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NAVAL FORCES VIETNAM

MONTHLY HISTORICAL SUMMARY

MAY 1966

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INDEX
MAY 1966

Coastal Surveillance Force

USCGC POINT GREY Trawler Incident ........................................... 1
TEE SHOT V .................................................................................. 9
MARKET TIME Units ....................................................................... 11
Harbor Defense ............................................................................. 13

River Patrol Force

Rung Sat Special Zone Activities .................................................. 17
Loss of PCF 41 ............................................................................. 21
LEXINGTON III ............................................................................ 24
Minings at Nha Be .......................................................................... 26
Mekong Delta Activities ................................................................ 29
PBRs .......................................................................................... 31

Naval Advisory Group

Fleet Command ............................................................................. 33
Coastal Zones and Coastal Groups .............................................. 35
Riverine Areas and River Assault Groups .................................... 38
Vietnamese Marine Corps ............................................................. 39

Civic Action and Psychological Warfare Activities ....................... 42

U.S. Naval Support Activity, Saigon ............................................. 47

APPENDIX I Equipment Salvaged from Trawler
APPENDIX II MARKET TIME Statistical Summary, May 1966
APPENDIX III GAME WARDEN Statistical Summary, through May 1966
APPENDIX IV Compilation of Contraband Material Captured by U.S.
and VNN MARKET TIME Units, 1 Aug 65 - 31 May 66
APPENDIX V Extract from the Report of Medical and Dental
Department Activities, III Marine Amphibious
Force, May 1966
COASTAL SURVEILLANCE FORCE

In addition to increasing patrols as new units arrived in-country, May provided the highlight of fifteen months of MARKET TIME operations when a Communist trawler was run aground and destroyed off the Ca Mau Peninsula. During May MARKET TIME units participated in one special operation, TEE SHOT V, and on several occasions rendered support to friendly ground forces and to Coastal Groups on patrol. As usual, assistance was always given to friendly fishermen in need, and on one occasion 157 persons on a sinking junk were saved and transported to safety (see PsyWar and Civic Action Section).

The overall readiness of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard units comprising Task Force 115 was excellent during May. The additional six PCFs received in-country and the establishment of a Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Surveillance Unit at Vung Tau further increased the capabilities of the Coastal Surveillance Force.

* * * *

USCGC POINT GREY TRAWLER INCIDENT

For USCGC POINT GREY the evening of 9 May started as many other routine patrols in Area 8 off the Eastern coast of the Ca Mau Peninsula. Dark and overcast with passing rain squalls,

1 Appendix II provides a statistical breakdown of MARKET TIME Activities during May.
the night was typical of the early days of the southwest monsoon season. At approximately 2200, while patrolling four miles off the coast, POINT GREY observed what appeared to be a large bonfire on the beach. Upon closing the beach she determined it to be two large bonfires at a position just north of the entrance to the Bach Gia river. As this activity was highly unusual, POINT GREY decided to maintain continual surveillance in the same area throughout the night. (see chart for positions)

POINT GREY's reaction to the twin bonfires and her diligent surveillance of the area yielded results when at 0010 on 10 May, she established radar contact with what appeared to be a steel hulled vessel, proceeding on an approximate course of 260° at a speed of ten knots. POINT GREY closed the contact and at 0120 issued a challenge. There was no reply. She continued to close and at a range of 400 yards illuminated the contact by searchlight, identifying it as a trawler. POINT GREY then made her initial report to Coastal Surveillance Center, An Thoi stating that the trawler was maneuvering at various courses and speeds in a northwest direction. POINT GREY continued to shadow the trawler.

1 The following narrative is based on CTF 115 161130Z, Enemy Trawler (contact 10E1 - final wrapup).

2 For listing of message traffic relating to incident see CTF 115 Historical Summary, May 1966.
At 0200 the trawler appeared to heave to, and remained dead in the water at a position off-shore from the bonfires. By 0315 the trawler was reported drifting. POINT GREY illuminated the area with 81mm illumination, closed to 100 yards and hailed the trawler. There was no reply. Three or four people were seen briefly, but otherwise the crew managed to remain out of sight. At 0500 the trawler was at a position approximately 1000 yards from the shore, and was starting to drift into restricted waters. It was decided to delay boarding operations until daylight principally because of the restricted waters and adverse sea conditions.

By daylight the trawler appeared to be deserted and aground approximately 400 yards from the shore, and at 0700 POINT GREY approached to make a boarding attempt. The suspicious nature of the trawler received strong confirmation when POINT GREY came under intense fire from the shore. She returned the fire and withdrew to a position 15000 yards from the shore to await assistance.

USS BILSTER (DER 327) and USS VIREO (NSC 205) were already enroute. In addition CTF 115 ordered USCGC POINT CYPRESS to the scene and requested the assistance of the Vietnamese Navy. VNN Headquarters responded by ordering to the scene five junks of Coastal Group 41 and the Fleet Command ships LSIL 328 and PGM 614. Bilster arrived at 1145, but shallow water precluded a close approach and she remained 7500 yards from the shore.
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Additional support would be necessary prior to again attempting to board.

The tide and sea conditions continued to work against boarding operations, carrying the drifting trawler to within 100 yards of the shore, near an area covered by dense mangrove swamp. However, at 1350 air support became available and the order came from CTF 115 to expedite boarding. With aircraft providing support, POINT GREY worked her way in towards the trawler. All proceeded well until POINT GREY was approximately 200 yards from the shore, when heavy, accurate small arms and automatic weapons fire was received from Viet Cong positions in the mangroves, wounding three men on POINT GREY's bow. She quickly backed to a position 400 yards from the shore where it was possible to turn, and then withdrew to safer waters. The three wounded men were transferred to BRISTER for medical evacuation. Following this incident, surface units provided gunfire throughout the afternoon to prevent the Viet Cong from approaching the trawler. Several hits on the trawler caused small fires and small secondary explosions.

