OPERATIONS IN THE CO CHIEN RIVER
March 1968

A - PBRs - 21 March
B - PBRs - 6 March
C - SEALs/PRU - 6 March
.50 caliber mount on PBR 138. Even though the explosion was a low order detonation the force was sufficient enough to blow the forward gunner overboard. PBR 119 maneuvered between the enemy firing positions and the lead boat to provide a cover while the lead boat picked up the wounded sailor. Four more rounds were fired, but missed the boats, before the PBRs could suppress the enemy fire. The patrol headed back to Vinh Long with the wounded consisting of three PBR crewmen (one serious) and one Vietnamese Maritime policeman. After arriving at the PBR base, PBR 119 was joined by PBR 111.

The patrol headed back to the ambush area now armed with a 60-mm mortar and immediately drew small-arms fire on arrival. The fire was quickly suppressed at which time the patrol mortared the tree line behind the initial ambush site. The patrol, upon learning that the outpost was now under attack, proceeded up the canal to aid the Vietnamese units. When the patrol started receiving fire from houses south of the outpost the boats moved in close to the houses and destroyed them with .50 caliber machine-gun fire. All enemy fire ceased. Casualties inflicted on the enemy were undetermined.

On the morning of 6 March the maximum use of a Navy team was employed resulting in a substantial enemy casualty toll. The action began when the SEAL 7th platoon and an element of a Vietnamese Provincial Reconnaissance Unit engaged the Viet Cong 531st Company and elements of the 509th at 0700 about 3 miles north of Phu Vinh. Throughout the day PBRs provided
OPERATIONS IN THE BASSAC RIVER
March 1968
neutralizing fire as needed while the Navy "Seawolves" maintained con-
stant air support. The ground units reported that many lives were saved
by the coordinated fire by the patrol craft and armed helicopters during
the 7-hour operation. There were 6 known Viet Cong killed and 20 wounded.
There were at least 15 other that were probably killed; however, their
bodies were not found. One of the dead was identified as the commander
of the 531st Viet Cong Company. The ground units also captured 1 AK-47
rifle, 1 BAR, one .45 caliber pistol, 12 grenades and 700 rounds of
assorted ammunition. There were no friendly casualties.

On 24 March, 5 miles east of Vinh Long, PBRs 134 and 85 of River
Section 522, came under rocket and automatic-weapons fire while on a
routine patrol. The enemy attacked from several positions and fired
at least seven RPG-7 rockets at the boats. PBR 134 took two hits —
one in the starboard bow which exited through the port midship; the
second hit starboard midship, destroyed the radio and radar equipment
and wounded two crewmen. PBR 134 cleared the area while PBR 85 con-
tinued to return fire on the enemy positions; however, it was not until
the "Seawolves" arrived, shortly thereafter, with their 2.75 inch rocket
and machine-gun fire that the Viet Cong fire was suppressed. Enemy
casualties were undetermined.

**Operations in the Bassac River**

On 5 March, following Viet Cong attacks on three outposts just
east of Tra On, Navy "Seawolves" conducted air strikes along a tree
line from which enemy fire had previously originated that day. The Navy helicopters opened their attack with a level bombing run dropping 20-pound bombs directly on target. The initial attack was followed by rocket and machine-gun passes, as the Viet Cong returned fire with heavy automatic weapons. The enemy ground fire hit the lead aircraft twice, wounding one crewman. The "Seawolves" continued their attack until all rockets were expended, leaving six Viet Cong dead, five wounded, one structure destroyed, three structures damaged and three tons of rice destroyed.

On 6 March, acting on intelligence that 5 to 10 Viet Cong tax collectors were operating 7 miles southeast of Tra On, on the southern bank of the river, PBRs landed Popular Force troops to conduct a ground sweep while "Seawolves" patrolled overhead. The Vietnamese troops soon gained contact and drove the Viet Cong into a field. The "Seawolves" reacted immediately with an airstrike in the area where a Viet Cong was seen running. The Popular Force troops later found seven dead Viet Cong. There were no friendly casualties.

On 12 March a PBR blockade established about 20 miles up river from the Binh Thuy base successfully engaged the enemy. The boats from River Section 511 had been on station all night and had encountered sporadic automatic weapons fire during the long wait. At first light ARVN troops resumed a ground sweep in the area, that had started the day before, and began flushing out the enemy. A 40-foot junk with about 10 Viet Cong
aboard attempted to run the blockade. The PBRs opened fire on the junk, destroying it and then directed their weapons' fire along the bank. The patrol craft killed 2, by body count, wounded 7 and in view of the voluminous barrage directed against the enemy junk it was highly probable that 18 others were killed. (It is not unusual, due to the swift river currents, to lose sight of a body once it enters the water). The PBRs concluded their action by also destroying four sampans.

On 13 March, two PBR patrols from River Section 511, while transiting the Bassac River, 7 miles southeast of Can Tho, detected a sampan crossing from the mainland to May Island. When the patrol closed the sampan, a Viet Cong in the sampan opened fire on the lead boat of the patrol with an AK-47 automatic rifle. The patrol immediately returned the fire destroying the sampan and killing three communist insurgents. As the PBRs attempted to recover the remains of the sampan they received intense automatic-weapons and small-arms fire from enemy positions on both the mainland and May Island. The patrol once again retaliated with all their weaponry and set off a secondary explosion on May Island. A red fireball followed by smoke and flames rose 30-40 meters in the air and the fire continued to burn for over an hour. The patrol made another firing pass at the island but was unsuccessful in suppressing the enemy guns. In the action, the forward gunner on the lead boat sustained a serious wound. The PBRs cleared the area and called for a helicopter medical evacuation.

A second PBR patrol arrived on the scene shortly and continued the
engagement along with a Vietnamese Navy ISIL that had also joined in
the river battle. Meanwhile, the air rescue of the wounded PBR sailor
was aborted when the rescue helicopter and the covering Navy armed
helicopters received intense ground fire. The wounded sailor was sped
up the river by boat to Can Tho, where an ambulance rushed him to the
hospital. Action at the scene of the ambush continued and after three
firing runs by the two PBRs and the ISIL the enemy fire was silenced.
Three Navymen were wounded in the fierce engagement. Viet Cong casual-
ties totaled three known killed. Casualties ashore were undetermined.

