



River Currents



Helo landing on ATC

Jim Rosselli C Co 3rd/60th
River Raiders

A PUBLICATION OF
THE MOBILE RIVERINE FORCE ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 23, NUMBER 4
WINTER 2014

From the Galley

Folks we have a lot of good reunion info in this publication of the *River Currents*, so I'll be brief and won't take up too much space. So far we have received a number of registrations and reservations—that's great for this far out. Usually we don't have this many until around the first of the year. I have been at this a long time and what this shows me is we're going to have another great turnout.



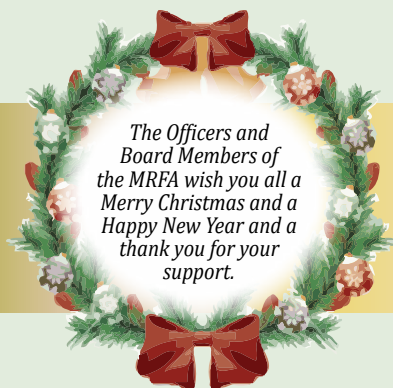
Al Moore

I would recommend if you want to stay at the main hotel make your reservation ASAP, although the other two hotels are nice as well. Frank Jones has done another great job in setting up the hotels, etc. Please read all the below information carefully.

As for your Association, we're doing just fine. We did have a problem with our web site as someone hacked into it and fouled it all up. Mike Harris, our outstanding webmaster, has been working around the clock to get it back to the way it was. After Mike gets that done, we plan on re-designing the web site. It's going to take time and lots of work and effort.

I want to thank Georgie and Robin for another great job with the newsletter. Without Georgie Ardinger's help and assistance over the years, the Association would not be where it is today. Thanks Georgie for all you do. As for myself, I'm doing okay. I take it a day at a time. Everyone take care of yourself and have a great winter. Must not forget Doc Pries and his group—great job as always in DC for Vets Day. **Albert**

PS: Some of you have sent articles in, please have patience and we will have them posted in future issues of the newsletter. The *River Currents* staff has not forgotten them.



Veteran's Day at the Wall



Scott and Tom Cantell, MRFA Wreath, and Smitty w/PTSD picture for Janet Helenthatter



Doug and Brian Smith w/47th wreath

We had a very good gathering to honor our fellow Vets and those on the Wall. There were about 60 people overall who participated in our wreath laying at the Wall on Veterans Day.

Patrick Hughes and Jerry Amondson placed the 9th Ind Div wreath. Doug Smith and his son, Brian, placed the 47th wreath. Tom Cantwell and his son, Scott, placed the

MRFA wreath. It was great having Doug's and Tom's sons join us. Our children and their children are our legacy.

Once again, the MRFA-9th Inf Division stands up and honors our Brother and Sisters on the Wall. Bravo Zulu!

In brotherhood,
Doc Bob Pries Board Member MRFA
priesrl@att.net



The Milk Run

By Richard E. Lorman T-152-6
(1968-69) richlorm@comcast.net

Armored Troop Carrier, T-152-6, had been a lucky boat, with only one direct rocket hit over almost a full one-year's tour of duty; but multiple wounds had occurred. The senior engineman had gone home with three Purple Hearts, and the original boat captain had part of his nose shot off and left our boat; mostly unremembered replacements came and went over time.

Nobody had died on Tango 6, and she never had a breakdown or missed an assignment. In fact, frequently we were the rescue and towing boat for other disabled riverine craft.

The remaining five members of our original plankowner crew sat out on our flight deck the sunny early morning of Friday the 13th, 1969, having completed ahead of schedule the official inventory and upkeep work required to prepare for the USN "newbie" replacement crew coming aboard on Sunday.

T-6 was out at the end of a long string of Tangos tied side-by-side to the support ship's pontoon. Other boats were still catching up late on those same turnover chores so they weren't able to go out on any operation. Our crew had diligently finished up early with the detailed inventory, bow-to-stern cleaning and repainting, and getting all sorts of supplies aboard—mostly C-rats, fuel, and ammunition.

We carefully estimated that T-6 had typically been in at least 50 full firefights during our tour of duty. That's not counting the many times we were attacked and were ordered to hold fire. We were quite pleased with ourselves and cautiously cocky over ending our active boat time. We were shorter-than-short and soon headed home via the Freedom Bird.

Our crew was told we would **never** go out on operations again; our time on the boat was finished forever; all we had to do was turnover the boat to the replacement crew arriving on that Sunday, the 15th . . . only 2 days and a wake-up away.

Suddenly, an officer approached all ginned up about a surprise Rocket Alley operation we had to go out on. We angrily flashed to maximum refusal mode—to the point of mutiny. The officer returned three times with increasingly adamant orders and threats; then he changed tactics. He then pleaded that this "brief mission" would be merely a "milk run." By these careless words, he had put a curse on us...right on top of all the other superstitions.

Light but effective engine room sabotage was considered but



Rear photo of Tango 6 at Nha Be December 1968

deemed too dangerous and underhanded; after all, it would mean another boat would have to take our place.

Filled with fearful anticipation, I tore out the spongy insides of a bulbous seldom-used USN Sound-Powered Phone helmet and jammed it on top of my regular helmet. As luck would have it, this double-helmet protection surely saved my life later that morning. It looked quite goofy and triggered puzzled and curious reactions from both Army and Navy onlookers alike.

Tango 6 was untied and slowly slipped away from the boats that were remaining behind. As we passed one of them, from atop of the flight deck of his boat, an extra-large crewmember (inspired by my headwear) tossed me his personal flak jacket and flak pants to put on over mine, which I gratefully did immediately. Two helmets and now double flak gear too . . . quite a sight.

We proceeded to where we'd pick up the army soldiers and then begin the operation. This was from the sandbagged ferry ramp at the mystical city of My Tho.



A typical coxswain flat view of Tango 6 proceeding downstream

The first soldier to enter the well deck, an RTO, walked across the lowered bow ramp out of the bright sun and into the shade of the overhead flight deck, stopped, looked at me up and down in my layers of flak gear, and exclaimed: **"Do you know something that we don't?"** He stood there for a moment, very heavily laden, with a fresh pack of Camels under his helmet's strap and folded-up antenna making Venetian blind noises. His spontaneous question had to go largely unanswered in the rush except for my blurring out: "I'm short!"

Around 30 fully equipped soldiers of the Blue Platoon, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, 47th



It was Friday, June 13th, 1969...

Infantry, jammed together into the well deck with another navy crewman and me. In my worried mind, I went through a list of each of the foreboding signs of bad luck: It was Friday the 13th; the Rocket Alley "milk run" comment/curse; being as short as our boat crew was; being officially advised we would **never** have to go out on an operation again; that a brand-new replacement crew would take over Tango-6 on Sunday . . . only 2 days away; and finally that our boat had always been lucky—relatively speaking, that is. That streak was now threatened.

Tango 6 loaded with infantry troops and traveled elephant-style with eight other boats down the river towards Ben Tre.

After we had transited for a while, I dropped down from my M-60 machine gun position and asked a genuinely friendly soldier, a medic, what time it was. He smiled broadly, looked at his watch and said "10:30." At that instant, automatic weapons fire poured from the port side jungle bank along with nearby rocket explosions. He looked at me and I looked at him; we mutually shrugged silently "Here we go!"

45 years later, troops there that day have indicated, sadly, that he was killed that day . . . on our "milk run."

Behind the friendly medic, I saw the infantry troops leap through the air with their weapons firing at the jungle banks only 50 feet away. I still can't think of that memory without getting goose bumps on my forearms; they were magnificent.

