May 1966, TF-116 commenced operations in the Mekong Delta. Initially, the PBRs and helo fire teams commenced operating from dock landing ships (LSDs) near the river mouths. Operating the PBRs in the open seas was less than desirable, and in time, tank landing ships (LSTs) operating on the rivers replaced the LSDs as afloat bases. On 1 February 1967, COMNAVFORV established TF-115 and TF-116 as separate commands with each task force commander reporting directly to COMNAVFORV. In March 1967, the Navy awarded a second contract to United Boatbuilders for the construction of 130 Mk. II PBRs. Before the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, they built 294 PBRs. On 31 March 1967, Captain Paul N. Gray relieved Captain Burton Witham as Commander River Patrol Force.

In early 1966, Minesweeping Boats (MSB) commenced countermining operations on the Long Tau and Soi Rap Rivers At the time, there were twelve MSBs involved in the operations. On 20 May 1966, the minesweeping assets became Minesweeping Squadron Eleven,

Detachment A (MINRON Eleven Det A.) In June 1967, the MSBs were augmented by the arrival of six LCM(M)s – minesweeping LCMs. On 1 May 1968, MINRON Eleven Det A became Mine Divisions 112 and 113.

The River Patrol Force's air arm came into existence with the loan of twenty-two UH-1B "Iroquois" helicopter gun ships from the Army's 197th Aviation Company. The inter-service support agreement stated the Navy was to receive forty-nine aircraft and that the Army would replace all lost aircraft. That did not materialize. In June 1966, Detachments 25, 27, and 29 of Helicopter Composite Squadron One (HC-1) deployed from Naval Air Station, Imperial Beach, CA, to Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon as the Navy's first (and only) helo gunship detachments. On 1 April 1967, those detachments were disestablished and immediately established as Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron Three (HAL-3) - the "Seawolves." On 1 September 1968, the River Patrol Force and River Squadron Five were disestablished and were replaced by River Patrol Flotilla Five. The administrative commander of the new command was COMPHIBPAC. Simultaneously the force's River Divisions and River Sections became River Patrol Squadrons and River Patrol Divisions respectively. On 2 November 1968, the same day Operation SEALORDS commenced, COMUSMACV, by presidential directive, commenced the Accelerated Turn Over to the Vietnamese (ACTOV) by which US forces, in time would transfer their equipment and combat responsibilities to the Republic of South Vietnam. This "Vietnamization" process continued under the Nixon Administration. Also on 2 November 1968, Vice Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, USN, Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam, established 30 June 1970 as the completion date for the US Navy's turnover date. On 3 January 1969, Light Attack Squadron Four (VAL-4) - the "Black Ponies" - was established at Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego, CA, and deployed to Vietnam; its OV-10A "Broncos" provided organic fixed-wing attack aircraft. For the next two years, River Patrol Flotilla 5 with the Coastal Surveillance Force and the afloat assets of the Mobile Riverine Force, TF-115 and TF-117, respectively saw action in Operation Sealords (TF-194) while simultaneously transferring assets to the Vietnamese. At the end of 1970, with the last transfer of PBRs to the Vietnamese Navy, COMNAVFORV deactivated River Patrol Flotilla FIVE, the last of the three in-country naval task forces. At that time, COMNAVFORV established Commander, Delta Naval Forces, composed of the SEAL units and US Navy aircraft still in country became TF-116.

****

My experiences were first as Plans Officer and then Operations Officer for Commander, River Patrol Force located at Naval Support Activity Detachment Binh Thuy (NAVSUPPACT DET) Phong Diem Province, Republic of Vietnam. My assignment came in the form of BuPers Order No. 072170, dated 23 August 1967, and transmitted as BUPERS message 251525Z August 1967. In a telephone conversation, my detailer told me that I was to be the operations officer of a task force commanded by Rear Admiral Ward located at Can Tho. I told him I did not think the Navy was assigning lieutenant commanders as operations officers for flag officers. I was correct as Admiral Ward had relinquished command of the River Patrol Force seventeen months earlier and the River Patrol Force had relocated to Tra Noc, and then Binh Thuy, indicating BuPers, or at least my detailer, was unaware of the command arrangements in Vietnam. That did not surprise me.

My original orders directed me to report to the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, CA,

by 9 October 1967, for temporary duty under instruction to include a two-week counter-insurgency/self-protection course and a two-week course on riverine warfare. BUPERS message 122049Z September 1967 modified my orders by canceling the riverine warfare course at NAVPHIBASE Coronado and directing me to report to Commanding Officer, Naval Inshore Operations Training Center (NIOTC), Mare Island, San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard, Vallejo, CA, by 23 October 1967 for two weeks instruction in a riverine warfare orientation course.

Upon reporting to NAVPHIBASE, Coronado, on 5 October 1967, another modification deleted the self-protection course at the Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, CA, and replaced it with Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) training conducted by Fleet Airborne Electronics, Training Unit, Pacific, Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego, CA.

However, before any training began I, like everyone else reporting to the PHIBASE prior to assignment in Vietnam, had a physical examination. The scales said I weighed 239 pounds. A doctor advised me that I was overweight for assignment to Vietnam – the upper limit was 236 pounds, the maximum for naval aviators. With tongue in cheek, I expressed my disappointment at the news. The doctor then told me I would have to get down to at least 236 before I left Coronado, and added that if I did not do it on my own, they would hospitalize until I attained the desired weight. I decided to do it on my own. He then prescribed some appetite appeasement pills to help me reach that goal. In retrospect, the medications were not necessary as the training I was about to undertake certainly would caused me to shed the requisite three pounds. In fact, I lost more than that.

The two-week counter-insurgency course consisted of a series of auditorium lectures on the Republic of Vietnam, its history, the customs, and mores of the country and an overview of the Navy's in-country roles and missions. To my knowledge, this was one of the earliest efforts to provide Navy personnel going to a foreign country with an overview of that country's history and the roles of the US military operating in that country. One item I recall was the advice that when sitting with Vietnamese, be careful should you cross your legs because showing the sole of your shoe to a Vietnamese was considered as insulting.

Having completed a two-year tour in Joint Chiefs of Staff message center, I thought I had a good understanding of what had recently transpired in Vietnam and particularly in the aftermath of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution of 1964 as the United States commenced transition from years of publicly stated advisory role to a full combat mission. I found the introductory material was an accurate although broad-brush approach. It certainly did not provide the many data, which to my recollection, had higher classifications than the scope of the presentation.

The SERE training started with two days in a classroom at NAS North Island and included a night on the beach. The real training followed later that week out in the desert at Warner Springs, CA.

Our instructors knew their subject; some were POWs during the Korean War. They attempted to explain what we could expect as prisoners if captured in Southeast Asia. They shared their experiences from Korea as well as those of the then few US personnel shot down

and captured in Southeast Asia. Specifically mentioned were LT Charles Klusman, a RF8A pilot from VFP-63 Det C flying from *Kitty Hawk* shot down on 6 June 1964, and LTJG Dieter Dengler, an A1D "Spad" pilot from VA-145 assigned to *Ranger* who was shot down on 1 February 1966. Both escaped after becoming prisoners in Laos.

The SERE classes emphasized the importance of knowing and maintaining the chain of command, exerting leadership, and adhering to the Code of Conduct. The Code came into existence during the Eisenhower administration because of Korean War prisoner experiences. Each student received a copy of the Code and Geneva Conventions regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. Both said a prisoner would provide only name, rank, and serial number. The Code admonished captured military personnel to adhere to that guidance as long as possible. Further, the instructors cautioned us about intentionally lying under interrogation because an experienced interrogator would soon discover our lies. They left the consequences of that to our imaginations.

Dressed in Marine fatigues, we left the classroom in the early afternoon of the second day to prepare for our night on the beach facing Coronado Roads near the Zuniga Point breakwater. Our instructors gave a few suggestions regarding collecting food and the use of parachutes for sleeping bags and shelter. We foraged for food along the beach and breakwater hoping to find enough to feed our class of 125. Our "designated" cooks prepared our meal in a large metal pot filled with water and whatever sea life others collected. Fortunately, we ate in the dark. We spent the night sleeping on the beach using parachute panels as sleeping bags.

The next morning, buses carried us to Warner Springs for our field training. Our training was to be in three segments: a night evasion exercise, a day land-navigation exercise, and two days in a prison compound.

During the initial phase, we lived in tents fashioned from parachutes and again slept in parachute panel sleeping bags. We subsisted off the land. It was not easy as the entire area had a profusion of snares set by previous classes. The animals, long exposed to generations of SERE students, were wary and very difficult to trap. The staff somewhat sympathetically provided us with supplemental rations. The first night we received a five-pound can of GI corned beef to feed the 125 students. Several students volunteered to take on the momentous task of deciding how to cut that five-pound block of meat to provide an equal ration to each person. Surprisingly they did it. The next afternoon after fruitlessly foraging the desert for dinner, the instructors gave us four live pigeons, two tame rabbits, and some rice. They then demonstrated how to kill and dress the creatures. We had a thin rabbit-pigeon-rice stew highly flavored with fresh wild sage picked in the desert. Our cooks were not master chefs. Their food tasted like sage and rice soup with thankfully overcooked meat. It helped to be hungry.

The training area was in Cleveland National Forest. For our night evasion exercise, we were marched to an area some distance from our camp and then the instructors told us to return to camp. The instructors indicated the general direction of our camp and advised us the enemy was very adept at capturing and handling prisoners. The first part of the exercise took us through woods and our main concern was to make as little noise as possible. However, near the halfway point, we came to a clearing about thirty meters wide and covered with white sand that provided

no cover. The moon was out and it took great skill to cross that spot. I was still planning my crossing when the exercise ended. The instructors called to the stragglers telling them to return to camp. We received a "special" greeting from the guards for taking so long.

The next morning, we lined up to receive our instructions for the day navigation exercise. We did not know that earlier in the morning the US Forest Service declared the fire index too high to conduct our hike. As we stood in ranks waiting for our instructions, a large group of the "enemy" descended on and captured us as we dumbly stood in formation. We then learned we would enjoy an extra day in the prison compound in lieu of the navigation exercise. Several members of the class, including me, attempted to resist capture or the orders of the enemy. The guards immediately pulled us out of ranks, threw us to the ground and then summarily executed us by pistol fire using blanks. Unfortunately, that did not excuse us from the prison compound exercise, but it did mark us for special treatment.

It was impossible for those seventy-two hours in a simulated prison compound to equate to the real thing. The only thing it did was to expose the student to some of the things that could happen. Obviously, we were not beaten or tortured as many prisoners were. However, that did not mean we did not receive physical abuse because we did. To prevent unnecessary injuries, the instructors told us never to touch the guards. (This supposedly was for our personal safety; but perhaps it was for the guard's safety as well.) The guards were "pros" when it came to "correcting" a prisoner who had disobeyed an order or just for general principles. The guards frequently "telegraphed" their punches. By that, I mean we always saw their fist approaching our head. However, at the last second, the fist opened, and we received a slap on the face. Yes, they stung and some hurt, but they did not knock us down, loosen our teeth or break our jaws.

The prison compound was about 300 feet long and perhaps seventy-five feet wide and on a slight incline. A high wire fence enclosed the yard and one corner on the high end of the camp had a tall watchtower. The guard in the tower had a .30 caliber machine gun loaded with blanks. There were no barracks, at least for prisoners; so we correctly surmised we were going to be awake for a long time. Earlier we had learned a full meal was the reward for anyone escaping the compound. That was an incentive, but failure in an attempt to escape obviously had disadvantages. Rumor held that some time earlier, a prisoner, a SEAL, confounded the guards by running back and forth over the length of the camp. On one of his downhill legs, he went to the fence and scrambled over it before the guards realized what he was doing. Several buildings at the end of the compound contained, among other things, the interrogation center.

Faithful to our lessons at North Island, we made mistake number one; we posted a seniority list for officers and chiefs. The senior officer was Commander Charles "Chuck" Hathaway, USCG, who was en route to command Coast Guard Squadron One. Number two was LCDR John Hurd, USN. John was XO of USS *Wiltsie* (DD-716) when I was on the DESRON Seven staff. I was number three. Now the guards knew as much as the prisoners did and the divide and conquer operation started. First, Chuck Hathaway disappeared; I am not sure he even made it to the compound phase. During the first night, John came up to me and said, "Tom, I can't take it any more so you're now in charge" John disappeared.

Almost immediately, I was taken in for interrogation. I stood in front of a desk with a

lamp glaring in my face. I had not been required to remove my fatigue cap so with just the slightest motion of my head I was able to shade some of the light coming from a lamp on the desk aimed directly at me and observe my surroundings. Two interrogators sat at a desk and several guards were in the background. The guards, realizing I could see the interrogators made me remove my hat. Although I could no longer see what was directly in front of me, I did retain my peripheral vision.

My interrogation started and I responded, name, rank, and serial number. Somewhere between name and rank, I got my first slap. I have no idea how long that continued. Finally, a voice said that I needed help answering the questions. They then dragged in one of the enlisted men, and each time I refused an answer, they slugged him. Every time he could, he would give me a slight shake of the head. That continued for a while and I felt like hell (as I was supposed to do.) After one slap, the sailor started bleeding from the mouth. Still he shook his head, "No." I again refused to answer and the sailor received another slap. At that time, I considered the point made and the "game" had gone far enough. I gave a response other than name, rank and service number. They immediately removed the sailor and had his mouth treated. That was one of the artificialities of the compound exercise; all injuries regardless of how minor were to be immediately treated.

It did leave me to ponder whether I would do the same if faced with a real situation. The Code told us to resist as long as we had the will to do so. In the real world, could I let my silence cause the death or serious injury to someone else? Fortunately, I never had to face that situation.

A guard led me to an adjacent room and introduced me to the black box, a device I came to know intimately. I stepped into the box and assumed a near fetal position on my knees. My feet, head and shoulders generally touched the sides of the box. The lid closed, pushing down on my buttocks until the lid locked. I discovered my body twisted so that my nose was only an inch or so from an armpit, a less than desirable place after living in my clothes for several days. I attempted to keep track of time by counting, but I always managed to lose my count and had to start over. Again, the guards kept a close watch on those in the boxes and got us out before serious problems arose. During one session in the black box, I started coughing and gasping for breath. The lid opened and a guard told me to get out. I did with some difficulty. I expected to go back to the compound; instead, I went into a larger box, big enough to hold several people. It was a crawl-in type box and reminded me of an oversize doghouse. A few minutes later, I noticed a fan was now near the opening, apparently placed there to help me cool down. When that happened, and my breathing became normal, it was back to the black box.

When the prisoners were not being interrogated or reposing in black boxes, they had various work details within the compound. While so engaged, one could expect a slap or a kick (normally with the side of a boot rather than the toe); or, if a guard felt lenient, he would order a prisoner to do fifty to 100 pushups.

While helping with the driving of a steel stake into the ground, a steel chip flew off and cut my hand. It was not a bad cut. Had I received a similar one while working around the house, I probably would ignore it. However, in this case, a guard immediately took me from the detail and reported my injury to a senior. Next, he led me out of the compound to a first aid station.

The guard advised this was outside the compound training and escape would not keep me out of the compound nor get me a full meal. A corpsman took care of my "wound" while repeating the earlier advice about escaping. When he finished his task, he offered me a ham and cheese sandwich and a glass of milk. I refused them, as I would not return to the compound knowing I had food not available to my fellow prisoners.

The prison compound phase of our training suddenly ended about 0300 on Saturday when the Camp Commander announced, "You are impossible. I give up. You're all free!" At that, the guards appeared with big containers of orange juice and hot oatmeal and told us to eat all we wanted. Since childhood, oatmeal was not high on my list of foods. That morning changed my attitude toward oatmeal. Buses returned us to North Island. I called Pat who took me home. I crawled into the tub, soaked, and scrubbed my way through three tubs of water; then I went to bed.

I reported to NIOTC, Mare Island on 22 October 1967. The photo board behind the duty officer's desk indicated Commander John Ives, USN, was the school's executive officer. He was the DESRON Thirteen maintenance officer when I joined *Small* in 1960. As there we no rooms available in the BOQ, I stayed at a hotel in downtown Vallejo. The accommodations were drab, but it had the advantage of being near the landing where I rode a small passenger ferry to and from Mare Island. One evening, my brother Jerry and his wife Gertie drove to Vallejo picked me up and we then drove to Napa where we joined our uncle, Tom Kane, then the chaplain at Imola State Hospital for dinner at an Italian restaurant.

NIOTC did not have a specific training program for those going to staff assignments. However, they had courses for those destined to both the River Patrol Force and the Mobile Riverine Assault Force (TF-117.) (TF-117 was the result of an Army-Navy concept developed in early 1967 to employ Army units in Navy ships and craft as the Mekong Delta Mobile Assault Force or MEDMAF. The Marines normally associated with amphibious warfare were already heavily committed in the I Corps Tactical Zone immediately south of the DMZ.) Those of us going to staff positions included Captain Robert S. Salzer, USN, and Lieutenant Commander Robert Condon, the CO of UDT-12 (Underwater Demolition Team Twelve). Bob Salzer was to relieve Captain Wade Wells, USN, as Commander, Mobile Riverine Force, TF-117. UDT-12 operated as a part of TF-117. Our training was under the care of Lieutenant Roy F. Boehm, USN.

Roy, a legendary Underwater Demolition Team member, was a pioneer when the Navy developed its unconventional warfare SEAL (SEa, Air, Land) Teams in 1962. When the Navy's first SEAL unit, SEAL Team Two, was established, Roy was the executive officer; and Lieutenant Commander John Callahan, USN, the commanding officer. However, John was delayed in getting to Naval Amphibious Base, Little Creek, Norfolk, VA, in time for the scheduled commissioning of SEAL Team Two, thus, Roy was the first OIC of SEAL Team Two.

(On 5 February 1964, Viet Cong sappers mined USNS *Card* T-AKV-40 causing the ship to sink at its berth in Saigon Harbor. At the time, *Card*, formerly CVE-11, an escort carrier, served as an aircraft ferry operated by the Military Sea Transportation Service [MSTS.] Roy told us those investigating the incident interviewed him as he had trained some South Vietnamese navy personnel in the very act that sank *Card.* He claimed his statement to the investigators was

to the effect the swimmers had followed their instructions faithfully, however, he claimed no responsibility for their subsequent politics. Neal Mills, an OCS classmate, commanded USS *Tawakoni* ATF-114 that towed the damage *Card* down the rivers and on to Subic Bay.)

Ironically, John and Michelle Callahan, and their daughter, Colleen, were neighbors in Coronado when I received my orders to Vietnam. For some time, I thought John had made a bad decision as he had already initiated action to resign from the Navy and go into the restaurant business. He did that and I later reevaluated my thoughts of John's plans. His restaurant, located in the boathouse of the Hotel Del Coronado, was the first of what became the Chart House chain. It later expanded to include the Cork and Cleaver chain. One of the features of both restaurants whose menus were painted on cleavers, was their prime rib, including the, "Callahan Cut." John later sold his interests in the business for several millions of dollars.

Roy ensured we received a good overview of what we could expect in Vietnam. Our training consisted of participation in practical training exercises in the sloughs of the Sacramento River as well as classroom and seminar sessions.

Those sloughs were familiar places as my family and friends fished in those waters during my youth. One fishing adventure in 1943 gave me a scare. I went fishing with Cecil Hough, a friend of the family, who kept his boat, the *Aneth H* (named for his wife) at Antioch. Cecil and I started on a weekend fishing trip. The idea excited me greatly, not necessarily for the fishing aspects, but mainly because we lived on the boat. On Saturday afternoon with the boat anchored in a slough, we prepared for fishing. I was on the fo'c's'le on getting our fishing poles and started to go aft on the starboard side to join "Cec." As I walked along, I held onto a short handrail on top of the cabin. The boathook lay alongside that rail and without paying attention to what I was doing; I placed my hand on the boathook instead of the rail, lost my balanced and went over the side with the poles firmly gripped in my left hand. I did not want to lose the poles and that obviously hampered my ability to swim toward the boat, and I started to drift down stream. "Cec" slipped the anchor, started the boat and came after me, all the while I was calling, "Hurry, "Cec." By the time he got me back on the boat, the fishing poles were long gone. We took the boat back to Antioch and then drove to Oakland, The following weekend Cec and my Dad went back to the area to try to drag for the lost anchor and fishing gear. They had no luck with either item.

The sloughs provided a fair representation of the narrower rivers and canals of the Mekong Delta. The ground cover in the training area was not as tall or dense as in Vietnam, but was sufficient to provide cover for ambushing forces. One of the islands had a base camp and underwent sneak nighttime attacks by SEAL or UDT personnel. Although the Sacramento River Delta has a fair share of insects, it lacked the heat and humidity of the Mekong Delta, particularly in November.

We studied and discussed the CTF-116 operation order as well as "spot (action) reports" from TF-116 units, all of which were received by NIOTC. The latter caused Roy problems as they indicated the PBRs (Patrol Boat, River) were operating in smaller rivers and canals something strictly prohibited by the operation order.

Roy asked me as the prospective plans officer to keep him apprised of changes in tactical guidance and operations so the training conducted at NIOTC replicated actual in-country operations. I assured him I would. Surprisingly, when I later arrived in country and mentioned this to Captain Gray, he prohibited it with a comment to the effect that if the people at Mare Island wanted to know what we were doing, let them come out and learn for themselves. That seemed to be a strange attitude for an operational commander to take with regard to the facility training his yet-to-report personnel. Some months later, Roy, along with several others did in fact come in country. After a perfunctory call on Captain Gray, they spent their time with the divisions and sections. I assumed they got the information previously denied to them.

Our Mare Island training included familiarization firing of the various weapons we could expect to encounter. They ranged from .45 automatic pistols to .50 caliber machine guns, hand grenades and M79 grenade launchers. I have always been an accurate shooter as far as firearms are concerned. However, I really have never been very accurate when throwing anything. That was not the case at Mare Island as I surprised the Marine Corps instructors and myself with my accuracy in throwing grenades. Unfortunately, the familiarizations did not include how to use a M66 LAW (light anti-tank weapon). Little did I know that within 90 days I would have to try to learn that by reading faded instructions painted on a LAW while being shot at by the Viet Cong.

I left NIOTC on 3 November 1967 with orders to report to Travis Air Force Base, Fairfield, California, for flight W243/312 leaving the night of 7 November 1967 for Saigon. I arrived at Travis as directed and learned World Airways held the contract for my flight. We were to fly from Travis to Elmendorf Air Force Base, Anchorage, Alaska, for fuel, then on to Yokota Air Force Base in Japan for more fuel before finally going on to at Tan Son Nhut near Saigon. Because of a lighter than expected passenger load, the plan was revised. We flew directly to Yokota. World Airways had just graduated a class of flight attendants and we ended up with a double crew in the cabin. That word leaked to the passengers before we boarded and many seemed eager to have twice as many "round eyes" (an expression to describe non-Asians) with them during their last hours before arriving in Saigon. Unfortunately, we were disappointed. When we boarded the plane, we were glad it was a night flight. I have yet to see another group of such unattractive flight attendants, male or female.

Arriving at Tan Son Nhut on 8 November, we deplaned according to our service and armed personnel escorted us to our ground transportation. At that time, Tan Son Nhut was very busy and handled about 1,500 flights a day; thus, there was a lot of movement of personnel and equipment on the group. Our escorts were to keep us from going astray. The fact that they were armed was a coincidence as most people in Vietnam were armed.

The Navy personnel boarded a rickety old Bluebird school bus painted haze gray and bearing a Navy registrations number. Heavy wire mesh replaced the windows so the VC could not toss grenades into the bus and among the passengers. We arrived at the Annapolis Hotel, which served as the receiving station in Saigon. It did not have a good reputation in the Navy, a sentiment echoed in the States by the media. I started to get off with the other passengers but learned that lieutenant commanders and above were billeted elsewhere. So I continued as the sole passenger until the bus arrived at Koelper Compound, a small French-built hotel that served as a transient point for field grade officers. The compound, named in honor of Captain Donald

E. Koelper, USMC was located at 8 Nguyen Ven Trong. Capt. Koelper posthumously received the Navy Cross for action on 16 February 1964. Koelper served two purposes: it provided transients a place to eat and sleep and it was an indoctrination facility for newly reported officers. While at Koelper, I saw several people I had previously met at the various training sessions at Coronado.

I shared a small room with an Army lieutenant colonel then on his way home. Shortly after we introduced ourselves, I heard a then-strange flop-flop sound outside. I asked if it was a Huey (A Model UH-1 helo) and he replied, yes. Welcome to Vietnam, I recognize that sound forty years later.

The room was large enough to hold a pair of GI bunks, upper and lower, and two wall lockers. The bath contained a toilet, apparently designed for Vietnamese midgets, and a shower. The showerhead was almost directly over the toilet and the shower curtain served as the bathroom door. The air-conditioning consisted of a large open screen-less window and a small, slow-motion ceiling fan. For illumination, we had two lights - one in the bed and one in the bathroom both were either fifteen or twenty-five watts. At night, more light came in through the window than was provided by these lights. The open windows introduced me to the Vietnamese National Bird, more commonly known as the fly. They may not have been large flies, but their nasty persistence compensated for their lack of size. Bug spray was a major personal weapon for those in Vietnam. Most of the bug spray I saw in Vietnam came from Neodesha, KS.

The building had an elevator; it was a candidate for the Guinness Book of Records as the slowest in the world. I learned I could walk to or from my third floor room faster than the elevator even when it had a one-floor head start. That elevator provided good exercise for the tenants.

My first morning, 9 November, found me at NAVSUPPACT (Naval Support Activity) headquarters where I went through the check-in process. The first comment by the yeoman handling my check-in was, "I notice you did not volunteer for duty in Vietnam." That information did not appear on a computer printout he was reading. I said that I had volunteered; and he asked when so he could correct the record. I replied, "4 March 1947." He looked puzzled and asked for clarification. I explained I enlisted in the Navy on that day and had been there ever since; therefore, I had volunteered to go where the Navy sent me. He still did not understand me. (Since about 1963, the services – at least the Navy – actively sought personnel to volunteer for duty in Vietnam and doing so was considered as an asset in one's service record.)

US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) staff personnel provided all of our training during daylong classes at Koelper. To this day, I cannot recall hearing as much hog wash and disinformation at any military presentation as I had heard at Koelper.

We all knew what MACV was, but then we learned of the Free World Military Assistance Organization (FWMAO.) FWMAO was composed of military units from Australia, New Zealand, The Philippines, Korea and Thailand. In addition, nations that were not militarily involved in Vietnam provided support such as surgical teams from Germany, a Swedish-staffed hospital ship, and others. Even Taiwan had military liaison personnel throughout the country. It

became evident MACV used FWMAO to convince newly reported personnel that not only were personnel from the United States as personified by MACV, but from the Free World in the form of FWMAO were opposing the Communist aggression in Vietnam. The briefing officers wore replicas of the MACV and FWMAO shoulder patches as badges hanging from the pockets of their uniforms.

Private John Steinbeck IV, a reporter for the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service in Vietnam had recently written "The Importance of Being Stoned in Vietnam" for the *Washingtonian* magazine. It was one of the earliest exposés of marijuana usage among the in-country troops. He provided various figures to support his allegations. COMUSMACV denied that drugs posed a problem among the American forces in Vietnam. A Marine Corps major from the MACV Provost Marshal's (PM) office spent an hour belittling the article. The major said Steinbeck was wrong and he could prove it! The major said the number of in-country troops who smoked anything was much smaller than the number Steinbeck claimed smoked pot.

The basis for the PM's claim was analyses of ration cards. The cards were issued quarterly and supposedly contained a record of all alcohol, tobacco and luxury items purchased by individuals. To get a new card, one turned in his old one, and everyone turned in their last card when once they had left Vietnam permanently. During my year in Vietnam, my ration cards recorded the purchase of one small portable radio, which I still have, and two bottles of Chivas Regal, which I do not have. That, however, was not all I bought, it was just what my four ration cards indicated.

I can imagine a child or grandchild asking his father or grandfather what he did in Vietnam and receiving the reply, "I counted punch holes in ration cards for the MACV Provost Marshal and got the 'Green Weenie'" (Army Commendation Medal) if one was enlisted or a Legion of Merit if one was an officer supervising hole counters.

The same major's presentation put the lie to all the scandalous press reports about black market activities in Saigon. He said their MPs check the city regularly and he assured us there wasn't more than about $5,000 worth of merchandise on the city's black market at any time. However, the day before that lecture, I looked up a friend from JCS days, Army captain Bill De Witt, who was in the operations shop at MACV. He picked me up in a jeep and we went out for dinner at a floating restaurant the VC had blown up a short while before. Surprisingly, I noticed a large Claymore mine at the foot of the brow leading to the restaurant. It made me wonder if it was there for potential attackers or fleeing customers. After that, we poked our heads into a few bars along Tu Do Street, and then generally walked around.

The number of black market operations we saw in stores, alleys, or wherever entrepreneurs could set up shop amazed me. In one store, I saw more M-16 rifles (they had been relatively recently introduced to replace the M-14) than I suppose many units possessed. If it was GI, one could find it in a shop if he looked long enough. One shop had a window display of every decoration, service and campaign medal issued by the U.S. military since before World War II, with the notable exception of the Medal of Honor.

The presentation regarding in country naval operations was given, by of all persons, an

Army major from the MACV operations directorate. It was complete with photos and statistics. Oddly, he did not address TF-115, TF-116 nor TF-117 or any other in country Navy organizations. Instead, he focused on the VNN River Assault Groups (RAGs). During his presentation, he referred to the Mekong as a fast flowing river with currents sometimes as high as ten or more knots. Then he described the characteristics of LCMs and LCVPs and said their typical speeds were approximately seven knots. That brought calls of derision from my classmates about the Navy that could not go anywhere, except down stream.

Frankly, I was bored with Saigon and wanted to get out of there. I had a big advantage over my Army classmates: I knew where I was going and what I was to do once I got there. They on the other hand had no idea what their assignments were except they knew they would have split tours - six months in the field and then six in Saigon or vice versa. (They noted that could mean the possibility of an end-of-tour decoration upon completing each assignment. That would look good on their records.) As we broke from class for lunch and at the end of the day, they all dashed to a bulletin board to look for their names and an APO number. When they found their name, they then had to look up a personnel clerk who told them what unit was associated with the APO number.

I later encountered similar Army officers who were assigned as advisors to Vietnamese Regional and Popular Forces or as we called them the "Ruff" "Puffs." The Regional Forces were a Provincial Army somewhat like a state's National Guard unit. The Popular Forces were District Forces, perhaps equating to a county militia.

Many of the “Ruff Puff” officers and senior NCOs had been in their units for a number of years. They were all indigenous to the area in which they served. Their advisors, on the other hand, for the most part, were young well intentioned, eager US Army first lieutenants and captains, who may or may not have been combat arms (infantry, artillery, armor or combat engineers) soldiers. Regardless of their arm or service, all of them received standard infantry indoctrination before coming in country. When assigned to Ruff Puff units, they knew they would be there six months. Based on their limited training and experience, some thought they were going to show their Vietnamese counterparts, who had been in the business for years, how to win the war during their six month assignments. One could almost hear some of the Vietnamese say, “Oh, no! Here is another six month miracle maker.”

On 14 November, it was time to leave Koelper and return to NAVSUPPACT headquarters. There, I received my field gear. That was a green GI duffle bag filled with sets of jungle utilities, boots, socks, blankets, a field jacket, a waterproof map of the country, a first aid kit, K-bar knife, web gear and canteen, emergency (pencil) signal flares, air mattress, mosquito netting, etc. On top of the bag rested a brand new flak jacket and steel helmet.

I also received my first allocation of chloroquine tablets. They were large pink anti-malaria medication and we were to take one a week for the remainder of our stay in Vietnam. The person issuing the pills suggested that if possible, we pick one day a week to take our pills and hopefully, it was a day that where the taker would be in relatively close proximity to a head as the pills could have a purgative effect.

A bus took me to Tan Son Nhut and left me, bag and baggage, on an apron to await air transportation to Binh Thuy. Before long, a Naval Support Activity Saigon Air Cofat C-117 (an upgraded R4D or C-47 "Gooney Bird"- the military version of the Douglas DC-3) taxied up. It was the daily Market Time support flight made the rounds to the various Coastal Surveillance Force locations. I loaded my gear on board and we waddled down the runway, became airborne, and eventually ended up at Binh Thuy Air Base (BTAB) after a stop at Vung Tau. (Air Cofat derived its name from Cofat, a then-defunct French cigarette. The NAVSUPPACT Saigon building was located on the site of the former Cofat cigarette plant.)

Most of the activity related in the narrative took place in the Mekong Delta defined as follows: The Mekong Delta and perforce the IV Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ,) included the fifteen provinces south of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) and the Capital Military District. It encompasses approximately 75,000 square miles (slightly less than that of Nebraska) of rice paddies and mangrove forests, and an odd outcropping of mountains, known as the Seven Mountains, in the southeast near the Gulf of Siam and Cambodian border

The Delta had a population of about 8-million, roughly 50-percent of Republic of Vietnam's population. Can Tho was the largest city in the Delta. Other cities included My Tho, Sac Dec, Vinh Long, Ben Tre, Long Xyuen, Chau Duc (Chau Phu), and Soc Trang (Khahn Hung). A vast majority of the Delta's population lived in small villages and hamlets throughout the region. Almost if not all of the population lived on or near a waterway whether a river or canal.

The Delta is a flat alluvial plain created by the Mekong River and its four tributaries, the My Tho, Ham Luong and Co Chien Rivers emptying into the South China Sea, and the Bassac River that is south of the Mekong.(Bassac is the French name for the Hua Giang.) Collectively, the four rivers comprise about 800-miles of navigable water. In the northeastern part of the Mekong Delta, the Soi Rap and Long Tau Rivers are the major navigation channels between Saigon and the South China Sea. The southern extremity of the Mekong Delta, the Cau Mau peninsula, includes the U Minh forest. Thousands of miles of canals crisscross the Delta. Some are relatively large while others cannot accommodate anything much larger than a sampan.

The Mekong Delta, known as the "rice bowl" of Vietnam was a major source of food for the capital area. (It is one of the world's most productive in the growing of rice.) As there were comparatively few roads in the Delta and no bridges over any major river, much of that produce traveled through the canal systems.

The weather is hot, humid, and affected by the southwest or "dry" monsoon generally from late fall to early spring and the northeast of "wet" monsoon during the other half of the year. (One could almost detect the monsoonal change by the sudden absence or appearance of rain. During my tour, the onset of the dry Monsoon began on 27 November 1967 and ended on 27 April 1968. During that six-month period, no rain fell on Binh Thuy.)

In January 1968, the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, or more commonly, the Viet Cong forces in the Delta consisted of twenty infantry battalion, one artillery battalion and one sapper (engineer) battalion. There were some NVA (North Vietnamese Army,

or more correctly, the PAVN – People's Army of Vietnam) cadre and/or advisors serving with these units. In addition to these combat units, the VC infrastructure included political, logistics and other elements.

Someone had the foresight to notify the Navy at Binh Thuy that I was arriving, thus a vehicle waited to take me to my new home. We drove to the Naval Support Activity Detachment, Binh Thuy, about a mile down the road from the Vietnamese air base. Somebody showed me my room in the BOQ where I dropped my gear and then went to meet my new boss, Captain Paul N. Gray. He welcomed me and said that I should take a couple weeks to become more familiar with the Game Warden operation then he expected me to charge along with the rest of the staff. Before I left his office he told me to get rid of the Marine Corps fatigue cap that I received with my jungle fatigues and to buy a black beret as that was the only head gear allowed in the River Patrol Force.

There are several versions as to how the black beret became part of the River Patrol Force uniform. One is that the Chief of the Vietnamese Maritime police gave a black police beret to Captain Burton B. Witham, the officer who relieved Admiral Veth as CTF-116. The River Patrol Force's initial mission was to "supplement Vietnamese units in patrol of the Delta and Rung Sat Special Zone waterway." Captain Witham then asked COMNAVFORV about making it part of the uniform and received a resounding "No" as it was not part of US Naval Uniform Regulations. On 29 April 1967, COMRIVPATFOR sent a message to RIVPATFOR with an information copy to COMNAVFORV and COMRIVRON Five. It read:

"UNCLAS
RIVER PATROL FORCE BLACK BERET
1. THIS MSG AUTHORIZES WEARING BY THE RIVER PATROL FORCE OF THE BLACK BERET OF THE VIETNAMESE NATIONAL MARITIME POLICE WITH THE GREEN UNIFORM. FOLLOWING RULES APPLY:
(A) BERET WILL BE WORN WITH RIVER PATROL FORCE INSIGNIA CENTERED ON RIGHT SIDE.
(B) BERET WILL BE WORN ONLY WITH GREEN UNIFORM.
(C) ONLY STANDARD SIZE RIVER PATROL FORCE INSIGNIA WILL BE WORN ON BERET. STANDARD SIZE IS A TWO AND ONE-HALF INCH DIAMETER EMBROIDERED PATCH OR METAL INSIGNIA. NO OTHER EMBLEM OR RANK INSIGNIA WILL BE DISPLAYED ON BERET.
(D) THIS MESSAGE DOES NOT PRECLUDE WEARING OF BATTLE HELMETS WHEN REQUIRED.
(E) ONLY RIVER PATROL FORCE PERSONNEL MAY WEAR BERET. THIS INCLUDES LST PERSONNEL AND MINESWEEPER, HEICOPTER AND SEAL DETACHMENTS.
2. YOU HAVE EARNED THE RIVER PATROL FORCE BERET. WEAR IT PROUDLY.
3. BERETS EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY. DISSEMINATE RAPIDLY.
4. THIS IS A TURNOVER ITEM."

The first time I saw a sailor wearing a black beret was in Sacred Heart Church in Coronado. One Sunday when Pat and I were at Mass, we saw a sailor in service dress blues wearing a beret. I now assume he was a sailor who had just completed his tour with the River Patrol Force. He obviously was out of uniform.

I as well as others did not comply with Captain Witham's directive. Throughout my tour, my beret had a subdued miniature Navy officer's cap device as well as a not-subdued metal insignia of a Vietnamese army *thu ta* - major; I never located a source for Vietnam navy rank insignia. The berets had a small ribbon loop at the back. There was a protocol regarding the loop. If one did not participate in patrols, the loop remained intact. On the other hand, if one made patrols he cut the loop. When one had been in a firefight, he would notch the ends of the cut loop. Later, people attached small pins resembling a B-40 rocket propelled grenade to their berets for each time they had been in a boat hit by one of those pieces of ordnance. My beret's loop received its cut and notched. The B-40 pins came after I no longer made patrols and I never retroactively added them to my beret. As much as I disliked wearing the beret, I still have mine.

For most of the remainder on my time in Vietnam, my uniform of the day consisted of jungle fatigues, nylon-leather jungle boots and in January 1968, leather boots, and of course the black beret. Later, I went to an USAF supply office at BTAF and obtained an Air Force flight suit that I wore during many subsequent helo flights. Unlike the Navy flight suit that was made of nomex, the Air Force flight suits were made of a gray cotton material. They did not afford protection in a fire, but they were cooler.

Skivvies came in two colors, khaki and white; I never wore the latter. Some, supposedly emulating the SEALs, went "commando" or without skivvies. One rational was that once you were wet from rain or being in the water, your uniform would dry faster than the skivvies would - not having them prevented the obvious discomfort.