SEALs of the 8th Platoon waiting in ambush on the night of 14
March, 9 miles west of Can Tho observed a man in a sampan approaching
close to the bank where the ambush was posted. Two of the Navymen
sprung into the sampan and captured the lone occupant who was armed
with a U.S. M-1 rifle. Upon questioning, the captive identified him-
self as a member of the Viet Cong Tay Do Battalion. The Viet Cong was
gagged and bound and the SEALs once again silently waited at their
ambush site. One hour later another sampan with six occupants approached.
The SEALs spewed forth a hail of bullets killing all six enemy. Found
in the sinking sampan were documents, assorted ammunition, communications
equipment, grenades and medical supplies. There were no friendly
casualties.

On 26 March Commander Task Force 116 conducted a combined G-827/1
River Assault Group operation against Tan Dinh Island, a Viet Cong strong-

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U.S. Navy SEALs set charges on a Viet Cong bunker in the Mekong Delta. The assault, conducted by U.S. - Vietnamese Navy task force units, took place on Tan Dinh Island on the Bassac River and was part of Operation BOLD DRAGON III.

held in the lower Bassac River. Known as BOLD DRAGON III, the operation employed 14 PBRs, USS JENKINS COUNTY (LST846), 2 light helicopter fire teams, a rocket-equipped LCM-6, an armored LCPL and LCM-6, and a SEAL
platoon, all from Task Group 116.1 and RAG 25/29 riverine craft with Regional Force/Popular Force (RF/PF) troops from Tra On sub-sector embarked.

The attack began at 0900 with harassing and interdicting fire from the IST, LCM, PRBs, Monitors, and FOMs (V-bottomed river craft about the size of an LCVP), and air strikes by the helicopters. At 1000 the SEALs and PFs landed to destroy bunkers and buildings. After making contact with a small enemy force, they withdrew. The entire force then transited the narrow channel between the island and the mainland, putting in destructive fire on enemy fortifications along the bank. The armored LCM-5 employed a 106-mm recoilless rifle mounted on a section deck above the well deck. Helicopters concluded the operation at 1500 by dropping on the island 6 CS gas canisters, which release gas over a 30-day period, and 93 anti-disturbance mechanisms. There were no friendly casualties. Viet Cong losses consisted of 1 killed (body count), 3 killed (probable), and 20 .30 cal., 3 buildings, 4 sampans, 3 motors, and 1 small ammunition dump destroyed.

On 20 March four PBRs from River Section 535, two helicopter light fire teams from Detachment 7 and SEAL Platoon Delta Two combined for an "Operation QUICK-KILL", 7½ miles southeast of Can Tho. The action began when two PBRs on a routine patrol were fired upon from three enemy positions on May Island. Within an hour SEALs
were landed by PBR while the Navy "Seawolves" patrolled overhead. The SEALs commenced sweeping inland, following an initial airstrike by the Navy helicopters, and made contact with one man believed to be a Viet Cong lookout. The man fled; however, bunkers, numerous trenches, an old base camp and two expended rocket boosters were found. The SEALs, shortly after sighting the fleeing Viet Cong, commenced receiving automatic and small-arms fire from the right front. The Navymen returned fire while two scouts moved out to look for a flanking position from the right flank. "Seawolves" attacked the source of enemy fire with negative results. About five minutes later the two SEAL scouts came upon the source of the enemy fire; four Viet Cong were firing from a hootch. The scouts opened fire and the Viet Cong dropped from sight. The scouts returned to the main group to report their sighting when whistles were heard in the front and rear of the squad. The SEALs withdrew to the river as the Viet Cong manuevered using whistle signal. When the PBRs picked up the SEALs, the "Seawolves swung in and raked over the area where the Viet Cong were manuevering. The Tra On sector advisor later reported that 27 Viet Cong were killed in the attack. There were no friendly casualties.

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GAME WARDEN UNITS

On 2 March Commander River Squadron FIVE and his staff relocated from Saigon to Binh Thuy.
On 2 March Commander Coastal Division 17 changed to the operational control of CTF 117 ending a ten day-evaluation of the PACVs by CTF 116.

On 14 March Rear Admiral Kenneth L. VETH, USN, COMNAVFORV, presented the Presidential Unit Citation to MINERON ELEVEN Detachment ALFA at Nha Be. (See Organization and Command)

On 22 March USS GARRETT COUNTY (LST786) arrived at Vinh Long and embarked River Section 523 which vacated task unit designator 116.2.3 and assumed 116.2.4. River Section 522, previously embarked in GARRETT COUNTY, remained at Vinh Long and changed its task unit designator from 116.3.7 to 116.2.1. River Section 513 shifted its location from Sa Dec to Binh Thuy and changed its task unit designator from 116.2.1 to 116.1.4.

On 25 March River Section 514 was activated at Nha Be.

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GAME WARDEN STATISTICAL SUMMARY
March 1968

1. PBR Statistics:
   a. Total Patrols (two boats): Day 1261 Night 919
   b. Total Contacts: Day 71,604 Night 4,942
   c. Total Inspected: Day 17,257 Night 1,960
   d. Total Boarded: Day 37,775 Night 1,274
   e. People Detained: 580
   f. Total Patrol Hours: h,653

2. Helicopter Fire Team Statistics:
   a. Total Flight Hours: 1,317.9

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b. Helo Missions:
   (1) Pre-planned strikes: 242
   (2) Reaction: 127
   (3) Targets of opportunity: 234
   (4) Support: 346

3. GAME WARDEN Totals:
   a. Fire Fights:
      (1) PBR 57
      (2) Helo 105
   b. Sampans:
      Destroyed: 106
      Damaged: 160
      Captured: 0
   c. Structures:
      Destroyed: 199
      Damaged: 132
   d. Bunkers:
      Destroyed: 60
      Damaged: 0
   e. Enemy:
      KIA: 168
      KIA (poss.): 2
      WIA: 64
      Captured: 6
   f. Friendly:
      KIA: 1
      WIA: 64
   g. Friendly Battle Damage:
      (1) PBR 34
      (2) Helo 20
      (3) LCM 0
   h. PBR MEDEVAC: 130

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RIVERINE ASSAULT FORCE (TASK FORCE 117)

With the advent of March, the major ships of the Mobile Riverine Base (MRB) lost any delusions of immunity or invulnerability from Viet Cong attacks. During the month four units of the MRB were attacked in three separate incidents by recoilless-rifles and mortar fire while anchored in the vicinity of the Dong Tam support base, 5 miles west of My Tho in Dinh Tuong Province.