When I stood up to man my M-60, I saw that the jungle to the starboard side was too distant to pose a real threat. But moving across the well deck wasn't an option. I was locked into position by the army gear and being plugged into the bulkhead by my sound-powered earphones and microphone.

I fired at the more distant shore lightly with little expected effect, the ambush being from the opposite side. Just then, my lights went out. A single AK-47 round had penetrated both helmets and fractured bones of my upper neck. Unfortunately, the large hanging flak curtains ended a bit forward of my gun position, leaving my back exposed



to direct enemy fire from the port side.

When I was down flat on the deck from the initial bullet wound, and then the first rocket had hit above us, I felt a great crushing feeling, like playing sandlot pick-up tackle football at 8 years old and getting piled on. My helmets and communications gear jammed up into my face; I was essentially paralyzed and couldn't move, breath, or speak out. However, I could hear and see much as I repeatedly went in and out of consciousness among other wounded; some on top of me.

Then, around 20 seconds later, the second rocket (or recoilless rifle round) exploded in the same area, igniting uniforms and equipment on fire while heavy enemy automatic fire continued unabated.

Over my earphones, I could hear someone yell repeatedly: "Lorman, What's going on down there?" A crewman climbed from the coxswain's flat to the edge of the well deck and looked down at the burning carnage and rushed to report to the helm. I was on my back with my neck twisted around and looked up I could see him through narrow eye slits. He looked horrified.

I could hear the shouted orders to reverse the boat's direction and prepare for Medevacs to arrive. This was either over my earphones or from nearby Army PRC-25 radios. Both Medevacs and the Command and Control helicopter responded swiftly.

In Tango 6's well deck, many of the wounds were very serious and we needed to get Medevacs in quickly.

After the two rockets hit in the packed well deck and rough triage was underway, I was at first assessed to be dead and was thrown aside into that pile along with others both under and over me. Somehow, luckily, I was later discovered to be alive. It was during this short time that I went through the intriguing out-of-body/gently-floating-toward-a-warm-beckoning-light

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

MILK RUN

Continued from previous page

experience. It is eye-opening real; believe me.

The now-declassified CONFIDENTIAL Monthly Historical Summary for June of 1969 states: "Total friendly casualties were four soldiers killed, and 22 soldiers and four navy men wounded." This was all on Tango 6, except for one USN WIA. Zippo-152-1 caught four rockets and one hit T-152-11.

I have no memory of hearing either of the two rockets exploding near me, although I felt the impact of each of the powerful blast waves. Concussion travels faster than sound, thus the effect.

While a Medevac chopper barely touched down on the flight deck of another Tango next to ours, I was carried up to the surface on a litter and passed between encouraging faces and thumbs-up from some of my boat crew. The Medevac Huey was violently shaking and extremely loud yet strangely welcoming. I got slid in crossways and tightly



This was a sad and thoughtful day; it's a mystery to me where that rope came from (unidentified soldier).

next to another wounded G.I. on a stretcher.

Primary on my mind was the statistic that if you got on a Medevac flight, your chances of "making it" were something like 98%.

I could see thick quilted padding of the insides of the noisy bird and only a little bit to each side...then I finally lapsed into unconsciousness that lasted over several days of medical operations and treatments.

However, in the moments just as the Helo lifted off, in searching for answers, I felt around with my severely burned right hand and came into contact with a slippery left hand—and we held on tight in mutual support of one another.

Many years later, through Internet connections, I found out his name and he is doing well; he recalls our handholding at the beginning of that flight.

Meanwhile, accompanied by several other boats, Tango 6 proceeded to Fire Support Base Karen for a sorting out of debris and a gut-wrenching clean-up.

The photos are from Fire Support Base Camp "Tiger's Lair" where the boats went after the ambush was over. Much debris in the form of uniforms, flak gear, and other assorted stuff was taken from Tango 6 via stretchers and piled there. This is also where the "gut-wrenching" clean-up of Tango 6 was done.

Later, in a Dong Tam inflatable Quonset hut hospital, I woke up while being roughly immersed in a large metal tub full of ice, for extreme fever, in the central aisle of the ward. It worked. Later, in a crispy clean bed, I blissfully luxuriated in the air-conditioning; it was wonderful, even being covered in bandages.

Distant rocket warnings at Dong Tam caused us to be put on the

plywood deck alongside our hospital beds. As usual, Dong Tam proved to be an interesting and often dangerous place to be.

At no time did I feel any pain...not even from the third degree burns to my right hand. The same with gunshot to my upper spine where C-2 and C-3 were fractured, shrapnel that tore through my intestines, and serious lower leg wounds with nerve damage. Multiple surgeries and treatments over months and decades are another story.

Occasional nightmares leave me awakened and upset with just enough to remember that I was back on the assault boat or in yet another hospital with other wounded around me; all in a grotesque and surreal style.

I've never experienced the weight of survivor's guilt from any combat situations where I was lucky when others weren't. I always did my assignments well; had I fouled up and caused WIA/KIA now that would be different.

I believe all of us carry the weight of our combat experiences, but I think it strengthens us in many ways. Nobody can ever legitimately challenge our service or manhood, although some nitwits may try. Much thanks to all those of the Army and Navy who diligently worked to re-construct the "milk run" ambush of June 13, 1969. I am sure we all hope that it serves to interest and help all our combat brothers. We are, after all, still in the same boat...

This article is offered In Memory Of the four Army KIAs on Tango 6, June 13, 1969: SP4 James Clifford Lucero, PFC Kenneth Lee Conner, SP4 Thomas Milton Aaron, and SP4 Arturo Salazar and Tango 6's other well deck crewman: Louis J. Bokusky [d. 9-11-13], who was

manifestly wounded on that fateful day, causing a lifetime of suffering.

AFTERWARD: On Sunday, June 15, 1969, in action a few hundred meters from the Friday, June 13th ambush site, [then] Lt. Thomas G. Kelley, USN, although terribly wounded, would perform with "Conspicuous Gallantry," thus earning the Medal of Honor. ★



Above: These photos shows helmets still with cigarettes, a Zippo lighter, and bug juice. Behind, on a second litter, are ammunition, smoke grenades, and other debris from T-6.

Silent Cherokee

By Walter T. Gage 3rd/47th and 3rd/39th Infantry (05/66-05/68)
lucindagage@gmail.com

I think Daniel was one of the Oklahoma City guys I liked from the start. A harder worker I've ever seen. He didn't say much but communicated well. Danny was a good soldier and friend. We trained at Fort Riley, Kansas.

I had put Danny and all of Vietnam behind me, but when it started coming back I just needed to find his family and let them know somehow about his bravery the night everyone was gone from where I was. Danny showed up and helped me out of a deadly tight spot. We became separated shortly after that night.

Several months later on the 10th of December 1967, Danny's outfit was attacked at 4:00 a.m.; simultaneously, our outfit was under attack at Rach Kien. We were about 5 miles apart. Danny and 11 other soldiers lost their lives that night near An Nug Tan. I felt his family probably didn't know specifics about his actions that night as a form letter is usually sent out by the military.

I had already gone through the old newspaper microfilm at an Oklahoma City area library

and found no obituary. We then found Danny buried at Evergreen Cemetery in Tucson, Arizona, through graves registration. We drove to Tucson within days and under a lone tall palm tree flowered the brass plaque, Danny's marker. I unloaded a lot that day and was totally embarrassed. My wife understood, helped me through it all, and then drove us to the library in Tucson.

