

River Currents



A PUBLICATION OF
THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE ASSOCIATION

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From the Galley

Hope this finds each and every one of you doing okay and feeling well and ready for some nice spring weather after such a long and hard winter. Here in North Carolina we are still in the midst of a very long and large draught but hopefully spring will bring us some rain.

I want to update you on a couple of things. The Association is running smooth and well. After so many years with the great Officers and Board Members we have in place, it pretty well runs by itself. Mike Harris continues to do an excellent job with the web site (www.mrfa.org). A note to those of you who have sent me information, pictures, and articles to be posted on the web site: please also send copies to Mike Harris at mekong152@charter.net. You can find lots of interesting information—check it out, you won't be disappointed!

Brenda, Joe, Georgie, and I are still at it with the newsletter (*River Currents*) which we are very proud of. A number of you have decided to have your issues of *River Currents* sent to you via e-mail. So far, we have only had a few mishaps/complaints. Our printer is unable to do a full color newsletter but those who receive their newsletter by e-mail receive a full-color copy. To do a full-color paper copy, there would be a cost increase and we would have to change printers. We have had the printer since 1994, and they have always done an excellent job, the price is right, so we have no plans to change.

Bob and Nancy VanDruff keep the products updated and their turnover on orders is excellent. Charlie "Boats" Ardinger continues to do a great job with the Membership and Treasurer duties. Don Blankenship has the MRFA e-mail list running smoothly. Whenever someone tries to go political, religious, etc., (against the rules of the e-mail list), Don handles this well and puts a stop to the action or one of the other members on the list will remind whoever refuses to abide by the rules that no politics or religious matters are allowed on the list. There is a site run by member Stan Lambert where you can air it all out (Brown Water Navy and Delta Army Vietnam Veterans). You may contact Stan at stanlambert@prodigy.net. We found out that talking politics

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MRFA and 9th Infantry Meeting

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Meeting will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 12-14, 2008. Our check-out date is Sunday, June 15, 2008.

Your officers and board members will be meeting with the Adam's Mark and the Local Convention Bureau staff in June to finalize the plans for our 2009 reunion. We thought that some of you who have never been to a gathering of the troops or a reunion, or who would rather have a smaller group environment, may be interested in attending to do some socializing with some of your fellow Army and Navy members.

We have asked the hotel to set aside a number of rooms for those of you that may be interested in visiting with the officers and board members and anyone else who may show. There will be no meals or events scheduled, although we will have a hospitality room where everyone can congregate and snacks and beverages will be available. We will set up a CD-DVD player for those

who want to show their CD or DVDs. There is no registration fee.

The hotel has shuttle service available for anyone who wants to go to downtown Indianapolis and visit some of the local sites. Times vary on when the shuttles leave and return to the hotel so you may want to check with the main desk on their schedules.

The dates are Thursday, June 12 to Saturday, June 14. Check-out is on Sunday, June 15. Cost per room per night is \$79. To make reservations, call 317-248-2481 and be sure to mention you're making reservations under the Mobile Riverine Force Association. Give the dates you plan on staying—remember, you are not required to stay all three nights. If you live in the area and just want to drop in, you're more than welcome. For more information, contact Albert at mrfa@bell-south.net (my new e-mail address); Cynthia Busboom at 317-381-6160, cbusboom@adamsmark.com; or Reggie Vaughn at 317-381-6127.

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Shake 'n Bake Sergeants of Vietnam

by Jerry S. Horton, Ph.D.

On a vacation flight to Florida, I bought a book called *The Teams: The Story of the Army Special Forces in Vietnam*.

About three-quarters of the way through the book, I came upon a startling passage: "A Shake 'n Bake sergeant was one of the lesser-known evils to come out of the Vietnam War and infect the Army. These twerps would attend some NCO school for 6 to 8 weeks and come out of it an E-5, buck sergeant—No experience, little skills, but a great big attitude."

Damn. Someone had actually written this for publication—and maybe for millions to read.

I had been one of those Shake 'n Bakes. Was my experience in Vietnam a sham, an illusion? True, I had been a greenhorn to

war—as had thousands of officers—but, I had excellent training. I had not thought about my tour in Vietnam for 30 years.

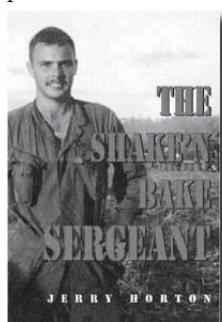
This statement initiated my journey back in time to recover my past as a Shake 'n Bake. There was quite a story to be told as I found out.

The NCO Problem and Solution

As early as 1956, the Army officially knew it would not have enough NCOs for a sustained war. A staff study asserted that in the future the need for enlisted leaders would far exceed the number available and that at the commencement of, and during hostilities, the need for leaders might be so pressing as to make it necessary to appoint leaders before their ability could actually be proved on the battlefield.

It was also recognized in Vietnam that it was not a senior commander's war, it was a junior leader's war. There were over 200 combat sergeants turning over each week and many

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From the Galley

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and religion on the MRFA e-mail list was a no-no. Some members were getting mad at other members about their political or religious beliefs and a few words were being exchanged not suitable for the list, so we stopped these types of postings. We are just too old to be getting our blood pressure up and hurting other people's feelings. We have all been through too much to be fighting amongst ourselves at this stage of our lives. If you would like to know more about the Association's e-mail list, you may contact Don Gunner Blankenship at rivervet@cox.net.

I cannot say enough how proud I am of our Officers and Board Members—these are the best folks anyone could ask to work with or for. And for you, the members, I cannot say enough about you. We have a great group of men and women within the MRFA—we are an Army and Navy Team that's unbeatable. For example, on our e-mail list if someone asks for assistance, within minutes—and I do mean minutes—someone steps forward and offers assistance. We have a few members who do unit historical searches for others seeking help on their unit and ships histories, and we have a few members who are very knowledgeable in Veterans Affairs. So, we as an Association have been able to help many members with their VA claims and have a very high rate of success. We have also been able to help some of our widows who have run into road blocks with the VA.

I am now, as I have always been, very proud and honored to be the President of the MRFA. I have been very fortunate and blessed over the years to be associated with some of the best folks out there and without them we would not be where we are today. I see no reason we cannot continue on this road or path we have made for one another. You all deserve and rate a Big BRAVO ZULU for a job well done.

Albert



Dear Albert,

I wanted to take a moment to pass on a heartfelt thank you for the outstanding generosity extended to Riverine Squadron TWO (RIVRON) by you and all the members of the Mobile Riverine Force Association (MRFA). The donation of \$7,600 worth of items that your organization forwarded to RIVRON TWO Sailors as Christmas "Care" packages will certainly raise morale, and more importantly, will reinforce to our fighting Riverine Sailors that even though they are thousands of miles away from home in a hostile environment, they are never far from the thoughts and prayers of outstanding Americans such as you and the members of the MRFA. On behalf of the Navy Riverine Force, thank you all very much.

Sincerely
M. L. Jordan, Captain, U.S. Navy

Medal of Honor Recipient Thomas Kinsman



Rank and organization:

Specialist Fourth Class,
U.S. Army, Company B,
3rd Battalion, 60th Infantry,
9th Infantry Div.

Place and date:

Near Vinh
Long, Republic of Vietnam, 6 February 1968

Entered service at: Seattle, Washington

Born: 4 March 1945, Renton, Washington

Citation:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty Sp4c. Kinsman (then Pfc) distinguished himself in action in the afternoon while serving as a rifleman with Company B, on a reconnaissance-in-force mission. As his company was proceeding up a narrow canal in armored troops carriers, it came under sudden and intense rocket, automatic weapons and small-arms fire from a well entrenched Viet Cong force. The company immediately beached and began assaulting the enemy bunker complex.