On 3 March COMUSMACV directed that one river assault division of the Mobile Riverine Force (MRF) deploy to I Corps to provide gunfire support and escort services for logistics convoys on the Cua Viet and Perfume rivers.

On 14 March two riverine assault craft were destroyed in widely separated incidents when ASPB-92 was either mined or hit by a large caliber round and sank far up the Sam Giang River in Dinh Tuong Province where it could not be salvaged, and T-112-7 was mined and overturned in the Cua Viet River in Quang Tri Province. The incident in I Corps caused the death of six sailors of the Mobile Riverine Force.

Operations in Phong Dinh Province

Throughout the night of 1 March, assault craft of TG 117.2 continued their security patrols in the vicinity of the salvage operations for ASPB-112-4, which was sunk on 27 February, 6 miles southwest of Can Tho on the Can Tho River.

At 0355 ASPB-112-8 and a monitor, M-112-1, on security patrol,
received several B-40 rocket hits from the south bank of the Can Tho River, 6 miles southwest of Can Tho from a squad of Viet Cong. The monitor suffered only minor damage and there were no casualties; however, the ASPB sustained heavy damage to the engine cooling system for both engines. There was minor flooding in the ASPB which was brought rapidly under control. The disabled boat was towed back to the MRF. One crewmember, Boatswains' Mate Second Class Leslie E. MURRAY, USN. was killed during the ambush, and another Navyman was slightly wounded.

Meanwhile, ground operations continued in the Can Tho area as RADs 92 and 111 lifted their battalions to beaches on the Can Tho River 4 miles southwest of Can Tho. The first landing at 0700 was unopposed and no contact was made until 1100, when the 3/60th Infantry Battalion ran into sporadic enemy fire. At 1400 heavy contact was developed and continued until about 1900, when the elusive enemy withdrew under the cover of darkness.

Twice during the night the dug-in infantrymen were victimized by mortar barrages but, with the advent of dawn, the ground troops pressed the attack and made intermittent contact with the guerrillas. Thirty-two Viet Cong were killed and 1 prisoner was captured during the 1½ day operation, while Army personnel suffered 5 fatalities and had 39 men wounded. As a result of this action there was one Navyman killed and one sailor wounded. The MRF units also captured 14 individual
weapons, 300 B-40 rocket charges, 77 RPG-2/RPG-7 rocket rounds, 14 grenades and 947 rounds of small-arms ammunition.

At 1930 on 2 March it was reported that ASPB-91 had been swamped by two ASPB's passing at high speed, and had sunk in less than 1 minute near the junction of the Can Tho River and Ba Long Stream 4 miles southwest of Can Tho. One Navyman, trapped in the berthing compartment drowned as a result of the rapid sinking.

The sinking of ASPB-91-1 was the fifth such incident in less than 30 days, only one of which was caused by enemy action. In the three cases investigated, there was some evidence that personnel error partially contributed to the sinkings. However, the primary faults were found to be the lack of seaworthiness caused by inadequate compartmentation, and marginal buoyancy coupled with excessive weight and a low freeboard. Every operating procedure had been repeatedly stressed; however, additional design and safety engineering was urgently required. Technical guidance was requested from the Naval Ships Command; however, in the interim, ASPB operations were temporarily curtailed to the minimum consonant with combat requirements.

Basically, the ASPB assault employment was limited to minesweeping due to their speed and demonstrated resistance to mining. Patrol and interdiction tasks while on strike operations were assumed by ATC's and monitors. The resultant increase in requirements for these LCM conversions was met by substituting ASPB's for ATC/monitors on base defense
patrols. The ASPB ordnance loadout and supplies were also curtailed and their storage rearranged to allow the optimum trim. Additional ammunition and supplies, if required, were to be carried in an ATC resupply boat, which would be located in the area of operations.

On 2 March in response to a request from the Senior Advisor, IV Corps, Major General George S. ECKHARDT, USA, a riverine armored reconnaissance element (RARE) was formed to transit the Mang Thit/Nicholai Canal between the Bassac and Co Chien rivers. The RARE was composed of the following units of TG 117.1: three ASPBs, one ATC(F) flamethrower, two monitor gunboats, three ATC troop carriers and a spare ATC, and also a second flamethrower ATC(F), and a CCB (command and communication boat) from TG 117.2. In order to cope with any waterborne obstructions that may have been encountered along the route, a detachment from Underwater Demolition Team TWELVE, with their diving equipment and explosives, was positioned in the lead of the riverine column.

At 0500 on 2 March, Vietnamese Rangers of the 42nd and 44th ARVN Rangers were embarked in the troop carriers at Can Tho, and the operation commenced. The RARE proceeded down the Bassac River to the city of Tra On, 11 miles southeast of Can Tho, and entered the Mang Thit/Nicholai Canal.

During the 25-mile transit to the Co Chien River, the RARE and its supporting helicopter light fire team flushed out and killed 10
fleeing Viet Cong. There were no friendly casualties during the transit. Upon reaching the Co Chien River at 1130, the riverine group continued on to Vinh Long, where the Vietnamese Rangers were off-loaded for air movement back to Can Tho. The RARE and the embarked UDT Detachment proceeded to Dong Tam to await the arrival of the MRF.