Technically, a NMP (National Maritime Police) officer was to be part of each patrol. As very few of the Game Warden sailors were proficient in Vietnamese, the police provided a valuable interpreter service Force. When I arrived at Binh Thuy, the national police sometimes participated with patrols, but their presence dwindled and had for all practical purposes disappeared by the time I left. I assume the gradual shift of Game Warden operations from law enforcement to combat was the major cause. Nevertheless, we still wore the black berets. They were hot! The French must have been sadists for introducing heavy wool berets into a tropical environment.

The Commander, River Patrol Force, was Captain Paul Nagle Gray, USN. He was a naval aviator, of medium stature, nearly bald, and smoked cigarettes with a holder normally clenched in his teeth at a Rooseveltian angle. During the Korean War, he commanded VF-54, the "Hell's Angels," a squadron of AD Skyraiders (forerunners of the A-1) part of Air Carrier Group Five in USS *Essex* CV-9. Gray was part of the 12 aircraft that on 12 December 1951 successfully attacked the heavily defended railway bridges near Majonne, or the "Bridges of Toki Ri." Shot down three times, 7 October 1951, 20 January 1952 and 22 January 1952, Gray's superiors grounded him for "personal safety." While in Coronado, I had seen a number of articles and photographs in the *Coronado Journal* about the River Patrol Force mainly featuring

Paul Gray.

Gray had been the operations officer on the NAVFORV (Naval Forces, Vietnam) staff in Saigon. He wanted to run the River Patrol Force, started a campaign, and eventually replaced Captain Burt Witham.

Captain Gray's deputy was Commander Robert F. Paul. Commander Paul had an additional duty, Senior Advisor to Commander, Fourth Riverine Area, located in Can Tho, about six miles down the road. The Vietnamese Navy had four separate forces, one of which was the River Force. Fourth Riverine Area was the "naval arm" of the Vietnamese IV Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). The Vietnamese navy river force had several River Assault Groups, or RAGs, located throughout the Delta. These RAGs were descendants of the French *Dinassault* (naval assault division) forces and are not to be confused with the US River Assault Groups formed later during Operation Sealords. For the most part, the VNN RAG's watercraft consisted of remnants from the days of French control, and LCMs modified as command and control boats or monitors and LCMs and LCVPs used as troop transports. A few of the French designed STCAN/FOMs (*Services Techniques des Contructrions te Armies Navales France Outre Mer*) remained in service. Although he was the TF-116 deputy commander, most of Paul's time and effort focused on the Vietnamese. (The US Navy began its advisory effort in the Mekong Delta 1956. The American public in general is unaware of this fact, or that the US advisory effort in Vietnam started in 1950.)

The Chief Staff Officer was Commander John R. Miller, an aloof person who seemed to keep a distance from every one. Lieutenant Commander Frederick "Fritz" Steiner, who was getting ready to rotate, headed the Operations Department. The Surface Ops was Lieutenant Commander Donald E. "Gene" Mosman, and the Air Ops was Lieutenant Fred J. Lakeway. The Plans slot was empty. I was to fill that slot while being acclimated to the job and waiting for Fritz to leave. Our Intelligence Officer was Lieutenant Bruce Young. In mid-January, Lieutenant Commander Duane "Dewey" Feuerhelm replaced him. Dewey, a 1630 (Special Duty, Intelligence,) came from NORAD (North American Air Defense Command) in Colorado Springs, CO. Because of restrictions based on special security clearances, Dewey should not have been on assignment outside of Saigon. We also had a psyops (psychological operations warfare) officer, a PAO, LTJG Gary Reynolds ran our NOC (Naval Operations Center) and LTJG Bruce Jayne, the personnel officer. There may have been other staff positions, but I do not recall what they were or who filled the billets. We did not have staff maintenance and communications positions. The river division/section received logistic and maintenance support from the NAVSUPPACT Det. (detachment) or LST they called "home." NAVSUPPACT DET Binh Thuy provided communications support for CTF-116.

Operation Game Warden had a wide variety of assets. Although our operational chain of command was straightforward - it all started with COMNAVFORV through Captain Gray as CTF-116, the administrative command was extremely complex with some commanders located in Pearl Harbor, San Diego or Norfolk, VA. The operational assets included:

- River Squadron Five commanded by Commander Paul Kane in Saigon.
- Light Helicopter Attack Squadron Three (HAL-3) "The Seawolves,"

commanded by Commander Robert W. Spencer
•SEAL Team Detachment A located at Binh Thuy composed of platoons from SEAL Team Two supported by MST-2 (Mobile Support Team)
•SEAL Team Detachment G located at Nha Be composed of platoons from
•SEAL Team One supported by MST-3.
•Mine Squadron Eleven, Detachment A located at Nha Be.
•Support ships. LSTs assigned to Landing Ship Squadron (LANDSHIPRON) One.

These units and their capabilities will be described more fully later in this narrative.

The River Patrol Force units at Nha Be, Vinh Long, Sa Dec and Binh Thuy were located at Naval Support Activity, Saigon (NSAS) detachments at each of those locations. The units at Vinh Long were collocated on a VNN RAG Base. Additionally, NSAS had an afloat asset, the YRBM-16 (a non-self propelled repair, berthing and messing barge.) Originally designed for submarine crews during their inter-patrol in-port periods during World War II, the YRBM-16 served as a base for a river section of ten PBRs. Further, one section of 10 PBRs and one Detachment of HA(L)-3 were located on the LSTs operating on the Co Chien, Ham Long and Bassac Rivers. In essence, the forces were in a position to cover most of the Delta's major waterways.

River Squadron Five had five river divisions and each division has a varying number of river sections, each composed of ten PBRs. River Division Fifty-One, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Don Sheppard was at Binh Thuy. River Division Fifty-Two, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Tom Lewis located at Vinh Long. River Division Fifty-Three commanded by Lieutenant Commander Sam Steed was at My Tho. River Division Fifty-Four was at Nha Be; and River Division Fifty-Five commanded by Lieutenant Commander Hal Brenneman was forming at Binh Thuy. In November 1968, Task Force 116 had two Task Groups: 116.1, The Delta River Patrol Group (RIVDIVs 51, 52, 53 and 55) and 116.2 the Rung Sat River Patrol Group commanded by Commander Donald Warthen, with RIVDIV 54.

The Patrol Boat, River (PBR) was a unique boat. The prototype, constructed in one week and based on a commercial boat created by William Slane's Hatteras Yacht Company, High Point, NC, successfully fulfilled the Navy's specifications. After accepting Slane's prototype, the Navy requested bids for the construction of river patrol boats. In November 1965, the Navy awarded the construction contract to the United Boatbuilders, of Bellingham, WA. The contract called for the delivery of 120 Mark I PBRs by 1 April 1966 at a unit cost of $75,000. A subsequent contract awarded in March 1967 called for the construction of 120 Mark II PBRs. Eventually, the Navy bought 290 PBRs.

The PBRs were thirty-one feet long and built entirely of glass-reinforced plastic. The boat's had ceramic ballistic armor capable of withstanding a .30 caliber bullet on the gun turret, plates on either side of the coxswain's flat, two vertical plates amidships over the engine housing and a shield on the after 50 caliber machine gun. Their propulsion system consisted of a pair of supercharged GM Detroit 6V-53N 220 HP V6 diesel engines, each driving a Jacuzzi pump capable of moving 6,000 gallons of water a minute. The pumps' discharge was through a

controllable nozzle system, thus, the PBRs had neither rudders nor propellers. At 2800 rpm, the PBR had a range of about 200 miles. At full speed, the PBR could reverse course in a boat length and stop in three boat lengths. Their armament consisted of turreted twin .50 caliber machine guns forward and a pedestal mounted single .50 aft. Amidships was a pintle-mounted M60 7.62mm machine gun and a Mark 18 grenade launcher. These weapons were on the amidships armor plates. The Mk. 18 was a hurdy-gurdy type weapon capable of firing belted 40mm grenades as fast as one could turn the handle. It supposedly had a 250-round capacity; after belting 250-rounds, an operator was too damn tired to belt the 251st. Additionally, the crewmembers had their personal weapons supplemented by M79 grenade launchers, assorted hand grenades, M66 LAWs (Light Antitank Weapons,) 12 gauge shotguns, and in some cases hand-held 60mm mortars using a sand bag as a base plate. The PBRs had one Raytheon 1900/N radar and two AN/VRC-46 VHF FM transceivers.

The Mark I PBRs had a Styrofoam-filled fiberglass hull structure that proved to be an asset in that many badly damaged PBRs were able to stay afloat. That was particularly so when the PBRs began to encounter enemy forces armed with Chinese made B-40 and B-41 rocket propelled grenades. RPGs have shaped-charge warheads and require a solid target to detonate. The PBR's most solid fixtures were the armor plates, engines, forward turret and radar antenna. RPGs often penetrated hulls and superstructure without detonating. Unfortunately, the Mk II PBRs did not have Styrofoam.

The crew consisted of a boat captain, forward gunner, after gunner, and engineer. The boat captain could be a chief or first class petty officer, and later, a second-class petty officer. Initially, boatswain's mates and quartermasters served as boat captains; later, any rate performed the duty. The engineer doubled in brass as the amidships gunner using the M-60 or the Mk. 18. The crews were cross-trained so that every man could serve in any position. Fully loaded, a PBR displaced about 8.5 tons, and could make close to thirty knots while drawing about five inches of water.

A patrol consisted of a minimum of two PBRs. The patrol officer was a LT, LTJG, CPO, and sometimes, a PO1. (The training pipeline was too long to let us use Ensigns, who then made LTJG after 18-months of service.) The patrol might or might not include a Vietnamese National Maritime Police officer. A cardinal rule of all patrols was never work without one boat in a position to support the other. A patrol could cover about ten miles of river and would last twelve or more hours.

The patrols subsisted on “C” rations, fresh water or “bug juice” (Kool Aid) and had copious amounts of insect repellant, especially for night patrols. There were several ways to prepare a meal. One was to open the ration boxes and place the cans containing entrees on an engine to heat them. Another was to empty the contents of the entrée cans into a steel helmet and place that on an engine to heat. A standard condiment was Tabasco sauce. The E. M. McIlhenney Company produced a three-ounce bottle of Tabasco exclusively for use in Vietnam. In addition, they published the *C Ration Cook Book*, used throughout Vietnam. We did not eat every C ration component; some used the canned white bread for target practice. The crews patrolled their "head." In other words, if one had to go to the head, he did it over the side. In that respect, we were the same as generations of Vietnamese.

The Naval Support Activity Saigon Detachment at Binh Thuy was the headquarters of the River Patrol Force and home of River Division Fifty-one, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Donald D. Sheppard; several of his division's sections also were at Binh Thuy. Nestled on a pad on the edge of the NAVSUPPACTDET compound was Light Attack Helicopter Squadron Three, Detachment Seven (HA[L]-3, Det 7). The Officer-in-Charge at that time was Lieutenant Commander Bill Martin, a naval reservist from New York. Bill would achieve a bit of notoriety after he left active duty by "streaking" some highly visible function in New York City. He was recognized and identified at about the same time of his selection for promotion to commander. He was able to keep his publicity shots, but not his promotion.

Lastly, Binh Thuy was a home base for SEAL Team Detachment ALFA, its rotating platoons from SEAL Team Two supported by rotating detachments of MST-2 (Mobile Support Team-2). (The TF-116 SEALS operating in the Rung Sat belonged to SEAL Team Detachment GOLF at Nha Be.) When I reported aboard, the platoon leader was Lieutenant Jack Maccione. Jack had the reputation of being a big poker player and was on the move always looking for a game. He collected all kinds of Vietnamese memorabilia and his room looked like an Oriental antique shop. After his release from active duty, Jack became a contractor in Portsmouth, VA, and later opened a short-lived restaurant in Virginia Beach, named, "Heroes," located in the former Victoria Station. It closed after a few years.

A SEAL platoon was composed of two officers and 10 enlisted men They conducted a myriad of clandestine missions ranging from intelligence collection, ambush, infrastructure elimination, recovery of prisoners of war, etc. The SEALS employed a wide variety of weapons that included but was not limited to standard and non-standard military firearms.

The MST-2 and 3 detachments supporting SEAL operations had a variety of small craft in their inventory. The SEALs frequently used PBRs for mission insertion and extraction. Later in mid-1968 they obtained their SEAL Assault Boats (STABs, later known as Strike Assault Boats.) The STABs had aluminum hulls, had a high-speed water propulsion system, and were capable of carrying 3 – 5 SEALS. The MST-2 detachments also had a boat known as the HSSC (Heavy SEAL Support Craft.) The HSSC was a standard LCM-6 modified with a helo deck over the well deck and had heavy armament including three single M2 .50 caliber machineguns, two twin .50 caliber machine guns, 2 M60 machine guns, a M134 7.62mm Gatling-type mini-gun, and a 106mm recoilless rifle.

Major General Nguyen Van Manh was the commander of the Vietnamese IV CTZ (Corps Tactical Zone) when I arrived. Senior military billets, as well as province and districts chiefs and some mayoral assignments, were highly politicized within the Vietnamese army. Assignments frequently changed as various political factions were able to assert their prominence. President Thieu was in the process of "evaluating" senior officers and attempting to remove those aligned with former President Ky from positions of political influence and power. One's political allegiance in many cases was more important than military ability. That may seem strange, but political instability was almost a traditional part of Vietnam's history, particularly after the defeat of the French in 1954.

The U.S. Senior Advisor to IV CTZ was Brigadier General William Desobry, who became a German POW near Bastogne during the early phases of the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. On 14 January 1968, Major General George S. Eckhardt replaced BG Desobry. The corps headquarters were in a compound near the center of Can Tho. The Vietnamese corps commander lived in a villa along Route 27, the road leading to Binh Thuy, and the senior advisor and his team lived in Eakin Compound, southeast of the corps headquarters.

The corps consisted of the Seventh, Ninth, and Twenty-first ARVN (Army of Republic of Vietnam) Infantry Divisions, plus the Forty-fourth Special Tactical Zone (STZ.) The headquarters for the divisions were, My Tho, Sa Dec and Can Tho, respectively. The Forty-fourth STZ, located on the north side of the Mekong, generally between Sa Dec and the Plain of Reeds (Plaines des Jarres, or Dong Thap Muoi), was headquartered at Cao Lanh, Kien Phong Province. The 44th was created by removing one district each from the responsibilities of the "over extended" infantry divisions. The 44th STZ troops consisted on CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) troops, Regional and Popular Force troops and mercenaries. An ARVN colonel commanded the 44TH STZ. One unnamed US Army Senior Advisor characterized the 7th ARVN Infantry Division as the "Search and Avoid Division" and that the 9th and 21st Infantry Divisions as not as good.

Can Tho was the largest city south of Saigon. It must have been a very picturesque place at one time. Wide streets, attractive buildings, parks, and many of the streets was tree lined. It was also the scene of some very severe sectarian warfare. In 1957, some 15,000 people died in a battle between religious sects. The combatants did not have the semi- and automatic weapons later used in the country, but they fought with old firearms, swords, spears, axes and whatever else the combatants could, lay their hands on. Vietnam's history records many such "battles of religious strife."

In addition to its PBRs, the River Patrol Force's operational assets included, Mine Squadron Eleven, Detachment Alfa. It was originally composed of twelve built-for-the-purpose 57-foot mine sweeping boats (MSB.) In 1967 six-river minesweepers (MSM) actually converted LCM-6s, joined the detachment. The minesweepers were located at Nha Be. On 1 May 1968, Detachment Alfa became Mine Divisions 112 and 113 each composed of six MSBs and six MSMs. Light Helo Attack Squadron Three (HA[L]-3) was the Navy's only helicopter gunship squadron. The squadron's headquarters were located at Vung Tau.

Four LSTs – *Garrett County* LST-782 *Jennings County* LST-846 *Harnett County* LST-821 and *Hunterdon County* LST-838 served as bases for river sections and "Seawolf" helo detachments. While three LSTs were in country at any given time, the fourth would be in Subic Bay or Guam for maintenance. The LSTs, armed with 40mm guns, provided gunfire support for the PBRs and other operations. The Navy's 40mm ammunition, primarily designed for anti-aircraft fire, self-destructed at 4,000 yards. Some of the LSTs requisitioned Army ammunition, as those rounds did not self-destruct. This increased the effectiveness of the LSTs gunfire support. Some LSTs developed their own version of the drift tactics used by PBR patrols. The totally darkened ships, secured all engines, generators and other noise producing equipment and drifted broadside in the river. When crewmembers stationed in the bow and stern detected enemy activity by sound or and Starlight scopes, the ship reacted accordingly.

Another floating asset was the YRBM-16, a non-self-propelled repair, berthing, and messing barge, supported a section of ten PBRs. We also had a rocket launching LCM-6. I do not know its history. The well deck of the LCM contained 5-inch rocket launchers similar to those found on early LSMRs (Landing Ship Medium, Rocket) during World War II. Aiming the rockets in the LCMR required a "Kentucky windage" art. To attain firing position, the LCM would nose onto the beach at the appropriate range from the target and then the coxswain would "twist" the LCM by use of the engines to train onto the target.

Although the operational chain of command was relatively clear-cut, the administrative one was confusing. The PBRs and their crews belonged to Commander, River Squadron Five then commanded by Commander Paul Kane in Saigon. RIVRON Five, which belonged to COMPHIBPAC in Coronado, had five river divisions: RIVDIV 51 at Binh Thuy; RIVDIV 52 at Vinh Long; RIVDIV 53 at My Tho and RIVDIV 54 at Nha Be in the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ.) On 20 November 1967, a fifth division, RIVDIV 55 activated at Binh Thuy. River Sections (10 PBRs) from divisions were located at Sa Dec, Vinh Long, My Tho, and Nha Be, and in each of the in-country LSTs operating on the My Tho, Ham Long, Co Chien and Bassac Rivers. A division operated from the YRBM-16 at Ben Tre on the Ham Luong River.

River Squadron Five had a 130 percent manning level; that is, it had 30% more people than actually required to fill each billet on the personnel allowance. The rationale for the over manning was to compensate for people on leave (all in-country personnel theoretically were entitled to two five-day in-country R&Rs and one ten-day out of country R&R,) illness, etc. It did not take too long to realize that the over manning was not adequate to keep all billets filled as our combat casualty rate was higher than anyone had anticipated during the initial planning for the squadron. Some PBR sailors volunteered to extend their in-country tours. Those making such a request received close evaluation to ensure that they had not developed trigger-happiness or an affinity to shoot up anything that crossed their path.

The crews of the River Patrol Force's PBRs were remarkable personnel in a unique operational situation. Each crew was a very close-knit cohesive unit, and each man was capable of filling any position in the boat in the crew. Patrol officers, whether commissioned or enlisted, and the enlisted boat captains routinely made tactical decisions affecting their operations whether a routine patrol or inserting and extracting SEALs or Ruff Puffs for ground operations, or a hot fire fight. When the situation warranted, patrols initiated calls for air support from the Seawolves or artillery support from ARVN and the directed those supporting arms until no longer needed.

There was no such thing as a routine patrol. One minute a patrol was nonchalantly patrolling its sector taking in all the beauty, checking passing watercraft or local Ruff/Puff outposts, when, WHAM!, all hell broke loose in what might have been a scene from the movie, *Apocalypse Now*, only with live ammunition. If the patrol could fight its way out, fine. If not, they called in supporting arms in the form of a Seawolf fire team or ARVN (Army of Republic of Vietnam) artillery if the patrol's location was within the battery's fan (range) and ARVN decided that was a day to shoot and directed those supporting arms until they were no longer required..

.

Very few, if any, of the commanding offices of Seventh Fleet ships were in a position to make such tactical decisions that those enlisted men or junior officers made on a daily basis, and most never would be in that position during their entire careers. Yet, award recommendations from the Blue Water Navy in the Seventh Fleet and the Brown Water Navy of the Mekong Delta went through their respective chains of command to the CINCPACFLT headquarters at Pearl Harbor for approval or forwarding further up the chain of command. It took time to make the PACFLT staff aware that the Blue and Brown Water Navies were fighting entirely different wars. That improved the award system for the Brown Water Navy. A further improvement came in the late summer of 1968 when Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam was upgraded to a three-star billet and had the authority to approve higher levels of decorations for the personnel.

One unforeseen problem was when the enlisted crews completed their tours and returned to the fleet. They were used to living as a small cohesive group of four, entirely dependent on each other and knowing each other's job. The vast majority had knowledge exceeding the scope of their military profession and many has made command decisions and employed supporting arms; something their blue water counterparts could not conceivably do if their ships were in a similar situation. I know of one case when a former PBR engineer was able to correct a problem in a KY-8 voice-encryption device on his ship that an ET could not resolve. Ironically, his commanding officer wanted to know what a machinist's mate was doing on the bridge. Lastly, many Game Warden sailors upon their return to the fleet found they were questioned regarding the validity of the decorations they received in the Brown Water Navy.

The Vietnamese watercraft most frequently encountered on the rivers was the motorized sampan. A pintle mounted Briggs Stratton-type engine driving a straight shaft with a propeller on the end provided their steering and propulsion. They were highly maneuverable and some were fast, making thirty-five knots, or more. Those could outrun a PBR, but not the .50 calibers. We also encountered much slower water taxis and even slower cargo barges.

A common nighttime tactic was for the patrol to shut down and drift watching for water traffic by radar or night vision scopes. The latter, called "Starlight scopes," were light intensification devices that allowed one to see considerable distances and generally with excellent clarity. Although somewhat bulky when compared with later models, they were better than the naked eye.

The PBR's speed advantage was also a disadvantage. When the boats were traveling at high speeds, they were quite noisy and one could hear them for a distance of about three miles. SEALs working ambushes or listening posts discovered the VC had signals to warn of the PBRs and they approached.

The Vietnamese were very ingenious in hiding contraband. They had a fondness for baguettes, the popular French bread. One method was slicing a baguette with a razor, fill it with ampoules of drugs, and then rewrap it as if it were in the bakery. It took a sharp eye to detect it. Another favorite hiding spot was in pots of *nuc mam*, a fermented fish sauce, a Vietnamese delicacy. They made it by placing fish, salt and sauces in clay crocks, sealing the crocks, and letting them ferment. It smelled horrible and usually had many maggots. It was not a thing one liked to place his hand while checking for illegal items. Nevertheless, it did have an interesting

taste on food.

Patrols reporting firefights did not always have to report personnel casualties as one could estimate how many were hurt by what the VC shot at them and where it hit. As an example, if a B-40 or B-41 (the Chinese version of the Soviet RPG-6 and RPG-7 rocket propelled anti-tank grenade, an adaptation of the German's World War II *panzerfaust.* That type of RPG is used by just about every third world nation forces in the world) hit the radar antenna all aboard usually were casualties. The boat crews tended to their own wounded while trying to get back home or to the nearest friendly installation.

When a patrol returned to its base, the crew, or sometimes someone else, had to clean the boat up, police up the expended brass, wash it down (sometimes including the blood, bone, flesh and pieces of clothing belonging to shipmates), refuel and rearm the boat, and get it ready for its next patrol. It was a strange way to fight a war. The crews spent up to fourteen hours on patrol, returned to their base for a hot shower, a meal, perhaps a PBR or two – Pabst Blue Ribbon - and a relatively comfortable bunk. The next day they were at it again. That continued until one's tour ended by regular rotation, medical evacuation or in an aluminum coffin.

The minesweepers and their crews belonged to Commander, Mine Force, Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. The minesweepers, operating out of Nha Be, had the responsibility of keeping the Soi Rap and Long Tau Rivers open for the ocean-going traffic to Saigon. For the most part, the VC used controlled mines. They planted the mines and detonated them electrically by controllers hidden along the riverbanks. In later years, remotely controlled devices of this nature received a more technical name, improvised explosive devices – IEDs. I reality, this type of weaponry is as old as warfare itself. Regardless of the nomenclature used, the VC was successful in sinking one merchant ship and damaging several others transiting the rivers.

To neutralize the mines, the minesweepers had to maneuver relatively close to the riverbanks as they dragged their sweep gear to cut the control wires. Being in close proximity to the shore frequently resulted in ambushes and the sweeper crews suffered many casualties and damage to their boats. The VC ambushed several of the MSBs and sank six. The VC also used home made floating mines frequently using artillery shells encased in a flotation device with a rudimentary contact-type detonator. Prior to my arrival, minesweeping forces found one sea mine in those rivers. That was a Soviet-made World War II mine discovered on 31 December 1966. The VC occasionally used controlled mines on the Mekong and Bassac Rivers; but, for the most part, they did not cause major damage to the PBRs.

Mines in the Long Tau and Soi Rap Rivers through the RSSZ were not the only problems encountered by merchant shipping during their 60-mile transits from Vung Tau to Saigon. The VC frequently set up ambushes along the rivers and hit the transiting ships with fire from recoilless rifles, automatic weapons and with RPGs. The PBRs and Seawolves based at Nha Be responded to such attacks often with SEALs or Ruff Puff troops.

HA(L)-3's personnel belonged to Commander, Naval Air Force, Pacific Fleet at NAS North Island in San Diego. The squadron's aircraft, UH-1B "Iroquois" manufactured by Bell in the 1962 -1963 time frame, belonged to the Army and were on loan to the Navy. We were

supposed to have 49 helos; yet we never had more than 25. The squadron had seven detachments. Det. 1 was assigned to *Jennings County*; Det. 2 was at Nha Be; Det 3 at Vinh Long; Det 4 in *Garrett County*; Det 5 in *Harnett County*; Det 6 in *Hunterdon County* and Det 7 at Binh Thuy. Nha Be's detachment had four aircraft while the remainder had two.

Originally, the Seawolves were to fly only in support of the Game Warden operation and then not more than one kilometer from the rivers. In reality, however, as the only helo gunship assets in the Delta totally under U.S. control, they did fly missions in support of other forces. The US Army's 13th Aviation Battalion had four UH-1 "Huey" (gunships, troop carrying "slicks"and medical evacuation "dust offs") companies, two O-1 "Bird Dog" (Cessna-type aircraft used by forward air controllers to spot artillery fire) companies and one OV-1 "Mohawk" (a twin-engine light attack and reconnaissance aircraft) company. The battalion was headquartered at Can Tho Army Air Field with the mission of supporting the ARVN units in IV Crops. Should the corps or any of its divisions plan an operation, it could tie up the U.S. Army's helo assets for as much as 72-hours before start time regardless of whether the Vietnamese actually conducted the operation or not. Thus, we often allowed the Seawolves to fill in for what would have been US Army-supported emergent missions. Although the Hueys in the battalion were more recent models than the UH-1Bs flown by HA(L)-3, the Seawolves' helos had radar altimeters and other equipment that permitted flying at night. Additionally, the Seawolf pilots were all naval aviators who had considerable fixed wing experience before they transitioned to helos.

The Seawolves added a critical third dimension to riverine warfare. When a PBR patrol came under attack on the river, the crews frequently could not see their attackers because of the dense trees and other vegetation along the river or canal banks. Sometimes smoke or muzzle flashes permitted the PBR crews to localize and more accurately make their counter attack, but that provided no information regarding the size of their opposing force. Helo fire teams could provide a more complete picture of the contact area and frequently would assist the PBRs to accurately adjust their fire.

Keeping those B-models flying posed some problems. The Army required certain maintenance procedures at specified number of flight hours. Every 2,000 hours, those procedures required depot maintenance. That is, the aircraft had to go to an Army facility for a major rework. As the Army did not have too many UH-1Bs in their inventory, it was unlikely we would receive a replacement aircraft should we turn one in, or, for that matter, lose one in combat. Thus, HA(L)-3's maintenance people used a Navy procedure which supposedly required maintenance to be accomplished at not more than ten percent beyond the recommended point. By that procedure, a Huey could operate for 2,200 hours before depot maintenance. As the average patrol was less than 45-minutes, the additional 200 hours added a lot more missions supporting TF-116.

The LSTs belonged to Commander, Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet at NAB Coronado and were part of Landing Ship Squadron (LANDSHIPRON) One. The "Ts", all part of the World War II LST-511 class, had been modified for river patrol support. (On 25 September 1970, *Garrett County, Harnett County* and *Hunterdon County*, would be reclassified as patrol boat tenders [AGP], while retaining their LST hull numbers.) Three "Ts" were in country at any given time; one each was on the Mekong, Co Chien and Bassac (Hua Giang) Rivers. The fourth was

generally in the Philippines or Guam for upkeep. The "Ts" had their own rotation schedule. One came in and one left. Finally, the YRBM-16, which belonged to Naval Support Activities, Saigon, was located at Ben Tre on the Ham Luong River. NAVSUPPACT Saigon's YRBM-16 had been at Long Xuyen, Tan Chau and Binh Thuy before it went to Ben Tre. By the summer of 1968, it was in I Corps.

On occasion, the on-station LSTs moved to Binh Thuy or other port cities or bases for a liberty. It was generally base liberty, but it gave the "T" sailors the opportunity to get off their ship, stretch their legs and perhaps get a beer or two. On at least one of those "liberty calls" at Binh Thuy, the crew was returning to their ship via a LCVP. They had unsuccessfully attempted to drink our clubs dry. A melee broke out on the boat and a sailor went overboard. The LCVP attempted to recover him and a couple PBRs joined the search. However, unfortunately, given the current of the Delta's rivers, when something like that happened, patrols down river from the incident received alerts to look for and retrieve the remains of the missing man. They sometimes recovered the body perhaps fifteen or twenty miles down stream from the incident. Sadly, that was the case in this situation.

In time, we developed tactics with Detachment Ten, Thirty-eight ARRS (US Air Force's Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron) at BTAB to air evacuate wounded crewmen from the boats with their HH-43 Husky helo. The detachment had the nickname "Pedro" from their voice radio call sign. The Husky hovered over the boat and retrieved the patient by a litter lowered to the boat. The downdraft of the helo's two rotors could cause problems for the boat crews.

The Pedros had a locally made business card with the following printed on it:

" Wife send a dear John?
Bad hang over?
Your aircraft quit?
Got a tiger by the tail?
Charlie put one on your ass?
CALL BINH THUY FOR AIR RESCUE
COST: A ROUND OF CHEER FOR OUR CREW "

In May 1968, The Air Force invited me to ride in one of their helos while they made a training film for casualty recovery. Instead of an actual recovery from a boat, the Air Force had the photographer lying on his back on the hardtop at BTAB. He took footage of the helo as it approached and lowered the litter. Then the cameraman got into the litter and shot footage as the helo hoisted the litter. During the filming, I was in the left – co-pilot's – seat. After the first shot, the pilot asked if I wanted to make the next approach. It suddenly dawned on me he thought I was a pilot. I told him, "No thanks, I'm not checked out in this type of bird." To which he replied, "That really doesn't matter as I can back you up." I never told him he had a "Black shoe" in the left seat. It also made me think, what I would do if something happened to him.

On 5 July 1967, Binh Thuy became the fourth operating location for TF-116 operations

on the Bassac. Nha Be was the first location. Then it relocated to Can Tho and then to Tra Noc, short ways up the river from Binh Thuy; and finally, they moved down river to Binh Thuy two days after that base was completed. The NAVSUPPACT Detachment was located between Route 27 and the river. The VNAF (Vietnam Air Force) Binh Thuy Air Base was about a mile west southwest of us. An IV Corps ammunition depot was about the same distance to the southeast. (Binh Thuy Air Base is now the Tra Noc Airport.) The US Army's Can Tho Army Air Field was between Binh Thuy and the city of Can Tho.

We had two-story wooden frame buildings that served as barracks and a BOQ. A large building served as the general and officers' mess. Other facilities included: the industrial shops, piers, magazines, warehouses, power plant, distilling plant, laundry, sick bay, helo pad, a large headquarters building, concessionaires' shops, EM club and O' Club. A high (about 15-feet) floodlit fence surrounded the landside of the compound. A number of bunkers existed between the barracks and other buildings. A bunkered .50 caliber machine gun provided coverage of the normally closed main gate.

A government contractor, Pacific Architect and Engineering, built the facility. At one time, I heard the Army considered our barracks as sub-standard. The rationale was that the latrine facilities were not separate from the living quarters. I never verified that statement; however, indoor plumbing certainly had its benefits.

With the exception of rooms set aside for Captain Gray and Commanders Paul and Miller, and Captain Gray's mess, none of the living spaces in the BOQ had air conditioning. Typically, the furnishings in the one-man rooms consisted of a single metal framed bunk, a steel GI double wall locker, and a table and chair. The outer "wall" had fixed louvers over a ceiling-to-floor screen. That and a ceiling fan provided air conditioning. They provided privacy and a degree of protection from the rain. During the northeast (dry) monsoon season, I obtained some cloth like sheeting and hung sheets inside the louvers to minimize the amount of dust blowing into my room.

A rotating chief warrant officer sold me his small refrigerator (the egg shelf designer obviously thought of duck eggs,) a double hot plate with stainless steel coffee pot and two ashtrays. Later I fashioned a bookcase and a weapons locker from a couple of 2.75- inch rocket boxes. Like many other, I placed a condom over the muzzle of my M-16; it was an easy way to keep the bore clean. Once I obtained the aforementioned portable radio, my quarters were more comfortable. I decorated my room with a "short timer's" drawing, as well as various greetings cards I had received in the mail. On occasions, I heard a "tap tap" on my door at night and Captain Gray's cook, a Vietnamese woman who lived in the pantry, passed me a plate of whatever special dessert remained after the captain's meal. I was then living in fat city - literally.

(Almost everyone in country had a "short timer" chart. Mine was the drawing showing a bikini-clad woman lying on her left side, propping her head with her left arm. The drawings had 364 segments that the owner shaded in on a daily basis. If asked what one's "DEROS" was – Date of Estimate Return from Overseas Service – an Army expression, the reply was X numbers of days and a wake-up. The Vietnam War was perhaps the first in US history where military forces for the most part deployed to the combat zone for a one-year period (the Marines had

thirteen-month tours.) In time, that meant units were perpetually training and integrating new personnel on a possibly near-continuous basis. The practice certainly did not reinforce the age-old concept of unit integrity.)

Vietnamese women maintained the barracks. They dusted the rooms and floors. They also cleaned the head. The head for the BOQ had a shower bay, an area partially enclosed by a five-foot high tiled cinderblock wall that contained 8 or 10 open showers. I recall early in my tour being in the shower when the housekeeper came in. She nonchalantly washed down the tiles on the walls. I was surprised the first time it happened, however, I soon adjusted to it and learned to ignore them.

Binh Thuy's water came from the river. Erdalators purified our water by the reverse osmosis process. Binh Thuy's water was different when compared to that at most other US installations. While their water usually had a yellow tinge, ours was clear. Vietnamese employees of Pacific Architects and Engineering operated the power and distilling plants.

In general, the Vietnamese were competent. However, one sometimes wondered about a few of them. As an example, one attempted to balance the generators before synchronizing them to split the electrical load. He was making minor voltage adjustment by turning the zero setscrews on the voltmeters instead of actually adjusting the generator. Miraculously he was successful in that he paralleled the generators without losing the load or blowing one of the machines.

Some base amenities, such as our internal telephone system had appeared at about the same time a pallet load of beer disappeared. It seemed the old China Station art of cumshaw was alive and well in Vietnam. There was a prevalent story of a blue-painted Air Force jeep coming aboard one day, disappearing, and then a new Navy jeep with a fresh olive drab paint job complete with yellow registration numbers appeared several days later.

Through a weekend self-help project, we constructed a patio and barbecue adjacent to our Quonset hut O' Club, and cookouts became a regular event. We must have come out on the short end of some of the cumshaw work because I have a distinct recollection that we had copious amount of Carling's Black Label beer, which did not sell very well. For obvious reasons, **P**abst **B**lue **R**ibbon was a popular beer with our people.

The club itself was comfortable. At least it was dry, from the rain, that is, and air-conditioned. There seemed to be an endless supply of liquor and it was staffed by three Cos, (*Co* is the Vietnamese word for unmarried woman; actually, each *co* was a *ba* - that is married). The favorite was Co Ti Ti (*ti ti* means small.) The Cos always wore *ao dais*, the typical Vietnamese woman's attire of rather tight pants and a tailored tunic that came down to below the knees. They got along well with everyone; however, that all changed when a SEAL squad would come back in from an operation. The SEALs' first stop was to get a drink and they'd come into the club in their tiger suits, web gear and weapons, caked with mud, slime, sweat and stinking like hell. Of course, they still had camouflage paint on their faces and hands. The instant the *co*s saw them, they would scream and run to the back room.

One of the SEALs, Frank G. “Gordy,” or sometimes “Baby Seal” Boyce, had a routine that he performed after he had been drinking. He started by taking bites out of the bar glasses - I never saw any blood when he did that. Next, he'd make a fast trip to the head and upon his return, he took his pants and skivvies off, jumped up on the bar, stuffed a long streamer of toilet paper in the crack of his buttocks, lit it, and then did his, “Dance of the Flaming Asshole.” I never saw Gordy burn himself during his act.

The officers' mess was a room in the general mess building. It had the obligatory tables, chairs, white tablecloths, and napkins. We signed a log for our meals. At the end of each month, we received a bill and sent a check in payment to Saigon; I always marked the payee as, "Non-Support Activity, Saigon;" none were returned uncashed. Just inside the front door was a small desk occupied all day long by a most attractive young Vietnamese woman, perhaps in her late teens or early 20s - it was difficult guessing the age of Vietnamese women. She always dressed in the highest western fashions available in the Delta, including high heels, hosiery, and frilly frocks. Her job was to monitor the log and collect cash from visitors passing through. I cannot recall her ever smiling or saying anything pleasant. Her mother worked as a maid in the BOQ. The mother and daughter appear later in this account.

Twice a month, mobile pay teams flew in from Saigon to handle our pay and pay accounts. All cash payments were in military scrip. Regulations prohibited our possession of US greenbacks or foreign currency other than that of Vietnam. We had to use in-country checking accounts and could not transfer funds between an in-country bank and stateside banks. It appeared the US authorities wanted to prevent black market or similar operations.

One payday a lieutenant, looking the worse for wear, arrived looking for the pay team. He was the NILO (Naval Intelligence Liaison Officer) at Ha Tien, on the Gulf of Siam. He had been there for six months, had existed on cash and a now near-depleted checking account. He was flat broke. When he spoke to the disbursing officer on the pay team, he got a collection of 12 checks with the comment to the effect it was about time he showed up, as he (the DO) was tired of carrying the checks back and forth every two weeks. The lieutenant exhibited remarkable restraint by not throttling the disbursing officer.

The daily routine for the TF-116 staff started with a gathering in the conference room where Fritz briefed all activity during the preceding 24-hours. Spot Reports were the primary source of operational information sometimes amplified by telephone or radio calls. When it became apparent from Steiner's briefing that nothing had happened in a particular sector of any river, we could always depend on Captain Gray saying, “Ops, send River Section (fill in the number) a message telling them to get out of the center of the river and up close to the banks so they can draw fire. That's what they are paid for.” That is a direct quote I heard it countless times.

