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THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE ASSOCIATION

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The History of the MRFA

Where We Got Our Start

Over the years, a number of you have asked how the MRFA was started. Below are the first clippings from a newspaper article on our first reunion.

A lot of people should be recognized for having a hand in starting the Association. Charlie Ardinger, John Iannucci, Rich Corrick, and many more were instrumental in getting us up and running. At the first reunion, we elected officers and a Board of Directors. Although the first reunion was listed in a different magazine as a reunion for the USS Benewah APB-35, we started hearing from Navy and Army folks who had lived onboard her as Army Infantry and Navy boat crews and ships company, so we invited anyone Army or Navy who had contacted us to the reunion. At the reunion, it was decided we would become a Navy and Army association made up of TF-117 and the 2nd/Bde 9th ID. Never in our wildest dreams did we ever believe we would become one of the better Vietnam Veterans associations out there. Shortly after our first reunion, we started hearing from other Navy and Army units although not riverine that served in the 9th ID and other Navy units in-country asking to come onboard. They needed a home so we opened our umbrella to these units too. We became the home for a lot of different units that served in-country. Some, if not most, of these units have left the MRFA and gone on their own (Army and Navy alike) but we were and are proud to have been able to assist these units and have always wished them well. Some are still MRFA members. So with a small reunion, for a small but outstanding ship, we became the MRFA. I receive a lot of credit for starting the association but I could not have done anything without the help and support of many great people. Some are still with us and some have passed away or moved on. But it took more than one person to get us to where we are today. I want to thank each and every one of you; those from our humble beginning to those of you with us today. And to those units and folks that said we would never make it as an Association ... well we're still here BABY. Army and Navy ROCKS.

Albert Moore

From the St. Maries Gazette Record St. Maries, Idaho, December 4, 1991 "Benewah County"

Reunion for USS Benewah set for May, 92

A North Carolina resident is organizing a reunion for the U.S.S. Benewah, a ship that served with distinction from 1946 to 1973.

Albert B. Moore of Conover, N.C. will have the reunion for the ship, named after Benewah County, in May of 1992.



The U.S.S. Benewah was used as a troop ship and served in VietNam longer than any other ship in that war. It earned 11 battle stars in VietNam plus a number of other awards during its service, Mr. Moore said in a recent letter.

Veterans of World War II, Korea and VietNam are expected to attend the reunion next May. Mr. Moore served on its crew from 1966 to 1968.

For more information, write him at 106 Bellview Dr., Conover, NC, 28613 or email mrfa@bellsouth.net.

— Al Vogel

From the St. Maries Gazette Record St. Maries, Idaho, May 13, 1992 "Benewah County"

Reunion of ship named for county draws 120 to N.C.

About 120 persons attended the Apr. 2-5 reunion in Conover, N.C., of those who served aboard the U.S.S. Benewah.

Albert Moore, the coordinator for the reunion, said no one from the county the ship was named after attended the reunion. It was the most decorated ship in the VietNam War, earning 11 battle ribbons and numerous other awards.

Captain Gerald Saucier (pictured here with Al Moore) of Virginia Beach, VA, attended the reunion. He was the first captain, commanding it from 66-68.



Launched in 1945, the U.S.S. Benewah was initially used as a barracks ship for troops at the end of World War II. It provided logistic support during the Korean War and in VietNam was the flagship for a Riverine force operating in the Mekong River delta.

It was transferred to Subic Bay, Philippines in 1973 and transferred to the Republic of Philippines the following year. — Al Vogel

Hi Albert

My wife and I had a great time at the reunion, we enjoyed ourselves very much, met some old friends and made some new ones. I came down with a case of gout in my right foot on Friday but the hotel supplied me a wheelchair at no cost for the weekend, and we had lots of smiles and laughs.

Albert in July of 1967 the Viet Cong bush wacked our company and bloodied our noses pretty bad, and ever since then every July 11th I can't help but think of this. And this July like always, only this year I got a pen and paper and wrote down my thoughts of our platoon medic. This article if you feel is worthy I would be please to see it published in *River Currents*. But do feel any grunt can relate to my feelings.

Points of Light

Dave Nelson A CO 4th/39th 9th ID

I was very fortunate in 1967 to have been assigned to A Company 4/47th, a unit in my opinion, full of heroes!

The Vietnam I recall was hot, very hot, always humid, muddy, sticky, and infected with every kind of creature that would bite, poke, scratch, or leave a rash.

Out of the rice paddies and swamps stands out in my mind some very very special people

the combat medic ! These men without a second thought for their own lives bust through a wall of hellfire knock the devil aside to get to an injured soldier. When the firing seemed the worst and all us grunts would be hitting the ground, there would be our medic ignoring all danger to aid a fellow soldier.

Most of them have been in situations where survival seemed slim, and there would be "Doc" not only treating the wounded but giving hope.

Surely many medics were lost in combat in Vietnam. But I always felt God put some kind of shield around them to do their job.

I cannot put in enough words, or give enough praise to all you courageous medics that done so much for your fellow man in a gloomy era of our history

From the deepest part of my heart, a sincere thanks to all of you. Kudos to Ron Tabor our 1st platoon medic, a better man never wore a pair of jungle boots... Dave Nelson, 108 Springer Ave., Elmwood, WI 54740.

Veterans Day 2009, Washington, DC



SPECIAL EVENT FOR VETERANS DAY IN DC 2010

Veterans Day 2010, Washington, DC Wreath Layings at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and the U.S. Navy Memorial

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will be placing wreaths at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, on Veterans Day, Thursday, November 11, 2010. We will be gathering at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at 8:30 a.m. on the 11th and proceed to the Wall at 9:00 a.m.