The return of the MRF to the Mekong River system on 3 March terminated Operation CORONADO XI. The Force had arrived at Can Tho on 13 February and Operation CORONADO XI began in the Cai Rang District of Phong Dinh Province on the following day. The next 16 days were marked by an unprecedented tempo of operations and contact with the enemy. The river assault craft and infantry battalions operated against the foe on all except two days, when the boats were patrolling the Can Tho River and moving a RARE through the Mang Thit/Nicholai Canal.

The known cumulative destruction inflicted on the enemy during CORONADO XI amounted to 245 Viet Cong killed. There were also 15 guerrillas captured along with 2 weapons and ammunition caches, which contained large quantities of B-40 rocket and mortar rounds. During this operation U.S. casualties amounted to 4 sailors and 40 Army men killed, and 22 Navymen and 197 soldiers wounded.

Operations in Dinh Tuong Province

At 0240 on 5 March, the MRB, at anchor near Dong Tam, went to general quarters as several incoming rocket or recoilless-rifle/mortar rounds were heard whistling overhead by the boats of the defense patrol. Shortly
Men attached to 2nd Platoon of the PRF wash off mud before going aboard the base camp craft for a warm shower, hot food and a clean bed after a cold and wet combat operation in the Mekong Delta.

Consequently, U.S. WOOD COUNTY (LST1123), the PRF resupply ship, was hit twice heavily by rocket attack, aviation fuel and ammunition, received a direct hit from a recoilless-rifle round; however, the damage was
minimal and there were no personnel casualties. This marked the first
direct mortar/rocket/recoilless-rifle attack launched against the MBU
since it was formed and began operating in the Mekong Delta. About 0515
the Dong Tam support base came under sporadic mortar attack which continued
until 0600.

On 7 March the MRF commenced Operation CORONADO XII by conducting
a two-battalion riverine and airmobile operation in the Cho Gao District.
The primary objective of this operation was to locate, engage and destroy
the Viet Cong 261st Main Force Battalion and other enemy elements operating
in the area.

Contact with the enemy was very light until 1720 on 8 March, when
Bravo Company of the 4/47th Infantry Battalion established heavy contact
5 miles northeast of My Tho. The initial fire fight was fast and furious
with four airmobile helicopters and one helicopter gunship shot down.
Sporadic action continued until 0250 the next morning when SPB HALLORAN,
located 5 miles east of My Tho, began receiving a mortar barrage. One
of the mortars made a direct hit on the artillery barge ammunition stowage
area and caused a raging fire which was not brought under control until
0600. Several assault craft from RAD 111, with fire fighting teams from
USS ASKARI (ARL30) and USS BENEWAH (APB35), rushed to the scene and assisted
in evacuating the wounded and extinguishing the blazing fire. There were
two U.S. Army barges and four 105-mm howitzers severely damaged in the
inferno. Later that day the damaged howitzers were removed, and the
irreparable barges were destroyed by EOD personnel. There were 14 Army-
men wounded in the mortar attack, and 1 Navyman, Seaman Eugene E. SWIFT,
USN, was mortally injured by exploding ammunition while fighting the
blaze.

Later that afternoon the infantrymen were backloaded by RADs 91
and 92, and in company with the MRB returned to the Dong Tam anchorage.
The cumulative results for this three-day operation amounted to 114 Viet
Cong killed and 170 bunkers and 70 punji pit booby traps destroyed. The
MRF units also captured a small cache of 12 weapons and over 400 rounds
of assorted ammunition. Friendly casualties consisted of 12 Infantrymen
killed, 1 Armyman missing and 98 soldiers wounded in action.

At 2330 the next morning, after a very brief rest at the MRB, RAS
9 and RAD 11 commenced another phase of Operation CORONADO XII (10-11
March). This operation was conducted in the Ban Long/Cam Son Secret
Zone with the riverine units supporting elements of the 4/17th and
3/60th Infantry Battalions. Although heavy contact with the elusive
enemy was not firmly established, the MRF assault forces killed 31 Viet
Cong, captured 10 prisoners-of-war, and destroyed 15 bunkers and 1 sam-
pan. U.S. casualties were relatively light with one soldier killed, and
two sailors and four Armymen wounded. One of the captured Viet Cong had
VNS 270,225 ($2,290) in his possession.

Intelligence reports received on 12 March indicated that the Viet
Cong were salvaging unexploded artillery rounds from the water at FSPB
HALLORAN, where two of the TF SIX GUN artillery barges were destroyed on 9 March. The next day the MRF EOD investigated the report and uncovered 151 rounds of 105-mm ammunition which had been salvaged and partially disassembled by the Viet Cong. If the ammunition had not been discovered by the EOD team, the main explosive could have been used by enemy sapper teams with devastating effects. The EOD team also discovered the body of a soldier who had been missing since the mortar attack on the FSPB on 9 March. After destroying the projectiles, the team and supporting assault boats returned to the MRB at 1345 on 13 March.

Early on the morning of 14 March, USS WASHTENAW COUNTY (LST1166), anchored near Dong Tam, received a hit on the portside amidships, about 6 feet below the weather deck. The round, believed to be from a 57-mm recoilless-rifle, did not penetrate the hull, and failed to cause any damage. Retaliatory fire could not be returned, because MRB defense patrols were in the area from which the attack was delivered. The ground troops later swept the area with negative results.

At 0620 on the same day, a RARE, reconnoitering on the Sam Giang River 7 miles northwest of Dong Tam was taken under fire from the south bank of the river. At about the same time, ASFB-92-7 received a direct hit in the stern causing a one-foot hole below the waterline. The boat commenced flooding rapidly, and in a futile attempt to save the craft, it was beached on the nearest bank to keep it from total submergence. However,
As the last few shells continued to fall fighting, a crewman of an ASPE return fire from a long-rearless-rifle or rocket round boled their ship. Bowed sinking, the coxswain reached the boat and climbed into his canopy. A sailor at the base of the flag pole was frantically stuffing his flak jacket into the jagged
the gradient was too steep, and the minesweeping boat rolled over on its side. Initially the forward part of the boat was above water, but as the tide rose the disabled craft gradually disappeared from view. The damage was believed to have been caused by either a mine caught in the boat's sweep gear or by a large HEAT round.

