

Below is misc information that I have found on the net or has been sent in by some of the many people who have helped furnish information that I have used to put this site together.

29 March 1967 -- The second contract to United Boat Builders of Bellingham, Washington was issued for an additional 80 PBR's. To be designated Mark II. They reflected the operational experience gained from their predecessor's, the Mark I. The most evident change was that the .50 caliber machine-gun mount on the Mark II was further forward than in the Mark I. The Mark II had a greater displacement and was also longer than the Mark I. The PBR's were developed specifically with a shallow draft and high maneuverability, to operate effectively under combat conditions in the waters of the Mekong River Delta. The 458th was issued new Mark IIs from the start.

//////////////////////////////////// Below is account of Navy operation, the 458th was not involved in any way with this operation to the best of my knowledge. Subject: Operation GIANT SLINGSHOT (<http://www.elliott.navy.mil/slingsht.htm>) Date: Thursday, August 20, 1998 4:34 AM Operations throughout the month of December 1968 consisted generally of boats coming upon groups of Viet Cong on the beach or crossing the river and being engaged by the boats. The enemy at this time did not recognize the maneuverability of the PBR or the heavy firepower of the river assault craft and in most cases engaged without hesitation or prior planning. They were engaged and driven back with casualties far exceeding those of the U.S. Naval Forces. BM2 LEHMAN, USN, was the first person killed in Operation GIANT SLINGSHOT. On the afternoon of 14 December 1968, two PBRs from River Division 534 had spotted artillery onto several bunkers about twelve kilometers north of Tra Cu and were departing the area to resume patrol when they were ambushed and taken under intense rocket and machine gun fire at XT 405160. Both boats were hit. A Navy light helicopter fire team (LHFT) and one from the Army scrambled to the scene and placed strikes into the area. Six U.S. Navy personnel were wounded including Lehman, who later died of wounds. Activity continued heavy throughout the month of December,

and cache discoveries became more numerous during the latter half of the month. Mid-December saw the arrival of the River LST USS HARNETT COUNTY (LST-821) at Ben Luc on the Vam Co Dong. Two more River Patrol Divisions were added bringing the total to five. LCDR Arthur J. ELLIOT, USN, was embarked in USS HARNETT COUNTY and assumed Vam Co Dong On-Scene Commander. On 15 December 1968 three separate rocket sites were discovered by the U.S. Army, all aimed at YRBM-18. On two hours notice YRBM-18 commandeered a passing Filipino tug and relocated downriver in the Vam Co River in the vicinity of the "French Fort" (XS 897616). USS HARNETT COUNTY was also pulled back and all three support craft stayed in the French Fort area for the next few days. The USS HARNETT COUNTY sailed daily to Ben Luc and returned at night. This maneuver was evaluated as being more dangerous than staying at Ben Luc, since Ben Luc afforded the relative safety of the Ben Luc Bridge Defense Force which defends the vital bridge linking Saigon to points south or Route Four. At 231825H, USS HARNETT COUNTY was fired upon by five rockets (XS 700665) while transiting back to French Fort. The USS HARNETT COUNTY and accompanying units received no hits. The month ended on a saddened note when LCDR ELLIOT was killed instantly by shrapnel from a B-40 rocket while on a patrol. He had been on patrol on the upper Vam Co Dong (XT 280335) and was killed when one of the two PBRs on patrol was taken under fire.

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The following is an excerpt, for the entire text go to www.history.navy.mil

Chapter 3: The Years of Combat, 1965-1968
River Patrol

The great strategic and economic importance of South Vietnam's extensive inland waterways made it clear from the beginning of the war that the Navy would be in the front rank of the allied forces. Laced by 3,000 nautical miles of rivers, canals, and smaller streams, the fertile Mekong Delta south of Saigon, where the largest segment of South Vietnam's population lived, constituted the country's rice bowl. Northward along the coast to the DMZ, sizable rivers stretched inland past vital population centers such as the old imperial capital of Hue. Throughout the country the road and rail system was rudimentary while the waterways provided ready access to the most important resources. The side that controlled the rivers and canals controlled the heart of South Vietnam. U.S. naval leaders were determined that allied forces would command these waterways when they established the River Patrol Force (Task Force 116) on 18 December 1965. From then until March 1966, the Navy procured river patrol boats (PBR) in the United States, prepared the crews at the Coronado, California, and Mare Island, California, training centers, and deployed the units to Southeast Asia for Operation Game Warden. On 15

