

# River Currents



A PUBLICATION OF  
THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 1  
SPRING 2007

## The Navy of the Republic of Vietnam

By Edward J. Marolda

The Vietnam Navy (VNN) came into existence, fought its battles, and faded into history in a short span of twenty years (1955-1975). But, during that time, the VNN, with the assistance of American advisors, became one of the world's largest navies with 42,000 men and women and 672 amphibious ships and craft, 20 mine warfare vessels, 450 patrol craft, 56 service craft, and 242 junks.

The organizational changes to the Vietnam Navy during those two decades reflected the evolution in the service's mission and responsibilities. Initially, the Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnamese Armed Forces, an army officer, controlled the Navy Staff and its chief. With the encouragement of American naval advisors, the general staff established the billet of Chief of Naval Operations, which handled the administration, if not the operational control, of the naval service.

In the early years, the navy's combat forces consisted of the Sea Force (renamed Fleet Command in January 1966), River Force, and Marine Corps (made

a separate military service in April 1965). Recognizing that the sea was a likely avenue of approach for Communists infiltrating from North Vietnam or moving along the South Vietnamese littoral, in April 1960 the navy established the paramilitary Coastal Force and in July 1965 formally integrated it into the navy.

The different missions of the navy's combat forces determined how they were operationally controlled. The units involved in open sea and coastal patrol missions operated first in five Sea Zones, then in four Naval Zones (after October 1963), and finally four Coastal Zones (after April 1965). The coastal zones, from the 1st in the north to the 4th in the Gulf of Siam, corresponded to the army's I, II, III, and IV Corps areas. Coastal Force junks patrolled the off-shore waters from 28 bases along the coast. The regional operations of the Coastal Force were directed from coastal surveillance centers set up in Danang, Cam Ranh, Vung Tau, and An Thoi.

The River Force, organized into river assault groups on the French model of Dinassaut (naval assault divisions), initially served the army divisions closest to its Mekong Delta naval bases at Saigon, My Tho, Vinh Long, Can Tho, and Long Xuyen. In the early 1960s, the navy also formed the River Transport Escort Group to protect the vital foodstuffs being convoyed to Saigon, and the River Transport Group to

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Naval Support Base Cat Lo  
turned over April 1971.

## FROM THE GALLEY

ALBERT MOORE, MRFA PRESIDENT

### Reunion 2007

Reunion 2007 will be held at the Adams Mark by the Airport, 2544 Executive Dr., Indianapolis, IN 46241, from Thursday, August 30 until check-out Sunday, September 2. Members may make reservations starting September 6, 2006. Room rates will be \$79 per night. To make your own reservations, call the hotel at 317-248-2481. Be sure to mention you're making your reservations under the Mobile Riverine Force Association. For more information on the hotel, contact Angela Jordan, Convention Service Manager at 317-381-6107 or [ajordan@adamsmark.com](mailto:ajordan@adamsmark.com). Take a virtual tour at [www.adamsmark.com](http://www.adamsmark.com). Be sure to click on the Indianapolis Adams Mark.

**Room reservations have been going faster than usual, so if you want to be sure you have a room at the Adams Mark and not a standby hotel, we recommend you make your reservations ASAP.**

**Win a FREE Tour!**  
*See page 3!*

### Reunion 2007 Hospitality Rooms

If you want more info on booking an individual hospitality room, contact Angela Jordan, Convention Service Manager at 317-381-6107 or e-mail [ajordan@adamsmark.com](mailto:ajordan@adamsmark.com). If Angela is unavailable, you may contact Reggie Vaughn, Sales Manager 1-317-381-6127 or e-mail [rvaughn@adamsmark.com](mailto:rvaughn@adamsmark.com).

### Adams Mark Free Shuttle Service

The Adams Mark has free shuttle service to and from the airport. To phone the hotel for shuttle service,

look for the bank of phones in the baggage area.

The Adams Mark also has shuttle service

available to and from the downtown area. We will

have shuttle schedules in the summer issue of *River Currents*.

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## I WAS THERE LAST NIGHT

By Robert Clark

"The High Ground" PO Box 457  
Neillsville, WI 54456

A couple of years ago someone asked me if I still thought about Vietnam. I nearly laughed in their face. How do you stop thinking about it? Every day for the last twenty-four years, I wake up with it, and go to bed with it.

But this is what I said. "Yeah, I think about it. I can't quit thinking about it. I never will. But, I've also learned to live with it. I'm comfortable with the memories. I've learned to stop trying to forget and learned instead to embrace it. It just does not scare me anymore."

A psychologist once told me  
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# NAVY 20-mm GUNNER IN VIETNAM, 68-69

by Capt. Robert J. Kermen, USN (Ret.)

Source: Adapted from a draft provided by CAPT Kermen to the Naval War College dated 19 Dec. 2003.

Recollections of Captain Robert J. Kermen, USNR, who served as an enlisted 20-mm gunner with the Mobile Riverine Force, River Division 112, in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam during 1968-1969. He was stationed aboard ATC-112-7 from November 1968 to July 1969 when River Squadron 11 was turned over to the South Vietnamese Navy. He served on the staff of Commander Naval Forces, Vietnam, until November 1969. Captain Kermen is a U.S. history teacher living near Mount Shasta, CA.

The long journey to Vietnam began with 11 weeks of intensive training at Naval Inshore Operations Training Center (NIOTC), Vallejo, California, in August 1968. Riverboat training was conducted at Mare Island and in the Suisun Sloughs of the San Francisco delta. Included in the 11 weeks was a week of gunnery school at Camp Roberts, California, and a week of Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) School at Warner Springs, CA.

We trained in Vallejo as a crew but were broken up soon after our arrival in Vietnam. Four of the original seven were still together by the time we turned over the boats to the South Vietnamese in 1969. We had four different boat captains, three different enginemen, and several boat coxswains in that period. Firm friendships were established in all instances as we became more like brothers than shipmates.

We arrived at Dong Tam by Caribou aircraft landing on a steel mat runway. After checking in and receiving the routine lectures, we walked down to the boat basin with sea bags in tow. To our surprise, we spotted a brand new Armored Troop Carrier (ATC) getting our number painted on it by a scruffy looking "River Rat." He explained that the original ATC-112-7 was sunk by a mine recently killing all aboard. Pretty sobering thought for all of us.

The boat even had a head although it never worked. Instead, we used a bucket with a toilet seat that we hung on the bar armor when not in use. We also used the bucket to wash our clothes after a suitable rinsing.

