



River Currents

USS Garrett County LST-786 Brown Water Navy

Christmas 1967 Dong Tam
Padre Johnson
Other Chaplain Unknown

A PUBLICATION OF
THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE ASSOCIATION

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From the Galley

Hello everyone just a few short lines to update you on the association. There is not really that much going on right now. The main three hotels sold out early and had to add two back-up hotels. The problem was our two main back-up hotels did not give us the allotted amount of rooms as we were hoping for. We were hoping to keep everyone on the Marriott Campus, but that didn't happen.

We just hope and pray everyone will have a great time at the reunion. The Marriott is or was new to the association and a lot different than what we are used too. Lot of changes has been made within the hotel industry and you don't receive as many goodies as we use too. The state of Indiana passed a law that we have to use hotel bartenders in the large hospitality room only; something we have never had to do before. Individual hospitality rooms have stayed the same to do what you want. The Marriott was nice enough not to charge us for one bartender but the second bartender we have to pay for.

Furnish transportation to and from the airport was a first for the Marriott as well as having a shuttle bus to take folks downtown and bringing them back. Most hotel hotels are doing away with free shuttle service; it's all a cost-saving thing. The hotel industry has been seeing hard times over the last few years or so.

Hanging banners now have a cost; the Marriott did waive that cost for us. We did have changes in the sales department at the hotel since we were first contacted by the Marriott, and it's difficult when you change folks in mid-stream coming up to a reunion. Frank Jones who is now our reunion coordinator has done a great job working with the hotel. I do not handle the reunions anymore. I thought it was time for someone else to have the fun, and after 20 years of doing reunions I was somewhat burnt out doing them. Georgie Ardinger who has helped me with reunions over the last few years was a big help to Frank and I.

Over the next few years, there will be more changes at the hotel. The days of a hotel giving you 1,000 rooms at a reunion rate are over; there is no more Drawbridge Hotel. It's hard for us with our size to just have one hotel anymore. So we have to do the best we can and hope for the best, but you the member make the reunions no matter wherever you stay. So far you all have done an excellent job in supporting the reunions and the association and it's much appreciated. We appreciate all the help and support at the reunions of all our volunteers who step in and help the board members.

We will have more info, pictures, and comments in our winter issue of *River Currents*. So to all who attend the reunion, we hope you have a great time. Don't forget DC on Veterans Day. Doc Bob Pries always does a great job. We will use a new hotel in DC. We used it years ago under a different name and a lot of changes for the better have been made at the hotel. I hope we have a mild winter; cold weather and I don't get along that well together. So everyone hang in there and take care of one another as we get older we seem to need each other more and more every day. -Albert

Veterans Day 2013 Washington, DC

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will be placing wreaths at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, on Veterans Day, Monday, November 11, 2013. We will be gathering at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at 8:30 a.m. and proceed to The Wall at 9:00 a.m.

We have blocked 40 rooms at the recently renovated Arlington Court Suites in Arlington, Virginia, for November 8 to 11 (check out on 11/13). Room rates are \$119 (plus tax) per night. These rates are good for two (2) days before the 8th and two (2) days after the 11th.

For reservations, call 1-703-524-4000 ext. "0." Please state our group name "MRFA" and give your dates of arrival and departure. If you plan to attend, you must make your reservations under our group code prior to the cutoff date of October 28, 2013.

The Arlington Court Suites, a Clarion Collection Hotel, is located at 1200 N Courthouse Rd, Arlington, Virginia 22201. (Note: This is about 1/10th of a mile from the hotel we have used for the past 6 or 7 years.) For more information on this hotel, go to <http://www.arlingtoncourthotel.com/>.

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will have a hospitality room available November 8 to 11. Come join us as we honor our fallen Brothers on Veterans Day 2013. We look forward to seeing you in DC.

For more information, contact Board Member Bob (Doc) Pries, (513) 659-4974, priesrl@att.net. ★



Door Gunner

by Dick Calton, Specialist-4/Infantry MOS 11B20 US5160899

It was June 1966 when I was drafted in NYC and sent to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, for basic, then a couple of months later to Fort Gordon, Georgia, for Infantry training, and a couple of months after that to Fort McClellan, Alabama, for jungle training. I was then a fully trained infantry soldier and transferred to the Bavarian Alps for my permanent assignment, or so I thought. After 6 months, I received orders for Bearcat in South Vietnam, so I hopped on a TWA and arrived in Saigon in May 1967.

Upon arriving in Bearcat, I was assigned to the 191st Assault Helicopter Company as a door gunner and issued an M-16. Funny thing is, I had never seen a helicopter before and I didn't know if I would get airsick, and I had never seen an M-16, or even knew what it was. But, I learned, with absolutely no assistance from anyone!!!!

I was assigned to a U.S. Army helicopter, with tail number 65-10019, which was in the 1st Platoon of the 191st Assault Helicopter Company in the 214th Combat Aviation Battalion (attached to the 9th Infantry Division). Helicopter #65-10019 was a UH-1D model (referred to as a slick) that was used to transport the combat infantry troops into, and out of, the battle zones. It had a single jet engine that ran on JP-4 jet fuel, which is very flammable. The crew consisted of the Aircraft Commander (pilot), a co-pilot, a crew chief, and a door gunner. The crew chief is the mechanic who was responsible for maintenance and also served as a door gunner during flight. The door gunner was an infantry soldier that was responsible for maintaining all weapons and armament. Helicopter 65-10019 was armed with two swivel-mounted

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Rung Sat Special Zone

*By Captain Carl Nelson US Navy (Ret.)
Senior Advisor (Commanding Officer)
for the RSZZ Sailors and Marines*

The story of the Vietnam War would not be complete if it did not tell about protecting the Long Tau Shipping Channel, the most strategic waterway in South Vietnam. By controlling that river and the surrounding region called the Rung Sat, which translated, depending on who did the translation, to either "Killer Forest" or "Forest of Assassins," the Vietnamese and their American advisors contributed significantly to the war effort.

“ The Rung Sat was a place of excitement, misery, and mystery where gallant men—American and South Vietnamese—fought and died, but were always victorious over their guerrilla enemy; thus, the Long Tau stayed open during the entire war. ”

Long Tau Channel

The Channel, which remains to this day the only deep draft route from the South China Sea to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), is a dredged connection of three rivers: Song Nha Bay, Song Long Tao, and Song Saigon. During the war, 95% of all supplies entering South Vietnam arrived from the ocean by surface vessels. One-third of those critical cargoes aboard military munitions ships and civilian oil tankers (often with women among their crew) came by way of the Long Tau Channel through the port of Saigon or the Shell Oil terminal at Nha Be.

The channel always had historical import. During World War II, the Japanese patrolled it. After that war, the French navy took control with one River Assault Group (RAG), which was used to stop pirates and robbers who preyed on ships and boats.

Viet Cong activity began in the early 1950s. Then known as the Viet Minh, they began, without causing alarm, to build well-concealed bases with bunkers and trenches throughout the Rung Sat.

In 1954, the South Vietnamese, using combined Air Force, Navy, and Infantry under the Ngo Dinh regime, fought and defeated the Binh Xuyen in the Rung Sat.

In June 1962, the Government of Vietnam (GOV) recognized the Long Tau as the main shipping channel and the Song Soirap as the secondary ship channel (they could only keep one route properly dredged).

The Ugly Terrain

Certainly it was mission necessary to use combined water- and air-mobile force because the characteristics of the Rung Sat Special Zone made many portions impenetrable and not

feasible for ground operations. The terrain was mostly bayou or swamp with 3,600 miles of creeks, rivers, and canals with an 8- to 12- foot tidal range. Dense mangrove swamp and jungle covered 85% of its area. Roads were practically non-existent and people moved from place to place by boat or sampan. Needless to say, movement of troops was always difficult because of the dense foliage and thick mud.