There I finally found the obituary that I had been hunting. It showed names of family survivors and the town Danny grew up in, Byars, Oklahoma. As I read this, Danny's words quickly came back to me about his hometown just 5 miles away from where I had grown up. I had this information buried in my head the whole time. His parents had moved to Tucson while we were gone. I had no idea how his family would feel about being contacted or what was motivating me for that matter. After all, this was nearly 30 years late.

In the town of Byars, we talked to several gentlemen and one fellow remembered the family. We located his sister Ginger several days later; she was still in Tucson. Another sister, Joy, lives in Ada, Oklahoma, and his little brother (38 years old) was living in a shed behind her farm house.

This guy had all of Danny's medals on the wall, all his old pictures there, and was in deep depression just living with all this. We were invited to Tucson where Ginger was awaiting our arrival outside their apartment. She actually pulled me out of the passenger side of our car to hug me. She seemed starved to talk to someone, anyone, about Danny.

When I asked the family for permission to run an obituary, even his brother (Russell) got excited. I ran it in two hometown newspapers. Russell called saying he had bought every copy at a diner in Ada.

I was the only one to contact these folks and I think it helped them as well as me. Russell doesn't live in the shed anymore and Ginger doesn't e-mail us all the time now. We answered every one for over a year.

I can at last mention his name without feeling the fear of those nights and that whole year. I have a good feeling about Danny not being forgotten now as I have met family members with names; Danielle, Danny, Daniel, and Daniel Eli. This was an all-around win.

Gator ★

2015 MRFA Reunion September 2-6, 2015

We will be at the Indianapolis Marriott East again. The hotels we want to fill up first are listed below with the room charge. When making your reservation through the reservation department, make sure to reference the MRFA

so you get the MRFA rate. These rooms went very quickly last reunion, so make your reservations early. These rates are good 3 days prior to the reunion and 3 days following the reunion. The last day to book is August 3, 2015.

2015 MRFA & 9th Infantry Division Reunion Registration Form • Sept. 2-6, 2015

Name _____

Unit in Vietnam _____ Dates _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ or Cell _____

E-mail _____

Name(s): Spouse/Guest(s) _____ City _____ State _____

Send my registration form by email? ☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ No guests

☐ First Reunion

Registration fee \$60.00
Cost includes member and spouse/girlfriend
(Does not cover lodging, food, bus trips, or shuttles)
Total number of other guest(s) (____ x \$20 each) _____
Guests under 16 are free.
Registration fee for Nonmember (\$75) _____
Late registration fee (\$75) _____
Grand total enclosed \$ _____

When filling out the form, be as accurate and clear as possible. Use one unit and one date, even if you have served in more than one unit.

Please send this form with your check or money order (payable to MRFA or Mobile Riverine Force Association) before August 16, 2015, to MRFA 2015 Reunion, 1857 County Road A14, Decorah, IA 52101.

There will be a \$25 processing fee for all returned checks and cancellations prior to the reunion.

Note: You will still have to check in at the registration desk to receive your name tag.

If you wait and pay your registration fee at the reunion, the late registration fee will be \$75. Register early and help the MRFA as we use

your fees to purchase food, beverages, and other items.

If you have any questions, contact Frank Jones (frank@raffertylighting.com).

Thanks for your support in our great association. **Albert Moore, MRFA President**

Indianapolis Marriott East (\$79.00/night)
1-317-352-1231, 1-800-228-9290
La Quinta Inns & Suites (\$69.00/night) 1-317-359-1021
Fairfield Inn & Suites (\$74.00/night) 1-317-322-3716

Note of interest: If you have any problems registering at the hotel, please contact Frank Jones. Frank prefers e-mail (frank@raffertylighting.com or popsaroni@sbcglobal.net). You can leave a message at his home (314-822-1230). Frank will return calls or e-mails as soon as possible. Frank works a full-time job, so bear with him on answers.

Indianapolis Marriott East is located in Indianapolis's East neighborhood and local attractions include Indiana State Fairgrounds and Pepsi Coliseum and Children's Museum of Indianapolis. Regional points of interest also include Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Bankers Life Fieldhouse.

Hotel Features: Indianapolis Marriott East's restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. A bar/lounge is open for drinks. Room service is available during limited hours. The hotel serves buffet breakfasts (surcharges apply). Recreational amenities include an indoor pool, a spa tub, and a fitness facility. Wireless and wired high-speed Internet access is available in public areas (surcharges apply). Guest parking is complimentary. Additional property amenities include gift shops/newsstands and laundry facilities. This is a smoke-free property.

Guest Rooms: Indianapolis Marriott East has 315 air-conditioned guest rooms featured with coffee/tea makers and complimentary weekday newspapers. Beds come with premium bedding. Bathrooms feature shower/tub combinations, complimentary toiletries, and hair dryers. The MRFA guests are exempt for the fee for in-room high-speed Internet (wired and wireless). Guest rooms offer multi-line phones with voice mail. Televisions have premium satellite channels and pay movies. Rooms also include electronic check-out. Guests may request refrigerators but they are available on a first come/first serve basis and wake-up calls. Housekeeping is available daily. Guest rooms are all non-smoking.

Notifications and Fees: The following fees and deposits are charged by the property at time of service, check-in, or check-out: (1) Pet fee, USD 75.00 per pet; (2) Pet deposit: USD 75.00 per stay; and (3) Buffet breakfast fee, USD 16.95 per person (approximately). The above list may not be comprehensive. Fees and deposits may not include tax and are subject to change.

Discount: The hotel will be giving us a 10% discount for all food and beverages purchased in the hotel restaurant. You have to wear your name badge when asking for this discount.

Handicap Home Health Depot Scooters: To rent a handicap scooter, contact Kathy or Paula at Home Health Depot (317-347-6400). The requirement is a \$400 deposit, \$150 for rental, \$75 for delivery, and \$75 for pick-up. If there are no damages to the scooter, the rate upon return will be, delivery, and pick-up for the dates of September 1-6, 2015. **The MRFA is not responsible for the delivery of the scooter or the payment.**

Castleton Square Mall: The hotel will provide complimentary transportation to and from Castleton Square Mall at a prearranged time with departure from the hotel in the morning and departure from Castleton Square Mall in the afternoon. Service will be offered on a first come, first serve basis. ★

2015 MRFA & 9th Infantry Division Reunion Flight Information • Sept. 2 to 6, 2015

NOTE: Flight info due no later than August 16, 2015, to get on the hotel shuttle. **No exceptions to this rule. If you do not sign up, you will have to find your own transportation to the hotel.**

Name(s): _____

Cell Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Date	Airline	Flight Number	Arrival time INTO Indianapolis Airport	Number of People Needing Ride from Indianapolis Airport
Date	Airline	Flight Number	Arrival time DEPARTING Marriott East Hotel	Number of People Needing Ride to Indianapolis Airport

Flight Information Form: If you are flying and have friends flying, try and work your air travel around each other. The airport is about 16 miles from the hotel and the cost per taxi runs around \$45 or \$50. To provide the complimentary transportation on a prearranged scheduled basis, fill out the below form and send to Christine Noggle by e-mail cnoggle@indymarriotteast.com; fax to Christine Noggle at 1-317-352-9775; or mail to Christine Noggle, Event Manager, Indianapolis Marriott East, 7202 E 21st St, Indianapolis, IN 46219, ATTN: 2015 MRFA Reunion Flight Info.