Hampered by exceedingly dense undergrowth which limited visibility to 10 meters, a group of 8 men became cut off from the main body of the company. As they were moving through heavy enemy fire to effect a link-up, an enemy soldier in a concealed position hurled a grenade into their midst. Sp4c.

Kinsman immediately alerted his comrades of the danger, then unhesitatingly threw himself on the grenade and blocked the explosion with his body. As a result of his courageous action, he received severe head and chest wounds. Through his indomitable courage, complete disregard for his personal safety and profound concern for his fellow soldiers, Sp4c. Kinsman averted loss of life and injury to the other 7 men of his element. Sp4c. Kinsman's extraordinary heroism at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

MRFA Meeting in June

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Additional Hotel Info

The speedway and downtown bring all the excitement of the city right to your doorstep. Here you'll find the warmth and charm of the grand hotels combined with the comfort and efficiency of the most modern accommodations. Our staff will provide unrivaled service and attention to detail, taking care of all your needs. Experience Indianapolis' finest hotel and have a truly remarkable stay!

Location: Just one half mile from the Indianapolis, International Airport and only 8 minutes to downtown, the Convention Center, RCA Dome, and Circle Centre Mall. Easy access to interstate highways makes the Adam's Mark a convenient destination from any part of the city, state, or country. Address and phone: 2544 Executive Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46241, 317-248-2481. Airport: Free shuttle to

and from the Indianapolis International Airport, accessed by courtesy phones located in both baggage claim areas.

Guest amenities: Free parking, outdoor pool, health club, gift shop, same day dry cleaning and laundry, express check-out, safe deposit and security storage, shoe shine, room service, wireless high-speed Internet in lobby area. **Accommodations:** Our 407 deluxe guest rooms and suites feature Large work desk, Herman Miller Ergonomic Desk Chair, complimentary high-speed Internet access, speed dial phone with message alert and modem access, remote control color TV, in-room movies, iron/ironing board, hair dryer, wake up and turn-down service, non-smoking and accessible rooms available. **Dining and entertainment:** The Marker Restaurant—Award-winning American and continental cuisine and the Marker Lounge—For quiet moments, featuring a large screen TV.

Veterans Day 2008, Washington, D.C.

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will be placing wreaths at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., on Veterans Day, Tuesday, November 11, 2008. 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 Hilton Garden Inn Arlington/Courthouse Plaza at 1333 North Courthouse Road in Arlington, Virginia 22201, for November 8 to 11. Room rates are \$119 (plus tax) per night. For reservations, call 703-528-4444 and refer to our group reservation code "MRF." Reservations may also be made online at [\[house.gardeninn.com\]\(http://house.gardeninn.com\). Be sure to enter the online reservation code "MRF" in the booking box labeled Group/Convention code. Reservations under these group codes must be made before the cutoff date of October 18, 2008, so make your reservations soon.](http://www.arlingtoncourt-</p>
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The MRFA will have a hospitality room available on Nov. 9 and 10. Come join us as we honor our fallen Brothers on Veterans Day 2008. We look forward to seeing you in D.C.

For more information, you may contact Board Member Bob Pries at 9702 Friar Tuck Drive, West Chester, OH 45069. Phone: 513-755-1223 or email: rpries@cinci.rr.com.

Shake 'n Bake Sergeants

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men were one-tour enlistees or inductees. The Army faced the problem of sending career men back or filling NCO positions with unqualified men. The demand for experienced NCOs in Vietnam exceeded the supply. In Vietnam, the Army was trying to meet these shortages by making a two-grade substitution of personnel. This means the platoon leader in combat is forced to pick the brightest PFC he can find, declare him the sergeant, and entrust the lives of a dozen men to his care.

The Army had to do something different.

How it was Started

The Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course came about as a result of a conversation between Lt. General Jonathan O. Seaman, Commanding General, II Field Force, and SGM William Wooldridge, the SGM of the Army at that time, this was December 1966. SGM Wooldridge relayed the conversation to the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Harold K. Johnson. As a result, a memo was drafted for approval that resulted in the development of the course.

The Concept

Under the NCO Candidate Course concept, this same bright young PFC will be the man selected for intensive leadership training. Now, he will be given the opportunity to undergo 21 weeks of additional seasoning prior to assuming responsible leadership positions. The purpose of the Infantry Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course was to fill the Army's critical shortage of junior NCOs with the best qualified and best trained men available. Upon completion of 21 weeks of training, the individual would not only be technically proficient but would have developed those intangible qualities that combine to make him a leader of men.

School Design

Its design and implementation was shepherded by Hank Emerson and Colonel David Hackworth.

They modeled their new program on the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program and used much of the OCS support system, including the same instructors and the same curriculum. The first candidates in this new school were volunteers, who had completed both basic and AIT training, and whose leadership potential was considered to be exemplary.

The NCOC course gave these handpicked soldiers an additional 12 weeks of training, one-third of which took place in the evening hours, followed by 9 weeks of on-the-job training, called OJT. OJT involved the actual running of functioning squads, at various training centers throughout the country. These "instant" sergeants were then ready to be assigned their tour in Vietnam. This training program for sergeants was virtually identical to that given to officers, except that it was abbreviated to 5 intensive months, rather than 6.

School Beginnings

The first class began around the first of August 1967. The Infantry Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Class Number One graduated on November 25, 1967. Sergeant Major Wooldridge, the Sergeant Major of the Army, addressed the newly appointed noncommissioned officers.

To quote Sergeant Major Wooldridge, "At first, there was opposition far and wide. The mail and phone calls were hot and heavy. In late August, I had to prepare a message in the Army Digest giving my view on the course and responding to the major concern of NCOs in the field regarding promotion." Wooldridge went on to say, "Army leaders have great regard for the promise of the course and they were never disappointed with their results."

Monday, 1 April 1968 Becoming a Shake 'n Bake (excerpt from the book *Shake 'n Bake Sergeant*)

My training took place at the NCO Academy at Fort Benning, Georgia. When I graduated this time, I would have earned the rank of E-5, known to everyone in the military as an instant NCO. An instant sergeant. A Shake 'n Bake sergeant.

Most noncommissioned officers rise through the ranks in the Army after years of service. When I—and others like me—will go from an E-1 to an E-5 in only 6 months, I will become a Shake 'n Bake. This nickname was taken from the Betty Crocker quick-mix product for baking chicken and had become very popular during the '60s. In 3 short months, the Army produced instant sergeants . . . Shake 'n Bakes.

My initial pride in being chosen for NCO training was soon blunted because I couldn't find anyone on the post who liked us NCOCs. The name simply meant a noncommissioned officer candidate . . . a sergeant in training. We would not be promoted to the position of a noncommissioned officer until we had completed a 12-week training period plus our on-the-job training.

The older NCOs resented us because we would receive our stripes in school and not in long-term service or combat. The enlisted men, whom we would command, resented us because we were inexperienced and we might have taken their opportunity for field promotion from them or get them killed while we matured on the job in combat. We were often treated with the same disdain by commissioned officers, although their training had been very similar to ours.

The essence of the problem was based on gut feelings. No one believed the Army could train a sergeant through schooling alone. A squad leader in Vietnam had to have real combat experience. Period. Shake 'n Bake sergeants would have rank and responsibility, but they would be absolutely useless . . . or so it was believed.

In the last 2 months, my training was identical to that given officer candidates. Our classes took place in the same classrooms of the Infantry School. During this period, harassment and discipline continued, but the Army's goal was not to attempt to break us (to weed out those who were unable to become leaders) but to have us finish the program. They needed us in Vietnam.