March 1966 the River Patrol Force was also designated River Patrol Squadron 5 for administrative and supply purposes. By 31 August 1968, the force consisted of five river divisions, each controlling two 10-boat sections that operated from combat bases along the major rivers or from ships positioned in the rivers. The Navy reconditioned each of the ships so they could serve as floating base facilities for a PBR section and a helicopter detachment.

River Patrol Force Dispositions

River Division 51 Can Tho/Binh Thuy
River Division 52 Sa Dec (later Vinh Long)
River Division 53 My Tho
River Division 54 Nha Be River
Division 55 Danang

Support Ships -- 1966

Belle Grove (LSD 2)
Comstock (LSD 19)
Floyd County (LST 762)
Jennings County (LST 846)
Tortuga (LSD 26)

1967-1968

Garrett County (LST 786)
Harnett County (LST 821)
Hunterdon County (LST 838)
Jennings County (LST 846)

The PBR, the ubiquitous workhorse of the River Patrol Force, was manned by a crew of four bluejackets, equipped with a Pathfinder surface radar and two radios, and commonly armed with two twin-mounted .50-caliber machine guns forward, M-60 machine guns (or a grenade launcher) port and starboard amidship, and a .50-caliber aft. The initial version of the boat, the Mark I, performed well in river patrol operations but was plagued with continual fouling of its water-jet engines by weeds and other detritus. In addition, when Vietnamese sampans came alongside for inspection they often damaged the fragile fiberglass hull of the PBRs. New Mark IIs, first deployed to the delta in December 1966, brought improved Jacuzzi jet pumps, which reduced fouling and increased speed from 25 to 29 knots, and more durable aluminum gunwales.

Task Force 116 also employed the experimental patrol air cushion vehicle (PACV), three of which operated in the Mekong Delta during 1966 and 1967 as PACV Division 107. During 1968, the PACVs deployed to the Danang area as Coastal Division 17. Although able to move with great speed over shallow, marshy areas, such as in the Plain of Reeds, the PACVs proved to be too noisy and too mechanically sophisticated for

riverine war in South Vietnam. After the Tet emergency, the craft were shipped back to the United States for reevaluation.

A key component of the Game Warden operation was its air support element. Initially, the Army deployed detachments of two UH-1B Iroquois helicopters and their crews to PBR bases and river-based LSTs. Beginning in August 1966, however, air crews from the Navy's Helicopter Support Squadron 1 replaced the Army personnel. Then on 1 April 1967, the Navy activated Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron (HAL) 3 at Vung Tau with responsibility for providing Task Force 116 with aerial fire support, observation, and medical evacuation. By September 1968, the 421-man "Seawolf" squadron controlled detachments of two helicopters each at Nha Be, Binh Thuy, Dong Tom, Rach Gia, Vinh Long, and on board three LSTs stationed in the larger rivers of the Mekong Delta. The Bell UH-1B "Hueys," armed variously with 2.75-inch rockets; .50-caliber, 60-millimeter, and 7.62-millimeter machine guns; grenades; and small arms, were a powerful and mobile complement to the Game Warden surface units.

The River Patrol Force commander led other naval forces, including the highly trained and skilled SEALs. By mid-1968, the 211-man SEAL Team 1, based at Coronado, fielded twelve 14-man platoons, each composed of two squads. Generally four or five of the platoons at any given time were deployed to South Vietnam, where one or two of them served with the special operations force in Danang and another three operated from Nha Be as Detachment GOLF in support of the Task Force 116 campaign in the Rung Sat Special Zone. Beginning in early 1967, the Atlantic Fleet's SEAL Team 2 provided another three platoons, two of which were stationed with the Game Warden units at Can Tho. These units launched SEAL operations in the central delta area. Although focused primarily on the areas to the south and west of Saigon, the SEALs also mounted operations in the I and II Corps Tactical Zones.