If you e-mail this form, you will receive a confirmation e-mail back within 3 days of arrival as to what your pick up times will be. If flights are delayed, call 1-317-322-3716, Ext 1255, when you get into Indianapolis airport and they will get you on the next shuttle.

I Was Just There Last Night

Sent by Member Bill Sayers 9th Inf Div
3rd/60th nam9th@aol.com

This story came to me anonymously via e-mail, the author, a fellow Vietnam Veteran. After reading his story, I felt compelled to share this with you. If you didn't participate in the Vietnam War, this will give you some insight into how our minds work. He writes: 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 past 40 years, I wake up with it—I go to bed with it. This was my response:

"Yeah, I think about it. I can't stop 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 to embrace it. It just doesn't scare me anymore."

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? Yeah, I was there just last night, before I went to sleep, on my way to work this morning, and over my lunch hour.

My sister says I'm not the same brother who 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 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 Flanigan was my friend. Bob Flanigan 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 to the world. Now, this was a guy who had come in-country the same time as me—A guy who was loveable and generous. He had blue eyes and sandy blond hair.

When he talked, it was with a soft drawl. I loved this guy like the brother I never had. But, I screwed up. I got too close to him. I broke one of the unwritten rules of war. DON'T GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO DIE. 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 good at it, that 40 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 bothers her that they can do this. It's not that I don't love my wife. I do. She puts up with a lot from me. She'll tell you that when she signed 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, although 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 tried our best not to show it.

I recall the smells, too. Like the way cordite hangs on the air after a firefight 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. The memory isn't going anywhere.

I remember how the night jungle appears almost dreamlike as a 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 to death.

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. You want to know what is frightening. It's a 19-year-old-boy who 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 19-year-old who just lost a friend and is angry, scared and determined that "some*@@*s 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 rather be. Places and people they hope to see again. The picture shares space in a frame with one of my wife's. 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?"

"Hey, man. I was there just last night."

So was I. How about the rest of you Vets—hits home doesn't it!

Share this article with others so they understand why many of today's Veteran's behave the way they do be it Vietnam or other conflicts, this is a common thread shared by all. ★

Mobile Riverine Force Association Membership Application Form

- ☐ New Member ☐ Associate Member ☐ Renewal ☐ Sponsor
☐ Donation ☐ CCB-18 ☐ Mobile Museum
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MEMORIES OF THE MRF VIETNAM

You Can't Judge a Sailor by His Uniform

By Thomas Fitzgerald RM USN ASPB 91-1
(1968-69) rtf1969@wi.rr.com

A lot of guys from the class I trained with at Mare Island in Class 12-R finished our tour on the boats at the same time. We were scheduled to go home in early March of '69. While in Dong Tam waiting to go home, we were told by our officers that we could wear a special Mobile Riverine Force green dress uniform to go home in but we would have to buy them at the Dong Tam tailor shop. Fifteen of us needed new boots to finish our uniforms because ours were to worn to use as part of a dress uniform. No one could find anyone on the Navy side in supply that would give, or sell us new ones. Without the boots, the uniform would not be complete and couldn't be worn home. I mentioned that 6 months ago. I accidentally found a guy at the Army supply depot that gave me a pair of boots to replace my heel-less, rotted ones. We decided to walk over there to see if he was still there. To the man, we were unshaven, had long hair and were wearing the uniform of the day, which was whatever mismatched cloths we put on that morning, or had slept in the night before. As our group walked down that dusty, dirty Dong Tam road on our quest for new boots, I noticed we were kicking up a dust cloud around us that reminded me of the character "Pig Pen" from the Peanuts cartoon strip. We were truly a bunch of short timer

"River Rats," ending 13 months in a tropical jungle combat zone. Just ahead, an Army officer of some rather high rank was walking toward us. As we passed each other, we did what any group of short timer River Rats would do, we ignored him. About 5 seconds after passing him, he suddenly screams at top of his voice, "Soldiers, Halt." We being short timer River Rats of course didn't, so he screams at us again, "Soldiers, I said Halt." This time we stopped, mainly out of curiosity to see why this person was screaming at us. He instantly begins to berate our little group for being a disgrace to this man's Army, made some rather unkind remarks about our lack of military uniforms, insulted our personal hygiene, the length of our hair and was quite concerned that we didn't salute an officer as we passed each other. He promised us he would like to put us all in the brig. All of a sudden, in the middle of his screaming

blistering tirade, he stops in mid-sentence, does a double take and silently looks us over again. An understanding look appeared on his face. He gruffly asks, "Are you guys Navy," to which we all answered, Yes Sir!!! He slowly, quietly looked us over one last time, then with an expression of utter dismay and disbelief on his face, shook his head, flailed his arms and told us all to get out of there!! We did just that, found the army supply depot and lucked out because the same guy was still there. After hearing our sad story, he reluctantly gave all 15 of us new boots. He was very concerned he would be thrown in the brig

for "losing" that many pair of boots at one time but helped us anyway. We all thanked him and went back to the Navy side. I figured that Army officer must have been new in-country, or was a pencil pusher. He judged a book by its tattered cover. He missed the fact that you could not find a more professional group of combat-hardened sailors to run a river with. ★

I figured that
Army officer must
have been new in-country.
or was a pencil pusher.
He judged a book by its
tattered cover.

Short Timer Humor

By Thomas Fitzgerald RM USN
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The night before leaving Dong Tam for Saigon, we were packed and ready to go home. Our dress green uniforms complete, 15 of us with new spit-polished Army boots. No one could sleep. About 30 of us went to watch a movie on the top of the YRBM repair barge. The night was warm with a slight breeze. With no moon and only starlight above; it was a very dark night in Dong Tam. There were just enough small lights on the top of the barge so you could see where you were walking. Light from the movie projector made it almost possible to see the guy next

to you. It just happened that the movie showing that night was John Wayne's "The Green Berets." As the movie progressed to its final dramatic conclusion, our group of short timer combat-tinged River Rats began making jokes and cat calls about the "combat scenes." In these final minutes of the movie, John Wayne calls in an air strike on one of his own base with his men in it, in order to save it from being overrun by the movie VC. At that very moment, the real VC decided to start a real mortar attack on the Navy side from the river in toward the YRBM. As the mortars walked in, the base attack siren began to scream. The first colored trip flares go up lighting the night sky telling us in case we hadn't noticed, we are under attack. Moments later, the second line

of trip flares go off while mortars continue to land and explode with a rip and tear. Gun fire can be heard around our side of the base. The projector operator screams he is going to shut the movie off and we have to run for cover. As he does this, one of our short timers yells at the operator to let the movie run. At that same instant, for some crazy reason, the rest of us all yelled at that poor projector operator to let the movie run. At this moment, the third line of trip flares go off, reminding us that the bad guys have gotten past the outer perimeter as the movie continued to run to it dramatic conclusion. On screen, John Wayne gives orders, mortars explode and machine

gun fire envelopes the movie screen. At the same time around us, real mortars continue to explode and real gun fire can be heard from our lofty perch. As colored trip flares continued to light up the dark night sky over the YRBM, we are all of a suddenly part of an insane surrealistic moment in time. We all sat there and watched John save his men and as the credits began to run, the projector continued to run, (the operator had long ago left the building). Now it was also time for us to run, the moment gone, common sense returned to our group of short timers, as real mortars continued to drop and explode around the YRBM. Before we could get to a bunker, the attack ended. Our last night in Dong Tam was going out with a bang.★

Your membership expiration date is printed on your
River Currents just above your name and address.