Experience in Vietnam

History shows that the Shake 'n Bake sergeants performed well in combat. They served with distinction as leaders in our infantry units. They suffered high casualty rates in combat because they were assigned to units that experienced heavy fighting. There were 1,003 Shake 'n Bakes killed in combat out of 20,068 men trained. This casualty rate, at 5%, was considered to be extremely high. I had no idea that I was pursuing one of the Army's most dangerous careers but we were invented for only one purpose—to lead men in combat. And that we did. There were three Medal of Honor recipients graduated as NCOCs.

*Once I returned from Vietnam, I never heard the words Shake 'n Bake for 30 years until the day I read the book *The Teams* with Jesse Ventura's words. Forty years ago it seemed the world had the same negative opinion of us Shake 'n Bakes.*

It turned out that the last Shake 'N Bake Sergeant graduated from Fort Benning on March 18, 1972. The Army concluded that the program was a success. Because of it, the Army implemented two new, similar programs. These programs gave new opportunities for advancement to career soldiers returning from Vietnam. The new schools established at Fort Benning were BNCOC (Basic NCOC) and ANCOC (Advanced NCOC). The Shake 'n Bake program was the basis for all training of NCOs in today's Army.

Some Shake 'n Bakes' are still in the service today, but many have since retired as Senior NCOs and Officers. A number of NCOCs completed their career in the Army and at least two of them attained the rank of Sergeant Major.

*As part of the quest to recover my past, I wrote a book entitled *The Shake 'n Bake Sergeant*. It was published in 2007 and is available for purchase at www.shakenbakesergeant.com. I have had several notable military authors and experienced military veterans review this work and all have agreed with me that the Army was damned lucky to have the Shake 'n Bakes in the Vietnam War and that my book tells it like it really was.*

Comments by William Wooldridge, Sergeant Major of the Army 1966-1968

What the title doesn't say, but what the reader will find, is that this book is a worthwhile history. It not only gives a personal account but also gives the history of the United States Army's Noncommissioned Officer Candidate Course. It offers an understanding of the American soldier in the 1960s and shows the important role of the Army's noncommissioned officers then and now.

After reading so many exaggerated and misinformed books about Vietnam, it is indeed refreshing to read the factual, nonassuming words of this sergeant. He has done an excellent job of saying it like it was in his time. His first person accounts will bring you face-to-face with the realities of an infantry squad leader in Vietnam. You may contact Jerry at 1335 Hidden Harbor Way, Sarasota, FL 34242; Cell: 1-941-735-8830; E-mail: JerrySHorton@aol.com

From the Family of Pat G. Stauber, BM1 U.S. Navy (Ret.)

I just wanted to let everyone know what a pleasure it was for me and my husband to be invited to and to have the honor of meeting all the wonderful men and women that served with my Dad, Pat Stauber, at the Reunion this past year. It is a memory that I will hold dear for the rest of my life. Everyone I talked with was so wonderful and seemed very sincere in helping me get answers to some hard questions. My dad didn't talk much about Vietnam or maybe we just didn't know enough about that time in his life to ask the right questions. Either way, we missed that opportunity to talk about it with him but thanks to you all, we now have a much better understanding. Albert, you have been a wonderful friend these last couple of years as I have struggled to deal with the loss of my dad, and I cannot thank you enough. You were my guiding force in helping to get this all set up for me and I will never forget it.

Thanks again to everyone that talked with me and gave me such valuable information about my dad and his life. I love you all!

Sincerely,

Charlotte Gladden
586 Jones Circle
Anna, TX 75409

Hi "Pony" Albert,

I just want to say how much I enjoy your MRFA site and *River Currents*, the articles, comments, and photos of the Vietnam era, from the guys that served in Country, keep up the good work

Your Aussie Mate from IUWG-1
VC Hill Vung Tau
Mike Ey, CDT-3 1969

Have you seen the website lately? Check it out at www.mrfa.org!

Do you have a story or a comment you'd like to share?

Get in touch! Share a funny story or a touching memory. You can send via email to Al Moore: mrfa@bellsouth.net.

First Combined Army/Navy Operations

For the history buffs, I have found what I believe was the first combined Army/Navy operation against hostile forces. The operation occurred during the Seminole War in Florida more than a quarter of a century before the Civil War (when combined operations were much larger). The purpose of war was to forcibly remove Seminole Indians from Florida to Oklahoma.

In late October 1837, Lt. Levi N. Powell, USN, was ordered to lead a force of 85 sailors, two companies of artillery (serving as infantry) and one company of militia to penetrate the Everglades as part of a multi-prong attack on the Seminoles. Lt. Powell's force used a variety of boats (whatever the Navy could buy, rent, build, or steal), including (apparently) dugout canoes.

As a side note: In a series of wars against the Seminoles in Florida, about 1,500 U.S. soldiers died. The Seminoles never surrendered to the United States Government; hence, the Seminoles of Florida call themselves the "Unconquered People." The Florida Seminoles are the only American Indian tribe never to have signed a formal peace treaty with the United States. Check out the book by Buker, George E. 1975. *Swamp Sailors: Riverine Warfare in the Everglades 1835-1842*. Gainesville, Florida: The University Presses of Florida.

—Bob Dyson
Co. B, 2/47 Inf.

Powell skirmished with the Seminoles several times, but the biggest fight was on January 15, 1838, when it attacked a village lead by a chief believed to be Tuskegee. In a fierce fire fight, the Americans were forced to withdraw with five KIAs and 15 WIAs. Showing the inter-service nature of the operation, the KIAs included Naval Surgeon Dr. Frederick Leitner, two enlisted sailors, and two enlisted Army soldiers.

A number of similar combined operations occurred during the remainder of the war, which ended officially in 1842 when the United States permitted the Seminoles not already removed to stay in Florida.

40 Years Ago – Romeo Platoon 2nd/39th Infantry

Romeo Platoon, 2nd/39th, was doing what it did every day. We were in the field, looking for signs of the VC. This particular day we were doing Eagle Flights—get on a chopper, fly to an LZ, get out and sweep the area, and back on the chopper to go to a new LZ.

As I remember it, we were on the last sweep of the day. The chopper dropped the Platoon off in the middle of a rice paddy. We swept forward toward a treeline, about 500 meters away. When we got into the treeline, we set up a platoon CP, and sent the three squads out to sweep in a cloverleaf pattern. It was the day before Thanksgiving, and I think that many of us were already thinking of the stand-down, and turkey dinner that awaited us, back at Bear Cat.

The CP set up in what I remember as an old cemetery, but I could be wrong on that. I was the RTO to LT Dan Peck. Also with the CP was our medic—Wayne Biles. I'm not sure if SSG Anderson, the Platoon Sergeant, was with us. Our other RTO (sorry, I can't remember his name) was with us, and probably a 4.2 FO and RTO, but I don't remember which ones.

After checking communications with the squads, I was just taking off the PRC-25, when we felt a tremendous explosion, Dan Peck took off like a deer, and the rest of the CP followed. I struggled to get the radio back on, and tried to re-establish communications with the three squads. First and Third squads checked in, but I couldn't raise the Second squad—my old squad (I had been RTO for the Squad Leader, Sgt Rivera).

Between our CP position and the explosion, there was a narrow canal, with my radio still only half way back on, I tried to jump the canal, and ended up stuck in the mud for a minute or two.

When I finally got out of the canal, I raced up the line to the Second squad. The first person I reached was Doc Biles. He was holding Bob Ochoa's head in his lap. It was clear that Bob was already dead—he was already gray. I could see just a drop of blood, right over his heart, where he had taken a piece of shrapnel.

As I got to the front of the line, I came to a wall of foliage that hung down over the trail, blocking off what was ahead. I went through, to where Lt. Peck was, and discovered a scene right out of hell. There was blood and flesh all over, and little else.