The uniforms of the Mobile Riverine Force were really used only for special events such as inspections and award presentations. Utility greens were the standard issue. Most of the time we were in dungaree or O.D. shorts with jungle boots or tennis shoes. Going into combat, we donned our flak jackets, flak pants, and helmets. Some sailors even wore bandanas to keep the sweat from running into their eyes. The overall impression was that of a pirate crew. All that was lacking was a pirate flag. We loved it! Cooking aboard the boats was interesting as well. While heat tablets were commonly used, some of us used C-4 explosive, which burns hot and

very fast. I shudder today when I think of heating up leftovers at home using that method. C-4 was plentiful. We always had a case or two on hand for use by the Army troops we carried. Some crews tried to individualize the appearance of their boats by adding everything from state flags to Charles Shultz cartoons. Snoopy sitting on his doghouse was common. Sayings such as "Sat Cong" appeared as well. Our officers were pretty tolerant to a point; then the hammer would come down and we would repaint the boat. I once tried to calculate how many coats of paint we put on our boat. Maintenance of our boats was a constant battle in that climate and environment. Rocket hits into the cases of C-rations we carried around our "superstructure" that were constantly covering the sides of our boats with such delicacies as "beef with spice sauce," "fruit cocktail," and canned ham and eggs (no loss there!).

We lived on the boat 24 hours a day. Our bunks were metal frames with canvas stretched across them and an air mattress on top. Food consisted of Korean War era C-rations and LRRPs, which were dehydrated meals much like today's MREs. This food was quite good once you developed a taste for it. We carried 20-30 cases of food at all times as well as several hundred gallons of drinking water. Malaria pills and salt tablets were also a necessary part of our diet. Rarely did we eat aboard the ships we were tied up to. In theory, we were supposed to berth, eat, and shower aboard the ships but they were pretty crowded with the 9th Infantry Division Infantry we were supporting. It was just easier to live on the boats.



Our boat crew consisted of two boat-swain's mates, one engineman, one gunner's mate, and three seamen. Boat captains were usually First or Second Class Petty Officers whereas the boat coxswains were Third Class Goatswain's Mates. The gunner and engineman were Second and Third Class Petty Officers. The three seamen served as gunners. It was not unusual to have these billets filled by unconventional ratings such as yeomen, signalmen, or even journalists. Many had volunteered for the boats and many made rate as the result of tests or even field advancement. I was a seaman when I went to Vietnam but became a Journalist Striker

(JOSN) as a result of passing the advancement exams. In 1969, Admiral Zumwalt, Commander Naval Forces, Vietnam, "field promoted" all river sailors who were eligible. Thus, I became a Journalist Third Class manning a .20 mm.

The ATC is quite interesting. It is a modified LCM-6 with added armor protection and a full weapons suite. The hull is protected by an inch of armor plate, two feet of Styrofoam, and a cage of rebar on the outside. The rebar was also called "trigger bar armor" that caused the incoming Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) to detonate before hitting the armor plate. This saved many lives as most RPGs could penetrate one inch of plate. The weaponry was quite interesting as well. The main armament was one MK-19 grenade launcher and two .20 mm Honeywell, belt-fed machine guns. These were mounted in three turrets aft. The well deck had six .30 caliber machine guns. Small arms consisted of six M-16s, two 12 gauge shotguns, two M-79 grenade launchers, and a .38-caliber revolver. Within 2 weeks of taking over the boat, however, we changed out some of the weapons. We replaced the six .30 caliber with four .50 caliber machine guns and replaced the M-19 grenade launcher with another .20-mm machine gun. This made the boat much more formidable. In combat, the four .50s in the well deck were manned by our enginemen and the Army troops we were transporting.

The .20 mm was a very formidable gun. It is approximately 7 feet long and weighed enough that two of us were needed to get it out of the mount for cleaning. These guns fired about 700 rounds per minute but this was rarely done. We mostly fired short bursts to keep the barrel from overheating and the rifling from disappearing. The gun was fired electrically but, in the event of power loss, could be fired manually with a Phillips screwdriver. The guns were modified aircraft guns and were fed by a belt from a feed box mounted on the swiveling base. The feed box held several hundred rounds of 20-mm ammo. In a normal firefight, this ammo was expended and the feed box had to be replenished several times. The ammunition was sequenced in five round sets with two rounds of blue high explosive, two of red incendiary, and one black armor-piercing tracer. There was a high incidence of jamming on the armor-piercing tracers. The cause was attributed to the low capacity oiler that lubricated the action. We overcame this obstacle by pouring oil over the rounds in the feed box. The gun never jammed after that, although it definitely increased the smoke in the gun mount.



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## The MRFA and Vietnam-Indochina Tours Announce Grand Prize Free 10-day Ground Tour of Saigon and the Mekong Delta

**Cost:** \$2 a ticket, on sale in Indianapolis. Grand Prize drawing is Sept. 1 at the Delta to the DMZ Dance. You must be an MRFA member to participate. Winner must use ticket, it cannot be exchanged or given to someone else. You must be present to win.

Operated by Vietnam-Indochina Tours, providing tours to Vietnam for 12 years. For further information contact: Vietnam-Indochina Tours, info@indochinatours.com, tel: 360-570-2096, Olympia, WA.

### Ground Tour Includes:

- ◆ Tours of: Saigon, Cu Chi, My Tho, Dong Tam, VC Island, Tan An, Ben Luc, Can Tho & Vung Tau
- ◆ 10-nights three-star hotel accommodations
- ◆ All breakfasts
- ◆ All airport transfers and private air-conditioned ground transportation
- ◆ Private guide and private tours
- ◆ All admissions
- ◆ All boat transportation
- ◆ In lieu of the Mekong Delta tour, \$1,000 towards the cost of a ground tour to I and II Corps can be substituted.
- ◆ Saigon and IV tour can be customized. Contact Vietnam-Indochina Tours at info@indochinatours.com for details.
- ◆ Valid for travel between: 1 Sept. and 30 Nov. 2007 or 1 March and 30 November 2008.
- ◆ Non-transferable, non-redeemable for cash.



## NEW HOTEL POLICY

Since we visited the Adams Mark last year, the city or county has passed a no smoking law in hotels, lounges, and restaurants. For you that smoke, the hotel will have smoking areas posted around the hotel. We're sorry for this inconvenience, but it's a local law and something we have no control over. It seems there aren't many hotels in any state that allow smoking anymore.



# MRFA

## REUNION REGISTRATION

**PRE-REGISTRATION DEADLINE: AUG. 22, 2007**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

UNIT: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME(S) OF WIFE, FAMILY AND/OR GUEST(S): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

STREET: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_

STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTIONS: CALL 828-464-7228 OR EMAIL: MRFA@CHARTER.NET

#### NOTE:

There will be a \$25.00 charge for all returned checks. Cancellations prior to the reunion will be charged a \$10.00 processing fee.

