

## HOVERCRAFT

### Aboard the USS Tortuga LSD-26

The British company Hovercraft supplied seven vehicles of the type BHC SR.N5 to the American company Bell of aero system. After the re-equipment on General Electric Lm-100 gas turbines received the hovercrafts the designation Bell Sk-5 Model 7232. Three as **PACV or Pak Vees (Patrol air Cushion Vehicles)** designated units (004, 017 and 018) went to test purposes to the U. S. Navy into Viet Nam, where they were stationed in Cat Lo. From there from operated it 1966 eight months long. In January 1967 they went to the general overhaul and re-equipment back into the USA, before they returned 1968 for a further year to Viet Nam (DaNang and Tan My).

The employment of the Pak Vees took place during the first Viet Nam stay under the command of the Task Force 116. Starting from 1968 they stood in the service of the Coastal division 17.



The PACVs were to be operated in high speeds (70 kn) in the marshes and canals of Viet Nam, their employment was accompanied however with a high noise generation because of the gas turbines. Also to high mechanical maintenance and upkeep were required. Compared with the PBRs (Patrol Boat River) the air cushion vehicles were more expensive to operate and maintain.

In July of 1965, the US Navy bought three hovercrafts Sr-n5 model 7232 of Bell Aerosystems Company. They were imported boats of the British Hovercraft Corporations and had been modified with shield and a machine gun rack, and changed the engine for a T-58 turbine of General Electric who developed 1300 HP and the radar for an American model.

In 1965, hovercrafts had been assigned by the US Navy as PACV (Patrol Air Cushion Vehicle). Extensively search missions of and destruction in lands of the Delta of the River Mekong 1966 had been used by the TF-116 in the 1967 in division PACV 107.



The US Navy operated seven PACV (Patrol Air Cushion Vehicle) in the Vietnam. The TF-116 used three between 1966-1967.

The fast PACV were easily operated in plain canals and quagmires, passing easily for obstacles and on land. However, they were too sophisticated for the marginal operations. For using aviation technology they were expensive and difficult to keep-up. They consumed fuel in extreme amounts.

These models 7232 could develop 52 we and carry 17 equipped combatants. The costs of maintenance of the 7232 were similar to the one of a jet aircraft. The price of each hovercraft was in an excess of a million dollars each. In 1967 the US Navy modified these extensively hovercrafts endowing with decks straight (the previous ones were rounded off), the improved skirts, greater has storage of fuel and a brought up to date engine.



In 1968 they had been transferred to the coastal area of DaNang. Later they had been refitted for the Coast Guard use in San Francisco.