These elite naval commando units carried out day and night ambushes, hit and run raids, reconnaissance patrols, salvage dives, and special intelligence operations. Normally operating in six-man squads, the SEALs used landing craft, SEAL team assault boats (STAB), 26-foot armored trimarans, PBRs, sampans, and helicopters for transportation to and from their target areas. Mobile, versatile, and extremely effective in their dangerous work, the SEALs were a valuable fighting force in the riverine environment of Vietnam.

Mine clearance forces also were essential to the security of Vietnam's waterways. Nowhere was this more crucial than on the rivers near Saigon, the country's most vital port. Viet Cong mining of the main shipping channel, the Long Tau River, which wound its way through the Rung Sat Special Zone south of the capital, could have had a devastating effect on the war effort. Consequently, on 20 May 1966, the Navy established Mine Squadron 11, Detachment Alpha (Mine Division 112 after May 1968) at Nha Be,

under Commander Task Force 116. From 1966 until mid-1968, the minesweeping detachment operated 12 or 13 minesweeping boats (MSB) reactivated in the United States and shipped to Southeast Asia. The 57-foot, fiberglass-hulled vessels were armed with machine guns and grenade launchers and carried surface radars and minesweeping gear for clearing explosives from the key waterways. The Navy also deployed three-boat subordinate units to Danang and Cam Ranh Bay. Detachment Alpha's strength increased in July 1967 when the first of six mechanized landing craft (LCM(M)) that were specially configured to sweep mines arrived at Nha Be.

Game Warden operations got underway in early 1966. Naval leaders set out to secure the vital water passages through the Rung Sat and to establish patrols on the large Mekong Delta rivers. On these latter waterways, the Viet Cong transported arms and supplies brought in from Cambodia, shifted guerrilla units, and taxed the population. The Navy created two separate task groups to direct operations in the respective areas.

On 26 March 1966, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine, and South Vietnamese forces kicked off Operation Jackstay, the war's first major action in the Rung Sat. PBR units (including one section from Tortuga), minesweeping boats from Nha Be, SEALs, and helicopters operated together to sweep the area. At the end of the 12-day effort, the allies had killed or captured 69 of the enemy; destroyed Viet Cong supply bases, training sites, and other logistical facilities; and, at least for a time, restricted enemy movement in the zone.

The enemy, however, remained a potent threat. In one month, August 1966, Viet Cong mines in the Long Tau heavily damaged SS Baton Rouge Victory, a Vietnamese Navy motor launch minesweeper, and MSB 54. In November, a Viet Cong mine sank MSB 54. And on the last day of the year, American forces discovered a Soviet-made contact mine in the shipping channel. The Americans and the South Vietnamese intensified minesweeping operations and the enemy continued to fight back. In February 1967 Communist recoilless rifle fire and mines destroyed MSB 45 and heavily damaged MSB 49.

By the spring of 1967 the rapid buildup of allied forces in the Rung Sat area, the refinement of tactics, and improvement of weapon systems began to reduce enemy effectiveness. During the year Vietnamese Regional Force and U.S. Army 9th Division troops conducted aggressive sweeps ashore in coordination with the helicopter, PBR, and MSB units; the better equipped LCM(M)s augmented the minesweeping force at Nha Be. SEALs began sowing mines throughout enemy-held areas, and both PBRs and MSBs added rapid-fire, 40-millimeter grenade launchers to their armament. From mid-1967 to mid-1968, the Viet Cong continued to ambush shipping on the Long Tau with mines, 122-millimeter rockets, rocket-propelled grenades, recoilless rifles, machine guns, and small arms. Quick action by allied reaction forces, however, often cut short these assaults. Thus, ship damage and personnel casualties were relatively light. Other attacks never occurred because PBR and SEAL patrols upset enemy plans or the MSBs and LCM(M)s swept up mines. Consequently, the Communists were unable to sever the vital

lifeline to Saigon, even when their forces were fighting for survival during the Tet and post-Tet battles of 1968.