By 1700 the surf and tide had shifted the trawler to within fifty yards of the shore, making salvage impossible prior to darkness. With the trawler resting close to the beach, the possibility of a Viet Cong attempt to remove the cargo during the night was high. The decision was reached to destroy the trawler. The destruction order was passed at 1726 and destruction commenced at 1750. Surface units shelled and aircraft bombed and strafed.
the trawler throughout the early evening hours. Numerous fires and secondary explosions were observed until 2030, when a violent explosion ripped the trawler in two pieces and extinguished the fires. Destruction attempts then ceased, and surface units and MARKET TIME aircraft provided flare illumination for the remainder of the night.

During the early evening of 10 May, the Vietnamese Navy ships LSIL 328, PGM 614 and five junks of Coastal Group 41 arrived on the scene. Daylight on 11 May revealed the trawler broken into two sections and listing heavily to port. All was quiet on the shore and Coastal Group 41 moved in and established a defensive perimeter. With U.S. and Vietnamese surface units providing support, LSIL 328 commenced salvage operations. The Commanding Officer of LSIL 328 was designated on scene commander. In the early afternoon, USN SEALs and VNN LDNN (UDT) arrived and assisted both in salvage operations and in maintaining the defensive perimeter. The tide and surf presented the only opposition as salvage of the trawler’s cargo proceeded smoothly throughout the day. The surface units withdrew at nightfall and salvage operations ceased. Surface units, flare ships and MARKET TIME aircraft provided flare illumination throughout the night.

Salvage operations were resumed at first light on 12 May. At 0730 USS TORTUGA (LSD 26) arrived on the scene with Harbor Clearance Team One, LLC-1, and the helicopter fire team embarked.
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The Officer in Charge of HCT-1 reported to the VNN on-scene commander as his technical advisor. At 1500 salvage operations were interrupted by Viet Cong harassing fire, forcing the defensive perimeter to withdraw to sea and causing a temporary cessation of operations. An air strike was called and the opposition ceased. At 1610 the Commander in Chief of the Vietnamese Navy arrived on scene aboard VNN PC-10 and assumed on-scene commander. Salvage operations were resumed by 1800, and continued throughout the night.

Salvage operations concluded at 1015 on 13 May and the defensive perimeter was withdrawn. All salvaged material was placed aboard LSVL 328 which departed for Saigon with CINC VNN embarked. All salvage personnel and the SEAL team were back-loaded and by 1600 all units except BRISTER had departed the scene. BRISTER then took the wreck under fire and completed its destruction, resuming normal patrol at 1900.

Material salvaged from the trawler included six crew-served weapons, approximately fifteen tons of ammunition, movie projectors, film and other propaganda material. The violent explosion which destroyed the entire bridge and amidships portion of the trawler precluded recovery of communications and navigation equipment, ship's logs, charts, and other records. Nameplates removed from the ship's machinery by salvage personnel indicated the bulk of

---

1 See Appendix I for a complete breakdown of material recovered from the wreckage.
The engineering equipment was manufactured in East Germany in 1964. A few nameplates were also in French and Chinese. Printed material recovered included both propaganda and training manuals.

An analysis of the ordnance recovered was provided by the COMUSMACV Technical Intelligence Officer. According to his findings the most significant item recovered was the 120mm mortar ammunition manufactured in Communist China in 1965. This is the second time this type of ammunition has been recovered for technical analysis in South Vietnam, and it is the first time it has been discovered in the Mekong Delta region. Also significant was the recovery of 12.7mm API ammunition manufactured in Communist China in 1965. The appearance of ammunition of such recent vintage could indicate both a shortage of ammunition on the part of Communist troops in the area and the relative efficiency of the Communist supply system.1

An analysis of aerial photographs of the trawler and dimensions obtained by the salvage crews indicated that the craft was of steel construction, approximately 110 feet in length and 22 feet in beam. It had two hatches, the forward hatch eight feet by thirteen feet, and the after hatch eleven feet by eleven feet. The hull was a blue-grey color with the bridge superstructure area painted white. There were no flags or identification markings on the hull.

1 COMNAVFORV 14003Z May 66 Intelligence Summary "SPHINX" 37-66.
Photographs of the trawler also revealed a number of features noted on a trawler intercepted by the USS HISSEM (DER-400) while apparently attempting to infiltrate into the southwestern tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula on 31 December 1965. This trawler was subsequently tracked into the territorial waters of Communist China.\(^1\&\)\(^2\) Features similar in both ships included construction and configuration of the bow and forecastle, break of the poop and stern, a small ventilator mounted on the port quarter, stack placement, arrangement of stanchions, and color of the hull and superstructure. It was concluded that either the same ship or identical ships were involved in both infiltration attempts. In addition, the gross dimensions of both ships are similar to the communist arms carrier destroyed at Vung Ro Bay in February 1965.\(^3\)

In October 1964, a Viet Cong doctor was infiltrated into the Ca Mau Peninsula. He was subsequently captured.\(^4\) A sketch he prepared of his infiltration ship resembled closely both the HISSEM trawler and the POINT GREY trawler. The doctor stated that his ship had sailed from Haiphong, east through the Hainan Strait, south through the South China Sea, and west to the Ca Mau Peninsula.

