RIVER PATROL FORCE (TF-116)
8 November 1967 - 3 November 1968

On 1 September 1965, Rear Admiral Norvell G. Ward, USN, Chief of the Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVADGRU) Vietnam, directed the expansion of Operation Market Time, to include the maritime approaches to Saigon, and particularly, the Long Tau and Soi Rap Rivers. Until that time, Operation Market Time, or more accurately, Task Force-115, the Coastal Surveillance Force, composed of a wide variety of ships and craft, ranging from "basket boats" to destroyers, had exclusively patrolled the coast of the Republic of Vietnam. The expanded mission gave cause to the creation of a new organization, Task Force-116, the River Patrol Force, and Operation Game Warden. The initial Game Warden patrols were made by two Mk. IV LCPLs (Landing Craft Personnel, Large,) metal hulled successors to the 36-foot"Higgins" boats used in World War II. The initial operating base was the Vietnamese Naval Repair Facility in Saigon. In November 1965, the Navy awarded a contract to the United Boatbuilders, Bellingham, WA, for the construction of 160 31-foot Mk. I River Patrol Boats (PBR). On 18 December 1965, the River Patrol Force, TF-116, was established with Admiral Ward as the Task Force Commander. In February 1966, SEALS commenced operations in support of TF-116. On 16 March 1966, Captain Burton "Burt" B. Witham, Jr., USN, relieved Admiral Ward as CTF-116. 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. The River Patrol Force's air arm came into existence with the loan of 22 UH-1B "Iroquois" helicopter gun ships from the Army's 197th Aviation Company. The inter-service support agreement stated the Navy was to receive 49 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 commissioned as Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron Three (HAL-3) - the "Seawolves." On September 15, 1968, the River Patrol Force's administrative title changed from River Squadron Five to River Patrol Flotilla Five. Simultaneously, the force's River Division and River Sections became River Squadrons and River Divisions, respectively. On 2 November 1968, the same day Operation SEALORDS commenced, COMUSMACV, by presidential directive, commenced ACTOV, the Accelerated Turn Over to the Vietnamese, 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 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 commissioned 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, the River Patrol Force, with the Coastal Surveillance and Mobile Riverine Forces, TF-115 and TF-117, respectively, saw action in Operation SEALORDS, while simultaneously transferring assets to the Vietnamese. By the end of 1970, only one facet of SEALORDS, Solid Anchor, remained under US Navy command and carried a TF-116 designator. The River Patrol Force passed into history on 1 April 1971, when Solid Anchor and SEALORDS came under Vietnamese command.

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The following recounts my experiences first as Plans Officer, then as Operations Officer for Commander, River Patrol Force, headquartered 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 251525Z August 1967. My detailer told me that I was to be the operations officer of a task force commanded by Rear Admiral Ward. I told him I did not think the Navy was assigning lieutenant commanders as operations officers for flag officers. I was correct, as BuPers, at least my detailer, was unaware of the command arrangements in Vietnam

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. Those orders were modified by BUPERS 122049Z September 1967 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 temporary duty under 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, replacing 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.

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 over overview of that country's history and the roles of the US military operating in Vietnam. Having just 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 old 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 the classroom at NAS North Island including 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 to expect as prisoners if captured in Southeast Asia. They shared their experiences from Korea and those of the then few US personnel shot down and captured in Southeast Asia who managed to escape including LT Charles Klusman, a RF8 pilot, and LTJG Dieter.Dengler, an A1D "Spad" pilot.. Both escaped after becoming prisoners in Laos in 1964 and 1966, respectively.

The SERE classes emphasized the importance of knowing and maintaining a chain of command, to exert 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.

We left the classroom in the early afternoon 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. Fortuitously, 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 5-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 a 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 them. We had a thin rabbit-pigeon-rice stew highly flavored with fresh wild sage picked in the desert. Our cooks were not master chefs, as it 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 told 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 50 meters wide and covered with 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 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 of us, me included, made an attempt to resist capture or the

orders of the enemy. The guards immediately pulled us out of ranks, threw us to the ground then summarily executed 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 72-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 did not receive physical abuse, because we did. To prevent unnecessary injuries, the instructors told us not to touch the guards. 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 you received a slap in the face. Yes, it stung and some hurt, but they did not knock you down, loosen teeth or break jaws.

The prison compound was about 300 feet long and perhaps 75 feet wide 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 would be awake for a long time. Earlier, we learned a full meal was the reward for anyone escaping the compound. That was an incentive, but failure in an attempt escape obviously had disadvantages. Scuttlebutt 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 on the list was LCDR John Hurd, USN. John was XO of USS WILTSIE (DD-716) when I was on the DESRON 7 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. 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 tiniest 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 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 every 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 point, 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 my armpit, not the best place in the world after living in my clothes for several days. I attempted to keep track of time by counting, but always managed to lose my count and started 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, possibly big enough to hold several people. It was a crawl-in type box and reminded me of a short doghouse. A few minutes later, I noticed a fan was now near the opening, apparently place 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 you do 50 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; one that I would have not thought about had I been doing that at home. 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 of 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 a 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 and soaked and scrubbed my way through three tubs of water, then 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 13 maintenance officer when I joined SMALL in 1960. As there we no rooms available in the BOQ, I stayed at a hotel in 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.

NIOTC did not have a 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.) At that time, TF-117 had an earlier name, the Mekong Delta Riverine Assault Force, or, MEDRAF. The training for those of us going to other than river divisions and sections, including Captain Robert S. Salzer, USN, who was slated to relieve Captain Wade C. Wells, USN, as CTF-117, and Lieutenant Commander Robert Condon, the CO of UDT-12 (Underwater Demolition Team) assigned to TF-117 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 2, 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 2, thus, Roy was the first OIC of SEAL Team 2.

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, which 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. Oddly, my family and friends had fished in those sloughs in my youth.

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 country, 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-types. 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 (River Patrol Boat) 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. Unfortunately, after I 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. Several 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 the .45 automatic pistols to .50 caliber machine guns, hand grenades and M79 grenade launchers. I had 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 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 somebody was shooting at me.

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 a fuel, then on to Yokota Air Force Base in Japan for more fuel before finally going on to at Tan Son Nhut near Saigon. Due to 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 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.

At Tan Son Nhut, we deplaned according to our service. The Navy personnel boarded a rickety Navy bus. It was an old Bluebird school bus. Heavy wire mesh replaced the windows so the VC could not toss grenades into the passengers. We arrived at the Annapolis Hotel, which served as 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 was a transient point for Army field grade officers. Koelper served two purposes, it provided transients a place to eat and sleep and it was an indoctrination facility for newly reported officers.

I shared a small room with an Army lieutenant colonel then on his way home. 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 door bathroom. 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 each in the bed and bathrooms; both were either 15 or 25 watts. At night, more light came in through the window.

The building had an elevator, a candidate for Guinness Book of Records as the slowest in the

world. I learned I could walk to and 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 endured a check-in process. The first comment by the yeoman handling my check-in was, "I notice you did not volunteer for duty in Vietnam," as that was not indicated 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.

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 bull shit and disinformation at any military presentation as I did at Koelper. We all knew what MACV was, but then we learned of, the Free World Military Assistance Organization (FWMAO.) FWMAO was composed of units from various nations, which were not militarily involved in Vietnam. Such as surgical teams from Germany, a Swedish-staffed hospital ship, etc. Even Taiwan had military liaison personnel throughout the country. It soon became evident MACV used FWMAO to convince newly reported personnel that not only the US, as personified by MACV, but the Free World in the form of FWMAO was 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.

John Steinbeck, III, had recently written one of the earliest exposés of marijuana usage among the in-country troops. He provided various figures to support his claims. A Marine Corps major from the MACV Provost Marshal's (PM) office spent an hour telling us how wrong Steinbeck was. 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, you turned in your old one and you turned in your last one when you rotated out. 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, just what my four ration cards indicated. I can imagine a child or grand child 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 you were enlisted or a Legion of Merit, if you were 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. "Our MPs check the city regularly and I can assure you there isn'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 what appeared to be a form of a Claymore mine at the foot of the brow. It made me wonder was it for potential attackers or fleeing customers. After that, we poked our heads in to 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, you could find it in a shop if you 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 addressed neither TF-116 nor TF-117. 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 10 or more knots. Then he described the characteristics of LCMs and LCVPs stating their typical speeds were approximately 7 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 someone to tell them what unit was associated with the APO number.

I would later encounter 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, sort of 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. All, regardless of their arm or service, received standard infantry indoctrination before coming in country. When they assigned to Ruff Puff units, they knew they would be there six months. Many, based on their limited training and experience, 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. You could almost hear some of the Vietnamese say, "Oh, no, here is another six month miracle maker."