Rung Sat Special Zone

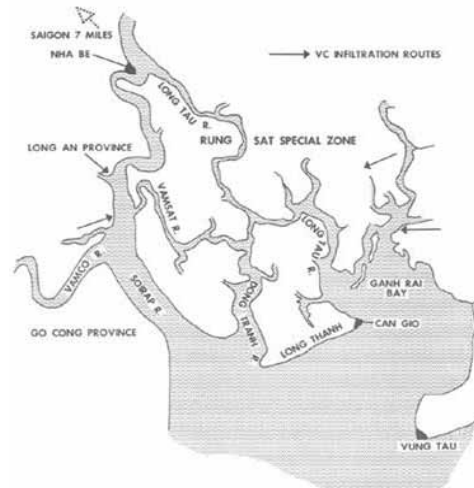
In December of 1962, the GOV formed Dac Khu Rung Sat or Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ) by transferring the two districts/sub-sectors of Quang Xuyen and Can Gio from the Gia Dinh Province and placing them under the tactical command of the Vietnamese Navy. However, pacification remained the responsibility of the Gia Dinh Province Chief. The zone thus became the only tactical/sector under VNN military control and placed a Vietnamese Navy Commander (Trung Ta) and later a Captain (Dai Ta) in command. Centered about 20 miles southeast of Saigon and headquartered at Nha Be, where the channel converged with the Soi Rap to form the Saigon River, the pie-shaped zone extended southwest over a 400 square mile area split in half by the 26 mile Long Tau Channel.

The Enemy

The strategic significance of the Long Tau Channel was not lost on an enemy who tried everything to shut it down just as the Americans had closed the water routes to Hanoi. Based on interrogation of prisoners, in April of 1966 COSVN approved their own Special Zone that was a mirror image of the RSSZ, but they called their zone T-10 or Doan 10 (Group 10). According to captured documents, the initial Commander of the assigned guerrillas was a Senior Colonel of the North Vietnamese Army who had previously served as CO of an artillery regiment. He was headquartered in underground air-raid bunkers and trenches near Phuoc Lai Village in the Nhon Trach District of Bien Hoa Province. Doan 10 was responsible for attacking ships transiting the Long Tau Channel, shelling Saigon, and disrupting the GOV pacification program by using intimidating and harassing tactics. This covered organizing Communist party chapters mirroring every village, capturing or eliminating the Provincial Self-Defense Forces (PSDF) as well as village and hamlet officials.

Doan 10 was composed of seven units (Dois) designated 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 10. Dois 2, 3, and 5 were responsible for Khu (area) "A" that consisted of attempting to control the northwestern Rung Sat rivers: Dong Tranh, Dong Kho, Ong Keo, and the Long Tao. Dois 7, 8, 9, and 10 were responsible for Khu "B" that consisted of the lower Long Tau, and other southeastern rivers.

Each of these areas had a battalion type command group and three main force sapper/infantry companies. These companies were composed largely of North Vietnamese troops sent to South Vietnam on a 3-year enlistment. They were well trained and had a formidable strike capability that included recoilless rifles,



B-40 rockets, mortars, 0.51- and 0.30-caliber machine guns, watermines, and during the last years of the war (1971-73) the Soviet AT-3 (Suitcase Sagger) Anti-tank missile (manpack version).

The personnel assigned included at least 14 girls, who were mostly used to carry mortars, B-40s, and the Russian-made AT-3 wire guided rockets. The girls were almost exclusively used for setting, aiming, and firing the mortars and rockets.

In addition, they recruited and trained local VC to supplement their ranks. A Viet Cong village infrastructure with its supporting military arm (a local guerrilla platoon) existed for every New Life Village in the Rung Sat.

The strength of Doan 10 varied from estimates of almost 100 including the guerrillas in early 1969, to about 400 in 1970, to less than 100 by the time the Americans pulled out in 1973.

The Americans Came

American naval forces joined the responsibility for protecting the channel's many brown water curves as early as 1965 and in March of 1966 Operation Jackstay, a combined USN/USMC amphibious operation was conducted in the RSSZ. The results were seven U.S. KIA/MIA and 53 VC KIA (BC).

In April 1969, the two U.S. Army advising teams under the U.S. Senior Advisor RSSZ in the Rung Sat were replaced by USN/USMC teams. About that same time, River Patrol Boats (PBRs) arrived and were organized under the River Patrol Force (TF-116). The Senior Advisor (SA) then also wore the hat of RSSZ River Patrol/Group, CTG 116.2 (116.9 after 1968).

From 1966 until the pullout in 1973, U.S. Marine Major Bronars (later Lieutenant General), followed by U.S. Navy Commanders Wandres, Straney, Wages, Williams, Stuart, Armel, and Nelson served as S.A. RSSZ and led the Navy/Marine Corps advisory effort.

Besides adjusting to Nuoc Mam, the very odorous fish sauce used as an indispensable condiment with all Vietnamese cookery, the Americans took on the mission of securing the RSSZ, and in particular defending and ensuring the security of Long Tau. They were to conduct tactical operations to destroy the enemy and provide direction and support for the pacification

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MRF Ambushed February 6, 1968, TF-117 RivDiv 111

"From where I was standing, I could see the VC firing from spider holes and trees less than 100 feet from where we beached. The troops couldn't see them because they were running up the ramp. I stood up with my bullhorn and started yelling at them to keep down, trying to tell them where Charlie was. All of a sudden I felt like someone hit me in the back with a baseball bat, and I was thrown to my knees."

Boatswain mate First Class R. D. Sullivan shifted uncomfortably as he spoke. In the pale blue pajamas of the Navy sick bay, he looked strangely out of place. He was tanned and weather-beaten face of an outdoorsman with going on 20 years in the Navy. He was obviously uncomfortable in his confinement.

Sullivan, the Boat Captain of Tango-111-10, attached to River Assault Flotilla One in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, was describing the battle that had landed him in the hospital on one of the support ships.

It was the afternoon of February 6, 1968, when Sullivan's boat, in company with six other assault craft, navigated Rach Cai Cam Canal near Vinh Long. They had been called into the area as a reaction and reinforcement force following heavy enemy contact by other Mobile Riverine units in the area early in the day.

"The canal was only about 100 feet wide," Sullivan recalled. "We were under fire as we approached the beach, but that was nothing compared to what we were in for later."

Sullivan's boat T-111-10 was carrying a platoon of Riverine Infantrymen of the 2nd

Brigade 9th Infantry Division, the ground unit of the MRF.

The battle in which they were engaged was one of many in Operation Coronado X, a campaign designed to free the delta area south of Saigon from the Viet Cong that had gripped it for several years. As the boats moved down the narrow canal, it became obvious the VC were laying in ambush. Sullivan shook his head. "They were waiting for us closer to the beach than we expected." We beached the boat under fire from the boat banks. I was standing between the two 0.50-caliber machine gun mounts high above everyone else. The army was running up the ramp into the fire and couldn't see what I could. While I was yelling at them, a rifle grenade bounced off the 20-mm cannon mount right behind me and detonated.

As Boat Captain of the 56-foot converted landing craft, Sullivan's duty is outside the boat above the conning station. Wearing battle gear, protective body armor, and a helmet, he is able to direct his boat's activities while commanding an unobstructed view of the surrounding area. "I give credit to my flak jacket and helmet for saving my life," Sullivan declared.

As it was, I was able to walk below after I told the kids I was hit. They put battle dressings on me and took me to a medical aid boat. In 10 minutes, I was on a helicopter and on the way back to the MRF Base."

Sullivan moved stiffly as he talked, turning his whole body to look at people who walked by. He was still heavily bandaged and doctors



had not yet released him for duty. His back and shoulder wounds were minor only because he was wearing the body armor.

The "kids" of whom Sullivan spoke are the members of his crew to be around 18- or 19-years old. Although he referred to them as kids, he certainly did not describe them as such. "They learned fast, under fire. There are no mistakes allowed here."

After taking the wounded Boat Captain to a medical clearing station, the crew returned to the battle, beached the boat, and resumed their mission. Before that day was over, 15 of their fellow combat sailors had been wounded. But they and the Infantry of the 2nd Brigade had routed the VC who left 86 dead and 27 assorted weapons in their wake.

Note: BM1 R. D. Sullivan drowned on August 21, 1968, while serving in the MRF TF-117 in Dinh Tuong Province. While serving aboard Tango -111-10. BM1 Sullivan was born December 19, 1925, in Centerville, TN. ★

RUNG SAT CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

effort including the civil administration of the two districts: Quang Xuyen on the west and Can Gio on the east.

Intelligence

Two district intelligence squads, a Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU), and a USN SEAL platoon based at Nha Be and later at Cat Lai were used throughout the war on various intelligence missions. The resourcefulness of the intelligence program, including the PRU/Phoenix and PsyOps programs strengthened the effectiveness of RSSZ operations. Typically, they were sent to capture and interrogate VC or sympathizers in an effort to keep current on enemy capability and intentions.

Combat Operations

Rung Sat tactics were tailored to meet the situation and were the epitome of a joint team effort. Day-to-day ops consisted of patrolling the main rivers and inspecting transiting watercraft for contraband or the movement of guerrillas.