Be sure to enclose your check or money order payable to MRFA with this form. Send to:

MRFA Reunion, 106 Belleview Dr. NE., Conover, NC 28613

| REGISTRATION INFO   | QTY. | COST    | TOTAL   |
|---|------|---------|---------|
| MRFA MEMBER Registration Fee: Included with your registration, you will also receive a complimentary registration for <b>one (1)</b> guest (spouse, girlfriend, significant other, etc).                                | 1    | \$35.00 | \$35.00 |
| Additional Guest(s): Additional guests include children and/or friends, etc. Note that this fee is applicable to <b>each</b> additional guest.  |      | \$10.00 |         |
| Non-Member Registration Fee: If you served as part of the MRF (TF-115, 116 or 117, the 9th Inf. Division or any other Army or Navy supporting unit), <b>but are not a member of the MRFA</b> , this fee applies to you. |      | \$50.00 |         |
| <b>GRAND TOTAL ENCLOSED</b>   |      |         |         |

branch of service, Army or Navy, at the end of play. Winners to be announced at the reunion.

The course is very reasonable in price to play.

Currently, 18 holes of golf, without a cart, is just \$18.00. Food and drinks at the turn can be arranged, but that will depend on how many players sign up in advance and want the service. There is no registration fee and the tournament is open to all levels of players. Since it is a public course, and we will be somewhat limited in our time, it is advisable that players have some experience at playing, but all "Duffers" are welcome.

Friday, August 31st will be a full day of events and should be fun for all of us. Who said, "Golf was just for old guys?" (McCann, 1978).

Please let me know if you want to play and if you would be interested in burgers and a beverage for lunch.

Contacts for the event are: David G. McCann (M-6); bdalmcc@bresnan.net; (406) 442-8168; Orville L. Daley (USS Askari); LECOWBOY@aol.com.

Our Tee Times will depend on how many members we have playing. We are hoping for at least 50 players to show interest in the event so we can reserve time at the course. If less than 50 members show interest, we will still golf at Winding River on Friday morning, August 31st. Currently, our Tee Times will be between 0900 and 1000 hrs.



## Join us at the MRFA & 9th Infantry Division Golf Tournament

Friday morning, August 31, 2007 at the Winding River Golf Course, Indianapolis, Indiana is being set for the time and place for our first organized MRFA Bi-Annual Golf event.

All members and guests, are invited to join us for 18 holes of golf at Winding River Golf Course, 8400 South Mann Rd. (Highway 31 South); phone (317) 856-7257.

The event should take about 5 hours and have us back at the Adams Mark Hotel in

plenty of time for other reunion planned events. A shuttle service can be arranged, for a small fee, from the Adams Mark Hotel, to and from the course. The shuttle can hold up to 12 people at a time and the current price per shuttle is \$50.00, divided 12 ways, that is a good deal.

Foursome Teams will be randomly drawn at the hotel, before the event, and you can sign up at registration. If at all possible, the teams will be made up of two players from each branch of the service. A point system will determine the winning

# THE 39th REGIMENT OF THE 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION

The 39th Infantry Regiment was organized at Camp Syracuse, New York on 1 June 1917 by transfer of veteran troops from the 30th Infantry Regiment. In December, the 39th was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division and in the spring of 1918, sailed for France as part of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. The regiment fought with such valor and distinction during this war that it earned its famous nickname "Fighting Falcons".

During the lull between wars, the regimental crest was designed and approved.

Each of the devices in the crest holds significant meaning for the regiment.



- The shield is blue for infantry.

- The fleur-de-lis is from the coat of arms of Soissons, a town in France recaptured by the 39th Reg. in 1918.

- The two trees represent the Groves of Cresnes, the site of the regiment's first military success in France during World War I.

- The boar's head on the canton is taken from the crest of the 30th Infantry Regiment and indicates the 39th was organized with personnel from the 30th Inf. Reg.

- The crest is a falcon's head, for Mount Faucon in Meuse-Argonne.

- The falcon holds, in its bill, an ivy leaf, from the shoulder sleeve insignia of the 4th Infantry Division to which the regiment was assigned during World War I.

- The motto "D'une Vaillance Admirable" is a quotation from the French citation which awarded the Croix De Guerre with Gilt Star to the regiment for its distinguished service in World War I.

During World War II the regiment fought as part of the 9th Infantry Division. The Fighting Falcons of the 39th became the first unit of United States combat troops to set foot on foreign soil when they stormed the beaches of Algiers in November 1942. During fighting in Sicily, Italy, the regiment came under the command of the legendary Colonel Harry A. "

"Paddy" Flint who gave the regiment its

triple A- Bar Nothing slogan ...Anything, Anywhere, Anytime - Bar Nothing. The regiment took great pride in the AAA-O slogan, displaying it on their helmets and vehicles, even in combat. When questioned about the soundness of the practice, Colonel Flint confidently declared, "The enemy who sees our regiment in combat, if they live through the battle, will know to run the next time they see us coming." Later in the war, the 39th landed at Utah Beach and fought through France. The Fighting Falcons joined the 47th Infantry Regiment in capturing Roetgen, the first German town to fall in World War II. The 39th fought valiantly through the Battle of the Bulge, helped secure the Remagen bridgehead and roared across Germany as the allied forces finished off the last of the German resistance. When the dust settled following VE day, the 39th Regiment held campaign streamers from some of the bloodiest and most hard fought battles of the war - Algeria, Tunisia, Sicily, Normandy, Northern France, The Rhineland, Ardennes-Alsace, and Central Europe. It was cited twice by the Belgians for valorous actions and awarded the Belgian Fourageré. It also received two French Croix de Guerre with Palm, the French Fourageré, and three Presidential Unit Citations.

After a series of inactivations and activations spanning a 20-year period, the 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry Regiment was reactivated on 1 February 1966 as part of the 9th Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. The 39th answered the call to duty once again in late 1966 when it deployed with the 9th Infantry Division for combat in the Republic of Vietnam. The regiment participated in operation Palm Tree, the 1968 TET battle, and the battle of the Plain of Reeds. When the 2nd Battalion returned to Hawaii and deactivated in September, 1969, its battle streamers now included Counteroffensive Phase II, Counteroffensive Phase III, TET Counteroffensive, Counteroffensive Phase IV, Counteroffensive Phase V, Counteroffensive Phase VI, TET 69 Counteroffensive, and Summer-Fall 1969. The battalion had also garnered three Republic of Vietnam Crosses of Gallantry with Palm, The Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Medal, First Class, two Valorous Unit Awards and its fourth Presidential Unit Citation.

For its part in World Wars I, II and the Vietnam Conflict, the 39th Infantry Regiment possesses 21 battle streamers. Its decorations include four Presidential Unit Citations, four French Croix de Guerre (two with Palm and one with Gilt Star), and the Belgian Fourageré. Following reactivation and transfer to the Training and Doctrine Command, the 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry Regiment departed Fort Dix, New Jersey for Ft. Jackson, SC, arriving on

## From the Galley

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- Registration starts daily at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, August 30th and Friday, August 31st.

- Large Hospitality Room with snacks and beverages 9:30 a.m. daily

- Product Sales in the Large Hospitality Room 9:30 a.m. daily

- Golf at Winding River Golf Course Friday morning, August 31st

- Pig Out Friday at 1700 August 31st

- Guest Speakers after Pig Out

- Memorial Service at 9:00 a.m. September 1st

- By MRFA Army & Navy Chaplains includes an Empty Chair Ceremony By Dave Schoenian; flag presentations for family members of departed members of the MRF and 9th Infantry Division.