We will also have a ceremony at the U.S. Navy Memorial at 3 p.m. until 4 p.m. honoring the MRF and 9th Inf Div. Complete with



speakers also with placing of wreaths at the Lone Sailor Statue in honor of all our fallen brothers Navy and Army Veterans of the MRF and 9th Inf Div. A first for the Navy Memorial they have okayed our doing the Missing Man Table Ceremony same as we do at our reunions. We will furnish our own speakers, Chaplains, Bugler, and wreath layers. More in upcoming issues of *River Currents* on our speakers and other events at the Navy Memorial. If you have never been to one of our ceremonies at the Navy Memorial, it's something you do not want to miss. The U.S. Navy Memorial is



located at 7th Street between Pennsylvania Avenue and Indiana Avenue in Washington, DC (701 Pennsylvania Ave, NW).

We are in the process of confirming rooms and rates at the Hilton Garden Inn Arlington/Courthouse Plaza in Arlington, Virginia, for November 8 to 11. We will have more details in upcoming issues of *River Currents* along with all the contact information for the hotel and online reservation system. The Hilton Garden

Inn Arlington/Courthouse Plaza is located at 1333 North Courthouse Road, Arlington, VA 22201. The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will have a hospitality room available on November 9 and 10. Come join us as we honor our fallen Brothers on Veterans Day 2010. We look forward to seeing you in DC. For more information, contact Board Member Bob Pries at 5832 NW Windy Pines Lane, Port Saint Luci, FL 34986-4637, 772-879-0867, or priesrl@att.net.

A great time once again. And as always, our thanks to Bob Pries for all the hard work it takes to make this event a success!

ARL - WORKHORSE OF THE BROWN WATER NAVY

USS Askari (ARL-30) operating in South Vietnam on 27 September 1967 as part of River Assault Flotilla ONE. She has used her "A" frame hoist to lift a 56-foot Armored Troop Carrier onto a pontoon for maintenance. Other riverine craft,



including a monitor, await their turn. The full load displacement of an ATC was 69.2

tons and its hoisting weight was 55.8 tons, suggesting that Askari and its sisters had the improved 60-ton capacity "A" frame hoist.

U.S. National Archives Photo # 19-N-6515, a US Navy Bureau of Ships photo now in the collections of the U.S. National Archives.

USS Satyr (ARL-23) anchored in South Vietnamese waters, c. 1971



USS Sphinx (ARL-24) in Vietnamese waters.



USS Indra ARL-37 1960's support was for a short period of time.

USS Krishna (ARL-38) repairing a Swift boat at An Thoi, South Vietnam.



What to do if....

Before I start my regular column, I'd like to thank all the members of the MRFA who made me feel so welcome at their reunion in September. It was such a pleasure to meet so many folks who's names I had heard from my husband each time he returned from one of these get togethers. Now I can put faces with the memories of his conversations about people with whom he had spent so much time.

Now down to what I feel is really important. At that reunion, Tim Goins and I had the opportunity to talk with a number of the attendees about PTSD, benefits, and Agent Orange. A recurrent concern that we heard was the frustration that Vietnam Vets faced when trying to obtain payment for medical care obtained under both Tricare and Champva. It was not always the fault of the paying organization, but was often the fault of the provider. In frustration, Vets often paid the bills and then tried to obtain reimbursement. I have also heard this same complaint from a number of widows.

What's important here is that you need to review your bills from the provider to make sure that they have billed Tricare or Champva, in addition to billing a primary insurance source (if you have one) or medicare (if you are eligible) or both. In many instances, Doctors, hospitals, or other civilian medical providers fail to bill Tricare or Champva, subsequent to billing the other sources, or they bill them in the incorrect order, thus resulting in a rejection of the claim. Another source of error is when the provider bills Tricare when they should be billing Champva, or bills Champva when they should be billing Tricare.

In any of these scenarios, the Veteran or Beneficiary receives a bill from the provider, demanding payment for services that could be covered by Tricare or Champva.

Before paying the balance, check your bill. If it does not say that all sources have been billed, call up the provider and insist that they first send a bill to Tricare or Champva, if it is not listed as having been submitted; or that they rebill, if you received a rejection based on the fact that your primary insurer was not billed first (and in some instances first and second).

If you pay the balance before the billing is done correctly, it may never get billed, and it may also not get added to your out-of-pocket deductible, causing you to pay more than is required by year's end.

Additionally, when you visit your provider, if you have insurance or medicare, in addition to Tricare or Champva, do not pay the copay, but tell them, "to bill it to your Tricare or Champva insurance." You may ultimately have to pay, but again, if you pay this fee, it will not get added to your out-of-pocket deductible.

One other issue has surfaced, and that is the provider billing Tricare when they should have billed Champva, or billing Champva

when they should have billed Tricare. And, I've seen the same provider make the same mistake numerous times. This has happened even when they have been given the proper information. Be sure to check for this error.

It is the responsibility of the provider to bill all the insurers in the proper order and to bill the proper insurer. Until this is done, you are not liable for the payment. There may be an exception to this, but I've yet to find one.

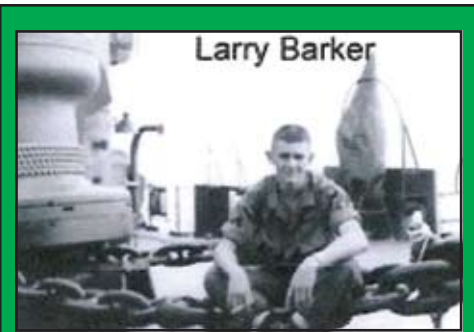
If this is confusing, please email me and I will try to clarify any questions you may have on this or any other items that I have covered in previous columns. thewrightthings@verizon.net
Paula Wright (Scott)

Hi Gentlemen,

My name is Ralph Harter. I was in Bravo Co 4th of the 47th. I was on the same squad as Arthur Friley. I got in-country Oct 20, 1967, and was wounded Dec 15, 1967. I was in the hospital in Japan until April. I cannot remember names of others that I served with, I am sorry. If anyone knows me, please contact me.

You can either reply or call me at 304-758-5139.

Thanks,
Ralph Harter, Rt # 1 Box 166A
Middlebourne, WV 26149
e-mail silverhart@citynet.net



Hello:

My maiden name is Deanna Barker.