Forces

Ground forces assigned to the RSSZ consisted of Regional Force (RF) Companies, Popular Force (PF) platoons, and Peoples Self-Defense Force (PSDF) available for local security and offensive operations. Navy assets included 70 + USN/VNN boats under the operational control of the Commander Rung Sat Special Zone in collaboration with his Senior Advisor. Sea Wolves, flying UH-1 gunships stationed at the Nha Be heliport were used for direct support and OV-10 Black Ponies stationed at Vung Tau were

used for close air support. Table 1 shows the units involved in securing the RSSZ.

Because of their very nature, guerrillas had to move at night; therefore, night ambushes and water-borne guard posts were used regularly. The primary strike method consisted of air-mobile and water-mobile offensive operations. USN HAL-3 "Seawolf" gunships and VAL 4 "Black Ponies" (OV-10s) were primary air support. Other assets on call from Tan Son Nhut Air Base and CamRon Bay AFB consisted of TACAIR F-4s and F-100s, Spectre AC-130s, Stinger AC-119s, Spooky AC-47s, and Nitehawk UH-1s. These were called in through DAS 3 (call sign Blue Chip Guns) the III CTZ Direct Air Support Center.

River Patrol Operations

The Long Tau Channel was segmented into six patrol zones with two PBRs assigned to each zone on a 24-hour basis. Their primary objective was to provide both escort of "special interest" shipping (tankers and ammo ships) and surveillance of the river traffic. Minesweepers with mechanical sweep gear from MID 93 traveled in pairs, one on each side of the Long Tau at approximately 100 yards distance. Pairs of sweeps departed Nha Be or Cat Lai (after 1970) at about 0800, 1200, 2000, and 2400 daily, providing overlapping coverage. However, an MSB conducted a check-sweep for influence mines on the Long Tau



Nha Be Naval Base

Table 1. Rung Sat Special Zone Units

Unit	Consisted of
RPD 51	4 PBRs
RPD 52	6 PBRs
RPD 57	20 PBRs
RAG 27	1 Commandment, 1 Monitor, 6 LCMs, 13 RPCs
RF Boat Co. 29	1 LCM, 8 LCVPs, 1 LCU
MID 93	6 MSRs, 3 LCMs
RPD 153	8 ASPDs
RPD 535	10 PBRs
RPD 531	10 PBRs
MID 112	7 MSBs
MID 113	6 MSRs, 8 MSDs, 8 MSMS, 3 LCMs
TE 116.9.6.1	1 LCM, 2 LSsCs, 1 MSSC
TG 116.9	Zippo
SEALs (NAU Nha Be)	Boat Repair Capability
Logistic Support Base	
Sea Wolves (Nha Be)	4 UHs
RSSZ HQ Battalion	400
Provincial Reconnaissance Unit (PRU)	
Regional Force Companies (RF)	13 Popular Force Platoons (PF) and Peoples Self Defense Force

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DOOR GUNNER

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M-60 machine guns and 500 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition per gun. Additionally, each of the crew members was armed with M-16 rifles and 80 rounds of 5.56 mm ammunition. The pilot and co-pilot also carried Colt-38 caliber revolvers. There were also a variety of smoke grenades. The maximum load consisted of only six U.S. troops (or nine Vietnamese army troops who were much smaller and lighter) because the extreme tropical heat caused the jet engine to lose power as a result of the heavy loads. The pilot and copilot sat in bullet-proof seats and all crew members wore bullet-proof vests. The crew chief and door gunners usually elected to sit on their bullet-proof vests to protect the family jewels.

There was one occasion when elements of the 39th Infantry Regiment were getting hit so badly that Helicopter #65-10019 had to return to extract the troops while the troops were being overrun. During that extraction, nine of the helicopters in the 1st platoon had taken numerous hits and were no longer flyable. My machine gun and my rifle had both ran out of ammo, so I was using the pilot's revolver to provide cover. I later volunteered to return to the battlefield when there was only one helicopter still flying, and later to be shot down.

Sometime in mid-1967 I remember on several occasions that we inserted/extracted elements of the Queens Cobra's (Royal Army of Thailand) into, or out of, combat zones.

There were also many times that we landed on either the Benewah or at the Nha Be Naval Base for rearming and/or refueling.

Then during late 1967, I remember on several occasions that we inserted/extracted elements of the Australian infantry into, or out of, combat zones. Then someone in the 191st Assault Helicopter Company had shot and killed two large elk (perhaps 500 lbs. each). The elk were taken back to Bearcat and butchered. Those elements of the Australian army then came to Bearcat, along with their chef who had experience cooking the elk on the Barbie. So we had one hell of a party with barbequed elk and Australian beer.

During the first 3 weeks of December 1967, the entire company was transferred (TDY) from the USA 9th Infantry Division into the ARVN 7th

Infantry Division. It was during this time that we supported only the Vietnamese Infantry and after combat we were also responsible for picking up the hundreds of pieces of parts from the dead bodies from the battlefield, wrapped in ponchos, and taking them to the Vietnamese morgues. This was a gruesome task and a real nightmare.

On another occasion, Helicopter #65-10019 was shot down while flying and as it was going down the main rotor hit a tree, causing the fuselage to spin. I remember flying around the interior of the fuselage several times and because I didn't wear a seat belt, I ended up landing on the ground outside of the helicopter after it had crashed to the ground. None of the crew members were badly injured, and there were

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During that extraction, nine of the helicopters in the 1st platoon had taken numerous hits... My machine gun and my rifle had both ran out of ammo, so I was using the pilot's revolver to provide cover.

”

no passengers, so we set up a perimeter next to the downed helicopter. It was later reported that we had gone down within a Viet Cong battalion-sized base camp. Although nobody was volunteering to rescue us because of the situation, we did get rescued.

On another occasion, Helicopter #65-10019 was shot down while flying and as it hit the ground the skids were completely flattened and the fuselage was flat on the ground. None of the crew members were badly injured, and there were no passengers, so we set up a perimeter next to the downed helicopter. We were rescued within the hour.

Then there was the time that we were able to fly back to base camp, but just barely. After landing, I counted a total of 18 direct hits to Helicopter #65-10019. One of these rounds had evidently hit the engine compartment and ricocheted into and through the bullet-proof vest that I was sitting on, and then hit me in the ass. Well, I pulled this round from my ass and put on a bandage, but never reported it to the medics so I was never given a Purple Heart for this

incident. However, I still have that armor-piercing round that I had pulled from my ass, after all these years.

During the Tet Offensive, Helicopter #65-10639 in the 3rd platoon was shot up, and the pilot was shot and killed on February 1, 1968, and then with a replacement pilot, Helicopter #65-10639 was shot up again and the door gunner was shot and seriously wounded on February 2, 1968. I was then transferred from Helicopter #65-10019 to Helicopter #65-10639 as the replacement door gunner on February 3, 1968. This was a Gunship that was armed with two mini-guns capable of firing 6,000 rounds per minute along with two rocket pods, each armed with seven 2.75 rockets. The door gunners each had free-standing M-60 machine guns along with four extra barrels and 2,000 rounds of ammunition per gunner. My first assignment on this gunship was February 4, 1968 in Cholon.

Later on, we were involved in a firefight over a Viet Cong base camp using anti-aircraft guns. An enemy round hit the mini-gun on the right side, and since I was hanging out the right side to fire my machine gun, I was hit with shrapnel in the face, right arm, and right shoulder. After landing, I had to be medivaced to the main hospital of the 9th Infantry Division and was operated on while I was in a bed in the hospital hall. I received a Purple Heart for this incident.

I was then briefly transferred (TDY) into the Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion of the 47th Infantry Regiment as a battalion (recon) scout sometime during April 1968. There was one occasion when we were loaded onto US Naval landing craft (LCMs) and made a combat beach assault on a remote shore located somewhere along the Mekong River, supported by artillery and jets. And as a scout, I remember being sent out after darkness, into the unknown, while it poured down rain.

Finally, I returned to the 3rd platoon of the 191st Assault Helicopter Company, completing several more combat missions. The 191st Assault Helicopter Company had flown a total of 37,260 combat hours that reportedly accounted for 396 VC kills according to actual body counts during its first year in-country. The three platoons of the 191st Assault Helicopter Company had suffered only 17 deaths during that period.

I was discharged on June 11, 1968, and hopped a TWA flight to Oakland and never looked back.