- From the Delta to the DMZ Dance with DJ from 2000 until ?? - September 1st

- Raffles Daily

- Guest Speakers will follow the "Pig Out". So far we have a commitment from Vice Admiral Emmett H. Tidd (USN Ret.). In May 1969, then Captain Tidd, reported as Chief of Staff and Aide to then Vice Admiral Zumwalt who was Commander of the United States Naval Forces, Vietnam and Chief, Naval Advisory Group, Military Assistant Command, Vietnam, Lieutenant General George A. Crocker (USA Ret.). LTG Crocker's military career includes two combat tours in Vietnam, first as a rifle platoon leader with 3d Platoon, "C" Company, 3rd Battalion, 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, (Mobile Riverine Force/1967-68) and second tour, with the RVN 42d Ranger Battalion, Can Tho. Read more about LTG Crocker and Admiral Tidd at 2007 reunion online at [www.mrfa.org](http://www.mrfa.org).

- Back by popular demand Emily Strange Red Cross volunteer stationed at Dong Tam, 1968.

- Please Note: Fishing Trip 07 has been cancelled due to lack of member response.

## Indianapolis Convention Bureau

For more info on the Indianapolis area, contact Paul Williams, Meeting and Sales Manager of the Indianapolis Convention and Visitor's Bureau by calling 1-800-956-INDY, or by e-mailing [pwilliams@indianapolis.org](mailto:pwilliams@indianapolis.org), or visit [www.indy.org](http://www.indy.org).

## Join the CCB-18 Party!

If you live in the San Diego area and would like to assist in the restoration of CCB-18, try being an MRFA volunteer on the working party, Army or Navy! If you are interested, please contact Charles Campbell, 677 G St. SP#1, Chula Vista, CA 91910; phone 619-427-6835 or e-mail: [cccec@cox.net](mailto:cccec@cox.net). You can also contact Everett Jones at 1947 Gotham St., Chula Vista, CA 91913, 619-421-3721 or by e-mail: [oneerj@pacbel.net](mailto:oneerj@pacbel.net).

22 August 1990. The battalion is justifiably proud of its historic past and today continues to uphold these same high standards of excellence in Basic Combat Training as it prepares young men and women for service to their nation. Anything, Anywhere, Anytime... Bar Nothing!

The motto best translates "With a Military Courage Worthy of Admiration".



## Navy of the Republic

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

move army forces throughout the delta. In April 1965, the Joint General Staff established the III and IV Riverine Areas to manage River Force operations. The navy was given sole responsibility for handling operations in the Rung Sat "Special Zone," a maze of rivers and swamps south of Saigon.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the United States supplemented the modest force of ships and craft turned over to the VNN by the French with hundreds of naval vessels, including escorts (PCE), patrol rescue escorts (PCER), motor gunboats (PGM), large support landing ships (LSSL), large infantry landing ships (LSIL), tank landing ships (LST), medium landing ships (LSM), and minesweeping launches (MLMS). These vessels improved the ability of the oceangoing force to patrol the 1,200-mile coastline, provide gunfire support for troops ashore, and carry out amphibious landings and open sea operations.

The River Force received a fleet of smaller vessels, including specially converted mechanized landing craft (LCM) that served as monitors, command boats, troop transports, minesweeping boats, patrol vessels, and fuel barges. The United States also provided the river sailors with 27 American-built river patrol craft (RPC). Unfortunately, these vessels proved to be too noisy, under armed, and easily slowed by river vegetation.

Armed with these combatants, the Vietnam Navy played an increasing role in the fight for South Vietnam. Along with American naval forces, the Fleet Command and the Coastal Force seized or destroyed thousands of junks, sampans, and other craft ferrying enemy munitions and personnel along the coast. The Coastal Force also carried out many amphibious raids, patrols of shallow inlets and river mouths, and troop lifts. These operations played an important part in the allied campaign to deny the enemy easy access to the coastal regions. For instance, during Operation Irving in October 1966, ground forces and junk units in II Coastal Zone cooperated to kill 681 Viet Cong guerrillas. Even though Communist forces sometimes overran the triangular-shaped fortifications of the Coastal Force, they more often failed to overcome the defenders.

In addition to off-shore patrol, Fleet Command ships also patrolled the larger Mekong Delta rivers and protected merchant ships moving between the sea and the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh. The VNN paid a price for its success on the rivers, however. In one period during 1966, enemy river mines sank an LSSL and damaged an LSIL and a utility landing craft (LCU). Viet Cong mines also sank several of the command's minesweeping launches in the Rung Sat during 1966 and 1967.

While the VNN sometimes crowned its operations with victory and its sailors often fought bravely, serious deficiencies

plagued the service all throughout its existence, but especially during the 1960s. Careerism and political activity on the part of many naval officers weakened the war effort. The coup d'etat against President Diem in November 1963 and the political troubles of 1965-1966, in which the navy figured prominently, damaged the morale of officers and blue jackets alike and distracted them from their military mission.

The training of sailors, many educationally unprepared in the technical skills essential for the operation of complex vessels, weapons, and equipment, was generally inadequate. Low pay and austere living conditions prompted many sailors to desert the colors over the years and frustrated recruitment.

The material condition of the navy raised even more serious concerns. Hull and equipment deterioration in the World War II era ships and craft was a serious problem, as was the lack of sufficient spare parts, supplies, and fuel. Compounding the problem was the inability of the ship and boat repair facilities in South Vietnam to handle the workload generated by the high-intensity operations of 1967-1969.

Because of these personnel and material problems, the Vietnam Navy rarely had 50 percent of its ships and craft in operation for blue-ocean, coastal, or river missions.

The VNN's fortunes rose, albeit temporarily, with Washington's decision to turn the war effort over to the Vietnamese and withdraw U.S. military forces from Southeast Asia. In early 1969, President Richard M. Nixon formally adopted as U.S. policy the so-called "Vietnamization" program. The naval part of that process, termed ACTOV (Accelerated Turnover to the Vietnamese), involved the phased transfer to Vietnam of the U.S. Navy's river and coastal combatant fleet. As entire units came under Vietnam Navy command, control of the various combat operations passed to that naval service as well. Hence, the VNN took on sole responsibility for river assault operations when the joint U.S. Army-Navy Mobile Riverine Force lowered its colors and transferred 64 riverine assault craft in the summer of 1969.

The Vietnam Navy performed well during the allied push into Cambodia in the spring of 1970. On 9 May, a combined Vietnamese-American naval task force, under Vietnamese command, steamed up the



Mekong River and secured control of that key waterway from Communist forces. The combined flotilla stormed enemy-held Neak Luong, a strategic ferry crossing point on the river. Then, the Vietnamese contingent of river combatants pushed on to Phnom Penh.