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) For narrative of HISSEM incident see NAVADVGRP Historical Report, January 1966.
\(^3\) CORNAVFORV 141003Z May 66, op. cit.
\(^4\) Naval Advisory Group Historical Review, June 1965, p. 5.
SOME WEAPONS RECOVERED FROM TRAWLER
The alert reaction of POINT GREY resulted in detection of a major infiltration attempt and destruction of the trawler and its contraband. Close coordination between Vietnamese and U.S. units involved in the salvage operations resulted in a rapid extraction of all usable material from the wreckage. The capture and destruction of large quantities of arms, ammunition and explosives has denied the Viet Cong use of these during the monsoon season operations, while the capture and destruction of projectors, films and propaganda material has injured the Viet Cong psychological warfare effort in the south of the Republic of Vietnam.

* * * *

THE SHOT V

The THE SHOT concentrated patrol concept was employed once during May in support of Operation DAVY CROCKETT II in the northern section of Binh Dinh Province. THE SHOT V was established in the coastal area from Dong Phu village south to Chanh Oai village to detect and capture or destroy any hostile craft attempting to exfiltrate the area.

Participating U.S. units included USS FALGOUT (DER-324), two PCFs from Division 104 at Cam Ranh Bay. FALGOUT provided logistic support for the two PCFs as well as berthing for two spare PCF crews. Participation of Coastal Groups 21 and 22 was requested through Vietnamese Navy Headquarters. In addition, MARKET TIME patrol aircraft were directed to give special emphasis
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to this area, and were to report immediately all contacts to the nearest surface unit.

FALGOUT commenced patrol in the TEE SHOT V area the morning of 5 May. Liaison was established with Coastal Groups 21 and 22 that afternoon. The Coastal Group junks then entered the patrol effort, maintaining two junks on patrol at all times. However, the patrol effort was considered to be only marginally effective until the arrival of PCFs 42 and 48 the following afternoon. Both units were briefed and topped off with fuel and water. With the arrival of the PCFs sufficient forces were available to effectively counter exfiltration.

On 7 May at 1105 PCF 42 came under fire from the beach. The forward turret gunner was hit on the flak jacket by small arms fire, incurring superficial wounds to the face and arms. At the time USS AGERHOLM (DD-626) was in the area on NGFS station approximately 800 yards away from the incident, and the wounded man was transferred to her for treatment. Neither PCF 42 nor AGERHOLM could determine the origin of the attack, and the fire was not returned.

Five instances of thirty foot sailing junks carrying cargos of salt between the villages of Degi and Sa Huynh were reported on 7 May. At the time investigation by VN personnel on the scene indicated that their cargo manifests were in order, issued by local authorities at Sa Huynh. After four similar junks carrying salt cargos were escorted by PCF 48 to Qui Nhon on 10 May, it was
revealed by local authorities that the papers were illegal. The Sa Huynh authorities did not have the authority to issue papers for the transport of goods originating in a Viet Cong controlled area (Degi is in a Viet Cong area).

TEE SHOT V was terminated the morning of 13 May. During the operation a total of 2,448 junks were detected, 1,210 inspected and 424 boarded. Twenty-three persons and six junks with a total of seventeen tons of salt were apprehended and delivered to VVN authorities. No exfiltration was detected or was believed attempted.

MARKET TIME UNITS

Three Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV) arrived at Vung Tau on 1 May aboard the USS CABILODO (LSO 16) and were offloaded on 2 May. The PACVs, formed as PACV Division 107, then proceeded to the Market Time base at Cat Lo. The period of 3 May through 19 May was utilized in setting up maintenance and logistic support equipment and in preparing the PACVs for operations. Refresher training, initial area familiarization and training in Market Time operations also were conducted during this period.

An evaluation to determine the suitability of the PACV in performing Market Time missions and tasks got underway on 20 May. With the technical assistance of the Naval Research and Development Unit of the Joint Research and Test activity, this evaluation was to continue for a period of approximately ninety days.
evaluation includes tests of PACV maneuverability, speed, lift capabilities, suitability for independent and coordinated MARKET TIME patrols, MEDEVAC operations, search and rescue, and logistic transport. Emphasis during the latter part of May was placed on lift performance, navigation and MARKET TIME operations. By the end of May the PACVs had operated a total of over eighty-four hours.

Six additional PCFs arrived in country during May. PCFs 55 through 59 and PCF 61 were offloaded at DaNang on 15 May. Two PCFs remained at DaNang, bringing the total boats in Division 102 to twelve. The remaining four boats transited to Qui Nhon on 16 May, forming the nucleus of PCF Division 105. Division 105 is the fifth PCF division to be formed, and the last under present plans. With the arrival of the new boats and the loss of PCF 41 on 22 May (See section "Loss of PCF 41" under CTF 116 Operations) the total number of "SHIFTS" in country stood at 48 by the end of the month.

In aerial surveillance operations, USS SALISBURY SOUND (AV 13) with CTF 72 embarked, arrived at Cam Ranh Bay on 15 May, set up a seadrome and activated Task Group 72.5. On 16 May SP-5B aircraft began flying patrols from the seadrome in support of MARKET TIME operations. Patrol Squadrons 40 and 48 had aircraft detachments at Cam Ranh Bay supported by SALISBURY SOUND for the remainder of the month. Fifty-two MARKET TIME flights were flown by TG 72.5 during this period. The aircraft on patrol investigated contacts
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For MARKET TIME ships and reported all contacts and suspicious activity discovered. A detachment from Patrol Squadron Two relieved Patrol Squadron One as TG 115.6 on 29 May. The detachment has seven SP-2H based at Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon flying in support of MARKET TIME operations.