USS Whitfield County (LST-1169) Vietnam 1968



A rocket fired for a little target practice 1968



A hit but not much damage



So fire a torpedo



Then a second amidships



That did the trick



And a grand old lady



sinks to her watery grave



But her many crewmembers will remember her.

The Sinking of the USS Whitfield County (LST-1169)

This LST that supported the Mobile Riverine Force in Vietnam was sunk to make a coral reef in July 2004 somewhere off the coast of Greece.

Photos by Rick Bennett.

I Can Answer One of Patrick Kelly's Questions (A Twisted Ankle on CCB 151 River Currents Summer 2013)

Concerning an After Action Report for the Operation By Richard Staley (06/68-06/69)

Yes, there was one. I was RIVRON 15 Ops Officer, and I wrote after action reports for every operation I rode (and I rode on this one). It may have been classified "Confidential" at the time but must be declassified by now. I do not know where the reports currently reside.

RIVRON 15 departed the MRB and embarked a battalion of VNMC around November 1, 1968, and worked the Ractt Gia—Long-Xuyen canal for the better part of the month as part of the opening phase of SEA LORDS. Commercial traffic on the canal had been shut off by the VC severely interrupting the flow of Phu Quoc Island nuoc maam to Saigon. By Thanksgiving, the canal was declared open.

With the marines still embarked, we headed west toward the Cambodian border working a variety of areas providing us a number of interesting events. The one that sticks in my mind was when the marines, who were trying to sweep the summit of a small mountain, requested artillery support of us. The 105-mm turrets on the monitors could not elevate, so in order to fire ahead of the marines moving up slope, our two monitors put their noses on the river bank and revved their engines pushing up the bank until they achieved our best guess for the desired elevation for their guns. This seemed to work for a while, but eventually a round exploded behind the

advancing marines and we had to call the fire support off.

By the time we headed into the U Minh Forrest the day after the unilateral Christmas armistice, we had been in the field nearly 2 months and the boats were pretty beat up. A number of them were under tow because of propellers and shafts fouled with wire. Somewhere along the way we were joined by a VNN RAG featuring an assortment of unique craft from the French war. The RAG would not lead the column and they would not go last so we had to put them in the middle.

We proceeded downstream until we nearly ran out of water and it became too narrow for a boat to turn around. The marines set up a fire support base and flew in six 105-mm howitzers. There was not much contact initially. I remember the field hospital that Patrick Kelly mentioned. The supplies had come from the world over.

We decided to move a few miles north the afternoon of the 31st and four of the guns were lifted out, but then helo support was held up and we waited. Eventually, the last two guns were lifted out just as darkness began to fall. By now, the VC have gathered every available body they could muster and bullets were zinging around the area even before the marines reembarked.

The firefight was as Patrick Kelly described it; long and chaotic. One of the ATCs lost his tow and the boat captain (BM1 Hickman I think) went back on his

stern and made it up again under fire. The RAG started firing and could not be turned off. They fired until they either ran out of ammo or burned up their gun barrels. My fear at the time was that they would fire into our boats.

I also do not know who called in the AC 47. It was neither me nor Cdr Deal. Maybe the MRB was able to monitor some of our VHF comms and did it on their own. But the sight on a dark night was amazing. It looked like molten metal being poured from a spot in the sky slowly at first and then accelerating, and the sound was as if a giant bolt of material was being ripped. The impact was close, and I was in earnest hope that the aircrew knew where we were.

Forty-four years later I can still say that it was the most memorable New Year's Eve of my life.

In a unique quirk, I revisited the area 4 years later as a crew member of Goldsborough (DDG 20). In January 1973, Goldsborough was assigned NGFS duties in IV Corps on the Gulf of Thailand west coast. One day we were detailed an air spotter who directed us to coordinates inside the U Minh. After we had slithered in over the mud banks and taken up station, I looked at the chart and realized that I had been here before. We shot for a couple of hours. The spotter was enthusiastic and credited us with all manner of damage, but I knew in my heart that there was not a structure in the area worth the cost of a single 5-inch round. ★

From the Membership

Hi Albert,

I send my best and a big Thank You for the Vietnam Service Flag you donated to the PCF-816. It has been flying from the mast ever since it arrived. It is beautiful and we are so proud to have it. Yard workers at the Marine Group where we are hauled out have made many compliments. Many pictures of this flag have been posted on Jim Deal's MyFamily web site. I hope you have access to that site. If not, contact Jim Deal, copied on this email.

Thank you again!

Virg Erwin

July 22, 2013

Charley and Georgie

As I said in the email, the mind goes first. I can't remember from day to day. Just ask my wife. Ha. The guys left it to me to remember to send it to you for In Memory. Those guys were my heroes and when they all died, or were wounded on June 19, 1967, or that year, it was imprinted in my mind. You and Albert keep us guys going, and we appreciate it so much. I will not see you folks this year, as getting around is hard for me to stay on my legs too long. My Alpha guys 4th/47th will be there for sure. Tony (moon shine) Spradling can't wait to see Albert, as he has grown fond of Albert, as we all have. Enjoy the reunion my friends, and believe me I will be thinking of you guys. It will be a busy week for you for sure.

Jim Henke A Co. 4th/47th

In Memory—James Henke, Tony Spradling, Dave Nelson, James Callan, and the Band of Brothers for Sgt Gerald Thurman and Spec James B. Johnson, and all our Brothers lost on June 19, 1967, from A Co. 4th/47th 9th in AP BAC, Long An Province.



3rd/34th Arty Barges



1097th MD Boat Company

Photos from LTJG Larry Irwin

Folks these are some of the best photos I have ever seen of the MRF from our beginning. Thanks to LTJG Larry Irwin (a gunnery officer on the USS Floyd County, skipper of PCF 10, NIOTC instructor, and training officer at Camp Roberts, California, where most all the MRF sailors went for gunnery training before going to Vietnam) for making the photos available and for Don Blankenship posting them on his web site (http://www.rivervet.com/larry_irwin.htm). What a great collections of photos, which I'm sure you will enjoy. There's probably a good picture of your support ship, and if you were in RivDiv 112, there's probably a picture of your boat in 1967. Albert

Operations Report, Sunday, July 14, 1968

All elements of Task Force Group Bravo returned to Dong Tam Sunday, including ATC 131-8, which was damaged late Saturday morning by an underway explosion believed to be a small water mine.

Divers flown to the scene from the Sphinx and those on the combat salvage boat completed temporary repairs on the ATC Sunday morning, permitting it to make the transit from the mouth of Snoopy's Nose to the YRBM-17 at Dong Tam.

The first four ATCs of River Division 132 joined Task Group Bravo at Dong Tam Sunday afternoon. The boats completed the 2-day transit from Vung Tau at 1445.

Operations Report, Saturday, July 13, 1968

This report indicated that the 4/39th infantry was backloaded with intentions of proceeding to a PZ vic for an air mobile lift, however, as RAC transited down Rach Ba Rai enemy fire was received from both banks. Fire was returned and suppressed. Company 3rd BDE and CTG 117.2 made the decision to land the 4/39 Infantry on both sides of the entrance to the Ba Rai. After beach prep C Company was landed at 0945. As A Company made beaching approach, fire was received from the beach. The task unit withdrew, the beach was repped and A Company was beached. As Tango T-131-8 was beaching, and underwater explosion blew an 18" hole in its deck. Salvage ops began and both boats remained beached. The 4/39 infantry swept the beach and adjacent areas and established a defense perimeter. Several boats beached in the vicinity of Tango 8 and Tango 13. All boats remained inside of the perimeter throughout the night while salvage operations continued. Battle damage included (1) T-131-5 heat round through MK 19 mount. Weapon damaged beyond repair. Heat round through starboard side under 20-mm mount. Minor damage; (2) T-131-13 underwater explosion caused an 18-inch hole in port shaft tunnel in lazaret. Will require lift; (3) T-131-8 underwater explosion caused an 18-inch hole in hull under starboard fuel tank. Engine room flooded. Will require lift; (4) T-131-2 port engine has broken crank shaft; (5) A-111-3 contaminated fuel system, and (6) T-131-6 port engine still inoperative.

Casualties from this morning's action were as follows: 7 USA WIAs, 9 USN WIAs, and 2 dustoff, one of which remained in Dong Tam, the other medivached to Long Binh.

After landing of 4/39 Infantry Battalion, the troops sweep through the ambush site and discovered 2 VC KIAs (one floating and one in small bunker). The KIAs were credited to CTU 117.3 by the Army. Several blood trails were also noted.