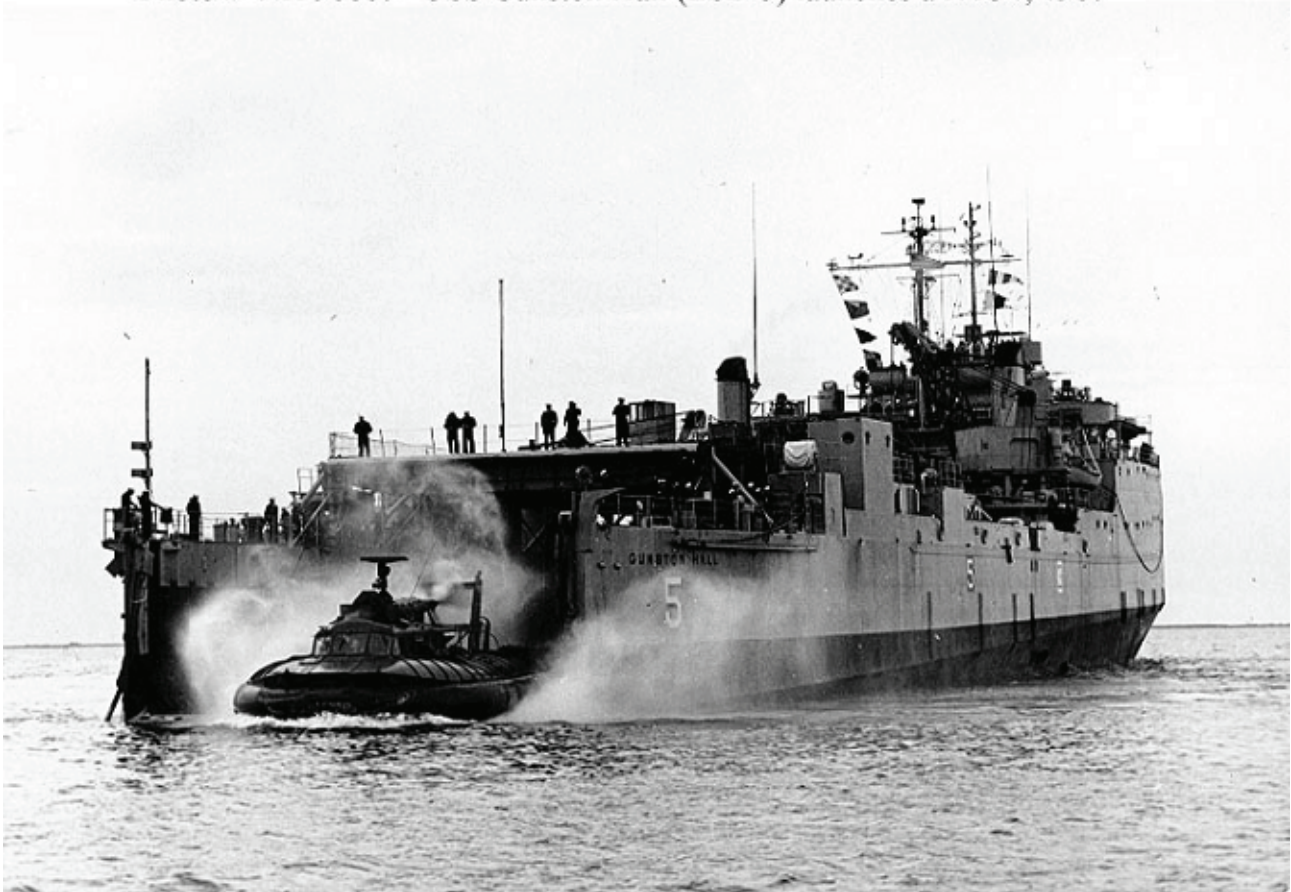






We would drop the tailgate and ballast down (ballast detail in the pump room) so the hovercraft could come into the “dry” well deck (not flooded). Deck crew tried to work the hovercraft into position like a boat (lines to cleats). The deck crew

Photo # NH 96887 USS Gunston Hall (LSD-5) launches a PACV, 1967

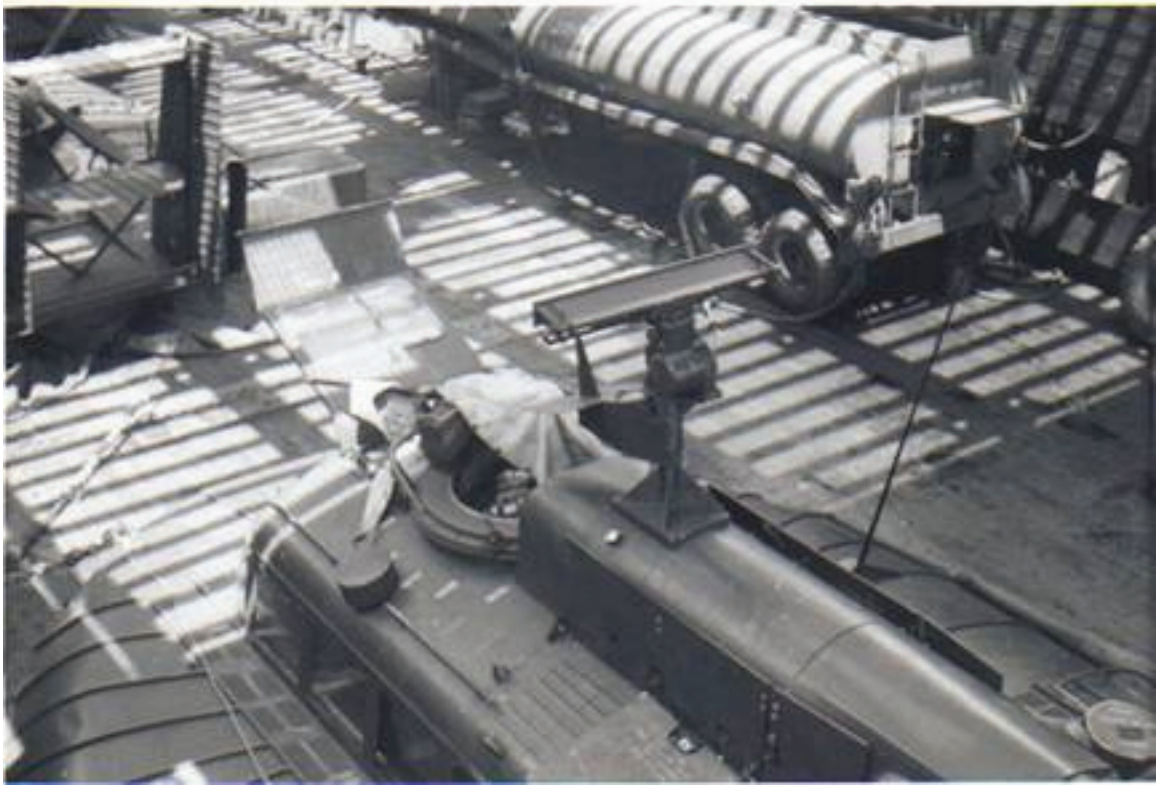


would call out, for example, white cleat to red cleat and green to yellow etc. It sure took a long time. Once because of a coming storm, they just got a bunch of men to push the hovercraft into position without using the lines. A lot faster and saved time. I don't think anyone of the deck crew could hear afterwards for days as a result!

**"Pictures of the Hovercraft operating from the USS Tortuga LSD-26 in 1966."**



Picture from John Lamb.



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