Twenty-six Coast Guard cutters remained on MARKET TIME patrol during May in addition to five DEHs, six MSOs and two HSCs. The following SEVENTH Fleet units were under the operational control of CTF 115 for MARKET TIME operations during May:

USS BLISTER (DEH-327)
USS VANCE (DEH-387)
USS FALGOUT (DEH-324)
USS FORSTER (DER-334)
USS KOIWER (DER-331)
USS KILTCHEL (DER-329)
USS FINCH (DEH-328)
USS IONE (DER-325)
USS DYNAMIC (MSO-432)
USS CONFLICT (MSO-426)
USS INFLICT (MSO-456)
USS LOYALTY (MSO-457)
USS FORTIFY (MSO-446)
USS ZEROG (MSO-433)
USS DEPENIOUS (MSO-449)
USS ENDURANCE (MSO-435)
USS PERSISTENT (MSO-491)
USS IMPLICIT (MSO-455)
USS CANNET (MSC-290)
USS VIDE0 (MSC-205)
USS HARK (AKL-12)
USS BEULE (:KL-28)
USS KRISHNA (AKL-38)

* * * * *

HARBOR DEFENSE

In January 1966 a harbor defense team composed of representatives from CINCPACFLT, NAVFAC, COMINPA&C and COMULAGRUONE.
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visited the major coastal ports in the Republic of Vietnam to determine the harbor defense requirements. The ports visited included DaNang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Cam Ranh Bay and Vung Tau/Cat Lo.¹ Based on the findings of the harbor defense team, a harbor defense plan has been prepared for Vung Tau and is being prepared for each of the other ports.

The plans provide for a harbor defense unit at each location. The units will have the mission of detecting and defending assigned land areas, water areas and water approaches against small surface craft attack, intrusion by deception craft, sabotage by sneak attack, underwater swimmers or subversive personnel and enemy mine laying operations. A Harbor Entrance Control Post will serve as the command center for each unit. Radar search, visual search and searchlight sections will provide surveillance, while surface craft are to provide harbor and entrance patrols and investigation and prosecution of suspect contacts.

The establishment of the harbor defense units will be in three phases. In phase I, Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Surveillance Units (MIUWS) consisting of five officers and fifty-four enlisted men will be deployed to each of the sites. The MIUWS Units will establish an interim harbor defense capability utilizing equipment and personnel assigned. The initial step

¹ For the initial work on harbor defense see CHN.VA/DVGRP Summary Report, February 1966, p. 14.
will be to establish the Harbor Entrance Control Post and provide basic surveillance, utilizing radar, visual watches and communications. During this phase liaison must be effected with local officials and military authorities to establish and enforce boat restricted areas and traffic regulations.

Phase II is the semi-permanent phase in establishing harbor defense. Advanced Base Functional Components will phase out the MIUKS equipment. Newly arriving personnel will receive on-the-job training, and will gradually replace the MIUKS personnel. Phase III will consist of a completely staffed and equipped harbor defense unit. Permanent structures will be completed and all facilities will be operational. Phase III will remain in effect until the end of hostilities.

The MIUKS Units assigned are Unit 12 at Vung Tau, Unit 11 at Cam Ranh Bay, Unit 23 at Qui Nhon and Unit 22 at Nha Trang. They will be under COMINPAC for administrative purposes. Harbor defense units in the II, III, and IV Corps Tactical Zones are to be under operational control of CTF 115, while the unit at DaNang in the I CTZ will be under NVSUPPACT DaNang.

MIUKS Unit 12 arrived in Vung Tau in mid-April and started construction of the interim facilities for Vung Tau harbor defense. A deserted French hillside defensive position, affording excellent visual coverage of the Vung Tau anchorage and channel, was selected as the Harbor Entrance Control Post. The fortifications were found to be in a good state of repair, providing usable rooms and bunkers.
HARBOR ENTRANCE CONTROL POST, VUNG TAU
The access roads were also found to be usable. During May the Vung Tau unit started operations with one radar installed at the HECP and one LCPL for harbor patrol. A second LCPL arrived from Saigon at the end of the month.

The MICKS at Nah Trang and Qui Nhon received their initial shipments of equipment during May. At present each of these locations have a security force of one officer and six enlisted men.

* * * * *
RIVER PATROL FORCE

Operation GAME WARDEN expanded during May as the first river patrol units moved into the Mekong Delta. Activity continued in the Rung Sat Special Zone where patrols continued to interdict Viet Cong movement while U.S. Army Operation LEXINGTON III destroyed numerous enemy facilities. Viet Cong mining activities re-emerged as a very real threat in an incident at the Nha Be anchorage.

On the afternoon of 18 May Captain B. B. Witheram, Jr., USN assumed command of the River Patrol Force. Ceremonies were held at the GAME WARDEN base at Nha Be.

** * * * *

RUNG SAT SPECIAL ZONE ACTIVITIES

Heavy Viet Cong harassment of U.S. patrol units on the Soirap River north of the entrance to the Vam Co River took place during the early days of May, a continuation of similar events during April. Starting the evening of 30 April and continuing for five successive nights, USCGC POINT PARTRIDGE, on patrol four miles north of the entrance to the Vam Co River, received small arms and automatic weapons fire from the west bank of the Soirap River. On each occasion POINT PARTRIDGE returned the fire with her .50 caliber machine guns and 81mm mortar. On 1 and 3 May she also received assistance from the

1 APPENDIX III provides a statistical breakdown of GAME WARDEN operations through May.
"Seawolf" helicopter fire teams. There was no assessment of Viet Cong casualties, but each time the fire was silenced. PFRs on Soirap patrol received similar fire on one occasion.