From all indications, damage sustained by T-131-8 and T-131-13 was from contact mines or trip wire activated mine that detonated as boats beached.

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every third day. Two minesweepers provided continuous non-overlapping patrols on the Soi Rap River.

During the period from 24 June 1969 to 28 February 1970, the following units were attached to the Rung Sat Special Zone River Patrol Group, superbly led by (then) Commander Jerry Wages USN were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation: HAL (3) Det (2); MinDivs 112 and 113; River Divisions 531, 533, 554, 571, and 593; River Squadron 59 Staff; Seal Two Det Alfa 4th, 5th, 7th, 9th, and 10th Plts; Seal Two Det Golf Echo Plt; MST Two Det Alfa, Delta; MST Four; Watchstanders NAG/TOC; and River Assault Division 153.



MSB-49 (1967) out of Nha Be

Air-Mobile Operations

The most formidable strike operation in the Rung Sat was the air-mobile concept. This consisted of one-half an assault helo company (C&C), two gunships, four troop transports, FAC (NGLO airborne), and a Hunter/Killer Team (a LOW and Cobra). The air-mobile operation was the most successful for inflicting maximum enemy casualties and destruction of enemy basecamps and structures. Waterborne tactics consisting of assault, patrolling, blocking, fire support, ferrying, medivac often supported these ops, communications relays, harbor sites, POW collection, troop resupply, and extraction.

A typical RSSZ operation began D-5 when intelligence collection and plans were developed and coordinated with the VN. After the operation was approved by the Commander RSSZ and about D-1, the senior tactical advisor and the overall tactical commander conducted a visual recon of the area. At daybreak on D-Day, the C&C helo, followed by the FAC, several front firing UH-1s, and the transport helos took off. After marking the HLZ with smoke, the C&C and FAC stayed at about 1,000 feet. When the transports were about 500 meters from the HLZ, the airstrike conducted the softening up with rockets and mini-guns. The transports were allowed 10 seconds to discharge their troops and get out before the next transport arrived. Helo gunships remained in the area, on call, just in case. After the troops secured the adjacent area, they moved out in the most lucrative direction under the coordination of the tactical commander who was observing from the C&C helo.

Water-Mobile Operations

The second most powerful strike operation used in the RSSZ was the water-mobile concept. Based on intelligence, a task force was typically formed of the specific kinds of river craft needed for the enemy situation. A task organization might include a Commandment, four RPCs, an LCM, four ASPBs, a Zippo, four PBRs and two KSBs. Because each craft had a different speed and draft, they left their berths at different times so as to arrive at the objective in the Rung Sat or upper Saigon River for a coordinated strike. The concept was to have the watercraft move into a cordon position under cover of darkness. Assault boats with troops embarked stood

by for amphibious ops at first light. Any suspicious craft were captured and checked for contraband, weapons, or false ID cards. Detainees were collected and towed with their sampans to a predetermined point where local police checked them. The troops inserted in predetermined areas and conducted searches. When the troops completed their search, they re-embarked and inserted in a new area. Table 2 shows the capabilities of some of the craft.

Table 2. Watercraft characteristics

Watercraft	Characteristics
Commandment	Speed of 10-12 knots, a 5- foot draft, carried 20 troops and was armed with two 20-mm guns, one 81-mm mortar, two 0.50 cal. MGs and two 0.30 cal. MGs.
River Patrol Craft (RPC)	Speed of 10-12 knots, a 4- foot draft, carried 15 troops and was armed with two twin 0.50 cal. MGs and two 0.30 cal. MGs.
LCM-6	Speed of 10-12 knots, a 5- foot draft, carried 90 troops and was armed with three 20-mm guns and two 0.50 cal. MGs
PBR	Speed of 25 knots, a 2- foot, 5-inch draft, carried 6-8 troops and was armed with twin 0.50 cal. MGs, two M-60 MGs, and an M-18 Honeywell Grenade launcher.
ASPB	Speed of 15 knots, a 5- foot draft, could carry 30 troops and was armed with two 20-mm MGs, two 0.50 cal. MGs, two 0.62 MK21 MGs, two M-60 MGs, two M-18 Honeywell Grenade launchers, eight 3.5-inch rockets and a 60-mm mortar.

Night Ambushes

The VC moved at night using the sampan, a 20-foot craft with a 10-inch draft propelled by a horizontal-thrust 6HP Briggs and Stratton engine, pole, or oar at a speed of 6 knots. They did not typically travel on main streams because they were too well patrolled. Nor travel in the rain because the sampan flooded easily and sank. Nor did they travel against the tide because the current was often 8 knots or when there was no moon, because it was difficult to navigate in the dark.

Statistical data showed they moved no later than 2200 and used patterned routes. Therefore, the best ambushes were set up on minor, well used side streams, at medium or high tide on moonlit nights with no more than light rain, down-tide from a suspected base camp between sunset and midnight.

The insertion was made by any craft from ASPB to sampan depending on the depth of the stream and the troop lift requirement. For purposes of ambush siting and troop reembarkation, tidal effects were the most vital aspects of the ambush. The kill zone was typically sited at stream junctions and a prearranged signal, such as a flare, a claymore mine detonation, or machine gun fire, triggered the ambush. Grenades and mines were used for concussion effect on any evading swimmers. Boat support remained near the ambush site and after springing a successful ambush and once policed of any evidence (to reduce chance of alerting the next enemy element that entered the kill zone), the boat and squad made a rendezvous for return to base.

Results

The first major ground operation in the Rung Sat was conducted in 1965 by Vietnamese Regional Force Troops under the command of and supported by the Vietnamese Navy. The second operation was conducted during Operation Jack Stay. Its forces penetrated deep in both Can Gio and Quang Xuyen Districts resulting in many VC bases being destroyed and large supply caches captured or destroyed.

A major element of the success enjoyed by the Allies/GOV in protecting the Long Tau Channel and other

RUNG SAT CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

strategic rivers during the remainder of the war was the result of an extensive defoliation program conducted many times over. A wide swath the entire length and both sides of the Long Tau was cleared of any dense jungle that could have concealed attacks on shipping. The first defoliation was carried out along the banks in 1965. In 1966, 1967, and almost every year thereafter including the last year of the war, 1972, the banks were again sprayed with herbicidal defoliants.

From mid-1969, the casualties to Doan 10 personnel were so high that cadres and soldiers were ordered to disperse very thinly to avoid casualties. They took to living three to a hideout in dense nipa-palm areas. In 1970 alone, there were 188 VC killed or captured in action. After Allied/GOV operations of 1970 VC forces were demoralized.

Over the course of the war only one ship, the Baton Rouge Victory, on August 23, 1966, was sunk. Another merchant ship, a large oil tanker, went aground in 1972, but neither ship obstructed the flow of vital logistics. From a high of about two shipping attacks each week in 1966-67, the VC were reduced to less than one every two months by the end of the war.

Success came under the leadership of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt and his successors Admirals Salzer, Price, and Wilson. Of course it was also because of the combined efforts of the brave sailors and marines who conducted the day-to-day river patrols. The many small intelligence and ground unit strikes kept the VC off balance, and the constant attrition by the air- and water-mobile operations made the Rung Sat one of the most successful operations of the war.

To top it all off, during the later stages the advisors turned over their boats and equipment and successfully trained the Vietnamese such that the Rung Sat Special Zone held until the very end.

The last advisory team left Nha Be and pulled out of country on February 11, 1973, one day before the first of the 115 American POWs were released from Hanoi.

Acknowledgment: Although written by the last Senior Advisor of the Rung Sat Special Zone, this history has been gratefully reviewed and critiqued by such authorities as Navy Captains C. Jerry Wages, James G. Williams, and Marine Colonel E. V. Bodolato. Thank you.

Notes from Members on the Rung Sat Special Zone

To me, the most interesting thing about the Rung Sat is what the Vietnamese have made of it. For centuries, up to and including the war, it was a trackless mangrove swamp, the abode of rebels and bandits. Since we left, the Vietnamese have built a highway straight down the middle of the Rung Sat to the beach facing across towards Vung Tau, and have turned the beach into a resort. Google Earth will show you the results. I bet the Corps of Engineers could have done the same thing in 1967 for a fraction of what we spent on riverine operations, and solved our military problems in the process.
Bill Befort Co. B 1st Platoon, 4th/47th Inf (02/66-09/67)

Hey Al, Greetings, I served on the MSBs in Nha Be, Vietnam, from April to December 1970. [All MSBs were redeployed back to Long Beach, California, in December 1970] and of course Nha Be sits on the north tip of the Rung Sat.