As we pieced it out later, Fred Dode was walking point. He saw something up ahead, stopped the squad, and called Sgt. Rivera up. Jerry McDonald was carrying the radio, and he went forward with Rivera. As they got close to what we later determined to be a large command detonated Chi-Com claymore, it exploded, killing Sgt. Rivera, Jerry McDonald, Fred Dode, and Bob Ochoa.

We searched for who set off the explosion and couldn't find anything. We even called in the tracker dogs, and still were unable to find who set it off.

In speaking to Dan Peck recently about this, he said that we were actually patrolling an area called the "VC Trail." Many units from the Battalion had been hit in this area in the past, and we were sent in to see what we could find. This was something that I didn't know or didn't remember.

Three days later, on Saturday the 24, while Romeo and Juliet were under the operational control of Charlie (I think) Company, we suffered an air strike that practically wiped out Juliet and killed James O'Neal, William Smith, and Ramon Torres.

A very bad week!

History of The 9th Infantry Division (1966–1969)



The 9th Infantry Division had the dual honor of being the first division since World War II reactivated for direct deployment into combat and the last division sent to Vietnam. The Division had received its colors at Fort Riley, Kansas, on February 1, 1966. Division engineering elements began arriving in Vietnam during October 1966. The first 5,000 troop contingent landed on the beaches of Vinh Long on December 19, 1966. Division headquarters was at Camp Bearcat (formerly Camp Martin Cox) some 20 miles northeast of Saigon. Construction of a permanent base, Camp Dong Tam, in the VC-infested Mekong Delta started in January 1967. Initially, it housed the Division's 3rd Brigade Headquarters and the 3/60 Infantry Battalion.

The Division's first significant contact with the enemy occurred on January 20, 1967, when units of the 1st and 2nd Brigades and the 3/5 Cavalry—participating in Operation COLBY—defeated Main Force VC in the Phuoc Chi Secret Zone (25 miles east of Saigon). On March 10, 1967, the 2nd Brigade moved into Camp Dong Tam and the 3rd Brigade relocated northward to Tan An. To improve Division mobility in the inundated Mekong Delta and Rung Sat Special Zone, two battalions from 2nd Brigade—the 3/47 and 4/47—joined U.S. Navy Task Force 117 afloat in June to establish the Mobile Riverine Force. To bolster armored fire power in I Corps Tactical Zone, the commander of Allied Forces in Vietnam ordered the Division's armor reconnaissance squadron—A, B, and C Troops, 3/5 Black Knights Cavalry—to Wunder Beach (15 miles south of the Demilitarized Zone) in February 1968. This reassignment distinguished the 9th Infantry Division as the most widespread division in Vietnam. In August 1968, the Division relocated its headquarters and colors to Dong Tam (now a division-size base camp).

The 9th Inf. Division was part of Increment I of the United States



*Captain William B. Fulton
363rd Infantry Regiment*

awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by Lt/Gen Mark Clark, Commanding Fifth Army Italy, November 16, 1944.

troop withdrawal from South Vietnam. The 1st and 2nd Brigades, along with Division headquarters, departed Vietnam in July and August 1969 leaving the 3rd Brigade at Tan An to operate as an autonomous combat unit under administrative control of the 25th Infantry

Division. The 3/60 Infantry had been given the honor of spearheading the Division's withdrawal by departing on July 8, 1969—the first 9th Infantry Division battalion to go home. The lone 3rd Brigade withdrew a year later during October 1970 as part of Increment IV.

1 September 1968

Dear Family and Friends of River Assault Flotilla One:

Several significant events have occurred since my last newsletter in June.

Many of the boats and most of the men from River Assault Squadrons 13 and 15 have now arrived in-country. And by the time you receive this letter, we expect that the last of our 11 ships will have joined the Flotilla.

Due to the size of our expanded force, we have divided our ships and boats into two separate task groups that will normally operate independently of each other.

Mobile Riverine Group Alfa consists of River Assault Squadrons 9 and 11 and seven ships—USS Benewah, USS Colleton, USS Nueces, USS Mercer, USS Askari, USS Sphinx, and an LST supplied by the Commander Seventh Fleet on a two to three rotational basis. Three battalions of infantrymen from the 2nd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, will be embarked in the ships and comprise the Army ground force elements of this task group. Captain R. W. Allen presently commands Task Group Alfa; however, he completes his year of duty in Vietnam in September and will be relieved by Captain Thomas F. Booker early in the month.

Mobile Riverine Group Bravo includes River Assault Squadrons 13 and 15 and four ships—USS Satyr, APL-26, APL-30, and another LST provided on a rotational basis by the Commander Seventh Fleet. Task Group Bravo will support Army elements of the 3rd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division, which will live ashore at Dong Tam Base, about 5 miles west of the city of My Tho, Captain John G. Now commands Task Group Bravo.

The formation of the two separate task groups permits us more flexibility than we have had before. For a 10-day period in late July and early August, the two groups were operating on opposite extremities of the Delta, more than 100 miles apart. Task Group Bravo was conducting missions against Viet Cong elements in the area around Nha Be only a few miles south of Saigon. Meanwhile Task Group Alfa was making the southernmost penetration of the war into the Delta when it launched ops in and around the U Minh Forrest that has been a Communist base area for at least a decade and perhaps for as long as 25 years.

More than 250 Viet Cong soldiers were killed and huge weapons caches were captured in this operation south of Can Tho, making it a most successful endeavor. The boats, with their arsenal of heavy weapons, played a significant role as did the Vietnamese 5th Marine Battalion that was operating with the Mobile Riverine Force for this 9-day period. I understand these operations received good play in the stateside press, so you may have read about them.

In response to several requests that I have received, I will now describe how a typical operation is planned and executed.

We select the area for each of our many operations on the basis of the latest intelligence information regarding current locations of enemy forces, in coordination with appropriate Army commands and Vietnamese authorities.

Our planners then go to work to draw the details of the operation. Some of the things that they must consider are the number of friendly troops and assault craft required to do the job, how many boats of each type will be required, what waterways can and cannot be used due to depth, with other factors such as vegetation growing in the water, and what the tidal situation is the target area. The tides are very severe in this part of the world and have great bearings on our operations. Frequently, we must plan our transits so that we cross shallow areas at high tide or pass beneath low bridges at low tide. Once, down south of Can Tho, we even jacked up a bridge a few feet so that the boats could pass beneath. It is imperative that all such matters be carefully planned in advance, but we must be careful to ensure that the planners do not compromise the security of an operation by too much coordination or identifiable reconnaissance.

The Army and Navy staffs then go over the operation in complete detail to see if we can find any weaknesses or fault in our plans. At the conclusion of this meeting, the plans are typed on stencils, duplicated, and distributed to the various Army and Navy commanders who will participate in the operation. The operational area is also cleared with local Vietnamese military authority to avoid conflicting with any ops they may have planned in the same vicinity. Perhaps 12 hours prior to the beginning of the mission, we hold what we call a "back brief" for all of our own commanders. They then go back to their respective units and brief their personnel of the operation.

Many of our operations feature dawn or predawn landings. Thus, the troops often board the boats for transit to the operational area between midnight and four in the morning. Regardless of the early hour, we always have a hot breakfast ready for both the boat crewman and the infantrymen before they go.

Three assault boats at a time come along side the platoons beside each barracks ship to embark the Army troops. Although we operate at darken ship conditions in the Delta, we do use relights of low candle power, covered on the sides and focused downward on the pontoons, to provide the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

That “Whup, Whup” Sound

My son and I were out in the yard yesterday when I stopped dead in my tracks. I cocked my head to one side to listen. Patrick asked, “What is it?” I said, “Can’t you hear it?” “No, I don’t hear anything,” he replied. “There is a Huey coming this way,” I said. I then held up my hand indicating that he should be silent and listen. In a minute or so the whine of a jet engine came to us. Shortly after that a UH1 Huey helicopter came into sight.