At 2200 on 5 May POINT PARTRIDGE detected a single sampan crossing the Soirap from east to west at a point just north of the positions where fire had been received. POINT PARTRIDGE closed, using her searchlight and siren, and immediately received automatic weapons and small arms fire from the sampan. This was returned with 700 rounds of .50 caliber machine gun fire. The occupants, estimated at four, abandoned the sampan. POINT PARTRIDGE then took the sampan in tow.

The sampan was eighteen feet long and camouflaged with palm fronds. Two Chinese Communist carbines, each with seven rounds of 7.62mm ammunition, were found in the sampan. The principal cargo was a large quantity of sixteen foot pointed stakes, evaluated as anti-helicopter stakes. Also recovered were two fifty-five gallon water drums and some personal papers.

Contrary to what are believed to be standard Viet Cong movement tactics, this incident took place at low tide under a full moon. Previous studies indicated that the Viet Cong would take advantage of the dark phases of the moon for attempted movement of supplies. Also, particularly in tidal areas, high tide has been regarded as a criteria in Viet Cong movement.

USCGC POINT KENNEDY, on Soirap station south of POINT

1 CHNNAVGRP msg 231913Z Apr 66.
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PARTRIDGE came under fire the same evening from an old French fortification located on the north bank of the junction of the Soirap and Vam Co Rivers. This particular fortification, located in a secure Viet Cong area, has often been a source of harassment to both U.S. and Vietnamese patrol units. At 1923 POINT KENNEDY received small arms fire which by 1935 had been supplemented with automatic weapons. POINT KENNEDY returned the fire with .50 caliber machine gun and 81mm mortar fire. By 1946 the shore attack had been silenced. There were no friendly casualties.

On 7 May USCGC POINT GRACE detected a sampan crossing the Soirap from east to west, apparently following the identical route as the POINT PARTRIDGE contact of two nights earlier. POINT GRACE sounded her siren, fired warning shots and attempted to overtake the sampan, but the distance was too great and the contact evaded into a small stream on the west bank. However, POINT GRACE was not to be denied. Two night later at 2005 she picked up a contact in the same area, following the same crossing pattern. When POINT GRACE closed, illuminated, and fired warning shots, four persons jumped overboard. Two men and one woman were recovered from the water. The fourth, later identified as a male, managed to escape. The sampan was also recovered and found to contain two carbines of CHICOM manufacture, one Mauser rifle, two cartridge belts, 85 rounds of ammunition and assorted food, clothing and personal effects. The prisoners and material
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were turned over to Vietnamese authorities at Nha Be.

This incident terminated two months of highly successful river patrols for the WPBs as their patrol stations were assumed by PBRs on 11 May and the cutters returned to MARKET TIME duties. During this period the WPBs established an excellent precedent of diligent and aggressive river patrols.

During most of May three PCFs remained under operational control of CTF 116 for patrol in the Rung Sat Special Zone. On the morning of 22 May PCF 32 detected a sampan crossing the Dong Tranh River from east to west. An occupant opened fire with a .30 caliber weapon. PCF 32 returned the fire with 400 rounds of .50 caliber fire, damaging the sampan. However, the sampan managed to beach and the occupants fled. There was no assessment of casualties.

The morning of 27 May PCF 37 sighted a sampan with two persons embarked closing the beach near the location where the attack on PCF 41 had occurred. As PCF 37 closed, the sampan was beached and abandoned after being partially camouflaged. PCF 36, on patrol in the same area, was called to assist, and both units closed the beach to investigate. In the process an explosion, possibly a small mine, occurred thirty yards astern of PCF 36. At the same time the Viet Cong took the PCFs under small arms fire. It was evident that the Viet Cong had used the sampan as a decoy to lure the PCFs into the vicinity. The PCFs returned the fire and cleared the area. There were no casualties.
During May the "Seawolf" helicopter fire teams, operating from USS TORTUGA, again made a significant contribution to Rung Sat Special Zone activities. In addition to supporting CNE WARDEN patrol units, the fire teams came to the assistance of Vietnamese Regional Force units on three occasions. The fire teams were also utilized to search out and destroy Viet Cong installations and sampans. During May the fire teams accounted for four Viet Cong killed, four sampans destroyed, 19 sampans damaged and five Viet Cong structures destroyed. They flew a total of 31 armed reconnaissance missions, twenty-five rapid reaction missions, sixteen escort missions and seven medical evacuation missions.

* * * * *

LOSS OF PCE 41

On 22 May between 1830 and 1845, while on patrol in the Rung Sat Special Zone in support of U.S. Army Operation LEXINGTON III, PCE 41 came under fire from a heavy caliber weapon on the east bank of the Dinh Ba River. A hit was sustained in the lower half of the starboard bulkhead of the pilot house, killing the coxswain, wounding the radioman and destroying most of the equipment in the pilot house. Within seconds of the initial hit a mine exploded adjacent to the PCE, resulting in possible bottom damage. PCE 41 returned the fire and accelerated at maximum speed.

1 COMNAVFORV msg 230700Z May.
speed. However, steering control had been lost sequential to
the hit in the pilot house and the boat ran aground before control
could be regained.

The Viet Cong attack terminated soon after the PCF went
aground. The radio had been damaged in the attack, and efforts
to re-establish communications were unsuccessful. Mortar
illumination shells, .50 caliber tracer ammunition and the search-light were all used in an unsuccessful attempt to bring assistance.