After three days at Koelper, it was time to pack 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, mosquito netting, etc. On top of the bag rested a brand new flak jacket and steel helmet. As 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 Navy C-117 (an upgraded R4D or C-47 "Gooney Bird"- the military version of the Douglas DC-3) taxied up. 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.

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 then went to meet my new boss, Captain Paul N. Gray. One of the first things Captain Gray told me was to get rid of the Marine Corps fatigue cap I had been issued with my greens and to buy a black beret, because that was all he would allow his personnel to wear.

Captain Burton B. Witham mandated the wearing of black berets by TF-116 personnel on 29 April 1967. There apparently were two reasons for his order. First, one of the River Patrol Force's earliest original missions was law enforcement, as an extension of the Republic of Vietnam's National Marine Police (NMP.) Secondly, the Commander of the NMP publicly presented a black police beret to Witham. COMNAVFORV did not approve Captain Witham's initial request to adopt the beret. He later issued his directive. Earlier in the year, Pat and I noticed a sailor attending Mass at Sacred Heart church in Coronado. He wore his service dress blues and a black beret. I wondered about it, now I knew. Later, I learned he should have been wearing his white hat.

Technically, a NMP officer was to be part of each patrol. 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 berets were to be unadorned with the exception of either a metal or an embroidered River Patrol Force patch. 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 ranks. The berets had a small ribbon loop at the back. There was a protocol regarding that loop. If you did not participate in patrols, the loop remained intact. If you made patrols, you cut the loop. You notched the ends of the cut loop once you had been in a firefight. 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 notch. 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.

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 had flown AD Skyraiders (forerunners of the A-1) from several carriers and commanded an attack squadron. Shot down five times, 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, but 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, and started a campaign and eventually replaced Captain Burt Witham.

Captain Gray's deputy was a commander whose last name was, 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* forces and are not to be confused by 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 remained in service. Although he was the TF-116 deputy commander, most of Paul's time and effort focused on the Vietnamese. (Although generally unknown by the American public, the US Navy's advisory effort in the Mekong Delta began in 1956.)

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" Mossman, and the Air Ops was Lieutenant Fred J. Lakeway. Fred was a naval reservist. The Plans slot was empty, so I filled it while being acclimated to the job and waiting for Fritz to leave. Our Intelligence Officer was Lieutenant Bruce Young. We also had a personnel officer, psyops (psychological operations warfare) officer, a PAO, and a young LTJG whose first name was Gary, who ran our NOC (Naval Operations Center). There may have been other staff positions, but I do not recall what they were or who filled the billets. We did not have a staff maintenance position. The river division/section parent NAVSUPPASCT Det. (detachment) or LST provided logistic and maintenance support.

Binh Thuy was the home of River Division 51, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Donald D. Shepard, several of his division's sections also were at Binh Thuy. Nestled on a pad on the edge of the NAVSUPPACTDET compound was the home of Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 3, Detachment 7 (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 2 Detachment ALFA and its rotating platoons as well as rotating platoons from SEAL Team 1. 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.

I do not recall the name of the commander of the Vietnamese IV CTZ Corps Tactical Zone) when I arrived, nor do I recall the names of the four or five general officers who served in that position during my tour in Vietnam. Senior military billets, as well as province and districts chiefs and some

mayor assignments, were highly politicized within the Vietnamese army. Assignments frequently changed as various political factions were able to assert their prominence. One's political allegiance appeared to be 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. Some time before February 1968, Major General George S. Eckhardt replaced BG Desobry. The corps headquarters was 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 7th, 9th and 21st ARVN (Army of Republic of Vietnam) Infantry Divisions, plus the 44th Special Zone. The headquarters for the divisions were, My Tho, Sa Dec and Can Tho, respectively. The 44th Special Zone, 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.

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 were 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 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.”

The River Patrol Force's assets consisted of or was planned to be composed of 250 Mark I and Mark II PBRs. Other operational assets included, Mine Squadron Eleven, Detachment Alfa. It was originally composed of 12 built-for-the-purpose 57-foot mine sweeping boats (MSB.) In 1967 6 river minesweepers (MSM) which were converted LCM-6s joined the detachment. The minesweepers wre located at Nha Be. In May 1968, Detachament Alfa became Mine Division 112. 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 helo dets. While three LSTs were in country at any given time, the fourth would be in Subic Bay or Guam for maintenance. Another afloat asset was the YRBM-16, a non-self propelled repair, berthing and messing barge, which could support a section of 10 PBRs. We also had a rocket launching LCM-6. I do not know its history. The well deck of the LCM contained six 5-inch rocket launchers similar to those found on early LSMRs (Landing Ship Medium, Rocket) during World War II. Aiming those rockets 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 5, and then commanded by Commander Paul Kane, in Saigon. RIVRON 5, which belonged to COMPHIBPAC, was then composed of four divisions, one each located at Nha Be, My Tho, Vinh Long and Binh Thuy. A fifth division was forming at Binh Thuy. River Sections (10 PBRs) from some of these divisions were located at Sa Dec, in each of the in-country LSTs and the YRBM. River Squadron 5 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 county personnel theoretically were entitled to 2 five day in country R&Rs and one 10-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 anticipated during the initial planning for the squadron.

The PBRs were unique boats. Made by United Boatbuilders, of Bellingham, WA, they were 31 feet long and built entirely of fiberglass. The boat's only armor were 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 225 HP V6 diesel engines, each driving a Jacuzzi pump capable of moving 4,000 gallons of water a minute. The pumps' discharge was through a controllable nozzle system, thus, the PBRs had neither rudders nor propellers. Their armament consisted of turreted twin .50 caliber machine guns forward and a pedestal mounted single .50 aft. Amidships were 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 you could turn the handle. It supposedly had a 250-round capacity; after belting 250-rounds, you were 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 FM transceivers.

The boat's Styrofoam-filled fiberglass structure would prove to be an asset in many aspects. 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 had shaped-charge warheads and required a solid target to detonate. The PBR's most solid fixtures were the armor plates, engines, forward turret and radar antenna. RPGs would often penetrate hulls and superstructure without detonating.

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. Fully loaded, a PBR displaced about 8.5 tons, and could make close to 30 knots while drawing about 5-inches of water. The boats were capable of reversing course or stopping in a boat length. Procurement cost was about $86,000 each.

A patrol consisted of a minimum of two PBRs, and the patrol officer would be a LTJG, LT, 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 may or may 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 10-miles of river and would last 12 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 box and place the cans containing entrees on the 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 had a 3-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. You patrolled your "head." In other words, if you had to go to the john, you did it over the side. In that respect, we were the same as generations of Vietnamese.

There was no such thing as a routine patrol. One minute you would be nonchalantly patrolling your sector taking in all the beauty, checking passing watercraft or local Ruff/Puff outposts, when, WHAM, all hell would break loose in what might have been a scene from the movie, "*Apocalypse Now*," only with live ammunition. If you could fight your way out, fine. If not, you could call in supporting arms in the form of a Seawolf fire team or ARVN (Army of Republic of Vietnam) artillery if you were within the battery's fan (range) and ARVN decided that was a day to shoot. If, not, you made a strategic withdrawal.

The Vietnamese watercraft most frequently encountered on the rivers was motorized sampans. A pintle mounted Briggs Stratton-type engine driving a straight shaft with a propeller on the end provided their propulsion. They were highly maneuverable and some were fast, making 35 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 detected 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 it was 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 a good load of maggots; just the thing you like to stick your hand into to check for illegal items.

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 you could expect all aboard were casualties. The boat crews would tend to their own wounded while trying to get back home or to the nearest friendly installation.

In time, we developed tactics with Detachment 10, 38 ARRS (US Air Force's Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron) at BTAB to air evacuate our wounded from the boats with their HH-43 "Husky" helos. 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 case problems for the boat crews.

When the patrol returned to its base, the crew, or sometimes someone else, would have 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 your shipmates), refuel and rearm the boat and get it ready for the next patrol. It was a strange way to fight a war. Spend 14-hours on patrol, return to your base for a good shower, a meal and a relatively comfortable bunk, then the next day you were at it again. That continued until one's tour ended by regular rotation, medical evacuation or he left in an aluminum coffin.

Some PBR sailors volunteered to extend their in-country tours. Those making such a request received scrutiny to ensure that they had not developed trigger-happiness or an affinity to shoot up anything that crossed their path.

One of the remarkable things about the River Patrol Force's boat crews were they were in combat on a near daily basis. Patrol officers, whether commissioned or enlisted, and the enlisted boat captains routinely made tactical decisions including the calling in of air or artillery support supporting. At that time, very few commanding officers of Seventh Fleet ships were in a position to make such decisions, and some never would through their 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.

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. They were successful in sinking one merchant ship and damaging several others transiting the rivers.

To neutralize the mines, the minesweepers had to get 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 at least six sank. 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.