Salvage efforts continued throughout the day; however, they proved to be infeasible without the assistance of the light lift craft, which could not transit the narrow waterway. Consequently, the ASPB was stripped of all removable weapons and equipment and was destroyed by EOD personnel.

On 15 March the MRF commenced a two-battalion search and clear operation in the Ven Tranh District to engage elements of the 261st and 263rd Main Force Battalions. At 1620 the 3/60th Infantry Battalion established solid contact with a heavily bunkered enemy 7 miles northeast of My Tho. The contact was broken about 2030, when the enemy main force withdrew; however, sporadic contact continued throughout the night.

As a result of the two-day operation the MRF killed 26 Viet Cong and destroyed 261 bunkers, while also capturing 3 weapons, 34 hand grenades and 33 rocket rounds. U.S. Army losses amounted to 7 Armymen killed and 28 soldiers wounded.

After one day of preventive maintenance and local operations on 17 March, the MRF continued Operation TROUNG CONG DINH, a riverine operation, in the Cai Be and Cai Lay districts. The MRB relocated to an anchorage near Vinh Long after RAS 9 and RAD 111 lifted their battalions and
escorted Task Force SIX GUN (the artillery barges) into the area of operation.

Bone-tired and pensive, a U.S. Navy boat captain of the Mobile Riverine Force takes advantage of a peaceful moment to reflect on his private thoughts after an exhausting day of combat operations in the Mekong Delta.

Intelligence reports indicated that the Viet Cong 263rd Main Force Battalion had established a base camp on the Ba Rat Stream about 5 miles
north of the Mekong River. The concept of the operation called for the 3/60th Infantry Battalion to be landed south of the suspected base camp, and then move to the north with the assault craft providing waterborne blocking support from the river. The 4/47th Infantry Battalion was to land on the Luu River to the west and move eastward. The operation went according to plan, but the base camp failed to materialize. Contact was very light during the morning hours, but the afternoon was filled with action for the riverine craft which were patrolling the waterways.

On 18 March at 1610, two ASPB’s, one monitor, and an ATC(F) flamethrower of RAD 92, transiting the Ba Rai Stream 3 miles southwest of Cai Lay, were ambushed by rockets, recoilless-rifle and automatic-weapons fire from both banks of the narrow canal. During the action Lieutenant David H. WYRICK, USN, the commander of Task Unit 117.1.2 was killed instantly when a B-40 rocket impacted against the monitor that he was using as a command boat. The 4 boats were all damaged, but withdrew under their own power from the withering fire, carrying 16 wounded Navymen. The rugged riverine craft were unable to suppress the intense enemy fire and called in supporting fire power to neutralize the area.

The battle continued to rage as the enemy guns refused to be silenced, and the deeply entrenched guerrillas continued their well-coordinate hit and run ambush tactics for the next 3 hours. The Luu River, the Cai Be and the Ba Rai streams all became hotbeds of enemy activity. At 1730 and 1830, units of RAD 91, transiting the Luu River...
to beach Army elements into their night positions, received recoilless-rifle and automatic-weapons fire from the shore at three different locations. Two sailors were slightly wounded in the encounters, while enemy casualties were unknown.

The Viet Cong struck again between 1915 and 1930 when units of RAD III at Fire Support Base WHITNEY on the Mekong River, 4 miles southeast of Cai Be, were attacked with rocket and small-arms fire by an unknown size enemy force. The fire was suppressed, but only after two Army LCM-8s were damaged and two soldiers were wounded. There were no Navy personnel or material casualties.

Due to the intensity of the attacks against the riverine craft, it was evaluated that the Viet Cong force were massing for an attack on Cai Lay. Therefore, the infantrymen resumed ground operations at dawn on 19 March, sweeping the area of the previous night's heavy firefight; however, contact with the enemy was not renewed.

The communist escaped from this two-day operation practically unscathed with only two known fatalities and four prisoners captured. The combined assault forces of the MRF destroyed 126 bunkers, while losing one U.S. Navy officer, and having 18 sailors and 9 soldiers wounded.

The vital importance of having a helicopter available for airborne tactical control and coordination of the river assault craft in the narrow Viet Cong-dominated waterways was tragically manifested in a Ba Roi Stream ambush on 18 March.
The 1610 attack on elements of TU 117.1.2 hit the three lead boats with a devastating hail of B-40, RPG-1 and automatic-weapons fire, killing the unit commander and disabling all three craft. The radios were useless for several minutes, so that neither the squadron nor the task force commander could find out what was happening. The crews fought gallantly on their own against an enemy totally concealed from their view by the dense foliage.

While the effectiveness of a command and control helicopter on this particular occasion must remain conjectural, Commander Task Force 117 cogently emphasized the inherent advantage of an aloft observer to be as follows:

1. Facilitates detecting burked ambush positions not visible at ground level.
2. Maintains the riverine craft in mutually supporting positions.
3. Can order units to withdraw when communications are confused.
4. Can order and provide aloft spotter services for supporting artillery fire or airstrikes.
5. Can distract the enemy attack by machine-gun fire from aloft.

At 1100 the next day, the ships of the MPB relocated from the vicinity of Vinh Long to Dong Tâm arriving at 1435. The ground operation was secured at noon in order to return to the Dong Tâm anchorage and prepare for the planned airmobile operation the next day against insurgent forces reportedly massing northeast of My Tho.
On 20 March the MRF commenced a two-day airmobile reconnaissance-in-force operation in the Binh Tranh District to locate and destroy the 1st Viet Cong Battle Group. Even though contact with a sizeable enemy unit was not established, the ground troops killed 2 Viet Cong and captured 1 prisoner while destroying 175 bunkers. There was one soldier wounded in the operation.

