

Article originally started in August of 2009 during deployment with Rivron One Detachment
Three to

Al-Basrah Iraq by SN Jarrod Michael Schwartz OIF/OND 2010

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Updated October 2011 to remove operational and intelligence report information

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**RIVERINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE,
A JOB WELL DONE**



Home to Riverine Squadron One, Detachment Three, the Basra Operations Command was an outfitted hotel from the 1970's that now houses the local Iraqi military. The Riverines posted outside their front door to ensure security of the outlying compound.

Deployment of Riverine Squadron One, Detachment Three was tense at times in southern Iraq with daily Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's) set along the roadways, incoming fire (mortar Thursdays) and car bombs on the weekends to would keep the Riverines on their toes. To affectively defend against such attacks, they focus on their training and stay alert at all times. Their training cycle has taken them a long time get to this point and combined with deployment away from home it can take nearly a year to complete. With this keen mindset they continue their job to ensure security in their area of operations around the city of Al Basrah along the southern border of Iraq. Throughout their duties of teaching the local Iraqi police how to conduct boat operations on river ways they will continue to respond to calls of rocket attacks and IED cache' sights. Their priority is to ensure the safe keeping of each teammate, their Riverine Assault Boats (RAB) and to respond to and secure the sight of any rocket launch.



As a Riverine, Seaman Zachary Schelm welcomes the first of the day's operations after successfully ensuring the boats communications are operable, having a 'comm's guy' who knows his job is a priceless asset

“There are a lot of tedious tasks with preparing communications along with being a gunner, but my pre-checks on radios require me to ensure all systems are interoperable, worn out equipment due to the harsh environment creates a difficult issue. I have ongoing maintenance to keep it all working.” Says SN Schelm, one of the detachments communications personnel.

After receiving word of an incoming rocket attack upon a local military base the boat crews would respond with urgency to get their craft underway. A process that can take over an hour to complete, though with some prior planning and having their boat pre-checks completed they have challenged themselves to get underway in under ten minutes. Preparing the boats with water, weapons, ammo and fuel is a time consuming process and the Riverines must be able to respond immediately to the call for help.



EN2 Bender stands by his .50 caliber machine gun with CMCN Peterson in the background. As the boat's engineman he is responsible for the operation of the craft properly running, even while in combat. When asked, he'll simply say happy thoughts keep him safe

Navigating the Sha'at Al Arab river way requires hair trigger response by the coxswain to properly bypass obstacles lying in or, far more dangerous, under the water. Debris and trash thrown into the river can clog up the engines water pumps. Ships, boats or debris left over from scavenged hulls lie half sunken along the river way leaving dangerous pathways to bypass even during a routine patrol. Despite the boats design to float even after receiving massive damage, the ability to withstand severe abuse, and to handle sea state three in limited capabilities, making contact with an underwater obstruction at approximately 40 knots would tear into the hull of the engine bay and leave a team stranded along the water way. A small boat with massive firepower and filled with armed Riverines is a formidable force, but having a "boat go down hard", as in losing the use of an engine, will nearly halt the progress of the mission until the boat engineer



A scavenged hull is a common nuisance along the Sha'at Al Arab river way. More dangerous to the Riverines patrol craft are underwater obstructions that must be safely navigated

completes the necessary repairs. The mission takes priority and these men do everything to ensure success is attained. During this deployment they have already completed over 180 missions in a six month period. They take their tasks seriously. "When there is an issue with the boat, I have to check the systems for possible scenarios of what went wrong, I start with the lowest common denominator while maintaining a vigilant watch on my weapon. I still need to be ready to transition into action, it's a very dynamic situation."



Sunrise or sunset, it's still over 90 degrees and 80% humidity

Today's briefing is no different than any other and starts at 0330 on a hot July morning and will include new intelligence of a possible weapons cache' sight. The Riverines plan accordingly by starting with the mission briefing defining the local territory, the sight to be secured, team positions and weapon employments, routes and communications available and any contingency plans. The briefing is very well detailed with every man knowing what their role is and understanding the role of each other. After dismissed, the teams break for some chow, consume as much water as humanly possible and standby to deploy. After checking their own gear, the boat and their weapons, they check their teammates gear to ensure the extra supplies are secured. During maneuvers on the water a Riverine Patrol Boat (RPB) or RAB can be going 39+ knots and suddenly, without notice, come to a complete stop within two boat lengths. Stand on the stern of the boat, jump, and you will find yourself in the boat captain's seat. Turning on a dime is no problem either, each crewman just ensures they are properly stationed at their weapon or take a quick lesson on how to fly across the bow of the boat. While these maneuvers are practiced consistently during the school phase at Camp Lejeune North Carolina, they are not conducted in a combat setting unless the situation requires it. The time to learn is not when you are on deployment and these men understand this.