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 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 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 Army had "slick" (troop carriers) and gunship helo companies in the Delta, however, their mission was to support IV Corps operations. 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.

Keeping those older aircraft flying posed some problems. Army procedures 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, 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 10% 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. I have forgotten what LST Squadron "owned" the ships. 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 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 would come in and one would leave. Finally, the YRBM-16, which belonged to Naval Support Activities, Saigon, was located at Ben Tre on the Ham Luong River. The YRBM-16 had been at Long Xuyen, Tan Chau and Binh Thuy before it went to Ben Tre. By the summer of 1968, it would be in I Corps.

On occasion, the on-station LSTs would move 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 15 or 20

miles down stream from the incident. Sadly, that was the case in this situation.

Binh Thuy was the third operating location for TF-116 operations on the Bassac. Can Tho was the first location, then they relocated to Tra Noc, a short way up the river and finally, they moved down river to Binh Thuy. 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. 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 officer's 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 being the latrine facilities was not separate from the living quarters. I never verified that statement; however, indoor plumbing 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 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 southwest monsoon season, I 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 2.25- inch rocket boxes and picked up the aforementioned portable radio. On occasions, I would hear a "tap tap" on my door at night and Captain Gray's cook, a Vietnamese woman who lived in the pantry, would pass me a plate of whatever special dessert left over from the captain's meal. I was then living in fat city.

Vietnamese women maintained the barracks. They would dust 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 and contained 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 who worked for 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 for synchronizing 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.

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 Cos 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 would do after he had been drinking. He would start 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, would take his pants and skivvies off, jump up on the bar, stuff a long streamer of toilet paper in the crack of his ass, light it, and then do 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 would send a check in payment to Saigon; I always marked the payee as, "Non-Support Activity, Saigon;" none were returned. Just inside the front door was a small desk occupied all day long by a most attractive young Vietnamese girl, 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 were not allowed to 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 extreme control by not throttling the disbursing officer.

The daily routine for the TF-116 staff started with a gathering in the conference room where Fritz would brief 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 30 persons. One wall covered with a map of the Delta. On an adjacent wall was a chart noting the decorations awarded to members of the River Patrol Force. The top listing was the two Medals of Honor. The first, for BM1 James E. “Elliott” Williams, was presented by President Johnson for service as a patrol officer in PBR-150 on 31 October 1966, who commented, "Damn, Williams, you've got a big neck." as he attempted to place it there. Williams also had a Navy Cross, two Silver Stars, a Navy and Marine Corps Medal, three Bronze Stars, 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 second Medal of Honor went to Seaman David G. Oulette, the forward gunner on PBR-124. On 6 March 1967, he saw a grenade thrown for the boat, shouted a warning and then ran aft pushing his shipmates out of the way. He fell on the grenade. The Navy named a frigate, USS OULETTE (DE-, later FF-1077) in honor of him. (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 dies, he gets a posthumous MOH. If he lives, he received the Navy Cross. Both situations required an instantaneous unselfish act. Does surviving make it a lesser act?)

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 dictated I should receive a through indoctrination in all of the operations in the

Delta, including psychological operations, or, “psyops.” 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," C-47, with sound amplification systems feeding large speakers mounted in the fuselage. We were to fly a *chu hoi* Open Arms) mission.

In support of the Republic of Vietnam, US military forces participated in the *chu hoi* program designed to entice the Viet Cong to become *hoi chans*, that is, those who rallied to the Saigon government. The *chu hoi* program had many appropriately marked hand out items, e.g., boxes of matches, bars of soap, etc., to be distributed by the US military as their contribution to the program. On occasions, *hoi chans* were “turned” and served with RVN military units.

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 use on the PBRs for use in our partt of the *chu hoi* (open arm) 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 Base - they needed a PA system to announce flight arrivals and departures. In exchange, I got a case of whiskey that went to the club.

Captain Gray was insistent that his staff officers, particularly those involved with operations become qualified river patrol officers. Thus, very early in my tour, I started my indoctrination with River Division 51. 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 have 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.

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 whose 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 busy ripping USAID (Agency for International Development) labels from the cases of supplies.

After affecting the rendezvous, 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 that showed up amazed me. They lined up patiently, and in single file went through our processing center. In turn, each child received a brief physical examination by the corpsman and 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 would try 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 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, the SA 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 flak jackets on 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. Little did I know that I would again meet the Army major who was the District SA, and would be near him when he died on Christmas Eve in Vung Tau.

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 did no have alerted supporting forces, i.e., Seawolves or artillery. We turned off the Bassac and started through an ever-narrowing canal. 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 as 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 a more than 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. They were followed their personal possessions including a couple of chickens and a dog. 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 to 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 as at that

time family members would take newspapers to the hospital to place under their relative to keep him 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 your personal schedule 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 apparently non-destructible pre-World War II 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 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 Art. 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 as most people thought that "zip guns" had disappeared from the scene long before that time.

There were certain security measures one always took when driving a jeep. First, you always ensured the gas cap had a padlock. That prevented someone from 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 one parked, you physically locked the steering wheel with a pad lock and chain, and raised the seat to the vertical position. The last measure was to keep one 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 would get involved and perhaps not. On one occasion, a Vietnamese civilian and an ARVN truck had a minor collision. The two drivers got into a argument and it ended with the solider drawing his weapon and shooting the civilian. The soldier then got in his truck and drove off.

One of the first planning actions I participated in was the deployment of GAME WARDEN assets to I CTZ. 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, then up the Cua Viet River to Dong Ha, just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The Navy was reluctant in the allocation of resources from the Delta to I Corps. TF-116 had about 90 PBRs to cover more than 700 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.

Between 18 September and 9 October 1967, Operation GREEN WAVE evaluated the feasibility of PBR operations in I Corps. HUNTERDON COUNTY, with River Section 521 embarked, went to I Corps and operated as TG-116.3 at various locations in I Corps. The LST with its PBRs then returned to the 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 21 November 1967 River Division 55 staff activated at Binh Thuy, and nine days later deployed to I CTZ. On 5 December 1967, River Section 521 embarked in HUNTERDON COUNTY went to Danang.. That same week, PBR Mobile Support Base I, (MB-1) composed of a complex of Ammi barges, arrived in Danang. Later, all three, RIVDIV 55, RIVSEC 521 and MB-1, were moved to Tan My, and on 9 January 1968, operations began on the Perfume River. On 24 February 1968, the I CTZ operation became Task Force Clearwater commanded by Captain G. W. Smith, USN. In March, Clearwater received ATCs (armored troop carriers), monitors and a CCB (command control boat) from TF-117's River Assault Division 112.

Meanwhile, other things were going on in the Delta on Thursday, 23 November 1967. That 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 we 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 with the YRBM sinking at its moorings. The explosion killed five and injured 16. others. Two of the injured died in Japan.

The first assisting forces were PBRs from River Section 521 in HUNTERDON COUNTY followed shortly there after by the 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 of 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 FAC's (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; 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 2.25" 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, the 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 Din Island, or more accurately, islands, as “Ti Ti Canal” bisected the island.

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 (our call sign) 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. Then I heard a strange sound, something like slow clapping. I started to put one and one together. I was about to grab the M-3 and shoot at the individual. 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 felt 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 request 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.

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. 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 foot. A short drive brought me to the 632nd USAF Dispensary at BTAB. I hobbled into the building and hopped up on a table. 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 less than 60-minutes. 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. .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 nor Radars. A voice told me to assume a prescribed

position for a spinal. I apparently moved as they started the spinal. A voice asked, “Did he move?" The surgeon 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 me neck and the other behind my knees and pulled. 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.

The following morning, the ward's two nurses, a blonde-haired woman and a red head spent some time with me, as I was the only Navy-type on the ward. They wanted to talk about the Navy, its traditions and ceremonies. The day before, 1 December, 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 did 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, a medic emptied and refilled the basin and put it back in 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. Later, I learned 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, which 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 six 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, as 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 half 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 bloody walking cast to

the ward and reentered a much cleaner and air-conditioned world. What a contrast.

Now that my systems and I seemed to function properly, my name appeared on an air evacuation list. The next morning, ten patients were stacked in a Dust Off - a medical evacuation helo - and flew 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 would report 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 about three days after arrival; I would have surgery to close my wound. One of the hospital's two orthopedic surgeons would perform the simple operations. 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 and several other gurneys 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 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 told 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 corpsman and was handed a urinal and was told they needed 1000 cc. I gave 950, 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, my surgeon, 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 the one who had operated on my foot, and guess I made the right decision, as it 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 caused me some concern, as the medical policy was that if hospitalization would exceed 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 (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.

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. A day or so 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 Cindy, 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 bad as they could have been.

Foolishly, I asked Pat not to tell my parents about my situation, as 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. If I wrote, my return address or the APO cancellation stamp would indicate I was not at Binh Thuy. Therefore, for a month, my parents heard nothing from me and they continually asked Pat if something was wrong.