We always started our sweeps at zero dark thirty, we did both magnetic and chain drag sweeps, there was always two boats on each patrol at the same time, only one boat would deploy sweep gear in most cases, and the other was a cover boat.

Every sweep was different, and we took small arms fire from time to time, [Harassment fire] and there was this one time [I think it was late July or August 1970] that a command detonated mine blew up ahead of us, but no one was injured.

I hope this information is helpful. Take care.
Billy Sanders RivRon 11 C-112-1 & T-112-1 (04/67-12/67)

War Stinks

This is a version of one of my stories first published in the 1997 edition of the *Mobile Riverine Force Volume 1* by Turner Publishing Company.

It was night in late June 1969 when a Japanese freighter rounded the corner of Nha Be to head up river to Saigon. It didn't make it. There was a mine waiting for it and when it was all over, the freighter lay on its side in the murky river water. I was on the APL 30 approximately 50 meters away and slept right through the event. The first clue I had that something had happened was in the morning when I was drinking my morning coffee along the starboard rail.

I looked out on the base, which we were moored to, and saw about 40 Japanese tourists sitting on their suitcases. I then saw some small boat movement on the

river and noticed the ship lying on her side. We had just arrived in Nha Be and several of us stayed with the APL to prepare for a tow to CONUS (Continental United States). When this task would be completed, I would be assigned to Nha Be. One of my duties would be to take a Boston Whaler out at night and patrol for illegal crossings of sampans, anti-swimmer patrol, and look for and detonate mines. I would be stationed at Nha Be for 3 months, bringing to a conclusion my 12-month tour in Vietnam.

The freighter was loaded with rice and diesel fuel and as the months passed without it being salvaged, that combination created a very distinct and sickening

odor. By the time August and September arrived, you did not require night vision devices or a map to find your way around the river. You knew right where you were as you approached the distinct odor of the freighter. I would be interested in knowing whatever became of that ship. I would think eventually something would be done to salvage it.

Things I recall about being in the Rung Sat Special Zone are the really high and low tides.

Robert Heiney APL-30 and Nha Be (09/68-09/69) robert.heiney@gmail.com

Hi Al, The swamp-like terrain, mangrove, leeches, walk and sunk in the heavy mud that turned into a shiny brown/gold look dust when it dried up; the smell of humidity and vegetation; and the heat and humidity was unbearable. You dug 6 inches and were in water already. There were areas that you could walk for hours and the sole of your boots did not have a speck of dirt. It was like a layer of vegetation over a layer, over a layer... then back to the mud over and over. Crossing a small river every 15 minutes or less...then removing the leeches again.

CSM Orlando Gallardo Co. B, 4th/39th Inf, 9th Inf Div (10/67-09/68)

Wasn't the Rung Sat an area where the tide would have a very low and a very high tide? If it was, I remember once being caught in a high tide and having to climb a tree and wait for 6? hours for the tide to recede. Was this area also called "Rung Sat SECRET Zone?" Thanks.
Sgt Chuck Baran HHC 2nd Bde, 9th Inf Div S2 (11/67-11/68)

Albert. That Rung Sat Special Zone was a disaster waiting to happen. When the boats headed that way, we knew we were in trouble. We always said, anyplace but the Rung Sat. We knew if we were wounded in that hell hole, we might not have gotten out in time. The terrain was hard to navigate, and we never knew where the enemy was until it was too late. Many a good soldier was hurt there, and we always felt we should never have been sent in a place, where so many would die, for nothing. Our Navy brothers felt the same way and they also hated that thick muddy jungle crappy place, where no man should have gone, especially for a body

count, of our enemy that the big boys wanted. Their tails sat in a safe place; while our guys died in that infested hell hole. When we would pull out of there, we would thank the Good Lord. Many a good soldier, who I and others looked up

to that year, damn near cracked because of a place called the Rung Sat. It took a lot out of a good man, who had been through a lot, after that place. Some were never the same. They called it shell shocked back then; today they call it PTSD. Either way it adds up to the same old thing, there were too many lives taken in places like that, where brave soldiers didn't have to be sent. In the end, we paid dearly for our operations in there. This is how I feel about the place called the Rung Sat, and there are a lot of other great soldiers better than I, also feel that way. Thanks for listening guys, some things about



Remains of the Freighter

Return to Vietnam for a Different Purpose

by Captain Carl Nelson US Navy (Ret.)

Midnight. It was the last day of January 2000 exactly 3 months before the 25th anniversary of the fall of the South Vietnam to Communism. A chill sliced the air at San Francisco International. We boarded our plane already knowing about the heat and humidity of our destination. I remembered it well, but this time I was returning for an altogether different purpose than I did once before I came this way. In the first instance, I was there to fight the Viet Cong and fend off the next falling domino. Before I left for my return trip, another veteran who had different experiences than I had asked in a petulant tone, "Why, in heaven's name, would anyone want to go back to Vietnam?"

The primary reason I was returning this time was to accommodate Mr. Loung Nguyen who asked me to go with him for the Tet 2000 holiday and meet his parents.

You see, Lew (his Americanized name), now 36 years old, is one of 44 Vietnamese children rescued on April 19, 1980, from a drifting boat in the South China Sea. At the time, I was Commanding Officer of the U.S. Navy ship that saved them. We made passage to Singapore and left them there for humanitarian agencies to move on to freedom. Our job was done and we sailed away assuming never to hear of them again.

In 1995, now retired from the Navy, I received a phone call from one of the survivors. After that, a relationship with the 44 grew and over the years I attended several reunions, two weddings in northern California, and a feeling of pride about their success in America.

Last November, when Lew asked me to return, I pondered his request for several days.

Having served four tours of duty in that war, one of which was in the delta as a brown water advisor, I often thought about making a nostalgia trek. As professor of international business, I was also interested in observing any changes in Vietnam and comparing life and the economy

today with the way it was before the Americans pulled out.

But, the real reason I agreed to return was to learn the answer to the question "Why?" "Why would parents send their children to the ocean and possible death in badly outfitted, unseaworthy boats with the known threat of pirates, thirst, and starvation?"



HS KOS (L-116) Creek Navy Ex-1169

Once aboard the 747, we skimmed the northern fringe of the Pacific Ocean knowing it would be about 24 hours before we landed at Than Son Nhut, the former military airbase now an international airport.

Heat. Humidity. Nothing changes. Everything changes. I found a country overflowing with 77 million people yet only slightly larger than New Mexico, which has a population of about 1.5 million.

The biggest change I noted in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) was that hardly anyone wore uniforms. There were a few police and those were mostly unarmed, yet I felt safe in this nation now at peace. Apparently, cops are not out in conspicuous force. An ex-patriot told me, "Since about 1988 their role has been steadily dwindling. Prior to that one needed their permission to attend a family gathering numbering more than five people. In the larger cities such as Saigon and Hanoi there is some crime, but nothing on the scale that would compare to the United States. In the heartlands, crime is almost non-existent."

The city can best be described by two words: motorcycles and red. I admit to exaggeration, but it seemed to me that there is at least one motorcycle or moped for every person in the country. Although there are very few automobiles, crossing the street is a very brave act. I thought

of a new T-shirt slogan: "I crossed a street in Ho Chi Minh City and lived." Red is the color of Communism and the Government spares no cost in splashing the landscape, roads, and buildings with red banners and flags with gold stars or the hammer and sickle symbol.

Ex-patriots have a saying about Vietnam, "The Communists got two things when they took over: Ownership of the land and the right to rename the streets otherwise everything is the same." Ho Chi Minh City is still frequently called Saigon even though the name is only one of the three major communities that make up the city region.

Most major international hotel chains have prominent locations in the city. I stayed at a medium priced hotel, US \$22/day, and found it clean with about the same comforts as a Best Western in the States. The same hotels Americans knew during the war are still operating. I had dinner one night at the famous "Top of the Rex."

The economy is a paradox. Their currency is strongly controlled and is not convertible in foreign markets so at 14,000 Dong to one, the U.S. dollar is cherished on the streets and explains why Americans and other foreigners are so welcome.

All significant macro indicators show a country in a recession, but my observations tell a different story. There is a significant "black economy" where things get done despite Government bureaucracy. There is money where there appears to be none and much of it has been brought in by the Viet Kieu—Vietnamese who are now citizens of other countries.