In July 1970, the U.S. Navy ceased its offensive missions on I Corps's Cua Viet and Hue rivers and by the end of the year its other major operations throughout South Vietnam. During that time, Commander U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam, transferred to the VNN 293 river patrol boats and 224 riverine assault craft. The Vietnam Navy grouped these fighting vessels into riverine assault interdiction divisions (RAID), river interdiction divisions (RID), and river patrol groups (RPG).

The same process worked with the off-shore patrol operation during 1970 and 1971. As part of the U.S. Navy's ACTOV program and the U.S. Coast Guard's SCATTOR (Small Craft Assets, Training, and Turnover of Resources) program, the United States transferred to the VNN complete control of the coastal and high seas surface patrol operations. The American naval command transferred four Coast Guard cutters, each equipped with 5-inch guns, radar escort picket ship Camp (DER 251), Garrett County (LST 786), and various harbor control, mine craft, and logistic support vessels. In the midst of this activity, the American and Vietnamese naval forces managed to sink or turn back all but one of the eleven Communist ships that attempted to infiltrate contraband into South Vietnam during 1971. By August 1972, the VNN took on responsibility for the entire coastal patrol effort when it took possession of the last of 16 American coastal radar installations.

In addition to ships and craft, the U.S. Navy, under the ACTOVLOG (Accelerated Turnover to the Vietnamese, Logistics) program, transferred to the Vietnam Navy its many combat and logistic support bases. The first change of command occurred in November 1969 at My Tho and the last in April 1972 at the former centers of American naval power in South Vietnam, the bases at Nha Be, Binh Thuy, Cam Ranh Bay, and Danang.

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## 20-mm Gunner

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

The process of loading and firing the .20 mm was pretty interesting too. The breech block was retracted by means of a stirrup that was pushed down by your foot. This essentially cocked the gun. The rounds were brought up by hand from the ammo box through a feed belt to the rotary loader. A trap door on the top of the loader was opened and the rounds pulled over "fingers" in the drum. A ratchet was used to crank the rounds into the drum until three clips fell out of the loader. The gun was now ready to fire.

As the gun is fired, shell casings are ejected down through the bottom and clips are ejected out the right side of the rotary loader. Needless to say, after a long firefight, you were standing on a pile of brass and clips and surrounded by smoke. Sometimes you were entangled in your sound-powered phones as well. Add this to B-40 rockets and small arms fire hitting your boat, things got pretty exciting!

The day-to-day life on the ATC was composed of long periods of boredom punctuated by short periods of terror. Our main mission was to carry troops into combat and insert them for search-and-destroy missions against the Viet Cong in the Mekong Delta. These troops were mostly 9th Infantry Division but occasionally Vietnamese troops. These missions actually began the night before with briefings to the

boat captains. We loaded troops directly off the ships and usually landed them shortly after sunrise. Sometimes, these landings would shift based on the tides. We had to be able to get in and out with plenty of water under the keel. After we had offloaded them, we would exit the canal and move around to retrieve them when they exited on another canal. In this way, we also served as a blocking force. Once the 9th Infantry Division embarked, we returned to the Mobile Riverine Base.

Getting to and from these insertion points were the most dangerous times. The VC loved to hit us going in because they knew we were carrying troops by out draft. They could inflict the most casualties at this time because they could control the timing of the attack. Coming out with troops was not quite as bad because they had generally been pushed out of the areas by the infantry sweeps and helicopter gun ships supporting the operations. After a while, these ambush points became predictable and were given names by us--Snoopy's Nose, Rocket Alley, and Blood Alley come to mind. Some of these places were located fairly close to our shore base at Dong Tam.

When we were "off the line," we either hauled supplies for the Army, patrolled the MRB at night, or provided waterborne security for Army artillery barges. The barges were towed by Army LCM-8s that also provided living quarters as well as hot

chow. There were usually six barges with one 105-mm howitzer on each. These mobile fire support bases ranged up and down the rivers to provide artillery support for the 9th Infantry Division. They provided their own security on the land side but we patrolled their rear with one ATC. All night long, we would steam back and forth lobbing concussion grenades in the water to discourage swimmers. We had a two-boat patrol and alternated this security duty every 4 hours. One of the major disadvantages of this duty was that having the boat in long periods of contact with the river bank allowed rats to come aboard and share our living quarters. They would hide by day and run around at night. Sometimes, they ran right across your chest while you were sleeping. This provided another form of recreation. We would remove the bullets from our .38 shells and push the case into a bar of soap thus producing a "soap bullet." Great for short range and they did not ricochet. Many rats "bit the bullet" this way.

Every night, just prior to sunset, the whole MRB, consisting of at least five ships, would shift anchor and re-anchor after dark. This was done to prevent the VC from targeting the ships easily. This operation necessitated having all boats tied up to each ship getting underway and circling in a giant "racetrack" until the ships re-anchored. We would then come in and tie up again. All of us knew how to drive the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

## Medal of Honor Recipient Leonard Keller

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.

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 gre-



nade, 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 bunk-

ers, 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 tree-line, 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.



*Always remember to forget  
The things that made you sad  
But never forget to remember  
The things that made you glad,*

*Always remember to forget  
The friends that proved untrue,  
But don't forget to remember  
Those that have stuck by you,*

*Always remember to forget  
The troubles that have passed away,  
But never forget to remember  
The blessings that come each day*

*Author Unknown*



## I Was There

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that NOT being affected by the experience over there would be abnormal. When he told me that, it was like he'd just given me a pardon. It was as if he said, "Go ahead and feel something about the place, Bob. It ain't going nowhere. You're gonna wear it for the rest of your life. Might as well get to know it."

A lot of my "brothers" haven't been so lucky. For them the memories are too painful, their sense of loss too great. My sister told me of a friend she has whose husband was in Nam. She asks this guy when he was there. Here's what he said, "Just last night." It took my sister a while to figure out what he was talking about. JUST LAST NIGHT. Yeah I was in Nam.

When? JUST LAST NIGHT. And on my way to work this morning. Over my lunch hour. Yeah, I was there. My sister says I'm not the same brother that went to Vietnam. My wife says I won't let people get close to me, not even her. They are probably both right.

Ask a vet about making friends in Nam. It was risky. Why? Because we were in the business of death, and death was with us all the time. It wasn't the death of, "If I die before I wake." This was the real thing. The kind where boys scream for their mothers. The kind that lingers in your mind and becomes more real each time you cheat it. You don't want to make a lot of friends when the possibility of dying is that real, that close. When you do, friends become a liability.

A guy named Bob Flannigan was my friend. Bob Flannigan is dead. I put him in a body bag one sunny day, April 29, 1969. We'd been talking, only a few minutes before he was shot, about what we were going to do when we got back in the world. Now, this was a guy who had come in-country the same time as myself. A guy who was loveable and generous. He had blue eyes and sandy blond hair. When he talked, it was with a soft drawl. Flannigan was a hick and he knew it. That was part of his charm. He didn't care. Man, I loved this guy like the brother I never had. But, I screwed up. I got too close to him. Maybe I didn't know any better. But I broke one of the unwritten rules of war.