Major ships of the Mobile Riverine Base were at an anchorage similar to the above when the Viet Cong attacked them with mortars and recoilless rifles on 22 March 1969.

During the early morning hours of 22 March the Viet Cong "declared war" on the major ships of the MRB, when nine rounds of mortar and
recoilless-rifle fire were directed against BENEWAH and WASHTENNAW COUNTY. The ships were anchored near Dong Tam in the middle of the Mekong River, 6 miles southwest of My Tho. The LST, heavily laden with highly volatile aviation gasoline and ammunition, was bracketed by four mortar/recoilless-rifle rounds, which landed close aboard.

BENEWAH, anchored nearby, was struck by two 75-mm recoilless-rifle rounds, one of which hit 1 foot below the waterline. The other round impacted on the fourth deck, portside forward, penetrated the outer hull, and sent deadly shrapnel plunging through four additional bulkheads, spraying hot metal into the mess hall. Miraculously, the normally crowded messhall was empty at the time and no one was injured. Neither ship suffered any personnel casualties during the attack.

On 24 March the KRF commenced another phase of Operation TRUONG CONG Dinh with RADs 22, 22 and 111 supporting the 3/17th and 3/60th Infantry Battalions and Task Force SIX SUN. The 1½-day sweep and clear operation, which was conducted in Cai Be District, resulted in the death of 13 Viet Cong and the capture of 3 enemy prisoners and 1 weapon. U.S. Army forces suffered one fatality and five men were wounded during the sporadic action.

Following a brief respite during the afternoon and night of 25 March, the KRF conducted a two-battalion search and clear operation in the Cho Gac District of Dinh Trieng Province and in the Hoa Dong District of Co Cong Province. The area to the south of Vinh Binh in
the Hoa Dong District, which was commonly referred to as "Coconut Grove," had been labeled by the intelligence community as a Viet Cong assembly and rest area and gave every indication of being a lucrative target.

After formulating a comprehensive operational battle plan, the assault forces of the MRF, in conjunction with elements of the ARVN 7th Division, moved into the "Coconut Grove" area. Despite the glowing intelligence indicators, major contact was not effected. Enemy casualties amounted to 8 combatants killed, and 1 wounded, while 1 Viet Cong was captured and 220 bunkers were destroyed. There were three soldiers wounded by a booby trap in the one-day engagement.

On 28-29 March the MRF, in coordination with the ARVN 7th Division, moved back into Dinh Tuong Province and conducted riverine operations in the Long Dinh and Cai Lay Districts in search of the elusive Viet Cong 514th Main Force Battalion and local force units. Contact during the two-day operation was again sporadic, resulting in 10 enemy guerrillas killed, 1 prisoner, 7 weapons and 38 detainees captured and 4 sampans destroyed. U.S. casualties amounted to two Armymen killed and five soldiers wounded.

Meanwhile, the ground troops of the ARVN 7th Division uncovered several large caches of enemy weapons and ammunition. Responding to a request from ARVN 7th Headquarters, RAD-92 lifted the captured arms and ammunition out of the area and turned them over to ARVN representatives at the Long Dinh Bridge. The caches were so large that RAD-
provided further lift facilities on 30 and 31 March to move the remainder of the ammunition to the ARVN 11th Regiment Headquarters at Long Dinh. The caches included 753 rocket/recoilless-rifle rounds, 770 assorted mortar rounds, 150 "bangalore" torpedoes, 143 mines of assorted sizes, 10,000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 240 hand grenades, 11 crew-served weapons and 19 AK-47 weapons.

On 30-31 March the MRF continued search and destroy operations in the Cai Lay District. During the first morning 10 Viet Cong were killed in 2 separate but sharp contacts. Intelligence obtained from one of the guerrillas before he died indicated that the enemy unit in the area was the Cai De Local Force Company, which was in the vicinity to rendezvous with the 263rd Main Force Battalion. There were no friendly casualties as a result of the two-day action, while the enemy forces suffered a total of 10 killed. The MRF units also captured 1,000 mines and 11 weapons and destroyed 12 bunkers and 1 booby trap.

**MRF Operations in I Corps**

On 3 March COMUSMACV directed that elements of one river assault division be deployed for a period of about 30 days to provide heavy escort services for waterborne logistic convoys on the Cua Viet and Perfume rivers. The deployment of these 14 riverine craft from RAD 112 decreased the MRF troop lift capability by about 25 percent. For the period of the deployment to I Corps, RAD 9 was tasked to support both infantry battalions while RAD 111 augmented by the RAD 112 boats which
were left behind, provided base defense and close support for Task Force SIX GUN.

The riverine unit, under command of CTG 117.2 and comprised of 1 CCB, 3 monitors and 10 ATC's, arrived in I Corps on 9 March and commenced operations under the operational control of Commander Task Force CLEAR-WATER.

On 10 March, TO 117.2 commenced its first sweep and clear transit of the Cua Viet River from Cua Viet to Dong Ha. Four ATC's, one monitor and a CCB escorted two Landing Craft Utility (LCU) boats, and six LCM-8s up the eight-mile stretch of river and returned escorting a similar group of resupply boats without incident.

About 1345 the next day, a command-detonated mine was exploded astern of an LCM minesweeper in an area which had been swept four or five times. The command wire and part of the detonator were recovered by ATC-112-2 on the south bank of the river near a resettlement village.

The following day the riverine assault craft detachment was subjected to an enemy artillery attack which completely destroyed the maintenance, messing and berthing facilities at the Cua Viet Naval Support Activity Detachment loading ramp. There were no casualties to either the personnel or craft of TO 117.2; however, as a result of the attack, the assault boat crewmembers were required to berth on their craft.

On 11 March at 0719, ATC-112-7 was sweeping close to the west bank of the Cua Viet River 2 miles southeast of Dong Ha in Quang Tri
Province when the boat hit an estimated 900-pound watermine. The force of the explosion was so tremendous that it flipped the 72-ton troop carrier upside down causing extensive damage to the bow and starboard side of the craft. There were six crewmembers killed and one seriously wounded in the mining. Due to the extensive hull damage, the boat was deemed unsalvageable.