The conference room was rather comfortable. It had a large table capable of seating about 26 persons. A map of the Delta covered one wall. On an adjacent wall was a chart noting the decorations awarded to members of the River Patrol Force. The top listing was the Medal of Honor

The first Medal of Honor went to Seaman David G. Oulette, the forward gunner on PBR-124. On 6 March 1967, he saw a grenade arcing toward the boat, shouted a warning and then ran aft pushing his shipmates out of the way. His body absorbed the grenade's detonation killing him. The Navy named a frigate, USS *Oulette* (DE-, later FF-1077) in his honor. (A review of existing records indicates those who intentionally throw themselves on a live grenade to protect others would receive one of two medals. If the person died, he got a posthumous MOH. If he lived, he received the Navy Cross. Both situations required an instantaneous unselfish act. Does surviving make it a lesser act?)

The second presentation was by President Johnson to BM1 James E. "Elliott" Williams for service as a patrol officer in PBR-105 during an action on 31 October 1966. The President allegedly commented, "Damn, Williams, you've got a big neck," as he attempted to place the medal there. Williams also had a Navy Cross, two Silver Stars, a Navy and Marine Corps Medal, three Bronze Star Medals, three Purple Hearts, a Navy Commendation Medal and two Vietnamese Gallantry Crosses. At that time, policy required the automatic transfer out of Vietnam of anyone receiving his third Purple Heart. I knew several persons who concealed wounds, rather that get their third Purple Heart and a ticket home. Elliott Williams died in 1999. USS *James E. Williams* DDG-95 bears his name. The Gamewardens of Vietnam Association presented a black beret to the commanding officer of the ship. Since then a crewmember in the ship wears the beret for a day.

Between May 1966 and 30 September 1968, Game Warden sailors received more than 5,000 personal decorations. An additional 1,500 recommendations were somewhere in the review and decision process.

The medal chart listed other decorations as well. Eventually the chart came down as the ever-increasing numbers of one decoration, the Purple Heart, shocked visitors.

Captain Gray directed I should receive a thorough indoctrination in all of the operations in the Delta, including psychological operations, or, "psyops." In support of the Republic of Vietnam, US military forces participated in the *chieu hoi* program designed to entice the Viet Cong to become *hoi chans*, that is, those who "rallied" to the Saigon government. The *chieu hoi* program had much appropriately marked hand out items, e.g., boxes of matches, bars of soap, etc., that US military personnel distributed as their contribution to the program. On occasions, *hoi chans* were "turned" and served with RVN military units. Given the nature of the country, I feel safe in stating that some *hoi chans* continued to serve their original masters as double agents.

My first psyop exposure started at BTAB where I was to make a psyops flight with the Air Force. The plane was a "Gooney Bird"" EC-47, with sound amplification systems feeding large speakers mounted in the fuselage. We were to fly a *chieu hoi* or "Open Arms" mission. (C*hieu hoi* is a combination of the two verbs, 'to welcome' and 'to return'. Later, some studies indicated that on an average, it cost about $125 to "turn" a VC and about $400,000 to kill one. I imagine a statistic like that appealed to the bean counters in McNamara's Department of Defense.)

Before boarding the aircraft, we donned chest harnesses for emergency parachutes. Once

on board, the crew chief marched down the line of six or eight passengers attaching parachutes to our harnesses. He asked each of us if we were left or right handed, and mounted the chute accordingly. He provided one admonition; "If you have to use it, grab the "D" ring and pull it sharply making sure your arm is clear of the top of the chute. If you don't, you'll probably lose your arm."

Just before take off, the pilot, an Air Force colonel who appeared to be at least sixty years old stepped into the cabin to see if all was ready; it was, and off we went. The plane climbed up to an altitude of perhaps 2,000 feet and the sound operator started feeding tapes into the amplifier. I have no idea what it sounded like on the ground, but it was deafening in the plane. As we were making the flight right in the middle of the afternoon siesta, it was a small wonder that neither friend nor foe opened fire at the plane.

We had portable speaker systems for the PBRs for use in our part of the *chieu hoi* program. In most cases, when a PBR crew started broadcasting any VC in the area responded with gunfire. In time, speaker operations declined and finally halted. It was not worth the effort. In later months, I swapped a set of psyop speaker equipment to an Army officer at Can Tho Army Air Field - they needed a PA system to announce flight arrivals and departures. As CTAAF handled much of the supplies coming into the Delta, the colonel was in the position to offer something in return. I got a case of whiskey that went to the club and a case of San Miguel beer that I kept for my own use. He did offer some Australian beer that came in 28-ounce cans. I declined, as they were too large to fit into my refrigerator.

Captain Gray was insistent that his staff officers, particularly those involved with operations become qualified river patrol officers. His intention was that we should personally experience what was happening on the rivers; but he did not expect to serve as patrol officers on a regular basis. Thus, very early in my tour, I started my indoctrination with River Division Fifty-one. Don Sheppard's people eased me into their patrol schedules starting with routine patrols and working up to more difficult ones until Sheppard considered I had enough experience to warrant designation as a patrol officer. Throughout that period and when embarked with a patrol, I was just another crewmember. The patrol officer or the boat captain, as the case may be, was the person in charge of whichever boat I rode. After weeks of training with RIVDIV 51 on 28 February 1968, Captain Gray designated me as a River Patrol Officer

One of my earliest indoctrination missions was assignment as part of a MEDCAP (medical civil assistance program) operation in Vinh Binh province on the lower Bassac River, northeast of Dung Island. As we headed down river to where we were to rendezvous with a patrol from the down river LST, we pulled into Can Tho long enough to embark an American civilian nurse who was to accompany us. She and a corpsman from NAVSUPPACT DET Binh Thuy would be our medical staff. As we traveled down the river, the corpsman while muttering, "We're the US Navy" was busily ripping USAID (Agency for International Development) labels from the cases of supplies.

After affecting the rendezvous with the patrol from the LST, we cautiously proceeded up a canal to the village where the MEDCAP was scheduled. Local officials and Vietnamese nuns from the Catholic school greeted us and led us to the school where we set up shop. The U.S.

Senior Advisor (SA) for Tra Cu district had arranged for perimeter security for the village.

The number of kids who showed up amazed me. They lined up patiently, and in single file went through our processing center. In turn, all children received a brief physical examination by the corpsman or nurse to determine if they had any obvious physical or medical defects, e.g., sores, lesions, lice, etc. Next, they got a DPT shot and a small glass of worm medicine to gulp down. As they continued through the line, we looked at their clothing. We then rummaged in boxes of children's clothing that we had and tried to find some appropriate yet useful item for each child.

We worked solidly at that routine from late morning until about mid-afternoon, and then MAJ Robert Jackmeyer, the SA, appeared and told us to move out as "Charlie" (the VC) was aware of our presence and a force was approaching the village. We continued. Finally, MAJ Jackmeyer returned and said he and his force were moving out and that we were on our own. We continued until we had taken care of the last child. Then, when we should have been going to the boats, the Vietnamese nuns came forth with a bottle of some non-descript tar-like black liqueur and offered us a drink in appreciation of what we had done. We accepted their hospitality, but only had one drink. We thanked them, hopped into the boats and headed down the canal to the river. Shortly afterward, we heard sporadic small arms fire behind us. We put the nurse on top of the engine cover between the vertical armor plates, placed a couple of flak jackets on top of her and headed for the river at maximum speed. Once we got to the Bassac, we parted company with the PBRs from the "T" and headed home, dropping the nurse at Can Tho. I did not know that I would again meet MAJ Jackmeyer and would be near him when he died on 23 December in Vung Tau.

Night patrols were the most challenging, as the crews were highly dependent on their radar or Starlight scopes for information. When conducting drifting operations, the silence was almost "deafening" as everyone strained to hear the telltale sounds of motion on the water.

The first time I saw the Seawolves in action at night fascinated me. I could hear the "whooomp whooomp" of the fire team yet I could see nothing. Suddenly the sky lit with the trail of tracers from the machine guns and the rocket trails. Suddenly, the helo's navigation lights briefly came on to ensure that the helos would not run into each other. Then just as suddenly, there were out again.

On another occasion, I participated in a medevac (medical evacuation) at a Ruff/Puff outpost. Our force consisted of an LCM and two PBRs. According to our own doctrine, the mission should not have occurred, as we had not alerted supporting forces, i.e., Seawolves or artillery. As turned off the Bassac and started through an ever-narrowing canal, the patrol officer asked me what weapon I would use if we got into an ambush. I immediately replied "My M-16." He then said, "No, not an M-16, what weapon?" That made me realize that the morning a few months earlier firing a .50 caliber machine gun from the stern of an LCM in San Pablo Bay really had not taught me much.

The vegetation of the banks almost touched the PBRs and the wider Mike boat brushed it aside. It took us about 10-minutes to get through that canal. We were very alert since it was an

ideal place for an ambush. The canal widened and joined with a larger one that led to the outpost. As a neophyte, I expected that we would load the injured soldier and be on our way - it did not occur to me that a LCM might have been more than was required to evacuate a single injured soldier.

We beached the Mike boat and lowered its ramp. I was unprepared for what happened next. Some soldiers carried the patient to the well deck on a rickety, dirty litter. He did not look too comfortable or well. Next came his wife, children and what appeared to be his or his wife's mother. Their personal possessions, including a couple of chickens and a dog followed. We hoisted the ramp and retraced our route back to the river then headed for Can Tho. When we arrived, the Mike boat nuzzled to a pier where medics waited for the soldier. We then helped the family out of the boat and put their possessions on the pier. An ambulance took the soldier, but the family remained on the pier. They were on their own. It never occurred to me that the Vietnamese military had no policy regarding "Taking care of our own." The soldier wouldn't fare much better in the hospital since at that time family members often took newspapers to the hospital to place under their relatives to keep them somewhat clean and away from perhaps not too clean or maybe contaminated bedding.

The Senior Advisor IV Corps extended an invitation to CTF-116 to attend his weekly briefing at IV Corps headquarters. The TF-116 operations officer was the designated representative. Although the intention was to enhance the spirit of "joint effort" in the Delta, it actually imposed a degree of risk to those at Binh Thuy. The briefing began at 0900 every Wednesday. One of the cardinal rules of surviving in an environment such as Vietnam is varying personal schedules and routines. Attending the briefings required travel at approximately the same time every Wednesday over the same route. Normally, two attended the brief, each riding "shotgun" for the other as we drove to and from Can Tho. We rode in old "612," the nickname for the operations jeep derived from the vehicle's serial number. We traveled on Route 27 to Can Tho. Route 27, for the most part, was a paved two-lane road. Military vehicles, grossly overloaded buses, bicycles, motor scooters, and the seemingly indestructible black Citroen sedans trailing heavy black smoke clogged the road.

Route 27 crossed a small river and the road narrowed to one-lane to pass over a one-way bridge. A Vietnamese soldier is a small shelter at the center of the bridge controlled the traffic flow with a hand-operated sign indicating which way traffic would flow. I rarely arrived at the bridge at a time that allowed us to cross it without stopping. The stops were the challenges. A number of hootches (semi-permanent structures or huts) clustered beside the road where entrepreneurs sold food and drinks to those waiting to cross the bridge.

As vehicles waited, large groups of children beleaguered the occupants, begging for anything we wanted to give them or they could steal from our vehicle should we not be alert. One thing continually went through our minds as we waited for our lane of traffic to move, which one of these smiling little sons-of- bitches is going to suddenly pull a weapon and shoot us. I went through that for my entire tour; fortunately, nothing happened.

Later I learned that within six weeks after my departure, Captain Art Price decided to attend the briefing. While his vehicle waited at the bridge, a young boy shot him. Fortunately, the

boy used a "Zip gun," that is, a piece of pipe with a diameter approximately the size of the caliber of the bullet. Zip guns usually had rubber band firing mechanisms. Fortunately, the wound was not serious. The round reportedly penetrated Art's clothing but did not enter his body, and that the spent slug ended up in his skivvies. If that story is true, Art was extremely lucky; most people thought that "zip guns" had disappeared from the scene long before.

There were certain security measures one always took when driving a jeep. First, we always ensured the gas cap had a padlock. That prevented someone from siphoning gas from the tank, but more important it perhaps kept someone from putting a grenade wrapped with friction tape into the gas tank as a delayed bomb. It would take time for the gas to dissolve the tape's adhesive, thus providing the time delay. When we parked, we physically locked the steering wheel with a pad lock and chain, and raised the seats to the vertical position. The last measure was to keep us from plopping onto a seat, which might have a pressure-activated booby trap under the seat.

Traffic was terrible, particularly in cities like Can Tho. Fender benders, or worse, were very common and an accepted unpleasant fact. Perhaps the police got involved and perhaps not. On one occasion, a Vietnamese civilian vehicle and an ARVN truck had a minor collision. The two drivers got into an argument and it ended with the solider drawing his weapon and shooting the civilian. The soldier then got into his truck and drove off.

One of the first planning actions I participated in was the deployment of Game Warden assets to I CTZ, that part of South Vietnam just below the DMZ. Early in 1967, Lieutenant General Lewis W. Walt, USMC, CG, III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF,) and the senior U.S. officer in I CTZ, requested TF-116 and TF-117 assets to afford protection to the water lines of communications. Specifically, the request covered the area from Danang up the coast to Tan My, then up the Perfume River (Song Huong) to Hue and, along the coast to and then up the Cua Viet River to Dong Ha, just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

The Navy was reluctant to allocate resources from the Delta to I Corps. At that time, TF-116 had about 90 PBRs to cover more than 800 miles of navigable waterways. As for TF-117, they were committed to providing a mobile base for the 2nd Brigade of the US 9th Infantry Division. The brigade's maneuver units were the 3rd and 4th Battalions, 47th Infantry Regiment, 6th Battalion, 50th Infantry Regiment, 3rd and 5th Battalions 60th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion 34th Field Artillery Regiment and at times, the 5th Battalion, Vietnam Marine Corps. (Note: The Army battalions assigned to TF-117 sometimes referred to their units as "Riverine Infantry" i.e., 3rd Battalion, 47th Riverine Infantry Regiment. I am not certain the entire regiment carried the "riverine" designation, officially or unofficially.)

Between 18 September and 9 October 1967, Operation Green Wave evaluated the feasibility of PBR operations in I Corps. *Hunterdon County*, with LCDR Sam Steed, COMRIVDIV 53 and River Section 521 embarked, went to I Corps and operated as TG-116.3 (a temporary designation) at various locations in I Corps. The LST with its PBRs first operated at the mouth of the Cua Hai Bay north of Danang with minimal success, and then shifted to the Cua Dai River south of Danang. Both locations were difficult in that the PBRs were operating in open seas and surf zones. The Cua Dai presented a more serious problem in that it had a high

concentration of heavily armed VC that the PBRs could not overcome without supporting arms. At the end of the evaluation period, and with half of the boats damaged by the surf and enemy action, all units returned to Delta. A COMNAVFORV report included, "That the I Corps PBR deployment be terminated due to unproductive traffic control and heavy enemy weapons and fortifications against which the PBR was not designed to stand."

Nevertheless, the situation rapidly changed. On 20 November 1967, River Division Fifty-five staff activated at Binh Thuy, and nine days later deployed to I CTZ. In my brief time in Vietnam, I had developed a friendship with Hal Brenneman, COMRIVRIV 55. When he learned he was going to I Corps, he asked if I would like to go along as his operations officer. At that time, I felt I did not have sufficient in-country experience to accept that position and respectfully declined. Had I said "yes" my experiences during Tet would be considerably different from those I had in the Delta as Hal and his people were deeply involved with the fighting on the Perfume River and getting supplies to the Marines at Hue.

On 2 December, PBR Mobile Base I (MB-I) composed of a complex of Ammi barges manufactured at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard, arrived in Danang. (The versatile Ammi barges were 30 X 90 feet pontoons that could be connected together to form a base providing berthing, messing, command and control, logistics, maintenance shops and a helo platform. Mobile Support Bases saw extensive service during SEALORDS – described later – to provide basing for forces operating off the Cau Mau Peninsula.) Three days later, River Section 521 embarked in *Hunterdon County* went to Danang. Later, all three, RIVDIV Fifty-five, RIVSEC 521 and MB-1, were moved to Tan My, and on 9 January 1968, operations began on the Perfume River.

The new organization, known as I CTZ River Patrol Group, was under the operational control of COMNAVFORV. Lieutenant Commander Hal Brennaman, COMRIVDIV 55 served as the tactical commander under Commander, First Coastal Zone. On 24 February 1968, the I CTZ operation became Task Force Clearwater commanded by Captain G. W. Smith, USN. In late February LGen Walt, CG III MAF made a request to COMUSMACV for the assignment of additional PBRs to I CTZ. RIVSEC 543 made the movement in two five-boat increments, the last arriving in I Corps on 2 June. In March, Clearwater received ATCs (armored troop carriers), monitors and a CCB (command control boat) from TF-117's River Assault Division 112. On 28 May, all River Assault Division 112 assets in Corps, except the ATCs returned to the Delta.

Immediately prior to my arrival, an unusual and perhaps bizarre operation took place on 4 November. Units of RIVDIV Fifty-one conducted the "Flaming Arrow" operation conceived by Don Sheppard, the division commander. The operation which took place on the Bong De Canal called for the employment of flaming arrows (right out of a Saturday afternoon western serial at the local movie theater) to burn down enemy or suspected enemy hootches.

On the day I arrived at Binh Thuy, Don led another unusual operation at Tan Dinh Island. It started with Seawolves dropping CS, on the objective area. (CS is the military symbol for chlorobenzylidenemalonitrile – a tear gas classified by the Geneva Convention as a riot control agent.) Meanwhile, the crews of PBRs lobbed CS grenades ashore. For this operation, the boat crews wore gas masks in addition to their flak jackets and steel helmets. Unfortunately, a wind shift made the CS less than effective and the VC reacted violently. During the ensuing firefight

LT R. J. Novak received a serious head wound that required his eventual medical evacuation to the States. Some time later, Don Sheppard, COMRIVDIV 51 was rummaging through his desk and discovered Novak's blood caked gas mask with one eyepiece shot out. He mailed it to Novak as a souvenir. I am sure he was pleased to receive it.

On 16 November, I received my first exposure to VIPs coming to Binh Thuy for briefings on Game Warden. On this occasion, I as a recent arrival, sat in on the briefing, observing what transpired. In a few months, I would be doing the briefing.

Our visitors were Senator Howard W. Cannon, D-NV and Congressman Paul N. "Pete" McCloskey, R-CA. Cannon, a retired Air Force Reserve major general had quite a political and military background including spending forty-two days on the ground in the Netherlands after being shot down during World War II. He was quiet and certainly did not use either his military rank or position during the visit.

On the other hand, McCloskey was a different story. His administrative assistant immediately told us the Congressman was a Marine Corps colonel during the Korean War and received a Silver Star. In fact, he repeated that bit of information a number of times during the visit. Additionally, he never refereed to McCloskey as Congressman; instead, it was "Colonel."

After hearing the command briefing, they were asked if the had any questions. Cannon said no and thanked us for the presentation. McCloskey, on the other hand, did have questions, but not about TF-116. He was incensed to learn that Army troops in the Delta conducted amphibious operations as part of TF-117 while the III Marine Amphibious Force was in I CTZ doing what he considered the Army's mission. He apparently was unaware that when the initial idea to form a mobile riverine force arose the Marines declined because of their then heavy commitment in I CTZ.)

The "colonel" continued to assure us that he would see about that, the Marines in I Corps, as soon as he got back to Washington and said that future CODEL (Congressional Delegate) visits would focus on that issue. We saw only one other CODEL in the Delta after Tet, and he was not interested in what the Marines were doing. Given the post-Tet mood in the US, perhaps we were no longer a politically correct organization to visit in an election year.

Thanksgiving Day started the same as any other holiday. We did not expect an "All hands" effort all day long. We had the traditional Thanksgiving dinner, and then most headed for their rooms. However, Captain Gray had other ideas. He called an all officers meeting and we gathered in the vestibule outside the NOC (Naval Operations Center) in the headquarters building. There, he spent an hour or so delivering a lecture on world economics. After haranguing us, he presented his bottom line. Those who had investments in the stock market or elsewhere should divest their holding. Those without holdings should acquire all the liquid assets they could. He then advised both groups to invest in gold or gold stocks – "Every damned cent you own." Perhaps Gray was clairvoyant as President Nixon took the U.S. off the gold standard and let the U.S. dollar float on the world market in August 1971. Gold prices skyrocketed from the then $35 per troy ounce. Perhaps Gray wanted us to avoid the rush.

Having received that sage advice of America's own national holiday, we went to bed, not knowing that the night would present us with startling news. At the morning briefing, we learned that at 0115, 24 November, the VC had mined the YRBM-16 at its moorings at Ben Tre on the Ham Luong River. The explosion, adjacent to a recently filled diesel storage tank caused extensive damage resulting in the YRBM sinking at its moorings. The explosion killed five and injured sixteen others. Two of the injured died in Japan.

The first assisting forces were PBRs from River Section 521 *Hunterdon County* followed shortly there after by the LST. (It allegedly was the first nighttime river transit by a Game Warden LST.) Salvage crews floated the YRBM-16 and it went to Dong Tam for temporary repairs. Then a tug towed it to Japan for permanent repairs. Those lost were ETN3 Robert L. Gray and EN2 Wilson N. Flowers, from NSA Det YRBM-16 who died in Japan, and SN George R. Ycoco, BM1 Joseph J. Simon, GMG3 Lonnie B. Evans, SN Dale E. Egbert and GMG3 Ronald E. Crose of River Section 522.

After the morning briefing on Friday, 1 December 1967, Captain Gray told Fred Lakeway to get an aircraft and give me an aerial familiarization flight over the Delta. Fred immediately contacted Binh Thuy Air Base and by late morning arranged for an Army O1D "Bird Dog." The aircraft was a two-seater Cessna used by FACs (forward air controllers) to spot artillery fire. It was about the same size as a Piper Cub. I had not obtained a permanent side arm so I borrowed a Browning 9mm-automatic pistol from Jack Maccione. We went to BTAB; and after Fred conducted his pre-flight checks, we boarded. I was in the back seat of the tandem seat arrangement, and somewhat overfilled the space available. To give me more room, the crew chief removed the back seat "stick." I received a strong admonition to keep my feet clear of the back seat's rudder peddles. Fred had a .45 as a side arm but also brought along an M-3 "grease gun" sub-machine gun. I have no idea where he got it; I never saw another Vietnam. Fred stowed the M-3 in a well to the left of my seat. The aircraft had two 2.75" rockets on the ordnance stations under each wing.

Fred and I communicated through the ICS. It also allowed me to hear all radio transmissions. We took off, flew up the Bassac to Long Xuyen, then down the Long Xuyen di Rach Gia canal to Rach Gia. All the while, Fred provided a running commentary describing the areas as we flew over them. I thought it was great being able to have my own private air tour of the Mekong Delta. We made a stop at Rach Gia on the Gulf of Siam. Then we were airborne again and headed back to the Bassac, then up the Bassac. Below the Cambodian border, we crossed over to the Mekong and followed it to Vinh Long. That was a "necessity" stop, primarily for fuel. Fred assured me that Vinh Long had one of the better exchanges in the Delta. After a stroll through the exchange, we returned to Vinh Long AB. When Fred conducted pre-flight checks of the aircraft, he discovered a pointed tool, looking much like an ice pick, sitting inside the main air intake to the engine. He looked up the chief of the ground crew who serviced the aircraft and raised all sorts of hell. The sergeant (U.S.) disavowed any knowledge of the incident or wrongdoing on his part or that of his crew. Fred, not too happy with the situation, rechecked the aircraft. Finding nothing wrong, we obtained clearance for take off and departed. Once airborne, Fred headed for the lower Bassac to complete my aerial indoctrination. As we headed back up the river to Binh Thuy AB, we passed over Tan Dinh Island about 12 miles downriver from Can Tho.

Unexpectedly, I heard Fred's voice as he called on the district "push" (radio frequency) requesting permission to fire at a target of opportunity. I heard a voice responding that Shotgun 12 (Shotgun was the call sign for the Army's 221st Reconnaissance Airplane Company) had clearance. I thought that Fred was really putting on a show for me. Fred then told me on the ICS that he had seen something on the island and we were going to make a rocket attack. I poked my head out of the removed window on the port side of the aircraft. All I could see were trees, vegetation and a few hootches.

Then I saw an individual and little yellow winks next to his body. Next, I heard a strange sound, similar to hands slowly clapping. I started to put one and one together. At that instant, Fred nosed the Bird Dog over in a dive - we had probably been flying at 1200 - 1500 feet. As the altimeter passed 900 feet, and, as was written in the then popular detective novels, I sensed what felt like a hammer hit on my right foot. I looked and saw the top of my boot opened like a flower in bloom. I told Fred, "I just took one in the foot" He replied, "You're shitting me," then looked over his shoulder and saw I was not joking. He immediately pulled out of the dive and headed back to Binh Thuy. He shifted to the BTAB push advised he had wounded personnel on board and requested immediate clearance to land. He asked Binh Thuy AB to notify the Navy of the situation. A response can back asking Fred to ensure he got the pistol I borrowed from Jack Maccione. As that was the only thing relayed to us, I thought that it was a strange reaction.

It was a surreal experience. I knew what happened to me, but I felt no pain or discomfort. I just sat there listening to the radio conversations and wondering what would happen next. At most, I expected some medic would bandage me up and I would be back in business. Also on my mind was how I would explain this to Pat. Another thought entered my mind. This was my third week of a one-year tour and 1968 was leap year. It could be a long one!

An USAF ambulance met us as soon as we landed. I hopped out of the plane, waved aside the medics with a stretcher and hobbled to the ambulance. Admittedly, I walked on the heel of my right boot. A short drive brought me to the 632nd USAF Dispensary at BTAB. I hobbled into the building and hopped up on a table. As a medic removed my boot, I noticed that my black sock had a strange tinge to it. The medic cut the sock off revealing a wound in the area of the middle toe. My immediate thought was if I had to lose a toe, why not the middle one as it should not affect my balance or walking.

They gave me a shot of Demerol (I still did not feel pain), bandaged my foot and I returned to the ambulance. Again, I hobbled along, carrying my right boot. Why, I do not know. A short ride took us to the flight line where I walked to and boarded a HH-43 "Husky" helo belonging to Det. 10, 38th ARRS (Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron) for a flight to the Army's 3rd Surgical Hospital at Dong Tam. They referred to the helo as "Pedro" from its voice radio call sign. The total elapsed time from, "I just took one in the foot," to my hobbling from Pedro to the A&D (admission and discharge) end of the hospital was just about an hour. The Pedro's pilot, an Air Force Captain, had an appropriate name, Tom Precious. A former B-52 pilot, he decided rescue work was more to his liking than SAC.

While an Army medic prepared my paperwork, another one removed my uniform. I did

not care about the uniform but I did not want to lose my Marine Corps fatigue cap. As I was going to be away from Binh Thuy that day, I left my damn beret there. A medic told me that was not a problem, but it was. I never saw my cap again. From A&D, it was a short trip to surgery.

The 3rd Surgical Hospital was a modern MASH (mobile army surgical hospital, an updated version of the type depicted in the long-running TV series, MASH.). It consisted of a series of Quonset hut-shaped air-inflated structures. They looked like half sausages lined in a row. All the units were air-conditioned and were quite comfortable. Medics placed me on a table in the surgical tent. I looked around; saw no Hawk Eyes, MAJ Houlihans or Radars. A voice told me to assume a prescribed position for a spinal. I apparently moved as they started the spinal. Another voice asked, "Did he move?" Another person said that I apparently felt what was going on causing me to move. He ordered, "Immobilize him." I saw a large nurse move toward me as I lay in a fetal position on my left side. She placed one hand behind my neck and the other behind my knees and held me tightly. At that time, I thought they could have put a bulldozer in my lower back and I would not be able to move. Once the spinal took effect, the surgeon asked if I wanted to watch. When I replied, "No," they rigged a drape and went to work. In a short time, they finished and I went on a ward.

After being place on a bed I laid there wondering, then went into mild shock. A medic responded to my call and adjusted me so that I was not laying flat on my back. That seemed to correct my situation. As I returned to normal, I became aware of two medics struggling to insert a catheter into a patient. That did not encourage me to relax and attempt to go to sleep. (Years later I had a spinal for another surgery and had the same result; shock until somebody got my head elevated.)

The following day the ward's two nurses, a red head and a blonde, spent some time with me. I was the only Navy person on the ward. They wanted to talk about the Navy, its traditions and ceremonies. Earlier that day Captain Robert S. Salzer relieved Captain Wade C. Wells as CTF-117 in USS *Benewah* (APB-35). All off-duty hospital personnel were invited and those who attended wore their spit-shined jungle boots and starched fatigues. The Navy, on the other hand, wore summer whites, which greatly impressed the Army.

The ward's morning routine started with personal hygiene. A nurse or medic handed a stainless steel basin filled with hot water to the first person in each of the two rows of beds. That person also received a bar of soap, a towel and a safety razor. When he finished his morning toilette, everything went to the next bed. Periodically, someone emptied and refilled the basin and put it back into circulation.

An army lieutenant occupied the bed to my left. When he received the basin, he immediately gave it to me. I used it and passed it on. Sometime after breakfast, an off-duty nurse in civilian clothes, came on the ward with a basin of clean water, went to his bed, kissed him and then proceeded to give him his morning toilette. I wondered why the rest of us had not received the same treatment. Someone told me that the lieutenant, wounded in the field, arrived at Dong Tam for treatment. When he awoke after surgery, his eyes met those of the nurse and they immediately fell in love. They wanted to get married, something that entailed a lot of red tape in Saigon. Patients normally were in surgical hospitals no more than about 36-hours before

they went to another hospital. Every time the lieutenant's name came up on an evacuation order, he "developed" a temperature or other evacuation-prohibiting malady. That had been going on for weeks! I never did learn if they ever married.

The procedures of the hospital required all patients to remain in bed for at least 24-hours following surgery. After that, they were free to get out of bed and move about as necessary. I became a clock-watcher for two reasons. First, I wanted to be able to get out of bed and move about. Second, and more important, I wanted to go to the head without having to use a urinal or sit on a bedpan in a ward with no privacy screens. When my 24-hour wait ended, I called a nurse and told her I wanted to get up because I needed to go to the latrine. (I knew some basic Army expressions.) She had the ward master get me a pair of crutches; and when I asked where the latrine was, he replied go out the back of the ward and turn left. I did and got a big surprise.

The latrine was nothing more that a big out house. It was a wooden frame structure with a roof and screened walls. I went up several steps and through a door less entry all the while fighting one of the biggest collections of flies I had seen in a long time. I picked out a hole, and proceeded to do my thing. Beneath each seat, reposed half of a standard POL barrel partially filled with diesel fuel and of course, more flies. When a barrel reached a certain level, someone hauled it away for burning and replaced it with an empty one. I hobbled along the duckboards on my crutches and blood stained walking cast to the ward and reentered a much cleaner and air-conditioned world. What a contrast.

While in the latrine I recalled a story, I had heard years before of an incident during World War II. According to the story, a GI was in the latrine eagerly opening a letter from his sweetheart. It was a Dear John letter. The distraught GI lit the letter with a match and dropped it into the hole he was sitting on. The flaming letter supposedly caused a fire resulting in further injuries to the GI. Fortunately, there were no letter-reading GIs in the latrine while I was there.

Now that my systems and I seemed to function properly, my name appeared on a list of those who be evacuated to another hospital. The next morning, 3 December, I was one of ten patients stacked in a Dust Off - a medical evacuation helo - and flown to the 36th Evacuation Hospital at Vung Tau where I went to the orthopedic ward.

During my brief stay at Dong Tam, the 3rd Surgical Hospital was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tracy E. Strevey, Jr., MC, US Army, and the Chief of Surgery was Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth A. Cass, MC, US Army. Nearly ten years later, August 1977, to be exact, I reported to the US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, as a student. Two of my classmates were Tracy Strevey and Ken Cass; it is a small world.

The routine at Vung Tau meant that about three days after arrival I would have surgery to close my wound. Dr. Harmon, one of the hospital's two orthopedic surgeons would perform the simple operation. The night before the surgery, an orderly placed a NPO sign on my bed indicating that I was not to receive anything to eat or drink after midnight. As expected, as soon as that happened, one of the men on the ward started singing a little ditty he had made up regarding, "Scissors and Knives." It was a routine on our ward, as far as he was concerned.

The next morning, my gurney and several others queued up waiting for our turns in surgery. My records lay on my chest. I picked then up and started to read them. After I had gone through several pages, an indignant nurse snatched them out of my hands saying I could not read them.

Finally, orderlies moved four of us into the OR. I briefly looked around, then felt an IV and woke up in the recovery room. I felt hungry and asked for food. The medic said I must pass some liquid before I ate. He handed me a tray containing two glasses of water, two glasses of "bug juice" and two bowls of Jell-O. I got them down as fast as I could. I really did not want to stay there. The floor of the recovery room was concrete and on the floor next to my bed was a very large dark stain. In my mind, someone had lost a lot of blood there. I might have been right or wrong, but I wanted to get out of there. In time, I got the urge that was required, called to a medic and was handed a urinal and was told they needed a given amount. I gave a lesser amount but that seemed to be enough and an orderly wheeled me back to my ward. It was near-perfect timing as the cart with the noon meals was about to go out the door and I was able to retrieve the ration that had been brought for me.

The day after the surgery, Dr. Harmon, when making rounds, asked me if I wanted to lose my foot. If not, get some boots and start walking around. After rounds, the ward master went to A&D and found a pair of size 12 boots. He cut part of the top of the right one to accommodate my swollen foot. I started hobbling around. The next day, the other orthopedic surgeon made rounds. He asked whose boots were under my bunk. When I replied mine, he asked me if I wanted to lose my foot. That caused me to get both surgeons together for a discussion. Neither would deviate from his original position. I opted to go with Dr. Harmon as he had operated on my foot, and guess I made the right decision since my foot is still there and working properly.

Once I started moving around, I indicated I wanted to return to Binh Thuy. I was told that would not happen until my foot was nearly healed which could take up to a month. That was worrisome, as the medical policy was that if hospitalization exceeded 30-days, the patient was to leave Vietnam, probably to another hospital in the Far East Theater. My stay at Vung Tau lasted almost 30-days (I wonder what it would have been if I had been seriously wounded?) and until the very last minute, I did not know if I was staying in country or going to Japan, the Philippines or Guam.

When this whole episode started, I had directed that I did not want my next of kin notified that I was in the hospital. Instead, I wrote Pat a letter, that started something like, "A strange thing happened on my way to the war; I broke my foot." I then went on to say that I had some help in doing that and would be in the hospital for a while. Several days after my arrival at Vung Tau, I made a MARS (Military Amateur Radio Station) affiliated phone call home from the ward. By coincidence, Pat had just received my letter and was sharing it with Cyndi, our six-year-old daughter. It could not have been better timing. There she was learning of my situation from a letter and then came my voice on the phone hopefully providing assurance that things weren't so bad as they could have been.

Foolishly, I asked Pat not to tell my parents about my situation because I did not want to cause them concern. That put Pat in a bad spot for the simple reason I frequently corresponded

with them and anyone else who wrote me. On 20 December, I wrote to my parents explaining what had happened and that I had foolishly asked Pat not to tell them of my problem and not to be resentful toward her for her silence in the matter. One of my rationales in not writing to my parents was that even if I used my Binh Thuy address, the postal cancellation would indicate I was somewhere else. In that respect, I was correct. I later saw that all of the letters I sent to my parents from Vietnam, only one had a postmark – the one from Vung Tau.

I was not the only Navy person on the ward. The other was a young PBR gunner from a river section at Nha Be. While on patrol, his boat stopped a Vietnamese fisherman for an ID check. The Vietnamese asked the sailors to toss a grenade into the river to stun and/or kill the fish. One of the crew tossed an M-26 fragmentation grenade into the water; however, it was too close to the PBR. When it detonated, the gunner ended up with extruded wire shrapnel in his abdomen.

PBR crews occasionally used grenades to kill or stun fish at the request of Vietnamese fishermen. Unfortunately, those friendly gestures sometimes resulted in injuries such as the gunner's or deaths. I know of one case when a grenade accidentally landed in a sampan, killing a small girl. The father asked for and received $50 as compensation.

Of the 65 patients on the ward, only about 10 had the notation, "IRHA" – Injury Result of Hostile Action - on their bunk nameplates. Many of the other injuries were the result of vehicle accidents or other mishaps. Too many, however, appeared to be the result of stupidity, ignorance or indifference.

The nameplates on the beds bore the patient's name and personal data. Those for Army patients bore a replica of their division or unit shoulder patch. The gunner and my nameplates stood out in stark nakedness.

The nameplate insignia served at least one purpose; facilitating what I referred to as the Sunday parade. Every Sunday general officers visited the hospitals. Accompanied by a medical staff member and an aide de camp, they rapidly paced through the wards looking for their unit's shoulder patch. They then stopped at the bed; the general spoke to the soldier. If the nameplate had IRHA, the general reached back to the aide who handed him a Purple Heart. The general pinned it to the soldier or his pillow and was on his way looking for his next soldier. During one of those "Sunday parades," I saw Brigadier General George Smith Patton, III for the first time. He was with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Six years later, Major General "Georgie" (or "Cement Head," if you knew his West Point nickname) Patton, and I would serve together at the US European Command headquarters, in Stuttgart Germany.

I received one communication from Binh Thuy. Commander John Miller, the Chief Staff Officer called, not to enquire about me or my prognosis, but to tell me he was sending me a copy of the Game Warden Operation Order as well as a supply of pencils and paper. He wanted me to either update the current opord, or write a new one. I told him I did not think it was a good idea since the opord had a confidential security classification and I had no way of properly securing classified information. Additionally, I opined the suggestion possibly violated the Geneva Conventions pertaining to military hospitals (I knew hospital ships could not carry crypto

systems.) He did not appreciate my remarks and I surmised they were more nails in my coffin as far as Miller was concerned. Somehow, I had a bad start with him and I sensed he wanted to "get me" if he could. At that point, he could not because, as Paul Gray had said, "He is a staff member, bloodied in combat." Therefore, I was beyond John Miller's reach.

I noted several things during my stay at the 36th Evacuation Hospital that I found to be interesting, unusual or amusing. I cannot recall the number of times my temperature was taken while there. Oddly, all the thermometers were metric but our charts were not. Therefore, every time a temperature was taken, the nurse (do not recall that corpsmen did such things) would calculate our temperatures to Fahrenheit before entering them on the charts. Strangely, only nurses gave injections. I asked a nurse why the corpsmen did not give shots. Her reply was what if the corpsman made a mistake. I responded what if you make a mistake. She was insulted that I had such thoughts.

The best-looking nurse on our ward was male and the best-looking nurse in the hospital, the chief nurse, did not like men - what a hell of an environment for recovery!

One morning, Dr. Harmon made his rounds in total field gear - flak jacket, pistol, canteen, M-14 ammo pouches, first aid kit, etc. He did leave an M-14 and helmet just inside the door. I asked what was going on. He advised that after his rounds he was flying to Saigon to see a Bob Hope show and wanted to be prepared. In my view, Bob Hope had been slipping for some time and should have considered staying home, but was he so bad you had to be armed? On the other hand, maybe the doctor carried weapons in the event the helo went down during the flight to or from Saigon.

In addition, the world of cumshaw was alive and well on the orthopedic ward. I personally witnessed some horse-trading in which a GI traded a 2½-ton truck for a 5-ton air conditioner. Things like that must have driven the Army's inspector general personnel nuts, as the Army was stricter about property than was the Navy.