### DON'T GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TODIE!

Sometimes you can't help it.

You hear vets use the term "buddy" when they refer to a guy they spent the war with. "Me and this buddy of mine..."

"Friend" sounds too intimate, doesn't it? "Friend" calls up images of being close. If he's a friend, then you are going to be hurt if he dies, and war hurts enough without adding to the pain. Get close; get hurt. It's as simple as that.

In war you learn to keep people at that distance my wife talks about. You become so good at it, that twenty years after the war, you still do it without thinking. You won't

allow yourself to be vulnerable again.

My wife knows two people who can get into the soft spots inside me. My daughters. I know it probably bothers her that they can do this. It's not that I don't love my wife, I do. She's put up with a lot from me. She'll tell you that when she signed on for better or worse she had no idea there was going to be so much of the latter. But with my daughters, it's different.

My girls are mine. They'll always be my kids. Not marriage, not distance, not even death can change that. They are something on this earth that can never be taken away from me. I belong to them. Nothing can change that.

I can have an ex-wife; but my girls can never have an ex-father. There's the difference.

I can still see the faces, though they all seem to have the same eyes. When I think of us I always see a line of "dirty grunts" sitting on a paddy dike. We're caught in the first gray silver between darkness and light. That first moment when we know we've survived another night, and the business of staying alive for one more day is about to begin. There was so much hope in that brief space of time. It's what we used to pray for. "One more day, God. One more day."

And I can hear our conversations as if they'd only just been spoken. I still hear the way we sounded, the hard cynical jokes, our morbid senses of humor. We were scared to death of dying, and trying our best not to show it.

I recall the smells, too. Like the way cordite hangs on the air after a fire-fight. Or the pungent odor of rice paddy mud. So different from the black dirt of Iowa. The mud of Nam smells ancient, somehow. Like it's always been there. And I'll never forget the way blood smells, sticky and drying on my hands. I spent a long night that way once. That memory isn't going anywhere.

I remember how the night jungle appears almost dreamlike as the pilot of a Cessna buzzes overhead, dropping parachute flares until morning. That artificial sun would flicker and make shadows run through the jungle. It was worse than not being able to see what was out there sometimes. I remember once looking at the man next to me as a flare floated overhead. The shadows around his eyes were so deep that it looked like his eyes were gone. I reached over and touched him on the arm; without looking at me he touched my hand. "I know man. I know." That's what he said. It was a human moment.

Two guys a long way from home and scared shitless. "I know man." And at that moment he did.

God I loved those guys. I hurt every time one of them died. We all did. Despite our posturing. Despite our desire to stay disconnected, we couldn't help ourselves. I know why Tim O'Brien writes his stories. I know what gives Bruce Weigle the words to create poems so honest I cry at their horrible beauty. It's love. Love for those guys we shared the experience with.

We did our jobs like good soldiers, and we tried our best not to become as hard as our surroundings. We touched each other and said, "I know." Like a mother holding a child in the middle of a nightmare, "It's going to be all right." We tried not to lose touch with our humanity. We tried to walk that line. To be the good boys our parents had raised and not to give into that unnamed thing we knew was inside us all.

You want to know what frightening is? It's a nineteen-year-old-boy who's had a sip of that power over life and death that war gives you. It's a boy who, despite all the things he's been taught, knows that he likes it. It's a nineteen-year-old who's just lost a friend, and is angry and scared and, determined that, "Some asshole is gonna pay." To this day, the thought of that boy can wake me from a sound sleep and leave me staring at the ceiling.

As I write this, I have a picture in front of me. It's of two young men. On their laps are tablets. One is smoking a cigarette. Both stare without expression at the camera. They're writing letters. Staying in touch with places they would rather be. Places and people they hope to see again.

The picture shares space in a frame with one of my wife. She doesn't mind. She knows she's been included in special company. She knows I'll always love those guys who shared that part of my life, a part she never can. And she understands how I feel about the ones I know are out there yet.

The ones who still answer the question, "When were you in Vietnam?" with "Hey, man. I was there just last night."



## 20-mm Gunner

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

boat so this exercise was fun. You had to “walk” the boat in against the river current and avoid hitting anyone fore or aft. In the dark. We really got quite competitive at this. Periodically, we were tasked with MRB security that consisted of circling one of the ships all night, dropping concussion grenades periodically to take care of swimmers.

During my tour on the rivers, our boat participated in many and varied assignments. Most of our time was spent in the Delta, but we did go up to the “Parrot’s Beak” on Operation “Giant Slingshot” as a support boat for the PBRs. We were stationed at Tra Cu and Go Dau Ha. This was the only place we saw blue, clear water.

I have never regretted this experience as I feel I have become a better person for it. This experience was the turning point in my life. The term “Don’t sweat the small stuff” has a different meaning since Vietnam.

## Navy of the Republic

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

By 1973, the Vietnam Navy possessed the material resources to carry on the fight alone. The 42,000-man naval service marshaled a force of over 1,400 ships and craft to meet the enemy on the rivers and canals of South Vietnam and in the South China Sea. The relatively young, dramatically expanded, and still developing Vietnam Navy had great potential, but it needed time to mature.

The Vietnam Navy never got that time. Disenchanted with the American venture in Southeast Asia, during 1973 and 1974 the United States drastically cut financial support for the Vietnamese armed forces. The Vietnam Navy was compelled to reduce its overall operations by 50 percent and its river combat and patrol activities by 70 percent. To conserve scarce ammunition and fuel, Saigon laid up over 600 river and harbor craft and 22 ships. The enemy did not target the waterways during this period, but the respite was short lived.

In little more than a month during the spring of 1975, Communist ground forces seized all of northern and central South Vietnam, bypassing any VNN concentrations. The Vietnam Navy’s ships and sailors soon joined the hurried exodus of troops and civilians from the I and II Corps areas. With the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, many of the VNN’s ships and craft put to sea and gathered off Son Island southwest of Vung Tau. The flotilla of 26 Vietnam Navy and other vessels, with 30,000 sailors, their families, and other civilians onboard, joined the U.S. Seventh Fleet when it embarked the last of the refugees fleeing South Vietnam and headed for the Philippines.