Game Warden operations in the central reaches of the Mekong Delta began on 8 May 1966 when PBR River Section 511 of River Division 51 at Can Tho patrolled a stretch of the Bassac River. Soon afterward, other units initiated surveillance of the upper Mekong and the My Tho, Ham Luong, and Co Chien arms of the mighty river that emptied into the South China Sea.

In two-boat random patrols Task Force 116 sailors checked the cargo and identity papers of junks and sampans plying the waterways, set up night ambushes at suspected enemy crossing points, supported the SEALs with gunfire and transportation, and enforced curfew restrictions in their sector, usually no more than 35 nautical miles from the base.

Game Warden operations in the central delta registered only modest success from 1966 to 1968. Only 140 PBRs were on station to patrol many miles of river and canal. As a result, they could canvass only the larger waterways. Still, the Task Force 116 patrol forced the Viet Cong to divert troops and other resources to defense and to resort to less efficient transportation on smaller rivers and canals. During 1966 the task force refined its tactics, evaluated the performance of its boats and weapons in combat, and regularized its operational procedures. At the same time naval leaders repositioned the LSD and LST support ships inland because heavy seas at the river mouths made operations from there difficult. The year 1967 opened with the accidental loss of a PBR during launching operations from Jennings County and the first combat loss of a river patrol boat. These events foreshadowed a busy and dangerous year for the Game Warden sailors who boarded over 400,000 vessels and inspected them for enemy personnel and contraband. In the process, the River Patrol Force destroyed, damaged, or captured over 2,000 Viet Cong craft and killed, wounded, or captured over 1,400 of the enemy. However, the U.S. Navy suffered the loss of 39 officers and men killed, 366 wounded, and 9 missing in battle.

The Tet Offensive of 1968 fully engaged Task Force 116. Because of their firepower and mobility, the PBRs stiffened the defenses of numerous delta cities and towns that were under siege by the enemy. The river patrol boat units were key elements in the successful allied stands at My Tho, Ben Tre, Chau Doc, Tra Vinh, and Can Tho. The enemy prevailed only at Vinh Long, where the Viet Cong overran the PBR base forcing the defenders to withdraw to Garrett County. Despite this and a few other temporary setbacks, Task Force 116 reestablished firm control of the major delta rivers by mid-year and helped cut short the Viet Cong attacks on Saigon.

The river sailors also gave critical support to allied forces fighting to contain the enemy surge in I Corps. From September to October 1967, River Section 521 and Hunterdon County deployed to the river areas south of Danang and to Cau Hai Bay near Hue. PBR units operated permanently in the northern reaches of South Vietnam after 24 February 1968, when COMNAVFORV established Task Force Clearwater, under the operational control of the Commanding General III Marine Amphibious Force. The mission of the task force was to secure the Perfume River (which gave access to Hue from the sea) and the Cua Viet River. The Task Force eased supply efforts to American forces arrayed along the DMZ and holding the besieged outpost at Khe Sanh. Home for the task force headquarters was Mobile Base II, a floating barge complex stationed first at Tan My and later at Cua Viet. Because heavily armed North Vietnamese Army units were presented in this region, COMNAVFORV strengthened the 20-boat PBR task force with monitors, armored river craft, PACVs, and landing craft minesweepers. Task Force Clearwater could also call on helicopter, attack aircraft, artillery, naval gunfire, and ground troop support from other units in the I Corps region. Convoys bristling with weaponry were required to maintain the line of communication with forward combat units. The naval forces carried out equally vital minesweeping and patrolling operations. During 1968, Task Force Clearwater's support was crucial to the successful defense of Khe Sanh, the recapture of Hue, and the defeat of the enemy offensive in I Corps.