In the middle of December, another combat casualty arrived on the ward. He was the Major Jackmeyer the Tra Cu District SA when I was on the previously described MEDCAP. He had been driving in a jeep when a sniper blew away one of his kneecaps. His bed was across the aisle from mine. He seemed to be in continual pain, perhaps more so than the wound caused. He was constantly moaning or crying and asking for painkillers. They kept him pretty well medicated, but that seemed to have little effect on him. Doctors, nurses, corpsmen, chaplains, and fellow patients, including me, talked to him, trying to raise his spirits and get his mind off his condition. It was all to no avail, and it was not too long before he became a pariah on the ward as his actions were certainly getting on our nerves as well as those of the staff.

In the late morning of 23 December, someone decided taking him outside in the sunlight might help. When he learned of this plan, he protested and became almost hysterical as they placed him on a gurney. Once he was outside, we could still hear him yelling and complaining. Later the noise stopped. He had died of a heart attack.

Late that afternoon, another patient, an Aussie on the opposite end of the ward who had

lost a leg, started making loud noises and complained of loneliness. In no time at all, every Aussie in the hospital who could walk or crawl was at his bedside trying to cheer him up. Somebody even gave him a bottle of beer (the ward staff ignored it). In about a half hour's time, he settled down and soon they were all singing Aussie songs and Christmas carols. At that point, most of the rest of us one the ward joined in.

In order to get Christmas letters to the patients in a timely manner, the postal clerk delivered mail as soon as it was received at the hospital instead of their usual once a day deliveries. The clerk delivering mail to our ward wore a Santa Claus suit. We noticed that as the day wore on Santa seemed to be getting merrier and merrier. It was obvious that he had a bottle or people were giving him drinks. At mid-afternoon, a conventionally dressed postal clerk came through the ward looking for Santa. They eventually found him passed out on top of a hootch. I can imagine what he must have felt like, dressed in that hot suit, sound asleep and broiling in the sun.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve, the Catholic chaplain held an open area service. I cannot remember how many attended but to me it seemed to be a large group. The chaplain announced that instead of hearing individual confessions, he was granting a general absolution. I attended Midnight Mass that evening.

Christmas Day was festive considering where we were. We have a sumptuous dinner - shrimp cocktail, roast turkey with cornbread dressing and giblet gravy, roast beef, glazed sweet potatoes as well as mashed potatoes, buttered mixed vegetables, assorted relishes, butter flake rolls, fruit cake, mincemeat and pumpkin pies, assorted nuts and candy and of course, coffee, tea or milk. I concentrated on the roast beef as it was real while the turkey appeared to be processed

The mayor of Vung Tau came through the wards accompanied by a group of young women. They passed out presents. I received a mug that seemed suitable for beer or coffee. Oddly, the handle was in the shape of a naked woman. Later an ARVN lieutenant colonel came through. I believe he was the military commander for the area. He too passed out presents. Mine was a brass stand with brass replicas of ancient weapons.

Red Cross representatives also passed through the wards handing out standard Red Cross packages containing comfort items, e.g., stationary, pencils, candy, etc. They also distributed letters from elementary school children in Atlanta. I recall that I spent part of the afternoon playing Scrabble with other patients.

We received another present in the form of the annual Christmas cease-fire. It was, the first night since I left Saigon that I did not hear artillery or other gunfire noises.

My hospitalization was ending end and the ward master told me that 27 December was to be my discharge date. Then I learned I was the subject of a jurisdictional dispute, who would issue my travel orders, the Army or the Navy? That caused me to miss the Navy's Air Cofat flight on the 27th.

Finally, on 29 December, the ward master told me to gather my belongings, as this was

my discharge date. He asked my clothing sizes and a few minutes later returned with a set of brand new green fatigues. When I completed my out processing through A&D, the clerk told me I could leave. However, as I was not on any flight manifest for that day, it was somewhat up to me to get myself back to Binh Thuy. The alternative was to stay at Vung Tau until I was booked on a flight. After almost a month in the hospital, that was not a viable option.

I went over to HA(L)-3 headquarters, thinking someone there might be willing to fly me home or at least have a suggestion how to get there. That was not the case, and I got the distinct impression that as soon as they learned I was from TF-116 staff, they did not want to have anything to do with me. A Red Cross worker happened to be nearby overheard this and asked to use the phone. She called the CO of an Army Aviation Company and asked if he had any unscheduled flights to Can Tho. Within an hour, I was in an Army C-1 "Otter," headed for Can Tho. Oddly, it took me longer to get from Can Tho to Binh Thuy than it did to fly from Vung Tau.

When I got back, I found my old room in the BOQ appeared to be just as I left. Later after I unpacked my scant belongings, and was getting ready to relax and perhaps have a beer, I made a discovery. During my absence, some of my friends had helped themselves to some of my beer. Nevertheless, they were considerate in that they left replacements, ginger ale, orange soda and grape soda. Grape soda?

Fred told me that when they checked Shotgun 12 after the 1 December incident, it had six bullet holes in the floorboard, and I had my foot over one of them. In addition, there was a 2-inch hole in one wing.

Learning that confirmed what I had thought of on a number of occasions, I was extremely lucky. Had that bullet hit six inches farther forward or aft, I in all probability would not be writing this now. That convinced me that should I ever get into the back seat of an O-1, the stick would remain in place just in case I would have the opportunity to take instant flying lessons should something happen to the pilot. Fortunately, I never faced that situation again.

I also learned on 2 December, Gray mounted an operation on Tan Dinh Island in retaliation for my injury the day before. I have no idea what damage, if any, it inflicted on the VC. Unfortunately several of those involved in the operation including the TF-116 PAO, received wounds. Minor ones, thank God. I certainly did not enjoy the thought that others were hurt because of me.

Fritz Steiner told me Captain Gray, had been part of a group of in-country personnel who went to Cam Ranh Bay on 23 December when President Johnson visited there (We knew of his visit when I was at Vung Tau.) Gray received a Silver Star for leadership for some operation. I thought, hey, what an honor, personally receiving a decoration from the President in whose name such awards are given. After the ceremony, all those honored had lunch, not with the President, but with General Westmoreland, COMUSMACV. Then Fritz told me that to the best that he could recall, Captain Gray had been in Penang, Malaysia, on R&R and probably in a whorehouse at the time of the operation. The recommendation and citation had been prepared in Saigon. I took Steiner's word on that and never checked for myself.

Prior to my journey through the Army's hospital system, I knew, and was rapidly reaffirming, that Captain Paul Gray was impetuous and publicity minded. There were too many incidents to think otherwise. He was the type who equated success with casualties. However, unlike the McNamara model of enemy body count, Gray seemed to count only US casualties.

Whenever he had the urge, he would tell Fritz, “Gin up something for me.” Fritz would get together with Don Sheppard of RIVDIV Fifty-one and they “ginned” something up. Fritz liked to give those operations football-style names, e.g., Crimson Tide, Green Wave, etc. Gray would trade his beret for an Aussie bush hat, grab his Swedish K sub-machine gun and off he would go, frequently accompanied by a photographer or PAO or both. Gray would also take his own movie camera.

Those operations had questionable operational results, but often they were cinematographic successes. Some of those operations included the previously mentioned “Flaming Arrow” operation where the operation focused on the use of flaming arrows to burn down hootches and the one when the PBR crews employed CS with not so spectacular results. Perhaps these were good publicity stunts, but a doubtful military tactic in the 1960s. Another operation, supposedly approved by the District Chief concerned, resulted in the shooting up and general destruction of buildings and crops used by the VC. Subsequently, a Japanese citizen who owned the plantation registered numerous complaints. When the District Chief was asked, he said he never approved the operation in writing (he had given Gray a verbal OK) thus, the US government paid the owner $250,000 for the damage.

Other stories of Paul Gray's “ginned up” operations abounded, including one created for Vice Admiral John J. Hyland, USN, Commander, Seventh Fleet during a visit to the Delta in May 1967. That operation, which included PBRs, Seawolves, SEALs, and an LST, concluded with the parading of "captured” VC dressed in brand new black pajamas, which still showed the creases from being folded, in front of the admiral and his party on the deck the LST where they had observed the whole operation. The facial expressions of the VCs indicated they might not be VCs after all.

On other occasions, the ginned up operations had the PBR sailors using tactics we had never thought of before, such as one on 27 November when sailors use portable flame throwers from the sterns of PBRs to burn down hootches. Using napalm from a fiberglass boat could cause problems if a mishap occurred.

Captain Gray recorded his exploits using his movie camera. Editing produced a film purporting to give the viewer an overall overview of Operation Game Warden. Not everybody had the opportunity to see it as Captain Gray showed it only to selected visitors, those with three or more stars, or their civilian equivalents.

Typical scenes included Jack Maccione stepping on a punji stake with one foot and then the other, all within a period of minutes. (Punji stakes were non-explosive booby traps consisting of sharpened bamboo sticks placed so the unwary who stepped on it would drive the feces-contaminated stake through his foot.) A metal plate in the soles of our jungle boots supposedly

reduced the likelihood of punji-induced injuries.

Another segment showed Captain Gray receiving treatment for a wound on his left buttocks. He had led an operation on Tan Dinh Island on 3 October 1967; and as they were extracting, a boat crewman accidentally pulled the trip wire on a grenade booby trap, thus the piece of metal in Gray's left cheek. The film clip showed him standing on the stern of a LCM with his pants and skivvies around his ankles while he, wearing his sun glasses and with his cigarette holder at a jaunty angle, grinned at the camera operator as somebody attended to his wound.

In October 1968, after another visit to the Delta, Admiral Hyland, then the Commander in Chief, US Pacific Fleet, turned to Wayne Beech (Deputy, CTF-116) and me as he boarded a plane at BTAB that would take him to Saigon, and said, "Thank you, gentlemen, for a most enjoyable visit to the Delta to see how you really work. And thank God, I didn't have to watch Paul Gray's bleeding ass again."

Binh Thuy apparently was on either the MACV or NAVFORV PAO circuit. It seemed we forever received visitors either wanting or being told what they needed to know about Operation Game Warden. They included military officers, government officials, on two occasions, members of the Congress, Rear Admiral G. J. Crabb, RAN, the Commander of the Australian Navy, and General de Bergata Mariate (brigadier general) Jaime Neveres and five other officers from Argentina. I have no idea if any of the group understood or spoke English because as soon as they sat down for the briefing, most of them immediately went to sleep.

On 3 January 1968, TF-116 reorganized and expanded its task organization as follows:

TG-116.1 (COMRIVDIV-51) the Bassac River Patrol Group
TG-116.2 (COMRIVDIV-52) the Co Chien River Patrol Group
TG-116.3 (COMRIVDIV 53) the My Tho River Patrol Group
TG-116.4 (RSSZ Advisor) the Rung Sat River Patrol Group
TG-116.5 not assigned
TG-116.6 (OIC SEAL Team Det A) the Delta SEAL Group
TF-116.7 not assigned
TG-116.8 (CO HAL-3) the Helo Support Group
TG-116.9 unassigned.

River Sections and other subordinate or attached units fit into the organization as task units and task elements as appropriate providing fifty-eight separate task designations. COMRIVDIV-55 and RIVSEC 521 in I Corps were not included in this seemingly unwieldy organization.

Sometime in January, one of the patrols working the Mekong became involved in a medevac. The patient was a pregnant Vietnamese. A patrol picked her up and headed for the nearest hospital. They did not make it in time, and the woman gave birth with some of the crew assisting as mid-wives; something not covered by their training at Mare Island. The mother and baby eventually made it to the hospital. According to *Stars and Stripes,* the mother named her child Nguyen PBR Phu. I often wondered what became of the child, especially after 1975. This was not a unique situation as several children were born in PBRs as the stork outdistanced them

in the race to a hospital. In reality, I would assume very few babies in rural Vietnam were born in hospitals.

We noted an increase in VC activity in the crossing point near Tan Dinh Island. Early in the afternoon of 11 January, the VC ambushed a PBR patrol from the west bank of the Bassac River with B-40s and small arms fire. A quick reaction force of PBRs, SEALS and Seawolves responded. Lieutenant Jake Rhinebolt headed the SEAL platoon. The Seawolves supported the operation. The PBRs inserted the SEALs away from the site and they then headed the located. They discovered a VC bunker and attacked it. Five VC were killed as the attempted to exit the bunker, but in the firefight, we lost a SEAL, SN Roy B. Keith. Jake told me that in spite of repeated briefings to the contrary, Keith made the mistake of stepping in front of an entrance to a VC bunker during the assault. A VC stitched him with an AK-47.

In the after action policing of the area, someone discovered that one of the dead uniformed enemy wore a wristwatch indicating an hour's difference from local time. His watch could have been wrong, but South Vietnam was on "Hotel" time while North Vietnam was on "India." (The world's twenty-four local 15-degree wide time zones have an alphabetic designation starting with "Zulu" at Greenwich, England, and proceeding through the alphabet in an easterly direction.) The unanswered question was he a NVA cadre or liaison type. If so, it was one of the early indications the NVN had personnel that far south in the Delta.

After the operation, CTF-116 recommend COMNAVFORV consider the feasibility to collocating small US Army or US Marine Corps units at Gamewarden bases for employment as Quick Reaction units to for use in similar emergent situations. Although no such units were established, the Senior Advisor IV Corps requested is advisor teams to provide local forces for such operations.

Many military personnel knew that SEALs were in the Delta, but most of them did not understand their training and mission. Some thought the SEALs were some kind of super-infantry and sought them for "high diddle-diddle, right up the middle type-assaults." No request of that type received approval. The TF-116 SEALs performed a wide variety of reconnaissance and intelligence gathering missions as well as interdicting VC operations.

LTJG Richard "Dick" Marcinko conducted a reconnaissance of the Vinh Ti Canal south of Chau Duc (also known as Chau Phu) toward its juncture with the Rach Giang Thanh, which led to Ha Tien. He did it by posing as a prisoner under escort by local CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) "guards." He gathered significant intelligence regarding infiltration routes in the area.

Dick's patrols went considerably farther inland from the rivers than the SEALs had previously operated. Whenever they killed someone, they left a stripe of their facial camouflage paint on the victim to ensure all knew the SEALs had been there. The TF-116 SEALs occasionally operated in concert with other SEALs operating with the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) engaged in Operation Phoenix, the CIA-directed program to eliminate VC and VC cadre through an assassination campaign.

Dick Marcinko had a nickname, "Demo Dick," given to him by a reporter. He told me that after his first Vietnam tour, Dick had made a tour of East Coast ports in an APD (high-speed transport) as part of a Navy recruiting effort. During that trip, a reporter wrote an article about Dick in *Male*, a "gung ho" male-oriented magazine, and called him "Demo Dick." The article made a number of untrue or exaggerated claims about regarding Dick's first tour in Vietnam. The article directly or indirectly caused two things. First, the VC placed 50,000 piasters dead or alive reward on Marcinko, and, second Dick filed a lawsuit in the US District Court in Norfolk for libel and invasion of privacy. There was an out of court settlement.

(In later years, Dick was the commissioning commanding officer of SEAL Team Six, the Navy's first anti-terrorist organization and among other things, had a role in providing security to the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. He also headed the "Red Cell" team that tested security of Navy installations, sometimes with controversial results. Although selected for promotion to captain, he was not promoted. Instead, Federal authorities arraigned, tried and convicted him of various charges. After serving his sentence, Dick became a prolific author on the subject of terrorism and counter-insurgency.)

On 16 January 1968, I had my first exposure to a real in-country "dog and pony show," the IV Corps quarterly review of the Combined Campaign Plan. I had seen and read the CCP before I knew that I would have to go to corps headquarters every three months to learn what had transpired in the past ninety days and might happen in the next.

The Combined Campaign Plan derived its name from military jargon in which anything produced by two or more nations is "Combined," while anything produced by two or more U.S. services is "Joint." Thus, the Combined Campaign Plan was a product of the combined efforts of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff (their equivalent of our JCS) and the Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam. The secret document, issued annually, was about two-inches thick and had a pink cover. It described the political and military climate in the country and then laid out specifics for each of the four corps tactical zone. I never read the I, II or III CTZs portions, but I did read about IV CTZ, and I did that for two successive issues, 1967 and 1968. For all intent and purposes, they were identical. One would think the only difference between the two plans was the year.

The friendly order of battle in IV CTZ had not changed in those two years as far as units were concerned. Their capabilities, however, may have changed if for no other reason than the receipt of new equipment. TF-116 and TF-117 were in the friendly order of battle, but it contained little about their capabilities because they were not part of the Corps' command structure. Oddly, the enemy order of battle did not change either. A close reading of the CCP would reveal why.

The 1967 CCP began with the assumption there were 40,000 insurgents (no regular units, just insurgents!) in IV CTZ. The goal for the year was the elimination of 40,000 insurgents. Each Quarterly Review indicated the progress in achieving the goal. In other words, on 1 January 1967, there were 40,000 insurgents in IV CTZ. By 31 December 1967, the Corps accomplished the goal of eliminating 40,000 insurgents. Then reading the 1968 CCP one found the same assumption and goal: start with and eliminate 40,000 insurgents during that year. I

wondered how long that farce had continued. I knew the Vietnamese had a reputation for being prolific, but providing 40,000 new insurgents each year? One need not have to have be a doctor of philosophy or a graduate of the National War College to realize that something was not exactly correct in that approach to planning any year's campaign.

In reality, the IV CTZ goal of eliminating 40,000 insurgents reflected a problem in Vietnam; the war in part, was statistics-driven; a reflection of Secretary Mc Namara's attempts to quantify everything with numbers. I certainly had observed that when I was with JCS. The most commonly cited statistic in military records and the media was body count.

The problem was there was no single way to quantify enemy, or suspected enemy casualties. Very early on, in the early 1960s, some US advisors emulated their ARVN counterparts by collecting VC ears as proof of KIAs. Once that appeared in the US media, it was not an acceptable practice. As alternatives, COMUSMACV created and promulgated a number of formulae to determine body count. By massaging the formulae, it was possible after any action to report a given number of enemy confirmed, probable and possible KIA without producing or seeing one body.

As an example, one formula stated that if friendly forces recovered a crew-served weapon (mortar or machine gun) after an action, the unit could claim four probable KIAs or one probable and three possible KIAs. Recovering a B-40 or B-41 rocket propelled grenade launcher produced one probable and one possible. A sidearm meant one probable or one possible. The unit did not need any other evidence such as a body or a blood trail, etc.

In time, we attempted to ensure reports from TF-116 units were accurate even if they would have to be understated. It was a sensitive subject. Complicating the matter was that in 1968, the enemy with improved tactics and certainly improved weapons was hurting us more than they had in the past, and that affected another Washington-created statistic, the kill ratio. In addition, the media were alert to detect and report changes indicating the factors in that ratio were decreasing. (With the creation of Operation SEALORDS in November 1968, COMNAVFORV promulgated criteria for determining enemy casualty counts. They were more stringent than those established by COMUSMACV were.)

At one time, I conducted a personal survey of what the Seawolves accomplished in a thirty-day period. I did that by measuring ammunition expenditure for confirmed body count: that is actually seeing a body that we were positive was dead. My rudimentary survey indicated that the helos fired 67,000 7.62mm machine gun rounds for every confirmed KIA. That may seem to be an inordinately high amount of ammunition to expend to produce one KIA. However, the National Park Service estimates troops fired between 8,000 and 10,000 rounds for each person killed or wounded during the Battle of Bull Run, and they were not using automatic weapons.

In reality, the whole problem of overstated battle accomplishments is as old as warfare itself. Anyone who had read or studied the ponderous volumes of the *United States Strategic Bombing Surveys* conducted after World War II knows that the combined Allied air forces accomplished far less damage in Europe and Asia than was originally reported by participants.

Major dignitaries attended combined Campaign Plan Quarterly Reviews. Thus, Captain Gray drove his black sedan to CTAB to await the arrival of Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, USN, Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam. We picked up the admiral and the flag lieutenant and went to IV Corps headquarters in Can Tho. Others attending the review included General William C. Westmoreland, USA, COMUSMACV; General Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Vietnamese Joint General Staff; Ambassador Robert Komer; Commodore Tran Van Chon, VNN, Vietnam's Chief of Naval Operations; Captain Robert Salzer, CTF-117 and COL Burt A. David, USA, the Commander, 2nd Brigade, 9th U.S. Infantry Division.

Robert Komer, a former CIA officer in Turkey, with the rank of ambassador, was the Deputy COMUSMACV for CORDS - Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. His responsibilities included moving food – primarily rice – to the capital region, and the continuation of a number of programs designed to persuade the civilians in the south to support their government rather than the Communists. The French, Japanese, and the US employed the strategy at various times. Former names included “Strategic Hamlets” and “New Life Relocation Hamlets”. Ellsworth Bunker was the US Ambassador at that time.

Before the conference started, we had an informal meeting with Admiral Veth in a courtyard. There was some small talk mainly between Admiral Veth and Captain Gray. At one point, the admiral talked about difficulties with MACV. He mentioned that although he was the senior U.S. naval officer in Vietnam, he was nineteenth in the overall seniority of U.S. flag and general officers then in country. Then he commented about difficulties within the naval command both in country and out of Vietnam. He looked directly at Captain Gray and said, “It’s getting so bad that I am almost to the point of issuing letters of reprimand with Combat Vs.” That is a direct quote. One thing that came to my mind with that remark was the “dog and pony” show Gray staged for Admiral Hyland during his last visit. Among the staff accompanying Admiral Hyland on that trip, was the Fleet Judge Advocate General, who allegedly wanted to initiate court-martial proceedings against Captain Gray.

We went into the conference room to hear the Quarterly Review. The only U.S. officers involved in making reports were the Army officers assigned to the IV Corps Senior Advisor's staff. The Navy attendees observed from the back rows. In typical Army fashion, the briefings went through the “G numbers,” that is, G-1 personnel and administration; G-2 intelligence; G-3 operations; G-4 logistics; G-5 plans and civic operations; and G-6 communications-electronics.

I clearly recall the G-2 briefer giving a relatively standard intelligence brief. There certainly were no alarms sounded regarding enemy movements or intentions. He mentioned that the Corps was considering the start of air operations in the western part of the corps area to detect and interdict any enemy movement discovered there. The plan called for U.S. Army OV-1 “Mohawk” reconnaissance aircraft working in concert with either Army helo gunships or other “Mohawks” outfitted as attack aircraft. There was no specific starting date for the proposed operation. (In hindsight, where was the intelligence regarding enemy movements that formed the basis for the proposed operations? There was no mention of it during the briefing)

At the conclusion of that part of the Review, the only problem I heard identified was

during the G-4 presentation. The logistics briefer stated that “Ruff” “Puff” (Regional Force, Popular Force) outposts required additional barbed wire to improve their defensive systems. He said although there was ample wire in storage at depot level, there was insufficient motor transport to get the wire from the depot to the outposts.

Finally, the Commander, Fourth Riverine Area made his presentation. He addressed the security of the major waterways in the Delta - that is rivers, and major canals. He used a large outline chart of the Delta showing the waterways color coded green, yellow or red, meaning respectively, open and safe for water traffic; open to water traffic, however, intermittent enemy action could be anticipated; and, finally, closed to water traffic or essentially enemy-controlled.

His briefing went smoothly until he mentioned the Mang Thit (River) - Nicoli Canal complex connecting the Bassac and Mekong Rivers. He declared them “red.” The IV Corps commander and many of the Vietnamese staff officers present loudly voiced their objection. Their position was that the Navy made a plotting error, as the complex was “green,” not “red.” A heated debate ensued. As it was in Vietnamese, we did not understand it, but we suspected what caused the debate.

In late 1966 or early 1967, the then IV Corps commander opened the Mang Thit - Nicoli by putting the 7th ARVN Division on one side of the waterway and the 9th ARVN Division on the other. Then, with the banks secured, Fourth Riverine Area's RAGs punched their way through. When they completed the transit, and with the two divisions providing bank security, units of the Fourth Riverine Area again transited the system with former General Nyugen Van Thieu, the President of the Republic of Vietnam embarked. There was much national and international news coverage of the event. When the president's transit was completed, the two divisions went back to their garrisons and the VC moved back in.

Be that as it may, the now IV Corps commander, a general officer in a politically motivated army, was not going to let a mere commander in the Vietnamese Navy make him lose face by saying that the Mang Thit - Nicoli was “Red.” Not, that is, if the general wanted to keep his job. After much argument, the obviously cowed Fourth Riverine Area commander took a green felt-tip marker from his pocket and changed the Mang Thit – Nicoli to green. He may not have known it at the time, but his days as Commander, Fourth Riverine Area were numbered. We did not know it, but Ambassador Komer’s presence during that exchange was going to affect the US Navy a few months later.

At the appropriate time, the briefing broke for lunch. I have no idea where the generals and the ambassador ate, but we of lesser stature had lunch in a courtyard. It consisted of sandwiches and soft drinks or beer. Interestingly there were no glasses or paper cups for the drinks; however, each bottle of soda or beer had a straw stuck into it. Upon taking a close look at the beer bottle I received, I was happy to have the straw.

Later I would attend a number of numbing briefings conducted by US Army advisors to Vietnamese units or organizations. It was a twice a day, morning and evening, routine, given in "G-number" order. It did not matter whether an individual briefer had anything significant to say when his turn came, he popped up and said something, and even if to say that, he had nothing to

report.

When the briefing ended later in the afternoon, we got into Captain Gray's staff car, took Admiral Veth and the flag lieutenant to CTAB. When their plane cleared the runway and was wheels up, we continued up the road to Binh Thuy. It had been quite an interesting day.

On 18 January, I learned of the first fatality of someone I knew. Two VC RPGs hit ATC 1 (Armored Troop Carrier 1) - a flamethrower "Zippo" boat belonging to River Assault Division 112 at the confluence of the Ong Buong and Ven Tre Rivers killing Lieutenant Commander Bob Condon, the CO, UDT-12, during an operation with TF-117. Bob and I had been at NIOTC just a few months earlier.

In mid-January, we started planning for Operation Bold Dragon I. The concept called for nine PBRs, five from Vinh Long and four from Binh Thuy, to operate on the upper reaches of the Mekong and Bassac Rivers respectively during the forthcoming Tet holiday. We also planned to put a SEAL platoon on the upper Bassac as well. Lieutenant junior grade Richard Marcinko, who had recently returned in country for a second tour, commanded that platoon

In April 1967, RIVSEC 522 operated from the YRBM-16 at Tan Chau, patrolling the upper reaches of the Mekong River. However, on 3 July 1967, the operation ended and the YRBM and RIVSEC 522 relocated to Binh Thuy, then shifted to the lower Bassac and remained there until 5 September 1967 when they relocated to Ben Tre. Although I never saw any printed documentation regarding the move from Tan Chou, several people alluded that the relocation from Tan Chou resulted from the patrols being too effective in interdicting smuggling and black market operations. Some of the people involved in the smuggling were members of the Vietnamese army and navy. That was particularly true with the VNN's units who regularly escorted the weekly international convoys up the Mekong to the Cambodian boarder.

The purpose of Bold Dragon I was to reestablish patrols on the upper rivers during Tet when we knew the Vietnamese military and naval forces would be in their garrisons. We then could get a better appreciation of what was going on in those border areas.

We recognized and accepted that Bold Dragon I had one weakness, and that is it was being conducted about sixty miles from the nearest normal location of a Seawolf detachment. Repositioning a detachment closer meant relocating support materials and personnel and degrading our air support capabilities in other areas. That exemplified the problems the shortfall of nearly twenty-four helos had on our operations. In retrospect, had I given it much thought, I would have recalled from my JCS days that the VC had not been quiet during Tet '63, '64 or '65. I do not recall any other planners mentioning if anything happened during Tet '66 or '67. Perhaps that was the result of one-year tours, a lack of corporate memory.

In April 1967, TF-116 units that arrived there in August 1966, were removed from, Long Xuyen city and An Giang province for a different reason. The population of An Giang Province predominantly were Hoa Hao (pronounced, "waa how".) One of the many religious sects in Vietnam, the Hoas Haos, came into being in May 1939 through the efforts of Huyen Phu So. They were fiercely independent and resisted attempts to pacify them made by the French and the

Japanese.

When World War II ended, So and the Hoa Haos along with Cao Dais (another religious sect) joined the National United Front, a Viet Minh-led organization opposing the French. Later, both sects, disenchanted by the actions of the Viet Mnh, withdrew from the NUF that subsequently dissolved.

In 1947, the Viet Minh made overtures to the Hoa Haos to regain their support and proposed a conciliatory meeting An Giang province. On 21 April 1947, while en route to the conference, So was ambushed and killed at the direction of Nguyen Binh, one of the two Viet Minh leaders in the Delta. The Viet Minh then hacked So's body into small pieces and scattered it around the province to keep the Hoa Haos from finding enough to create a memorial to him. From that time onward, the Viet Minh and later the Viet Cong had a difficult time making in-roads in An Giang province.

In August 1966, RIVSECS 522 and 523 commenced operating from the YRBM-16 at Long Xuyen. The patrols of that portion of the Bssac were not productive and the enemy's activities further down river increased. Thus, on 31 March 1967, CTF-116 terminated the Long Xuyean operation and shifted the YRBM-16 and the two river sections to Binh Thuy.

In mid-January, I received notification from BuPers of my selection as one potentially eligible to attend the undergraduate program at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey. My eligibility was in effect until March 1969. The notification also told me that I was short six semester hours of being fully qualified. That caused me to enroll with the US Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) for a correspondence course with the University of California in order to get the six hours credit.

I made what was supposedly a one-day trip to Saigon When I attempted to return to Binh Thuy I learned of the cancellation of my flight. Through some quirk, I spent the night in the Embassy Hotel. It was not a military hotel or one where overnight transients stayed. It was one of Saigon's better commercial hotels. I looked somewhat out of place as I entered the lobby wearing jungle fatigues, boots and beret a .45 belted to my waist and carrying my flak jacket and blue overnight or "AWOL" bag that contained shaving gear, extra sox and underwear and a box of .45 ammunition. After registering, a livered bellman appeared to carry my things to my room. When we entered, he placed the AWOL bag on a baggage rack, then opened the closet and hung my flak jacket with all the care he would give to an expensive tailored suit. It was a night of comfort, but the next day, it was onto a plane and back to my room at Binh Thuy.

On 23 January 1968, we along with the rest of the world learned of the capture of USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2) by naval forces of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea. We felt the same indignation as the rest of the country, and, of course, many discussions raged regarding, "What I would done have been had I been in command of *Pueblo*."

Later, we received a message from CINCPACFLT advising that a copy of COMRIVPATFOR OPORD 101-YR was aboard *Pueblo* and we could assume it compromised. We had to provide our assessment as to the potential damage caused by the probable

compromise. Given the fact that the opord was very out of date, we considered the effects of a compromise to be minimal. If fact, we privately joked that it might even be advantageous as it certainly could mislead the VC as to what to expect us to do under varying circumstances. Ironically, I later met and knew Commander Lloyd M. "Pete" Bucher, *Pueblo*'s CO, when I was at Monterey after I left Vietnam.

On 25 January, we received intelligence indicating that the VC intended to attack the base at Binh Thuy. A special 5-PBR patrol patrolled the Bassac near the base and did engage a VC force located on the shore opposite the base.

(According to the writings of a retired North Vietnamese general in 1964, the Political Bureau of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's Party Central Committee conceived a plan known as "General Offensive – General Uprising." It envisioned once the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong attacked the institutions of the puppet government the general populace would rise up in support of their salvors from the North and defeat the puppet government and the American aggressors. The plan called for three separate offensive actions, one during Tet, the second in May and the third in September. The Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), the politico-military command in the south, would determine the time for the execution the General Offensive – General Uprising. In October or November 1967 COSVN determined 30 January 1968 as N-Day, the start of the plan. An attack against the Americans at Khe San would precede N-Day with the objective of diverting American and South Vietnamese forces away from targeted areas. Before N-Day, the North Vietnamese changed from an older to a newer lunar calendar – the difference was one day. For unexplained reasons, some North Vietnamese/Viet Cong units did not implement the calendar change; thus, the General Offensive – General Uprising got off to a fragmented start.)

Shortly before the commencement of the Tet truce, the Senior Advisor IV CTZ issued a message to his advisors throughout the Delta that intelligence indicated that the Viet Cong intended to make attacks after the truce. This did not square with the information provided at the IV Corps Combined Campaign Plan conducted on 16 January. I have no recollection of that message was addressed to CTF-116; but then we were not part of Advisory Team 96 – the Army advisors to the Vietnamese forces in the Delta.

When we walked into the briefing room on the morning of 31 January 1968, we were stunned to see the wall-covering map of the Delta splashed with red markers indicating enemy action during the night. Thirteen of the fourteen provinces south of the Capital Military District and in the IV Corps Tactical Zone had suffered attacks and with the major ones directed against the province capitals. The lone exception was An Giang province and its capital, Long Xuyen - Hoa Hao country! The Tet '68 Offensive had started.

Tet is the lunar New Year and has religious significance to the Vietnamese. With the approach of holiday, *both* sides declared a "truce" during Tet. Nineteen sixty-eight was no exception. When the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese attacked, COMUSCMAV promulgated a message canceling the truce applicable to US forces. I do not know about the rest of the country, but the River Patrol Force did not wait until they received that directive; we already were in combat.

. (Oddly, there were three annual “truces” during the early years of the Vietnamese War. The first of a couple days’ duration occurred over Christmas and a similar one for the western New Years at the end of December. The other and longer one was during the lunar New Year more commonly known as Tet. The VC and North Vietnamese rarely observed any of the “truces;” but we, and the South Vietnamese did respect it regardless of what the enemy did. When the enemy violated the truce, COMUSMACV would send a message to all concerned announcing the cancellation of the truce.)

We had several major concerns. At Vinh Long, fighting was taking place at the RAG Base where River Division Fifty-two was located. It was also the location of the Naval Security Group Detachment. Many of our people were in their billet compound on the east side of Vinh Long and because of the fighting in the city could not get to the RAG Base. Ving Long Army Air Base was under attack; this caused concern for Lieutenant Commander Al “Wes” Weselesky's Seawolf detachment.

My Tho and Nha Be had been hit. The Seawolf detachment at Nha Be (our only four aircraft detachment) was operating over Saigon providing protection to the US Embassy. At first, we had no information regarding the Bold Dragon I force with four PBRs from RIVSEC-535 operating out of Chau Doc and five boats from RIVSEC-513 operating from Camp Thuong Thoi, a Special Forces location on the upper Mekong. Can Tho was under attack as was Binh Thuy Air Base. There was some dismay. We were still absorbing the impact of what had happened. Obviously, the first thing we needed was the status of our forces throughout the Delta. Captain Gray took it all in and then as he left the conference room, commented, “Don't be concerned about this as it is like a mosquito biting an elephant on the ass.”

Reports started trickling in. There was fighting in Can Tho, mainly in the Ben Xi Moi section of the city. The corps commander was in his villa, protected by a battalion of the 21st ARVN Division. The Senior Advisor and his staff were in Eakin Compound and could not get out because of sniper fire. That lasted until the next day when a medical officer became irked and blew the sniper out of a tree. VC forces were in the university in Can Tho apparently using it as a command post.

In Vinh Long, the RAG Base reportedly changed hands several times, but was still in friendly control. *Garrett County* came up the river and started evacuating friendly forces from the RAG base

During the early phases of the attack on the RAG Base, the spooks destroyed the NAVSECGRUDET's (Naval Security Group Detachment) equipment. In one aspect, that was no loss. It would be some time before we would again start receiving monthly reports from them saying that at such and such a time two PBRs (and the patrol would be identified) reported being engaged by the enemy at (giving the grid coordinates as broadcast). Then we received a formatted report stating that failure to encode the grid coordinates revealed significant information to the enemy. Ironically, the enemy used the same coordinate system and certainly knew where they had engaged or been engaged by the PBRs in a firefight. The eventual delivery of the long-promised on-line voice security equipment would help solve such problems.

At Chau Doc, Lieutenant Jack Doyle had a hornet's nest. Early in the morning of 31 January, the city came under attack by the 313th VC Main Force battalion. One of their primary objectives was to isolate Camp Arnn the home of the Special Forces Mike Team B-42, but more important, the base from which the PBRs operated. (B-42 arrived at Camp Arnn on 1 May 1965.)

Chau Doc is less than five kilometers from the Cambodian border. The only friendly ground forces in the city attempting to drive the VC out of the city were about 36 *hnungs* (Chinese mercenaries) part of a Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) under the control of the Province Senior Advisor's CORDS advisor, US Army Special Forces Staff Sergeant Drew Dix assigned to the CIA.

When the attack began, two RIVSEC-535 PBRs and their support LCM were at Camp Arnn, moored to a pier. The two other RIVSEC-535 PBRs were upriver toward the Cambodian border retrieving Dick Marcinko's twelve-man SEAL platoon that had just tangled with several hundred VC at the Cambodian border. With the SEALs on board, the boats started toward Chau Duc. The PBRs and LCM at Camp Arnn cleared the pier and headed down river. While en route, the LCM received a hit from a 57mm recoilless rifle wounding two crewmen and inflicting minor damage.

The two PBRs augmented by volunteers from the LCM then began making firing runs on enemy positions but were unable to keep the enemy pinned down. When the PBRs carrying Marchinko's SEAL platoon arrived and under heavy fire, they landed the SEALs in the city and then joined the other PBRs on the river.

In the city, Dix's *hnungs* and some of Marcinko's SEALs were rescuing U.S. personnel from their offices and billets. One was Maggie, a civilian nurse who had barricaded herself in her billet until rescued. (Maggie had a carbine and said she was ready to take as many of the enemy as possible while saving one bullet for herself.) In a separate action, as the SEALs attempted to clear the north side of the city, one of them, AMH2 Clarence Risher, in spite of repeated calls to take cover, stood in the middle of a street firing a Stoner machine gun. He became the only US fatality. (An interesting aftermath: SSG Dix received the Medal of Honor, while some of the SEALs received Bronze Star Medals. It all depends on who wrote recommendations; perhaps the Navy tended to be a bit more conservative than the Army was.)

By 0830, the SEALs rescued and escorted sixteen people to the river where PBRs picked them up and took them to the LCM about 500 yards down stream. Meanwhile, the SEALs continued securing military and civilian facilities in the city.

Reinforced by the five RIVSEC-513 PBRs from the Mekong that arrived late that morning, Jack got all nine PBRs in a column. They then headed up the river to attack Viet Cong positions in a noodle factory on the east side of the river and a hospital the VC were using as a command post on the Chau Doc side of the river.

Around 1930, 31 January, two PBRs carried thirteen Vietnamese military and civilian personnel to the hospital at Long Xuyen 24-miles down river and carried fresh water and medical

supplies on their return to Chau Duc.

On the morning of 1 February, the PBRs again landed the SEALs in Chau Duc and in conjunction with the PBRs firing from the river, broke the enemy siege on Camp Arnn

Meanwhile, Captain Gray decided to take some people and go by helo to Vinh Long to "motivate" the sailors to get out of their compound and back to the waterfront. He was back by mid- afternoon. En route home, the helo took some ground fire that shattered some Plexiglas cutting a number of those on board the helo. Upon landing, Gray put himself in for a Purple Heart but refused to allow recommendations for the others who, as he said, "Only had scratches," not unlike his own. Bruce Jaynes, our personnel officer took care of the others. Later, TF-117, having broken off an operation elsewhere, arrived at Vinh Long to stabilize the area.