Thus ended the Vietnam Navy’s short, if dramatic history. The VNN’s sailors often fought with bravery and determination,

# Vietnam War Medal of Honor Recipients 9th Infantry Division

\* P = Posthumous

**Sammy L. Davis, 2nd/4th Arty.**

**Edward A. DeVore, Jr., B Co., 4th/39th \*P**

**James W. Fous, Co. E, 4th/47th \*P**

**Don J. Jenkins, 2nd/39th**

**Leonard B. Keller, 3rd/60th**

**Thomas James Kinsman, B Co., 3rd/60th**

**George C. Lang, 4th/47th**

**David P. Nash, 2nd/39th \*P**

**Clarence Eugene Sasser, 3rd/60th**

**Raymond R. Wright, 3rd/60th**

## About the Medal of Honor

The Medal of Honor was established by Joint Resolution of Congress, 12 July 1862 (amended by acts 9 July 1918 and 25 July 1963). The Medal of Honor is awarded by the President in the name of Congress to a

person who distinguishes himself or herself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life or her life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. The deed performed must have been one of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades and must have involved risk of life. Incontestable proof of the performance of the service will be exacted and each recommendation for the award of this decoration will be considered on the standard of extraordinary merit.

killing many of the enemy and suffering heavy losses of their own. But, their valor and sacrifice was not rewarded with victory in the Vietnam War.

*Reproduced with permission from: Tucker, Spencer C., ed. Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History. Santa Barbara, CA ABC-CLIO, 1998.*

## Note from LT Hai Tran, South Vietnamese Navy

In 1975 the South Vietnamese Navy was involuntarily discharged from the world’s naval community. The Officers and men never enjoyed a happy and victorious ending. They suffered loss and humiliation. In April 1975 their small fleet arrived in Subic Bay, Philippines without identity. The US Navy painted over the Vietnamese Navy (VNN) ships hull numbers. The fatherland’s flag was forced to be lowered from the masts. And by all accounts the South Vietnamese Navy ceased to exist.

On January 19, 1974, this proud Navy fought against the huge Chinese Navy in Hoang Sa (Paracel Islands) archipelagos without any help or support from the U.S. Seventh Fleet. Sailors who abandoned ships scattered to the sea. The U.S. Navy offered no assistance. U.S. Naval Historians have never mentioned a word about this sea battle.

The ill-equipped former DER Foster (VNN HQ 4), with torpedo tubes without torpedoes, long range radar that had been stripped off after changing hand from the US Navy, was all but useless. Former U.S. Coast Guard WHEC craft, with slow 5" guns, could not get the upper-hand on the high speed Chinese gunboats. The aftermath was VNN PCE (HQ 10) was sunk. Two Chinese gunboats were sunk and some were damaged. The Hoang Sa (Paracel Islands) were lost.

After 1973 the U.S. sharply reduced its support. The VNN had to use its ammunition sparingly. A victory at Tuyen Nhon changed the Viet Cong’s movements towards Saigon. The Viet Cong commander offered millions of dong for Lt. Commander Le Anh Tuan’s head.

On April 1975 Task Force 99 blocked a Viet Cong attack on Saigon from Tay Ninh and alerted a surveillance post for the VNN fleet to evacuate via the Long Tao waterway to safety.

On April 30, 1975, after Duong Van Minh called Republic of Vietnamese Armed forces to surrender, Lt. Commander Le Anh Tuan committed suicide when his river flotilla was ambushed by Russian made T-54 tanks. Many boats were abandoned in Vung Tau and in South Vietnam’s waterways. Officers and enlisted sailors felt betrayed by their comrades and allies. The only way they could save their miserable lives was to draw close to their families. Sadly, Commander Ha Ngoc Luong killed his wife, children and then committed suicide at the Nha Trang Naval Academy.

After April 30, 1975 some LST crewmen, with AK47s held behind their backs, trained Viet Cong sailors to run those types of ships. They did so while watching dirty pigs and chickens feeding on the former proud ships’ decks.

Officers were separated from their families. They had to do duty in forced labor Re-education Camps for years. They tried to escape Vietnam by all possible ways. With their experiences as sea going sailors, many were successful. Some succeeded in reaching free countries and began rebuilding their lives.

The Viet Cong Navy updated the former DER Foster (HQ 4) and began using her as a training ship. They armed WHECs with missiles. Today they are still using some former VNN LST for cargo ships. Their fleet has dozens of gas turbine Petya gun boats with torpedo launchers. The Ukraine is planning on selling them some 2,000 ton Gepard frigates and Molniya missile boats equipped with Moskit supersonic anti-ship missiles under Ukrainian license. Vietnamese shipyards will build these type of ships for Viet Cong Navy.



# These Few Good Men Veterans Day 2007, Washington, D.C.

By Michael Norman

I now know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite. Not to tell stories or look at old pictures, not to laugh or weep. Comrades gather because they long to be with the men who once acted their best, men who suffered and sacrificed who were stripped raw, right down to their humanity.

I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate. But I know them in a way I know no other men. I have never given anyone such trust. They were willing to guard something more precious than my life. They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me. It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another.

I cannot say where we are headed. Ours are not perfect friendships: those are the province of legend and myth. A few of my comrades drift far from me now, sending back only occasional word. I know that one day even these could fall to silence. Some of the men will stay close, a couple, perhaps, always at hand.

As long as I have memory. I will think of them all, every day. I am sure that when I leave this world, my last thought will be of my family and my comrades.... Such good men.

The MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will be placing wreaths at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. on Veterans Day, Sunday, November 11, 2007. 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.

Additionally, on Saturday, November 10th, at 1:00 P.M., the MRFA and 9th Infantry Division will be placing a wreath at the Navy Memorial. The U.S. Navy Memorial & Naval Heritage Center is located at 701 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. We will have an Honor Guard, a bugler and a number of speakers, both the Army and Navy.

We have blocked 40 rooms at the Hilton Garden Inn Arlington / Courthouse Plaza in Arlington, Virginia for November 8th - 12th. Room rates are \$119.00 (plus tax) per night. For reservations call 1-703-528-4444

## A memory I Will Never Forget:

*November 11, 2006, I walked with true American heroes to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.*

- KATHRYN R. GOUDELOCK

and refer to our group name "MRFA". Reservations may also be made on-line @ [www.arlingtoncourthouse.gardeninn.com](http://www.arlingtoncourthouse.gardeninn.com) be sure to enter the on-line reservation code "MRFA". Reservations under these group codes must be made before the cut off date of October 17, 2007, so make your reservations soon.

A Hospitality Room will be available on November 9th and 10th.

The Hilton Garden Inn Arlington/Courthouse Plaza is located at 1333 North Courthouse Road, Arlington, VA 22201.

We look forward to seeing you in D.C. Come join us as we honor our fallen Brothers on Veterans Day 2007.

## Hotel Parking:

Self Parking: \$10.00 - Fee effective 1/1/07 (6' clearance)

In/Out Privileges: Available

Secured: Available • Covered: Available

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

## ADS IN RIVER CURRENTS A Civil War Heritage (Mobile Riverine Force)

Due to the overwhelming demand from members and outside vendors, we will no longer place advertisements in *River Currents* with the exception of MRFA and 9th Inf Div products sold by the MRFA.