My father, PFC Larry L. Barker (CPL Posthumous), E Co, 4th Bn, 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, USARV was KIA on 09/09/1967, in Kien Hoa Province, South Vietnam.

I believe his Company Commander was Captain Howard Fanning.

I was born 3 months after my father's death.

I am searching for anyone in his unit that may have served with him.

I have thought of him often and would like to speak or correspond with someone who knew him.

Any assistance you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

Ms. DeAnna Barker Bass

300 Pecan Tree Avenue, Lone Jack, MO 64070;
wk@lightventures.com

What happened to the USS Benewah?

History of the USS Benewah following its distinguished service in the United States Navy

The following account has been verified by several on the crew including Captain JG Pizarro MC (Philippine Navy). Captain Pizarro states: "I spoke to two (2) CPOs here in my unit, one of whom was (of all people) my own POIC in the Operating Room. They both confirmed what was written in the Philippine Navy history book.

According to Captain Pizarro, the Benewah was converted into a hospital ship for the Philippine Navy. The AH-3 Hospital in Tulungan (formerly the USS Benewah) was indeed improved, repaired, even repainted white with a red cross at the middle hull, and stocked with supplies and medicines.

Last Known Photo of the Benewah

While all this refurbishing was going on at the Mariveles, Bataan Shipyards, an acetylene tank blew up inside the ship which caused a fire, thus severely damaging the AH-3. Apparently, after stocking the ship, it was never used as a hospital ship after the explosion and fire. Captain Pizarro further states "My POIC

further informed me that after that (the fire), there were no more attempts to repair the ship - it was towed somewhere to the southern Philippines and was, according to him, used as a barracks ship but where and for how long, he could not remember." He further states, "Maybe after the fire, the Benewah was indeed sunk and used as a barrier reef, but I don't know where."

I just thought you might want to know what fate your ship actually had after it left the service of the USN.

Happy Halloween and best regards sir!

CPT JG PIZARRO MC (PN)

The above account was verified by crew member Harold Hugo who wrote the following:

"I WAS TOLD THAT THE BENEWAH WAS BEING CONVERTED TO A HOSPITAL SHIP BY RANDY ELLIS, WHO WAS HER ENGINEERING OFFICER IN 1952/53, WHEN I RELIEVED HIM UNDERWAY TO NAPLES ITALY IN 1953. HE SUBSEQUENTLY WORKED FOR THE

NAVY DEPARTMENT, AND SAW THE SHIP IN SUBIC BAY, AND EVEN MADE A PHOTO THERE, AND GAVE IT TO ME. ~ May She Rest in Peace following her Valiant Service ~



Photo courtesy of Captain JG Pizarro from the collection of COL LUIS VIZCARRA MC (PN) (ret'd)

Up The River On Year's Eve?

No, I'm not talking about the Suwannee River just a few miles east of here. I'm talking about the Mekong River in Vietnam 39 years ago.

While most of the country is thinking of parties and celebrations tonight I am staying home. For one thing this is the "Bible Belt" and rural Florida. Not much partying going on around here, no matter what the occasion. For another thing, I have to go to work tonight at midnight. That means no drinking even if I was inclined to.

So, that reminded me of that New Year's Eve on the Mekong River back in 1968. There was an impromptu meeting in the Ensign Locker of the USS Benewah. That is the four-man stateroom where I lived and the largest stateroom on the ship. That is not counting the cramped troop officer's quarters aft. This was just the ship's junior officers.

The subject was a New Year's Eve party. The talk quickly turned to alcoholic beverages. Everyone looked at me. As the Welfare and Recreation Officer, I had the key to the reefer below that held several cases of cold, yes cold, beer. Hello, we were on a Navy ship where there was no drinking allowed aboard ship. Once a week we had a beer party on the pontoons tied up alongside where we managed to wipe out 80 or so cases of beer. That included ship's company, gunboat squadron crews, embarked Army officers and men, and of course the embarked Staff officers and men.

Anyway, any appearance of beer on the ship would surely point to yours truly. My beer was out of the question. I did not volunteer the fact that a young lady pen pal from Florida, who I never met, had sent me a fifth of Jack Daniels.

There isn't much privacy on a barracks ship. It is about 300 feet long and had almost 1,100 men aboard. They were talking about a quiet party in the Ensign Locker. Just the ship's junior officers. Sure enough, from under mattresses here and there appeared partial bottles of liquor. Enough for everyone to have a drink except yours truly. I had the watch that night. It would not be too smart to appear on the bridge with alcohol on my breath. Not only that, the time they were going to hold this soiree was when I was planning to catch a few hours of sleep prior to going on watch.

No, I didn't get much sleep in that small stateroom. It was meant for four officers to live in, and only two at a time standing up. It was crowded that night, standing room only. The loss of sleep didn't bother me much. You see, I was a short-timer.

As I stood watch on the darkened bridge that night I pondered the fact that I couldn't get any shorter. In fact, I should have been leaving on New Year's Day. On that day I would have been in Vietnam for one year and due to go home. One small problem was that home was, at that time, in Okinawa.

My dad was in the Marines and my folks

were stationed on Okinawa. I was not leaving on New Year's Day because I was waiting for a message that would say that I had permission not to go straight back to the States. Usually everyone due to leave Vietnam had a plane ticket to go home a week or more before they were due to leave. I had no ticket, nor did I ever get one.

It would be almost a week before I got permission to go to Okinawa and elsewhere in between. Even without a ticket I managed to get a flight to Okinawa, a flight to Hong Kong, a flight to Japan, and eventually a flight back to the United States..... almost 3 weeks after having left Vietnam.

Anyway, that night I had no idea what lay ahead of me. I did spend some time thinking of the past year. A lot of it was deadly dull. Stuck on a ship 300 feet long with 1,100 other men and no entertainment. We had no TV reception. I was not to see any bowl games. Then I will go to work at midnight tomorrow night. There were nightly movies in the officer's wardroom but there were so many senior officers that we were lucky to get to sit on a trash can in the back of the room. Not only that but the AC couldn't keep up with all the heat generated from all those bodies. Yes, it was hot in there. Almost not worth watching a darned movie.