Being There

By Walter T. Gator 3rd/47th and 3rd/39th Infantry (05/66-05/68)
lucindagage@gmail.com

There have been a number of people I have been lucky enough to know. Two outstanding ones come to mind as the kind of friends you can really count on, no matter what. I didn't meet these two until halfway through life at Fort Riley, Kansas in 1966. I met the first of these guys in basic training, 9th Infantry Division Army recruits. We housed in a part of the base called Custer Hill.

There he was sitting on the bottom bunk next to mine looking like anything but a warrior but attending to his gear in every detail. Damn, I was drafted (25 years old) because of my recent divorce and seemed like I was surrounded by kids.

This Cherokee from Byars, Oklahoma, was really quiet, watched my stuff like a hound dog in my absence and I noticed was a very hard worker. I had a good work attitude also. We began to realize after several weeks of extra cleaning, painting, supply details, etc., we were the NCO favorites for after-hours and weekend duty. This extra duty acquainted me with one of the strongest friendships two men can have.

The second of these guys was as opposite in every detail as could be. Here he was, bodacious, scrappy, entertaining, laughing easily, and, a month and a half older than me. He was Beaumont Texas' loss to the Army and was the oldest man in our company.

I had no way of knowing there would be an instant when these guys would be my most valuable assets. Assigned to the 3/47th Infantry, 2nd Brigade, Echo Company, we became part of what was called the Mobile Riverine Force.

The whole idea of the force was to use the 5,000 miles of rivers in the Mekong Delta as somewhat of a relief effort for the helicopters. The Brown Water Navy would insert us from little ramp loadings or tango boats. These guys would haul us around, sometimes taking hours getting there. These were platoon-size boats. The ramps would lower and we were the ones getting off to engage the enemy. They were equipped with direct fire 81-mm mortars, and other offensive weapons, traveled small waterways carrying a company or two requiring eight or ten of these boats. We stayed out for days at a time, and the boats relocated us when needed. We did however ride the choppers some and that was the fun way of getting there. After riding the boats, etc., for several months, our Platoon was designated Surveillance Reconnaissance. We went from one mud hole to another and realized we had

it better than some, doing just berm duty for little artillery emplacements and the like (rear echelon more or less).

On one of these jobs, we were to man bunkers surrounding two artillery pieces next to a 90% Viet Cong village. The Beaumont boy was in his clod bunker to the north, an Oklahoma City boy Gary was to the south, and here I was with a fellow totally new to me in my clod built bunker. It took several nights to know he was completely reliable and finally I was able to take my turn sleeping. The Viet Cong were pretty active in this area and did attack several spots of our perimeter with small arms fire and set up a Chinese claymore mine about 25 feet from Gary's bunker. The claymore was command detonated from a long length of wire when Gary and his partner stood up that morning. The experts checked it out some minutes after Gary pulled in the wire—dead batteries—live Gary.

The next night it was Gary's turn again I guess. It was my turn to be awake and to watch and listen. It started quickly—M-60 machine gun (our type) spitting red tracers all over Gary and his partner's bunker. I knew instantly these were bad guys and the clod bunker couldn't stand this kind of test. I laid across our low built bunker with an M-16 rifle, took quick aim, lowered the muzzle just a bit, and gave a quick burst to the source of the red tracers. I then gave two more quick bursts, although the first had been successful.

Stopping the 60 had given my exact position away and I guess it was my turn for attention. We ran some mortars for a short time early on in-country and had some idea what a 4.2 inch muzzle flash looks like in total darkness. There it was straight in front of me. Two muzzle flashes pointed straight up and at me as fast as rounds can be hung in the tube and dropped. I could tell by the sound the rounds were charged for short range. I went into our clod bunker, by now my partner was awake, and we sort of pushed each other into this small bunker. I heard the Beaumont boy's M-16 open up with a long burst. The two rounds fell just behind us, wounding two artillery guys. I could still hear Beaumont's best firing when I stuck my head up and saw his tracers. Our move was to scurry if they dropped another round as the second effort usually goes right into your hip pocket after a quick adjustment to the gun. The boy had just given up his exact position, but I guess he got lucky and the night was again dark and silent. Two months after that night he was extensively wounded

in a really bad enemy overrun deal with at least 10 to 1 numbers.

I have spent the last 30 years looking for the boy, and after recruiting help from my wife of 28 years and her "Internet stuff" found him in Waco, Texas. We've spent several weekends together at each other's houses. At an eatery in Waco called Buzzard Billy's, I briefly mentioned this incident. I could tell he was uncomfortable so I told him I was not going to thank him for having the guts to see if his rifle still worked that night as it would embarrass him. That's the way it is.

“ I was still running and changed my direction to the gun position burning down somewhat by now but was providing light. The rest of the gun crew almost ran over me and that's when I saw the terror in their eyes and knew I was running in the wrong direction. ”

He and wife have a beautiful place with cattle, lakes, and guest houses. I've met his AA sponsor and several of his employees at his 7-day-a-week business. When he introduces me to AA members, preacher, friends, etc., he says "This is my friend Gator I've told you about." He and wife are always encouraging us to come back before we even leave and we feel totally at home with them. That kind of love makes the 30-year search worth it.

Now comes the second part of this unlikely duo. Just before turning in our 81 and 4.2 mortars (just carrying the two by then), we set up at the old French Fort ruins and were marking a few targets nearby for an air strike with illumination rounds burst at tree top level. We were doing some harassing interdiction targets also. That's about all.

I was sitting about 75 feet from our 4.2 gun. I don't know what time it was, but it had become dark and a late supply helicopter had just left the area. I never did know what happened but our four deuce gun position lit up like a huge bonfire. The hissing rushing sounds were

shooting fire into the air about 50 feet. This was the result of propellant charges and I saw one of the gun crew running from the gun position totally on fire and screaming in pain. I jumped up from my crouched position, running to intercept him. I could see it was our medic and recognized him and there was another soldier (couldn't see him) pushing the burning soldier to the ground.

I was still running and changed my direction to the gun position burning down somewhat by now but was providing light. The rest of the gun crew almost ran over me and that's when I saw the terror in their eyes and knew I was running in the wrong direction. I don't know why people do things perceived to be heroic when all the while they're in a panic, but I ran into the burning gun position and began to dump sandbags on the gooey mess of residue from the charges now burning into the basic load of high explosive rounds packed two to the wooden box. There were individual cardboard canisters shielding about 25 white phosphorus rounds standing on their ends against the wooden ammo boxes. These were providing a work area for the 19 exposed rounds on top.

I was aware of my bad choice in being where I was but here I was dumping sand and expecting an explosion. I didn't think the propellant charges inside the boxes had gone off in the huge vertical fire (they seemed intact) but the wood was burning now and still cooking the exposed rounds. At the height of my terror (knowing I didn't even have time to run away), there was this damn silent Cherokee Indian standing in the entrance of the gun position. He yelled my name and with an entrenching tool began tearing the gun position apart and throwing me opened sand bags. I yelled at him and tried to run him off, but I guess he was just as scared as I was. There had already been a gun position fire in the 4/47th at Dong Tam Fire Base and the results were bad. Time didn't exist but finally the fire was out.