At 1937, due to location of the craft in VC territory,
impending darkness, lack of radio communications and an outgoing
tide, PCF 41 was abandoned. Prior to abandoning the crew jea-
tisoned the after .50 caliber machine gun, the URC-58 radio and
some of the ammunition. The life raft was then launched and the
crew, armed with small arms, proceeded southeast until picked up
by PCF 37 at 2145. The one wounded man was then transferred to
Dong Hoa Village, support base for Operation LEXINGTON, for
helicopter medical evacuation. The remainder of the crew was
taken to Vung Tau for treatment of shock and minor injuries.¹

Helicopter fire teams were then ordered into the area to
interdict any Viet Cong attempts to strip PCF 41, and a reaction
force of one commando element, one monitor, and four FOMs from RAG 22
departed Nha Be at 2300. CTG 116.2 and the USN SEAL team were
embarked.

¹ CTU 115.3.7 msg 230330Z May.
The reaction force arrived on the scene at C300 on 24 May and found the PCF down by the bow about 30 degrees, heeled over to port about forty-five degrees, and about eight per-cent submerged. The reaction force removed the one body along with the forward .50 caliber machine guns, the starlight scope and the remaining ammunition. An incendiary grenade was used in an attempt to render the mortar useless. An attempt was then made to tow the PCF from the sand bar where it had grounded, but severe bottom damage apparently suffered from the mine explosion occurring after the initial hit caused it to sink in midstream in about twenty-five feet of water. The reaction force marked the spot and then withdrew from the area. This was the second PCF lost to enemy action.  

On 24 May at 0430, a salvage unit composed of seven SEAL team divers, seven units of RAG 22 and VN Regional Force Company 999 departed Nha Be for the area of the PCF 41 sinking. The salvage unit, with CTG 116.2 embarked, arrived on station at 0820 and commenced operations. RF Company 999 landed and set up a defensive perimeter on the north bank of the Dinh Ba River while four RAG FOM's conducted reconnaissance by fire of the south bank. One LCVP with minesweeping gear rigged was utilized in an expanding square search for PCF 41. At 0915 the LCVP exploded a Viet Cong mine, but no casualties were experienced. The search continued, but was unsuccessful in locating PCF 41. Due to the

1 See NAV/DWGRF Historical Report, Jan 66.

2 CTG 116.2/SA RSSZ 250920 May msg provides narrative of salvage operations.
hazardous location and severely damaged condition of the FCF, salvage efforts were abandoned late in the morning.

The same morning, Regional Force Company 999, operating on the north bank of the river, made contact with a Viet Cong unit of unknown size at 0937. In the ensuing action four Viet Cong were killed, one submachine gun, two carbines, and one B-50 anti-tank rocket launcher and two rockets were captured. Whether this weapon or a 57mm recoilless rifle dealt FCF 41 the fatal blow remains a matter of speculation. Later, during operation LEXINGTON III, several expended 57mm recoilless rifle rounds were discovered in the same area.

The B-50 launcher is the first captured in South Vietnam, and was discovered in excellent condition, indicating that it had just recently been brought into the war. National origin of the weapon has yet to be established. It can be fired from either the shoulder or the ground and has a probable effective range of 250 meters. The rocket is spin-stabilized, 105mm in diameter and initially evaluated as being capable of penetrating eight inches of hardened steel.¹

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LEXINGTON III

Operation LEXINGTON III, a search and destroy operation conducted by the Second Brigade of the U.S. Army First Infantry

¹ COMNAVFORV msg 261026 May. COMNAVFORV Intsum "Sphinx" 47-66.
Division in the Rung Sat Special Zone, took place between 21 May and 9 June. The operation consisted primarily of a series of deployments of rapid reaction forces, utilizing both helicopter and amphibious troop lifts. An artillery and general support base was established at Dong Hoa Village for the first phase of the operation and later shifted to Ly Nhon for the second phase. (see chart).

Both U.S. Navy and Vietnamese Navy units played an active part in the operation. On 20 May two LCUs of the VNN Logistic Lift Command transported 105mm howitzers, vehicles, water and ammunition to Dong Hoa. Three LCM-6s from RAG 22 with the U.S. advisor embarked assisted in the troop transport. One VNN LCU was also utilized to assist in the support and artillery base shift to Ly Nhon.

RAG 22 played a vital role in an amphibious operation on 2 May. Three LCMs were utilized to carry troops from Ly Nhon to a landing position on the Dinh Ba River. Two POMs and a monitor provided an escort, and two LCVPs with minesweeping gear cleared the channel. To provide diversion tactics for the amphibious assault, two PCFs and four PBHs departed Ly Nhon the same morning for a position off the mouth of the Van Sat River, scene of a highly successful amphibious action during Operation JACK STAY in April.¹ At this position they circled and bombarded the mouth of the river with 81mm mortar and .50

¹ See COMNAVFOHV Historical Summary 1966, p. 3.
caliber machine gun fire to give the impression of impending assault. In the meantime the main convoy proceeded south down the Soirap River, to the Dong Tranh River and into the Dinh Ba River.

GAME WARDEN units also provided an anti-infiltration/exfiltration patrol throughout the operation. Manning seven stations on a continual basis, the eight PBRs and three PCFs concentrated their patrols in the vicinity of LEXINGTON III activity (See PCF 41 incident). U.S. Navy SEAL teams conducted several ambushes during the operation.

LEXINGTON III accounted for 35 Viet Cong killed in action by body count. There was one friendly killed in action and four wounded. Thirty weapons were captured, fourteen base camps, five fortified positions, twenty-nine sampans and twelve huts were destroyed. One fifteen bed hospital with its own generator and two ammunition/weapons facilities were also destroyed, the principal triumphs of the operation. A moderate quantity of rice and ammunition, some tools and a grenade press were also accounted for.