Task Group 117.2 assault craft continued to keep the Cua Viet River supply route to Dong Ha open and, on 16 March, commenced enforcing a 1630-0830 surfaw against sampan traffic on the waterway. Sporadic enemy harassment continued throughout the following week as evidenced by one 60-mm mortar attack on the assault boats, which failed to cause any personnel or material damage. These continuous patrols were most instrumental in enabling the logistic craft from Naval Support Activity, Danang to maintain their independent transits of the Cua Viet River.

On 28 March a monitor, M-112-1, on a routine sweep patrol operation on the Cua Viet River, experienced a near miss when an estimated 200-pound watermine was command-detonated about 10 feet astern of the craft. The monitor lost steering control but did not suffer any personnel casualties.

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RIVERINE ASSAULT FORCE UNITS

On 4-5 March at Dong Ha, the 3/47th Infantry Battalion replaced the 4/47th Infantry Battalion as one of the two afloat battalions. The 4/47th Infantry Battalion embarked in USS COLLETON (APB36) and USS WASHTENAW.
COUNTY (LST1166).

The ASPB salvage operations for A-112-4 and A-91-1, sunk in the Can Tho River on 27 February and 2 March respectively, were completed when the two boats were towed into the basin at Dong Tam at 2200 on 8 March. (Salvage operations will be covered in more detail in the salvage section of the supplement)

On 25 March USS TOM GREEN COUNTY (LST1159) relieved WASHTENAW COUNTY as the MRF supply ship.
PBR escort YFU transporting vital cargo to U.S. and Free World troops in Northern I Corps Tactical Zone.

During March the forces assigned Task Force CLEARWATER continued to provide protection for the vitally important logistics craft which traveled the Perfume and Cua Viet rivers. By exercising overall control and coordination of the logistics craft while in transit, CTF CLEARWATER improved and expedited naval supply support to combat forces in Northern I CTZ. CTF CLEARWATER employs two River Security Groups to coordinate the logistic movements and to protect the craft and personnel.
OPERATIONS IN THE PERFUME RIVER
The Hue River Security Group receives and instructs convoys which are formed at Tan My, and the Dong Ha River Security Group performs the same function for convoys which are formed at Cua Viet. When formed, the convoys consist of an escort unit and a movement unit, both under the command of a designated convoy commander. The function of the escort unit is to provide for the uninterrupted transit of the movement unit by employing mine countermeasures, direct fire support, and by coordinating aircraft, artillery and naval gunfire support. The function of the movement unit is to deliver cargo to its ultimate destination without delay.

Extensive efforts to disrupt and interdict logistic convoy transits on the Cua Viet River continued throughout March. Enemy initiated incidents ranging from small arms harassment to an extensive mining campaign occurred throughout the month.

On 5 March a convoy consisting of five LCU’s and three LCM-8s, escorted by two LCM-6 minesweeping boats, two LCPL patrol boats and two USMC helicopter gunships, departed Cua Viet enroute to Dong Ha. At 1215 the convoy came under an intense small arms and recoilless-rifle attack approximately 2 miles east of Dong Ha at the mouth of the Hien Giang River. Although material damage to the convoy craft was slight, the convoy commander, Lieutenant Barry W. HOOPER, USN, was killed and four other Navymen were wounded.

The convoy continued on to Dong Ha and river operations were
YFU-72 crewmen line sides with small arms as the craft head up Perfume River. The crewmen responded to orders for a sharp lookout for Viet Cong attackers.

terminated until USMC ground troops swept and secured the area from which the attack originated. At 1630, after the Marines had completed their sweep operation, the convoy commenced the return trip to Cua Viet.
At 1723 two mines detonated near an LCM-8 but no personnel casualties resulted and damage to the craft was slight.

On 14 March an ATC minesweeping craft, sweeping close to the west bank of the Cua Viet River channel, approximately 2½ miles northeast of Dong Ha, hit an estimated 900-pound mine. The craft, which flipped upside down by the force of the explosion, suffered extensive damage to its bow and starboard side, and was later designated a total loss. Six crewmembers were killed and one was severely wounded as a result of the incident.

Enemy initiated incidents on the Perfume River were nonexistent during early March, primarily because of control of the river banks by friendly forces, and on the 3rd of the month CTF CLEARWATER discontinued the convoy mode of operation. Logistic craft were allowed to make individual or group transits of the river which was continually patrolled and swept for mines. Individual transits of the river continued without incident until 25 March when LCU 877 received a rocket and .50 caliber machine gun attack approximately 4 miles north of Hue. Normal convoy operations were reinstated following this incident and during the remainder of the month convoys transited without incident.
Despite numerous enemy attacks, Naval Support Activity (NAVSUPP-ACT) Danang, and its detachments continued to offload and clear expeditiously during March. A total of 28 tonnage records were established by NAVSUPP-ACT activities during the month; 22 monthly records and 6 daily records. Among the new monthly tonnage records were: 308,233 short-ton throughput at Danang; 46,602 short-ton throughput at Dong Ha; and 25,592 short-ton throughput at the Hue/Tan Ky complex. March's 40,737 short-ton monthly throughput for the combined I CTZ ports also exceeded the previous high set in January 1968 by almost 21,000 short-tons.

Despite the continuing population build-up in I CTZ, overall net supply effectiveness for Danang and Chu Lai rose from 89.0 percent in February to 91.0 percent in March; overall gross effectiveness also increased slightly from 88.0 percent to 88.4 percent. Demands for the month totalled 176,811, a 50 percent increase in the last two months.