The silent Cherokee was there near An Nug Tan the night my Texas friend received his near fatal wounds. They were in the same bunker and it was the first one hit that night. Well, it's not my story so I won't tell it. But the silent Cherokee, who stood so tall beside me that night, died of massive wounds standing just as tall next to the Texas boy. I know as sure as I am alive and safe today that they both did everything humanly possible to help each other. These guys were there and are both a very real part of my life today. ★

MRF Summary Report - November 1968

**From: Commander
U.S. Naval Forces, Vietnam**

**To: Commander in Chief
U.S. Pacific Fleet (Code 12)**

**Subject: U.S. Naval Forces,
Vietnam Monthly
Historical Summary**

**Mobile Riverine Force
(Task Force 117)**

In the devastating attack on the USS WESTCHESTER COUNTY (LST1167) at 0323 on 1 November, the U.S. Navy suffered the heaviest loss of life to enemy action in a single incident, of the Vietnam War. Eighteen U.S. Navy men died in the attack. In addition five U.S. Army, one Vietnamese Navy and one Vietnamese Army "Tiger Scout" were killed. Seven of the 24 Navy wounded required medical evacuation. Three U.S. Army personnel were also wounded.

After offloading all troops, River Assault Squadron personnel and



their equipment, the WESTCHESTER COUNTY was beached in Dong Tam harbor on 4 November in order to accomplish temporary repairs to make her seaworthy. Just 10 days later, on 14 November, the ship got underway—testimony to the professionalism and hard work of the Navy men from the several different units who cooperated in getting the repairs completed expeditiously. WESTCHESTER COUNTY arrived in



Yokosuka, Japan, her home port, on 26 November.

The MRF continued the pattern of operations that began with the reorganization of the MRF on 15 October, with MRG ALFA operating in the eastern Delta and MRG BRAVO to the west. Of the five River Assault Divisions assigned to MRG ALFA, RAD 91 supported the THIRD Battalion Vietnamese Marine Corps in operations in Kien Hoa Province; RAD 92 was assigned Base Defense duties; RAD 111 supported the 3/34th Artillery Battalion of the Ninth Division; RAD 112 operated with the U.S. 3/60th Inf. Bn. in Kien Hoa Province; and RAD 151 continued to work with the 3/39th Inf. Bn. in eastern Long An Province, operating out of the Navy base at Nha Be. Of the three remaining divisions that were assigned to MRG BRAVO, RAD 131 provided for Base Defense, RAD 132 supported SEA LORDS interdiction operations, and RAD 152 supported the FOURTH Battalion Vietnamese Marine Corps. The Riverine Assault Craft also supported other troop units in particular operations during the month.

River Assault Division 151 provided boat support to Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team and Harbor Clearance Unit personnel during the period 1-6 November for salvage clearance operations on the Cho Gao Canal. Four sunken barges had been partly blocking the canal. During the operation 1520 pounds of explosives were used in 12 detonations. A survey following the successful operation indicated

a minimum depth of 6 feet over the former obstructions.

Early on the morning of 3 November operation DELTA RAIDER began when RAD 112 got underway with troops of the 3/60th Inf. Bn. and RAD 91 loaded elements of the 3rd VNMC for multiple riverine and air mobile insertions designed to locate and engage units of the Viet Cong 516th Main Force Battalion and several Viet Cong Local Force Companies that were operating in Kien Hoa Province. The operation lasted until 10 November, netting more than 100 Viet Cong killed. On the last day of the operation RAD 91 was ambushed twice while transferring Vietnamese Marines from the Ben Tre River to assault landings on the Ong Huong Stream. In the first ambush, two monitors were hit as about 30 rounds of recoilless-rifle fire, with small arms and automatic weapons fire, were directed at the craft. One Navy gunner was killed on M-91-2 and three were wounded. Z-92-2 took a rocket hit in the second ambush but



there were no personnel casualties.

Enemy swimmer/sappers again struck the MRF the night of 15 November. The Light Lift Craft FOUR (YLLC-4), and LCU converted to salvage work by the addition of a large boom and miscellaneous salvage and diving equipment, was mined and sunk while at anchor on the Ham Luong River near the entrance to the Ben Tre River. Two explosions within seconds of each other were observed and the craft

sunk by the stern almost immediately. Two sailors were killed and 13 wounded, including 4 crewmen of R-92-2 which was moored alongside. Investigation by Task Force 117 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team personnel revealed one large hole along the port side about 15 feet long and extending around the stern of the craft. Command detonating wire and other implements of mining were discovered on further searching. Almost immediately the YLLC-2 was sailed to the scene and the craft was carefully surveyed to determine the feasibility and method of salvaging it. Because of the severe damage to YLLC-4 and the hazardous location, Commander Service Group THREE recommended that the Medium Lift Craft (YMLC) not be risked in an uneconomical salvage effort. COMNAVFORV directed the destruction of YLLC-4 to eliminate it as a navigational hazard. Detonation of demolition explosives and the total destruction and clearance of YLLC-4 took place on 26 November.

On the evening of 1 November Task Group 117.2 joined with units of Task Force 115 and 116 in the first combined operation in the Delta. Under the operational control of Commander Task Group 194.0 (FIRST SEA LORD), the assault operation was launched into Kien Giang Province to stop the flow of men and equipment across the Cambodian border southeastward into the Delta.

Task Group 117.2 provided troop lift and close support for the FOURTH Battalion Vietnamese Marine Corps, while conducting riverine strike operations, and also conducted interdiction operations to prevent the flow of Viet Cong supplies through the area. Mobile Riverine Base BRAVO relocated to the vicinity of Long Xuyen on 2 November to enhance support. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

R & R (on the Fan Tail)

**By Walter T. Gage 3rd/47th and 3rd/39th Infantry (05/66-05/68)
lucindagage@gmail.com**

Early 1967 I was serving in Vietnam with the 2nd Brigade of the 9th Army Infantry Division assigned to E Co., 3rd Bn., 47th Inf. The unit was part of what they called the Mobile Riverine Force that operated in the Mekong Delta, an area known for its mud and water. I was the radio operator for the 4.2" mortar platoon leader. After some time operating in the Rung Sat Special Zone (mangrove swamp), we were brought out and put aboard a Navy troop ship that was anchored off Vung Tau, an in-country R&R center.

The next morning, after a choice Navy breakfast, I was standing on deck talking with a sailor about the ship when I noticed a small front-ramp boat and asked the sailor, "Where is that little boat going?" "Oh, that goes to Vung Tau every hour," he replied. "When does the last one run?" I queried. He told me: Late in the afternoon.

Satan began to enter my head and I found six cohorts and told them I was going to Vung Tau and invited them along, which didn't take much effort. They joined me just as the next boat was off-loading. I yelled to the Chief sitting at the back of the boat, "Is this the boat to Vung Tau?" "It sure is!" he

replied. "But you better hurry!" There we were in laundered fatigues that were raggedy and stained but nearly presentable, no rifles, no hats and no polish on our boots. On the boat we got.

When we arrived ashore, it was everything we had dreamed of: hard surface streets and cold beer. We patronized several bars and had several beers but managed to catch the last boat before sunset.

We were back aboard and I was headed straight for a nap and there they were—Lt. Gibby, SSG Cox, and all the squad leaders hovering over a map. I was the Lieutenant's radio man and I thought, "Damn, he's been looking for me to attend this confab!" I knew I was right when he looked up at me from his crouched position. "Where you been, Gator?" he asked. I was only a little tipsy from the beer and I was able to stand up really straight and I immediately said, "I was on the fantail, Sir." He looked at me for a few long seconds and asked, "Where is the fantail, Gator?" I was thinking about the conversation I had with the sailor—fantail—rear end of ship. I immediately pointed in that direction. He asked me if the other six guys were back from the fantail, also. I said, "Yes, Sir." He went back to his meeting. He never mentioned this again. ★

MRFA Memorial/Museum Activities for 2014

Well the year is about over and time to close it out and look forward to next year. We kept the Memorial/Museum traveling around this summer getting a lot of exposure and some new members. Have to thank Charlie and Georgie Ardinger for a lot of that; they did a great job.