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 fishermen 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.

On 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 mishap. Too many, however, appeared to be the result of stupidity, ignorance or indifference. I would later see that on the rivers.

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 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 ward looking for their unit's shoulder patch. They then stopped at the bed; spoke to the soldier while reaching back to the aide who handed the general a Purple Heart. The general pinned it to the 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. Five 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 GAMEWARDEN 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 to be a good idea as the opord had a confidential security classification and I had no way of 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.

In the middle of December, another combat casualty arrived on the ward. He was the Army major who had been 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. He 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 keep him pretty well medicated but that seemed to have little effect on him. Doctors, nurses, corpsmen, chaplains and fellow patients, me included, would talk 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 24 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 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 Christmas Day, we had a typical holiday dinner. The chaplains conducted services for those

who could attend, and then visited the wards. The mayor of Vung Tau, a Vietnamese Army lieutenant colonel (trung ta) came through the wards, wishing us a Merry Christmas, making small talk with some of the patients, while his aides passed gave a present to each of us. Amazingly, I still have mine.

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, my surgeon 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?

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 then was the Navy.

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. After being processed through A&D I was told I could go. Then I learned it was up to me to get back to Binh Thuy. 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 took me in tow. Within an hour, I was in an Army C-1 “Otter,” headed for Can Tho Army Air Base. Oddly, it took me longer to get from CTAAB to Binh Thuy than it did to fly from Vung Tau.

When I got back, 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. Had that bullet hit six inches further forward or aft, I, in all probability would not be writing this now. That convinced me that should I ever get into another O-1, the stick would stay in the back seat, just in case I would have 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 Din 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 that 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 in 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. 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 that 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 Shepard of RIVDIV 51 and they would “gin” 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 were cinematographic successes. Some of those operations included, "Flaming Arrow” where the operation focused on the use of flaming arrows to burn down hootches. Perhaps it was a good publicity stunt, 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 raised numerous complaints 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 Admiral John J. Hyland, USN, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, during one of his periodic visits to the Delta in the spring of 1967. That operation, which included PBRs, Seawolves, SEALs and a 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.

On other occasions, the ginned up operations had the PBR sailors using tactics we had never thought of before, such as burning hootches with portable flame throwers or using large amounts of CS, or other gas-type weapons officially known as riot control agents to ensure their Geneva Conventions legality. The latter operations required the boat crews to wear gas masks in addition to the flak jackets and steel helmets. On one such operation, a lieutenant assigned to River Division 51, took an enemy round through an eyepiece of his gas mask. The resulting wound necessitated his evacuation to the States. Some time later, Don Shepard, while rummaging through his desk found the

lieutenant's blood caked gas mask and mailed it to him at a hospital as a souvenir. I am sure he was pleased to receive.

Captain Gray would record 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 contaminated stake through his foot. Frequently, the VC coated the stakes with feces.) 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 wound on his left buttocks. He had led an operation and as they were extracting, a boat crewmember 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, on another visit to the Delta, Admiral Hyland would turn to Wayne Beech (Deputy, CTF-116) and me as he boarded a plane at CTAB that would take him to Saigon, and say, "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 they needed to know about Operation GAME WARDEN. They included military officers, government officials, members of the Congress and one group of military and naval officers from Argentina. As soon as they sat down for the briefing, most of them immediately went to sleep.

The first “big” visit I experienced was in mid-January 1968. The visitors were Senator Howard W. Cannon, D-NV and Congressman Paul N. “Pete” McCloskey, D-CA. Cannon, a retired Air Force Reserve major general had quite a political and military background including spending 42 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 won the 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 giving the command briefing, I asked the two if they had 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. (Guess the "colonel" had never studied enough Marine Corps history to learn that the 5th Marines and 6th Marines formed a brigade of the Army's 2nd Infantry Division in France during World War I.) 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. McCloskey's visit was 10-days to two weeks before TET. 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.

Sometime in January, one of the patrols working the Mekong became involved in a medevac. Rather than some wounded type, 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.

On 18 January, I learned of the first fatality of someone I knew. A VC RPG hit ATC 1 belonging to River Assault Division 112, killing Lieutenant Commander Bob Condon, the CO, UDT-12, during an operation with TF-117. Bob and I were 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.

Between April and June 1967, TF-116 units operated from the YRBM-16 at Tan Chau, patrolling the upper reaches of the Mekong River. However, orders from Saigon terminated the operation and the forces relocated to bases further down river. The patrols had been too effective in interdicting smuggling and black market operations. The people involved in the smuggling were members of the Vietnamese army and navy. That was particularly true with the VNN's Fleet Operations Force 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, and we 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 24 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 united were removed from, Long Xuyen city and An Giang province for a different reason. The population 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 any attempts by any force from the French to the Viet Minh, and later, the post-1954 governments and the Viet Cong. One Hoa Hao-Viet Minh battle in 1945 produced 15,000 casualties in hand-to-hand combat.

In 1947, the Viet Minh made overtures to the Hoa Haos, to gain 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. Thus, when GAME WARDEN units arrived in Long Xuyen in August 1966, the Hoa Haos felt it would cause the VC to attempt to get back into the province. TF-116 left Long Xuyen in April 1967.

We had noted an increase in VC activity in the crossing point near Tan Din Island. On 11 January, a joint PBR-SEAL operation was mounted. Lieutenant Jake Reinbolt headed the SEAL platoon. The SEAWOLVES supported the operation. The operation came off as scheduled; however, 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 24 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.

Many people were aware 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 Dick Marcinko conducted a reconnaissance of the Vinh Ti Canal south of Chau Duc (also known as Chau Phu) toward it's 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 further inland from the rivers than the SEALs had previously operated. Whenever they killed someone, they would leave a stripe of their facial camouflage paint on

the victim to ensure all knew the SEALs had been there. The TF-116 SEALs did not, however, work 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", which was given to him by a reporter. After his first Vietnam tour, Dick had made a tour of East Coast ports in an APD, 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. The VC placed a 50,000 piasters dead or alive reward on Marcinko, and Dick sued the reporter and magazine for approximately $100,000, and won.

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 us that a copy of COMRIVPATFOR OPORD 101-YR had been aboard PUEBLO and had probably been 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 leaving Vietnam.

On 27 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 90 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 2-inches thick and had a pink cover. It described the political and military climate in the country and then laid out specifics for each 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 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 capabilities, as we 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 would find 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. You did 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 quantity 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. If the actual number of enemy dead was greater than the actual number of friendly dead, then, you might assume things were going in your favor.

The problem was there was no single way to quantify enemy, or suspected enemy casualties. Very early on, in the early 1960s, 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 would attempt 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.

At one point in time, I conducted a personal survey of what the Seawolves accomplished in a 30-day period. I did that by measuring ammunition expenditure for confirmed body count that is actually seeing a body that you were positive was dead. My elementary survey indicated that the helos fired 67,000 rounds of 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 estimated 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 was 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 players 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. Other attending the Review included General William C. Westmoreland, USA, COMUSMACV; the 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 his Army counterpart, the Commander, 2nd Brigade, 9th U.S. Infantry Division. (Ambassador Komer was one of two US ambassadors accredited to the Republic of Vietnam. While Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker attended to diplomatic affairs, Ambassador Komer oversaw CORDS, the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. That was a continuation of a number of programs designed to persuade the civilians in the south to support their government rather than the VC. (The French, Japanese and US employed the strategy at various times. Former names included “Strategic Hamlets” and “New Relocation Life Hamlets”.)

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 specifically recall the G-2 briefer giving a relatively standard intelligence brief. There certainly were not any alarms sounded regarding enemy movements or intentions. He mentioned that the Corps was considering the start of air operations in the western area of the corps to detect and interdict any enemy movement discovered there. The plan called for U.S. Army OV-1 “Blackhawk” reconnaissance aircraft working in concert with either Army helo gunships or other “Blackhawks” outfitted as attack aircraft. There was no specific starting date for the proposed operation.

At the conclusion of that part of the Review, the only problem I heard identified was during the G-4 portion. 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 depots 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 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 - 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 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 recoded the Mang Thit - Nicoli. 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 would affect the US Navy a few months later.

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 their turn came, they popped up and said something, even if it to say that 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. However, it was not as interesting as what happened 72-hours later.

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 covered 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!

We had several major concerns. At Vinh Long, fighting was taking place at the RAG Base where River Division 52 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 could not get to the RAG Base. Ving Long Army Air Base was under attack, causing concern for Lieutenant Commander Al Weselesky's Seawolf detachment.