Weather and sea conditions permitted normal fuel transfer operations at all sites. Fuel issues in I CTZ increased from 1,150,000-gallons daily average during February to 1,400,000 in March. A large portion of this increase was in Northern I CTZ where throughput increased from a 346,000-gallon daily average at the end of February to 498,000 at the end of March. River transit capability was increased during the month with the addition of an AMTI barge at Cua Viet, bringing the total capability to 340,000 gallons per day. An explosion and fire at the
Members of the first class of women stevedores at Danang look on as Boatswains' Mate First Class Eugene WEST, USN, and Vietnamese instructor Phan Tan THIEU explain handling of block and tackle gear. The women will operate forklifts, winches and direct cargo operation in I Corps seaports.
Shell My Khe Tank Farm in Danang destroyed a 32,000-barrel JP-4 tank on 11 March; at month's end, the construction arrangements for a new tank were being made by Shell representatives.

One Army terminal service company provided eight hatch teams for cargo operations at NAVSUPFAC'T's piers during the month. Their services helped offset the loss of local national labor and the cargo volume build-up. One terminal transfer platoon manned the new LCU ramps at Dong Ha and also provided the necessary equipment. The strict 1900 to 0700 curfew imposed in the Danang area also hampered efficient cargo operations. Most noticeable was the absence of local nationals from hatch teams and pier-ramp cleanup operations. Included in a group of new employees hired during the month was one female hatch team; at month's end their work appeared to be satisfactory.

NAVSUPFAC'T Danang and its detachments continued to be harassed by enemy attacks during March. Casualties to NAVSUPFAC'T personnel resulting from the attacks included 5 Navy men killed and 60 wounded. Forty-six of the wounded personnel were treated and returned to duty.

On the morning of 10 March an enemy artillery attack on Cua Viet resulted in the ignition of 150 short tons of staged ammunition. The subsequent fires and secondary explosions caused the most widespread destruction of any NAVSUPFAC'T Danang facility to date. Although total personnel casualties were relatively light (1 killed and 22 wounded), material destruction was quite extensive. Living quarters, the messhall,
Sailors clear debris and begin to rebuild at the Naval Support Activity Detachment in Cua Viet. A Communist-rocket attack hit supplies and ammunition staged on the ramp causing the destruction. Fire, shrapnel and the force of the blast reduced much of the detachment to a mass of rubble, twisted steel, broken sandbags and splintered and charred-wood littered areas where living and working quarters once stood.

Communications van, a 30-ton crane, a rough-terrain forklift, plus a large quantity of staged cargo were all destroyed. As a direct result of the rapid response of the personnel involved, there was a minimal interruption of cargo operations at the port. Within 30 hours, communications were restored and building material were on the scene to commence
reconstruction. At month's end 60 percent of the construction/repair work was completed.

The Phu Bai Base was attacked on 26 March with 174 rounds of rocket and mortar fire. As a result of the attack, 5 structures were destroyed and 10 were severely damaged. The runway and adjoining taxiways sustained 11 hits during the attack. Three direct hits on the runway caused crucial holes which were repaired within 4 hours. The runway was reopened to C-130 aircraft traffic within 10 hours after the attack, and the remaining runway damage was repaired within 2 days.

Security for NAVSUPFACT's logistic craft which ply the Cua Viet River improved during the month, but the boats continued to be subject to small arms, rocket/artillery and mining attacks. The monthly totals for operations on the Cua Viet River included six logistic craft mined, four hit by recoilless-rifle/small-arrrs fire and one patrol boat and one mine-sweeping craft sunk. A sharp decrease in enemy activity against logistic craft on the Perfume River was apparent during the period 2-24 March. On 25 March Tan My received 30-50 mortar rounds in the vicinity of the boat cove, fuel farm and cantonment area. The mortar attack resulted in three LCM-6 boats being damaged, several holes in FOL pipelines and minor damage to a JP-4 tank.

The arrival of six new 45-foot picket boats during the month enabled NAVSUPFACT Danang's harbor security forces to maintain boat patrols in Danang Harbor. The patrolling units apprehended 45 junks/sampans and
111 persons for curfew and restricted area violations.

The number of patients admitted to the NAVSUPPACT Danang hospital during March totalled 1,783. Of the total number received at the 367-bed hospital, 796 were admitted for combat injuries; 729 for various diseases and 258 for non-combat injuries. A total of 577 persons were treated and returned to duty and 672 were evacuated to hospitals outside of South Vietnam.

At month's end, NAVSUPPACT Danang's personnel status showed an onboard count of 9,470, with support being provided to 190,334 U.S. and free world military forces in the I Corps area.

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During the month of March the enemy continued to harass and attack Naval Support Activity (NAVSUPPACT), Saigon, detachments and logistics craft. On 3 March the Nha Be detachment received an estimated 35 rounds of mortar and recoilless-rifle fire. Approximately 15 rounds landed within the perimeter of the base and another 20 rounds landed in the water near the base. Results of the attack included four Navymen injured and the Public Works compound damaged extensively.

On the 4th, the Qui Nhon detachment received approximately 50 rounds of automatic-weapons harassment fire. No casualties resulted from the hostile fire.

On the morning of 11 March, YFR 890 received heavy enemy automatic-weapons and B-40 rocket fire while transiting the Mekong River 23 miles west of My Tho. The Delta resupply craft sustained eight rocket hits which caused extensive hull damage above the waterline and considerable machinery damage. Three Navymen were wounded during the attack.

On the evening of the 20th, an enemy mortar attack on My Tho City resulted in moderate damage to NAVSUPPACT detachment's generator installation and a jeep. There were no USN personnel casualties.

On the 27th, the Dong Tam base received nine rounds of harassing 120-mm mortar fire. There were no personnel casualties as a result of the attack and only slight damage to a 5-ton truck belonging to the Navy detachment.
A UH-1N-D helicopter lands on the flight deck of an APL on a resupply mission.

The progress of general base construction returned to a near normal level during the month, but some hindrance still remained as some problems arose concerning the revalidation of the security passes of Vietnamese nationals.

The number of line items stocked by NAVSUPPACT Saigon totaled 63,603 in March. The overall supply effectiveness decreased during March; net effectiveness was 74 percent and gross effectiveness was