“How could you hear the engine that far off,” my son said. I told him that it wasn’t the engine that I heard. It was the noise the rotor blades made. They make a peculiar “whup, whup” sound that is unique to Hueys. For some reason, I could hear that sound long before other people could. There are no military bases close by and we don’t see many helos, or planes for that matter, around here. My being able to identify the sound of a Huey goes back many, many years.

In 1968, you found me many miles up the Mekong River in Vietnam. I was assigned to a barracks ship that was the flagship of a Mobile Riverine Base. I was a new naval officer and it was my first ship.

The ship had a helo pad in the middle of the ship, way up on the top deck. As the flagship, we were used to getting a lot of helicopter traffic. There was one large H34 Sikorsky helicopter that came once a day with the mail.

It had a huge piston engine whose roar blotted out all other sounds. Then there was a two-seat Hiller helicopter with a smaller piston engine. The most frequently used helicopter

was the Army’s UH1 Huey. It had a jet engine that had a whine to it. It also had a distinctive “whup, whup” rotor noise.

There were four of us junior officers who had to take turns being “LSO,” (landing signal officer). Whenever a helo wanted to land, we had to guide it down to that small flight deck with hand signals. A public address system announcement of “Flight quarters, flight quarters. All hands man your flight quarters station,” meant me, along with two enlisted men with wheel chocks for those helos with wheels. There was also a man dressed in a silvered fire fighting suit. He manned the foam

station on the flight deck in case of a crash and a fire.

Hueys, Hillers, and the later Hughes scout helos were easy to guide onto the deck. It was that huge mail carrying H34 that caused us the most problems. It would barely fit on that helo pad. In fact, if you stood directly in front of that helo while it was

landing you would wind up going over the side. That is 40 feet above the water. There is a safety net to keep you from falling.

You had to stand off to one side and let the pilot know when his wheels were over the flight deck.

Only then could he set down. Worse yet, his wheels had to be chocked by the safety crew to keep it from rolling over the side. We’re talking about three foot six or so clearance here. I was glad that only one of these showed up each day. They never showed up at night, thank goodness.

Helo landings at night were interesting because we could only show red lights at night on deck. Any type of white light was liable to cause us to draw enemy fire from the riverbank. It was also hazardous. One night I was officer of the deck on the bridge, and a Huey called in for a landing. I called out the duty flight quarters crew. We waited and waited, but the helo didn’t show. About half hour later we were informed that the pilot had flown his helo into the river. He must have become disorientated because it didn’t even happen near us.

Whenever we had Very Important Persons (VIPs) show up, they always came by helo. When that happened, we turned out “sideboys.” That is two rows of sailors in dress white uniforms. The visitor walks between the two rows while a bosun “pipes” him aboard with a whistle. As a junior officer, I often had to stand there in short sleeved dress whites. I had a telescope under my left arm. I would be in charge of the de-

tail. In the following photo, I am the one to the right of the man with the yellow vest, behind the rank of four enlisted men in white. If you look closely, I am holding that darned telescope.

When the ship was underway in the Mekong River, we were always at general quarters (battle stations). All officers changed from khakis to green battle dress uniforms. That was so we wouldn’t stand out against the dark green of the ship’s paint scheme. We were painted dark green so we wouldn’t show up against the dark river bank at night and draw enemy fire. Often, when we steamed up or down the river, we were under fire from hidden, fortified positions. They were set back away from



HUGHES HELO PICTURED JUST AS IT IS GETTING DARK.



the river banks.

Once in a while, we would have VIPs arrive by helo while we were steaming up or down the river. Many of these times we had been fired upon from the river banks. We would change from our dark green uniforms into the dress whites for the sideboy detail. We would be standing out on the flight deck as perfect targets waiting for the VIP to arrive; this was while the entire crew on deck, most of them manning the guns. They would be dressed in their greens. They would also be wearing helmets and body armor. What we called “flack jackets.” What was the VIP wearing when he stepped off the helo....why combat greens, of course. So much for those dress whites we wore.

Junior officers ate at the first of two seatings in the wardroom for lunch because of the limited size of the wardroom. One day was different from all the rest. There was an hour and a half allocated for lunch. Most of

us in our stateroom were lying down taking a short nap... a “nooner.” We heard a loud bang. Someone said, “Sounds like they dropped that new diesel generator we loaded aboard this morning.” I said, “Either that or else...” I never got a chance to say, “... or we are under attack.” All of a sudden the general quarters alarm sounded. It is a loud klaxon horn followed by, “General quarters, general quarters. All hands man your battle stations.”

Since we went to general quarters almost



every night, for real, we wasted no time in getting to our battle stations. My station was in the Combat Information Center (CIC). It has very little to do in this type of ship. Reports came in that we had been hit about five times on the starboard side and that we had casualties.

I could hear every gun on deck firing. The noise was deafening. Then, to my surprise came the announcement for flight quarters. I was the LSO that day. The Commander of the 2nd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division was returning to the ship. I couldn't believe his helo would try to land while we were under fire. I also couldn't believe they would want me standing out there on that flight deck.

The door to the flight deck was right next to CIC. I put on a helmet and yellow vest and stepped out onto the flight deck. The first thing I saw when I went on deck was signalman McGuire. He picked up a 50-caliber machine gun from the port side rail and carried it to the other rail where all the action was. There wasn't a place to mount the machine gun so he laid it on the rail. He then began firing it from his hip, sort of John Wayne style.

The next thing I saw was smoke and a fire. There was a landing craft loaded with a fuel bladder in the cargo area tied up to the LST (Landing Ship Tank) that was acting as our ammunition ship. It had been hit and the entire landing craft was blazing. I saw a crewman jump aboard the craft and get it underway away from the ammo ship. He then jumped into the river to get away from the blaze. A gunboat picked him up.

With all that firing going on, I walked to the side of the ship where we were being fired upon, turned around with my back to that riverbank. I then began signaling to the colonel's Huey, indicating for it to land. Every second I was expecting to be hit in the back. I wasn't hit, but I had other problems.

As soon as the colonel's helo landed on the deck, he jumped out and headed for the bridge. That's where the ship's captain was. I walked towards the pilot's side of the helo to tell him he had better swing around. I wanted him to leave the way he came even if it meant taking off with the wind instead of into the wind. It was too dangerous to attempt to fly off in the direction he was headed. Every gun we had was blazing away on that side of the

ship. Before I could reach the pilot's window, he lifted off. He headed towards the side of the ship where I just knew he would be blasted out of the air.

As the Huey went past the edge of the flight deck, 40 feet above the water, he no longer had the ground effect of the deck. He swooped down towards the water and made a tight left in front of our guns. There were 50-caliber machine guns firing from two decks and the four 40-mm cannons that were going, "ka-boom, ka-boom, ka-boom-boom-boom," in rapid succession.

In all the excitement, it is a miracle that the colonel's Huey didn't get shot down by our guns. Imagine the gunner's surprise to see the Huey swoop around the side and in front of the ship about 80 feet in front of them and 20 feet above the water. They could have probably read the pilot's name on his helmet from that distance. I know I raced to the edge of the flight deck and looked down expecting to see the Huey explode in flames. It never happened.

It was after this incident that Major Sun tried to convince me again to transfer to the Army. This had been an ongoing discussion for months. This time the major pointed out that had I been an Army officer I would have gotten a Bronze Star for walking out on that flight deck and exposing myself to enemy fire. I still wasn't going to give up my Navy commission. It was the only time in my year aboard ship when we were attacked during the day while at anchor. In the photo above, taken by me in a Huey taking off, Major Sun is standing on the flight deck to the right, in green army fatigues.