My Tho and Nha Be had been hit. At first, we have no information regarding the BOLD DRAGON I force on the upper Mekong and Bassac Rivers. Can Tho was under attack as was Binh Thuy Air Base. In fact, BTAB would come under attack for each of the next 42-nights. 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 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 going on 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 got 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. The spooks destroyed the NAVSECGRUDET's (Naval Security Group Detachment) equipment. In one aspect, that was no loss. It would be some months 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 the PBRs in a fire fight. The eventual delivery of the long-promised on-line voice security equipment would help solve such problems.

Up at Chau Doc, Lieutenant Jack Doyle had a hornet's nest. The city had been the objective of the 313th VC Main Force battalion. (Nguyen Thi Dinh who was born in 1920 and joined the Communist party in 1938 as a runner in Kien Gang Province, commanded the 313th. Wounded during the assault against Chau Doc, she later took command of Military Region II. Nguyen participated in the Paris Peace talks and when she died in 1992, she had been one of Vietnam's six vice presidents for five years.)

Complicating that matter is that Chau Doc is only a few kilometers from the Cambodian border. The only friendly ground forces attempting to drive the VC out of the city were about 36 nungs (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. Dick Marcinko's SEAL platoon that had just returned from a harrowing experience the previous night when they tangled with a several hundred VCs at the Cambodian border augmented them. Jack got all eight PBRs in a column and sailed up and down the river bringing his

weapons to bear on enemy positions, including the noodle factory across the river and just north of Camp Arnn and the city's only hospital, which the VC had taken and was using as a command post. Elsewhere in the city, Dix's nungs and some of Marchicko's SEALs were rescuing U.S. personnel. One was Maggie, a civilian nurse. She had barricaded herself in he billet until rescued her. In a separate action, as the SEALs attempted to clear the north side of the city, one of them, AMH2 Clarence Risher, became the only US fatality. An interesting aftermath: SSG Dix received the Medal of Honor, while some of the SEALs received Bronze Star Medals.

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 in the bird. 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. Our personnel officer took care of the others.

His next plan was the relief of our people in Chau Doc. He and I flew up early in the morning of 31 January, to reconnoiter the area and liaise with the local personnel. After that, he planned to return to Binh Thuy and I would stay as the task unit commander. Arrangements had already been made to get a LCM full of additional supplies moving toward Chau Doc to supply our forces up their. ENCM Bob Nissley from NAVSUPPACT was in charge of the LCM.

On the north end of the city was, Camp Arnn, a one-time French hotel that since March 1965 served as the base for an Army Special Forces team, B-42, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel William F. Smith, known within the Special Forces community as, "Bourbon Bill." Prior to Tet, the colonel had agreed to let the BOLD DRAGON I boats use the pier at Camp Arnn, and offered to let us use the facilities there for crew 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 2nd, 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 town and seemed not to have too much information at all. It developed that during the attack; his Special Forces detachment apparently did 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 using his jeep. He seemed surprised by what we saw. Colonel Smith's reactions surprised both Gray and me. He was the senior US military commander in the area and had been there throughout the entire period.

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 laying 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 24 .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 nun's living quarters and then destroyed the surgery. The medical supplies or instruments not taken by them lay on the floor broken or smashed. Someone, apparently a VC, shot a hole in the air manifold of the hospital's emergency diesel making it useless.

We met with Mr. James Tulls, the Province Senior Advisor, a Mr. "William Smith", the Military Security Service Advisor (he was actually with the CIA) 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, 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 replied, “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 and would use weapons 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, a Major 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 myself comfortable. Two and a half hours later, we met. He apologized for keeping me waiting, but, "We are scheduled for an inspector general's inspection in six weeks and we have a lot of 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 and get off the boats. He said he was concerned about food for his troops, as the attack had disrupted their normal supply route. 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." 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 said that although they had plenty of beer, they were so short of hard liquor, that he was limiting his people to one drink a day. He wanted the LCM for booze! I wondered if this guy, his CO and their unit were parts of the real world or not. With the exception of use of the pier, I did not get anywhere in our negotiations. When the LCM arrived, we 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 at nearby Camp Thuong Thoi. 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 former US tank was buried hull-down on a hill south of Chau Doc as a fixed artillery emplacement. A US sergeant was the advisor to the Vietnamese lieutenant (trung uy). When the mortar fire started, the tank located the source by eyeball and the tank's infrared searchlight. They reported this to Camp Arnn, which gave permission for the tank crew to commence counter battery fire.

A problem arose because the tank crew would not fire unless ordered to do so by their trung uy, who was asleep in his tent. The sergeant reported he attempted to wake the trung uy but could not do so. The sergeant reported the situation by radio. As we were on the local frequency, we heard the 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 uy'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, I took four boats from RIVSEC 535 with Lieutenant Bill Dennis and 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 as the people stoically watched. There were no smiles and only occasional waving at us. In part, it could have been that they really did not know who we were, coupled with their general distrust of anything that smacked of the central government in Saigon. After all, the Vietnamese government's treatment of the Hoa Haos, and other minor religious sects apparently was not too different than they received from the Viet Minh and Viet Cong. Memories were long and emotions ran deep.

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 A-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. ("Rags" would later be on the G-3 staff for SA IV CTZ at Can Tho. In that capacity, he was always very deferential to TF-116, probably because of what happened later that day.)

Camp Thuong Thoi was a relatively large compound. In addition to the 12-man A Team, there were several hundred Vietnamese militiamen there. A major asset at Thuong Thoi was a 4.2" mortar, which could provide coverage to the nearby Cambodian border. A master sergeant named "Ski", the

senior Special Forces NCO, told they had a patrol up a few clicks up the Hong Ngu River that was pinned down by snipers; and asked if we could we 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 army 105mm howitzer battery was located in the town of Hong Ngu and that his A Team controlled it. 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 as the river led to the Cambodian border.

The three 105 tubes were right where we had been told they would be and they appeared to be in good repair and 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 started up the canal. We had gone about 300 meters when a Vietnamese dai uy (captain) yelled, "VC," and he was right, as the area about 15 meters away came alive with small and automatic weapons fire, which was soon followed by B-40s. We had walked into the damnedest ambush many had seen. We returned fire and went at maximum speed to clear the kill zone. In the process, most if not all the boats received hits by B-40 rounds, fortunately, not seriously. I personally recall seeing six B-40 rounds, including a cartwheeling dud, in flight at one time. PBR-731, the boat I was riding, took one from port to starboard through the engine compartment. When it hit, the coxn's flat clouded in smoke so thick I could not see the boat captain who was about a foot away. Luckily, the only damage caused by the rocket was a broken ground to one of the engines. It did not affect our speed or mobility.

Bullets hit the awning frame over my head and showering me with splinters of hot aluminum on my arms and face. Had the round been a few inches lower, it would have hit my helmet. In about an hour, I would see what that could cause.

We proceeded up the river until it intersected with a smaller one near a small outpost whose troops were sitting on the parapets watching the show that had just erupted downstream. We regrouped; found we were in good shape and without other than a few minor personnel casualties. The bottom line was that we were still combat effective and we had to get out of there.

We called in 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. After about ten minutes of artillery, we stopped it and simultaneously took off at maximum speed down the river. If the VC were mad when we came up the river, they were really pissed off after the artillery, and we took a lot of fire on the way out. As we were making our final turn before having a clear shot to the Mekong, PBR-735, the last boat in the column, took a B-40 in the stern which blew the transom out; the boat headed for the for bank, beached and the crew went for cover.

Realizing they had not made it, we stopped. A fast check indicated the 731 was perhaps in the

best shape, so with another boat for cover, we went back up the canal and beached about 5 meters from the disabled boat to be in a position to pick up the crew should they make an attempt to come to us.

After a few minutes, we were running low on ammunition and there was no sign of the other crew. The 731's engineer, William E. Hayenga, Jr., a 19-year old fireman, said, "I'll go get them," and before anybody could say anything, he jumped ashore and ran up the bank hollering for them. He disappeared from sight, then, a minute or so later (seemed like an hour), he reappeared, shepherding the crew to our boat. He in fact was dragging the boat captain, who could not walk due to a pinched nerve. 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 M16s 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, so I returned to filling and emptying clips. Once the 735's crew was on board, we got the hell out of there and rejoined the other boat. For those few moments, Hyenga later received the Navy Cross.

Master Chief Nissley had been listening to his radio, heard the original call from Ragsdale. Anticipating our needs, he moved the LCM to Camp Thuong Thoi, and was there when we arrived.

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 728 tied up, we immediately got him ashore and into the basement of the Special Force's headquarters bunker where their aid station was located. Before we got him, there it did not look good. 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 got there, and then get him to a hospital. Unfortunately, our efforts were in vain.

The boat captain of PBR-735 said his crew had rigged a few booby traps before they left the boat for the high ground. They then remembered that the grenade they used to set off their grenade locker was a smoke grenade, not much of a booby trap. As it was unlikely that a ground force could get there, Ski requested a fixed-wing air strike to destroy the boat, but I am sure it did not arrive in time to prevent the VC from looting the boat. Photos taken by Ski's people later confirmed that.