We went through a phase where we played darts. We got quite good at it, but alas, we got tired of that after a while. We never got tired of poker, but that was usually only on weekends.

Of course, in between long stretches of boredom, there was the almost routine call to general quarters in the middle of the night. We spent a lot of time anchored off the Army base of Dong Tam. Unfortunately, Dong Tam was like a magnet for mortar rounds, recoilless rifle rounds, and rockets. We would all rush to our battle stations in the wee hours of the morning and then just stand there not firing a shot.

It seems that most of the time, but not all of the time, the people shooting at our Army base from across the river didn't see us. That was because we were painted dark green. That way we wouldn't stand out against the river bank at night and draw fire. That's why we were blacked out at night.

Of course there was that one night when a round almost ended things. If it had hit two inches higher, I would not be here now. As it was, the shell hit below the deck weld and exploded in the mess decks under the Ensign Locker. The mess decks were deserted at that hour.

That New Year's Eve watch, one of my very last, I looked through the helicopter log. We had a flight deck for helos on the highest part of the ship, amidships. I started counting. I had been Landing Signal Officer for just about 800 helo landings in the past 12 months. That is where you stand on deck with a yellow vest

on when the helo comes in for a landing.

I joined the Navy to sail in ships. Not only that, but to drive, or as they say in the Navy conn ships. In the whole year aboard the Benewah, I never once conned the ship. Any time we got underway, we were at battle stations. The Operations Officer always conned the ship then.

In the next 4 years, I would get to conn ships. It even turned out that I was an excellent ship handler. Of course that was about the only good thing that my last captain said about me. For most of my time in the Navy, I felt like Henry Fonda's character in Mister Roberts. I only served 5 years on active duty, but retired as a Commander after another 15 years in the Reserves. It seems I was a better senior officer than a junior officer. Oh well, that's the way it goes sometimes.

What I did get out my tour in Vietnam were two things. One was three rows of ribbons. What that meant was respect, of sorts. When I came back from Vietnam, I was a Lieutenant Junior Grade with only a year in the Navy. When I would speak to a more senior officer, he would always look at those three rows of ribbons. Then he would think about that one ribbon on his own uniform. What that meant was that he gave me just a little bit more of his time than he would have if I had been a nobody junior officer. My next ship was a Minesweeper. My captain said that his ship only trained for what happens in battle, doing those things that I had done for real on my last ship.

The other thing I got were memories and the courage to sit down and write about some of them. Most of them are not very flattering but that is the way things were. I took a lot of photos. That helps me remember and put my thoughts down on paper.

I think now at what I had considered dull, uninteresting times back then and shake my head. For the last 30 years, life has been filled too much of otherwise dull times, compared with my life up the Mekong River. I think of my nephew Danny, newly married and a college student. All I can tell him is finish that engineering degree and find a career that is interesting, if not downright exciting.

As I get closer to retirement I think of what I can do after that. That is going to be a challenge. It would be nice to be free of this midnight shift and have time to do something really interesting.

Well, tomorrow night my college team is playing in the Orange Bowl so I will definitely watch that. What does the next year bring? Who know, but I plan on spending more time doing those things that I usually never seem to have time for.

Have a Happy New Year.

Tom Sparkman, USS Benewah APB-35

PLEASE NOTE: YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE is printed on your issue of *River Currents* just above your name and address.

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H1 - Westchester

USS Washoe City LST-1165
VIETNAM

H2 - Washoe

USS Holmes CTY LST-336
VIETNAM

H5 - Holmes

USS Mark AKL-112
VIETNAM

H6 - Mark

USS Krishna ARL-36
VIETNAM

H10 - Krishna

USS Askari ARL-30
VIETNAM

H11 - Askari

USS Hickman
City LST-825
VIETNAM

H14 - Hickman

USS Claron River LSMR-483
VIETNAM

H15 - Claron River

TASK FORCE 116
PBR's
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H19 - TF 116

TASK FORCE 117
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H23 - Shore Patrol

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ARL-24
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H9 - Sphinx

USS Mercer APB-39
VIETNAM

H12 - Mercer

USS Satyr ARL-23
VIETNAM

H13 - Satyr

USS Nueces
APB-40
VIETNAM

H17 - Nueces

USS BRULE
AKL 28
VIETNAM

H18 - Brule

USS Indra ARL-37
VIETNAM

H21 - Indra

USS Colleton APB-36
VIETNAM

H22 - Colleton

USS Whitfield City
LST-1169
VIETNAM

H24 - Whitfield



H26 - Benewah Patch



H27 - IUWG-1 Patch

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H30 - Combat Medic

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Dong Tam

H31 - 9th MP Company

9th Medical Bn
Dong Tan
VIETNAM

H33 - 9th Med. Bn.

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H34 - Military Police



H32 - 2nd/47th Mech.

H28 -
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H29 - 9th Infantry Patch

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H40 - 9th Svc. Ribbon



H41 - MRF Presidential Unit Citation (PUC)

H42 - MRF COMBAT ACTION RIBBON



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H37 - RAF - TF 117

H36 - RAF - Army/Navy

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P8 - River Raider



P9 - RivDiv 92



P10 - RivDiv 131



P11 - Brown Water



P12 - 3/60th



P13 - 39th Inf



P14 - RivDiv 111



P15 - RivDiv 132



P16 - White River



P17 - 47th Inf



P18 - 3rd/60th



P19 - RivDiv 112



P20 - RivDiv 152



P21 - RivDiv 153



P22 - Dept. of Navy



P23 - Dept. of Army



P24 - VN Svc. Ribbon



P25 - Purple Heart

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B2 - VCCC

VCCC decals -
12" x 4" in full color.