Gray's next plan was the relief of our people in Chau Doc. He and I flew up early in the morning of 2 February to reconnoiter the area and liaise with the local personnel. After that, he planned to return to Binh Thuy and I stayed as the task unit commander. Arrangements were already in progress to get a LCM full of additional supplies moving toward Chau Doc to resupply our forces up there. ENCM Bob Nissley from NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy was in charge of the LCM.

Camp Arnn was on the north end of the city. A one-time French hotel, it served as the base for an Army Special Forces team commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William F. Smith, known within the Special Forces community as, "Bourbon Bill."

Prior to Tet, the colonel agreed to let the Bold Dragon I boats use the pier at Camp Arnn and offered to let the crews use the facilities there for rest and messing. Although not new by any means, Camp Arnn appeared to be comfortable. The Special Forces seemed well organized and their compound appeared to be relatively secure.

When Captain Gray and I arrived the morning of the second, things were decidedly different. The confidence previously exuded by the Special Forces was no longer apparent. In fact, LTC Smith could not answer basic questions regarding the situation in the city and seemed not to have too much information at all. It developed that during the attack his Special Forces detachment apparently could do little other than defend their compound. That suspicion was somewhat confirmed after Colonel Smith finally agreed to give us a windshield tour of the city. We used his jeep. He seemed surprised by what we saw.

Colonel Smith's reactions puzzled both Gray and me. Although Smith was the senior US military commander in the area and had been there throughout the entire period, he apparently had not been out of Camp Arnn since the attack began.

The battle damaged a large part of the city. Looting had occurred. Over 1200 buildings burned to the ground but most of the fires were then out. About two hundred civilians died during the VC attack. Bodies were lying in the streets and alleys; however, someone had already put lime on the corpses.

The Catholic hospital, which the VC used as a command post, was a mess. The VC threw patients out the windows to get them out of the way. When Jack Doyle's PBR battle line raked the place with 27 .50 caliber machine guns, they really tore the upper floors up. (The PBRs could not depress their guns enough to reach the ground floor.) Later as the VC started their withdrawal, they burned everything they could - particularly the nuns' living quarters and then destroyed the surgery. The medical supplies or instruments not taken by the VC lay on the floor broken or smashed. Someone, apparently a VC, shot a hole in the air manifold of the hospital's emergency diesel generator making it useless.

We met with Mr. James Tulls, the Province Senior Advisor, a Mr. "William Smith," the Military Security Service Advisor (he was a CIA field operations officer) and others to decide on a course of action to restore services and security to the city. With the exception of the Special Forces at Camp Arnn, Sergeant Dix's *hnumgs*, the PBRs and Marcinko's SEAL platoon, there were no friendly regular military forces in the area. The regiment of the 9th ARVN Division normally stationed near Chau Doc had been pulled back with the rest of the division at Sa Dec for the Tet holiday. There was no indication if or when they would return. The Special Forces controlled a number of CIDG militia units in the general area. Their primary missions were border surveillance and interdiction. The ability of the 313th MF Battalion to assault Chau Doc from Cambodia may attest to the effectiveness of the CIDG units.

A Vietnamese man asked what the immediate need was for supplies. Someone provided the universal answer, "Money." With that, the man who was the local Hoa Hao chief produced a very big wad of large denomination piasters, or dong, and laid it on the table. He also said he had many people who knew how to use weapons and would use them when necessary. That brought considerable silence, as it was illegal under Vietnamese law to provide weapons to the Hoa Haos. Nevertheless, in the end, that is exactly what we agreed to do.

After that meeting, I returned to Camp Arnn to negotiate with the Special Forces. When I attempted to talk with LTC Smith, he demurred and referred me to his executive officer, Major Andre LeBlanc. When I approached him, he told me that he was busy with some pressing business and that he would be with me as soon as possible. "In the meantime, make yourself comfortable." Two and a half hours later, we met. He apologized for keeping me waiting, but explained they had an Inspector General's inspection in six weeks and they had many preparations to take care of. I could not believe what I heard!

Major LeBlanc advised me all of the pre-Tet billeting and messing arrangements were no longer in effect. However, we could continue to use the pier to let our crews get off their boats. He said he was concerned about food for his troops, since the attack had disrupted their normal supply route and apologetically said they could provide our PBRs crews with a meal consisting of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and iced tea.

I told him we had a LCM-load of supplies due in later in the day and we could share rations. He asked what was coming and I said 300 cases of C rations. His reply was thanks, but no thanks, "My troops only eat 'A' rations." ("A" rations are those normally prepared and served in military mess halls; very different from the small waterproof boxes of C rations consumed in the field whether pre-heated the preferable way, or cold.) His unit's posted menu

for that day listed roast beef.

He expressed concern about another logistic shortfall and asked if the LCM could be down loaded and sent to Long Xuyen to pick up some material. He then explained that although they had plenty of hard liquor, they were so short of beer that he was limiting his people to one can a day. He wanted the LCM for booze! I wondered if this guy, his CO and their unit were parts of the real world. With the exception of use of the pier, I did not get anywhere in our negotiations. When the LCM arrived, it moored it there along with the boats not on patrol.

In mid-afternoon, we heard a loud buzzing sound in the distance that increased in volume as its source approach the city. It was a group of several airboats, similar to those used in the Florida Everglades. They belonged to a Special Forces A Team (A-432) at Camp Thuong Thoi on the upper reaches of the Mekong across from Tan Chau. They came over to learn the status in Chau Doc. After about a half hour, they boarded their boats and roared off. I did not then know I would see them again the next day.

That night the VC started mortar attacks from across the border in Cambodia. A Vietnamese manned, 4.2-inch mortar pit was located on a hill south of Chau Doc. A US sergeant was the advisor to the Vietnamese lieutenant (*trung úy*). When the mortar fire started, the US Advisor and the mortar crew located the source by eyeball. The US Advisor reported the facts to Camp Arnn and requested permission to take the enemy position under fire; and the Advisor received permission to do so.

A problem arose because the mortar crew refused to fire unless ordered to do so by their *trung uy*, who was asleep in his tent. The US sergeant radioed to Camp Arnn reporting he attempted to wake the *trung úy* but could not do so. As we were on the local frequency, we heard this exchange. Finally, Major Le Blanc came on the circuit (I recognized his voice) and directed the sergeant to take his .45, cock it and hold it next to the *trung úy's* head, although not aimed at it, and fire it to see if that would wake him. LTC Smith then came on the circuit, identified himself, rescinded the major's order and then started a verbal battle with the major. Given the time of night, I suspected that LTC Smith and MAJ LeBlanc were in their respective rooms in the compound conducting that debate. My suspicions later proved to be correct. That was the case. The thickness of a wall separated the two as they argued. I think it is safe to assume that beside us others heard it as well.

At that point, I was about to radio the LCM and PBRs at the pier to get underway and join us in the river just south of town. As I reached for the mike, they reported that they were underway and were coming to join us. We spent the night anchored in the river.

The next morning four boats from RIVSEC 535 – PBRs 725, 727, 728 and 731 with Lieutenant Bill Dennis in the 728 and me in the 731 left Chau Doc. We went through Kinh Chau Doc an Tan Chau, the large canal connecting the Bassac and Mekong Rivers. We cruised at a slow speed passing a number of villages all displaying the dark brown flag of the Hoa Haos. We had a lot of psyops material on board, cigarettes, soap, and other items - which we tossed to the villagers as we made out transit. It was difficult to determine what kind of a reception we received because the people stoically watched. There were no smiles and only occasional waves

at us. Coupled with their general distrust of anything that smacked of the central government in Saigon, it could have been they really did not know who we were. After all, the Vietnamese government's treatment of the Hoa Haos, and other minor religious sects apparently was not too different from that they received from the Viet Minh and Viet Cong. Memories were long and emotions ran deep.

At 1430, shortly after we entered the Mekong, we received a radio call from the Senior Advisor, Tan Chau District, requesting that we stop by. We did so and met the SA, a LTC Ragsdale. He told us he had a request for assistance from a Special Forces Team, A-432, located at Camp Thuong Thoi, across the river from Tan Chau. He asked that we go there and speak to the SF personnel. We went back up the river to talk to them. (Later, "Rags" had an assignment to the G-3 staff for SA IV CTZ at Can Tho. In that capacity, he was always very deferential to TF-116. That probably was because of what happened later that day.)

Camp Thuong Thoi, established in May 1966, was a relatively large compound. In addition to the twelve-man A Team, there were several hundred Vietnamese CIDG militiamen there. A major asset at Thuong Thoi was a 4.2" mortar that could provide coverage to the nearby Cambodian border. A master sergeant named "Ski", the senior Special Forces NCO, told us they had a patrol a few clicks (kilometers) up the Hong Ngu River that was pinned down by a company of VC; asked if we could help get them out. I knew that we should not be in a small river unless we had supporting arms such as a helo fire team or artillery. It was obvious we were in unfamiliar territory and well beyond the range of the nearest Seawolf detachment.

Ski told us a Vietnamese 105mm howitzer battery was located in the town of Hong Ngu and that his A Team controlled it and it would provide support for us if needed. Ski also offered to have some of his militiamen accompany us should we decide to assist in the matter. We then went to Hong Ngu. Bill Dennis and I were both concerned about the river. Once we were committed to the river, the only way out was by reversing our course because the river led to the Cambodian border.

The three 105 howitzers were right where we had been told they would be and they appeared to be in good repair. The Vietnamese crews seemed alert. Bill Dennis, the boat captains, and I discussed the situation. As they had more experience on the river, I sought their candid opinions. The final decision hinged on the dependability of the artillery support. Ski's men vouched for the Vietnamese gunners. I finally told the SF we would do it.

We picked up some Vietnamese militiamen and the PBRs 731, 725, 727 and 728, in that order started up the river. We had gone about 100 meters when a Vietnamese *đai úy* (captain) yelled, "VC," and he was right. The area about fifteen meters away came alive with small and automatic weapons fire; B-40 rounds followed immediately. We had entered the damnedest ambush many had seen. We returned fire and went at maximum speed to clear the kill zone. I personally recall seeing six B-40 rounds, including a cart wheeling dud, in flight at one time.

PBR-727 captained by QM1 Tom Norton, took a hit in the bow by a B-40, wounding Norton in both legs. The engineer BT Ron Spicknall took the helm.

Bullets hit the awning frame over my head and showering me with splinters of hot aluminum on my arms and face. Had the rounds been a few inches lower, they would have hit my helmet. In about an hour, I would have seen what that could cause. (About a year later, I nicked myself while shaving and a small aluminum splinter popped out as I attempted to treat the cut.)

We proceeded up the river until it intersected with a smaller canal near Tan Hoi. Nearby was a small outpost whose troops were sitting on the parapet watching the show that had just erupted down stream. This was the outpost we were to support! We regrouped; found we were in relatively good shape although we did have some wounded. The bottom line was that we were still combat effective and we had to get out of there.

A call went to the 105s and they responded immediately and accurately with a combination of HE (high explosives) and WP (white phosphorous). In the meantime, we lined up for our exit. At 1650 after about ten minutes of artillery, we stopped it and simultaneously took off at maximum speed down the river. If the VC were angry when we came up the river, they were very irate with us after the artillery, and we took a lot of fire on the way out.

PBR-731 took a B-40 through the hull in the engine compartment. When it hit, black smoke engulfed the coxn's flat. It was so thick that I could not see BM1 Jim Rocco, the boat captain, who was standing about 18-inches from me. The rocket missed the engines and fuel tanks, and the only damage it caused was breaking a ground wire on one engine, but that did not affect the engine's operation. The blast knocked Jerry Hudson the after gunner off his feet and temporarily deafened him. He soon was back at his gun furiously returning fire. The rocket made a relatively small hole as it entered the hull but made a shotgun-like splatter as it existed and the boat began to ship some water.

PBR-725 with Bill Dennis on board made it through the kill zone without receiving a rocket hit.

As we were making our final turn before having a clear shot to the Mekong, BM1 Chuck Holden, the boat captain of PBR-728, the last boat in the column, radioed: "We're hit. We're hit and beaching." A B-40 round hit the transom and blew out the stern. The blast blew Lewis Martin, the after gunner onto the engine covers with shrapnel wounds in both legs. A few seconds later, a second rocket hit, destroying the stern. One engine was dead and the other soon stopped. The force of the rocket hit pushed the boat closer to the riverbank. A third B-40 hit the after .50-caliber mount and forced the boat onto the bank. A fourth and the last rocket hit the boat and blew Gunner's Mate Jim Detrick and Quartermaster Andy Fiskal over the side. Holden picked up Martin, who had found an M-16 and threw him over the side. The engineer, Keith Jones, grabbed an M-60 and belt of ammunition, and went over the side. Holden, the boat captain, with small arms firing pelting the hulk, grabbed an M-79 grenade launcher and a box of grenades and went over the side. The cardboard box disintegrated in the water, leaving him with one round in the M-79.

Holden then decided to return aboard the 728 and destroy its remains. He smashed the radar and found a box of grenades. Rapidly pulling the pins on two grenades, he quickly left the

boat before the expected explosion. He looked back toward the boat and saw “the prettiest green smoke you ever saw.” In his rush, he pulled the pins on smoke, not fragmentation grenades.

Realizing they had not made it, we stopped. PBR-727 reported it was sinking and Bill Dennis told it to head independently to Camp Thuong Thoi.

A fast check indicated that in spite of the B-40 hit, PBR-731 was perhaps in the best shape; so with PBR-725 with Bill Dennis as the cover boat, we went back up the canal and beached about five meters from the disabled PBR-728 to be in a position to pick up the crew if they attempted to come to us. Jim Ditrick ran toward us and scrambled on board, but the others from PBR-728 were not in sight. We began firing at the VC positions across the canal.

After a few minutes, we were running low on ammunition and there still was no sign of the other crew. The PBR-731’s engineer, William E. Hayenga, Jr., a nineteen-year old fireman, said to me, “I'll go get them;” and before anybody could say anything, he jumped ashore and ran up the bank hollering for them. Finding nobody in the PBR-728, he began searching for them in the hootches along the canal bank. He found Jones standing and firing the M-60 from his hip. He then located Fiskal and Martin. He told Martin and Jones to go to the 731 and then he and Fiskal started looking for Chuck Holden. Hyenga even went to the remains of the PBR-728 but could not find him. He then returned and found that Martin and Jones had not gone to the PBR-731. Martin refused to go anywhere until they found Holden. Fiskal and Hyenga picked Martin up and they all headed for the PBR-731.

With all except Holden on the PBR-731, BM1 Rocco called Holden’s name and he suddenly appeared, lumbering down the canal bank. A big man, he jumped onto the boat with such force, he pushed it off the bank. When that happened, Rocco gunned the engines and PBR-731 joined PBR-725 and continued down the river to the Mekong, and then went to camp Thuong Thoi.

By that time, we had exhausted the boat's 3,000 rounds of .50 calibers as well as the M60's ammunition supply. We used our M-16s until we used all the loaded clips then started loading them and firing to keep up a semblance of return fire. I saw the LAW, but not knowing how to use it, I looked at the instructions painted on it, but decided that was taking too long. I returned to filling and emptying clips. For those few moments (it seemed like an hour at the time), Hayenga later received the Navy Cross.

Master Chief Nissley had been listening to his radio and heard the original call from Ragsdale. Anticipating our needs, he moved the LCM to Camp Thuong Thoi and was there when we arrived. Shortly after our arrival, at Camp Thuong Thoi, PBR-727 sank in forty feet of water.

GMG3 Thomas Craghead, the forward gunner of the PBR-725, had a serious wound. A 7.62 mm armor-piercing round hit the front of his helmet and he slumped in the turret. When the 725 tied up, we immediately got him ashore and into the cellar of the Special Force's headquarters bunker where their aid station was located. Before we got him there, it did not look good for him. We got his helmet off and saw he had a very grievous wound. Although the bullet made a small entry hole in the helmet, it had taken out the right rear of his skull. The medic

hooked up an IV, probed the very large wound, found and removed the round and then dressed the wound. The Special Forces had already called for a Dust Off, but we knew it would be some time before it picked him up and got him to a hospital. Unfortunately, our efforts were in vain.

It was a bad day for the River Patrol Force. Eight men received wounds, and one, GMG3 Thom Craghead died from his wounds. Rocket fired destroyed the PBR-728 and the PBR-727 sank because of battle damage. They were the first Mk-II PBRs lost in action

The 105-howitzer battery at Hong Ngu fired onto the PBR-728's hulk and Ski later got a fixed-wing air strike on the remains. Whether they prevented the VC from getting anything useful from the boat is unknown. Some weeks later, Ski appeared at Binh Thuy and gave me a set of photos of the PBR-728's battered remains.

Normally requests for fixed wing air strikes went through two channels, US and ARVN, with the final decision made in Saigon after MACV and the JGS consulted and decided who was to do it, VNAF or 7th AF. It was a ponderous system, but it was the established system at that time.

We radioed Binh Thuy to advise our status and then spent the night at Thuong Thoi. While there, I devoted a lot of time with the others reviewing the day looking for lessons learned and possible intelligence. We concluded that all told the VC fired about forty B-40s at us in that engagement. Later, we learned that was a new record for the number fired at PBRs in a single engagement. If so, it certainly indicated that we were facing a significantly better-armed enemy than we had previously experienced. That proved the case as time would tell. The next morning Binh Thuy advised that a helo was en route to evacuate our wounded and the PBRs and LCM were to return to their parent bases. On the afternoon of 5 February, I was back at Binh Thuy.

Captain Gray asked me for a written report regarding what had transpired in Chau Doc with LTC Smith and B-42. My 6 February 1968 memorandum read:

"1. The following incidents were directly observed at Chau Doc:

a. 031400H FEB 68. Attempted to establish liaison with MAJ ANDRE LEBLANC, MPC, XO B-42, to determine what coordinated support PBRs could provide in recovery operations. Was advised byMAJ LEBLANC that he was busy with financial returns and liaison could be conducted later. This in fact did happen about 2100H when it was deferred until 041000H.

b. About 031630H, I was engaged in conversation with MAJ LEBLANC with regards logistic support PBRs could provide. The Major requested us to make a run to Long Xuyen and bring back a load of beer as his detachment was down to 'a can per man per day ration'.

c. During the night of 3-4 FEB, a VN manned 4.2' mortar site had been assigned (a) fire mission. The U.S. Advisor reported to B-42

that the mortar was manned but the crew would not fire until their officer was on station and the Advisor stated he had been trying to get his counterpart up for about 45 minutes. The reply from XO B-42 was essentially as follows, 'Take your .45, cock it, hold it about 5 inches from his god dam head and maybe that will wake him up.' The next transmission heard was from CO, B-42 to XO, B-42 and was 'Knock that off'. (All personnel identification made by voice calls.)

d. There appears to be an abnormally high incidence of lack of cohesion with B-42 Staff Officers. Perhaps these were the result of recent events, but doubt it.

2. The following item was reported to my by LTJG ERICKSON, USN, NILO, Chau Doc:

a. The CO, B-42 is exercising abnormal and unauthorized control on NILO radio communications in that all outgoing NILO reports are screened to ensure they contain nothing that could reflect adversely on B-42. NILO stated that he once arranged for a report to be transmitted without clearance and the Comm Supervisor (SFC COWAN) was held responsible. I realize this is all hearsay but because of the seriousness of the allegation, recommend that it be investigated."

I later heard that LTC Smith, the CO B-42 had supposedly recommended the PBRs at Chau Doc for the Valorous Unit Award, the Army's equivalent of the Navy Unit Commendation. If that was true, the Army apparently did not approve it. I also heard that both LTC Smith and MAJ Le Blanc left B-42 somewhat ahead of their normal rotation dates. Perhaps the IG got them when they finally had their inspection.

On 6 February, the YLLC-4 (light lift craft) with Harbor Clearance Unit One Team 3 arrived at Thuong Thoi from Dong Tam. The next day they lifted PBR-727. With repairs completed, PBR-727 returned to service.

When the report of our action was prepared for transmission, a radioman apparently typed "B-43" when describing the RPGs fired at us. That evoked a series of questions from the intelligence community in Saigon wanting to know more about this new weaponry in use by the enemy.

Several days later, I went back to Camp Thuong Thoi, dead heading in a Seawolf fire team led by Lieutenant Commander "Chuck" Sapp, the OIC of Det 7. While we were there, the Special Forces asked for our help in relieving a unit on the Vietnamese side of a canal that formed the Cambodia - Vietnam border. Chuck checked his charts, talked it over with his wingman, and decided to take the mission. The plan was that the fire team would make one firing run as it flew east to west parallel to, but not over or close to the Vietnam side of the canal. The only ordnance used would be from the port sides of the aircraft – the side away from the border canal. We hoped that indicated to those in Cambodia that we were not firing at them

or their nation. While Chuck and his people were concentrating on ensuring the ordnance did not come close to the canal, I was looking out the starboard door at Cambodia, perhaps 200 - 250 meters away. I was really focusing on a Cambodian fort, clearly identified by its flag and watching what appeared to be a 20mm gun slowly tracking us as we made the firing run. Fortunately, Chuck's plan worked, or, the Cambodians did not have any ammunition.

In spite of the pluses and minuses as far as TF-116 was concerned, the worst thing about Tet was the apparent paralysis of the ARVN divisions in IV CTZ, particularly the 9th and 21st, at Sa Dec and Can Tho, respectively. Well, at least the 21st had a battalion protecting the corps commander's villa.

The Province Senior Advisor for Ving Long Province was Colonel Ronald A. Roberge, EN, USA. Ron had been in the Delta since November 1966 first as an advisor with the 21st ARVN Division, then a Sector Advisor at Ba Xuyen and finally, the PSA at Vinh Long since July 1967. He was absolutely frustrated in efforts to get *Thiếu Turởng* (major general) Lam Quang Ti, the commanding general of the 9th ARVN Division to do anything, much less get out of garrison. He finally gave up in his effort, flew to Saigon and went to MACV where he sought General Creighton W. Abrams, USA, Deputy, COMUSMACV. Ron explained the situation to General Abrams and said that he, Ron, wanted a replacement. Instead, General Abrams and Ron returned to Sa Dec where General Abrams walked unannounced into General Ti's office and advised him he had two choices: get the division into the field or go to Saigon in irons, and that he had thirty seconds to make up his mind. The 9th ARVN finally moved out. Again, it was one of life's ironies as far as Vietnam was concerned. When I went to the Army War College in 1977, Ron Roberge was on the faculty as Director of Nuclear Studies in the Military Operations, Planning and Strategy Department. He loved to play tennis but did not want to talk about Vietnam.

On 15 February, CTF-116 directed CTG-116.1, 116.2 and 116.3 to implement a recommendation of the SA IV CTZ to provide a ready-for-action USN/VNN package force for use in combined RF/PF operations primarily to target VC staging areas and tax collection points. The next day, CTF-116 initiated an experimental operation employing SEALS in conjunction with PRU (Provincial Reconnaissance Unit) troops in Phong Dinh, Ving Binh Chau Duc and Kiang Provinces to develop communications and liaison for the collection of intelligence.

On 18 February, Captain Gray submitted the following assessment to COMNAVFORV regarding the Tet Offensive: “The offensive campaign recently conducted by the Viet Cong cost the enemy a high price in lives lost, but has not diminished his capability to continue the insurgency at pre-campaign intensity for an indeterminate period. GVN forces have been severely hampered by the necessity to defend the population centers. GVN resources have been spread thin, thus permitting the Viet Cong a wide selection of targets. If the enemy objective was to demonstrate that the GVN and FWMAF could not effectively defend the people of the Delta he must be judged successful… There is no evidence, however, of the Vietnamese people rallying to the VC Cause.”

The fighting in Can Tho was stubborn. TF-117, which moved to My Tho after its operation at Vinh Long, commenced the 106-mile river transit to the Can Tho area. On 21

February, at Captain Gray's request, the three PACVs (patrol air cushion vehicles - hovercraft) then operating with TF-117, changed operational control to CTF-116 for a period of about ten days to evaluate the suitability of the PACVs for Game Warden operations.

. We had an idea when PACV DIV 107 would arrive at Binh Thuy, and our ears confirmed that. We heard them long before they were in sight. We really did not have a place to store them, and someone suggested beaching them near the helo pad and they had a tough time negotiating the riprap on the steep embankment. They were also in need of maintenance, typical after a long, high-speed run.

This was not the first time TF-116 was involved with the PACVs. Previously, the River Patrol Force and Market Time had evaluated the PACVs in the fall of 1966, but the results were less than spectacular. In November 1966, the three PACVs went to Moc Hoa and were under TF-116 operational control. In conjunction with CIDG units from the 44th Special Tactical Zone, they conducted a 16-day operation in Plain of Reeds; Operation Quai Vat ("Monster") Although the PACVs had successes in the Plain, several factors, e.g., noise, lack of maneuverability, etc., militated against their permanent employment by TF-116. The PACVs cost one million dollars each; the same money would buy another 10 or more PBRs. The PACVs then went to TF-117, then to I CTZ to work with TF Clearwater. Finally, the PACVs returned to the States in the summer of 1968 for "further evaluation." In 1969, the Navy transferred them to the Coast Guard.

Unfortunately, Captain Gray now had a new toy to use and he immediately set out to do something with the one PACV that was in the best operational shape. He had it headed up the Bassac and then down a canal - why in the world he chose a narrow canal for a PACV that needed room to maneuver, I do not know. As the PACV proceeded down the canal, a B-40 blew part of the skirt off, causing the fan to lose lift. The crew beached the PACV and immediately set up a defensive perimeter. They called for help and the SEALs and MST-2 detachment at Binh Thuy responded. The basic problem was the damage prevented the PACV from getting out of the canal under its own power.

Finally, it became evident the only way to get it out was to lift it with one of the three Army CH-54 "Tarhe," or Sky Crane helos in country. The nearest one was in the Saigon area and Saigon controlled the Sky Crane employments. That certainly prevented keeping the PACV problem as a local secret. The incident did not improve the already tenuous relationship between TF-116 and TF-117. All that we could do was defend the crippled PACV for a couple days until the Sky Crane would arrive. Before that happened, TF-117 arrived off Binh Thuy and Captain Salzer provided his own perimeter defense using troops from the 2nd Brigade.

PACV leaving Binh Thuy via CH-54 “Tarhe”

On 7 March, CTF-116 reported to COMNAVFORV that the PACV’s mechanical unreliability and limitations imposed on them by terrain rendered them unsuitable for employment by TF-116.

One of the first orders of business once TF-117 was on scene was clearing the VC out of Can Tho. That action started rapidly. One of the hardest problems was getting the VC out of their command post in the university. Finally, with Vietnamese approval, that was done by a combination of 105 mm howitzers with leveled tubes pumping HE and “beehive” (anti-personnel projectiles containing hundreds of flechettes, or darts) into the building from a block away while an air strike got it from on top. Naturally, Uncle Sam now owed the Vietnamese for repairs to or replacement of the building.

Another TF-117 operation was on the Song (River) Can Tho, south of the city where the VC reportedly was massing for another attack on the provincial capital and IV Corps headquarters. They went in with their various assault craft and artillery barges. That highlighted to me a basic difference in the two task forces operational philosophies. When attacked from or near a populated area, PBR crews were to defend themselves while attempting to minimize collateral damage when we returned fire. That apparently was not the case with TF-117.

When they were extracting from the operation, they came under sniper fire near an old French fort at the juncture of the river and a canal. They responded by bringing up their artillery barges, each carrying two M102 105mm howitzers, lowered the barrels and fired directly into the sniper’s positions. Their massed fires went through the ambush position, the old fort and into a village behind the fort.

It was not long before our headquarters at Binh Thuy was teeming with people from the

village including, the village chief, the local priest among others. All were making claims regarding property and personal damage and demanding restitution. The River Patrol Force had spent a lot of time trying to build up good relations with the people along the waterways, and now a different American naval force was on scene and caused the losses. As far as most of the Vietnamese were concerned, if it floated, had a green paint job, and flew an American flag, it belonged to TF-116; thus, we got the complaints.

Another operation conducted in February 1968 was in the Mang Thit - Nicoli. Troops from the 2nd Brigade, 9th U.S. Division were inserted and made a sweep toward the river which had 44 TF-117 craft and 10 TF-116 PBRs as a blocking force. The VC cleared out of the area; however, the sweep was about as effectively as the one done by ARVN and Fourth Riverine for President Thieu's transit, perhaps two years earlier. In other words, as soon as the troops and boats left, Charlie moved back in. (Recall that during the earlier discussion of the Quarterly Combined Campaign Review in January, the Commander, Fourth Riverine Area was chastised by the corps commander for reporting the Mang Thit-Nicoli as a Red – closed – area.)

The Mang Thit - Nicoli was vexatious. It was an important economic route because it carried rice from the Delta to the Capital Region. The waterway reduced transit time for waterborne traffic between the Delta and Saigon, not by hours, but by days. Unfortunately, it passed through an area that had been under VC control for a long time. When the area was "red," or closed, which was most of the time, the rice convoys had to go up the Bassac to the Van Nao cross over to the Mekong. They then proceeded down that river until they reached the vicinity of Vinh Long, where they transferred the rice to trucks moving up Route 4 to the capital area

From our point of view, it would take a concerted and sustained effort to open it and keep it open. That obviously, and as described above, did not fit the IV CTZ commander's view. Before the summer was over, Ambassador Komer, the US Ambassador for CORDS (he was an old CIA hand who had served in Turkey) would publicly declare the US Navy cowards for not being able to open that waterway and shorten the time it took to get rice to Saigon.

US intelligence sources came up with an interesting bit of information during the Mang Thit - Nicoli operation. A VC courier was eliminated some 80-miles away from where the operation was taking place. In his possession, was a TF-117 pocket communications plan taken from the body of an Army lieutenant killed the previous day. It surely indicated how effectively the VC courier system worked.

On 27 February just about the time most of us were staring to go to bed, all hell broke loose of the IV Corps ammo dump down the road. We could hear and feel near-continuous explosions. Flashes, tracers, and detonating pyrotechnics, lighted the sky. Spent rounds coming from the dump were hitting some of our buildings, but fortunately none of our people. That continued throughout the night and very few of us got any sleep.

By sunrise, we learned that the VC had not attacked the place. Instead, a sentry had accidentally knocked over a cooking fire (in an ammo dump?) and it spread rapidly. Providentially, the initial fires were in the south end of the depot that contained small arms,

pyrotechnics, and artillery rounds. The north end, closest to us, contained the" iron" bombs for the VNAF Spad (A-1) squadrons at BTAF. ("Iron" bombs are conventional general-purpose high explosive bombs dropped by aircraft.)

Captain Gray was disturbed that he could not get valid information regarding the situation at the dump. He announced he wanted an air reconnaissance. He picked me as the observer. My pilot was Commander "Con" Jaberg, HA(L)-3's XO, who happened to be visiting. We took off from the Binh Thuy pad and went down river at low altitude, then went up high enough to see the dump, then closed it slowly, while attempting to keep the aircraft from taking hits by stray rounds as they cooked off. It was quite a sight, not to mention flight.

A considerable amount of ammunition had apparently been lost in the south end; however, the iron bombs appeared to be in no obvious danger. We noted a number of people on the ground in the depot. Although they seemed to have their hands full, it also appeared things were under control, given the circumstances.

TF-116 and TF-117 did conduct some operations together. One was a sweep of Tan Dinh Island. The concept was to insert troops from Ti Ti Canal separating the two halves of the island, and have them conduct a shoulder-to-shoulder sweep of the north half of Tan Din. PBRs would provide the blocking force around the island to catch escaping VC. During a final planning session, Commander Robert M. "Bob" Collins, USN, my TF-117 counterpart told me, "To keep your god dam plastic boats out of the way of my boats. If not, we'll blow you and your silly black berets out of the water like we would the VC." The troops conducted their sweep, flushed no VC, and were receiving sniper fire from the swept area as they extracted.

TF-116's efforts during Tet were recognized. On 12 February 1968, we received the following message from MG George Eckhardt, USA

"R 120001Z FEB 68
FM SENIOR ADVISOR IV CORPS
TO CO TF116
INFO COMNAVFORV

UNCLAS MACV-IVC-SA 724 FOR GRAY FROM ECKHARDT
SINCE THE VC OFFENSIVE STARTED 31 JAN, I HAVE RECEIVED MANY REPORTS FROM THE ADVISORS THROUGHOUT IV CORPS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR COMMAND IN COMING TO THEIR ASSISTANCE DURING THESE CRUCIAL TIMES. I KNOW YOU HAVE SUFFERED GRIEVOUS LOSSES BUT YOUR MEN HAVE COVERED THEMSELVES
WITH GLORY BECAUSE OF THEIR COURAGE AND DEDICATION.
YOU HAVE DEALT THE AGGRESSORS A HEAVY BLOW WHICH
SPEAKS WELL FOR THE PROFESSIONALISM AND CAPABILITY
OF YOUR ORGANIZATION. PLEASE PASS MY DEEPEST
APPRECIATION TO ALL CONCERNED AND BEST WISHES FOR
CONTINUED SUCCESS.

The Tet offensive severely disrupted a number of construction projects underway throughout our part of the Delta. Those projects were under the cognizance of the Officer in Charge of Construction, OinCC, pronounced, "Oink," a Naval Civil Engineer Corps (Seabee) organization in Saigon. The projects in our area were the responsibility of a young CEC lieutenant junior-grade, billeted at Binh Thuy. Prior to Tet, he conducted most of his travels around the Delta checking progress using either commercial buses or water taxis. When he traveled he usually only carried a small bag containing changes of clothing, toilet articles and whatever papers he needed. After Tet, he would not leave Binh Thuy. Later, Saigon recalled him from the Delta.

Apparently, General Abram's visit to General Ti during Tet had some effect because parts of the 9th ARVN moved into the field. Eventually ARVN units moved into the field. On 9 March, the VC ambushed the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry of the 9th ARVN division. The command element received the brunt of the attack wounding 1st LT Jack Jacobs and an enlisted advisor. The unit called for Dust Offs. When they arrived, the landing zone was too hot for them to land. However, a Seawolf fire team from Vinh Long under Al "Wes" Weseleskey became involved. Wes' wingman helo was hit, the pilot wounded and Wes directed the aircraft to return to Vinh Long. Wes, using a neighboring Army AH-1 Cobra gunship for cover went in, picked up LT Jacobs, a US sergeant and a Vietnamese soldier all were severely wounded, and brought them out.

Wes had a knack for words and his unique spot reports had high repute in the Delta. He never fired at a VC, but he certainly fired at many "Communist insurgents." His masterpiece was the spot report describing the rescue. It did not set well with the CO, HA(L)-3, as Wes failed to adhere to the squadron's tactical doctrine by going in without his wingman. Wes' next fitness report reflected the squadron commander's displeasure. Wes received the Navy Cross for the event. In 1970, when we were at Monterey and coming in zone for selection to commander, Wes told me he was worried about the fitness report. I suggested that under normal circumstances, it should be a concern; but I thought that perhaps a Navy Cross for the same event might outweigh the fitness report. Our names were on the selection list announced some months later.

In the midst of the post-Tet operations, we had an organizational change. On 2 March COMRIVRON Five and his staff relocated from Saigon to Binh Thuy. The main advantage of the move was to put the operational and administrative commanders and their staffs at the same location. It also meant moving a lot of furniture to accommodate Commander Paul Kane and his staff. (Interestingly, Dick Coupe, the COMRIVRON Five Chief Staff Officer repeatedly told me how bad things were in Saigon during the Tet offensive. "You only think you had it tough here in the Delta. Why, in Saigon, we could not get out of billet – a hotel – for several days".) A week after RIVRON FIVE's arrival, Commander Sayre A. "Archie" Swartzrauber, USN, relieved Paul Kane as the squadron commander. Archie was one of the XOs in USS *Halsey* (DLG-23), our flagship, when I was on the DESRON Seven staff. (After retiring, Archie joined the Sons of the American Revolution and added a "c" to his last name. That apparently was the original spelling of the family name.)

After Tet, we noticed a perceptible change in the logistics support of facilities in the

Delta. Since then it appeared that more of our materials were arriving via air transportation then by NAVSUPPACT's small fleet of vessels, e.g., YFs and AKLs.es in the Delta.

The post-Tet ground operations continued until early April. Some of them took place relatively close to NAVSUPPACTDET Binh Thuy. For a while, we watched VNAF A-1 Spads make late-afternoon strikes in the tree lines south of our base. At first, we used to watch them from just inside our perimeter fence while sipping on a beer or other refreshment. One afternoon someone heard something hit the ground next to him. It was a red-hot striker plate from an exploded bomb. After that, we were not so eager to line the fence for the afternoon bombings.

The VNAF A-1s, or "Spads," were the workhorses for iron bomb close air support in the Delta. The pilots were getting plenty of action and the maintenance turn-around of the aircraft was critical. At Binh Thuy Air Base, a young Vietnamese airman was ordered to clean the interiors of two aircraft. He did so, however, he used aviation gasoline as the cleaning agent. Because of the fumes, the aircraft had to be grounded until they were completely ventilated causing them to miss missions. That infuriated the squadron commander who ordered the man summarily executed. Whether the young airman was a VC agent or just stupid was never revealed. Possibly, the squadron commander did not bother to find out.

The VNAF A1s from BTAB were not the only aircraft involved in attacking the VC and their positions. On several occasions, B-52s flying out of Guam conducted strikes in IV CTZ as part of their "Arc Light" mission. We and other friendly forces were advised of the first of these by a classified message which told us that at 1100 local on a given date, an Arc Light mission would be conducted about ten or fifteen kilometers south of our location and to ensure that all friendly forces were withdrawn from the target area.

Many of us lined up along the southern perimeter fence to see what we could. Although the sky was relatively clear, we did not see any contrails from the approaching aircraft. That attested to the effectiveness of the Air Force's contrail suppressors. We did not hear the aircraft either. Our first indication of the actual attack was hearing a constant series of detonations as the bombs went off. Then we felt a tremor of the earth. The sound stopped as suddenly as it had started as the mission ended.

I later flew over areas that where Arc Light missions were conducted. It truly was precision bombing. As we flew over target areas, we could look down and see parallel rows of evenly spaced holes in the ground. The area looked like someone had drilled the holes using a gigantic template. All the vegetation around the impact points had burned or blown away. It was very impressive.

There was one fallacy with the in-country Arc Light missions, the necessity of getting friendly forces out of the area before the attack. A commonly used method was the broadcast of a "heavy artillery warning," in plain language over several common radio frequencies. The broadcasts, addressed to "Any station this net," stated to the effect, "Be advised that a heavy artillery warning will go into effect at (time) for the area (the grid coordinates for the four corners of the objective area.)"

Obviously, it did not take too many "heavy artillery warnings" before the VC realized what they meant and cleared the area probably as fast, if not faster then the friendly forces. Six years later in Stuttgart, Germany, I worked with an Air Force colonel, "Sandy" Sanderson. Sandy's job in Vietnam included reviewing Arc Light bomb damage assessments. He confided the "heavy artillery warnings" detracted from the success of the strikes. After the missions, a ground unit sometimes conducted a shoulder-to-shoulder walk through the objective area in an effort to evaluate the results. The least productive case Sandy recalled was the sweep of one target area produced a case of grape jelly obviously taken from some US Army ration depot. The jelly had survived the attack.