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 would do it, VNAF or 7th AF. It was a ponderous system, but it was the established system at that time.

We let Binh Thuy know what had happened, and 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 had been previously experienced. That proved the case as time would tell. The next morning, Binh Thuy advised that a he 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.

When the report of our action was prepared for transmission, the 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.

A few 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 near the Vietnam side of the canal. The only ordnance used would be from the port sides of the aircraft. 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.

Captain Gray asked me for a written report regarding what had transpired in Chau Doc with LTC Smith and B-42. I submitted what I hoped was an unemotional, yet factual report. I subsequently learned that LTC Smith supposedly had recommended the PBRs at Chau Doc for the Valorous Unit Award, the Army's equivalent of the Navy Unit Commendation. If that was true, it evidently did not get approval. 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.

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 BG 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 out 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 in 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, 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.

It became somewhat obvious that IV Corps could not get started let along gain any momentum. TF-117 received orders to move from Dong Tam on the Mekong to the Bassac in the general vicinity

of Can Tho. Given its size and ponderousness of its movement, we knew it would be several days before they got there. They did, however, and perhaps at Captain Gray's request, send their PACVs (patrol air cushion vehicles - hovercraft) around first. 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 didn't have a place to store them, so it was decided to beach them near the helo pad; they had a tough time negotiating the rip-rap on the steep embankment. They were also in need of maintenance, typical after a long, high-speed run.

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, three PACV's, based at Moc Hoa, under TF-116 operational control, and in conjunction with CIDG units, 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. Besides, the PACVs cost one million a piece; 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 were 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 canal for a PACV, 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 support forces were on their way. 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 we had to 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.

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 in the canal system south of Can Tho. 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, we were supposed 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 fort at the juncture of a river and canal. They responded by bringing up their artillery barges, each carrying two 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 we were inundated people from the village, the village chief, the local priest and others, who were making claims for property and personal damage and demands for restitution. We had spent a lot of time trying to build up some good relations with the people along the waterways, and now a different bred of American had arrived on scene. As far as most of the Vietnamese were concerned, if it floated, was green and flew an American flag, it belonged to TF-116, thus we got the complaints.

TF-116 and TF-117 did conduct some operations together. One was a sweep of Tan Din Island. The concept was to insert troops from Ti Ti Canal and have them conduct a shoulder-to-shoulder sweep of the island. PBRs would provide the blocking force around the island to catch escaping VC. During a final planning session, Commander Robert "Bob" M. 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.

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, about as effectively as when ARVN and Fourth Riverine had done it for President Thieu's transit, perhaps two years earlier. In other words, as soon as the troops and boats left, Charlie moved back in.

The Mang Thit - Nicoli was vexatious. It was an important economic route as 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 go up the Bassac, cross over to the Mekong, then proceed down that river until they reached Route 4, the main highway to and from the Delta. 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 U.S. 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.

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
BT
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 GREVIOUS 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 DEEP APPRECIATION TO ALL CONCERNED AND BEST WISHES FOR CONTINUED SUCCESS.
BT

The Tet offensive severely disrupted a number of construction projects going on throughout our part of the Delta. Those projects were under the cognizance of the Officer in Charge of Construction, OinCC, pronounced, "Oink", and 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 normally 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. On 9 March, the VC hit one unit and their American advisors hard; two US advisors received serious wounds. 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 Weselesky became involved. The wingman helo was hit, the pilot wounded and returned to Vinh Long. Al, using a neighboring Army AH-1 Cobra gunship for cover went in, picked up the advisors, and brought them out.

Al 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 Al apparently failed to adhere to the squadron's tactical doctrine. Al's next fitness report reflected the squadron commander's displeasure. Al received the Navy Cross for the event. In 1970, when we were at Monterey, and coming in zone for selection to commander, Al 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.

One March night, just about the time most folks 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. 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. Fortunately, the initial fires were in the south end of the depot, which 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.

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 keeping the aircraft from taking hits by stray rounds as they cooked off. It was quite a sight.

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.

In the midst of the post-Tet operations, we had an organizational change. COMRIVRON Five moved from Saigon to Binh Thuy. The main advantage of the move was to put the operational and administrative commanders and staff at the same location. It also meant moving a lot of furniture to accommodate Commander Paul Kane and his staff.

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 the fence while sipping on a beer or other refreshment. One afternoon, somebody heard something hit the ground next to him. It was a red-hot striker plate from an exploded bomb. After that, we were not as 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 missions 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 10 or 15 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 would later fly 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; that was 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 to learn 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 was 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 troop unit frequently 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.

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 river. 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; 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 ammunition used green-colored tracers.

Tet caused TF-116 some logistics problems, especially 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 based on what expenditures 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 only in-theater ones were those on the LSMRs (Landing Ship Medium, Rocket) and USS CARRONADE IFS-1, which were part of the blue water Navy, and never operated in our brown water environment.

Following Tet, Binh Thuy Air Base came under attack on 42 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.

LT Charles J. "Chuck" 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 flew with the Seawolves on many occasions and I flew with the Army on a number of occasions, and I flew with in Air America (CIA) 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 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.

One young LTJG named Smith was the largest helo pilot I ever met. He once told me he we 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 was their speed. The one time I flew with them, 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, a helo's pilot sits in the right sea.) The helos's armament consisted of two fixed rocket pods each containing five 2.25-inch rockets and two fixed mounts each with three forward firing 7.62mm machine guns. Each door gunner had a hand held M-60 machine gun. On Army helos, the door gunners's weapons were usually pintle-mounted. That was not the case with the Seawolves. The door gunners would wear safety harnesses and 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 dets 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.

Another detachment experimented with 5-inch HVAR (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 2.5-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 clap 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 would land somewhere without difficulty, but then would have to sally back and forth over the small landing area to get the aircraft back into the sky. Sometimes we would make it by taking telephone wires or perhaps a small tree branch out on our skids. Other times, we would have to sit down a 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. 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 the initial target list. I surmise two factors accounted for that: NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy was not close to a major city, and in spite of what we thought of our operational effectiveness, perhaps the VC did not consider us a major military organization. The VC military objectives in the Delta appeared to be the seats province or district governments.

April brought another change; Captain Arthur Whyte Price, Jr., USN would relive Captain Paul N. Gray. However, Captain Gray would not go quietly. He directed that one more operation be

‘ginned” up; one that involved almost every asset we owned on the Bassac - the LST, Seawolves, PBRs and SEAL platoons. He even advised some of the news media offices in Saigon when the operation was scheduled.

The big day arrived, the forces moved into position, the press loaded their cameras, and Tan Din Island stood by for yet another assault by TF-116. At the appointed hour, everything and everybody started shooting. When the shooting finally subsided, the forces returned to their normal locations. I do not think we did anything to Charlie, if in fact; Charlie was on Tan Din that day. Fortunately, what few personnel injuries we incurred were minor. The worst aftermath was that for about 48-hours we were in a 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, all the film footage they had was not 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 some other personnel changes. Frtiz Steiner left and I had moved up to Ops. 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. Lieutenant Commander Duane "Dewey" Feuerhelm replaced Lieutenant Bruce Young as Intelligence Officer. Dewey, a 1630 (Special Duty, Intelligence) , came from NORAD (North American Air Defense Command) in Colorado Springs, CO, and because of restrictions based on special security clearances, technically should not have been assigned outside of Saigon. 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. Commander Sayre Archie Swarztrauber, Sr., USN, relieved Paul Kane as COMRIVRON 5. Archie had been one of the XOs of USS HALSEY (DLG-23), our flagship, when I was on the DESRON 7 staff. Later, Archie, promoted to rear admiral in 1976, changed the spelling of his name to, Schwarztrauber. Lieutenant Commander Bob Peterson replaced Don Shepard as COMRIVDIV 51 and Lieutenant Commander Arthur J. "Jack" Elliot, replaced Hal Lewis as commander of RIVDIV 52 at Vinh Long. We had a succession of SEAL platoons led by the Richard "Andy" Anderson, Stan Meston, 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. 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, who came from II CTZ, was highly effective. Instead of using the villa, he 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 would return to the compound, plan the next day's operations, take a shower in a stall attached to the truck, get some sleep, and then return 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 with one of his men. The corps's activity declined sharply.

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-types met with Generals Abrams and Eckhardt privately before the official presentation. General Abrams wanted to get the US advisors report before he heard the IV CTZ's version. General Abrams sat absorbing all the information he was 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?