B3 - MRFA

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The Mine Explosion

During the latter part of 1969, several boats in RivRon 15 were to move in to the Song Ong Doc River near the southern tip of the delta. Some were to be transported by LSD to the area and four others (mine included) were to transit the distance by river. One Alpha, a Monitor, a Tango, and a CCB made the trip (I can't recall exactly, but I think it was several days). It was slow going because several of the canals were uncharted. We were stuck aground on a couple of occasions at low tide but were fortunate not to have been attacked. We were definitely afraid of the area to which we were going because one Alpha, A-132-3, which had been previously mined, was displayed at the base at Dong Tam. The hull was bent and beyond repair and it was a constant reminder of what a mine can do. Maybe that's why they just didn't salvage and sink her. Here's what she looked like:

When we arrived and rendezvoused with the other boats off shore of a Vietnamese Marine Base along the Song Ong Doc, then we began operations. It was definitely different down here and you could tell that Charlie was in control and it was much easier for them to transport larger ammo (mines and mortars) than up north toward Saigon. When we would transit a village anywhere else, the kids would line the river banks with a hand out. Here the village would be deserted. That was definitely a bad sign. From a personal perspective, it was terrible. In the north you knew where safe spots were and seldom had to keep that hot flak jacket and helmet on. Down here you wore it everywhere while underway. And this place was mosquito heaven! We drenched ourselves in that smelly, oily repellent and it didn't do anything but add to our own misery. Around dusk on one particularly hot and humid afternoon, I can remember having to close the lid on my gun mount (we never closed them) and going to war with a million of those little critters. I thought the heat would kill me.

Another Alpha and our boat went on night ambush when we arrived. In the rivers up nearer to Saigon, Charlie transported ammo, rice, and medical supplies usually via a two-man sampan. Covering the sampan with nipa palm and staying very close to the banks, they would row silently along to their destination. Occasionally, PBRs or Alphas would position themselves (staggered) along either bank and if someone came into view in the starlight scope, we'd pop a flare, say lai dai (sorry if I don't have that "come here" spelled correctly), and then open fire if they did not immediately surrender. Because it was relatively easy for Charlie to turn over the sampan and drift by us with the current, it was sometimes easy for him to escape. So the technique was speeded up so that the whole procedure took about

two seconds to open fire. Hey, anybody on the river at night was considered the enemy. Night ambush was the scariest operation for us, because our boats sounded like washing machines and to tie up to the river bank in the dark and not be able to see 3 feet into that jungle, you just knew Charlie was going to sneak up on you and blow you away. Every sound of a rat or some other critter walking 10 feet away would make you freeze. After the first 2 hours, if you hadn't been encountered you had the upper hand. Down in the canals off the Song Ong Doc, either no one had been doing night ambush or Charlie was just brazenly in control of the situation. They operated their sampans with motors on them and didn't even try to disguise them. We wiped out 11 that first night! That was a record for us. Normally we'd be lucky to get one.



A-132-3 mined on the Song Cai Tu River May 1, 1969, while leading a column of boats immediately behind two Alphas minesweeping, A-132-1 on the port bank and A-132-4 on the starboard bank. Information courtesy of Keith Phillips (A-132-1).

The next day we were rafted up along the bank near the Vietnamese Marine Base when we came under a heavy mortar attack. The boats quickly got underway and scattered. Rather than go back to that location, we picked up the VN Marines to insert them up one of the canals a few hours away. Before insertion, just as the Navy has done countless times, we prepped the beach with heavy fire power from all of the boats. This insertion happened to be near a village where not one person could be seen (could it be they knew we were coming?) Well, you know it just wasn't 100% American invasion, what can I say?! Unfortunately, for the villagers, we blew the crap out of every structure, sampan, pig, chicken, or anything else we could make a target out of. Not a proud moment in my memory, but when you put fire power in the hands of a boy that's what you get sometimes. Besides, my favorite weapon was an M79 grenade launcher and when I got more to shoot at than the coconuts in the top of palm trees I was thrilled. By this ninth month of my tour, I was getting pretty good at lobbing those grenades. I can't remember whether or not it was on this insertion or another where I fired a grenade at a

hooch too close to the bank and back shot at me a piece of shrapnel that hit me in the left shoulder and severed a small artery. I could remember seeing it coming at me and thought I got a secondary explosion (no one would confirm it). When I looked down at my shoulder pumping out blood in little spurts, I laughed. Why I thought it was funny looking, I'll never know. A little pressure and a bandage and it stopped bleeding right away. Thanks to Jerry McIntosh, our engineman, for playing Doc.

That evening we went back to the river bank next to the base and rafted up, usually three to five boats together so we could go back and forth, play poker, trade C-rats, and LRPs (long range patrol rations that were better than C-rations), etc. This was the pits down here, not only because Charlie was thick in the area, but we had no MRB to rely on for a hot meal. The next morning, October 23, 1969, brought a much needed mail call. We hadn't received mail for 21 days, and that meant about 10 or so letters from my girl back in San Diego (we fell in love by love letter while I was over there and got married 10 days after I got back and have been married ever since). These included pictures which I carefully laid out on my rack. My rack was one of two exposed racks above the engine covers. There was a metal super-structure on the sides, but a tarp covered the area. Most of the time I liked having an open-air bunk except that the mosquitoes were tough to keep out of the netting.

One of my favorite retreats was the canvas on top of the coxswain flat. I could sit there and lean back against my gun mount. My boat captain, BM2 Dale Walker, was up there with me on this hot morning using the radar as an umbrella and leaning against the mast holding it up. Getting up in the air was about the only way to get cool. Dale was a great friend we enjoyed the slightly cooler temperature perched up there on that tarp in what little shade we could find. This day though we were deep in thoughts of home and were both writing letters to catch up. In fact, it was pretty quiet on all the boats with everyone reading mail and writing. Suddenly, a huge explosion rocked the boat!!