Riverine Assault Force

While the object of the Game Warden force was to reduce the enemy's logistic support, that of the joint Army-Navy Mobile Riverine Force (MRF) was to locate, encircle, and destroy Communist units in battle. American military leaders patterned the MRF after the French naval assault divisions, or *dinassauts*, which performed well in the Indochina War from 1946 to 1954. The Americans designed a formation especially suited to the Mekong Delta, where the absence of dry land and abundance of navigable waterways made it desirable to station ground troops on board a mobile afloat base. In addition to transporting infantry and artillery, the naval component was intended to provide gunfire support for land sweeps from heavily armed and armored river craft. As finally organized, the Mobile Riverine Force consisted of an Army element, the 2d Brigade of the 9th Infantry Division, augmented in mid-1968 by the 3d Brigade, and a Navy element. The MRF was under COMUSMACV's overall direction

The Commanding General II Field Force, Vietnam, exercised operational control of the Army contingent while COMNAVFORV commanded the naval component, designated

the Riverine Assault Force (Task Force 117). Commander Task Force 117, also titled Commander River Assault Flotilla One for purposes of supply and administration, directed the operations of River Assault Squadrons 9 and 11 (also assigned task group numerical designations). After June 1968 squadrons 13 and 15 joined the force. That same month, the task force was reorganized into Mobile Riverine Group Alpha with squadrons 9 and 11, and Mobile Riverine Group Bravo, with squadrons 13 and 15.

Each 400-man squadron, divided further into two river assault divisions, marshalled a powerful fleet of five monitors. Each monitor was protected with armor and equipped with .50 caliber, 40-millimeter, and 20-millimeter gun mounts, two 40-millimeter grenade launchers, and an 81-millimeter mortar. Another two or three similarly armed and armored craft served as command and control boats. A total of 26 armored troop carriers that mounted .50-caliber machine guns, rapid-fire grenade launchers, and 20-millimeter cannon transported the Army troops. Also installed on the former amphibious landing craft were helicopter landing platforms. A number of craft mounted flame throwers or water cannon to destroy enemy bunkers. A modified armored troop carrier functioned as a refueler for the river force. Beginning in September 1967, to augment the firepower of these converted landing craft, each squadron was provided with 8 to 16 newly designed assault support patrol boats for minesweeping and escort duties.

In addition to leading the naval combat flotilla, Commander Task Force 117 also functioned as Commander River Support Squadron 7. He was responsible for the Mobile Riverine Base from which normally one or two infantry battalions and one river assault squadron operated.

Mobile Riverine Base Composition

- 2 self-propelled barracks ships (APB)
- 1 LST (another LST operated between the MRF and Vung Tau)
- 1 specially configured landing craft repair ship (ARL)
- 1 non-self-propelled barracks craft (APL)
- 1 repair, berthing, and messing barge (YRBM)
- 2 large harbor tugs (YTB)
- 1 net-laying ship (AN)

Mobile Riverine Base Ships

1967-1968

APL 26

Askari (ARL 30)

Benewah (APB 35)

Caroline County (LST 525)

Cohoes (AN 78)

Colleton (APB 36)

Indra (ARL 37)

Kemper County (LST 854)
Mercer (APB 39)
Nueces (APB 40)
Vernon County (LST 1161)
Washtenaw County (LST 1166)
Whitfield County (LST 1169)
Windham County (LST 1170)
Satyr (ARL 23)
Sedgwick County (LST 1123)
YRBM 17
YTB 84
YTB 85

Mobile Riverine Force units rotated between the afloat base and Dong Tam, a logistic complex three miles west of My Tho that Army engineers and Navy Seabees built especially for the joint operation. The base contained barracks, mess halls, repair shops, floating crane YD 220, a C-130 airstrip, small drydocks, and waterfront facilities for the river craft. Further, the Army based the headquarters of the 2d Brigade, 9th Infantry Division at Dong Tam.

The Navy's first Mobile Riverine Force contingent arrived in South Vietnam on 7 January 1967, when Whitfield County disembarked River Assault Squadron 9 at Vung Tau. This and following units underwent extensive preparation in river warfare at the Naval Inshore Operations Training Center, Mare Island, California, before deployment to Southeast Asia. On 28 February, COMNAVFORV activated Task Force 117 under Captain Wade C. Wells. In March River Assault Squadron 11 joined River Assault Squadron 9 at Vung Tau. By June 1967, support ship Kemper County, barracks ships Benewah and Colleton, and other vessels had arrived in-country to round out the Navy's MRF contingent.