After Tet, various agencies conducted inquiries to determine how the intelligence community did not discover the movement and massing of enemy troops and their logistics. Generally, those investigations revealed an almost total breakdown in intelligence gathering, analyses and dissemination. That 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 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 than we had experienced under Captain Gray. First, and foremost, 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 was vastly improved, 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 not 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, did not appear to be logistically supportable at the time. Putting the boats in that area was a problem in itself, but it was not as large as developing a logistical facility of some type and providing security for the facility 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 Deepe, a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* accompanied him. 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 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 was 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 would take information they 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 would be 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. In reality, 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. Surprisingly, we had a military delegation, army, naval and air force, from Argentina. Few seemed to understand English; they slept through the brief. Rear Admiral Pierre N. Charbonnet, Jr., COMCARDIV 6 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 most of his 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 hurt and my ships damaged?" MSTSFE had both government-owned and chartered ships plying the rivers of the Delta for years on supply missions. On occasions, the VC shot at them. One such incident occurred during Tet. The Mekong makes a dogleg turn between My Tho and Sa Dec. A MSTSFE-chartered tug 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. 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 think; 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 let 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 the 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 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, with several stripes of camouflage paint on his face 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 and 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 came from. The SEAL explained the weapon in detail which seemed to satisfy the general, however, his mood seem to change when he learned it had been developed by a Naval Ordnance Laboratory, China Lake, specifically for the SEALs.

Silver, the SEAL scout dog would become 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, 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 broke 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, who 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, early 1960s, DARPA created the "ARPA Net," the basis for today's Internet.)

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. When operating near high speed, the sound carried for several miles. We had evidence the VC had set up warnings systems to alert their compatriots using crossing points of the approach of a patrol. 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. As 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.

During 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 as every time he moved his head, they detectors moved with him. 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 and I explained our operating procedures and environment things 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 the They gave him 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 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 12 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 would suddenly hear a dog yipping in or near the kitchen, then hear many Vietnamese swearing which ended the yipping. Shortly thereafter, another meat course came out of the kitchen.

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 our party 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.

That spring we were involved in evaluating another experimental project, a reconnaissance

aircraft. The aircraft was a sailplane converted to an airplane. Schweizer, an American company that had been in business since the late 1930s, manufactured it. It was a glider with a unique power plant. In an effort to reduce engine and transmission noises, the power train consisted of a series of drive belts. The aircraft was to be equipped with a basic package of infrared sensors to detect body heat and cooking fires.

The aircraft had a standard military experimental designator, that is, one beginning with, "X"; I have subsequently forgotten the remaining alpha-numerics. Our "secret weapon" aircraft, or "whoosh-mobile" as we called it, reposed in a hanger at the U.S. Army Air Field at Soc Trang, or, Khanh Hung, depending on whose map you read. Our Air Ops, Fred Lakeway, was the test pilot. I flew down to Soc Trang with Fred on one occasion to look at the plane. It was a bit unusual in appearance. It had the traditional sleek lines of a sailplane; however, there was a big blobby nacelle on top of the wing with a propeller tacked on to the front end of that.

Fred did make a couple of test flights over the Bassac on nights with varying amounts of visibility. The PBR patrols knew the test schedules so they could help evaluate detect ability. On moonless nights, the tests were satisfactory. 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 those on the ground could detect the aircraft. In spite of the holes, he got it back to Soc Trang. Perhaps the Army worked with it after that, but I do not recall Fred making any other test flights.

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. On 5 May, one of them encountered an ambush, which resulted in the near-total destruction of PBR-130 and the loss of Lieutenant Carl Kollmeyer and EM3 Ronald Saporitoa. Carl, the OIC of RIVSEC 511, 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 130. I went to Chau Doc as soon as we learned what had happened.

The 130's 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 Carl’s death. 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 who had been in Chau Doc during Tet.

Bihn Thuy dispatched an LCM to bring the 130’s 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 satisfied with the quality of work done there. As NAVSUPPACTBinh Thuy had the repair materials and hull molds, they asked for and got the task of rebuilding the 130. It took several months of long, tedious work, amply supplemented by pride to complete the task. At least, 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. NAVSUPPACT Det Binh Thuy did a fantastic job restoring the 130. From that, point onward, NAVSUPPACT Binh Thuy undertook all major repairs.

We did have outside entertainment at Binh Thuy. The USO booked shows, mainly small song and dance groups, and a lot of them were from Australia. The usual procedure was to put the shows 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 a bit 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. About ten days later, it became apparent the troupe may have made money other than on the stage. About ten days after their departure, an estimated an estimated by the 10 - 20 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.

At two-boat patrol led by Lt William E. “Bill” Dennis, in PBR-750 chased a sampan up a canal. With the captured sampan in tow, and a detainee on board 750, the patrol headed back to the My Tho River. En route, the VC ambushed the patrol, with PBR-750 withstanding the worst 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. 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. Patrick 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 fewer 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 other did not have. That was, pick a target, plan the operations will little outside participation, and then go UNODIR (unless otherwise directed) and then 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, you 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. It was to separate the Vietnamese, taking all those loyal to Saigon and put them on ships. 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 because we were in the neighborhood and had not bothered them.

On occasions, they would invite us to for a 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 seemed well maintained. However on one corner were the remnants 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 be amongst 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 51units had been working with a local Ruff/Puff, Sergeant Thanh. He was an exception to the general rule about Vietnamese. Among his many accomplishments, he had received, as I recall, ten Gallantry Crosses. The RIVDIV 51 people would frequently make 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 would 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 in Vinh Long. 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 GI 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, they were to be turned over to Vietnamese authorities, generally, the Military Security Service. Detainees did not arrive at Binh Thuy on a regular basis, thus the NSADET really were 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 were about 6 feet tall, and 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. It was up to intelligence types to determine if it was valid or accurate. If a detainee would 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 “dai uy” 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 6 or 7 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 20-years, and she certainly was not the attractive teenager we had previously seen.

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 ones 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, 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's USS BRULE (AKL-28), which plied the rivers for years, or through a depot at Can Tho Army Air Base. NAVSUPPACT Det noted that certain 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 CTAAB, an enterprising colonel intercepted them and provided them to the senior advisor's 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 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 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 would receive 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 with emphasis on the French period 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 dai uy 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 to conduct combat operations in a combat zone seemed ludicrous. Secondly, one could loose the initiative or opportunity to accomplish a mission in a time-sensitive situation while waiting for somebody up the line to approve the operation. Thirdly, the longer you 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, at that 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 though it to be a relatively safe self-imposed limitation. The recommendation was not accepted and our limitation for independent operations was set at 8 PBRs and a platoon of troops. I had intentionally stayed away from the expression, "platoon" because a SEAL platoon consisted of 2 officers and 12 enlisted men, essentially the same number of people, as an infantry squad and I wanted to avoid the possibility of a semantics battle between TF-116 and Saigon.

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 country, I had attempted to make up the deficient 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 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, miss this chance and there was not going to be another. (After I arrived at Monterey, it was determined the semester hour short- fall did not exist and I completed in the program in two years.)

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 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. Womble, did not survive.

On 14 July, I flew from the Delta to Danang where I was temporarily a member of the Army's 199th Replacement Battalion awaiting air transportation to Hawaii. That was in accordance with COMUSMACV's policy wherein all in-country personnel were supposedly entitled to two in-country R&Rs of three days duration and one out of country of 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 for Pat and I and give us more time together.

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, when she went to board the plane in Los Angeles, Captain John K. Leslie, who had been COMDESDIV SEVENTY-TWO when I went to DESRON 7, was on the same flight. John was then on the CINCPACFLT staff. He kindly escorted Pat on 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 my time 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 was en route from Vung Tau to Can Tho, missed the cut off between the Mekong and Bassac Rivers. Seven miles later, the LCU unknowingly crossed the border into Cambodia where the Cambodian navy intercepted it. The LCU commanded by CW4 Ralph W. McCullough, had a crew of 10 other soldiers and a Vietnamese policeman. 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,

As soon as Saigon learned the LCU had crossed the border, CTF-116 received a directive requiring that our patrols be alert for and to prevent future navigational errors on the part of Army watercraft operating in the Delta. The media learned of the incident, 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.

At part of our new “mission” of helping the Army’s navigation in the event they again missed the cutover between the Mekong and Bassac Rivers We had, three sign made and erected on an island below the border. They read:

ATTENTION
CAMBODIA
BORDER
5 KMS

To discourage others from removing or tampering with that crossing warning sign, the second one was a mine warning sign

In addition, the third indicating a bit of American humor, read:

Burma
Shave

On 29 July, we again expanded our area of operations by establishing an Ammi barge mobile base, MB-2, similar to the one set up in I Corps earlier in the year at Camp Thuong Thoi. 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 were to reduce US casualties. The SF A-432 detachment at Thuong Thoi would remain operational until 1970. It appeared that this time, the River Patrol Force was staying on the upper Mekong permanently.

Some people made the mistake of underestimating the ingenuity and creativity of our enemy. As an example, a slight variation 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 a US .30 caliber ammunition can.