On 11 March, TF-116 became involved with Operation Prize Crew, a tri-service (Army, Navy and Air Force organization) that was conducting an evaluation of an experimental unique reconnaissance aircraft, the QT-2PC, derived from the Navy's X-26B.

The aircraft was a standard Schweizer SGS 2-32 sailplane modified by the Lockheed Missile and Space Co., by adding a muffled Continental O-200A four cylinder horizontally opposed, air cooled engine mounted in a nacelle behind and above the pilot. A belt-driver reduction system connected the engine to the propeller shaft that extended forward over the fuselage to place the propeller in front of the aircraft. The aircraft was to be equipped with a basic package of infrared sensors to detect body heat and cooking fires. The main tactical advantage of the aircraft was it generated very little noise.

The aircraft had undergone test flights in the States including at NIOTS, Mare Island. During those flights conducted at 1,000 feet on moonless nights indicated even boat crews who received briefings on the operation and asked to report all sightings, did not detect the aircraft.

The Prize Crew evaluation was to take place in I Corps; however, Monsoon considerations shifted the project to IV Corps. The two "secret weapon" aircraft or "whoosh-mobiles" as some called them, reposed in a hanger at the U.S. Army Air Field at Soc Trang, or, Khanh Hung, depending on whose map one read. Tet delayed the start of the evaluation. Because of the heavy attacks on Soc Trang, the aircraft temporarily relocated to Vung Tau.

Our Air Ops, Fred Lakeway, was the assistant operations officer for Prize Crew and one of the pilots. I flew down to Soc Trang with Fred on one occasion to look at the plane. Its appearance was one a person would never forget.

QT-2PC in the hanger at Soc Trang

One of the flights Fred made was on 13 March. He observed eight large junks transiting in a canal near Dung Island Two PBRs and a Seawolf fire team responded and reported destroyed or heavily damaged all the junks.

Moonless nights were obviously the best time for the QT-2PC. Fred tried one flight on a night when the clouds obscured the moon. Again, it appeared it was going to be a successful run. However, as Fred was banking to return to Soc Trang, the moon appeared from behind the clouds, and he had instant proof that although those on the ground might not detect it by sound they could still see it and fired at it. Fred got it back to Soc Trang.

Later, Lockheed made further modifications to the QT-2PC. The modified aircraft bore the designations QT (Quiet Thrust) 1, 2 and 3. The "QT" tests led to the development of the eleven Lockheed YO-3A "Quiet Star" aircraft that arrived in Vietnam in July 1970 and operated from Soc Trang, Long Thanh and Binh Thuy until 1972.

On 14 March, RADM Veth went to Nha Be to present a Presidential Unit Citation to MINRON ELEVEN Detachment A. The PUC recognized the efforts of the men operating the MSBs and MCMs keeping the approached to Saigon open from 1 May 1966 to 18 February 1967. It was the first PUC awarded for combat operations by a Navy unit in Vietnam.

It became apparent to me that I would be doing a lot of flying around the Delta mainly with the Seawolves. Thus, on 18 March and with Captain Gray's approval, I submitted a request through the chain of command to the BUPERS to have my status modified to Duty in Flying Status, Operational or Training Flights (DIFOT) specifically as a technical observer. I thought if I had to do that much flying, I should receive the $110 hazardous duty allowance as were other non-aviation personnel in Vietnam. When my request left Binh Thuy, I got an Aviator's Flight Log Book from the Seawolves and commenced meticulously logging every flight I made.

My request laboriously wended it way through the chain of command and eventually arrived at the BUPERS. Some six months later BUPERS' decision started down through the same chain of command. It denied my request for DIFOT based on a previous decision by the Comptroller General that essentially said that although I would be fulfilling a bona fide mission in the aircraft, there was no indication that I would actually be involved with the operation of the aircraft or would be contributing to its safe and efficient operation. This seems to say that if I were a designated naval aviator or flight officer, there would be no question regarding compensation; but as a non-aviation type, that was a different matter. Ironically, I later learned that had I delayed my request until Vice Admiral Zumwalt became COMNAVFORV, BUPERS would have approved the request.

After Tet, various agencies conducted inquiries to determine how the intelligence that may have detected some of the movement and massing of enemy troops and their logistics was not translated into military action. The investigation conducted by the Navy was brutally frank in identifying weaknesses at all levels of command ranging from the NAVFORV intelligence

organization, to the operating forces, TF-115, TF-116, and TF-117, to the NILOs at various locations throughout the Delta.

On 22 March, COMNAVFORV sent the following message to the intelligence officers of the four Coastal Zones, the Third and Fourth Riverine Areas with information copies to CTF-115, CTF-116 and CTF-117. The subject was "Intelligence to Operations:"

> "IN GENERAL THE QUALITY OF INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION COMING FROM OUR REPRESENTTIVES IN THE FIELD HAS BEEN BEEN EXCELLENT AND CONTINUES TO IMPROVE. IT IS ALSO INTERESTING AND USEFUL. HOWEVER, THE PRIMARY VALUE OF INTELLIGENCE IS TO ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF COMBAT OPERATIONS IN ORDER TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY. WHENEVER PRACTICLE, THIS HEADQUARTERS ATTEMPTS TO CONVERT INTELLIGENCE INTO OPERATIONAL ACTION. IT IS DESIRED THAT YOU DO THE SAME. WHENEVER YOU HAVE GOOD HARD INFORMATION OF ENEMY INTENTIONS OR LOCATIONS GET IT TO THE NEAREST OPERATIONAL COMMANDERS IN YOUR AREA ASAP. USE YOUR INITIATIVE AND INGENUITY, PROSELYTING AS NECESSARY, TO STIMULATE TIMELY ACTION. YOU WILL THEN BE APPLYING INTELLIGENCE IN THE MOST EFFECTIVE ROLE INSTEAD OF AS INTERESTING REPORTS FOR SUBSEQUENT EVALUATION AND FILING. KEEP THE INFORMATION FLOWING TO US BUT CONVERT IT TO ACTION LOCALLY WHEENEVER POSSIBLE. KEEP IN MIND THAT, WHILE IT REMAINS THE PREROGACTIVE OF THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER TO EXPLOIT INTELL-IGENCE, THE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER IS IN THE BEST POSITION TO STIMULATE ENTHUSIASM AND PROD THE OPERQTIONAL PLANNERS INTO ACTION. THE EXTENT TO WHICH FIELD INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS CAN PROVIDE BASIS FOR COMBAT OPERATIONS, WILL REFLECT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LIAISON AND RAPPORT WITH COMMANDERS IN YOUR AREA. REPORT INSTANCES WHERE IT HAS BEEN POSSIBLE TO TRANSLATE INTELLIGENCE TO OPERATIONS. RADM VETH SENDS"
>
> .

:

Post-Tet operations continued at night, the VC's favorite time to maneuver. There were many nights when we could hear ground-fighting going on south of the Bassac. On those nights, we frequently saw that AC-117 gun ships working the area. We would be looking toward the battle area when suddenly; we saw what appeared to be a red stream arcing from the sky toward the ground; it was like a narrow stream of lava. We knew that "Spooky" was using its Vulcan multi-barrel machine guns with a firing rate of 3,000 rounds per minute. If the wind blew in the proper direction or "Spooky" was close enough, we would hear a loud "riiiip" when the Vulcans fired. Periodically we saw green streams arching from the ground toward "Spooky." Soviet and

Chinese ammunition used green-colored tracers.

Tet caused TF-116 some logistics problems, especially with ammunition. The basis for the quarterly allocation of ammunition was the amount expended two quarters earlier. During Tet, we expended almost all our ammunition in January and early February and had little in March. The allocation received for the quarter beginning 1 April reflected our usage during the last quarter of 1967. In July 1968, we figuratively had ammunition coming out of our ears as our quarterly allocation reflected our expenditure during Tet.

Those determining the allocations closely reviewed our expenditure records. As a result, RIVSEC 511 did not receive ammo for its World War II bazooka. Nobody could remember how or where the section got the thing. We also lost the allocation for our rocket boat. Saigon could not determine how 5-inch naval rocket launchers got in country. The ships using that type of rocket were the LSMRs (Landing Ship Medium, Rocket) and USS *Caronade* IFS-1 (Inshore Fire support Ship,) that were part of the blue water Navy and never operated in the brown water environment.

Following Tet, Binh Thuy Air Base came under attack on forty-two successive nights. The attacks occurred between 2300 and 0100 and soon were not surprises. Perimeter guards, using night vision devices, "Starlight scopes," could see the VC moving into position and setting up their mortars. For reasons I never understood, they were not permitted to take the VC under fire until the first VC round had been fired. When the first round detonated, the control tower crew turned on a tape recorder until the attack was over. After rewinding, they played the tape counting detonations, and added one at the end of the tape. They then knew how many impact areas to expect. Meanwhile, during the attack, VNAF personnel in a housing area (more like a squatter's camp) just north of our fence line, came out of their hootches and randomly fired small arms into the air. It could be dangerous to be outside at that time, as you never knew where all the expended ammo was falling. Surprisingly, BTAB incurred little damage during those attacks. (Those mortar attacks had a strange effect on me. When a mortar round detonated or I heard any unexpected explosion, I felt a twinge in the area of my half middle-toe of my right foot. That condition persisted for several months. I never knew that cause; perhaps it was a psychosomatic reaction.)

LT Charles J. "Charlie" McCoy, CHC, the NAVSUPPDET Chaplain drove over to BTAB to make a MARS call home to his mother to assure her that he was all right. He completed the call, felt he had accomplished his objective, when one of the VC attacks began. In the process, he received slight wounds. I often wondered if he explained that he got a Purple Heart as a result telling his family not to worry about him.

I frequently flew with the Seawolves and the Army on a number of occasions, and even had a few flights in Air America (The CIA's airline) Hueys. I noticed that each group of aviators had their own characteristics.

The Navy helos rarely flew above 1,200 feet. Perhaps that provided them with the best opportunity to observe what was happening on the ground. As one Seawolf pilot, Ed Furey said, "Let's get down there and root around a bit"" The pilots and flight crews were supposed to wear

body armor when they flew. A full set consisted of one piece protecting the chest area and a second, protecting the groin area. The armor material then in use was a type of ceramic. When worn they were hot, heavy and somewhat inflexible.

One young LTJG named Smith was the largest helo pilot I have ever met. He once told me he was legally too tall to fly helos and that he hunkered down as much as he could every time he had to take a physical "Smitty" hated body armor, and therefore rarely wore it; or if he did, he just wore the chest protector. His wife delivered their first child during his Seawolf tour. A few days after he received notification of the birth, his aircraft took a round through the chin bubble (the Plexiglas on the lower front part of the aircraft's nose). The round clipped the edge of his seat, hit his chest armor, and careened past his face and out of the top of the aircraft. Smitty always wore full body armor after that.

The Air America pilots I flew with appeared to be in their 30s.The most surprising thing I noted about Air Americas Hueys was their speed. The first time I flew with them, I was surprised to see the air speed indicator read 150 knots. Of course, their helos were not loaded down with weaponry and armor.

A Seawolf helo had a crew of four, pilot, co-pilot, crew chief, who doubled as a door gunner, and a door gunner. (Unlike a fixed wing aircraft, the pilot of a helo sits in the right seat.) The helos armament consisted of two-fixed rocket pods each containing seven 2.75-inch rockets and two flex mounts each with two forward firing 7.62mm machine guns. The crew chief and door gunner each had a hand held M-60 machine gun. Additionally, a M79 40mm grenade launcher was available for each gunner. On Army helos, the door gunners' weapons were usually pintle-mounted. That was not the case with the Seawolves. The door gunners, wearing safety harnesses would lean far out of the doors to increase their flexibility of their weapons. Frequently, retained by their safety harness, they climbed out on the skids to have greater visibility and firing arcs.

One helo detachment upgraded their armament by pintle mounting a single 50-caliber machine gun on each side. They had to remove them, however, because the heavy vibrations when the guns fired were harmful for the helo's airframe. Everyone knew the B model Hueys were already fragile. (It is my understanding that at a later date, pintle mounted .50 caliber machine guns did replace at least one of the hand-held M60s. Obviously, someone found a solution to the structural problem.)

Another detachment experimented with 5-inch HIVAR (high velocity aircraft rockets) with some success. That led to a jurisdictional dispute. A regulation created in Saigon dictated that aircraft firing ordnance larger than the 2.75-inch rockets carried by helo gunships, had to have a 7th Air Force "frag" (mentary) oporder.

The cabin of the helo had jump seats for the crew chief and gunner. When one "dead headed" in a Huey, he could expect to find a seat on the many ammunition boxes in the cabin. Many sat on their flak jackets not as protection in the event of an explosion, but as padding. One stayed alert when dead heading with other helo crewmembers as they made a game of waiting until the passengers dozed off or was otherwise distracted, then they suddenly clapped their

hands simulating the sound of ground fire hitting the aircraft. If the aircraft took evasive action without first checking the passengers, roars of laughter would come out of the dead headers followed by a shouted, "Gotcha!"

I learned that it was easier to land a helo than to take off. On more than one occasion, we landed somewhere without difficulty, but then had to sally back and forth over the small landing area to get the aircraft back into the sky. Sometimes we made it by taking telephone wires or perhaps a small tree branch out on our skids. Other times, we had to sit down to unload ordnance, generally the rockets, to make the aircraft light enough to take off.

After Tet, we realized several things. First, it was quite evident that there had been changes in VC weaponry not so much the type of weapons, but the quantity. If nothing else, the number of B-40 and B-41 rounds fired at TF-116 units far exceeded our previous experience. Second, there was also a very distinct possibility that there were more NVA-types in the Delta than had been there before.

Some wondered why we at Binh Thuy had not been on VC's target list during Tet. I surmise two factors accounted for that: First, The VC's objectives were to disrupt RVN government and ARVN military command centers with the secondary objectives of attacking RVN air bases. Secondarily, the VC anticipated the South Vietnamese would then rise up en mass to further disrupt and overthrow the government. With those objectives, NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy was not in close proximity to a major city, and second, in spite of what we thought of our operational effectiveness, perhaps the VC did not consider us a major military target.

April brought another change: On 3 April 1968, Captain Arthur Whyte Price, Jr., USN relieved Captain Paul N. Gray. However, Captain Gray did not go quietly. He directed that one more operation be"ginned" up" - one that involved almost every asset we owned on the Bassac. On 26 March Operation Bold Dragon III got underway at Tan Dinh Island. The forces employed were *Jennings County*, the LCM "rocket boat," two Seawolf fire teams, 14 PBRs, the HSSC (heavy SEAL support craft) belonging to MST-2, a SEAL platoon, RAG-25 and RAG-29 from the 4th Riverine Area and Ruff Puffs from Tra On. He even told some of the news media offices in Saigon when the operation was scheduled.

At the appointed hour, everything and everybody started shooting. When the shooting finally subsided, the forces returned to their normal locations. The operation produced one VC KIA and a couple probable KIAs. The SEALs blew up a few hootches and bunkers, and destroyed several sampans and motors. Fortunately, what few personnel injuries we incurred were minor.

The worst aftermath was that for about 48-hours we were in a near stand down on the Bassac, replenishing ammunition, replacing burned out gun barrels, etc. Nevertheless, Captain Paul N. Gray, USN, had his swan song, received the Distinguished Service Medal and later the Navy League of the United States presented him with their John Paul Jones Award for inspirational leadership.

About ten days after the fiasco, I received a phone call from the ABC Bureau Chief in

Saigon. He asked if we were the organization that had recently run a big operation on one of the rivers in the Delta. I replied to the affirmative. He then said they had a crew covering the event; however, through some equipment malfunction, none of the film footage they had was of a TV broadcast quality. He then said, and I directly quote, "Could you please rerun the operation so we can get some good footage?" I replied, and again I directly quote, "Get fucked!" and hung up.

Along with Paul Gray, we went through other personnel changes. On 5 April, I replaced Frtiz Steiner as operations officer. Gene Mossman left and was replaced as Surface Ops by Orton "Ort" Kreiger. Ort had a son somewhere in country in the Army; who visited his dad at Binh Thuy on at least one occasion that I recall. Ort's tour in Vietnam would come to a stupidly painful end shortly after I left. He had tactical command of some PBRs during one of the early Sealords operations - explained later. While sitting in their base camp one evening, a sailor was toying with a captured pistol. It discharged and hit Ort shattering a hip. It was a stateside hit, and Ort was eventually medically retired.

Lieutenant Commander Chuck Craft, a helo pilot, replaced Fred Lakeway as Air Ops. Commander Wayne L. Beech replaced John Miller as CSO. After his relief as Senior Advisor to Fourth Riverine Area, Commander Paul departed. His replacement did not have Deputy, COMRIVPATFOR as an additional duty. Lieutenant Commander James J. Roberts came aboard as Plans Officer; Jim was a classmate of mine from OCS. Lieutenant Commander Bob Peterson replaced Don Sheppard as COMRIVDIV Fifty-one We had a succession of SEAL platoons led by among others, Richard "Andy" Anderson, Stan Meston, and Robert "Bob" Gormly as well as turnovers in HA(L)-3, DET 7. Finally, Lieutenant Commander Calvin "Cal" Raymond, another of my OCS classmates took over as OIC, NAVSUPPACT DET Binh Thuy. A short time later, Lieutenant Commander Larry Rice, yet another one of my OCS classmates became the maintenance advisor to the Fourth Riverine Area. Larry and I also served together on the DESRON Seven staff before we came to Vietnam. Time moved on.

By mid-April, the vestiges of the Tet were over and the Delta appeared to resume normal routine. By that time, we had had two different corps commanders. One, *Thiếu Turởng* (MG) Nguyen Viet Thanh, the former commander of the 7th ARVN Division was highly effective. Prior to becoming the corps commander, he had been successful in reversing the 7th ARVN's reputation as the "Search and Avoid" Division. General Westmoreland once described General Thanh as the best division commander in the Vietnamese Army.

Instead of using the villa, General Thanh lived in a command truck in the corps compound and was in the field with his troops every day. At the end of the day, he returned to the compound, planned the next day's operations, and took a shower in a stall attached to the truck, got some sleep, and then returned to the field. We were encouraged. For a while, it looked like IV Corps, and particularly the 21st ARVN Division was finally doing things. One day, when he returned to the compound, he announced that he was retiring because of ill health. President Thieu replaced him. The corps's activity declined sharply.

(Stories persisted regarding ARVNs war fighting methodologies. One was that an ARVN unit would never completely circle an enemy unit, thus, allowing VC/NVN an opportunity to

escape decimation or capture. One rationale for this supposedly was that members of the same Vietnamese families could be opposing each other in a battle. However, I do not recall hearing that VC/NVN units fought in a similar manner.)

Game Warden forces made an out-of-area deployment in late April. Between 20 and 26 April, *Hunterdon County* with RIVSEC 532 embarked, then located at Qui Nhon, provided blocking forces and other support for ROK Marine Corps units during Operation Maeng Ho II Maeng Ho translates as, "Fierce Tiger."

On 22 April, Commander Charles N. Straney relieved Commander Don Whartham and the Senior Advisor to the Rung Sat Special Zone and simultaneously became Commander Rung Sat River Patrol Group, TG-116.4.

The end of April brought about another review of the Combined Campaign Plan. This time Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker headed the US delegation that included General Creighton W. Abrams. Deputy COMUSMACV. The senior US-military officers met with Generals Abrams and Eckhardt privately before the official presentation. General Abrams wanted to get the US advisors reports before he heard the IV CTZ's version. Art Price and I represented TF-116 at the meeting. General Abrams sat absorbing all the information provided. All the while, his aide de camp ensured there were always two aluminum tubes containing Bering cigars at the general's left elbow. It was during the small talk that morning that I heard "Abe" utter something that stuck in my mind. He provided advice to all "comers" or aspiring comers. It was, "The higher you climb the flag pole the more your ass shows."

The briefing followed the same format that I had seen in January. I was thunder struck when the G-2 briefer got up and gave a report on the total analysis of the VC build up for Tet, "*As I briefed in January*," and what had transpired during Tet and thus far during the post-Tet operations. I wondered where and when he had given that January briefing, as neither I nor anyone else from TF-116 had heard anything like that. It was amazing. Three months earlier, the only problem in the corps area was the lack of motor transport to move barbwire from depots to the field. Now we learned Intelligence knew the VC's intentions for Tet; but after all, that was a Combined Campaign Plan Quarterly Review. What else should we have expected?

4 May 1968 brought another change of command; Captain Arthur H. "Art" Munson relieved Commander Robert W. Spenser as CO HAL-3 in ceremonies at Vung Tau. It was a welcomed change for the helo crews.

On 8 May, Det 7's Seawolves were supporting an operation in a canal just south of our base. AMS3 Lloyd A. Cone, the right door gunner, took a shot in the head and fell back into the aircraft with his finger still on the trigger of his M-60 machine gun. His gunfire put a big slice in the side of the aircraft, and sprayed Jack Kelly, the pilot, with fragments. The fire team made an emergency landing at BTAB. They repaired the helo and patched up Jack's wounds. Unfortunately, the door gunner died.

Captain Price's concept of operations was considerably different from that we had experienced under Captain Gray. First, there were no more "ginned" up operations. Every time

we conducted an operation, it was part of an overall plan to improve our methods of and expand our areas of operation. Our intelligence system showed signs of improvement and we began to use that information more effectively.

Although the river divisions and their sections were doing their job on the rivers, we could accomplish more if we operated closer to the infiltration routes to Delta from Cambodia. The majority of that infiltration was no longer along the rivers where we normally operated; instead, it was from the canal systems south of the Bassac leading to the Cambodian border. In other words, we were intercepting some of the enemy material after it came into Vietnam, but not as it came into the country. It was not acceptable to state publicly that Cambodia was a way station for supplies for the VC. That made our planning efforts all the more difficult.

Captain Price wanted to interdict the supply routes coming from Cambodia. His first thought was to cut the east-west flow by controlling the Long Xuyen di Rach Gia Canal, and following that, establish forces at Ha Tien, on the coast of the Gulf of Siam. Both were valid goals; however, they did not appear to be logistically supportable at the time. Putting the boats into that area was a problem in itself, but it was not as large as developing logistical facilities of some type and providing security for the facilities as well as the boats when operating. In addition, there was the nagging problem of potential turf battles with TF-115.

Traditionally, the lines of demarcation between the Coastal Surveillance and River Patrol Forces respective areas of operation were inviolable. Crossing the line either by accident or intent, had caused some violent actions on the parts of both forces. At those times, we were our own worse enemies. Fortunately, although TF-115 and TF-116 units shot at each other, I do not recall that we killed each other in those turf wars.

One of the many briefings I conducted for visitors was for the PACFLT Public Affairs Officer. Bev (Beverly Ann) Deepe, a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* accompanied him. (Bev would spend seven years in Vietnam; the longest time for any representative of the US media.)

Normally, when briefing the media, we presented a general overview of our operation and then took the questions that followed. During the question and answer session, Bev raised a question regarding VC infiltration routes. I did not answer at first. The PAO said that it was all right to answer as Bev was a reliable person. My eyes quickly shifted to Art Price, who gave a slight nod. I then laid out an overview of what we knew, or more accurately thought we knew, regarding the routes on our side of the Vietnam-Cambodia border, and very generally, on the other side. A four-lane highway went from the port of Sihanoukville to the Cambodia-Vietnam border. There was no city or town or road system there, however, on Vietnam's side of the border was an extensive canal system. Nevertheless, policy did not permit us to hint that the Cambodians might be involved in Viet Cong supply. I never understood that policy. After all, Market Time maintained productive patrols in the Gulf of Siam, and we intercepted stuff in the Delta – it had to be coming from somewhere! Moreover, there certainly was evidence of materials transiting the Ho Chi Minh Trail. To the best of my knowledge, Bev Deepe never violated that confidence.

In that respect, Bev Deepe, as a member of the news media, was unusual. If I recall correctly, MACV accredited about 500 correspondents. There certainly were more than 500 "media representatives" in country. The accredited media had relatively free access to the country and enjoyed a high priority as far as air transportation was concerned. I once asked someone just how high that was, and was told that the press could not bump the dead and wounded. Another media problem was the "stringers," particularly people who took information they had received in the normal course of their jobs and then sell it to a news agency.

One such stringer worked for a U.S. agency in Can Tho. Through his job, he had access to a tactical radio and routinely monitored our frequencies. At the first indication of a firefight, he was on the phone to our NOC identifying himself as a representative of the Associated Press, and then stated a litany of questions. In time, we realized who and what he was. On his next call, the watch officer simply hung up on him. He called back protesting we were infringing on his First Amendment rights. From our perspective, all he was doing was selling our casualties to the highest bidder. After several hang-ups, he quit bothering the NOC.

The flow of people coming through for briefings seemed to be endless. Rear Admiral Pierre N. Charbonnet, Jr., COMCARDIV Six was the only CARDIV commander to come through during my watch. His flagship rotated from the Sixth Fleet to TF-77. As he had no responsibilities regarding TF-77 operations, he admitted he spent time touring the area.

Another memorable briefing was for Rear Admiral Lucien B. McDonald, USN, Commander, Military Sea Transportation Service, Far East, located in Yokohama. He patiently sat through the briefing, and then spat out, "What the hell do you mean by starting a war down here and getting my people killed and my ships damaged?" For years, MSTSFE had both government-owned and chartered ships plying the rivers of the Delta on supply missions. On occasions, the VC shot at them. The Mekong makes a dogleg turn between My Tho and Sa Dec. On 7 April, the MSTSFE-chartered tug *Michael* and barge belonging to Alaska Barge and Towing, was going upriver in that area when a pair of PBRs overtook and passed them. The VC apparently fired at the PBRs missed them and hit the tug killing the master and chief mate. The PBRs doubled back, took the ambush site under fire, and then rendered assistance to the tug. I did remark to the admiral that it was my understanding that a war had been going on in the Delta for some time before we arrived on scene. My remarks did not allay his anger. At least he did not accuse me of insubordination.

We had one post-Tet Congressional visit. Contrary to Congressman McClusky's promise, this delegation did not address who did amphibious operations in the Delta. Their visit did provide a laugh and a bit of embarrassment.

Lieutenant Stan Meston, a SEAL platoon commander, briefed the Congressmen on clandestine operations. In his presentation, Stan mentioned some of the exotic weaponry available to them, including a cross bow.

The CODEL asked for a demonstration. Stan reluctantly got the weapon and described it, all the time muttering under his breath, "Why did I mention this god dam thing; I've never used one." A crowd gathered outside the operations building for the demonstration. A pile of lumber

near the fence line became the designated target. Stan gave quite a detailed explanation about the weapon including tactical advantages. He placed a bolt into the bow, took aim and fired. The last we saw of the bolt was as it passed through the canvas top of a passing ARVN 2-½ ton truck driving past our base on Route 27. Stan never quite lived down his embarrassment.

Another briefing, and one that indicated a total break down of intelligence on our part, was for General Abrams after he became COMUSMACV. We gave him our standard presentation, e.g., organization, mission, equipment, how we did things, etc. All went well up to that point. Then we realized we had a serious breakdown in intelligence. We were unaware that General Abrams, an old tanker, did not have much use for Special Forces or similar organizations. Thus, when I finished the regular part of the briefing, the door opened and in walked a SEAL platoon in complete field array, camouflage paint, and all. Their scout dog Silver, a German Shepard sported several stripes of camouflage paint on his face and had a M66 LAW tied to his right side.

The SEALs started their presentations: "I am (name) and I am a $250,000 weapons system. My weapons are and they are capable of…" right on down the line. In the meantime, Silver had placed his front paws on the briefing table and was looking at General Abrams, who ignored him. Silver then took a crap on the deck. Finally, something sparked General Abrams's interest, the 40mm shotgun carried by one of the SEALs. He wanted to see it and asked where it had come from. The SEAL explained the weapon in detail that seemed to satisfy the general; however, his mood seems to change when he learned the Naval Ordnance Laboratory, China Lake, had developed it specifically for the SEALs.

Silver, the SEAL scout dog became the center of several controversies. Silver received a wound on an operation and later formally received a Purple Heart. In addition, Silver was one the platoon's roster. When the platoon rotated out of Vietnam, the disbursing office at NAVSUPPACT Saigon had a series of paychecks they had been holding for Seaman Silver, as he never picked up his checks when the mobile pay teams came to the Delta. Later, authorities learned Silver had returned to States with the platoon. The rules in effect at the time were that scout dogs brought into Vietnam had to remain there. Euthanasia was the only alternative. The platoon obviously had broken the rules. I have no idea what became of Silver or the platoon leader responsible for the dog's return to the States.

Quite unexpectedly, an Air Force colonel from Seventh Air Force operations directorate arrived at Binh Thuy. It was the first visit by the Air Force anyone could remember other than the Pedro pilots from BTAB.

The colonel spent some time with Captain Price. Later, Art told me to arrange for the colonel to ride with a patrol. I checked with Bob Peterson; he had no objection. Bob selected the patrol and we briefed the colonel as well as the patrol officer. We made it abundantly clear to the colonel that even though the patrol officer was a lieutenant, he was in command of the patrol. Should anything happen on the river, the colonel, in spite of his seniority, would obey whatever direction the patrol officer provided. The colonel agreed, and he joined the patrol.

When the colonel completed the patrol, he immediately went to Captain Price and

recommended the patrol officer for a Silver Star. Art, who was dumfounded, called me to find out what had happened on the river. We had not received any spot reports from the patrol indicating enemy action. To the contrary, all we received were routine status reports. I checked with Bob and the patrol officer and it was nothing more than a routine patrol. I reported that to Captain Price the colonel was amazed.

In addition to visitors desiring briefings, we also saw numerous "traveling salesmen." Under the aegis of the Defense Advance Research Projects Agency (DARPA) practically any company or individual with a seemingly plausible idea or device that might help win the war, could in certain cases get a grant of up to $50,000 and six weeks to evaluate their whatever in-country. Some good things came out of that effort, but those were rare when compared to the total effort and expenditure. (In the late 1950s, and early 1960s, DARPA created the "ARPA Net," linking major universities and research centers, the basis for today's Internet. This was before Al Gore invented it.)

The use of electric 10-horse power Johnson trolling motors to move boats quietly at night was a major benefit. One of the biggest problems with the PBR was engine noise. At night, patrols frequently turned off their engines and drifted with the current watching the river by radar and "Starlight" scopes. Although an effective tactic for a small portion of the river, it also left large sections of the rivers uncovered by patrols. Using the electric outboard motors helped solve part of the noise problem while still affording the patrol some mobility. To illustrate, PBRs with the electric outboard motors actually made undetected approaches to sampans in rivers and canals. Two not-so-good ideas stand out in my mind.

The first was the visit of an individual who claimed his company had developed a revolutionary portable directional sound detection system. Since he arrived late in the afternoon, he got a room in the BOQ had dinner, and was ready to make his presentation and demonstration in the morning. After having his dinner, he came into the club.

While having a drink, he enthusiastically talked about his product. It was lightweight, easy to use and directional with pinpoint accuracy. He really attracted our attention. Finally, he suggested that rather wait for the formal presentation scheduled for the next morning, he was willing to give us a sneak preview. We agreed and he headed for the BOQ.

He returned carrying what appeared to be a flat suitcase. He opened it and began assembling his device. He then put it in the operating position, turned and faced the crowd. His device indeed was a sound amplification system. The device consisted of a pair of special detectors, attached to an amplifier then to the operator's ears. The detectors were large Mickey Mouse-type ears, perhaps 10-inches tall and about 6-inches wide connected by a headband. When placed on the operator's head they most assuredly provided directional definition because every time he moved his head, the detectors moved with it. The crowd broke out in gales of laughter. The representative, not saying a word, disassembled his rig put it back in the case and the next morning left without making his formal presentation.

Another man represented a company in Louisiana that manufactured a defoliant for use in water. The product allegedly was quite effective in clearing bayous. He came to Binh Thuy on

two occasions. The first time, I listened to his presentation and told him, “No.” He returned a second time and I explained our operating procedures and environment to him. First, to his claim his product would eliminate the potential of things like water hyacinth, jamming propellers, and rudders. I explained that the PBRs design had eliminated that problem - no propellers or rudders. I did not mention nor did he bring up the potential of clogged Jaccuzi pumps.

I then presented a scenario. We had been on the rivers for several years and in that time, had attempted to establish a good relationship with the Vietnamese who lived on or near the water. They washed themselves and their clothes in the water, caught food from the water, cooked with the water, and drank the water. I then told him what he was proposing was that we, using our now-familiar looking green boats flying U.S. flags, would spray his product on the vegetation in the presence of the Vietnamese who would watch it turn brown, die and sink in three days. While doing that, we would assure them that we had not done anything to the water, the marine life in the water, or them. In the meantime, the VC, watching the same process would be cranking up their propaganda machines and would present us with problems of untold magnitude. The bottom line being we did not need his product or the potential headaches it could give us. He never returned to Binh Thuy.

Strange things did occur on the rivers. A PBR patrol working the Bassac, received a call from the Senior Advisor at Tra On, requesting the patrol rendezvous with him. The patrol responded and upon arrival, the SA's representative told the Patrol Officer the Sector Advisor requested his presence at their headquarters. They gave him no explanation. The patrol officer, a LTJG named Butler, was one of a group of people who received continual reminders to maintain some semblance of dress while on patrol. He had a habit of stripping to the waist, if not further, as soon as his patrol got underway.

Upon arrival at the SA's headquarters, someone asked for his rank and full name, which he provided. A Vietnamese army clerk then at a desk furiously started typing some forms. A few minutes later, the Corps Commander was ushered into the room. Someone read some words in Vietnamese and English and the corps commander started looking for someplace on the JG's attire, or lack thereof, to pin a Gallantry Cross, one of Vietnam's more senior combat decorations. Neither the patrol nor patrol officer had done anything that day to earn the medal other than being on patrol in that sector of the river when the corps commander visited the sector and decided to decorate some American navy type.

The Tra On District Chief invited a group of us to a luncheon held in Tra On. On our arrival the District Chief, Senior Advisor and several other dignitaries welcomed us. As we took our seats, I noted twelve bottles of Martel cognac lined up on the bar. That I learned was to be our aperitif. After we emptied all the bottles, the meal started. I do not recall what we had to eat, but it seemed to come in a number of courses. The Vietnamese had learned culinary arts from the French. Copious amounts of beer accompanied the meal. As was typical of many Vietnamese eateries, groups of dogs loitered around the kitchen door and, I suppose, in the kitchen as well. It did not help too much when we suddenly heard a dog yipping in or near the kitchen, then heard many Vietnamese swearing which ended the yipping. Shortly thereafter, another meat course came out of the kitchen. I am sure the sounds were coincidental with the origins of the meal; however, it did cause one to wonder.

The meal ended with a round of toasts to our two nations and respective chains of command. The toasting involved various Vietnamese liquors of several colors, flavors and – obviously - potencies. When the toasts and farewells ended, we got back into our boats and headed for Binh Thuy. One of the Americans was a young man who had just reported to his river section. He was not feeling any pain. We reminded him that this type of thing did not happen all the time and to enjoy it while he could. When we arrived at Binh Thuy, we all proceeded to sick bay to get the "five gallon" shot of gamma globulin in a post-facto attempt to prevent getting hepatitis from the ice served in our drinks.

In May 1968, the VC started another campaign which some labeled as a "Mini Tet." For the most part, they were unsuccessful in causing the problems they had in January and most of what we experienced was sporadic increases in action along the rivers. We again had patrols on the upper Bassac and Mekong. On 5 May, one of them encountered an ambush that resulted in the near-total destruction of PBR-130 and the loss of Lieutenant Carl Kollmeyer and EM3 Ronald Saporito. Carl was a well-liked, highly respected person, who was wise to the ways of the river. Unfortunately, for some reason or another, that day he did not follow a basic rule always have a cover boat. Two 75mm recoilless rifle rounds hit the PBR-130. I flew to Chau Doc as soon as we learned what had happened.

The PBR-130 survivors and Carl's body were at Camp Arnn when I arrived. The senior Navy man when I arrived was Lieutenant O'Brien. I knew "Obie" as we were both from Binh Thuy. He and the others appeared to be in a state of shock about death of Carl. I could not blame them as I had similar feelings. We talked for a while and I hoped it might have helped him in some way. While we were talking, a soldier approached us and said they needed someone to identify Carl's body to finalize the preparations prior to sending it to a mortuary unit. I started to get up, but Obie said, no, he would do it. When he returned, we talked until it was time for me to get in the helo and return to Binh Thuy. Obie later married a civilian nurse named Maggie, the same woman the SEALs and CIDGs had rescued in Chau Doc during Tet.

Binh Thuy dispatched an LCM to bring the PBR-130 hulk back to Binh Thuy. It was in bad shape, floating with only the bow sticking out of the water. However, after a 60-mile trip lashed to the side of an LCM, and then unceremoniously dumped on the riprap at Binh Thuy, it looked as if it was ready for a scrap heap.

Before that time, the standard procedure required sending PBRs requiring extensive repairs to the Ship Repair Facility at Subic Bay in the Philippines. Although they made the repairs, the in-country forces were not always satisfied with the quality of work done there. As NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy had the repair materials and hull molds, they asked for and got the task of rebuilding the PBR-130. It took several months of long, tedious work, amply supplemented by pride to complete the task. At last, PBR-130, bearing the name USS *Binh Thuy* on its transom, was ready to return to service. The finished product was a thing of beauty, and PBR-130 returned to the river, however, without the name on the transom. Concern about possible objections by higher authorities caused its removal. NAVSUPPACT Det Binh Thuy did a fantastic job restoring the 130. From that point onward, NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy undertook all major repairs.

Our intelligence officer, Dewey Feurerhelm, painstakingly amassed information of the VC infrastructure operating in the general area of Phong Diem Province. At one time, he had papers stuck all over the war outside the NOC in his attempt to put all the pieces together. Eventually he identified a large number of the VC including their names, positions and physical description. That resulted in an increase in the number of the infrastructure members apprehended by patrols operating out if Binh Thuy.

About June, PBRs on My Tho commenced operating from the *APL*-55 at Dong Tam and later at the confluence of the My Tho and Ham Luong Rivers.

On 10 June, a significant change took place in Saigon. The US Navy transferred eight PBRs and four MINDIV-112 LCM(M)s the the Vietnamese Navy as they assumed full responsibility for the security of the major ship channel on the Long Tau River. This was the first transfer of mission from the US Navy to the Vietnamese Navy. It was a harbinger of what was to come.

We did have outside entertainment at Binh Thuy. The USO booked shows, mainly small song and dance groups, and many were from Australia. The usual procedure was to put a show under a 6-week USO contract. After that, theatrical agents in Saigon picked up the acts and booked them throughout the country. Bases that were hiring those groups had to be cautious, as there was a considerable difference in fees between USO and the freelance groups. I recall one freelance group that came to the Binh Thuy area for a weekend. When they left, they had made about $10,000 for their stage performances. Later, it became apparent the troupe might have made money other than on the stage. About ten days after their departure, ten to twenty people went to either the Navy or the Air Force dispensary for their penicillin shots.

That, however, did not characterize all of the entertainment groups. Most of the groups were legitimate entertainers. I recall one group from southern California that featured a young singer named Brandy Wine. On 21 June, the group staged a terrific show. Although I attended their performance, I really was not in the mood for it. That afternoon we received a spot report telling of the loss of PBR-750 earlier that day.