There is a web site today for the Mobile Riverine Force. In it, there is an article about the ship celebrating its ten thousandth helo landing. I had to laugh. The last week I was onboard the ship, while I was standing one of my last watches as officer of the deck, I got out the helo log. I went through it, page by page, and counted the times I had been Landing Signal Officer. I had been LSO for just over 800 helo landings. Approximately 95% of those had been Hueys. In that time, I got exactly two rides in a Huey. Here it is 34 years later and I can still identify that "whup, whup" sound of a Huey long before most people even hear anything at all.

Tom Sparkman, September 1, 2002



Beer and Soda Available During the Vietnam War

A Welcome Break from the Hardships

Jim Stone Echo 2/39 Romeo Recon
March 15, 2003

Here is my 2 cents worth, from the perspective of a grunt (11-H) who served with the First BDE—2d/39th INF, from 2/68 to 2/69. Most of my time was spent in the field at FSBs or working out of the base camp at Rach Kien... with occasional trips to Bearcat and Dong Tam, but very little exposure to the Navy and the MRF.

I remember a number of American beer brands being available in-country that year... Pabst Blue Ribbon, Carling Black Label, Budweiser... I even had some Ballantine's once!

One thing that I found interesting was that all of the cans of beer that we got over there were the old style (pre-"pop top") cans that required a can-opener (a/k/a "church key"), even though pop tops had been in widespread use in the United States for several years. I guess that there must have been some kind of problem in transporting pop-top cans across the Pacific by ship. Maybe some of you swabbies might know why that was.

As for the local Vietnamese stuff, there was "Ba Moui Ba"-Biere "33," which came in a bottle about the size of a U.S. 12 oz., and tasted OK, most of the time. The other local beer was called "Tiger Beer," but was actually named Biere Larue and usually came in a 1-liter bottle. This stuff was very inconsistent in quality. Some bottles tasted bitter, some like formaldehyde, and even vinegar! But occasionally (about once out of 3 or 4), you hit one bottle that was about as good tasting as you could ever find.

I did a Google search on those two "Bieres," and found that both labels are still available in Vietnam, but are now owned by a subsidiary of Foster's Group of Australia. I think that Biere "33" Export is even available here in the United States. I have been told that this beer is sold locally in Vietnam and has been relabeled as Biere "333" (or "ba-ba-ba") for some reason.

Speaking of Foster's... do any of you guys who were in-country just after Tet of '68 remember a period of time when American beers were unavailable? Some time in February or March, all we could get out in the field was Foster's Lager and another Aussie beer called Reschs. Foster's was OK, but that Reschs was crap... real bitter, as I recall.

I just looked up Reschs and found it on Foster's web site... their only export brands nowadays are Reschs Real Bitter and Reschs Pilsner... we must have gotten some of that bitter beer, although I have remembered it for the last 35 years as Reschs LAGER.



PLEASE NOTE: YOUR MEMBERSHIP EXPIRATION DATE is printed on the front of your issue of River Currents.

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A Welcome Break

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Around that same time, we could not get American Coke or other sodas... instead we got F&N Soda from Malaysia. This stuff came in two flavors, Lemonade (which tasted kinda like a dry ginger ale-think Canada Dry) and Ginger Beer-which tasted like *\$^@!

The reason, we were told, why our hard-earned cash was being wasted on these inferior foreign products, instead of good old American beer and soda pop, was that a freighter full of American beer and soda had been blown up in Saigon harbor during Tet, and the Army had to procure supplies from closer sources in the western Pacific. Hell, I think I even saw some San Miguel from the Philippines at an EM club, once!

We used to take up a collection from all of the guys (and I think it may have been supplemented by "company funds") and one of our NCOs would take a jeep with a trailer into Dong Tam on a beer run (and also to pick up other supplies). He would come back with a trailer loaded with whatever had been available at the PX (or was it the "Class-6" store?).

Once out at our base in the field, we had to get the local kids to bring us ice to chill down our beer and sodas... and we also needed something to use as a cooler. At one time, we were at a place we called Fort Dent, a little compound with an ARVN fort and an abandoned schoolhouse on Hwy 4. We "requisitioned" a large water crock from a native hooch. This was a red clay pot about 2-3' tall and about as round. We used to load up this crock with beer and soda cans in the bottom and fill it with ice cracked from the big blocks that the kids would deliver by Lambretta, covered in rice husks for insulation.

It was great to come back after a hard day of slogging through the paddies and woodlines along Hwy 4, to come "home" to our schoolhouse and find a chilled-down crock of beer and soda. I used to reach way down to the bottom of that crock and grab a couple of nice cold cans of beer and crack them both open with my church key... one hole to vent and a double wide for pouring. I would then "shoot" the first one to slake my thirst, then sip the second one while relaxing and cleaning my machine gun and getting ready for chow. Man, it was about as close to heaven as a low down dirty grunt could experience, without sex or drugs!

At chow time, we switched to soda, as we always went out on roving patrols or set up ambushes at night, or else manned the bunkers at our little fort. Of course, while out on patrol, we generally did not drink beer, local, or otherwise. On occasion, we did manage to buy a bottle of the locally bot-

tled Coke (it seemed much sweeter than the U.S. stuff and costed as much as \$1 per bottle) or some other soda. They had some pretty strange flavors of soda pop in Vietnam... sarsaparilla (tasted like a weak root beer), mint, and orange, among others. The best local soda (non-cola) that I remember was Bireley's Orange Soda.

Bireleys, it seems, must have been a Western brand, but it looks like it is now owned by Asahi of Japan. Speaking of Japan, while on R&R there, I had Asahi Lager, Sapporo, and Kirin Beer... all pretty good, as I recall. Yah, I know... I do have a tendency to ramble on and on...Keep it cool, bro's.

Dewey Pollock-T-131-3 1968-69 (3/15/03)



Above: a shot of the "Pontoon Beer Party" in the making. Notice who's guarding the beer.

Note: On a trip back to Vietnam in the 1990s, Mike Harris, our Webmaster, asked a former South Vietnamese Navy man why the "33" was changed to "333." He was told the Russians made the change when they moved into Vietnam after 1975.



Mike Harris T-152-1

1968-69 (3/15/03)

Some time in '69 we came out of the rivers/canals and stood BID patrol around the ships. One afternoon I cranked the sweep gear up so we could change watches. It was heavy so I tried to be cautious in case it was a mine. Finally, a green-mesh sack appeared about the size of a sandbag. In it was a one-half case of unopened Foster's beer cans. Now how's that for a snag? Of course, we iced them down and enjoyed.

Here's a couple of photos that include the "Schlitz" and "Falstaff" beer that Jim Stone left out above.



A hootch wall made out of "Falstaff" beer cans.

Our monkey friend who used to drink with us at Rach Soi.



OLD RELIABLE

They were called "Old Reliable" and they garnered lots of fame.

Those familiar with their story know they lived up to the name.

From the forests of the Ardennes to the land of Charlie's birth

"Old Reliable" set the standard; to a man they proved their worth.

Riverine Infantry was a concept that was tested once before

With a group of Union soldiers fighting in the Civil War.

But the 2nd Brigade went for perfection in the war in Vietnam

By invading Charlie's hideouts from its home base in Dong Tam.

Those who sit and count their blessings in this land of liberty

Aren't aware of hardships suffered in the quest to keep it free.

From the rivers of the Delta to the jungles filled with death

Fighting hand-to-hand with Charlie, "Old Reliable" passed the test.

The "Brownwater Navy" and "Old Reliable" formed a solid plan

That would bring the war to Charlie and drive him from the land

The Navy had the boats that would take them to the places

Where the soldiers went ashore and destroyed the VC bases.

Riding Tangos up the rivers proved at times a deadly chore.

Taking mortar rounds and rockets from the bushes on the shore.

Delta canals were so narrow that they couldn't turn around

So they slugged it out with Charlie as they raced for safer ground.