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MININGS AT NHA BE

The ability of the Viet Cong to infiltrate a secure port and, using a crude but highly effective device, inflict serious damage on shipping was strongly confirmed the morning of 26 May. At 0150 a loud explosion resounded through the Nha Be anchorage.
followed by a series of distress signals from a ship's fog horn.

The GAME WARDEN base at Nha Be immediately went to general
quarters, and PBRs and units of VNN RAG 22 were sent to investigate.

The PBRs reported that the ship EASTERN MARINER, of Panamanian
registry and carrying a cargo of 4000 tons of bagged cement, was
settling by the stern with a slight starboard list. Twelve feet
of freeboard was remaining and the crew was abandoning ship. The
PBRs and RAG 22 units rescued the crew and brought them to Nha Be.
There were no casualties.

Shortly after the explosion a tug arrived on the scene, and
an investigating party consisting of the tug's master and four
U.S. Navy officers boarded the EASTERN MARINER. They reported
that the engine room and fire room were flooded to the main deck
and that two holds were partly flooded. By 0315 two pumps had
been rigged by the tug to attempt to keep the ship off the bottom.

At 1230 the EASTERN MARINER, assisted by three tugboats and
three LCM pusher boats, beached on the eastern bank of the Nha Be
river clear of the main ship channel. Investigation by divers
revealed a twelve foot by ten foot hole in the starboard quarter
of the vessel. Subsequent diving attempts recovered remnants of
nylon cord, indicating that a mine had been attached to the ship.

At about 1000 on 26 May a tugboat reported to the NSTS Office,
Nha Be, that a second explosion had occurred near another ship
anchored about 350 yards from the EASTERN MARINER. Investigation
revealed that the French ship KILOS DEL M.R had experienced an
underwater explosion while weighing anchor. There was no damage
to the ship. Examination of her anchor chain showed an attached nylon cord, evaluated as having been used to affix a mine.

All ships at Nha Be were informed of the danger and instructed by CTG 116.2 not to heave around on their anchor chains or turn their screws until they had received an underwater inspection. U.S. Navy SEAL and EOD personnel and VNN LDAN then conducted underwater inspections. At 1340 EOD personnel discovered a water mine attached to the anchor chain of the ship OUR LADY OF PEACE, anchored in the same general area as the other two ships. OUR LADY OF PEACE was carrying a cargo of 500 pound, general purpose bombs.

The mine recovered contained about 130 pounds of TNT rigged to be electrically detonated by a double timing device attached to the mine. EOD personnel reported that the mine was attached to the anchor chain by metal hooks and nylon parachute cord which allowed the mine to drift back under the ship with the current. The size of the mine and its construction indicated that it was towed through the water to the site by a small boat. When the hooks were secured to the anchor chain the mine was allowed to drift free under the vessel as dictated by the river current.

The one successful mining and two attempted minings of 26 May prompted a quick re-evaluation of the anchorage security requirements for Nha Be. Although the U.S. Army, Vietnam First Logistic Command had been tasked with port security for Nha Be, it was evident that they would require immediate assistance to provide adequate protection for the fuel, ammunition and other
WING FROM "OUR LADY OF PEACE" BATTERIES AND TIMING DEVICES REMOVED
CONFLICT

ships at anchor there. Special security provisions were estab-
lished by COMNAVFORV, and CTF 116 was assigned operational control
of all U.S. Navy units engaged in the special security activities
in support of the Army’s port security responsibilities.1 EOD and
SEAL personnel were organized to conduct special underwater inspec-
tions of all U.S. and foreign ships anchored at Nha Be according
to priorities established by the MSTS Office. Eight additional
PBRs were transferred from Vung Tau to Nha Be to assist in anti-
swimmer security patrols commencing one hour prior to sunset and
continuing until sunrise. The assistance of EAG 22 was also
elicited. MSBs conducted periodic sweeps of the anchorage.
Arriving ships were briefed on the security requirements and were
encouraged to employ maximum security measures during darkness,
including rigging lights to illuminate anchor chains and sides.

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MEKONG DELTA ACTIVITIES

The first operational test of the GAME WARDEN concept in the
Mekong Delta commenced on 8 May when Commander River Division 511
with River Section 511 embarked in USS TORTUGA (LSD-26) at Vung
Tau and departed for the Bassac River. The following day River
Section 511 chopped to CTG 116.1 at Can Tho, debarked from
TORTUGA and transited the Bassac River to the interim GAME WARDEN
base at Can Tho. During the transit fire cover was provided by

1 COMNAVFORV msg 261129Z May 66.
Tortuga's helicopter fire team. Light small arms harassing fire was received during the transit, but it was quickly suppressed.

Upon arrival at Can Tho, the PBRs underwent a week of area familiarization and training. Two days of daylight patrols were also conducted to permit the local population to become familiar with the new patrol boats. On 15 May two PBRs were distributing leaflets promulgating new curfew hours on the Bassac River when they received automatic weapons fire at a point 15 miles southwest of Can Tho. They cleared the area with no casualties or damage. However, on the return trip to Can Tho they again came under heavy, constant automatic weapons fire. Fish traps across the river at this point had forced them to a position close to shore, greatly increasing their vulnerability to hostile fire. Two crewmen were injured on one PBR and both craft received light material damage. They returned the fire with a heavy .50 caliber barrage while clearing the area.

After completing promulgation of curfew regulations the PBRs started regular night time patrols. Arrangements were made for the National Police liaison officers to accompany the patrols in the Can Tho area.