Earlier in the day, a two-boat patrol led by Lt William E. “Bill” Dennis, in PBR-750 chased a sampan up a canal off the My Tho. With the captured sampan in tow, and two detainees on board PBR-750, the patrol headed back to the My Tho River. En route, the VC ambushed the patrol with PBR-750 receiving the brunt of the attack. The initial attack killed LT Dennis and the boat captain, BM1 Scott C. Delph; the uncontrolled boat headed for the beach. Although wounded the after gunner, GMG2 Patrick O. Ford, continued firing into the ambush. When it was obvious the boat could not be controlled or saved, Ford got all the survivors into the water. There VC machinegun fire killed Ford. PBRs arriving on the scene searched for bodies recovering Bill’s and those of two VC suspects that were in the PBR-750, but they did not find Ford’s body.It was the greatest one-day loss for RivSec-535. It truly affected me as I had worked with Bill Dennis and the crew of RivSec 535 at Hong Nhu in February.

The VC recovered Ford’s and left it in plain sight with an ambush around it. On 25 June,

the local Popular Force chief learning of the VC's attempt to lure other PBR sent a force to engage the VC and recover Ford's body in an attempt to lure other PBRs.

GMGs Patrick O. Ford posthumously received the Navy Cross. USS *Ford* FFG-54 honors his name.

About ten days later, Brandy Wine's group made *Stars and Stripes*. They had been traveling in a vehicle near Vung Tau when it hit a mine, seriously injuring the entire group.

We had learned one thing early in our tours, and, in spite of the fact that we were allies, never trust a Vietnamese until he or she has really proven him/herself to you. All too often, operations planned with the Vietnamese and based on hard, valid intelligence, became compromised or otherwise produced considerably lower results than should have been reasonably expected. There were a number of reasons for this. Obviously, we had security lapses on our part. Another factor was the necessity to obtain political and military clearances for many of our operations other than routine river patrols.

Every time we broadened the circle of those aware of our operations, we increased both the possibility and probability of compromise. Perhaps the strongest institutional characteristic of the Vietnamese is family. The potential for family members to be on opposing sides in the conflict always existed. Moreover, the Vietnamese military personnel we liaised with usually were indigenous to the area, thereby increasing the potential for compromise. Although part of TF-116, the SEALs had an advantage others did not have. That was pick a target, plan the operations will little outside participation, and then go UNODIR (unless otherwise directed) and disappear for the operation.

Because of the feelings and the examples given above, many Americans had a low esteem for the Vietnamese, and some referred to them as, "Slopes" or "Flange Heads." Perhaps it was something based on trust or lack thereof or perhaps it was a racial thing. Nevertheless, one rarely put a Vietnamese on a par with an American.

A periodically expressed feeling toward the Vietnamese people was somewhat summarized by a suggestion someone made and was often repeated by others. It was a solution to the war and all the problems. The plan called for the separation of the Vietnamese. All those professing loyalty to Saigon would embark in ships and go to sea. Next, nuke the country, getting rid of all the VC and North Vietnamese. Finally, sink all the ships carrying the good Vietnamese.

However, there were exceptions.

Across the river from the base at Binh Thuy was a canton (a political unit) that was very independent. Their attitude was similar to that of the Hoa Haos. They did not trust their national government but they tolerated us. I guess that was due to our being in the neighborhood but not bothering them.

On occasions, they invited us to visit. The differences between their hamlet and other

villages or cities were dramatic. One of the first things a visitor noticed was street numbers and the names of occupants on individual houses. I never saw that anywhere else in Vietnam. The streets were clean and the buildings well maintained. However on one corner was the shell of a burned out building. The canton chief told us it had been a local bar. One of the patrons, a man who had lived in the village for about 15 years, sat there one afternoon when it was crowded and nonchalantly pulled the pin on a grenade taking out himself and most of the people in the place. They later learned he was a VC mole who had apparently finally received his orders. The chief wanted the burned-out shell to serve as a reminder to his people that the enemy could still be among them.

At the end of a pleasant afternoon, we finally learned why we were there. Through unexplained means, the hamlet had acquired a US made 81 mm mortar located in one of their defensive bunkers. The mortar's sight was missing and the canton chief was hoping we could provide one for him. As 81mm mortars were not in our ordnance inventory, it took a bit of creativity.

Long before I arrived at Binh Thuy, RIVDIV Fifty-one units had been working with a local Ruff/Puff, *Trung Sī* (Sergeant) Thanh. He was an exception to the general rule about Vietnamese. Among his many accomplishments, he had received ten Vietnamese Gallantry Crosses. The RIVDIV Fifty-one people frequently made small raids at various places in their patrol areas using Thanh and his men. For the most part, the operations were highly successful, and in many cases, gained us useful information. The Vietnamese were very effective in getting information from enemies or suspected enemies and their interrogation methods at times made the Geneva Conventions appear to be non-existent.

One of Sergeant Thanh's techniques was to bind the ankles of a prisoner and hoist him feet first into a tree, then start to ask questions. If he did not get the answers he wanted, he would then put *nuc mam*, a very spicy fish sauce, into the person's nostrils. Thanh seemed to think it was an effective method.

That type of interrogation was not the exclusive domain of the Vietnamese. I had seen some U.S. interrogations that bent the rules and sometimes, quite a bit. I recall walking in on an interrogation conducted by a Naval Intelligence Liaison Officer. The detainee was sitting in a darkened room with his wrists tightly bound in front of him while another set of bindings behind his back held his upper arms. His skin was almost black from lack of circulation. In the middle of the front of his shirt was the unmistakable imprint of a GI jungle boot. His groin area was very wet and nearby was a typical US Army hand-cranked EE-8 field phone with two short wires attached to the terminals. The Vietnamese had absolute hatred in his eyes. I doubted he gave up much useful information.

Under the rules of engagement then in force, US forces did not capture prisoners of war. However, we could and did take "detainees," with the theoretical provision that they be held no more than 72-hours; after which, we had to give them to the Vietnamese authorities, generally the Military Security Service (MSS). Detainees did not arrive at Binh Thuy on a regular basis; thus, the NSADET really was not prepared to handle them. A CONEX box served as a holding cell. CONEX was an abbreviation for consolidated exchange, the Army and Air Force Exchange

System, and the CONEX boxes' normal use was to prevent the loss of Post Exchange material with high black market value. The boxes, somewhat akin to a shipping container, were about 6 feet tall, 6-feet wide and perhaps 10 feet deep. They were made of heavy corrugated steel, had heavy steel doors and no ventilation. The few detainees I saw at Binh Thuy generally provided information. SEALs conducted some of the interrogations. One tactic used was to question the detainee inside one of the sand bag bunkers that dotted NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy should we come under attack. Beforehand, the SEALs would sprinkle red colored liquids on the floors and walls of the bunker so that when they removed the blindfold he immediately perceived that he was in for an unpleasant time. Sometimes he was. It was up to intelligence types to determine if it was valid or accurate. If detainees did not provide information, their next stop was the MSS. They usually got the information they were looking for.

Both US Navy and Vietnamese personnel served as Binh Thuy's gate guards. On one occasion as the guards conducted random checks of departing civilian employees, they selected a maid who worked in the BOQ. She was the mother of the young woman who acted as cashier in the officer's mess. A search of the woman revealed she had classified material, perhaps a "hip-pocket" oporder someone carelessly left in his room. She insisted that was not the case and claimed the paper was a note containing instructions the đ*ai úy* left her. As she could not read English, she was taking it home for her daughter to translate so she could take care of the lieutenant's laundry. Her improbable reasons were not accepted. The guards detained her at the gate and one went to get the daughter. The guards turned the two over to the MSS. We never saw the mother again. Perhaps she decided not to work for us. Perhaps she was not in a position to work. On the other hand, perhaps she did not exist anymore. Her daughter did return to work about six or seven weeks after her detention. I assume she was not liable for any charges. She had changed physically. Her sophisticated walk and airs had disappeared; she seemed to have aged at least twenty years, and she certainly was not the attractive young lady we had previously seen.

On 14 June, on a whim, I wrote a letter to former President Truman then living in Independence, MO commenting that the date was the twentieth anniversary of a speech he made in San Francisco and that it was my privilege to be part of the military honor guard during his presentation. I commented that I was proud to have had that brief association with him and that I had always respected his policies. Several weeks later, I received a note from him that closed with "Thank you and the best of luck to you!"

On the morning of 27 June 1968, I was sitting at my desk when I got a crazy idea. I got a message blank and drafted the following:

"From: CTF-116
To: SA IV CTZ
UNCLAS
AS THE UNITED STATES ARMY COMMENCES ITS NINETEENTH YEAR OF ADVISORY EFFORT IN VIETNAM, WE OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY'S RIVER PATROL FORCE CONGRATULATE YOU AND WISH YOU CONTINUED SUCCESS."

I then took the message to Captain Price, and tongue in cheek, handed it to him. Surprisingly, he released it and we sent it on its way. Later, the IV Corps hot line in our NOC rang; it was Commander Richard J. "Dick" Dietz, USN, the Navy Liaison Officer, calling me. When I answered, Dick said that he supposed I was the only one at Binh Thuy who would come up with a message like that. He allowed that the reaction within the SA's staff was they were surprised (1) we would send a "congratulatory" message, and, (2) that the Army had been in country for 18 years. They apparently missed the real intent of the message, which was, since you have been here for almost a career, what have you accomplished?

As perhaps a parody of Herman Wouk's, *The Caine Mutiny*, we too had a strawberry incident. Actually, ours was strawberries and milk. Binh Thuy received supplies from Saigon, sometimes by NAVSUPPACT Saigon's "fleet" composed of the light cargo ship USS *Brule* (AKL-28) and the self-propelled cargo lighters USS *Kodiak* YF-866 and YF-890 that plied the rivers for years delivering material to the various NAVSUPPACT Dets and the ships in the Delta. Another method was through air delivery via a depot at Can Tho Army Air Field. (Three modified sister ships of *Brule*, *Banner, Pueblo,* and *Palm Beach* served as intelligence collection ships.) NAVSUPPACT Det Binh Thuy noted that certain air-delivered food stuffs ordered from Saigon never arrived. That led to a long dialogue with Saigon providing shipping data and Binh Thuy saying, "No, we did not get them!" Finally, somebody decided to investigate.

The missing items were frozen strawberries and milk processed in a certain way that almost made it palatable. They were Navy-peculiar items and not available to the Army. As they passed through the depot at CTAAF, an enterprising colonel intercepted them and provided them to the senior advisors' mess. The Army reacted in its usual way. The colonel had a relatively safe job, and probably anticipated he would get through a Vietnam tour, hopefully without being shot, (check off) and earn a Legion of Merit (check off) without too much difficulty. Instead, he was relieved for cause for being caught stealing strawberries and milk from the Navy. That probably ended a promising career.

We had been under pressure to have the Vietnam Navy's *Lien Doc Nguois Nhia*, (LDNNs) literally translated as, "soldier who fights under the sea," their equivalent of our SEALs, conduct operations with the SEALs. We did, and it got off to a shaky start. That was not because of their tactical ability. Instead, it was because it seemed every time the LDNNs were paid, they took off for Saigon or wherever their families were located. That was the only way they could assure themselves that their families received financial support. It seemed to be a strange way of fighting a war. "Sorry, we can't join your operation tomorrow because today is payday and this afternoon, I'm heading home. I'll be back, but I don't know when."

We expressed our displeasure and considered sending the LDNNs back to Saigon. One of their *dai* uys asked for and received an opportunity to make a plea to keep them as part of our operations. He gave a long impassioned plea impassioned presentation. It started with a condensed history of Vietnam. He emphasized that during the French period, they were mean and "How they physically beat us." He actually shed tears at that point. The amazing thing is that when the French left 24-years earlier, the *đai úy* hadn't even been conceived! The bottom line was that we did not send them packing. They worked out well on operations; but to paraphrase the song made famous by Melina Mercouri, "Never on Payday."

The summer of 1968 caused some changes in the way we did things, and those changes were politically driven. President Johnson had already announced that he would not stand for reelection. Recognizing the nation's aversion to the increasing casualty rate, he also directed the initial phases of the "Vietnamization" of the war; something usually attributed to President Nixon's administration. In order not to jeopardize the preliminary negotiations that were just starting between the U.S. and the North Vietnamese, Washington wanted no big surprises from U.S. forces in country. Therefore, we received a directive to develop a limitation on local operations to preclude such surprises. Any operation larger than an established level would require prior authorization from higher headquarters in country, or elsewhere before implementation.

That was a tough tasking. First, having to request permission from someone not near the scene to conduct combat operations in a combat zone seemed ludicrous. Secondly, one could lose the initiative or opportunity to accomplish a mission in a time-sensitive situation while waiting for someone up the line to approve the operation. Thirdly, the longer we waited for permission to conduct the operation, the greater was the likelihood of a compromise. It seemed to be a bummer all the way around.

Finally, at my suggestion, Captain Price recommended that TF-116 require outside approval for any operation that exceeded one river section (ten PBRs) and one company of troops. My thought was until that time we had rarely conducted an operation exceeding 10 PBRs and 120 troops (even Captain Gray's "swan song operation" did not approach the upper troop limit,) thus, I thought it to be a relatively safe self-imposed limitation. The recommendation was not accepted and our limitation for independent operations was set at eight PBRs and a platoon of troops. I had intentionally stayed away from the expression "platoon" because a SEAL platoon consisted of two officers and twelve enlisted men, essentially the same number of people as an infantry squad. I wanted to avoid the possibility of a semantics battle between TF-116, Saigon, Pearl Harbor, and Washington.

Four incidents occurred in July stand out in my memory.

10 July. BUPERS issued Order No. 133403 to Lieutenant Commander Thomas W. Glickman, USN; stating that when detached in November, proceed to the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, by 3 January 1969, for duty under instruction in BS/BA curriculum, 461. A handwritten note from my assistant detailer, Lieutenant Commander Richard C. "Dick" Berry, USN, advised that although the course was two years, a preliminary screening of my academic records indicated I was six semester hours shy of eligibility requirements for the program. Therefore, he was slating me to be at Monterey for an additional six months, if necessary. After arriving in Vietnam, I had attempted to make up the deficiency by taking a correspondence course from the University of California by USAFI (United States Armed Forces Institute.) I had not been able to do it justice, so I withdrew. I wrote to my detailer explaining that situation and asked that I remain a candidate for Monterey. They must have been understanding and generous. I understood what was happening; missing this chance to go to Monterey meant there was not going to be another. After I arrived at Monterey, it was determined the semester hour shortfall did not exist and I completed the program in two years. When I reported to

COMNAVSURFLANT for duty in 1978, then Captain Dick Berry was the Assistance Chief of Staff for Readiness.

13 July. The VC downed a Det. 1 Seawolf on Dung Island. A fire team on a mission drew ground fire. The lost aircraft apparently took a round or rounds in the main engine's transmission. That froze the main rotor and eliminated the possibility of auto-rotation, and the aircraft went down like a rock. When we got a ground party to the site, they reported the aircraft was about 18-inches high. The crew composed of LT John L. Abrams, LTJG James H. Romanski, AMH3 Raymond D. Robinson and AMS3 Dennis M. Wobbe, did not survive.

On 14 July, I flew from the Delta to Danang where I was temporarily became a member of the Army's 199th Replacement Battalion awaiting air transportation to Hawaii. That was in accordance with COMUSMACV's policy whereby all in-country personnel were entitled to two in-country R&Rs of three days duration and one out of country lasting 10 days. We had a wide choice of destinations, Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia, and Hawaii. I opted for Hawaii as I thought it would be the shortest trip for both Pat and me and would give us more time together. To kill time while at the 199th, I got a haircut. The barbershop provided other services and I decided to get a manicure. It was a mistake as the maicurist cut all my nails short – almost to the quick. It was the first and at this writing nearly four decades later, the only "professional?" manicure I have had.

I had made reservations for us at the Ilikai Hotel on Waikiki Beach and had written separately to the hotel asking for a large floral arrangement. It turned out to be one of the largest I had seen and I do not recall seeing it on my bill.

While I was flying in from Vietnam, Pat was wending her way from San Diego to Hawaii via Los Angeles. By coincidence, as she waited for the plane in Los Angeles, she encountered Captain John K. Leslie, who had been COMDESDIV Seventy-two when I went to the DESRON Seven staff. John was then on the CINCPACFLT staff. He kindly escorted Pat through the flight.

We met at the Army's R&R center at Fort DeRussey in Honolulu, got our luggage and a cab, and headed for our hotel. I was in heaven! When our time together ended, we parted ways at Fort DeRussey and got on planes heading in opposite directions.

17 July. The US Army LCU-1577 on a supply mission, while en route from Vung Tau to Can Tho, missed the Vam Nao cross over between the Mekong and Bassac Rivers. Seven miles later, the LCU unknowingly crossed the border into Cambodia where the Cambodian navy intercepted it. (PBRs on patrol sighted the LCU but assumed they knew where they were going.) The LCU commanded by CW4 Ralph W. McCullough, had a crew of 10 other soldiers and a Vietnamese police officer. After months of posturing, the Cambodian government released the LCU and its crew on 19 December 1968. The US government gave the Cambodians a dozen bulldozers as part of the exchange.

On 18 July, COMNAVFORV gave TF-116 specific tasking to ensure that any Army watercraft passing Tan Chau be advised of the proximity of the Cambodian border. Three days later, PBRs stopped eight Army LCMs as they approached the border. The patrol officer learned

the Army personnel in charge of the LCMs had recently arrived in country, lacked adequate charts for their travel and that the compasses in the LCMs were inoperative. The PBRs escorted the LCMs to Camp Thuong Thoi for the night and the next day the PBRs led them to the Vam Nao cross over to their destination on the Bassac River.

The media learned of the incidents, and before the month was over, *Newsweek* mentioned in its "Periscope" column that the Navy was taking measures to prevent errant navigation on the part of the Army. We, of course, added an appropriate one-liner to the poster with our mission statement in the briefing room. That obviously did not set well with Army visitors.

As part of our new "mission" of helping the Army's navigation, in the event they again missed the Vam Nao cross over we had three signs made and erected on an island below the border. They read:

On 22 July, PBR Mobile Base (MB) II departed Nha Be en route to Camp Thoung Thoi with COMRIVDIV 55 (LCDR Edward J. Schneider) and RIVSEC 551 embarked. They arrived at Thuong Thoi on 28 July On 30 July, HAL-3 Det 5 relocated from *Hunterdon County* to MB II and on the same day, SEAL Team Det G Delta Platoon arrived at MBII. It appeared that this time the River Patrol Force was staying on the upper Mekong permanently.

Earlier in the month, the Special Forces Detachment B-42 in Chau Doc became a

Regional Force organization. That change resulted from a directive to turn Special Forces operations over to indigenous Vietnamese forces. The Special Forces also received the directive to reduce US casualties. The SF A-432 detachment at Thuong Thoi would remain operational until 1970.

Some people made the mistake of underestimating the ingenuity and creativity of our enemy. As an example, a slight variation in the stitching in the hem of a handkerchief might escape the casual observer. However, when that handkerchief was aligned with one carried by another person, it served as the identification of one courier to another.

A smart technician could convert a portable AM/FM receiver available in any exchange for use to monitor US/ARVN voice radio tactical circuits. A SEAL ambush working on a canal bank intercepted a sampan of VC. Among the items captured was a battalion's communications station. It fit inside of a standard US .30 caliber ammunition box.

The VC had high proficiency in voice radio communications including imitative deception. I was in the NOC one evening, when one of the receivers suddenly came to life with an urgent call to "Red Rose" (our call). The caller, using a SEAL call sign, gave grid coordinates located in the Long Toan Secret Zone near the mouth of the Bassac, stated they were under attack, and requested Seawolf support. The voice call and the sound of the voice indicated the caller was Lieutenant junior-grade Frank "Gordie" "Baby SEAL" Boyce. The three of us in the NOC, the watch officer, Gordie and I looked at each other in amazement. The VC obviously hoped to shoot down the fire team. That incident indicated we probably should have been paying more attention to the use of authentication systems.

The SEALs continued to conduct successful operations throughout the Delta. However, someone made a grievous mistake during one on 20 August 1968 and the operation had a disastrous result. A SEAL Team 1 platoon deployed from Binh Thuy to conduct an operation near Mo Cay in Vinh Long province. An ambush was established, but unfortunately, they ambushed themselves. The ensuing firefight killed the assistant platoon leader, WO-1 (Torpedoman) Eugene S. Tinnins.

Admiral Veth verbally relayed an unusual order to us. It was to determine the feasibility of staging what would appear to be a VC ambush of the weekly Mekong convoy to Cambodia. Ships of the VNN Fleet Service Force escorted those merchant convoys up the Mekong Rivr to the Cambodian border. Historically, the VC never bothered those convoys. It seemed someone in Saigon apparently thought that an attack on a convoy while in Vietnamese waters might cause the Cambodian government to blame the VC, possibly affecting their relationship.

Lieutenant Richard "Andy" Anderson's SEAL platoon received the tasking for planning and executing the operations. However, Andy, recently restored to duty after suffering wounds in an operation near My Tho, declined to take the assignment. That did not set well with Captain Price, thus the assignment went to Lieutenant Robert "Bob" Gormly's platoon.

Bob and I flew over to Vinh Long to talk to Jack Elliott, COMRIDIV Fifty-two. After discussing the proposed operation with Jack, we boarded one of his Boston Whalers, and three of

us went up the river looking for an appropriate place to conduct the operation. We saw a small island, beached the whaler, and conducted a ground reconnaissance. We found what appeared to be an ideal spot: no sign of VC or other activity, several routes of access, good cover yet good visibility of the river and presumably, the convoy as it came by. The plan was to use a captured B-40 aimed to miss at least one of the ships or to hit one in an area least likely to cause casualties. Our thought was to make it abundantly clear the convoy realized an attack was taking place.

As we headed back to Vinh Long, we noticed machine gun fire toward a group of sampans ahead of us. The VC had set up a tax collection station and the gunfire served as an invitation to those in the sampans to come ashore and pay their taxes. As we only had side arms and two M-16s, we went to the other side of the river, and gave the tax collectors a wide berth. Once clear of them, Jack radioed their position to this nearest PBR patrol.

When we received approval for the convoy ambush, the plan went into motion. On 4 September, as the convoy came by the ambush site, a B-40 round was fired toward MS *Heavenly Dragon* and some AK-47 fire was directed toward the convoy. The Vietnamese navy escort did not do anything about it. Unexpectedly, two Vietnamese fishermen decided to visit the island that day and stumbled onto the ambush. With their mission accomplished and with no chance of compromise, the SEALs extracted and returned to Binh Thuy. Later, *Stars and Stripes* reported the attack and that a PBR patrol in the area making an attack on the ambush site reported killing two VC. To our knowledge, there was no reaction by the Cambodian government.

Jack had a problem attempting to eliminate tax collectors operating on the Ham Luong River. Each time he attempted to take them out, the VC departed as soon as they heard the PBRs approaching. Frustrated, Jack devised a new tactic and accomplished his mission. This time the PBRs were not directly involved in the operations, however, they were in the general area as a back up force.

Obtaining the cooperation of a rock barge operator, Jack placed a force of men on the offshore side of the pile of rocks on the barge. The towboat and barge made its way down the river at its normal slow pace. The VC stopped the barge and came out to make to collect their taxes. They did not get any money nor did they survive the attempt.

It was standard procedure that river division commanders exercise operational control over supporting Seawolf fire teams. That ensured the PBRs on patrol had close support when they needed. It also meant, the river division commanders controlled the use of the helos for non-Game Warden missions such as requests for fire teams from Army advisors supporting ARVN or Ruff/Puff units in their outposts.

That policy caused a problem at Binh Thuy. I was unaware of the problem until the watch officers in the NOC brought it to my attention. Bob Peterson, COMRIVDIV Fifty-one, although an excellent division commander had a problem with the bottle at night. The complaint from the NOC officers was that when they got calls for helos from IV Corps, they would call Bob, explain the request and he would normally release the fire team, regardless of the merit of the request, and frequently, could not remember doing so the next morning. The pilots of Det. 7

confirmed this. At that point I told Captain Price that I was taking control of Det 7 employment for non-TF-116 missions and why. He agreed and I then told Bob what I was doing and why. I got no argument.

As I now was receiving the nighttime requests, I became aware of the nature of the requests. The vast majority came from Ruff/Puff outposts when a VC sniper fired a few rounds at the outpost late at night to disturb their sleep. In those cases, the advisor called IV Corps to request a helo fire team to chase the sniper so he could get back to sleep. As the Army did not have gunships on standby, they called on the Navy to fill the request. To me, taking Seawolves away from the TF-116 mission was wrong. It was a waste of valuable assets. That was particularly true as the sniper invariably stopped shooting as soon as he heard the helos approaching.

I established a new procedure at Binh Thuy. Henceforth, when the NOC received such a request from IV Corps, the watch officer would check the wall map to determine if the "beleaguered" outpost was within the fan (range) of an artillery battery controlled by the corps. If that was the case, they were to tell the Corps, "Use artillery; it is faster and cheaper"" Of course, if the Corps had a real need for a fire team, they usually got it.

One special aerial reconnaissance mission assigned to TF-116 actually originated in the official residence of the Republic of Vietnam's ambassador to the United States in Washington, DC. One of the guests at a reception hosted by the ambassador was Wilbur E. "Bill" Garrett, then an associate and later, editor of the *National Geographic*. Bill noticed a framed display of old coins and asked the ambassador about them. The ambassador told him they were Roman coins that someone had discovered in the Delta north of the Gulf of Siam. The ambassador, according to what Bill later told us, claimed that the Romans, known to have traveled as far as present day India, went farther and settled, at least temporarily, in what was now Vietnam.

Bill managed to obtain authorization to investigate the possibility of a one-time Roman presence in Vietnam. He arrived at Binh Thuy with documentation and photographs. He repeated what he had learned from the ambassador and subsequent research. All he needed was some aerial reconnaissance of the Delta so he possibly would locate some indication of the remains of period Roman structures, nearly 2000 years after the Romans left. Was this something the French missed in their nearly 100 years in Southeast Asia?

We arranged for an Army "slick" for transportation. Captain Price and I accompanied Bill and his party. Bill had an idea where he wanted to look but had no particular appreciation as to who may control those pieces of real estate. We traveled south from Binh Thuy toward the Gulf of Siam, then zigzagged back toward the Bassac, while Bill and his people looked for traces of the Romans and took photos of the scenery. One of his requested "zigs" brought us too close to the Seven Mountain area, a known VC stronghold and the helo came under fire, which it rapidly evaded.

I had flown in many Seawolfs and some Hueys operated by Air America (the CIA's airline,) but that Army slick was the first one that I was in that rapidly climbed to 5,000 feet. Personally, I did not know a Huey could fly that high. I know that we did not discover any

ancient Roman ruins in IV CTZ that day. I never did learn if Bill Garrett ever had any success in his quest.

The summer of 1968 brought us several distinguished visitors: Woody Hays, the famed Ohio State football coach; Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, USN, the Chief of Naval Operations; and Admiral John S. Mc Cain, Jr., USN, who on 31 July relieved Admiral U. S. G. Sharp, USN, as CINCPAC. (Admiral McCain, a submariner, was the son of the World War II TF-38 commander. At the time of his visit to Binh Thuy, his son, an aviator, was a POW in the Hanoi Hilton. Prior to Admiral McCain's visit, Admiral Sharp had been through on a farewell trip. His aide, Commander Henry C. "Hank" Mustin, USN, who had been Chief Staff Officer of the Delta River Patrol Group under Commander Ken Meek, accompanied him. Hank's younger brother, Lieutenant Thomas M. "Navy Tom" Mustin was then in one of the RIVSECs at Binh Thuy.)

Admiral Moorer's visit was perhaps the most dramatic and a real revelation for the TF-116 personnel present. Captain Price made opening remarks and introduced me as the briefer. I gave an updated and amplified version of our normal briefing. All went well until I got to the part discussing air assets. My comment was to the effect that HA(L)-3, had twenty-four UH-1Bs instead of the forty-nine called for by the inter-service support agreement with the Army. At that point, Admiral Moorer said, "And you aren't going to get any more, you're going to get fixed wing aircraft instead." We stared at him perhaps with our mouths opened. He then turned to a captain on his staff and heatedly asked to the effect, what is going on? Do we make decisions in Washington affecting the operating forces and not tell them about it? Get this situation squared away! Admiral Moorer then proceeded to personally brief us on the OV-10As that were in the pipeline as VA(L)-4. In very short order, we started receiving information regarding the Black Ponies.

Admiral McCain's visit was not as volatile. He was not a big man, probably stood about five foot five. He wore jungle fatigues that appeared to be for a person almost twice his size. His Marine Corps fatigue cap with four black stars, was not his size either. His ears kept the hat from covering his eyes. In one corner of his mouth was one of his trademarks, a big cigar. His escort officer was an Army colonel.

The admiral set the mood for the visit when he entered the briefing room. His first comment was, "Finally, it's good to be around people who can understand me. Where can I pump my bilges?" Somebody led him to the head. After the briefing, he said he wanted to walk around the compound, which he did without his escort. Every time he saw a sailor, he walked up, stuck out his hand, and said, "Hi, my name is McCain. What's yours son?"

In the summer of 1968, somebody perhaps in Saigon concluded that the United States had spent an enormous amount of money producing various types of boats to work on the waterways of Vietnam. The proposal was to get some of those boats working together toward a common goal - interdicting enemy waterway infiltration and logistics channels.

Obviously, the creation and support TF-116 and TF-117 cost a huge amount of money. In spite of that expenditure, the River Patrol Force was losing ground in its attempts to accomplish its mission. Simply stated, we did not have enough boats to cover the Mekong Delta, Rung Sat

Special Zone and Task Force Clearwater in I Corps. Although we wanted to, any attempt to expand, our operations resulted in the dilution of our already established operating areas.

In addition to the expenditures to create the "Brown Water Navy," the US paid for the construction of boats for the Vietnamese National Maritime Police (the source of our black berets,) and the Vietnamese Customs Service. The US had 1,500 specially designed boats manufactured in Taiwan for the Customs Service. Interestingly, the Vietnamese Customs Service had uniformed US Navy advisors. Perhaps other organizations had US-provided boats as well.

We met with advisors from the Customs Service to determine how we could operate, if not together, then in mutual support of each other. Their boats were somewhat smaller and slower than a PBR and carried lighter armament. During the discussions, several differences emerged. First, if the River Patrol Force and Customs Service were to operate together, they wanted the Customs Service to have overall command responsibility. Secondly, they seemed to be less than enthusiastic at the prospect of becoming engaged in firefights particularly with ground based enemy forces. While those events were routine for the River Patrol Force, the senior Customs Service's advisor was hesitant to have the Customs Service involved in, as he stated, "Such violence." After further discussion, the Customs Service's agreed that combined operations were feasible; but in the event a USN/VCS patrol encountered a "hot" situation, the Customs Service advisor insisted that his green and white boats back off while the more heavily armed PBRs engaged the enemy. Obviously, that was not acceptable to us.

We did conduct a small number of combined patrols with the Customs Service to gain experience in that type of operation. They were not successful. Combined operations of that nature might have worked several years earlier when the River Patrol Force primarily had a law enforcement responsibility, but as our standard operations changed from that to combat operations it was too late.

That event did highlight a pressing need. If the objective was to interdict enemy waterborne lines of communications on a permanent basis, the River Patrol Force could not do it by itself. We could effectively operate on open rivers and larger canals, but once off the rivers, the best solution to interdiction was the employment of ground forces as well a boats. Sergeant Thanh's small force could not assist in that effort, but the 2nd brigade of the 9th Infantry with TF-117 could. Before that could happen, we had to overcome the traditional parochialism and turf protection long existing between TF-115, TF-116 and TF-117.

Through some astute intelligence work, some luck, and a Vietnamese with knowledge and a willingness to talk voluntarily, we garnered information about a VC arms cache near Phu Vinh, in Vinh Binh province. A PBR/SEAL operation was organized and its results exceeded our expectations. The source had been correct, there was an arms cache there and it was big. We recovered a majority of the munitions and destroyed the rest in place. Our boats simply could not carry all of it. The inventory exceeded 40-line items. That may not seem like much, but the quantities, measured in cases gave an appreciation of the cache's size.

Saigon was very impressed and decided to reward the civilian who provided the information. We arranged for the presentation. The civilian was indigenous to his area and did

not speak English. When he was located, he was invited (told) to get into a helicopter. The helo then flew him to Binh Thuy and an escort brought him to the headquarters building. Once inside they then went to the conference room where a number of people waited. On the table was a black brief case. After a few introductions and good words, Captain Price, speaking through a translator, asked the civilian to open the brief case. Hesitatingly he did. Inside were bundles of neatly packaged piasters - one million of them! The translator thanked him for his service to his country, told him the money was his reward, and we will take you home. The poor man was in a state of shock. I often wondered if he lived through the day.

We periodically received intelligence regarding VC activity in the U Minh forest. That was a long way from the rivers; and although some might have wanted to make incursions in that area, it was not feasible under the existing conditions and command relationships. Some of those intelligence reports, such as submarines delivering materials in the Bo De River, probably had a F-5 evaluation (the lowest rating for intelligence based on probability [F] and reliability [5]) As that was in TF-115's area of responsibility, they periodically checked the area. Market Time had patrols in the Gulf of Siam to interdict seaborne infiltration; but just as our river patrols, that left the canal systems essentially unchecked. It was safe to assume the VC had materiel in the U Minh, but the problem, under our existing organizations was what to do about it. (The Bo De River and Cau Mau Peninsula later became operating areas under Operation Sealords.)

In early September, a small group of naval aviators arrived to brief us on a new tactical air concept programmed for in country evaluation. This was "Project TRIM." The acronym TRIM meant, "Trails, Roads, Interdiction, Multisensor." The aircraft involve were the four modified P2V Neptune patrol bombers assigned to Heavy Attack Squadron (VAH) 21 normally based at NAS Sangley Point in the Philippines; however, Naval Air Facility, Cam Ranh Bay was their base for the proposed in country operations.

The Neptune's modifications were extensive. A twin 20mm turret replaced the MAD (magnetic anomaly detector) boom in the tail of the aircraft. Mounted under each wing were forward firing 7.62mm machine gun pods capable of firing 6,000 rounds per minute. Beneath the forward fuselage was housing containing four 20mm guns. The TRIMs carried four Mk 82 500-pound and two Mk 83 250 pound bombs. The bombs were replaceable by four Mk 77 napalm canisters. All crew positions had armor and the aircraft had fiberglass propellers to compensate for the additional armament weight. With the modifications, the aircraft received a new designation, AP-2H. The briefers mentioned the aircraft had extensive sensor systems, presumably heat sensors.

The object of the TRIM aircraft was to conduct low-level night reconnaissance to detect enemy positions or movement by heat, light, sound, and, smell. According to the briefers, the aircraft underwent extensive nighttime testing in the California deserts using alerted project personnel. The aircraft were able to make low-level passes and were completely undetected by the ground personnel. The briefing ended with, the aircraft are coming, would be tested in the Mekong Delta and an alerting message would tell us when the mission's schedules.

The first Project TRIM mission started at Cam Ranh, The aircraft flew over the South China Sea to the mouth of the Bassac and then along the left or southern bank of the river. The

sensor system apparently worked as planned and provided the airborne personnel with sufficient information to conduct a bombing run. They did, and then continued their mission. Unexpectedly, they took fire from the VC and after the mission from COMUSMACV and Commander, 7th U.S. Air Force as well.

The fire from the VC resulted from the fact they saw and/or heard the plane and opened fire. The “flak” from COMUSMACV originated with the Joint General Staff because the VC "base camp" the TRIM bombed was a friendly village, and the 7th Air Force’s flak was for a violation of one of the basic aviation rules in the Republic of Vietnam. That was, no US aircraft would employ ordnance larger that a 2.75" rocket in the Republic of Vietnam unless that mission was under a 7th AF "frag" order (fragmentary operation order).

To my knowledge, that was the only TRIM flight over the Delta.VAH-21 had one of the shortest lives in naval aviation history, two weeks short of 10 months. The AP-2Hs ended up in mothballs at Davis-Mothan Air Force Base. The Pima Air Space Museum in Tucson procured, restored, and displayed AP-2H BuNo 135620, one of the four aircraft assigned to VAH-21. The 156520 participated in a flight in October 1968 and had bullet holes to prove it. Perhaps this is the aircraft making the TRIM flight in the Delta.

Lieutenant Commander Jim Roberts, our Plans Officer, inherited an unusual task: he became the TF-116 “Duck Blind” Officer. Duck Blind was a code word for McNamara's electronic sensor system that was supposed to seal off the DMZ and monitor enemy movement along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Decisions, possibly made in Saigon, extended the Duck Blind effort to the Mekong Delta.

Messages alerted us to the impending arrival of Duck Blind shipments. Jim went to BTAB to meet the specified flight, and signed for the cases containing the sensors. The "ducks," similar to the ADSIDs (air delivered seismic indicating devices) previously used on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, were shaped like bushes or small trees. When implanted in vegetation they could blend in with their surroundings. Supposedly, the "ducks" would seismically detect the movement of people or vehicles then transmit that information to a centralized control point. Theoretically, the controllers would be able to pin point the source through triangulation and then direct appropriate attacks on those causing the movement.

The standard operating procedure required that the “ducks" to be emplaced with an anti-disturbance device equipped booby trap. Generally, that was an M-26 fragmentation grenade with an anti-disturbance device attached to the firing mechanism. Unfortunately, that requirement resulted in non-fatal personnel casualties in the Rung Sat Special Zone. A boat crew was recovering a "duck" that had been implanted near the water's edge. Mud caked and covered the duck’s “roots.” The patrol thought either the booby trap had fallen off or perhaps they did not know it was there in the first place. It went off when someone started clearing the mud from the roots. Fortunately, no one died.

The "duck blind" effort was not successful in the Delta.

CTF-116 received an invitation from SA, IV CTZ to attend a special conference called by

the corps commander for all province chiefs to discuss various matters of common interest. I attended as the US Navy representative. A young English speaking Vietnamese army *trung úy* served as my escort. When I arrived in the conference room, I found that I was the only American. The *trung úy* provided me with an earphone not as nice as those seen in photos of the UN. I sat back solely dependent upon what I heard from an unseen translator. The *trung úy*, obviously trying to be helpful also provided ad lib translation. To my dismay, what I heard through the earphone did not always agree with the *trun úy's* translation. Perhaps that should not have surprised me.

Eventually, the conferees brought up the subject of the waterways and their security. The format of the conference provided each province chief with the opportunity to have his say on each subject. When the chief of a province that bordered on a river had the floor, I soon learned what his complaint would be. If the US Navy relaxed *its* stringent curfews and curfew enforcement, the people could go about their regular business and the province would be so much better of economically.