After mortaring us the day before to clear us out of the area, Charlie placed a 500-lb. mine just off shore where we liked to beach the boats for the night. The mine was located right at the stern of a CCB and a Tango boat (I've recently learned it was C-152-1 and T-152-5) and we were tied up to the Tango boat's starboard side. My bell was rung by the explosion and the tarp on which we were perched acted like a trampoline sending both Dale and myself up in the air and into the water. My first memory after the explosion was being underwater with Dale above me on one side and the boat pitching violently on the other, with my toes tickling the mud. Dale hit the side of the boat coming down and broke a hip. Fortunately, I cleared the boat with only minor lacerations from junk being blown apart by the explosion.

It's strange what you recall in such a situa-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

TAPS

Tribute to a Fallen One

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to KELLER, LEONARD B. Rank and organization: Sergeant, U.S. Army, Company A, 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division. Place and date: Ap Bac Zone, Republic of Vietnam, 2 May 1967. Entered service at: Chicago, Ill. Born: 25 February 1947, Rockford, Ill.



Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Sweeping through an area where an enemy ambush had occurred earlier, Sgt. Keller's unit suddenly came under intense automatic weapons and small-arms fire from a number of enemy bunkers and numerous snipers in nearby trees. Sgt. Keller quickly moved to a position where he could fire at a bunker from which automatic fire was received, killing 1 Viet Cong who attempted to escape. Leaping to the top of a dike, he and a comrade charged the enemy bunkers, dangerously exposing themselves to the enemy fire. Armed with a light machine gun, Sgt. Keller and his comrade began a systematic assault on the enemy bunkers. While Sgt. Keller neutralized the fire from the first bunker with his machine gun, the other soldier threw in a hand grenade killing its occupant. Then he and the other soldier charged a second bunker, killing its occupant. A third bunker contained an automatic rifleman who had pinned down much of the friendly platoon. Again, with utter disregard for the fire directed to them, the 2 men charged, killing the enemy within. Continuing their attack, Sgt. Keller and his comrade assaulted 4 more bunkers, killing the enemy within. During their furious assault, Sgt. Keller and his comrade had been almost continuously exposed to intense sniper fire as the enemy desperately sought to stop their attack. The ferocity of their assault had carried the soldiers beyond the line of bunkers into the treeline, forcing snipers to flee. The 2 men gave immediate chase, driving the enemy away from the friendly unit. When his ammunition was exhausted, Sgt. Keller returned to the platoon to assist in the evacuation of the wounded. The 2-man assault had driven an enemy platoon from a well prepared position, accounted for numerous enemy dead, and prevented further friendly casualties. Sgt. Keller's selfless heroism and indomitable fighting spirit saved the lives of many of his comrades and inflicted serious damage on the enemy. His acts were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.

There are 93 Medal Of Honor Recipients living today.

On 18 October 2009, **Leonard F. Keller** was killed in a motorcycle accident in Pensacola, Florida. Mr. Keller was a recipient of the Congressional Medal Of Honor for his service in Viet Nam. He was an employee of the Navy in Pensacola. You may contact the family at 6555 Baxley Road, Milton, FL 32570. Sgt Keller was a member of the Mobile Riverine Force As-

sociation.

Member **Stanford E. Ward** passed away March 31, 2007. Stanford served with PBR-114, Cua Viet (01/69-01/70). You may contact the family c/o Leatrice Ward, 9116 Lakeview Dr, New Port Richey FL 34654-3414, 727-863-5603.

Jerry Lee Brooks, GMG2, passed away on March 29, 1998, in



Antelope, California, after an unwinnable battle with inoperable stomach cancer.

Jerry was in Class 32R at NIOTC and went to Vietnam with the class in February 1969. He served as a gunner on ATC 112-12 and other boats of the MRF. He was wounded at least twice and received two Purple Hearts.

If you have any information about Jerry's service in Vietnam, please contact Paul Kershner at atch10@yahoo.com, so we can fill in some of the blanks in 1969 and add that to this information to honor him.

The MRFA Officers and Board of Directors would like to express sincere sympathies to the families of our fallen brothers.

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Brothers of the 2nd/47th Inf for all Army and Navy KIAs
Frank Buck for son Frank H. Buck ENFM USN T-92-10 KIA 12/28/67

Michael Connolly for LTJG James Francis Rost, Jr., RivDiv 132, KIA November 1969

Gene Cooper for Steve Brichford FT2 1968/69 and Jerry Ro-leofs 1967-68 USS White River LSMR-536

Nan Fulton for LtGen Bill Fulton Cdr 2nd Bde Asst Div Cdr 9th Inf Div (1966-68)

Ray Funderburk for LTC John B. Tower CO 2nd/47th Inf
David Hammond for Lt Willie Kitchen C Co 3rd/47th (1967/69) killed in an automobile accident 1992

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

Bob Houle CS2 for Larry Hunter CS3 USS White River LSMR-536

Lee "Tex" McKean GMG2 for James "Buddy" Hood GMG2 USS White River LSMR 536

Men of C Co 4th/47th 1967 for our Brothers KIA 03/19/67 Benito Alaniz; KIA 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. Jindra, Timothy A. Johnson, Forrest L. Ramos, Cameron A. Rice, David A. Robin, Sheldon B. Schulman, Hubert J. Fink, Kenneth D. Frakes, William M. Geier, John L. Winters; KIA 07/11/67 Marion "Butch" Eakins, Elmer F. Kenney, Harold W. King, Philip A. Ferro, George E. Smith; KIA 07/29/67 Cecil B. Bridges; KIA 09/29/67 James M. Sunday; KIA 10/06/67 Gale A. Alldridge, Danny D. Burkhead, Charles W. Davis; KIA 11/10/67 Charles W. Grizzle; and KIA 05/06/68 John T. Hoskins

Adam Metts for Donald L. Bruckart T-111-2 KIA 03/31/69
VP Roy Moseman for Oscar Santiago C-2 4th/47th (10/67-10/68)

Jasper Northcutt for SSGT Henry T. Aragon B-2 2nd/47th KIA 08/23/67, SGT James E. Boorman B-2 2nd/47th KIA 08/27/67, SP4 James D. Bronakoski 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 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 3/11/67 (first KIA 1st Platoon B Co. 2nd/47th in Vietnam)