"I always need the boats in top working condition, I have to plan ahead and make it available for a quick response. Before every mission I still check each sailors gear to make sure it is good to go." As a lead coxswain he has several responsibilities that come with the position. He enjoys the work that comes with it but understands the reality of his responsibility. "Working with several boats at one time to ensure safe travel is about communicating, especially at night. When we are going through low overhangs for example, we have to be extremely careful."



SN Reed awaits the go ahead to kit up and take the coxswains position, as the most junior coxswain he has an exciting responsibility to his crew

The camaraderie among the sailors is healthy and helps to control the stress of combat and, despite long, hot hours of back to back mission schedules and consistently irritated locals at the military coalition presence, the teams work at keeping their moral high. The locals have mixed feelings about the presence of US combat troops in the region, most are capitalizing on the building economy that comes with troops being in the area, however, others still do not enjoy the fact that the US Navy patrols the area looking for insurgency actions and supplies. This is where the grey lines of war cover the moments in combat, defining those who are, or more importantly, are not, enemy combatants. On any routine patrol through a local village they may engage in activities that are harmful to the Riverines, throwing rocks at convoys, dropping objects from bridges and generally ignoring warning signs of convoys and do not necessarily fulfill the definable threat triangle but in the least raise the stress of a mission setting. Riverines understand this point and follow their training to ensure a safe and successful mission. Some villages refuse to discuss any details with Riverines as they patrol around the city, and it leaves a good question as to why. When we do receive information from local village chiefs they are generally respectful and like the idea of knowing they helped to remove a part of the insurgency threat. Giving out details of long known weapons or ammo cache' points, wanted persons of interest or even just meeting US troops seem to give them a sense of pride in helping. Today they have received word of possible rocket cache sights that insurgents have been known to use.



MA2 Brennan stands by on the bow of an RPB for insertion onto a beach

“I know where I need to be before we get to a sight, my position requires keeping the high ground for an overall picture of the situation. Weather can be a big concern, when I’m in 120 degree weather for hours on end I have to keep focus.” He laughs for a moment recalling a situation. “At one point we were visiting a village and this kid walks out of a house and just pulls out a toy gun, it was a split second decision to realize the situation for what it was and stop him from escalating the moment. The last thing we wanted to do is upset the village chief after we’ve just made a successful first contact.”



A local village chief speaks with LT Buttler, Det 3 OIC about questionable traffic and actions on the river. A positive repertoire with the locals is paramount in completing the mission setting

After receiving this information it was compared with the mission briefing and other usable raw data and found to possibly be the same sight. “We are hot on a trail and will continue up the river to investigate the truth of it, setting a trap for coalition forces has been used before utilizing false intelligence and does pose a live operational threat.” Says LT Buttler, detachment OIC.



Det. Three RST secures an embankment after receiving intelligence on a possible IED cache' site

After being given the location and possible size of the cache' sight, the Riverines depart and continue on with the mission. Upon arriving at the sight and securing the area the boats approach the embankment and launch RST. Riverine Security Teams embark to secure the sight for EOD personnel to arrive and destroy any cache present. Our presence in the area turns any enemy combatant into an upstanding citizen. After several hours of waiting and finally hearing the



Not all sun and sand, Riverines secure the area while EOD neutralize a cache' sight. Dozens of rockets, grenades and mines were found. This is just one of many responses by the Riverine force

wondrous sound of the loss of enemy weapons you could almost hear a sigh of contention from the insurgents knowing they'll have to shop elsewhere tomorrow. A job well done. After thanking the local chief for his help the Riverine Force return to base. With several hours in a blazing desert sun overhead the troops are ready to move on.



Crews return after a successful discovery and destruction of a rocket cache sight. After several hours in the intense heat the troops push the limits of heat exhaustion

As forces return the corpsmen deployed with the crews will continue to check the men for heat exhaustion and ensure that they stay operational. During a six month deployment they keep busy with collateral duties to assist the busy schedule and help the troops to stay on top of their duties.



Recently capped PO1 for medical care under combat, HM1 Hightower awaits the call to continue on with the daily missions

When all have returned, the boats, the weapons, the water supply and the fuel are replenished, the watch's are set for they are still required to rotate through a watchbill and stand guard on the boat dock or for a Quick Reaction Force, then the troops debrief on the mission. Every detail is gone over from the first briefing to the last moment they stepped onto the docks. Some points are carefully scrutinized to provide each man with the knowledge to keep that point in check. Men are called out and congratulated on making correct choices and correcting issues at hand. Everything is gone over to ensure the success of the next mission becomes a continuing process. Egos are left aside while a debrief is conducted and every man is encouraged to give his honest opinion on how the mission went from his perspective. Being a small combat community the leadership understands that every man, despite rank, must understand every position on the boat and how it works. With this comes a familiarity with each person's duties that honesty among boat crews is what keeps the mission going.

Back at the tent after a mission one would probably not find too many present. Check out the gym, that's where you'll find them de-stressing after fourteen hours on the water...



14 men in a 16-man tent will bring about interesting ways to improvise.