First we went to Winona, MN, for Steamboat Days in June. They had a nice crowd and we had a lot of people tour the museum. Thanks to Jim Lukaszewski for getting it set up and to the VFW for helping out. We then went to Decorah, IA, for the Nordic Fest celebration and parade. We blended right in with all the military people marching and the crowd is very enthusiastic for the veterans participating.

We then went to Bemidji, MN, for the Beltrami County Fair. Our member Wendell Affield set this up and had everything ready. We were escorted in from Little Falls, MN, by the Patriot Riders and Legion Riders; it was real nice. We had a good turnout for the Memorial/Museum and the people treated us very well.

Wendell had some friends who let Charlie, Georgie, and I stay at their lake home. It worked out well; it was beautiful and the highway patrol even let me off with a warning for no seat belt.

We then went to Camp Ripley for the day on our way home. They had a Veterans Day exhibit set up and we opened up the museum for it. They had a house for us to stay at and we also toured the base. Thanks again to Wendell for helping to get these set up. It was nice weather both places and the people were great.

In August, we went to Chatfield, MN, for a day at Western Days. The VFW sponsored us and had everything ready. After the parade we set up in front of the VFW for a while and again we got treated very well. Thanks to Ken and the VFW for the food and donation.

After that we went to Norfolk, NE, to the Nebraska Vietnam Vets Reunion. We had a good group help us out with everything and the weather was great. Thanks to

Carl Schaldeck Jr. and his people for everything. I even think Charlie Ardinger and Carl got along once they figured out it wasn't Charlie that dropped them off in the mud on the river.

Next we went to Loves Park, IL, where Loren Salzman had us come and set up with The Moving Wall for a couple of days. The weather was a little cool and rainy but we had people come through and asked a lot of questions. Again thanks to Charlie and Georgie along with Harry Hahn who showed up to help. Again the people were great and the local legions, VFW, and the Navy Club were great.

Overall, it was a fast summer—we got a lot of exposure for the organization and some new members along the way. We needed new tires on the trailer as they were the original one and getting bad. The pickup will need some tires next year and the inside of the trailer will need some work. Will wait and see what the next year brings. We got a 12-foot canopy so we could set the

displays up outside and keep the trailer open, which works out well for the bigger tango boat and the models and weapons.

While in Indy next year, we should look at some of the things on the Memorial/Museum and see what we want to do as far as maintenance.

Next year we have two things going so far. Late August we will be going to Forest City, IA, to a Vietnam Vet gathering that sounds really nice and then to Indianapolis.

There are some pictures on our web site of some of the places we went this past year, if you care to look. So for now, I will be putting the trailer in the shed for the winter and hope to see you in Indy next year.

Hope all is well with everyone.

In Brotherhood, Bruce Graff
USS Passumpsic AO-107
(07/65-10/68) pinecrek@
mabeltel.coop ★

1097th Trans on the Mekong Delta

By 1Lt. John F. Lamm

This article appeared in the 9th Infantry Division's "Octofoil" in 1968.

A huge grey barge was a rather unlikely setting for an Army company, and so was a working organization of 27 landing craft, various welders, carpenters and coxswains.

However, the waterborne 1097th Transportation Co, commanded by Capt. John E. Henry, was a rather unlikely company, combining a touch of both the Army and Navy.

Since July 1967, the 1097th was the only tactical boat company in Vietnam. Their job—tow artillery barges of the 3d Bn, 34th Arty. throughout the river-laced area of the 9th Inf. Div.'s 2d Bde. They also kept the barges supplied with ammunition and the necessities of life.

The company's one platoon of boats was responsible for moving the artillery's nine barges whenever and wherever needed.

Night work

Working at night, vessels tied up next to a barge and moved in a side-by-side fashion to the new artillery location. The side-by-side configuration was dictated by the need to keep the

barge stabilized. While the barges were stern towed through narrow channels, they could not be moved in this manner for long distances or it would require one craft to tow and one to keep the barge from moving from side to side.

In addition to moving the barges from site to site, the boats were used for everything from mess halls to jails. One acted as a battery command post and was the administrative center for the three-barge battery site. It housed a battery mess hall, office area and quarters for the office personnel, first sergeant and battery commander.

Another boat was the fire direction center for the battery. In addition to a fire plotting and computing room, the boat housed 10-12 men.

One boat had been converted to a jail and interrogation center and acted as a clearing station for on-the-spot questioning and classifying of many 2d Brigade detainees.

Maintenance and repairs to the boats on location with the barges were accomplished by a damage control vessel. Commanded by a marine maintenance warrant officer, the boat tied up to a boat already underway and sent a repairman aboard to complete the repairs while the column of boats was moving. This prevented any dangerous gaps from opening in the line of boats.

"The biggest problem is with engines," said Sp5 Boyd Stout, a boat repairman, "and if it is serious, repairs must be made on the maintenance barge at Dong Tam. The engines take a real beating, especially when a boat gets hung up on one of the sandbars. But if it was needed, we could rebuild an engine in 12-14 hours."

"Probably the messiest repair we have is a propeller shaft or screw," Stout continued. "In that case, we often have to wait until the tide goes out, leaving the boat high and dry. We



A maintenance boat of the 1097th

then waded through the muck and mud to do the repairs."

Moving the bulky craft along the waterways of the Mekong Delta was left up to coxswains.

Coxswains

Maneuvering the vessels by juggling their four engines and rude, the coxswains could slip the craft through narrow streams and find themselves navigating on everything from streams, just large enough to fit the craft, to the wide "big blues" with their shifting sandbars. When tied up, they constantly had to move the boats in and out from shore with tide level changes.

"They get here and have probably never pulled a barge," said 1Sgt. George Kennedy, "but they get right in and do a good job."

In charge of the platoon that moved the boats was Lt. John Hernandez. "I think we do about 99% of our moving at night. If we run into any trouble, we have 0.50 caliber and M-60 machine guns, M-79 grenade launchers and the men's individual weapons. And, if things got real hot, we could use the artillery for direct fire."

Life was good aboard the boats. Everyone had a dark tan, the pace was good and no one complained. But when it was almost pitch black out and a young 20-year-old coxswain calmly towed a barge down a canal just wide enough to hold it, the 1097th more than paid for its existence. ★



A view from above an artillery barge with a boat hooked to it

UP001 MRF Mekong Delta
(white anchor)

UP002 MRFA Vietnam

UP003 MRF Mekong Delta
(yellow anchor)UP004 9th Inf Div
(no words)

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UP010 VCCC (brown)



UP011 VCCC (silver)



UP012 Combat Boat Captain



UP013 Combat Boat Crewman



UP014 RivRon 9



UP015 RAD 91



UP016 RAD 92



UP017 RAD 111



UP018 RAD 112



UP019 River Squadron 13



UP020 RAD 131



UP021 RAD 132



UP022 RivRon XV



UP023 RAD 152



UP024 Riv Div 153



UP025 MRF 3/47



UP026 3rd/60th Inf



UP027 39th Inf



UP028 47th Inf



UP029 USS Benewah APB-35



UP030 USS Colleton APB-36



UP031 USS Mercer APB-39



UP032 USS Nueces APB-40



UP033 USS Benewah Logo



UP034 USS Mercer Logo



UP035 River Raiders



UP036 River Rat



UP037 Army River Rat



UP038 Navy River Rat



UP039 Brown Water Navy



UP040 NIOTC



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Elcess

Member **David C. Elcess** passed away on August 13, 2014, after a long illness. He is survived by his loving wife, Doris (Reasoner) Elcess. David attended Wilbur Wright High School and retired as a Master Chief Cook in the Navy. You may contact Doris at 2628 Pine-wood Blvd, Sebring, FL 33870, ddelcess@com-cast.net.