As I traveled the city, on its under-construction "ring road," in a chauffeur driven car, I saw entrepreneurs doing business in every nook and cranny of the city and its surroundings. Industrial parks as large as in the States exist where Taiwanese, Australians, as well as American companies take advantage of global wage differentials. There are a 36-hole Country Club and a Water

Park exactly like one near my own neighborhood in southern California. Supranational government agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF are funding many infrastructure projects. An Australian firm has the contract to electrify the country.

One ex-patriot explained the economy this way, "Increased prosperity is clearly evident compared to 5 years ago. New paint, clothes, vehicles, and restaurants are evidence of growth, but there is still a long way to go. The people don't have much money; however, they want everything and they will figure out how to get it. For Americans wishing to do business, the lack of a Trade Agreement remains an impediment."

My former military base at Nha Be still exists and continues to serve the Vietnamese Navy, but of course, they didn't let an old enemy onboard for a visit. Other bases like Binh Hoa had long ago been converted to either public purposes or for Vietnamese national defense. Property such as the large rice farms and rubber plantations has been redistributed, as communists do, to the population. People, in turn, have built a home and have their own garden where Americans had airstrips and barracks.

After 3 days in Ho Chi Minh City, Lew and I made our way by van (the nationalized Vietnamese airline doesn't fly during Tet) to Buon Me Thuot. It was a long and bumpy trip to this town of about 30,000 population, 250 miles north, in the Central highlands. There we stayed in the home of Lew's gracious parents and participated in the annual lunar New Year celebration called Tet. I had already enjoyed America's "once in a thousand years" New Year's Eve Party on December 31, 1999, so this is the beginning of the "Year of the Dragon" was to be my second celebration. Tet is a 3-day affair in Asia when homage is paid to elders and ancestors and time is spent visiting extended families and friends. It is by far the most significant event in Vietnam and its importance is unfathomable to most outsiders. Besides being the nation's number

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RUNG SAT MEMORIES

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that war that never change in a soldier's mind, even after all these years later.

Jim Henke Alpha Co 4th/47th 9th Inf Div
(06/67-06/68)

Dear Albert

A few of my memories of the Rung Sat Special Zone: Even when I hear the name, it brings chills up my spine. Let me explain why—it was nothing but acres of mud and bamboo so thick you

couldn't see 10 feet in front of you, the mud up to your crotch area, constantly with a tidal effect measured in feet rather than inches.

We were told this was a Viet Cong Training and Staging Area and a place for them to rest up and regroup. When the tide was out, it looked almost like a hog lot with many tracks of bare feet or VC sandals. For every grunt, the enemy would ambush you quickly with a violent burst of fire power and explosives charges, and then melt away usually in a short time. They were also

masters of setting booby traps. A constant fear for us guys tripping one. The entire Mekong Delta was similar, but the Rung Sat brought a special feeling of fear and terror that I'll never forget!! I would judge this area to be the one of the worst places in the world to fight in—A horrid miserable, mud-infested, stinking place. I think I can speak for all who served at any time in the Rung Sat.

Dave Nelson A Co 4th/47th (06/20/67-01/25/68), 108
Springer Ave., Elmwood, WI 54740

RETURN TO VIETNAM
CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE
one holiday—think of it as our Easter Sunday, 4th of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, and the Super Bowl all rolled into one—it is also everyone's birthday.

The first visitor to a Vietnamese home must be a lucky person whose personal phuc (happiness) will bestow benefit on the whole family. Thus, one of the reasons I was invited to so many homes during my stay in the village.

The stories of the boat people have been documented hundreds of times—there is even an Internet Web page at www.Boatpeople.com.

It is one thing to make the personal decision to immigrate—leave one country and make your way to another. It's quite another thing to commit your children to relocation bridged by only the roulette of fate that a ship might pick them up before they died in the South China Sea.

On April 24, 1975, the North Vietnamese army closed the noose on the capital city of Saigon and by the end of that month the war was over. Communism had prevailed over liberty, democracy, and

capitalism. With the northern army in control, the process of conversion began.

For the next 10 years, the Communists held school. Everyone had to be trained into the new way. The country went into a major depression, people began to starve, and personal freedoms came to an end. Controls were put in place curtailing the movement of people, goods, and capital.

Lew's father, who was born in 1922 and raised a Catholic in North Vietnam, witnessed French Colonialism, followed by the Japanese occupation, then after 1945, enjoyed the relative liberty brought again by French Colonialism. But, hating the loss of freedom after the Communists beat the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, he escaped to the south with his family.

By 1980, things became unbearable. Catholics in Buon Me Thuot, for fear of an uprising (gatherings of more than six people were outlawed), could not even hold an outdoor Mass and were hounded to become Communists. This farm town that raises coffee, rubber, and

pepper came to a standstill when the land was redistributed.

About that time, people learned over BBC radio that ships—French, German, and American—were picking up refugees in the ocean just off the coast. The eldest sons of two Buon Me Thuot families asked their fathers if they could go to the coastal city of Vung Tau and build a boat to take their families away from Vietnam. The fathers gave permission and the boat was built. When the boys came back to get the family, the Communists were watching. Only four boys from each family could go and Lew was one of them.

I interviewed his father (with Lew as the interpreter) about why he approved the boat trip. I asked, "Why would parents send their children to the ocean and possible death in badly outfitted, unseaworthy boats, with the known threat of pirates, thirst, and starvation? Did you know about the dangers of the ocean?"

His answer: "Yes, I knew, but it was better for them to die at sea than live without freedom." ★



U.S. Coast Guard Squadron

by Daniel Cannode USCG
Squadron One Point Grey WPB
82324 (05/69-04/70)

Although we were the smallest element in the River War in Vietnam, there were three Divisions in Vietnam that made up the U.S. Coast Guard Squadron One, Division 12, Da Nang, RVN (I Corp); Division 13, Cat Lo, RVN (IV Corp); and Division 11(IV) Corp, on the island of An Thoi, off the southern tip of Vietnam.

We proudly flew the American Flag and the United States Coast Guard Ensign on every single patrol.

I am proud to be a Coast Guard Veteran of the Vietnam War and of the Mobile Riverine Force.

Semper Paratus

May 1968 Daily Information Summary 05-26 Unclassified

RivDiv-111, 3rd/47th Seek Out The Enemy

Thirty three Viet Cong were killed and three were captured by the units Sunday in heavy fighting 7 miles southeast of Ben Tre. The battle broke out at 0715 when assault craft of River Division 111 were ambushed on the Huong River. Ground elements that were beached in the area achieved almost immediate contact and the fighting continued until sundown.

Two Navy men were killed and 13 were injured in a series of rocket and recoilless attacks on the boats. Most of the casualties occurred in the first assault of the 111 craft as they moved into land elements of the 3rd/47th riverine infantry. The lead units in the column bore the brunt of the attack. The Boat Captain and Radioman of ASPB-111-1 were killed instantly and two other crew members were injured when their boat took two rocket and two recoilless rifle hits. Two of the rounds struck the boats 20-mm cannon, another hit the mast. And the fourth tore into the coxswains flat killing Boat Captain BM2 Ronald W. Durbin from Cumberland, Maryland, and RM3 Jerry L. Williams from Picher, Oklahoma.

Four crewmen on ASPB-111-5 were also injured in the first attack as a rocket blew off their 20-mm mount. Monitor 111-2, the first boat behind the lead ASPB took heavy fire and reported two men with minor wounds. ASPB-111-3 also took rocket hits but had no casualties.

Boats of River Division 91 were also hit several times during the day. At 0750 they were ambushed with automatic weapons fire just west of the point where the 111 boats were attacked. A crewman on ASPB-91-7 was slightly

wounded in the attack, although there was no significant damage to the boat.

The 91 boats were the target for a second, more substantial attack later in the morning at virtually the same position the 111 boats were hit. Four men including three crewmen of ATC-91-5 were injured by automatic weapons, rocket and recoilless rifle fire.

The boats were attacked on several other occasions during the afternoon, but no other personnel casualties resulted. Other units hit by hostile fire were ASPB-111-2, which took four recoilless rifle rounds, also Zippo 111-7; and ATC-111-1 took hits with no casualties. Ground forces of the 3rd/47th stayed in continuous contact with the VC elements, calling in heavy air and artillery strikes on the enemy bunkers. As of 1900, three army personnel were reported killed and 26 were wounded. All army casualties except two were from the 3rd/47th.