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 in the 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 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, on 20 August 1968, one turned into a disaster. 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.

COMNAVFORV verbally relayed an unusual order to us. It was determine the feasibility of staging what would appear to be a VC ambush of the weekly Mekong convoy to Cambodia while under VNN Fleet Service Force escort up the Mekong to the Cambodian border. Historically, the VC never bothered that convoy and it was apparent that if we would stage an attack, perhaps the Cambodian government might 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 operation, 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 52. After discussing the proposed operation with Jack, we boarded one of Jack's 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 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 it 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 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, the plan went into motion. The convoy came by as scheduled, a B-40 round was fired toward one of the ships as well as AK-47 fire. The Vietnamese navy escort did

not do anything about it. Unfortunately, some Vietnamese fishermen decided to visit the island that day and stumbled onto the ambush. With their mission accomplished and no chance of compromise, the SEALs extracted safely and returned to Binh Thuy. Although *Stars and Stripes* reported the attack, 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 tow and barge made it's was 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 exercised operational control over supporting Seawolf fire teams. That ensured the PBRs on patrol had close support when needed. It also meant, the river division commanders controlled the use of the helos for non-GAME WARDEN operations, such as requests for fire teams from Army advisors supporting ARVN or Ruff/Puff units.

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 51, 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 would stop shooting as soon as he heard to 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; its 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 further and settled, at least temporarily, in what was now Vietnam.

Bill managed to wrangle authorized to investigate the possibility of a one-time Roman presence in Vietnam. He arrived at Bihn 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 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. One was Woody Hays, the famed Ohio State football coach. Another was Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, USN, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the third was Admiral John S. Mc Cain, Jr., USN, who on 31 July relieved Admiral U. S. G. Sharp, USN, as CINCPAC. (Earlier, 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 Captain Burt Witham, accompanied him. Hank's younger brother, Lieutenant "Navy Tom" Mustin was then in one of the RIVSECs at Binh Thuy.

Admiral Moorer's visit was perhaps the most dramatic and real eye opener 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 24 UH-1Bs instead of the 49 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." 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 Mc Cain'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 stars painted black 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 would walk up, stick out his hand, and say, "Hi, my name is Mc Cain. 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 Vietnam's waterways. 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, we simply did not have the assets required to expand our operations

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 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 would 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 operations. 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 no 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 local type and did not speak English. When he was located and then asked (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 like 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

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 Neptunes, modifications were extensive. Twin 20mm turrets replaced the MAD (magnetic anomaly detector) stinger in the tail of the aircraft. Mounted under each wing were forward firing 7.62mm 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 82 250 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, so the project personnel claimed. 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 then up the river's left bank. The sensor system apparently worked as planned and provided the airborne personnel with sufficient information to conduct a bombing run. They did, and continued their mission. Unexpectedly, after the bombing run, they took fire from the VC, and 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 2.25" 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.

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 in Saigon, extended the Duck Blind effort to the Mekong Delta.

Messages alerted us to the impending arrival of Duck Blind shipments. Jim would go to BTAB to meet the specified flight, and then signed for the cases containing the sensors. The "ducks", were 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. In theory, 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 booby trap. 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, it did not kill anybody.

The "duck blind" effort was not successful in the Delta. This means that we had the same degree of success they had on the DMZ and Ho Chi Minh Trail.

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 uy served as my escort. When I arrived in the conference room, I found that I was the only American. The trung uy 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 uy, 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 uy's translation. However, perhaps that should not have surprised me.

Eventually, the conferees brought up the subject of the waterways and their security. The conference's format 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 "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 uy translator gave no indications whether or not the unseen translator was accurate. Naturally, no province chief changed his curfew.

At the invitation of General Eckhart, the IV Corps Senior Advisor, we participated in a study known as the "Senior Advisor IV Corps Tactical Zone Dry Season Campaign Plan." Captain Price designated me as the TF-116 representative. 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 two

brigades to a division, the plan envisioned a minimum of three 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 our recommendation. 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 Skyhook Extraction System at BTAB. The system's purpose 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 balloons in the case of water recovery. The recovering aircraft would make a low pass over the area snagging the line with a hook system deployed out of a cargo hatch such as the rear hatch of a C-130. Upon snagging the line, the aircraft would rapidly climb in altitude while simultaneously winching in the evacuee.

I knew that the Fulton Skyhook Recovery 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 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 to educate us of the dangers, both physical and legal, one could expect if 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 drop flares and star shells had nylon parachutes and shroud lines. The Vietnamese discovered the synthetic materials, particularly lines, were stronger than the tradition hemp lines they 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 late August 1968, a representative from CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, arrived for such a briefing. Due to 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, some examples follow. 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 head 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 7; DESRON 7 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. The first was the disestablishment of River Squadron 5 and the establishment of River Patrol Flotilla 5 as its replacement. All River Divisions became River Squadrons, and River Sections became River Divisions. It also meant a realignment of the staff. Art Price became COMRIVPATFLOT 5 and remained CTF-116, making him both the operational and administrative commanders. That change was long overdue! Commander Wayne Beech, remained as deputy commander. Commander Sayre Archie Swarztrauber doffed his hat as the last COMRIVRON 5 and became Chief Staff Officer, RIVPATFLOT 5. The members of the former RIVRON 5 staff merged with the RIVPATFLOT 5 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 RIVRIV 5 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. (After his retirement from the Navy, Archie officially changed the spelling of his last name to Schwarztrauber.)

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 the judge the entries laid out 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". To the best of my recollection, 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 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. An ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) trung uy (1st LT) was 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 staff immediately attended to the sailors, but did nothing for the trung uy. 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 uy 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 laying 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 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 25 WIA. If I recall correctly, that was the largest casualty list as far as GAME WARDEN LSTs were concerned.

Eighteen 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.

Shortly after the change of command, Lieutenant Eddie Walker, who was Admdiral Zumwalt's flag lieutenant when the admiral commanded CRUDESFLOT 7 and later in OPNAV as the Director of Naval Analysis, took command 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.

During one of CADDO's stops, Eddie and I got together for a few drinks and rehashed events since we last saw each other in San Diego. He told 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 usually exceeded one year. Thus, their wives could occasionally visit in country.) When Dick met to 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 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 it wound down. His aide carried a supple of medals, which the admiral presented, sometimes in an impromptu manner, write-up to follow. It was a 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 to COMNAVAIRPAC at NAS North Island, in connection with the OV-10As slated to come in country. It was convenient as his home was in Coronado.

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 sox 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 was 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 young 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, I rushed out of the building, got 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 your 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 were 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 you did not toss an extra uniform into your bag. The cocktail hour was devoted to more discussions on the same subject that the admiral had discussed with me just an hour earlier. The 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 Allan P. Slaff, USN, CHNAVADGRU. His role for the evening was to address the integration of the Vietnamese Navy into possible future operations. This was about three months after President Johnson directed the Vietnamization program. Captain Slaff 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 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 were continuing at the breakfast table. When the admiral arrived, he seemed to be preoccupied. We then learned what had upset him. That morning's news carried the announcement that Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy had married Aristotle Onassis. He talked about that for a couple minutes, muttered, "How could she do that?" then we resumed our operational discussions.

After breakfast, we got into a staff. 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 C-21 headed for Binh Thuy. I felt honored as those aircraft normally carried only general and flag officers.

When I got to our headquarters, I briefed Wayne Beech, and we closeted ourselves with Duane "Dewey" Feurerhelm, our intelligence officer, Bob Peterson, who ran the river squadron at Binh Thuy, Jack Elliot from Vinh Long and the squadron commanders from My Tho and Nha Be, whose names I

have forgotten.

The clarion call from Saigon came directing a meeting at COMNAVFORV headquarters on Saturday, 26 October 1968. Those attending from Bihn Thuy were Wayne Beech, Dewey Feurerhelm 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 'mini' staff was Captain Earl F. "Rex" Rectanus, Admiral Zumwalt's intelligence officer and one or two others whose names are long forgotten. 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 the previous year 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 13 days in 1960 - 1962, had given me a lot of insight about Captain Salzer when TF-117 was on the Bassac. 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 will 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 was of pronouncing, riverine .We then went through a process, by task force, of identifying

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. He then paced around in the "U", slowly dictating a basic operation order in prescribed military format. His delivery style was slow, clear and deliberate, and it was not too 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 Feurerhelm, 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.

Thus, we were there for the birth of COMNAVFOV 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 of in their history. Their future would be bloodier and deadlier; but they would accomplish their purpose of interdicting enemy supply lines.

Captain Robert S. Salzer became the first SEALORDS commander. At the time, 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 rarely 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. 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 was water. Before leaving, she autographed a poster in the club expressing her thanks to TF-116 for their help for the Special Forces.

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 sold 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 a disturbing experience. 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 and particularly those returning from Vietnam. 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.

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