In his strongholds in the Delta, Charlie thought he was secure

But he failed to comprehend the things that soldiers will endure.

Waist deep in delta mud as they struggled through the mire

"Old Reliable" kept on pushing, laying down a deadly fire.

There were many fearsome battles for the men of this brigade

And accolades were common for the roles the soldiers played.

Dinh Thuong, Long An, Song Rach Gai, where so many brave men fell

Strange sounding names from long ago with stories yet to tell.

The soldiers of "Old Reliable," who played the stakes so high

Rousted Charlie from the Delta, by water, land and sky

The records of their bravery are now etched in history

For the 2nd of the 9th was known as Riverine Infantry.

So as you sit and count your blessings in this land of Liberty

Think of all the brave, young soldiers who have died to keep it free.

And rest assured, if ever needed, "Old Reliable" will heed the call.

To fight your wars and shoot your guns and defend you one and all.

For the members of the 2nd Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division, 3/47th, 4/47th, 3/60th, and all other members of the U.S. Army who fought so valiantly on the rivers and canals of Vietnam. Thanks,
Larry Dunn



Mike Harris cooking some steaks that we traded for. Note the "Falstaff" beer.

MRFA GET WELL WISHES...

Albert,

Just to keep you updated. I have been sick and not on my computer. My throat cancer is back. On November 23, I was put in the hospital; the ENT went down to look for any more cancer, like my lungs and other places. He did a biopsy of the old spot and my cancer is back. So he has sent me to a large group at the University of Cincinnati. I have had one exam. And I might lose my voice box. My skin has damage from the radiation. That can be a problem. Take care,

CS2 Larry Hunter

Larry served on the USS White River LSMR-536 (66-67). You may contact Larry at 6363 Winding Way, Maineville, OH 45039, 513-677-2581 or lhunter536@aol.com. *Larry is also a MRFA board member.*

Maj. Ron Menner had emergency bypass surgery, December 7. Ron says 'I had been having some problems since the middle of the summer and wrote it off to heartburn. My family doctor and I were chasing the gall bladder as the possible cause. I was scheduled for routine heart tests (stress, echo-gram, etc.) on December 3 and I flunked the stress test. My heart doctor scheduled me for a follow-up cauterization on December 6 and I flunked that. I was admitted and the surgery took place on December 7. I had 90% blockage in one of the two main heart arteries. I would not have survived a heart attack. I came home yesterday, December 13 and continue to improve every day. My appetite and strength are coming back. I should be back to normal in about 3 months.'

Ron served in C Co 3rd/47th 8/66-8/67. You may contact Ron at 3425 Hwy 62 E., Boon-

eville, IN 47601, 812-897-1893, or rmenner@worldnet.att.net.

Captain Burt Watham U.S. Navy (Ret.) is in bad health. Captain Watham was the first Commodore for Task Force 116 (Gamewardens) You may contact Captain Watham at 7538 Ebro Road, Englewood, FL 34224, burtonw106@aol.com. There is a phone number, but it would be best to e-mail the Captain or send a card. (Information furnished by members of the Gamewardens Association). Captain Wartham was one of the founding members of the Gamewardens Association.

Member **Ken Locke** has been very ill. His daughter Karen said that Ken had been in the hospital and came home yesterday. Today his blood pressure dropped and he passed out. She called 911 and they took Ken to the hospital. Right now Ken is intensive care. Karen said that she would keep me updated on Ken's condition.

Ken Locke served on the USS White River LSMR-536 (6/66-01/68). You may contact Ken at 888 N 67th Pl, Springfield, OR 97478, 541-747-8270.

Member **Wesley Lanham** has been very ill. His daughter Monica writes "My dad is doing well. He had a stroke in October and it left him paralyzed on the right side and unable to speak. But he is getting better fast. He is home with my mom and she asked me to get in touch with you. Thanks for checking on him. He is good. God Bless."

Anyone wishing to contact Wesley, please contact his daughter Monica Thomas or wife Lerma at 2630 NW 1st St. Boynton Beach, FL 33435, 317-381-6130. Wesley served on the USS White River LSMR-536 (1967-68).

MRFA

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Charlie Ardinger • MRFA Membership Chairman

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Please Note: This form may be used for New Memberships, Renewals and Changes of Address. Be sure to check the appropriate box.

The MRFA Board of Directors and Members wish a speedy recovery to all our brothers and sisters.

Letter to Friends of River Assault Flotilla One

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

small amount of visibility required for the infantrymen to assemble their packs and safely climb aboard the ATCs (Armored Troop Carriers).

Once the ATCs are loaded, the boats form into a column and begin the trip to the op area. Loading the formation are two and two to four ASPB (Assault Support Patrol Boat) minesweepers followed by a Monitor, a group of ATCs, and other Monitors convoy. The Squadron Commander controls the actions of his boats from aboard a CCB (Command and Communications Boat) that is usually near the middle of the column. The Army artillery barges, escorted by other Navy assault craft, will have left earlier so that they will be in place and ready to fire prior to the time the troop convoy begins moving into the dangerously narrow waterways near the operational area.

Enroute to the landing site many of the soldiers will be catching a few final hours of sleep. The first part of the journey will be a long one, of the larger rivers where the boat crewmen will be able to relax somewhat, although all gun mounts

will be manned and ready for action should the column be attacked.

As the boats near their objective area and turn into one of the hundreds of small streams, everyone becomes more alert. Most areas of the Delta are heavily populated, and therefore, we do not open fire unless first fired upon. In some unpopulated, VC-dominated regions where we have every reason to expect enemy ambushes, we may "recon by fire" while going through. By firing at suspicious spots and bunkers with cannons and grenades, we can sometimes surprise the enemy into opening fire prematurely. At the least, it tends to spoil his aim.

Finally, we reach the area where the landing is to be made. We may have "softened" the beach for the ground assault with jet air strikes, with helicopter gunship ordinance, artillery fire, or by fire from boats. We always stand ready to provide supporting fire to the troops prior to, during, and after the landing. The Monitors, CCBs, and ASPBs continue to cruise in mid-stream with every weapon at the ready as the ATCs are beached to debark the troops. After the Army has gone ashore, the boats will frequently take up blocking stations to prevent escape of the Viet Cong by sampan.

The troops will normally stay ashore for 2 to 3 days, although we may move them by boat to many different locations during that period of time. By the end of 3 days, every sailor and soldier is ready to return to the ships for a warm shower, hot meal, and clean bed.

As I have said numerous times before, I have never worked with a more dedicated, resourceful and professional group of men than we have in our force. They are doing the job they came here to do.

I am sorry that I don't have the time to send personal letters of appreciation to the many of you who have written to express their support of the task we are trying to achieve. In a country such as ours, no war should ever be described as a "popular" one, but I cannot understand or excuse those Americans who are lending moral support and encouragement to the Viet Cong to continue their terrorist acts against their own countrymen and their ambushes of our forces. It is good to be reminded that this noisy group is definitely in the minority.

Sincerely,

R.S. SALZER, Captain, U.S. Navy
 Commander, River Assault Flotilla One

TAPS *Those gone, but not forgotten...*

Member **Alan Wargel** passed away in June 2007. Alan had been sick for a number of years from Agent Orange that had attacked his central nervous and vascular systems, which resulted in uncountable mini strokes over the past years. Alan also suffered from PTSD. Alan's daughter, Paula Gualtiere, says her dad received a burial with full military honors and it was a funeral that greatly honored him for his service to his country. Alan served on Tango-91-1 (1966/68). You may contact Paula Gualtiere at 33 W Georgia Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85013, e-mail pgualtiere@cox.net.



Linda Wargel, widow of Alan Wargel, passed away December 7, 2007. Linda had been suffering from severe COPD (lung disease) and she had a few other medical conditions that were not in her favor. Daughter, Paula Gualtiere, says she knows that Alan and Linda are together again and enjoying themselves. You may contact Paula Gualtiere at 33 W Georgia Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85013, e-mail pgualtiere@cox.net.