I first met Dave on the USS Breckinridge TAP-176 out of San Francisco in 1957; he was a real nice person, an outstanding Commisaryman, and a

great shipmate. I later ran into Dave in Vietnam! He was the Chief Cook on the USS Colleton APB-36 (10/66-12/67) MRF TF-117. I will miss my old friend although he had been in poor health these last few years. He always stayed in touch and our friendship lasted over 50 some years. May our brother rest in peace. He will be missed.

Albert B. Moore



Dillon

Member **Alfred Dillon** Captain U.S. Navy (Ret.) passed away on September 9, 2014. He was Commanding Officer of the USS Washtenaw County LST-1166 (04/66-04/68). Captain Dillon was an ex-enlisted man who rose through the ranks. He will be missed by all who knew him. May he rest in peace and have calm and peaceful seas. The Washtenaw County was part of the MRF TF-117.

You may contact his wife Alice Chen, 3232 Avenida La Cima, Carlsbad, CA 92009-9540, 760-479-1665.



Benson

Member **Richard Benson** passed away September 3, 2014. Richard served on the USS Brule AKL-28 (11/69-11/70). You may contact the family c/o 120 W. Belvidere Ave. Apt 2, Kellogg, MN 55945. Daughter's e-mail bfitth@hotmail.com.

Member **Robert Pierce** passed away July 10, 2014. Robert served in HHC 3rd/47th Infantry (11/68-11/69). You may contact his wife Ingrid Pierce, 18303 SW State Route M, Rushville, MO 64484-7158, 515-961-7716.

Member **George Lewis Michelbrink** passed away September 22, 2014. While in Vietnam, he served with River Assault

Squadron 15 River Assault Division 152 as a Plank Owner and Coxswain onboard C-151-2 (08/68-10/69). You may contact the family c/o 808 W. Schley, Aberdeen, WA 98520-8133.



Arnold

Member **Richard B. Arnold** passed away April 19, 2014. Richard served in A Co 3rd/47th Inf (01/67-12/68). You may contact his wife Joyce Arnold, 8611 Tacoma Ave S, Tacoma, WA 98444-6344, 253-535-4576.

Sandra Sue Johnson passed away on October 13, 2014, following a long illness. Her husband, Don Grunow, served onboard the USS Mark (AKL-12) from June 1969 to May 1971. You may contact Don c/o 4900 Olive Grove Lane, Virginia Beach, VA 23455-5214, 757-499-3651, dongrunow@verizon.net.

In Memory Of

This section is for members who wish to sponsor the MRFA by placing a notice in memory of one of their fallen comrades. In some instances, 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 four issues.

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

Mrs. Elizabeth M. Hayes for LTC Daniel P. Hayes HQ 3rd/34th Artillery (06/67-01/68)

Leo Haynes for my fellow plank owner and buddy Don Grier GM2 USS Benewah. He died in a car crash in 2003

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

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

Bruce Jensen in memory of Frederic Peers Webb A-111-4 KIA 12/21/67

J. R. Johnson 3rd/47th 9th "Recon" (05/66-01/68) in memory of Walker, Gotch, Paradez, Nelson, and Hayes

Dave Justin for Robert "Bobby" Scharnick A Co 2nd Platoon 3rd/60th and Dennis McDougal A Co 3rd/60th

Bob Land, Rich Lierman, Jim Zervos, and Pete Oakander for Frank Dettmers, our boat captain on CCB-131-1 (May 69-May 70). We do this in his honor and remembrance.

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

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

H. Bruce McIver for HMT1 Zeph Lane who was severely wounded 03/31/69 and unfortunately killed in a private plane crash 05/20/85

Adam Metts for Donald L. Bruckart T-111-2 KIA 03/31/69

A R "Monti" Montillo for William "Bulldog" McLaughlin B Co 3rd/60th KIA 10/03/68 and Barry "Butch" Copp B Co 3rd/60th KIA 10/28/68

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John Smith for Paul D. Jose B Co. 3/60th KIA Westy 11/01/68

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

Ken Sundberg for Michael David Sheahan 5th/60th KIA 02/25/68, Robert L. Conley 5th/60th KIA 02/01/68, and Glenn Dean Taylor 5th/60th KIA 02/01/68

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

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

Steven Totcoff for my brother CPL Dennis S. Totcoff B Co 3rd/47th 9th Inf Div KIA 5/2/68

Edward Toth for Norman Neuleib USS Askari ARL-30 (1952-53)

USS Benewah shipmates: John Long EN2, Craig Bronish MR3, and George Schnieder MR2

USS Guide MSO-447 for Shipmate and Brother Harold Foster

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

Ron and Judy Wallace for all those lost from 3rd/47th Inf

Gary Williams for Dale Winkel C Co. 3rd/60th 9th Inf (01/68-01/69)

CPT Steve Williams and MAJ Bob Bischoff in memory of 2LT David George Williams, Co A, 4/47th, KIA 9/21/67

David Wilson 2nd/60th KIA 08/05/69, Timothy Shelton 4th/39th KIA 06/25/69, Steven Murray 4th/39th KIA 05/26/69, Harvey Crabtree 2nd/4th Arty KIA 06/19/69, and Dennis Mattox 1st/501st 101st Abn KIA 08/23/69

SUMMARY REPORT

Continued from page 8

River Assault Craft met with several ambushes along the Rach Gia-Long Xuyen Canal during the operation. The first phase of the operation, the assault phase, ended on 6 November, while the interdiction phase continued.

As part of the same general SEA LORD operation, Task Group 117.2 supported reconnaissance-in-force operations in the Soc Son area of Kien Giang Province from 9 through 11 November, using the Ha Tien-Rach Gia and the Tri Ton Canals to transport the troops into the area of operations about 20 miles north northwest of Rach Gia. This was followed by operations from 12 to 14 November in the "Three Sisters" area about 10 miles northwest of Rach Gia. During the operation nine rounds of 105 mm were fired from a monitor indirect at a range of about 3½ miles. The rounds were spotted by an Army artillery officer and achieved an accuracy of about 30-60 yards after the initial spotting round. The firing was done while the monitor was beached on the Tri Ton Canal. Lacking a fire-control computer three reference points were used: a stake on the craft's bow, an aiming stake about 25 feet from the shoreline, and an open sight positioned just forward of the coxswain's flat. With the bow as the pivot point, the crew maneuvered the monitor to keep the reference points in line with the sight. On the 14th the troops were backloaded and returned to Rach Gia.

From 16 to 21 November River Assault Craft of Task Group 117.2 shifted their area of operations to an area about 25 miles southeast of Rach Gia. After landing the Fourth Bn. VNMC, the craft set up interdiction patrols in the surrounding waterways. Later, on 25 November, RAS 13 loaded ARVN troops at Can Tho and then proceeded down the Bassac River to conduct riverine assault operations on the Dung Island complex while the troops searched for Viet Cong ashore the RAC joined PBRs in blockading the islands. The operation ended on 29 November, the same day that River Assault 151 concluded its lengthy operations at Nha Be and rejoined MRG BRAVO.

★



Mobile Riverine Force Association

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