On 17 May, in their first night action, the PBRs received automatic weapons fire from a shore position having again been forced into range of the Viet Cong weapons by fish traps. The fire was returned. On 29 May while investigating three sampans attempting to cross the Bassac, a two boat patrol received heavy
automatic weapons and small arms fire. The fire was returned but the PBRs were forced to clear the area. The use of heavy shore fire to cover the transport of supplies across rivers had been witnessed many times previously on the Songap River. This, however, is the first incident of this tactic involving U.S. patrol boats on the Mekong Delta waterways.

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PBRs

The addition of 16 PBRs during May brought the total of the boats in country to 47. On 23 May eight PBRs were offloaded from S.S. RIDGEFIELD VICTORY and on 28 May eight more boats were offloaded from S.S. U.S. TOURIST. On 4 May River Section 542 was activated, followed by River Section 531 and River Section 543 on 16 May.

The rapid tempo of operations in the Rung Sat Special Zone during May taxed crews and their boats. The PBRs ran twelve hour patrols with an additional two to three hours spent transiting to and from the patrol areas. In addition, most River Patrol Sections were required to perform their own maintenance. Most boats were used on daily patrol, allowing little time for preventive maintenance. However, this condition will improve as more boats and crews become available and as the support bases start developing maintenance facilities and commence providing maintenance support.

Operations from the LST and LSD interim support ships showed
that a high order of seamanship is required to prevent damage to the PBRs when moderate seas are running. Several times during May, River Patrol Sections were forced to operate out of the base at Cat Lo as the PBRs experienced difficulty operating from the LST. Seas of three to four feet caused hull damage alongside the LST and LSD and made boarding of the PBRs from the support ship difficult.

Three problem areas came to light in the PBRs themselves during the month. Numerous pump drive shaft casualties were experienced. To attempt to rectify this, Naval Ship System Command is procuring a stronger shaft. PBRs also started experiencing extensive surface corrosion of the pump grill inserts and pump suction pieces, and on the seats for the impeller wear rings. NAVSHIPSYS.COM is investigating the problem. The third problem was the inability of the PBRs to make their designed speed of twenty-five knots. This seems to have been caused principally by excessive weight.

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The reorganization of the Vietnamese Navy which neared completion during April, came to a virtual standstill during May. The primary reasons for this were political in nature, centered around a possible large scale turnover of the top jobs within the service. Some higher ranking officers in VNN were sent to attach billets or to schools in the United States. The general climate throughout the month remained one of uncertainty, with most officers adopting a "wait and see" attitude. As a result the process of reorganization, along with other improvements, slowed to a near standstill. Fortunately the effect on actual operations was slight.

During the month the number of inspections personally conducted by CNO increased. However, follow-up action on discrepancies encountered during those inspections was minimal. From reports available the senior VNN officers were aware of problems which confronted them, and promulgated orders in an attempt to correct the troublesome areas. Again, follow-up action was weak.

FLEET COMMAND

Advisors noted no significant improvement in Fleet Command operations and maintenance during May. Fleet Command ships continued to assist MARKET TIME units in their coastal patrols, and to maintain patrols in the river areas. During the month 34 gunfire support support missions were fired by Fleet Command.
units, primarily in support of Regional Force and Popular Force outposts in the Mekong Delta and the Rung Sat Special Zone. In a typical action on 17 May, a Viet Cong company was reported moving on Dong Ho Village in the Rung Sat Special Zone. LSIL 331 and PCM 612 arrived on the scene and bombarded the Viet Cong with heavy 40mm and 20mm fire, thwarting the attack. In action in the I Corps Tactical Zone, PCE 11 fired seventy rounds of 3" ammunition at Viet Cong outposts in the vicinity of Coastal Group 16. Three outposts were reported destroyed. In other significant action previously noted, Fleet Command ships played an important role in the capture and destruction of the Viet Cong trawler on the Ca Mau Peninsula.

Continual stress on routine maintenance by the Fleet Command Maintenance Officer resulted in some improvement in shipboard maintenance practices. However, many officers still believe that their sole job is operating the ship and that the shipyard is responsible for maintenance. Advisors reported that engineering practices continued to be lax in spite of their persistent stress on the importance of proper watch standing and preventive maintenance procedures. Personnel distribution practices, lack of experienced technicians, old ships and long lead time for spare parts all continued to add up to the maintenance problems of the Fleet Command.

The IDNN (UDT) conducted three operations in May, none involving enemy contact. Eighteen men, two officers and their U.S. advisor conducted beach surveys at Hon Cau Island on 5 May and Don Tray Bay on 6 May. These are both located in the Con Son (Poulo Condore) Islands. From 10 May to 14 May IDNN personnel participated in the salvage of material from the Viet Cong trawler; and on 19 May a reconnaissance of prospective landing areas near the Co Chien River was conducted.

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COASTAL ZONES AND COASTAL GROUPS

Naval operations in the First Coastal Zone (CZ) were hampered by the political unrest in the I Corps Tactical Zone. The primary problem was in the area of logistics. Some of the Coastal Groups were short of food and fuel during the month as their junks were unable to get into DaNang for resupply. This situation was somewhat alleviated by Fleet Command ships delivering supplies from Nha Trang and other ports to the south.

Advisors report that blocking operations for ARVN land operations continue to be fruitful in the First CZ. Three of these were conducted during May. In the most significant of these on 31 May, Coastal Group 16 provided a blocking force for Operation QUYET THANG 14/G in the Quang Nhai sector. Fifty junks were checked, two Viet Cong captured and twenty bags of salt confiscated. In significant ground action on 18 May, Coastal Group 16 landed