Dave Remore for Paco 3rd/60th Inf KIA 05/02/67 and Bandido Charlie 5th/60th Inf KIA 07/30/67

Tom Sanborn for Spec4 Thomas H. Williams A Co 4th/47th Inf KIA 08/24/68 near Kia Lay, Spec4 David Thorton A Co 4th/47th Inf KIA 11/07/68 on Toi Son (VC) Island, and 1st Lt James L. Tarte A Co 4th/47th Inf KIA 8/24/68 near Kai Lay
Chet "Gunner" Stanley for all the USN and USA KIAs of the MRFA (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

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Sgt. Okey Toothman for Sgt Sam Saavedra 3rd/47th and Sgt Booker T. Myles 3rd/47th

Steven Totcoff for my brother CPL Dennis S. Totcoff B Co 3rd/47th KIA 5/2/68

USS Guide MSO-447 for Shipmate and Brother Harold Foster Tommy Walker USS Haverfield DER 393 (12/63-07/67)

Ronald Wallace for all those lost in 3rd/47th

The Mine Explosion

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

tion but I distinctly remember Dale moaning when I was under water and I was worried about drowning. I pushed Dale toward the surface and tried to push myself away from the boat so that it didn't pound me into that mud. My legs were kicking to beat hell by this point and I was never so relieved to reach the surface and that breath of air as anything before, or since, in my life. I grabbed Dale, whom I could see was in severe pain, and pulled him toward the boat. I think it was John McDowell and one of the Vietnamese, Nguyen Van Manh, on our boat who pulled Dale aboard as I pushed. They threw me a line and I climbed aboard. Our engineman, Mac, was also injured as was one of the Vietnamese, Phan Thanh Duch. All three of them would later be dusted off and I would never see or hear from them again.

Assessing the situation, I decided I had to take command being the senior uninjured person still aboard. The force of the explosion had taken our boats off the beach and had severed the lines between the Tango and Monitor. The Monitor, which was sinking by the stern, managed to get an engine started I think, and ran herself hard up on the beach. The Tango boat still tied to us was sinking by the stern and her crew was boarding our boat. Our two boats were drifting away from the bank. We were also taking on water and getting pretty low on the port side. I looked into the after lazaret and saw the port exhaust boot had been blown off and water was flooding the compartment. I jumped down in there and started flinging stuff out. I was able to get the boot back on and stop the incoming water. After climbing out, I noticed the Tango boat was continuing to pull us down. We had managed to untie the forward line but the aft line had such a strain there was only one way to get it loose. I told our forward gunner, Dennis, to take the fire ax to the line. Just as he was doing so it occurred to me that I should have confirmed that all of the other crew was aboard our boat. Too late! Snap went the line and the Tango immediately capsized. Everyone started yelling for a missing crew mate (Fluentes, according to Dennis Bacon, our forward gunner). I thought, oh great, I've given my first order as boat captain and would be responsible for killing someone. We scanned the surface for what seemed like minutes but could have only been seconds and out from under that overturned hull came Fuentes. I was greatly relieved to say the least. Dennis recalls that the guy told him he was looking for \$400 in his footlocker when the boat capsized. We pulled him aboard and managed to beach ourselves and began the cleanup and dusting off of wounded on the deck of an another Tango boat.

The explosion had blown off the engine covers and my rack. My new pictures of my girlfriend (now my wife of over 30 years) as well as half my mail were floating in that bilge water (that oily crud never came off). The sugar shaker for my tea and my radio in my locker

had disintegrated, so had my bottle of scotch. In other words, Charlie had turned my little world upside down and I wasn't even able to shoot at him. All I could do was shout obscenities at the other river bank where I figure he watched the whole thing with some feeling of great accomplishment.

Here is the paragraph describing the above mining incident from the monthly COMNAVFORV report:

"The enemy did inflict some damage, however, on 22 October when two RAC (Riverine Assault Craft) assigned to a joint operation at Old Song Ong Doc were mined while beached at the base camp (VR 971 023). An estimated 100-pound bomb detonated between boats CCB-1 and ATC-5 resulting in 15 wounded (none critically). T-5 sank and C-1 was beached sustaining flooding in the engine room. Three other craft in the vicinity were damaged. The incident points out the advisability of greater separation between beached RAC in order to minimize damage from mining attempts."

I sure thought it was a bigger mine than 100 pounds from the damage sustained to the boats and the height which some remember people and boats flying up in the air. It seems there were times when command tried to minimize what was happening. Who knows? At least it didn't kill anyone that day.

The next day (or a few, I don't recall), we

headed out of the Song Ong Doc to an LSD or Coast Guard Cutter off the coast for repairs. When we cleared the mouth of that river some distance off the coast, I swear the water went from its cruddy brown color to crystal clear blue/green in the distance of 1 foot. It was the most amazing transition I had ever seen. There was a kind of yellow algae in that blue water that made it so beautiful. We were in what seemed to be 10-foot swells but they were wide apart and a light breeze meant a pretty smooth roller coaster ride. We had not taken much spray over the bow since I was in training at Mare Island. As I was coming down out of my gun mount, I stepped as always across the top of the coxswain flat onto the super structure and from there it was just a step 3 feet down off the gun stop to the deck. That day, though, there was water on that gun stop and my foot slipped right off and straight to the deck. I ended up breaking one of the bones in my foot. Little did I realize when I hobbled into the Doctor on that LSD (or Cutter?), it would be the last time I'd see my boat. Back then to Dong Tam by helicopter with a cast on my foot to finish my tour (3 months) as a Shore Patrol in the Enlisted Men's Club. But that's another story! Article by Don Blankenship 24256 Compadre Way, Ramona, CA 92065 Don served in RivAstSqd's 11-15 on A-111-3 and A-152-21 rivervet@cox.net.