Retired Army **Col. William "Bill" Jones** passed away, Thursday, November 29, 2007. Col. Jones was a 1959 graduate of Officers Candidate School and was inducted into the OCS Hall of Fame in 1984. Col. Jones held a variety of command and leadership positions. He served as a platoon leader and a weapons platoon leader in Bravo Company 12 Infantry, Fort Riley, Kansas. He also served as an executive officer in Korea. As a field grade officer, he served as division G-2 9th Inf. Division Vietnam. Col. Jones' commands included C Co. 31st/7th Inf Division, Korea; Detachment A 541 D Co, Special Forces Group, Vietnam; C Co. 1st Battalion 31st Inf 9th Division, Vietnam; A Co. 1st Special Forces Group, Okinawa; HHC 2nd Battalion, 47th Inf 9th Division, Vietnam; and 54th Inf (mech), Fort Knox, Kentucky. Col. retired after 32 years of service. Col. Jones retired as the SOCLANT commander in 1989 and resided in Fayetteville, North Carolina. He was with his family when he passed away. Col Jones was laid to rest with the rendering of full military honors in Sandhills Sate Veterans Cemetery in Spring Lake.

I could write many things about retired Col. William Jones but it would be mostly personal as I was his track commander and driver for 6 months in 'Nam. He did go to our 2003 reunion and it was like old times. It was a great reunion. Col. Jones and I were the lead track on 31 Jan '68 in the Tet Offensive in defense of 2nd Field Force in Long Binh, Binh Hoa Province. The fighting was fierce. Again in May '68 at the Battle of the Y-Bridge in Cholon, we lead the way. Bill Jones always led from the front on any contact. Books have been written on both battles by Keith W. Nolan. When you read his obituary, you will understand Bill Jones was a "Great American" and one Hell of a Warrior! Should you want more info, please do not hesitate to let me know. His call sign was "Panther 3." I remain always "Panther 33."

Panther 33, Russ Vibberts

EN3 Darcey E. Swank, River Division 572 (February 1969–February 1970) passed on November 1, 2007, due to cancer. Condolences may be forwarded to dswan7@juno.com.

GMG3 Edwin C. Cross, River Division 531 (February 1969–February 1970) passed on December 4, 2007, due to cancer. Condolences may be forwarded to his wife Connie Cross at 42018 County Road 37, Ault, CO 80610-9652.

Everett "Yogi" Hebert, River Section 533 (September 1966–June 1967) passed on December 8, 2007, due to a heart attack. Condolences may be forwarded to his wife Evelyn Hebert at 205 Bubby Drive,

Houma, LA 70360-7974.

William F. Crain passed away October 6, 2007. He was a World War II veteran (1944-45). You may contact his wife, Charlotte, at 1001 Chestnut St, Ashland, OH 44805-3906, 419-289-0118.

Robert "Bob" Baker Shirley, 66, passed away January 5, 2008, because of surgical complications. While in Vietnam, Bob served as a U.S. Naval Officer in Charge of a Swift Boat. He was commended by his commander for having performed above and beyond his duties. This commander described his performance as both exceptional and exemplary. He was actively involved in Swift Boat veterans groups until the time of his death. Bob later earned two Masters Degrees and pursued a career in telecommunications, retiring from DSC Communications (now Alcatel) in 1998 as a Director. Bob's favorite hobbies included woodworking and radio-controlled model airplanes. He is survived by his spouse, Kim Anh Shirley, and his three children, Thomas Shirley, Jennifer Dang, and Michael Shirley as well as many nephews, nieces, and grandchildren. You may send your condolences to Thomas Shirley at tomas.shirley@yahoo.com or 214-334-3299 (California). Kim Anh Shirley and Family, 7 Darr Road, Heath, TX 75032, Children: Michael, Thomas and Jennifer.

This letter is to inform you of the passing of my husband, CWO4 Robert Allen Ellis USN "Bosun" (Retired), on March 16, 2007. Bob was sick for 11 years. He had respiratory failure and congestive heart failure. He fought a long and hard fight! Bosun Ellis served on YFUs 55-66-76 from 7/67 to 10/68. You may contact the family at Faye M. Ellis, 747 Woodmere Dr., Pensacola, FL 32503, 850-478-2296, f.m.ellis@cox.net. May Boson Ellis rest in peace after a long and hard fight. Thank you, Faye Ellis

Hott, James "Jimmy" Allen 60, of Seminole died Sunday, January 13, 2008 at his home with family. Jimmy is survived by his wife of 28 years, Cheryl "Cheri." Jimmy was a US Navy veteran who served proudly as a River Rat with the Brown Water Navy; Riv Div 573 during the Vietnam War between 1965 and 1969. We want to thank our families and the wonderful friends who helped us through this very difficult time, but most especially the brotherhood of veterans and their wives who helped to welcome him home. Jimmy you are missed. May God's peace embrace you as you join Him in His Heavenly Kingdom. We love you.

CPO Arthur G. Carter USN (Ret.) passed away Tuesday, February 5, 2008. He was a true patriot and will be missed. Chief Carter served on YRBM-17 NSA Dong Tam 1967. You may contact the family at 416 Holiday Hills Dr., Martinez, CA 94553.

Larry Enderud passed away Saturday 9, February 2008. Larry served on A-153-3 1969-70.

Member **Thomas Paquette** passed away February 9, 2008 from brain cancer. While in Vietnam he served on T-111-8 (RivDiv-111 /RivRon-11) from 4/67-4/68. Tom was a sailor's sailor and will be missed by all his shipmates and friends. He was so honored to have helped lay the Mobile Riverine Force Associations wreath at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC this past Veterans Day. The family would like to thank all the members who made this possible and such a special occasion for Tom. He leaves behind a loving family and many friends. Tom's wife says that Tom fought the cancer hard, but in the end the cancer won.

To contact the family of Tom Paquette please do so C/O Irene M. Paquette 2807 Village Dr. Fairbault, MN 55021 - (507) 334-6340 - itpaque@hickorytech.net.



In Memory Of

This section is for the members who wish to sponsor the MREA by placing a notice in memory of one their fallen comrades. In some cases, the name of the sponsor will precede the name of the person who was KIA, or has passed on since Vietnam. It's \$25 for 4 issues.

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 Regina Gooden for Sgt Lloyd Earl Valentine B/CO/3rd/47th (9/5/68)
 Fred Gottwald for Sgt. Walter J. Garstkiewicz C Co 3rd/60th and C Co 6th/31st KIA 01/09/70
 Dave Hammond for Lt Willie Kitchen C/CO 3rd/47th 67/69, killed in an automobile accident 1992
 Gerald Johnston USS Nye Cty for James "Willie" Willeford Nye Cty LST-1067 11/28/66, friend, and sailor 19-year-old (RIP Buddy)
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	MRF w/Vietnam Ribbon Vietnam (Olive Drab)	
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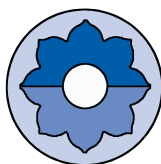
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David Tyler RivDiv 132 M-6/T-24 (1969-70)
USS Terrell Cty LST-1157
Peter W. Van der Naillen USS Clarion River (1968-69)
Bob & Nancy VanDruff T-91-5 and T-92-4
Jack Watson C Co 3rd/60th Inf (12/68-9/69)
Everett Wiedersberg Monitor-112-1 (2/68-1/69)
Stephen G. Wieting USS Benewah APB-35 (11/66-2/68)
George Wilfong (USA Ret) A Co. 4th/39th Inf
Bob Witmer USS Krishna ARL-38 (10/66-09/67)
Hugh Young 9th MID (11/68-10/69)
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