Most of the boats moved out of the AO early in the evening as the Army settled in. The MRF relocated to Ben Tre Sunday morning, departing Dong Tam at 0800 and arriving at the new anchorage about 1115.

Navy KIAs: Boat Captain BM2 Ronald W. Durbin from Cumberland, MD, KIA 5/26/68 Kien Hoa Province; and RM3 Jerry L. Williams from Picher, OK, KIA 5/26/68 Kien Hoa Province. Army KIAs: Douglas Rolland Sutton C Co 3rd/47th from Bryson City, NC, KIA 5/26/68 Kien Hoa Province; Morris Edward Thomas B Co 3rd/47th from Las Vegas, NV, KIA 5/26/68 Kien Hoa Province; and PFC Ronald Lee Smith C Co 3rd/47th KIA 5/26/68 Kien Hoa, Province. ★

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Tom Bogner for Jim Stone Echo Co 2nd/39th (02/68-02/69)

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Brothers of the 2nd/47th Inf for all Army and Navy KIA's

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John W. Gerbing for Noel T. West A Co. 4th/47th KIA 06/19/67

Regina Gooden for Sgt Lloyd Earl Valentine B Co. 3rd/47th KIA 09/05/68

James Henke, Tony Spradling, Dave Nelson, James Callan, and the Band of

Brothers for Sgt Gerald Thurman and Spec James B. Johnson, and all our

Brothers lost on June 19, 1967, from A Co. 4th/47th 9th in AP BAC, Long An

Province

Joe Hilliard for Joe Benack from Florida and Donald Hartzell from Pennsylvania

Colleen Huber for Shawn Huber D Co. 3rd/47th Inf (10/68-01/69)

Dave Justin for Tim Doty A Co 3rd/60th

Harry Kawamura for CPL Terry T. Kawamura MOH 173rd Airborne Bde KIA

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John LeBorgne for Luis Mora KIA 02/02/67; Roy Littlehales, Gary Richards,

Robert Vernes, Charles Lewis KIA's 02/16/67; Gerald Novak KIA 03/02/67;

James Novotny, Oscar Nicewander, and Dennis Morrell KIA's 03/20/67; all

from Co A 3rd/39th 9th Inf Div

Willie B. Lloyd for Capt Walter J. Riedemann USN (Ret.)

Richard MacCullagh for John (Doc) Phillips, HMC, USN (Ret) RivRon 15

Richard MacCullagh for Chaplain Rene L. Petit, LT, CC, RC, RivRon 13 and 15

Men of C Co. 4th/47th 1967 for our Brothers KIA 03/19/67 Benito Alaniz;

MIA 04/09/67 Ronald P. Schworer; KIA 04/13/67 Charles "Duffy" Black;

KIA 05/15/67 Donald M. Peterson; KIA 06/19/67 Robert J. Cara, Robert J.

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KIA August 12-13, 1968.

Jasper Northcutt for SSGT Henry T. Aragon B-2 2nd/47th KIA 08/23/67, SGT

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B-2 2nd/47th KIA 04/27/67, SP4 Michael G. Hartnett B-2 2nd/47th KIA

04/27/67, SGT William D. Mize B-2 2nd/47th and 5th/60th KIA 10/28/67,

CPL Harold K. Southwick B-2 2nd/47th Inf KIA 03/02/67 (first KIA in B Co.

2nd/47th in Vietnam), and PFC Robert C. Voltz B-1 2nd/47th Inf (Mech) KIA

03/11/67 (first KIA 1st Platoon B Co. 2nd/47th in Vietnam)

Roy Spivey for my squad leader Charles "Chuck" Cataldo who fought the good

fight in Vietnam, but lost the battle to cancer in November 2010

Chet "Gunner" Stanley for all the USN and USA KIA's of the MRF (1967-70)

Ken Sundberg for Michael David Sheahan 5th/60th KIA 02/25/68, Robert L.

Conley 5th/60th KIA 02/01/68, and Glenn Dean Taylor 5th/60th KIA 02/01/68

Robert Sutton for LT James F. Rost Jr. Vin Te Canal Chau Duc KIA 11/69

Robert Thacker for SFC Earl T. Pelhan, Jr., 15th Eng, 9th Inf Div, KIA in Delta Lo

Steven Totcoff for my brother CPL Dennis S. Totcoff B Co 3rd/47th 9th Inf Div

KIA 5/2/68

USS Guide MSO-447 for Shipmate and Brother Harold Foster

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Henry Velez for my fallen brothers, B Co. 2nd/39th Inf

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CPT Steve Williams and MAJ Bob Bischoff in memory of 2LT David George

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David Wilson 2nd/60th KIA 08/05/69, Timothy Shelton 4th/39th KIA 06/25/69,

Steven Murray 4th/39th KIA 05/26/69, Harvey Crabtree 2nd/4th Arty KIA

06/19/69, and Dennis Mattox 1st/501st 101st Abn KIA 08/23/69

EN1 Charles Edward Baxter passed away after a prolonged illness, April 26, 2013. While in Vietnam, Charlie served with River Section 512 in 1966-67.



Sherwood in Vietnam



Sherwood

Carson Kelly Sherwood passed away May 25, 2013. Carson served his country in the U.S. Army as a Combat Vet in Vietnam with the Mobile Riverine Force Spear Headers 9th Infantry Division in B Co. 4th/47th from May 1966 to May 1968. May our brother rest in peace and in God's hands.

Elaine Weaver Williams passed away in a local nursing home, December 31, 2012. She is the widow of Boatswains Mate 1st Class James Elliott Williams who became the most highly decorated enlisted sailor in naval history while serving on PBR 105

with River Division 531 in 1966-67.



McDonald

Jeanette McDonald passed away from cancer June 9, 2013. She was the wife of Thomas F. McDonald, who served on T-152-3. You may contact the family c/o Thomas McDonald, PO Box 55, Coos Bay, Oregon, 97420, 541-888-0362.



Panichelli

Anthony Panichelli passed away June 29, 2013. Anthony served in B Co 2nd/47th (02/70-08/70). You may contact Sharon Napier, 103 Willow Oak Dr, Vanceboro, NC 28586-0009, 252-702-9310.

Anthony attended all of our 47th Infantry Regiment Reunion and Veterans Day Wreath Laying Ceremonys in Washington DC. He was a good man and Brother. I, and many others, will miss him always. Bob Pries

Ocia Shively passed away March 27, 2012. She was

the widow of B. F. Shively BMCS USN (Ret.) Boat Captain CCB-111-1 (1966-67). May our sister rest in peace.



USS Endurance



Wark

Member Michael Wark passed away January 27, 2013. Michael served on the USS Endurance MSO-435 (05/70-07/71). You may contact the family c/o 506 W 6th St, Williamstown, WV 26187-1404.

Member Richard Jackel passed away after a long and courageous battle with cancer July 17, 2013. Richard served on the USS Benewah APB-35 (11/66-11/67). Richard was a good man and a good shipmate and will be missed by all who knew him. You may contact the family c/o Linda Jackel, 22 Pinehurst Rd., Farmingdale LI, NY 11735, 516-293-3084, richdjackel2000@yahoo.com.



Quick

Member CDR Jay E. Quick, USN (Ret) passed away May 21, 2013. While in Vietnam, Cdr Quick served as the Senior

Naval Advisor to the Vietnamese Navy Amphibious Task Force (09/69-08/70). You may contact the family c/o Clayre Quick, 2909 Espana Ln, Modesto, CA 95355-7951.



Brumm

Member Patrick Brumm passed away from Agent Orange, October 7, 2011. Patrick served as a Mars Operator in the 52nd Signal (10/67-10/68). You may contact the family c/o Cynthia Brumm, 29585 Road 164, Visalia, CA 93292-9681, 559-747-1232, EAGLESPRIT111@aol.com.

Larry Gibby passed away June 8, 2012. Larry served with the 3rd/47th. You may contact the family c/o 9614 NW Golden Ave, Vancouver, WA 98666-6446.

Thurman Gilbert passed away April 22, 2006. Thurman served with the 3rd/47th. He was residing in Gainesville, Texas, at the time of his passing.

Member Gil Greenwald passed away from cholangiocarcinoma, April 1, 2013. Gil was stationed on the USS Askari ARL-30 (11/66-11/67). You may contact the family c/o Carol Greenwald, 32190 Pudding Creek Rd, Fort Bragg, CA 95437-8103, 707-964-8280, gilgreenwald@mcn.com.

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