MRF units had already fought minor actions against the Viet Cong in the Rung Sat and in the vicinity of Dong Tam. On 1 June, with the MRF up to strength and most units acclimated to the combat area, the force began intensive operations to find and destroy enemy guerrilla units around Dong Tam. The first major battle occurred between 19 and 21 June when the Army-Navy team trapped three Viet Cong companies about 15 miles south of Saigon and killed 255 enemy soldiers. Another 59 Communists died in the area during July. Reacting to intelligence that two Viet Cong battalions were preparing to attack Dong Tam, the Mobile Riverine Base ships weighed anchor and steamed 61 miles upriver to a new site. There they joined with Vietnamese Marine, Vietnamese Army, and U.S. Army battalions in decimating and scattering the prospective enemy assault force. The MRF recorded success of another sort in September when a landing and sweep maneuver in the eastern Rung Sat uncovered a cache of 105 rifles and machine guns, 165

grenades, 60 howitzer and mortar shells, and 56,000 rounds of small arms ammunition. A small enemy hospital and 850 pounds of medicine were found soon afterward.

The Viet Cong, however, eventually adjusted to MRF tactics and struck back. During Operation Coronado V in September 1967 the enemy sprang an ambush along a two-mile stretch of the Ba Rai River southwest of Saigon. By the end of the four-hour engagement, half of the vessels in the convoy had been hit by enemy fire, three sailors were dead and 77 were wounded. Another six men were killed or wounded in an ambush later that same month. Still, the MRF, acting in conjunction with the Vietnamese Army 7th Division, trapped elements of the Viet Cong 263d and 514th Main Force Battalions in October and inflicted 173 casualties on these units.

From October to the end of November, the Mobile Riverine Force searched for enemy troops reportedly concentrated north of the Mekong between Sa Dec and Dong Tam, but the enemy avoided significant contact. Then, on 4 December, the Viet Cong triggered an ambush against River Assault Division 112 on the Ruong Canal northeast of Sa Dec. The river sailors turned the tables when they fought through the ambush and landed troops on the enemy's flank. Soon other American and Vietnamese combat units surrounded and killed 266 Viet Cong and captured 321 small arms and 5,000 rounds of ammunition.

MRF actions during the 1968 Tet Offensive were the key to allied military success in the delta and earned the force the Presidential Unit Citation. Exploiting the inherent mobility and firepower of the riverine command, COMUSMACV used it as his primary reaction force in the vast delta. During the first week of February 1968, the MRF battled through the streets of My Tho to help recapture the overrun city, and then shifted to Vinh Long for several days of intense combat with three Viet Cong battalions. For the rest of the month the Army-Navy team fought around the delta's chief city, Can Tho. The force killed 544 of the enemy in this period of almost constant crisis.

During the first three months of 1968, the Mobile Riverine Base traveled almost 1,000 kilometers while conducting operations in Dinh Tuong Province and entering new areas in Vinh Long and Phong Dinh Provinces. In March, ten armored troop carriers, three monitors, and one command and control boat of River Assault Division 112 deployed to I Corps and supported allied ground troops with gunfire on the vital Cua Viet and Perfume Rivers.

During the second quarter of the year when the Communists mounted serious post-Tet attacks, the riverine force decimated the Viet Cong 514th Main Force Battalion near Cai Lay in the delta and another formation south of Saigon. Fighting to relieve pressure on the capital, the MRF inflicted 687 casualties on besieging enemy forces.

In July and August, the Mobile Riverine Force ranged throughout the delta with its full complement of river craft, support ships and 9th Division troops. In the latter month, the MRF joined with other Army and Navy units and with Vietnamese forces in a large-scale penetration of the U Minh Forest, a longtime Viet Cong stronghold. Although the enemy fiercely resisted this intrusion, causing heavy allied casualties, this military presence was maintained. The operation heralded a subsequent campaign to deny the Communists security in any area of the delta. Having demonstrated their worth during two years of combat, Mobile Riverine Force units would be in the vanguard of this new strategic approach to the war.