### MRFA/9TH INF. WEBSITE [www.mrfa.org](http://www.mrfa.org)

Mike Harris is our web master. He does a great job with the web site. There's information on the VA, KIA, about anything you want on the 9th, MRF, and other in-country units, patches, books, and tour info. Mike has it somewhere on the site. You may contact Mike Harris if you want a book, pictures, etc., posted there. Mike makes the final decision on what will be posted. Contact him by e-mail [mekong152@charter.net](mailto:mekong152@charter.net). Mike served on Tango-152-1 (68-69).

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

In the fall of 1862, General Ulysses Grant packed 32,000 weary Union soldiers onto river boats and began the siege of the vital Confederate city of Vicksburg, Ms. Using the Mississippi Delta Waterways to position Navy gunboats and to transport men and equipment, the superior Northern forces penetrated the river strongholds.

General Grant's forces teaming with Rear Admiral David Porter's Mobile Riverine Force (MRF) carried the North's offensive deep into Dixie. Fleets of armor-protected boats provided fire support and ferried troops as the Union assaulted the series of fortifications along the Mississippi River.

Thundering volleys from naval gunboats and mortar vessels played a decisive role in the North's successful winter and spring campaigns of 1862 and 1863. After the defeat of the Confederates in the battle of Port Gibson on April 30, the fortress of Vicksburg fell on July 4.

River assaults also played dominant roles as key Union victories claimed Belmont, Fort Henry, and Shiloh. Riverine warfare virtually split the Confederacy in two. The Riverine Force was born. It's our history and our birth as a Mobile Riverine Force fighting unit.



**MRFA**



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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.

# TAPS *Those gone but not forgotten*

**Lawrence Ferguson** passed away October 1, 2006. Lawrence served in RivRon 9 T-92-5 from 10/67 to 12/68. You may contact his wife at 12015 Clear Creek Ct, Silverdale, Washington 98383-9615, 360-692-4331 or joanferguson@wavecable.com.

**BM1 Pat G. Stauber (USN Ret.)** passed away on April 27, 2006 in Lonoke, Arkansas. While in Vietnam he served with River Assault Squadron 15 as Boat Captain of A-151-2 from September 1968 to September 1969. BM1 Stauber received the Bronze Star w/V for heroism and two Purple Heart Medals. He retired from the U.S. Navy in 1974. You may contact the family at Charlene Stauber, 111 Summerwood Drive, Searcy, AR 72143, 501-268-5405 or daughter Charlotte Gladden, 586 Jones Circle, Anna, Texas 75409, phone 972-924-8217 or cgladden@jcpenny.com.

**Robert E. Tak** passed away April 1st, 1975, from complications due to pneumonia. Robert served in RivRon 9 we believe on ASPB-91-4 in 1968. You may contact the family in care of his son at Anthony Tak, 1103 N. 3rd St., Johnstown, CO 80534, rgrtak@msn.com.

**John R. "TOP" Secor** 1stSgt U.S. Army (Ret.). passed away on the 5th of February 2007. Top served in C/CO/4th/47th (1967-68)

in A/CO 2nd/47th (Mech) Infantry (1968-69) and C/CO/5th/60th (1969-70).

Top is one reason a lot of us made it home. We all have a lot of gratitude and respect for him, for all he did for us in Vietnam. That appreciation for him often reflected by us in visiting with him at the reunions 30 some years later.

Thanks Top for always being there for us when we needed help you always had the right "wise answer". You are a first class Soldier Hero and every time I think of the proud time we soldiers served together, your strong character and integrity will always be remembered as one of Honor."

Ja Wan Thompson 2nd/47th. John "Top" Secor served as 1st Sgt in Charlie Rangers, 5th/60th Infantry after his duty with the Panthers. As company commander I could not have had a more professional right hand man and friend. It was my honor to soldier with Top Secor. The world is in morning today; a Soldier has passed away. May he rest in peace. Terry Stull 5th/60th

I knew this man he was a fine Soldier and leader of men.

Bill Reynolds C/CO/4th/47th You may contact the family of "TOP" Secor at: C/O daughter Jill Curtis 18 Westminster Dr. Lumberton, NJ 08048; or email corlisj@comcast.net.

*The MREFA Board of Directors and Staff would like to extend their most sincere sympathies to all the families of the fallen.*

## 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 "Brown Water 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.

## In Memory Of

This section is for the members who wish to sponsor the MRFA 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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# Get Well Wishes

*We wish good health and fast recovery for each of our brothers and their families.*

Jim Grooms (ENC Ret) has been having health problems. We hope Jim starts feeling

better soon and look forward to seeing him at the reunion. You may contact Jim at 3137 Braeburn Pl., Highlands Ranch, CO 80126, phone: 303-683-9224 or jimgrms@yahoo.com.

Bobby Rider has been in bad health for awhile now but seems to be getting worse. Please keep Bobby and Elisabeth in your

thoughts and prayers at this time. Bobby served on Monitor 111-3 (01/68-01/69). You may contact Elisabeth at 303 N Vancouver Ave, Russellville, AR 2801-2747, 479-968-6659 or canerday@suddenlink.net.

*Have a get well wish to post? Send an email to [mrfa@charter.net](mailto:mrfa@charter.net)*

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Donald Salmi Associate Member  
Norman Saunders B Co 3rd/39th Inf (1/69-8/69)  
John Schleicher IUWG-1  
Harry David Schoenian C Co 47th/47th Inf (7/68-7/69)  
Jerry (Doc) Schuebel B Co. 3rd/60th Inf  
Col Sam L. Schutte USA (Ret) B Co 4<sup>th</sup>/47<sup>th</sup> Inf (VN)  
Mark Seymour YW-118 NSA Danang (1/70-9/70)  
Lawrence J. Shallue HHC 2nd/47th Mech Inf (04/66-12/67)  
Jerry J. Shearer C Co 2nd Pit 3rd/60th Inf  
Donald Shelton USS White River LSMR-536  
William & Jocelyn Shreffler B Btry 7th/9th II Field Forces (1967-68)  
Richard M. Simpson C Co 3rd/47th Inf (5/67-5/68)  
William (Bill) Sinclair XO USS White River LSMR-536 (4/65-2/68)  
Tom Slater USS Hampshire Cty LST-819  
Br/Gen Douglas Smith U.S. Army Ret. Cdr 2nd/47th Mech Inf  
Chet "Gunner" Stanley C-111-1 (1966-68)  
Alan Strickland A Co. 2nd/47th Mech Inf  
Allen Strohmeier 5th/60th (11/67-11/69)  
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William Tamboer T-151-9  
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USS Guide MSO-447  
Benjamin D. Utley C Co. 3 Pit 3rd/60th Inf  
Peter W. Van der Naillen USS Clarian River (1968-69)  
Bob & Nancy VanDruff T-91-5 and T-92-4  
Ricky & Darrell Vice T-131-7 (1968-69)  
Jack Watson C Co 3rd/60th Inf (12/68-9/69)  
A.J. "Jim" Webster IUWG-1 Unit-2 (2/69-7/70)  
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Charles Westcott, RivDiv 111, 112, and 131  
Tom White C Co. 4th/47th Inf  
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  
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