When the first province chief made that statement, I knew the others would repeat it, or something very similar. My response to the first province chief was to the effect "Neither the United States Government nor the United States Navy has imposed any curfew on Vietnam's waters. Instead; at the request of the government of the Republic of Vietnam, we have joined with the National Marine Police in the enforcement of the curfews established at that time by each province chief. An examination of the curfews presently in existence in the IV Corps Tactical Zone will clearly demonstrate that there is no standard curfew; however, there is a specific curfew for each province. If it is your desire to modify or eliminate the curfew previously imposed by your province, I can assure you that the United States Navy will be most happy to oblige your desires by modifying or eliminating our enforcement to coincide with your directives. Thank you." By the time, I had repeated that eleven times I had my delivery style down rather nicely. Of course, I had no idea what the translator told the province chiefs nor did I know how many understood English. My *trung úy* translator gave no indications whether or not the unseen translator was accurate. Naturally, no province chief changed his curfew.

Major General Eckhart, the IV Corps Senior Advisor, created a group of US military representatives to conduct a study known as the "Senior Advisor IV Corps Tactical Zone Dry Season Campaign Plan." Captain Price designated me as the TF-116 representative. I do not recall who represented TF-117.

We took a hard look at the situation in the Delta. We looked at what the corps must accomplish and determined the assets to undertake the task. No Vietnamese participated in the effort nor did we consult or refer to the Combined Campaign Plan. We approached the problem as if there were no Vietnamese forces available. We concluded that to attain and maintain the Delta free from the influence of either VC main force or guerilla units would require a minimum of 16 maneuver battalions. Based on a ratio of three battalions to a brigade, and three brigades to a division, the plan envisioned a minimum of two US divisions operating in the Delta.

That was highly unlikely to happen. At least, someone had finally analyzed the problem in the Delta; now somebody would have to make a decision regarding the recommendations. In

retrospect, the recommendation was excessive, particularly when there were three ARVN divisions in the Delta. However, it reflected the Westmoreland Vietnam strategy; the "search and destroy" tactics as well as a unilateral Army approach to the matter.

The Air Force advised that there would be a demonstration of the Fulton Surface to Air Recovery (STAR) at BTAB. The system, an outgrowth of systems used during World War II, was to extract personnel, e.g., spies, SEALs, etc., from enemy territory or seas by aircraft that did not land to accomplish the mission. It required the persons on the ground to wear to a harness system attached to a long elasticized line the far end of which was elevated off the ground or water by balloons. The specially configured recovering aircraft, in this case an HC-130, would make a low pass over the area snagging the line with "V" shaped device attached to the nose of the aircraft. The person recovered was then reeled into the stern door of the cargo bay by a hydraulic winch.

I knew that the Fulton STAR System was not new and did work. It almost worked during the demonstration at BTAB. The "rescuee" was located on the runway. The C-130 made its low pass and snagged the line on the first try. It then gained altitude and began winching in the "rescuee." Unfortunately, the aircraft suffered a winch failure that left the "rescuee" dangling on the end of the line about halfway to the aircraft. The plane circled BTAB while they attempted to repair the winch. In the meantime, the sky opened up with a typical monsoonal rain. Finally, after about a half hour of dangling in the rain, with the winch repairs completed they finally hauled him in. I doubted that person volunteered for other demonstrations.

In spite of the denials made by the MACV Provost Marshal's representative during my briefings at Koelper Compound, there was a drug problem in Vietnam. We needed no further proof than NAVSUPPACT Saigon establishing drug information teams and sending them to every naval installation under its jurisdiction. Their purpose was to educate us of the dangers, both physical and legal, one could expect if he became involved in any manner with drugs. Most of the information was straightforward and factual and some of it stretched the imagination.

It was through one of these teams that I learned that the United States was a major contributing factor to the military drug problems in Vietnam. According to the briefer, the root (no pun intended) of the problem was our ordnance. US-manufactured pop flares and star shells had nylon parachutes and shroud lines. The Vietnamese discovered the synthetic materials, particularly lines, were stronger than the traditional hemp lines they had used for centuries. The increased availability of synthetic lines seriously affected the livelihood of Vietnamese hemp farmers. Facing an economic disaster, the poor farmers had no recourse other than to produce hemp as marijuana to sell to the US military forces. I wondered what the creator of that story smoked. (Three years later when stationed in Germany, I encountered Army drug information teams. Speaking out of one side of their mouths, they told the troops what the Army's drug policies were and to keep clean. Then, using the other side of their mouths, they told the troops which drugs proscribed by the Army could be legally purchased over the counter in German drug stores.)

Moreover, higher authorities wondered why the military services of the late 1960s and 1970s had drug problems!

In the course of my duties, I gave countless briefings to visiting civilian and military officials. In early August 1968, a representative from CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, arrived for such a briefing. Because of the nature of his assignment, I gave him a private briefing with a follow-up discussion. His first dozen or so questions were typical of visitors. Then he changed from general to specific questions and presented a list of questions. Those questions covered a multitude of areas; here are some examples. What we liked and disliked about the way we operated? What we wanted to do and could not do? What were our relations, good and bad, with other naval commands -TF-115 and TF-117? What were are relationships with the Army and Air Force and the Vietnamese?

After reading the list, I asked him what was his real purpose in being at Binh Thuy. He then admitted that the questions were not his, but those posed by the Director of the Navy's Systems Analysis organization, Rear Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN, who was to relieve Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, USN, as Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam. I had known and worked for Admiral Zumwalt when I was on DESRON Seven Staff and he was COMCRUDESFLOT Seven; DESRON Seven belonged to him. It was a Zumwalt trait I readily recognized - gather as much information as you can, however you can; it is one way of getting the true picture.

On 1 September 1968, Task Force 116 went through a major organizational change. We learned of this in an unusual way. The Chief of Naval Personnel issued message orders (CHNAVPERS msg 161611Z SEP 68) to Captain Price, directing him to report to COMPHIBPAC as Commander, River Patrol Flotilla Five (RIVPATFLOT Five) effective 1 Setember 1968. Until that time, our administrative commander was COMNAVFORV. The same BUPERS message directed Captain Price to issue orders to the officers assigned to RIVPATFOR and RIVRON Five and all the River Divisions and Sections detaching them from their present duties and directing them to report to COMRIVPATFLOT Five or to the commander of such RIVRON or RIVDIV as COMRIVPATFLOT Five may designate. Thus, RIVPATFOR and RIVRON Five became history and the former River Divisions and River Sections were now River Squadrons and River Divisions.

This change also meant a realignment of the staff. Art Price became COMRIVPATFLOT Five and remained CTF-116, making him both the operational and administrative commander. That change was long overdue! Commander Wayne Beech remained as deputy commander. Commander Sayre Archie Swarztrauber doffed his hat as the last COMRIVRON Five and became Chief Staff Officer, RIVPATFLOT Five. The members of the former RIVRON staff merged with the new RIVPATFLOT staff. As they were mainly administrative personnel, they did not join the operations department. The majority of the people who had lesser visibility positions after the change were the former RIVRON staff.

I was certain this would not set well with Archie, and he told me as much. Going from number one in one unit to number three in another, without changing desks would not set well with anyone, and particularly someone with high career aspirations. I anticipated that Archie would not complete his year at Binh Thuy. I was correct as he later went to I CTZ to relieve Captain G. W. Smith as Commander, Task Force Clearwater, established in February of that

year.

At about this time we made an organizational change. River Squadron 52 at Vinh Long became as River Squadron 57 composed of River Divisions 571, 572, 573, 574, and 575. The first four were the former River Divisions 526, 523, 524, and 525. Similarly, River Division 54 at Nha Be became River Division 59 composed of River Divisions 591, 592, 593 and 594. The first four were the former River Divisions 541, 542, and 544. A fifth division 595, composed of ASPB division joined the squadron.

Captain Price initiated a contest to design a new insignia for the flotilla. The prize was a twenty-five dollar savings bond. About a dozen people submitted designs. On the final day on the contest, a group of us assembled in the conference room to judge the entries arrayed on the conference table. The winning design was a dark blue shield outlining the Delta with the major rivers in a light blue. Superimposed over a yellow-gold Roman "V" was a black PBR crossing from left to right. A streamer legend across the top read, "RIVPATFLOT FIVE." I believe the design prize went to a young officer on the old RIVPATFOR staff. At last, we finally no longer had the MACV crest in our unit insignia. My recollection is that an early COMUSMACV directive required the MACV crest, or parts of it, as a component of any insignia developed for in country units.

The U.S. complex at Binh Thuy area was expanding. Pacific Architects and Engineering built the Army's 29th Evacuation Hospital on the west side of Route 27 slightly north of NAVSUPPACT Det. PA&E started work on an enlarged naval facility north of the hospital which would include a Fleet Air Support Unit (FASU) for the OV-10As, Admiral Moorer had told us about. The naval presence in the Delta was on the rise.

The hospital was a pleasant addition, as the nurses would come to our club. It was nice to see a "round eye" other than in the movies or occasional USO shows. There was a certain amount of humor at the hospital as indicated by a sign posted near the nurse's quarters. It read, "Moose Crossing."

Captain Art Munson, the CO of HA(L)-3 – the Seawolves - became acquainted with the chief nurse and would occasionally fly in bringing things from Vung Tau's exchange – it was a lot better than ours or the one at BTAB. After one such trip, the chief nurse offered to give Art a tour of the hospital, including the nurses' quarters. As they walked down a hall, she offered to show him a typical room, and selected one of a nurse who was on duty. She was not. When the chief nurse opened the door, the nurse was sharing her bed with a man. The chief nurse immediately closed the door and led Art down the hall. Captain Munson's only comment was, "Well, at least it was a Seawolf."

The proximity of the hospital soon illustrated one of the incongruities among the "allies" assisting the Government of Vietnam. A night patrol working up the Bassac near Long Xuyen had an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) *trung úy* (1st LT) on board as an interpreter. The patrol was ambushed, got in a firefight, and took casualties. The casualties arrived at the 29th Evacuation Hospital. The medical staff immediately attended to the sailors, but did nothing for the *trung úy*. Their reaction was he should go the ARVN hospital in Can Tho some six miles

down the road. The NOC notified me of the situation and I immediately went to the 29th. I made it abundantly clear to the medics that the *trung úy* was not ARVN, but in fact was a member of the National Maritime Police, assigned to the River Patrol Force. We argued for a couple minutes, but finally they relented and started treating him. While all that transpired, he was lying on a table half stripped. I believe the final tally was that there were 125 puncture wounds between his mid-abdomen and feet. He looked like a big red sieve and I doubted he would have lasted through a ride to Can Tho.

On the afternoon of 12 September, the VC ambushed USS *Hunterdon County* LST-838 on the Ham Luong River. The ship received numerous hits from B-40s and automatic weapons fire. One rocket hit the king post supporting the boom then in use to hoist a PBR out of the water. That hit caused the PBR to drop. The ship suffered two KIA, EN3 Carl R. Stone and ENFN Wesley G. Doty, and twenty-five WIA. If I recall correctly, that was the largest casualty list as far as Game Warden LSTs were concerned.

Two days later, the VC ambushed the YFR-866 about six miles north of Vinh Long on the Mekong River while it was making a resupply run. The lightly armed YFR defended itself while attempting to clear the kill zone. Several crewmembers received wounds during the engagement. Seawolves from Vinh Long responded, as did PBRs. One of the Seawolves medevaced the wounded crewmen.

Sixteen days later, on 30 September 1968, Vice Admiral Elmo R. "Call me Bud" Zumwalt, Jr., USN, relieved Rear Admiral Kenneth L. Veth, USN, as Commander, Naval Forces, Vietnam. The ceremony took place aboard USS *Garrett County* (LST-786,) which went to Saigon to serve as a temporary flagship. Contemporary photographs showed the Navy in tropical whites and the Army in their jungle greens, albeit, starched and neatly pressed with spit shined jungle boots.

Other than the change of commanders, Zumwalt's arrival gave the Navy an "extra star" in the hierarchy of in-country flag and general officers.

A couple weeks after the change of command, Lieutenant Eddie Walker, who was Admiral Zumwalt's flag lieutenant when the admiral commanded CRUDESFLOT Seven and later in OPNAV as the Director of Naval Analysis, relieved Mike Weindant as CO of USS *Caddo Parish* (LST-515.) The ship was one of several LSTs making in country supply runs and was a frequent visitor at Binh Thuy. The Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS) had an office and LST beaching area just north of our compound.

Shortly after the change of command, *Caddo* was at Binh Thuy. Eddie looked me up and wanted to talk about a potential problem in the ship. Over a drink, he told me that during the relieving process, Mike told him he meant to "fire" the ship's engineering officer, but had not gotten around to doing it and suggested that Eddie do it at the earliest opportunity. I recommended Eddie put aside Mike's comments and make his own judgments regarding the chief engineer, as there may have been personal rather than professional problems between the two. "Eddie, you are now the CO and those decisions are yours, should not be based on what Mike thought should be done but never got around to doing."

Having addressed that issue, we sat back and proceeded to “catch up” on events since we last saw each other.in San Diego. Eddie told me about Bud Zumwalt’s promotion to vice admiral. Eddie said the promotion to vice admiral became effective upon departure from the States. The admiral’s party, including Eddie, flew from San Francisco on a PanAm flight. The flight’s departure was uneventful. When the aircraft reached flight level and the seat belt and no smoking signs went out, the flight attendants began passing glasses of champagne to the surprised passengers. Those who asked where the champagne was coming from learned, "The man in first class with all the stars on his collar." It was an airborne wetting down party!

Dick Dietz, the Naval Liaison Officer at IV Corps, told me of a reception he attended during one of Mrs. Eckhart's periodic visits to Can Tho. (The tours of flag and general officers exceeded one year. Thus, their wives could occasionally visit in country.) When Dick met her, she commented that she had heard that Admiral Zumwalt had gone from one star to three without stopping at two. Dick told her that was incorrect, he, Admiral Zumwalt, had indeed been a two star, but not for long. That was true. Captain Zumwalt’s promotion to rear admiral lower half (later a one-star rank) occurred on 1 July 1965. Thirty-nine months later, he became a vice admiral.

One unrealized advantage to having a vice admiral as COMNAVFORV was a change in the award and decoration system. Admiral Zumwalt had authority to award certain decorations without reference to the PACFLT headquarters. He used that authority shortly after assuming command. He would go into the field, sometimes while operations were in progress or as they wound down. His aide carried a supply of medals, which the admiral presented, sometimes in an impromptu manner, write-ups to follow. It was a great morale booster. Little did we know that within a few weeks, Admiral Zumwalt would change the way naval forces were to operate in country. Those changes resulted in an increase in the numbers of decorations presented, and, in the amount awarded posthumously.

In mid-October, Captain Price went on TAD (temporary additional duty) to COMNAVAIRPAC at NAS North Island, in connection with the OV-10As slated to come in country. It was convenient since his home was in Coronado. (It was during Captain Price’s absence that Admiral Hyland visited the Delta and made his comment regarding “Paul Gray’s bleeding ass.”)

On 20 October 1968, COMNAVFORV headquarters directed that either the commander or the operations officer report to Saigon as soon as possible. Commander Beech told me to go. I grabbed my AWOL bag, threw in my shaving kit, a box of .45 ammo, a couple sets of skivvies, a couple pairs of socks, and my flak jacket. I strapped on my .45 and headed for BTAF where I caught a flight on a Royal Thai Air Force C-124 headed for Saigon. It was a miserable flight. We had heavy rain all the way and the pilot flew low possibly using Route 4 for navigation purposes. The thought went through my mind, “This is a good way to get shot down if Charlie is out in the weather.” The plane leaked like a sieve with water coming in through the ventilation system and even bubbling around window frames.

Carlton Canady, a lieutenant from the NAVFORV Operations Shop, met me at Tan Son

Nhut. Carlton was the action officer for TF-116. As we exchanged greetings, he asked me why I was there as I asked him what I was doing there. When we arrived at the headquarters (sometimes known in the Delta as, Fort Fumble) I was told by Captain William Eason, USN, the N-3 (Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations) that Admiral Zumwalt wanted to see me and I would stay in or near his (Eason's) office to await a call from the front office. Sometime after 1700, we learned that the admiral had left for the day and was at his villa. After a phone call or two, someone rushed me out of the building, put into a staff car and the driver sped to the admiral's villa. My AWOL bag, now containing my pistol belt, weapon and flak jacket were back in the N-3 shop.

General Westmoreland formerly occupied the admiral's villa. As I entered, Admiral Zumwalt was exercising by rapidly going up and down the stairs to the second floor. The aide told me to wait the lounge. It was a large and very comfortable room furnished with plush rattan furniture and various plants and flowers. The steward ensured that I had a nice tall, cool scotch and water. In time, the admiral came in and told me what he had in mind. Essentially, he wanted to get TFs 115, 116, and 117 working together on common goals to crack the hard nuts. He knew that we had been doing well in our respective general areas of operations, but he also surmised we had our own ideas about other areas we could and should expand into but had not been able to do so because of resource problems. His idea, integrated operations, could solve many of the resource problems. Our discussion lasted about an hour and ended on this note. I was to return to Binh Thuy the next day, get together with our task group commanders, and come up with a shopping list for future operations. He specifically directed me not to mention anything of our conversation to anyone on the NAVFORV staff. The admiral then said he would arrange for a car to take me wherever I was going for the night.

I waited on the porch for my transportation. A few minutes later, the flag lieutenant appeared and asked where I was staying that night. I responded that I had not had an opportunity to make those arrangements but would go back to headquarters and find someone in the N3 shop to put me up for the night. The aide stepped back into the villa and returned telling me that I would spend the night at the villa. When I explained about my AWOL bag back in the ops shop, he dispatched the car to retrieve it for me.

The aide led me to a comfortable room and said dinner would follow the cocktail hour. I felt, looked and smelled like a fish out of water. Admiral Zumwalt shared his villa with his "mini-staff." that is, a group of officers he brought with him when he arrived in country. They were his action officers while most; if not all of the NAVFORV staff was essentially "gofers." When I arrived back in the lounge, I was the only one in greens, the rest were in khakis or whites. Although my greens were fresh that morning, they now had a certain aura about them that could only come from the Binh Thuy laundry. Secondly, I had been soaked in sweat, rain and anything else that possibly leaked into the C-124. I repeatedly asked myself why I did not toss an extra set of jungle fatigues into my bag. The cocktail hour was devoted to more discussions on the same subject that the admiral had discussed with me just an hour earlier. These discussions continued when we went to the dining room. There again I felt like a fish out of water - a big, green, grungy fish

After dinner, we returned to the lounge for more discussions. Present at that time was

Captain Paul E. Arbo, USN, the Senior Advisor to the Vietnamese Navy. His role for the evening was to address the integration of the Vietnamese Navy into possible future operations. This was about a three months after President Johnson directed the Vietnamization program. Captain Arbo touted several Vietnamese Navy assets, stating their effective training and operational capabilities as demonstrated by their performance in the field.

Someone asked for my views on the subject. I responded that we really had not worked on a regular basis with Vietnamese Navy units in the Delta, the main reason being differing operational concepts and missions. IV Riverine Area forces mission was to support operations of the IV Corps. Our mission was independent of IV Corps's operations. Further, what successes we had experienced when operating with the VNN resulted more from personal relationships developed between local commanders. I also commented about trustworthiness and reliability, adding that some of our units did not like to work with the Vietnamese until they became familiar with each other and developed mutual trust and confidence. Finally, I addressed an absentee problem we had experienced particularly when trying to integrate operations between the SEALs and LDNNs. It went well for a while, but as soon as the LDNNs were paid, they had a penchant to return to Saigon or wherever to take care of their families. Solving that problem would improve operational reliability. I sensed my comments, although true, were about as out of place as my rumpled green uniform.

The next morning our discussions continued at the breakfast table. When the admiral arrived, he seemed to be preoccupied. We then learned what had upset him. The news that day announced the marriage of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy to Aristotle Onassis (20 October 1968 in the States.) He talked about that for a couple minutes, when he muttered, "How could she do that?" Then we resumed our operational discussions.

When we finished breakfast, we got into a staff car. The aide drove with me to his right and the admiral squeezed in next to me. Three more were in the back seat. Bud had apparently learned a lesson or two - if you are a VIP in bandit territory never ride in the back seat where VIPs normally ride. Admiral Zumwalt again told me not to say anything to anyone at headquarters and that the aide would arrange air transportation for my return to the Delta as soon as possible.

When we arrived at headquarters, I went to the Ops Shop - the only place where I knew the location of a coffee pot. As soon as I walked in, Captain Eason called me into his office and asked what was up. I replied, "Nothing, sir." He then said lieutenant commanders from the field do not spend the night at the admiral's villa when nothing is up. Finally, he reminded me that his khaki shirt's collar had a silver eagle while the collar of my greens had some sort of a semblance of an embroidered brown oak leaf. He then ordered me to respond to his questions. My answer was, "With all due respect, sir, I refer you to Admiral Zumwalt for your answers."

The arrival of the flag lieutenant saved me from further questions by Captain Eason. A car took me to Tan Son Nhut where to my surprise I found myself the only passenger in a small passenger aircraft headed for Binh Thuy. I felt honored as that particular type of aircraft normally carried only general and flag officers.

Before leaving Saigon, I placed a call to CDR Beech requesting that he get our river squadron commanders to Binh Thuy the next day and I would explain more when I got there later in the day.

When I got to our headquarters, I briefed Wayne Beech, and Duane "Dewey" Feurerhelm. The next day, I briefed Bob Peterson, who ran the river squadron at Binh Thuy, Jack Elliot from Vinh Long, Sam Steed from My Tho, Ed Schneider from Thuong Thoi and Charles Staney from Nha Be on what Admiral Zumwalt wanted and we went to work developing our list of objectives and priorities for each squadron commander's area of responsibility. Some were a continuation of the operations we had been doing since we TF-116 started operations in early 1966 while others were operations focused on interdicting enemy lines of communications off the rivers – areas where until that time we could not operate because of security and logistic support considerations.

The clarion call from Saigon came directing a meeting at COMNAVFORV headquarters on Saturday, 26 October 1968. Those attending from Binh Thuy were Wayne Beech, Dewey Feuerhelm and me. When we arrived at Fort Fumble, we went to a large conference room. There we found Captain Robert S. Salzer, CTF-117 and some of his staff, Captain Roy F. Hoffman, CTF-115 and some of his staff. In addition, present from Admiral Zumwalt's staff was Captain Earl F. "Rex" Rectanus, Admiral Zumwalt's intelligence officer. We sat at the conference table looking at each other. Although we were all part of the same Navy, we really had never operated together cooperatively. Admiral Zumwalt entered the room accompanied by his aide and Rear Admiral William F. House, USN, Deputy, COMNAVFORV. The members of the normal N-3 staff, including Captain Eason, brought up the rear.

Admiral Zumwalt made a brief announcement that he had called together representatives of the operating forces to develop Operation Sealords (**S**outh-**E**ast **A**sia **L**and **O**cean **R**iver **D**elta **S**trategy). The basic concept of Sealords was to have the three in-country operating forces, TFs 115, 116 and 117, work together toward common goals to interdict VC supply lines and the VC/NVA themselves. His words were like a breath of fresh air! My mind immediately went back to Tet when we planned the TF-116/117 operation at Tan Dinh Island. I remembered Bob Collins, my TF-117 counterpart, telling me, "Keep your god dam plastic boats out of the way of my boats. If not, we'll blow you and your silly black berets out of the water like we would the VC." Bob Collins, who uttered those words, was part of our working group.

Admiral Zumwalt then invited his N-3 staff to take seats around the wall, if they wished, and learn how naval operations are developed. He also told them that they would not participate in the planning or discussion in any way. That must have been a shock to them. As he and Admiral House departed, the flag lieutenant reentered the conference room and with pencil and paper in hand announced, "Gentlemen, this will be working conference. Lunch will be hamburgers, cheeseburgers, French fries, coffee or Coke. Who wants what and how many?" After taking the orders, he departed.

Captain Salzer conducted the meeting. This was not my first encounter with him. Obviously, we saw each other during the post-Tet TF-116/TF-117 operations at Tan Dinh earlier

in the year. However, Bob and I had met when we were at NIOTC the previous October. At one time, we spent the better part of a morning on the fantail of a LCM-3 in San Pablo Bay learning the art of firing a single .50 caliber machine gun at various targets.

Captain Salzer had a reputation as an operational organizer. His material officer, Commander John Ives, an old acquaintance of mine from DESRON Thirteen days in 1960 - 1962, had given me a lot of insight about Captain Salzer when TF-117 was on the Bassac at the tail end of Tet '68. John also told me Bob Salzer was disappointed that his name was not on the last rear admiral selection list. Perhaps there is truth in the adage that good things come to those who wait. Bob Salzer retired as a vice admiral.

Captain Salzer immediately made it abundantly clear that we were to work together. We were to employ and utilize all of our assets to the maximum to achieve any or all objectives. The old competitiveness and animosities between the forces were history. We were to be innovative, creative and focused on interdicting infiltration routes whenever the "river-ine" forces found them. That was his way of pronouncing, riverine. We then went through a process, by task force, identifying our perceived priorities, and what we thought would be necessary to accomplish the mission. That went on through the burgers and probably, around 1330; we had a general outline of what we wanted to propose. At 1400, Admiral Zumwalt came in to for a briefing on our progress. Bob Salzer led the briefing and those of us from the various task forces explained and/or defended our recommendations. When he finished his questions, Admiral Zumwalt stood and said that this was it was what he wanted, now write the operation plan. He then left the room.

The conference table we had been using was "U" shaped, and I had been sitting at the bottom of the "U". Captain Salzer, who was standing in the middle of the "U," tossed me a legal pad and told me to start writing.

Captain Salzer then paced around in the "U," slowly dictating a basic operation plan. Military operation plans follow a prescribed five-paragraph format: situation; mission; execution; administration, logistics; and, command and signal. Those five paragraphs can cover multiple pages and are the basic operation plan and do not include the numerous annexes and other supplemental items.

His delivery style was slow, clear and deliberate. It was not difficult to record his words verbatim. When I stumbled, and needed a repeat, he without any change of voice, would repeat his previous words exactly as originally spoken. In time, I was developing writer's cramp; so with a nod from Earl Rectanus, I passed the pad to him. It later made the rounds of the table, Wayne Beech, Dewey Feuerhelm, I had one or two more cracks at it. New pads replaced the filled ones. Finally, we completed the task. Obviously, there were parts that needed fleshing out, e.g., names of individual commanders, units, call signs, frequencies, etc. Nevertheless, an operation plan came into being in about nine hours. Our hand-written draft went to the communications center to be prepared in message format. Later that day Admiral Zumwalt personally carried it to General Abrams for approval.

Captain Salzer, just named as the initial commander of SEALORDS, started talking about

his needs for a staff. Standing in front of and looking directly at me, he commented that he needed someone familiar with the Delta's rivers and canal systems and IV Corps headquarters and the Corps Senior Advisor's staff. I said nothing, and he repeated his comment.

Most people would not have hesitated in accepting that assignment, and perhaps at some other time in my life, I would not have either. However, in this case, accepting the assignment could delay my departure and reunion with my family. I would not do that to them. Secondly, I had a set of orders that meant a lot to me. Lastly, I already had two Purple Hearts for my services in Vietnam and I truthfully did not want to take the chance of getting a third, as I might not be there to receive it. Finally, Bob asked me directly, and I replied truthfully that I was in receipt of orders and a port call and had seven days left in country.

We then got into a discussion as to where I was going for my next duty, the Naval Postgraduate School for two years. Bob then asked when the course commenced, and I replied, January. He then said he saw no problem in my taking the ops job as he thought he could see his way clear to releasing me in six to eight weeks which would still allow time to fly home and move my family to Monterey (over a Christmas holiday) and be ready to start classes the first week of January, 1969. At that point, Wayne Beech finally interceded on my behalf, and Bob stopped pushing the point.

As Captain Robert S. Salzer was the first SEALORDS commander, we wondered if we should refer to Bob as the First Sea Lord. A few weeks later, Rear Admiral House became the SEALORDS commander and indeed, referred to himself as the First Sea Lord.

Our work completed, the three of us returned to Binh Thuy the night of 26 October. We immediately started work on a presentation for Captain Price when he returned from San Diego. We thought of opening with, “Oh, by the way Boss, while you were out of town, Admiral Zumwalt had this idea, and…”

Sunday 27 October 1968 was, of course, Navy Day. Little did we know that in a few years, Admiral Zumwalt, then the CNO, would eliminate Navy Day as a service tradition and replace it with the Navy Birthday on 13 October. In honor of that Navy Day, many of us wore whites, something we never did in the Delta. It was the first and only time I wore them in country.

In the afternoon, while in our club, we had an unexpected guest, a lieutenant colonel in the Army Nurse Corps. She, of course, was in a green field uniform, but oddly, her insignia was that of the 5th Special Forces, Airborne. There were no women in the Special Forces then or now. However, she looked familiar to many of us; it was Martha Raye. Maggie spent the better part of the afternoon with us. She also made it clear she came there intentionally because she was aware of what we had done for the Special Forces units on the upper rivers earlier in the year, particularly at Chau Doc and Thong Thoi (I wondered if she knew what they had done to us?) Maggie was an interesting person to talk with. Many were surprised to learn of her long association with nursing, the Army and particularly, the Special Forces. She was a chain smoker and consumed gin as if it were water. Before leaving, she autographed a poster in the club expressing her thanks to TF-116 for their help for the Special Forces.

Thus, I was present at the birth of COMNAVFORV OPLAN 111-69. On 5 November 1968, Operation Sealords was underway. SEALORDS was neither the first nor the last ZWI (Zumwalt's Wild Idea) to arise in NAVFORV, but it probably had the most telling effect on the Navy's in country forces. Finally, the United States Navy's three operational forces in Vietnam combined their assets and capabilities and cohesively started working together to attain common goals.

It took three years to reach that point. In a very short time, the combined assets would be in the hardest and toughest battles in their history. Their future would be bloodier and deadlier; but they would accomplish their purpose of interdicting enemy supply lines and pacifying a significant part of the Delta. Simultaneously, the US Navy was training and transferring their combat assets and mission over to the Vietnamese under the ACTOV (Accelerated Turn Over to the Vietnamese) directed by President Johnson. In two years both missions were accomplished.

I lost several friends during the early weeks of SEALORDS. The first was LT Jack Berkebile, a one-time TF-116 personnel officer died in a firefight on 23 November 1968 in the Vinh Te Canal southwest of Chau Doc. On 29 December, LCDR Jack Elliot, COMRIVRON-57 was killed on the Van Co Dong where he was the tactical commander for the then recently initiated Operation Sling Shot designed to interdict the infiltration from Cambodia into Vietnam through the "Parrot's Beak" located northwest of Saigon. Some of the PBRs involved in Sling Shot were airlifted to their operating areas by US Army CH-54 Tarhe helos, similar to the one that hoisted the PACV out of the canal shortly after Tet.

On 2 November 1968, I was in Saigon for out-processing, and the morning of 3 November 1968, I passed through Military Customs en route to my "Big Bird," operated by Braniff Airways. Those final acts in country really ticked me off as far as the Army was concerned. As an officer, I was waved through by the Customs MP without as much as a by your leave. Yet, he and his compatriots would take every piece of luggage belonging to an enlisted man, unload it and check each item in it. Anything that smacked of the strictest (and perhaps individual) interpretation of what constituted a war trophy whether taken on the field or bought in a shop in Saigon was confiscated. Nevertheless, once we cleared customs at Tan Son Nhut, we did not see our luggage again until we arrived at Travis Air Force Base. There the U.S. Customs Service checked everybody. I guess they knew what was going on at Tan Son Nhut.

I really did not know what to expect when our aircraft rotated then went wheels up at Tan Son Nhut. Perhaps I expected shouting or some other form of demonstration. I was surprised as the passengers were as quiet as if it were a routine civilian flight in another part of the world. Who knows? Maybe they did not feel we were safe until we got to our first fuel stop, which was Yokota. From there, it was a straight shot to Travis where we arrived, thanks to the International Dateline, mid-morning of the day we left Saigon.

My parents and brother greeted me at Travis. Very few people greeted the rest of the passengers other than the U.S. Customs Service and a bunch of hawking cab drivers. I spent the night in Oakland, and the next day arrived at Lindbergh Field in San Diego, where Pat, Cindy and Ted were waiting. It had been a long year (leap year) and I will never forget the

experiences.

Returning to the US was disturbing. It was difficult to witness the attitudes held by some of the more vocal Americans toward their government, but most disgraceful was their attitude toward American service personnel - particularly those returning from Vietnam, and toward the wives and families who waited for their men to return. Those attitudes would continue for years. I participated in the Korean War, the so-called "Forgotten War." That war too was unpopular and the first one we "lost." Perhaps that set the stage for the reaction to Vietnam. I do not know.

I now started one of the longest leaves of my naval career. I had more than sixty days on the books and was entitled to an additional two days travel and four days proceed time to get to Monterey. This meant I would be able to celebrate both Thanksgiving and Christmas with my family in 1968, and all holidays and whatever for the next two years.

We also had plenty of time to arrange for our move from Coronado to Monterey. I had applied for housing at the PG School and had received a tentative yes. Final assignments were to be determined based on family separation, etc.

I do recall stopping by the naval station O Club one day for lunch. Seated at the bar was CWO Joe Slobotik, who had been the electronics material officer when I reported to DESRON Seven staff. I sidled up to Joe and said hello. He turned, paled and almost choked on his beer. Once he got his breath back he went on to explain that somewhere along the line he had heard that I was dead. Thus, my appearance was quite a shock to him. It was also a bit of a shock to me, as it was the only time I had heard a report of my death. Fortunately, it was somewhat premature.

Leaving Coronado meant we were leaving behind a person who was perhaps the greatest friend to all humanity, Bill Jorgensen, our letter carrier. He was unique as a public servant and as an individual. He always had cheery words for those he encountered. He once told us that he came to the Coronado post office from San Diego as a temporary replacement for a regular letter carrier. He never left. Years later, around 1978 or 1979, when he finally retired, the people on his route conducted sort of a rolling party as he made his last rounds.

During my year in Vietnam, whenever Bill was delivering a letter from me, rather than sticking it in the mailbox with the rest of the mail, he would ring the bell and hand deliver it. Bill also kept track of his patrons - it was easy as he always had their forwarding addresses - and they, or at least we, received a Christmas card from him every year. He would remember children's birthdays and school graduations (with prompting, of course). We came to look for to Bill's cards even after he had retired, and they came every year. Finally, in the late 1980s, a Christmas card arrived from San Diego that did not have Bill's large bold penmanship. The card was from his wife telling us Bill would no longer be sending cards. He had died earlier that year.

We moved out of the house at 219 H Avenue we had rented since 1965. In retrospect, we should have made an offer to Herb Bainer as I suspect he would sell it to us. However, we did not and that was the second time we missed an opportunity to buy real estate in Coronado. We stayed at a motel on Orange Avenue until it was time to go to Monterey. One evening while in

the motel, Ted and I were preparing to take a shower. I did not think things out too clearly beforehand, especially as we had never done that before. We stepped into the stall and I then turned the water on. The sudden burst of water scared Ted, then about two and a half years old. It was years before he would take a shower with anyone or alone. However, as he grew older, he began showering and apparently like it, as it seemed his showers could almost empty a hot water tank.

During the prolonged leave period, we made a trip to the Bay Area to see our families. While there, Pat and I took a trip to Monterey to check things out. We went to the housing office and found that we were almost certain of assignment to housing in La Mesa Village, the school's housing area. We would later learn that some of the incoming students ended up in nearby Fort Ord. Of course, others ended up renting places on the Monterey Peninsula's famed Seventeen Mile Drive.

We also made a trip to the school itself where we met Lieutenant Commander George Crowninshield, USN, and the assistant curriculum officer for the BA/BS Program. He said that he recognized my name but could not find my file among those for the incoming class. That did not run up any red flags as far as I was concerned so we continued talking and he gave me information on what to expect as a student.

It would not be a picnic. A person needed a minimum of 45 semester hours to get into the school (that I already knew), and needed somewhere in the neighborhood of 225 or so, to graduate. Thus, it was a heavy academic load. George made it abundantly clear that it did require a lot of work. He also stated that it would be intensive with a 2-week break in the summer and another for Christmas and New Years.

Collocated at the nearby Monterey Peninsula Airport was Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Monterey. It had a collection of aircraft available for use by the pilots and naval flight officers going through the school so they could maintain their proficiency. In other words, fly for four hours each month to maintain their eligibility for flight pay.

I would later learn that our class had an abnormally large number of non-aviation officers as students. The main reason was that in 1968, a lot of naval aviators and naval flight officers were in squadrons on carriers in or destined for the Gulf of Tonkin, thus, there were more vacancies at Monterey for surface officers. Many of the naval aviators were products of the NAVCAD (Naval Aviation Cadet) program whereby they went through flight school before they got their degrees. The idea being, they would go to Monterey to get their degree.

Another group who benefited from the smaller number of aviators in the school was the graduates of the merchant marine academies - the USMMA at King's Point, New York, and the state MMAs in Maine, Massachusetts, and California. Those schools had three academic years with the fourth year at sea. The lack of a fourth academic year made their degrees unacceptable for accreditation purposes.

I would encounter a number of people I had known in Vietnam or elsewhere at Monterey. Walt Toehlke, was XO of *Floyd B. Parks* when I was in *John R. Craig*; Jack Doyle, the OIC of

River Section 535, (COMRIVDIV 535, after 1 September 1968) whose boats I was with in Hong Ngu; Jim Dee, a fellow staffie on the DESRON Seven staff;. George King, the ops officer of River Division 512 at Binh Thuy; Dick Saunders, our next-door neighbor in Coronado; Mike Weindant, who was CO of USS *Caddo Parish* LST-515, which made supply runs in the Delta; Al "Wes" Weselesky, who ran the Seawolves in HA(L)-3 Det 3 at Vinh Long. Ken Jobe, who was my first CO in *John R. Craig*, was on the faculty of the Naval Management School.

Others from Vietnam that I would encounter in the future included Bob Collins, the TF-117 operations officer who threatened to blow our boats out of the water at Tan Dinh during Tet. In 1975 Bob, then a rear admiral and COMSERVGRU Three, was my operational commander when I deployed with USS *Kilauea* AE-26. George King from River Division 512 and a Monterey classmate was one of my XOs when I commanded *Kilauea*. In 1982, Richard "Andy" Anderson, the SEAL platoon leader who did not take the Mekong Convoy ambush operation, was in the operations directorate of the U.S. Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. At that time, I was the Chief Staff Officer for MSCLANT in Bayonne, NJ. Andy and I worked together with the FBI's New York field office in developing tactics for rescuing hostages in merchant ships. The initial training exercises took place aboard USNS *Yukon* T-AO-152 moored at the Military Ocean Terminal, Bayonne. Later, MSCLANT and USSPECOPSCOM developed tactics for the open sea recapture of merchant ships taken over by terrorists. (The first such operation I know of was the seizure of a foreign merchant ship after the crew mutinied and anchored the ship within the US Economic Zone off the coast of New Jersey.) Dick Dietz, the IV Corps Naval Liaison Officer, and I would serve together in MSC and I would later relieve him as CO, MSC Office, Norfolk, in January 1983.

Gene Mossman and I would again work together in 1985 - 1986 when he was the Chief Inspector for the Atlantic Sub-Board of Inspection and Survey and I commanded the Military Sealift Command Office in Norfolk and had many ships undergoing INSURV.

The then unrealized beauty of my orders to Monterey it was the beginning of that which would become nearly six years of continuous family life, albeit on two continents, uninterrupted by deployments. It was unimaginable even in one's wildest dreams!