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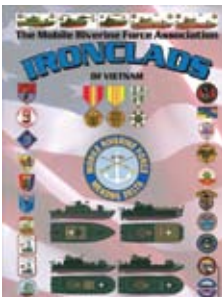
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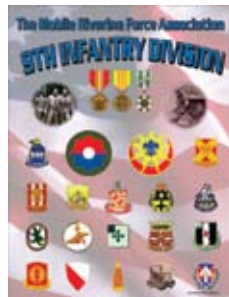
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 Bob Lennon USS White River (1966-68)

Walter F. Lineberger III XO RivDiv 91 (1968-69)
 Tom Lively C Battery 3rd/34th Inf (10/68-09/69)
 Ken Locke USS White River LSMR-536
 Richard Lorman T-152-6 (6/68-6/69)
 James and Debby Lowe APL-26 (05/68-05/69)
 David Lull B Co. 2nd/47th Inf (03/69-05/70)
 James Masters USS Askari (09/69-08/70)
 Sgt E-5 Ken McLean B Co. 4th/47th Inf 2nd Bde USS Colleton (11/68-01/69)
 Thomas L. "Mac" McLeomore T-112-7 (12/66-12/67)
 Big Jim Meehan IUWG-1 Nha Trang
 Adam Metts T-111-2 (8/69-10/69)
 Alan Metzger LCU's NSA Danang
 Cdr David Miller USN (Ret.) CO RivDiv 112 (11/67-12/68)
 Nicholas P. Miller COS RAS Div 152 (7/68-6/69)
 Paul Moody USS Pivot MSO-463 (1966-67)
 Albert and Sara Moore USS Benewah APB-35
 J. Russell and Alice Moore A-91-5 (11/68-06/69)
 Joe Moore, Jr. USS Colleton (11/66-11/67)
 Roy and Lynn Moseman 4th/47th Inf
 Co Van My TF-115.3.7 Cat Lo
 Paul Nace USS Colleton (09/68-11/69)
 Saul Nava A Co. 4th/47th Inf (09/68-07/69)
 MAJ Joe Nichols III CO C Co 3rd/60th Inf (1967)
 Robert Nichols B Co. 3rd/60th Inf (10/68-08/69)
 Lynden R. Noe USS Benewah (04/69-12/69)
 Jasper Northcutt B Co 2nd/47th Mech Inf (11/66-5/67)
 George R. O'Connell USS Terrell Cty LST-1157
 Christopher Olsen T-131-8 (05/68-05/69)
 Joseph Opatovsky PCF-103 (09/67-04/69)
 John Oxley E Co. 3rd/47th Inf (01/65-11/67)
 Capt Jerry L. Pape USN (Ret.) COMRIVFLOT ONE (01/68-12/68)
 BMC Dan Peckham USN (Ret.) C-91-1 Coxswain and A-91-8 Boat Captain (11/67-12/68)
 Luis Peraza Casanova D Co. 3rd/60th Inf (11/68-08/69)
 John Perry T-132-11 (6/68/6/69)
 Terry Peters USS White River (LSMR-536) (11/67-10/69)
 Col Pete Peterson USA (Ret.) Cdr 3rd/60th Inf
 LTC Nathan Plotkin USA (Ret.) HQ 2nd Bde
 BM1 W. R. Posey YTB-785 (1967-68)
 LCDR Leonard Previto CTF-117 (08/67-08/68)

Paul A. Ray M-151-5 (6/69-7/70)
 Donald and Marijo Robbins USS Benewah APB-35
 Joseph K. Rosner RivRon 15 M-6
 Bonni Rosner Associate Member
 Tom Sanborn A Co 4th/47th Inf (06/68-06/69)
 Norman Saunders B Co 3rd/39th Inf (1/69-8/69)
 Elbert Sawley, Jr. USS Mauna Loa (1967-68)
 Harry David Schoenian C Co 4th/47th Inf (7/68-7/69)
 Jerry (Doc) Schuebel B Co. 3rd/60th Inf
 Col Sam L. Schutte USA (Ret.) B Co 4th/47th Inf (VN)
 Jerry Shearer C Co 3rd/60th Inf (04/67-04/68)
 Richard Simpson "Mule" C Co 3rd/47th Inf 9th Inf Div (05/67-05/68)
 William Sinclair CDR USS White River (04/65-02/68)
 Terry Sloat River Assault Squadron 11 (12/68-4/69)
 BrGen Douglas Smith USA (Ret.) Cdr 2nd/47th (Mech) Inf
 Chet "Gunner" Stanley C-111-1 and M-111-3 (1966-68)
 Alan Strickland A Co. 2nd/47th (Mech) Inf
 John P. Sturgil USS Colleton APB-36
 Robert Sutton RivRon 9 M-92-2, Z-92-11, and R-92-1 (11/68-05/69)
 John Swart T-132-1 (04/68-04/69)
 Wynn Thies C Co. 2nd/39th Inf (09/67-09/68)
 Charles Thompson 9th Admin Co (02/66-11/67)
 Harley G. Timmerman T-132-10 (06/68-06/69)
 William "Doug" Turner USS Askari ARL-30 (05/67-05/68)
 Erol Tuzcu A Co. 3rd/60th Inf (1968-69)
 USS Terrell Cty LST-1157
 Ernest Valdez B Co. 4th Platoon 3rd/39th Inf (11/67-11/68)
 Roger C. Valentine CS1 US Navy (Ret) USS Askari (07/67-05/68)
 Bob and Nancy VanDruff T-91-5 and T-92-4
 GMG1 Ricky Vice T-131-7 (1968/69)
 Ron and Judy Wallace 3rd/47th Inf (05/66-08/67)
 Gary Weisz A-91-4 (10/67-07/68)
 Stephen G. Wieting USS Benewah APB-35 (11/66-2/68)
 Norm Wilkinson B. Co. 4th/47th Inf
 Robert Zimmer XO USS Mercer APB-39 (1968-69)
 John Zivic USS Vernon County LST-1161 (1967-69)
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